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Gambling in Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians

What this research is about

North American Indigenous cultures had practiced gambling long before Europeans came to North America. Some Indigenous cultures believed that gambling welcomed spirits. So, they often included gambling in their cultural ceremonies. However, European colonists introduced more commercial types of gambling. This influenced many Indigenous people to engage in more European styles of gambling. Today, only a small number of Indigenous people still practice their traditional forms of gambling. Many Indigenous groups are now providers of commercial, Westernized gambling.

The rates of problem gambling are often higher in Indigenous groups. This study compared gambling and problem gambling in Indigenous vs. non-Indigenous Canadians. The researchers aimed to provide a current overview of Canadian Indigenous gambling. They also aimed to understand the specific risk factors for Indigenous problem gambling.

What the researchers did

The researchers used data from two surveys. The first survey was the Canadian Community Health Survey. This is an annual survey given to people living in Canada's 10 provinces. This study used the survey results in 2018 from respondents who were at least 18 years old. A total of 23,952 people completed the survey and 1324 of them self-identified as Indigenous.

The 2018 survey asked about participants' health. It also included a Gambling Module. The Gambling Module included a short version of the Gambling Participation Instrument. This asked participants how often they engaged in different types of gambling, such as lotteries, electronic gambling machines

What you need to know

This study examined survey results of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians to compare their gambling behaviour. The researchers found that Indigenous Canadians were more likely to gamble on electronic gaming machines (EGMs), bingo, and instant lotteries than non-Indigenous Canadians. They were also more likely to experience problem gambling. However, the risk factors for problem gambling were similar in both groups. For example, EGM use was the strongest risk factor for problem gambling in both groups. The researchers suggest that there should be fewer EGMs in regions with high numbers of Indigenous people.

(EGMs), and sports betting. The survey also included the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI). The PGSI categorizes people as having non-problem gambling, at-risk gambling, or problem gambling.

The second survey was sent to Canadian adults who were members of an online panel. It was only sent to people who gambled in the past year. A total of 10,999 people completed the survey and 589 of them self-identified as Indigenous. This survey asked about substance uses, mental health, and impulsivity. It also asked about the following aspects of gambling:

- Past year gambling (measured with the Gambling Participation Instrument)
- Problem gambling (measured with PGSI and the Problem and Pathological Gambling Measure)
- Motivation for gambling (e.g., gambling to win money, for entertainment, and for social reasons)
- Context for gambling (e.g., gambling alone or with others, using alcohol while gambling)

- Family history of problem gambling
- Social exposure to gambling (e.g., if people in their social group gamble)
- Mistaken beliefs about gambling (e.g., not understanding the random nature of gambling)

What the researchers found

Overall, gambling behaviour was similar in Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians. However, there were some differences. For example, Indigenous people had higher levels of gambling, and they were more likely to have problem gambling. Indigenous people were also more likely to gamble on EGMs, bingo, and instant lotteries than non-Indigenous people.

The researchers compared results for people who gambled regularly (at least once per month). They found that Indigenous people were more likely to gamble for social reasons and were more likely to use substances while gambling. They were also more likely to have substance use and mental health disorders. They also had higher social exposure to gambling and were more likely to have a family member with problem gambling. There were no differences in mistaken beliefs about gambling in Indigenous vs. non-Indigenous Canadians.

The researchers found that gambling on EGMs was the strongest risk factor for problem gambling. This was true for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians. Having a higher number of EGMs in a region was linked to increased problem gambling rate in that region. Thus, the presence of EGMs may increase problem gambling risks. Other common risk factors included having mistaken beliefs about gambling, being male, and gambling to escape or relieve stress.

How you can use this research

This study shows that the risk factors for problem gambling are similar between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians. The researchers suggest that treatments need to be culturally appropriate but may not need to be specific to different cultures. They also suggest reducing use of EGMs and increasing availability of treatments.

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.

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