

WAGER 13(10) - The Prevalence of Disordered Gambling Among U.S. Adolescents and Young Adults

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Youth gambling has been a subject of great concern, especially given the increased access to gambling in recent years. Previous studies examining the prevalence of gambling problems among U.S. youths have produced inconsistent results (e.g., some rates higher than and some lower than adult rates) depending on the screening questionnaire, the definition of gambling problems, and the sample. This week the WAGER reviews a study by Welte, Barnes, Tidwell, and Hoffman (2008), which examines the prevalence of disordered gambling among a nationally representative sample of U.S. youths.

Method

- Conducted a random-digit-dial telephone interview between August 2005 and January 2007 with a nationally representative sample.
- Interviewed 2,274 U.S. residents aged 14-21.
- Measured gambling problems by using the South Oaks Gambling Screen - Revised for Adolescents (SOGS-RA, using cut point 4+ as problem gambling) and the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV/Diagnostic Interview Schedule (DSM-IV DIS, using cut point 3+ as problem gambling).
- Assessed demographic variables, such as age, gender, race, religion, marital status, employment status, living status, and socioeconomic status.

Results

- 68% of the respondents had gambled during the past year. 2.1% met SOGS-RA criteria and 2.2% met DSM-IV criteria for experiencing a gambling disorder. This prevalence of problem gambling is lower than the prevalence in adults (5.5% from SOGS) in a similar national U.S. adult survey (Welte, Barnes, Wieczorek, Tidwell, & Parker, 2001).
- Males had a significantly higher disordered gambling rate than females.

- Gambling problems were less likely among respondents who were younger, of Asian ethnicity, had lower socioeconomic status, or were Mormon.
- Higher rates of problem gambling were significantly associated with the transition into adulthood (i.e., working full time, living independently, and not being a student).

Table 1. Past year gambling problems (as measured by SOGS-RA) among a nationally representative sample of U.S youths (n=2,274) (adapted from Welte et al. 2008)

Number of problems	%	Cumulative %
5+	1.3	1.3
4	0.8	2.1
3	1.0	3.1
2	3.4	6.5
1	6.2	12.7
0	87.3	100.0

(Click the image to enlarge it.)

Limitations

- Participants self-reported gambling behavior; thus there is potential for [self-report bias and/or recall bias](#).
- The completion rate for the telephone survey was unreported.
- The cut-points used for the SOGS-RA and DSM-IV DIS were arbitrary and inconsistent. If the DSM-IV cut point of 5+ for disordered gambling were applied, the corresponding prevalence of gambling disorder would be 1.3% and 0.4% for SOGS-RA and DSM-IV DIS, respectively.

Conclusion

The rate of problem gambling observed among this sample is similar to the rate observed among Canadian youth, that is 2.2% from the Canadian Problem Gambling Index (i.e., 2.2% using the Canadian Problem Gambling Index: Huang & Boyer, 2007). The significant relationship between demographic factors and problem gambling, especially factors related to life transition to adulthood, found in this study helps to identify more vulnerable subgroups among youth gamblers and provides important baseline data for future gambling studies.

What do you think? Comments can be addressed to [Evelyn Chao](#).

References

Huang, J. H., & Boyer, R. (2007). Epidemiology of youth gambling problems in Canada: a national prevalence study. *Can J Psychiatry*, 52(10), 657-665.

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