

# research snapshot

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## The link between cyberbullying and online gambling among youth

### What this research is about

Many youths take part in risky and addictive behaviours, like gambling. Increased access to the Internet has led to more youth spending time online, with some youth gambling online. In Spain, online gambling is now the leading cause of gambling problems among young people. Online gambling among youth is linked with a range of health, emotional, and financial problems. It is important to understand what predicts youth online gambling to inform early prevention and intervention efforts.

One of the factors that might predict youth online gambling is cyberbullying. Cyberbullying refers to the experience of bullying (e.g., harassment, exclusion, trickery) via digital devices. Some youth who experience cyberbullying may avoid going online. Others might use the Internet in ways to escape the stress of cyberbullying, such as online gambling. No research has explored the link between online gambling and being a victim of cyberbullying.

Other factors that might predict youth online gambling include parenting styles, participating in sports, gender, etc. The current study explored the link between online gambling and several potential risk (including cyberbullying) and protective factors among Spanish youth.

### What the researchers did

The researchers used data from the 2014 Spanish Survey on Drug Use in Secondary Education. Participants were 37,486 students aged 14–18 years. They completed a questionnaire during a regular class period, which included several measures about online gambling, cyberbullying, and other related factors.

### What you need to know

There were several risk and protective factors linked with online gambling among a large sample of Spanish youth. Online gambling was positively associated with being a victim of cyberbullying. That is, youth who gambled more online also reported being bullied on the Internet more frequently. Positive parenting style and time spent reading protected against online gambling. Youth who reported more care or affection from their parents, and whose parents know their whereabouts, reported less gambling. Having more spending money, participating in sports, and being male increased the risk for online gambling.

Students reported how often they gambled with money online in the last 12 months. They reported how often they felt harassed, threatened, or believed they had been bullied on the Internet.

To measure parenting style, participants reported how often they experienced care or affection from their parents. They also reported if parents know where they are when they go out at night. The youth reported how often they practiced sports or read for pleasure.

The youth also reported demographic factors, such as age, gender, amount of money available for spending each week, immigrant status, and whether each parent had a university degree.

The authors analyzed the links between the reported factors and how often youth gambled online.

### What the researchers found

Six percent of Spanish youth, aged 14–18 years, reported online gambling. About 3.2% gambled at least 2–4 times per month, 1.7% gambled at least 2–3 times per week, and the rest gambled more than 4 times per week. Four percent reported being a victim of cyberbullying ‘often’ or ‘very frequently’. Another 6% reported being a victim ‘sometimes’.

There was a positive relationship between online gambling and being a victim of cyberbullying. This means that as cyberbullying increased, so did online gambling.

There was an inverse relationship between online gambling and parenting style. As care or affection from parents increased, online gambling decreased. Also, youth whose parents know where they are when they go out at night reported decreased online gambling.

There was a positive relationship between online gambling and playing sports. This means that as sports participation increased, so did online gambling. There was an inverse relationship between online gambling and reading. This means that as reading for pleasure increased, online gambling decreased.

Males reported more online gambling than females. Males who were an immigrant reported less frequent online gambling than non-immigrant males. There was also a positive relationship between online gambling and amount of money available for spending. This means that as spending money increased, so did online gambling.

### How you can use this research

The findings suggest that many factors contribute to youth online gambling. This requires multiple prevention and intervention efforts. For instance, schools could create campaigns to raise awareness about the risks of online gambling. Programs could focus on preventing cyberbullying, which might reduce the number of youths who gamble online to deal with the stress of cyberbullying.

Programs could teach both youth and their parents about the risks of online gambling for youth. Regulations that complement the education are needed, though. Measures could focus on reducing gambling advertising, especially during sport matches which could be seen by youth. Also, policymakers could develop guidelines that limit at what age, how much money, at what times of day, and how often a person can gamble online.

### About the researchers

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