

Gambling and problem gambling in four communities of Eeyou Istchee

Purpose

This study reports on a 2007-2008 survey of gambling habits among adults in Chisasibi, Wemindji, Waswanipi, and Mistissini. Its objectives were to

- Describe the demographic, social, and psychological characteristics of gamblers in Eeyou Istchee
- Look at the relationship between gambling and other problems like substance abuse.

Research methods

Before developing the survey, the researchers spoke with 46 key informants in Eeyou Istchee—people like social workers, youth protection workers, and Public Health officers. (A separate report on this consultation is available.) These informants said that many forms of gambling are now practiced in the communities, and gambling is perhaps the most common leisure activity. They also felt that the problems associated with gambling are being hidden or denied. These problems, they said, include child neglect, people running out of money for essentials, and people drinking to excess while they gamble.

Gambling

- Lottery tickets (6/49, Pick3, Nevada...)
- Bingo
- Casino games
- Other games like sports pools, cards, poker

The current study surveyed a random sample of 507 adults (18 and over) in Chisasibi, Wemindji, Waswanipi, and Mistissini. Each participant was interviewed twice, for two hours each time. The interviews were semi-structured, and used a set of well-tested tools (standard sets of questions) to measure things like gambling problems or substance abuse. All the interview tools were available in English and Cree, and some of them were put on audiotape so that people could use them even if they had poor reading skills.

Results of the survey

Extent of gambling and problem gambling in these communities

The study found that 68% of adults in the four communities had gambled or gamed in the past year. Men and women were equally likely to engage in most forms of gambling, but women were more likely to play bingo, and they played more often than men.

According to this survey, most gamblers are at little or no risk of having problems due to gambling: only a small proportion (3%) can be described as “high risk.” These results differ from those of the 2003 *Canadian Community Health Survey* in Eeyou Istchee, which found a much higher proportion of problem gamblers (over 9%). This may be because the two surveys used different tools to measure problem gambling.

Characteristics of high-risk gamblers

What are the characteristics of high-risk gamblers? To answer this question, the researchers compared two groups: gamblers who seemed to be at little or no risk of problems, and those at moderate or high risk. As you might expect, the two groups differed in their gambling habits. People in the higher-risk group

- Gambled more often
- Spent more money on gambling (an average of \$346 per month vs \$121 per month in the lower-risk group)
- Risked more money at a time (higher-risk players had typically risked up to \$630 at one time in the past year, compared to \$205 in the lower-risk group)
- Were more likely to gamble while drunk or high (21% vs 10%)
- Were more likely to hold mistaken beliefs about gambling, such as thinking that after losing many times they are more likely to win, or that a particular system would help them win.

Other than in gambling behaviour, people in the two groups were fairly similar: they did not differ in terms of gender, employment rates, or employment income. The main demographic difference was that people in the higher-risk group tended to be younger, and were more likely to have completed high school.

Gambling and risk of health or social problems

Gambling sometimes goes along with other health and social problems, so the researchers compared non-gamblers, lower-risk gamblers, and higher-risk gamblers to see if they had different rates of

- physical health problems
- mental health problems
- problems with abuse of substances like tobacco, alcohol, or drugs

Higher-risk gamblers had no more physical health problems than others, but they did have more mental health problems. In particular, they were more likely than others to report psychological problems such as depression (Table 1).

Table 1: Rates of mental health problems Non-gamblers, lower-risk gamblers and higher-risk gamblers compared Adults (18+) in Chisasibi, Wemindji, Waswanipi and Mistissini, 2007–2008			
	Non- gamblers	No/Low-risk gamblers	Mod/High- risk gamblers
Depressive symptoms in past week (Beck inventory)	10%	8%	19%
Relationship problems with spouse in past month	11%	9%	22%
Prescribed psychiatric medication in past year	9%	17%	14%
Any anxiety disorder (CDIS-IV)	8%	7%	10%
Any mood disorder (CDIS-IV)	26%	20%	37%
Note: statistically significant differences (.05 level) found within each group, using Chi square corrected for multiple comparisons.			

There were large differences between the groups in substance use. Higher-risk gamblers were more likely to smoke, although they smoked no more heavily than anyone else. More dramatically, 38% of higher-risk gamblers were classed as “substance abusers,” compared to about 20% of people in the other groups. People in the higher-risk group spent far more per month on alcohol and especially on drugs (Table 2). They were more likely to have been in trouble with the law, and they were considerably more likely to have been in treatment for substance abuse (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Proportion of adults reporting various problems, by gambling status, 2007–2008

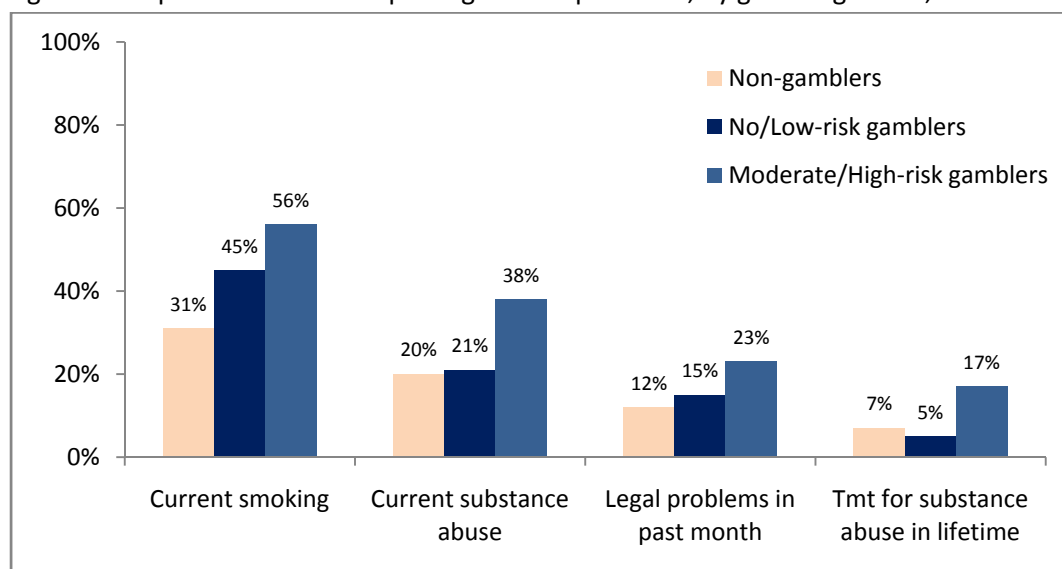


Table 2: Average amount spent on alcohol and drugs in month prior to survey As reported by adults (18+) in Chisasibi, Wemindji, Waswanipi and Mistissini, 2007–2008			
	Non-gamblers	No/Low-risk gamblers	Moderate/High-risk gamblers
Alcohol	\$14	\$19	\$38
Drugs	\$13	\$13	\$82

Conclusion

The study found that Eeyou Istchee has a small group of problem gamblers, made up of people who are at risk on many different fronts. They hold erroneous beliefs about gambling, gamble frequently and heavily, and may gamble while drunk or high. They have higher levels of psychological distress. They are more likely to be in trouble with the law. And they are more likely to abuse substances. In short, the people in this small group have many issues besides gambling.

This is a plain-language summary of a more technical report by Kathryn Gill, entitled “The social and psychological impact of gambling in the Cree communities of northern Quebec. Final report for the *Programme des actions concertées —impacts socioéconomiques des jeux de hasard et d’argent.*” July 30, 2010.