

Gambling in Texas: 1995 Surveys of Adult and Adolescent Gambling Behavior

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Chapter 14. Comparisons Between Adolescent and Adult Gambling

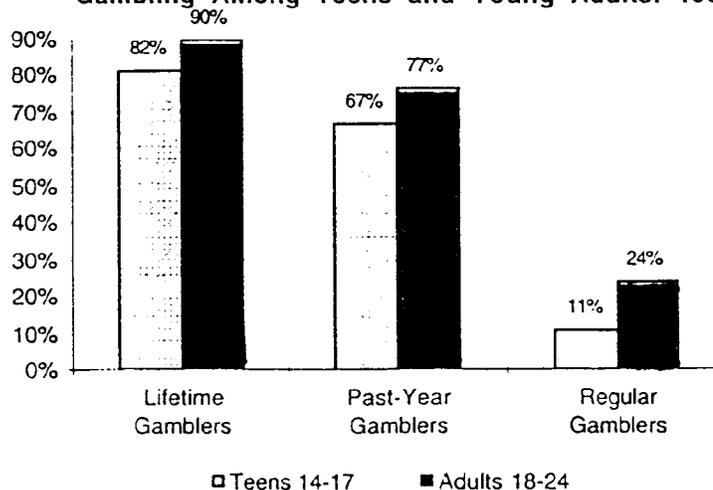
A question frequently asked is: To what extent does teenage behavior carry over into adulthood? The teen years are often times of experimentation with risky behavior; however, in most cases, this behavior ceases once a person reaches adulthood. However, early involvement in potentially addictive behaviors is often a strong predictor of later problems. For instance, adult problem gamblers typically report having begun gambling at an earlier age than adults who gamble without problems, and adult substance abusers report earlier first use of alcohol or drugs than other users. Although it cannot be determined which teens with problems will go on to have problems in adulthood and which ones will "grow out of" their behavior, it is instructive to compare the characteristics of teen and adult gamblers

to see the degree to which teen behavior changes or doesn't change once the line is crossed into adulthood.

Although the questionnaires used in the adult and teen surveys were somewhat different, adults and teens can be compared on several dimensions of gambling. In the following comparisons, adolescent gamblers are compared with adults who were surveyed at the same time, in spring 1995. The comparison is limited to

adults aged 18 through 24 in order to have a reference group closest in age to the teens. Interest is in what happens to teens' gambling behavior immediately or soon after reaching adulthood. The teens and young adults were similar in gender, race/ethnicity, and regional distribution, so no weighting was necessary in order to compare their behavior. It must be kept in mind that this is not a true longitudinal look at individuals as they pass from their

Figure 14.1. Prevalence and Recency of Gambling Among Teens and Young Adults: 1995



teens to adulthood, but rather a look at two cross-sections of the population. Current teenagers may behave differently when they enter their twenties than do young adults today.

Prevalence of Gambling

As shown in Figure 14.1, in 1995, about 82 percent of teens and 90 percent of adults aged 18 through 24 had ever bet for money in their lifetimes. About 67 percent of teens and 77 percent of adults had bet during the past year, and 11 percent of teens as compared to 24 percent of adults were regular (weekly) gamblers.

In the 1992 survey, teens gambled approximately as much as young adults. The fact that more adults than youth have ever gambled in 1995 may reflect the fact that the lottery affected adult gambling rates much more than it did teen gambling.

On most of the specific activities that were asked about comparably in both surveys, a higher percentage of adults than adolescents had gambled. However, teens had gambled more than adults on sports events with friends and they had gambled about as much as adults on games of skill.

Problem Gambling

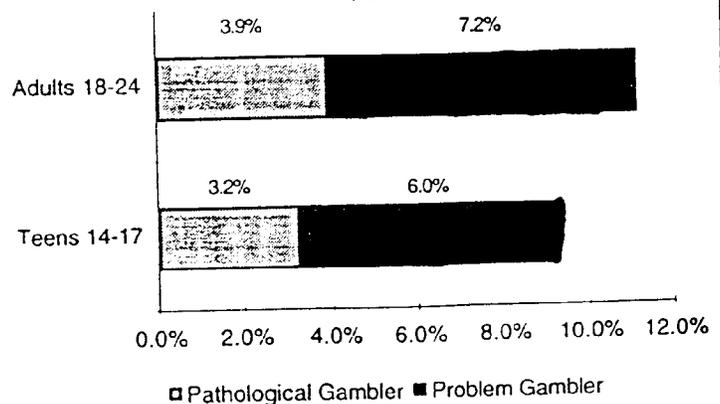
The adult survey used the SOGS for assessing problem gambling, whereas the teen survey used a multifactor method. However, since the SOGS questions were the basis for assessing teen problem gambling, a SOGS score for teens can be derived in the same way as for adults. The SOGS classification of "probable pathological gambler" corresponds roughly to the multifactor method's "problem gambler" and represents the most seriously troubled gamblers. The SOGS classification of "problem gambler" corresponds approximately to the multifactor method's "at-risk gambler" and designates gamblers with a few problems or risk factors for developing problems.

Using the SOGS, it was es-

timated that 3.9 percent of Texas adults aged 18 through 24 were lifetime pathological gamblers and another 7.2 percent were lifetime problem gamblers (Figure 14.2). Using the same criteria, 3.2 percent of adolescents would be classified as lifetime pathological gamblers and another 6.0 percent as problem gamblers. Teens were therefore slightly less likely than young adults to be problem or pathological gamblers.

A comparison of adult and teen gamblers who have had any gambling problems (that is, lifetime problem and pathological gamblers combined) reveals no significant differences in gender, race/ethnicity or region of residence. However, teen problem or pathological gamblers are more likely to say that

Figure 14.2. Problem and Pathological Gambling Among Young Adults and Teens: 1995



their friends gambled than were young adults with gambling problems: 60 percent of teens said that most of their friends also gambled, while this was true for only 35 percent of young adults. Apparently, gambling is more of a way of socializing for adolescents than for adults, even among those who gamble problematically.

In terms of substance use behavior, among both teens and adults, problem gamblers were more likely than other gamblers to have used illicit drugs in the past year and to report substance-related problems. About 63 percent of teens and 75 percent of young adults with gambling problems had used alcohol during the past year; however, more teens (37 percent) than young adults (21 percent) had used illicit drugs.

Figure 14.3. Past-Year Substance Use Among Young Adult and Teen Problem Gamblers: 1995

