

Gambling and Other Risk Behaviors on University Campuses

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In 1995, the National Center for Disease Prevention and Health Promotion conducted a survey profiling the health of US college and university students (Douglas, Collins, Warren, Kann, Gold, Clayton, Ross, & Kolbe, 1997). This comprehensive study and many others indicate that college students engage in a variety of risky behaviors, such as the excessive use of alcohol, unprotected sexual activity, driving while intoxicated, and use of illicit substances (Schneider & Morris, 1991; Wechsler, Dowdall, Davenport, & Castillo, 1995; West, Moskal, Dziuban, & Rumbough, 1996). In recent years the concern of the campus community has focused on binge drinking (Wechsler, Lee, Kuo, Seibring, Nelson, & Lee, 2002) and how binge drinking interacts with use of other drugs (Jones, Oeltmann, Wilson, Brener, & Hill, 2001).

Student involvement in gambling and problem gambling has been relatively overlooked in the study of risk-taking behavior. This is unfortunate, however, as it is reasonable to expect that the growth of legalized gambling over the past decade would result in an increase in student gambling and gambling problems, including students who gamble at a pathological level. According to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV, 2000), pathological gamblers experience loss of control and multiple negative consequences as they chase their losses in an ever-deepening spiral. Pathological gambling in minors has been associated with a variety of negative and addictive behaviors, including low grades, and high rates of alcohol, tobacco, and illicit drug use (Stitt, Grant, & David, 2000). Many gambling venues are available to college students. In many states the legal age for gambling, including high-stakes games, is 18 years of age (Lesieur, 1996). Most Americans now live within a four-hour drive of a gambling casino (Winters, Bengston, Dorr, & Stinchfield, 1998). Internet gambling is available to anyone who has access to the Internet (Anderson, 2001).

In the last several years, the discovery of sports betting networks operated on campus by students has become a nationwide concern (Oster & Knapp, 1998). Rings of illegal bookmaking by college students were uncovered during the last decade at universities in Michigan, Florida, South Carolina, Texas, Arkansas, Iowa, Maine, and Rhode Island (Rhoden, 1992). In 1996, The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) conducted an infractions survey, which found that 3.7% of the Division I student-athletes reported betting on a game in which they played, and 25.5% said they had gambled money on other college sporting events (Cullen & Latessa, 1996).

The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) has stated that problem gambling is not just a concern for student athletes (McCellan, Caswell, Beck, Hollady, Mitchel, & O'Connor, 2002). NASPA advocates that college officials increase their awareness of the potential health risks associated with gambling. They further recommend that materials related to problem gambling be integrated into student prevention and treatment programs.

In a survey of Massachusetts high schools and colleges, Shaffer, Forman, Scanlan and Smith (2000) found that, while 82% of the institutions conducted regular health surveys, only 5% had ever asked questions about gambling. College administrators reported an awareness of problem gambling as an issue but most of the concern related to following the NCAA guidelines for student athletes. When asked about coverage of gambling issues in the curriculum, students were likely to discuss gambling in mathematics and statistics classes but rarely in health or social sciences courses. The authors concluded that higher education provided few opportunities for students and faculty to learn about gambling and its potential hazards.

