



# GAMBLING RESEARCH REVEALS

## Expanding our understanding of the Internet gambler: A pilot study

OVER THE PAST DECADE, Canadians have accessed the Internet in record numbers to look for information, communicate with others, make transactions, and to provide entertainment. In addition to these seemingly benign activities, they've been using the Internet to gamble at online casinos, place sports wagers, and to utilize the services of peer-to-peer betting exchanges. Of those individuals who frequent gambling sites, there is a paucity of information concerning whom they are or why they've chosen to participate in this gambling format. Dr. Rob Wood and Dr. Rob Williams of the University of Lethbridge jointly received a grant from the Institute to address this knowledge gap through their investigation entitled "Using on-line survey techniques to profile the internet gambler: A pilot study."



**Dr. Rob Wood recently provided answers to the following questions about this project:**

### What interested you about Internet gamblers?

WOOD: Internet gamblers are interesting, in general, insofar as relatively little is known about their characteristics and game-play patterns. More importantly, preliminary studies have suggested that Internet gamblers may, on average, be much more likely to suffer from a gambling problem in comparison to their land-based counterparts. As a larger number of governments and jurisdictions appear poised to legalize and profit from Internet gambling, this potentially strong relationship to problem gambling should be of crucial importance to researchers.

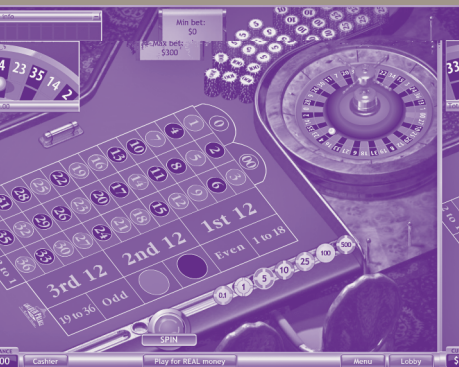
### What makes it so difficult to study Internet gamblers?

WOOD: The difficulty lies in generating a sufficiently large and representative sample for statistical analysis. Internet gamblers comprise a very small proportion of the general population (under 1% in many jurisdictions). Traditional recruitment methods such as random digit dialing require immensely large and costly general samples to capture even a small group of Internet gamblers. It is easier to generate a large sample of Internet gamblers by recruiting individuals directly at online gambling sites. These larger samples, however, tend to be self-selected.

The Alberta Gaming Research Institute is a consortium of the Universities of Alberta, Calgary, and Lethbridge. Its primary purpose is to support and promote research into gaming and gambling in the province.\*

#### OUR MISSION

To significantly improve Albertans' knowledge of how gambling affects society



“Future online gambling sites should incorporate controls over the gambling experience, such that the probability of developing a gambling problem is substantially reduced.”

### What is the problem with self-selected samples of gamblers?

**WOOD:** Any research based upon self-selected samples must be viewed with caution, since it is difficult to assure that such samples are representative of the broader population. For example, Internet gamblers who select themselves into researchers’ studies could be systematically different from those Internet gamblers who choose to abstain from participating. Such systematic biases could make it difficult to generalize from a sample of Internet gamblers to the population of Internet gamblers as a whole.

### Are Internet gamblers more or less likely than non-Internet gamblers to be problem gamblers?

**WOOD:** Compared to average rates observed in Canada, the Internet gamblers in our study were almost 10 times more likely to be classified as either moderate (CPGI score of 3 to 7) or severe problem gamblers (CPGI score of 8+). According to CPGI criteria, 42.7% of the people in our survey were either moderate (22.6%) or severe (20.1%) problem gamblers.

### Were you surprised that a high percentage of gamblers reported playing play slot-style games online?

**WOOD:** I wasn’t too surprised by this finding, since 65% of the sample agreed or strongly agreed that they felt comfortable with online transactions. These are predominantly net-savvy people, and they are also predominantly risk-takers. Thus, they have the motivation to play slots in the first place, coupled with the perception that they are competent enough to avoid “shady” gaming sites.

### Were there any differences between Canadian online gamblers and those from other countries?

**WOOD:** The main difference we observed was with respect to the proportion of problem gamblers who were Canadian versus other nationalities. While still quite high, at 34.1%, Canadians in our sample exhibit proportionally lower rates of problem gambling than Americans (43.3%).

### Do the results of your survey have any possible policy implications?

**WOOD:** Our study concludes with a number of policy implications and suggestions.

- 1. Provide Internet gamblers with feedback about their problem gambling status:** Internet gambling sites should provide gamblers with prominent and easy access to some type of feedback about their problem gambling status. Such feedback may make online gambling patrons more cognizant of the nature of their gambling behavior, and may even have a therapeutic effect.
- 2. Develop Internet-based treatment and prevention programs:** Given that Internet gamblers tend to also be competent “netizens,” rates of problem gambling could be minimized by the development of an effective and easily accessible web-based problem gambling treatment and prevention program.
- 3. Implement controls that regulate access and use:** Future online gambling sites should incorporate controls over the gambling experience, such that the probability of developing a gambling problem is substantially reduced. For example, given that the amount of time one spends gambling is associated with a higher likelihood of being a problem gambler, Internet gambling sites could implement a time and frequency limit for site patrons. Problem gambling might

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also be minimized with the implementation of self-imposed credit limits and effective self-exclusion programs.

- 4. Implement strict controls over advertising and promotion:** Governments should take care not to advertise in a way that disproportionately targets, or appeals to, high-risk groups. Moreover, given that there are health risks associated with gambling, information about those risks should also be included in any advertising or promotion efforts.

Additional information about this research investigation is available from the Institute web site and through the following two peer-reviewed journal articles based on this research:

Wood, R. T., Williams, R. J., & Lawton, P. K. (2007). Why do Internet gamblers prefer online versus land-based venues? Some preliminary findings and implications. *Journal of Gambling Issues*, 20.

Wood, R. T., & Williams, R. J. (2007). Problem gambling on the Internet: Implications for Internet gambling policy in North America. *New Media & Society*, 9(3), 520-542.

## From the Institute Library...

### Internet Gambling: Past, Present and Future [Book Chapter]

This book chapter discusses the major trends and issues associated with Internet gambling. Specifically, it seeks to highlight crucial domains of knowledge and research on Internet gambling, as well as any resulting implications. *This is an e-version of a book chapter that has been made available courtesy of Elsevier Publishing Inc.*

Citation: Wood, R. T. & Williams, R. J. (2007). Internet gambling: Past, present and future. In G. Smith, D. Hodgins & R. Williams (Eds.), *Research and Measurement Issues in Gambling Studies* (pp. 491-514). Burlington, MA: Elsevier. <http://hdl.handle.net/10133/422>

### Internet Gambling: A Comprehensive Review and Synthesis of the Literature [Research Report]

This review was produced for the Ontario Problem Gambling Research Centre and attempts to comprehensively identify and synthesize the literature concerning Internet gambling.

Citation: Williams, R. J., & Wood, R. T. (2007, August). Internet gambling: A comprehensive review and synthesis of the literature. Report prepared for the Ontario Problem Gambling Research Centre, Guelph, Ontario, Canada. <http://hdl.handle.net/10133/432>

## Are you planning a follow-up study?

WOOD: This was a pilot study, and we are currently investigating many of the same issues among a much larger, and more representative sample of Internet gamblers. In our current research, we are especially interested in understanding the ways that Internet gamblers systematically differ from gamblers who do not access the Internet.



"...preliminary studies have suggested that Internet gamblers may, on average, be much more likely to suffer from a gambling problem in comparison to their land-based counterparts."



# 2008 GAMBLING SOCIETY

A QUESTION OF BALANCE

## Friday, April 4 & Saturday, April 5, 2008 @ The Banff Centre, Banff, Alberta, Canada

The Alberta Gaming Research Institute and the University of Alberta are co-sponsoring the seventh in a series of special interest conferences in the area of gambling studies. The 2008 conference will focus on issues of social responsibility, integrity and accountability as related to gambling policy and regulation.

An international slate of experts will address topics such as consumer protection, legal liability, on-reserve gambling, electronic gambling machine issues, Internet gambling and the recent Ontario and British Columbia Ombudsmans' reports on gambling improprieties in those provinces. The conference takes place at the Banff Centre a relaxing and intimate setting in the majestic Canadian Rockies and will be of interest to educators, administrators, clinicians and researchers.

The conference 2008 program, and registration form are now available from the Institute web site [http://www.abgaminginstitute.ualberta.ca/2008\\_conference.cfm](http://www.abgaminginstitute.ualberta.ca/2008_conference.cfm)

## Call for poster submissions

A poster session will be held during the conference. The Conference Committee invites researchers to submit a 200-word abstract in electronic format (MS-Word preferred) to Dr. Garry Smith at [garry.j.smith@ualberta.ca](mailto:garry.j.smith@ualberta.ca). Abstracts should include: title of research, names of author(s) with the presenting author underlined, author affiliation, and contact information. The abstract should address: (a) sample and methods, (b) results, (c) implications for the field.

**Submission deadline is Friday, February 9, 2008** (with peer review process and decision notifications by February 29, 2008). **All poster presenters must register for the conference.**

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