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Original article

## Gambling-Related Attitudes and Behaviors in Adolescents Having Received Instant (Scratch) Lottery Tickets as Gifts

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 A B S T R A C T

**Objective:** Instant (scratch) lottery ticket gambling is popular among adolescents. Prior research has not determined whether adolescents' gambling behavior and attitudes toward gambling are influenced by the receipt of scratch lottery tickets as gifts.

**Method:** Cross-sectional survey data from 2,002 Connecticut high school students with past-year gambling were analyzed using bivariate approaches and logistic regression analyses. Interactions between gambling-problem severity and lottery-gift status were examined in relation to multiple outcomes.

**Results:** Adolescents who received a scratch lottery ticket as a gift compared with those who did not were more likely to report features of problem gambling, buy scratch lottery tickets for themselves, and buy and receive other types of lottery tickets; they were also less likely to report parental disapproval of gambling and to see gambling prevention efforts as important. Later ( $\geq 15$  years) age-at-gambling-onset was inversely linked to gambling-problem severity in the lottery gift group (odds ratio [OR] = .38) but not in the nongift group (OR = .91), yielding a significant severity by gift status interaction. Other academic, health, and gambling-related correlates of gambling-problem severity were similar in the gift and nongift groups.

**Conclusions:** For adolescents, the receipt of scratch lottery tickets as gifts during childhood or adolescence was associated with risky/problematic gambling and with gambling-related attitudes, behaviors, and views suggesting greater gambling acceptability. The extent to which the receipt of scratch lottery tickets may promote gambling behaviors and the development of gambling problems warrants consideration. Education, prevention, and treatment strategies should incorporate findings relating to receipt of gambling products by underage individuals.

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 IMPLICATIONS AND  
 CONTRIBUTION

Lottery-ticket-gift receipt by adolescent gamblers is associated with permissive attitudes towards gambling, early age of gambling onset, and differential associations between age-at-gambling-onset and problem-gambling severity. These findings suggest that gifting lottery tickets to youths may impact adolescent gambling attitudes and behaviors and that prevention efforts consider these relationships.

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High rates of adolescent gambling exist worldwide [1,2]. In North America, more than 15 million adolescents (ages 12–17 years) have gambled, and over two million have experienced gambling problems [1,3]. Many youths gamble on lotteries despite age restrictions prohibiting their participation [3,4]. Although the sale of lottery tickets to minors is illegal [4,5], parents often buy lottery tickets for their children. Minors who receive lottery tickets as gifts may be more likely to participate in lotteries and possibly other forms of gambling. The receipt of lottery tickets as gifts may also influence adolescents' perceptions of the acceptability of gambling [4,6], including their views of problem gambling prevention efforts, parental attitudes toward gambling, and underage participation in gambling.

Data suggest that 4% to 8% of adolescents exhibit gambling problems, with another 10% to 15% at significant risk [1,7]. Problem gambling is characterized by interfering or excessive patterns of gambling, and pathologic gambling is a formal psychiatric condition [8]. Given that gambling during adolescence, particularly problem and pathological gambling, has been linked to poorer functioning (e.g., higher rates of depression and substance use, abuse, and dependence) both during adolescence and later in life, it is important to understand the factors that may contribute to gambling behaviors among youth [1,9–13]. Furthermore, inasmuch as risky patterns of gambling not meeting the threshold of pathologic gambling are relevant to youth, recent studies of youth gambling have investigated at-risk/problem gambling (ARPG) [12,14].

In this study, we examined the gambling attitudes and behaviors of high school students according to their status as recipients of gifted lottery tickets. We hypothesized that ticket-gifted adolescents would be more likely to report ARPG, have family members with gambling problems, purchase lottery tickets, perceive their parents as being more approving of gambling, view problem-gambling-prevention efforts as less important, and have an earlier age at gambling onset, compared with non-ticket-gifted adolescents. We also examined the correlates of ARPG in the adolescents who did and did not receive lottery scratch tickets as gifts, as understanding the features related to ARPG might help parents, teachers, administrators, and clinicians identify youth who might be exhibiting risky or problematic gambling, thus facilitating early intervention. We hypothesized that gambling-problem severity as indexed by ARPG would be more strongly associated with adverse health measures (dysphoria/depression and substance use) and participation in forms of gambling related to lotteries (i.e., nonstrategic forms) among adolescents who received scratch tickets as gifts compared with those who did not.

## Method

The present study examined gambling and other risk behaviors among high school students in Connecticut, focusing on lottery-gift status as defined by responses (yes/no) indicating whether participants had “ever received a lottery scratch ticket as a gift in the past year.” Inasmuch as details of study design, recruitment, and measures used have been published previously [11,12,15–18], and given the space limitations in the journal, a detailed description of these methods is provided in Supplemental materials.

## Data analysis

Data were entered from paper into an electronic system. Data cleaning procedures and spot checks of completed surveys were performed to ensure that data were accurate and within range. All statistical analyses were conducted using the SAS system (SAS Institute, Cary, NC). We examined the bivariate relationship between lottery-gift status and demographic characteristics, as well as the bivariate relationship between lottery-gift status and gambling measures. We also examined the bivariate relationship between gambling-problem severity and demographic characteristics, stratified by lottery-gift status. Statistical significance was determined with Pearson  $\chi^2$  tests. A Bonferroni correction was applied such that  $p$  values  $<.0025$  were considered statistically significant.

We next constructed logistic regression models for binary dependent variables and multinomial logistic regression models for categorical dependent variables and ran separate models according to lottery-gift status to determine the lottery-gift-status-specific effect of gambling-problem severity. To determine whether the effect of gambling-problem severity differed according to lottery-gift status, we constructed a model that included the main effects of gambling-problem severity and lottery-gift status, as well as the interaction term (gambling-problem severity\*lottery-gift status). We present the stratum-specific odds ratios (ORs) and 95% confidence intervals (CIs), as well as the interaction OR and 95% CI. The interaction OR is the ratio of the stratum-specific effects; CIs that excluded 1.0 indicated a statistically significant interaction. All models were adjusted for gender, race/ethnicity, grade level, and family structure. Post-hoc analyses separating the ARPG group into at-risk gambling (ARG; those acknowledging one to two inclusionary criteria for PG) and problem/pathologic gambling (PPG; those acknowledging three or more inclusionary criteria for PG) groups were performed to investigate whether the relationships between health, functioning, and gambling measures differed across gift and nongift groups according to this gambling-problem-severity stratification.

## Results

### *Instant-lottery-gift status and gambling-problem severity*

Of the 2,022 reported adolescent gamblers, 1,052 (52.5%) reported having received lottery scratch tickets as gifts. Among those who received lottery scratch tickets as gifts, 78.4% ( $n = 825$ ), 14.5% ( $n = 152$ ), 3.1% ( $n = 33$ ), and 4.0% ( $n = 42$ ) received tickets less than monthly, monthly, weekly, and daily, respectively. Lottery gift status was associated with greater gambling-problem severity ( $\chi^2 = 13.83$ ;  $p = .0002$ ). Among adolescents receiving lottery tickets as gifts, the prevalence of ARPG was 38.7%; the prevalence of ARPG was 29.9% among adolescents who did not receive lottery tickets as gifts.

### *Lottery-gift status and sociodemographic characteristics*

Lottery gift status was associated with Caucasian, African-American, Hispanic, and Other race/ethnicity (all  $p < .0001$ ) and family structure ( $p < .0041$ ) but not with age, grade level, or gender (Table 1).

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