



# RESEARCH SYNOPSIS

Matheson, F.I., Devotta, K., Wendaferew, A., and Pedersen, C. (2014). Prevalence of gambling problems among the clients of a Toronto homeless shelter. *Journal of Gambling Studies*. DOI 10.1007/s10899-014-9452-7.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

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What is the prevalence of pathological gambling among the homeless in Toronto?

## PURPOSE

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Research has shown that gambling problems are prevalent among the homeless and that gambling increased the risk for homelessness. The current study built upon previous studies to assess gambling severity among the homeless in Toronto. The purpose was to estimate the prevalence of problem gambling in this population.

## HYPOTHESIS

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None stated.

## PARTICIPANTS

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Participants were recruited from the Good Shepherd Center, a community-based center that provides a range of services to homeless in Toronto. The sample comprised 264 participants, mostly males (mean age = 47 years).

## PROCEDURE

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Participants were recruited by the center staff and given a computerized version of the NODS/NODS-CLiP.

## MAIN OUTCOME MEASURES

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The NORC Diagnostic Screen (NODS) was used to assess lifetime gambling-related problems. The screen measured ten criteria derived from the DSM: preoccupation, tolerance, withdrawal, loss of control,

escape, chasing, lying, illegal acts, risked relationships, and bailout. The CLiP was used to screen out non-problem gamblers.

## KEY RESULTS

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About 15% of the sample reported never gambling in their lifetime and close to 43% were classified as non-problem gamblers. Of those who gambled, 8% were at risk of problem gambling, 10% met criteria for lifetime problem gambling, and an alarming 25% met criteria for pathological gambling.

## LIMITATIONS

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None stated.

## CONCLUSIONS

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This study examined the lifetime prevalence of at-risk, problem, and pathological gambling among the homeless population in Toronto. Findings revealed an alarming 25% of the homeless met criteria for pathological gambling and 10% problem gambling. This research provides further evidence that gambling is becoming more of a problem among the homeless and substance using populations, compared to the general population. It is clear that there is a need for more knowledge regarding housing instability and homelessness among problem and pathological gamblers. Furthermore, more information is needed to develop effective community-based interventions and national initiatives to combat homelessness.

**KEYWORDS:** gambling, homelessness, community services, shelter, housing instability

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