

research snapshot

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Attempts to reduce or quit gambling among people who gamble

What this research is about

Only 10% to 20% of people with gambling problems seek treatment despite the negative consequences. A major reason that people do not seek treatment is a desire to make the change on their own. Most studies on self-recovery from gambling problems have used convenience sampling to recruit participants. Thus, their participants are not representative of the population and it is difficult to generalize the findings.

To address this gap in research, the present study recruited a representative sample of people who gamble. The aims of this study included the following:

- (1) To estimate past-year attempts to reduce or quit gambling and the characteristics of people who made a change attempt versus those who did not.
- (2) To compare the characteristics of people with gambling problems who attempted the change on their own versus those who sought help.
- (3) To describe the reasons why people attempted to make the change on their own and how successful they thought they had been.
- (4) To describe the help options that people sought and how successful they thought they had been.

What the researchers did

The data were obtained from the Alberta Gambling Research Institute's National Study on Gambling and Problem Gambling in Canada. Participants were recruited from an online panel of the survey firm Leger360. Email invitations were sent to panel members until at least 1,400 completed surveys were received from each province or region in Canada. The final sample included 10,054 participants.

Participants completed an online survey that included the Gambling Participation Instrument (GPI) and the

What you need to know

This study examined past-year attempts to reduce or quit gambling among people who gamble. A total of 10,054 participants from across Canada were recruited from an online panel. The results showed that 5.7% of participants attempted to reduce or quit gambling in the past year. Among people with gambling problems, most people had attempted to reduce or quit gambling in the past year. Over 90% of these participants attempted to make the change on their own. Only 7.7% sought formal or informal treatment. The two common reasons for attempting self-change were not believing that one needed the help and being too ashamed to seek help. Over one-third rated their self-change attempt as quite or very successful.

Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI). A score of 5 or higher on the PGSI was considered to indicate problem gambling. Participants completed the Gambling Fallacies Questionnaire (GFQ), a measure of erroneous gambling beliefs. They also reported any co-occurring mental health problems and addictions in the past year; family history of gambling problems; history of child abuse or neglect; and number of significant negative events in the past year.

Participants reported their attempts to reduce or quit gambling in the past year. Those who scored 5 or higher on the PGSI were asked whether they attempted the change on their own or with the help of others. Those who attempted to change on their own were asked the reasons why they did not seek help. Those who sought help were asked what kind of help they received.

What the researchers found

The sample was weighted to match the gambling and demographic profile of people who gamble in the national Canadian Community Health Survey 2018 Gambling Module. Based on the weighted sample, 5.7% of participants attempted to reduce or quit gambling in the past year. People who made a change attempt tended to have more serious gambling problems and were more likely to have problem gambling. They were also more likely to have other mental health and addictive problems. But, among people with problem gambling, some substance uses were less likely among those who made a change attempt (i.e., cannabis, alcohol, and tobacco).

Among the 1,497 participants with problem gambling, most people (59.8%) made a change attempt in the past year. The majority attempted to change on their own (90.2%). Around 9.8% sought help, with 7.7% having sought formal or informal treatment. People who sought help tended to have more serious gambling problems than those who attempted to change on their own. They were also more likely to have other mental health and addictive problems. Several demographic characteristics were also associated with help-seeking, particularly being married or in a common relationship.

Most participants who attempted to change on their own thought they did not need help from others (55%). Another common reason was being too ashamed to seek help (31%). The other two reasons were being unaware of where to seek help (18%) and not believing that treatment would work (16%). About half (49%) rated their self-change attempt as somewhat successful. Over one-third rated their self-change attempt as quite or very successful (37.6%).

Participants who sought help tended to seek out different help options, including self-help materials, self-exclusion, and counselling. Many rated the help as being somewhat helpful (44.3%). Over one-third rated the help as being quite or very helpful (39.7%).

How you can use this research

This study could inform public health, treatment programme providers, and researchers.

About the researchers

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Citation

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