

Online Gambling: Prevalence & Trends

Youth & Digital Technology: Growing Up Online Toolkit

This document focuses on online gambling in people 12 to 24 years old, commonly referred to as youth or young people. Throughout this section, service providers will find statistics and trends related to age, gender, relationships with family and community, pre-existing mental health and addiction issues, and personality traits.

Examples of gambling trends:

- Lotteries
- Instant lotteries (scratch cards)
- Bingo
- Crypto-based betting and casinos
- Betting on billiards or pool games
- Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) in betting
- Card games (e.g., poker, blackjack, etc.)
- Private sports betting or sports lotteries
- Casino games (e.g., slotmachines, roulette, etc.)
- Video lottery terminals (VLTs)
- Online gambling dice games [1].

Age

Youth 12 to 24 years of age are at higher risk for problem gambling due to the unique developmental aspects of adolescence, which includes mood swings, impulsivity, and the desire for independence [2].

Risk factors for youth problematic gambling

Risk factors for youth problematic gambling include alcohol use, antisocial behaviours, depression, tobacco, cannabis and illicit drug use, impulsivity, involvement in multiple gambling activities, sensation seeking, violence, and under-controlled temperament [3].

Gender Differences

Male gamblers are two to three times more likely to be at risk for problem gambling than their female peers [2]. Research suggests that boys and men are more attracted to the competitive and risk-taking aspects of gambling games. More of them take part in activities such as engaging in sports betting, using video lottery terminals, and playing poker [3]. Additionally, they

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informationandcyfistandards@recoveryalberta.ca

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tend to begin gambling earlier and to have a younger age of onset of gambling disorder than girls and women [4].

As the digital landscape evolves, gambling research has expanded from traditional gambling to online gambling and now includes the online simulated gambling that's integrated into video games and social networking sites [3].

Social networking sites can normalize gambling behaviours. Young people are being introduced to gambling through gaming, as the two activities “share aspects of interactivity, presentational qualities, and elements of skill and chance” [4] (p. 380).

Thirteen percent of youth ages 12–18 play simulated online gambling games regularly [3]. The most common are casino card games, slot machines, and video games such as Grand Theft Auto, Pokémon, and Fortnite [3, 4]. One in 20 adolescents has tried a simulated gambling application on a smartphone [5].

Relationships with Family & Community

For every person who has a gambling problem, eight to ten other individuals are directly affected in some way. For example, it is common to have trouble with peers and family. Academic failures, work difficulties, and family conflict may exacerbate gambling problems, making it a potential unhealthy coping mechanism [6].

The following are consequences that youth and their families may experience from online gambling:

- Financial difficulties
- Legal/criminal issues (e.g., theft)
- Secrecy and dishonesty
- School issues: attendance, academic, behavioural, social and interpersonal concerns
- Mood swings or irritability
- Mental and physical health concerns
- Suicidality
- Substance use concerns
- Excessive use of digital technology (e.g., phone, computer, video games, etc.)
- Parent-child relational conflict; increased family conflict
- Physical, verbal, and emotional abuse between family members
- Discomfort when discussing the gambling problem
- Loneliness and isolation [2, 6].

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Pre-Existing Mental Health & Addiction Issues

Problem gambling is associated with personality disorders, depression, anxiety, suicidality, and mood disorders [8]. Youth problem gamblers are more likely to attempt suicide or manifesting suicidal ideation than other youth. Problem gambling in youth is also associated with higher rates of substance abuse, delinquent and criminal behaviours, and poor overall health [9].

Personality Traits

A correlation exists between gambling and high impulsivity, lower social connections, higher levels of sensation seeking, and poor inhibitory control [8].

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