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# The role of parents in the development of gambling behaviour in adolescents

Parental monitoring of their children's activities and their selection of friends has been shown to be one of the strongest predictors of antisocial behaviour (Vachon, Vitaro, Wanner & Tremblay, 2004).

### Awareness

In relation to gambling behaviour, adolescents whose parents are less aware of how and with whom they spend their leisure time may have greater opportunities to gamble and may experience fewer parental sanctions for doing so. Consequently, these adolescents may gamble more frequently and experience more gambling problems.

### Discipline

Along with poor monitoring, inadequate disciplinary practices have been recognized as a significant family risk factor in a wide range of adolescent anti-social and/or undesirable behaviours such as alcohol use, cigarette smoking, illicit drug use, underaged sex and gambling (Vachon, et al, 2004).

### Parental role

Many studies have noted the important role that parents have in relation to their child's gambling behaviour. Research has consistently shown that adolescent problem gamblers are more likely to report that their parents gamble (Gupta & Derevensky, 1997; Winters et al, 1998; Darbyshire, Oster & Carrig, 2001; Delfabbro & Thrupp, 2003; Felsher, Derevensky & Gupta, 2003; Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Rohde, Seeley &

Rohling, 2004; Clarke, 2004; Oei & Raylu, 2004).

### Girls and single-parent family

It has also been claimed that the relationship is stronger for females (i.e., girls are more likely to be influenced by parents who gamble than boys) (Chalmers & Willoughby, 2006). Other studies (e.g., Fisher, 1999) have found that problem gambling was associated with living in a single-parent family.

### Parental gambling

Strong correlation has been found between adolescent gambling and parental gambling (Wood & Griffiths, 1998; MORI/International Gaming Research Unit, 2006; Ipsos MORI, 2009). This is particularly worrying because it has long been known that a number of studies have shown that when people gamble as adolescents, they are then more likely to become problem gamblers as adults (Ide-Smith & Lea, 1989; Griffiths, 1990; Huxley & Carroll, 1992). For instance, in a study involving 11- to 15-year olds ( $n = 1195$ ), Wood and Griffiths (1998) found a strong correlation between parental and child participation on the National Lottery. In fact, of the participants who took part in these activities most had their lottery tickets (71%) and scratchcards (57%) bought for them by their parents.

### Gambling activities

In another study (Fisher & Balding, 1998), it was found that the parents of the problem gamblers were more than twice as likely to

have gambled on each of nine different forms of commercial gambling activities compared to the parents of non-problem gamblers. Adolescent problem gamblers were more than three times as likely as the other adolescents to report that they thought their parents gambled too much. The problem gamblers' parents appeared less likely to disapprove of adolescent gambling than the other parents. The most common companions overall for lottery and scratchcard gambling were the adolescents' parents.

### **Internet gambling**

Parental gambling does not just concern lottery gambling. The 2007 British adolescent prevalence study surveyed 8,017 young British people aged between 12 and 15 years of age about their Internet gambling behaviour (Griffiths & Wood, 2007).

In order to ascertain their experience of gambling on the Internet, adolescents were asked 'Have you ever played any National Lottery game on the Internet?' Those who had done so were also asked 'Which, if any, of the following games have you played in the past 7 days?' and were presented with the following options: (i) instant win games for money, (ii) free instant win games, (iii) lotto, and (iv) one of the other lottery draw games.

Those who had experience of gambling online were also asked how they played National Lottery games on the Internet, and presented with the options: (i) the system let me register, (ii) I played along with my parents, (iii) another adult let me play, (v) I used my parent's/guardian's online National Lottery account with their permission, (v) I used my parent's/guardian's online National Lottery account without their permission, and (vi) played free games.

The results showed that 16% played along with their parents, one in ten used

their parent's online National Lottery account either with their permission (10%) or without it (7%).

### **Gambling behaviours**

The latest 2009 British adolescent gambling prevalence study (Ipsos MORI, 2009) surveyed 8,598 11-15 year-olds for problem gambling behaviours. Parental gambling and attitudes were key.

Results across the survey indicate that parental influence and behaviour appears to play a key role in underage participation in gambling but that parents may be less likely to discuss gambling with their children than other potentially risky behaviours. For example, those adolescents who said their parents gambled were also more likely to gamble themselves (25%, compared with 12% of those who said their parents do not gamble).

However, when asked to indicate how their parents would feel about children engaging in a number of potentially risky behaviours - such as smoking, taking drugs, drinking and gambling - children were less likely to know how their parents would feel about gambling on the National Lottery or fruit machines than other behaviours (23% and 20% respectively did not know what their parents would think, compared with five percent who were unaware of their parents' views on cigarettes).

### **Risk factors**

A Canadian study (Vachon, Vitaro, Wanner & Tremblay, 2004) explored the possible links between family risk factors (i.e., parent gambling and parenting practices) among 938 adolescents.

Results showed that adolescent gambling frequency was related to both parents' gambling frequency and problems. However, adolescent gambling problems were linked only to fathers' severity of gambling problems. It was also reported that low levels of parental monitoring enhanced adolescents' risk of getting

involved in gambling activities and developing related problems. A higher level of inadequate disciplinary practices was also related to greater gambling among the adolescents.

### Parental attitudes

Another Canadian study carried out in 1995 (but published four years later; Ladouceur, Boudreault, Jacques & Vitaro, 1999) examined the attitudes and knowledge of parents regarding gambling behaviours among children aged 5 to 17 years.

A telephone survey of 279 parents (32% fathers and 68% mothers) was carried out in 1995 and reported that parents overestimate the age of a child's first wager and underestimate the probability that their own child has already gambled.

Almost nine in ten parents (86%) believed that the availability of gambling for children should be reduced and that schools should include prevention programmes concerning problem gambling. It was also reported that 84% of the parents would be willing to buy lottery tickets for their child.

A follow up study carried out five years later in 2000 (Ladouceur, Vitaro & Côte, 2001) with 213 respondents showed a number of changes in parents' attitudes, behaviour, and knowledge concerning youth gambling.

Parents were more satisfied with government limitation of access to gambling, and more accurately informed about legal aspects of the sale of lottery tickets. However, the percentage of parents who failed to associate youth gambling with some of its correlates (e.g., parental gambling problems) increased from 1995 to year 2000.

The improvements that were observed suggested that parents had benefited from media-transmitted information during this period. However, the deterioration of some parental attitudes suggested that it was still

important to educate parents about youth gambling, and to design interventions adapted to parents' needs.

### Conclusion

Studies of children of parents who are said to gamble excessively have been found to be at consistently greater risk than their classmates who did not describe their parents as having a problem with compulsive gambling. These findings strongly suggest that without early and competent intervention, children of parents who gamble excessively: (a) will be seriously disadvantaged when attempting to solve their present adolescent and future adult problems of living; and (b) as a consequence are, themselves, high-risk candidates for developing one or another form of dysfunctional adjustment, including an addictive pattern of behaviour.

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