

Youth Gambling: Prevalence and Trends

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CONTEXT FOR YOUTH GAMBLING

Rapid Expansion of Gambling

- **Gambling is now legal in all but two states in the U.S. (Utah and Hawaii); creation of new lotteries and casinos; gambling advertising in television, radio, newspapers, billboards, etc.**
- **Estimates of wagers for the entire country were about \$300 billion in 1991 and more current estimates are around \$500 billion.**
- **Gambling advertisements entice the public with the message that gambling is a quick and easy way to get rich. Newspaper ads show pictures of winners with the byline, “this could be you!”. Of course, advertisements do not show the masses of people who lose their money gambling. It is unknown what effect this exposure will have on youth. Youth may not understand the inherent risks of gambling and the low probability of winning, and therefore may be susceptible to this type of promotion, in the same way that youth may be more susceptible to cigarette advertising.**

COMMON ACTIVITY AND AMBIGUITY

- **Gambling has become a common activity for many Americans. It is estimated that about 80% of the U.S. population gambles (Lesieur, 1989; Volberg, 1994). Gambling is also a very common activity among youth. Most studies estimate that about 80% of youth have gambled in their life and about 60% have gambled in the past year.**
- **The public seems to be either divided or unsure of whether gambling is a good or a bad thing. For example, in Minnesota, the state lottery passed by a slim margin of 1,214,032 (59%) to 843,307 (41%). Gambling has been referred to as the only “vice” endorsed and promoted by both the church and state.**
- **The ambiguity regarding gambling is apparent in state government. On the one hand, youth are instructed by their teachers (and ostensibly their state department of education) that the way to get ahead in life is to study and work hard, on the other hand, their state lottery tells them they only need to be lucky. Although gambling is for adults, youth are exposed to the advertising.**

CONCERNS ABOUT GAMBLING

- **With the growth of commercial gambling there has also been increasing concern about the negative social and personal consequences of easy access to a variety of gambling venues. There is a good deal of concern about underage gambling and youth problem gambling.**
- **This is the first generation of youth to be exposed to such widespread and easy access to a variety of gambling venues, ubiquitous gambling advertising, and general social approval for an inherently risky activity that was once prohibited.**
- **There have been both national and local media reports of problems associated with youth gambling, e.g., students acting as bookies in schools, adolescent gamblers getting in debt with bookies with subsequent threats and acts of violence, adolescent boys arrested for breaking and entering homes for the purpose of supporting their gambling habit, to name a few.**

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT YOUTH GAMBLING?

There are a number of recurring findings that cut across studies. These findings serve as a foundation upon which to further build our knowledge base.

- **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 preoccupation, and to serious adverse consequences**
- **Most youth have gambled at some time and many underage youth have played a legalized game. Although many youth gamble, most do so infrequently and do not suffer any adverse consequences.**
- **Boys are more involved in gambling than girls**
- **Older youth gamble more often than younger youth**

- **Some studies have found racial/ethnic differences in youth gambling, with some ethnic minorities showing higher rates of gambling than whites (Stinchfield, Cassuto, Winters, and Latimer 1997; Wallisch 1993)**
- **Youth start gambling at an early age, oftentimes in grade school (Ladouceur, Dube, and Bujold 1994)**
- **Rates of youth gambling and problem gambling appear to be fairly stable (Stinchfield, et al. 1997; Wallisch 1996; Winters, Stinchfield, and Kim 1996)**
- **There is a small percentage of youth who appear to be over-involved with gambling and some show signs of pathological gambling. Prevalence rates of pathological gambling are reportedly higher among youth than adults. Jacobs (1993) estimated from his review that 4-6% of youth have serious gambling problems. Shaffer and Hall (1996) in their recent review, give a similar estimate of between 4.4% and 7.4% of youth have a serious gambling problem.**
- **Youth gambling is related to other behaviors including use of tobacco, alcohol and marijuana, antisocial behaviors, and parental gambling (e.g., Jacobs, 1993; Winters, Stinchfield, and Fulkerson, 1993).**
- **Youth gambling starts earlier than use of tobacco, alcohol and marijuana (Stinchfield, et al 1997).**

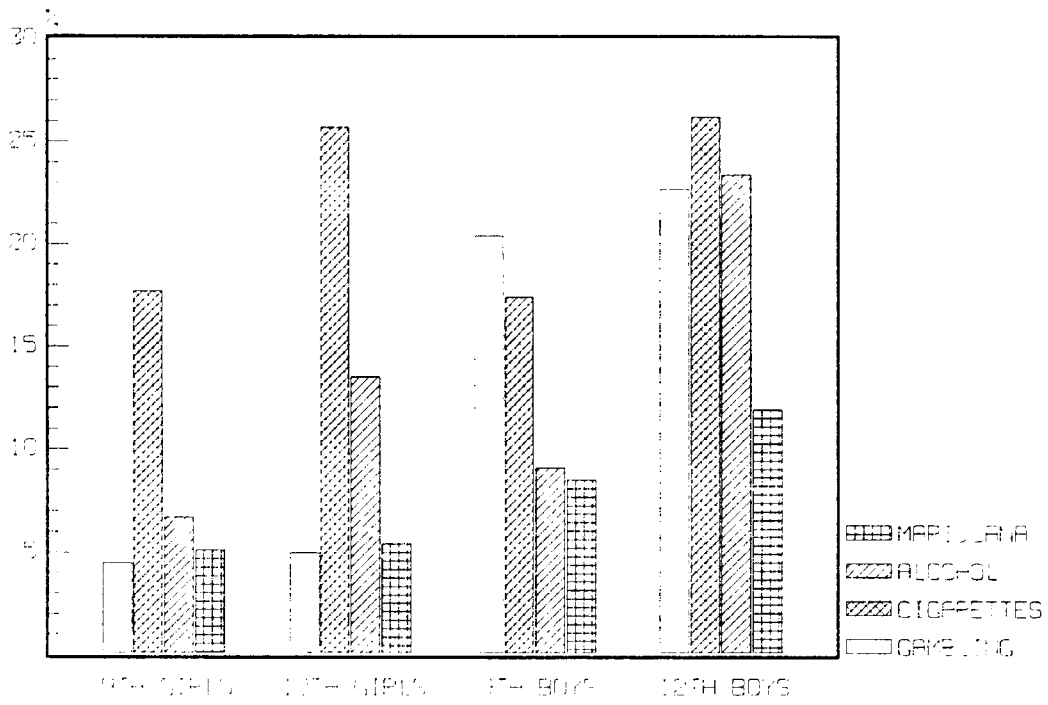


Figure 1. Rates of weekly/daily gambling, cigarette, alcohol, and marijuana use in 9th and 12th grade boys and girls. 1995 Minnesota Student Survey (N=75,900).

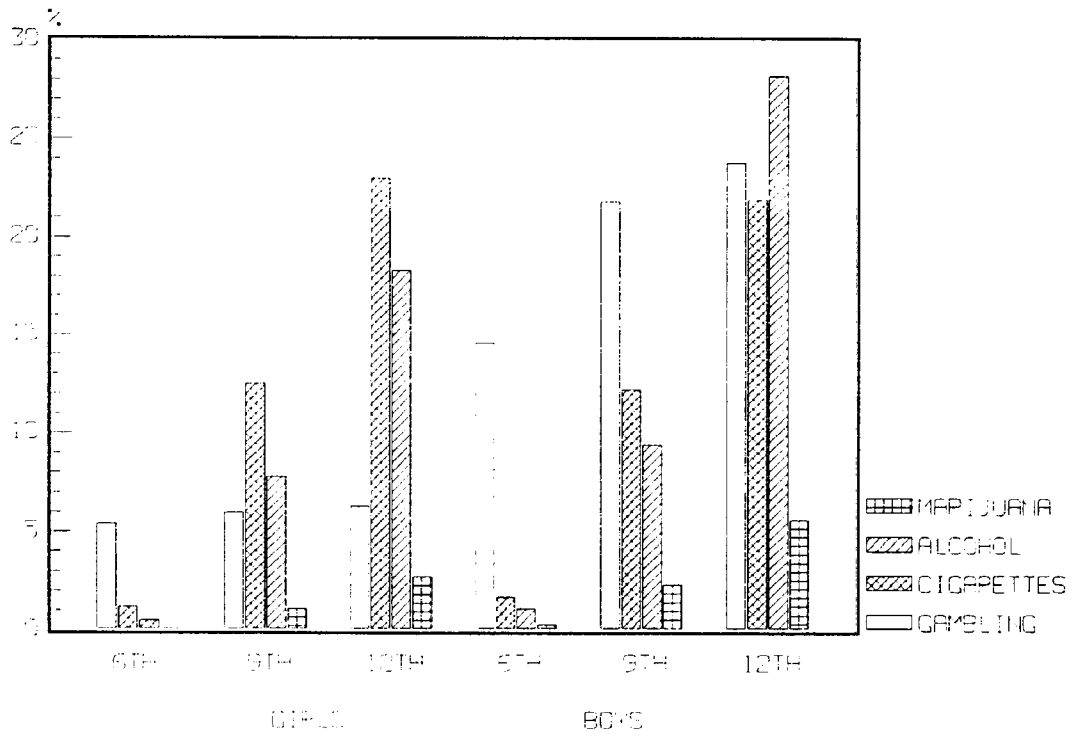


Figure 2. Rates of weekly/daily gambling, cigarette, alcohol, and marijuana use among 6th, 9th, and 12th grade boys and girls. 1992 Minnesota Student Survey (N=122,700).

ARE YOUTH GAMBLING MORE, LESS, OR ABOUT THE SAME?

Three studies have addressed this question:

- **1990 and 1991 in Minnesota:** Longitudinal study of 532 Minnesota youth in 1990 and resurveyed one year later (Winters, Stinchfield, and Kim 1995). Rates of gambling and problem gambling did not change in this sample. However, there was a change in that gamblers' preferences shifted away from informal games to legalized games, particularly among those youth who reached the legal age for gambling during the course of the follow-up interval.
- **1992 and 1995 in Texas:** Two different youth samples from the same general population were surveyed in 1992 and 1995 (Wallisch, 1993, 1996). Gambling remained relatively stable from 1992 to 1995 with gambling in the past year remaining at 67% and weekly gambling dropping slightly from 14% in 1992 to 11% in 1995. Problem gambling also declined from 5% in 1992 to 2.3% in 1995.
- **1992 and 1995 in Minnesota:** For the sample as a whole, there were no significant changes in gambling from 1992 to 1995, however, in some subgroups, there were some increases: (a) 12th grade boys showed some slight increases in weekly/daily play of legalized games from 1992 to 1995 (See Table 5); (b) the percent of boys who were weekly/daily gamblers and answered "yes" to both gambling problem items increased slightly from 1992 to 1995 (See Tables 3 and 4); and (c) the percent of 9th and 12th grade boys playing all five games on a weekly/daily frequency increased from 1992 (1%) to 1995 (2%) (See Table 6).
- **In summary,** it appears that youth gambling has remained fairly stable in the general population. However, there does appear to be an increase in play of legalized games for youth who turn 18 years old; and an increase in the number of youth, particularly males, who are over-involved in gambling. Therefore, the answer to the question "Are youth gambling more, less, or about the same?" is that for most youth it is about the same or slightly less, but for a few it is more.

Where and How are Youth Gambling?

Gambling Survey of 1,094 MN youth aged 15-18 in 1990 (Winters, Stinchfield, & Fulkerson, 1990).

45% began gambling during grade 6 or before

Informal Gambling

57% Played card games for money

47% Bet on sports teams/sporting events

50% Bet on games of personal skill like golf, pool, etc.

Legalized Gambling

49% report that they have played lottery scratch-offs

23% report playing the lottery by picking numbers

46% played Bingo for money

23% played slot machines, poker machines

35% played pull-tabs

20% bet on horse/dog races

When underage youth were asked how they were able to play the lottery or pull-tabs:

28% had bought the ticket themselves

73% had a parent buy it for them

40% had another adult buy it for them

Attitudes about Gambling:

72% think it is wise to have an age limit for gambling

31% plan to buy a lottery ticket in the next month

54% think lotteries serve a useful purpose

Parent attitudes about their children's gambling:

79% say their parents know they gamble

49% report that their parents approve of their gambling

WHAT DON'T WE KNOW ABOUT YOUTH GAMBLING?

- **Public health officials, policy makers, parents, and teachers want to know the extent of underage and problem gambling and what can be done to prevent it**
- **The field of youth gambling research is in its infancy. There are a number of gaps in our knowledge about youth gambling**

For example:

- **Why do youth have reported rates of problem and pathological gambling 4 times the rate of adults?**
- **Should the SOGS be used with youth? And if yes, what revisions need to be made and what SOGS cut-score should be used?**
- **Will youth gambling increase, decrease, or remain stable?**
- **Why do youth gamble?**
- **Why does an individual move from social/recreational gambling to pathological gambling?**
- **What prevention efforts should be used with youth?**
- **Do prevention efforts work?**

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE NEXT?

- **Develop reliable and valid screening, assessment and diagnostic instruments specifically for youth.**
- **Monitor youth gambling and pathological gambling on a national basis.**
- **Longitudinal studies to determine the antecedents of youth problem gambling.**
- **Develop and evaluate prevention programs targeted for specific gambling types of youth, e.g., general population, youth exhibiting risky gambling behavior.**
- **Develop a continuum of care for those youth with gambling problems, including screening, assessment, referral, intervention, treatment, aftercare, and support groups.**

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