

# research snapshot

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## Current warning messages on scratch lottery tickets are not effective

### What this research is about

Scratch-off lottery tickets are a form of lottery gambling. Scratch-off tickets contain a hidden area that is scratched off to reveal possible prizes. In 2006, the World Lottery Association accepted recommendations to include warning messages on scratch-off lottery tickets. The warning messages include information to play responsibly and the odds of winning. These messages are often found on the back of the cards.

Lottery tickets are available worldwide and are a popular form of gambling. A study with US residents found that 13% played lotteries weekly and 62% reported playing in the past year. People who play lotteries frequently are at a higher risk for gambling disorder. Warning messages on electronic gaming machines have been effective in reducing risky gambling behaviour. To be effective, messages should be noticeable. It is also important to inform people about the chances of winning. No study has examined the effectiveness of warning messages on lottery tickets. The researchers addressed this gap by examining how people inspect and understand warning messages on lottery tickets.

### What the researchers did

The researchers conducted two studies. Both studies were with undergraduate university students in the US. The first study consisted of 64 students who were of legal age to gamble (18+). Participants were randomly assigned to two conditions. In the first condition, participants were instructed to interact with a popular lottery ticket (Jumbo Bucks) as they would in real life. In the other condition, participants were told to search for warning messages on the

### What you need to know

Scratch-off lottery tickets contain warning messages about the risk of gambling on the back of the ticket. The researchers examined the effectiveness of warning messages on scratch-off tickets. In Study 1, 64 undergraduate students were randomly assigned to either interact with the scratch ticket as they would in real life or to search for the warning messages. They were also asked about the effectiveness of the messages. Study 2 involved 47 undergraduate students. Study 2 was similar to Study 1 but used two different tickets and eye-tracking to assess attention to the warning messages. In Study 1, one-third of participants did not search the back. In Study 2, participants were no more likely to look at the warning messages than other areas of the scratch tickets. In both studies, most participants reported 'Play responsibly' was easy to understand. But, most participants thought the message was not effective. Only 21–23% of participants understood that the odds of winning referred to all prizes.

lottery ticket. A video recorder was used to measure the time participants spent examining the ticket by trained research assistants. Participants were also asked if they saw the warning messages. All participants completed questionnaires to assess the warning message. For example, participants were asked if the warning message, 'Play responsibly', was easy to understand. They were also asked about the overall effectiveness of the warning message and questions about the odds of winning. Participants were also asked about their demographic characteristics and history of playing lotteries.

Study 2 was similar to Study 1 with a few differences. First, participant's attention to the warning messages was assessed using eye-tracking. Eye-tracking provides a more objective measure of attention. Secondly, participants viewed two different scratch tickets (Jumbo Bucks and Slingo). A total of 47 undergraduate students took part in Study 2. Like Study 1, they were randomly assigned and provided instructions to look for the warning messages or no such instructions. They were shown both sides of the two scratch tickets. Participants were asked to rate the warning messages the same as in Study 1.

### What the researchers found

In Study 1, one-third of participants never turned to the back of the scratch ticket in both conditions. Participants who were told to search for the warning messages spent more time looking at the scratch ticket. In total, 52% of participants responded yes or maybe when asked if the ticket had messages about the risk of gambling. Only 12% accurately reported seeing at least one of the messages ('Play responsibly' and odds of winning). Participants who were told to search for the warning messages were more likely to report seeing at least one message. Over half of the participants said that 'Play responsibly' was easy to understand. Most stated that 'Play responsibly' was not an effective warning message. Providing information about the odds did not change the participants' perceptions of winning. Only 23% correctly identified that the odds were about winning any prize. The results were not due to demographic differences or a history of purchasing lottery tickets.

For Study 2, participants who were told to search for the warning messages looked at the odds of winning more than participants who were not instructed. Overall, instructions to search for the warning messages did not result in more time spent looking at the warning messages. Like Study 1, most participants could not correctly identify the warning messages. They also thought the message 'Play responsibly' was ineffective. Only 21 to 23% of participants correctly identified that the odds of winning referred to all prizes. Providing odds information lowered participants' beliefs about their chances of winning.

### How you can use this research

Gambling operators can use these findings to modify warning messages on scratch-off lottery tickets to make them more visible. Researchers can test the location and type of messages that would be most effective for scratch-off lottery tickets.

### About the researchers

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### About Gambling Research Exchange (GREO)

Gambling Research Exchange (GREO) has partnered with the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University to produce Research Snapshots. GREO is an independent knowledge translation and exchange organization that aims to eliminate harm from gambling. Our goal is to support evidence-informed decision making in safer gambling policies, standards, and practices. The work we do is intended for researchers, policy makers, gambling regulators and operators, and treatment and prevention service providers.

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