

A board game with colorful pawns and a red die on a green and yellow board.

Exploring Problem Gambling Among Older Adults in Virginia

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Trigger Warning

The following slides contain text, images, and other media depicting gambling elements as well as the discussion of addiction that may be distressing for some individuals. If at any time you feel triggered by the discussion, please feel free to leave the session and seek assistance if needed.

Virginia's Helpline:

888-532-3500

Free & Confidential 24/7 Call/Text/Chat





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VIRGINIA COUNCIL on PROBLEM GAMBLING
A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization
vcpg.net

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Agenda

Speaker Introductions

Defining Gambling & Problem Gambling

How is this related to Seniors?

Story Example

About Our Organizations

Problem Gambling & Older Adults

Proposed Research Study

What is gambling?

Gambling = risking something of value on an uncertain outcome.

Examples: sports betting, lottery, slot machines, poker, bingo parlors, skill games, iGaming.

Gambling Expansion Post 2018

Gaming Expansion	Gaming Type	Description
Historical horse racing (Authorized in 2018; play began in 2019)	Horse race wagering	Electronic gaming terminals similar in appearance to slot machines, and winning is determined by the results of previous live horse races
iLottery (Authorized in 2020; play began in 2020)	Lottery	Refers to internet sales of lottery products via smart phones, computers, and other internet-enabled devices.
Texas Hold 'Em poker tournaments (Authorized in 2020; play has not begun)	Charitable Gaming	An organized competition of players who pay a fixed fee for entry into the competition and for a certain amount of poker chips for use in the competition.
Sports wagering (Authorized in 2020; play began in 2021)	Commercial gaming	Wagering on the outcomes of live or future sporting events. Wagers can be placed through online operators.
Resort casinos (Authorized in 2020; play began in 2022)	Commercial gaming	A brick-and-mortar building hosting a gaming floor with slot machines and table games, as well as having space dedicated to other amenities such as a hotel, restaurants, retail, and meeting and event space.
Skill games/gray machines (Authorized 2020-2021, many still operating)	Unregulated	Electronic gaming terminals similar in appearance to slot machines.
Internet gambling	Illegal	This includes virtual casinos, poker, lotteries, and other online wagering platforms.

Problem Gambling Defined

- Problem gambling = behavior disrupting school, family, or mental health.
- Similarities to alcohol/drug addiction: cravings, loss of control, tolerance, withdrawal.
- Classified in the **DSM-5** (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th edition) as “Gambling Disorder:
 - **A persistent and recurrent problematic gambling behavior** leading to clinically significant impairment or distress, as indicated by the individual exhibiting **four (or more)** symptoms like:
 - Needs to gamble with increasing amounts of money to achieve excitement
 - Is restless or irritable when attempting to cut down or stop gambling
 - Has made repeated unsuccessful efforts to control or stop gambling
 - Is often preoccupied with gambling
 - Often gambles when feeling distressed
 - After losing money gambling, often returns another day to get even (chasing losses)



VIRGINIA COUNCIL on PROBLEM GAMBLING

Mission:

The Virginia Council on Problem Gambling aims to increase **public awareness** of problem gambling, ensure the widespread availability of **treatment** for problem gamblers and their families, and to encourage **research** and programs for **prevention** and **education**.

VCPG maintains a neutral stance on gambling.





The Virginia Helpline

888-532-3500

call, text, or chat 24/7 - toll-free & confidential



1-800-MY-RESET
NATIONAL PROBLEM GAMBLING HELPLINE™



THE COUNCIL ON COMPULSIVE GAMBLING OF NJ
800-GAMBLER®

Virginia's Helpline Demand Is Surging



2025

calls made to the VCPG helpline

21,983

**39% increase over 2024*

total intakes

1,508

**50% increase from 2024*



VIRGINIA COUNCIL on PROBLEM GAMBLING

Intakes are counted once the caller asks for help with problem gambling.

Helpline Utilization Has Grown Sharply Over Time

2019 - 2025

Total calls
increased 2,123%
(989 to 21,983)

Total intakes
increased 385%
(311 to 1508)

In 2025

2 out of 10

intakes from calls to the VCPG
helpline were age 55 and older

Age 55 – 64 13%

Age 65+ 7%



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VIRGINIA COUNCIL on PROBLEM GAMBLING

knowledge | strength | support



VIRGINIA COUNCIL on PROBLEM GAMBLING



Virginia Partnership
for GAMING & HEALTH

Helpline: Full Range of Services

Telephone Crisis Counseling

Online Text/Chat

Informational mailing

Support Group Referrals

Initial Diagnostic Consult

Referral to Individual Counseling

Weekly Wellness Support Meetings

Follow-up Calls

About VPGH

The Virginia Partnership for Gaming and Health (VPGH) at Virginia

Commonwealth University, is a

consortium of stakeholders committed to strengthening services for individuals who need support for problem gambling.

VPGH serves to centralize treatment and peer recovery services for Virginia

residents in need of therapeutic support.



Virginia Partnership
for GAMING & HEALTH
Hope | Support | Solutions

vpgh.org

We can help!



Virginia Partnership
for GAMING & HEALTH
Hope | Support | Solutions

Connecting with VPGH means connecting you with a plethora of resources, including, but not limited to:

Access to treatment and recovery **funds/resources** available through the VPGH network

Direct referral and coordination of an initial assessment with network **clinicians**

Provide and/or directly refer to network CPRS for **peer services**

Referrals to Gamblers Anonymous, **peer groups** and other mutual aid groups

Connection to a one year **GamBan** subscription, self-exclusion forms and financial counseling through **GamFin**

Provide information/connection to other **services/resources** that fit support seeker needs

On-going **follow-up** for up to one year, or longer if needed

Presentations, training and **outreach** related to problem gambling, treatment and recovery



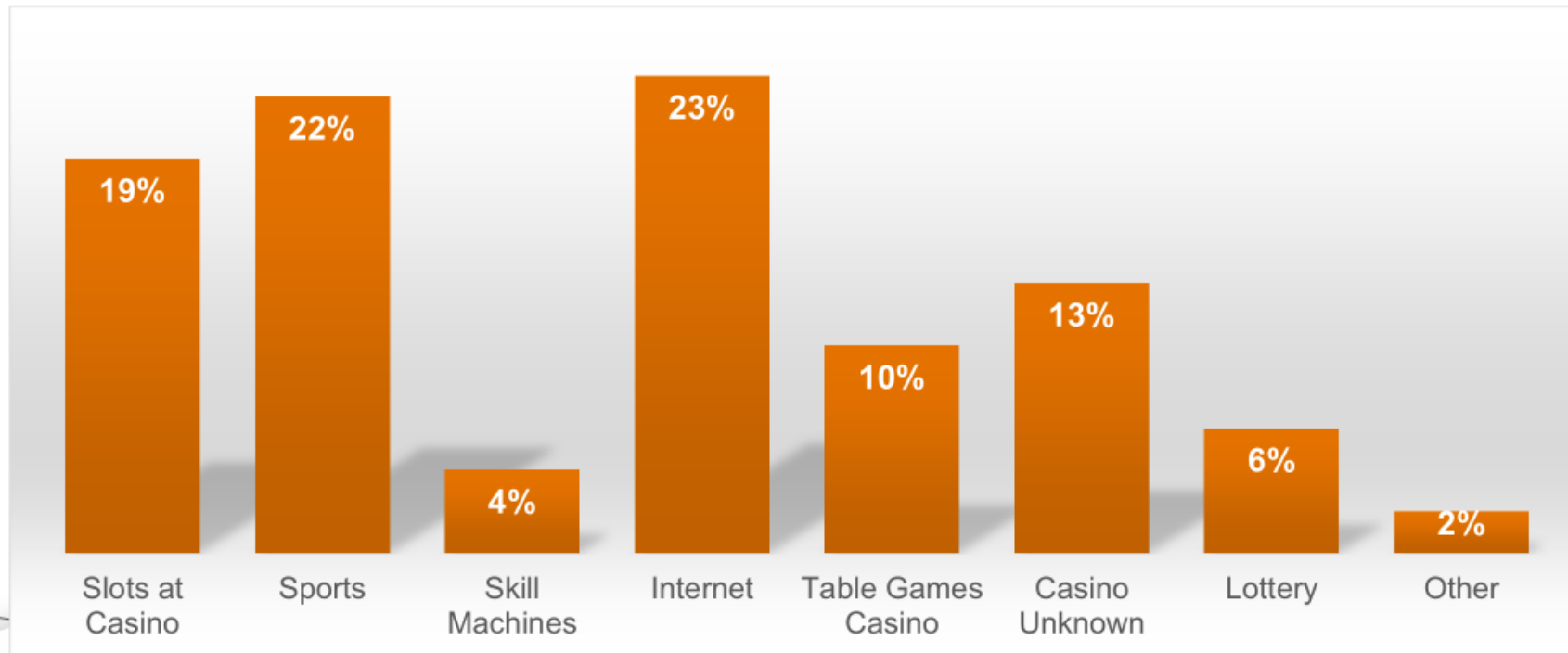
For **direct referrals to VPGH** services use this link
form.jotform.com/231788315025052, scan the QR code, or call
the helpline 1-888-532-3500

PROBLEM GAMBLING AMONG OLDER ADULTS

- Gambling participation rates among older adults have increased in recent decades
- Limited research on the prevalence of problem gambling among older adults
- Online gambling has increased in popularity with older adults
- Older adults are less likely to report issues with gambling than younger adults but are observed to stay in treatment longer



2025 Types of Play



A close-up photograph of a wooden game piece, possibly a pawn, standing on a green board with various colored circular markers (yellow, purple, white, black). The background is slightly blurred, showing more of the board and other pieces.

MOTIVATION & RISK FACTORS

- Social isolation, loss, loneliness, and grief are key predictors of late-life gambling issues.
- Co-occurring issues like depression, PTSD, and substance use can exacerbate gambling.
- Physical frailty and chronic pain can drive escapism through gambling.
- Gambling venues offer perceived safe and accessible social spaces.



HOW DOES PROBLEM GAMBLING AFFECT OLDER ADULTS?

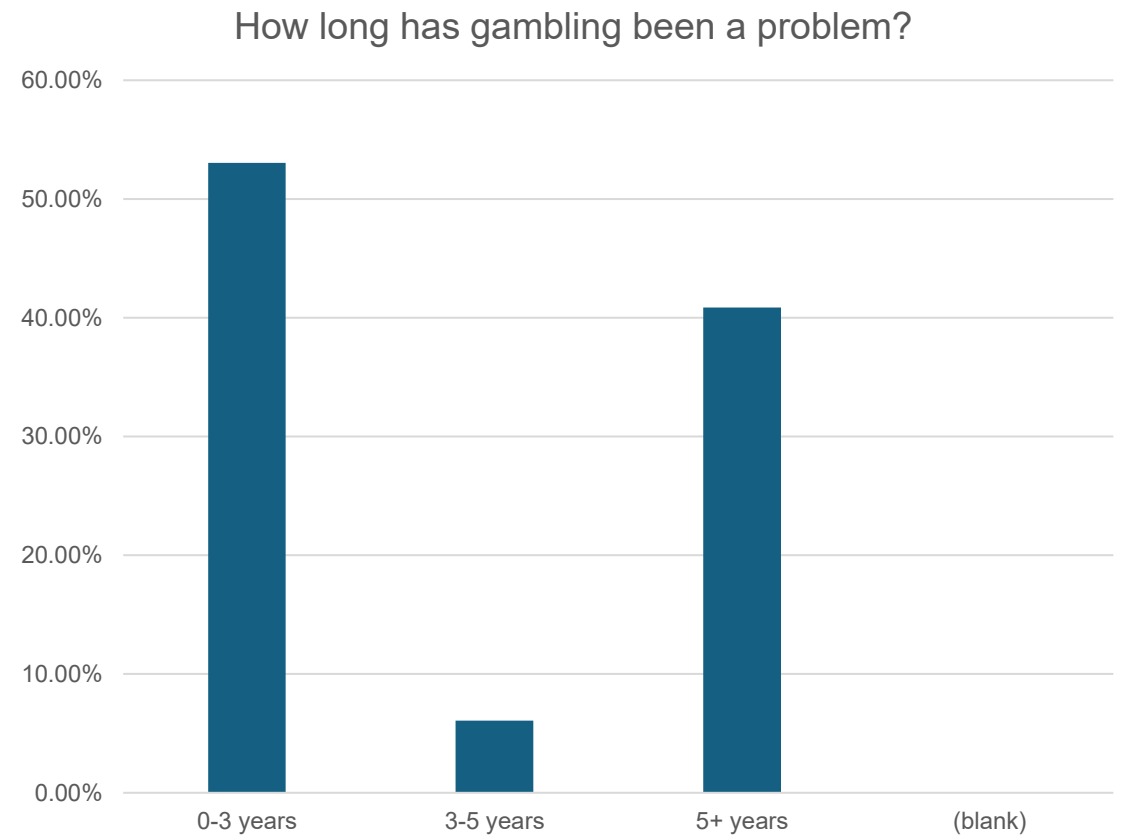
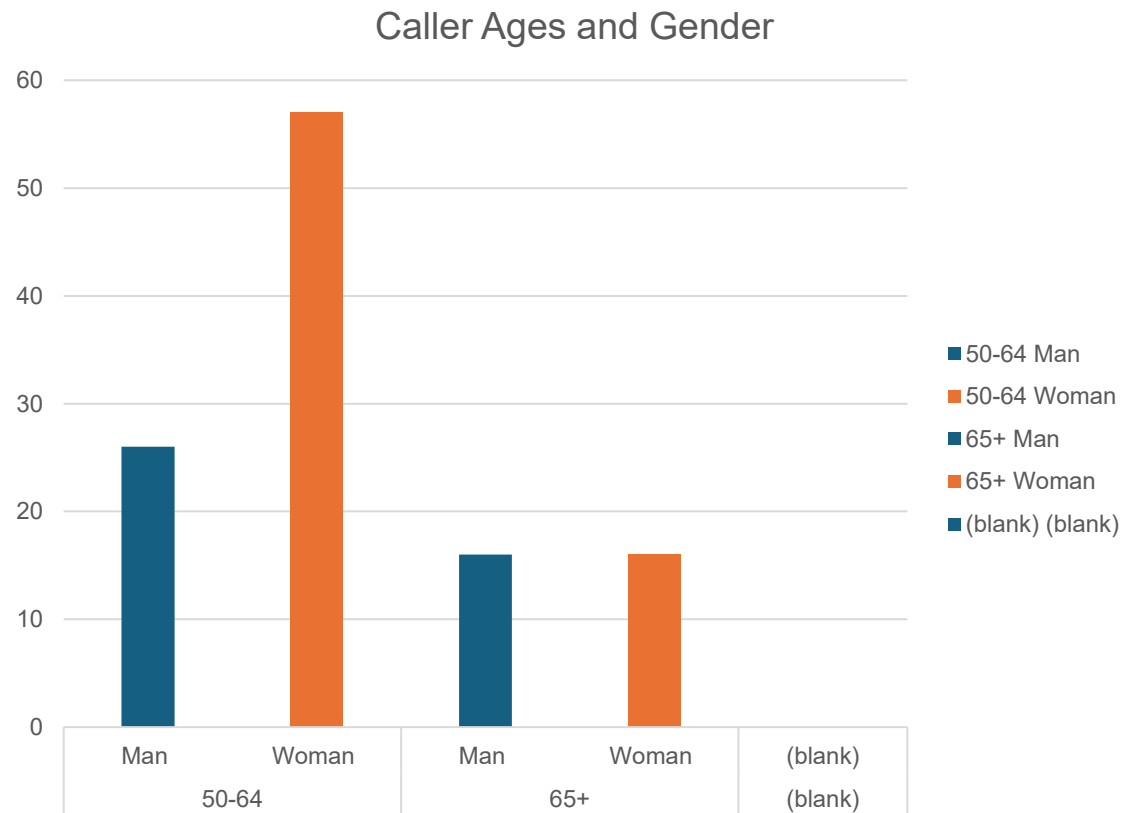
Linked to increased medical, psychiatric, and social issues.

Higher levels of cognitive decline.

Negative impacts on family dynamics and financial well-being.



Characteristics of Older Adult Problem Gamblers in Virginia



Challenges for Addressing Problem Gambling

Lack of awareness about problem gambling in older adults.

Treatment is underutilized; older adults often face stigma or denial.

Identifying effective strategies for reducing problem gambling behaviors in older adults.



PROBLEM GAMBLING PREVENTION STRATEGIES

- Implementing self-control strategies (e.g., using limits and playing smart)
- Changing the social and physical environment to support behavioral change.
- Participation in religious or community groups is a protective factor.
- Public education campaigns needed to destigmatize problem gambling.





LIBERAL ARTS AND HUMAN SCIENCES
CENTER FOR GERONTOLOGY
VIRGINIA TECH.

Established in 1977-78 – Our Mission: Improve the lives of older adults

Our Mission and Philosophy

The Center serves as a research-based educational resource both for University academic departments and for community organizations conducting research or offering services for older adults. In addition to providing their expertise nationally and internationally, the Center's faculty members frequently provide technical assistance, written materials, and educational programs to agencies, organizations, and individuals in Virginia.

We accomplish our mission through three primary efforts

Research – Teaching – Outreach & Engagement

- **Research** is conducted on a local, national, and global level.
- **Teaching** provides an outlet for graduate students to learn about issue related to aging.
- **Outreach & Engagement** activities include the Virginia Tech community, the New River Valley, and the state of Virginia.



The Center is the administrative unit for the **Graduate Certificate in Gerontology**, a university-approved program of graduate study designed to offer dynamic learning experiences.

The focus on three core gerontology competency domains—aging processes and outcomes related to biological changes and health, dimensions of psychological functioning, and contemporary social and societal issues—assures the public of the quality of the program and its graduates and clarifies for employers the knowledge and skills imparted to students who earn the certificate at Virginia Tech.

Research Team



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Research Questions

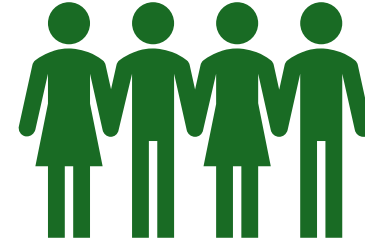
What are the lived experiences of older adults in Virginia who have experienced gambling-related harm?

What are the service gaps, recovery needs, and patterns related to gambling initiation, escalation, and help-seeking?

Research Plan



Study Design: Qualitative descriptive pilot study using semi-structured interviews



Population: 10-20 older adults (50+) with gambling concerns identified through Virginia gambling support systems

Research Goals

- Understand the experience of older Virginians who encounter gambling concerns
- Collect data on perceived service gaps to better understand how to address problem gambling in Virginia



“Often older people who develop gambling problems have been fine gambling recreationally most of their lives, but as we get older, we’re subject to more stressors related to health, we start to lose loved ones. That can lead to behavior like gambling becoming a way to escape, to numb some of that physical or emotional pain.”

-Ted Hartwell, former director of storytelling at the Nevada Council on Problem Gambling





Questions

Thank you!

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