

Chapter 5

Attitudes and Perceptions of Gambling and Problem Gambling in Illinois

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Chapter 5 Highlights

Attitudes and Perceptions of Gambling and Problem Gambling in Illinois

Approximately 61% of Illinoisans believed the current **availability of gambling opportunities** is OK, while 22.8% believed it is too widely available, 8.3% believed gambling should not be legal in Illinois, and 7.4% believed gambling is not available enough. People with problem gambling (29.2%) were the group most likely to believe gambling was too widely available in the state.

Attitudes about **gambling legality** also varied, with two-thirds of Illinoisans believing that some types of gambling should be legal and some illegal, such as those that harm people or animals.

Of those who initially reported no gambling in the past year, 45.0% of them later reported gambling in the past year when presented with specific types of gambling.

Only half (49.7%) of people who scored as having problem gambling on the PPGM said they **thought they had a gambling problem** only in the past 12 months, 24.5% said they only did more than 12 months ago, and 7.0% said both.

Perception of harm is a risk factor for problem gambling and can influence how problem gambling is addressed. Among Illinoisans, 36.6% indicated that the harms associated with gambling outweigh the benefits, 16.8% indicated the benefits outweigh the harms, and 46.5% said they were about equal.

While general attitudes toward gambling varied among Illinoisans, 96.4% agreed with the statement that **gambling can become an addiction**, 62.3% agreed with the statement that gambling was dangerous for family life, 21.8% agreed with the statement that gambling is morally wrong, and 18.9% agreed with the statement that they would be embarrassed if a family member needed help with a gambling problem.

Of Illinoisans with problem gambling, nearly half agreed with the statement that gambling is a harmful form of entertainment and over 60% agreed with the statement that gambling is dangerous for family life, both higher percentages than people without problem gambling.

When looking at attitudes toward gambling among racial/ethnic groups, more Asian and Hispanic/Latinx Illinoisans agreed with statements that gambling is a harmful form of entertainment, dangerous for family life, morally wrong, and that people who gamble too much cannot be trusted.

According to assessment participants, problem gambling is not well understood and is **stigmatized**, leading to denial of the issue and lack of treatment.

Attitudes and Perceptions of Gambling

As noted previously, gambling disorder is recognized by medical professionals as a type of addiction, similar to substance use disorders. Gambling disorder is a chronic condition, treatable by professionals and other supports for affected individuals. The prevalence of problem gambling in a population is a public health issue. However, gambling is not always recognized this way by the general public nor does the public appear to understand that gambling disorder is treatable. As with other substance use disorders, problem gambling may be seen as a sign of moral weakness, as an act of criminality, or as an individual choice. These attitudes and knowledge about gambling contribute to players' gambling and help-seeking behaviors and have implications for guiding initiatives to address at-risk and problem gambling.

Knowledge about services for treating gambling disorder are another important factor in addressing problem gambling as a public health issue. In the literature, lack of knowledge of treatment options is often cited as a barrier to treatment for a gambling disorder [1]. Feelings of shame, embarrassment, lack of acknowledgment of a problem associated with gambling, and fear of stigma also act as potential barriers to treatment [1]. Assessing the knowledge, attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors of individuals in relation to gambling is an integral part of addressing problem gambling. The following section details assessment participants' and survey respondents' perceptions and attitudes about gambling, its availability, its benefits and harms, as well as knowledge and behaviors related to seeking help for problem gambling.

Perception of Gambling

To understand Illinoisans' perception of what is included under the term gambling, residents were initially asked a general question about their participation in gambling prior to being asked about specific types of gambling. The only guidance given at the beginning of the survey was, *"By gambling we mean when you bet money or something else of value so that you can win or gain money or something else of value."* They were then asked the general question, *"When was the last time, if at all, you bet or gambled for money or something else of value?"* The next series of questions then asked about specific types of gambling, such as instant win or scratch lottery tickets (**Appendix E**). The data were then analyzed to compare their response to the initial general question of the last time they gambled to their responses to the last time they did any of the specific types of gambling listed. Of residents who initially reported never gambling or gambling more than a year ago, 45.0% later reported gambling of some type in the past year. This was highest among Hispanic/Latinx Illinoisans (47.3%) and White Illinoisans (46.3%) and under 40.0% for each of the other groups. Among this group, the most commonly reported types of gambling were instant win or scratch lottery tickets (52.4%), Powerball, Mega Millions, and daily numbers (49.9%), office/friend pool (19.9%), and high-risk trading of stocks, commodities, futures, or virtual currencies (18.1%). It is possible that they did not perceive these activities as gambling, or that these activities did not immediately come to mind when thinking about the last time they gambled. This perception of what is or is not considered "gambling" could be important to address in problem gambling awareness campaigns relative to risks and harms of various activities.

Availability / Legality

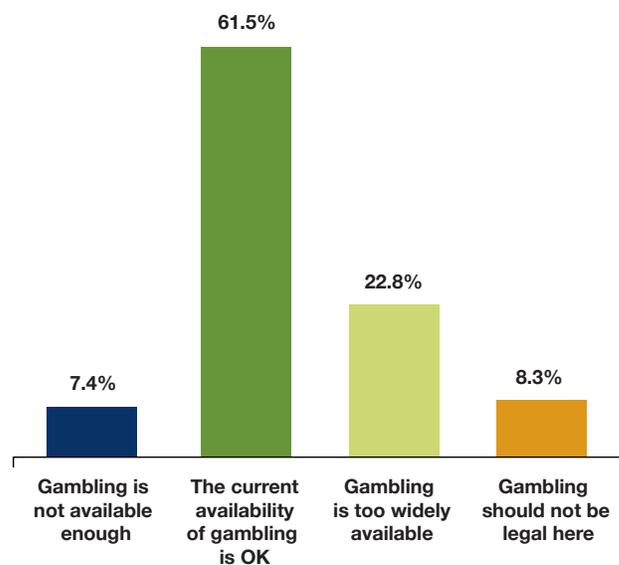
Wide availability or access to gambling opportunities, as well as exposure to popular culture and advertising that support or encourage gambling, may contribute to increased risk of problem gambling [2]. The availability and legality of gambling venues (whether in-person or online) would presumably increase the prevalence of people gambling in a given region and may thereby increase the prevalence of problem gambling in the population. However, evidence from the research literature is mixed about the effect that gambling expansion has on the prevalence of problem gambling [3–6]. Some studies have shown an initial increase in gambling and problem gambling following the opening of a new casino, but an eventual leveling off, as local residents adapt to the novelty [7]. The impact of gambling expansion varies by context and the population. Access to gambling opportunities are therefore explored, but must be monitored over time with future assessments, in order to examine them as a potential risk factor for problem gambling.

As previously mentioned, community members and service providers/organization leaders in Illinois recognized that gambling opportunities had existed in their community for many years prior to the passage of gambling expansion legislation. For example, one community discussion participant indicated that they were “*raised around it [gambling],*” while another described gambling as “*occurring rampantly already.*” While several community discussion participants acknowledged the ubiquitous nature of gambling, many also commented that the expansion of gambling “*changed the culture of the community*” in terms of how community members view gambling. Specifically, these community discussion participants noted, gambling is more visible, both in terms of advertisements and gambling opportunities (e.g., slot machines and video gaming) in public spaces. In contrast, some participants did acknowledge benefits to expansion. Several of these individuals perceived the recent gambling

expansion legislation as positive because legalization could allow for better monitoring of gambling. Further, some community members commented on the commitments to contribute a portion of gambling revenue to education and perceived the expansion to be an opportunity to continue this effort and bring revenue into the state.

Assessment participants varied in how they viewed the level of gambling opportunities in the state. Interview and community discussion participants generally reported that the availability of gambling opportunities was excessive in the state. However, the majority of survey respondents did not perceive gambling opportunities to be problematic. Among a representative sample of the adult population of Illinois, 61.5% of survey respondents cited the current availability of gambling in the state as OK, 7.4% reported that gambling was not available enough, 22.8% indicated it was too widely available, and 8.3% said gambling should not be legal in Illinois (Figure 1).

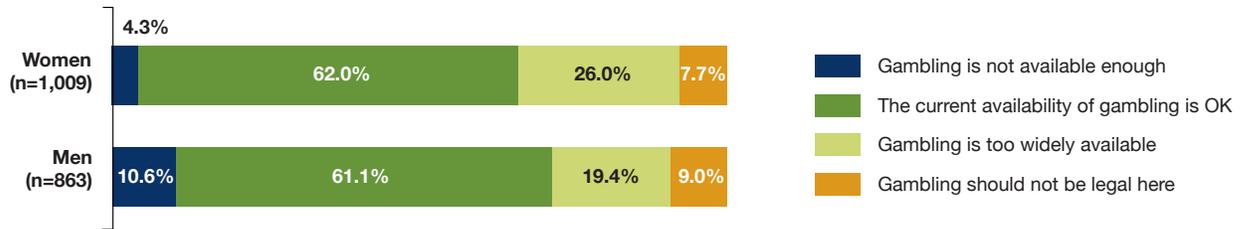
Figure 1. Attitudes Towards Gambling Availability, Among Illinois Residents, 2021 (n=1,989)



Data Source: IL Problem Gambling Assessment, Representative Population Sample, Weighted %, 2021

When looking at attitudes towards gambling availability by gender, women and men held similar beliefs, with wider gaps between the beliefs that gambling is not available enough (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Attitudes Towards Gambling Availability, Among Illinois Residents, by Gender, 2021 (n=1,972)

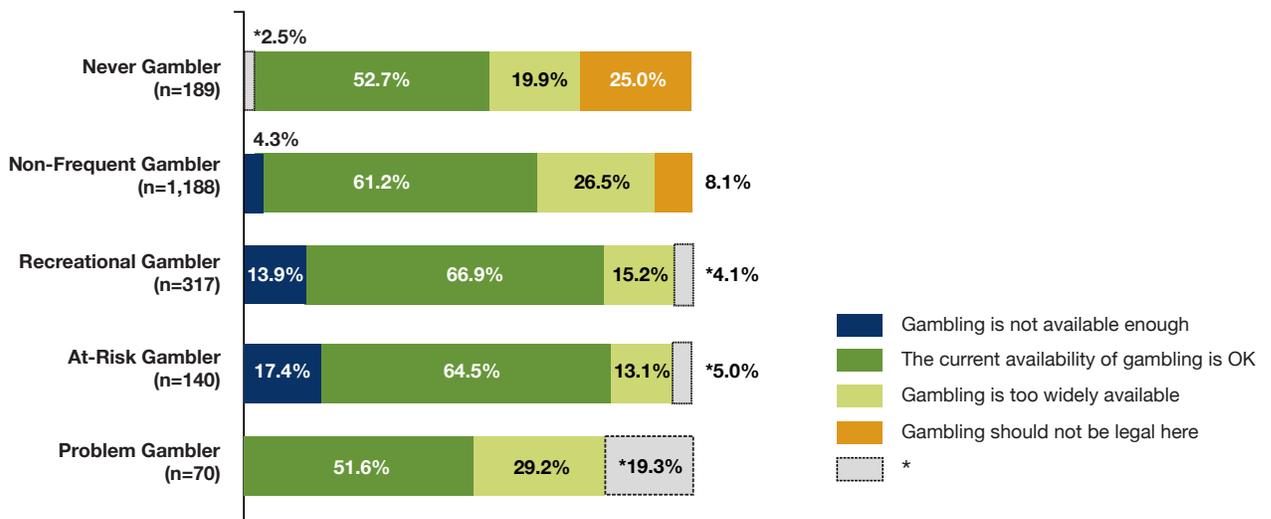


Data Source: IL Problem Gambling Assessment, Representative Population Sample, Weighted %, 2021

Attitudes toward gambling availability in Illinois varied when responses were analyzed by gambling participation. Illinoisans who had never gambled tended to report that gambling should not be legal in Illinois (25.0%), compared to 4.1% of Illinoisans who gamble recreationally (Figure 3). However, Illinoisans with a gambling problem were the group most likely to think

that gambling was too widely available in the state (29.2%). Frequent recreational gamblers were the most likely to indicate that the current availability of gambling is OK (66.9%), while Illinoisans at-risk of developing a gambling problem were most likely to say that gambling is not available enough in the state (17.4%).

Figure 3. Attitudes Towards Gambling Availability, Among Illinois Residents, by PPGM, 2021 (n=1,904)



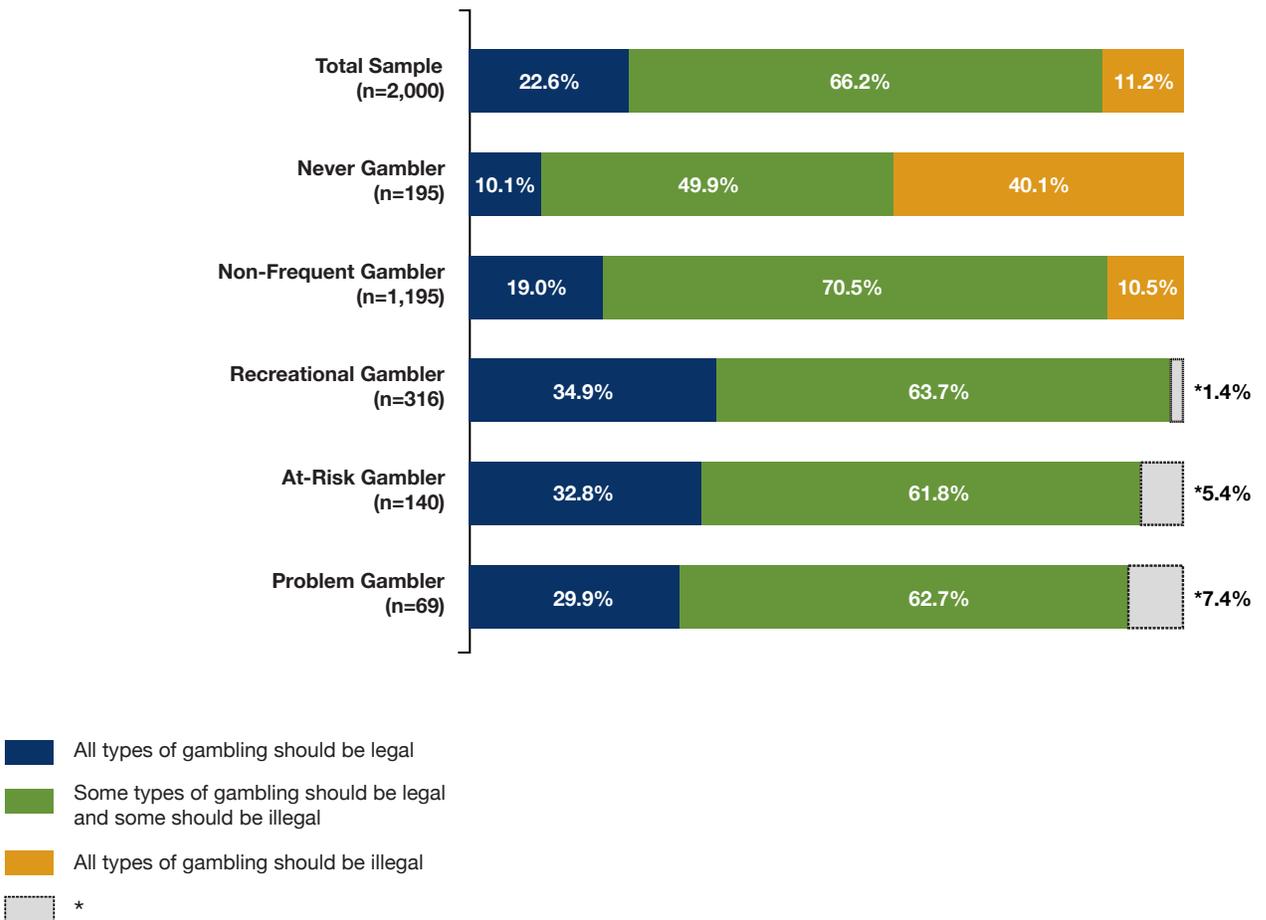
Data Source: IL Problem Gambling Assessment, Representative Population Sample, Weighted %, 2021

Note: * n<10 interpret with caution.

Illinois residents were also asked their opinion about gambling legalization in the state. The majority of Illinoisans reported that some forms of gambling should be legal and some should be illegal (66.2%), while 22.6% indicated that all types of gambling should be legal, and 11.2% cited that all types of gambling should be illegal (Figure 4). Among the 66.2% of Illinois adults who noted that some types of gambling should be illegal, the most commonly reported types of gambling they suggested should be illegal were those involving animals or harm to people or animals.

Similar to attitudes toward gambling availability, attitudes toward gambling legality varied when Illinoisans were analyzed by gambling participation. Illinoisans who had never gambled were the most likely to think that all forms of gambling should be illegal (40.1%), compared to just 10.5% of people who gamble infrequently (Figure 4). Roughly one in three Illinoisans who gamble frequently (recreational, people at risk for problem gambling, and people with a gambling problem) indicated that all types of gambling should be legal, compared to only 10.1% of Illinoisans who had never gambled.

Figure 4. Attitudes Towards Gambling Legality, Among Illinois Residents, by PPGM, 2021



Data Source: IL Problem Gambling Assessment, Representative Population Sample, Weighted %, 2021

Note: * n<10 interpret with caution.

Perceptions of Harms / Benefits

Perception of harm is a risk factor for problem gambling as it is for other addictive behaviors. Participants in community discussions differed in their perceptions of gambling as a behavior that has the potential to be harmful. Participants with personal experience dealing with a gambling disorder (either individually or within their families) perceived gambling to be a harmful behavior while participants without personal experience varied more in their perceptions. In general, conversations with youth revealed that younger populations were more likely to view gambling as potentially harmful. Interestingly, one youth noted that while gambling is viewed as a choice in their community, in online gaming forums, an increasing number of users are viewing certain tactics, such as micro-incentives that raise the stakes, employed by gaming companies to be manipulative: *“it’s becoming more viewed as this person is being manipulated by this game to want to [gamble].”*

Additionally, both community members and service providers/organization leaders in Illinois perceived differences in how problem gambling is approached relative to other disorders. One service provider pointed out differences in how gambling disorders manifest, leading to differences in how treatment is sought. This person noted that unlike substance use disorder, gambling disorders have *“more ups and downs”* in terms of a person’s perception of harm and *“people are able to wait a much longer time before they access any help.”* A community resident echoed this sentiment and pointed out that because people can *“move things around financially,”* it takes time for people to *“hit rock bottom”* and seek help.

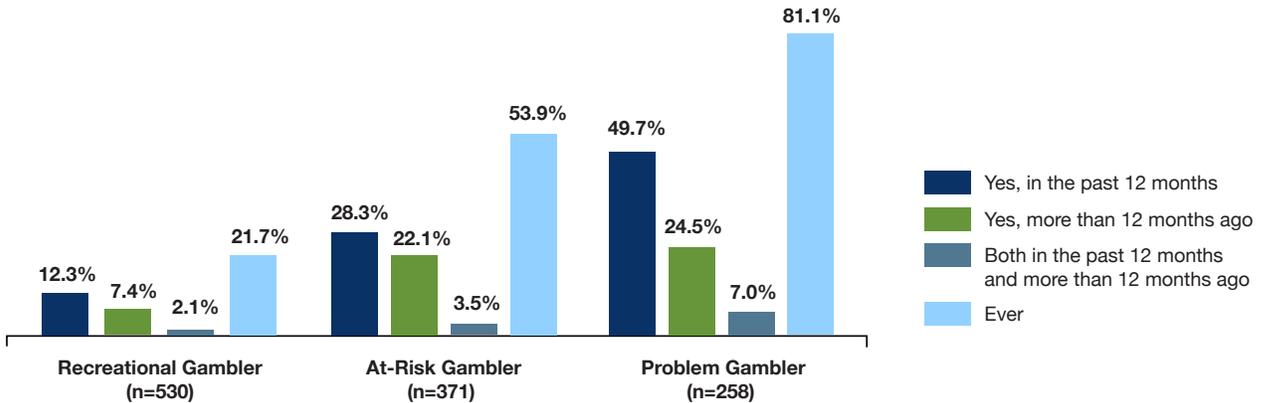
Interview participants with experience in treatment and service provision also noted that a key difference with other disorders is the prompt to seek treatment. When discussing challenges to initiate treatment, one participant highlighted that gambling is particularly difficult to treat because it can be a *“hidden disease”* and people with gambling disorders often do not have legal prompts to seek treatment: *“Gamblers do not get DWIs to get them started in treatment.”* Additionally, it can be difficult for people in treatment/recovery to hold themselves accountable because *“there is not a blood test or breathalyzer”* in the same way there is for alcohol or other drugs.

“

Gamblers do not get DWIs to get them started in treatment.

The challenge of recognizing problem gambling as a serious problem was reflected in the survey data as well. Respondents to the Frequent Gambler Survey were asked whether they thought they had ever had a gambling problem. Only half (49.7%) of people who scored as having problem gambling on the PPGM said they thought they had a gambling problem only in the past 12 months, 24.5% said they only did more than 12 months ago, and 7.0% said both (Figure 5). In total, 81.1% of problem gamblers said they had ever had a gambling problem, compared to 53.9% of at-risk gamblers, and 21.7% of frequent recreational gamblers. This may indicate the need for more public education about the signs and symptoms of problem gambling.

Figure 5. Self-Reported Gambling Problem Among Frequent Gamblers, by Past 12 Months, More Than 12 Months, Both in the Past 12 Months and More Than 12 Months Ago, and Ever, 2021 (n=2,267)

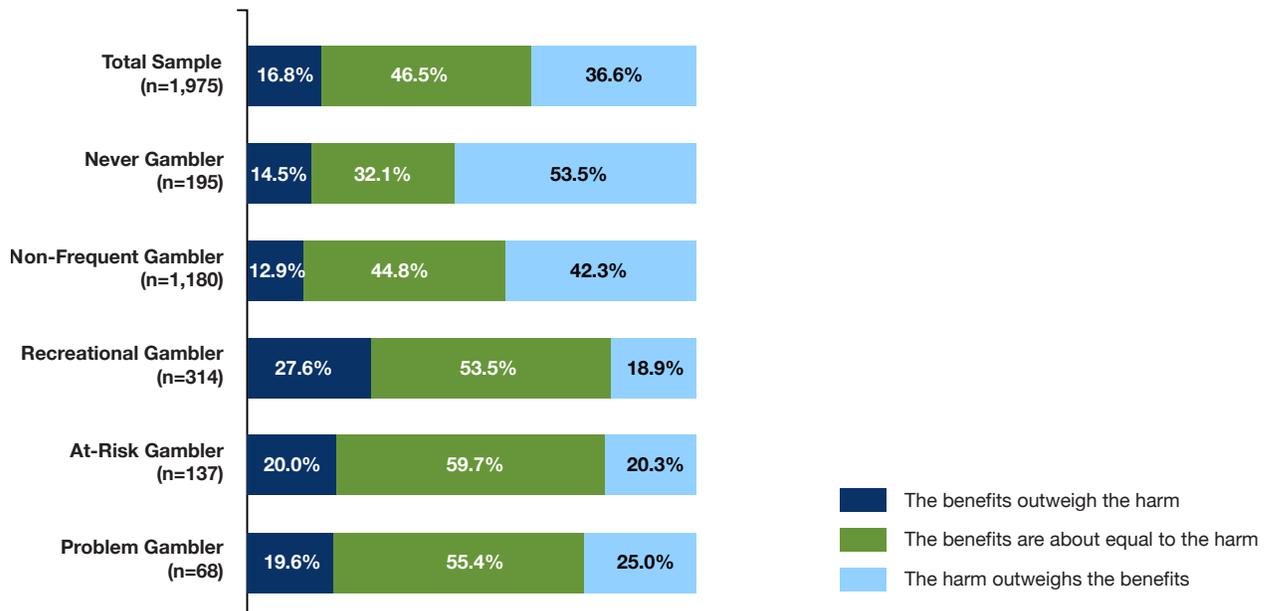


Data Source: IL Problem Gambling Assessment, Frequent Gamblers Sample, Frequent Gamblers Only, 2021

Among Illinoisans overall, 36.6% indicated that the harms associated with gambling outweigh the benefits, 16.8% thought the benefits outweigh the harms, and 46.5% thought that the benefits and harms of gambling were about equal (Figure 6). Illinoisans who infrequently gamble were least likely to believe that the benefits of gambling outweigh the harms (12.9%), compared to 27.6% of frequent recreational gamblers. By gambler

type, the order of Illinois residents who thought that the harms of gambling outweigh the benefits were those who had never gambled (53.5%), non-frequent gamblers (42.3%), people with problem gambling (25.0%), people at risk for problem gambling (20.3%), and frequent recreational gamblers (18.9%).

Figure 6. Gambling Benefits and Harms, Among Illinois Residents, by PPGM, 2021



Data Source: IL Problem Gambling Assessment, Representative Population Sample, Weighted %, 2021

Families and Affected Others

While problem gambling is often considered as an individual issue, it has wide-ranging impacts on close relationships with spouses/partners, children, and other family members. On average, problem gambling affects 6 social ties and 1 to 3 social ties among low to moderate-risk gamblers [8]. Based on problem gambling estimates from the Illinois Problem Gambling Prevalence Survey, an estimated 2 million Illinoisans are affected by those with problem gambling. An additional 1 to 2 million Illinoisans are impacted by those at low to moderate risk of problem gambling.

Interview and community discussion participants primarily noted the financial challenges associated with problem gambling on families, with an organizational leader noting that it is *“challenging for families to pay for medical care, food, and housing”*. Another service provider also noted that some people are gambling away money, *“instead of putting their gambling money into food or diapers”*. More broadly, people with problem gambling also rated the following social harms as the most severe: ending relationships, failure to uphold occupational responsibilities, failure to supervise children, and escapism [9]. Additionally, in another study among treatment seeking families, over half of affected others endorsed a loss of trust, anger, depression/anxiety, and communication breakdown [10]. Similarly, in the Illinois Problem Gambling Assessment 10.3% of people at risk for problem gambling and 53.0% of people with a gambling problem reported that their gambling has caused serious problems in their relationships with a spouse/partner or important friends/family in the past year. 62.3% of Illinoisans also agreed with the statement that gambling is dangerous for family life.

Further, children of people with a gambling problem also face unique challenges because of parental problem gambling. In another qualitative study with children of people with a gambling problem, respondents highlighted the effect of emotional neglect and loss, including the physical loss of a parent due to the lack of supervision; the loss of the integrity of the parent-child relationship; and tangible losses of money, time in school, and hunger [11]. In extreme cases, pathological gambling was also associated with the perpetration of severe child abuse, independent of socioeconomic status and comorbid diagnoses [12]. More than half of Illinoisans with a gambling problem noted that their gambling has caused them to repeatedly neglect their children or family in the past year. Problem gambling can also have generational impacts. In the Illinois Problem Gambling Assessment, people with problem gambling (14.7%) and those at risk for problem gambling (17.1%) appeared more likely to report that someone in their family had ever had a gambling problem compared to frequent recreational gamblers (10.1%).

Families also play an important role in treatment and recovery support. Among people at risk for problem gambling and people with a gambling problem who sought help in Illinois, 50.0% sought support from family members and more than a one-third sought help from a spouse/partner. Among Illinois residents, more than one third of respondents reported they would seek advice for themselves or someone else from a family member, spouse/partner. This indicates there is a greater need of support for family members of people with a gambling problem and education and empowerment of family members is potentially a great resource to help people with

problem gambling get the treatment they need. In FY 2020, 15.1% of calls to the Illinois Problem Gambling Helpline (1-800-GAMBLER) were family members or friends. Given the wide-ranging

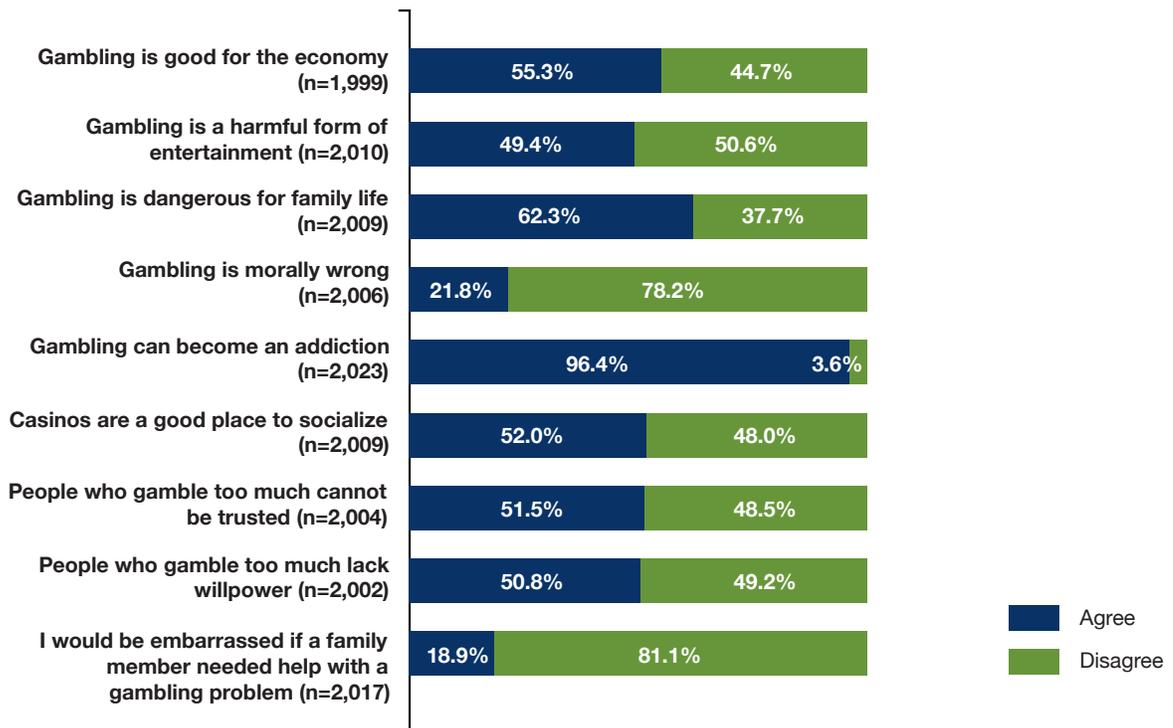
impact of gambling on families, it is crucial that public health efforts also address the unique needs of families and affected others in tandem with the family member with problem gambling.

Illinoisans expressed differences in attitudes toward gambling (Figure 7). For questions on how much they agreed with the statements that gambling is good for the economy, gambling is a harmful form of entertainment, casinos are a good place to socialize, people who gamble too much cannot be trusted, and people who gamble too much lack willpower, roughly half of Illinoisans agreed with those statements while roughly half disagreed. In contrast, 96.4% agreed with the statement that gambling can become an addiction, 62.3% agreed with the statement that gambling is dangerous for family life, 21.8% agreed

with the statement that gambling is morally wrong, and 18.9% agreed with the statement that they would be embarrassed if a family member needed help with a gambling problem (Figure 7).

96.4% of Illinoisans agree that gambling can become an addiction

Figure 7. Attitudes Towards Gambling, Among Illinois Residents, 2021



Data Source: IL Problem Gambling Assessment, Representative Population Sample, Weighted %s, 2021

Variations in attitudes about gambling were apparent when responses were examined by gambling participation. Illinoisans who had never gambled stood out as the most distinct group, with 68.8% agreeing with the statement that people who gamble too much cannot be trusted, 68.6% agreeing with the statement that gambling is a harmful form of entertainment, 65.2% agreeing with the statement that people who gamble too much lack willpower, and 54.7% agreeing with the statement that gambling is morally wrong (Figure 8). Illinoisans who had never gambled were also most likely to agree with the statement that they would be embarrassed if a family member needed help with a gambling problem (29.2%), relative to 26.1% of people with problem gambling, 19.3% of non-frequent gamblers, 13.4% of frequent recreational gamblers, and 10.3% of Illinoisans at risk of problem gambling. Interestingly, Illinoisans with problem gambling also showed some distinct differences in

attitudes from other frequent gamblers. Nearly half (47.4%) of Illinoisans with problem gambling agreed with the statement that gambling is a harmful form of entertainment, compared to only 29.9% of people at risk for problem gambling, and 30.7% of frequent recreational gamblers (Figure 8). Over 60% of people with problem gambling agreed with the statement that gambling is dangerous for family life, compared to 46.6% of people at risk for problem gambling and 44.5% of frequent recreational gamblers. One possibility why Illinoisans with problem gambling may endorse gambling harms more than other gamblers, is that they may have more direct experience with those harms [9]. Problem gambling can have far-reaching impacts on relationships, specifically it is estimated that one person with problem gambling affects six others [8]. Additionally, relationship issues with family, friends, and close others often precedes treatment-seeking among people with problem gambling issues [13].

Figure 8. Attitudes Towards Gambling, Percentage Who Agree or Strongly Agree Among Illinois Residents, by PPGM, 2021

| | Never Gambler | Non-Frequent Gambler | Recreational Gambler | At-Risk Gambler | Problem Gambler |
|--|---------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Gambling is good for the economy (n=1,914) | 36.7% | 48.6% | 73.9% | 80.1% | 65.7% |
| Gambling is a harmful form of entertainment (n=1,925) | 68.6% | 54.9% | 30.7% | 29.9% | 47.4% |
| Gambling is dangerous for family life (n=1,924) | 78.5% | 67.3% | 44.5% | 46.6% | 61.6% |
| Gambling is morally wrong (n=1,922) | 54.7% | 22.9% | 6.7% | 6.2% | 18.8% |
| Gambling can become an addiction (n=1,937) | 95.3% | 97.0% | 96.0% | 96.5% | 91.4% |
| Casinos are a good place to socialize (n=1,923) | 39.9% | 47.2% | 65.5% | 68.1% | 61.4% |
| People who gamble too much cannot be trusted (n=1,918) | 68.8% | 56.8% | 39.2% | 30.3% | 33.7% |

| | Never Gambler | Non-Frequent Gambler | Recreational Gambler | At-Risk Gambler | Problem Gambler |
|---|---------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| People who gamble too much lack willpower (n=1,918) | 65.2% | 54.2% | 39.6% | 40.3% | 39.3% |
| I would be embarrassed if a family member needed help with a gambling problem (n=1,931) | 29.2% | 19.3% | 13.4% | 10.3% | 26.1% |

Data Source: IL Problem Gambling Assessment, Representative Population Sample, Weighted %s, 2021

Attitudes about gambling were also examined by race/ethnicity. Black/African American Illinoisans appeared the most likely to agree with the statement that gambling is good for the economy (62.6%) and Asian Illinoisans were the least (37.5%) likely to agree with this statement (Figure 9). Conversely, over 70% of Asian Illinoisans agreed with the statements that gambling is a harmful form of entertainment and

dangerous for family life, compared to only about 50% of Black/African American Illinoisans. Asian Illinoisans were again most likely to agree with the statement that people who gamble too much cannot be trusted (72.0%), while Hispanic/Latinx Illinoisans were somewhat more likely than other groups to agree with the statement that people who gamble too much lack willpower (60.2%).

Figure 9. Attitudes Towards Gambling Percentage Who Agree or Strongly Agree Among Illinois Residents, by Race/Ethnicity, 2021

| | Asian (n=50) | Black/African American (n=333) | Hispanic/Latinx (n=413) | White (n=1,116) | Other Race/Ethnicity (n=100) |
|--|--------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------|
| Gambling is good for the economy (n=1,989) | 37.5% | 62.6% | 51.0% | 55.9% | 52.4% |
| Gambling is a harmful form of entertainment (n=1,999) | 73.1% | 46.3% | 52.0% | 48.6% | 47.0% |
| Gambling is dangerous for family life (n=2,000) | 73.8% | 52.5% | 69.9% | 61.8% | 60.7% |
| Gambling is morally wrong (n=1,996) | 51.2% | 27.3% | 27.6% | 18.2% | 21.8% |
| Gambling can become an addiction (n=2,012) | 94.8% | 93.8% | 94.8% | 97.4% | 96.1% |
| Casinos are a good place to socialize (n=1,999) | 39.9% | 63.3% | 54.8% | 49.2% | 57.2% |
| People who gamble too much cannot be trusted (n=1,994) | 72.0% | 46.6% | 60.1% | 48.8% | 59.0% |

| | Asian (n=50) | Black/ African American (n=333) | Hispanic/ Latinx (n=413) | White (n=1,116) | Other Race/ Ethnicity (n=100) |
|---|-----------------|--|--------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------------------|
| People who gamble too much lack willpower (n=1,993) | 46.5% | 53.0% | 60.2% | 47.7% | 56.2% |
| I would be embarrassed if a family member needed help with a gambling problem (n=2,007) | 26.0% | 19.9% | 24.4% | 16.5% | 24.9% |

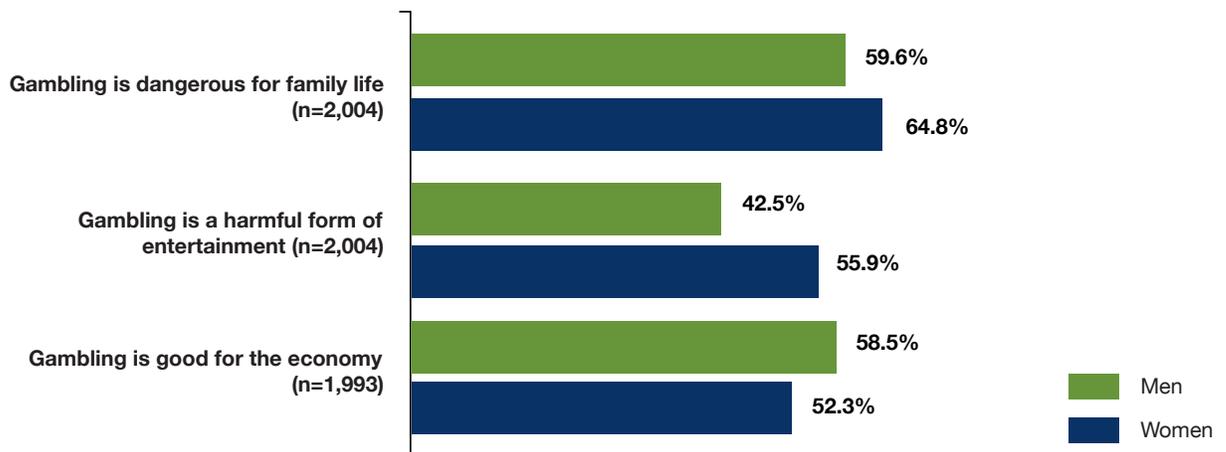
Data Source: IL Problem Gambling Assessment, Representative Population Sample, Weighted %s, 2021

Note: Exact number of respondents by race/ethnicity varied across items.

Attitudes by gender among Illinoisans were similar across most items. Some notable differences emerged among attitudes that gambling is harmful (Figure 10). Women were more likely to agree or strongly agree with the statements that gambling is dangerous for family

life (64.8% vs. 59.6%) and that gambling is a harmful form of entertainment (55.9% vs. 42.5%). In contrast, men were more likely to agree or strongly agree with the statement that gambling is good for the economy (58.5% vs. 52.3%).

Figure 10. Attitudes Towards Gambling Percentage Who Agree or Strongly Agree, Among Illinois Residents, by Gender, 2021



Data Source: IL Problem Gambling Assessment, Representative Population Sample, Weighted %s, 2021

Stigma and Understanding of Addiction

Many interview and community discussion participants reported that problem gambling is stigmatized in Illinois in the sense that people who do have a gambling disorder feel shame in their behaviors, particularly when they have lost a substantial amount of money. Participants described how this shame leads to people denying or lying about the existence of a gambling disorder and/or declining treatment. According to participants, this stigma is a burden for those with problem gambling and their loved ones, and it creates a barrier to addressing problem gambling. In almost every conversation with community members and service providers/organization leaders, participants named stigma and shame as the primary reasons why many people with a gambling disorder do not seek treatment or acknowledge their gambling disorder at all. Often, these participants mentioned, society views problem gambling as a choice or a “lifestyle” rather than a legitimate disorder requiring treatment. One community member noted that sometimes when gambling is recognized, *“it’s viewed as an annoyance [among other people] rather than a problem.”* Many also attributed stigma surrounding problem gambling to lack of understanding that gambling can be a disorder. This sentiment was reflected in many interviews, particularly among service providers, who agreed that there tends to be a fundamental lack of knowledge around gambling disorders. For example, one provider said, *“the issue of gambling is that people don’t understand what gambling is”* while another stated, *“in general people don’t know that gambling disorders exist – people don’t know and don’t talk about it.”*

According to community members and service providers/organization leaders, this lack of understanding of gambling as an addictive disorder is another factor that fuels feelings of shame and prevents people from seeking help. Several service providers/organization leaders also perceived the combination of stigma and a general lack of understanding frequently leads to denial, and can result in communities not taking gambling disorders seriously. One treatment provider noted that *“we are 50 years behind [other behavioral health issues] in terms of the level of stigma in the community.”* Additionally, two treatment providers perceived the sense of shame and stigma associated with gambling to be stronger than the shame and stigma associated with substance use disorder. One of these gambling treatment providers elaborated by stating that stigma is so strong, people who want to place their name on the self-exclusion list, avoid it because they worry their name will be released to the public. Additionally, when seeking treatment, some patients will avoid allowing a treatment provider to bill their insurance because *“they’re terrified their employer will find out.”*

“

“We are 50 years behind [other behavioral health issues] in terms of the level of stigma [about problem gambling] in the community.”

Illinois gambling treatment provider

Among youth, there seemed to be a shared sentiment that younger generations are more receptive to the idea of gambling becoming a harmful disorder while older generations view it as a personal choice. It should be noted, however, that some youth participants acknowledged that many of their peers view problem gambling as a personal choice. For example, one youth participant noted that while their friends do not regularly discuss problem gambling as a disorder, *“they would probably think it was choice if they did.”*

All of this stigma and fear around help-seeking, participants pointed out, indicates a strong need for the public to normalize treatment for gambling disorders more *“like we’ve done with other behavioral health disorders.”* Another service provider noted the importance of shifting the narrative from one of *“personal failure”* to *“social responsibility.”*

One service provider noted the importance of shifting the narrative from one of “personal failure” to “social responsibility.”

These qualitative perceptions contrast with the 96.4% of survey respondents who agree with the statement that gambling can become an addiction (Figure 7). This may indicate that people know gambling can become an addiction but do not know what that looks like in themselves or others. Recognizing gambling as an addiction is an important step in addressing the problem, however recognizing specific signs of addiction, understanding the role of personal choice, and seeking advice are additional steps that may need to be addressed in education and awareness campaigns.

Chapter 5: References

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