

# Gambling Problems Among the Clients of a Toronto Homeless Shelter.

## What is this research about?

Currently, there is very little research examining the prevalence of problem and pathological gambling among people experiencing homelessness. To fill this gap, this study investigates the issue of problem gambling among clients of a homeless shelter in Toronto, Ontario. The researchers' goal is to estimate the prevalence of problem gambling among these clients.



## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW!

There is growing evidence that problem gambling is more prevalent among people experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness than the general population. Problem gambling is one of many patterns that may lead to homelessness. Because gambling-related homelessness develops over time, early intervention is essential to ensure that individuals receive the support they need before they experience a housing crisis.

**Problem gambling** refers to difficulties in limiting money and/or time spent on gambling.

**Pathological gambling** is a mental disorder characterized by chronic and irresistible urges to gamble.

## KEYWORDS

gambling, community services, shelter, homelessness

## ARTICLE SOURCE

Matheson, F., Devotta, K., Wendaferew, A., Pedersen C. (2014). Prevalence of gambling problems among the clients of a Toronto homeless shelter. *Journal of Gambling Studies*, 30(2):537-46.



## WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS DO?

The study was conducted at The Good Shepherd Centre, a community-based organization that provides services for homeless and marginally housed individuals in inner city Toronto. In order to recruit participants, the researchers visited the centre at different times, including mornings, afternoons, weekdays, and weekends.

In total, 264 participants were recruited from March 4<sup>th</sup> to March 29<sup>th</sup> 2013. After recruiting a participant, the researchers conducted a brief interview ranging between 1 to 10 minutes in length.

## WHAT DID THE RESEARCHERS FIND?

Out of the participants interviewed:

- Almost 15% had never gambled in their lifetime
- Close to 43% were non-problem gamblers
- 8% were at risk of lifetime problem gambling
- 10% met the criteria for lifetime problem gambling

- 25% were lifetime pathological gamblers
- Among gamblers, 58% were lifetime pathological gamblers and 42% were at risk of, or met the criteria for lifetime problem gambling

This study provides further evidence that problem gambling is prevalent among individuals who are homeless or under-housed. Among the general population,

past studies suggest that lifetime prevalence of problem gambling is 2.3% and lifetime prevalence of pathological gambling is 0.6%. These findings demonstrate a significant difference between the prevalence of problem gambling among homeless people compared to the general population.

## HOW CAN YOU USE THIS RESEARCH?

Research suggests that gambling-related homelessness develops over time. Because early intervention can prevent a housing crisis caused by problem gambling, social service agencies should include gambling in their initial assessment of clients. These agencies also require additional support and resources in order to address the complex issue of problem gambling. People who are homeless or under-housed are often missing from research on gambling, because these individuals can be difficult to recruit. As such, the issue of pathological gambling is under-estimated in studies and statistics. There is a great need for further

research on the prevalence of gambling among vulnerable populations. It is also important to study the ways in which gambling interacts with other factors that are linked to homelessness, such as substance abuse and mental illness.