

Disadvantaged urban youth may be more likely to be problem gamblers

The findings come as Baltimore is poised to welcome a Las Vegas-style casino this year, providing more enticement for young people in some of the city's toughest neighborhoods to start a habit that some may find addicting. They also come as operators strive to keep youths out of the casinos and as the General Assembly passed legislation to establish fines for underage gamblers caught on gaming floors.

Advertising alone for the new casinos could spur the more impulsive types to sneak into the facilities or gamble closer to home and engage in other risky behaviors such as sex, drugs and alcohol, the researchers found.

"Just because you live in a disadvantaged Baltimore neighborhood, you're not more likely to be impulsive," said Dr. Silvia Martins, who led the research at Johns Hopkins' Bloomberg School of Public Health and has published a nearly a dozen papers on Baltimore youths and gambling. "But there would likely be less prevention strategies in place to control those who are impulsive."

The newest study, now online at the journal Addictive Behaviors, found that almost half of 427 youths had gambled before age 18 . . . Of those who had gambled, close to half were frequent gamblers.

Other studies in the series, led by Martins, now an associate professor of epidemiology at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health, found that gambling could lead to depression, crime, homelessness and joblessness in young adulthood.

The researchers said these kids may have more chaos and violence in their lives, a deeper attraction to quick riches and better access to the lottery and other gambling opportunities such as card and dice games. They also may have little to stop them.

The research concluded that youth in disadvantaged communities are 12 times as likely as those in more stable areas to have gambling problems. Read more: <http://www.baltimoresun.com/health/bs-hs-youth-gambling-20140418,0.6576566.story>