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For Immediate Release

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On the Path to Problem Gambling: National Survey Shows Casinos, Slots and Lotteries Attract Youth Into Potentially Addictive Habit

Findings from The Annenberg National Risk Survey of Youth, 2003

(Sacramento, CA) More than half of young people (52.7%) ages 14 to 22 report that they gamble in an average month, and nearly one in six (16.2%) gamble in an average week. Private forms of gambling (card games, sports betting, and bingo) dominate early gambling experience prior to age 18. However, with age restrictions lifted for those in the 18 to 22 age group, public gambling sites, such as in state lotteries and casinos (slot machines), attract a significant proportion of new gamblers. Most of these sites either permit gambling at age 18 (state lotteries and some slot machine sites) or restrict gambling to persons of age 21 and older (most casinos). Internet gambling remains at the same level across age groups, perhaps reflecting its ease of access irrespective of age.

Public gambling sites play an important role in attracting gamblers. Nearly half of youth ages 20 to 22 who are attracted to public gambling sites do not gamble in private venues, and among weekly gamblers who gamble at public sites, 60% only gamble publicly and tend not to participate in private gambling activities. For youth in the 14 to 15 age range, private gambling is more popular than public gambling on a monthly (42% vs. 15%) as well as weekly basis (7.4% vs. 3.9%). However, for youth in the 20 to 22 age range, public gambling is more popular than private gambling on a monthly basis (49% vs. 37%) and equally popular on a weekly basis (9.4% vs. 10.1%).

Gambling rates are higher in 18 to 22 year old youth, a pattern that mirrors the higher rates for other risky behaviors that are legally available for adults but restricted in public sale to adolescents, such as use of alcohol and cigarettes. Among youth in the 14 to 15 age range, 45.3% report gambling on a monthly basis, while among youth ages 20 to 22, nearly 60% report gambling on a monthly basis.

More young men ages 14 to 17 have tried gambling than cigarette smoking or drinking alcohol. Although young women have not tried gambling to the same degree, their gambling experience is considerably greater after age 17 and approaches that of young men.

Approximately 8% of all youth in the survey gamble weekly and report one or more problems associated with gambling, such as spending more than they would like on gambling and being preoccupied with their habit. Half of these youth gamble in public sites. Nearly a third of youth (31%) who gamble only in public venues on a weekly basis experience problems, while nearly half of youth (47%) who only gamble privately report problems. Almost nine in ten youth (88%) who gamble weekly in both private and public

venues report one or more problems with their gambling. Although it is not possible to make precise projections of future gambling pathology from these symptoms, they are indicative of greater risk for gambling problems among youth who gamble regularly.

These findings underscore the need to monitor the effects of public gambling on young people. Public gambling appeals to both heavy gamblers and to those youth who have not gambled privately. There is also a need to target gambling as a risk behavior in prevention programs directed to young people and their families. As opportunities to gamble in public venues increase, the risk of attracting more youth to this habit and its attendant problems grows.

Methodology

The survey was conducted by telephone between March 3 and June 30, 2003 by Shulman, Ronca, and Bucuvalas, Inc., using random digit dialing procedures. The survey, in its second year, is designed by the Adolescent Risk Communication Institute of the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Rachel Volberg collaborated in the design of the survey modules concerning gambling. The sample contained 900 completed interviews with young people ages 14 to 22 across the 48 states. The response rate using the CASRO method was 52.4%, which is comparable to the rate obtained by CDC (48.9%) in its national telephone surveys of behavioral risk factors. Results are weighted to represent national proportions for age, gender, race/ethnicity, and region of the country. Although error ranges for the survey vary with the question, the maximum error is +/- 3.3% for the entire sample and +/- 4.6% for the section on monthly gamblers. When data are examined by age group, the maximum error is larger.

All respondents were asked questions about a range of risky activities in which they might have engaged. If they had ever engaged in them, they were asked if they had done so in the last 30 days. For gambling, respondents were asked whether they had ever “gambled for money, such as playing the lottery or betting on sports or a game of skill.” Respondents were also asked a separate series of questions about their frequency of engaging in specific gambling activities “in an average month.”

If respondents had gambled in the last 30 days or if they had engaged in one or more specific gambling activities in an average month, they were deemed to be monthly gamblers and were asked four questions about difficulties related to their gambling. Just over half of the respondents (51% or 464) were administered the problem gambling items.

Detailed Findings

Risky Activities

Table 1 shows the percentage of respondents by age and gender who ever engaged in five risky activities. With the exception of not using seatbelts, both males and females show increases in these behaviors with age. Although males are more likely to engage in all of these behaviors than females, the differences between males and females for smoking cigarettes, consuming alcohol and riding in a car without a seatbelt are neither large nor significant. In contrast, the differences between males and females for gambling and smoking marijuana are both large and statistically significant.

Table 1. Percentages ever engaging in five risk behaviors by gender and age.

Age (N)	Male		Female		Total
	14-17 (210) %	18-22 (244) %	14-17 (199) %	18-22 (248) %	14-22 (901) %
Ever gambled	65.7	80.7	36.7	60.1	61.9
Ever smoked cigarettes	31.9	70.4	30.7	60.5	50.0
Ever consumed alcohol	57.1	87.7	57.8	84.7	73.1
Ever smoked marijuana	21.9	52.5	13.6	34.1	31.7
Ever ridden w/o seatbelt	76.6	78.7	88.6	86.2	76.2

Specific Monthly Gambling Activities

Table 2 shows the percentages of youth at different ages who engage in different gambling activities. Gambling in private such as card playing, betting on sports, and in bingo, is most popular among youngest respondents. Bingo has been designated as a private form of gambling in this study because, although it is regulated, age restrictions are rarely enforced and many families do not view bingo and other charitable gambling activities as true gambling. Bingo is most common among the youngest respondents but declines with age as youth become more involved in gambling with peers and in public venues. Gambling in public venues, such as on lotteries and slot machines (mostly located in casinos), is significantly higher among youth aged 18 to 22 for whom such activities approach the legal age in most jurisdictions. However, Internet gambling seems to be accessible at all ages.

Table 2. Monthly gambling by age and type of gambling.

	Age				Total
	14-15 (204) %	16-17 (205) %	18-19 (204) %	20-22 (288) %	14-22 (901) %
Played cards	19.6	23.6	27.5	24.7	23.9
Bet on sports w/ nonfamily	23.2	27.9	32.8	26.0	27.4
Purchase lottery tickets	10.8	13.2	32.4	42.7	26.4
Play bingo	26.5	24.0	18.5	13.9	20.1
Play slot machines	9.4	9.8	16.2	22.2	15.1
Bet on horse races	7.9	11.2	10.2	12.8	10.8
Gamble on Internet	8.9	9.3	8.8	8.4	9.1
All forms of gambling	45.3	45.6	56.9	59.9	52.7

Interestingly, among respondents who denied any lifetime participation in gambling (i.e. they answered “no” to the question about lifetime participation), 18% indicated that they played bingo in an average month, 13% bet on sports with non-family members, 12% purchased lottery tickets, 11% indicated that they played cards for money, 9% played slot machines,

8% bet on horse races and 7% gambled on the Internet in an average month. In the future, it will be important to explore why some youth do not view such activities as “gambling.”

Overall, average participation rates ranged from 27% for betting on sports with non-family members to 9% gambling on the Internet. At least two in ten of the respondents in this survey bet on sports, purchased lottery tickets, played cards for money or played bingo in an average month. Only about one in ten of these respondents played slot machines, bet on horse races or gambled on the Internet in an average month.

Youth who reported gambling in the past 30 days or in various types of gambling in an average month were categorized as “monthly gamblers.” Approximately 53% of youth in the survey gamble on a monthly basis. Monthly gamblers are more likely to be male, although the gender difference declines as youth age (Table 3).

Table 3. Monthly gamblers by age and gender.

Gender	Gamble Monthly	Age				Total 14-22 %
		14-15 %	16-17 %	18-19 %	20-22 %	
Male	Yes	54.8	60.0	66.0	66.2	62.1
	No	45.2	40.0	34.0	33.8	37.9
N Male		104	105	103	142	454
Female	Yes	35.4	30.3	47.5	53.7	43.0
	No	64.6	69.7	52.5	46.3	57.0
N Female		99	99	101	147	446

When aggregated by type of gambling, monthly gambling in private venues (i.e., card games, sports, and bingo) declines with age but public gambling (i.e., lotteries, slot machines, and on the Internet) grows rapidly, especially after age 17, and overtakes private gambling after age 19 (Table 4).

Table 4. Monthly gamblers by age and type of gambling.

Type of Gambling	Gamble Monthly	Age				Total (901) %
		14-15 (203) %	16-17 (206) %	18-19 (204) %	20-22 (288) %	
Private	Yes	41.9	42.9	47.1	36.5	41.6
	No	58.1	57.1	52.9	63.5	58.4
Public	Yes	15.3	17.5	36.3	49.0	31.3
	No	84.7	82.5	63.7	51.0	68.7

The rise in public gambling is mostly attributable to youth who gamble only in public on a monthly basis (Table 5). Gambling only in private declines with age while public gambling (both in combination with private gambling and alone) is significantly higher in older (18 to 22) than in younger (14 to 17) youth. However, the increase in youth who only gamble in public is larger (from 1.5% to 22.9%) than among those who gamble in both sites (13.8% to 26.0%). In the 20 to 22 age group, nearly half (47%) of public gamblers are drawn from those who only gamble in public.

Table 5. Monthly gamblers by age and type of gambling (private only, public only, and both).

Type of Gambling	Gamble Monthly	Age				Total (901) %
		14-15 (203) %	16-17 (206) %	18-19 (204) %	20-22 (288) %	
Private Only	Yes	27.9	27.3	20.1	10.1	20.3
	No	72.1	72.7	79.9	89.9	79.7
Public Only	Yes	1.5	1.5	9.3	22.9	10.1
	No	98.5	98.5	90.7	77.1	89.9
Both	Yes	13.8	15.6	27.0	26.0	21.1
	No	86.2	84.4	73.0	74.0	78.9

Weekly Gambling

Youth who report gambling at least once a week are seriously involved in gambling, and nearly one-third (30%) of monthly gamblers gamble on a weekly basis. As with monthly gambling, weekly gambling in private venues (i.e., card games, sports, and bingo) is more frequent among younger individuals (Table 6). However, weekly involvement in public forms of gambling (i.e., lotteries, slot machines, and on the Internet) is dramatically higher among individuals aged 18 to 22 and is just as popular as private forms of gambling by ages 20-22.

Table 6. Weekly gambling by age and type of gambling.

Type of Gambling	Gamble Weekly	Age				Total (901) %
		14-15 (203) %	16-17 (206) %	18-19 (204) %	20-22 (288) %	
Private	Yes	7.4	14.6	17.6	10.1	12.2
	No	92.6	85.4	82.4	89.9	87.8
Public	Yes	3.9	2.4	12.7	9.4	7.3
	No	96.1	97.6	87.3	90.6	92.7

As with monthly gambling, the tendency for older youth to gamble more in public sites on a weekly basis than younger youth is largely attributable to increases in gambling rates among youth who do not gamble in private venues on a weekly basis (Table 7). Gambling rates among youth who only gamble in public increase from 1.5% to 5.9% (almost 300%), while the increase for youth who gamble in both sites is from 2.0% to 3.8% (less than 100%). In the 20 to 22 age group, over 60% of the public gamblers are drawn from those who only gamble in public.

Table 7. Weekly gambling by age and type of gambling.

Type of Gambling	Gamble Weekly	Age				Total (901) %
		14-15 (203) %	16-17 (206) %	18-19 (204) %	20-22 (288) %	
Private Only	Yes	5.4	13.7	11.3	6.3	8.9
	No	94.6	86.3	88.7	93.8	91.1
Public Only	Yes	1.5	1.5	6.4	5.9	4.0
	No	98.5	98.5	93.6	94.1	96.0
Both	Yes	2.0	1.0	6.3	3.8	3.3
	No	98.0	99.0	93.7	96.2	96.7

Problem Gambling Symptoms

Respondents who had gambled in the last 30 days or who participated in one or more specific gambling activities “in an average month” were asked four questions about problems related to their gambling (Table 8). The most frequent symptom was preoccupation with gambling (thinking often about gambling). Spending more money than one had planned was also a frequent problem. Tolerance for gambling (spending more and more to get the same level of excitement) and withdrawal symptoms (feeling bad when trying to cut down or stop) were less common. It is not surprising that the prevalence of these problem symptoms increase with age, although tolerance appears to remain relatively stable. We used answers to these questions to identify individuals who were at risk for gambling problems.

Table 8. Percentages of monthly gamblers who report each of four symptoms of problem gambling.

Problem	Age				Total (466) %
	14-15 (88) %	16-17 (92) %	18-19 (116) %	20-22 (170) %	
Preoccupation	17.0	20.7	30.2	31.2	26.2
Spent more than planned	8.0	6.5	15.7	21.2	14.4
Withdrawal	3.4	7.6	6.0	9.4	7.1
Tolerance	5.7	6.5	5.2	7.1	6.2

As seen in Figure 1 below, weekly gamblers who engage in both public and private forms of gambling are most likely to report at least one symptom of problem gambling (88%). Youth who gamble in an average month but not on a weekly basis are least likely to report problems (27%). However, nearly one-half (47%) of those who only engage in private gambling and nearly a one-third (31%) of those who only engage in public gambling report some symptoms.

In total, weekly gamblers who use public gambling sites and experience symptoms of problem gambling account for approximately 4.1% of youth ages 14 to 22. Those who only engage in private gambling account for an additional 4.2% of youth in this age range. Hence, about 8% of young people ages 14 to 22 are at risk for the development of problem gambling.

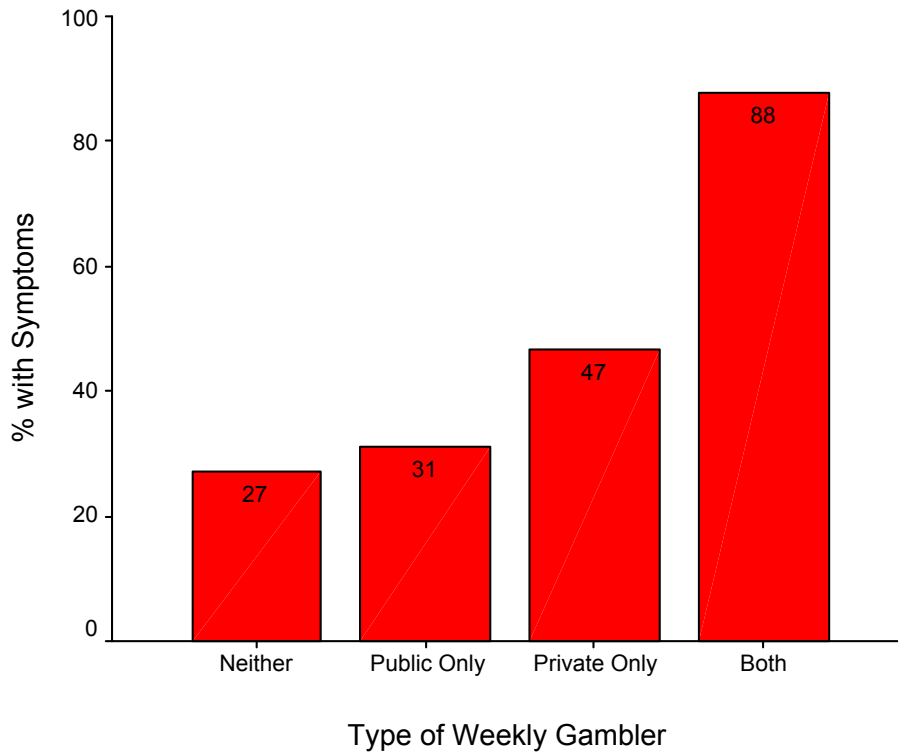


Figure 1. Percentages of gamblers who report symptoms of problem gambling by type of weekly gambling (public, private or both) and those who gamble in an average month but not on a weekly basis (neither).

The Adolescent Risk Communication Institute

The Annenberg Public Policy Center’s Adolescent Risk Communication Institute was established in January 2002 with funding from the Annenberg Foundation. The Institute identifies effective interventions and policy initiatives to improve the health and development of young people in the US. The Institute emphasizes the development of cross-disciplinary approaches to reducing adolescent tobacco and drug use, unprotected sex, suicidal behavior, and problem gambling. Dan Romer is the Research Director of the Institute. Kathleen H. Jamieson is the Director of the Public Policy Center.

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Dr. Rachel Volberg is the President of Gemini Research, an organization that specializes in the study of gambling and problem gambling in North America and internationally. She is also an adjunct faculty member at the School of Public Health at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst as well as Senior Research Scientist at the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago. Dr. Volberg is the author of “When the Chips are Down: Problem Gambling in America” (Century Foundation, 2001).