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Adolescent gambling on the National Lottery

A small percentage of children are 'addicted' to instant scratchcards.

Officially, no one under the age of 16 years old is allowed to play the National Lottery or 'Instants' scratchcards, but press reports indicate that that this prohibition does not always apply. In fact, research carried out by the Office of the National Lottery suggests that a small percentage of children are 'addicted' to instant scratchcards.

There appears to have been an increase in concern over the issue, and a growing awareness that these activities may be widespread amongst young people and that the effects may be far-reaching. For some young people this may include problem gambling, even involving them in criminal acts in order to finance these activities. For many more, the influence — whilst appearing less severe — may be resulting in a significant change in their attitudes toward gambling.

This study set out to examine the acquisition, development and maintenance of National Lottery and instant scratchcard gambling amongst adolescents. Other factors (for example, adolescents' attitudes towards gambling, and levels of problem gambling) were also examined.

Time and money spent playing

The total sample consisted of 1195 adolescents aged 11-15 years (550 male, 641 female, 4 unspecified; mean age = 13.3 years). The findings were as follows:

48% had played the National Lottery. Of these:

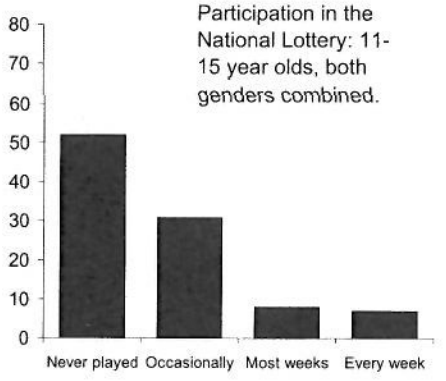
64% currently play only occasionally;
16% play most weeks;
14% play every week.

30% had played 'Instants' scratchcards. Of these:

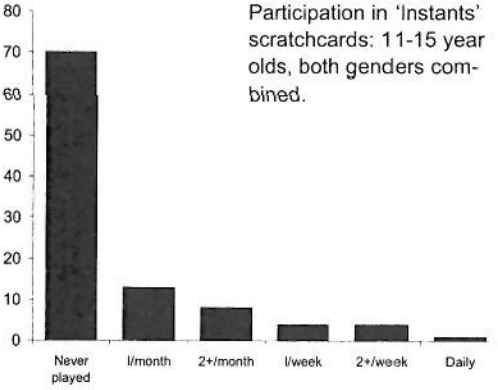
44% currently play once a month;
27% play a few times a month;
12% play once a week;
13% play a few times a week;
4% play every day.

The histograms represent these groups as a percentage of the whole sample.

There were no significant gender differences in frequency of play on either of these activities.



Participation in the National Lottery: 11-15 year olds, both genders combined.



Participation in 'Instants' scratchcards: 11-15 year olds, both genders combined.

Great Baddow High
Greys Convent
Hallmead, Haverring
Harlow College
Harold Hill Community
The Harwich
Hassenbrook, Stanford-le-Hope
Hedley Walter, Brentwood
Helena Romanes, Great Dunmow
Honywood, Coggeshall
King Edmund, Rochford
King Harold Comp, Waltham Abbey
King John, Benfleet
Laindon, Basildon
Loughton County High
Marshalls Park, Romford
Mayflower County High, Billericay
Mountfitchet
Mountfitchet High, Stansted
Neave, Romford
Nicholas, Basildon
Plume, Maldon
Prittlewell High, Southend-on-Sea
Reddencourt, Romford
Saunders Draper, Hornchurch
St Anselm's, Basildon
St Clere's, Stanford-le-Hope
St Edward's CE, Romford
St Helena, Colchester
St John's, Epping
St Mark's, Rayleigh
St Martin's, Brentwood
St Peter's High, Burnham-on-Crouch
Sherfield High,
South East Essex Sixth Form College
Southend High for Boys
Stanway, Colchester
Stewards, Harlow
Stone-by-Nayland Middle, Colchester
Stour Valley, Chelmsford
Swayne, Rayleigh
Tabor High, Braintree
The Park, Rayleigh
The Ramsey, Halstead
Rickstones, Witham
The Thorpe Bay, Southend-on-Sea
Torells, Grays
Ursuline Convent, Brentwood
Westcliff High, Southend
West Hatch High, Chigwell
William de Ferrers, Chelmsford
William Edwards, Grays, Thurrock
Woodlands, Takeley End

Gloucestershire

Heywood, Cinderford
Katharine Lady Berkeley's, Wotton-under-Edge
Oxstalls, Gloucester
Sainbridge, Gloucester
St Peter's High, Tuffley
Whitecross, Lydney

Greenwich

Abbey Wood
Blackheath Bluecoat
Blackheath High
Crown Woods, Eltham
Eaglesfield, Woolwich
Eltham Green
John Roan, Blackheath
Kidbrooke
Plumstead Manor
Waterfield, Abbey Wood

Hackney

Edith Cavell Lower

Hampshire

Alderman Quilley, Eastleigh
Bourne CC, Emsworth
Calthorpe Park, Aldershot
The Connaught, Aldershot
Court Moor, Fleet
Cove, Farnborough
Cranbourne Sixth Form, Basingstoke
Crockiade College, Andover
Dearnery, Southampton
Fernhill, Farnborough
Frogmore CC, Yateley
Hampton Park, Southampton
Harriet Costello, Basingstoke
John Hunt of Everest, Basingstoke
King Richard, Portsmouth
Kingsley, Wiveley
Oak Farm, Farnborough
Oak Park CC, Havant
Queen Mary's Sixth Form College, Basingstoke
Romsey, Greatbridge
St Edmund's RC, Portsmouth
St Luke's CE, Southsea
The Wavell, Farnborough
Westgate, Winchester
Western Park City Girls', Southampton
Winton, Andover

Harrow

Gayton High

Havering

Abbs Cross, Hornchurch
Brittons, Rainham
Gaynes, Upminster
Harold Hill CC, Romford
St Edward's CE, Romford

Hereford & Worcester

Abbey High, Redditch
Aylestone, Hereford
Belmont Abbey, Hereford
Bishop of Hereford's Bluecoat, Tupsley
Chantry Sec. Martley

Criterion	National Lottery %M	%F	%C	'Instants' scratchcards %M	%F	%C
Think about playing them at odd times	36	25	32	18	13	16
Need to spend more playing them	13	5	10	15	7	12
Restless or tense when trying to cut down	10	6	9	7	6	7
Play to escape problems	10	5	9	10	2	6
Chase losses	40	26	35	30	28	29
Lie to family and friends	6	3	5	7	4	6
Spent dinner or bus money on them	7	5	6	8	5	6
Stole money from family to play	4	2	3	4	4	4
Stole from elsewhere or shoplifted to play	4	1	3	8	2	5
Argued with family or friends about playing	3	4	4	7	4	6
Missed school at least five times to play	3	2	3	6	2	4
Sought help for associated money worries	2	1	2	3	2	2

Table 1. Diagnostic criteria of the gambling addiction scale (percentages of total sample, 11-15 year olds). M=male, F=female, C=combined.

A significant number of the participants illegally bought their own National Lottery tickets (17%) or scratchcards (26%). There were no significant gender differences in illegal buying.

The average amount that these adolescents spent per week was £1.52 on the National Lottery and £1.40 on scratchcards. There were no gender differences in amounts of money spent.

Links with parental gambling

There was a very strong correlation between parental and child participation on both the National Lottery and scratchcards (in other words, children were more likely to gamble if their parents did). Furthermore, of the young people who took part in these gambling activities, most had their Lottery tickets or scratchcards bought for them by their parents (National Lottery 71%; scratchcards 57%).

Attitudes toward National Lottery/scratchcard gambling

A large majority of the adolescents in this study reported that they thought gambling was a bad idea (72%). However, there was a significant gender difference, with more males than females reporting that they were in favour of gambling (males 40%; females 18%). There was, however, no gender difference when asked about their views on the acceptability of the National Lottery and scratchcards.

The majority of the young people that had participated in either of these schemes thought that the National Lottery (76%) and scratchcards (57%) were a good idea. Of the respondents who said that gambling was a bad idea almost half (49%) suggested that the National Lottery was a good idea, and 33% suggested that scratchcards were a good idea. Again, there were no significant gender differences.

Some notable percentages derived from the data are shown in Table 2.

Problem gambling

Levels of problem gambling were examined using an addiction scale adapted by Dr Sue Fisher from the American Psychiatric Association (Table 1).

On the basis of answering 'yes' to four or more questions on the scale, it was found that 6% of players might be problem gamblers on the National Lottery (26 male, 11 female). For scratchcards the level was also 6% of players (18 male, 7 female).

Aside from these possible problem gamblers, many more participants answered 'yes' to 1-3 questions on the scale. For instance, *Do you often find yourself thinking about the National Lottery or scratchcards at odd times of the day, or planning the next time you will play?* produced a comparatively high number of positive responses in reference to the National Lottery (32%) and scratchcards (16%). This was also true of the question *After losing money on the National Lottery or scratchcards do you play again to try and win your money back (more than half the time)?* which produced comparatively high numbers of 'yes' responses (National Lottery 35%; scratchcards 29%).

Table 2. Some notable percentages of the whole sample.

Think gambling is a 'bad idea'	72%
Have played the National Lottery at least once	48%
Have played 'Instants' scratchcards at least once	30%

Studies of other forms of gambling have shown strong links between parental and child gambling.

Some adolescents are getting a 'buzz' or a 'high' whenever they successfully buy Lottery tickets illegally.

There were, once again, significant gender differences in response to these questions, with more males than females answering 'yes'. Furthermore, 17% of both male and female participants answered that they were worried about how much they spent on the National Lottery and scratchcards.

Parental purchases

This study suggests that large numbers of adolescents in the UK are taking part in the National Lottery or playing instant scratchcards. This appears to be true of both male and female adolescents, who reported approximately equal levels of play on both these activities.

Whilst a significant number of adolescents appear to be buying their own National Lottery tickets and scratchcards illegally, a more worrying aspect may be the number of parents who are buying National Lottery tickets and scratchcards for their children. Studies of other forms of gambling have shown strong links between parental and child gambling, and have indicated that the earlier children begin to gamble, the more likely they are to become problem gamblers in the future (Ide-Smith & Lea 1988; Fisher 1993; Winters, Stinchfield & Fulkerson 1993; Griffiths 1995).

The willingness of parents to buy National Lottery tickets and scratchcards for their children perhaps reflects their perceptions of these activities as being non-gambling. It is harder to imagine parents placing bets on horses on behalf of their children, as horse racing is clearly perceived to be a bona fide form of gambling. However, this does not appear to be the case for the National Lottery or scratchcards which appear to have been legitimised as socially acceptable to large sections of society.

Pressures to participate

This acceptability appears to be due to a number of factors. For instance, the National Lottery and scratchcards are sanctioned by government and are allowed to advertise widely, being available in a variety of public places such as post offices, supermarkets, petrol stations and newsagents. Furthermore the National Lottery has a twice-weekly prime-time television show, *The National Lottery Live*, incorporating well-known celebrities and pop bands who, in effect, endorse the National Lottery product. *The National Lottery Live* television programme may in particular appeal to adolescents because of the pop groups who appear on the programme (for example the Spice Girls and Boyzone), who are hugely popular with those under 16 years of age.

The effects on adolescents may be considerable. Not only are they exposed to these products in a variety of public places: they also observe their parents taking part, and parents may to a large extent encourage them by buying them National Lottery tickets or scratchcards. The most important weakness of this study should perhaps be noted at this point: all the data were self-reported, which means that the information about parental gambling relies on their children's assessment. This, of course, may or may not be valid, and the data should be treated with some caution.

'Buzzes'

It is clear that most adolescents have control over their gambling behaviour. Although there were no significant gender differences in participation in these activities, problem gambling was found to be a predominantly male phenomenon.

The finding that problem gambling occurred on both the National Lottery and scratchcards was quite surprising, as Griffiths (1997) had speculated that the National Lottery in its present form (a bi-weekly draw) was unlikely to be problematic due to the low event frequency. However, anecdotal evidence from our focus group research suggests that some adolescents

The National Lottery and scratchcards could contribute to a dramatic increase in problem gambling in the UK.

are getting a 'buzz' or a 'high' whenever they successfully buy Lottery tickets illegally. If the act of buying the ticket itself is physiologically and psychologically rewarding, then it is not hard to see why some adolescents may develop gambling problems on the National Lottery!

Increasing problems?

The full implications of the National Lottery and scratchcards on our society have yet to be determined. However the evidence from this study and previous studies of adolescent gambling (see Griffiths 1995 for an overview) indicate that the National Lottery and scratchcards could contribute to *a dramatic increase in problem gambling in the UK.*

Results quoted above showed a majority disapproving of gambling, but the views of many adolescents towards gambling may be radically altered in the near future. The government sanctioning of these activities, the high level of advertising, links to 'good causes', and *The National Lottery Live* television programme may all play a significant role in this process.

Ideally, future research should take the form of longitudinal studies to investigate the long-term effects of adolescent National Lottery and scratchcard gambling. Although such research is both time-consuming and expensive, and the results would not be available for many years, by which time problems may have already developed, the long-term outcomes may override the short-term social impact.

Full results of this study have appeared in the *Journal of Adolescence* (Volume 21, pages 265-273, 1998).

Encouraging young people to gamble?

A comparison between the percentage participation of 11-15 year olds reported in this article, and that derived from Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire (HRBQ) data, confirms the statement on page 55 that many youngsters are having Lottery tickets and scratchcards bought for them.

HRBQ data for 1997, for 11-15 year olds combined, give the following percentages that participated during the previous week *using their own money* (either buying the products themselves or having them bought by someone else):

National Lottery 5.5%
Scratchcards 4%

The Griffiths-Wood figures cannot be related directly because of the different question format, but they suggest a typical weekly percentage involvement of approximately:

National Lottery 12%
Scratchcards 15%

On the face of it, this suggests that half are having at least some Lottery tickets bought for them, while about three-quarters are being bought scratchcards.

Although the 'problem' gamblers appear to be the ones funding their own gambling, these figures support the opinion presented in the article that young people are being manoeuvred to a more accepting attitude to gambling.

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Counthill Comp
Kaskenmoor
North Chadderton Comp
Saddleworth High
South Chadderton Comp
Oxfordshire
Bicester Community College
Burford
Cressex, High Wycombe
Faringdon
Gillott's, Henley-on-Thames
Henry Box, Witney
Highdown, Reading
King Alfred's, Wantage
King James's VIth Form College, Henley-on-Thames
Kingsbrook, Milton Keynes
Princes Risborough
Theale Green, Reading
Wallingford
Richmond-upon-Thames
Clarendon, Hampton
Christ's United RC & CE, Richmond
Grey Court, Ham
Grey Court, Richmond
Orleans Park, Twickenham
Rectory, Hampton
Sheene, Richmond
Teddington
Waldegrave, Twickenham
Whitton
Rochdale
Roch Valley High
Sutherland High, Heywood
Salford
Walkden High, Worsley
Sandwell
Alexandra High, Tipton
Bishop Vesey, Walsall
Heathfield High, Cradley Heath
Holly Lodge High, Smethwick
Manor High, Wednesbury
Perryfields High, Warley
Shireland High, Warley
Warley High
Wood Green High, Wednesbury
Sefton
Birkdale High, Southport
Bootle High
Chesterfield High, Crosby
Christ the King, Birkdale
Formby High
Hillside High, Bootle
Litherland High
Manor High, Crosby
Maricourt RC High, Maghull
Meols Cop High
Sacred Heart RC High, Crosby
Sheffield
Carter Lodge Campus
The City
Jordanthorpe
Myers Grove
Tapton
Thornbridge
Hermes
Shropshire
Church Stretton
Grove, Market Drayton
Lacon Childe, Cleobury Mortimer
Sir John Talbot's, Whitchurch
Somerset
Backwell
Blake, Bridgwater
The Blue, Wells
Bishop Fox's, Taunton
Brymore, Cannington
Buckler's Mead, Yeovil
The Castle, Taunton
Chilton Trinity, Bridgwater
Countess Gytha, Wellington
Danesfield CE Middle, Williton
Fairlands Middle, Cheddar
Haygrove, Bridgwater
Heathfield, West Monkton
Holyrood CS, Chard
Hugh Sexey Middle, Blackford
Huish Episcopi, Langport
The King Alfred, Highbridge
King Arthur's Community, Wincanton
King Ina Middle, Ilminster, Cheddar
King's Mead, Wivelscombe
Ladymead CS, Taunton
Maiden Beech, Crewkerne
Maiden Beech Middle, Crewkerne
Millfield Junior
Oakfield, Frome
Preston, Yeovil
Selwood Middle, Frome
Somerset College of Arts & Technology, Taunton
Stanchester CS, Stoke-sub-Hamdon
St Augustine of Canterbury, Taunton
St Dunstan's, Glastonbury
Swanmead Community, Ilminster
Sydenham Community, Bridgwater
Wadham CS, Crewkerne
Westfield, Yeovil
West Somerset CC, Minehead
Whitstone CC, Shepton Mallet
Yeovil College
Staffordshire
The Blake, Hednesford
Blakehill, Cannock
Newall Green High
Parrenthorn, Prestwich
Philips High
Poundswick High
Prestwich High
Whalley Range High for Girls
Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Heaton Manor
Redewood
Rutherford
Walbottle High
Walker
West Gate CC
Newham
Cumberland, London E13
Easlea Community, London E16
Langdon, London E6
Norfolk
Broadland High, Hoveton
Caister High, Caister-on-Sea
Charles Burrell High, Thetford
Downham Market High
Earlham High, Norwich
Fakenham High
Flegg High, Mattham
Framlingham Earl High
Great Yarmouth High, King's Lynn
Hamond's High, Swaffham
Hellesdon High, Norwich
Hewett County High, Norwich
King Edward VII High, King's Lynn
Litcham High, King's Lynn
Neatherred High, Dereham
North Walsham High
Notre-Dame, Norwich
Open Community High, Attleborough
Reepham High
St Clement's High, Clement
Taverham High, Norwich
Northamptonshire
Bearfield, Corby
Bishop Stopford, Kettering
Campion, Bugbrooke
Chenderit, Middleton Cheney
Chicheie, Rushden
Danetre, Daventry
Daventry William Parker
Delapre Middle, Far Cotton
Duston Upper, Northampton
Emmanuel CE Middle, Lings
Fitzwilliam, Wellingborough
Henry Gotch, Kettering
Huxlow, Wellingborough
Kettering Boys'
Kingsbrook, Deanshanger
Kingsley Park Middle, Northampton
Kingsthorpe Upper, Northampton
Lings
Magdalen College School, Brackley
Manor Field, Rushden
Mereway Middle
Mereway Upper
Montsaye, Rothwell
Moulton Comp, Northampton
Northampton School for Boys
Northampton School for Girls
Northampton Trinity
Prince William, Oundle
Roade
Southfield Boys' High, Northampton
Spencer Middle, Northampton
Sponne, Towcester
Thomas Becket RC Upper, Northampton
Weavers, Wellingborough
Westfield, Wellingborough
Weston Favell Upper, Northampton
Wollaston, Wellingborough
Northumberland
Ashington High
Astley Community, Seaton Delaval
Berwick-upon-Tweed City High
Blyth Tynedale High, Blyth
Coquet High, Morpeth
Cramlington High
The Duchess's High, Alnwick
Hexham Community, Hexham
King Edward VII, Morpeth
Ponteland High, Newcastle-upon-Tyne
Prudhoe High
Queen Elizabeth High, Hexham
Ridley High, Blyth
St Benet Biscop High, Bedlington
Nottinghamshire
Alderman Derbyshire, Bulwell
Arnold Hill
Brunts, Mansfield
Carlton le Willows, Nottingham
Eliott Durham, Nottingham
Glaisdale Comp, Bilborough
Hartland School, Worksop
Kingsgate, Hucknall
Kirkby Comp, Kirkby
Manor Comp, Carlton
Minster, Southwell
Rufford Comp, Edwinstowe
Sconce Hill, Newark
Shirebrook, Mansfield
South Wolds, Nottingham
Tuxford Comp
Valley Comp, Worksop
West Bridgford
William Crane, Aspley
William Sharp, Nottingham
Oldham
The Blue Coat