Is mobile gambling among youth a warning sign for problem gambling?

What this research is about

There is a rapid rise in the use of technology to gamble. This has increased gambling among youth. It can be easy for youth to access online gambling websites despite being underage, as many websites have poor proof-of-age verification processes. Mobile gambling through smart phones and tablets also allow youth to access gambling websites/apps anywhere and anytime. Since mobile gambling provides youth with greater availability and accessibility of gambling opportunities, underage mobile gambling has become a growing concern around the world.

Past research shows that rates of problem gambling among youth are about two to four times higher than those of adults. There are many factors that might protect youth from problem gambling, or place them at increased risk of it. For example, parental and peer disapproval of gambling could deter youth from gambling. The current study examined the rate of mobile gambling among youth, and its association with gambling-related problems. The study also explored factors that might protect youth from frequent gambling using their mobile device.

What the researchers did

Participants were 6,818 junior/senior high school students, aged 10 to 19 years, in Ohio, USA. The adolescents completed a survey that assessed how often they gambled on a mobile device (smart phone or tablet) in the past year. It also assessed how often they engaged in other forms of gambling and if they were at risk of a gambling problem.

The survey assessed various factors that had been known to protect youth from gambling problems. These included their perception of risk of harm from gambling (i.e., how much people risk harming themselves if they gamble or make bets for money), and their perceived peer and parental disapproval of gambling (i.e., how wrong friends/parents feel it would be to gamble or make bets for money).

The researchers analyzed the associations between mobile gambling, being at risk of a gambling problem, and other forms of gambling. Then, they examined whether gender, grade, perceived risk of harm from gambling, and parental and peer disapproval of gambling predicted how often the adolescents gambled on their mobile device in the past year.

What the researchers found

Almost one-third of the participants reported gambling during the past year, and 5% reported having gambled on a mobile device. Regular gambling on a mobile device (at least monthly) increased the risk of developing a gambling problem and engaging in other forms of gambling. Being female, being younger, and perceiving higher parental disapproval of gambling were associated with less frequent mobile gambling in the past year. The results suggest that underage mobile gambling may be a warning sign of problem gambling among youth.

What you need to know

This study examined the prevalence of mobile gambling among youth and its association with at-risk gambling. Participants were 6,818 high school students, aged 10 to 19 years, who completed a survey. Almost one-third of the adolescents reported gambling during the past year, and 5% reported having gambled on a mobile device. Regular gambling on a mobile device (at least monthly) increased the risk of developing a gambling problem and engaging in other forms of gambling. Being female, being younger, and perceiving higher parental disapproval of gambling were associated with less frequent mobile gambling in the past year. The results suggest that underage mobile gambling may be a warning sign of problem gambling among youth.
having gambled on a mobile device. Males were almost four times more likely to gamble and use their mobile device for gambling than females. Older students (grades 10-12) were almost two times more likely to gamble on their mobile device than younger students.

Regular mobile gamblers (at least once a month) were 13 times more likely than non-regular gamblers to be at risk of a gambling problem. Males were more likely to be at risk of a gambling problem than females. Regular mobile gamblers were also more likely to engage in other forms of gambling, especially with online poker, daily fantasy sports, and fantasy sports.

Being female, being younger, and perceiving higher parental disapproval of gambling predicted less frequent mobile gambling among the participants. But, perceived risk of harm and perceived peer disapproval of gambling did not predict how often they gambled on their mobile device.

**How you can use this research**

The results suggest that underage mobile gambling may be a warning sign of at-risk gambling among youth. Public health could design education and prevention campaigns to prevent mobile gambling among youth. For prevention and intervention programs to be effective, program providers could involve parents/guardians and educate them about youth gambling. Policy-makers and online gambling regulators could focus efforts on ensuring that online gambling websites have strong proof-of-age requirements to prevent underage gambling.

**About the researchers**

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**Keywords**

Mobile gambling, adolescents, at-risk gambling, perceived parental disapproval

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