


Problematic Gambling Among Oregon Youth Housed in Correctional Facilities

Oregon
Health
Authority





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Introduction

Youth gambling is a public health issue

Incarcerated adults have rates of problematic gambling that are among the highest found in any population. Less well-studied, are problematic gambling, gambling-related incarcerations, and gambling-related incidents among youth housed in secure facilities for criminal behavior.

In recent years, gambling behavior among youths has emerged as a public health problem, specifically concerned with the growth in online gambling and electronic accessibility for young people.¹ Prevalence rates vary worldwide, but in North America, estimates range from 2.1-2.6%² and is more likely to affect older adolescents, males, racial minorities, adolescents with parents who gambled, and youths who do not live with their parents.¹

Youth gambling is problematic for a number of reasons, as researchers have observed a relationship between starting to gamble at a young age with greater risk of problematic gambling.³ Findings suggest that in late adolescence gambling patterns⁴ are formed, with risk factors for gambling including male gender, delinquency, sensation-seeking, and cyberbullying.⁵ On the other hand, having positive relationships with one's parents and being involved in meaningful activities mitigated gambling⁵ behavior.



Youth Gambling in Oregon⁶

In 2020, 9.3% of surveyed Oregon youths reported gambling in the past 30 days. Rates were highest among male youth (12.6%), followed by transgender or gender non-conforming youth (11.3%), and female youth (6.1%).

Incarcerated youth are particularly vulnerable to gambling

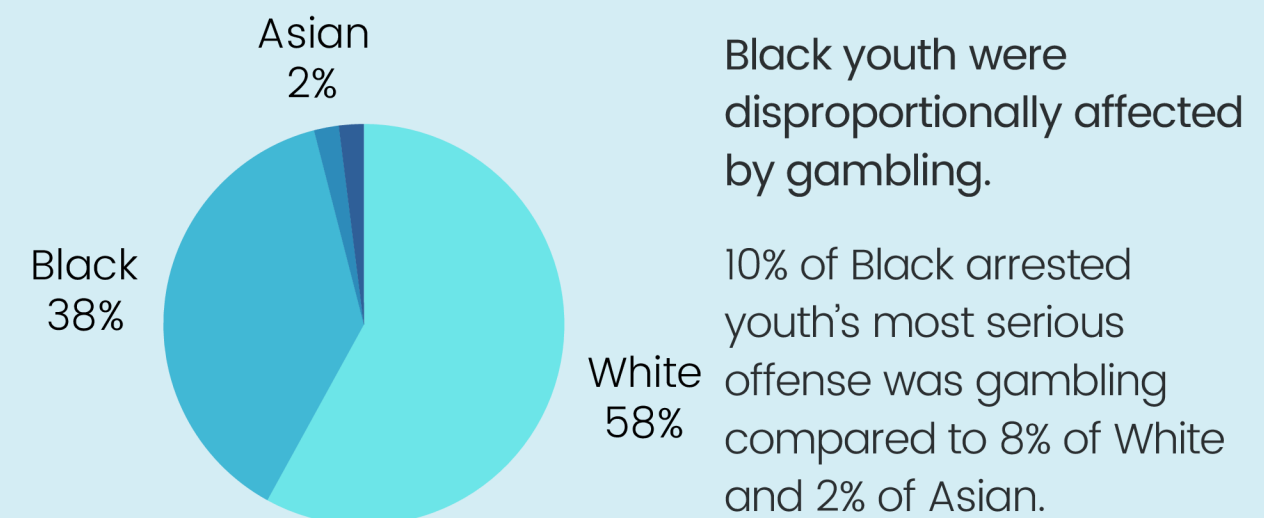
Youths housed in correctional facilities are additionally at an increased risk of developing gambling-related problems. In addition to gambling, incarcerated youths are more likely to have a range of health risk factors, such as current substance use, beginning to use substances at a young age, and early mortality.⁷ Studies have observed atypical responses to reward and punishment among incarcerated adolescent males, which are inherent aspects of gambling, increasing the likelihood of developing addictive behavior.⁸

Studies with this population are limited. Existing research has found:

- In a 2007 Canadian survey of incarcerated youth, 83% of respondents reported gambling in the last year, with 67% gambling one or more times per week.⁹ 18% of surveyed incarcerated youth met diagnostic criteria for disordered gambling, who were more likely to gamble alone, gamble in public spaces (e.g., convenience stores, bingo halls), gamble to feel older, and engage in risky behavior to pay off gambling-related debt.
- In a 2009 research report on gambling among adolescents involved in Georgia court systems, 16% of males exhibited problem gambling symptoms, compared to 4.4% of females.¹⁰ Specific risk factors for problem gambling included having someone in their life with problematic gambling, a parent having problematic gambling, and substance use.

Trends Among Youths Arrested for Gambling¹¹

190 youths were arrested in 2019 with gambling as their most serious offense. 71% were male.



The number of youth arrests for primarily gambling in 2019 decreased by 89% among males, but increased by 29% among females.

Methodology

Project purpose

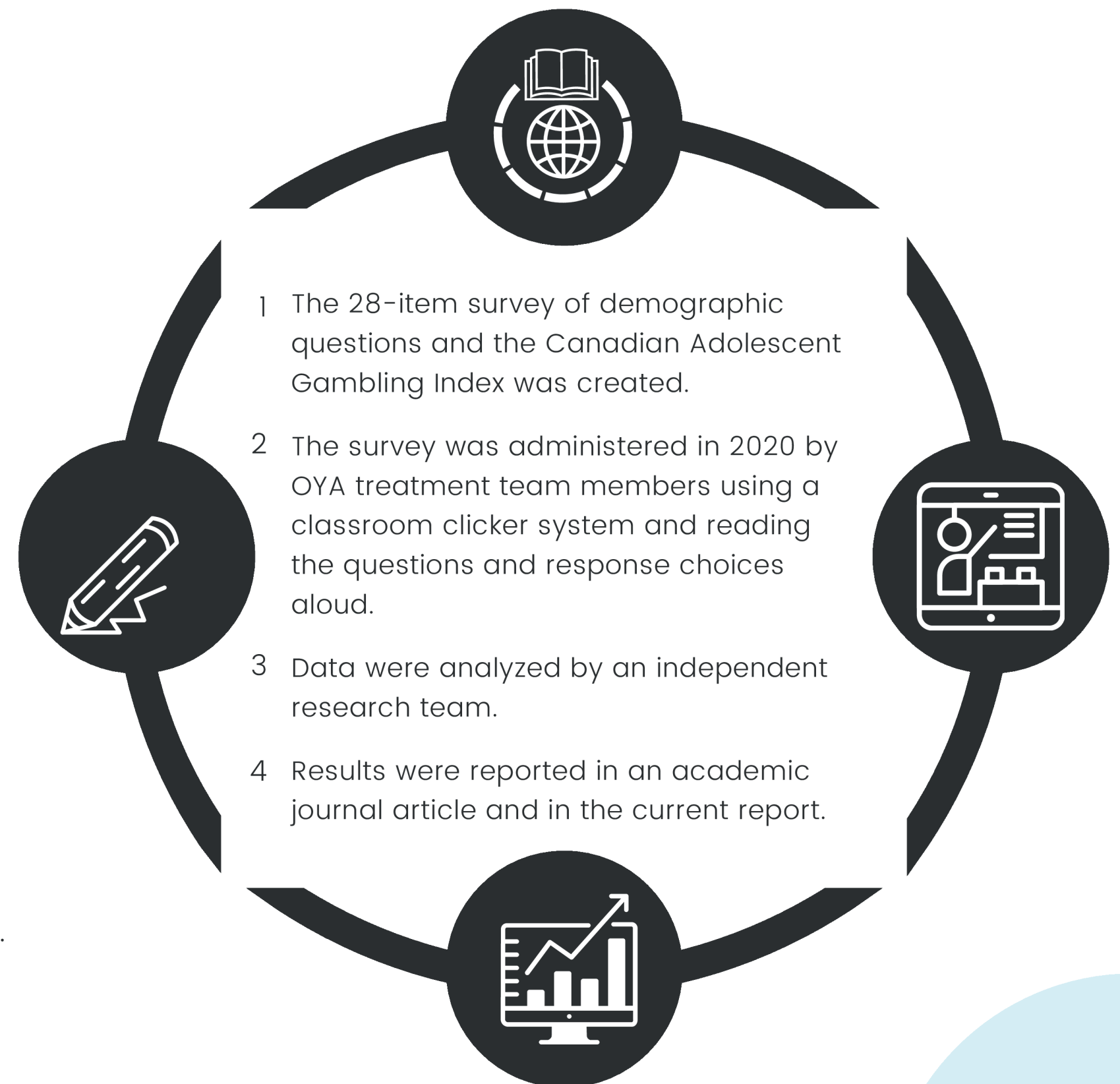
Very few studies have investigated rates of problematic gambling, gambling-related incarcerations, and gambling-related incidents among youth housed in secure facilities for illegal behavior. The results of this study have important implications for gambling harm reduction and the Juvenile Justice System.

Participant profile

The survey was administered to Oregon youths residing in the Oregon Youth Authority (OYA) housing facilities, including units from MacLaren Youth Correctional Facility, Camp Florence Youth Transitional Facility, Oak Creek Youth Correctional Facility, Jackie Winter Transition Program (formerly Young Women's Transition Program), Eastern Oregon Youth Correctional Facility, and Rouge Valley Youth Correctional Facility.

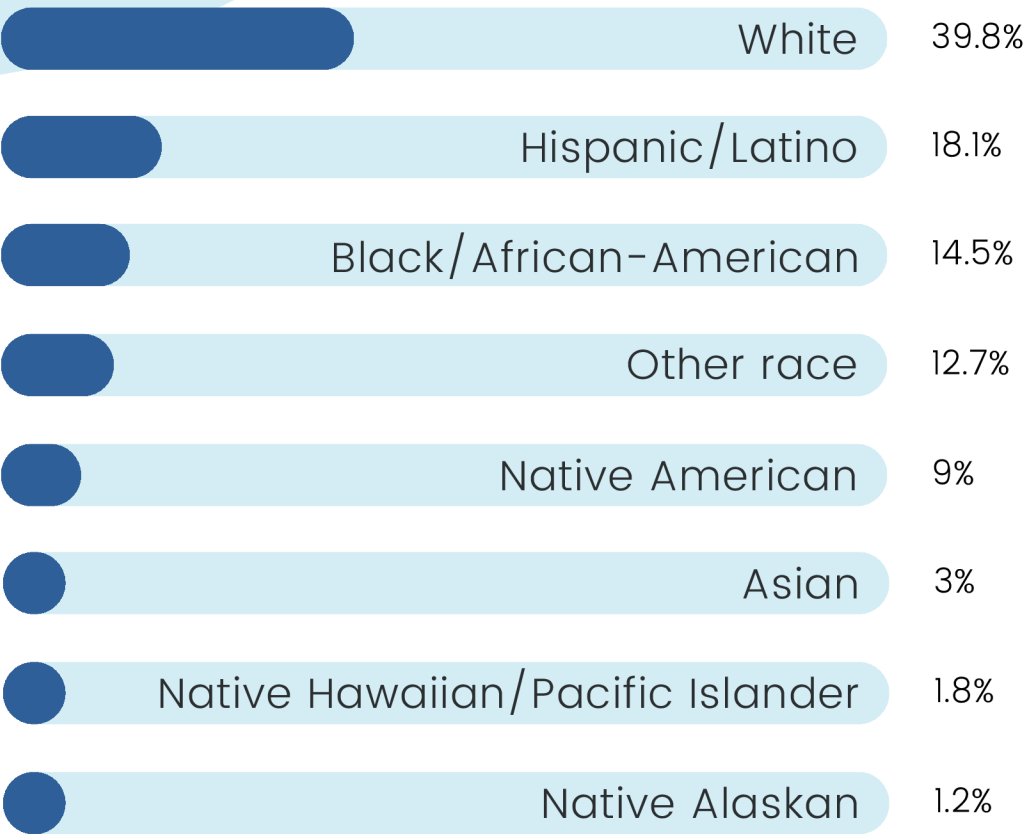
Two-thirds of the sample were male and just under 40% White. For the most part, age was distributed between 15 years old and 21 years or older. Majority of the sample was between the ages of 15-18 when they were most recently arrested.

Due to many subgroups having samples of $n < 20$, some were consolidated for statistical analysis.

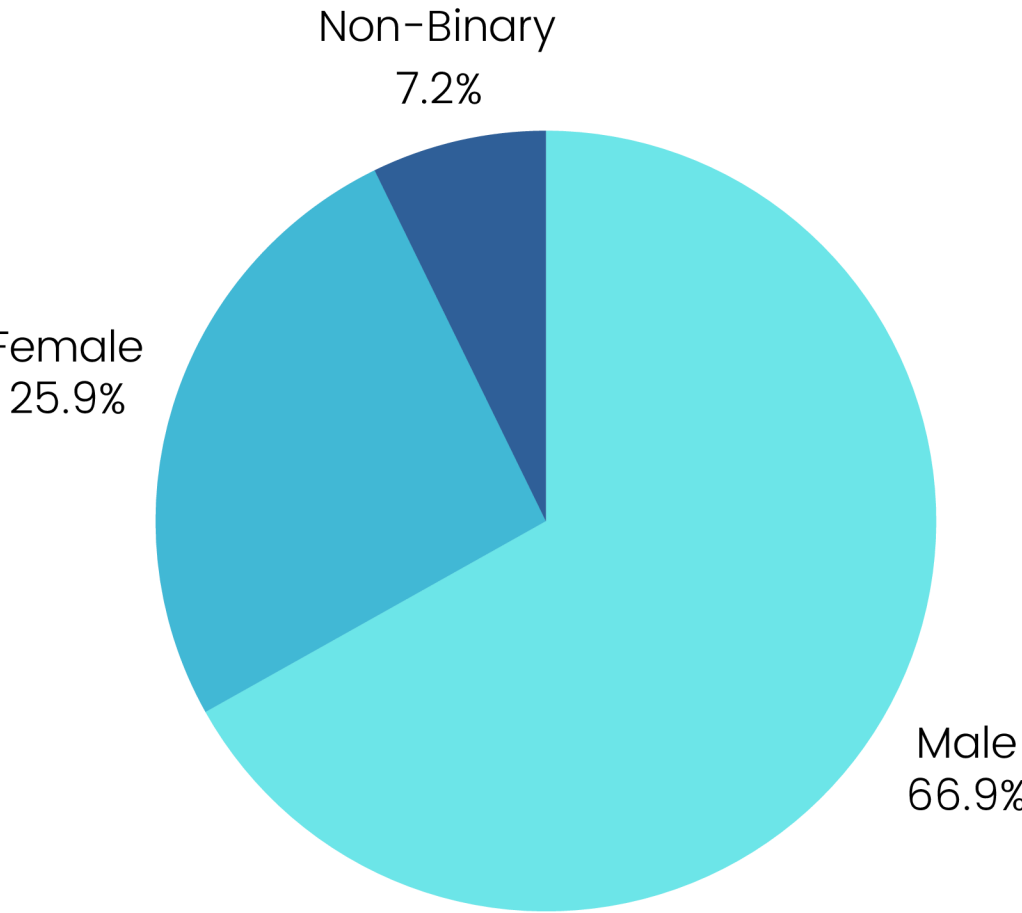


Sample Characteristics

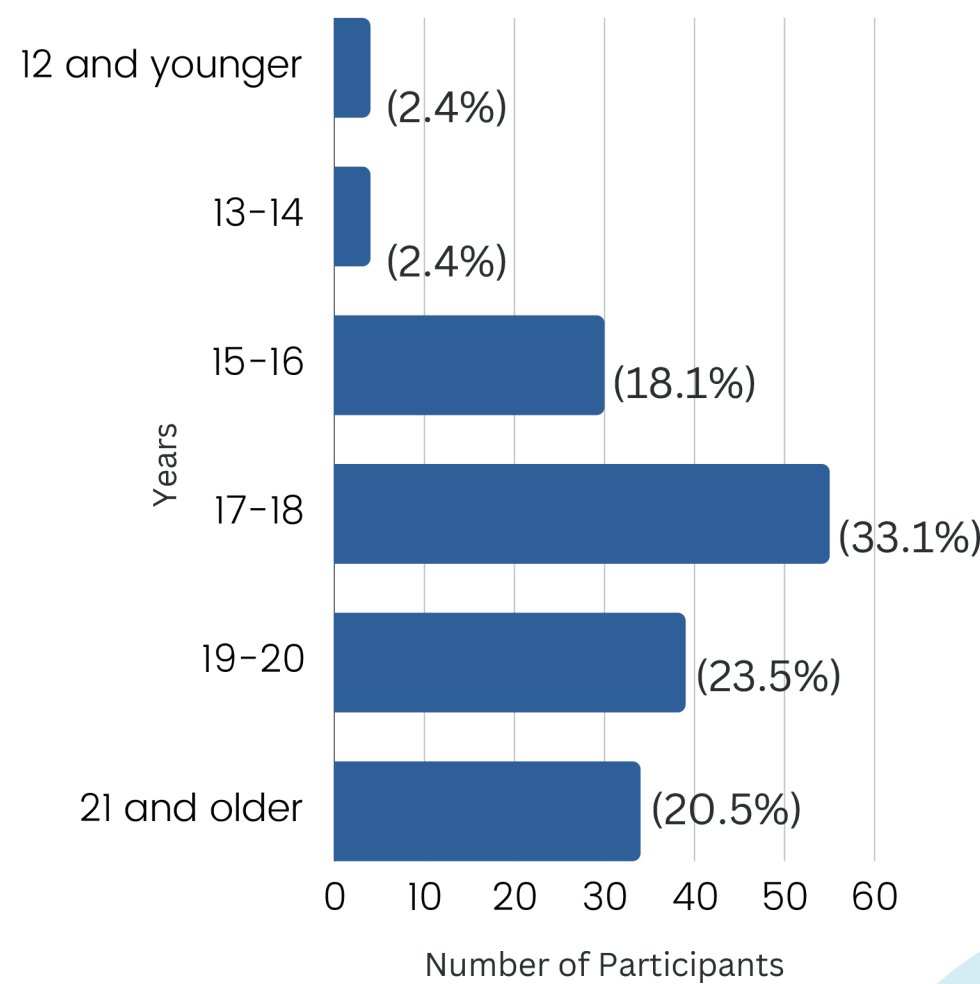
Racial identity



Gender identity



Age



Results

This study's results are presented in three categories, including a profile of incarcerated youth gambling, problematic gambling severity levels, and consequences related to gambling.



Profile of Gambling

- Types of gambling activities
- Locations of gambling (venues)
- Frequency of gambling

Problem Gambling Severity

- Canadian Adolescent Gambling Index (GPCC/GAGI) score

Gambling-Related Consequences

- Gambling-related crime
- Gambling-related altercations

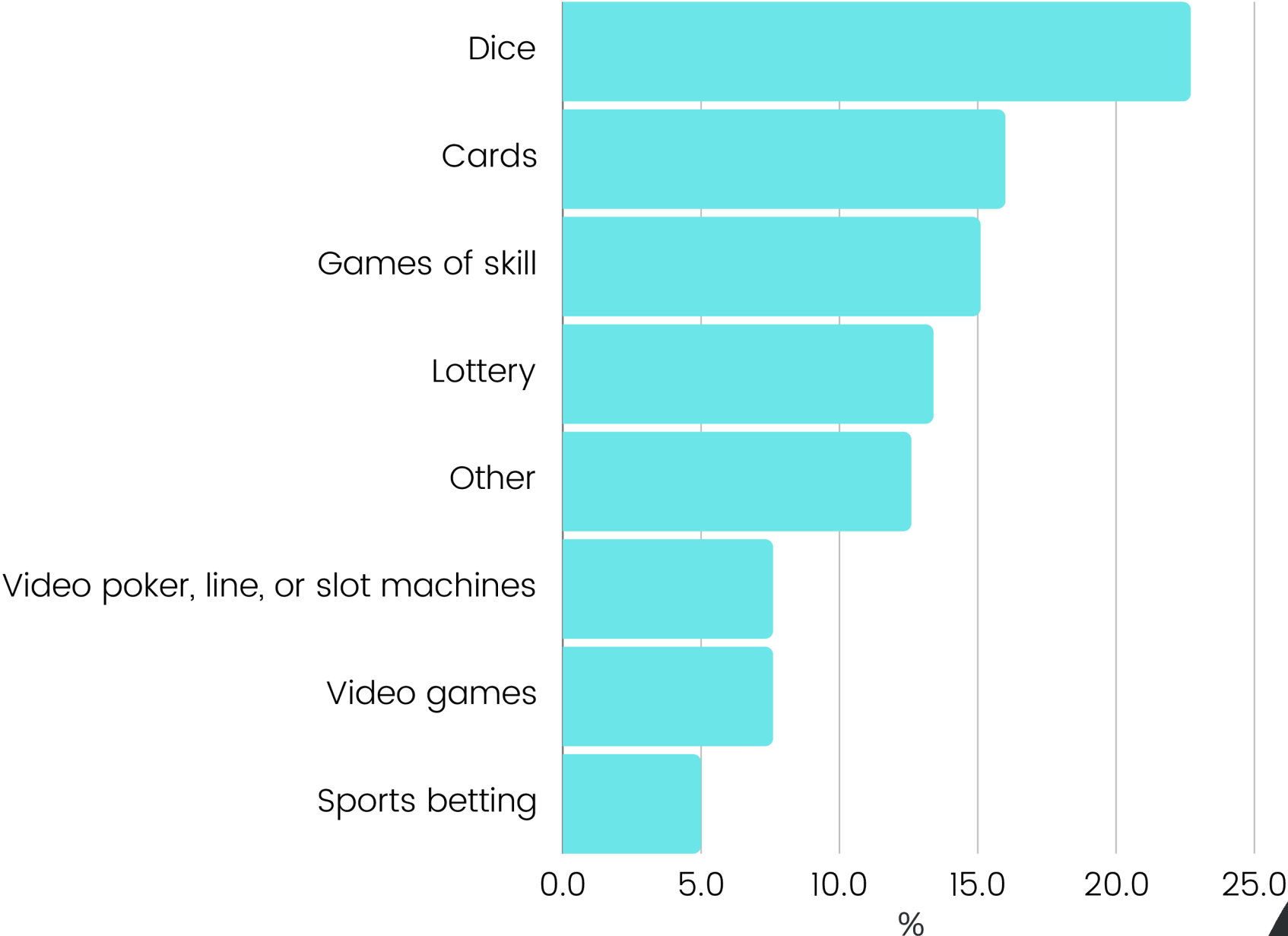
Profile of Gambling: Activities

Gambling Activities

Participants were asked about their primary form of gambling in the three months leading up to their arrest.

- 71.7% of the sample gambled during the three months before incarceration. This is a stark contrast to the 9.3% of Oregon youths in the general population who reported gambling in the past month in 2020.⁶
- Dice was most commonly endorsed as a primary gambling activity, reported by just under one-fourth of the sample.
- Cards, games of skill in which the individual betting was a player, and lottery (e.g., scratch tickets, Mega Bucks) followed in popularity.

Primary Gambling Activity in the 3 Months Before Arrest



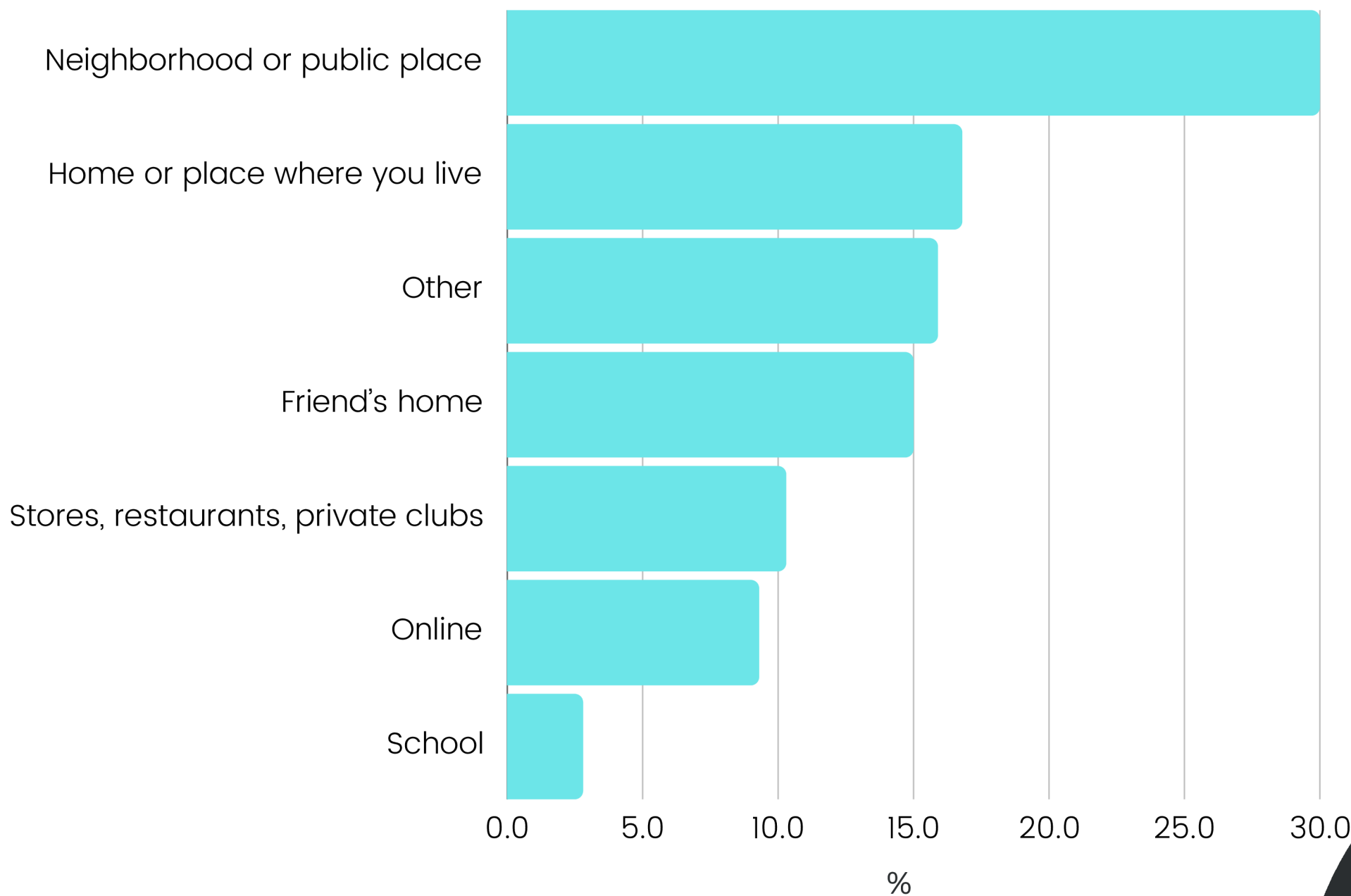
Profile of Gambling: Location

Gambling Venues

Participants were asked about where they primarily gambled in the three months leading up to their arrest.

- 64.5% of the sample reported gambling during the three months prior to being incarceration.
- Gambling locations varied, but were predominantly in one's neighborhood or another public place.
- Gambling primarily at home, at a friend's home, or other unspecified location followed in frequency.

Primary Gambling Venue in the 3 Months Before Arrest



Profile of Gambling: Frequency

Gambling Frequency

Participants were asked to estimate the frequency at which they gambled in the three months leading up to their arrest in addition to the three most recent months.

- Majority of the sample reported not gambling at both time points, and there was an increase in gambling abstinence between pre-incarceration and the most recent three months.
- For those who reported video poker, video games, or lottery games, the reduction in gambling was 2.5 times higher than those who had primary gambling activities that are more accessible within correctional facilities.



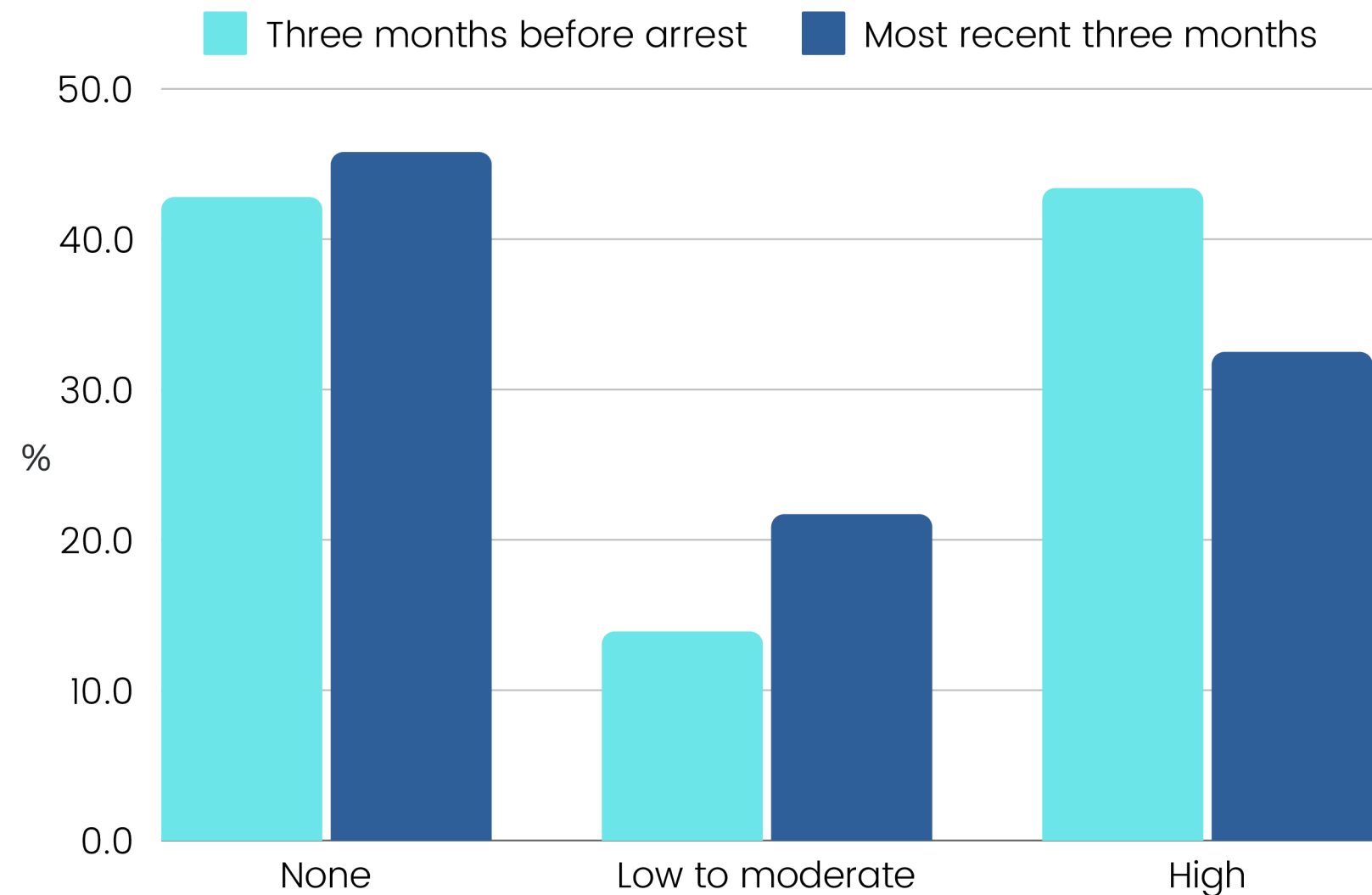
Problematic Gambling

Problematic Gambling Severity

Problematic gambling was assessed using the GPCC/GAGI. Participants were asked to evaluate their gambling behavior in the three months leading up to their arrest in addition to the three most recent months. A score of 6 or higher is suggestive of problem gambling.

- Prior to incarceration, respondents' mean GPCC/GAGI score was 5.40 with 43.4% of the sample screening positive for problem gambling.
- In the most recent three months, the mean was 4.43 (SD = 5.52) with 32.5% (n = 54) screening positive for problem gambling.
- Between pre- and post-incarceration, 8.4% shifted into the problem gambling range, while 19.3% moved out of the problem gambling range on the GPCC/GAGI.

GPCC/GAGI Scores from Time Periods 3 Months Before Arrest and Most Recent 3 Months



Shifts in Gambling Behaviors Pre to Post Commitment

58% of the sample reported gambling before incarceration, compared to 51% who reported gambling in the three months prior to completion of the survey. Nearly three times as many participants moved out of problem gambling status as those who moved into problem gambling status. This means incarceration is more likely to have a rehabilitative effect on youths than it is to exacerbate gambling problems. This may be the result of various factors, including lost access to many forms of gambling.

Impact of Gambling Type

Youths who gambled primarily via video poker, video games, and lottery games, compared to those who reported other forms of gambling that are more commonly played within correctional facilities (e.g., dice, cards), were more likely to reduce their gambling frequency.

Impact of Age

While there were not overall changes in severity, age played a role. Youths who were arrested at 14 years old or younger were more likely to experience an increase in problem gambling status

This means that younger incarcerated youth are more vulnerable to developing a new gambling problem while incarcerated than their older counterparts..

Problem gambling among incarcerated adolescents is 111 times higher than their peers in the general population.¹²

The rates found in the current study are much higher than other published work.

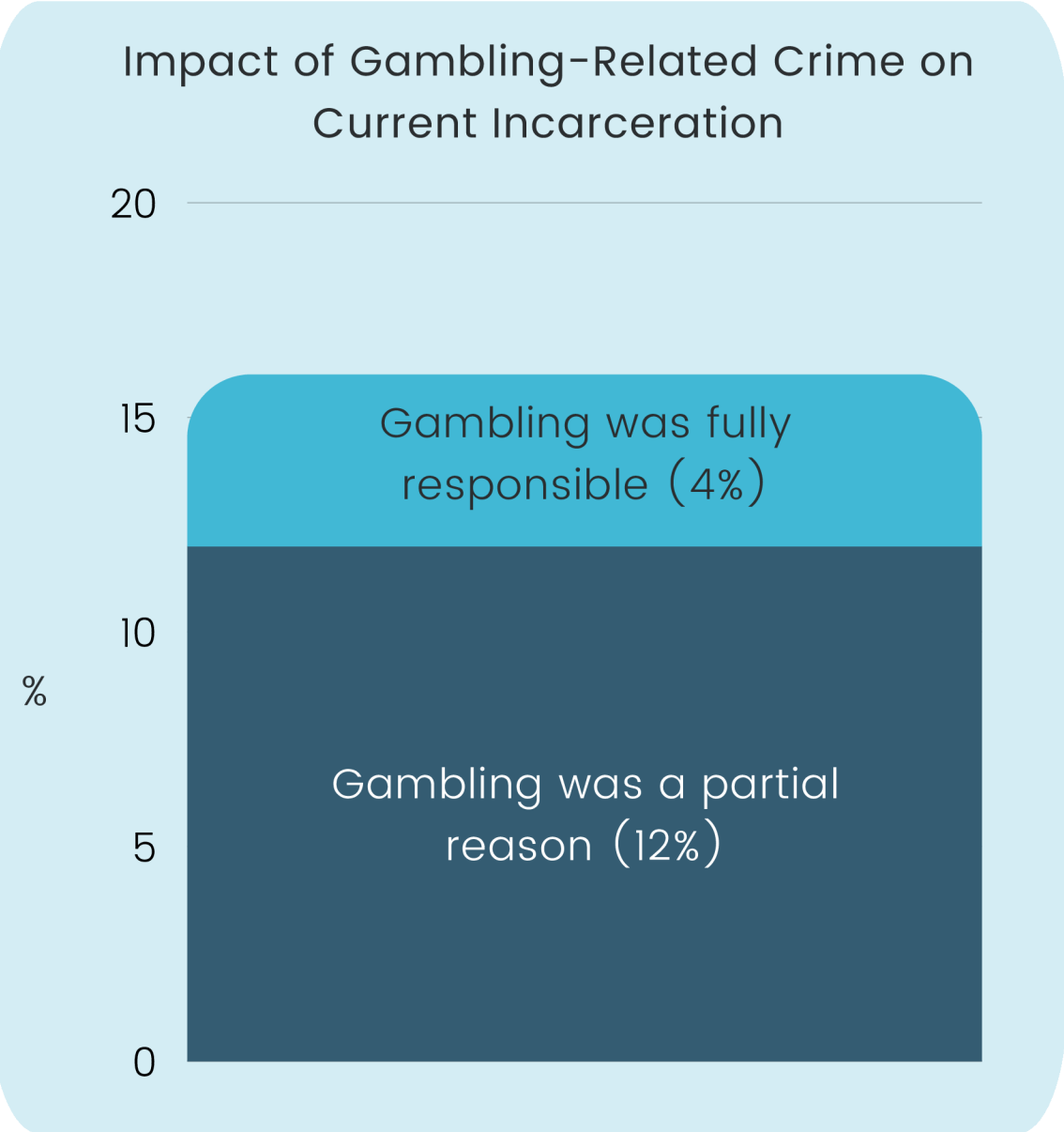


Gambling-Related Crime

Gambling-related crime partially accounted for 12% of incarcerations and an additional 4% reported gambling-related crime being the primary contributing factor to their current incarceration.

Racial identity was a significant predictor of gambling-related crime leading to arrest at any capacity. Youths identifying as a race “other” than White, Hispanic/Latino, or Black/African-American were more likely to report gambling-related crime being a factor in their arrest. This group is diverse (including Native American, Asian, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, and “other”), and group samples were too small to run between-group analyses that would be more accurate than “other”.

Age of arrest, current age, or gender identity did not make a significant difference in who reported gambling-related crime.



Gambling-Related Altercations

While residing in an OYA facility, gambling-related conflict partially accounted for 23% of altercations between respondents and their peers, while an additional 10% fully accounted for reported altercations.

Age of arrest, gender identity, and racial identity all appear to be predictors of gambling leading to an altercation among youths housed in correctional facilities. Specifically,

- Youths identifying as a race “other” than White, Hispanic/Latino, or Black/African-American (e.g., identifying as Native American, Asian, Native Hawaiian, Pacific Islander, or “other”);
- Youths identifying as female; and
- Youths who were aged 14 or younger when they were arrested were more likely to report gambling-related alterations while incarcerated.

Current age did not make a significant difference in who reported gambling-related altercations.



Key Takeaways



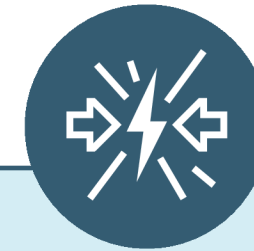
Incarcerated youth are particularly vulnerable to problem gambling.

Problematic gambling among incarcerated Oregon youth is 111x higher than their general population peers.



Youth who reported gambling activities that are more accessible in correctional facilities (e.g., dice, cards) are likely to continue gambling while incarcerated. Notably, dice, cards, and games of skill are the most commonly reported forms of gambling among youth in this study.

Youth who primarily gamble via video poker or video games experienced more of a reduction in gambling once incarcerated.



Gambling-related crime and altercations disproportionally affected youths who identify as races other than White, Hispanic/Latino, and Black/African-American.

Black/African-American and Native American incarcerated youth are nationally overrepresented for gambling-related crime,¹³ which is partially consistent with this study. Small sample sizes of many groups limited analyses, but this will be important to parse out in future studies.



Incarcerated youth arrested at younger ages (e.g., 14 years old and younger) were more likely to develop problematic levels of gambling after their arrest and be involved in gambling-related altercations while incarcerated, compared to older youth.

Recommendations

- **Systematic screening and provision of gambling-harm intervention services**

These results present a distinct need for youth to be screened for gambling problems upon entering and exiting the Juvenile Justice System, and for prevention and intervention services to be offered within juvenile corrections settings.

- **Study effective interventions**

Investing in interventions to address problem gambling among youth offenders is supported by data generated from this study.

- **Contribute to a validation study**

Although the CAGI is a validated problem gambling screening instrument within the general population and used in studies with incarcerated youth, it has not been specifically validated for incarcerated youths, nor have any other existing problem gambling measures been validated with incarcerated youth samples. Given the high rates of gambling observed within this population, validating a measure may deepen our understanding of this specific health risk behavior.



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