

Parental monitoring lowers odds of a gambling problem

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Keeping an eye on your child can lower their odds for gambling by young adulthood, according to research conducted at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health. Adolescents who had poor parental supervision at age 11, and which continued to decline through age 14, were significantly more likely than their peers to be problem gamblers between ages 16-22.

The study, "Parental Monitoring Trajectories and Gambling," is the first to examine the relationship between parental monitoring during early adolescence and gambling behaviors in late adolescence and [young adulthood](#). Results are online in the journal *Addiction*.

The Columbia researchers and colleagues from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health followed 514 Baltimore youth surveyed on parental monitoring and gambling. Two distinct patterns emerged: 85% were in a "Stable group" that reported consistently high levels of parental monitoring; the remaining 15% were in a "Declining group" that reported slightly lower levels of parental monitoring at age 11 with declining rates to age 14.

While the Stable group reported significantly higher levels of monitoring at each time point, the differences between the two groups were modest, yet statistically significant; both the Stable and Declining groups were fairly well monitored during early adolescence. The Stable class was monitored approximately all of the time, and the Declining class was monitored most of the time. "The finding that such a small difference in

[parental monitoring](#) is associated with a significantly increased risk for problem gambling could be due to the current sample of predominantly African American youth from urban, low SES environments in which parents tend to be more aware of the potential detrimental impact their environment has on their children and, thus, try to closely monitor the youth," said Silvia Martins, MD, PhD, Mailman School of Public Health associate professor of Epidemiology, senior and corresponding author.

"As children grow older, it is normal for them to spend more time outside their home with friends, and for parents to give them the freedom to do so. But parents should be careful to stay engaged and be vigilant," said Dr. Martins. "Teenagers seek autonomy, but they may not yet have the maturity to keep them from engaging in risky behaviors."

Importantly, the study is the first to identify a way for parents to prevent future problems with gambling. Gender, race, socioeconomic status, impulsivity, aggression, and affiliation with peers who engage in antisocial behavior are all known risk factors for gambling, but all are difficult to intervene on. Parental monitoring, on the other hand, is known to be an effective intervention throughout early adolescence. While the intervention in this study lasted just one year and targeted academic achievement and aggression, the individuals were interviewed annually since first grade (when they were 6 years-old).

"This study identifies a characteristic that future gambling prevention and intervention programs can target," said Dr. Martins.

A potential explanation for the decline in gambling in the Stable group could also be explained by the fact that priorities begin to shift as adolescents mature, and the time previously spent on risky activities, such as gambling, is now often devoted to establishing careers and intimate relationships. Another reason suggested by Dr. Martins and colleagues is that with the advent of online social networking sites,

young adults could be spending more free time on their smart phones, computers, and other electronic devices instead of gambling.

Youth Gambling: An Increasing Concern

Gambling among youth is a growing problem. Studies have shown that more than 80% of them have engaged in gambling, and as many as 13% meet the diagnostic criteria to be considered problem gamblers. This encompasses a preoccupation with gambling and obtaining money to gamble, gambling despite adverse consequences, and an inability to stop gambling despite a desire to do so.

In Maryland, where the study population was based, video lottery terminals were legalized in 2008 and table games, in 2012. Across the country, the gambling industry is on the rise. "The recent expansion of gambling outlets coupled with the growth of online gambling could increase gambling among young adults. For this reason, it is important to understand what makes a child vulnerable to problem [gambling](#) and ways to intervene," said Dr. Martins.

The study builds on previous research by Dr. Martins finding that a pattern of impulsivity beginning in the first grade predicts [problem gambling](#) in urban male teenagers.

Provided by Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health

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