

# Expansion of gambling does not lead to more problem gamblers, study finds

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A new study by John Welte has shown that despite an increase in gambling opportunities, rates of problem gambling have remained stable.

In the past decade, online gambling has exploded and several states, including New York, have approved measures to legalize various types of gambling. So, it's only natural that the number of people with gambling problems has also increased, right?

Wrong, say researchers at the University at Buffalo Research Institute on Addictions (RIA).

"We compared results from two nationwide telephone surveys, conducted a decade apart. We found no significant increase in the rates of problem gambling in the U.S., despite a nationwide increase in gambling opportunities," says John W. Welte, PhD, senior research scientist at RIA.

The first telephone survey interviewed 2,613 people in 1999-2000, and the second survey interviewed 2,963 people in 2011-13. Individuals were asked about their participation in a broad range of gambling activities, including raffles, office pools, pulltabs, bingo, cards, pool, gambling machines, casinos, lottery, Internet gambling, and sports, horse or dog track betting.

Despite an increase in gambling opportunities, rates of problem gambling remained stable. Problem gambling includes behaviors such as constantly thinking about gambling, increasing bets to sustain thrill, lying to conceal gambling activity and the inability to stop gambling, among others.

Using several different criteria, the researchers found no statistically significant change in problem gambling or its more severe form, pathological gambling. Rates of problem gambling remained in the 3.5 to 5.5 percent range, depending on the measure used, and rates of [pathological gambling](#) were in the 1.0 to 2.4 percent range.

And although there have been frequent stories in the media about women who are gambling addicts, men are more than twice as likely as women to be problem gamblers. In fact, the survey showed the prevalence of problem gambling among women actually decreased, from 2.9 to 2.5 percent.

In addition, the researchers found that overall participation in gambling activities decreased. The percentage of respondents who gambled in the past year dropped to 76.9 percent in 2011-13, down from 82.2 percent in 1999-2000. Among respondents who gambled at least once in the past year, there was a significant reduction in the average number of days on which they gambled—59.9 days per year in 1999-2000 to 53.7 days in 2011-13.

"Our results show it is clear that U.S. residents are gambling less often," Welte says.

Previous research by Welte found that people are twice as likely to be problem gamblers if they live within 10 miles of a casino. So, with a rising number of casinos in the country, why hasn't [problem gambling](#) increased at the same rate?

Welte can only speculate. "It may be due to the economic downturn we experienced starting in 2008, which resulted in a decline in casino business," he says. "It also could be due to the 'theory of adaptation'—that while initial increases in exposure to gambling venues lead to increases in rates of [problem gambling](#), a population will eventually adapt and further negative consequences will not continue."

Provided by University at Buffalo

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