

Online Gambling: Prevalence and Trends

This document focuses on online gambling in people 12 to 24 years old, identified as youth or young people. Throughout this section, service providers will find some statistics and trends in 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]. Even though 18 is the legal gambling age in Canada, underage people can easily access unregulated and regulated gambling websites [1]. Some gaming sites ask the player's age before individuals start playing a game, for example on PlayAlberta

<https://www.playalberta.ca/casino>.

Other sites have the Responsible Gambling (RG) check accreditation that helps gambling venues evaluate, monitor, and manage all aspects of their RG strategy

<https://www.responsiblegambling.org/for-the-public/safer-play/safer-gambling-tips/>

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]. They are more

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

As the digital landscape shifts, so does research into the prevalence of gambling. Gambling definitions have gone from traditional gambling to online gambling, and now include 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 and Community

For every person who has a gambling problem, eight to ten other people are directly affected in some way. For example, it is common to have trouble with peers and family. Failures at work, school or difficulties with family, might increase problematic gambling, and this activity may be used as an unhealthy coping mechanism [6].

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

- financial problems
- problems with legal/criminal issues (e.g., stealing)
- secretiveness and lying
- school issues: attendance, academic, behavioural, social and interpersonal concerns
- mood swings or irritability
- mental and physical health problems
- suicidality
- substance use problems
- 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 [6]

Pre-Existing Mental Health and Addiction Issues

Problem gambling is associated with personality disorders, depression, anxiety, suicidality, and mood disorders [7]. 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 [8].

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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