



# Decoding Risk

Gambling Attitudes and Behaviours Amongst Youth in Nova Scotia

An independent research report funded by the Nova Scotia Gaming Corporation

Report Prepared by Eric Meerkamper, D-Code Inc.

September 27, 2006

## Table of Contents

	<b>Page</b>
▪ Study Objectives	2
▪ Methodology	3
▪ Executive Summary	4-8
▪ Detailed Findings	9-25
▪ Conclusion	26

## Study Objectives

This study uses qualitative and quantitative research conducted with young Nova Scotians to develop insights into attitudes and behaviours as they relate to gambling.

This study is a resource for various stakeholders and practitioners involved in developing prevention initiatives, programs and messages targeted towards youth.

This study is not intended, and has not been designed, to identify the causes or incidence of problem gambling amongst Nova Scotia youth.

This study explores current perceptions of and participation in various risk related activities; perceptions and attitudes towards gambling; participation in various gambling activities; role of parents and friends as influencers; and key gender and age variances amongst study participants.

## Methodology

This research project consisted of both quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. The project was designed to provide accurate, reliable and representative quantitative data, as well as rich qualitative feedback to “fill in the gaps” with personal experiences.

All phases of this research have been conducted following the guidelines of the Marketing Research and Intelligence Association (MRIA).

### **Quantitative Research Phase**

The quantitative portion of the study was conducted in August 2006. The field work, including obtaining the survey respondent sample, was conducted using two national online respondent panels.

In total, 499 young Nova Scotians between the ages of 15 and 20 completed the survey. The data has been properly weighted to reflect Statistics Canada population data for age and gender. The margin of error for this study is 4.9%, 19 times out of 20 (95% confidence level).

The online methodology was specifically chosen as the preferred methodology for a number of reasons. Firstly, online penetration amongst the target audience is very high. Secondly, with mobile phone penetration rates amongst youth increasing rapidly, it is also becoming difficult to find youth through landline-based phone methodologies. Thirdly, the additional anonymity that online approaches offer may generate more frank responses on sensitive question areas.

### **Qualitative Research Phase**

The qualitative phase used an on-line discussion methodology to achieve the project objectives. A total of 37 Nova Scotia youth, between the ages of 13-20 were recruited from D-Code’s network of over 800 D-Coders to participate in this phase of the project. The youth were split into 4 groups based on age (13-14 years, 15-16 years, 17-18 years, 19-20 years). Each day, from August 21 to 25<sup>th</sup>, various questions were asked of participants who then posted their responses and also responded to postings from others.

The on-line discussions solicited detailed feedback through a password-protected message board, and was specifically designed to foster open discussion, debate, and reflection on various areas including risk perceptions, as well as gambling attitudes and behaviours.

## Executive Summary

The quantitative and qualitative insights gathered from this project have been extensive and will also provide a basis for future research. This report highlights the key findings with a particular focus on how they can assist practitioners and other stakeholders involved in developing prevention initiatives, programs and messages.

The findings have been grouped into 11 primary insight areas as follows:

**Insight #1: Youth, and particularly young males, do not perceive taking risks as negative.**

**Insight #2: Youth classify Gambling and Betting as moderately risky.**

**Insight #3: Betting and Gambling are not significant concerns for most youth.**

**Insight #4: Youth are able to differentiate between gambling and betting by activity.**

**Insight #5: Youth are actively involved in both regulated and unregulated gambling activities.**

**Insight #6: Young males gamble more than females and display more positive attitudes toward gambling.**

**Insight #7: Poker is top of mind, however the perception is somewhat greater than the reality.**

**Insight #8: Gambling location is significantly impacted by gender and age.**

**Insight #9: Youth in Nova Scotia are gambling online (self reported) in much higher numbers than adults.**

**Insight #10: The world of gambling is filled with ambiguities and contradictions for youth.**

**Insight #11: Friends are the key influencers.**

Key insight areas are briefly discussed below with further supporting data and discussion within the detailed findings section of this report.

**Insight #1: Youth, and particularly young males, do not perceive taking risks as negative.**

For most youth the general concept of “risk” is not necessarily seen as a bad thing; the concept of risk on its own is unlikely to dissuade non-responsible activities.

For example, 40% of respondents agree that “I like to take risks”, while only 26% disagree. Similarly, respondents were more likely to agree that “If you don’t take risks you will not get ahead”, and that “Risky activities are more fun than safe activities.” Only 12% of the respondents feel that “Taking risks is stupid,” while 65% disagree.

Interestingly, these generally positive attitudes towards risk and risk taking are the most pronounced amongst the younger respondents (15-17 year olds).

**Insight #2: Youth classify Gambling and Betting as mid-level risky behaviours.**

When asked to rate 21 various activities based on level of perceived risk, the top five were: 1) drinking and driving, 2) doing ecstasy/similar drugs, 3) having unprotected sex, 4) hitchhiking alone, 5) shop lifting. Gambling and betting were rated 10 and 13.

Since gambling and betting are seen as mid-level risky behaviours, prevention initiatives messaging will need to work particularly hard to compete for “share of mind” amongst youth. This may also indicate that a “risk” based messaging strategy may in fact not be the best approach for communicating prevention initiatives behaviour.

**Insight #3: Betting and Gambling are not significant concerns for most youth.**

Relative to a number of issues that teens are dealing with, it appears that gambling and betting are of little concern to youth and not commanding the same level of attention by teens as other issues.

When asked to rate a list of issues according to importance to people their age, drug use, negative body image, drinking too much alcohol, drinking and driving and peer pressure were the top 5 issues.

**Insight #4: Youth are able to differentiate between gambling and betting by activity.**

Respondents were asked whether they believe that “Gambling” and “Betting” are the same thing, and the majority of respondents (73%) agreed they were. This was particularly true with females (76%), but the majority of males (69%) also agreed.

However in contrast to the above finding, when the question was not asked in the abstract, but rather applied to specific activities, the respondents were able to quite definitively classify many of the activities as either “gambling” or “betting”.

In order to communicate effectively with young people about this activity, it is important to know what they call it and use the language they use.

**Insight #5: Youth are actively involved in both regulated and unregulated gambling activities**

It is apparent that many underage youth are actively involved in both regulated and unregulated gambling activities. The top 5 gambling activities amongst the total sample youth are as follows: 1) raffle tickets for fundraising, 2) scratch tabs or instant wins, 3) a dare or challenge, 4) lottery tickets, and 5) poker.

Interestingly, participation by type of activity changes as respondents get older. For example, for the 15-17 age group, gambling on a “dare or challenge” is the second most common gambling activity, following “Raffle tickets for fundraising”, with fully 27% having said that they did this in the past 12 months. Also, “Poker” moves up to third place with 22% participation.

**Insight #6: Young males gamble more than females and display more positive attitudes toward gambling.**

The quantitative findings suggest that gender significantly impacts gambling behaviour amongst youth. 60% of males report that they had bet or gambled versus only 25% of females. Males are not only more likely to have bet or gambled, they are also significantly more likely to have engaged in multiple gambling activities in the past year. In total, 30% of all respondents have participated in four or more different gambling activities in the past 12 months. Of this subset of “higher frequency gamblers”, almost 60% are male.

**Insight #7: Poker is top of mind, however the perception is somewhat greater than the reality.**

When asked to name the most popular gambling activity among people their age, both male and female respondents ranked poker to be by far the most popular gambling activity. However, while in the minds of many youth, poker stands out as the number one gambling activity it actually ranks fourth (tied with lottery tickets) in the list of gambling activities respondents participated in during the past year.

**Insight #8: Gambling location is significantly impacted by gender and age.**

There are significant gender variances in terms of gambling locations. For example, female respondents indicate that "Home" (40%) is their number one gambling location, followed by "Convenience Store" (19%) and only then by "Friend's House" (14%). Conversely for males, primary is "Friend's House" (41%), with "School" and "Home" following well below. It is likely that these variances are at least in part related to the type of gambling activities favoured by the different gender groups (for example, lottery tickets for females and poker for males).

Respondents who have become of legal gambling age (19 years old) show a significantly increased incidence of having gambled in locations where access is actively restricted, such as "Convenience Store", "Casino", and "Bar". For example, while 42% of 19-20 year olds report that they have gambled in a Casino, only 6% of 18 year olds have. This suggests that efforts to restrict underage participation at point of sale / point of play at these venues are having a significant impact.

**Insight #9: Youth in Nova Scotia are gambling online (self reported) in much higher numbers than adults.**

In less actively restricted gambling channels, such as online or via wireless devices, the younger respondents in fact show **higher** usage of those channels than their older counterparts. For example, while 12% of 19-20 year olds indicate that they have gambled online, 15% of 18 year olds and 19% of 15-17 year olds report that they have.

While it is assumed that a portion of internet gambling activity is not for money, as it is possible to play online without wagering money, the research does indicate that at a minimum 6% of 15-17 year olds have played online poker for money in the previous 12 months. This compares to 3% of 18 year olds and 8% of 19-20 year olds.

Previous research on adults in Nova Scotia indicates that rates of internet gambling are significantly lower than the rates found amongst youth in this study. In 2003, 0.2% of Nova Scotians were gambling on internet (2003 Nova Scotia Gambling Prevalence Study. At 6% 15-17 year olds are therefore gambling **significantly** more than the general population.



**Insight #10: The world of gambling is filled with ambiguities and contradictions for youth.**

Youth are constantly receiving mixed messages about gambling. On the one hand it is often glamorized (e.g. "Celebrity Poker"), while on the other hand responsible behaviour messaging is communicating the potential risks associated with gambling.

Overall, the majority of respondents (67%) feel neutral or slightly positive about gambling as an activity. 76% believe that "gambling is harmless," and 54% believe that "gambling doesn't hurt anyone."

However, at the same time, 75% "strongly agree" or "agree" that "most people will lose money", 67% believe that "gambling leads to problems," and "57% believe that "gambling can be highly addictive."

**Insight #11: Friends are the Key Influencers on gambling participation and perceptions.**

Aside from having money, which is obviously a prerequisite to gambling, friends top the list of 14 different reasons that may influence youth gambling. Our research also demonstrates that friends are an important source of knowledge for gambling as well. When we asked respondents to tell us where they learned what they know about gambling, 64% of said their friends, who ranked as the number one gambling information source, television was second followed by parents.



## Detailed Findings

### Insight #1: Youth, and particularly young males, do not perceive taking risks as negative

From STD's to smoking to gambling, responsible behavior messaging for various social issues, often use the word and concept of "risk" as a way of communicating to youth about the potential dangers of a particular activity.

However, amongst youth, risk taking is often in fact associated with achievement, status and skill. For example, there are numerous popular websites, such as [www.stupidvideos.com](http://www.stupidvideos.com), that are primarily devoted to showcasing risky activities.

It is not surprising then, that the general concept of "risk" is not necessarily seen as a bad thing. As can be seen by the number of respondents in this study who agreed with the following statements, the concept of risk on its own is unlikely to dissuade non-responsible activities.

For example, 40% of respondents agree that "I like to take risks", while only 26% disagreed. Similarly, respondents were more likely to agree that "If you don't take risks you will not get ahead," and that "Risky activities are more fun than safe activities." Only 12% of the respondents feel that "Taking risks is stupid," while 65% disagree.

Interestingly, these generally positive attitudes towards risk and risk taking are the most pronounced amongst the younger respondents (15-17 year olds), as illustrated in the following chart.

Risk Attitudes	Total	15-17	18	19-20
If you don't take risks you will not get ahead	44%	52%	40%	48%
Risky activities are more fun than safe activities	44%	51%	32%	38%
I like to take risks	40%	44%	33%	37%
Taking risks is stupid	12%	8%	14%	16%

Based on these results we can see that age plays a significant role in shaping the perceptions and attitudes towards risk taking with 15-17 year olds having an overall more positive view of risk taking in general. The qualitative research further supports this finding. One quote, in particular, from the online discussion sums up the general attitude youth expressed toward risk:

*I think everyone is entitled to get involved in some risky behavior, especially teenagers.*  
Connor - age 15

Similarly, there is a gender skew to risk perception with males being much more positive towards risk taking, with females generally neutral or slightly supportive.

## Insight #2: Youth classify Gambling and Betting as mid-level risky behaviours

Based on the research youth appear to determine the risk levels of specific activities by the immediacy, likelihood, and/or severity of the possible negative outcome of the activity. There also appears to be a link in the possibility of physical risk vs non-physical risk when determining risk levels.

When asked to rate various activities based on level of perceived risk, the top five were: 1) drinking and driving, 2) doing ecstasy/similar drugs, 3) having unprotected sex, 4) hitchhiking alone, 5) shop lifting.

Rank	Activity
1	Drinking and driving
2	Doing ecstasy/similar drugs
3	Having unprotected sex
4	Hitchhiking alone
5	Shop lifting
6	Smoking
7	Cheating on a test
8	Skipping work
9	Internet dating
10	<b>Gambling</b>
11	Smoking marijuana
12	Using fake ID
13	<b>Betting</b>
14	Speeding
15	Getting drunk
16	Playing extreme sports
17	Lying to your parents
18	Skipping school
19	Staying out all night
20	Getting a tattoo
21	Having protected sex

Overall females tend to view all activities as more risky than males do. This gender skew holds true for all activities aside from skipping work and using fake ID. Not surprisingly, females view hitchhiking alone as significantly more risky than males.

Since gambling and betting are seen as mid-level risky behaviours, prevention initiatives messaging will need to work particularly hard to compete for “share of mind” amongst youth. This may also indicate that a “risk” based messaging strategy may in fact not be the best approach for communicating youth gambling prevention messages.

### Insight #3: Betting and Gambling are not significant concerns for most youth

Relative to a number of issues that teens are dealing with, it appears that gambling and betting are of little concern to youth and not commanding the same level of attention by teens as other issues.

When asked to rate a list of issues according to **importance to people their age**, Drug use, Negative body image, Drinking too much alcohol, Drinking and driving and Peer pressure were the top 5 issues.

How youth ranked their biggest concerns for people their age	Total
Drug use	27%
Negative body image	18%
Drinking too much alcohol	17%
Drinking and driving	8%
Peer pressure	8%
Sexually transmitted diseases	7%
Smoking	4%
Problems at home	4%
Violence (bullying, gangs	4%
Too much pressure from parents	3%
Street racing	0.6%
Gambling	0.4%
Betting	0.4%

Participants in the online discussion expressed strong concerns towards drug use as well as the belief that “the society we live in is enforcing messages that are negative.” For example:

*The biggest concern in my opinion would be drugs. Because at this age, people are still figuring things out and trying new things, now if someone wants to try it, go right ahead, because most people get peer pressured into doing it and then they can get addicted. Jessica - age 15*

*I am concerned that the society we live in is enforcing images that are negative. Being the pretty perfect skinny looking girl, is what is ideal. Unfortunately, this is leading to bigger issues; anorexia, bulimia, low-self-esteem. If the girls of today are feeling this way, how will the future be brought up?. Isabelle – age 19*

The top 5 issues in the quantitative research correspond to the top issues youth cited in the online discussion. In addition to these issues, participants also stressed the importance of leading a healthy lifestyle. None of the online participants mentioned gambling or betting in this portion of the discussion.

Respondents were also asked to rank what issues that **they themselves worried most about**. In this case the so called "teen" issues are less of a stress for respondents in comparison to their future, school, and money. The top 5 things that respondents worry about are: 1) their future, 2) school/grades, 3) money, 4) physical health, 5) getting a job.

In general, females are more likely to worry. Females tend to worry more about their future, school/grades, money, physical health, dating/relationships, parents, and losing weight more than males do.

Not surprisingly, older respondents are more likely to worry about money: 68.9% of 19-20 year olds vs. 50.5% of 15-17 year olds.

Rank	Overall ranking of what respondents personally worry about
1	Your future
2	School/grades
3	Money
4	Physical health
5	Getting a job
6	Dating/ relationships
7	Parents
8	Home-life
9	Losing weight
10	STD's
11	Bullying/ personal safety



#### Insight #4: Youth are able to differentiate between gambling and betting by activity

In order to develop effective youth gambling prevention messaging, it is important to understand how the target audience themselves use and understand the key terms of “Gambling” and “Betting.”

Respondents were asked whether they believe that “Gambling” and “Betting” are the same thing, and the majority of respondents (73%) agreed they were. This was particularly true with females (76%), however the majority of males (69%) also agreed.

However in contrast to the above finding when the question was not asked in the abstract, but rather applied to specific activities, the respondents were able to quite definitively classify many of the activities as either “gambling” or “betting”. There are no significant variances by gender or age.

Interestingly, activities that are sports related or based on an individual’s physical skill or performance, generally seem to be considered betting activities. Conversely, mechanical devices, lottery / scratch tickets and card games seem to be considered gambling.

In order to communicate effectively with young people about this activity, it is important to know what they call it and use the language they use.

The following chart illustrates the most common classifications for a number of activities.

Activities defined primarily as “gambling”	Total
Slot machines	74%
Scratch tickets/pull tabs or instant win	69%
Lottery tickets	66%
Poker	53%
Bingo	45%
Internet poker	53%
Bingo	45%
Card games (other than Poker), dice or board games	37%

Activities defined primarily as “betting”	Total
A dare or challenge that you or someone else can do something	59%
Own or someone else’s performances in games of skill (pool, golf, etc.)	49%
Horse racing	49%
Sports “Pool” (with friends, at work etc.	46%
Sports event or sports game	38%
Sports through a bookie (someone who accepts and pays off bets)	38%

Activities defined as neither “gambling” nor “betting”	Total
Arcade or video games	58%
Raffle tickets for fundraising	49%

**Insight #5: Youth are actively involved in both regulated and unregulated gambling activities**

The following chart displays the different types of gambling activities youth have participated in the past year waging either money or something of value.

Gambling Activity	Total	Male	Female	15-17	18	19-20
Raffle tickets for fundraising	34%	30%	37%	30%	31%	40%
Scratch tabs or instant wins	26%	24%	29%	15%	23%	40%
A dare/challenge	26%	32%	20%	27%	24%	25%
Lottery tickets	24%	22%	26%	13%	11%	47%
Poker	24%	36%	12%	22%	28%	26%
Arcade/video games	15%	16%	15%	15%	12%	17%
Other card games, dice etc	15%	15%	14%	14%	13%	16%
Bingo	14%	9%	19%	13%	12%	17%
Performance (own/someone else)	13%	18%	8%	13%	12%	13%
Sports Pool	8%	13%	4%	6%	11%	11%
Slot machines	7%	6%	9%	0.3%	4%	19%
VLT's	6%	6%	6%	2%	2%	13%
Internet poker	6%	8%	4%	6%	3%	8%
Sport event	3%	4%	2%	2%	3%	4%
Horse Racing	2%	1%	3%	1%	1%	3%
Sports through a bookie	2%	2%	1%	1%	1%	3%

An initial insight is that it is apparent that many underage youth are actively involved in both regulated and unregulated gambling activities. The top 5 gambling activities amongst the total sample of youth are as follows: 1) raffle tickets for fundraising, 2) scratch tabs or instant wins, 3) a dare or challenge, 4) lottery tickets, and 5) poker.

Of particular interest is to examine how **participation** by type of activity changes as respondents get older. For example, for the 15-17 age group, gambling on a “dare or challenge” is the second most common gambling activity, following “Raffle tickets for fundraising”, with 27% having said that they did this in the past 12 months. Also, “Poker” moves up to third place with 22% participation.

Turning legal age correlates to increased participation in legal gambling activities. Participation in Lottery, Scratch / Instant wins, Slot Machines and VLT'S, all show a significant increase after respondents turn 19 years old.

The research indicates that parents are the most frequent source of lottery ticket and scratch/tab pull tickets for underage youth.



The research also indicates that **attitudes** towards gambling change with age. When asked the question "There is nothing wrong with gambling once in a while", 67% of 19-20 year olds agreed with the statement vs. 53% of 15-17 year olds. However, older respondents were also more likely to "strongly agree" that it is 'impossible to gamble responsibly" with 34% of 19-20 year olds vs. 26% of 15-17 year olds strongly agreeing with this statement. Not surprisingly younger respondents are also more likely to feel strongly that "Older people are more likely to have a gambling problem than people my age" with 38%% of 15-17 year olds, 27% of 18 year olds and 19 % of 19-20 year olds.

There are also significant participation and attitudinal gender differences which are discussed in the following section.

**Insight #6: Young males gamble more than females and display more positive attitudes toward gambling**

The quantitative findings suggest that gender significantly impacts gambling behaviour among youth. When respondents were asked if they had ever bet or gambled on something where they risked money or something of value, 43% said yes. The gender skew in this finding is sizeable: 60% of males report that they had ever bet or gambled versus only 25% of females.

Past-year youth gambling behaviour reinforces this gender skew. Based on the total sample, 34% said that they had not participated in any of the listed gambling activities in the past year. Of this “non-gambling” group, close to two-thirds were female. Males are not only more likely to have bet or gambled, they are also significantly more likely to have engaged in multiple gambling activities in the past year. In total, 30% of all respondents have participated in four or more different gambling activities in the past 12 months. Of this subset of “higher frequency gamblers”, almost 60% are male.

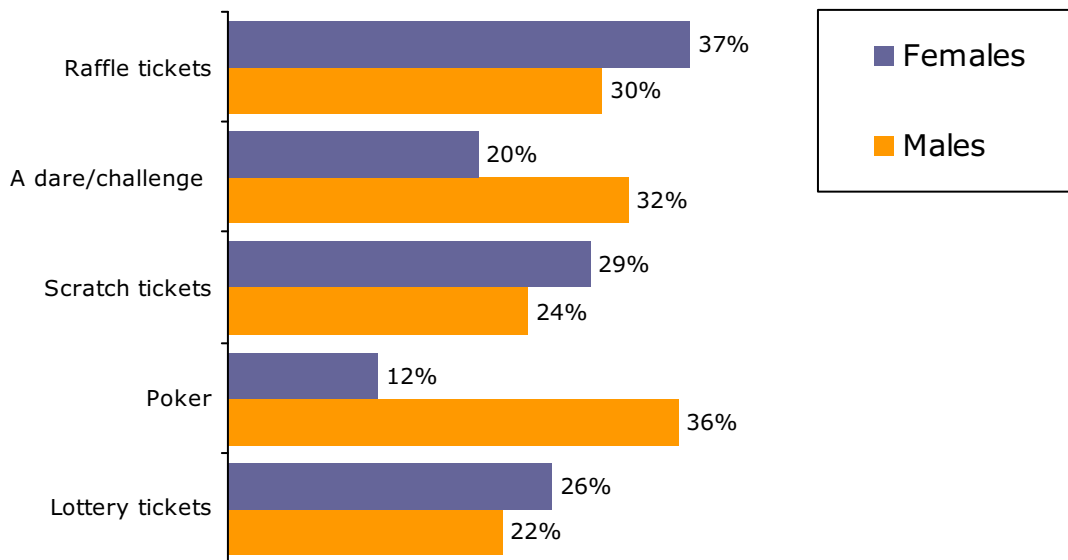
Taking a closer look at the types of gambling activities youth report doing in the past year reveals that gender strongly impacts the types of gambling activities youth partake in (please refer to chart on the following page). Among female respondents, the top 3 gambling activities are:

Rank	Top 3 Gambling Activities - Females
1	Raffle tickets for fundraising
2	Scratch tickets/pull tabs or instant win
3	Lottery tickets

These activities all fall under the “conventional gambling” umbrella and can be described as more impersonal/solitary forms of gambling. On the other hand, the top 3 gambling activities that males have participated in are:

Rank	Top 3 Gambling Activities - Males
1	Poker
2	A dare or challenge
3	Raffle tickets for fundraising

The top 2 male gambling activities are both forms of “social gambling” which involve interactive games of skill or chance. This is also evident in the finding that 18% of males have participated in their “own or someone else’s performance of games of skill (pool, golf, bowling, darts, etc)” in comparison with only 9% of females.



### Gender Impacts Perceptions

Corresponding to their behavioural differences, the quantitative findings show that males and females also have dissimilar attitudes toward gambling. Males are significantly more likely to view gambling as an activity that they can learn from.

- One in four male respondents “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that “gambling can teach you how to manage risk” in comparison to less than 1 in 10 female respondents.
- Males are also twice as likely as females to view gambling as a fun activity.
- When asked to agree or disagree with the statement “gambling is fun and exciting”, 31% of male respondents “agreed” or “strongly agreed” in comparison with 14% of females.

Overall, males have a higher tendency to view gambling as an enjoyable social activity.

- 35% of male respondents “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that “gambling is a fun way to spend time with friends” in comparison with only 7% of female respondents.

Perhaps this discrepancy between males and females surrounding the fun or social side of gambling is directly related to the types of gambling males and females engage in. One possibility is that because females engage in “mechanical/impersonal gambling activities” more than “social gambling activities”, they are far more unlikely than males to view gambling as the type of activity they would have fun doing with friends.

In fact, the findings show that in some cases, females have strong anti-gambling attitudes and in others they have neutral or slightly positive attitudes. For example, when asked whether or not gambling was an activity that youth like to do in their spare time, 73% of female respondents “strongly disagreed” in comparison with 57% of males. The research shows that females are also less likely to see gambling as a “trendy” activity. When respondents were asked how they felt about the statement “gambling is cool”, 52% of females said that they “strongly disagreed” in comparison with 35% of males.

On a similar vein, a smaller portion of females (33%) “agreed” or “strongly agreed” with the statement “gambling is popular with people my age” versus 48% of males. Corresponding to the higher popularity of gambling among young males, 13% of male respondents “agreed” or “strongly agreed” that they “have felt pressure by others to gamble” in comparison with only 2% of females. Not surprisingly, male respondents were significantly more likely than female respondents to “agree” or “strongly agree” that they would gamble in the next 3 months: 41% of males versus 28% of females.



**Insight #7: Poker is top of mind, however the perception is greater than the reality.**

The hype and media attention surrounding poker seems to have inflated its perceived popularity among youth. We asked respondents who have gambled with at least one type of gambling activity in the past year to name **what they think** are the most popular gambling activities among people their age. The result was somewhat surprising. Both male and female respondents ranked poker to be by far the most popular gambling activity.

Rank	Perceived Top Gambling Activities Amongst Youth
1	Poker (43%)
2	A dare or challenge that you or someone else can do something (10%)
3	Arcade or video games (10%)
4	Internet poker (6%)

Interestingly, in the minds of many youth, poker stands out as the number one gambling activity although it actually ranks fourth for all respondents (tied with lottery tickets) in the list of gambling activities respondents performed in the past year. Poker is the third most popular gambling activity for 15-17 year olds, and the second most popular for 18 year olds.

Many participants in the online discussion often mentioned poker in their discussions around youth gambling. One young respondent shared his view that, "People my age gamble because it suddenly became cool a few years ago, with American Eagle selling shirts about poker and gambling on them." Certainly, it is likely that the current popularization of poker by the media has impacted youth perceptions giving it heightened awareness without the corresponding actual behavioural participation. According to another online discussion participant, seeing poker on television increases its "cool factor," which most probably increases its popularity among teens.

Although the number of youth who perceive poker to be popular far exceeds those who actually play poker, a significant number of youth have played or play poker, with males dominating the group. The popularity of poker among young males catapults it to the top of the list of respondents' favourite gambling activities. Out of those who have gambled at least once in the past year, 20% say poker is their favourite gambling activity (31% of males and 7% of females). Lottery tickets, on the other hand, rank fourth on this list with only 8% of respondents choosing it as their favourite gambling activity. In the online discussion, respondents in the two older groups brought up the subject and popularity of poker many times. One respondent mentioned that "cards were actually banned" from his school because "kids would skip class to play poker". Clearly, poker is capturing the attention of many youth, particularly young males.



### Insight #8: Gambling location is significantly impacted by gender and age

Examining where and when gambling activities are taking place provides insight into the environments in which responsible youth gambling prevention messaging might be transmitted and/or received.

Respondents were asked to indicate from a provided list the locations where they **usually** gamble. The overall leading location is "Friend's House" (28%) followed by "Home" (20%), and "School" (14%), as indicated in the following chart.

Gambling Locations	Totals
Friend's house	28%
Home	20%
School	14%
Convenience store	14%
Casino	8%
Bar	3%
Internet/online	2%

However, there are significant gender variances in terms of gambling locations. For example, female respondents indicate that "Home" (40%) is their number one gambling location, followed by "Convenience Store" (19%) and only then by "Friend's House" (14%). Conversely for males, primary gambling location is "Friend's House" (41%), with "School" and "Home" following well below. It is likely that these variances are at least in part related to the type of gambling activities favoured by the different gender groups (for example, lottery tickets for females and poker for males).

Similarly, there are also significant age variances as it relates to location. The main difference is that upon reaching legal gambling age, the 19-20 age group appears to shift the location of their gambling activities to the "Convenience Store" (26%), followed by "Casino" (19%), "Friend's House" (17%), and "Home" (17%).

Respondents were also asked if they had **ever** gambled in a number of locations. Of particular interest is that respondents who have become of legal gambling age (19 years old) show a significantly increased incidence of having gambled in locations where access is actively restricted, such as "Convenience Store", "Casino", and "Bar". For example, while 42% of 19-20 year olds report that they have gambled in a Casino, only 6% of 18 year olds have. This suggests that efforts to restrict underage participation at point of sale / point of play at these venues are having a significant impact.

Gambling Channels	Total	15-17	18	19-20
Convenience store	35%	23%	21%	53%
Casino	19%	3%	6%	42%
Bar	11%	1%	1%	25%



**Insight #9: Youth in Nova Scotia are gambling online (self reported) in much higher numbers than adults.**

In less actively restricted gambling channels, such as online or via wireless devices, the younger respondents in fact show **higher** usage of those channels than their older counterparts. For example, while 12% of 19-20 year olds indicate that they have gambled online, 15% of 18 year olds and 19% of 15-17 year olds report that they have.

Gambling Channels	Total	15-17	18	19-20
Internet/online	16%	19%	15%	12%
Cell phone or other wireless device	3%	5%	5%	0.4%

While it is assumed that a portion of internet gambling activity is not for money, as it is possible to play online without wagering money, the research does indicate that at a minimum 6% of 15-17 year olds have played online poker for money in the previous 12 months. This compares to 3% of 18 year olds and 8% of 19-20 year olds.

Previous research on adults in Nova Scotia indicates that rates of internet gambling are significantly lower than the rates found amongst youth in this study. In 2003, 0.2% of Nova Scotians were gambling on internet (2003 Nova Scotia Gambling Prevalence Study). At 6% 15-17 year olds are therefore gambling online **significantly** more than the general population.



### **Insight #10: The world of gambling is filled with ambiguities and contradictions for youth**

Gambling appears to be an area full of contradictions and one that is particularly difficult for youth to navigate.

Youth are constantly receiving mixed messages about gambling. On the one hand, it is often glamorized (e.g. "Celebrity Poker"), while on the other hand youth gambling prevention messaging is communicating the risks associated with gambling.

Unlike other areas in which youth may receive prevention messages, such as drinking and driving, where the potential negative impacts are clear and immediate, there do not appear to be similar commonly shared feelings towards gambling. This uncertainty in their understanding appears to manifest itself in the various contradictory attitudes that they have towards gambling.

Overall, the majority of respondents (67%) feel neutral or slightly positive about gambling as an activity. 76% believe that "gambling is harmless", and 54% believe that "gambling doesn't hurt anyone".

However, at the same time, 75% "strongly agree" or "agree" that "most people will lose money." 67% believe that "gambling leads to problems," and "57% believe that "gambling can be highly addictive." These types of contradictions were also common in the online discussion component of this study. The following two quotes from the online discussion illustrate this:

*When you gamble there will be many more bad things that happen than good things like you will lose lots of money, you may lose lots of friends, you can also lose many loved ones and your job because your spending too much time gambling but the people that are gambling probably think of the positive things that can happen like you may walk out with more money than you went in with but that only a slight possibility so I still wouldn't gamble. Neil - age 14*

*I would say that the positive outcomes would be winning lots of money, being popular among those who see you win, being able to spend your winning on stuff that you wanted but couldn't afford before you won and a huge boost in confidence with yourself because you won. James age - 19*

While there are some gender differences, they too are somewhat contradictory. For example, while males are more likely than females to "strongly agree" that "there is nothing wrong with gambling once in a while" (30% vs 17%), more males than females (29% vs 21%) "strongly agree" that "gambling is for losers."

This study has identified friends and parents as key influencers for youth as it relates to gambling. Interestingly, the mixed perceptions and attitudes towards gambling expressed by the respondents may in fact be similar to their parents' perceptions and attitudes.

For example, 72% of respondents say that their parents neither support nor oppose the gambling that the respondents participate in. In addition, only 7% of the respondents say their parents “strongly oppose” their gambling activities and 5% say their parents in fact “strongly support” their gambling activities. As well, 38% of respondents say that their parents gamble, while 51% say their parents do not (12% say they do not know).

As has been previously noted, “gambling” is in fact seen by youth as a wide spectrum of activities as diverse as buying a lottery ticket to playing poker, with very different risks and benefit perceptions attributed to each. It will thus be important for any prevention initiatives messaging to clearly identify the specific types of behaviours, situations and activities that can assist youth in recognizing the risks of problem gambling.

### Insight #11: Friends are the Key Influencers on gambling participation and perceptions

Investigating the subject of youth gambling influencers reveals that friends are key influencers to youth gambling behaviour. In the quantitative analysis, we asked respondents who had gambled at least once in the past year to select from a list and pick out the influencer that has the biggest impact on how often they gamble. The following findings highlight the strength of friends on youth gambling behaviour:

Rank	Top 5 factors that have “the biggest impact” on how often youth gamble
1	Amount of money I have (37%)
2	If friends are involved or organizing an activity (35%)
3	Amount of free time (6%)
4	If I am on a “winning streak” (5%)
5	If stakes are high/jackpot (4%)

Aside from having money, which is obviously a prerequisite to gambling, friends top the list of 14 different reasons that may influence youth gambling. Our research also demonstrates that friends are an important source of knowledge for gambling as well. When we asked respondents to tell us where they learned what they know about gambling, 64% of youth said their friends. Friends ranked as the number one gambling information source followed by television.

Rank	Where do youth learn about gambling?
1	Friends (64%)
2	On TV (56%)
3	From parents (49%)
4	On the Internet (37%)
5	Other (32%)

A significant portion of our qualitative research focused on the influence and importance of friends on youth attitudes and behaviours. Not surprisingly, the common sentiment among respondents was that most often friends play a significant role in influencing their behaviour. Based on the qualitative research we see that teens turn to their “closest” friends for guidance on “teen related” issues because they know that their friends are thinking about the same things.

However, many respondents also said that for important decisions, that dealt with their career or their future for example, parents were often a more important resource. This reordering of the relative importance of parents also took place in the quantitative findings. When we asked respondents who they would go to first for help if they ever had a problem with gambling, respondents were slightly more likely to choose their parents.

Rank	If you had a problem with gambling, who would you go to first for help?
1	Parents/caregiver (38%)
2	Friend (34%)
3	Get information from the Internet (11%)
4	Call a help line (7%)
5	School counselor (3%)

Encouragingly, young respondents say that their parents are the first resource they would turn to for help. Ranking close behind parents, friends still remain a very important source of information and support for youth. This finding is particularly important when thinking of youth gambling prevention messaging channels that best suit the typical youth support system.



## Conclusion

As this research has shown, Youth are participating in and being exposed to a wide range of gambling activities, and for the most part, do not have strong negative perceptions of gambling. Arguably, gambling has in fact become more associated with positive attributes such as “fun” and “excitement”.

As well, relative to other activities gambling does not rank highly with most youth in terms of being a risky activity, nor as being a significant youth issue. Thus, “breaking through” to youth with youth gambling prevention messaging related to gambling is a particularly difficult challenge.

Most youth do, however, believe that gambling can have serious negative consequences if not managed properly, and thus should be open to receiving youth gambling prevention messaging if it is crafted in a way that speaks to them.

All of the findings from this study will be useful in supporting the development or evolution of youth gambling prevention programs. However, there is one particular insight that should definitely be considered going forward, and that is the higher participation and significantly different attitudes towards gambling that are held by young males. Prevention initiatives messages should consider segmenting the target audience and developing customized strategies designed to reach specific target groups.

## Contact Information

Eric Meerkamper; Partner, D-Code  
401 Richmond St West Suite 251  
Toronto, Ontario  
M5V 3A8  
416-599-5400 x 30  
[www.d-code.com](http://www.d-code.com)