



Illegal gambling in Canada: Prevalence and predictors

What this research is about

The legal status of gambling in Canada has changed significantly throughout its history. Most types of gambling were illegal until 1969, when lotteries became legal. Other types of gambling have since been legalized, including slot machines, sports betting, and online gambling websites operated by individual provinces. A reason put forth for legalizing gambling is to reduce illegal types of gambling and increase revenue.

A small number of studies suggest that illegal gambling in Canada has declined since many types of gambling have become legal. However, there is not enough evidence to definitively say that legalizing gambling has effectively replaced illegal types of gambling. The aim of this study was to examine the rates of self-reported participation in illegal forms of gambling in Canada. The researchers also wanted to see which gambling and demographic characteristics might predict participating in illegal gambling in Canada.

What the researchers did

In 2018, the researchers recruited adult participants who had gambled at least once a month in the past 12 months through Leger Opinion. Leger Opinion is an online survey administration website where members can complete surveys for compensation. The survey for this study was promoted until a sample size of 1400 adults per province (except the Atlantic provinces) was obtained. The Atlantic provinces have a smaller population, so a total of 1400 adults from these provinces were recruited.

Participants were asked to complete an online survey, which consisted of several questionnaires. The

What you need to know

Most types of gambling have been legal in Canada for the past thirty years, although this has not always been the case. It is difficult to establish the rate of illegal gambling in Canada as no prevalence studies have been conducted. The aim of this study was to examine the prevalence rate of illegal gambling in Canada. The researchers were also interested in examining the predictors of illegal gambling in Canada. The researchers surveyed over 10,000 Canadians who had gambled at least once every month. They found that the prevalence rate of illegal gambling was very low, varying from 0.05% to 1.59% depending on the type of illegal gambling. Several significant predictors of illegal gambling were identified, including engaging in more types of gambling, gambling more frequently, and having problem gambling.

Gambling Participation Instrument (GPI) was used to measure types of gambling participated in; whether it was online or in-person for each type; how often participants engaged in each type; and money and time spent per gambling type. The GPI also assessed illegal online gambling; illegal casinos or card rooms; illegal betting shops or bookies (sports betting); and illegal animal contests (e.g., cock fights and dog fights). Illegal online gambling meant accessing an online gambling website outside of one's province.

Participants also completed the Problem and Pathological Gambling Measure (PPGM), which was used to measure problem gambling. In addition, the researchers weighted the results of this study according to another national study that assessed

legal gambling participation among Canadian adults. This means that the estimates of illegal gambling in this study could be generalized to all Canadian adults.

What the researchers found

A total of 10,199 participants completed the survey. The researchers found that the rate of engagement in illegal gambling was very low amongst Canadian adults. It ranged from 0.05% to 1.59% across different types of illegal gambling. The most popular type of illegal gambling was illegal online gambling, which was highest in two provinces, Alberta and Saskatchewan. These two provinces did not have a legal online gambling website managed by the province at the time of the survey. Illegal online gambling in Alberta and Saskatchewan was significantly higher compared to the other provinces and regions. Quebec had the lowest rate of illegal online gambling. The least popular type of gambling was illegal sports betting through an illegal shop or bookie.

Several characteristics were found to be predictors of the different types of illegal gambling. People who gambled on a larger number of gambling types and who gambled more frequently were more likely to engage in all four types of illegal gambling. Also, problem gambling predicted engaging in illegal online gambling and illegal animal contests.

In terms of demographics, people who lived in Alberta or Saskatchewan, were younger, were male, and were of African heritage were more likely to engage in illegal online gambling. Having a Latin American heritage was a predictor of placing bets through illegal betting shops or bookies. People who were of Latin American or Middle Eastern heritage and who were younger were more likely to gamble in illegal casinos/card rooms.

How you can use this research

This research could be useful to researchers and policy makers who are interested in the impact of legalization on illegal gambling. This study demonstrated that illegal gambling occurs at a very low rate in Canada, a country that has legalized many forms of gambling. Notably, illegal online gambling

was higher in areas where legal options were not available at the time of the survey.

About the researchers

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