

# Your shout

## It's all in the game ... highs and lows of hitting the jackpot



It's a Lotto rollover today, but would winning the lottery really make you happy? **Dr Mark Griffiths**, director of the International Gaming Research Unit at Nottingham Trent University, takes a look

**M**ANY of us dream about winning large life-changing amounts of money on games like Lotto. But does winning huge sums of money make us happier?

Last month the newspapers were full of stories about the largest ever Lotto jackpot in the UK following 14 consecutive rollovers.

The £66 million prize was eventually shared between two couples – David and Carol Martin from Hawick in Scotland, and Gerry and Lisa Cannings who are from Peterborough.

Research on lottery winners has found that they are euphoric very briefly, before they settle back to their normal level of happiness or unhappiness. This is because happiness is relative.

There is a popular belief by some psychologists that in the long run, winning large amounts of money on gambling activities will not make someone happy. Researchers who study

happiness say that everyone has a certain level of happiness that stays relatively constant, but can be changed by particular events that make the person happy or sad.

Thankfully, this change only lasts for a short period of time.

For instance, if someone is a generally happy person and a close relative dies, research shows that after a few months or so, the person will go back to the same happiness level that they were previously.

However, this works the other way too.

If a person is not very happy in their day-to-day life, they could win a large amount of money on the lottery and they would probably be happy for a couple months but then they would 'level out' and go back to life at their normal unhappiness level.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, most of the research on big lottery winners has shown that their lives are much better as a result of their life-

changing wins, but there are always a few winners who find other problems occur as a result of their instant wealth.

They may give up their jobs and move to a more luxurious house in another area.

This can lead to a loss of close friends from both the local neighbourhood and from their workplace.

There can also be family tensions and arguments over the money; and there is always the chance that winners will be bombarded with requests for money from every kind of cause or charity.

There are also those groups of people who will view the acquisition of instant wealth as 'undeserved'.

Basically, when people win large amounts of money through gambling, other people around treat them differently even if the winners do not move neighbourhood or carry on in their job.

This can lead to envy and resentment not just from people who know the



Gerry Cannings, 63, and his wife Lisa, 48, from near Peterborough, won £32.5 million.

winners, but also from those in the locality of where the winners may move to.

However, most gaming operators have an experienced team of people to help winners adjust to their new life and to minimise potential problems.

There are also case reports in psychological literature of people becoming depressed after winning life-changing amounts of money, although these are presumably the exception as no researchers would get case reports published showing people were happier after winning a

large amount of money!

Despite potential problems, most of the psychological research indicates that winners are glad they won.

Interestingly, one study of 1,163 lottery winners in the USA showed that the vast majority of lottery winners (63%) carried on working in the same job after their big win, with a further 11% carrying on working part-time in the same job.

The average amount won by those who carried on working was \$2.59 million.

This appears to show that winning the lottery does not

necessarily lead to a changing of lifestyle for the vast majority of winners although smaller scale studies have tended to show that the majority of lottery winners give up work following a big win of over \$1 million.

Overall, the number of studies examining the effects of high jackpots on human emotion has been few.

Thankfully, the research that has been carried out suggests that the overwhelming majority of huge jackpot winners do not suffer negatively as a result of winning.

## Optimism is a great strength of the species



St Ann's vicar the **Rev Karen Rooms** looks at the moral issues around playing the lottery

**I**T seems around half of the population buys a Lotto ticket at least once a month, and the hard statistics tell us that we have a one in 45 million chance of winning the jackpot.

So why do we do it? Are we a nation of hopeless gamblers or hopeful dreamers? Is the Lotto a good thing?

My grandparents were opposites. One side of my family were church people and came from hard-working families who made do and were careful with money.

The other side were from a farm worker background made good in the hotel business and loved to

gamble, going to the racing and the casino.

I was promised a trip to the casinos in Nice when I reached 18. There was a family undercurrent of disapproval travelling in both directions. So how do I square up the rights and wrongs of this?

Some church traditions take issue with gambling in any form – even a simple game of bingo. This may be rooted in a conviction that working hard is a good thing, and that wealth is something that is deserved as the outcome and reward for hard work. We see this value played out in the politics of



the right, and when those who make their money quickly are not valued in the same way as those who build their wealth over a long period of time. You have to earn it.

There is no doubt that Christianity identifies wealth as something which competes with God for our love and devotion. It is treasure on earth as opposed to treasure in heaven or

something of eternal value.

So for us it is the love of money which is the root of all evil, not money itself.

Wealth and generosity are wonderful resources for addressing human need and

important for the common good. Money makes the world go round after all.

I am not convinced that our love of the Lotto is a dangerous, harmful or immoral trend that has overtaken half of our nation.

It is not exactly a huge risk to invest a couple of pounds in a possibility.

Human optimism is one of our great strengths as a species. It defies reason, and energises and heals us. I suspect it is the possibility of a better and different future that drives our Lotto ticket buying.

Research tells us that the emotion – how it feels – is far more important than the cold improbabilities. Is it more about a longing for a change, albeit one which doesn't cost us very much? It is, after all, only spending the price of a cup of coffee on a dream.

**Does doing the Lotto do any harm? Are we a nation of hopeless gamblers or hopeful dreamers?**