A Canadian cohort study of risk factors that predict problem gambling

What this research is about
A range of factors have been reported to be associated with problem gambling. These include gambling-related factors (e.g., gambling to escape), personality traits (e.g., being impulsive), and mental health (e.g., depression). It is unknown if many factors have a causal role or if they appear as a consequence of problem gambling. Therefore, longitudinal studies that collect data over multiple years are needed.

There have been several longitudinal gambling studies, including six large-scale studies in five countries. Most of these studies are limited by the number of factors they investigate. Most studies are also somewhat specific to their region and time period.

This study builds on previous research by using data from a Canada-wide longitudinal study. The dataset includes a larger number of people with gambling problems than any previous study. It includes almost all factors known to be associated with problem gambling. Factors that predict problem gambling are strongest if they are present in the prior year rather than in two, three, or four years earlier. Therefore, this study looks at the causal role of the factors over two waves of data collection (baseline to one year later).

What the researchers did
A cohort of 10,199 Canadian adults who gambled completed an online survey in 2018. Among them, 4,707 completed a follow-up survey one year later. A number of factors were found to predict current problem gambling and future problem gambling at follow-up. Gambling-related factors were the strongest predictors. Being impulsive and lower household income were also strong predictors. Even though there were multiple risk factors, people tended to self-report a single cause for their gambling problems.

What the researchers found
At baseline, 1,346 participants met the criteria for problem gambling (13.3%). Another 1,388 participants

What you need to know
This study identified factors that predict problem gambling using data from a Canada-wide longitudinal study. A cohort of 10,199 Canadian adults who gambled completed an online survey in 2018. Among them, 4,707 completed a follow-up survey one year later. A number of factors were found to predict current problem gambling and future problem gambling at follow-up. Gambling-related factors were the strongest predictors. Being impulsive and lower household income were also strong predictors. Even though there were multiple risk factors, people tended to self-report a single cause for their gambling problems.
were at risk (13.7%). Also, 2,710 participants had at least one major mental health disorder according to DSM-5 criteria (26.8%). At follow-up, 531 participants had problem gambling, with 227 being new cases.

Predictors of current and future problem gambling
The researchers identified 23 predictors of current problem gambling (at baseline), and 14 predictors of future problem gambling (at follow-up). Gambling-related factors were the strongest predictors. Mental health and demographic factors had a more modest contribution. In particular, current problem gambling was the strongest predictor of future problem gambling. Other strong gambling-related predictors of current and future problem gambling included: largest gambling loss in a single day; total gambling losses in the past 12 months; high level of false gambling beliefs; playing electronic gaming machines (EGMs); importance of gambling as a leisure activity; family history of problem gambling; and socialising with people with gambling problems. Being impulsive and lower household income were also strong predictors.

Self-reported causes of problem gambling
A total of 1,261 participants answered the open-ended question about the causes of their gambling problems. About 4.9% said they “didn’t know”, 12.0% denied having a problem, and 83.1% provided an explanation. The majority mentioned a single cause. Most causes fell into four categories: (1) desire to win money/poverty/greed; (2) boredom or enjoyment/excitement; (3) stress/depression/mental problems/trauma; and (4) poor self-control/addiction.

Only 37.1% of participants reported if particular types of gambling contributed to their gambling problems. The most common type was EGMs. Over half of the participants (51.8%) said their problems were mostly with land-based gambling. Another 31.1% mentioned online gambling, and 17.1% mentioned both.

How you can use this research
This study identified predictors of problem gambling that are similar to previous studies. The findings suggest core risk factors that are cross-cultural. This study could inform intervention and policy measures to prevent and minimise gambling problems.

About the researchers
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Citation

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