



Widespread Gambling Found Among U.S. Adults; 82 Percent Report Taking a Chance During Past Year

Gambling population becoming "more female, older and less white"

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Contact: John Della Contrada, dellacon@buffalo.edu
Phone: 716-645-5000 ext 1409
Fax: 716-645-3765

BUFFALO, N.Y. -- Gambling is widespread -- and spreading -- in American society with 82 percent of individuals interviewed having gambled in the past year, according to a national survey conducted at the University at Buffalo's Research Institute on Addictions (RIA) and reported in the Winter 2002 issue of the *Journal of Gambling Studies*.

Previous surveys found gambling participation at 61 percent (1975) and 63 percent (1998).

The two most common types of gambling identified in the RIA study were lottery (66 percent) and raffles/office pools/charity gambling (48 percent). Twenty-three percent of the individuals interviewed in the current survey gambled weekly or more often. Furthermore, 22 percent of total gambling activity comes from casino gambling, 15 percent is attributed to betting on lotteries, 4 percent to betting at the track, and card games not at a casino or track account for nearly 10 percent.

"Off-track betting on horses or dogs is a particularly high-action type of gambling," according to John W. Welte, Ph.D. "It leads all other types of gambling in the frequency of play (average 36 times per year) and in average wins and losses (\$193), but it is engaged in by only 2 percent of those who were interviewed."

Internet gambling has received a considerable amount of attention, but currently accounts for a negligible portion of gambling in the U.S., added Welte, senior research scientist with RIA, who is a research associate professor in the Department of Social and Preventive Medicine in the UB School of Medicine and Biomedical Sciences and lead investigator on the study.

The research results were based on data from a telephone survey conducted in 2000 and involving 2,630 randomly selected Americans 18 years of age and older residing throughout the U.S. An earlier study based on the survey by Welte and colleagues indicated that "problem" drinkers were 23 times more likely to have a gambling problem than individuals who did not have an alcohol problem.

Welte said the researchers found that overall, gambling is prevalent among adults in all socio-economic status (SES) groups. While there is a general tendency for the rate of gambling participation to increase as SES increases, he said that there are indications that lower SES gamblers gamble more intensely.

"Among those in the lowest 20 percent of SES, 5.3 percent were rated as 'problem' or 'pathological' gamblers," Welte explained. "For those in the highest 20 percent, only 1.6 percent were classified as 'problem' or 'pathological' gamblers."

He said the study showed that when it comes to region, New England has the heaviest gambling in the country, particularly for sports betting and the lottery. The South has

the lowest likelihood of gambling.

He noted that similar rates of gambling were found for both men (84 percent) and women (80 percent) interviewed for the study. However, men bet more frequently than women, in larger amounts and were more likely to be "problem" or "pathological" gamblers.

Rates of participation in lottery gambling were 24 percent in the 1975 national study, 54 percent in the 1998 national study, and 66 percent in the UB study. Rates of participation in casino gambling were 9 percent in the 1975 study, 26 percent in the 1998 study and 27 percent in the UB study.

The UB study revealed that African Americans were less likely to have gambled in the past year than any other ethnic group, but those who did gambled more heavily than other groups. African Americans and Hispanics were more likely than average to be "pathological" or "problem" gamblers.

"The growth of gambling opportunities throughout the country has been associated with a shift in the profile of the gambling population to become more female, older and less white," Welte said. "Gambling pathology or 'problem' gambling, is still rather uncommon," he added, "but is becoming more prevalent among less affluent Americans."

Also involved in the study were Grace M. Barnes, Ph.D., senior research scientist with RIA and an adjunct associate professor in the Department of Sociology in the UB College of Arts and Sciences, and William F. Wieczorek, Ph.D., director of the Center for Health and Social Research at Buffalo State College.

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