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Youth Betting on Cards Rising, National Annenberg Risk Survey Shows

Increase Highest Among Young Men in School
Card Players Also Likely to Gamble on Internet
Greater Risks for Gambling Problems Seen if Trend Persists

Card playing for money has risen among male youth ages 14 to 22, according to the National Annenberg Risk Survey of Youth (NARSY) conducted in 2003 and again in 2004. The increase is primarily among those young people who attend high school or post-secondary schools. In 2004, 11.4% of in-school male youth reported betting on cards at least once a week. In 2003, only 6.2% reported the same activity. This 84% increase in weekly card playing represents a statistically significant change in this behavior over a one-year period.

Increases in card playing were observed for male high-school youth (5.7% to 10.8%) as well as for those in college or other post-secondary programs (7.3% to 12.5%) (see Table 1). There was actually a drop in the proportion of male youth ages 14 to 22 who played cards weekly and were out of school, going from 20.0% in 2003 to 6.6% in 2004.

Across both years of the survey, weekly card players accounted for 44% of all weekly gamblers identified in the NARSY. The influx of high-school youth into the card-playing routine has also lowered the average age of the card playing population in this age range. In 2003, 25.9% of youth who bet on cards weekly were under 18, while in 2004, this went up to 43.2% (see Table 2).

“The rise in weekly card playing among young persons is worrisome.” said Dan Romer, Director of the Adolescent Risk Communication Institute. “These latest results suggest that the fad among teens is real and raise concerns that more young people will experience gambling problems as they age.”

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Problem Gambling Symptoms and Card Playing

Research indicates that adult problem gamblers started gambling at an early age. We were interested to see if young weekly card players are beginning to show signs of problem gambling and if their symptoms are stronger than those of other weekly gamblers.

In looking at other types of gambling including betting on sports with non-family members, playing the lottery, playing slot machines, betting on horse races, and gambling on the Internet, we were surprised to see a simultaneous drop in these activities among young men. For these forms of gambling combined, the rate of weekly involvement went from 12.1% in 2003 to 6.9% in 2004 for those still in school and from 15.7% to 10.8% among those out of school.

Despite the decline in other forms of weekly gambling, it does not appear that card playing has totally displaced these forms of gambling. Card players tend to engage in other forms of gambling as well. It remains to be seen whether the downward trend in other forms of weekly gambling will continue or whether this was a one-year phenomenon.

Even though other forms of regular gambling declined, weekly card players report more symptoms of problem gambling than other gamblers. Card players report more preoccupation with gambling (53.3% vs. 32.5%), and greater tendencies to spend more than they had planned on gambling (34.2% vs. 16.8%). Card players report similar levels of tolerance to gambling (10.7% vs. 9.4%) and of withdrawal (16.1% vs. 12.6%) compared to other weekly gamblers.

Because of the small change in the total population of young weekly gamblers, there was little change in the NARSY index of risk for gambling problems. This measure is based on answers to four questions about gambling cited above (preoccupation, over-spending, tolerance and withdrawal). In 2003, 8.2% of young people gambled weekly and answered affirmatively to at least one of the problem symptoms. In 2004, the percentage remained about the same at 7.5%. Nevertheless, card players tend to have more symptoms. As a result, if the trend toward card playing among young people continues, the overall severity of symptoms may also increase.

There were no changes in the rates of card playing among young women whether they were in school or not. However, in aggregate, other forms of weekly gambling did rise among young women going from 5.8% in 2003 to 8.0% in 2004, a small but statistically reliable increase.

Card Playing and Internet Gambling

Young weekly card players in the survey were also more likely to gamble frequently on the Internet. Across both years, 11.4% of weekly card players also gamble weekly on the Internet compared to only 3.1% of other weekly gamblers, a statistically reliable difference. The higher use of Internet gambling among card players suggests that they are visiting the many websites that provide opportunities to bet on cards. Although our surveys do not permit a detailed analysis of age in weekly Internet gambling among card players, the data suggest that the practice is about as strong among those under age 18 as those between 18 and 22.

Role of Schools and the Internet

The finding that card playing has caught on more strongly in school settings suggests that young people are better able to talk about and organize card games in schools even if the activity occurs outside of regular school hours. The popularity of poker and other card games on cable television shows, such as The World Series of Poker, is not likely to be solely responsible for the jump in the card playing, since access to these shows does not depend on school attendance. Indeed, those out of school watch just as much television as those still in schools. According to NARSY results, 17.1% of those not in school watch 5 or more hours of TV, somewhat more than those in school (11.1%).

The finding that larger proportions of card players also use the Internet for gambling, even if they are under the age of 18, suggests the need for greater monitoring of this gambling venue by parents and schools. Several bills have been proposed in Congress to outlaw or severely limit Internet gambling. Some have suggested that it may already be banned by existing statutes. No successful resolution has been found however for dealing with this apparently growing site for youth gambling.

Table 1. Percentages of youth engaging in weekly card playing and other forms of gambling by school status and year of survey.

	High School (%)		Post Secondary (%)		Not in School (%)		Total (%)	
	2003 (N)	2004 (N)	2003 (N)	2004 (N)	2003 (N)	2004 (N)	2003 (N)	2004 (N)
Card Playing								
Male	5.7	10.8	7.3	12.5	20.0	6.6	10.0	10.3
Female	1.5	3.3	1.1	2.2	2.5	2.0	1.7	2.7
Other Gambling								
Male	15.7	8.8	15.6	12.4	27.6	13.8	18.96	11.0
Female	4.9	6.9	3.3	7.9	9.3	10.7	5.83	8.0

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Table 2. Percentages of respondents in various demographic categories by type of weekly gambling and year of survey.

	Weekly Card Gambler (%)		Other Weekly Gambler (%)		Not Weekly Gambler (%)		Total (%)	
	2003 (N)	2004 (95)	2003 (81)	2004 (110)	2003 (766)	2004 (1296)	2003 (900)	2004 (1501)
Gender								
Males	85.2	81.1	70.4	53.6	45.8	48.3	50.3	50.8
Females	14.8	18.9	29.6	46.4	54.2	51.7	49.7	49.2
Age								
14-17	25.9	43.2	37.0	31.8	47.6	48.2	45.3	46.6
18-22	74.1	56.8	63.0	68.2	52.4	51.9	54.7	53.4
Race/Ethnicity								
Non-Hispanic White	56.6	75.0	48.8	49.1	67.0	67.9	64.8	67.0
Non-Hispanic Black	22.6	8.3	15.9	26.4	14.0	13.3	14.6	13.9
Hispanic	18.9	9.4	29.3	21.8	13.6	14.4	15.5	14.6
Other	1.9	7.3	6.1	2.7	5.4	4.5	5.1	4.5
School Status								
<High School	5.6	1.1	5.0	4.5	7.3	4.1	7.0	3.9
High School	29.6	52.6	42.5	36.4	47.6	46.8	46.0	46.4
Post Secondary	14.8	31.6	17.5	30.0	21.7	28.3	21.0	28.6
Not in School	50.0	14.7	35.0	29.1	23.4	20.9	26.0	21.1
Education Level								
<High School	7.4	3.2	6.2	5.5	8.5	5.3	8.2	5.2
High School	56.6	53.7	58	43.6	54.5	54.2	54.9	53.4
Post Secondary	37.0	43.2	35.8	50.9	37.0	40.5	36.9	41.4
Region								
NorthEast	13.0	22.1	25.6	17.1	17.5	18.9	18.0	19.0
MidWest	24.1	27.4	19.5	21.6	23.8	23.6	23.4	23.7
South	37.0	26.3	29.3	43.2	35.5	33.0	35.0	33.4
West	25.9	24.2	25.6	18.0	23.2	24.5	23.6	23.9

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Methodology

The surveys were conducted by telephone between March 3 and June 30 in 2003 and between April 27 and September 16 in 2004 by Shulman, Ronca, and Bucuvalas, Inc., using random digit dialing procedures. The survey is designed by the Adolescent Risk Communication Institute of the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania. The samples contained 900 (2003) and 1501 (2004) completed interviews with young people ages 14 to 22 across the 48 contiguous 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. Error ranges for the survey vary with the question, subgroup examined, and the year of the survey. The maximum error is +/- 3.3% for the entire sample in 2003 and +/- 2.6% for the entire sample in 2004. When data are examined by subgroup, the maximum error is larger.

All respondents were asked questions about a range of risky activities, including the frequency of engaging in specific gambling activities "in an average month." Weekly gamblers are those who said they gambled at least once a week in an average month.

If respondents had engaged in one or more specific gambling activities in an average month, they were asked four questions about difficulties related to their gambling. Just over half of the respondents (54%) were administered the problem gambling items. These items asked whether in the past year the respondent had (a) "often found yourself thinking about gambling," (b) "ever needed to gamble with more and more money to get the amount of excitement you want," (c) ever spent more than you had planned on gambling," and (d) ever felt bad or fed up when trying to cut down or stop gambling?"

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