



# YOUTH GAMBLING AS A PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE

## CAUSE FOR CONCERN

Youth problem gambling is a growing public health concern. Even though gambling activities are legally restricted to adults, there is clear evidence that underage youth continue to actively participate in gambling. More and more youth are exposed to the availability and accessibility of many forms of gambling and are tempted by the pressures to participate.

Gambling problems can have long-term, severe consequences on teenagers' lives and on the lives of those close to them. Some of the adverse effects of a gambling problem can be seen on various levels of individual functioning (affective, cognitive, social, academic) and on both mental and physical health.

The burden of problem gambling among youth is socially invisible and is masked by popular misconceptions. Public perception and knowledge are misguided, largely as a result of the promotion of gambling as a harmless form of entertainment and as an enjoyable activity. The gambling industry often promotes the picture of gambling as glamorous entertainment and as a means of achieving financial freedom. Adolescents are particularly attracted by the excitement and the prestige often associated with gambling, especially with the popularization of poker. Furthermore, most adolescents remain unaware of the risks associated with excessive gambling participation.

- From International Centre for Youth Gambling Problems and High Risk Behaviors



## COSTS AND CONSEQUENCES

Problem gambling among adolescents has been associated with a number of mental health outcomes including the following:

- higher rates of depressive symptoms
- increased risk of alcohol and substance abuse disorders
- increased risk of suicide and suicidal thoughts
- higher anxiety
- poor general health

Adolescents who gamble are also at increased risk of the following:

- delinquency and crime
- disrupted family/peer relationships
- poor academic performance

- Slightly adapted from MESSERLIAN, C., DEREVENSKY, J. & GUPTA, R. (2005) Youth gambling problems: a public health perspective. *Health Promotion International*, 20: 69-79.

Vision: Individuals, families, and communities free from gambling harm