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Problem Gambling Common Among Young Adults

U.S. survey estimates 750,000, mostly males, are hooked

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MONDAY, May 12 (HealthDay News) -- An estimated 750,000 American teens and young adults are problem gamblers according to researchers at the University at Buffalo's Research Institute on Addictions.



Problem gambling is defined as gambling associated with three or more negative consequences, such as gambling more than you intended or stealing money to gamble.

The national telephone survey of almost 2,300 respondents, ages 14 to 21, found that 2.1 percent were problem gamblers, which works out to a nationwide total of about 750,000 young problem gamblers, the researchers said.

They also found that 11 percent of respondents gambled twice a week or more -- considered frequent gambling -- and that 68 percent of respondents said they'd gambled at least once in the past year.

The findings of the survey, conducted from August 2005 through January 2007, are available online and were expected to be published in the June 2008 issue of the *Journal of Gambling Studies*.

"In a society where young people are increasingly exposed to gambling influences, there is cause for concern," principal investigator John W. Welte said in a prepared statement.

"As might be expected, all statistically significant results showed that greater gambling involvement is associated with aging into an adult status. In fact, gambling may be associated with the transition into adulthood," said Welte, a senior research scientist at the Research Institute on Addictions.

The study found that gambling increased with major life changes such as getting a job, leaving school, living independently from parents, and marriage. Young people who worked full-time were more likely to gamble, those who weren't in school were more likely to gamble frequently (twice a week or more), and those who lived independently were more likely to gamble and to be problem gamblers.

"As far as gender, it seems likely that females' gambling involvement tends to emerge in adulthood, while male involvement can be high in adolescence. We found identical problem gambling rates for adult males and young males (4 percent). We found adult females' gambling rates were much higher (3 percent) than that of young females (less than one-tenth of a percent). In other words, problem gambling is almost non-existent among female adolescents and young adults," Welte said.

Among the other findings:

- Black youth were less likely to have gambled than white youth. But if black youth gambled, they were more likely to be frequent gamblers -- 30 percent vs. 12 percent.
- Asians had the lowest gambling involvement.
- Native Americans were more likely than whites to be frequent gamblers (28 percent vs. 9 percent) and were more likely to score higher on measures of problem gambling. This may be a reflection of the rapid spread of legal gambling on Native American reservations.
- In general, young people with low socioeconomic status were less likely to gamble. However, if they did gamble, they were more likely to be problem gamblers.
- Young people in the highest socioeconomic groups had the lowest gambling involvement, the survey found.

More information

The American Academy of Family Physicians has more about [problem gambling](#).

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