

## **Study: Internet gambling stakes are high**

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**FARMINGTON, Connecticut (CNN) -- People who gamble on the Internet may tend to have more serious gambling addictions than people who wager in other ways, according to a study released Sunday.**

The report, published by the American Psychological Association, focused on visitors to dental and medical clinics.

"There is a significant gambling problem among people who visit medical and dental clinics," said psychologist Nancy M. Petry, a co-author of the study. "Although it's still pretty rare to be gambling on the Internet, we think it's going to increase."

The survey was made up of 389 visitors to a dental and medical clinic at the University of Connecticut in Farmington, Connecticut.

Among the 8.1 percent who said they had Internet wagering experience, 74 percent were classified by psychologists as "problematic" or "pathological" gamblers. Nearly half of the Internet gamblers said they played weekly.

In addition, nearly 40 percent of those who said they made more than \$50,000 a year also said they had never gambled on the Internet.

The median age of those who said they had gambled on the Internet was 31.7 years.

"The availability of Internet gambling may draw individuals who seek out isolated and anonymous contexts for their gambling behaviors," the study said.

The study also warned that the growth of the Internet will likely lead to more online gambling and the health and emotional disorders that often accompany gambling disorders, including substance abuse, circulatory disease, depression and risky sexual behavior.

"Younger people tend to be involved in risk-taking behavior," said Petry. "They have higher rates of gambling in general. Younger people are more likely to use computers."

Statistics from a previous study seem to confirm the University of Connecticut conclusions across a broader spectrum of Internet users.

The online advertising tracking firm AdRelevance, Jupiter Media Metrix reported in February that Web surfers earning less than \$25,000 a year represent 11 percent of the overall online population. However, they also represent 13 percent of all visitors to gambling sites, which is a very high percentage for such a minority population.

In addition, users between ages 25 and 54 are most likely to visit gambling sites, the firm reported.

Media Metrix also said the number of unique visitors on just 64 casino sites in December, 2001 was 13.6 million.

David Robertson, former chairman of the National Coalition Against Legalized Gambling, agreed that Internet gambling is a problem that only promises to hook many more gamblers into a life of addiction.

"This is what we have been telling people all along," Robertson said. "We have a generation that has grown up on video games and now they have a chance to win money at it."

"Statistics prove that teenage Internet gambling is the fastest growing addiction of the day, akin to drug and alcohol abuse in the 1930s," Robertson said. "It's pernicious, it's evil, it's certainly one that feeds on those who are the weakest members of society -- and that's the young and the poor."

A story published on National Journal's Technology Daily reported that the online gaming industry is growing quickly. It quoted a Bear Sterns study predicting an estimated 1,200 to 1,400 online gaming sites that could generate about \$5 billion by 2003. In 1999, Bear Sterns reported the number of gambling sites was about 700.

Co-chairman of the House Internet Caucus, Rep. Bob Goodlatte, R-Virginia, is sponsoring a bill that would create Internet infrastructure that blocks any casino

Web site's ability to accept payments by credit card or the transfer of electronic funds.

Such legislation is widely opposed by many pro-Internet groups.

Petry suggests legislation similar to what's required by the nation's tobacco industry.

One deterrent might be to require warning labels on all casino sites," she said. "Part of the issue of gambling is that people don't realize that it can be a problem."