Older Adult Gambling Prevalence

Research shows that older adults tend to gamble to socialize on excursions, to change their routine, get away for the day and relieve feelings of boredom.1, 2, 3, 11

- Recreational gambling rates: Approximately 28.7% of U.S. adults over the age of 65 gamble recreationally (i.e., they gamble more than 5 times in a year).4
- Disordered gambling rates: Approximately 0.1–1.9% of older adults meet the criteria for disordered gambling.5

Recreational Gambling, Substance Abuse Problems and Mental Health Disorders

Among older adults, those who have a gambling disorder are significantly more likely than recreational and non-gamblers to also have mental health disorders and/or substance abuse problems.

Co-occurring Disorders Among Older Adults by Gambler Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Substance Abuse</th>
<th>Non-Gambler</th>
<th>Recreational Gambler</th>
<th>Gambling Disorder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nicotine Dependence</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol Use Disorder</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drug Use Disorder</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mental Health Disorders</th>
<th>Non-Gambler</th>
<th>Recreational Gambler</th>
<th>Gambling Disorder</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A Mood Disorder</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An Anxiety Disorder</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Personality Disorder</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions (Pietrzak)
Problem/Disordered Gambling and Poor Health Outcomes

Among older adults, those who have experienced gambling problems are significantly more likely than their counterparts who have not experienced gambling problems to have mental disorders, substance abuse problems and/or poor health outcomes.

- Compared to older adults who do not gamble or gamble but are not problem/disordered gamblers, older adult problem/disordered gamblers are more likely to have the following poor health outcomes:
  - Obesity
  - Worse overall physical health

Gambling Pros and Cons

Research shows that older adults are at risk to develop problem gambling, but gambling can also be associated with positive outcomes for older adults.

Some older adult gamblers report:

- Better social support (e.g., someone to talk to about problems)
- Lower levels of depression
- Higher self-rated health
- Higher cognitive functioning

Endnotes