

# Gambling problems are more common than drinking problems, according to first-of-its-kind study

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After age 21, problem gambling is considerably more common among U.S. adults than alcohol dependence, even though alcohol dependence has received much more attention, according to researchers at the University at Buffalo's Research Institute on Addictions.

In results published this month in the *Journal of Gambling Studies*, John W. Welte, principal investigator on the study and a national expert on alcohol and gambling pathology, concluded that there is a distinct inconsistency between his research and much of the other research literature. Other research supports the proposition that problem gambling is more common among [adolescents](#) than among adults. Problem gambling has often been described as rare. Even the National Council on Problem Gambling describes it as "rare but treatable."

Welte and colleagues conducted, then combined, results from two national surveys of gambling and alcohol -- one of youth ages 14-21 and the second of adults 18 and older -- to identify patterns of U.S. gambling and alcohol use across the lifespan. They found that gambling, frequent gambling and problem gambling increases in frequency during the teen years, reaches its highest level in the 20s and 30s and then fall off among those over 70.

"No comparable analysis has been done previously and therefore none is available for a direct comparison of these results," Welte says. "But,

given what we found about the persistence of frequent and problem gambling through adulthood, increased prevention and intervention efforts are warranted."

Other results detailed in the article demonstrate that frequent gambling is twice as great among men (28 percent) as among women (13 percent). Men reach their highest rates of both any gambling and frequent gambling in the late teens, while females take longer to reach their highest rates.

The odds of any gambling in the past year are significantly higher for whites than for blacks or Asians, although the odds of frequent gambling are higher for blacks and Native Americans, the study found.

It is also notable that frequent and [problem gambling](#) become more common as socioeconomic status (SES) gets lower; gambling involvement tends to decline as SES rises. Welte speculated as early as 2004 that lower SES Americans may pursue gambling as a way to make money, leading to more difficulties than if their motivation were strictly recreational.

Welte's first telephone survey of adult gambling was conducted in 1999-2000 with 2,631 adults from 4,036 households nationwide. The second survey of youth gambling in 2005-2007 included 2,274 youth -- with parental permission -- from 4,467 households. Both surveys were conducted with residents drawn from all 50 states and the District of Columbia. Questions asked of those who agreed to participate ranged from frequency of drinking, quantity and type of alcoholic beverage to frequency of past-year gambling and type of [gambling](#), such as raffles, cards, casinos, sports betting, horse or dog track, lottery involvement and games of skill.

Provided by University at Buffalo

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