



LOTTERIES, SLOT MACHINES & HEALTH

Survey on gambling in Montréal

Who has been able to resist the temptation of buying a lottery ticket and trying his or her luck? This question naturally leads us to pose others. What is the state of gambling on the Island of Montreal and its impact on gamblers?

The Montreal-Centre Public Health Department became aware, several years ago, of growing concern in many countries over compulsive gambling and its effect on public health and sought to ascertain the extent of the problem on Montreal Island. Several questions on gambling were included in a mental health survey. An analysis of the data sheds light on the scope of the problem and the traits of the individuals affected.

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

The survey of the mental health of Montrealers was conducted between March 5 and June 14, 1999 and covered a representative sampling of French- and English-speaking residents 18 years of age and over. Over 3 200 respondents answered specific questions on gambling, for a response rate of 67%, which is excellent among city-dwellers.

The questions asked enable us to identify problem gamblers in light of criteria adopted by the American Psychiatric Association (APA). Two categories of individuals are deemed to be **gamblers**:

- individuals who have played slot machines (including video lottery terminals) more than five times in a given year;
- individuals who have participated more than five times in a lottery in a given year.

A gambler at risk of developing a problem displays certain behaviour, indicated below, drawn from the fourth revision of the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of the APA.

Depending on the number of positive responses to these questions, the gambler is regarded as:

- **symptomatic** (one or more symptoms);
- **problematic** (three or more symptoms);
- **pathological** (five or more symptoms).

What are the signs of persistent & maladaptive gambling behaviour?

The individual:

- is preoccupied with gambling, e.g. preoccupied with reliving past gambling experiences, or planning the next venture, or thinking of ways to get money with which to gamble;
- needs to gamble with increasing amounts of money in order to achieve the desired excitement;
- has repeated unsuccessful efforts to control, cut back, or stop gambling;
- is restless or irritable when attempting to cut down or stop gambling;
- gambles as a way of escaping from problems or of relieving a dysphoric mood, e.g. feelings of helplessness, guilt, anxiety, depression;
- after losing money gambling, often returns another day to get even ("chasing" one's losses);
- lies to family members, therapist, or others to conceal the extent of involvement with gambling;
- has committed illegal acts such as forgery, fraud, theft, or embezzlement to finance gambling;
- has jeopardized or lost a significant relationship, job, or educational or career opportunity because of gambling;
- relies on others to provide money to relieve a desperate financial situation caused by gambling.

The first category must draw attention and the second should sound the alarm. The third category of gambler is probably in difficulty.

Other information was collected during the survey concerning the respondents' socio-demographic traits and their mental health problems. The combination of this information with data on types of gamblers enables us to pinpoint their distinguishing characteristics.

FINDINGS OF THE SURVEY

The diagram provides basic information on the survey's extensive findings. The left side of the diagram illustrates the extent of the problem. Broadly speaking, 62% of the respondents are gamblers as defined above. The majority of them only play the lotteries. Nearly 10% or about 140 000 Montreal Island residents play the slot machines.

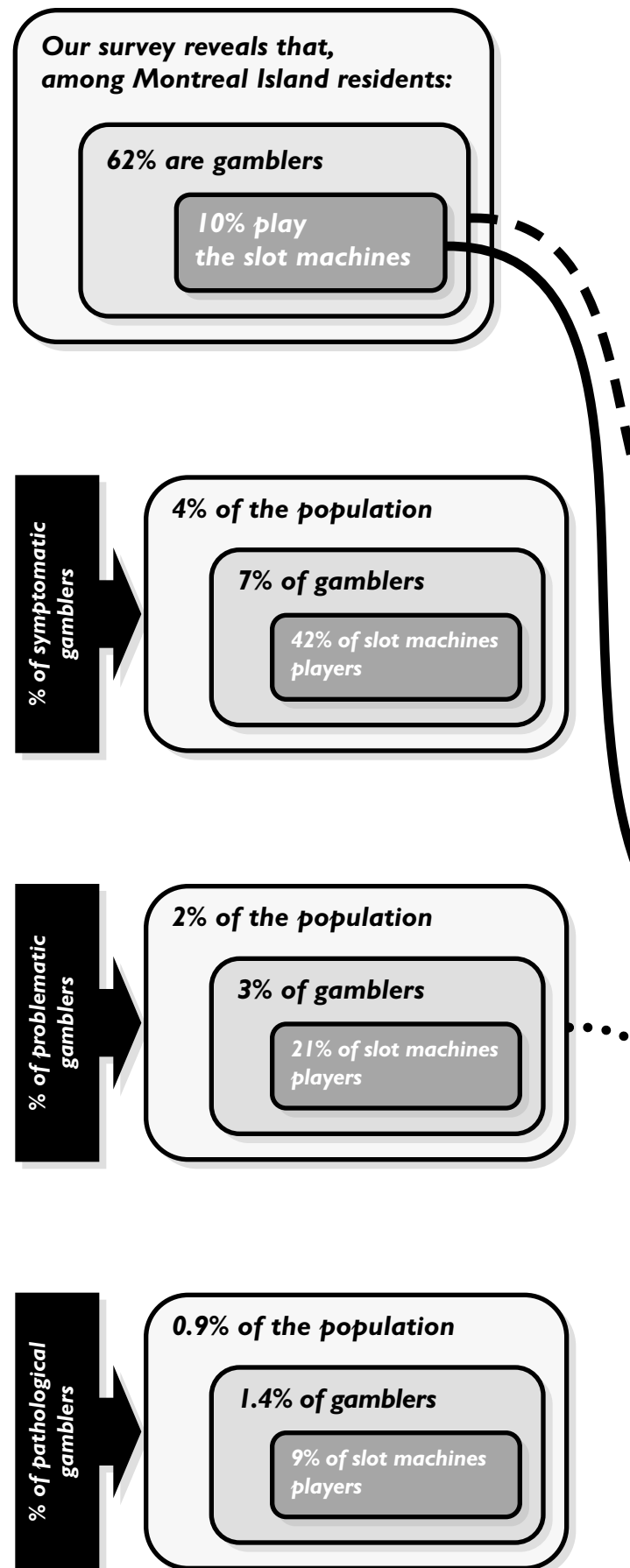
Scope of the problem

An analysis of the scope of the problem focuses directly on the categories of gamblers who have revealed the behaviour included in the list of symptoms mentioned earlier.

Someone who buys a lottery ticket on Monday in anticipation of a drawing on Friday has twice as many "chances" of dying before the drawing than of winning the big prize.

Jean Dion, *Le Devoir*,
February 18, 1999

Symptomatic gamblers account for 4% of the population, 7% of gamblers, and 42% of individuals who play the slot machines. The same trends are observed within the **problematic** and **pathological gamblers** groups and confirm the notion widely held among specialists of pathological gambling that video lotteries create dependency among a largest proportion of gamblers.



Gamblers' traits

The right-hand portion of the diagram indicates the key traits of certain categories of gamblers. An individual is more likely to be a **gambler** if he is a male between the ages of 45 and 64, has an above-average income and a below-average education. There is greater likelihood of being a gambler if the individual has no spouse and has already had a mental health problem.

An individual is more likely to be a gambler if



An individual is more likely to play the slot machines if



An individual is more likely to be problematic gambler



These tendencies also apply to **problematic gamblers**, which include pathological gamblers. There is a greater likelihood of being a gambler if the individual is a male, regardless of age, with above-average income, below-average education and with no spouse. Such individuals have also experienced generalized anxiety or alcohol abuse or dependency.

The picture changes somewhat in the case of **individuals who play the slot machines**.

There is a greater likelihood of being a gambler in this category if the individual is a male between the ages of 18 and 24 who is a low-income earner. Single people are also at greater risk. This trait clearly reveals that young people adapt more readily to electronic games such as video lottery.

To summarize, the more problematic gambling becomes, the greater the likelihood of its affecting poorly educated low-income earners who are isolated or who have experienced health problems. This observation confirms in part the findings of other research, i.e. that gambling wreaks havoc the most with the least privileged individuals.

Gambling-related problems

The fragmented data available on gambling-related problems merely reinforce the foregoing observations. The likelihood of experiencing job-related problems (keeping or finding a job) or problems with a loved one (a spouse or one's family) is markedly higher among symptomatic and problematic gamblers than among gamblers or the public in general. It should be noted that few symptomatic and problematic gamblers (roughly 3%) consult a health professional or a gamblers' self-help group.

You may have heard about the tourist vacationing in Las Vegas. He didn't have any money, so he just watch the games and bet mentally. In no time, he'd lost his mind.

Holly Sharv

TIME TO ACT

The data available are sufficiently revealing with respect to the scope of the gambling problem on the Island of Montreal to suggest a number of priority measures.

The **first measure** is implicit in this report. From our findings, we have estimated the number of problem gamblers on Montreal Island. Our estimates largely warrant deeming gambling to be a public health problem about which **the public must be informed**. We are already striving to do so.

Estimated number on Montreal Island for a total population of 1 450 000

Gamblers	892 000
Slot machines players	139 000
Problematic gamblers	29 000
Pathological gamblers	13 000

As noted earlier, 96% of gamblers do not develop a symptomatology, while 42% of video lottery gamblers do so (21% fall into the problematic category). Clearly, access to this type of gambling and its ability to create dependency call for considerable caution with respect to the expansion of the network of video lottery terminals. The **second measure** entails recommending to Loto-Québec a **moratorium on the number of video lottery terminals and sites**. We must broaden our knowledge of the effects of this type of gambling on the development of pathological gambling symptoms and, if possible, find ways of counteracting them.

We have also noted that those gamblers who are most likely to become problematic gamblers are the youngest, least educated individuals. The process by which young people start gambling and the paths that lead to pathological gambling are still unknown. We must envisage a **third measure**, centred on **research** devoted to the development of gambling habits and gambling-related problems and, simulta-

neously, attempt to **heighten awareness among young people** of gambling. A specific effort should also be made to facilitate access to the health care services available, since few pathological gamblers consult health professionals and young people are even less inclined than older people to do so.

Our findings reinforce the notion of the overlapping of problematic gambling and other mental health problems in the gambler's distant and recent past. The complexity of such overlapping is unclear and poses problems with respect to intervention. There is good reason to consider a **fourth measure**, aimed at broadening the integration of intervention-related research in a spirit of enlightened **experimentation** of diversified approaches adapted to the needs of the public and gamblers with pressing needs. In other words, we must act quickly but with a proper knowledge of the problem and solutions to it.

Summary Report

This Summary Report highlights the main results in a research project carried out in the field of public health.

Published by the
Public Health Department
Montreal-Centre Regional Health and Social Services Board

1301, Sherbrooke Street East, Montreal (Quebec) H2L 1M3
Telephone : (514) 528-2400
<http://www.santepub-mtl.qc.ca>

Director: Richard Lessard

Publishing supervisor: Yolande Marchand

Authors: Denis Allard and Serge Chevalier

English translation: Terrance Hughes

Computer graphics: Paul Cloutier

Print run: 1,000 copies

Legal deposit — 2nd quarter 2001
Bibliothèque nationale du Québec
National Library of Canada

Title of the report:
Jeu pathologique et joueurs problématiques — Le jeu à Montréal.

Authors:
Serge Chevalier and Denis Allard
The project was partially subsidized by the Montreal-Centre Regional Health and Social Services Board

Information : scheval2@santepub-mtl.qc.ca
The full report is available in French on the Web site of the Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse (www.ccsa.ca/rapportjeuf.htm)