

Expert warns of dangers of Internet gambling, especially on youth

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Participating in an online March Madness bracket or fantasy sport league is harmless fun for most people, but for someone with a gambling addiction, it can be a dangerous temptation.

“Now, with states entertaining the possibility of increasing revenue through legalizing internet gambling, it is even more important to pay attention to groups that may be vulnerable to problem gambling, particularly youth,” says Renee Cunningham-Williams, PhD, gambling addictions expert and associate professor at the Brown School at Washington University in St. Louis.

“Internet gambling provides youth with increased opportunities to gamble, which is particularly concerning because this generation is arguably the most technologically savvy of any generation in history.”

Cunningham-Williams says that young people have not passed through the period of risk for many mental disorders, yet need to navigate coming of age in an environment of increased acceptability and accessibility to gambling.

“Based on available research, it is unclear if the Internet contributes to more gambling problems, but we know that those who choose to gamble using the Internet and experience problems are often involved in other forms of gambling as well,” she says.

“The Internet may make gambling opportunities more attractive,

accessible and available.”

Cunningham-Williams agrees with the National Council on Problem Gambling’s position that advocates a harm-reduction public health approach to problem gambling.

“Such an approach recognizes that strong regulation is necessary but not sufficient,” she says.

“We need a comprehensive strategy that involves prevention and education about the harms associated with illegal and [problem gambling](#), effective treatment, and continued research. We do not currently have a lead federal agency to advocate for efforts to reduce the harm associated with problem [gambling](#).”

Cunningham-Williams says that although most Americans gamble without significant problems, for those who do experience problems, and the even larger at-risk groups, the individual, familial and social costs are devastating.

“There is help available — call 1-888-bets off,” she says.

Provided by Washington University in St. Louis

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