

Sports Betting among Young Adults in Massachusetts:

Perspectives, Engagement, Impact, and Recommendations



Overview

The Massachusetts Gaming Commission funded NORC at the University of Chicago, in partnership with Gemini Research, to increase understanding of sports betting among young adults in Massachusetts.

The study used a community-engaged research approach to understand the social and public health impacts of legalized sports betting among young adults, ages 18 to 25.

Research Questions

- 1 How do young adults **perceive** and **engage** in sports betting?
- 2 How has legalization affected **awareness**, **attitudes**, and **behavior**?
- 3 What **policies** or **programs** can reduce harm and support well-being?

Research Methods



Community-engaged Qualitative Study (2023-2026):

Interviews and/or focus groups with:

- **62** young adults
- **12** sports betting vendors, policymakers, and researchers
- **6** athletic directors and mental health counselors



Community engagement:

- Engaged young adults and community members to serve as collaborators as part of a Community Advisory Board (CAB)
- Trained two young adults from the community to serve as interviewers
- Conducted participatory analysis with CAB members and community interviewers to interpret and validate key findings

Young Adult Participants:

62 young adults participated in interviews or focus groups:

- **71%** previously bet on sports.
- **66%** ages 21-25; **34%** 18-20.
- **56%** identify as female, **42%** as male, **2%** preferred not to answer.
- **63%** identify as White, **21%** as Asian, **8%** as Black or African American, **8%** as Hispanic or Latino.

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Young Adult Sports Betting Views and Behaviors

VIEWS

Young adults hold ambivalent attitudes toward sports betting, viewing it as a socially acceptable activity with potential risk. While young adults acknowledged risk, they commonly viewed themselves and their peers as exempt from potential harms.

Sports betting is okay in moderation.

- ✓ Promotes social connectedness
- ✓ Increases engagement with sports
- ✓ Can generate income

Sports betting is harmful in excess.

- x Can cause financial loss
- x Can lead to addiction
- x Can create stress and relationship strain

"It's sinking a lot more money into a black hole than [young adults] would normally... that being said, it definitely does offer some interesting entertainment and social interactions, especially around watch parties for sports games."

BEHAVIORS

Most young adult participants shared engaging in sports betting infrequently, wagering less than \$10. A few shared betting more frequently and wagering more.

Young adult perceptions of their sports betting behavior:



Betting on sports is equivalent to "buying a coffee" or "going out to lunch."



Losses pose financial risk, create stress, and snowball when "chasing losses" to recoup.



Sports betting is a social activity that often occurs when consuming alcohol with friends.



Sports betting is easily accessible, normalized, and potentially addictive.

Young adults primarily bet on sports using online platforms and mobile apps.



Type of Bet

Moneyline bets were favored by young adults and perceived as straightforward and less risky when compared to prop bets or parlays.



Sportsbook Selection

Available promotions was a key factor for young adults when selecting a sportsbook. Other factors included recent advertisements and which had the "better line."

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Sports Betting Normalization and Differential Experiences

NORMALIZATION

Young adults perceive sports betting as normalized among their peers and socially embedded in everyday life.

Young adults often discuss and engage in sports betting across social, academic, and work settings.

"[Sports betting] gives people something to talk about with their friends or it's a fun way to get to know people."



Mobile and Online Platforms have increased the accessibility, convenience, and availability of sports betting for young adults.



Gamification of sports betting has created distance from traditional forms of gambling and minimizes recognizable feelings of risk and loss.



Advertisements feel pervasive, and widespread promotional incentives further contribute to engagement. "Free money" and "bonus bets" promotions contribute to sports betting feeling "lower stakes" and more approachable for young adults.

DIFFERENTIAL EXPERIENCES



Underage (18-20 years old)

- Underage sports betting was perceived as common due to existing loopholes and workarounds.
- Early exposure may contribute to underage engagement.



Gender

- Men were viewed as more frequent bettors than women.
- However, recent advertisements and influencers are perceived to be targeting young women.



College Students

- College campus is a common point of entry for young adults with newfound autonomy.
- Sports betting conversations and engagement are prevalent among peers.



College Athletes

- College athlete participants emphasized the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) ban on sports betting prevents most from engaging.
- Many expressed concern over pressure and harassment for athletes.

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Sports Betting Responsibility and Recommendations

Shared Responsibility for Harm Mitigation

 Participants viewed sports betting harm mitigation as a shared responsibility with responsible actors at multiple levels.



Participant Recommendations



Education & Awareness

Expand **financial literacy** and **gambling education** for young adults. Launch **public service announcements (PSAs)** modeled after anti-smoking campaigns.



Advertising & Messaging

Strengthen **regulations and restrictions** on sports betting advertisements to reduce their prevalence and influence.



Support Services

Increase **availability, visibility, and integration** of support services tailored for young adults. Adopt **amnesty policies and education** for collegiate athletes.



App-Based Safeguards

Integrate more prominent **opt-out warnings, disclaimers, limits, loss notifications, and tracking tools** within sports betting apps.



Policy & Regulation

Address existing **regulatory loopholes** that enable **underage betting**. Consider policy-based sports betting restrictions.



Research, Monitoring, & Evaluation

Continue to invest in **research, monitoring, and evaluation**, including quantitative, longitudinal, and equity-focused studies.