

# research snapshot

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## Gambling and problem gambling among older adults living in Ontario, Canada

### What this research is about

The majority of adults who are 55 years of age or older gamble. They tend to gamble more frequently on lotteries, bingo, and electronic gambling machines (EGMs) than younger adults. However, older adults gamble less on other forms of gambling and fewer older adults have problem gambling compared to younger adults. Problem gambling is repetitive gambling behaviour that leads to negative consequences. Yet, problem gambling can be more devastating for older adults than younger adults.

One reason is that many older adults face major life events, such as retirement, illness, and loss of loved ones. They may gamble to deal with these events and develop problem gambling as a result. Another reason is that retired older adults have limited income and may not recover from gambling losses easily. Casinos also promote gambling to older adults by offering services, such as bus tours to casinos and low-cost food and drink. Few studies have investigated how bus tours affect older adults' gambling behaviours.

Gambling treatment programs are often directed to support men and are poorly suited to address women's needs. More research is needed to understand sex differences in problem gambling. In this study, the researchers investigated how common gambling and problem gambling were among older adults in Ontario, Canada. They explored differences between men and women in gambling behaviours and attitudes, and if bus tours were associated with problem gambling.

### What the researchers did

The researchers analyzed survey data collected by Focal Research Consultants Ltd. in Ontario. The survey

### What you need to know

The researchers investigated how common gambling and problem gambling were among older adults aged 55 and older. They also explored sex differences in gambling behaviours, gambling attitudes, and use of bus tours to casinos. Participants of the survey were 2,187 older adults living in Ontario, Canada. The majority of older adults did not have a gambling problem. About 1.8% of older adults had moderate-risk or problem gambling. Older adults with more severe gambling problems were more likely to have taken bus tours to casinos. There were some differences in the types of games played between men and women. Most older adults believed that the harms of gambling to society outweigh the benefits and gambling is too widely available.

was a Random Residential Household Telephone Survey of older adults aged 55 and older about their gambling habits. Older adults from the general population and older adults who were regular gamblers were surveyed. In total, there were 1,800 older adults from the general population and 387 older adults who regularly gambled.

Interviewers administered the survey to participants over the telephone. They asked participants how often they gambled and what types of gambling games they played. Participants answered questions on the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI). The PGSI assesses the severity of people's gambling problems. The interviewers also asked participants whether gambling had replaced other leisure

activities, whether they went to a casino on a bus tour in the past year, and their attitudes toward gambling.

### What the researchers found

Most participants had gambled at least once in their lifetime and in the past year. The majority of participants did not have a gambling problem. Only a very small number of participants suffered from moderate risk (1.7%) or problem gambling (0.1%). The numbers of men and women who gambled or had moderate-risk to problem gambling were similar. These findings suggest that gender may not affect the gambling participation and problem gambling of older adults like it does in younger adults.

Participants mostly played lotteries and charity draws within the last year. About one in four participants played slot machines within the last year. More women played bingo, instant lottery, and small charity draws than men. More men played lottery, casino table games, horse racing, and types of sports betting that are not sports lottery or online.

Participants who had more severe gambling problems were more likely to have taken a tour bus to a casino in the last year. This finding suggests that bus tours are associated with greater gambling problems. It may also be the case that bus tours offer a cheaper and safer transportation for older adults who would visit a casino by other means.

Most men and women believed that the harms of gambling to society outweigh the benefits. Two-thirds of the women held that belief and more women adhered to it than men. About half of men and women believed that gambling is too widely available.

### How you can use this research

This study expands current knowledge of gambling and problem gambling among older adults. Policy makers could use this research to create gambling policies that reduce the number of EGMs. Research has shown that EGMs are a high-risk form of gambling that can lead to problem gambling. More research is needed to understand if older adults who take bus tours to casinos are more likely to develop problem gambling than older adults who do not.

### About the researchers

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### Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (GREO)

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 operators, and treatment and prevention service providers.

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