



## The role of family, religiosity, and behavior in adolescent gambling

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Predictors of adolescent gambling behavior were examined in a sample of 436 males and females (ages 13–16). A biopsychosocial model was used to identify key variables that differentiate between non-gambling and gambling adolescents. Logistic regression found that, as compared to adolescent male non-gamblers, adolescent male gamblers were older, had more conflict in their family, were more likely to have used drugs, and have peers that gamble. Compared to adolescent female non-gamblers, adolescent female gamblers had more attention and thought problems, and scored higher on rule-breaking. For both males and females, religiosity was a protective factor against involvement in gambling. Some of the results are consistent with previous research, while some of these findings are unique to this study. These results shed light on factors to consider when developing programs to combat the negative impacts of gambling on adolescents.

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Gambling among adolescents (e.g., playing cards with friends) is often perceived by society as almost a rite of passage, that is, just another “leisure” activity that adolescents engage in with friends and family. As a result, many believe that gambling among adolescents is an innocent leisure activity, and are hesitant to group this activity with risky behaviors such as alcohol consumption, drug use, delinquent behavior, or unprotected sex. Research over the past 10–15 years indicates however, that adolescent involvement in gambling is often associated with many of the same negative outcomes that are found with involvement in these other risky behaviors (Gupta & Derevensky, 1998; Jacobs, 2000; Wynne, Smith, & Jacobs, 1996). The primary purpose of this study was to identify factors (e.g., family environment, religiosity, substance use, age, peers, and gender) that help distinguish non-gamblers from gamblers among a sample of adolescents. Another primary purpose was to identify gender differences in the pattern of relationship between specific covariates and the dependent variable non-gambler versus gambler.

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## Prevalence of gambling and problem gambling in adolescence

Although the prevalence rate of adolescent gambling is typically lower than that of adults, gambling is still an area of concern among this age group. A study in Alberta conducted in 2005–2006 found that 62.5% of students in grades 7 to 12 had participated in at least one gambling activity in the previous 12 months (AADAC, 2007). Studies looking at the prevalence of adolescent gambling in other parts of Canada found past year rates ranging from a low of 37% to a high of 65% (Mackay, Patton, & Broszeit, 2005; Poulin, Martin, & Murray, 2005; Van Til & Poulin, 2002).

Similar to adults, there is a continuum of gambling behavior among adolescents. There are non-gamblers, low-risk or social gamblers, at-risk or moderate-risk gamblers, and problem or pathological gamblers. Although the vast majority of adolescents do not gamble excessively or experience negative outcomes as a result, research does indicate that adolescents have a significantly higher prevalence of problem and pathological gambling (i.e., 4–8%) when compared with adults (Derevensky & Gupta, 2000; Gupta & Derevensky, 1998; Jacobs, 2000; Lesieur et al., 1991; Shaffer & Hall, 2001; Wynne et al., 1996). While there continues to be some debate about the validity of these figures for adolescents (e.g., Ladouceur et al., 2000), the associated features (e.g., financial problems, criminal behavior, lost time at school, and suicide) are still of significant concern.

## Substance use delinquent behavior and gambling

Research has shown that substance use and delinquent behavior often occur together among adolescents (Elliott, Huizinga, & Ageton, 1985; Welte & Barnes, 1985). This is what Jessor has described as “problem behavior syndrome” (Jessor & Jessor, 1977). Over the last 20 years, researchers have examined gambling behavior among adolescents to see if it is also associated with this same syndrome. A consistent association with adolescent gambling and substance use has been found (e.g., Vitaro, Brendgen, Ladouceur, & Tremblay, 2001; Winters & Anderson, 2000). Similarly, a consistent association between adolescent gambling and antisocial and/or delinquent behavior has been observed (Barnes, Welte, Hoffman, & Tidwell, 2009; Pietrzak & Petry, 2005).

## Age

Rates of gambling are lower among older children and young adolescents and tend to increase in general as individuals mature in late adolescence and early adulthood. For example, Cook et al. (2010) found that rates of gambling participation increased steadily from 39% for 5th graders, to 65% for 7th graders, and 83% for 11th graders. Given the fact that participants in this study are younger adolescents (ages 13–15), we would expect the incidence of gambling to be lower than among older adolescents.

## Employment status

Adolescents who are employed are often exposed to older adolescents' or adults' risky behavior (Mortimer & Johnson, 1998; Wright, Cullen, & Williams, 1997). This exposure to risky behavior can sometimes lead younger adolescents to experiment with drugs and alcohol and become involved in delinquent behavior at an earlier age (Wright & Cullen, 2000). A similar argument could be made regarding exposure to gambling. This is particularly the case in jurisdictions such as Alberta where adolescents are able to work (e.g., in restaurants) starting at age 12.

## Gambling among peers

Peer influence on adolescent behavior is strong (Agnew & Peterson, 1989; Brown, 1990; Mahoney & Stattin, 2000). For instance, adolescents who associate with deviant peers are much more likely to engage in substance use (Dishion, Capaldi, Spracklen, & Li, 1995; Kandel, 1987) and other forms of delinquent behavior (Elliot et al., 1985). It is not surprising, then, to find that adolescents who have peers that gamble are at increased risk for developing a gambling problem at some point in the future (Brown & Brown, 1994; Griffiths, 1990; Jacobs, 2000).

## Family environment

Little research has looked at the role that family support or family cohesion plays in the gambling behavior of adolescents. A strong family environment is known to be a protective factor for adolescents, with better health outcomes (Resnick et al., 1997), and a decreased likelihood of becoming involved in problem behaviors (Barber & Buehler, 1996; Barrera & Li, 1996). One of the few studies that has examined this relationship found that high levels of family cohesion was a protective factor against developing a gambling problem (Dickson, Derevensky, & Gupta, 2008). As well, Hardoon, Gupta, and Derevensky (2004) found that there was a linear relationship between family problems and gambling, with fewer family problems associated with lower rates of gambling behavior (i.e., non-gamblers or social gamblers).

Alternatively, if parents or siblings are frequent gamblers, adolescents are likely to have more access to gambling, and be more knowledgeable about various forms of gambling. Past research has shown higher rates of gambling in adolescents who

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