

A quarter of 14-15 year olds have a go on the Lottery. Are they different to those who don't?

Sue Fisher & John Balding

Under-16s find the Lottery a good gamble

The UK is remarkable by international gaming standards in permitting children of any age to gamble on fruit machines. This existing freedom has already created a culture of commercial gambling among adolescents, particularly in seaside towns (Fisher 1991, 1995).

When the National Lottery was introduced in the UK in November 1994, the minimum legal age of participation was set at 16 years. A recent Home Office consultation paper on the deregulation of gaming machines cited the concessionary 16 years-old threshold for the National Lottery as being attributable to the low stake, long odds, weekly nature of the game. An advertisement for scratch cards, appearing the same week, in a local newsagent's window, told a different story. It stated *Win £50,000 in three seconds!*

The under-age gamblers

Studies show that lottery products are particularly popular with adolescents. A recent study of youth gambling in Minnesota showed that one in four of the under-age respondents (n=532) had

personally purchased state lottery products in the past year. The lottery game with the highest rate of regular underage participation was scratch tabs (cards), with 5% playing weekly or daily (Winters et al., 1995). The popularity of scratch cards with young people is not surprising, given that they are frequently marketed like sweets by the till, and have considerable eye appeal and ever-changing themes.

The participation in commercial gambling by children and young people is a public health issue because young people are particularly prone to gamble excessively. Studies to determine the prevalence of pathological gambling among adolescents in the USA, Canada, and the UK reveal that 5-6% meet the criteria. This is twice as high as in the general adult population (Fisher, 1993a, Schaffer et al, 1994). In addition, retrospective research studies have consistently linked problem gambling with starting gambling in childhood or adolescence (Stinchfield & Winters, 1994).

Pathological gambling among adolescents has been associated with supernormal expenditure, stealing, truancy, use of addictive substan-

ces, pathological video machine playing, poor academic achievement, and parental gambling (Fisher, all refs., Ladouceur & Mireault, 1988).

How many, and who?

This study provides a preliminary set of basic data on participation by children and young people in the UK National Lottery. Its joint aims were:

- To estimate the proportion of young people spending their own money on the National Lottery during the week prior to the survey.
- To undertake a brief comparison of some of the characteristics and gambling-related behaviour of the young people that had spent money on the National Lottery in the week prior to the survey, with those who had not.

Collecting the data

The data for this study were gathered by means of the Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire, developed by John Balding at the University of Exeter. This questionnaire has been widely used throughout the UK over a period of more than ten years to determine priorities in health needs assessment. The questionnaire is subject to continual revision to maintain relevance.

The self-completion questionnaires are administered by teachers well known to the young people, under conditions of strict confidentiality. Survey supervisors receive detailed guidance.

How valid are the data?

High-quality survey statistics are most sensibly interpreted as a 'best estimate' of the situation studied, and may be used for examining trends and making comparisons. The conditions under which the data are collected are very important, and Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire surveys are conducted by teachers that can create an atmosphere of co-operation and responsibility towards the task. They are committed to the project, are aware of the time and money that have been committed to it, and follow their training procedure carefully.

Validation processes through interview work, comparison with parallel data when available, and checks through local investigations, for example in GPs' records, give confidence in the findings. In the case of the present study, all the statistically-significant findings conform to

those expected in the light of existing knowledge about young people and gambling.

Sample

The sample is drawn from 12 schools situated in the North East, East, and South West of England that administered the Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire survey between May and July 1995. Of the 1762 young people in Years 8 and 10 that completed the questionnaire, 97 failed to answer the question about the National Lottery, resulting in a final sample for this study of 1665. The statistics provided are based on this final sample.

The gender and age composition is as follows:

Gender

Male 50%
Female 50%

Age

Year 8 (12-13) 53%
Year 10 (14-15) 47%

Ethnic background

White (UK or European origin) 98%
Other 2%

Underage spending on the National Lottery

The number of people that had spent money on the National Lottery during the week prior to the survey was determined by 'yes' or 'no' responses to the following question:

During the last 7 days, have you spent any of your own money on the National Lottery?

A positive response was received from 22% of all the young people in the sample. The breakdown by age and gender is as follows:

- Year 8 males 23%
- Year 8 females 14%
- Year 10 males 29%
- Year 10 females 23%

In the following discussion, this group are referred to as 'National Lottery participants'.

Some characteristics of underage National Lottery participants

Family structure

The National Lottery participants were signi-

ficantly less likely than the others to be living with both natural parents (69% compared with 75%, $p < 0.05$).

Ethnic group

The number of non-caucasian respondents is too small to test for ethnic bias.

Socio-economic group

As a rough indicator of socio-economic grouping, the young people were asked which daily newspapers were taken at home on most days. The National Lottery participants were not significantly more likely than the others to come from households that took any particular category of daily newspaper.

Personal income

The National Lottery participants were significantly more likely than the others to have more of their own money to spend during the same period.

31% of National Lottery participants received more than £10 from paid work compared with only 15% of non-participants ($p < 0.0001$).

7% of National Lottery participants received more than £10 from pocket money compared with only 3% of non-participants ($p < 0.01$).

Other gambling-related behaviour

Expenditure and frequency of playing fruit machines

The National Lottery participants were significantly more likely than the others to have spent their own money on arcade gambling and to be regular players of fruit machines.

23% of the National Lottery participants had also spent their own money on arcade gambling (fruit machines) in the past week compared with only 6% of the non-participants ($p < 0.0001$).

7% of the National Lottery participants had spent between £10 and £30 on fruit machine gambling in the past month compared with 2% of the non-participants ($p < 0.0001$).

22% of the National Lottery participants gambled on fruit machines at least once a week compared with 7% of the non-participants ($p < 0.0001$).

Self-perception of a gambling problem

The children were asked: *How much do you worry about gambling?* The National Lottery participants were significantly more likely than

non-participants to report that they worried about gambling.

24% of the participants were worried about gambling, compared with only 14% of the non-participants ($p < 0.0001$).

The children were also asked: *If you wanted to share a problem with gambling, to whom would you probably turn?* The National Lottery participants, while more likely to report that they were worried about gambling, were less likely to report that they would turn to someone for help.

36% of the National Lottery participants reported that they would keep a problem about gambling to themselves, compared with 30% of non-participants ($p < 0.05$).

Other potentially addictive behaviours

Underage spending on alcohol

The National Lottery participants were significantly more likely than the others to have (personally) purchased alcoholic drink during the same period.

38% of the National Lottery participants had also purchased alcohol in the previous week compared with 17% of non-participants ($p < 0.0001$).

Under-age spending on cigarettes

The National Lottery participants were significantly more likely than the others to have spent their own money on cigarettes in the same period.

25% of the National Lottery participants had also spent money on cigarettes in the previous week compared with only 13% of non-participants ($p < 0.0001$).

Comments

This preliminary study shows that in this sample of young people, 22% had spent their own money on National Lottery products during the week prior to the survey. There were no significant age, gender, or socio-economic group differences in this sample, and the proportion of non-white young people was too small to test for ethnic bias. The research would need to be repeated with a larger, nationally-representative sample, to provide reliable demographic data on under-age spending on the UK National Lottery.

Almost a quarter of the young people surveyed had spent money on National Lottery products during the previous week.

Spending money on the Lottery goes with smoking, drinking, and gambling on fruit machines.

The main findings are that:

- The young people that had spent their own money on the National Lottery in the previous week were significantly more likely than the others to have higher incomes to spend — either from paid work or from pocket money.
- There are highly significant differences in other gambling-related behaviours between the children that spend money on the National Lottery in the previous week and those that did not.
- The Lottery seems to have tapped an existing, well-developed commercial market in juvenile gambling, based upon fruit-machine playing.
- The children that had spent money on the Lottery were four times as likely as the non-participants to have also spent money in the same week on arcade 'fruit machine' gambling.
- They were also three times as likely to have spent between £10 and £30 on fruit machines in the past month.
- The children that had spent their own money on the Lottery during the previous week were significantly more likely than the other children to be worried about gambling.
- They were also significantly more likely to report that they would keep their concern to themselves, rather than share it with someone that could help.
- There are also highly significant relationships between the under-age purchase of National Lottery products and the illegal purchase of cigarettes and alcoholic drinks during the same period.
- The children that had spent their own money on the National Lottery were at least twice as likely as the non-participants to have also spent money in the same week on cigarettes and alcoholic drinks.

All of the significant findings conform to existing knowledge on juvenile gambling in the UK and elsewhere.

This study confirms the need for more information on adolescent gambling that will translate into practical policy initiatives. It is suggested that a major study of under-age gambling on the UK National Lottery is required

which focuses on (a) the impact of different forms of lottery product (the draw and scratch cards), (b) the environment of under-age gambling on the National Lottery (e.g. societal attitudes, advertising, other adolescent gambling markets), and (c) the characteristics of at-risk groups (e.g. demographic characteristics, parental gambling, other addictive or delinquent behaviours).

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More information on adolescent gambling is needed to inform practical policy initiatives.

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