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NATIONAL POST

Health

Gambling addictions are nine times more likely among homeless, Toronto study finds

[Jason Rehel](#) | May 21, 2014 4:44 PM ET

Kicking a gambling habit may make the difference between ending up living a life on the streets and keeping one's home, a new Toronto study suggests.

Researchers at St. Michael's Hospital say they've found evidence that links problem or pathological gambling to an increased likelihood of homelessness, in a groundbreaking study that explores a connection often suspected, but rarely tested. **Those who are homeless are nine times as likely as someone who is not to have experienced a gambling addiction or problem.**

The study, published in the June issue of *Journal of Gambling Studies*, looked at statistics for 254 clients at Good Shepherd Ministries in Toronto, a service for the homeless.

Results of the study were startling, with 35% of the 254 subjects interviewed indicated that at one point in their lives they suffered from either a problem or pathological gambling problem. That compares to a prevalence of problem gambling in the general population of between 0.6% and 4%.

"Intuitively, one might think there's a connection between problem gambling and homelessness but very few studies have explored this in any depth," said Dr. Flora Matheson, a research scientist with St. Michael's Centre for Research on Inner City Health, in a press release. "By doing this kind of research, we help community organizations to better understand their clients and provide more holistic, effective treatment."

The Good Shepherd shelter provides a number of services for homeless clients, but said that it was concerned that gambling was a "blind spot" for its staff given an existing focus on substances addiction and other issues of mental health.

Matheson suggests shelters should consider implementing screening for gambling as part of intake in the future, to ensure that limited resources are being allocated in targeted ways to help people specifically suffering through gambling addictions.

“Toronto shelters now have a sense of how important screening for gambling history is among people who are homeless,” said Matheson. “Further research is still needed to know whether similar rates exist across the country or the globe.”