

Gambling Attitudes and Behaviors: A 2011 Survey of Adult Iowans

Executive Summary

Prepared for the Iowa Department of Public Health, Office of Problem Gambling Treatment and Prevention
Prepared by the University of Northern Iowa, Center for Social and Behavioral Research
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Background & Methodology

- The Iowa 2011 Gambling Attitudes and Experiences Survey was conducted by the Center for Social and Behavioral Research (CSBR) at the University of Northern Iowa (UNI) and funded by the Office of Problem Gambling Treatment and Prevention at the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH).
- The primary purpose of the survey was to collect data from adult Iowans about:
 - types and frequency of gambling activities,
 - prevalence of problem gambling, and
 - awareness and opinions of publicly-funded gambling treatment services.
- Address-based sampling (ABS) was used to invite a random sample of adults living in residential households in Iowa to participate in the survey.
 - Invitation letters were mailed to 10,000 residential household addresses in Iowa.
 - The adult in the household with the most recent birthday was asked to complete the questionnaire online.
 - Telephone follow-up calls were made (when a telephone number was available) to households that did not respond to the invitation to complete the questionnaire online.
 - Between February 26, 2011, and May 9, 2011, questionnaires were completed by a total of 1,700 respondents (470 online and 1,230 by telephone).

Key Findings

- The prevalence rates of any gambling among adult Iowans were: 91% lifetime (ever), 69% during the past 12 months, and 42% during the past 30 days.
- The most frequently mentioned *favorite* gambling activities among adult Iowans were slot machines, lotteries, table games at casinos, cards with family or friends, and scratch tickets/pull-tabs.
- The types of gambling activities adult Iowans *most often engaged in at least once* during the past 12 months were raffle tickets, lotteries, scratch tickets/pull-tabs, and slot machines.
- Lottery numbers and scratch tickets/pull-tabs were the gambling activities *most regularly engaged in* (i.e., daily or weekly) during the past 12 months.

- Internet gambling is one of the least commonly reported types of gambling activities among adult Iowans. About 5% said they have ever gambled online and 2% said they had done so during the past 12 months.
- Among those who said they gambled at least occasionally in the past 12 months, the most important reason given by both men and women for gambling was for *fun or entertainment*. Among those who experienced any symptoms of problem gambling, men more often than women said they gambled for *excitement or challenge*, while women more often than men said they gambled as a *distraction from everyday problems*.
- Among those who *seldom* or *never* gamble, the main reasons for not gambling were the *possibility of losing money* and *not being interested in gambling*.
- Using a scale based on the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV* (DSM), the prevalence estimates of “probable pathological gambling” among adult Iowans was 0.6% for lifetime and 0.3% for the past 12 months. The combined rates for “possible” and “probable” pathological gambling were 1.2% lifetime and 0.5% for the past 12 months.
- Using the Problem Gambling Severity Index, the prevalence of “problem gambling” among adult Iowans was 0.6% for the past 12 months and 2.6% were at moderate risk for problem gambling.
- Using multiple measures of problem gambling, the overall total estimates of “pathological or problem gambling” were 2.0% (lifetime) and 0.7% (past 12 months).
- One or more symptoms of problem gambling were experienced during the past 12 months by approximately 13% of adult Iowans (18% of those who gambled during the past 12 months). The most commonly reported symptoms experienced were (a) betting more money than they could afford to lose, and (b) feeling guilty about the way they gambled or what happens when they gamble.
- Among those with any problem gambling symptoms during the past 12 months, 18% said they wanted to (a) decrease the amount of time they spend gambling, (b) decrease the amount of money they spend gambling, or (c) quit gambling altogether. In total, 8% of adult Iowans who gambled in the past 12 months said they wanted to reduce or quit gambling.
- Approximately 1 in 5 adult Iowans (22%) said they have been negatively affected by the gambling behavior of a family member, friend, or someone else they know.
- A majority of adult Iowans (59%) said they thought treatment for problem gambling “works.” However, only 1 in 3 (36%) said they know of some treatment options in their community and 15% said their community had *no* convenient treatment options.
- Ninety percent of adult Iowans said they are aware of the gambling helpline 1-800-BETS-OFF. However, only 49% were aware that Iowa had publicly-funded gambling treatment services.

Summary

Gambling Activities. Some form of gambling is a common practice among adult Iowans. Most adult Iowans have gambled at least once in their lifetime and more than 2 in 3 Iowans have gambled during the past 12 months. People's three favorite gambling activities were slot machines, lottery numbers, and table games at casinos. The most common gambling activities were buying raffle tickets, lottery numbers, lottery scratch tickets/pull-tabs, and playing slot machines. Internet gambling was one of the least commonly reported gambling activities among adult Iowans. The gambling activities people engaged in most regularly (e.g., daily or weekly) were lotteries and scratch tickets/pull-tabs.

Problem and Pathological Gambling in Iowa. The vast majority of adults who gambled have not developed a "gambling problem." However, about 1 in 6 of those who gambled during the past 12 months (or about 1 in 8 adult Iowans) said they had experienced one or more symptoms of problem gambling during that time. The most common symptoms experienced were (a) betting more money than they could afford to lose, and (b) feeling guilty about the way they gambled or what happened when they gambled.

Consequences of Problem Gambling. Although less than one percent of adult Iowans are classified as pathological or problem gamblers, more than 1 in 5 adults said they personally have been negatively affected by the gambling behavior of a family member, friend, coworker, or someone else they know. Thus, the physical, emotional, and financial consequences of problem gambling not only affect the gamblers themselves, but also have adverse effects on some gamblers' families, friends, employers, coworkers, and communities.

Social Support and Treatment Services. Among those who have experienced one or more symptoms of problem gambling during the past 12 months, 1 in 4 said they had talked with someone about their gambling. More than two-thirds of adults said they were moderately or extremely confident they would recognize the signs that a friend or family member had a gambling problem. An encouraging finding from the present study is that 90% of adult Iowans said they were aware of the 1-800-BETS-OFF helpline. People whose lives have been negatively impacted by gambling can call this helpline to be connected with publicly-funded gambling treatment services provided by the State of Iowa.

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