Problem Gambling: Youth, Delinquency, and Substance Abuse

Research has shown that between 5-8 % of Americans under eighteen have a serious gambling problem compared to 1-3 % of adults and it is estimated that 10-14% of youth are at-risk for problem gambling. Furthermore, the rate of gambling among youth in detention centers, psychiatric facilities, and in substance abuse program are approximately double the rates found in community and school samples. Because adolescents are also least likely to determine that they engage in problem gambling, resources need to be dedicated towards helping professionals identify those most at-risk and target youth for appropriate treatment interventions.

Common underlying risk factors

- Risk factors associated with both drug abuse and problem gambling among youth are low self-esteem, depression or suicidality, being a victim of abuse, poor school performance, a history of delinquency, being male, early drug or gambling experience, parental drug or gambling problem activity, and easy accessibility.

Substance use and youth problem gambling

- 59% of problem gamblers frequently used alcohol and illicit drugs
- Gambling tended to precede smoking tobacco, marijuana use, and alcohol use (11.2, 11.3, 11.6, and 13.2 years of age, respectively).
  - Males had significantly earlier onset than females of these behaviors
- Problem gamblers were more likely than non-problem gamblers to:
  - use illicit drugs, and to smoke tobacco and marijuana
  - drink alcohol to intoxication monthly or more frequently
- Students who never used drugs were 3.1 times less likely to have ever gambled than those who had used drugs
- Students who reported weekly/daily use of drugs were 3.8 times more likely to report weekly/daily gambling than those who used drugs less frequently (or not at all)

Youth Seeking Treatment for Marijuana Abuse

- Among a sample of youth entering treatment for marijuana abuse, a higher percentage (22%) experienced gambling problems than found in the general youth population
- Problem gamblers showed a greater frequency of drug and alcohol use, more illegal activity, greater psychiatric problems, more sexual activity, and were more likely to have been victims of abuse than the non-problem gamblers.

Gang affiliation and youth gambling

- Gang members had significantly higher rates of gambling, as well as more positive attitudes about gambling and frequent gambling than non-gang members
- Gang members reporting significantly higher rates of stealing to pay for gambling.
Incarceration and youth problem gambling

- Brown, Killian, and Evans (2005) found a strong association between gambling frequency and criminal behavior, suggesting that some criminal activity may be related to financing gambling.

Incarcerated youth reported the following

- 54% gambled for money
- 27% gambled 5 or more times a month
- 12% stole money to pay for gambling
- 13% borrowed money to pay for gambling

Legal problems related to gambling reported by students grades 6 – 12 in Louisiana

- Stealing to gamble (4.8 percent)
- Stealing from sources outside the family to gamble (2.8 percent)
- Gambling-related arrests (1.5 percent)
- Serious financial problems due to gambling (6.2%)