

Youth Gambling: A Consumer Issue

Today's youth have not known life without casinos and lotteries. Concurrently, youth see the "benefits" in scholarship programs (GA), parks and recreation facilities (CO), and schools (IL) supported by lottery proceeds. But our schools are not addressing the issue.

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Despite increased exposure to gambling, adults assume youth do not gamble as it is illegal until 18 or 21. Studies indicate the majority has gambled and problem gambling among youth exceeds that of adults (National Gambling Impact Study Commission, 1999). Their report listed these conclusions.

- Those who begin gambling at an early age are at high lifetime risk of developing a gambling problem.
 - Youth's rate of pathological gambling is similar to adults but the youth at-risk rate exceeds that of adults.
 - Children of compulsive gamblers are at increased risk of becoming problem or pathological gamblers.
- How do we deal with these situations? At present efforts to directly address the issues are limited. Elizabeth George (1999), Executive Director of the North American Training Institute, proposes that schools and youth organizations develop policies addressing gambling issues. She identifies four actions
- Gather information on the prevalence of youth gambling (who, how often, where?).
 - Develop policies to address these actions (Is gambling banned in schools? Is bingo a sanctioned fundraiser?). Findings from a preliminary study reviewing disciplinary codes of more than 20 Colorado school districts found no mention of policies addressing gambling, games of chance, wagering, betting, or gaming and how these activities are handled. Printed and online codes were reviewed.
 - Offer programs to students at risk or with problems. The North American Training Institute is a leader in preventive education targeting youth. Its "Wanna Bet? Preventing Adolescent Compulsive Gambling" (1997) educational guide targets 5th-8th graders. The Institute's youth-oriented website (www.wannabet.org) and "cool" magazine *Wanna Bet* explore underage gambling.
 - Emphasize primary interventions. Most programs have been remedial (Gamblers Anonymous or hotlines).

Consumer educators must realize that gambling is present and a major problem facing society. It may explain why some students are distracted, give undue attention to the outcome of athletic events, borrow money, sell prized possessions, or commit theft. The first step to effectively deal with this issue is awareness. This need is more acute with the growth of internet gambling (Bell, 1999). From awareness, prevention and intervention programs can be developed that build upon knowledge. The 1999 National Gambling Impact Study Commission's report includes youth gambling and gives the issue a national focus. It includes the North American Association of State and Provincial Lotteries 1999 advertising standards on avoiding appeals to youth. The 1999 American Gaming Association's Voluntary Guidelines for Casinos Marketing and Advertising asked members to 'avoid casino advertising and marketing that specifically appeal to children and minors' (1999, 3-25). Efforts by these industry groups at self-regulation may reflect their awareness of research and potential regulation.

References

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- National Gambling Impact Study Commission. (1999). National gambling impact study. (On-line <http://www.ngisc.gov/reports/finalrpt.html>, June 18, 1999.)
- Wanna Bet? Preventing Adolescent Compulsive Gambling: Educational Guide. (1997). Duluth, MN: North American Training Institute.

Endnotes

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