

knowledge snapshot



Evidence regarding the risk of problem gambling posed by scratch cards

What this article is about

Scratch cards or scratch tickets are a type of paper-based lottery product. Players scratch a thin film of foil to reveal matching symbols, letters, or numbers to win prizes. Scratch cards are popular worldwide and can be brought in lottery or retail outlets.

It has been suggested that scratch cards may be similar to slot machines. In both types of gambling activities, people get reinforced with a win after a random number of bets. Both have near-misses where players come close to having all matching symbols to win. Near-misses are thought to encourage people to continue gambling. However, there are also major differences between the two. Slot machines are played at a considerably faster pace and people can continue playing for hours. Slot machines also have visual and sound effects that can immerse people in the game. These features are absent in scratch cards.

There is some evidence that scratch cards are less risky than other types of gambling activities. For example, people who seek help for problem gambling rarely mention scratch cards as the source of their problem. This article describes existing evidence regarding the risk of problem gambling posed by scratch cards. The authors also explored how scratch cards compare to other types of gambling activities in terms of risk.

What was done?

The authors searched the database Scopus in July 2020. They looked for studies that examined the association between scratch cards and problem gambling or higher-risk gambling. The authors found 26 studies. Most of the studies were from Australia,

Why is this article important?

Scratch cards are paper-based lottery products that are popular worldwide. In this article, the authors review existing research studies on the association between scratch cards and problem gambling. They also rank the risk of scratch cards in comparison to other gambling activities. There is strong evidence that scratch cards are relatively low risk. The evidence is consistent and observable across multiple countries and population groups. When the authors ranked the different gambling activities, slot machines have the highest risk. This is followed by casino table games. Sports betting, race betting, and card games (e.g., poker) have moderate risk. Bingo, scratch cards, and lotteries have the lowest risk. There is a need for more research into the risk of online lottery products.

Britain, Canada, Europe, and the United States. Aside from one case study, all the other studies involved surveys with the general population or people who were seeking treatment in clinical settings. The authors did not find any study looking at online lottery products (e.g., instant win tickets).

The authors excluded some studies due to having a small number of participants or not using a validated tool to measure problem gambling. They excluded studies that did not distinguish between scratch cards and draw-based lotteries as separate activities. They also excluded studies that did not control for involvement in other gambling activities. People with problem gambling often engage in multiple types of gambling activities. It is difficult to know if their problem gambling is due to scratch cards or other

gambling activities. By controlling for involvement in other gambling activities, any association with problem gambling can be said to be due to scratch cards.

In total, there were 12 studies that remained. The authors applied the Bradford Hill Criteria to assess the strength of the evidence in these studies. The Bradford Hill Criteria is a set of public health principles to consider when establishing an effect. These principles suggest that evidence is stronger when there are multiple sources to support it and the effect is observed in different populations. Also, the evidence is consistent and plausible with different sources coming to a similar conclusion.

What you need to know

Of the 12 studies, three studies did not find any association between scratch cards and problem gambling. Six studies found that playing scratch cards could lower the risk of problem gambling. Three studies found that scratch cards could lead to problem gambling, but the risk was lower than for other gambling activities. Overall, the evidence suggests that scratch cards are associated with low risk of problem gambling. The evidence is consistent and observable across different countries and different population groups.

There were eight studies that provided data to compare across at least five different gambling activities. The authors ranked the gambling activities from highest to lowest risk. They found that the gambling activities could be placed into three main groups. Slot machines emerge as the highest risk activity. This is followed by casino table games. Sports betting, race betting, and card games (e.g., poker) have moderate risk. Bingo, scratch cards, and lotteries have the lowest risk.

The authors suggested that conventional retail scratch cards are different from slot machines. Scratch cards are not as continuous as slot machines. People need to go to a retail outlet to buy scratch cards and find a place to play them. Thus, there is a break in between purchases. People are also less likely to build up an expectation of winning or become immersed in

scratch cards. Finally, there are no visual or sound effects when playing scratch cards. This may weaken the effect of near-misses. However, the authors note that online versions of these games or machine-based delivery of tickets may pose greater risks in some countries and need to be further investigated.

Who is it intended for?

This review can inform gambling regulators, policy makers, and researchers. The authors suggest that future studies consider both offline and online gambling activities. Online lottery products may pose a different risk than paper-based lottery products.

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