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Internet Gambling Grows Among Male Youth Ages 18 to 22 Gambling Also Increases in High School Age Female Youth

Despite efforts by the federal government to impose restrictions on Internet gambling, college age youth are visiting online gambling sites at a growing rate, according to the latest National Annenberg Survey of Youth (NASY). Compared to the last survey conducted in 2008, monthly use of Internet gambling sites shot up this year from 4.4% to 16.0% in college age male youth (see Table 1 below). Nevertheless, use of the Internet for gambling did not increase on a weekly basis in this age group, staying at about 3% (Table 2 below).

High school age male youth exhibited only a small and statistically insignificant increase in monthly use of Internet gambling sites (from 2.7% to 6.2%). Weekly use of Internet gambling sites was virtually nonexistent among high school age males in the survey.

“The dramatic increase in use of online gambling by college age male youth indicates that payment restrictions on such sites are no longer a barrier to young people” said Dan Romer, director of the Annenberg Adolescent Communication Institute that conducts the annual survey. Projected on a national basis, more than 400,000 male youth in the college age range (18 to 22) gamble for money at least once a week on the Internet, and over 1.7 million do so at least once a month. Rates among high school age males are much lower but still significant with over 530,000 visiting gambling sites per month.

While it appears that most of the online gambling reported by young people is devoted to card playing, it is also likely that some of it involves betting on other outcomes. Some of the gambling sites that respondents mentioned visiting were horseracing sites, which are legal under current laws. “Young people must surely be confused by the inconsistent messages sent by our conflicting laws regarding online gambling,” noted Romer. “Why someone should be allowed to bet on a horse race but not a card game or other sports event is not altogether obvious.” The Unlawful Internet Gambling Enforcement Act of 2006 did not change any of the existing laws regarding interstate gambling, only the enforcement of those that do exist.

Female Gambling Up

While female youth continue to gamble less than males, the latest survey shows a sharp rise in gambling, primarily related to sports, among high school age females. While only 9.5% reported engaging in sports betting on a monthly basis in 2008, 22% reported such activity in 2010. This was largely the reason for an overall increase in total gambling for high school aged female youth, going from 18.9% in 2008 to 28.2% in 2010. Weekly rates of sports betting also exhibited increases in female high school youth, from less than 1% in 2008 to 8.3% in 2010.

Sports betting is also the most popular form of gambling in males tracked by the NASY. Nearly a quarter of males bet on sports in an average month, a rate that has not changed since 2008.

Other Forms of Gambling

While card playing is still quite popular, rates of this form of gambling have not changed for any group since 2008. In total, other forms of gambling (slots, lotteries, and horse racing) also did not change since 2008.

Problem Gambling Symptoms Decline in College Age Male Youth

Symptoms of problem gambling tend to parallel card playing and sports gambling trends. Among college age male youth, those who reported some type of gambling on a weekly basis and who reported at least one symptom of problem gambling declined, going from 12.1% in 2008 to 2.9% in 2010. Symptoms of problem gambling in female youth are much lower than in males, no higher than 2% in older females.

Table 1. Percentages of Respondents Reporting Different Gambling Activities at Least Once a Month in 2008 and 2010.

Type of Gambling	Male youth ages 14 to 17			Male youth ages 18 to 22		
	Rate in 2008	Rate in 2010	Change	Rate in 2008	Rate in 2010	Change
Cards	20.1	14.5	-5.6	31.6	33.3	1.7
Sports	28.9	24.1	-4.8	23.7	23.1	-0.6
Internet	2.7	6.2	4.5	4.4	16.0	11.6
Other	10.5	6.9	-3.6	33.0	32.1	-0.9
Total	41.7	38.2	-3.5	54.4	52.6	-1.8
Type of Gambling	Female youth ages 14 to 17			Female youth ages 18 to 22		
	Rate in 2008	Rate in 2010	Change	Rate in 2008	Rate in 2010	Change
Cards	8.5	0.8	-7.7	6.5	5.7	-0.8
Sports	9.5	22.0	12.5	5.5	8.2	2.7
Internet	0.5	1.5	1.0	0.0	4.4	4.4
Other	5.7	6.9	1.2	25.1	28.5	3.4
Total	18.9	28.2	9.3	31.2	32.9	1.7

Note: Other gambling includes sports, slots, lotteries, and horse racing. Shaded cells are significantly different from 2008.

Table 2. Percentages of Respondents Reporting Different Gambling Activities at Least Once a Week from 2002 to 2008.

	Male youth ages 14 to 17			Male youth ages 18 to 22		
Type of Gambling	Rate in 2008	Rate in 2010	Change	Rate in 2008	Rate in 2010	Change
Cards	4.1	0.7	-3.6	4.4	3.8	-0.6
Sports	9.1	7.6	-1.5	10.2	3.2	-7.0
Internet	0.9	0.0	-0.9	2.9	3.8	.9
Other	3.7	1.4	-2.3	8.7	9.0	0.3
Total	13.3	9.0	-4.3	16.0	14.1	-1.9
	Female youth ages 14 to 17			Female youth ages 18 to 24		
Cards	1.9	0.0	-1.9	2.5	0.6	-1.9
Sports	0.9	8.3	7.4	1.0	0.0	-1.0
Internet	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	1.3	1.3
Other	0.9	4.6	3.7	2.5	0.6	-1.9
Total	3.8	12.9	9.1	5.0	1.9	3.1

Note: Other gambling includes sports, slots, lotteries, and horse racing. Shaded cells are significantly different from 2008.

Methodology

The surveys were conducted by telephone in the spring and summer of each year by Abt SRBI, Inc., using random-digit dialing procedures. The survey is designed by the Adolescent Communication Institute of the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania. The surveys included 835 respondents in 2008 and 596 in 2010 with young people ages 14 to 22 across the 48 contiguous states. Response rates were at least 45 percent across both years, which is comparable to the rate obtained by the CDC in its national telephone surveys of behavioral risk factors in adults. Results are weighted to represent national proportions for age, gender, education, and region of the country. Respondents receive \$10 in appreciation for their participation. Error ranges for the survey vary with the question, subgroup examined, and year of the survey. For the comparisons shown in Tables 1 and 2, differences ranged from +/- 5% to +/- 9.3%. Maximum error ranges for comparisons between monthly rates for male youth ages 18 to 22 across 2008 and 2010 were approximately +/-10.6 percent.

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. 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?”

The Adolescent Communication Institute (ACI) was created by the Annenberg Foundation in 2002 as part of the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania. ACI aims to inform researchers, policymakers, and the public regarding strategies to prevent risks to healthy adolescent development and to enhance the well-being of youth. It conducts the annual National Annenberg Survey of Youth, the Annenberg Coding of Health and Media Project and reviews of research by panels of experts.

See <http://www.annenbergpublicpolicycenter.org/> for more information.

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