



## A review of current concerns over gambling and problem gambling in youth

### What this research is about

Gambling opportunities are now more widely available and easily accessible for youth in many countries. Gambling is also increasingly viewed as being a socially acceptable form of pastime. However, researchers are still struggling to understand factors that place youth at risk of problem gambling. The aim of this study was to summarize international evidence on the prevalence and concerns over gambling and problem gambling in youth.

### What the researcher did

The researchers did a literature review on the prevalence of gambling and problem gambling in youth under the age of 18. The research evidence was international in scope. Their review pointed to a number of current and emerging concerns in regards to youth gambling.

### What the researcher found

Many studies reported high rates of gambling among youth. Although prevalence rates varied depending on the country, it had generally been reported that 50-70% of youth gambled for money at least once a year. The prevalence rates of gambling and problem gambling in youth were often higher compared to adult populations. Recent survey studies reported that gambling participation had declined in youth and adults compared to earlier surveys. But rates of problem gambling remained the same.

In most North American, European and Australasian studies, the most common forms of gambling are lottery (e.g., scratch cards), card games, games of skills and sports wagering. Boys are more likely to gamble and to do so more frequently than girls. Boys are also more likely to have problematic gambling behaviours. Gambling participation has been linked to a host of other

### What you need to know

This study provides a review of international evidence on the prevalence and concerns over gambling and problem gambling in youth. Many studies reported high rates of gambling and problem gambling in youth as compared to adult populations. However, adolescent gamblers are not a homogeneous group. The availability, accessibility, and social acceptability of gambling activities all have a role in the prevalence of youth gambling.

Online and digital technologies present new and emerging concerns about youth gambling. Social media, a platform frequently used by youth, is being used by gambling industry to advertise their products. Another concern is the rise of simulated gambling games, such as social casino games. These games are set up to be similar to actual gambling activities. They may encourage youth to gamble and increase the risk of problem gambling over time. There are also concerns over age restrictions and legal classification of gambling and gambling-like activities. More long term, consistent research is needed to explore gambling behaviors in youth.

mental health issues and risk-taking behaviours. These include smoking, taking drugs, and drinking alcohol. Youth are motivated to gamble for money, entertainment, excitement or competition. Gambling is often viewed as a socially acceptable behavior. Many youth give little consideration to the negative consequences of gambling.

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is being used by gambling industry to advertise their products. Another concern is the rise of simulated gambling games, such as social casino games. These games are set up to be similar to actual gambling activities although they do not involve the use of real money. Simulated gambling games are more easily accessible and available for youth. They are also less likely to be supervised by parents as compared to actual gambling activities. Some studies have suggested that simulated gambling games may encourage youth to gamble and increase the risk of problem gambling over time. Also, while these games may not involve real money, players may be encouraged to purchase credits to continue playing.

There are concerns over the legal classification of gambling and gambling-like activities (e.g. legal age of use, access). Many jurisdictions do not enforce age restrictions. Other issues include the use of child-like cartoon characters on electronic gaming machines and popular children's games on lottery tickets.

In addition, current research has a number of issues. Many studies did not use consistent methods or tools to assess problem or pathological gambling. Most studies were based on small samples. However, there are now more nationally representative studies based on large and culturally diverse samples.

#### How you can use this research

The review outlines current and emerging issues relating to gambling and problem gambling in youth. While more research is needed, policy makers should consider stricter regulations on age of access, and advertising of, gambling activities. Gambling researchers should also work towards more standardized methods to assess problem gambling among youth. More research on the effects of youth gambling later in life is also needed.

#### About the Researcher

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#### Keywords

Gambling addiction, adolescent gambling, online gambling

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