

## Underage Gambling; The Gateway to a Life of Crime and Despair

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In recent years, the problems attributed to underage gambling have been brought to the public's attention; such problems include an increased risk for compulsive gambling, alcohol, drugs, prostitution, and drug dealing. The minds of adolescents, not being fully developed, are no match for the enticements of gambling. Underage gambling serves as the gateway drug to a life of crime. Adolescent gamblers develop an increased sense of guilt and suicidal tendencies. The crisis of underage gambling requires our immediate attention.

The human mind, while always developing, does not reach a level of maturity in areas of impulse control and moral judgment until the early to mid twenties (Neergaard). These lapses in the adolescent brain create a dangerous mixture of urges without the tools or judgment to control them. From this information it is easy to picture the repercussions of the youth caught in the snare of gambling; an ever growing need to continue to gamble. The Journal of Gambling Studies found about four percent of high school students have already reached out for help in concern with their gambling habits (Kaminer 167). The same journal also discovered the rates of compulsive gambling adolescents are higher than the rate of adults (Kaminer 167). These startling figures paint the picture of a crucial problem facing the youth of today.

Underage gambling is a gateway drug to a life of crime. Studies have linked teenage gamblers to an increased risk of aggressive behavior, stealing, drug sales, and prostitution (Kaminer 167). Anyone gambling under the age of eighteen has already committed a crime. The next step to their life of crime probably comes in the form of stealing money from close friends and relatives. From this their crimes escalate to greater, faster ways to get the money to

pay off their debts and fuel their addiction. The crimes they most often chosen are stealing, prostitution, and drug sales; all quick, easy, and illegal ways to get their cash. Underage gambling serves as the marijuana to a life of crime.

The results of the fast paced life of gambling, catches up with teens with a sense of guilt and an increase in their risk for attempting suicide (Kaminer 167-168). In one study they found over thirteen percent of the teenagers they talked with reported a sense of guilt about their gambling (Kaminer 167). The impact of this guilt combined with incomplete emotional and impulse controls produce a dangerous mixture, which has in some cases ended in death. Although these children may start gambling to feel good about themselves, as with drugs and alcohol, they will come back worse for wear.

The increased awareness of underage gambling will hopefully put a stop to the gambling habits of today's youth. Because the fragile minds of adolescents are no match for the lures of gambling, the adults in their life should take the initiative to permanently put a stop to their illegal gambling. The underage gambling habits of youth today will lead to the criminal habits of the youth of tomorrow; once they participate in illegal gambling they can only escalate in the intensity of their crimes until they either come to terms with their mistakes or sitting in a courtroom awaiting sentencing. The guilt resulting from the gambling habits of adolescents put them at an increased risk for suicide. While underage gambling is not a new problem, the current climate of today's society fans the flames of the resulting problems of underage gambling to an all-consuming inferno. Today's problems with underage gambling should be addressed before more children fall victim to the lures of gambling.

## Works Cited

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