Lottery Playing Amongst Youth: Implications for Prevention and Social Policy

Jennifer R. Felsher
Jeffrey L. Derevensky
Rina Gupta
McGill University

Factors associated with lottery ticket purchases, accessibility of lottery products, and lottery playing behaviour amongst 1,072 youth (ages 10–18 years old, mean age 14 years-old) was examined. Playing the lottery was found to be the most popular gambling activity with youth reporting playing all forms of lottery tickets including draws, scratch tickets, and sports lottery tickets. Youth reported beginning to play the lottery at age 12, with scratch ticket participation being amongst the most highly reported type of lottery activity with the youngest age of onset. The vast majority of youth are aware of the legal age to purchase tickets although many believed that there should be no age requirement to purchase any form of lottery ticket. Youth, regardless of their age, reported few if any difficulties in purchasing lottery tickets. Moreover, a third of underage youth reported going to the store specifically to purchase lottery tickets with this behaviour increasing with the age of the participant. This research confirms previous findings that lottery tickets are highly accessible to underage youth despite legal prohibitions. The results provide valuable information that can be subsequently used in the development of responsible social policy and youth gambling prevention programs.

Today's youth are exposed to an increasingly widespread and easily accessible variety of gambling venues and advertising. The trend

worldwide appears to be toward the growing legalization of multiple forms of gambling and a general social approval for a risky activity that was once prohibited (Stinchfield & Winters, 1998). A recent Canada West Foundation study (Azimer, 2000) found that over 70% of adult Canadians participated in some form of gambling during the past year, with the lottery being the most popular activity (50% reported purchasing a draw ticket [e.g., 6/49], with 42% purchasing lottery scratchcards). The high rate of lottery participation may be a consequence of the current availability of lotteries in every Canadian province (Ladouceur, 1996).

Gambling has become a well-established recreational form of entertainment for youth as well as adults. Research efforts have revealed that over 80% of children and adolescents gamble for money, and that between 4–8% meet the diagnostic criteria for pathological gambling, with another 10–14% of youth at-risk for developing a serious gambling problem (Derevensky & Gupta, 1998a, 1998b; Gupta & Derevensky, 1998a, 1998b; Ladouceur, 1996; National Research Council, 1999; Shaffer & Hall, 1996, 2001). Jacobs' (2000) review of the youth gambling literature concluded that along with the increase in the accessibility and availability of gambling venues, there has been a concomitant rise in juvenile gambling and that minors (12–17 years of age) have managed to penetrate and participate to some degree in every form of legal and illegal gambling activity. The concern is that adolescent studies of problem and pathological gamblers suggest that these youth begin gambling between 10–11 years of age (Gupta & Derevensky, 1998a; Wynne, Smith, & Jacobs, 1996).

GAMBLING PREFERENCES AND LOTTERY PLAYING AMONGST YOUTH

The range of gambling activities in which youth engage are quite varied. While youth engage in numerous activities, there are identifiable gambling preferences. These preferences are likely due to accessibility and financial resources, with lottery playing being particularly attractive. Jacobs' (2000) review suggests that within the past year, 67% of underage youth have gambled for money with lottery playing and purchases being the predominant activity. In an earlier study, Shaffer and Zinberg (1994) examined the prevalence of underage lottery pur-