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Adolescents' gambling a part of a cluster of problem behaviors

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Ten percent of young adolescent boys -- or one in 10 -- exhibit a symptom of conduct disorder as well as a symptom of risky or problem gambling, according to new research findings from the University at Buffalo's Research Institute on Addictions (RIA).

As the number of conduct disorder symptoms increase, the number of problem gambling symptoms increase in step, the study showed.

Interestingly, female adolescents exhibit conduct disorder (four percent) and risky or problem gambling (two percent) to a much lesser degree.

Symptoms of conduct disorder are defined as a number of chronic behavior problems in childhood and adolescence. These behaviors include lying, stealing, vandalism, impulsivity, substance abuse, verbal and physical aggression, cruelty to pets or people and repetitive behavior that violates the rights of others or social norms.

"Youth without symptoms of conduct disorder have a five percent rate of risky or problem gambling," according to John W. Welte, PhD, lead author of the RIA report. "Youth with symptoms of conduct disorder have a 23 percent rate of risky or problem gambling."

In a study of 2,274 youth between the ages of 14 and 21, Welte and colleagues reported that the extent to which problem gambling and conduct disorder occurred at the same time was much stronger among younger (14-to-15-year-old) adolescents.

For the 14-to-15 age-range, the odds of being a risky or problem gambler increased by a remarkable 80 percent with each additional conduct-disorder symptom during the past year, the study showed. As the age of the adolescents increased, this effect weakened. For the 20-to-21-year-olds, the researchers found no discernible relationship between conduct disorder and risky problem gambling.

The study was published in the October 2009 issue of the *Journal of Adolescent Health*.

Findings include that early-onset problem gamblers have a higher risk for conduct disorder than late-onset problem gamblers; that gambling problems that emerge early are likely a part of a general pattern of problem behaviors, and that gambling problems that emerge later are different in origin.

Among the 439 study participants who currently have at least one symptom of both conduct disorder and problem gambling, conduct disorder started earlier than problem gambling in 77 percent of the cases, results showed. The central message of the study, according to Welte, was that risky or problem gambling was more a part of general deviance for younger persons -- part of a cluster of problem behaviors that emerge early in life.

Source: University at Buffalo (news : web)

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