

research snapshot

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Do adolescent online gamblers have unique characteristics?

What this research is about

Online gambling has become a popular form of gambling. Few studies have identified the characteristics of adolescents who gamble online. None of the studies has compared if adolescent online gamblers differ from land-based gamblers. More research is needed to determine if different policies and programs are needed to target different gambling modes among adolescents. The current study examined the characteristics of adolescents who participated in land-based and online gambling. It compared land-based and online gamblers to determine whether the characteristics of online gamblers were unique.

What the researchers did

The researchers used data from the 2012-2013 Youth Gambling Survey (YGS). The YGS collected information from 10,035 students in Grade 9 to 12 from Newfoundland and Labrador, Ontario, and Saskatchewan. The YGS captured current gambling (gambling once or more in the past 3 months) and problem gambling severity. It assessed gambling mode (online versus land-based) and if respondents played free gambling games online (e.g., internet poker, internet slots). The YGS also collected socio-demographic information such as gender, race/ethnicity, and weekly spending money. Finally, the survey collected information on factors known to be associated with problem gambling among youth. These factors included having parents or friends who gambled, smoking, binge drinking, sedentary behaviour, and school performance.

Most adolescents who gambled online also participated in land-based gambling. Thus, online

What you need to know

The current study examined the characteristics of adolescents who gambled online and compared them to adolescents who were land-based gamblers. Participants were students in Grades 9 to 12 in three provinces in Canada. Most adolescents who gambled online also participated in land-based gambling. Adolescents with gambling problems were more likely to gamble online than to participate in land-based gambling only. Adolescents who played free games were also more likely to gamble online. Females were less likely to gamble online than males. Other than these characteristics, adolescent online gamblers were not that different from land-based gamblers. These results suggest that gambling prevention efforts for adolescents should focus on problem gambling across different modes of gambling.

gamblers included those who gambled online only and those who participated in both online and land-based gambling. First, the researchers compared the characteristics of online gamblers and land-based gamblers to non-gamblers. They then compared the characteristics of online gamblers to land-based gamblers.

What the researchers found

In the past 3 months, 32.3% of adolescents had engaged in land-based gambling and 9.3% had gambled online. Just over 12% of adolescents indicated that they had played free games online. A small portion of adolescents (2.2%) had high gambling severity.

Compared to adolescents who did not gamble, adolescents who played free games online were more likely to be current gamblers (both online and land-based). Adolescents with close friends or parents who gambled were also more likely to be current gamblers (online and land-based) compared to those who did not gamble.

Land-based and online gamblers were more likely to be binge drinkers compared to non-gamblers. Also, land-based gamblers were more likely to be current smokers. Online gamblers were more likely to receive poor grades compared to non-gamblers.

Adolescents with gambling problems were more likely to gamble online than to participate in land-based gambling only. Adolescents who played free games online were more likely to gamble online. Females were less likely to gamble online than males. There were no differences between online and land-based gamblers in terms of having friends or parents who gambled. There were also no differences between online and land-based gamblers in terms of smoking, binge drinking, or school performance.

How you can use this research

The profile of adolescent online gamblers was not very different from that of land-based gamblers. Thus, public health and government should focus gambling prevention efforts for adolescents across all modes of gambling (online and land-based). Prevention strategies should be incorporated into school curriculums to reach more adolescents. Although difficult, government and policy-makers should also regulate free play sites or develop harm reduction strategies for them.

About the researchers

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Adolescent, online gambling, land-based gambling

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