

*Aboriginal Adolescent Gambling*



*Firewatch*

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1995

*Fire makes us think of warmth, companionship and prosperity.  
However, without care and respect fire can also mean chaos and destruction.  
For our youth gambling is like a fire. It too brings dreams of prosperity, friendship and an  
end to all problems. But without care it too can bring destruction.  
The gambling fire is burning. We must be alert to the danger and help  
our young people treat it with care and respect.*

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# FIREWATCH

## ON

### ABORIGINAL ADOLESCENT GAMBLING



# NECHI

*Nechi Training, Research and Health Promotions Institute*

#### *Nechi Mission*

*Nechi is an Aboriginal movement committed to holistic healing and healthy, addictions-free lifestyles.*

November 6, 1995

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# OVERVIEW

The purpose of this study was to provide an estimate of the prevalence of gambling and problem gambling among Alberta Aboriginal youth and to determine the personal, cultural and social factors related to gambling and problem gambling.

Nine hundred and sixty-one Aboriginal students participated in the study. They were enrolled in grades 5 through 12 in 28 schools located throughout Alberta. Their average age was 14 with males and females being equally represented.

Overall, 89% of the students had gambled for money in the past year. Male students were somewhat more likely to gamble (92%) than female students (86%). The prevalence rate is similar to rates found among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in recent studies.

Playing bingo had the highest prevalence rate (57%), followed by playing cards with family and friends (49%), scratch tabs (48%), betting on sports teams (42%) and betting on personal skill games (35%). All other forms had rates of 30% or less. More female than male students played bingo. The most frequent gambling activities (i.e., played weekly or more often) were betting on sports teams (13%), bingo (12%), playing cards (10%) and playing video games like Nintendo (10%).

The average age at which gambling began was 11 with more than 25% beginning before age 10. This is younger than in other recent studies where the average age was about 13.

Over one-third (36%) of the students drink alcohol regularly or once in awhile. Drinking increased with age but did not vary with gender. The average age at which drinking began was 12. The percentage of students who drink was similar to that found among all Alberta students, however, frequency of drinking is higher among these students.

Forty-five percent of the students had used marijuana in the past year. Prevalence and frequency of use increased with age but did not vary with gender. Hallucinogens were the next most frequently used drug (12%). Other drugs had prevalence rates ranging from 9% to 5%. Marijuana use was almost 2.5 times that found in the general Alberta adolescent population and in a group of Minnesota Native-Americans. Use of most other drugs was also higher in this group.

Forty-eight percent of the students smoked regularly or once in awhile. Female students were more likely to smoke than male. The respective percentages were 58 and 39. Smoking dramatically increased after age 12. Of those 12 and under, 11% smoked regularly, while for those 13-15 and 16 or older, the respective percentages were 30 and 47. The average age at which smoking began was 11. The percentage of students in this study who have never smoked (32%) was lower than in the general Alberta student population (49%).

The students in this study were very active within their communities with 83% participating in cultural events, 87% in sports and 56% in other activities like music, art and writing.

Death of friends and family was a common experience for these students. Forty percent had friends die within the last year or two, 10% from suicide. Approximately 70% had family members die in the same period, 22% from accidents and 11% from suicide.

Violence and sexual abuse were also common experiences. Fifty-seven percent had been hit in anger and 17% had someone "touch their private parts" when they did not want it to happen.

Gambling problem severity was measured using the South Oaks Gambling Screen revised for adolescents. Using this scale and frequency of gambling, the students were classified as follows:

Do not gamble	11%
No problem gambling	38%
At risk for problem gambling	21%
Problem gamblers	28%

The rate of problem gambling among these students was more than 3 times that found in a similar study of non-Aboriginal youth (Winters et al, 1993b).

Problem gamblers were more likely to be male (65%) than female (35%). Problem gamblers were younger (13.5 years) than those at risk (14 years) or who gambled without problems (14.3 years). However, they were the same age as those who did not gamble (13.4 years).

Gamblers were more likely to drink alcohol, smoke tobacco and use marijuana than were non-gamblers. Among gamblers those identified as "problem" were likely to drink more frequently, drink more at one time and to use drugs other than marijuana.

Gamblers were more likely than non-gamblers to have experienced physical abuse and to have had their property damaged or stolen. Among gamblers, those "at risk" of developing problems were most likely to have experienced these things.

The gamblers were also more likely to come from homes where one or both parents gambled. In those homes where the mother's gambling was of concern (23%), the students were more likely to have had family members commit suicide (15%), to have experienced violence (71%) and sexual abuse (24%), to have had arguments about gambling (46%) and to gamble to forget their problems (30%). They are also more likely to be problem gamblers.

Three-quarters (74%) of the students live with their mothers. In 77% of these homes the father is also present. More than one-third (36%) of the students who live with their mothers have younger brothers and/or sisters living with them. Since the average age of the students is 14, the average age of their younger siblings would be less than 14. In more than half (53%) of these homes the mother gambles and in about 20% the students expressed concern about their mother's gambling. A significant number of young children appear to be at risk because of their mother's gambling.

This study is the first of its kind and provides valuable information which can be used at the community level to increase awareness about adolescent gambling problems and to stimulate the development of problem prevention strategies.

Adolescence is a time of rapid individual change in a rapidly changing world. This study provides a baseline which describes the current situation with respect to gambling and associated factors. This study should be repeated frequently (every 2-3 years) in order to monitor change and to assist in assessing the effectiveness of any problem prevention strategies that are implemented.

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