

# research snapshot

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## Many women who visit homeless shelters and drop-in services have experienced problem gambling

### What this research is about

Gambling is traditionally more popular with men than women. However, more women have started to gamble in the past few years. In particular, more women have started gambling online.

Research shows there is a link between problem gambling and homelessness. For example, people who experience homelessness are nine times more likely to experience problematic gambling than people in the general population. However, most research on problem gambling and homelessness focuses on men. So, researchers do not know as much about the link between problem gambling and homelessness in women.

Women who gamble often progress to problematic gambling more quickly than men and at later stages of life. Women who have gambling concerns progress to financial crisis earlier than do men, and in general, they earn less and are less likely to have access to credit and to financial reserves than men. As a result, women may be at higher risk of experiencing homelessness from financial problems caused by gambling. Thus, problem gambling and homelessness may also be linked in women. In Canada, about 27% of people who are homeless are women.

This study looked at problem gambling in women who visited shelters and drop-in programs in two large cities in Ontario, Canada – Hamilton and Toronto.

### What the researchers did

The researchers recruited women from 11 shelters and 4 drop-in programs. These centres provide meals, shelter, healthcare, and other services.

### What you need to know

Researchers found a link between problem gambling and homelessness in men. However, less research has looked at problem gambling and homelessness in women. This study surveyed women at 15 shelters and drop-in services in Ontario, Canada. It measured the rates of problematic gambling among women experiencing homelessness and poverty.

Six percent of women who visited the shelters experienced at-risk gambling, 9% experienced problem gambling and 19% experienced pathological gambling. Thus, problem gambling appears to be common in women experiencing homelessness and poverty. The researchers suggest shelters and drop-in programs screen for problem gambling and provide appropriate treatments.

The researchers visited each location multiple times between July 9, 2018, and March 17, 2019. Each visit was on a different day of the week and at a different time of day. When they visited, they invited all women who were present to participate. They asked 386 women to participate. In total, 169 agreed to participate and 162 completed the survey questions.

The researchers read each participant a definition of gambling. Then they asked the participants if they had ever gambled. Those who said “yes” to gambling, completed the NORC Diagnostic Screen for Disorders (NODS). The NODS, based on the DSM-5 criteria, is a 17-item screening process that yields a score ranging from 0 to 10. The researchers categorized participants based on their NODS scores:

- 0 points = non-problem gambling
- 1–2 points = at-risk gambling
- 3–4 points = problem gambling
- 5+ points = pathological gambling

## What the researchers found

Overall, 30% of participants did not gamble and 35% experienced non-problem gambling. Another 6% experienced at-risk gambling, 9% experienced problem gambling, and 19% experienced pathological gambling.

This means about one-third of women who visited the shelters were at least at-risk of experiencing gambling harms. Additionally, over one-quarter met the criteria for problem or pathological gambling. Thus, problematic gambling may be common in women who experience poverty and homelessness, but more research is needed.

## How you can use this research

This study shows a link between problem gambling and homelessness in women. The researchers suggest that shelters and drop-in services could screen women for problem gambling. These centres could also provide tailored treatments to the women who use their services.

## About the researchers

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## Citation

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## About Gambling Research Exchange (GREO)

Gambling Research Exchange (GREO) has partnered with the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University to produce Research Snapshots. GREO is an independent knowledge translation and exchange organization that aims to eliminate harm from gambling. Our goal is to support evidence-informed decision making in safer gambling policies, standards, and practices. The work we do is intended for researchers, policy makers, gambling regulators and operators, and treatment and prevention service providers.

Learn more about GREO by visiting [greo.ca](http://greo.ca) or emailing [info@greo.ca](mailto:info@greo.ca).

