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Gambling by Underage College Students: Preferences and Pathology

Journal article by Laurie Platz, Terry J. Knapp, Edward W. Crossman; College Student Journal, Vol. 39, 2005

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Journal Article Excerpt

Gambling by Underage College Students: Preferences and Pathology.

by Laurie Platz , Terry J. Knapp , Edward W. Crossman

University students (N=995) residing in an environment which affords many opportunities to gamble were surveyed. For those participants over 21 years of age, 92.5% said they had gambled at least once in a casino, compared to 59.8% of the 18 year olds, 72.8% of the 19 year olds, and 86.1% of the 20 year olds. Casino gambling is legal only at 21. Preferences in favorite game showed no difference between the two groups except that those under 21 years were more than twice as likely to prefer sports betting to those over 21. The percentage of participants classified as probable pathological gamblers by the South Oaks Gambling Screen was 9.21% for those under 21 years, and 14.91% for those over 21

The gaming industry shares a problem with the makers of alcoholic beverages: how to market a product to a broad set of consumers some of whom are excluded by legal statute from partaking. Just as there are underage drinkers of alcohol, there are the underage who frequent casinos and create a regulatory problem for the industry, and occasionally personal problems for themselves. The legal age for casino wagering in the United States is 21 years for all states, though some states may permit other forms of gambling at lower ages. Thus, the problem of gambling by underage persons is recognized as a matter of social concern for both the industry and for the individual.

College students provide a convenient population to assess the extent of gambling by underage persons, especially when the population is centered in an environment prolific with casinos. We are acutely aware of the problem because the gambling milieu of Las Vegas offers an enormous temptation to students of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. Gambling machines are accessible within a 100 yards of the campus, and the famed Las Vegas Strip is only a mile away. Most UNLV students come from the greater Las Vegas valley and have thus grown up in a city unmatched in opportunities for gaming. In previous studies we have examined pathological gambling (Oster & Knapp, 2001) and sports betting (Oster & Knapp, 1998; Knapp, Rasmussen, & Niaghi, 2003) by college students. Here

our particular interest is in the gambling patterns of college students who are under 21 years of age, and how they compare to their over 21 years cohort.

The best data to date on gambling by college students is contained in a meta-analytic review of studies which surveyed college students in both the United States and Canada (Shaffer, Hall, & Bilt (1997). The authors reported a lifetime prevalence of Level 3 gamblers, those with "clinically meaningful problems of disordered gambling," for college students of 4.67% (p. iii). Against this broad background of gambling by college students is the narrower question of wagering by those who are not yet 21 years old. The survey studies available on this issue are limited (see Knapp & Crossman for a review). However, they constitute a body of literature which continues to grow as do regulations and enforcement efforts to keep away from the tables and machines of the gaming industry those under the legal age to gamble (Stitt, Giacomassi, & Vandiver, 2000). Based on samples from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas our previous studies have found that well over half of students under 21 years claim to have gambled in a casino with nearly a quarter claiming to do so weekly (Oster & Knapp, 2001).

The present study assessed the frequency of gambling, game preferences, and degree of pathology reported by college students who were not yet of legal age to wager.

Method

Participants

Students who voluntarily participated in this study were recruited from psychology classes at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. The convenience sample of students (N = 995) was 53.8% female and 46.2% male. Their mean age was 21.05 years with a range from 17 to 73. The majority of the students (67.6%) were under the legal age (21 years) to gambling in Nevada and were state residents (73.9%). The ethnicity of the sample was: 61% white, 16.2% Asian, 7% African American, 6.3% Hispanic, 5.4% mixed racial heritage, .7% Native American, and 3.3% "other."

Instrument and Procedure

Participants were informed about the nature of the study and completed a set of questionnaires in a group setting. The questionnaire analyzed in the present report was The South Oaks Gambling Screen ...