



A large-scale national study of gambling severity among immigrant and non-immigrant adolescents: The role of the family



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HIGHLIGHTS

- Little is known about the link between immigrations status and adolescent gambling.
- This study used a large-scale nationally representative youth sample.
- First-generation immigrants had higher gambling severity.
- There was an interaction between family structure and first-generation immigrants.
- Not living with two parents increase gambling severity in first-generation immigrants.

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ABSTRACT

Aim: The primary aim of the present study was to examine the association between immigrant generation, family sociodemographic characteristics, and problem gambling severity in a large-scale nationally representative sample of Italian youth.

Method: Data from the 2013–2014 Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) Survey were used for cross-sectional analyses of adolescent problem gambling. Self-administered questionnaires were completed by a representative sample of 20,791 15-year-old students. Respondents' problem gambling severity, immigrant status, family characteristics (family structure, family affluence, perceived family support) and socio-demographic characteristics were individually assessed.

Findings: Rates of adolescent at-risk/problem gambling were twice as high among first generation immigrants than non-immigrant students; the odds of being at-risk/problem gamblers were higher among first-generation immigrants than adolescents of other immigrant generations or non-immigrant. Not living with two biological or adoptive parents appears to be a factor that increases the risk of becoming a problem gambler in first generation immigrants.

Conclusions: Immigrant status and family characteristics may play a key role in contributing to adolescent problem gambling.

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1. Introduction

Adolescent problem gambling is an emerging public health issue in many European countries and a recent study has shown that 1.6–5.3% of adolescents living in nine European countries had probable problem gambling (Molinaro et al., 2014). Adolescent problem gamblers (as with adult problem gamblers) generally appear to be a heterogeneous

group with the unique correlates and weightings of the risk factors contributing to problem gambling differing among individuals. Youth problem gambling has been associated with significant health and psychosocial problems, including depressive symptoms, increased risk for other addictions, poor general health and criminal behavior (Blinn-Pike, Worthy, & Jonkman, 2010). One recent study highlighted that while gender and age are the two sociodemographic factors consistently associated with adolescent gambling, surprisingly little research has been carried out with regard to immigration status (Hayer and Griffiths, 2016). Despite the growing number of immigrants in Italy

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(ISTAT, 2016), few studies have investigated problem behaviors of immigrant and non-immigrant adolescents. The few studies carried out mainly concentrate on drug use (e.g., Cristini, Scacchi, Perkins, Bless, & Vieno, 2015) or health status (e.g., Vieno, Santinello, Lenzi, Baldassari, & Mirandola, 2009). Consequently, the principal aim of the present study was to examine differences in problem gambling between immigrant and non-immigrant adolescents in Italy.

Research has shown that migrant status increases the likelihood of problem gambling due to the experience of acculturative stress (Ellenbogen, Gupta and Derevensky, 2007) and specific cultural, familial, and religious backgrounds (Hayer and Griffiths, 2016). Immigration in European countries such as Italy is relatively different from that of USA and Canada (Sam, Vedder, Liebkind, Neto, & Virta, 2008). For instance, Italy was a country of emigration until the 1980s. However, in the last 20 years, there has been a significant increase in the number of immigrants, with the number of immigrants rising from 2.7% in 2002 to 8.3% in 2016 (ISTAT, 2016). In the 2014, 14.9% of births in Italy were to immigrant parents (ISTAT, 2016). In contrast to other European countries, immigration to Italy did not begin during a period of reconstruction and economic development. Furthermore, unlike France or the United Kingdom, Italy has not experienced immigration from old Colonies by immigrants who speak the same language. In fact, the largest numbers of immigrants were almost all from the developing countries and from Eastern Europe. In Italy, migrants are generally characterized by low socio-economic status (SES) and have greater access to unskilled and semi-skilled manual jobs (Fullin & Reyneri, 2011). Finally, whereas Italy devotes resources to programs geared to integration, its laws contribute to keeping immigrants on the margins, denying them permanent residence and restricting their ability to establish roots, access citizenship, and develop a sense of belonging (Calavita, 2005).

Theories on the impact of immigration status on problem behaviors in adolescence have suggested both a risk and resilience perspective. According to the risk perspective, immigrants are frequently confronted with stress resulting from the process of migration, for instance the loss of family and friends, customs, surroundings, and the need to adapt to a new cultural context (Guarnaccia & Lopez, 1998). The risk perspective also highlights that immigrant adolescents are frequently confronted with discrimination that may negatively affect psychological functioning (Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009).

Disaggregating the immigrant category by generational status is particularly important as research suggests risk behaviors are not necessarily found among foreign-born youths (first generation), but among the children of immigrants, or the second generation (Camarota & Vaughan, 2009). For ease of discussion, throughout the paper the terms “first generation immigrant” and “second generation immigrant” are used to refer to foreign-born individuals and native-born children of foreign-born parents, respectively. Furthermore, foreign-born youths have the challenge of adopting norms and values from their adoptive country, thereby juggling the demands of two cultures, and which can make their adolescent years more precarious (Harris, 1999). The overall stress associated with adaptation can be difficult and may result in increased risky health behaviors (Cristini et al., 2015). To the best of the authors' knowledge, no studies have ever investigated the role of immigrant generation (i.e., first and second generation) in contributing to adolescent gambling. Within this risk perspective, it is hypothesized that immigrant adolescents (first and second generation) will show more gambling problems than non-immigrant adolescents.

The effect of immigration on adolescent gambling may also vary with family sociodemographic characteristics. The combination of financial, occupational, and social stressors as a consequence of migration, is likely to favor the stage for intergenerational conflict and stress in migrant families (Guarnaccia & Lopez, 1998). Children in immigrant families are more likely to live in poverty and have a parent who did not complete high school (Fields, 2003). The perceived socioeconomic status (SES) may reflect adolescent's perceptions of their social

disadvantage and life chances relative to others (McCulloch, Stewart, & Lovegreen, 2006). Research involving first-generation immigrants has demonstrated that subjective SES is more highly associated with alcohol and cannabis use (Hamilton, van der Maas, Boak and Mann, 2014). In addition, changes in family structure following immigration may impact parental ability to perform tasks of support, monitoring, and involvement in their children's lives (Hussey et al., 2007). Previous studies have found that living with a single parent (typically the mother) is more common among immigrant adolescents (i.e., third generation and higher Asian and Latino adolescents), and increases the likelihood of being involved in co-occurring sex and drug use among adolescent immigrants (Hussey et al., 2007). In regard to the association between these family socio-demographic characteristics (e.g., family structure, family socioeconomic status) and adolescent problem gambling, previous studies have found that adolescents who perceive their financial family status as low were significantly more likely than adolescents who perceived their financial family status as medium/high to be at-risk gamblers (Canale et al., 2016a). Moreover, adolescents who live with unrelated others or a single parent are significantly more likely than adolescents who live with two parents to be problem gamblers (Canale et al., 2016a).

Finally, non-gamblers and social gamblers have significantly higher mean scores on family support (emotional, informational, feedback and reciprocal support) compared with at-risk and pathological gamblers (Hardoon, Gupta, & Derevensky, 2004). Two family characteristics that appear to increase adolescent gambling – living with unrelated others or a single parent (Canale et al., 2016a) and in poor families (Canale et al., 2016a) – also vary by immigrant status (Hamilton et al., 2014; Hussey et al., 2007). Therefore, specific investigation into the family structure and financial family status surrounding immigrant adolescents and problem gambling in youth warrant empirical consideration.

1.1. The present study

As the aforementioned literature demonstrates, no studies have been carried out into adolescent gambling among immigrants in Italy. Therefore, the following study addresses this gap by investigating whether immigrant adolescents in Italy are more likely to be at-risk and problematic gamblers when compared with non-immigrant adolescents. Two specific questions are central to the analysis. First, what is the relationship between immigrant status and patterns of adolescent gambling? Based on prior studies in other countries (Delfabbro, Lahn, & Grabosky, 2005; Petry & Tawfik, 2001; Westphal, Rush, Stevens, & Johnson, 2000), it was hypothesized that immigrant adolescents will be more likely to report higher levels of at risk/problem gambling than non-immigrant adolescents. Second, what family characteristics might account for this relationship? The study also examined the association between immigrant generation, family sociodemographic characteristics (using the Family Affluence Scale [FAS] and family structure) and problem gambling severity. In particular, the study examines whether the association between FAS, family structure and at-risk/problem gambling vary with immigrant generation. It is hypothesized that the association between FAS and gambling will vary with immigrant generation, and that the variations will be most evident between adolescents of immigrant generations. In addition, it was hypothesized that the associations involving living with no two biological or adoptive parents and problem gambling severity will vary with immigrant generation and that the association will be stronger among immigrant adolescents.

2. Methods

2.1. Participants and procedure

Data in the present study were collected from Italian students who participated in the 2013–2014 ‘Health Behaviour in School-aged

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