

research snapshot

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Gambling and problem gambling rates among Canadian adults in 2018 and changes since 2002

What this research is about

Prevalence studies establish how common gambling and problem gambling are in a population. This information is useful to understand if different policies and interventions have been successful. In Canada, there have been only two national studies to study the prevalence rates of gambling and problem gambling. The first occurred in 2000 and the second occurred in 2002 as part of Statistics Canada's annual Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS).

Legal gambling opportunities have expanded rapidly in Canada since 2002. However, current rates of gambling, specific types of gambling, and problem gambling are unknown. The purpose of this study is to provide an update of gambling and problem gambling rates among Canadian adults. Another aim is to describe changes in gambling patterns since 2002.

What the researchers did

The researchers worked with Statistics Canada to develop a set of questions about gambling and problem gambling called the 'Gambling Module'. This set of questions was added to the 2018 CCHS.

The CCHS is an annual survey that collects information about health and health care use. Statistics Canada administers the survey to participants selected to be representative of the Canadian population. This is done by randomly selecting households from different regions. Then, one member from each household is randomly selected to participate. However, the CCHS does not include certain groups, such as people living on reserves and other Aboriginal settlements.

For the 2018 CCHS, the Gambling Module was restricted to people who were at least 15 years old

What you need to know

This study examined the prevalence rates of gambling and problem gambling in Canada. It also describes changes since 2002. The researchers analyzed data from 23,952 adults who participated in the 2018 Canadian Community Health Survey. Most participants (66.2%) reported gambling in the past year, mainly on lottery and raffle tickets. About 0.6% of the participants experienced problem gambling. Another 2.7% experienced at-risk gambling. Problem gambling rates did not differ markedly across the provinces. Gambling participation and problem gambling rates had declined in 2018 when compared to 2002.

and living in one of the 10 provinces (but not the three territories). A total of 24,982 people completed the Gambling Module. For this study, the researchers focused on 23,952 individuals aged 18 and older.

The Gambling Module included a shortened version of the Gambling Participation Instrument. It asked participants how often they engaged in eight different types of gambling in the past year. The types of gambling were instant lottery tickets, lottery or raffle tickets, electronic gaming machines (EGMs), casino table games, sports betting, bingo, other forms of gambling, and speculative financial market activities.

Participants who reported gambling at least once a month were asked if they gambled in person, online, or both. They also completed the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI). Based on the PGSI, the researchers grouped the participants as having no problem gambling (score of 0), at-risk gambling (score of 1-4), or problem gambling (score of 5 or higher).

What the researchers found

2018 Gambling Participation

Most participants (66.2%) reported gambling in the past year. Many of these participants gambled occasionally and on one or two types of gambling only. Lottery and raffle tickets were the most popular type of gambling. There were some differences between the provinces. The most notable difference was that EGM participation was higher in Manitoba and Saskatchewan than the other provinces.

The overall problem gambling rate was quite low. About 0.6% of the participants scored as having problem gambling. Another 2.7% scored as at-risk gambling. There were no significant differences in problem gambling rates across the provinces.

Comparing to 2002

When compared to 2002, gambling participation in 2018 had declined for most types of gambling, especially for EGMs and bingo. The only exception to this trend was casino table games. Online gambling had also increased but remained less common than in-person gambling. About 6.4% of the participants reported gambling online in 2018. This was a marked increase compared to the 1% in 2002. Both problem gambling and at-risk gambling rates had declined in 2018 when compared to 2002. Importantly, there was a 45% decrease in the overall problem gambling rate.

How you can use this research

The results show a decline in gambling and problem gambling despite the growth of legal gambling opportunities. However, the researchers highlighted several areas of concern. For instance, people with problem gambling may contribute more to gambling spending. Further, problem gambling rates do not take into account people who are harmed by another person's gambling. This study can inform researchers, policy-makers, and service providers.

About the researchers

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Citation

Williams, R. J., Leonard, C. A., Belanger, Y. D., Christensen, D. R., el-Guebaly, N., Hodgins, D. C., McGrath, D. S., Nicoll, F., & Stevens, R. M. G. (2020). Gambling and problem gambling in Canada in 2018: Prevalence and changes since 2002. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0706743720980080>

Study funding

This study is part of the Alberta Gambling Research Institute (AGRI) National Project, which is funded by the Canadian Consortium for Gambling Research, the Canadian Centre on Substance Use and Addiction, Gambling Research Exchange Ontario, and AGRI.

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.

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