

Questions taken on notice by Dr Jeffrey Derevensky, following the 16 September 2011 hearing:

Your submission (p.1) mentions your research on youth and problem gambling has been translated into 'award-winning prevention initiatives'. Could you describe these – where are they in place, to what extent, what have the results been, and could you suggest anything specific to Australia?

The following information comes from a book to be published entitled: Teen gambling: Understanding a growing epidemic. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. Additional information and order forms are available from our website at www.youthgambling.com

Current Gambling Prevention Programs

The past decade has witnessed a vast increase in the number of prevention programs attempting to reduce the incidence of problem gambling. The development of these programs is as the result of a considerable infusion of money, primarily from governments, which have directly benefited from the revenues of the very gambling venues which may be the cause of the problem in the first place. Of those that are currently being used (although implementation is quite sporadic), most developed for youth have little underlying science-based principles, failed to account for essential risk and protective factors, and few have been systematically evaluated. However, advances are being made continually to rectify this situation and the majority of these new programs can be best described as primary and/or universal preventive efforts with the overall goal of reducing the incidence of problem gambling (a harm minimization versus abstinence approach). Several programs have explicitly identified risk factors associated with the development of problem gambling. A number of these programs are predicated upon increasing one's understanding of the mathematical laws of probability (the basic assumption being that if one understands the laws of probability, the individual will either refrain from gambling or do so more responsibly) while others are focused on demystifying the myth that there is considerable skill involved in random activities (e.g., slots, roulette).

Commonalities and Differences amongst Programs

Prevention programs designed to reduce the incidence of gambling problems for youth have typically aimed at raising awareness concerning issues related to problem gambling. Most of these programs conceptualize gambling as an addiction, foster a harm reduction framework and while some may try to advocate abstinence until one has the cognitive capacity necessary to set and maintain limits, they typically emphasize responsible gambling. The distinction between responsible gambling and abstinence likely lies within the specific population targeted. Programs targeted toward populations where the prevalence of gambling and other addiction and/or mental health problems is high (e.g., First Nations), suggest prevention programs might encourage abstinence over harm minimization, taking a tertiary approach in their prevention efforts.

Since the objective of the majority of current programs is to raise awareness, most present information relevant to gambling and problem gambling, discuss motivations to gamble, articulate the warning signs associated with problem gambling, identify the consequences of excessive gambling, and try to provide information on where individuals can get help with a gambling problem. Several curriculums go a little further than merely presenting factual information and dispelling erroneous beliefs. These programs encourage the development of interpersonal skills, provide activities which foster and promote effective coping mechanisms, provide techniques and strategies to help improve one's self-esteem, and give useful insights into how to resist peer pressure.

Gambling Prevention Programs

As previously noted, a growing number of gambling prevention programs have been developed. Some of these would include *Don't Bet on It* - a South Australian program for children ages 6 to 9 years; *Gambling Minimizing Health Risks* in Queensland for children in levels 5 and 6; *Facing the Odds* in Louisiana for children in grades 5 to 8; *Wanna Bet* in Minnesota for children in grades 3 to 8; *Gambling: A Stacked Deck in Alberta*; and the Harvard/Massachusetts Council *Mathematics Curriculum for High School Students*.

For the past twenty years, the International Centre for Youth Gambling Problems and High-Risk Behaviors at McGill University has tried to incorporate the knowledge acquired from examining the risk and protective

factors associated with youth gambling and gambling problems into our prevention initiatives. This work has led us to a better understanding of the factors necessary to include in our prevention programs. At the same time, the importance of providing a diversity of strategies for teachers, prevention specialists, and parents seemed warranted. While most of these programs are school based, a number of them have been used in after-school programs and on some occasions, parents have elected to review them with their children. In spite of some evidence which suggests that single trial inoculations are very effective for long term gains in behavior changes, the Centre has adopted a multi-level approach, with some efforts directly student based, others requiring some teacher intervention, and still others needing more direct instruction and discussion. This multi-faceted approach is designed to appeal to educators who may be unfamiliar with the issue of teen gambling and/or gambling problems as well as those with a limited time in which to administer a curriculum. The Centre's prevention programs are also intended to address a number of different audiences; children and adolescents; teachers, parents, physicians, lawyers and even judges. All of the Centre's programs have been evaluated for their short-term gains (insufficient funding has been available for long-term follow-up) and have generally been found beneficial in improving knowledge, increasing awareness of the warning signs for problem gambling, modifying inappropriate attitudes, correcting false cognitions, understandings and erroneous beliefs (e.g., probabilities, skill vs. luck, strategies, superstitions, independence of events) with the intention of ultimately reducing gambling behavior and helping prevent excessive pathological gambling behavior disorders. While it is not the intent here to exhaustively describe the specific goals for each of these prevention initiatives (see www.youthgambling.com for a more detailed description of each of our products), the more general goals of our programs are to enhance problem-solving skills, increase feelings of self-confidence, improve coping skills, provide tools to resist peer pressure and social temptations, and facilitate good decision making while simultaneously addressing the issues associated with teen gambling. Many of these programs are currently being used in the U.S., Canada, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore.

The following activities have been developed for use in primary and secondary schools:

The Amazing Chateau (grades 4-7) and Hooked City (grades 7-12)

These award-winning interactive educational software games are designed for youth from the ages of nine to seventeen. The games are played individually, with each game taking approximately sixty minutes to complete. MAC and PC versions are available. Both games have been developed to capture the imagination of youth, provide them with some facts about gambling, dispel myths, and help good decision making while incorporating a problem solving approach. Children can do a self-assessment of their gambling and print valuable information. The games enable the students to maintain records of success while reinforcing a wide variety of concepts and misconceptions related to youth gambling issues. Players can stop and start whenever they like. In the Amazing Chateau, players try to acquire some very special crystals while answering skill-testing questions. Special attention is paid to increasing children's knowledge about gambling, challenging inappropriate attitudes toward gambling and increasing decision-making skills. Within Hooked City, the adventure begins with players being transported through dark and intriguing settings while trying to free their friend Tom. Unfortunately, their friend Tom has fallen into the trap of Mr. Hook, a dark character who is intent on having the players make highly questionable decisions and choices. The evil Mr. hook wants to get Tom addicted to gambling, which is imprisoning poor Tom. Fortunately, the players also meet Zack, a personable individual, who will guide the players into making correct choices which will ultimately free Tom and avoid falling into Mr. Hook's devious grasp. Players' performance is reinforced throughout the game based upon their accurate knowledge of gambling questions and perceptions. If they perform well, they receive a clue which helps them solve the puzzle to free Tom. Like the Amazing Chateau concept, the players in Hooked City are exposed to many of the myths surrounding gambling, the risk signs of problem gambling and are introduced to a problem gambler who sought treatment. Students are urged to complete a gambling screen to assess the severity of their gambling behaviors and are provided feedback and suggestions based upon their performance. Both programs come with a comprehensive manual. Ultimately, these programs were developed to help children adopt a healthier lifestyle and more positive attitudes and behaviors.

Youth Awareness and Prevention Workshops (Levels 1 & II)

These PowerPoint workshops were developed for children in late elementary, junior high and senior high school. Each package includes a CD-ROM containing the PowerPoint presentation as well as an instructor's manual. Included in each manual is background information on the subject of youth gambling, identification of the goal(s) of each slide, and suggested questions to help promote discussion. These workshops are designed to help educate children about the potential hazards associated with problem gambling. The workshops, using age appropriate examples, help clarify misperceptions, challenge erroneous beliefs, dispel myths associated with gambling and provide students with the opportunity to discuss concerns. Both workshops were evaluated on over 7,000 school-aged children and adolescents and have been shown to be effective in achieving their goals. While intended to be completed in one sitting, they can and have been done over several days.

Clean Break

This award-winning docudrama is approximately 28 minutes in length and was developed for typical high school students. As well, with support from the Canadian Ministry of Justice, a special emphasis was placed on providing examples which would be particularly appealing to delinquent youth. The production, using MTV fast-paced video and audio technology, follows a pathological gambler who describes his lifelong gambling addiction. Ultimately, in a moment of desperation he attempts suicide by jumping off a bridge. While not readily apparent to the audience, until the final moments of the video, his unsuccessful suicide attempt resulted in him now being a paraplegic confined to a wheelchair. The title of the docudrama, Clean Break, came from his powerful statement that he prefers being confined to a wheelchair than being plagued by a gambling addiction. He is now a "happy man" since he has made a "clean break" from the throes of this devastating addiction. Interspersed throughout the DVD are scenes using professional actors and examples of adolescent problem gambling behaviors based upon the Centre's clinical experiences working with youth having gambling problems. This hard-hitting docudrama is accompanied by an examiner's manual and a PowerPoint presentation for follow-up discussions. Unlike other documentaries, it is fast-paced and uses the newest technology to help retain the interest of its audience. Clean Break has been viewed by tens of thousands of youth. The special music used throughout the video was written by a rock band exclusively for this project.

Know Limits

Issues around gambling, drug and alcohol use, tobacco and other high-risk behaviors are presented in a team game format. Incorporating elements of charades, Taboo, and word scramble, information is disseminated in a fun and enjoyable game format for high School students. Like our other prevention initiatives, this game is designed to help clarify misperceptions, challenge erroneous beliefs, and dispel myths associated with gambling and other addictive behaviors. As well, trivia questions related to music and entertainment are interspersed amongst the questions which were tested by professionals and hundreds of students.

Public Awareness Campaigns and Safe Gambling Messages

Other Prevention Initiatives

Other prevention initiatives have been used to target individuals who frequently come into contact with adolescents and adolescent problem gamblers. For example, the Centre has developed two successful Public Service Announcements (PSAs), targeting Internet wagering and poker playing. The PSAs were developed to raise parental awareness that children's gambling which starts off innocently may in fact become a significant problem. Using no language, these attention-grabbing PSAs are 30 seconds in length and have a clear message - "Talk with your children." Having no language in these PSAs provides an opportunity to use these initiatives for multiple cultural and linguistic groups. As well, the tag line "Talk with your children" is easily translated without reshooting the entire PSA. Two versions of each PSA are currently available, one using predominantly North American adolescents, while the other incorporates Asian teenagers.

Other prevention and awareness programs have been developed for physicians, Youth Gambling Problems: Practical Information for Health Professionals, and those in the legal profession, Youth Gambling Problems: Practical Information for Professionals in the Criminal Justice System. These programs are designed to help raise awareness amongst physicians and individuals in the legal profession (lawyers and judges) about the extent of youth gambling, strategies to best identify youth gambling problems, and ways in which these professionals can help the individual and his/her family. Each of these programs includes a DVD with pertinent information on youth gambling problems incorporating interviews with the leading international experts in the field. As well, each package includes a CD-ROM containing relevant seminal papers, posters, and screening instruments, which can be downloaded and printed.

Many of these programs would be applicable in Australia and several have recently been approved to be translated into Danish.

Could you describe how online gambling providers are increasingly using social media (e.g., Facebook) to advertise services to young people?

This is being done in several ways: (a) Facebook has relaxed its attitudes toward advertising and now will accept gambling advertisements in several jurisdictions, (b) several online sites including Caesar's World have purchased controlling ownership in social media software development companies (e.g., Caesars owns 51% of Playtik). According to spokespeople for Caesar's, Playtika does not operate gambling websites, rather it offers games comparable to Farmville or Texas Hold'em poker where there is no prize or consideration. They have a slot application and a Yahtzee type application called Farkle Pro. Players *are* however able to buy virtual coins to build levels in games similar to putting a coin in a Pac Man machine and then putting an additional coin in the machine to maintain their level and status in the game. Less than 2% of players choose to buy virtual currency to build higher game level. Aristocrat also recently announced they were getting involved in this type of activity as are a number of other Internet gaming providers. Others have developed gambling simulations approximating real gambling sites, often referred to as .net companies.

Is the perception of gambling as 'entertainment' growing and is that making it more acceptable within society?

Absolutely, jurisdictions once vehemently opposed to expanded gambling ("gaming") have now converted their thinking to gambling as entertainment, thus the creation of "gaming." Gambling has become more socially acceptable and this has resulted in its widespread acceptance and expansion.

Does your research indicate that young people (especially young males) do not necessarily change gambling behaviour even if they know about the risks, because they do not believe they are at risk? Yes, in spite of endorsing many items on our gambling screens, losing lots of money, lying to friends and/or family they still often deny having a problem. We have a number of studies supporting this finding. Is this attitude or perception of risk (i.e. it won't happen to me) easily changed? This is difficult to change but having youth accept that they are having problems in general can be modified. What psychological factors are at play? This is partially developmental and typically requires youth to delineate the characteristics of others with problems. We often draw the analogy between a gambling addiction and a drug addiction.

Your research shows that young males especially view themselves as smarter than everyone else and they minimize the risks of gambling. As they get older, does their perception of risk change only because they have experienced greater gambling losses and the entertainment value is diminished? This behavior frequently continues until they reach approximately age 21; nevertheless they still externalize behaviors such that when they are losing when gambling they tend to blame it on someone or something else. "Someone distracted me, lousy dealer, unlucky (has nothing to do with their level of skill – unless winning).

Do you have any broad comments on how culturally entrenched sports betting has become in Australia? Has this been an organic development arising out of a long-standing passion for sport in this

country, or do you see market forces in an unregulated environment at play in the rise of sports betting? Is sports betting part of Canada's culture?

Clearly there are cultural and historical patterns. Males are strongly encouraged to play sports and reinforced by their fathers for both playing and their knowledge of sports. Observing one's father gambling on sports is extremely common in Australia, Canada, U.S. and other jurisdictions. Developmentally sports wagering is very popular even among young people.

Are young people more likely to place bets on 'alternative activities' apart from sports – i.e. politics, elections, celebrity baby names, reality TV contests? They tend to focus more on familiar games/activities. While they might wager on “American Idol” or other reality t.v. shows they typically won't wager on politics, art shows, etc. If there is a greater willingness among the younger generation to do this, does this point to a normalization of gambling in society? There is little doubt as to the normalization of gambling. It is widely endorsed by government and accepted amongst most segments of society.

To what extent are gambling advertisements themselves stimulating youth to gamble – i.e. can the effect on gambling patterns be attributed to the advertising itself, or from what might be perceived as a 'successful' or 'fun' experience of gambling?

Youth readily report seeing advertisements or hearing them on the radio. Pop-up messages on their computer is common, watching sports messages in Australia is common place. From our initial research it doesn't seem that it prompts non-gamblers to begin gambling but is positively accepted and promotes gambling for individuals with gambling problems.

Your submission (p.2) states that young people who take part in gambling focus on 'the excitement, entertainment value and the ability to make money.' Do any of your studies track young people's perception after a number of years of gambling? Does their view of gambling change over time, especially after they have experienced losses?

We don't have any longitudinal data tracking individuals over time, however, the cross cultural data shows that these perceptions are maintained right through adulthood. In spite of repeated losses and gambling-related problems it is the excitement (adrenalin rush) and entertainment value of gambling that maintains their desire to keep gambling. Money, for problem gamblers, becomes extremely important but rather than repaying debts it allows them to keep gambling.

Why do you think the parents of young people typically do not view gambling as a serious concern for their adolescents (according to your national Canadian study – p. 2), rating it less risky than video game playing?

Most parents are oblivious to gambling problems amongst teens. It is often referred to as the “hidden addiction” (the title of another book to be published in 2011). Unlike drugs and alcohol which are much more visible one can hide problems associated with gambling much longer. As well, everyone, including adolescents, have a stereotypical picture of a problem gambler. The problem gambler is typically a middle age male, maybe horse player – more likely to be a pokie or casino player, lost his family, lost excessive amounts of money, possibly stolen money, etc. But nowhere in these characteristics do we hear “teenager or adolescents”). They tend to lose less money, typically don't embezzle from employers, and don't lose their home and family, etc.

Could you elaborate on what tighter regulatory procedures concerning gambling advertising you would suggest for Australia?

a) need to ensure strict safeguards in place for Internet gambling, b) rules of conduct and oversight re: advertising, c) prohibitions concerning underage gamblers should be strictly enforced with heavy fines for those ignoring existing legislation, d) games and products attractive to youth should not be offered (e.g., scratch n' sniff lottery tickets), e) mandatory training for operators and staff (this need not necessarily be done in person but possibly through interactive computer programs).

What can you tell the committee about the lack of data in the area of online gambling

We are really only beginning to have a handle on this. Very few published studies exist and additional research (plus funding) will be necessary. Gambling operators often merely ask the individual to enter his/her date of birth without appropriate checks or ID. We need longitudinal research to actually see if Internet gambling creates problems or whether problem gamblers use this as one more gambling vehicle/venue. The other critical issue focuses on the “free” gambling sites, often referred to as practice or trial sites. These are often referred to as the .net sites and are typical of any Internet gambling sites. They enable anyone to play for “fun”. Is this a breeding ground for future players? Only time will tell. I also want to suggest that the next wave will include mobile gambling and this represents even greater potential problems.

Youth gambling and gambling advertising and what do you recommend to address this? What further research needs to be undertaken?

Our studies are the only ones I am aware of examining the impact of advertisement on youth gambling. Obviously more follow-up research is necessary. You can check our website for these published papers.

I would be happy to collaborate with Australian researchers. As previously mentioned during the hearings I have been a consultant to numerous Australian research projects, have worked with Drs. King and Delfabbro in Adelaide, Drs. Sally Monahan and Blaszczynski in Sydney, Dr. Jackson in Melbourne, and several others. There is a tape of my recent presentation for the Victorian Government at the Department of Justice in Melbourne. I have testified before several government committees internationally and am most willing to help in any way I can.

Establishing an international advisory panel which would help articulate a national research agenda may well support the excellent work of my Australian colleagues and the Productivity Commission.

Our website has a wealth of information and most of our publications can be downloaded from our site.

Let me know if I can help in any other way.

Jeffrey L. Derevensky, Ph.D.

Professor and Director of Clinical Training, School/Applied Child Psychology Educational & Counselling Psychology

Professor, Dept. of Psychiatry
McGill University