RUTGERS UNIVERSITY
Center for Gambling Studies

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**Rutgers Researchers Find Gambling Risks Among Young Americans, Including Teens as Young as 13**
*According to a national survey, 43% of teenagers gambled in the past year, with exposure to family gambling especially common among high-risk teen gamblers*

NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J., Oct. 28, 2026 — More than half (52.5%) of Americans ages 13 to 27 reported gambling in the past year, including 42.7% of teens ages 13 to 17, according to researchers at the Center for Gambling Studies at the Rutgers School of Social Work.

"We are living in a time where anyone can have a casino or sports book in their pocket," said Lia Nower, director of the center, who led the study. "Now teens who should be playing sports are betting on them, often with family members."

In the first national prevalence study of U.S. adolescents and young adults in nearly 20 years, researchers examined 21 gambling activities, ranging from bingo, raffles and games of skill to sports betting, cryptocurrency trading, esports betting and trading on prediction markets. The findings encompass online and in-person activities.

The researchers surveyed 1,677 young Americans and found 5.4% of all respondents were high-risk problem gamblers, a classification that corresponds to gambling addiction in clinical settings.

Among those who gambled in the past year, 39.5% showed some symptoms of problem gambling and 10.3% were high-risk problem gamblers**.** Among teenage gamblers ages 13 to 17, about 11% were classified as high risk for problems, despite being below the legal age for regulated gambling activities.

"These findings should be a wake-up call for parents, educators, health professionals and policymakers," Nower said. "Gambling is no longer confined to casinos and lottery tickets. It is increasingly embedded in video games, sports broadcasts and other products young people can access. We have worried this would increase rates of problem gambling among youth. Now we know. It does."

Researchers identified that risk starts early and isn't limited to boys. Nearly 43% of teens ages 13 to 17 reported gambling in the past year, often through activities such as bingo, raffles and games of skill. Among gamblers, high-risk problem gambling rates were similar for females (10.7%) and males (9.9%).

Other key findings include:

- Racial and ethnic differences were pronounced. Black respondents reported the highest participation in gambling in the past year (63.9%). Among those who gambled, 17.7% of Black respondents and 12.8% of Hispanic respondents were classified as high-risk problem gamblers, compared with 6.4% of white respondents.
- Lower household income was associated with the highest rates of gambling problems. Nearly 30% of those who gambled from households earning less than

$10,000 annually were classified at high risk for problems as were 22.8% of those from households earning $10,000 to under $20,000.

- Researchers found that gambling by family and household members was strongly associated with gambling and problem gambling among young people. Overall, 41.1% of those surveyed reported that a family or household member gambled, including 51.5% of adolescents ages 13 to 17. Those who believed a household member had a gambling problem were more than five times as likely to be high-risk gamblers, while those who gambled with a family member were more than four times as likely.
- Among adolescents ages 13 to 17 classified as high risk for problem gambling, 75.5% had a family member who gambled, 66.3% believed a family member had a gambling problem, and 61.2% had gambled with a family member.

The researchers also examined newer gambling-like activities that are more accessible than legalized gambling. For example, prediction markets allow participants to bet on sports using event contracts, which may fall outside traditional gambling regulations. Social casino games simulate casino gambling without initially costing money to play.

Researchers found about 40% of those who bet on prediction markets as well as 41% of social casino players were classified as high-risk problem gamblers – a rate nearly four times as high as gambling on other activities.

The study confirmed what the researchers have long suspected: there is an additive effect to problem gambling. The earlier and more often one bets and the more activities and settings they use, whether online or in person, the higher the risk for problems. Nearly 46% of those who gambled used both online and in-person venues. Of high-risk problem gamblers, 65.4% used both settings and 52.5% gambled weekly or more. High-risk problem gamblers participated in an average of 6.7 activities, compared with 2.7 among gamblers without problems.

Problem gambling was also associated with higher rates of substance use and mental health concerns. Compared with nongamblers, gamblers reported higher rates of alcohol use (44.6% vs. 25.9%), binge drinking (25.6% vs. 10.5%), drug use (26.7% vs. 17.6%), excessive social media use (51.0% vs. 38.7%) and excessive shopping (12.6% vs. 7.8%). Among high-risk problem gamblers, more than half (52.8%) reported anxiety, 38.4% reported depression and 13.1% reported suicidal ideation.

Nower and members of the Center for Gambling Studies recommend:

- Start prevention education in middle school, providing students, parents, teachers, and counselors with evidence-based information about gambling risks.
- Strengthen oversight of emerging gambling-like products, including prediction markets, social casino games, and other activities that may fall outside conventional gambling safeguards.
- Establish a federal gambling regulatory agency to set national minimum standards, including national self-exclusion and other safeguards that follow players across online and land-based gambling activities.
- Fund prevention and treatment where risk is highest by creating an office for problem gambling within the National Institutes of Health, with community partnerships in low-income communities.

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"We cannot wait until young people reach adulthood to begin addressing gambling-related harm," Nower said. "By that point, we will have very high rates of problem gambling. Prevention must start earlier, screening must be broader, and public policy must recognize that the gambling environment has changed dramatically."

Help is available: the National Problem Gambling Helpline is 1-800-MY-RESET. In crisis, call or text 988.

## About the Study

Adolescent and Emerging Adult Gambling in the United States was led by Lia Nower, J.D., Ph.D., of the Rutgers University Center for Gambling Studies, with funding from a Center of Excellence grant from the International Center for Responsible Gaming.

Download the study here: socialwork.rutgers.edu/nationalgamblingstudy

The study surveyed a nationally representative, probability-based sample of 1,677 adolescents and young adults ages 13 to 27 between April 24 and July 4, 2026, using NORC's AmeriSpeak panel. Results were weighted to national population benchmarks. The maximum margin of error was ±3.2 percentage points overall and ±6.1 percentage points for teens.

## About the Rutgers University Center for Gambling Studies

The Rutgers University Center for Gambling Studies is a multidisciplinary research, policy and training center dedicated to advancing understanding of gambling, gaming and other interactive technologies. Through independent, nonpartisan research, prevention initiatives, professional training and policy analysis, the Center works to reduce gambling-related harm and improve outcomes for individuals, families and communities.

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