

research snapshot

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Gambling, mental health, and demographic differences between people who gamble with and without cannabis use

What this research is about

Many people who struggle to control their gambling and have problem gambling (PG) also struggle with cannabis use. Recent research has shown that cannabis use is frequent amongst all age groups that gamble (adolescents, young adults, and adults). The aim of this study was to compare people who gamble with and without cannabis use on several measures. These measures include gambling characteristics (e.g., presence of problem gambling symptoms), substance use, and other mental health issues.

What the researchers did

The researchers recruited participants who were registered with Leger Opinion's (LEO) online panel. This online panel was designed to be representative of the Canadian adult population in age, ethnicity, etc. Participants could complete the study if they had gambled at least once per month in the past year. The study consisted of several online questionnaires.

Questions regarding cannabis use came from the 2018 Canadian Community Health Survey and the 2018 National Cannabis Survey, both from Statistics Canada. Questions relating to the DSM-5 diagnostic criteria for Substance Use Disorder, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Major Depressive Disorder (MDD), Generalized Anxiety (GAD), and Panic Disorder (PD) were also asked. The Gambling Participation Instrument (GPI) was used to measure frequency of gambling for eight types of gambling, time spent gambling, and money won/lost. The Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) was used to assess symptoms related to problem gambling.

The researchers compared people who used cannabis (cannabis users; CUs) to people who did not use

What you need to know

Recent research has demonstrated that people with problem gambling may also struggle with cannabis use. The goal of this study was to see if there are differences between adults who gamble and who do or do not use cannabis. The researchers surveyed 10,054 Canadian adults who gambled regarding their demographics, cannabis use, gambling history and frequency, and mental health. They compared people who used cannabis (CUs) and those who did not use cannabis (NCUs). The results showed that a greater proportion of CUs had symptoms of problem gambling, tended to be younger, spent more money gambling, and participated in more types of gambling compared to CNU. Several factors predicted being a CU. These included younger age, participating in online gambling, using tobacco and alcohol, and having experienced abuse as a child.

cannabis (cannabis non-users; CNU). This was done to see if there were demographic, mental health, and gambling differences between the two groups. The researchers also examined if there were any characteristics that predicted being a CU or a CNU.

What the researchers found

A total of 10,054 people completed the survey. Approximately 25% were CUs and 75% were NCUs. About 56% of CUs reported using cannabis while gambling in the past year. Of those who used cannabis whilst gambling, 41% used cannabis always, often, or sometimes while gambling.

In the entire sample, 27% of men were CUs and 24% of women were CUs. CUs tended to be younger than

CNUs. There were also several other demographic differences, including marital status, ethnicity, and household income. Specifically, CUs were more likely to be single/separated and have lower income. They were also more likely to have a minority background, such as Indigenous, African, or South Asian.

In terms of gambling, CUs scored higher than NCU on the PGSI. A higher proportion of people with problem gambling were CUs, and a higher proportion of people without problem gambling were NCUs. CUs spent more money gambling per month and participated in more types of gambling compared to CNUs. There was a greater proportion of CUs who used illicit drugs. There was also a greater proportion of CUs who met the criteria for mental health disorders, including SUD, PTSD, PD, and GAD.

The researchers examined predictors of group membership as a CU or a CNU. They found that age (being younger), identifying as First Nation, engaging in online gambling, having higher PGSI scores, using tobacco, using alcohol, and being abused as a child significantly predicted CU status. Their model correctly identified 95% of CUs and 55% of CNUs.

How you can use this research

This research could be useful to researchers interested in substance use among people who gamble, as well as clinicians who treat addictions. The results of this study indicate that cannabis use is prevalent among people who gamble, particularly among those who struggle with problem gambling.

About the researchers

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