

Victorian Population Gambling and Health Study 2018-2019

Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation: Research Report

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Overview

This report details results from a large general population survey on gambling participation, gambling problems and gambling-related harm in Victoria, Australia.

The survey and report were undertaken by a team of researchers from Central Queensland University (CQU) and commissioned by the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation (VRGF).

Background

The report commences by noting that gambling affects the quality of life of many Victorians - and that it has been found that gambling causes community level harms approaching the level of harm from alcohol abuse (Browne et al 2017).

The introduction then briefly canvasses changes to the gambling environment over time including that:

- Online gambling had a 30% increase in participation between 2009 and 2014;
- Sports betting advertising increased 41% from 2012 to 2013, and 30% from 2013 to 2014; and that
- Treatment seeking for online forms of gambling has also increased.

Esports is mentioned as another growing sector. In 2018, it had a global viewership of 350 million.

The convergence between gaming and gambling is also touched upon, with the report noting that loot box spend has been found to be significantly related to problem gambling risk. Video games attract young players and therefore, the availability of loot boxes may be increasing the risk for youth developing gambling problems.

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The background to the report concludes by noting that the gambling literature is transitioning from focusing exclusively on problem gambling (as a diagnosable mental illness/disorder) to broader concerns regarding gambling and public health.

Aim of the Study

The study aimed to survey the prevalence of gambling problems, gambling harm, attitudes towards gambling and correlates of gambling problems in Victorians 18+ years of age.

Method

The study was conducted between September 2018 and January 2019.

It was administered using a dual frame (mobile and landline) population representative telephone survey of 10,638 Victorians aged 18+. (Mobile respondents numbered 5,316, while those contacted by landline numbered 5,322).

Problem gambling was assessed using the Canadian Problem Gambling Index (CPGI/PGSI) and a Short Gambling Harms Screen (SHGS) developed by CQU was also administered.

The survey covered:

1. gambling participation by product,
2. problem gambling prevalence,
3. the relationship between gambling and other health and well-being outcomes,
4. a comparison of present results with prior findings, and
5. the prevalence and distribution of gambling harms within the Victorian community.

Findings

Gambling Participation

More than 69% of adult Victorians were found to have participated in some form of gambling in the previous 12 months.

- The most popular gambling form for participation was **Lotteries (44.4%)**.
- This was followed by:
 - **Raffle tickets (37.4%),**
 - **Race betting (19.8%)**
 - **EGMs (14.1%)**
 - **Scratch tickets (11.2%)**
 - **Casino table games (6.1%)**

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- **Betting on Sports (5.8%)**
- **Betting on Keno (3.3%)**
- **Betting on Bingo (1.5%)**

Comparatively few Victorians participated in eSports (0.5%) or fantasy sports (0.4%).

In the previous 12 months, 19.2% of all adults had placed bets online.

Gambling participation was highest for those aged 65-74 (78%) and lowest in the age group 18-24 (52.4%).

EGM gamblers most commonly played at clubs and hotels (77.5% of players).

27.3% played at Crown Casino and 1.3% reported that they played online.

80.8% of EGM players did not withdraw extra money through EFTPOS during a session.

9.6% made a single withdrawal, and 5.2% made two withdrawals for extra gambling money.

Problem Gambling

The survey found that less than 1% of the adult population is likely to suffer from a gambling disorder (CPGI 8+).

Men are more likely to be Problem Gamblers (1.0%) compared to women (0.5%). Moderate risk and problem gambling levels were also found to decline as income increased.

Overall:

- **0.7% of the population were identified as Problem Gamblers,**
- **2.4% as Moderate-Risk Gamblers,**
- **6.7% as Low Risk gamblers,**
- **59.2% as Non-Problem Gamblers,** and
- **31.0% were Non-Gamblers.**

Despite the low overall prevalence of problem-gambling among adults, the authors report that many gamblers show some indicators of low-risk or moderate-risk (14.2%).

Problem Gamblers were particularly likely to play EGMs (69.3% compared to 20.4% of gamblers overall), and to bet on races (52.4% compared with 28.7% overall).

7.3% reported they had felt guilty about their gambling at some point during the previous 12 months.

The relationship between Problem Gambling and mental health/well-being

Compared to Non-Gamblers and those without any gambling problems, Low-risk, Moderate-risk and Problem Gamblers had significantly lower levels of self-reported life satisfaction.

The authors note that it could be that this is due to their gambling. It could also be that those with lower well-being are drawn to gambling as a distraction/entertainment.

Problem Gamblers are more likely to be suffering from high levels of psychological distress.

22.8% of Problem Gamblers said they always drank alcohol while gambling. Only 6.0% of Non-Problem Gamblers said the same.

Problem Gamblers were also more likely to be smokers. 39.4% smoked daily compared to an estimated 11.5% of all adults.

9.4% of Victorian adults reported previously trying to stop, cut down or control their gambling at some point in their lifetime. 4% had spent two weeks or more thinking about their gambling. 3.6% had chased losses, 3.2% had lied to significant others about their gambling at some point and 3% had gambled to escape personal problems.

Comparison of present results with prior findings in Victoria

The prevalence of problem gambling (using the CPGI) has remained largely unchanged between the study years:

- 2008 0.7%
- 2014 0.8%
- 2018-19 0.7%

Overall gambling participation has also shown modest decline:

- 2008 73.1%
- 2014 70.1%
- 2018-19 69.0%

Distribution of gambling harms within the community

The SHGS revealed that those who engage in Private betting, betting on eSports, Fantasy sports and Keno – showed some of the highest levels of average harm.

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Those who bet on Racing, Australian lotteries, Scratch tickets and Prize draws – show some of the lowest levels of harm.

In consideration to both prevalence and harm, the gambling activities with the greatest population impact were found to include EGMs, Casino Table Games and Keno. Together, these gambling forms were reported as contributing to the majority of gambling harms.

Gambling harms were also found to vary by region e.g. Northern Metro and South-eastern areas had a relatively high prevalence of harm. Contrastingly, those surveyed in Western Victoria reported relatively fewer harms.

The survey included 4 severe, but common, harms:

1. Spent less on essential expenses e.g. health care,
2. Greater relationship conflict e.g. arguing,
3. Family/domestic violence, and
4. Didn't fully attend to children's needs.

Nearly 49% of these 4 harms were nominated by Problem Gamblers.

The decrement to health and well-being experienced in Victoria is estimated by the authors to have cost the equivalent of 123,809 years of life.

Awareness of gambling support services

With regard to awareness of the support available:

- 23.1% were aware of the National Gambling Helpline.
- 15.4% were aware of Gamblers or Pokies Anonymous.
- 46.8% were not aware of any gambling help services.

Amongst Problem Gamblers, these figures differed somewhat:

- 25.2% were aware of the National Gambling Helpline.
- 29.5% were aware of Gamblers or Pokies Anonymous and
- 33.6% were not aware of any services in Victoria to help with gambling problems.

Help-seeking behaviour

1.6% of Victorians had used a help service for their own or someone else's gambling issues with Problem Gamblers more likely to have used services.

8.1% of Problem Gamblers had used Gamblers Help/face-to-face counselling. This compared to 0.6% of Non-Gamblers and 0.2% of Low-Risk Gamblers.

6.2% of Problem Gamblers had used the National Gambling Helpline compared to 0.2% of Non-Gamblers and 0.3% of Low-Risk Gamblers.

Problem Gambler Profile

Problem Gamblers in the Victorian population were more likely to:

- be male (1.0%),
- be 35 to 54 years old (1.1% - 1.2%), and
- have an annual income of between \$20,800 and \$41,599 (1.3%).

54.8% had participated in in four or more gambling activities. The most common form of gambling for Problem Gamblers was lotteries (72.5%). 69.3% played EGMs and 52.4% bet on races.

28.8% of Problem Gamblers reported being affected by someone else's gambling.

Moderate Risk Gambler profile

Moderate Risk Gamblers were more likely to:

- be male (3.4%),
- 18-24 (5.4%), and
- have an income of between \$20,800 and \$41,599 (3.2%).

34.4% participated in four or more gambling activities and were the group found most likely to bet on casino table games (22.7%).

13.8% of this group reported that they had been affected by someone else's gambling.

Lower Risk Gambler profile

Lower risk gamblers were more likely to:

- be male (8.4%), and
- have an income of between \$20,800 and \$41,599 (8.0%).

32.5% participated in four or more gambling activities.

They were more likely to buy lottery tickets (70.7%).

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Non-Problem Gambler profile

Non-Problem Gamblers were more likely to:

- be female (61.2%),
- be 35-54 years old (67% - 68.9%),
- live in regional Victoria (65.1%),
- speak English only (64.1%), and
- have an income of between \$41,600 and \$156,000 (61.7% – 72.1%)

AGC Note: pp.96 – 104 of the full report provide a comparison with the 2008 and 2014 surveys.

Prevalence of Gambling Harms

The main harms gamblers reported from their own gambling were:

- reductions in available spending money (5.1%) and reduced savings (3.9%).
- 3.4% stated to experiencing regrets about their gambling.

Problem Gamblers reported in quite high numbers that they had been affected by someone else's gambling (28.8%).

This compares to 12.2% of Low Risk and 13.8% of Moderate Risk Gamblers who stated to being similarly affected.

Distribution of Gambling Harms

The report found that:

- Nearly 70% of total harms experienced were in the metropolitan region, and
- The greatest likelihood of suffering harm occurs in those with incomes between \$20,800 and \$41,599.

Conclusions

The authors concluded that, while the rates of problem gambling have remained steady in recent years, there is growing recognition that gambling harm is widely spread in the Victorian community.

Low-Risk, Moderate-Risk and Problem Gamblers are experiencing lower life-satisfaction than other Victorians.

They suggest that changes in the gambling environment should be monitored closely for their future impact on gambling problems and harm.

The authors also state that in the future, a public health approach focussing on a reduction in community-level harm has the greatest scope for improving the well-being of Victorians. This, rather than a focus on exclusively seeking to reduce rates of problem gambling.

[Click here to access the full report](#)

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