

## INTERNET GAMBLING AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS - UPDATE

A recent incident in a prestigious Montreal private school prompted the media and public to question the seriousness of internet gambling among youth. When a young grade nine student was caught selling poor quality counterfeit money to other friends in order to attempt to make back the \$12,000 dollars in debt he had accumulated as a result of gambling on the internet, police and school officials began to investigate. This event, while unfortunate, helped bring the costs and consequences of gambling, and more specifically internet gambling to the public fore.

Gambling problems among high school students have been well-documented. Numerous studies have shown that the majority of adolescents (70-80%) have gambled at least once in the past year with an average of one student per classroom is likely experiencing a serious gambling problem. The most popular forms of gambling among high school students include card playing, lottery and sports betting. While internet gambling is a relatively new phenomenon, a recent provincial survey in Quebec (2002) found that approximately 3.7% of high school students have gambled for money on-line.

Results from another Quebec-based study provide further information on internet gambling patterns and behaviour among youth. Drawing from a sample of 2087 high school, college and university students between the ages of 12-24 years, this exploratory study measured on-line gambling participation with or without money. The majority of youth, more than 89% of participants, reported gambling on

the internet with or without money in the past year. Males were more likely to report gambling on-line for money compared to females, 7.8% vs. 2.3% respectively. The study also found that gambling participation increased with gambling severity. Probable Pathological gamblers (59.3%) and At-Risk gamblers (58.7%) were also more likely to engage in gambling activities on the internet without money compared to Social gamblers (41.6%).



The access of internet gambling to minors would appear to be limited given that a credit card is needed to wager money. However, almost 25% of participants in this study used a personal credit card and one in 10 reported using a family credit card with permission to fund their on-line gambling activities. The latter suggests a degree of familial acknowledgement and acceptance of internet gambling.

Ease of access, rapid speed of play, not having to leave home to play, and overall convenience were identified as the most appealing characteristics of internet gambling among youth. Probable Pathological gamblers reported on-line competition as the most appealing aspect of internet

gambling. These factors not only make internet gambling appealing and easily accessible, they also render this form of gambling especially risky.

Internet gambling is generally government controlled with most internet gambling websites being off-shore operations. However, as the popularity increases many governments have become interested in the possibility of investing in the development of new forms of gambling as a means to bolster revenue. In fact, the Atlantic Lottery Corporation recently launched the very first on-line lottery purchasing program in Canada. Atlantic Canadians can now purchase lottery tickets for some seven games anytime, anywhere, on the internet.

The convenience and easy access to on-line gambling poses distinct enforcement issues. The primary concern with Internet gambling continues to be regulating access to both 'for money' sites as well as to practice sites. Governments struggle with a lack of effective approaches to monitoring and regulating on-line gambling providers, while providers grapple with self-regulation to prevent individuals, such as underage youth, from accessing their sites illegally.

As new forms of gambling continue to emerge, governments, professionals, parents, and the public must be made aware of the risks to youth. Safeguards to protect youth from access to internet gambling websites should also be implemented. Governments have a responsibility to develop socially responsible regulations and statutes on Internet gambling and to carefully assess their social policies concerning underage gambling in general.