

# research snapshot

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## How much gambling is too much among youth?

### What this research is about

Youth are in a vulnerable period of development in which they may attempt risky behaviours like gambling. This puts them at risk of experiencing harms and developing addictions from such behaviours. In fact, youth are two to four times more likely than adults to experience problem gambling. They are also more likely to experience harms related to gambling, such as poor mental and physical health impacts, money problems, and issues at school.

It is important to protect youth from gambling and its related harms. Understanding the actual gambling behaviour of youth and its links with problem gambling can provide insights into the limits beyond which gambling can cause harm to youth.

The current study examined the relationship between gambling behaviour and potential problem gambling among Finnish youth aged 12 to 17. The aim was to find out the behavioural limits for problem gambling. The researchers used data from a nationally representative survey in 2006. At that time, the age limit for gambling in Finland was 15 years old for slot machines and 18 years old for gambling in casinos, arcades, and online.

### What the researchers did

Data came from the Youth Gambling Survey 2006. Participants were Finnish youth, aged 12-17 years old, who gambled at least monthly. They completed the South Oaks Gambling Screen – revised for adolescents (SOGS-RA). Based on their SOGS-RA scores, youths' gambling was considered as non-problematic or potential problem gambling.

### What you need to know

The findings suggest that behavioural indicators could be used as initial markers of possible problem gambling among youth. Among Finnish youth aged 12-14 years, gambling behaviour began to cause harm when they gambled beyond 2-3 times per month, spent over €2 per week on gambling, spent more than €8 in any 1 day on gambling, and gambled on more than two different games per year. Among youth aged 15-17 years, gambling behaviour began to cause harm when they gambled beyond once per week, spent over €4 per week on gambling, spent more than €12 in any 1 day on gambling, and gambled on more than two different games per year. For both age groups, amount of money spent on gambling was the strongest indicator of possible problem gambling.

Youth also reported gambling behaviour indicators, including: how often they gambled in the past year, the amount of money spent on gambling activities per week, the largest amount of money spent on gambling in any one day, and the number of different game types played during the past year (e.g., lotteries, slot machines, card games). Youth also reported their age, sex, monthly spending money, and involvement of their parents or friends in gambling.

The researchers divided the youth into groups of 12-14 and 15-17 year-olds due to the age limit of gambling and differences in gambling behaviours. All analyses were done separately for the two age groups. The researchers used receiver operating characteristic (ROC) analysis to compare youth with

and without problem gambling to detect the behavioural limits for problem gambling.

### What the researchers found

Overall, 11% of youth had potential problem gambling. Compared to those without problem gambling, youth with problem gambling were more likely to have a friend or friends with gambling problems, had more monthly spending money, and gambled in more types of games. They also gambled more often, spent more money gambling, and bet with larger amount of money.

The risk of problem gambling increased with an increase in gambling frequency. Among youth aged 12-14 years, the risk increased when they gambled more than 2-3 times a month. Among youth aged 15-17 years, the risk increased when they gambled more than once a week.

The risk of problem gambling also increased with higher amount of money spent gambling. This was the strongest indicator of problem gambling. Among youth aged 12-14 years, the risk increased when they spent over €2 per week on gambling or spent more than €8 in any 1 day on gambling. Among youth aged 15-17 years, the risk increased when they spent over €4 per week on gambling, or spent more than €12 in any 1 day on gambling.

The risk of problem gambling also increased with higher number of gambling games played. For both youths aged 12-14 years and 15-17 years, the risk increased when they gambled on more than two different games per year.

### How you can use this research

The findings suggest that behavioural indicators could be used as initial markers of possible problem gambling among youth. Clinicians could use the behavioural limits to identify high-risk youth. Public health and policy-makers could use these limits to create guidelines, similar to limits that have been created for adolescents' alcohol use.

Future research could study the reasons for the different behavioural limits between youth aged 12-14 years and youth aged 15-17 years.

### About the researchers

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### 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](http://greo.ca) or emailing [info@greo.ca](mailto:info@greo.ca).

