



Chapter 3

Beyond Substance Abuse: The Rise of Gambling: Explores the Prevalence of Gambling Among High School Students as a Significant Risk

Irmak Çavuşoğlu*  

**International Cognitive and Behavioural Psychotherapies Society (CBPis), Nicosia, Northern Cyprus*

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Abstract

This study examines the prevalence and characteristics of illegal gambling among high school students in Northern Cyprus, contrasting it with illicit substance use. Utilizing European School Survey Project Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD) Survey data from 763 students under 18, the analysis reveals a 5.9% engagement rate in gambling, exceeding the 3.8% prevalence of marijuana, the most popular illegal drug. Online gambling accounts for 4.2% of total gambling. Among gamblers, brief sessions (30 minutes or less) are preferred by 2.4%, with lotto/bingo, football betting, poker, and card games being the top choices. Notably, football and animal betting combined surpass the popularity of other gambling types. Furthermore, 4.2% of student gamblers reported experiencing urges to increase their stakes to win. These findings suggest that gambling, with its concerning online presence and potential for financial harm, might be a more prevalent issue than illicit substance use within this specific demographic.

Keywords: Gambling, high school students, illicit drugs, substance use, North Cyprus, ESPAD

3.1. Introduction

While perceived as harmless entertainment by some, gambling has garnered scrutiny due to its potential for addiction, particularly among youth (Volberg, 2002). The allure of quick financial gains can mask the significant consequences of gambling addiction, impacting not only individuals but also their families and society (Shaffer & Korn, 2002). Understanding the prevalence and trends of gambling among high school students becomes crucial in Northern Cyprus, where cultural and socioeconomic factors may influence such behaviors. Gambling is a type of addiction that needs to be analyzed as it poses a risk factor for the social structure like other types of addictions such as illicit drug use. Despite of the research presents a comparative analysis of gambling and drug use to determine the level of gambling habits of high school students in Northern Cyprus in relation to the rates of illicit drug use.

Recent studies suggest a concerning rise in gambling among high schoolers. Riley et al. (2021) reported that within the past year, a significant portion of high school students engaged in some form of gambling. Also, King et al. (2020) found similar trends in online gambling participation among teenagers. Especially, this phenomenon extends beyond high schoolers; the accessibility of online platforms has transformed gambling from its traditional confines of casinos into a readily available activity for younger demographics (Welte et al., 2008). Given the heightened susceptibility to addictive behaviors during adolescence, these statistics raise significant concerns (Delfabbro et al., 2014).

Recent research indicates a worrisome increase in gambling among adolescents. In terms of to the findings of the research by Riley et al. (2021), it was revealed that a significant portion of high school students participated in any type of gambling in the previous year. Moreover, King et al. (2020) have identified similar patterns in the involvement of teenagers in online gambling. This phenomenon is not limited to high school students alone; the advent of online platforms has transformed gambling, traditionally confined

to casinos, into a readily accessible activity for younger age groups (Welte et al., 2008). Considering the heightened vulnerability to addictive behaviors during adolescence, these statistics give rise to significant concerns (Delfabbro et al., 2014). Several factors play a role in the increase of popularity by gambling among high school students. Firstly, the rise of online gambling platforms with lax age restrictions facilitates easy access (Abdi et al., 2015; Puharić et al., 2016). Secondly, peer pressure plays a significant role; adolescents are more likely to gamble if their peers engage in the activity (Oyetunji-Alemede et al., 2019). Finally, the allure of quick financial rewards can be enticing for teenagers seeking to fulfill their desires (Chow et al., 2022).

Although the research findings show that high school students in Northern Cyprus are becoming increasingly worried about gambling, the goal to determine the factors affecting students' propensity for gambling is to ascertain the extent to which their tendency relates to the use of illicit drugs. As a result, the findings of this study can offer an important point to consider for creating intervention and prevention programs that effectively manage addiction. The study aims to bring a new approach to the subject by comparing the rates of gambling and illicit drug use among high school students located in the Northern part of Cyprus.

3.2. Literature Review

This section is organized under 3 headings and deals with "the devastating impact of gambling on adolescents", "gambling in the European and Cyprus context", and a "drug and gambling habits in adolescents".

3.2.1. Devastating Impact of Gambling on Adolescents

Adolescent gambling poses significant risks, leading to complex and potentially severe consequences (Derevensky & Gupta, 2000). Mental health concerns like depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation are prevalent among high school student gamblers (Shead et al., 2010). Academic performance suffers as well, with regular gamblers exhibiting lower grades and higher

dropout rates (Vitaro et al., 2018). Financial strain is another major concern, often pushing teenagers towards borrowing or stealing to fuel their addiction, exacerbating their problems (Owonikoko, 2020).

3.2.2. Gambling in the European and Cyprus Context

Europe presents a unique context for studying adolescent gambling trends due to its diverse cultures and economies. The European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA, 2020) emphasizes the growing accessibility and potential dangers of gambling activities, particularly for younger demographics. The proliferation of online gambling platforms and targeted marketing campaigns aimed at youth have amplified concerns among educators, parents, and policymakers (Wardle et al., 2022). As a member of the European Union, Cyprus reflects and exemplifies continental trends. Its cultural melting pot, fostered by its strategic location at the crossroads of three continents, and booming tourism industry have contributed to a rise in gambling establishments and opportunities. Recent studies indicate a substantial increase in gambling activity among Cypriot high school students, necessitating further investigation (Floros et al., 2015).

3.2.3. Drug and Gambling Habits in Adolescents

Comparing the prevalence of gambling and drug use offers valuable insights into the severity of the gambling problem and its addictive nature (Sussman et al., 2011). Comprehensive comparison of high school students' prevalence of substance abuse and gambling are provided by various studies. While substance use remains a concerning issue, data suggests that gambling rates are on the rise and often exceeding those of various substance use behaviours. In terms of recent studies, a considerable proportion of high school pupils wager money at least once a year (Smith & Wynne, 2002). Given that gambling exposure among youth can result in negative adult behaviours, this trend is especially worrisome (Derevensky & Gupta, 2004). These actions are occurring more frequently, which implies that gambling is becoming more

accepted in this age range (Derevensky & Gupta, 2004). Also, it is important to highlight that high school students who regularly gamble waste a significant portion of their time to this specific activity. As a result, individuals frequently put their gambling habits ahead of their extracurricular and academic obligations (Volberg et al., 2010). The duration of gambling sessions is linked to higher risks of developing gambling-related issues (Delfabbro et al., 2016), suggesting that time spent gambling can serve as an indicator of severity. Sports game betting, lottery, and various card games are among the most popular forms of gambling among high school students (Derevensky et al., 2003). Gambling frequency varies depending on the activity, with some students gambling daily and others engaging less frequently. Understanding these preferences is crucial for designing effective prevention and intervention strategies (Canale et al., 2016). Adolescent gambling poses significant challenges with far-reaching consequences. Exploring the specific context of Northern Cyprus within the broader European landscape highlights the need for targeted interventions that address the unique risk factors and preferred gambling forms among high school students. By comparing gambling and drug use prevalence and understanding the duration and frequency of gambling activities, we can develop more effective strategies to mitigate the harms associated with this growing addiction.

3.3. Methodology

3.3.1. Research Aim and Questions

The purpose of this study is to thoroughly investigate and elucidate the intricate dynamics of gambling patterns in high school students. The research will primarily focus on the prevalence, trends, and contributing factors of these habits over the course of one year. The primary objective is to gain clarity regarding the frequency and types of financial gambling engaged in by this population (high school students). In addition, this study tries to determine the daily gambling habits of high school students. In order to identify potential trends or disparities in the frequencies of these behaviors among high school

students, the study will utilize data from the ESPAD 2023 findings to examine the quantitative aspects of substance use and gambling. A crucial aspect of this research will involve dissecting the students' preferences for various forms of gambling, with the aim of uncovering not only their favored options but also their rationale behind such preferences.

The research questions are mentioned below.

- i. What is the frequency of gambling among high school students in the last year?
- ii. How do the findings of the ESPAD 2023 survey compare with the prevalence rates of substance consumption and betting behaviors among secondary school pupils?
- iii. Over the course of the past year, what amount of time have secondary education students dedicated to participating in gambling activities on a typical day?
- iv. Which types of games do high school students exhibit a preference for, and with what frequency do they engage in such activities?
- v. What proportion of students enrolled in secondary education partake in online gambling activities?
- vi. To what extent do high school students experience the compulsion to deceive significant individuals regarding their involvement in gambling pursuits and to place larger wagers in an endeavour to augment their potential winnings?

3.3.2. Research Design and Data Collection Tools

The data collection tool of this study was obtained by using the ESPAD scale, which has been used in 40 different European countries since 1995 to examine the addiction types and habits of high school students.

3.3.3. Research Sample and Data Collection Procedure

Within the scope of the ESPAD North Cyprus 2023 research of the Anti-Drug Commission, data were collected from 763 students studying in high schools of 6 districts in the North of Cyprus by stratified sampling method. When the proportion of these districts in the sample is Kyrenia (25.9%), Nicosia (24.1%), Famagusta (19.7%), Iskele (14.6%), Güzelyurt (9.7%) and Lefke (5.9%).

3.3.4. Analysis of Data

The data obtained within the scope of the ESPAD 2023 Northern Cyprus research project were analyzed with SPSS 24 within the scope of this study and cross tabulations and frequencies were determined. In addition, Excel was used for data visualization.

3.3.5. Ethical Consideration

The study has been approved by the ethics committee of the Northern Cyprus Prime Minister's Anti-Drug Commission with regard to the Helsinki Declaration on human subjects testing. All the subjects were previously informed about the nature of the study and the data collected for the study were anonymized and processed to safeguard the privacy of participants and prevent the inclusion of any personal information.

3.4. Findings

Table 3.1. Prevalence of gambling for money in the last one year (12 months) among high school students

	<i>f</i>	%
2-4 times a month	15	2
Once a month	24	3.1
2-3 times a week	6	0.8
Never	718	94.1
Total students who gamble	45	5.9

A total of 5.9% of the students who participated in the ESPAD Survey in Northern Cyprus reported that they had gambled for financial gain in the last 12 months. 3.1% of high school students reported gambling once a month, while 2% reported gambling 2-4 times a month. In addition, a very small population of 0.8% reported gambling 2-3 times a week (see table 3.1.).

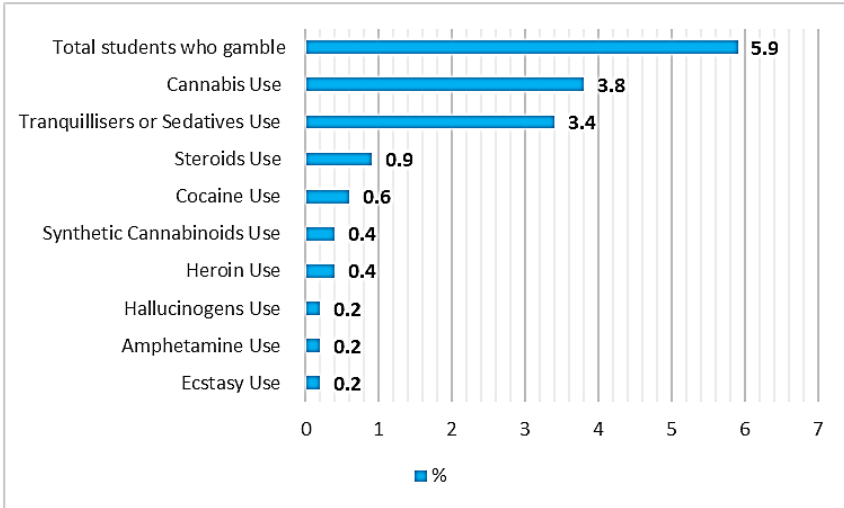


Figure 3.1. According to ESPAD 2023 North Cyprus findings, the rates of gambling and substance use habits of high school students in Cyprus

According to the findings in the figure 3.1. above, 5.9% of high school students have a gambling habit, which is even higher than the most used drug, marijuana. The illegal gambling of high school students constitutes a risky situation in this respect (see figure 3.1.).

Table 3.2. High school students' daily gambling time in the last 12 months

	<i>f</i>	%
2-3 hours	6	0.8
More than 3 hours	4	0.5
Between 30 min - 1 hours	15	2
30 min and less	18	2.4
Never	720	94.4

In the past year, less than 1% of high school students engaged in gambling for over 3 hours, while around 1% participated for 2-3 hours. Additionally, approximately 2% of students gambled for 30 minutes to 1 hour, and 2.4% gambled for half an hour or less. Analyzing these time intervals reveals that high school students tend to gravitate towards faster-paced gambling activities (see table 3.2.).

Table 3.3. Types of gambling preferred by high school students and prevalence of gambling

	Slot Machine		Poker etc. card games		Lotto/Bingo		Bet (Football)		Bet (Horse/Dog)		Cockfight	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
2-4 times a month	7	0.9	14	1.8	14	1.8	15	2	8	1	7	0.9
Once a month	6	0.8	15	2	40	5.2	22	2.9	5	0.7	2	0.3
2-3 times in week	2	0.3	7	0.9	4	0.5	7	0.9	8	1	4	0.5
Never	748	98	727	95.3	705	92.4	719	94.2	742	97.2	750	98.3
Total gambling	15	2	36	4.7	58	7.5	44	5.8	21	2.7	13	1.7

In terms of this study, the most popular forms of gambling among high school students are lotto and bingo, accounting for 7.5% of preferences. They are followed by football betting with a preference of 5.8% and card games such as poker with a preference of 4.7%. Horse/dog betting is preferred by 2.7% of students. Slot machines and cockfighting are less popular forms of gambling, with 2% and 1.7% preferring them respectively. The most popular types of gambling played 2-3 times a week are horse/dog betting, soccer betting and card games such as poker. However, football betting, lotto/bingo, and card games such as poker are less popular options and are usually played between 2-4 times per month. Students generally prefer card games such as lotto/bingo, soccer betting and poker once a month. Overall, 8.5% of high school students bet on football and animals (see table 3.3.).

Table 3.4. Proportion of high school students who gamble online according to ESPAD 2023 North Cyprus Data

	<i>f</i>	%
Once a month	9	1.2
Every few months	16	2.1
Few days a week	3	0.4
Each Week	4	0.5
Never	731	95.8
Total internet gambling	32	4.2

4.2% of high school students stated that they do not gamble online. When the distribution of the frequency of online gambling is analyzed, 2.1% gamble once every few months, 1.2% gamble once a month, 0.5% gamble every week and 0.4% gamble a few days a week (see table 3.4.).

Table 3.5. Rate of among high school students, the need to re-deposit money to win more at gambling

		<i>F</i>	%
Re-deposit money	No response	48	6.3
	Yes	31	4.1
	No	684	89.6

4.1% of high school students stated that they gambled again re-deposit money to win. 6.3% refrained from answering this question (see table 3.5.).

Table 3.6. The rate of high school students lying to people important to them in order to gamble

		<i>F</i>	%
Lying to people	No response	47	6.2
	Yes	18	2.4
	No	698	91.5

2.4% of high school students would even lie to people they care about in order to gamble. 6.2% refrained from answering this question (see table 3.6.).

3.5. Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that 5.9% of high school students in Northern Cyprus reported gambling in the past year, which is 2.1% higher than the most commonly used substance, cannabis. In this context, gambling is a significant risk factor for high school students. In addition, 4.2% gamble on the internet, with the most common forms of gambling being betting (e.g., football, animal races, etc.). These findings suggest that high school students are prone to short and fast-paced gambling. In terms of ESPAD 2023 survey, the study of gambling habits among high school students in Northern Cyprus reveals a complex web of engagement and preferences in gambling activities that must be analysed in order to understand the underlying factors and potential effects on the students' development and well-being. In terms of a study done in Connecticut, USA, 25.4% of teenagers stated to gambling in a previous year. This habit was related to several risky behaviours, traumatic events, and a decline in social support (Stefanovics et al., 2023). This emphasizes how crucial it is to comprehend the larger environment in which adolescent gambling occurs as well as any potential connections to other risk behaviours and psychosocial factors.

An important discovery indicates that gambling is more prevalent among high school students in Northern Cyprus compared to the usage of illegal substances. Cigarette and alcohol usage rates among high school students in Northern Cyprus showed a downward trend between 1996 and 2015. Unfortunately, there has been a significant increase in the use of illicit substances, with cannabis being the most popular choice (Çakıcı et al., 2017). Nevertheless, recent research suggests that gambling might be emerging as a more widespread risky behavior than drug use among teenagers in Northern Cyprus. More and in-depth research is needed to better identify these several factors behind the rise of gambling as well as changes in substance use among young people.

Discussion should focus on gambling patterns and durations among high school students. The findings of this study show that the most preferred

gambling types among high school students are lottery, bingo, betting (football, animal races) and poker. Preferred forms of gambling vary based on frequency, with card games, horse/dog betting, and soccer betting being the most common for those who gamble frequently. Most gamblers play for less than an hour, suggesting a preference for fast-paced gambling and instant satisfaction. Gambling duration and preferences provide insights into reasons and risk factors associated with students' gambling habits. In a study conducted in Italy by De Luigi et al. (2018), gambling activities of adolescents were identified, and certain activities were associated with higher risks and different risk factors. Therefore, understanding the gambling preferences of high school students in Northern Cyprus will contribute to the development of policies and action plans to reduce risk factors in the fight against addiction by identifying potential risks.

The emergence of online gambling among a percentage of 4.2 of high school students, with varying frequencies, is a pivotal aspect to investigate, particularly in light of the global upsurge in online gambling. The accessibility and potentially anonymous nature of online gambling may be contributing factors to its adoption among adolescents, and this calls for further examination in future research endeavours. The findings of the study conducted by Dinç et al. (2020) revealed that male participants exhibited significantly higher scores of online gambling addiction in comparison to female. Subsequent investigation should devote attention to this gender discrepancy in the prevalence of online gambling and its potential ramifications on gambling risks and behaviours among young individuals in Northern Cyprus.

The psychological and societal consequences of adolescent gambling must also be considered. The findings of a study conducted in the USA by Kurani et al. (2022) appeared that socio-economic difficulties at the local level, as well as parental substance abuse or gambling, were linked to negative childhood experiences. In this respect, further research in the context of Northern Cyprus would be very useful to understand the social and economic impacts of gambling and its patterns on society. Additionally, it is crucial to

explore the socioeconomic and familial consequences of adolescent gambling behaviour. According to a study conducted in Southern Spain, engagement in artistic pursuits exhibited an inverse relationship with gambling, while gambling demonstrated a positive correlation with higher family income and having a father who worked from home (Moñino-García et al., 2022). Examining the potential socioeconomic and familial impacts on gambling behaviors among high school students in Northern Cyprus could potentially unveil valuable insights into broader influences and potentially mitigating factors. It may be conceivable to acquire an understanding of the worldwide and local patterns in adolescent gambling through a comparison of the gambling practices in Northern Cyprus with those observed in other regions. The research study of findings shows that by Li et al. (2022) in China show that smoking and illicit drug use are at low and moderate levels, while alcohol use is high. To develop tailored interventions and policies, it may be imperative to grasp how regional factors, such as legal and cultural considerations, impact the gambling behaviours of adolescents.

3.6. Conclusion

The findings of the ESPAD survey emphasize the importance of addressing gambling habits among high school students in Northern Cyprus. The survey reveals a significant prevalence of gambling compared to the use of illegal substances, as well as the growing popularity of online gambling. These aspects, in conjunction with the specific preferences for gambling, call for in-depth research, the formulation of policies, and specialized interventions to prevent potential negative consequences associated with adolescent gambling. Identifying the preferences and risks associated with gambling is crucial for developing policies and action plans to combat it. As in each scientific study, it should be taken into that this study was conducted within certain limitations and opens a door for the development of new perspectives to contribute to new studies to be conducted on this subject. For example, understanding the reasons and motivations behind gambling, determining the accessibility of gambling, peer influence, etc. will be guiding

future research to better explore this issue. The contribution of the findings to be obtained with new research to be conducted on this subject will contribute to the development of action plans and policies in combating gambling and is extremely important for the well-being of adolescents in the development process.

3.7. Challenges and Limitations of the Study

Despite the use of a stratified sampling method aimed at representing different districts, limitations may exist in capturing the complete spectrum of gambling behaviors among all student demographics. Regional variations in attitudes towards gambling and varying levels of awareness could impact the validity and applicability of the study's findings. Moreover, the use of self-administered questionnaires in the study can introduce biases and add a factor of inaccuracy. The prevalence rates derived from students' self-reports may also be subject to bias due to social desirability or misinterpretation of questions, leading to under- or over-reporting of gambling activities. Furthermore, the study focuses on gambling at a single point in time, and it has been observed that gambling, particularly online gambling, can change quickly. Thus, the study may not provide complete information on the latest advances and changes in young people's gambling behaviors. While the study identifies several common forms of gambling, it may not account for less common or newly emerging forms that could be significant among students. The categorization used in the study may not fully represent the complexity of gambling behaviors. On the other hand, a significant methodological weakness of the study is the cross-sectional design adopted by the authors, which limits the ability to determine actual relationships between gambling behaviors and other potential correlates such as substance use or socio-economic status.

Conducting longitudinal investigations is a more effective approach to gain insight into how gambling behaviours develop over a person's lifetime, rather than focusing solely on quantitative aspects such as motivation and psychological effects. However, this method raises ethical concerns regarding

confidentiality and privacy, especially when collecting information about gambling and substance use. Researchers must handle these issues with sensitivity and care. While the study provides information about gambling behaviors in Northern Cyprus, it may not be applicable to other areas due to cultural and economic differences. To make more generalizable conclusions and develop targeted interventions, comparative analyses are needed. These limitations highlight the importance of interpreting results carefully and conducting further research to better understand adolescent gambling behavior.

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