

GAMBLING BEHAVIORS OF MISSOURI COLLEGE STUDENTS

Partners in Prevention (PIP) is Missouri's higher education substance abuse consortium dedicated to creating healthy and safe college campuses, by lowering college student underage and high-risk drinking, impaired driving, and other risky health behaviors. Progress of these goals is monitored through the Missouri College Health Behavior Survey (MCHBS) implemented by campuses annually each spring. In addition to providing insight into risky health behaviors, the MCHBS also examines students' non-health related behaviors such as gambling and driving behaviors. The following data from the 2012 MCHBS illustrates distinct differences between students who abstain from gambling, gamble occasionally, and those who are frequent gamblers.

| | NON-GAMBLERS (n=5736) | OCCASIONAL GAMBLERS (n=2107) | FREQUENT GAMBLERS (n=198) |
|---|---------------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| Experienced 1-2 Mental Health Stressors | 37% | 36% | 32% |
| Experienced 3+ Mental Health Stressors | 15% | 13% | 24% |
| Experienced any Mental Health Stressor | 52% | 49% | 56% |
| Suicidal Ideation or Attempts | 14% | 11% | 16% |

**Non-gamblers defined as students who have not gambled in past year; Occasional Gamblers defined as those who reported gambling less than 1-2 times per month; Frequent Gamblers defined as those who gamble more than once per week.*

DISCUSSION

According to the 2012 MCBHS, the majority of Missouri college students (71%) do not participate in gambling activities. The MCHBS defines these gambling activities as: any kind of poker or other card games for money; games in casinos; sports gambling with friends, coworkers or bookies; gambling on fantasy sports; gambling with the stock market; participation in the lottery; or video machines. Of those that do gamble, 72% report doing so less than six times per year.

However, when examining the differences between those who gamble in a healthy, occasional manner, and those who gamble frequently, we see stark differences in the mental health of those college students. Fifty-six percent (56%) of frequent gamblers report experiencing a mental health stressor in the past year (such as depression, chronic sleep issues, anxiety, etc.) as compared to 49% of occasional gamblers. The prevalence of frequent gamblers who reported experiencing three or more of these mental health stressors is almost twice as much as the frequency reported by occasional gamblers (24% and 13%, respectively). Perhaps the most troubling finding is the percentage of students experiencing suicidal ideation

or attempting suicide; 16% of frequent gamblers report thinking about suicide or attempting suicide, compared to 11% of occasional gamblers.

SUMMARY

While it is important to note that a majority of students are not engaging in frequent gambling, students who engage in this problematic behavior may be in need of additional mental health support. As a group of students, frequent gamblers may be hard to identify and campuses can find it difficult to provide services to this population. However, resources exist in Missouri to assist campuses in their work to provide outreach to problem gamblers. One such resource provided by PIP is found at **gambling.missouri.edu**. This site includes fact sheets about gambling and information for parents and educators. Suggestions for institutions to address problem gambling include incorporating gambling information in orientation programs and working with the campus counseling center. Additional resources can be found at **www.888betsoff.com**. For further information, please contact the Partners in Prevention staff.

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