

## **Gambling and problem gambling among young people in England and Wales (February 1998), Sue Fisher (University of Plymouth)**

### **CHAPTER 1: SUMMARY OF MAJOR FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS**

This independent study was commissioned by the Office of the National Lottery. It was designed and executed by Dr. Sue Fisher, Director of the Centre for Research into the Social Impact of Gambling, at the University of Plymouth. Data was collected under the direction of Mark Wardman at the Social Research Institute at Market and Opinion Research International Ltd. (MORI). The sample of 9,774 12-15 year olds was drawn from 114 schools in England and Wales and may be considered as being nationally representative of these regions.

### **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

#### Lifetime gambling

- Young people in England and Wales commonly gamble for money between themselves on the outcome of a game, or the toss of a coin, and the majority have taken part in some form of commercial gambling. Fruit machines are by far the most popular form of commercial gambling among young people, followed by National Lottery scratchcards and the National Lottery Draw:
- 75% of the 9,774 young people surveyed had gambled on fruit machines, 47% had gambled on National Lottery scratchcards and 40% had gambled on the National Lottery Draw.
- 16% of the 9,774 young people surveyed had spent £5 or more on fruit machines and 2% had spent £5 or more on National Lottery scratchcards in one day.

#### Past week expenditure by young people on fruit machines

- The young people surveyed were more likely to have spent their own money on fruit machines and to have spent relatively large amounts of money on them than any other commercial gambling form:
- 19% of the 9,774 young people surveyed had spent their own money on fruit machines and 46% of these had spent £2 or more on them during the week prior to the survey.

#### Past week expenditure by young people on the National Lottery

- 13% of the 9,774 young people surveyed had spent their own money on the National Lottery in the week prior to the survey as follows:
- 5% had spent their money on the National Lottery Draw
- 4% had spent their money on National Lottery scratchcards
- 4% had spent their money on both games.
- 23% of the young people who had spent their own money on the National Lottery Draw and 28% of the young people who had spent their own money on National Lottery scratchcards, during the week prior to the survey, had spent £2 or more.

#### Past week expenditure by young people on the National Lottery: distinguishing between legal and illegal transactions

- While the proportion of young people who had spent their own money on the National Lottery during the previous week declined from 15% in 1996 to 13%, this decline is entirely due to a fall in legal transactions (where the money is

handed over in the shop by an adult on behalf of a child). The proportion of underage purchases remains the same.

- Almost half of the children who had spent their money on the National Lottery during the week prior to the survey reported underage purchases (6.5% of the 9,774 young people surveyed).
- The children were much more likely to have made underage purchases of scratchcards than National Lottery Draw tickets:
- 64% of the 740 children who had spent their money on scratchcards in the past week made underage purchases compared with 46% of the 950 children who had spent their money on Draw tickets.
- Most of the underage purchases were made by the respondents themselves, although some children got a friend under the age of 16 years to buy the tickets for them. Most of the legal purchases were made by a parent on behalf of their child. Parents were more likely to have handed over money in the shop for Draw tickets (43%) than for scratchcards (25%).
- The young people who made underage purchases were more likely than the other children to be male, to be in School Year 10 (aged 14-15 years) and to have spending money of more than £5 in the same week that the Lottery purchases were made:
- 14% of the 14 - 15 year old boys surveyed made underage purchases during the week prior to the survey.

#### Underage purchases of National Lottery products from different retail outlets

- But the survey finds that retailers are challenging young people about underage Lottery purchases and that nearly half of underage attempts to buy National Lottery products are unsuccessful:
- the general success rate for attempted underage purchases was 56%.
- The children were more successful in some types of retail outlets than others:
- the success rate for attempted underage purchases in large supermarkets was lower than the average at 45%
- the success rate for underage purchases in newsagents was higher than the average at 67%.

#### Expenditure on fruit machines in different retail outlets

- A clue as to the present structure of the market for adolescent fruit machine gambling is given by the children who had spent their own money on them in the past week (19% of the 9,774 young people surveyed). More of these young people had played fruit machines in pubs (44%) than in any other venue. Second in popularity were seaside amusement arcades (35%), followed by inland amusement arcades (32%). The sum of these figures is more than 100% because, many of the past week players had played in more than one type of venue.
- There were some highly significant differences between the children who lived in seaside locations and the children who lived further inland. The seaside children who had spent money on fruit machines in the previous week were more likely than the inland children to have spent some in seaside arcades (47% compared with 28%) and less likely to have spent some in sports centres (14% compared with 21%).

#### Problem gambling in young people Defining Problem Gambling

- A small minority of people gamble in a way which compromises, disrupts or damages family, personal, or recreational pursuits. These people are called 'problem gamblers' (Lesieur & Rosenthal 1991). It can be seen from this definition that the term 'problem gambling' describes a range of behaviour. This range of behaviour may be viewed as a continuum with the less severe cases at one end and the most severe cases at the other.

#### A Problem Gambling Screen

- As the above definition suggests, problem gambling is a complex phenomenon, and not simply a matter of excessive expenditure on gambling. A problem gambling 'screen' is an index of behaviours and psychological states, known to be correlated with problem gambling, which is used to classify people as problem gamblers in a given population. This information is then correlated with demographic and other relevant data to provide detailed information for decision makers. The problem gambling screen used in this study is DSM-IV-J-R. A detailed technical report on the development and psychometric properties of the screen is provided in Appendix 1.
- The prevalence of problem gambling in young people aged between 12 and 15 years in England and Wales
- 5% (549) of the 9,774 young people surveyed scored as problem gamblers:
- 62% of the 549 young people identified as problem gamblers had a problem with fruit machines only (3% of the young people surveyed)
- 17% of the 549 young people identified as problem gamblers had a problem with National Lottery scratchcards only (1% of the young people surveyed)
- 21% of the 549 young people identified as problem gamblers had a problem with both fruit machines and National Lottery scratchcards (1% of the young people surveyed).
- The prevalence of problem gambling among the youth who lived in or near the seaside is significantly higher than that found among those living further inland: 7% compared with 5%. (The children who live in or near seaside towns account for 25% of the total sample).

#### The characteristics of young problem gamblers

- The most significant differences between the problem gamblers and the other children were gender and disposable income.
- 64% of the 549 young people identified as problem gamblers were male compared with 51% of the other children.
- 65% of the 549 young people identified as problem gamblers had a disposable income of £5 or more a week compared with 54% of the other children.

#### Past week gambling: problem gamblers compared with other players

- The problem gamblers were more than twice as likely as the other players to have spent their own money on all of the major gambling forms examined:
- 68% of the 549 young people identified as problem gamblers had spent their money on fruit machines in the past week.
- 46% of the 549 young people identified as problem gamblers had spent their money on the National Lottery Draw in the past week.
- 36% of the 549 young people identified as problem gamblers had spent their money on National Lottery scratchcards in the past week.

- 50% of the 549 young people identified as problem gamblers had spent their money on other commercial scratchcards in the past week.
- As with adult problem gamblers, young problem gamblers tend to play several different games:
- 41% of the 549 young people identified as problem gamblers had spent their money on three or more gambling games during the past week.

#### The social costs of gambling and problem gambling in young people

- A minority of children had been involved in undesirable behaviours as a result of their gambling. The following statistics relate to the young people who had spent their money on fruit machines or National Lottery scratchcards in the past year (about half of the sample, N=4,959):
- 9% had spent more than £10 on gambling in one day.
- 4% had truanted to gamble.
- 15% had spent their school fare or dinner money on gambling.
- 12% had stolen from their families to fund their gambling.
- 7% had stolen from outside of the family to fund their gambling.
- 10% had sold their possessions to fund their gambling.
- 14% had lied about the extent of their gambling.
- 5% had fallen out with their family more than once or twice because of their gambling.
- As expected the incidence of these sorts of behaviour in the problem gamblers was much higher. Moreover, young problem gamblers commonly overspend, truant from school, fall out with their families, steal and lie about their gambling. It is this combination of behaviours which causes such extreme distress to the young problem gambler and his or her family and friends. The following examples of undesirable behaviours by the problem gamblers in this survey are best considered cumulatively.
- 29% of the 549 young people identified as problem gamblers had spent more than £10 on gambling in one day.
- 23% of the 549 young people identified as problem gamblers had truanted to gamble.
- 50% of the 549 young people identified as problem gamblers had spent their school fare or dinner money on gambling.
- 43% of the 549 young people identified as problem gamblers had stolen from their families to fund their gambling.
- 27% of the 549 young people identified as problem gamblers had stolen from outside of the family to fund their gambling.
- 35% of the 549 young people identified as problem gamblers had sold their possessions to fund their gambling.
- 60% of the 549 young people identified as problem gamblers had lied to their families about their gambling.
- 28% of the 549 young people identified as problem gamblers had fallen out with their family more than once or twice because of their gambling.

#### Problem gambling and other potentially addictive behaviours

- The literature on adolescent gambling shows that problem gambling is commonly associated with other potentially addictive behaviours. This survey found that the problem gamblers in the sample were much more likely than the other children to have smoked cigarettes, drunk alcohol and taken illegal drugs in the past week than the other children. Indeed, not only were the

problem gamblers much more likely to have indulged in these behaviours, they were also at least twice as likely to have indulged in them frequently (on at least three days in the past week). For comparative purposes, the past week play of the problem gamblers on fruit machines and National Lottery scratchcards is also shown:

- 47% of the 549 young people identified as problem gamblers had smoked cigarettes in the past week compared with 22% of the other children.
- 73% of the 549 young people identified as problem gamblers had taken alcohol in the past week compared with 46% of the other children.
- 28% of the 549 young people identified as problem gamblers had taken illegal drugs in the past week compared with 9% of the other children.
- 75% of the 549 young people identified as problem gamblers had played fruit machines in the past week compared with 27% of the other children (these figures include those whose play was financed by someone else).
- 51% of the 549 young people identified as problem gamblers had played National Lottery scratchcards in the past week compared with 16% of the other children (these figures include those whose play was financed by someone else).
- Many of the young people reported that they had 'felt bad about the amount' that they used cigarettes, alcohol, drugs and/or played National Lottery scratchcards and fruit machines (in the past year). It is interesting in the context of this study that, looking at the sample as a whole, concern by young people about their own fruit machine gambling behaviour ranks second only to concern about their consumption of alcohol.
- 23% of the 9,774 young people surveyed had felt bad about the amount of alcohol they consumed.
- 22% of the 9,774 young people surveyed had felt bad about the amount they had played fruit machines.
- 19% of the 9,774 young people surveyed had felt bad about the amount of cigarettes they had smoked.
- 12% of the 9,774 young people surveyed had felt bad about the amount they had played National Lottery scratchcards.
- 8% of the 9,774 young people surveyed had felt bad about the amount of illegal drugs they had used.
- Not surprisingly, given their greater participation as a group, the problem gamblers were much more likely to have felt bad about the extent of their involvement in all of these activities. Above all, the problem gamblers had felt bad about the amount they played fruit machines:
  - 58% of the 549 young people identified as problem gamblers had felt bad about the amount they had played fruit machines.
  - 41% of the 549 young people identified as problem gamblers had felt bad about the amount of alcohol they consumed.
  - 37% of the 549 young people identified as problem gamblers had felt bad about the amount of cigarettes they had smoked.
  - 35% of the 549 young people identified as problem gamblers had felt bad about the amount they had played National Lottery scratchcards.
  - 21% of the 549 young people identified as problem gamblers had felt bad about the amount of illegal drugs they had used.

#### Problem gambling and parental gambling and attitudes

- Research shows that children who gamble are more likely than other children to come from home backgrounds where at least one parent is a regular gambler. Moreover, retrospective studies have shown that adults who are

problem gamblers are significantly more likely than other people to have started gambling in childhood or adolescence and to have a parent/step-parent who is/was a problem gambler.

- The parents of the children identified as problem gamblers were at least twice as likely to have gambled on each of nine different commercial gambling games than the parents of the other children, with the exception of the National Lottery Draw, where the difference was not as great, but still statistically significant.
- The 549 young people identified as problem gamblers were more than three times as likely as the other children to report thinking that their parents gambled too much: 15% compared with 4%.
- The study also finds that parental attitudes to child gambling are acted out in the gambling behaviour of their children. The children were asked how they thought their parents felt about someone of their age spending money on the National Lottery Draw, National Lottery scratchcards and fruit machines. This question revealed an important misunderstanding in adult perception as to the relative safety of the different gambling games. According to their children more parents approved, or did not mind, if their children played fruit machines than the National Lottery products. This demonstrates a certain lack of awareness by the general population as to what constitutes 'hard' and 'soft' gambling. Slot machines are known by scholars of gambling to be one of the most addictive games available (see Brown and Fisher, 1996 p11).
- The problem gamblers were much more likely than the other children to report that their parents approved, or did not mind, if young people their age spent money on fruit machines or National Lottery products:
- 69% of the 549 young people identified as problem gamblers reported that their parents approved, or did not mind someone of their age spending money on fruit machines compared with 49% of the other children.
- 58% of the 549 young people identified as problem gamblers reported that their parents approved, or did not mind someone their age spending money on the National Lottery scratchcards compared with 26% of the other children.
- 55% of the 549 young people identified as problem gamblers reported that their parents approved, or did not mind someone their age spending money on the National Lottery Draw compared with 34% of the other children.

#### Playing companions

- Looking at the sample as a whole, more of the children reported that they played the National Lottery Draw and National Lottery scratchcards with their parents than with anyone else. However, fruit machine gambling appears to be firmly established as a peer group activity and more young people played with their friends than anyone else.
- Problem gamblers were at least twice as likely to play the National Lottery Draw, National Lottery scratchcards and fruit machines with their friends, or alone than the other children.
- The popularity of National Lottery television programmes and promotions
- The National Lottery is promoted by the midweek and weekend National Lottery Live programmes, during which the midweek and Saturday Draw winners are revealed; and direct promotions shown in the commercial breaks between television programmes. Since the National Lottery Live programmes are broadcast before the 'nine o'clock watershed' and combine popular celebrities, top bands and general glitz and glamour, it is probably safe to say that they are appealing to young people.

- The majority of the children surveyed reported watching the National Lottery Live television shows on Saturdays (84%) and on Wednesdays (62%).

### **IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS**

As a result of the introduction of new forms of gambling, including the National Lottery, and the deregulation of other commercial forms, there has been a significant increase in the supply of commercial gambling in Great Britain. This study finds that commercial gambling games, particularly fruit machines and the National Lottery, are attractive to young people and that a significant minority circumvent the existing 16 year legal and voluntary minimum age restrictions to play them.

Controlling one's response to gambling requires certain life skills which are likely to be underdeveloped in children and young people. Consequently, previous research in other countries shows that the prevalence of problem gambling is higher in young people than in the general adult population. This study estimates that about 5% of the youth of England and Wales gambles in a way that is problematic for themselves, their families and society in general. Based on the findings of this study, the author suggests the following themes for consideration by policymakers and future researchers in the field of youth gambling:

- Institution of the appropriate regulatory controls for gambling by young people similar to those applied to the consumption of alcohol, including:
  - Having statutory age limits for commercial gambling and strictly enforcing them to reduce availability to children.
  - Making the gambling industry (whoever oversees and operates the games) more accountable in efforts to discourage access to gambling by children.
  - The development of awareness in adult society about
    - what constitutes hard and soft gambling
    - the susceptibility of children to problem gambling
    - the relationship between parental gambling behaviour and gambling in their children.
  - A review of the existing treatment centres and support groups for young problem gamblers with a view to assessing adequacy of provision.
  - The establishment of screening procedures for problem gambling in centres dealing with other addictions in young people.
  - More qualitative research among young problem gamblers and their families with a view to providing information for treatment professionals and counsellors including:
    - the impact of child problem gambling on the family
    - key factors influencing child problem gambling
    - the gambling careers of young problem gamblers.
  - More qualitative research into promotions for gambling services and the messages they convey to young people.
  - The routine monitoring of the prevalence of gambling and problem gambling in youth at appropriate intervals.
  - The level of concern by young people about how much their parents are gambling warrants research into the prevalence of gambling and problem gambling in the adult population.