

Substance use linked to Internet gambling

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With the click of a mouse or touch of a mobile phone screen — in pyjamas or jeans — gambling is now at our fingertips 24/7 with Internet play. With this increased access to gambling, are online gamblers more prone to risky behaviours than offline gamblers?

A new study published in *Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social Networking*, led by Sylvia Kairouz of Concordia University, has compared people who gamble offline only to people who also gamble online in an effort to answer this question. Her results show that alcohol and cannabis use are in fact associated with online users.

"There has been growing concern with the rise in online gambling and how this affects the health of our public," says Kairouz, professor in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology. "The number of gambling sites around the globe have grown from about 15 in 1995 to 2,358 in 2010 and global Internet gambling revenues increased from \$3 billion to \$24 billion between 2000 and 2010."

Kairouz's study looked at sociodemographic profiles, game-play patterns and level of addictive behaviours in adults who gamble online and offline. They used data from the 2009 Quebec gambling survey (part of the project *Portrait du jeu au Québec: Prévalence, incidence et trajectoires sur quatre ans*, subsidized by the Fonds québécois de la recherche sur la société et la culture), which aimed to describe gambling problems, patterns and associated [substance use](#) behaviours in the Quebec population. From this survey, a sampling of 8,456 offline-only gamblers and 111 offline/online gamblers was chosen for the research.

In gathering the samples, it was revealed that online gambling appears to still only be a marginal phenomenon in the Quebec population, with only 1.3 per cent reporting having gambled online in the 12 months preceding the survey.

For the study, the gamblers were asked to report their gambling frequency over the past year and to give the number of times they gambled weekly, monthly or yearly. They were also asked to report how much money and time they spent gambling on a typical occasion. Alcohol and cannabis use over the year was also measured.

"Our results show that online gamblers reported being involved in more types of gambling and they spent more money and time playing than those gambling offline only," says Kairouz. "The proportion of frequent and problematic drinkers and cannabis users was also much higher among the Internet players."

According to Kairouz, these findings suggest that online gambling emerges as one more risky behaviour among a panoply of other substance-related risky behaviours exhibited by this small group of individuals.

"We cannot determine, therefore, whether gambling on the Internet creates problems in and of itself, or whether those who already have addictive behaviours are more likely to be enticed to gamble on the Internet," says Kairouz. "We need to conduct more research looking at individual characteristics, environmental conditions, the object of the addiction (poker, for example) and so on to help us understand whether this group is more at risk for gambling-related problems. The hope would be to ultimately find ways to identify who the people at risk are, why they are at risk and then try to develop preventive measures to reduce the possibility of excessive online [gambling](#)."

Provided by Concordia University

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