



research reveals...

an update on gambling research in ALBERTA

About The Alberta Gaming Research Institute

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. The Institute's identified research domains include bio-psychological and health care, socio-cultural, economic, and government and industry policy and practice. The Institute aims to achieve international recognition in gaming-related research. It is coordinated by a Board of Directors working in collaboration with the Alberta Gaming Research Council. The Institute is funded by the Alberta government through the Alberta Lottery Fund.

OUR MISSION:

To significantly improve Albertans' knowledge of how gambling affects society

Your comments and queries are welcome either by e-mail abgaming@ualberta.ca or phone 780.492.2856.

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Five-year study underway to examine gambling behaviours of Albertans

GAMBLING IS A WELL ACCEPTED activity amongst the Alberta population—in the past year, 82% of the adult population has gambled in one form or another. Although the large majority of Albertans gamble responsibly, a small percentage experience significant problems. The design of effective educational and legislative strategies to minimize the harm caused by gambling hinges on understanding the factors that both promote responsible gambling and make people susceptible to problem gambling.

Determining those educational and legislative strategies is the principle underlying the largest research study ever funded by the Alberta Gaming Research Institute, and one of the largest gambling research projects ever undertaken anywhere. A collaborative multi-disciplinary project involving all three universities affiliated with the Institute (Alberta, Calgary, and Lethbridge) and other agencies, it is entitled "Factors Influencing the Development of Responsible Gambling: A Prospective Study." What makes it large is not just its inter-disciplinary, multi-institutional nature, but also its scope: it will involve a study of several distinct age groups (known as "cohorts") over an extended period of time (which is described as "longitudinal"). Dr. Nady el-Guebaly, Professor of Addiction Psychiatry at the University of Calgary, and one of the project's principal investigators, points out that this is "a critical opportunity to compare variables across the biopsychological, sociocultural, public policy, and economic domains."

In addition to Dr. el-Guebaly, other principal investigators include Dr. David Hodgins, Professor, Department of Psychology at the University of Calgary; Dr. Garry Smith, Professor Emeritus and Gambling Research Specialist, Faculty of Extension, University of Alberta; Dr. Robert Williams, Associate Professor, School of Health Sciences, University of Lethbridge; Dr. Donald Schopflocher, Biostatistician, Alberta Health and Wellness and Adjunct Professor of Epidemiology, University of Alberta; and Dr. Robert Wood, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Lethbridge. The project will be administered by a full-time Research Coordinator.

Institute Executive Director Vickii Williams points out that "in addition to the anticipated contribution this comprehensive research initiative will make towards achieving the Institute's mission of informing Albertans of how gambling affects society, it will also address the highest research priority identified at the Inter-Provincial Forum held in Ottawa in September 2003." As well, Dr. Rob Williams notes, this project has received extensive review from international experts—eight comprehensive reviews over two years. The study, he says, "will solidify Alberta's worldwide prominence in the field of gambling research."



Standing (left to right):
Garry Smith, David
Hodgins, Nady el-Guebaly,
Don Schopflocher
Seated (left to right):
Robert Wood, Vickii
Williams, Robert Williams

A research project of this nature is long overdue, says Dr. Rob Wood. "Indeed, as legalized gambling opportunities expand for Albertans, at a very rapid rate, our understanding of the factors that impact the individual's gambling behaviour lags behind. This groundbreaking, multidisciplinary study is geared towards ameliorating that gap."

After thorough examination of similar projects in various fields of research, the researchers determined that longitudinal studies are the best methodology for investigating the kinds of questions the project aims to address. They have been used extensively and successfully in the fields of health, mental health, sociology and addiction. As is apparent from the longitudinal study literature from the past two decades, a very limited number of published investigations have examined gambling behaviours and problems prospectively. It is this important gap in the research literature that provided the impetus to assemble a cross-disciplinary and tri-university Alberta research team to develop the present proposal. "The longitudinal design," says Dr. Garry Smith, "is particularly valuable for showing how gambling problems develop, how individuals cope with problem gambling, and the costs and benefits of gambling expansion."

Unprecedented in its size, the project will study 2,000 Albertans over a five-year period from 2005 to 2010. It will involve five age cohorts, with 400 in each group: 13-15 year olds; 18-20 year olds; 23-25 year olds; 43-45 year olds; and 63-65 year olds. Fifty percent of each cohort will be derived from the general population, while the other half will be recruited from a 'high risk' sample of individuals who are at increased risk for developing gambling problems because of their greater frequency of gambling. The entire sample will be selected by means of random digit dialing arranged by region (Edmonton, Calgary, and rural Alberta). "This design will yield a wide range of information and some wonderful analytical challenges," says Dr. Don Schopflocher. "It will be very exciting."

The initial interview will be conducted on a face-to-face basis; it will comprehensively assess all the variables, both individual and societal, that are potentially relevant to gambling behaviour. Participants will subsequently be contacted a minimum of four more times, on an annual basis. A small percentage of individuals will also be asked to keep

diaries relating to their gambling activities throughout the year.

The development of a comprehensive model of gambling behaviour will clarify several questions: What are the normal patterns of continuity and discontinuity in gambling behaviour? What biopsychosocial variables and behaviour patterns are most predictive of current and future responsible gambling and problem gambling? What is the impact of gambling availability, legislative initiatives, and prevention programs on the development of problem and responsible gambling? And, how do all of these things vary as a function of age and gender? These are all questions whose answers will inform effective educational and legislative initiatives to maximize the benefits of gambling and minimize the harm. "This study will teach us about gambling in general but will also paint a unique portrait of the Alberta experience," says Dr. David Hodgins. "Policy can spring from accurate data, obtained from Albertans."

Garry Smith adds, "this study will also provide a better understanding of 'normal' gamblers; that is, those who gamble responsibly and under control. For example, whether, and to what extent does gambling enhance personal well-being through a relaxing leisure activity, improving self-esteem, developing social bonds, and so on?"

Moreover, it is anticipated that the richness of the resulting database will also serve as a valuable resource for many other non-gambling investigations by other research groups. "I know," says David Hodgins, "that the data we collect, because it will be so broad ranging, will be a valuable resource to policy makers and researchers working in related areas—human development, culture, economics policy and so forth."

"Through our developing network of collaborative research," says Vickii Williams, "I anticipate that this project will be expanded to include other jurisdictions and, likely, specific populations. This multidisciplinary initiative affords a unique opportunity to capitalize on the range of research expertise that the Alberta Gaming Research Institute has available through its strong research base. I look forward to the contribution that it will make to increasing the knowledge base in this growing field of research and to working with this illustrious and dedicated research team."

The following scholarly works relate to longitudinal studies of gambling behaviours and problems:

Abbott, M.W., Williams, M. & Volberg, R.A. (1999). *Seven-years on: A follow-up study of frequent and problem gamblers living in the community*. Wellington: Department of International Affairs.

Barnes, G. M., Welte, J. W., Hoffman, J. H., & Dintcheff, B. A. (1999). "Gambling and alcohol use among youth: Influences of demographic, socialization, and individual factors." *Addictive Behaviors*, 24, 749-767.

Cottler, L.B. & Cunningham-Williams, R. (1998). "The 11-year incidence of gambling problems among drug users recruited from the St. Louis ECA Study." Presented at the National Academy of Social Services Workshop on the Social and Economic Impact of Gambling. Washington DC, June 1998.

Slutske W.S., Jackson K.M. & Sher K.J. (2003). "The natural history of problem gambling from age 18 to 29." *Journal of Abnormal Psychology* 112(2), 263-274.

Vitaro, F., Ladouceur, R., & Bujold, A. (1996). "Predictive and concurrent correlates of gambling in early adolescent boys." *Journal of Early Adolescence*, 16, 211-228.

Winters, K. C., Stinchfield, R. D., Botzet, A., & Anderson, N. (2002). "A prospective study of youth gambling behaviors." *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors*, 16, 3-9.

We've moved!

Effective April 1st, the address for the Alberta Gaming Research Institute administrative hub is:

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All other coordinates (e-mail addresses, phones, and fax number) remain the same.

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