

# GAMBLING RESEARCH



## Post-Doctoral Fellows Adding to Research Capacity at Partner Universities



The Institute welcomes **Catherine Laskowski** (Ph.D., Neuroscience, U. of Lethbridge) as the Institute's most recently awarded post-doctoral fellowship recipient. Her dissertation topic, which examines the relationship between gambling schedules and dopamine using an animal model of gambling addiction, has implications for the dopamine-related treatment of Parkinson's disease in humans. She presented preliminary evidence about these treatment effects at the January 2023 meeting of the U. of Lethbridge Gambling Research Group (GRG) in her presentation entitled, "My Strange Addiction - Can Dopamine Replacement Therapy Cause Behavioural Addictions?" Dr. Laskowski is based at the U. of Lethbridge and will be working in collaboration with Dr. Darren Christensen (Health Sciences).



**Youssef Allami** (Ph.D., Clinical Psychology, Université de Montréal) was also awarded an Institute post-doctoral fellowship and, since August 2022, he has been splitting his time between the U. of Calgary and the U. of Lethbridge. His work to date has involved (1) coordinating data collection with gambling treatment providers across Canada for the Pathways to Treatment project, and; (2) analyzing survey data for the Institute's national project investigating gambling and problem gambling in Canada being led by principal investigator Dr. Rob Williams, Health Sciences, U. of Lethbridge. Dr. Allami presented findings from his analyses at the November 2022 GRG meeting ("Predictors of remission from problem gambling: Do they apply equally to all types of gamblers?"). He is the lead author of two scholarly articles further discussing these findings which are anticipated to be published in 2023.

The primary aim of the Alberta Gambling Research Institute, a consortium of the Universities of Alberta, Calgary, and Lethbridge, is to support academic research related to gambling.

### MISSION

To facilitate evidence-based broad research that informs gambling public policy and educates Albertans and the wider audience about the effects of gambling.

Doctoral degree holders interested in being appointed as a Post-doctoral Fellow by one of the Institute's Partner Universities are encouraged to review the 2023/24 [Post-doctoral Fellowships Guidelines & Application Form](#).

## Study Establishes the Prevalence of Illegal Gambling in Canada for First Time



Mackey-Simpkin, S., Williams, R. J., Shaw, C. A., & Russell, G. E. H. (2022). Prevalence and predictors of illegal gambling in Canada. *International Gambling Studies*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14459795.2022.2149833>

Fifty-four years ago almost all forms of gambling in Canada were prohibited, with minor exceptions for bets between individuals, raffles for charitable purposes, and betting on horse races. Legislative changes in 1969 and 1985 paved the way for provincial governments to become more active in managing legalized gambling and expanding product offerings. Fast-forward to the present and there are now very few formats that are considered illegal. Those that remain outlawed – with the exception of animal fighting contests – are typically only illegal when they are not operated or regulated by a provincial government. Included in the “illegal” category are grey market gambling websites, underground casinos, card rooms, and bookmaking services. Media reports (see sidebar on page 3) indicate that pockets of illegal gambling still persist in Canada but until the recent publication of an article by Sean Mackey-Simpkin and colleagues in

*International Gambling Studies*, there had never been an accurate measure of the scope of this activity or reliable information about its participants.

Data for this study was collected in 2018 using a self-administered online survey completed by 10,199 adult (18+) online panelists from across Canada who were members of Leger Opinion (LEO)<sup>1</sup>. Past year gambling participation was assessed with the *Gambling Participation Instrument* (GPI) which assesses gambling participation in terms of types engaged in, means of access (remote or in-person), frequency, time spent, and expenditure. The specific illegal gambling activities assessed by the GPI were illegal online gambling, illegal casinos or cardrooms, and illegal animal contests. Problem gambling was also assessed using the *Problem and Pathological Gambling Measure* (PPGM).

Analyses of survey results determined that past-year self-reported engagement in illegal gambling was very low amongst survey participants. Specifically, prevalence of illegal gambling was 0.05% amongst

## Investigation of Illegal Sports Betting Operations by Ontario Provincial Police

In 2018, Ontario's provincial police force formed "Project Hobart" which was tasked with investigating an alleged illegal gambling operation run by members of the Hells Angels biker gang and an alleged Toronto crime family. Over two years, police zeroed in on a gaming house in Mississauga, Ont., as well as five illegal gambling websites, and made 28 arrests. Investigators estimated the sites, which operated under the names Ultimate SB, Titan SB, PlaytoWin SB, Privada SB and Players SB, likely had raked in gross profits of \$131 million over the past five years. Charges in the illegal gambling case were eventually withdrawn in 2022 for what Crown prosecutors said were unreasonable delays.

Source: Edwards, P. (2022, July 20). Massive gambling case against GTA Hells Angels falls apart over trial delay. *Toronto Star*.

Canadians for using illegal betting shops or bookies; 0.07% for patronizing illegal casinos or card rooms; 0.09% for illegal animal contests; and 1.59% for illegal online gambling. Participation in illegal online gambling had the highest provincial and federal prevalence rates among all illegal categories. The researchers postulate that this may have been because Canadians are unclear on the legality of gambling using out-of-country sites due to misleading advertising. Significant inter-provincial differences also exist with respect to illegal online gambling (e.g., ranging from 4.98% in Saskatchewan to 0.69% in Quebec) which the researchers attribute to inter-provincial differences in its legal provision<sup>2</sup>. The strongest individual predictors of participating in any type of illegal gambling were found to be engagement in a larger number of gambling formats and having a higher overall frequency of gambling. Additional individual predictors for specific types were the presence of gambling problems, provincial illegality of that form, male gender, younger age, and race/ethnicity.

In their concluding remarks, the researchers noted that their study detected a very low level of illegal gambling in Canada. This strongly supports the possibility that legal forms may have displaced illegal ones but definite conclusions cannot be made due to the absence of any historical baseline measure of illegal participation.

*Sean Mackey-Simpkin is a graduate of the Psychology Department at the University of Lethbridge and this research investigation was based on his [Honour's Thesis](#) undertaken under the supervision of Dr. Robert Williams.*

*1 Leger Opinion is Canada's largest online panel, with over 400,000 members demographically representative of the Canadian population and who receive compensation for taking online surveys on a variety of topics.*

*2 Alberta and Saskatchewan recorded the highest rates of out-of-province online gambling as these were the only provinces in 2018 that did not have a provincially-operated online gambling site.*





## The Cock Fight (1759)

by William Hogarth, etching, Yale University Art Gallery

William Hogarth (1697-1764), the celebrated painter, engraver and satirist, published [\*The Cock Fight\*](#) in 1759 as a ridicule of the English passion for cockfighting and wagering on their outcomes. These contests were a favourite pastime of the English nobility from the 16th century through the 19th century, when they were finally banned. Hogarth also produced several other engravings containing moralizing critiques about the evils of financial speculation which include [\*The South Sea Scheme\*](#) (c. 1721) and [\*The Lottery\*](#) (1724).

Photo credit: Yale University Art Gallery



## Upcoming Grant Opportunities

The **2023-24 Graduate Student Scholarship Guidelines & Application Form** is now available on the Institute website.

<https://research.ucalgary.ca/alberta-gambling-research-institute/apply-grants/graduate-student-scholarships>

Applications will be accepted from new applicants as well as current scholarship recipients. All candidates must have been accepted into, or be currently enrolled in, a full-time, thesis-based, Master's or Doctoral program at one of the Partner Universities.

A call for **2023-24 Major Grants Applications** will open May 1, 2023. Applicants must be one of the principal investigators and have faculty status at one of the Partner universities. Research collaborators may come from other universities, be external experts or have faculty status at another post-secondary institution.

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Email: [gfwong@ucalgary.ca](mailto:gfwong@ucalgary.ca)

### INSTITUTE LIBRARIAN

**Rhys Stevens**  
Email: [rhys.stevens@uleth.ca](mailto:rhys.stevens@uleth.ca)

**Media Inquiries**  
**Ph. 403-220-3062**

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### RESEARCH COORDINATORS

**University of Alberta**

**Dr. Fiona Nicoll**  
Email: [fnicoll@ualberta.ca](mailto:fnicoll@ualberta.ca)

**University of Calgary**

**Dr. David Hodgins**  
Email: [dhodgins@ucalgary.ca](mailto:dhodgins@ucalgary.ca)

**University of Lethbridge**

**Dr. Robert Williams**  
Email: [robert.williams@uleth.ca](mailto:robert.williams@uleth.ca)

### AGRI SENIOR FELLOWS

**University of Lethbridge**

**Dr. Darren Christensen**  
Email: [darren.christensen@uleth.ca](mailto:darren.christensen@uleth.ca)

**University of Calgary**

**Dr. Daniel McGrath**  
Email: [daniel.mcgrath@ucalgary.ca](mailto:daniel.mcgrath@ucalgary.ca)

**Please forward any comments or inquiries to:**

Email: [agri@ucalgary.ca](mailto:agri@ucalgary.ca)  
Ph. 403-220-3062

**Rhys Stevens**  
Writer

**Glenda Wong & Rhys Stevens**  
Editors

**North Design Group**  
Design/Layout

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