

# research snapshot

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## Online gambling and associated health risk factors among East Asians and South Asians in Canada during COVID-19

### What this research is about

Evidence suggests that the COVID-19 pandemic has a greater impact on the primary health of Asians than non-Asians in western countries. However, little is known about the secondary impacts on mental health and addictive behaviours. Prior to the pandemic, some studies have found that Asians have higher risk of gambling problems than non-Asians. Few studies have distinguished between East Asians and South Asians, though. The aim of this study was to explore online gambling during COVID-19 among East and South Asians living in Ontario, Canada. This study also explored a variety of risk factors that represent health inequities, such as substance use, mental health problems, and financial concerns during COVID-19.

### What the researchers did

In August 2020, an online survey was administered to adults living in Ontario, Canada. All participants had gambled in the last 12 months. At the time of the survey, the province-wide lockdown had been lifted. But most land-based venues remained closed. Of the 2,012 survey participants, 206 were East Asians (10.2%) and 107 were South Asians (5.3%). Most participants were White Europeans (73.1%). The rest were from other ethno-cultural backgrounds (11.4%).

The survey asked about involvement in 13 forms of online gambling since land-based venues were closed during COVID-19. The survey asked if the decision to gamble online was motivated by (1) COVID-19 social distancing measures and (2) a desire to earn income. Participants were also asked if they gambled online only, land-based only, or a mix of both prior to COVID-19. They were asked if they intended to gamble online only, land-based only, or a mix of both when land-

### What you need to know

This study explored online gambling during COVID-19 among East and South Asians living in Ontario, Canada. It also explored a variety of risk factors that represent health inequities. An online survey was carried out in August 2020. Of the 2,012 participants, 206 were East Asians (10.2%) and 107 were South Asians (5.3%). The researcher found that East and South Asians were more likely to experience problem gambling. East and South Asians were more likely to gamble online to earn income and to gamble under the influence of alcohol during COVID-19. East and South Asians also had higher rates of mental health problems (e.g., anxiety). A substantial number of participants reported negative impacts from COVID-19 on household income and employment.

based venues reopened. Participants were asked if they gambled under the influence of alcohol, cannabis, and other substance during COVID-19. The Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) was used to assess gambling risk. The General Anxiety Disorder (GAD-7) and the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) were used to assess anxiety and depression. Two questions asked about negative impacts on employment and household income during COVID-19.

### What the researchers found

#### *Comparing East Asians to non-East Asians*

Prior to COVID-19, East Asians were more likely to gamble online only or a mix of both online and land-based games than non-East Asians. During the pandemic, East Asians were more likely to engage in most types of online games. The exceptions were

instant lottery, lottery draws, and raffles. East Asians were more likely to gamble online to earn income than non-East Asians. They were more likely to want to continue gambling online only or in mixed mode when land-based venues reopened.

Compared to non-East Asians, East Asians were over three times more likely to experience problem gambling. They were more likely to gamble under the influence of alcohol during COVID-19. East Asians were also more likely to report moderate anxiety. Over one-quarter of East Asians reported moderate to severe anxiety (26.3%) and depression (28.3%).

About 44.2% of East Asians reported a negative impact on household income, 16% reported reduced work hours, and 8.3% reported lost employment during COVID-19. These rates were not significantly higher than non-East Asians.

#### *Comparing South Asians to non-South Asians*

Prior to COVID-19, South Asians were nearly four times as likely to play a mix of both online and land-based games than non-South Asians. During the pandemic, South Asians were more likely to play instant lottery, slot machines, casino table games, and horse race betting. South Asians were more likely to gamble online to earn income and in response to COVID-19 social distancing measures than non-South Asians. They were more likely to want to gamble in mixed mode when land-based venues reopened.

Compared to non-South Asians, South Asians were twice as likely to experience moderate-risk and problem gambling. South Asians were twice as likely to gamble online under the influence of alcohol during COVID-19. They were more likely to report moderate to severe anxiety and moderately severe to severe depression than non-South Asians. About 35.9% of South Asians reported moderate to severe anxiety and 33.7% reported moderate to severe depression.

About 43.9% of South Asians reported a negative impact on household income, 21.5% reported reduced work hours, and 8.4% reported lost employment during COVID-19. More South Asians reported reduced work hours than non-South Asians.

The researcher found that East Asians and South Asians had higher rates of online gambling, as measured by the number of games they had played over the past year, than other participants. But after adjusting for age and gender, only East Asians had a higher rate of online gambling.

#### **How you can use this research**

This study provides a more nuanced understanding of online gambling and associated risk factors in East Asians and South Asians. It may help to inform more targeted prevention and treatment programmes.

#### **About the researchers**

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#### **Citation**

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