



Research Summary

Commercial Gambling Advertising: Possible Impact on Youth Knowledge, Attitudes, Beliefs and Behavioural Intentions.

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Research Topic

Canada has experienced a rapid growth in legalized gambling over the past ten years. Research to date suggests that the prevalence of problem and pathological gambling among youth is two to four times higher than in the general population.

Commercial gambling advertising is pervasive in Ontario and across Canada, and effectively ensures that youth will be exposed to it in the course of their daily lives. Despite this, little is known about the impact of such advertising on the knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and behavioural intentions of young people. In related fields, research into the impact of tobacco and alcohol advertising has resulted in restrictions on both the content and placement of such advertisements.

Although regulations on commercial gambling advertising currently exist in the **Gaming Control Act of Ontario (1992)**, they apply solely to casino-type facilities that offer table games and slot machines. Lotteries and other legal forms of gambling are not currently covered in legislation.

The current research represents the first of a two-stage agenda, and is the first study of its kind to examine the impact of commercial gambling advertising on the knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and behavioural intentions of youth. This **exploratory** study is comprised of two phases: in the first phase, a content analysis was performed on over 450 commercial gambling advertisements in Ontario; in the second phase, a sampling of these advertisements was shown to young people in focus group settings across the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

Definition of Terms

Commercial gambling advertising - Promotes government sanctioned, legal gambling and its products to consumers. It is found in magazines, bus shelters, subways, and on the radio and television. In Ontario, this advertising is supported by substantial budgets.

Exploratory research - Studies undertaken in areas where there has been little or no research to date. As initial forays into new areas of inquiry, exploratory research looks for associations and relationships that might form the basis for more detailed inquiry. Data gathering is no less valid in exploratory research, but the findings may be limited to the sample studied and usually cannot be generalized to whole populations.

¹ **About the Principal Investigator:** David Korn, M.D., is a Certified Addictions Specialist, a public health physician, and a member of the Department of Public Health Sciences, Faculty of Medicine at the University of Toronto. He is currently the Head of the Public Health Gambling Project, at the University of Toronto and holds an affiliate position at Harvard Medical School, Division on Addiction. He is a board member of the U.S. National Centre for Responsible Gaming and an editorial board member of the Journal of Gambling Studies.

Gaming Control Act of Ontario (1992) - Introduces principles to govern commercial gambling advertising in Ontario, and does not permit:

- comparing games of chance to other forms of gaming;
- aiming advertisements at people under 19 years of age;
- using celebrities to imply that games of chance contributed to their success; and
- suggesting that games of chance increase social acceptance, personal or financial success, and/or resolve economic, social, or personal problems.

Note: The Gaming Control Act of Ontario (1992) and regulations, as they relate to advertising in Ontario, apply only to casino-type facilities that offer table games and slots:

- lottery advertising is governed by guidelines established by the Ontario Lottery and Gaming Corporation (OLGC);
- horse racing advertising is not regulated in Ontario; and
- charitable gaming advertising is governed by the Alcohol and Gaming Commission of Ontario (AGCO) through the terms and conditions it establishes for each charitable lottery.

Research Design & Methods

The content analysis of the gambling advertisements and focus group discussions were designed to examine the impact of commercial gambling advertising on youth. Impact was assessed in relation to four domains: knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and behavioural intentions. Research from related fields has shown that these domains represent the foundations for choices regarding healthy behaviour.

The research team began by compiling an inventory of commercial gambling advertisements that had run in various Ontario media during 2000-2003. Assistance with this task was provided by the OLGC, Woodbine Entertainment Group, Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (MOHLTC), and the AGCO.

The researchers found that advertising regulations in the Gaming Control Act of Ontario (1992) were imprecise and open to interpretation. Nevertheless, in the absence of a clear, comprehensive framework for gambling advertising, the guiding principles articulated in the Act were used as the basis for analysis in this study.

1. Content Analysis (Phase 1)

- Performed on over 450 gambling advertisements (print, radio, television, outdoor).
- Advertisements were deconstructed based on common themes, and coded into categories to allow for the selection of samples to be shown in the focus groups.
- A total of 29 advertisements were selected for the focus groups.

2. Focus Groups (Phase 2)

- Discussions with youth selected from across the GTA.
- 63 young people participated in eight focus groups (four aged 13-14 years; four aged 15-17 years).
- Participants were evenly split by gender and reflected diverse socio-economic, cultural, and geographic backgrounds.

Results/Discussion

1. Content Analysis

- i) Some of the commercial lottery advertisements reviewed are not consistent with the guiding principles of the Gaming Control Act of Ontario (1992), in that they:
 - allude to the potential for obtaining financial success through gambling;

- allude to the potential for obtaining social success through gambling; and
- use humour, youthful representations/images, and/or youthful dialect which has the potential to appeal to those 19 years of age and under.

The researchers recognized that lottery advertisements do not fall under the purview of the Gaming Control Act of Ontario (1992), but as mentioned earlier, all advertisements were assessed in relation to this standard, as it is the only policy guide that has been articulated by government.

ii) Principal messages in commercial gambling advertisements include:

- gambling is fun and exciting, and often centers around friends and social events;
- participating in gambling can lead to substantial wins (cash and/or gifts);
- gambling can be an escape from the pressures of daily life;
- gambling is a normal and enjoyable form of entertainment; and
- “It can happen to you” – the chances of winning are reasonable.

iii) Observations of the tone and style in commercial gambling advertisements include:

- humour is frequently used in one form or another, especially in lottery advertisements;
- most advertisements use male voices;
- bold colours and glossy materials are often used; and
- many advertisements reflect anti-establishment or anti-authoritarian attitudes.

2. Focus Group Results

i) Participants reflected the following contextual perceptions:

- gambling is a type of activity that places something of value at risk, with the potential for reward or greater return;
- the chances of winning are slim, and vary significantly according to the activity/circumstances; and
- the level of risk varies with the specific form of gambling.

ii) Participants reflected the following attitudes and behaviours:

- in their opinion, responsible gambling is acceptable and part of the social fabric;
- they express the right to choose what they do with their own time and money;
- the way in which one gambles is what makes the activity right or wrong (i.e., becomes a problem when done too frequently, too much is risked, or if “addicted”);
- despite understood legal prohibitions, most believe it is okay for underage people to gamble;
- most report that they participate in some form of gambling (illegal and/or informal gambling);
- gambling advertisements are “everywhere”; and
- reasons to gamble include:
 - to have fun;
 - to achieve financial gain;
 - to attain a desired lifestyle;
 - to socialize with friends; and
 - in response to peer pressure or an addiction.

iii) Perceptions of and attitudes toward gambling advertisements:

- many view advertisements as attempts to promote gambling as fun, engaging, and harmless;
- participants identified selected advertisements as attractive, colourful, and glossy; and
- several suggested that advertisements prepare youth to gamble once they reach legal age.

Study Limitations

- This is an exploratory study, and only represents basic groundwork.
- The sample was selected from within the GTA to reflect a diversity of age, gender, socio-economic status, and ethnicity. The sampling methodology is a generally recognized qualitative strategy; having said this, the sample was not randomly selected and is not representative of all youth.
- The content analysis was intended to identify a smaller group of advertisements for use in the focus groups. Analyzing all advertisements for their appropriateness to youth was beyond the scope of this research. The selected advertisements reflected a mix of those that might appeal to young people and those that might not.
- The researchers did not apply “discourse analysis” methods to the focus group discussions. The brevity of comments in focus group discussions did not lend them to this form of analysis. Future research that incorporates in-depth interviews may be better suited for this type of secondary analysis.
- The study did not examine other influences on the perspectives of young people (e.g., gambling-focused television programs; televised poker; gambling as a youth activity; and other messages from family, peers, and communities). The contribution of each variable might be probed in future research.

Conclusions

This study was intended to inform health professionals, public policy makers, and the gaming industry about the possible effects of commercial gambling advertising on youth. In this context, the following conclusions were offered by the authors:

1. Youth tend to consider gambling a normal behaviour.

- Acknowledge that gambling is a routine practice among peers, families, and community members.

2. Youth tend to see lotteries as the dominant form of legal gambling.

- Taglines and slogans from gambling advertisements are familiar to youth.
- Lottery advertisements are both familiar and appealing to young people.

3. Young people intend to gamble in the foreseeable future.

- Reflect intentions to continue gambling informally and purchasing lottery tickets.

4. Youth tend to view legal prohibitions as only marginally relevant.

- Cite age restrictions as potential barriers to participation in casino and racetrack gambling.
- Most intend to gamble despite being aware of age limits and understanding that a significant win is unlikely.

5. Youth tend to reflect that gambling risks are age related.

- Older participants (aged 15-17) feel they are able to manage gambling risks, but that younger people (aged < 15) might not be able to.

Based on the content analysis and focus groups, the following warrant further mention:

- *Casino Rama* has a series of advertisements suggesting that a visit to the casino is a way to reverse a string of bad luck. Alcohol advertising that deals with negative feelings in a similar manner has been criticized in the United States.

- With respect to lottery advertisements, *Pro-Line* was most appealing to young males in this study. Researchers have expressed concern about the marrying the youth culture to sports betting.

Implications & Recommendations

The researchers make several recommendations for future research, policy, and practice:

1. Research

- Expand current understanding of the impact of commercial gambling advertising on youth.
- Further examine and describe the extent to which young people are exposed to advertising.
- Further explore discrepancies/inconsistencies between gambling knowledge and behaviour.

2. Policy

- Establish a common set of guiding principles for all commercial gambling advertising to which young people are (or are likely to be) exposed.

3. Practice

- Strengthen youth media literacy initiatives.
- Intensify enforcement of lottery point-of-sale age restrictions.
- Expand counter-force/messaging strategies to prevent problem gambling.