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**GAMBLING AND PROBLEM GAMBLING
AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN NEVADA**

Report to the Nevada Department of Human Resources

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the results of the first survey of gambling and problem gambling among adolescents in Nevada. The main purpose of this study was to assess the extent of gambling and problem gambling among adolescents in Nevada. A sample of Nevada residents aged 13 to 17 (N=1,004) was interviewed between March and May, 2001, about the types of gambling they have tried, the amounts of money they spend on gambling and about gambling-related difficulties. The results of this study are intended to assist in the development of services in Nevada for youth with gambling problems and their families.

Findings

- While participation in all forms of gambling is illegal for individuals under the age of 21 in Nevada, 67% of the Nevada adolescent respondents said that they had bet on one or more types of gambling at some time in their lives, 49% had gambled in the past year and 7% bet on one or more types of gambling once a week or more often.
- The favorite types of gambling among Nevada adolescents are wagering on card, dice or board games with friends or family, wagering on private games of skill, and making side bets on arcade or video games.
- Boys are far more likely to gamble regularly than girls. Gambling involvement is also strongly associated with adolescent employment and income. Adolescents who receive an allowance and those who work 10 or more hours per week are much more likely to gamble weekly than those who work fewer hours or have less disposable income.
- Wagering on card, dice or board games with friends or family, on private games of skill and on arcade or video games accounts for the majority of reported monthly expenditures on gambling among Nevada adolescents.
- Nevada adolescents are most likely to have started gambling with family or friends on card, dice or board games.
- Gambling participation among adolescents in Nevada is correlated with the use of alcohol, tobacco, marijuana and illicit drugs. Weekly gamblers are more likely than less frequent gamblers to have used alcohol, tobacco, marijuana and other drugs in the past year and to have gotten into trouble in the past year because of their alcohol or drug use.
- In this report, a narrow definition of problem gambling, which captures a more extreme pattern of behavior, is used to estimate the prevalence of problem and at-risk gambling among youth in Nevada. A broad definition of problem gambling is used to identify risk factors associated with gambling problems among adolescents in Nevada.

Gambling and Problem Gambling Among Adolescents in Nevada

- Based on the narrow definition of problem gambling, 2.2% ($\pm 0.9\%$) of the total sample of adolescent respondents in Nevada was classified as problem gamblers, the most serious classification of gambling-related difficulties among youth. Another 9.9% ($\pm 1.8\%$) of the total sample of adolescent respondents was classified as gamblers at risk for developing gambling problems.
- Based on these figures, it is estimated that there are between 1,700 (1.3%) and 4,000 (3.1%) adolescents in Nevada who have experienced severe difficulties related to their gambling in the past year and another 10,400 (8.1%) and 15,000 (11.7%) adolescents whose gambling has caused them some difficulties in the past year.
- Using the narrow definition of problem gambling, prevalence rates are highest among girls, younger adolescents, Black and Asian adolescents compared with other racial groups, and among adolescents living in households with either a single parent or with three or more adults. The prevalence of at-risk gambling is higher among boys than among girls.
- Based on a broad definition of problem gambling, adolescent at-risk and problem gamblers in Nevada are most likely to be male and are more likely to come from non-White racial groups and from non-traditional households. Adolescent at-risk and problem gamblers in Nevada are more likely than non-problem gamblers to say that one or both parents gamble, to earn \$50 or more per week and to say that one or both parents has had a gambling problem.
- Using the broad definition of problem gambling, adolescent problem and at-risk gamblers in Nevada are most likely to wager regularly card, dice or board games with friends and family, on private games of skill, and on arcade or video games. While overall participation is low, problem gamblers are more likely than other adolescent gamblers to gamble regularly on the Internet.
- Adolescent problem gamblers in Nevada report starting to gamble at a significantly earlier age (11.6 years old) compared to at-risk and non-problem gamblers (12.4 years old and 12.6 years old respectively). Problem and at-risk gamblers spend more time gambling than non-problem gamblers and are more likely to have ever lost \$50 or more in a single gambling session.
- Gambling problems are closely correlated with the use of alcohol and drugs. Problem gamblers are more likely than at-risk or non-problem gamblers to have used alcohol, tobacco, marijuana and other drugs in the past year and to have gotten into trouble in the past year because of their alcohol use.
- Compared with adolescents in Georgia, New York, Texas and Washington State, where similar surveys have been carried out, adolescents in Nevada are less likely to gamble weekly or more often. Furthermore, the prevalence of problem gambling among adolescents in Nevada is lower than among adolescents in three of the other four states where similar surveys have been conducted.

Gambling and Problem Gambling Among Adolescents in Nevada

- With the most mature gambling economy in North America, Nevada can be considered a "proving ground" for many notions about youth gambling. Publication of several recent reviews of the youth gambling research literature provided an opportunity to test numerous hypotheses about youth gambling and problem gambling against the results of the Nevada survey. While hypotheses about the characteristics of gamblers and problem gamblers as well as the correlates of problem gambling in Nevada were supported, other hypotheses about gambling involvement and predictions about the prevalence of problem gambling among youth were not supported by the Nevada adolescent data.
- Some of the hypotheses that were not supported by the data were (1) that adolescent gambling participation in Nevada would be higher than in other jurisdictions; (2) that a substantial portion of adolescents in Nevada would have gambled at a casino; (3) that the prevalence of problem gambling would be higher among Nevada adolescents than among adolescents in other jurisdictions; (4) that adolescents in Nevada would be more likely than adolescents in other jurisdictions to report that one or both parents gamble; and (5) that adolescents in Nevada would report starting to gamble at a younger age than adolescents in other jurisdictions.

Future Directions

At present, there are no services for problem gambling funded by the State of Nevada. In considering what might be done for Nevada adolescents who experience gambling problems, policy makers may wish to give consideration to a range of options. These include establishing a statewide prevention program targeting at-risk adolescents in Nevada as well as fostering cooperative endeavors to discourage and minimize underage gambling in Nevada, developing public education materials and educational curricula targeted toward at-risk youth and their families, encouraging parents and adults to be attentive to the types of gambling they may be doing with underage persons, providing training opportunities to those who work with troubled adolescents, funding treatment services for adolescent problem gamblers and their families, evaluating services that are established based on uniform data collection, and continued monitoring of gambling and problem gambling among the adolescents of Nevada to assess impacts of changes in the availability of gambling on youth and to evaluate the effectiveness of the services that are implemented.

Directions for the Future

In spite of the long history of legal gambling in Nevada, there have been few efforts within the state to monitor gambling and problem gambling rates among adolescents, a particularly vulnerable group in the population, or to provide services for youth who are experiencing difficulties related to their gambling. In considering what might be done for Nevada adolescents who experience gambling difficulties as well as their families, policymakers may wish to give consideration to the following services and activities:

- establishment of a ***statewide prevention program*** targeting at-risk adolescents in Nevada, with active participation by government, community-based agencies, the gambling industries, academia, teacher and parent groups and other concerned parties;
- ***cooperative endeavors*** between government agencies, not-for-profit organizations and gambling operators to discourage and minimize adolescent gambling in Nevada;
- development and refinement of ***public education and prevention services as well as educational curricula*** targeted toward at-risk groups among youth, particularly girls and those aged 15 and 16;
- efforts to ***encourage parents and other adults*** to be attentive to the types of gambling activities they may be engaging in with underage persons;
- providing ***training opportunities*** for educators, law enforcement, criminal justice, mental health and substance abuse professionals and others who work with troubled adolescents to learn more about adolescent gambling and its impacts as well as how to screen for gambling problems and when and where to refer adolescent problem gamblers for help;
- funding for ***treatment services*** for adolescent problem gamblers and family members, preferably through existing problem gambling treatment providers or through agencies already active in the fields of adolescent alcohol and drug abuse as well as juvenile protection and detention;
- ***evaluating*** services that are established for adolescent problem gamblers, based on uniform data; and
- ***continued monitoring*** of gambling and problem gambling among adolescents to evaluate the effectiveness of prevention and treatment services that are established.