

knowledge snapshot



A narrative review of adolescent gambling research in the last 20 years

What this article is about

Gambling during adolescence is not a new phenomenon. But in the last 20 years, the gambling environment has changed. For example, the use of technology and Internet has made gambling more accessible to younger people. Past studies have found that parents and peers can influence adolescents' attitudes towards gambling, and their gambling behaviours. Moreover, certain biological and psychological factors may also shape their gambling behaviours. A review in 2002 indicated that there is a lack of understanding about adolescent gambling. Therefore, this article aimed to fill this gap by exploring research studies on adolescent gambling in the last 20 years.

What was done?

The authors conducted a narrative review. They searched various databases for articles about adolescent gambling. Articles that were published between 1998 and 2008 in English were selected. The authors found 1067 articles in their initial search. After reviewing titles and abstracts, removing duplicates, and removing articles that were not relevant, they were left with 129 articles. When they reviewed the full text of the remaining articles, the authors selected 107 articles as being relevant for their review.

What you need to know

The authors presented six main thematic areas: gender differences, drug use, technology, age differences, impulsivity, and the role of society.

In terms of gender differences, gambling is more related to adolescent males. Females are more likely

Why is this article important?

This article is a review of research studies on adolescent gambling in the last 20 years. The authors found a total of 107 relevant articles for their narrative review. Overall, gambling during adolescence is a complex issue with gender and age differences. Technology can contribute to gambling addiction. Other risk factors exist as well, such as impulsive and sensation-seeking tendencies. As a whole, society has not done enough to prevent gambling problems among adolescents.

to engage in causal gambling. Males are more likely to gamble regularly and to have gambling problems.

With respect to drug use, the articles showed that both gambling and drug use can interfere with adolescents' daily activities. Some risk factors for engaging with drugs and gambling include moral disengagement, delinquency, impulsivity, and relational difficulties. Some articles noted that drug use and gambling share certain characteristics. For instance, both drug use and gambling can dominate one's thoughts and create feelings of euphoria such as excitement and tranquility. Both types of addiction can also increase one's dependence and result in withdrawal symptoms.

With regard to technology, the articles showed that the Internet can contribute to gambling addiction, but more research is needed. Risk factors for problematic use of the Internet include low self-esteem, poorer parent-child relationship, and negative peer influence.

In terms of age differences, a study found that younger adolescents (aged 12–15) are more likely to take risks when gambling. Another article revealed that emotional intelligence is a protective factor for gambling and other risky behaviours. Emotional intelligence can enhance adolescents' interpersonal skills. However, one study did not find greater likelihood of gambling problems among adolescents, as compared to alcohol misuse.

Many studies showed that impulsivity is linked to gambling. Adolescents with more difficulty managing their impulses are more likely to gamble and have gambling problems. Also, adolescents who gamble tend to use less effective coping strategies.

Finally, across all articles, there is not enough information about prevention strategies. This indicates that society has not done enough to prevent the development of gambling problems among young people. Many forms of gambling, such as lottery and slot machines, are widely available. Several studies showed that nearness to gambling halls can influence gambling behaviours. Furthermore, a study found that educators only have partial knowledge about adolescent gambling.

Who is it intended for?

This review could be useful by policy makers, clinicians, and researchers. Policy makers could create responsible gambling campaigns for youth. Clinicians could develop prevention and intervention programs for adolescents who may show risk factors for gambling. For example, prevention programs could target males and those who show impulse control problems or have higher risk-taking tendencies. Further research could explore the motivations behind adolescent gambling.

About the researchers

Fabio Frisone, Federica Sicari, and Emanuele Maria Merlo are affiliated with the Department of Cognitive Sciences, Psychology, Educational and Cultural Studies (COSPECS), at the University of Messina in Messina, Italy. Fabio Frisone and Emanuele Maria Merlo are also affiliated with the International Research Center for Theoretical and Applied Cognitive Sciences

(CRISCAT) at the same university. **Salvatore Settineri** is affiliated with the Department of Biomedical and Dental Sciences and Morphofunctional Imaging at the University of Messina in Messina, Italy. For more information about this study, please contact Fabio Frisone at fabfrisone@unime.it

Citation

Frisone, F., Settineri, S., Sicari, F., & Merlo, E. M. (2020). Gambling in adolescence: A narrative review of the last 20 years. *Journal of Addictive Diseases*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10550887.2020.1782557>

Study funding

This study did not mention any funding sources.

About Gambling Research Exchange (GREO)

Gambling Research Exchange (GREO) has partnered with the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University to produce Research Snapshots. GREO is an independent knowledge translation and exchange organization that aims to eliminate harm from gambling. Our goal is to support evidence-informed decision making in safer gambling policies, standards, and practices. The work we do is intended for researchers, policy makers, gambling regulators and operators, and treatment and prevention service providers.

Learn more about GREO by visiting greo.ca or emailing info@greo.ca.

