

research snapshot

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Do sports-related gambling activities put youth at-risk for a gambling problem?

What this research is about

Fantasy sports are games where players assemble imaginary teams of real players of a professional sport, and score based on how their selected players perform in actual games. Online fantasy sports are growing in popularity in Canada and the United States. There is ongoing debate in the media and government on whether betting on fantasy sports is a gambling activity. If so, one may argue that fantasy sports betting should be regulated or made illegal. Past research has examined the influence of fantasy sports on problem gambling behaviours. But few studies have explored how youth are affected by fantasy sports betting.

Sports are very popular among youth, and sports wagering is a popular form of gambling. Problem gambling rates are also very high among youth compared to older adults. Therefore, it is important to pay attention to new forms of gambling, such as fantasy sports betting, among youth. The current study examined the relationship between sports-related gambling and being at-risk for a gambling problem among American youth. It also explored gender differences in sports-related gambling.

What the researcher did

The researchers used data from the 2016 Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services Board/Wood County Educational Service Center Survey on Alcohol and Other Drug Use. The survey collected information from 6,818 public school students in grades 7 through 12 from Wood County, Ohio.

The survey assessed problem gambling with 3

What you need to know

The current study explored the impact of sports-related gambling participation on problem gambling among youth. A survey was given to 6,818 high school students from Wood County in Ohio, USA. Youth who participated in sports-related gambling activities were more likely to be at-risk for a gambling problem. These included seasonal fantasy sports betting, daily fantasy sports betting, and sports betting in general.

Youth between 16 to 19 years old who played once a month or more were at higher risk for a gambling problem compared to younger youth. For youth between 13 to 15 years old, the strongest predictor of risky gambling behaviour was daily fantasy sports betting. Males participated more often in sports-related gambling activities than females. But females were at greater risk of developing a gambling problem when they did engage in sports-related gambling.

questions on loss of control while gambling, lying about one's gambling, and being preoccupied with gambling. It also captured information about the frequency of participation in sports-related gambling activities over the past year. Frequencies included "not at all", "less than once a month", "about once a month", "about once a week", or "daily". Sports-related gambling activities included seasonal fantasy sports betting, daily fantasy sports betting, and sports betting in general. Participants were divided into three age groups: 10–12 year-olds, 13–15 year-olds, and 16–19 year-olds.

What the researcher found

Youth participated in sports betting most often, followed by seasonal fantasy sports betting and daily fantasy sports betting. Youth who participated in sports-related gambling activities were more likely to be at-risk for a gambling problem. Betting once a month or more increased the likelihood of being at-risk for a gambling problem.

Youth between 16 to 19 years old who bet once a month or more were at a higher risk for a gambling problem compared to younger youth. However, daily fantasy sports betting impacted problem gambling behaviour the most among 13-15 year olds. Bets on daily fantasy sports can be made on a daily or hourly basis. Players of daily fantasy sports have less opportunity to be strategic in their games. Thus, betting on daily fantasy sports can be considered a higher risk form of gambling.

Males participated in sports-related gambling activities about 6 to 9 times more often than females. However, when females did participate in sports-related gambling activities, they had a stronger likelihood of being at-risk for a gambling problem. For instance, males were 6 times more likely to be at-risk for a gambling problem if they participated in daily fantasy sports betting more than once a month. But the likelihood of having a gambling problem increased to 37 times for females.

How you can use this research

Public health should educate youth on responsible gambling practices, including about sports-related gambling. Treatment providers should consider age and gender differences in at-risk status to tailor intervention programs. Policy-makers should develop age restriction policies for popular online fantasy sports sites for youth under the age of 19. Future research should examine risk and protective factors associated with sports-related gambling. Research should also look at the social and psychological impact of new forms of gambling like fantasy sports betting.

About the Researcher

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Keywords

Fantasy sports, sport wagering, at-risk gambling, adolescent

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Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (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 responsible 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.

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