



RESEARCH SYNOPSIS

Derevensky, J., Sklar, A., Gupta, R., & Messerlian, C. (2010). An empirical study examining the impact of gambling advertisements on adolescent gambling attitudes and behaviours. *International Journal of Mental Health Addiction*, 8, 21-34.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Do gambling advertisements promote the initiation and/or maintenance of gambling behaviour in adolescents? What impact does gambling advertising have on youth already experiencing gambling-related problems?

PURPOSE

There is a paucity of research examining the potential effects of gambling advertisements on children and adolescents behaviour. The current study sought to examine whether gambling advertisements promote the initiation or maintenance of gambling behaviour in youth. Additionally, the study sought to understand advertising's impact upon youth already experiencing gambling-related problems.

HYPOTHESIS

None stated.

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were 1,147 (50% males) adolescents aged 12 to 19 years from 5 secondary schools in Quebec and 3 secondary schools in Ontario. The age distribution included 220 students in Grades 7–8 (ages 12–14), 502 students in Grades 9–10 (ages 14–16) and 425 students in Grades 11–12 (ages 16–19).

PROCEDURE

Data collection was completed in a classroom, cafeteria, or school library depending upon the available facilities. Research assistants ensured appropriate supervision and anonymity of responses. No deceptive practices were included and anonymity and confidentiality was assured. Teachers were requested to either leave the room or remain at the front of the classroom in order to respect participants' privacy. Participants completed self-report measures of gambling behaviours and perception of gambling advertisements.

MAIN OUTCOME MEASURES

The Gambling Activities Questionnaire (GAQ) assessed four general domains related to gambling behaviour: descriptive information including

prevalence and types of activities; familial and peer gambling; social networks; and academic achievement. The DSM-IV-MR-J assessed problem gambling. Items are modeled after the DSM-IV criteria for diagnosis of adult pathological gambling. The Effects of Gambling Advertising Questionnaire (EGAQ) was developed specifically for this study following collating information from an earlier qualitative study. The questionnaire assessed the types and frequency of observed gambling advertisements, perceptions of the underlying messages, the qualities most influential, the perceived target of the advertisement, behavioural reactions to advertisements, the impact of advertisements and the ability to recall several advertising campaigns.

KEY RESULTS

Almost one quarter of the sample reported gambling for money before reaching adolescence. Males were more likely than females to report being frequent and problem gamblers. The most popular gambling activity reported was card playing. Males were more likely than females to report being involved in sports or game-related wagering. Males were more likely than females to agree with statements that gambling is a fun, enjoyable and exciting activity, an escape from daily problems and stressors, as well as a good opportunity to socialize. The majority of participants reported that gambling should be for adults only and that gambling can become a problem. Males were more likely to report positive reactions to gambling advertisements (e.g., being excited, wanting to gamble, gambling looks like fun). Females were more likely to report negative reactions to advertisements (e.g., being bored, disinterested, and finding ads annoying). The belief that gambling advertisements delivered messages such that "your chances of winning are high" and "winning is easy" was greater in females and older participants. A larger percentage of older respondents held the belief that "if you continue to gamble, your chances of winning will improve." Problem gamblers held more favorable attitudes towards gambling than social and non-gamblers, and were more likely to maintain the belief that one's chances improve if you gamble more. The more

severe the gambling problem the greater the exposure to gambling advertisements was. In particular, pathological gamblers reported seeing many TV and magazine gambling ads. In order to identify the characteristics of youth who are likely to gamble after seeing ads, youth reporting sometimes, often or always were classified as vulnerable while those reporting rarely or never were classified as not vulnerable. Seventy-nine percent of males and 57% of youth in grades 11 and 12 were in the vulnerable group. These youths were found to have held favorable attitudes towards gambling and gambling advertisements and one third of the group reported gambling weekly. Among problem gamblers, those classified as vulnerable to advertising were more likely to be weekly gamblers. Vulnerable problem gamblers were more likely to hold the belief that if you continue to gamble, the chances of winning improves. The risk of having a gambling problem increased 2.4 times with every one-point increment on the vulnerability scale. Only gambling frequency was a stronger predictor of problem gambling.

LIMITATIONS

The study did not directly measure exposure to gambling advertisements but rather assessed recall

of exposure by asking adolescents to respond to the frequency of observed gambling advertisements. The distinction between exposure and recall is important as recall likely varies with the interest level of what is being advertised.

CONCLUSIONS

Gambling providers and regulators should heed the warnings about the impact of gambling advertisements on youth and vulnerable individuals. At the very least, the development of responsible codes of practice and guidelines should be established. The ability of adolescents to gamble in spite of regulations prohibiting them to do so, along with a general societal permissive attitude toward gambling, represents a tacit acceptance of the social desirability of gambling. Legislators, regulators and the industry should take careful notice of these findings.

KEYWORDS: youth, gambling, advertising, pathological gambling

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11469-009-9211-7>