



Gambling and Problem Gambling in Canada in 2018: Prevalence and Changes Since 2002 (2020)

What is this Research About?

This study assessed gambling patterns and participation rates in 2018 compared to 2002 levels. The primary goal of this study is to provide an updated profile of gambling and problem gambling in Canada and to examine how the rates and patterns of participation compare to 2002. The reason for selecting 2002 as the comparable year is because there have only ever been two published national prevalence studies of gambling and problem gambling in Canada, the first in 2000 and the second in 2002 by Statistics Canada as part of the annual Canadian Community Health Survey. There has been significant expansion of legal gambling availability in Canada since 2002 as well as new forms of gambling (e.g., Esports betting, fantasy sport betting), new forms of payment (e.g., skins, cryptocurrency), and new access to online platforms. Current rates of overall gambling, specific types of gambling, and problem gambling are unknown, as is whether there continues to be significant interprovincial differences in these rates. Problem gambling may have either increased since 2002 due to increased availability or decreased due to “adaptation”. The questions were administered through the 2018 Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS). The CCHS is a survey of health determinants, health status, and health care use. A set of questions specific to gambling were implemented in the 2018 CCHS. This study attempted to fill in the knowledge gap that persists regarding gambling behaviour and to give an updated profile about adults who partake in gambling activities in Canada.



What the Research Did

In cooperation with Statistics Canada, measures of gambling behavior and problem gambling were included in the 2018 administration of the annual CCHS. This set of questions is known as the “Gambling Module”. The CCHS containing the Gambling Module was administered for a 6-month period (July–December 2018) and only in the provinces (no territories). A sample of 23,952 individuals 18 years and older responded to the Gambling Module.

The Gambling Module was an assessment of past year participation in eight different types of gambling. Respondents were asked about their frequency of in-person or online engagement in each of the following: instant lottery tickets, lottery or raffle tickets, electronic gambling machines, casino table games, sports betting, bingo, other forms of gambling, and speculative financial market



activities. Respondents who gambled once a month or more on one or more types of gambling were asked questions from the Problem Gambling Severity Index to categorize individuals into the categories of non-problem gamblers, at-risk gamblers, and problem gamblers.

What Did the Research Find?

The researchers found that the overall pattern of gambling in 2018 is very similar to 2002. There appears to be two main findings. The first is that the relative popularity of the different types of gambling in 2018 in Canada is very similar to 2002. The second main finding is that overall participation rates have decreased. This is particularly true for Electronic Gambling Machines (EGMs) and bingo but is true for almost all types of gambling. Casino table games and online gambling are the exceptions to this trend.

The majority of Canadian adults reported engaging in gambling in 2018. However, this is largely due to the purchase of lottery and/or raffle tickets, which is the type of gambling most Canadian adults participate in. Altogether, 66.2% of the Canadian adult population reported partaking in one or more types of gambling in 2018. Lottery and raffle tickets are the only type of gambling in which the majority of the Canada population participates in. Most people were classified as occasional gamblers although there is a subgroup of people who purchase lottery tickets on a regular basis. The majority of gamblers engage in more than one type of gambling.

Online gambling was the one form of gambling that has increased participation from 2002 to 2018 with 6.4% of adult Canadians reporting to have participated in online gambling in 2018 and 1.0% who engaged in 'arcade or Internet gambling' in 2002. A total of 47.0% of all online gamblers

indicated they only gambled online in the past year, whereas 53.0% indicated gambling both online and in-person. Online gambling participation has increased, but it is still uncommon relative to in-person participation. Other types of gambling are less common including casino table games and EGMs with most people reporting only occasional involvement. Patterns of gambling were very similar across provinces. However, there are higher rates of EGM participation in Manitoba and Saskatchewan.

With the vast majority of the population reporting limited gambling involvement, it is not surprising that the population prevalence of problem gambling is also low. A total of 0.6% of the Canadian adult population is estimated to be problem gamblers in 2018 (roughly 156,000 people) with an additional 2.7% being at-risk gamblers. There are no significant differences in provincial problem gambling rates. Comparisons between 2018 and 2002 show that both problem gambling and at-risk gambling have decreased since 2002, coincident with the overall decrease in gambling participation.

How Can You Use This Research?

This research can help to inform policy interventions and future research directions. Public education campaigns in Manitoba and Saskatchewan could focus on lower-risk strategies around EGMs and other forms of higher-risk gambling activities. Future research on online gambling would be helpful as this is an area of growing concern among policy makers and health professionals working with people who experience gambling-related harm.



What You Need to Know

Gambling and problem gambling have both decreased in Canada from 2002 to 2018. It is notable that the decrease in gambling and problem gambling in Canada have occurred despite an expansion of legal gambling opportunities since 2002. The relative popularity of the different types of gambling in Canada in 2018 is very similar to 2002 with the main difference being decreased gambling participation in 2018.

The most important difference between 2002 and 2018 is the decreased rates of problem and at-risk gambling, with problem gambling being 45% lower. The decrease in problem gambling in Canada also follows a worldwide trend beginning in the early 2000s. Several factors are thought to be at work: (a) an overall decrease in gambling; (b) increased awareness of the potential harms of gambling; (c) many people who experience gambling-related harm quit gambling; (d) increased industry and/or government efforts to provide gambling more safely and to provide treatment resources; and (e) increasing age of the population (as older people have lower rates of problem gambling).

Gambling expansion without any apparent additional increase in problems is something that has been reported in several other jurisdictions in recent years. Despite clear improvement, there are still areas of concern. Commercial gambling revenue per adult has not changed significantly from 2002 to 2018 (\$453 in fiscal 2001/2002 to \$503 in fiscal 2017/2018), which means that revenue per gambler has increased. There are still areas of concern regarding the expenditure per problem gambler (which may be increasing); the increasing lifetime prevalence of problem gambling in the population; and the much higher prevalence of people who have been harmed by gambling but do not meet criteria for problem gambling.

Citation

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