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## brief report

### brief report

### Underage gambling in Ontario casinos

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#### Abstract

This study describes self-reported attendance in an Ontario casino among Ontario students aged 18 and under in 2005 and describes changes in attendance compared to 2003 and 2001. The results showed that in 2005, 1.0% of underage students, representing some 9,400 students in Ontario, reported gambling at casinos in Ontario, a percentage that remains unchanged compared to 2003 (1.5%) and 2001 (1.4%). These data suggest that only a small percentage of underage students gamble at Ontario casinos, and there is no evidence that this percentage has changed significantly since 2001. **Key words:** underage gambling, youth, casino attendance

#### Introduction

With the expansion of legalized gambling, one issue of policy control is restricting youth access. One indicator of youth access to gambling is underage attendance at casinos. In Ontario, it is illegal for youth under the age of 19 to be in gambling areas of a casino. This brief report describes self-reported casino attendance in Ontario among Ontario students aged 18 and under in 2005 and describes changes in attendance compared to 2003 and 2001.

The Ontario Student Drug Use Survey (OSDUS) is an Ontario-wide survey of elementary (grades 7 and 8) and secondary (grades 9 to 12) school students conducted every 2 years since 1977. The 2005 survey, which used a stratified (region) two-stage cluster design (school, class), included 7,726 students in grades 7 to 12 from 42 school boards, 137 schools, and 445 classes. The 2003 survey

interviewed 6,616 students from 126 schools and 383 classrooms and the 2001 survey interviewed 4,211 students from 106 schools and 272 classrooms. Self-administered questionnaires were distributed in the classroom by staff from the Institute for Social Research, York University, between January and June. Student participation rates were 72% in 2005, 72% in 2003, and 71% in 2001; school participation rates were 95% in 2005, 88% in 2003, and 74% in 2001.

Since 2001, the OSDUS has asked students, "How often (if ever) in the last 12 months have you bet money at a casino in Ontario?" Open-ended count responses were recoded to indicate the percentage that reported one or more betting occasions. In each survey, this question was asked of a random half-sample of students, resulting in 1,943 in 2001, 3,283 in 2003, and 3,965 in 2005. All survey estimates were weighted, and variance and statistical tests were corrected for the sampling design.

In 2005, 1.0% of underage students, representing some 9,400 students in Ontario, reported gambling at casinos in Ontario, a percentage that remains unchanged compared to 2003 (1.5%) and 2001 (1.4%) (Table 1). Males were significantly more likely than females to report casino gambling in 2001 (2.3% vs. 0.6%;  $p = 0.002$ ) and 2003 (2.3% vs. 0.9%;  $p = 0.001$ ), but not in 2005 (1.4% vs. 0.5%;  $p = 0.054$ ). Similarly, students aged 16 to 18 years were significantly more likely than those aged under 16 to report casino gambling in 2001 (2.4% vs. 0.9%;  $p = 0.025$ ) and 2003 (2.5% vs. 0.8%;  $p = 0.002$ ), but not in 2005 (1.4% vs. 0.7%;  $p = 0.123$ ). Although the 2005 estimates for sex and age groups were somewhat lower compared to earlier years, these differences were all within sampling error and thus were not significant.

We must recognize that these data are based on self-reports and are likely underreported by some degree. As well, without qualitative interviews, we cannot know the precise definition of "casino" used by students, which could include formal operations or community "Casino Nights." Still, it is likely that such reporting issues would be constant across years. Of course, these data exclude underage casino attendance by adolescents not enrolled in school. In summary, these data suggest that only a small percentage of underage students gamble at Ontario casinos, and there is no evidence that this percentage has changed significantly since 2001.

**Table 1**  
**Percentage of Ontario students aged 18 and under who reported gambling in Ontario casinos within the past 12 months**

	2001		2003		2005	
	(n = 1,943) %	(95% CI)	(n = 3,283) %	(95% CI)	(n = 3,965) %	(95% CI)
Total	1.4	(0.9, 2.1)	1.5	(1.1, 2.1)	1.0	(0.5, 1.9)
Males	2.3	(1.4, 3.7)	2.3	(1.6, 3.4)	1.4	(0.6, 3.4)
Females	0.6	(0.3, 1.2)	0.7	(0.5, 1.5)	0.5	(0.2, 1.0)
15 or under	0.7	(0.5, 1.6)	0.8	(0.5, 1.6)	0.7	(0.2, 2.0)
16–18	2.4	(1.3, 4.2)	2.5	(1.8, 3.6)	1.3	(0.8, 2.3)

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