GAMBLIFICATION

The Rise of Nontraditional Betting Platforms

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Presentation Overview

ECONOMIC VIEW

This section explores:
- The economic rationale of predictions markets.
- How the expansion of gambling into life affects individual finances, public spending, and broader economic dynamics.

SOCIOLOGICAL VIEW

This section explores:
- How gambling becomes embedded in everyday life through cultural norms, institutional practices, and social environments.
- The sociological implications of a society increasingly shaped by gamblification.

PSYCHOLOGICAL & PUBLIC HEALTH VIEW

This section explores:
- The psychological impacts of gamblified features within non-traditional gambling markets that may lead to harm.
- Gambling treatment provider survey data on how new forms of gambling is showing up among clinical populations
- Possible solutions for reducing harm

Introduction

What Makes An Activity a Gamble?

STAKE

Something of value that a participant puts at risk, most commonly money.

UNCERTAINTY

The outcome of the event being wagered on is not known in advance and is influenced by random factors, partial knowledge, or uncontrollable variables.

PRIZE

The reward or potential gain from the gamble. It's what gives the gambling activity its appeal and motivates participation.

1. Macey, J., & Hamari, J. (2024). Gamblification: A definition. New media & society, 26(4), 2046-2065.

Gamblification[1]

Gamblification is the process by which gambling activities become integrated into everyday life, turning gambling into a constant presence and fundamentally changing our relationship to it. It transforms gambling from an overt, intentional act into something we encounter passively and routinely.

1. Adapted from Macey, J., & Hamari, J. (2024). Gamblification: A definition. New media & society, 26(5), 2045-2046

Gambling Ubiquity

ANYTIME

Gambling opportunities have expanded into a 24/7 landscape, ranging from traditional land-based casinos and global sports betting, to 24-hour stock trading, nonstop cryptocurrency markets, and prediction platforms that allow wagering on events at any hour.

ANYWHERE

Gambling access points have expanded dramatically, from physical venues such as casinos, bars, and office pools to digital platforms including websites, virtual worlds, streaming media, and smartphone apps. Technology continues to expand access through the development of integrated digital gambling ecosystems.

ANYTHING

Gambling opportunities have expanded far beyond traditional activities like casino games and sports betting to include cryptocurrencies, NFTs, and prediction markets that allow wagering on pop culture, politics, natural events, and virtually any activity that can be measured.
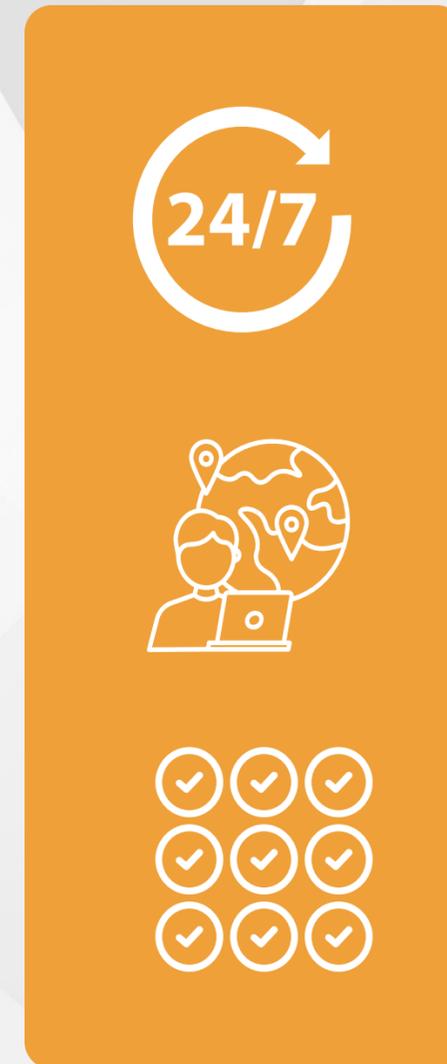
Prediction Markets

WHAT ARE THEY?

Prediction markets are platforms where individuals can place bets (or "trade shares") on the outcomes of future events, such as elections or weather patterns. Each possible outcome is treated like a stock, with prices fluctuating based on the likelihood of that event occurring. If your prediction is correct, you earn a payout. Popular platforms includes Kalshi and Polymarket.

WHY THEY MATTER?

Prediction markets reflect the "wisdom of the crowd" and are often praised for their accuracy in forecasting real-world outcomes. However, they also blur the line between information and speculation, turning everyday events into wagering opportunities. They normalize betting behavior and may encourage constant engagement with real-world uncertainty as a source of profit.

Gambling Expansion Types

SPORTS

VIRTUAL SPORTS BETTING

Most major sports betting platforms now feature virtual sports betting: simulated events that run continuously, 24/7, across a wide range of sports including soccer, basketball, football, horse racing, and cycling.

This removes the limitations of traditional sports calendars, allowing users to bet at any time, regardless of season or schedule.

IN-PLAY / MICROBETTING

In-play betting are wagers on outcomes after a sporting event has started (e.g., who will be in the lead at halftime).

Micro-betting is a subcategory of in-play betting that allows wagers on individuals sporting moments, such as will the next pitch be a strike?

This transforms betting from a pre-game decision to an ongoing activity, similar to slot machine-like behavior that is frequent, fast, and repetitive.

FINANCE

CRYPTOCURRENCIES

Cryptocurrency markets, featuring assets like Bitcoin, Ethereum, Dogecoin, and Shiba Inu, operate 24/7 and can offer leverage up to 100x, enabling high-risk day / swing trading at any time.

Some brokerage firms are offering these digital assets along side traditional assets, such as stocks.

NFTS AND DEFI

NFTs are digital assets that represent ownership of unique items, such as art or music, stored on the blockchain.

Decentralized Finance is a blockchain-based system that allows users to lend, borrow, trade, and earn interest without traditional banks or intermediaries.

Causes risk-taking under the guise of "respectable" financial investments.

Enables retirement planning in casino-like financial volatility.

NFTs and DeFi turn investing into a high-risk, fast-paced environment where the line between finance and gambling is increasingly blurred.

NATURAL EVENTS

NATURE

Prediction markets allow individuals to bet on natural events such as daily temperatures, rainfall amounts, and hurricane intensity. The appeal lies in their universal relevance and relatability since everyone experiences weather. Some events, like temperature forecasts, also have a low perceived knowledge barrier, making them feel more accessible than betting on sports, which may require understanding complex rules or statistics.

Because natural events like weather occur daily, they invite regular betting behavior and transform everyday unpredictability into a source of entertainment and profit. In this context, unpredictability becomes a monetizable feature of everyday life.

Does monetizing disasters, such as hurricanes or floods, trivialize human suffering? Does it erode empathy when profit is tied to catastrophe?

POLITICAL EVENTS

POLITICS

Prediction markets allow individuals to bet on the outcomes of political events such as presidential elections, the passage of tax laws, Federal Reserve monetary policy decisions, and so on.

These markets blur the line between civic engagement and financial speculation, turning democratic processes into tradable assets. But do they distort our relationship with government and policymaking? Do they incentivize manipulation, insider behavior, or reduce democracy to a wagering opportunity?

GAMING

LOOT BOXES / MYSTERY CRATES

Players spend money (or in-game currency) for a randomized reward.

PRIZE WHEELS / SPIN-TO-WIN FEATURES

Players "spin" a wheel or press a button to receive a prize, often wrapped in visual effects or anticipation-building animations.

Game-Within-a-Game Casino features including mini slot machines.

DIGITAL ASSETS

Some games enable players to earn or create NFT-based avatars that hold real world value and can be traded in secondary markets.

Games today increasingly incorporate gambling-like mechanics, such as randomness, reward loops, impulsive spending, and speculative risk. These features blur the line between play and wagering, especially for youth, and serve as a gateway into real gambling behavior.

SYMBOLIC EVENTS

CULTURAL MEANING

Prediction markets allow event wagering on outcomes tied to tradition, religion, public ceremony, or cultural meaning. Selection of the next Pope and royal birth names are examples.

Wagering on symbolic events illustrates how tradition, meaning, and identity are being increasingly absorbed into the logic of gambling. This not only risks cultural appropriation but also diminishes the significance of solemn experiences by reframing them as entertainment.

Hidden Price of Easy Access Gambling

Economic Impact

FINANCIAL INSTABILITY

DIVERTED CONSUMER EXPENDITURES

WORKFORCE DISRUPTION AND PRODUCTIVITY LOSS

PUBLIC HEALTH AND SOCIAL SERVICE COSTS

Social Structures and Norms

Is Gambling Just Something We Do Now?

WHAT PREDICTION MARKETS DO:

- Gamblify political and civic life

- Turn uncertainty into entertainment

- Reframe risk taking as "insight"

How Gambling Becomes Embedded in Everyday Life

Cultural Framing	• Betting = strategy, insight, civic engagement • Forecasting reframes risk as knowledge
Institutional Support	• Legal gray zones, VC Funding, strategic partnerships, media legitimization • Platforms presented as tech innovation or finance rather than gambling
Social Environments	• Reddit threads, Discord betting groups, WhatsApp group chats, conversations about "what the odds say" • Social sharing reinforces behavior as communal

When Gambling Becomes Culture

What was once openly labeled as "betting" is now frequently rebranded as "forecasting" or "prediction of events."

Gambling terms like "bet" and "win" are being substituted by words like "buy shares," "predict," "invest," and "gain".

A Society Built for Betting

- Contemporary sociological theories help us understand why prediction markets make sense in today's cultural and structural context.

- Betting becomes a coping mechanism in a world shaped by loneliness, volatility, and emotional commodification.

Normalization Obscures Harm

GAMBLIFICATION REFRAMES RISK, WE NEED TO REFRAME HOW WE DETECT HARM

- Gambling goes unrecognized

- Social validation reinforces constant engagement

- Cultural reframing makes harm harder to name or measure

- What looks like adaptation may be persistent overexposure — sustained, normalized engagement with risk systems that are psychologically and emotionally taxing.

A Psychological and Public Health View of Gamblification

IMPLICATIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS OF NON TRADITIONAL GAMBLING PRODUCTS

Design features heighten risk

- Various prediction markets and crypto exchanges incorporate features that mimic traditional gambling mechanics that are designed to trigger dopamine releases and exploit cognitive biases:

INSTANT REWARDS   SOCIAL COMPARISON MECHANISMS

IMMERSIVE VISUALS   DYNAMIC FEEDBACK LOOPS

- These features heighten the risk of excessive trading among investors.

Perceptions that activity is skill based increase risk

Non-traditional gambling markets are often viewed by participants as skill based

- Evidence suggests that activities perceived as skill-based may present greater risks of problematic behavior than pure chance-based activities.

- This finding appears linked to cognitive distortions; participants in skill-based activities demonstrate greater susceptibility to illusions of control and overconfidence in their abilities.

Barrada, J. R., Navas, J. F., Ruiz de Lara, C. M., Billieux, J., Devos, G., & Perales, J. C. (2019). Reconsidering the structure, and implications of gambling motives: An integrative approach. PLoS One, 14(2), e0212695.

Moragas, L., Granero, R., Stinchfield, R., Fernández-Aranda, F., Fröberg, F., Aymamí, N., ... & Jiménez-Murcia, S. (2015). Comparative analysis of distinct phenotypes in gambling disorder based on gambling preferences. BMC psychiatry, 15, 1-11.

Myrseth, H., Brunborg, G. S., & Eidem, M. (2010). Differences in cognitive distortions between pathological and non-pathological gamblers with preferences for chance or skill games. Journal of gambling studies, 26, 561-569.

Is the fusion of gambling features into prediction markets used to exploit behavioral psychology to create addictive behavior?

"By leveraging psychological triggers such as instant gratification, social validation, and FOMO, prediction platforms encourage compulsive engagement, where frequent reward mechanisms—such as celebratory pop-ups and leaderboard rankings—make it easy for users to become over-involved………and as studies show, especially impact vulnerable populations."

Rabinovitz & Packin (2025)

All Bets Are On: Addiction, Prediction, Regulation, and the Future of Financial Gambling

Forthcoming: Fordham IPLJ 2025

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Within gambling treatment programs, are non-traditional forms of gambling showing up as an issue?
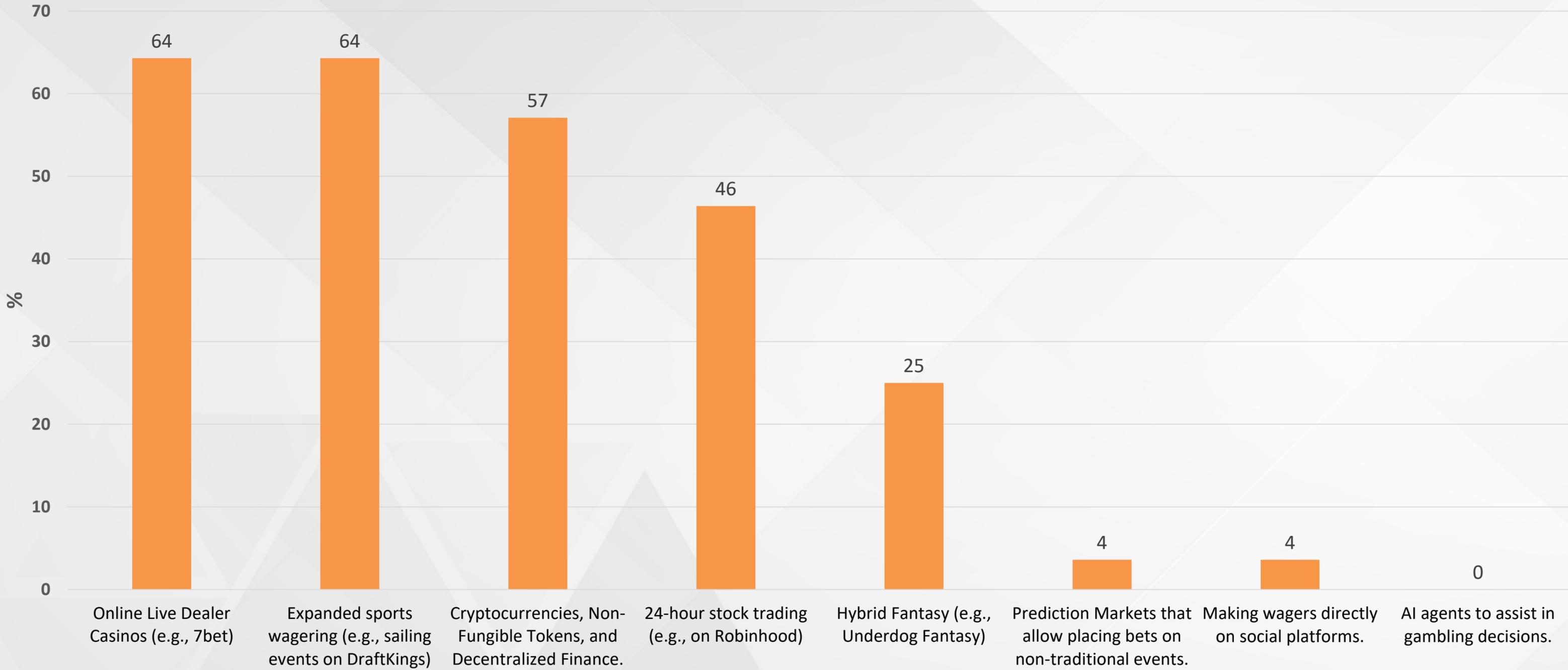
Oregon Gambling Treatment Provider Survey Findings
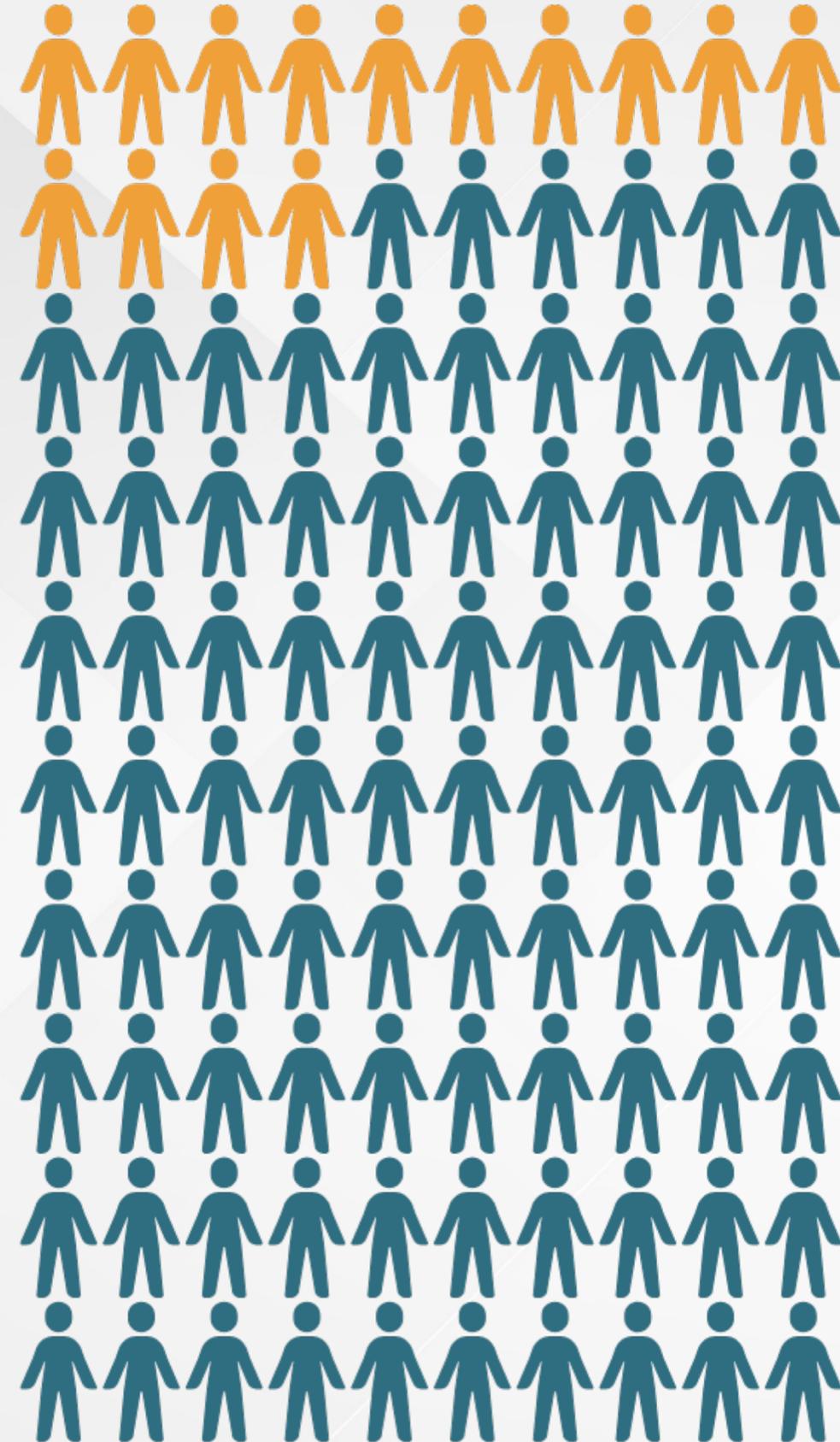
June 2025   N= 40

Percent of gambling treatment counselors reporting clients who engaged in non-traditional forms of gambling ("Have any of your clients engaged in the following")

What percent of your clients are reporting engagement with any of the listed non-traditional forms of gambling?

- Average = 14%

- Range between 0% to 50%

What challenges are clients sharing regarding these non-traditional forms of gambling?

ACCESS
- Ease of access via smartphone and internet

AVAILABILITY
- 24-hour availability

DIFFICULT TO DISENGAGE
- There are a lot of advertisement including personalized emails, "free play", cash bonuses, and other incentives to come back
- "Hard to stop"; triggers can include interacting with everyday essentials like smart phones and computers
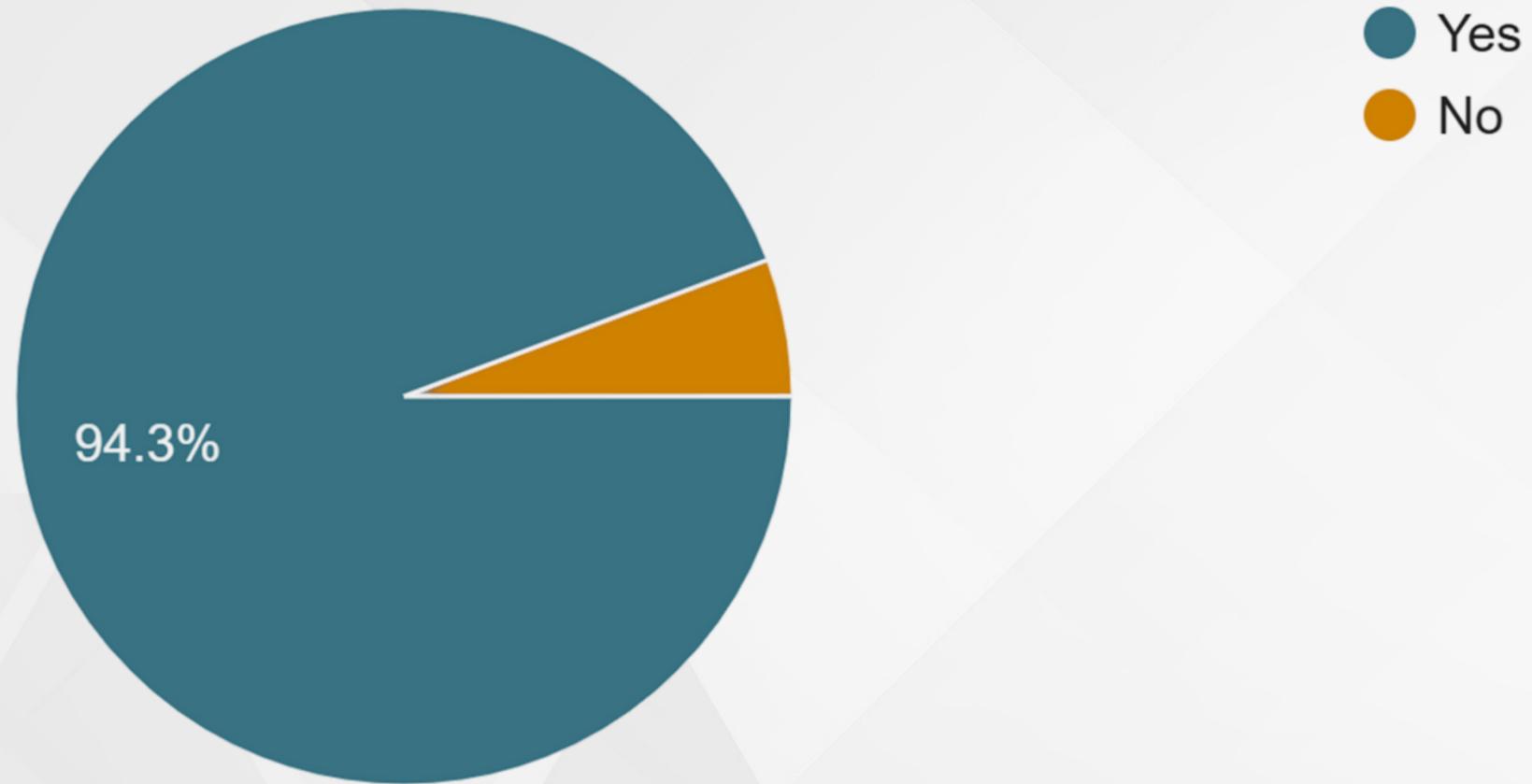
CLASSIFICATION & PROBLEM RECOGNITION
- Anything appearing to be a financial instrument (Crypto, day trading,etc) can be very hard to address because they are viewing this through a perceived veil of respectability, or even a "job" that is working out for them, even in the face of contrary evidence.
- Not believing it's gambling
- Thinking it is a higher form of gambling; able to outsmart the general population with knowledge of it before it becomes more well-known/mainstream; feeling like it is based on intelligence rather than random chance.

VALIDATION WITHIN A GAMBLING TREATMENT SETTING
- Feeling invalidated as other people don't see it as gambling
- Feeling like they don't belong in group treatment settings where other clients talk about more traditional forms of gambling

Do you feel like you need more training to better address clients who have reported these non-traditional forms of gambling?

35 responses

Legend:
- Yes
- No

94.3%

Public Health Responses To This Emerging Treat

Regulation

- Policymakers must craft a framework that safeguards financial and prediction markets' legitimate functions while protecting consumers from excessive gamblification

- Regulation needs to address consumer protection and responsible platform design

Gaming and Professional Sports Associations Arguing for Increased Regulation
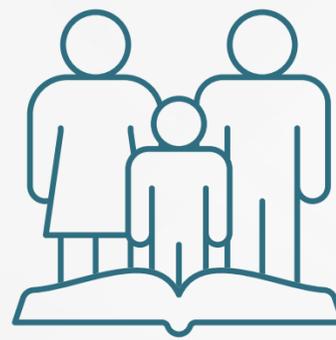
Public Education

We need to include the topic of non-traditional gambling markets into public health messaging.

FINANCIAL LITERACY

INTERNET SAFETY

PARENT EDUCATION

HEALTH PROMOTION

SAFER GAMBLING

Treatment and Prevention Integration

- Weave discussion of non-traditional betting markets into
  - Addiction treatment programs
  - Addiction prevention programs

- Professional training
  - Increase the capability of mental health and addiction providers
  - Increase the capability of prevention specialists

Unknowns

Is this a fad?

How does this change risk-taking behavior?

Will society adapt to a world where they can bet on anything, anywhere, anytime or will technological advancement combined with laxed regulation continue to increase popularity and greater levels of harm

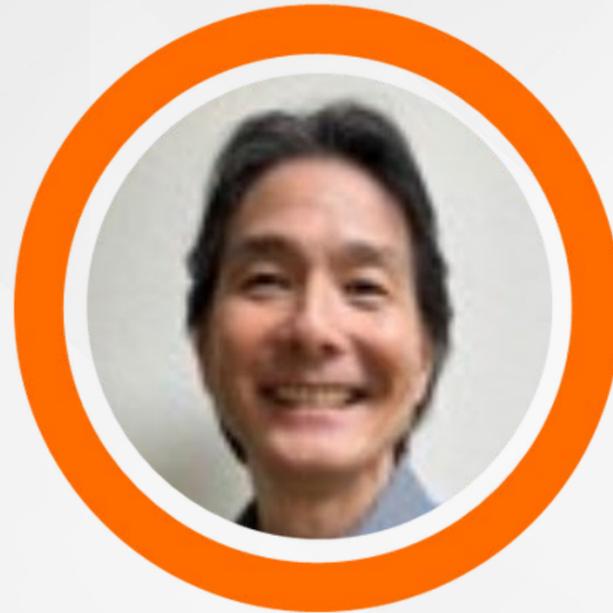How will the unregulated prediction markets economically impact regulated gambling industry?

What will be the increase in gambling prevalence?

THANK YOU

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