

High numbers of young people experimenting with gambling, study shows

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Two fifths (41 percent) of young people aged 11 to 16 report having engaged in gambling in the past year, a study shows.

The analysis from Cardiff University academics, the largest of its kind in the UK, reveals fruit machines at an arcade, pub or club were the most popular form of gambling, followed by playing cards for money with friends and purchasing scratch cards. Placing a private bet among friends and buying lotto tickets were also among the top gambling activities.

Of those who said they had gambled in the past 12 months, 16 percent said they felt bad as a result. Boys were more frequent gamblers than girls. Young people from minority [ethnic groups](#), and students who felt that they did not belong in their school, were also more likely to engage in gambling and to feel bad about the experience.

Researchers say the results show more needs to be done to raise awareness of the risks of gambling and recommend greater consideration of the responsibilities of industry and government, schools and families in minimizing young people's exposure to it.

Dr. Graham Moore, based at the Centre for the Development and Evaluation of Complex Interventions for Public Health Improvement (DECIPHer), where the research was conducted, said: "While over the past 20 years or so, lots of adolescent risk behaviors like smoking and drinking alcohol have become less common, we are seeing the emergence of new risk behaviors in today's society. Our research suggests that gambling might be emerging as a new public health issue.

"The evidence shows that people who gamble earlier in life are more likely to become problem gamblers in adulthood. The fact that there is widespread opportunity to gamble and limited education regarding its risks means that adolescents are particularly vulnerable to its harms. More work needs to be done, with policymakers, schools, families and young people, to understand how young people's exposure to gambling can be reduced."

Data for the study were gathered from more than 37,000 students who completed gambling questions as part of the 2017 School Health Research Network Student Health and Wellbeing Survey, which represents 193 secondary schools in Wales.

Respondents were asked a range of questions about gambling, including if they had gambled in the past 12 months, how often they had felt bad about gambling and what sorts of gambling they had participated in.

In the UK, commercial gambling is legal only for those aged 18 and over with two exceptions. Young people between 16 and 18 can legally purchase National Lottery products, including draw-based games, scratch-cards and online instant wins. There are no age restrictions on category D games machines, which include fruit machines.

Lead author Professor G.J. Melendez-Torres, who conducted the research at Cardiff University and is now at the University of Exeter, said: "Problem gambling is associated with lower self-esteem, poorer [school](#) performance and an increased risk for other addictions, as well as feelings of guilt, shame and self-hatred.

"Our findings demonstrate the importance of educating young people and parents about the potential harms of [gambling](#) and support policy recommendations for schools and the education sector to raise awareness of these issues."

The research is published in the *European Journal of Public Health*.

More information: G J Melendez-Torres et al. Prevalence of gambling behaviors and their associations with socioemotional harm among 11–16 year olds in Wales: findings from the School Health Research Network survey, *European Journal of Public Health* (2019). [DOI: 10.1093/eurpub/ckz176](https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckz176)

Provided by Cardiff University

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