

**BACKGROUND BRIEFING PAPER
ON
YOUTH AND ADOLESCENT GAMBLING
SUBMITTED BY
JOHN SHOSKY, Ph.D.
DEPUTY DIRECTOR/SENIOR WRITER
NATIONAL GAMBLING IMPACT STUDY COMMISSION
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[Please Note: This paper is intended as general background for the use of the Commissioners of the National Gambling Impact Study Commission. It is not intended for any other use, nor does it represent the position of the Commissioners or staff of the National Gambling Impact Study Commission.]

INTRODUCTION/PREVALENCE

There are a significant number of underage gamblers. A recent study found that of almost 17,000 students in Vermont, 53 percent reported gambling in the past 12 months.¹ Other studies have found that the lifetime rate of gambling by the last year of high school is between 75 and 91 percent.² In a survey of almost 900 students from four New Jersey high schools, Lesieur and Klein reported that 91 percent of students had gambled at least once and 86 percent had gambled in the last year.³ Ladouceur and Mireault have found in a study of more than 1600 Quebec high school students that 76 percent had gambled and 24 percent had gambled at least weekly in the past year.⁴ Arcuri and colleagues found that 64 percent of 1120 students in Atlantic City, New Jersey, had gambled in a casino and 9 percent gambled at least weekly.⁵

Proximity to legalized gambling is an important factor, as one study found that college students in New York, New Jersey, and Nevada had higher rates of gambling than did students in Texas and

¹ PROIMOS, ET. AL., Gambling and Other Risk Behaviors Among 8th to 12th Grade Students, 102 PEDIATRICS (2), August, 1998, 1-6.

² SHAFFER AND HALL, Estimating the Prevalence of Adolescent Gambling Disorders: A Quantitative Synthesis and Guide Toward Standard Gambling Nomenclature, 12 JOURNAL OF GAMBLING STUDIES, 1996, 193-214.

³ LESIEUR, Pathological Gambling Among High School Students, 12 ADDICTIVE BEHAVIOR, 1987, 129-135.

⁴ LADOUCEUR AND MIREAULT. Gambling Behavior Among High School Students in the Quebec Area, 3 JOURNAL OF GAMBLING BEHAVIOR, 1988, 3-12.

⁵ ARCURI, LESTER, AND SMITH. Shaping Adolescent Gambling Behavior, 20 ADOLESCENCE, 1985, 935-938.

Oklahoma.⁶

PATHOLOGICAL GAMBLING

The Lesieur and Klein study found that 6 percent of students surveyed could be classified as problem gamblers. The Ladouceur and Mireault study found that figure was between one and two percent. Harvard's Howard Shaffer has found that the rate of problem gambling among adolescents was 9.4 percent. Recently, the New York Council on Problem Gambling found that at least 40,000 children, or 2.4 percent, under 18 have become severely addicted to gambling, with thousands more (perhaps another 14 percent) judged at risk of developing gambling problems.⁷

RISK BEHAVIOR

Several studies have shown that pathological gambling is associated with alcohol and drug use, truancy, low grades, problematic gambling in parents, and illegal activities to finance gambling. Proimos and her colleagues found that gambling behavior was significantly associated with risk behavior. For example, gambling was associated with multiple drug and alcohol use. For 28 percent of those surveyed, gambling was also associated with carrying a weapon at least once in the past 30 days, and for those who reported a problem with gambling the figure rose to 47 percent. While nearly one-fourth of non-gambling students reported having fought in the last 30 days, the figure rose to 45 percent for those who reported gambling and 62 percent for those who reported problems attributable to gambling. In addition, the researchers worried about under-reporting; the frequencies might not reflect their true prevalence.⁸

George has argued that gambling is attractive to young people because it is culturally popular and surrounded by images of instantaneous wealth, power, status, and freedom. It also is an answer, for them, to address problems at home, low self-esteem, the need for a positive role model, and avoidance of pain and grief.⁹

⁶ LESIEUR, CROSS, AND FRANK. Gambling and Pathological Gambling Among University Students, 16 ADDICTIVE BEHAVIOR, 1991, 517-527. This is not to say that adolescent gambling in non-gaming states is insignificant. rather, even though the rate is lower, the percentage of adolescent gamblers is still disturbingly high. For example, See WALLISH, TEXAS COMMISSION ON ALCOHOL AND DRUG ABUSE, GAMBLING IN TEXAS: 1992 TEXAS SURVEY OF ADOLESCENT GAMBLING BEHAVIOR, September 1993: "Almost 66 percent of all [Texas] teens had gambled within the past year, 14 percent on a weekly basis, and 51 percent less regularly in the past year." (7)

⁷ Reported in an editorial, With 40,000 Kids Addicted To Gambling, New York Has A Problem To Tend To, BUFFALO NEWS, March 21, 1998, 2B.

⁸ PROIMOS, PEDIATRICS.

⁹ GEORGE, Underage Gambling: A Bad Bet for American teens," TREATMENT TODAY,

Vitaro and his colleagues also suggest that impulsivity is also a factor, with high problem gamblers having the highest scores in lack of impulse control.¹⁰

Others claim that adolescents receive a mixed message in states where some forms of gambling are legal. There are charges that the gambling industry lures young gamblers.¹¹

ANALYSIS OF STUDIES

Stinchfield and Winters have argued that there are some "recurrent findings that cut across a number of studies." First, youth gambling occurs on a continuum of involvement, from no gambling, to experimentation, to occasional gambling, to regular gambling, to over-involvement in gambling, to pre-occupation, and to serious adverse consequences. Second, most youth have gambled at some time and many underage youth have played a legalized game. Third, boys are more involved in gambling than girls. Fourth, older youth gamble more often than younger youth. Fifth, some studies have found that some adolescents from our nation's minority populations gamble more than whites. Sixth, gambling starts at an early age, sometimes grade school. Seventh, rates of youth gambling and problem gambling appear to be fairly stable. Eighth, prevalence rates of pathological gambling are reportedly higher among youth than adults. Ninth, youth gambling is related to parental gambling.¹² These conclusions serve as "a foundation upon which to build our knowledge base."¹³

PROGRAMS AND INITIATIVES

There have been a variety of initiatives to address youth gambling. In Great Britain, "Parents of Young Gamblers", a support organization, has been developed to directly meet the

FALL, 1996, 15.

¹⁰ VITARO, ARSENEAULT, AND TREMBLAY, Dispositional Predictors of Problem Gambling in Male Adolescents, 12 AMERICAN JOURNAL OF PSYCHIATRY, December, 1997, 1769-70. This study is also cited as evidence for the DSM-IV classification of problem gambling as a deficit in impulse control: "Altogether, these results are consistent with the DSM-IV classification of pathological gambling as an impulse control deficit. But these results go a step further: they show that for problem gamblers, impulse control deficits precede later gambling problems." (1770)

¹¹ NESBITT, The Lure of the Bet, CLEVELAND PLAIN DEALER, March 29, 1998, 1D. See, NESBITT, Teens Vulnerable to Betting Addiction, SEATTLE TIMES, March 29, 1998, A2.

¹² STINCHFIELD AND WINTERS, Gambling and Problem Gambling Among Youths, 556 ANNALS, American Academy of Political and Social Science, March, 1998, 172-185.

¹³ *Id.*, 174.

needs of very young pathological gamblers and their families.¹⁴ Griffiths has observed that such an approach allows for relaxation training, avoidance of gambling opportunities, and family and peer support, including supervision of the young person's money, seem to be promising useful interventions for young pathological gamblers.¹⁵ For example, the "North American Think Tank on Youth Gambling Issues" was convened at Harvard Medical School April 6-8, 1995, to conduct a public dialogue on youth gambling. A blueprint emerged for policy development, funding, and law enforcement recommendations. Another landmark conference was held in St. Paul, Minnesota on May 8 and 9, 1997 to develop a blueprint for the management of compulsive gambling. These conferences, which featured representation from both industry, government, academia, and advocates, illustrate the power of joint discussion on this issue.

There have been several creative out-reach initiatives. For example, given concern about gambling within America's Southeast Asian community, the United Cambodian Association of Minnesota, Lao Family Community of Minnesota and the Minnesota Institute of Public Health developed a prevention/education program to inform young Southeast Asians about the hazards of adolescent gambling and to help create personal guidelines for choosing to gamble, or not.¹⁶

The Minnesota Institute of Public Health also supported creation of a similar booklet for the general population.¹⁷

The Minnesota Council on Compulsive Gambling has prepared "Wanna Bet", which is a package containing a booklet, loose-leaf papers, and a video, each targeted to teenage gambling. The goal is to enhance critical thinking and to help identify compulsive behaviors.¹⁸

State governments may also develop services and activities to

¹⁴ SCHROEDER, Youth and Gambling: A Review of the Literature," REPORT OF THE NORTH AMERICAN TRAINING INSTITUTE, 03.001, 1995.

¹⁵ GRIFFITHS, Factors in Problem Adolescent Fruit Machine Gambling: Results of Small Postal Survey, 9 JOURNAL OF GAMBLING STUDIES, 1993, 31-47. See also, GRIFFITHS, Fruit Machine Addiction in Adolescents: A Case Study, 9 JOURNAL OF GAMBLING STUDIES, 1993, 387-399.

¹⁶ SVENDSEN, SOUTHEAST ASIAN YOUTH PREVENTION EDUCATION PROGRAM, April, 1997.

¹⁷ SVENDEN AND GRIFFIN, GAMBLING: CHOICES AND GUIDELINES, 1993.

¹⁸ NORTH AMERICAN TRAINING INSTITUTE, "WANNA BET", booklet, loose leaf papers, and video package, September, 1998.

address the problem of adolescent gambling. For instance, Volberg has suggested that a state, in cooperation with community-based agencies, the gambling industry, academia, and others, may wish to fund programs targeted at-risk adolescents and adults. The state could also develop public education and prevention services and implement educational curricula in conjunction with state education departments. In addition, the New York Council on Problem Gambling convened an "Education Think Tank" in November, 1997, to develop a prevention education model.¹⁹ Volberg also suggests state funding for treatment services for adolescent gamblers and family members through existing state-funded problem gambling providers.²⁰

INDUSTRY RESPONSE

In addition to programs documented in earlier meetings of this Commission, and new programs, such as the Nevada Retail Gaming Association's new program to post stickers on slot and video poker games, and their work to distribute literature from the Nevada Council on Problem Gambling,²¹ there are many industry actions that could contribute to keeping adolescents out of casinos.

For instance, the gaming industry has funded conferences, research, and programs designed to combat adolescent gambling.

The industry is also working on other fronts, including increased security within the casinos. In 1997, both Donald Trump and Frank Fahrenkopf spoke on the ABC program "20/20" of the need for security guards to identify abandoned adolescents in the casinos and to reunite them with absent parents who are on the premises. Mr. Fahrenkopf even suggested that security guards should be proactive, assisting children to leave the premises for their hotel rooms, to do everything possible to get them out of the casinos.²²

Some casinos have employed high technology to keep adolescents out of legal gambling establishments. All three New Orleans area casino boats now have scanners that read the magnetic strip on the back of a driver's license. This offers a more accurate way to determine the age on the card and the device can detect certain

¹⁹ VOLBERG, GAMBLING AND PROBLEM GAMBLING AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN NEW YORK, REPORT TO THE NEW YORK COUNCIL ON PROBLEM GAMBLING, March, 1998, 50.

²⁰ *Id.*, 51.

²¹ WILEN, Slot Route Operators Fight Problem Gambling, LAS VEGAS SUN, October, 1998.

²² ABC NEWS PROGRAM 20/20, Where Are Their Parents?: Children Roam Casinos While Parents Gamble," aired September 12, 1997.

types of card tampering.²³ However, privacy concerns have been raised.²⁴

Of course, law enforcement efforts, such as administrative citations, fines, closures, or license revocation could also help to curb illegal gambling by adolescents.²⁵

CONCLUSION

Adolescent gambling is pervasive. It is associated with problem gambling in adults and with risky behavior in adolescents. Public health organizations, parents, gambling treatment organizations, advocacy groups, public health officials, law enforcement agents, and industry representatives have all publicly stated that adolescent gambling is not in the best interests of young people or the gaming industry itself. This is an area of considerable common ground which can be used to tackle tougher issues of later problem and pathological gambling, which is correlated with adolescent gambling. Targeted programs may prevent illegal gambling from occurring and can identify young problem gamblers.

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²³ SMITH, Casino Carding Keeps Kids Away, THE TIMES-PICAYUNE, August 31, 1998.

²⁴ *Id.*

²⁵ ASSOCIATED PRESS, Youth Gambling Case hearing Set, TIMES-PICAYUNE, March 6, 1998, C2.