



# GAMBLING RESEARCH REVEALS

## Emergent Clinical Issues in Problem Gambling

Alberta Gaming Research Institute's 9th Annual Conference

Banff Centre, Banff, Alberta

April 8 – 10, 2010

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

An important and ongoing theme within the field of gambling research has been the development of an evidence-base for effective treatment of problem gambling. Despite research in this area having advanced a great deal in recent years, many questions still require the attention of the research community. For example: How do we make these treatments work even better? How can we maximize the number of people who are exposed to these treatments? How can we sell our treatments to those that could benefit?

What new approaches are worthy of further investigation? What are the most effective knowledge transfer approaches to influence policy and practice?

To further understand these and other related issues, the Institute will bring together top researchers in the field to share their recent research findings at its 2010 conference. In continuing a tradition of offering annual conferences on focused gambling research topics, the theme of conference 2010 is *Emergent Clinical Issues in Problem Gambling*. This event will take place at the Banff Centre in Banff, Alberta on April 9th and 10th, 2010. Presentation and discussion topics will include competing perspectives on etiology and conceptualization of gambling disorders.

In addition to hearing the latest research findings during plenary sessions, this year's conference will incorporate the following opportunities for information sharing:

- Conversation sessions providing a forum for all participants to engage in discussion on emerging issues such as knowledge transfer, conducting applied research projects and gender issues.



- A debate on whether the most fruitful way to conceptualize gambling disorders is as impulse, compulsion or addiction. Featured speakers will be Dr. Marc Potenza, Dr. Joseph Zohar, and Dr. Nady el-Guebaly.
- A poster session which will include fifteen-minute oral presentations on gambling-related research topics.
- The pre-conference symposium entitled *Behind the Mask: Understanding Women Problem Gamblers* on April 8th. Note: This event is limited to 30 registered conference participants.
- A welcome reception on April 8th.
- An evening banquet in celebration of the Institute's 10th anniversary on April 9th.

### Conference 2010 confirmed speakers and presentation topics

**Dr. Jim Westphal** (U. of Hawaii)—“Treatment efficacy and effectiveness”

**Dr. Malcolm Battersby** (Flinders University, Australia)—“An exposure-based Australian statewide therapy service for problem gamblers: A description and outcomes”

**Ms. Sally Monaghan** (U. of Sydney, Australia)—“Internet-based treatment options for problem gambling: A review of existing evidence and models”

**Dr. Thomas Nilsson** (Spelinstitutet, Sweden)—“Using Internet to help problem gamblers: Facts and figures from more than five years experience from Sweden”

**Dr. Nady el-Guebaly** (U. of Calgary), Dr. Marc Potenza (Yale University) and Dr. Joseph Zohar, (Chaim Sheba Medical Center, Israel)—“Pathological gambling: Impulse, compulsion and/or addiction debate”

**Dr. Hermano Tavares** (U. of Sao Paulo, Brazil)—“Delivering and assessing gambling treatment”

**Dr. Erin Gibbs Van Brunschot** (U. of Calgary)—“Connecting gambling and risk activity”

**Dr. Shawn Currie** (Mental Health and Addictions, Alberta Health Services)—“Canadian low-risk gambling limits: New evidence and limitations”

For regular updates of the conference program or to register for *Conference 2010: Emergent Clinical Issues in Problem Gambling*, go to [http://www.abgaminginstitute.ualberta.ca/2010\\_conference.cfm](http://www.abgaminginstitute.ualberta.ca/2010_conference.cfm)

# Internet gambling and youth in Quebec: A risky behaviour for adolescents?

by *Natacha Brunelle, Annie Gendron, Magali Dufour, Marie-Marthe Cousineau and Danielle Leclerc\**

**This article provides background information about a study led by Dr. Natacha Brunelle that was completed in December 2009 on Internet gambling among youth in Quebec. Ph.D. student Annie Gendron presented preliminary results in her research poster entitled “Comparison of the profiles of young nongamblers, gamblers and Internet gamblers relative to psychological distress, severity of substances use and impulsiveness/risk taking.” It was judged as best poster at Conference 2009.**

Gambling researchers have found that the prevalence of gambling problems among youth is higher than that in adult populations. It is also documented that young people use the Internet regularly (Liau, Khoo, & Ang, 2005; 2008) and tend to encounter more enticements to visit online gambling sites (Derevensky, 2009). As the availability of online gambling continues to increase, it is vital to also examine its impact on potentially vulnerable populations.

## **A survey of Internet gambling among adolescents in Quebec**

In 2007 our research team conducted a study with an adolescent population to survey their involvement with Internet gambling. We also examined the relationship between gambling severity, psychoactive substance (PAS) use and delinquency, notably among gamblers who had been introduced to Internet gambling. Our results indicated that, among Francophones in school settings aged 14 to 18 ( $N = 1876$ ), 7.3% indicated they had placed bets by Internet during their lifetime<sup>1</sup> and 7.9% had bet real money by Internet in the past year. Interestingly, a further 34.7% of youth who reported gambling behaviour also reported that they had gambled in “demo” mode on Internet gambling sites in the past year.

Our results showed that, according to the DSM-IV-J (APA, 1994), a greater proportion of gamblers who had been introduced to Internet gambling (i.e., bet real money) were found to be “at-risk” or “probable pathological gamblers” than other gamblers. When all the gamblers ( $n = 825$ ) were considered, 7.5% were found to be at-risk gamblers while 3.0% were probable pathological gamblers, which corresponds to 19.7% and 10.0% respectively when the Internet gamblers are isolated ( $n = 137$ ). Internet gamblers also presented higher severity profiles of PAS use and delinquency than other gamblers and non-gamblers.

The qualitative aspect of our study involved interviewing adolescents from youth centres, rehabilitation centres and schools who had been introduced to Internet gambling. They were asked about the relationships they perceived between their Internet gambling habits, their PAS use and their delinquency. Several individuals associated PAS use and gambling during their interviews while others associated it with committing crimes. These results lead us to believe that Internet gambling among adolescents is associated with a constellation of problematic deviant behaviours.

<sup>1</sup> This corresponds to 17.1% of the subset having been introduced to gambling in general within the sample ( $n = 825$ ).



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(vickii.williams@ualberta.ca)

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(dhodgins@ucalgary.ca)  
University of Lethbridge:  
Dr. Robert Williams  
(robert.williams@uleth.ca)

#### INSTITUTE LIBRARIAN

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(rhys.stevens@uleth.ca)

Your comments and queries are welcome  
either by E-MAIL: [abgaming@ualberta.ca](mailto:abgaming@ualberta.ca)  
PHONE: 780.492.2856

David Hodgins,  
Annie Gendron  
and Rhys Stevens

Writers

Leena Vanhala

Editor

Epigrafix

Design/Layout

Media queries

780.492.2856

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## Implications & recommendations

Due to the relationship we found between Internet gambling, PAS use and delinquency, it is advisable that additional attention be directed toward identifying individuals who are more “at-risk” for gambling-related problems. We recommend systematic screening for severity of gambling (especially for Internet gambling by Internet) among young people entering youth centres and addiction treatment centres. A single question regarding Internet gambling can be very relevant in detecting problematic gambling and other related problems. It would also be advisable for schools to adopt a position of vigilance relative to gambling and efforts be made to educate youth about its risks.

Preventive efforts should also be set up with parents to inform them of potential harms related to gambling and Internet gambling. In response to questions in our survey about parental supervision of the Internet at home, youths felt that their parents focused primarily on time spent online rather than the content of sites being visited. We also believe that parents must also be made aware of the importance of teaching their children about gambling issues.

In conclusion, it is essential to continue studying this emerging issue. With a generation of youth having grown up with the benefits derived from the Internet, we must continue to be vigilant regarding potentially harmful habits they could develop early in life. We know that Internet casinos use various strategies to attract gamblers; therefore, we must ensure that adolescents are adequately protected as they represent a population at risk of developing gambling problems.

#### \*Author Affiliations:

Natacha Brunelle, Ph.D.  
Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières  
Department of Special Education  
Canada Research Chair on Drug Use Pat-  
terns and Related Problems (Chairholder)  
Researcher at University Institute of  
Addiction, RISQ and GRIAPS

Annie Gendron, Ph.D. Student  
Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières  
Department of Psychology  
Canada Research Chair on Drug Use  
Patterns and Related Problems  
(Chair coordinator)  
Student at University Institute of  
Addiction, RISQ and GRIAPS

Magali Dufour, Ph.D.  
Université de Sherbrooke  
Faculty of Medecine (addiction program)  
Researcher at University Institute  
of Addiction

Marie-Marthe Cousineau, Ph.D.  
Université de Montréal  
School of Criminology  
Researcher at CICC and University  
Institute of Addiction

Danielle Leclerc, Ph.D.  
Université du Québec à Trois-Rivières  
Department of Special Education  
Researcher at CRIRES and GRIAPS

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