

NEW TRENDS IN YOUTH GAMBLING REVEALED BY 2019 MINNESOTA STUDENT

Youth gambling behavior, as reflected in the Minnesota Student Survey (MSS), has been analyzed periodically since 1992. Information from the 2019 survey was recently analyzed by Randy Stinchfield, Ph.D., retired gambling researcher at the University of Minnesota Medical School.

Some of the more significant trends and findings from the latest survey data include:

- For the majority of students, gambling participation has decreased significantly. When gambling items were first included in the MSS in 1992, youth gambling participation rates were 70%. However, now 70% represents the portion of youth who do *not* gamble.
- The rate of problem gambling remains essentially unchanged from the last survey in 2016 (0.5%; an additional 2% report problems associated with their gambling).
- Boys gamble more than girls (38.5% vs. 21.1%) and gamble more frequently than girls (9.7% vs. 3.4%).
- Fewer students were gambling in 2019 than were gambling in 1992 (84% of boys in 1992 vs. 39% in 2019; 62% of girls in 1992 vs. 21% in 2019).
- Fewer students were gambling frequently in 2019 than were gambling frequently

in 1992 (23% of boys in 1992 vs. 10% in 2019; 6% of girls in 1992 vs. 3% in 2019).

- Fewer underage students reported buying lottery products in 2019 than in 1992 (43% of boys in 1992 vs. 8% in 2019; 38% of girls in 1992 vs. 7% in 2019)

A fact sheet highlighting the study findings and the full research study can be viewed at www.northstarproblemgambling.org/youth-gambling.

Q&A with Dr. Stinchfield

We asked Dr. Stinchfield about the results of his analysis, what the findings suggest about youth gambling in Minnesota, and what future studies might entail.

Q: Why do you think that youth gambling, in general, has dropped so much?

A: It's hard to know for sure as nobody has really studied this phenomenon. It's probably due partially to prevention efforts in school but may also be a matter of changing interests over time. Back in 1992, gambling was new in Minnesota and may have been trendier among youth.

Q: What does the data suggest about future youth prevention efforts?

A: While prevention efforts have hopefully played a role in the decline, I think that future youth gambling prevention

messaging can be focused on teaching youth about all aspects of gambling, including the odds involved and to dispel the myth of luck. I think the data also suggests that messaging should be focused on boys and certain minorities, including Native Americans, Hispanics and African Americans.

Q: Are we asking the right questions given the shift to electronic games and embedded gambling elements?

A: Yes and no. We want to continue to ask about common forms of gambling so that we can look at trends over time, but we should add new items that capture new forms of electronic gambling on smart phones.

Q: What do you think would be "best practices" from a survey perspective next time?

A: I'd like there to be more gambling items on the survey. We have tried to do this in the past but there are so many interests represented in the survey that there is limited space. The last survey included three questions related to problem gambling and four questions on participation. I would like there to be more questions about smart phone use, social media, e-sports and other items that some would consider gambling.



Susan Sheridan Tucker
Executive Director
NPGA

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Flexibility During a Time of Uncertainty

As I pen this, it's been approximately a month since Governor Walz issued the stay-at-home order, but I've actually been officing from home a bit longer. There's a certain privilege to be able to continue operations fairly seamlessly through a pandemic.

In the same vein, I'm particularly grateful that Minnesota's Department of Human Services came through and honored the governor's waivers to permit reimbursement for telehealth services. It just makes sense to keep clients and the providers as safe as possible. Frankly, I hope this forces the issue and that telehealth becomes a permanent tool in a counselor's toolbox. Telehealth sessions can be a useful substitute when Minnesota snowstorms rage or for those who simply live too far to see a counselor on a regular basis. There should be no limitations for those seeking treatment for problem gambling. This issue of Northern Light takes a look at how counselors are incorporating telehealth into their practices.

In early March, I attended the 2020 New Horizons Conference hosted by BCLC (British Columbia Lottery Corporation). While my experience at the conference is chronicled in detail on page 6, I have to say it's one of the most valuable conferences I attend all year. I always come away very impressed with the amount of focus and resources Canada dedicates to problem gambling. In Canada, gambling disorder is recognized as a public health issue, with resources much more plentiful than they are here in the U.S. We long for the day the federal government acknowledges gambling disorder as an addiction, let alone a public health concern that deserves public funding.

As you know, we had to postpone our conference. Though extremely disappointing, it was obviously necessary. It's been rescheduled for December 1, 2020. All the speakers scheduled for April 30 are available to attend, so that part of our program will not change. Because dates were limited (and I'm still not convinced we will get the go ahead to hold it due to continued COVID-19 concerns), we are foregoing the second day's world café. I will be reviewing how we might hold that event at a different time. We also set a date for 2021, again just one day, April 21, 2021. NPGA will be celebrating its twentieth year of advocacy and we plan to celebrate this significant milestone with a great lineup of speakers and a little tooting of our own horn.

It's an understatement to say that uncertainty abounds. Whatever the coming months bring, I hope you, your families, staff and clients stay healthy.

Be well,
Susan Sheridan Tucker

Northstar Problem Gambling Alliance is a nonprofit agency whose mission is to help those affected by problem gambling in Minnesota. We do this by promoting awareness and understanding of the issue via our website, newsletter, community education programs, sponsorship of the Minnesota State Conference on Problem Gambling, and training of professionals in preventing and treating problem gambling.

Northern Light is funded by a grant from the state of Minnesota. Designer: ESD Graphics. Writer: Bill Stein



IN THEIR OWN Sandra Kay's Story

Words



For me, gambling led to two life-changing experiences. The first changed me for the worse. The second connected me to a support network I'd never had before.

My first experience gambling was when my brother gave me \$20 and took me to a casino. His intent was to teach me a lesson in how easy it is to throw money away gambling. Our birth father had a gambling addiction that devastated my brother's childhood and he didn't want the same thing to happen to me. (I was adopted at an early age and escaped those consequences.) But the problem with that lesson was that I actually turned that \$20 into \$60, and I guess I became unknowingly hooked.

The next time I gambled was several years later when I was out on a date after I'd been divorced and gone through having breast cancer. I just loved it. So much so that I went back the next day by myself. I enjoyed not having to answer to anyone. I'd been through a lot and figured I deserved to have fun.

I started going to the casinos more often. I'd make the 200-mile drive from Wichita to casinos in Kansas City and sometimes even further to play at larger casinos. It was a big

investment of time and money, but I looked forward to it.

What started as recreation and something fun to do, became an obsession. I probably gambled for more than 20 years.

It got to the point where I lost a whole paycheck. That was the most irresponsible thing I'd ever done. I remember thinking, "What the hell?!" I endeavored that that would never happen again, but it did.

Things got scarier and scarier. I lied about where I was going and to friends about the reasons I needed money. At the same time, I felt pressure to provide for my girls. I convinced myself that I would try to win to pay everyone back and pay my bills. It got so bad, I started writing bad checks and stealing.

I couldn't reconcile the person I had become with the person I thought I was. I didn't understand then — because I didn't know about gambling addiction — but now I realize I was in the throes of addiction.

I couldn't keep up with rent and was continually evicted. I ended up living in my car, which I tried to hide. I then lost my job because I performed badly after being out

all night gambling.

I decided I was going to kill myself. I went to the Emergency Room and explained that I felt suicidal. The staff wanted to admit me but I convinced them I'd be OK and left.

A short time later, I found myself back in the hospital parking lot, ready to go back in, but I fell asleep in my car. That's when the first of several extraordinary moments happened. A security guard knocked on the window, waking me up. She walked me into the hospital, where I was admitted to the Behavior Health unit and for a week had three meals a day and a roof over my head.

The next extraordinary moment occurred when the social worker at the hospital, who knew about gambling addiction, recommended a residential gambling treatment center in Minnesota (Vanguard Center for Gambling Recovery at Project Turnabout) where I could go at no cost. She made the arrangements and, not trusting I wouldn't try to go back to gambling after treatment, made me think about planning my life after I finished treatment.

I finally told my daughters about everything and they were very supportive. I felt this, too, was extraordinary.

I expected to return to Wichita but Sheryl Anderson, program coordinator at Vanguard, convinced me that I'd be better off starting a new life of sober living in Minneapolis, where I could live with other recovering addicts and learn how to build a life without gambling. Another extraordinary moment in the series was having John Rundquist as my counselor after I left Vanguard. He has made such a difference for me.

Perhaps the crowning extraordinary moment was getting involved in Gamblers Anonymous (GA). Through GA, I have met such wonderful people that have supported me in my recovery and in so many other ways. It is such a gift to be honest, to be accepted and to be understood.



ONLINE GAMBLING INCREASES DURING VIRUS CRISIS

As of April 9, less than four weeks after most casinos suspended operations amid COVID-19 concerns, online gambling appears to be on the rise both in the U.S. and around the world. According to Global Poker, an online social poker room, use of online poker sites increased by 43 percent in the U.S. since social distancing and lockdowns took effect. Notably, there was a 255 percent increase in first-time poker players, suggesting that gamblers unable to participate in their preferred ways, such as sports betting and those who frequent casinos, may be switching over.

A similar trend has been noted in Australia, where a study showed there was a 67 percent increase in online gambling the week following the shutdown of all non-essential services due to COVID-19. In fact, the Australian study revealed that the online gambling industry was a major benefactor of the shutdown, along with food delivery and online retail and subscription services.

It is currently illegal to bet online in Minnesota. Those who bet online are using offshore, unregulated venues.

If you or someone you know has moved to online gambling and would benefit from using a self-exclusion tool, NPGA is offering a free one-year subscription to Gamban, an app that will block tens of thousands of world gambling sites on all devices. If interested, please email sst@northstarproblemgambling.org.

GA MEETINGS DURING THE AGE OF COVID-19

The social distancing requirements imposed by Minnesota to reduce the spread of COVID-19 have had a significant impact on Gamblers Anonymous (GA) and other recovery groups who count on confidential, in-person meetings to create meaningful connection. "It's not the same as a physical meeting, where you can see each other, hug, cry and laugh," says a member of GA in Minnesota.

Although Zoom and other teleconference-

capable vehicles have provided a measure of humanity to person-to-person meetings, they are not used by groups concerned with anonymity and security concerns. Instead, local meetings are taking place online without video.

International GA also hosts a weekly call-in meeting that includes people from all over the world. While this meeting took place before the COVID-19 crisis, it has now branched into a meeting that is held every night of the week.

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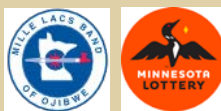
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COVID-19 SPURS INCREASE IN TELEHEALTH COUNSELING

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected virtually all aspects of life. Gambling counseling is no exception.

Given the drastic reduction in social contact, we asked several gambling counselors about the state of gambling therapy and the changes they've observed. Here's what they said:

Lisa Vig, Gamblers Choice

More of our clients are keeping appointments than we anticipated. *It tells me that staying connected to recovery support is very important at this time.* They have also been initiating and requesting additional individual support as well.

We use a variety of platforms, including Teams, Zoom and the phone. One accommodation we've had to make using these platforms is reducing the size of groups. It's more difficult to manage attention spans, allowances for everyone to talk and receive the attention they need with eight or nine in one group. We've adapted by offering shorter groups, more often, with fewer attendees.

As a counselor, I find that takes a different level of energy to conduct telehealth counseling. *When you're not in the same room sharing the same space, you have to pay more attention to their voice, inflections, participation and engagement since the ability to watch body language or other expressions is compromised.* The clients we have worked with have expressed gratitude

at every opportunity to stay connected.

I think telehealth counseling has a very valuable place, especially in this part of the country where we are dealing with rural living and limited availability of counselors. At least 50 percent of our clients would benefit from the option of telecounseling. Being able to utilize a combination of in person and telecounseling to customize delivery of treatment services would be ideal.

Craig Johnson, Club Recovery

Once all of my clients became used to the change and requirements of the stay-at-home orders, my group attendance has been good. Most clients are participating and "showing" up for group.

Except for rare occasions, we are completely virtual. We use phone or a Telehealth platform to conduct interactions with all clients at every level of service we provide.

While counseling is not a "one size fits all" process, I think that at some level and some circumstances all clients can benefit from using a Telehealth platform. We need to adapt and move forward with as many innovations in reaching out to clients that we can. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis, the treatment community has been advocating vigorously for the use of Telehealth platforms and CMS and DHS recently approved that all services we provide can

be done with Telehealth. Telehealth is a capability that we must keep as an option to use when a client may not be able to access services via traditional means.

There is a great need for gambling disorder providers outside of the Twin Cities, Duluth and near Fargo. Without Telehealth, potential clients in those areas would not be able to get services. *As a community of providers we must promote this capability wherever and whenever possible to reach all those who need help.* This will be the main topic of discussion at the next meeting of the DHS Advisory Committee on Gambling Disorder on May 14.

Paul Mladnick, Solo Practice/ Bridges & Pathways

I don't think Telehealth counseling is ideal but I don't think that much is lost. *About half of my clients prefer to cancel appointments until we have the all clear.* I'd say about 30 percent are coming to my office while about 20 percent are receiving counseling over the phone.

From a practical perspective, I am keeping my office sanitized prior to each session and I do practice social distancing in my office.

I have noticed that the number of referrals is down since March 17, so I have considerable availability for those with a gambling problem or those concerned for family and friends.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FURTHER REFINING RESPONSIBLE GAMBLING TOOLS

By Susan Sheridan Tucker

In early March 2020, I attended the annual New Horizons Conference on Responsible Gambling. It's a conference that always provides great insights and this year did not disappoint.

The theme was Future-Proofing the Gambling Industry, an aspirational goal where a gambling operator no longer makes money from those exhibiting problem gambling. This may seem like pie-in-the-sky, but several countries are taking steps through advancements in technology that enable them to better identify customers taking too many gambling risks and to engage them in conversations about risks and potential financial harm. We are seeing a subtle shift in the goals of responsible gambling from providing safeguards and prevention initiatives to *supporting safer gambling for all*, including reinforcing "ideal" consumer behaviors.

"Future-Proofing the Industry: Player Safeguards and Prevention"

There was much discussion about a paper by Judith Glynn of Strategic Science titled, "Future Proofing the Industry: Player Safeguards and Prevention." The paper sparked conversation about the role of responsible gambling tools, how to make those tools more efficient and effective, and determining ways in which the risks can be identified and addressed. The paper called for greater cooperation between regulators, operators and players, recognizing each has an important role in determining the best ways to minimize the harms associated with gambling.

Some highlights of the paper include:

- Establish the objective as making gambling safer for all players through education and awareness resources. This includes limit-setting tools, self-assessment tools and revising policies for on-site access to personal credit (ATMs, credit cards and limits on house credit, which ensures that the operator has ownership in the process).
- Operators must take a direct role in keeping their players safe. They see firsthand the risky behavior in their customers and have the ability to understand their players' playing activities and payment practices.
- Operators can respond to a customer exhibiting risky behavior through well-designed messages and personal intervention with trained staff on the floor intervening when a customer escalates their risk levels.
- Success in "future-proofing" will require cooperative efforts from operators, regulators and customers.

The issue that remains with responsible gambling programs is evidence showing that reliable and effective changes ensue in a customer's behavior. While there is some evidence showing that responsible gambling tools create positive changes in behavior and reduce risk, the adoption rate of such tools is still too low. More work needs to be done to provide messaging that stimulates

self-evaluation and personal relevance. Players need to receive messaging that instills autonomy and assists the player in their decision-making. Additionally, self-assessment tools must provide immediate results with personalized and actionable feedback. It's equally important to respond to the risk as much as just identifying it. While self-assessment tools provide a window to communicate with players, more research is needed to evaluate its effectiveness on actual behavioral change.

The full paper and others from New Horizons 2020 Conference can be found at our website www.northstarproblemgambling.org/reports-presentations.



NOTABLE FYIs

- NPGA purchased several one-year subscriptions for Gamban, an online gambling blocking tool. This is available to you or your clients at no cost. Please email sst@northstarproblemgambling.org for the code.
- NPGA's conference has been rescheduled for December 1, 2020, at Earle Brown Heritage Center, assuming large crowd functions are permissible by that time.
- Scholarships will be available for the National Council's annual conference on Problem Gambling, currently scheduled for July 22-25, if it isn't postponed or cancelled. More details to follow.

STATE of MINNESOTA

NPGA BRINGS ADVOCACY TO STATE SENATE

On March 3, 2020, Susan Sheridan Tucker, NPGA executive director, and Brianna Doura-Schawohl, director of advocacy for the National Council on Problem Gambling (NCPG), addressed the Minnesota senate's Government Finance and Policy and Elections Committee. They advocated for funding for problem gambling in SF1894. The following are some excerpts from this testimony (the complete testimony can be found at www.northstarproblemgambling.org/advocacy).

"We insist that any measure affecting the availability of gambling must provide for those adversely affected by this activity and will oppose any bill that does not include these provisions."

"Governor Walz recognized March as Problem Gambling Awareness Month. All over the country organizations like ours will make special efforts throughout the month to educate all that problem gambling is an addiction, a public health issue and treatment is available and works."

"We must not expand an industry without making provisions for the real people and their families who suffer the psychological, emotional and financial consequences from this insidious addiction."

"Unlike the bill introduced last session, this version fails to set aside any money for treatment, training, prevention, research and responsible gambling. This is a huge missed opportunity for Minnesota to set a new standard for its gaming industry. Nor does it provide enough language to identify whose standards the new commission will use to prevent compulsive and problem gambling."

"The United States is undergoing a rapid and massive expansion of gambling since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Murphy vs. NCAA in May 2018. NCPG and the NPGA urge including the following four principles in the bill."

1. Ensure that any expansion legislation includes dedicated funds to prevent and treat gambling addiction.
2. Require operators to implement responsible gaming programs that include comprehensive employee training, access to self-exclusion programs, ability to set limits on time and money spent on betting, and specific requirements for the inclusion of help/prevention messages in external marketing.
3. Identify an agency or entity with the tools and expertise to enforce responsible gaming requirements and create a comprehensive self-exclusion program.

4. Conduct research on the prevalence of gambling addiction prior to expansion and at regular periods thereafter in order to monitor impacts of gambling and have data that will support evidence-based mitigation efforts.

"Why wouldn't Minnesota want to include consumer protection tools? Gaming regulators around the world are adopting more responsible gambling programs because they have made this connection and acknowledge they would prefer to have healthy players participate in their business."

"We ask that before this bill goes any further, please build in the provisions NPGA and NCPG support. Any and all gambling expansion should mandate adequate consumer protections and set aside at least 1% of the funds from the tax revenue to support Minnesota's problem gambling programs. We look forward to working with the authors of the bill to ensure that any expansion of sports betting comes with the greatest benefit to the state, at the least risk to its citizens."

NPGA ARTICLE APPEARS IN MINNESOTA PHYSICIAN

An article authored by NPGA was published in the November 2019 issue of *Minnesota Physician*. The goal of the article was to educate health care providers about gambling disorder, also known as the "hidden addiction." The

article included reference to formal DSM-5 diagnostic criteria to highlight the reality of this addiction. You can read the full article at www.mppub.com/mp-s6-1119.html.





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