

Chapter 11

Prevention Efforts Toward Reducing Gambling Problems¹

Jeffrey L. Derevensky, Ph.D., Rina Gupta, Ph.D.,
Laurie Dickson, M.A. and Anne-Elyse Deguire, M.Sc.

The National Research Council's (1999) seminal review of the scientific literature for the National Gambling Impact Study Commission noted a trend toward the proliferation of gambling venues, increased expenditures, and the seriousness of the adverse consequences for those individuals with a gambling problem. Current attempts at primary prevention of gambling problems have been limited at best (National Research Council, 1999), nevertheless, the need to reduce the prevalence and risks associated with gambling problems remains an important goal. While such primary prevention programs can be conceptualized for individuals of any age, the vast majority of primary prevention programs intended to prevent gambling problems have focused upon youth, with some being oriented for other particularly high-risk and vulnerable groups (e.g., elderly/seniors, minorities,

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1. A large part of this review is based upon a report prepared by Derevensky, Gupta, Dickson, & Deguire (2001). *Prevention Efforts Toward Minimizing Gambling Problem* for the National Council for Problem Gambling, Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS) and the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Washington, D.C.; papers by Dickson, Derevensky, & Gupta (2002). The prevention of youth gambling problems: A conceptual model. *Journal of Gambling Studies*, 18, 161–184; and Dickson, Derevensky & Gupta (2004). Harm minimization and youth gambling problems. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 19, 233–263.

individuals with low income, and those experiencing other impulse and addictive disorders) (see Derevensky, Gupta, Dickson, & Deguire, 2001 for a list of prevention programs). This chapter summarizes the current literature on the prevention of gambling problems and harm minimization, highlights our current knowledge gaps, identifies issues of concern, presents a viable model for the development and evaluation of prevention programs, and provides recommendations for future directions. It is important to note at the outset that the current scientific knowledge concerning adolescent gambling behavior in general, and problematic gambling in specific, and its social impact is just beginning in earnest. As such, before *Best Practices* can be established, further basic and applied empirical and longitudinal research is necessary.

The Prevention of Youth Gambling

Much of the current primary prevention efforts have been aimed at school-age children. This is typical of primary prevention programs focused upon minimizing and/or preventing multiple mental health, antisocial, and risk-taking behaviors. Recent analyses has suggested that today's youth are at high risk for engaging in a multitude of risky behaviors including substance abuse, adolescent pregnancy, youth violence, school dropout (Bronfenbrenner, McClelland, Wethington, Moen, & Ceci, 1996; Weissberg, Wallberg, O'Brien, & Kuster, 2003) and gambling (National Research Council, 1999). Grasping the severity of the consequences associated with youth problem gambling is often difficult in light of the widespread attitude that youth have little readily available access to money and the perception that few have significant gambling or gambling-related problems. The fact that youth gamble has been well established (see the reviews and meta-analyses by Jacobs, 2000, in this volume; National Research Council, 1999; Shaffer & Hall, 1996, 2001). It is important to note that youth not only gamble for money with their peers and family members, but they have been shown to gamble in most forms of legalized and state sanctioned gambling in spite of legal restrictions and prohibitions. While most adolescents gamble in a socially acceptable manner with few apparent gambling related problems, as a group they have been shown to be particularly susceptible and at-risk for the development of serious gambling problems (Derevensky & Gupta, 1999; Derevensky, Gupta & Winters, 2003; Gupta & Derevensky, 2000; National Research Council, 1999).

Adolescent prevalence rates of problem gambling have been consistently reported to be between 4–8% (two to four times that of adults) (Gupta & Derevensky, 1998a; Jacobs, 2000; National Research Council, 1999; Shaffer & Hall, 1996, 2001), with another 10–15% of youth being at-risk for the development of a serious gambling problem (Derevensky & Gupta,