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# Young people and gambling in Southern Switzerland

## A regional analysis of the gambling habits of young people between the ages of 14 and 25

### Abstract

The aim of this survey was to provide a scientific investigation of the phenomenon of gambling among young people in the region of Southern Switzerland, quantifying the gambling habits and the presence of people with gambling problems among underage teenagers (14-17 years of age) and young adults (18-25 years of age) living in Southern Switzerland and among young casino patrons (18-25 years of age).

Before presenting the results it is useful to mention the size of the reference population in Southern Switzerland (i.e. the permanent resident population) according to the age groups of interest, in order to contextualize the data presented in a more complete manner. The source of the following data is the statistics of population and households from 2011 (STATPOP).

Permanent resident population in Southern Switzerland	Population of an age equal to or more than 18 years	14-17 years old	18-25 years old	14-25 years old
Number of people	280,523	13,364	28,275	41,639

The survey of the young population resident in Southern Switzerland has revealed that the vast majority of respondents (74.1% of minors between 14 and 17 years of age and 85.7% of young adults between 18 and 25) have gambled for money at least once in their lifetime, while percentages of 58.2% of minors and 71.9% of young adults are indicated as having gambled for money during the 12 months preceding the survey. In particular, the games played by minors are scratch cards, number lotteries (Swiss Lotto, Euromillions, ...) and bingo, followed by sports and private betting (practiced by 10% of minors between 14 and 17) and sleight of hand betting (6%); also among young adults the games most often played are scratch cards and number lotteries, but these are followed by casino games (roulette, slot-machines, poker and other card games, practiced by 13-18% of young adults), bingo (14%) and sports and private betting (10%). The percentage of regular players (those who gamble at least once a week) amounts to 4% among minors and 7.9% among young adults. Online gambling without betting money is widespread; in fact, among both minors and young adults, slightly less than half of the respondents had played this type of game during the 12 months preceding the survey, and about 10% had done so regularly. Number lotteries and scratch cards are games played mainly in their traditional places (kiosks, bars or service stations), bingo is very often associated with events (rural festivals, carnivals, ...), poker is mostly practiced at home with friends and casino games are practiced almost exclusively in casinos. Only 1% of minors

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who were interviewed played for money on the internet or on television during the 12 months preceding the survey, while the percentage for young adults was much higher, standing at 7.4%. The amounts of money spent on these games are generally low, as the monthly figure devoted to gambling by 90.7% of juveniles and 81.2% of young adults is less than or equal to 30 francs.

21.7% of young casino patrons, i.e. those between 18 and 25 years old, frequent gaming rooms (Casinò Locarno, Casinò Lugano and Casinò Mendrisio) regularly, i.e. at least once a week, while 4 out of 10 young patrons attend casinos from one to three times a month; thus, there remains about 38% of the young clientele who frequent casinos only occasionally, that is, less than once a month. 26.6% of young patrons surveyed spend at most half an hour in the casino, 65.7% stay for between 30 minutes and two hours, while 7.7% remain for more than 2 hours. By far the most popular game among young patrons is the roulette wheel, practiced by about half of the respondents, followed by slot machines (39.6%), black-jack (32.1%) and poker (12.3%). 66.8% of young patrons who spend money on gambling (about 80% of those surveyed) say they spend up to 100 francs per month, 25% indicate a figure of between 101 and 500 francs a month, and 9% state a monthly amount exceeding 500 francs.

The presence of gambling-related problems among the Southern Switzerland population of between 14 and 25 years of age and among young casino patrons (18-25) was investigated by the South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS), for young adults, and the South Oaks Gambling Screen Revised for Adolescents (SOGS-RA), for juveniles, two instruments widely used in this area. The estimate of the proportion of adolescents from 14 to 17 years of age with gambling problems is equal to 2.5%, while among young adults this stands at 3.45%. Overall, according to the two instruments mentioned above, 2.97% of young people between 14 and 25 years of age have gambling problems. Therefore, the phenomenon in question seems to affect approximately 1,240 young people from Southern Switzerland aged between 14 and 25. 77.8% of casino patrons between the ages of 18 and 25 interviewed do not have gambling problems, 16% are classified as problem gamblers and the remaining 6.2% as probable pathological gamblers.

Compared to the population of young adults (18-25 years of age) in Southern Switzerland, young casino patrons contain significantly higher proportions of men and people of Italian nationality who often live in small families (up to two members), as well as higher percentages of employed people and apprentices as compared with students and unemployed/inactive people. A very similar profile distinguishes young adults with gambling problems from those who do not have such problems (comparison made by combining the data of the population with those of the casinos); however, in this case two other criteria of differentiation were identified, that is, the greater proportions of regular smokers and regular consumers of alcohol (at least three times per week) among young adults with gambling problems. Inside the casinos, young patrons with gambling problems differentiate themselves from other young patrons particularly in their gambling behaviour; in fact, young patrons with gambling problems go to casinos more frequently and remain there longer, spend, win and lose much more than other young patrons, go to the casinos alone more often, tend to prefer the game of poker and account for their frequenting of casinos by claiming to like gambling itself and the environment/atmosphere of the rooms.

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The comparison between the results of the survey of the young population (14-25 years old) living in Southern Switzerland and the results of the general adult population of Southern Switzerland (greater than or equal to 18 years of age) has allowed us to highlight similarities and differences. The gambling behaviour of adolescents between the ages of 14 and 17 is similar to that of the general adult population, but with some differences which must be pointed out; in fact, among adolescents there are found to be higher percentages of people who practice sports or private betting (about 10% as against 1-3% in the general adult population), as well as a definitely lower percentage of regular gamblers (4% versus 9.6%). On the other hand, the gambling habits of young people between the ages of 18 and 25 are quite different from those which characterise the general adult population. In fact, higher proportions of gamblers have been observed among young adults (71.9% versus 60% in the general adult population), as well as gamblers playing online or on television (7.4% versus 3.3%), while the proportion of regular players is similar (7.9% versus 9.6%) and higher than that of adolescents. Furthermore, among young adults there is found to be much higher percentages of people who play casino games (13-18% versus 3-6% in the general adult population) and of people who have been to a casino in the last 12 months (52.2% versus 14.3%). In casinos, the gambling habits of young patrons (18-25 years old) are similar to those of the general clientele who were interviewed, even though the young patrons go there a bit less frequently, spend less and play more at blackjack (39.6% versus 18% among the general clientele) and less at the slot-machines (39.6% versus 50.4%). Gambling problems are identified in about 3% of people of between 14 and 25 years of age living in Southern Switzerland (2.5% among minors and 3.45% among young adults) compared with 1% found in the general adult population, indicating how this issue seems to have a higher incidence among the young population. Instead, there is virtually no difference between the overall prevalence of casino patrons with gambling problems (22.5%) and the prevalence of young patrons with gambling problems (22.2%).

The survey has allowed us to obtain important information which may prove to be useful for the implementation of preventive strategies and for the development of research in this area. The analysis of the socio-demographic and family profiles has indicated that young people at risk of developing gambling problems generally tend to frequent casinos; this finding is confirmed by the enormous difference between the percentage of young people with gambling problems in casinos (22.2%) and the percentage concerning the young population living in Southern Switzerland (2.97%). The job of monitoring and prevention must therefore be carried out mainly within the casinos. In addition, the analysis has shown that coming of age, which coincides with an increase in gambling opportunities, substantially modifies the gambling habits of young people. In effect, the comparison between adolescents of 14 to 17 years of age and young adults (18 to 25 years of age) indicates that coming of age leads to an overall increase in gambling (a growth in the proportion of gamblers, regular gamblers and online and television gamblers) combined with playing casino games and frequenting gaming rooms, all of which is much higher than within the general adult population. These results indicate the need to monitor the impact of the transition to adulthood on the gambling habits with particular attention (also because the incidence of gambling problems among young people is more significant), and confirm the efficacy of the potential preventive strategy already proposed in the area of the survey concerning the general population, namely the establishment

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of a programme to raise awareness of the risks of gambling addiction at the level of middle school or high school/vocational training. Finally, there are two recommendations concerning the development of research activities in this field. The first concerns the need to conduct longitudinal studies on gambling habits and gambling problems; in fact, the present study, being a photograph of the current situation, does not allow us to understand whether the great change in gambling habits related to coming of age is a temporary or a permanent phenomenon, information which can only be obtained by conducting a longitudinal study. The second recommendation concerns gambling on the internet; given the ever growing importance of this phenomenon, it could prove to be useful to conduct an in-depth study in this area, paying particular attention to the dynamics among young people.