

# research snapshot

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## Social inequality affects the relationship between poor mental health and gambling problems

### What this research is about

Over the last 20 years, there has been a significant increase in the number of gambling venues in Canada as well as in other countries around the world. In Ontario, Canada, gambling opportunities are prevalent in communities that have low socio-economic status - that is, poor areas with lower education and lower income. Easy access to gambling opportunities can lead to more gambling problems. Individuals with gambling problems are also more likely to have mental health problems, such as mood and anxiety disorders. Mental health problems are more common among people with low socio-economic status. The researcher investigated how the relationship between problem gambling and mood and anxiety disorders might be affected by socio-economic status. There have been no studies to date that examine the link between these three factors.

### What the researcher did

The researcher used data from the 2008 Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) for the study. The CCHS collected information about the physical, social, and mental health of Canadians. Data from 28,271 respondents who were living in Ontario, Quebec, and Saskatchewan were used in this study since these were the only provinces that asked about gambling activities. Participants were included if they were over 18 years of age and participated in at least one gambling activity during the past year. Socio-economic status was measured by taking into account household income and educational level.

### What the researcher found

People with mood and anxiety disorders had more severe gambling problems than those without the disorders. Moreover, people with higher socio-

### What you need to know

Research has shown that an individual's socio-economic status can affect their mental health and experience of gambling harm. In this study, the researcher investigated how the connection between poor mental health and problem gambling might be influenced by socio-economic status. The researcher found that the strength of the relationship between anxiety disorders and problem gambling varied depending on how much income a person earns. In particular, this study showed that people with anxiety disorders had more severe gambling problems if they had lower socio-economic status. This research can be used by policy makers to implement policies that restrict the number of gambling activities in low income communities. Researchers could use these findings to further investigate how social inequalities affect the link between mental disorders and problem gambling.

economic status experienced fewer harms as a result of gambling. Socio-economic status influenced the relationship between anxiety disorder and gambling problems. Specifically, individuals with an anxiety disorder had more severe gambling problems if they had lower socio-economic status, and the relationship was strongest at the lowest socioeconomic status. At higher socio-economic status, people with an anxiety disorder did not differ as much in terms of how severe their gambling problems were from those without the disorder. Socio-economic status did not affect the relationship between mood disorders and problem gambling.

### How you can use this research

Since anxiety disorders are common among individuals of low socio-economic status, mental health organizations could use this research to inform policy makers that there is a need to increase the number of mental health services in low income communities. Policy makers could give more funding to social programs to increase their capacity to respond to community needs. Policy makers could also use this information to implement policies that restrict the number of gambling activities in low income areas. Researchers could use this study to further explore how social inequalities affect the link between mental disorders and problem gambling.

### About the Researcher

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### Keywords

Problem gambling, sociology, socio-economic status, anxiety

operators, and treatment and prevention service providers.

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Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (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 responsible gambling policies, standards and practices. The work we do is intended for researchers, policy makers, gambling regulators and

