

Teenagers gamble away their education

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The odds are stacked against teenagers who regularly gamble. A new study in Springer's *Journal of Gambling Studies* shows that a 14-year-old who gambles is more likely to struggle at school. The study was led by Frank Vitaro of the University of Montreal, Sainte-Justine Hospital Research Center and the Research Unit on Children's Psychosocial Maladjustment in Canada.

In this long-term population-based study, 766 Canadian children were assessed when they were 14 and 17 years old through self-reports and responses from their parents. They were questioned about their gambling habits and academic performance with a focus on how many different types of gambling activities they participated in, rather than how often they gambled. This is because a diversity in someone's gambling habits has been found to better predict whether someone will develop gambling problems.

Information about the social status and structure of the families the children grew up in was also gathered from their parents. This took account of the level of education that the children's parents had attained, and the jobs they held.

A significant, albeit modest, correlation was found between a teenager who gambled at the age of 14 and 17 and his or her subsequent academic performance. Young people who already gambled regularly by the time they were 14 years old most often also saw a drop in their academic performance in the years following.

Vitaro says that teenagers' gambling activities after school hours often take up much of the time they might otherwise have spent on school-related work. Many gamblers are also known to skip classes.

He explains that through gambling, adolescents are also often exposed to antisocial peer groups, which in turn might diminish school engagement and [school](#) performance, either directly or through the increase of behavioral and social problems.

"Our results also confirm the pervasive role of socio-familial risk, which has been related to both elevated levels of gambling involvement and low academic [performance](#) among adolescents in previous studies," says Vitaro, who adds that personal factors such as impulsivity also play a role.

"From a clinical perspective, these findings suggest that children living in an unfavorable environment and manifesting high levels of impulsivity should be targeted for early prevention purposes," adds Vitaro. "Failing early prevention, reducing [gambling](#) involvement may also curb to some extent the decline in [academic performance](#)."

More information: Frank Vitaro et al, Longitudinal Links Between Gambling Participation and Academic Performance in Youth: A Test of Four Models, *Journal of Gambling Studies* (2018). [DOI: 10.1007/s10899-017-9736-9](#)

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