

Preface/Editorial for the Special Issue

With the recent widespread proliferation of gaming venues, extensive media coverage, and federal and parliamentary commissions, the issue of problem gambling has recently received considerable attention from public policymakers. Researchers, however, have been examining the issues related to youth gambling for a considerably longer period of time. Spurred by the North American Think Tank on Youth Gambling held at Harvard University in 1995, this area of research experienced a significant increase in empirical research and funding opportunities. While many issues remain unresolved and require further research, there is ample evidence that underage youth are actively participating in both legal and illegal forms of gambling. The increase in youth gambling has not occurred without serious consequences, with between 4–8% reporting very serious gambling-related problems and another 10–15% at risk for the development of serious gambling and gambling-related problems. Youth with serious gambling problems have empirically been shown to have familial, academic, peer, and legal problems.

This special issue is devoted to reviewing our current state of knowledge with respect to youth prevalence rates, several correlates and risk factors associated with adolescent problem gambling, the issues surrounding the measurement of youth problem gambling, and an exploration of treatment approaches designed for youth with serious gambling problems.

Within the first section, the prevalence rates and current trends of youth gambling are presented (Jacobs; Stinchfield). This is followed by several articles examining a number of correlates of youth gam-

bling, in particular the issue of youth substance abuse and gambling (Winters & Anderson) and the relationship between gambling, video-game playing and Internet use (Griffiths & Wood). The next section is devoted to the use of screening instruments, some methodological considerations (Derevensky & Gupta), the modification of the DSM-IV-J (Fisher), and further validation of the SOGS-RA (Wiebe, Cox, & Mehmel). Finally, the last two articles address the treatment of youth with serious gambling problems from a theoretical approach advocating the process of change model (DiClemente, Story, & Murray) and a description of an ongoing treatment program (Gupta & Derevensky).

No longer does one have to travel long distances to gamble. Governments throughout the world have made gambling readily accessible to everyone. While in most cases gambling remains an illegal activity for adolescents, there is little doubt that their resourcefulness enables them to readily access both legal and illegal gambling venues. This is the first generation of youth to spend their entire lives in a society that not only condones gambling but one in which the government often owns, supports, and advertises its products.

Since our knowledge of youth gambling problems is still in its infancy, the collected works should not be viewed as definitive answers but rather should be conceptualized as a beginning toward a better understanding of youth with gambling problems. This area of research is rapidly developing and growing stronger, with better questions being asked, and methodologies becoming more stringent and rigorous. Many avenues are left to explore, and it is our fervent hope that this special issue will serve as a stimulus to all researchers and clinicians who wish to make a contribution to this very exciting area of research, treatment, and prevention. As our knowledge base expands, so do our opportunities to develop effective, empirically based treatment and prevention programs. Prevention is the ultimate key to a healthier society. Enlightenment incurred from good science will eventually permit us to better identify those individuals at increased risk for a gambling problem, and provide them with effective prevention interventions.

While the prevention of gambling problems is not addressed at length in this special issue, it is our desire that it be at the forefront of those working directly with youth in educational-type settings, and those who have the power to affect social policy. It is clear from the papers presented here that much remains to be done to successfully

address the problem of youth who gamble, including increasing public awareness. Most parents and educators still remain unaware that children and adolescents within their communities are susceptible to serious gambling problems. It is hoped that gambling researchers, clinicians, and educators continue to do their part in informing those who remain unaware about the potential serious affects of youth gambling.

We are excited about the gains that have been achieved during the past five years, and are hopeful and confident that the next five years will bring about even more knowledge, greater awareness, and responsible social policy changes in the area of youth gambling.

While the incidence of severe gambling problems amongst youth remains relatively small, the devastating consequences to those individuals, their families, and friends are enormous. This all-encompassing problem permeates every aspect of the individual's life. One adolescent in our treatment clinic said it best: "If my life was a tree, one branch would be that I am a thief, another branch is that I'm a liar, another being I'm no longer in school, and another being I no longer have my parent's trust, respect, and I'm not permitted to live in their home. But if you cut off each of the branches you still haven't gotten to the root of the problem which is my gambling." This special issue is devoted to those youth with serious gambling problems and their families. We call upon our colleagues to establish an international research agenda aimed at increasing our awareness and knowledge of disordered gambling among youth so that we may better be able to develop more effective treatment and prevention programs.

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Rina Gupta
Jeffrey L. Derevensky