

# Research Snapshot

## Generational comparison of gambling problems and attitudes among older adults

### What is this research about?

Gambling is a popular leisure activity among people over the age of 55 and, in Canada, this age group is growing. Statistics Canada predicts that, by 2024, more than 20% of Canadians will be older than 65.

Although research suggests that older adults are less likely to have problem gambling compared to younger age groups, there are a number of features of aging that can increase the severity of gambling-related harm. As a result, researchers set out to see if there are any differences in attitudes towards gambling, participation, spending, and number of visits to casinos between people born before and after the baby boom.

### What did the researchers do?

To explore generational differences in gambling attitudes and behaviours, researchers recruited older adults in casinos across Southern Ontario, Canada, in 2013. The researchers used surveys and semi-structured interviews with three measures of gambling participation and six opinion questions.

The questions focused on general attitudes towards gambling and on its expansion in the province of Ontario. They looked for similarities among participants' responses. In total, 2,103 older adults participated in the study. The two study groups were identified based on each participant's year of birth: 1925

### What you need to know

Ontario researchers explored the gambling behaviours and attitudes of older adults (55+) born before and after the baby boom ("silent generation" vs. "baby boomers"). They found differences in rates of problem gambling and gambling participation patterns were higher for baby boomers, but they found that differences in attitudes were less consistent.

-1942 (the silent generation) or 1943-1960 (the baby boom generation).

### What did the researchers find?

There were significant differences in gambling behaviours between the two groups. These were:

- The proportion of participants screening for problem gambling in the younger cohort was more than two times the rate in the older group. More respondents in the older cohort were categorized as having no risk for gambling problems than those in the younger group.
- The older group visited casino/slots locations more often and spent more hours playing slot machines. The younger group spent significantly more per visit.
- A greater percentage of the older group said the harms and benefits of gambling

are equal.

- A greater percentage of the younger group thought that gambling was too widely available, but a greater proportion of the older group felt that current availability of gambling was sufficient.

These findings suggest that differences in rates of problem gambling between the two groups exist and that characteristic differences play an important role.

## Limitations and next steps

It's important to note that the differences seen in this study may reflect an age effect rather than a group effect. The researchers pointed out that differences in motivation to gamble put both groups at risk for problem gambling. But most previous studies grouped older adults together (65+), so it's difficult to compare them with the findings of this study.

The attitudes towards gambling seen in this study may not be representative of all older adults, since participants were recruited at gambling locations. It could be assumed that those motivated to go to a casino or slots location would already have fairly positive

views of gambling. In general, there's a lack of research on generational attitudes towards gambling. The next step will be to investigate these possible explanations.

## About the researchers

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## Keywords

Problem gambling, survey, casino, older adult, attitude, cohort

## How can you use this research?

In light of the growth in the aging population in Canada, it's important to understand the gambling behaviours and attitudes of older adults and identify ways to prevent gambling-related harms aimed at this age group. This study also highlights the need to consider the characteristic of generational cohorts among older adults when explaining differences in gambling behaviours within the category of "old adults."

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