

THE 1ST NYCPG SYMPOSIUM ON ADOLESCENT GAMBLING IN NEW YORK

THE ADOLESCENT GAMBLING SYMPOSIUM

Hope for You and Yours

REPORT SUMMARY

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Albany, New York



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This report provides an overview of the **Adolescent Gambling Symposium** held in Albany, New York on December 1, 2005 by the New York Council on Problem Gambling.

The Council would like to thank presenters and participants who provided the insight, energy and professional experience for a successful symposium.

INTRODUCTION

The New York Council on Problem Gambling History and Mission Statement

In 1972, the Board of Trustees of Gamblers Anonymous in the New York City area requested their Spiritual Advisor, Monsignor Dunne to establish a Council on Compulsive Gambling to do what they could not do because of anonymity – call national attention to the increasing problem of compulsive gambling in the United States. The National Council on Problem Gambling was founded at that time and in 1975, was chartered as a nonprofit organization. Initially organized by an alliance of health professionals and recovering gamblers, the National benefited from the work of pioneers such as Dr. Robert Custer and Monsignor Joseph Dunne of New York. Up until the National Council decided to relocate its headquarters to Washington, D.C., the National Council and the New York Council on Problem Gambling were in essence one and the same. In fact, money was provided by the New York State Office of Mental Health to maintain the National Council on Problem Gambling Helpline (1-800-437-1611). The New York Council on Problem Gambling was formally incorporated in 1995.

The New York Council on Problem Gambling is a not-for-profit corporation, under contract with the State Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services, dedicated to increasing public awareness about problem and compulsive gambling and advocating for support services and treatment for persons adversely affected by gambling.

Section 1.01 Defining Problem Gambling Among Adolescents

A variety of terms have been used in the gambling research literature to refer to difficulties caused by an individual's gambling. The most widely used term is problem gambling although it has been used in different ways in the literature (Lesieur & Rosenthal 1991; Rosecrance 1988). The term pathological gambling is generally limited to the psychiatric disorder first recognized by the medical profession in 1980 and most recently revised in 1994 (American Psychiatric Association 1980, 1994).

Research on adult gambling problems suggests that pathological gambling has strong antecedents in youthful gambling involvement (Custer & Milt 1985; Volberg 1994). However, since pathological gambling is defined as a progressive condition which takes some years to develop, we concur with other researchers who argue that problem gambling among adolescents is best viewed

as a pre-clinical state (Winters, Stinchfield & Fulkerson 1993b). Adolescent gamblers are a particularly vulnerable group in terms of the future development of pathological gambling. Their propensity to display the full clinical disorder is likely to be affected by a variety of risk factors and by the offsetting influence of prevention and treatment efforts. A related concern is that gambling may be an important but often ignored component in the development of other adolescent problems such as alcohol and drug abuse, and suicide.

The National Council on Problem Gambling uses the term problem gambling to indicate all of the patterns of gambling behavior that compromise, disrupt or damage personal, family or vocational pursuits (National Council on Problem Gambling 1997). Since this definition is equally applicable to adults and adolescents, this is the meaning intended by the term throughout this report. In discussing the results of the symposium, problem gambling refers to the most serious classification of adolescent gamblers; those who show the clearest evidence of gambling involvement that has compromised, disrupted or damaged other important areas in their lives.

Section 1.02 Inherent Problems of Adolescent Gambling

Gambling often begins as a recreational activity, such as playing Texas Hold'em poker, pitching coins, and betting on sporting events. The new craze of Texas Hold'em poker is taking over. Stimulated by the fascination of televised poker tournament's large payouts, teens are hosting their own poker games sanctioned by their parents who feel at least they are not drinking or drugging. Colleges throughout the state are also hosting Texas Hold'em nights as a form of recreation for their students. This addiction is creating a crisis in American schools where card and dice playing on school grounds are not uncommon.

Teenagers are becoming addicted to gambling at alarming rates. As we enter the twenty-first century, we must come to realize that the development of the Internet is a significant discovery that many businesses are using to capitalize on its market potential. The gambling industry is one of these businesses. As a result, many adolescents have gained easy access to gambling using the Internet. This access puts them at risk to have or develop a gambling problem.

Scratch-off tickets are a concern because of the ease with which adolescents can buy them. Some supermarkets have stand-alone vending machines and children can easily access them. In addition to this, advertising for gambling is fast persuading viewers that gambling is normal. Children are thus being further saturated with the principles of gambling and are growing up to believe gambling is socially acceptable.

The prevalence of adolescent problem gamblers is reported to be from 2 to 4 times higher than that of adult problem gamblers. The 1998 NYCPG Adolescent Prevalence Study reveals that 2.4% ($\pm 1.09\%$) of the total sample of adolescent respondents were classified as problem gamblers and an additional 14.0% ($\pm 2.05\%$) of the total sample of adolescent respondents were classified as gamblers at risk for developing gambling problems. Demographics of problem gamblers show that 90% of adolescent problem gamblers are male and 75% are Caucasian. This study also shows that the three forms of gambling presenting the greatest risk are games of skill/cards, lottery and sports betting. And, that the top three reasons identified by adolescent gamblers as to why they gamble were excitement, to win money and entertainment.

The results of a recent Zogby survey of 451 randomly called high school students and their parents regarding participation and views on teen gambling in New York state revealed it is no coincidence that adolescent gambling has surged in New York and other states that have legalized and glamorized various forms of wagering from state lotteries, playing the horses, to casino gambling. Today, abstinence from gambling is rare among teenagers. Though much more prevalent in teen males (47%) than females (25%), gambling is a growing concern for both--manifesting itself in different ways. Among teens who gamble, male students are twice as likely as females to bet most frequently on Texas Hold 'em poker or other card games (52% to 24%, respectively) and sports (21% to 10%). But, females are almost five times as likely as males to bet most frequently on scratch-offs or the lottery (48%) compared to male teens (10%) even though by law persons under the age of 18 can not purchase them.

The survey results also clearly show that parents expect educators to be their partners in preventing underage gambling and the development of problem gambling traits in their children. A full two-thirds (66%) of parents say they believe that teachers, guidance counselors, and coaches should be active in that effort. One-in-five (20%) teenagers, overall, say they have friends who spend too much time gambling and placing bets, this rate doubles (40%) among 18-year-olds. Tragically, teens often don't share with their parents that they are gambling, and thus parents can't feel confident that their teen is not gambling.

The next generation is the first in modern American history to grow up in an era when gambling is legally sanctioned and culturally approved. For the New York Council on Problem Gambling, the challenges ahead are twofold: to bring parents together with educators, and increase parents' awareness of teen gambling, and the signs of problem gambling in their children.

The release of the Zogby Survey statistics confirms our concerns that many adolescents are gambling, that parents are frequently not aware of it, and that very little education on adolescent problem gambling warning signs and

adolescent problem gambling prevention services are being provided. A comprehensive plan to address these needs must be developed.

Section 1.03 Adolescent Gambling Symposium

The New York Council on Problem Gambling's **Adolescent Gambling Symposium** provided a setting for examination of issues related to the current concern with adolescent gambling. This symposium highlighted critical issues of adolescent gambling and its impact on individuals, families, and communities.

Along with internationally renowned speaker, *Dr. Jeffrey Derevensky*, Co-Director of the International Center for Youth Gambling Problems and High Risk Behaviours, McGill University, *Frances Harding*, Associate Commissioner, Division of Prevention and Treatment Services, New York State Office of Alcohol and Substance Abuse Services, and approximately *50 participants*, which were comprised of invited parents, educators, community leaders, state agencies and clinicians, focused on establishing educational, prevention, policy and research priorities to address adolescent problem gambling.

Dr. Derevensky gave a two hour presentation, Youth gambling: From research to prevention (Appendix B). Participants were then asked to form two breakout groups and discuss the following **Five Points of Interest**:

1. Please identify the current adolescent gambling issues and problems that you are aware of (e.g., populations affected, service needs, information needs, lack of awareness).
2. What role do you believe the media plays in the current adolescent gambling trend and what role should they play in raising the awareness of adolescent gambling?
3. Is there a need for problem gambling education in our schools, and if so how should it be implemented?
4. Is there enough research currently available to properly address the issue of adolescent gambling and if not what should be done?
5. What safeguards can be put into place to protect our children.

One participant in each breakout group was asked to take notes and report back to the full group.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Advisory Committee Findings Summary

The exponential development of adolescent gambling has already demonstrated the tremendous potential for damaging individuals, families and communities. The Advisory Committee assessed the state of adolescent gambling in New York, and believes that the progression of adolescent gambling has taken a turn for the worse. Adolescent gambling has become the norm. To reverse the norm, successful prevention strategies that were used to combat adolescent alcohol and cigarette use must be utilized and implemented throughout the state. Prevention, education and treatment have been proven to work. If this is not done, adolescent gambling will surely continue to increase.

Historically, the continuity of problem gambling programs in New York has been threatened on an annual basis. Consideration must be given to establishing a dedicated funding mechanism using gambling revenues to provide for problem gambling prevention, education, research and treatment programs in New York State.

Assessment of the Symposium's Five Points of Interest

Please identify the current adolescent gambling issues and problems that you are aware of (e.g., populations affected, service needs, information needs, lack of awareness).

Issues & problems:

- Adolescent Gambling has definitely increased.
- Gambling is more accessible than ever before (e.g. Texas Hold'em Poker, & Internet).
- Stand-Alone Lottery Vending Machines.
- Socially acceptable (At least adolescents are not drinking.).
- Availability of Money.
- Few Prevention, Education, Treatment, and Research resources (e.g. Parents/Teachers/Community & Civic Leaders need education) .
- Lack of leadership & direction on how to address the issue of Adolescent Gambling. New York State Department of Education needs to take a more public stance and address this issue.
- College and graduate degree requirements should include courses on Problem Gambling.

What role do you believe the media plays in the current adolescent gambling trend and what role should they play in raising the awareness of adolescent gambling?

Media's role:

- Current Role:
 1. It is a one-sided message: Promotion of gambling without recognizing the down-side of gambling.
 2. The advertisement media promotes instant gratification (e.g. bottle caps, scratch-offs, games/toys, glamour of Texas Hold'em).
 3. The news media promotes the positive side and economic benefits of gambling rather than the social costs.
- Balanced Role:
 1. Media should be educators and corporate citizens. There needs to be a message making people aware that there is help. All gambling ads should include a prevention message – not just the New York Council on Problem Gambling 24-Hour Helpline number (1-800-437-1611) but warning signs.
 2. In efforts to encourage parents and adults to be attentive to the types of video games they are purchasing for children an “M” rating should be affixed to video games if gambling is present.

Is there a need for problem gambling education in our schools, and if so how should it be implemented?

Need for education:

- The onset of gambling occurs most often between the ages of 10 and 12.
- Recognition of youth gambling as a public health issue.
- Establishment of a unambiguous school gambling policy

Implementation:

- Develop and implement an adolescent gambling curriculum starting with grade school.
- Educate Student Assistance Counselors, Guidance Counselors, Teachers, Coaches, PTAs and Administrators.
- Establish Problem Gambling Prevention Programs in all schools.

Is there enough research currently available to properly address the issue of adolescent gambling and if not what should be done?

Symposium Participants evaluated the need for research and found that there is not nearly enough research devoted to the issue of adolescent gambling in New York State.

What should be done:

- More research on adolescent gambling and effective prevention and treatment specifically targeting adolescent-at-risk groups.
- Research the effects that the media and internet have on adolescents.
- Needs assessment.
- Develop screening and assessment tools.

What safeguards can be put into place to protect our children.

Safeguards:

- Development of a statewide media awareness campaign regarding adolescent gambling.
- Enactment of dedicated State funding mechanism based on percentage of gambling revenues.
- Distribution and visible posting of information about warning signs, where to get help and legal age of gambling wherever gambling is permitted.
- Attachment of an awareness message including New York Council on Problem Gambling 24-Hour Helpline number (1-800-437-1611) and warning signs whenever there is gambling advertisement.
- Enforcement of underage gambling laws.
- Removal of gambling vending machines.

Conclusion

Gambling is a pastime that can develop into a ruinous problem that can affect anybody. We need increased efforts to prevent problem gambling in New York, and starting with teens is an essential part of these prevention efforts. The main purpose of this Symposium was to assess the level of problematic gambling among adolescents in New York. This information is vital in understanding the development of gambling problems among New York citizens as well as in developing services for adolescents in the state. Adolescents represent a generation for whom legal gambling has been available all their lives. However, young people are unlikely to have developed skills and strategies to manage their gambling and are thus more likely to develop difficulties.

This report represents a significant step forward in our knowledge of adolescent gambling problems. It provides a benchmark for future assessments

of gambling and problem gambling among adolescents in New York. This report also provides a foundation for policy making and planning for problem gambling prevention, education, research and treatment services for adolescents. Consideration must now be given to educate New York adolescents about the risks of gambling, to provide problem gambling prevention services, to offer problem gambling treatment services, and to ensure that adequate and continuing problem gambling funds for such efforts are made available.

NEW YORK COUNCIL ON PROBLEM GAMBLING RECOMMENDATIONS

(These recommendations are the sole opinion of the New York Council on Problem Gambling and do not reflect the opinions of the participants who attended the Adolescent Gambling Symposium.)

- Establish an **Adolescent Gambling Task Force**.
- Develop and implement a school based **problem gambling curriculum** from grade school through high school in cooperation with the State Department of Education.
- Develop a statewide **public awareness media campaign** that increases the awareness of adolescent problem gambling.
- Provide **education, training and resources** for Student Assistance Counselors, Guidance Counselors, Teachers, Coaches, PTAs and Administrators to learn more about adolescent gambling and its impacts as well as how to screen for gambling problems and when and where to refer adolescent problem gamblers for help.
- Increase funding opportunities for **research** to properly identify and address the needs of adolescents and problem gambling in New York.
- Encourage the Media to **balance** its **reporting**.
- **Post Warning signs and New York Council on Problem Gambling 24-Hour Helpline number** (1-800-437-1611) wherever gambling is permitted. Since the legal gambling age in New York State is 18, all gambling operations must play an active role in opposing underage gambling by ensuring that adolescents are not placing bets and/or gaining access to gambling on the premises. It would also be helpful to increase existing efforts to disseminate the Council's Helpline number. (e.g. placing the New York Council on Problem Gambling 24-Hour Helpline Number (1-800-437-1611) in all phonebooks throughout the state)
- **Enforcement of underage gambling laws**.
- Enactment of a **dedicated New York State revenue source** for the express purpose of providing comprehensive treatment and prevention programs designed to address problem and pathological gambling.

APPENDIX A

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