

Gambling among Immigrants to Canada: A Quantitative Investigation Using the Canadian Community Health Survey

James Townsend, University of Winnipeg
Wenbiao Cai, University of Winnipeg

Funding:
Small Grant (\$39 240)

March 19, 2021

Research Priority: Investigate how economic, cultural/social, or jurisdictional factors influence gambling behaviour and what the implication may be for preventing and/or reducing gambling-related harm.

Significance

In Canada, the expansion of gambling opportunities coincides with a period in which changes in immigration altering the demographics of the Canadian population. Since the mid-eighties, annual inflows of immigrants have increased, with an increasing share of immigrants coming from non-European countries. More recently, with the Provincial Nominee Program, Manitoba has also experienced an increase in the share of residents that are immigrants. Relatively little is known about whether immigrants differ from non-immigrants in terms of their gambling behaviour or their susceptibility to gambling-related harms.

Research Questions

1. How does the gambling behaviour of immigrants compare with that of non-immigrants in terms of participation, frequency of participation and/or choice of gambling activities? Are the differences explained by differences in socio-economic factors?
2. Does the prevalence of problem gambling at a point in time differ between immigrants and non-immigrants? Do socio-economic differences between the two groups account for difference?

Methodology

Survey data from multiple years of the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) is used to summarize differences in the incidence and frequency of gambling behaviour of immigrants and non-immigrants. The CCHS includes a module based on the Canadian Problem Gambling Index

(CPGI), which includes a variant of the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI), a common instrument used to identify pathological gambling. Logit models of the incidence of gambling and the incidence of problem gambling are estimated to determine if the differences between the two groups can be attributed to socio-economic and other factors.

Key Findings

1. In 2002, established immigrants (those in Canada for 10 or more years) were no more likely to gamble than non-immigrants. For example, 59 percent of non-immigrants participated in at least one gambling activity 5-11 times in the previous year compared to 55 of established immigrants. For recent immigrants (those in Canada for fewer than 10 years), the corresponding figure was 34 percent.
2. In statistical models of the probability of participating in at least one gambling 5-11 times in the past year, the differences outlined in the previous point persist after province, work status, sex, age, marital status, province of residence, survey year, personal and family income are accounted for. The difference in incidence of gambling between immigrants and non-immigrants tends to be smaller for immigrants that have been in Canada for longer.
3. In 2002, immigrants and non-immigrants were similar in terms of the gambling behaviour they engage in. Purchase of lottery tickets is by far the most common activity, while participation in activities strongly associated with problem gambling, such as Video Lottery Terminals (VLTs) and live horse-racing, were much less common.
4. Problem gambling, using either the definition provided by the CPGI or a less-stringent definition using the PGSI, tends to be relatively uncommon. We find that 1.6 percent of non-immigrants and 1.4 percent of immigrants in Canada in 2002 were problem gamblers using the less-stringent measure.
5. Immigrants were no more prone to problem gambling than non-immigrants. This finding persists in our model of the incidence of problem gambling, which accounts for the same variables as the participation model.
6. In summary, Immigrants on the whole were no more likely to gamble in 2002, and they are no more susceptible to problem gambling than non-immigrants.

Conclusions

Our analysis suggests that as a group immigrants gamble less and are no more susceptible to problem gambling than non-immigrants. However, the survey data we use is not well-suited to analyzing immigrants using finer geographical detail (i.e. country of origin) and provides little information on cultural or religious factors that might identify pockets of the immigrant population that may be more prone to problem gambling. In addition, we have no information on the immigration program by which admission was granted and therefore cannot determine if differences exist between, for example, economic-class immigrants and refugees. Our analysis also relies heavily on data from 2002, which may not generalize to the present.

Implications

Our results provide weak evidence that the shifting demographics arising from immigration and changes to immigrant source countries do not pose extra concerns about responsible gambling. However, these findings should be used with extreme caution, since they rely on dated surveys and limited information about the source region of each immigrant. In addition, due to language and cultural barriers, it is prudent for provincial authorities to ensure appropriate outreach for individuals experiencing problem gambling and to educate members of immigrant communities on responsible gambling behaviour.

Disclaimer: This research was funded by the Manitoba Gambling Research Program of Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries; however, the findings and conclusions of this paper are those solely of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries.