

# Canadian Marketing: Problems And Prospects

## Evaluating the Role of Social Marketing Campaigns to Prevent Youth Gambling Problems

A Qualitative Study

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### ABSTRACT

**Background:** Gambling among adolescents is a growing public health concern. To date, social marketing as a strategy to address problem gambling among youth has not been widely used.

**Methods:** A qualitative study through the use of focus groups was conducted to explore adolescents' exposure to existing prevention campaigns and their message content and communication strategy preferences for a youth gambling social marketing campaign.

**Findings:** Participants prefer that youth gambling ads depict real-life stories, use an emotional appeal and portray the negative consequences associated with gambling problems. They further recommend illustrating the basic facts of gambling using simple messages that raise awareness without making a judgement. Participants caution against the "don't do it" approach, suggesting it does not reflect the current youth gambling culture.

**Conclusion:** This study should serve as a starting point for the development of a gambling prevention social marketing campaign. Targeting variables and campaign strategies highlighted should be considered in the early stages of development and tested along the way.

**MeSH terms:** Adolescent; gambling; social marketing

Children and adolescents are exposed to a growing number of pressures from parents, peers, the media and society. As a result, youth are frequently confronted with competing and conflicting messages promoting adult lifestyle choices.<sup>1</sup> The availability and promotion of alcohol and tobacco products, and the accessibility of gambling venues, coupled with the media's glamorization of adult behaviours are placing adolescents at increased risk for the development of a number of risky behaviours. Gambling has only recently emerged as a significant public health issue.<sup>2,3</sup> Despite the negative impact problem gambling poses on individuals and society, there have been few widespread prevention campaigns specifically targeting youth.<sup>4</sup> As well, little attention has been paid to the untapped resource of social marketing; despite the fact that as a planned process of social change, it has been a powerful tool in the development of comprehensive health promotion strategies that positively influence health.<sup>5</sup> As such, social marketing may be an effective prevention tool for minimizing youth gambling problems.

Focus groups were conducted to explore adolescents' exposure to social marketing campaigns aimed at reducing alcohol and tobacco use, and identify the features of those campaigns that participants considered most effective. This qualitative study further uncovered the message content and characteristics that youth revealed as being the most effective in raising awareness and communicating the risks associated with excessive gambling.

### METHODS

#### Participants

A total of 30 focus groups were conducted in nine participating schools. Seven of the nine schools served youth from rural and small towns in southeastern Ontario and two of the nine schools served youth from urban/suburban Montreal. The sample consisted of 175 participants, ages 12-18 years (see Table 1).

#### Procedure

Upon ethical approval from McGill University, consent forms and letters describing the purpose of the focus groups were distributed to parents via the participating schools prior to students' partici-

*La traduction du résumé se trouve à la fin de l'article.*

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