The WAGER, Vol. 30(2) – An examination of parental views on adolescent gambling

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Adolescent gambling is common, with many young people gambling before reaching a legal gambling age. This is concerning because underage gambling increases the risk of experiencing gambling problems later in life. Parental attitudes and behaviors are crucial to positive youth development, and gambling behaviors are no exception. This week, The WAGER reviews a study by Cassandra K. Dittman and colleagues that examined adolescent gambling from the perspective of parents in New South Wales, Australia.

What were the research questions?

(1) What are parents' knowledge of and attitudes towards their adolescent child's gambling? (2) Are adolescents exposed to gambling via their parents' gambling?

What did the researchers do?

The researchers recruited 1,185 parents (31% fathers, 69% mothers) of adolescents in New South Wales, Australia. Participants completed an online survey. They were asked about their attitudes towards adolescent gambling and ranked their concern with gambling alongside other adolescent issues (e.g., bullying, alcohol use). Parents reported both their adolescent child's and their own gambling behavior over the past 12 months and whether they had gambled with their adolescent present. The researchers used descriptive statistics to explore parental attitudes towards gambling and adolescent gambling exposure and gambling behavior. They used comparison tests such as ANOVA to examine differences across these facets by parent and adolescent gender.

What did they find?

Most parents disapproved of adolescent exposure to gambling. However, parents were less concerned with gambling compared to other adolescent issues like bullying and drug use. Twenty-seven percent of parents reported that their adolescent had gambled in the past year. Of the 947 parents who reported past-year gambling themselves, two-thirds had gambled with their adolescent present. Skin betting and fantasy sports betting were the most common parent-adolescent

gambling activities (see Figure). Compared to mothers, fathers engaged in more gambling in the presence of their adolescent. Fathers also gambled more with their adolescent sons compared to daughters.

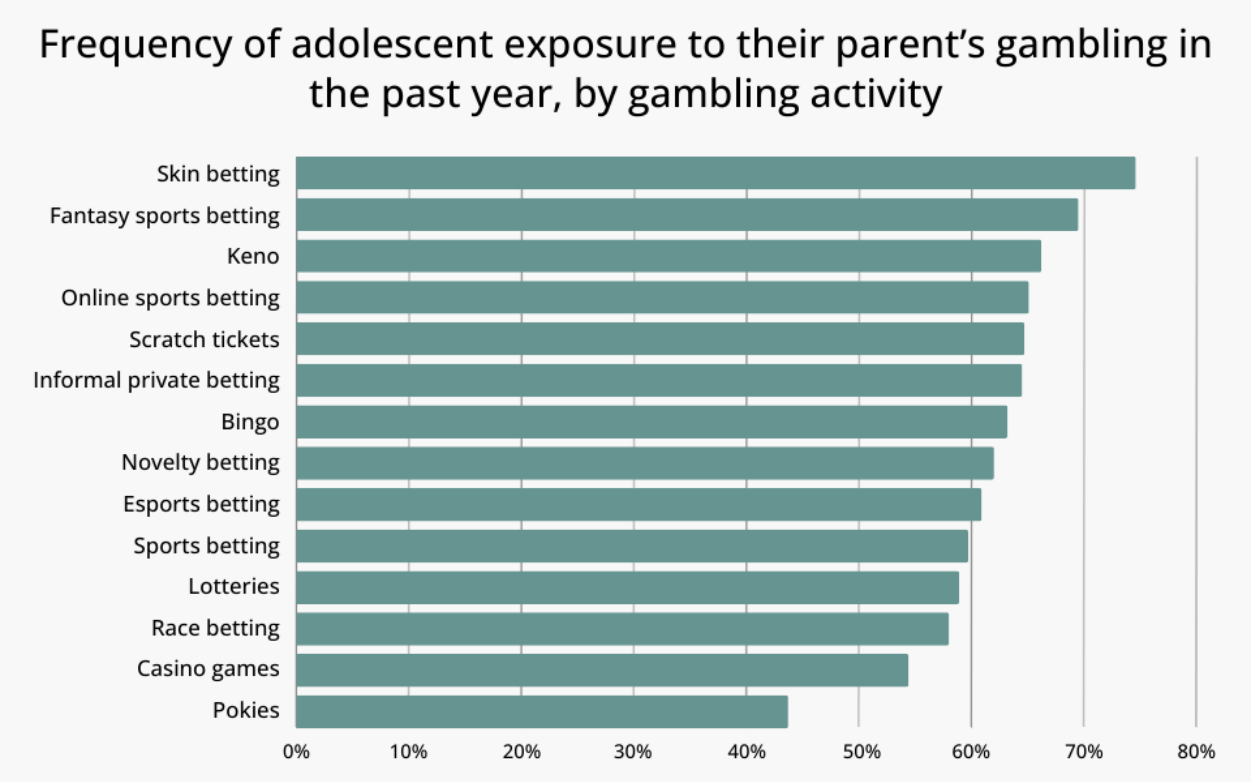

Figure. Frequency of adolescent exposure to their parent's gambling in the past year, by gambling activity and among parents who participated in that gambling activity. Please note: Figure does not depict the percent of parents from the sample who participated in each activity. For example, 12.0% of parents participated in skin betting in the past 12 months. Of them, 74.6% did so in the presence of their adolescent child at least once. Click image to enlarge.

Why do these findings matter?

Adolescents often gamble with the knowledge of their parents, and that some parents–particularly fathers–actively facilitate their child's gambling by involving them in their personal gambling activities. Parents may underestimate the risks associated with adolescent gambling. This could be because gambling is generally perceived as socially acceptable and often portrayed positively (e.g., through advertisements). Parents, and fathers in particular, could benefit from increased awareness and education about the risks associated with youth gambling, through initiatives like the GambleAware Parents Campaign.

Every study has limitations. What are the limitations of this study?

Participants might not have been fully representative of the Australian parent

population and their responses may be subject to self-report biases such as recall bias. This study examined parental knowledge of their adolescent child's gambling. It is possible that adolescents gamble more than their parents realize, so the frequency of adolescent gambling reported by parents may be an underestimate.

For more information:
The Massachusetts Department of Public Health provides information for parents about the risks of teen gambling and a guide for talking about gambling. Do you think that you or someone you know might have a gambling problem? Visit the National Council on Problem Gambling for screening tools and resources. For additional resources, including gambling and self-help tools, visit our Addiction Resources page.

— Kira Landauer, MPH

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