

Adolescence, gambling, and criminality

Serge Chevalier

Most often, when we think about gambling and its related offences, we limit our scope to the crimes gamblers might commit; more precisely to the very specific acquisitive crimes that some problem gamblers perpetrate. Such a view prevents us from perceiving a broader scope of the crimes associated with gambling, particularly in terms of adolescent gambling. Criminal behaviour and misdeeds related to gambling can be linked to not only the gamblers themselves, but to the gambling industry, as well as to other third party affiliates.

Gamblers – Crimes committed by gamblers include those which allow for the attainment of money by which to gamble or to repay gambling debts. However, gambling itself can be considered a crime when cheating, fraud and/or collusion are involved. An individual's mere participation in certain games can, in most jurisdictions, be considered a crime in and of itself. In many jurisdictions, what constitutes legal gambling is restricted to certain types of activities. Similarly, an individual is considered ineligible to play if he/she is a member of the casino staff, an EGM manufacturer, personnel within a gambling regulatory body, or a professional athlete. Other legal restrictions include age-based limitations; an underage gambler is therefore also considered to be committing a crime. In addition, the association between gambling and drug use has been well documented (see Chevalier, 2005, for a full literature review). Thus, it is also important to consider how gambling may be linked to drug use and drug trafficking-related offences.

Industry – The gambling industry may be involved in illicit or illegal conduct in terms of the integrity of its games, corruption, fiscal evasion and gambler eligibility. Moreover, the gambling industry, when broadly defined, may also encompass those involved in the operation

of illegal gambling activities. The most common illegal behaviour of the industry is found in the selling of lottery products to underage youth.

Third Party affiliates – Other criminal acts are committed within the gambling world without necessarily involving gamblers or the industry. Crimes in this category are quite numerous and include among others: money laundering, loan sharking, prostitution /'pimping', pick pocketing and corruption to name a few.

Adolescents - For the most part, gambling crimes associated with adolescents are connected to legal age restrictions. Quebec-based prevalence studies among high school students show that past year participation in provincially-operated gambling is 41%, with involvement varying by game and jurisdiction. Underage youth are in fact engaging in various forms of provincially-operated gambling opportunities. For example, among youth, 26-60% played scratch-type instant lotteries; 11-28% purchased lottery draws; 5-23% played sports lotteries; 6-18% wagered on EGM; and 10-47% played bingo (Chevalier, 2005).

Several studies have also linked gambling and drug use. The findings of these studies suggest that between 5-32% of adolescent gamblers also use illicit drugs. The proportion of drug use among gamblers increases as the severity of problem gambling increases, and in some cases, the rate of drug use can be as high as 30% to 60%.

Unfortunately, there have been very few studies to date that have examined the participation rates of adolescents in illegal forms of gambling such as sports betting with bookmakers, betting on animal fights, or Internet gambling. One recent study estimated that approximately 4% of adolescents engage in gambling online (Chevalier et al., 2003).

Acquisitive crimes are mainly committed

among the problem and pathological gambling populations. Studies have shown that between 4-8% of adolescents report serious gambling-related problems (Derevensky & Gupta, 2000; AADAC, 1997; Wynne Resources, 1996). Of these youth, between 24-58% have reported stealing from a family member, 18-39% have reported failing to reimburse debts, and 12-36% have reported stealing outside of their family (Gupta et al., 2004; Becoña, 1997; Wiebe et al., 2000).

This article is based on a full length literature review on adolescent gambling and crime. It is currently available in French and can be accessed on our Centre's website at: www.youthgambling.com. An English version will be made available shortly.

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