

# research snapshot

summarize | mobilize



Gamblers with a lower portion of friends and family who gamble may have a lower risk of developing gambling problems

## What this research is about

There are different types of gamblers. Recreational gamblers gamble for fun. At-risk gamblers have had negative experiences from gambling. Problem or pathological gamblers gamble repeatedly and this leads to negative consequences. Non-gamblers don't gamble at all. Many studies focus on understanding the characteristics of problem gamblers. Few studies examine the different characteristics of the other types of gamblers. It is important to understand how gamblers are different from each other to create effective prevention programs that protect gamblers from harm.

Research shows that there are similarities and differences between the different types of gamblers. These similarities and differences can be based on gender, ethnic group, age, amount of education they have, if they're married or not, how much money they make, if their family or friends gamble, and if they use drugs or alcohol. For example, non-gamblers tend to be female with more education. At-risk gamblers tend to be males with less education.

In this study, the researchers investigated the characteristics that make recreational gamblers different from non-gamblers, at-risk gamblers, and problem or pathological gamblers.

## What the researchers did

The researchers used data collected from the Baseline General Population Survey (BGPS) of Massachusetts. NORC at the University of Chicago obtained a representative sample of 9,578 Massachusetts adults who completed the BGPS online, on paper, or in a telephone interview. The BGPS asked participants about their recreation, physical, and mental health behaviours, alcohol and drug use, attitudes toward

## What you need to know

This study investigated how recreational gamblers differ from non-gamblers, at-risk gamblers, and problem or pathological gamblers. The researchers used data collected with the Baseline General Population Survey (BGPS). The survey was administered to adults in Massachusetts. The researchers utilized the Problem and Pathological Gambling Measure (PPGM) to identify different gambler types. Males, immigrants, gamblers with less education, and lower income had a higher risk of developing gambling problems. Gamblers who had a lower portion of friends and family who gamble had a lower risk of developing gambling problems. Different forms of gambling games contribute differently in causing problems for gamblers. Prevention service providers can use this research to create programs that consider the effect a gambler's social network may have on their gambling behaviour.

gambling, gambling participation, gambling motivations, awareness of problem gambling services, gambling-related problems, and demographics.

Participants who reported gambling once a month or more were asked to complete the Problem and Pathological Gambling Measure (PPGM). The PPGM assessed participants for problem gambling symptoms. The researchers used the results of the PPGM to sort participants into four different gambler types. These types were non-gamblers, recreational gamblers, at-risk gamblers, and problem and pathological gamblers. They identified respondents as non-gamblers if they didn't gamble at all in the past year. Recreational gamblers gambled in the past year

but did not have any problem gambling symptoms. At-risk gamblers reported gambling more often and losing more money than what the median problem and pathological gambler reported. Problem gamblers reported gambling at least once a month and scored high on the PPGM. Pathological gamblers reported gambling at least once a month and scored higher than problem gamblers on the PPGM.

### What the researchers found

Compared to recreational gamblers, non-gamblers had a lower portion of friends and family who were gamblers. Recreational gamblers and non-gamblers had similar characteristics otherwise. Compared to recreational gamblers, at-risk gamblers were more likely to be male, born outside the United States, have less education, and make less money. They were also more likely to have mental health problems and not drink alcohol. The second strongest predictor of being an at-risk gambler was having a higher portion of friends and family who gamble.

The researchers found the most differences between recreational gamblers and problem and pathological gamblers. Compared to recreational gamblers, problem and pathological gamblers tended to be Black, male, have less education, and be born outside of the United States. Like at-risk gamblers, the second strongest predictor of being a problem or pathological gambler was having a higher portion of friends and family who gamble.

At-risk gamblers were more likely than recreational gamblers to gamble at casinos. This finding makes sense, since research shows that casino games, such as slot machines and casino table games, encourage gamblers to play non-stop. Playing non-stop may increase gamblers' risk of developing gambling problems. Overall, at-risk and problem and pathological gamblers play many different types of gambling games. All types of gambling games can play a part in causing problems for gamblers, although they possess different risk profiles.

### How you can use this research

Prevention service providers can use this research to create prevention programs that consider the effect a gambler's social network may have on their gambling

behaviour. They could also use this research to develop programs for groups that are more likely to develop gambling problems such as men, people who immigrated to the United States, and people who have less education.

### About the researchers

**Alissa Mazar, Edward J. Stanek III, Martha Zorn, and Rachel A. Volberg** are affiliated with the Social and Economic Impacts of Gambling in Massachusetts (SEIGMA) project, at the University of Massachusetts Amherst School of Public Health and Health Sciences in Massachusetts, United States. **Robert J. Williams** is affiliated with the SEIGMA project and with the Faculty of Health Sciences at the University of Lethbridge in Alberta, Canada. For more information about this study, please contact Alissa Mazar at [amazar@umass.edu](mailto:amazar@umass.edu).

### Citation

Mazar, A., Williams, R.J., Stanek III, E.J., Zorn, M., & Volberg, R. (2018). The importance of friends and family to recreational gambling, at-risk gambling, and problem gambling. *BMC Public Health*, 18. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-018-5988-2>

### Study Funding

This study was funded by the Massachusetts Gaming Commission.

### Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (GREO)

Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (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 responsible 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).

