

More than money at stake:

A look at teen gambling

By Joanna Lee

Tim gets home from work late, he needs the overtime. Right now, money is short and his gambling problem isn't helping any. Tim started gambling when he was seventeen and was never able to stop. He carried the habit to college, where he lost all of his money as well as his job and had to quit school altogether.

Gambling is an obsession that has taken control of his life. Tim panics when he loses and becomes extremely moody. If he has a bad night, he will stay out late trying to make more money. The next morning, he is usually unable to wake up for work. When employers look at his record, they are skeptical of hiring someone who had problems with the law at such a young age. When he does get a job, his inconsistency gets him fired within a month.

According to estimation by the National Research Council, about 1.1million individuals between the ages of 12 and 18 are "pathological gamblers." Studies also show that around eighty-five percent of students in high school have participated in gambling at one point in time. A majority of these individuals have no idea how this habit could effect the rest of their lives. Before teens begin to take part in underage gambling, they should be aware of the consequences.

According to the Missouri Gaming Association, if anyone under the age of twenty-one is caught inside a casino, he or she will be detained by the Highway Patrol and eventually put into the hands of their local authorities.

A minor can then be punished by fine or imprisonment in an adult or juvenile court system. (Information according to Howard Shaffer in *Futures at Stake: Youth, Gambling, and Society*.)

Although the concept of punishment by law is bad in itself, it is not the only consequence of underage gambling. According to *Harrah's Entertainment, Inc.*, although few underage gamblers are actually arrested, many of these people suffer the consequences of their actions when applying for college or a new job. It is likely that a student will either not be accepted or at least looked down upon if they have been criminally punished.

Underage gambling can have great effects on an individual as well as on those around them. When gambling goes too far, family and friends are forced to help pay debts created by young gamblers. Individuals need to be aware of the consequences of their decisions before they give in to peer pressure.