Social Marketing Campaigns for Youth Gambling Prevention: Lessons Learned from Youth

Carmen Messerlian · Jeffrey Derevensky

Abstract Youth gambling is an important, although often overlooked adolescent health issue. Media-based prevention programs have long been employed as tools to address high risk behaviours, namely drug, alcohol and tobacco use, as well as sexual health. However, social marketing has yet to be drawn upon as a strategy to address problem gambling among adolescents. This strategy would appear to be especially relevant given the recent rise in the portrayal of gambling in the mass media, often glamorizing and normalizing games and practices. The authors aimed to examine the use of social marketing as a strategy for gambling prevention among adolescent. A qualitative study using focus groups was conducted to explore adolescents' exposure to existing prevention campaigns and their message content and communication preferences for a youth gambling social marketing campaign. Social marketing advertisements, depicting real-life stories with an emotional appeal, that portrayed the negative consequences associated with a gambling problem were highly endorsed by participants. Participants further recommended illustrating the basic facts of gambling using simple messages that raise awareness in a non-judgmental manner. Adolescents are critical of the "don't do it" message as this approach does not reflect the current youth gambling culture. It is expected that this study serve as a source for the development of future social marketing campaigns on youth gambling. Targeting variable and campaign strategies recommended herein should be considered in the early stages and tested along the way.

Keywords Gambling · Adolescents · Prevention · Social marketing · Media

Children and youth are exposed to a growing number of pressures from parents, peers, media, and society. They are confronted with competing and conflicting messages

C. Messerlian (✉) · J. Derevensky
International Centre for Youth Gambling Problems and High-Risk Behaviors, McGill University,
3724 McTavish Street, Montreal, QC H3A 1Y2, Canada
e-mail: carmen.messerlian@mcgill.ca

promoting adult lifestyle choices from a broad range of media. The accessibility, availability, and promotion of alcohol, tobacco, and gambling products, coupled with the media's glamorization and normalization of these behaviours are thought to be placing adolescents at increased risk for the development of multiple high-risk behaviours (Villani, 2001). Such high-risk behaviours include tobacco use, substance use and abuse, self-inflicted injury, increased unprotected sexual activity and problem gambling—gambling being the most recent risk behaviour to emerge as a public health issue (Korn & Shaffer, 1999; Messerlian, Derevensky & Gupta, 2005; Shaffer & Kidman, 2003).

Media-based programs to prevent the onset, reduce the risk, and minimize the consequences of more commonly recognized high risk behaviours, (e.g., tobacco and drug use) have existed for several decades. Unfortunately, despite recent research pointing to relatively high prevalence rates of problem gambling and its negative impact upon individuals and society, there have been few gambling prevention campaigns specifically targeting youth (Derevensky, Gupta, Dickson, Hardoon, & Deguire, 2003). Little attention has been paid to the untapped resource of social marketing, despite the fact that social marketing, as a planned process of social change, has been a powerful tool in the development of comprehensive health promotion and prevention programs (Kotler, Roberto, Roberto, & Lee, 2002).

Despite fledgling progress in media-based prevention in the area, significant advancement has been made toward understanding youth gambling behaviour (see reviews by Derevensky & Gupta, 2000, 2004). Children and adolescent gambling patterns have been well established over the past decade in research conducted across North America (Jacobs, 2004; National Research Council, 1999; Shaffer & Hall, 1996). It is clear that adolescents are particularly susceptible to the development of serious gambling problems and represent a vulnerable high-risk group (Derevensky & Gupta, 2004; Gupta & Derevensky, 2000; National Research Council, 1999). Presently, between 39 and 92% of youth report having gambled during their lifetime (National Research Council, 1999) and studies undertaken in the UK, Canada and the US estimate (based upon current screens) a general probable pathological gambling rate of 4–6% amongst youth under 18 years-of-age, with another 10–15% at risk for the development of a gambling problem (Derevensky & Gupta, 2000; Jacobs, 2004; National Research Council, 1999; Shaffer & Hall, 1996).

In today's media saturated environment, children spend an average of 21 h per week watching TV programming and spend the equivalent of a full-time work week exposed to the media (Nielsen Media Research, 1998; Roberts, Foehr, Rideout, & Brodie, 1999). Promotional advertising of traditional and technological forms (e.g., internet) gambling have surged as the gambling market has expanded and deregulated. Researchers have suggested that gambling messages in the public arena imply that gambling is an exciting and enjoyable form of entertainment (Azmier, 2000; Gupta & Derevensky, 1998; Wynne, Smith, & Jacobs, 1996). Unfortunately, the increase in gambling promotion has been paralleled by the long-term trend of increasing youth gambling involvement in North America (Jacobs, 2004). Still further, the trend in public attitudes toward gambling appears to be one of widespread acceptance (Azmier, 2000; Stinchfield & Winters, 1998). These positive attitudes, paired with research highlighting that early age of onset of youth gambling behaviour represents a significant risk factor for the development of gambling-related problems (Dickson, Derevensky, & Gupta, 2002; Gupta & Derevensky, 1998; Jacobs, 2004; National Research Council, 1999; Wynne et al., 1996) makes salient the need to better understand effective prevention campaigns utilized in other risky behaviours (e.g., substance abuse, alcohol abuse, tobacco use).

A recent analysis by Byrne, Dickson, Derevensky, Gupta, and Lussier (2005) identified research studies evaluating media campaigns that were disseminated community-wide, via radio and/or television. The studies included in their analysis assessed the effects of a media intervention designed to prevent or reduce tobacco, alcohol or drug use, or a combination of these substances among youth. Outcomes were assessed based on measurable changes in attitudes, knowledge and behaviour. While there was considerable variation in approach among media campaigns, there were commonalities among prevention message content, target audience and dissemination medium. Negative effects and denormalization strategies were found to be the most effective methods for affecting change in substance use attitudes, knowledge and behaviour among youth. Industry manipulation strategies were also associated with positive outcomes in many of the existing campaigns while hard-hitting, fear-based messages were associated with both positive and negative outcomes. Overall, Byrne and her colleagues suggested that the common characteristics of effective prevention campaigns serve as a basis for future research in the development of a youth gambling social-marketing campaign.

The present study aimed to identify campaign strategies used in the prevention of other health compromising behaviours and determine their applicability to the context of youth gambling. Given some parallel risk (or correlates) and protective factors across adolescent high-risk behaviours (Dickson et al., 2002, Jacobs, 1998; Jessor, 1998; Loeber, Farrington, Stouthamer-Loeber, & Van Kammen, 1998; Gupta & Derevensky, 1998), an improved understanding of the features that were successful in social marketing campaigns for other risk behaviours will help inform youth gambling prevention initiatives.

Qualitative research in the form of focus groups was conducted to determine the campaign approach and types of messages that would be useful in a youth gambling social marketing campaign. Rigorous focus group research also helped establish media strategies recommended by youth, and identify how and when these messages should be delivered. In so doing, it is anticipated that the findings of this study will help in the design of a future social marketing campaign. Given the prevalence of youth gambling and the public health implications, the development of such an intervention is appropriate and timely.

Materials and 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 Montreal. The sample consisted of 175 participants, ages 12–18 years (95 males, 80 females).

Procedure

Consent forms and letters describing the purpose of the focus groups were distributed to parents via participating schools prior to students' participation. In addition to obtaining parental consent, students were briefed and consented to participate in the study. All participation was voluntary, students were assured confidentiality and that they could withdraw from the study at any time.

Focus groups were carried out during the school day and were one class period in duration (approximately 45–75 min). One researcher moderated the discussion using a topic guide while a second researcher took notes on verbal and non-verbal communications. Additional questions were added during the discussion as new issues of confirmation or disconfirmation arose. Data collection was conducted until saturation was reached (Patton, 2002). A digital recording device was used to audiotape all focus group discussions. The digital recordings were later transcribed by a research assistant and then verified by a researcher.

Results

A comprehensive analysis of the focus group dialogues was conducted by two different researchers in multiple stages using a theme-building approach. In the first stage, the transcribed dialogues were read thoroughly in order to begin to identify general themes and recognise emerging patterns from the groups. The dialogues were re-read using a colour coding system to identify the main research areas that were derived from the topic guide. The transcriptions were then organized so that the sequence of the dialogue was reformatted by question rather than by group. Reading of the transcriptions was completed using the reformatted text in order to identify key points and sub-themes that emerged. Words, phrases and sentences that typified a theme were highlighted and key phrases and patterns were documented.

The two researchers independently performed multiple readings of the transcriptions in order to identify key ideas and sub-themes that arose from within groups, across different groups, as well as to identify areas where there was no agreement on a specific sub-theme or question. Following these multiple readings, a table was developed in order to document and track sub-themes, quotes, and disconfirming cases. Another careful re-reading of the transcriptions was then conducted to compile comprehensive notes on each sub-theme. Upon completion of the table, an interpretation of the patterns of responses by theme was compiled by drawing links between and within responses from different groups. After the analysis and interpretation were completed, both researchers met to compile and compare notes. Project validation was addressed by using and combining the two researchers' analysis of the transcriptions (Mays & Pope, 2000). There was considerable agreement between researchers on sub-themes and links drawn. However, in a number of cases, a sub-theme was broadened or reorganized in order to incorporate additional links made by individual researchers.

Theme One: Exposure to Existing Prevention Campaigns

Tobacco prevention campaigns were among the most visible and memorable of those mentioned throughout this study. Participants were able to easily recall several different campaigns promoting tobacco prevention. One in particular, entitled *Stupid.ca*, aired across Ontario at the time of the study, was recalled by the vast majority of focus group participants. The most notable feature of this campaign, making it widely appealing to many youth, was the use of humor. Most participants reacted positively to the use of humor as a means to conveying smoking prevention messages. Adolescents reported a habituation with the typical tobacco prevention ads implemented in the past. The approach used in the

Stupid.ca campaigns combined humor with facts and communicated to youth in a subtle way, without an authoritative tone. These factors made the ads largely appealing to participants. In addition, the *Stupid.ca* campaign consisted of a series of different advertisements that were able to reach and appeal to a broad youth audience. While this technique appeared to be effective, some youth described an aversion to ads which were excessive in their use of humor.

One participant explains their reaction to the *Stupid.ca* advertisement:

> *I think humor is the most effective way to grab attention in our society. I prefer that over some disgusting image like someone dying from lung cancer or listening to someone discuss the death of their son/daughter—these tactics have been used too many times. I think that we are now turning to humor, which hasn't been used many times. Laughing really helps to grab attention but the whole ad cannot be based on humor because then you will not take it seriously. Perhaps you should only start out with humor.* (Male, grade 9)

Campaigns preventing driving under the influence of alcohol were the second most recalled advertisements. Many of the drinking and driving ads depicted the consequences of drinking that go beyond the individual and do so through the use of emotion. The use of fear and shock appeared to be an important factor contributing to the participants being able to recognize and associate this behaviour with serious repercussions. In addition, the powerful visual images employed in these advertisements also helped participants remember the content of the ads. While the use of emotion could be considered a positive component of the drinking and driving ads, some participants described feeling disturbed and uncomfortable with seeing images of serious accidents and death.

General Influence of Prevention Campaigns

Interestingly, while the majority of participants stated that they were not directly affected by media prevention messages, most were able to recognize and identify benefits to teenagers in general. The benefit most cited by participants was providing youth with important information needed to help them make more informed decisions. Knowing the risks and being able to make up their own mind on issues affecting their health was highly valued by adolescents.

Several strategies emerged as being perceived as ineffective and therefore should be avoided in any social marketing campaign targeting youth. Adolescents were highly critical of campaigns that did not present a balanced perspective. Several groups discussed their frustration with biased messages that focused mainly on the negative/harmful aspects of the behaviour. These youth found such ads to be unrealistic.

Typical comments that capture this opinion include:

> *They won't tell you the good side...good and bad, they only tell you the bad, even though there is a good side...like it is good and bad. The negative messages make you think twice but usually you tend to follow your friends because you trust them more—they come up with the good side of doing drugs and smoking and stuff...when you see the commercial it tells you all the facts and makes you think twice but you have to make your own decision...* (Male, grade 9)

> *I hate commercials that totally focus on the negative—that really pisses me off.* (Male, grade 10)

Furthermore, campaigns employing the *don't do it* approach were not successful in transmitting prevention messages. On the contrary, this technique may in fact encourage the opposite desired reaction. Several participants stated that these types of authoritative messages triggered rebellious or defiant behaviour.

Participants explain their reaction to *don't do it* ads:

Ads that say 'don't do it' will just make kids want to do it more for the thrill of it...I was told not to, so I'm going to do it anyways. (Female, grade 11)

Some of these ads make us want to go against what they are saying – it makes us want to defy their orders. (Female, grade 10)

Another important caution raised in these focus groups was the effect of over-exposure. It appears that youth develop a habituation to advertisements as a result of over-exposure. In particular, repetitive ads, ones shown over too lengthy a period, or those that youth described as "dragging on," lose their effectiveness as many youth tend to tune out as a response.

Theme Two: Message Content and Characteristics for Gambling Prevention

Negative Effects

From the discussions that emerged, depicting the negative effects of gambling was widely recommended by participants as a primary message content strategy. This finding confirms previous research in the area that suggests that campaigns employing negative health effects were associated with positive measurable outcomes (Byrne et al., 2005). Participants suggested that gambling prevention campaigns demonstrate the harmful effects of excessive gambling behaviour and identified four primary categories of consequences: problems affecting the individual; problems affecting family and friends; financial concerns; and suicide risk.

Relevant personal consequences associated with a gambling problem would be an important feature to illustrate in a gambling prevention campaign. Attention should be drawn to problems surrounding health effects, missing school or work, and the risk of multiple addictions. However, participants cautioned that if portraying the personal costs of gambling, to do so within reasonable limits, without being excessively dramatic. A majority of focus groups also highlighted the importance of depicting the harm that could be caused to family and friends attributable to a gambling problem. While some youth perceived that the emotional harm caused by conflict and tension, lying and stealing, and reduced quality time with family and friends would be an effective campaign strategy, others highlighted the financial impact a teenagers gambling habit can have on loved ones, as one female participant acknowledged: "Hurting your friends would appeal more to our age group."

Financial consequence was another relevant point raised by several focus groups; showing the losses that a teenager could encounter as a result of a gambling problem would be an essential aspect of a campaign. In particular, participants suggested showing how money spent on gambling could be used for more constructive endeavors. One participant explains: "Gambling is always about how much you can win, so I think the best thing to do is show the flip side–show all the people that have lost money and devoted themselves to gambling." (Male, grade 11)

While not an opinion held by many, suicide was raised as a potential serious consequence of gambling by a small number of participants. These youth suggested that depicting the possible extreme outcome that can result from a gambling problem may help communicate the seriousness of the issue.

Industry Manipulation

Presenting the extent to which the government and industry profit from gambling was seen as a potential social marketing message strategy by some focus groups. Several groups stated that teenagers do not like being taken advantage of by government and they feel discontent with the industry profiting from individuals' losses. One group made a point to mention that they chose to play poker with friends rather than spend money on lottery/scratch tickets, as they prefer that their winnings go to a friend rather than the gambling industry. One participant commented: "My mom gets mad at me when I play poker, meanwhile she'll spend five dollars a week on a lottery ticket. Her money is going to some multi-million dollar corporation whereas my money is going to one of my friends." (Male, grade 12)

While participants perceived industry manipulation as an important issue, they believed that many of their peers that gamble are underage and do not necessarily wager on legalized, state-run games but rather on what they referred to as "street" gambling. They therefore cautioned that an industry manipulation angle may not in fact reflect the true nature of the youth gambling culture. Additionally, some participants advised that this approach not be a priority of a social-marketing campaign, given other more pressing youth gambling issues.

Denormalization

There was limited support for using a denormalization approach to gambling prevention; for the most part, participants believe this is not an effective method. Those individuals that found this strategy to be effective thought it could help counterbalance the multitude of advertisements, television shows and other media messages that promote and encourage gambling. These groups recommended that denormalization messages illustrate the true reality of gambling, for example, showing how there are more losers than winners. They furthermore suggested that a younger audience may be more influenced by a "gambling is not cool" message, compared to older teenagers. Older participants suggested that their age groups are more independent thinkers, and hence would not be influenced by a denormalization strategy. For example, one participant stated: "Grades 7 and 8 are more impressionable and worried about what's not cool, the uncool will have a backlash with the older teens." (Male, grade 10)

Some groups interpreted the denormalization strategy as being "preachy" and expressed concern with campaigns communicating gambling is "not cool" messages. This approach may therefore be ineffective for those youth who react in a rebellious manner to prevention messages. Another unexpected finding that emerged from this study was that several groups suggested a responsible gambling message as being a more appropriate strategy for a youth gambling prevention campaign. These youth stated that most of their peers gamble and thus a responsible gambling approach would better reflect the reality of youth gambling among this audience.

Real-life Stories

Overall, the idea of using real-life stories of adolescents that have been affected by gambling problems was widely endorsed by most focus groups. Specifically, groups recommended having guest speakers share their personal stories and experiences at school assemblies. The participants viewed using actual stories that touch upon the audience's emotions as an effective method for communicating youth gambling prevention messages. It was suggested that campaigns using emotional content by featuring real stories helped adolescents realize they are not immune to gambling problems. As such, depicting real-life stories may help dispel the myth that adolescents are not affected by gambling or other problems.

Additional Strategies Proposed

Comparison Participants supported the use of comparisons to illustrate the consequences of a gambling problem. Many participants suggested demonstrating the "before and after" in a social marketing campaign to highlight the development and progression of a gambling problem. These focus group members stated that an advertisement depicting a comparison can also be used to demonstrate that adolescents have a choice when it comes to gambling (i.e., depending on their decision to gamble or not, the outcome will be different).

Statistics Another popular suggestion made by participants was the idea of using statistics to inform and educate youth regarding basic facts on youth gambling. Many proposed showing the real odds of winning as a means to convey the reality that the majority of players lose when gambling. In addition, focus group members were interested in learning about the prevalence of gambling problems among peers their age. However, they stressed the importance of using statistics in a meaningful context to which they could relate.

Celebrity There were mixed reactions to the idea of using identifiable celebrities to communicate gambling prevention messages to youth. While some participants endorsed this idea, others felt it would be very difficult to choose a celebrity that the majority of youth support, respect and listen to.

Theme Three: Media Outlets

Television

Television was the most popular medium discussed by youth. An overwhelming number of participants agreed that television was the primary method to reach the largest audience. Many suggested using television to air gambling prevention advertisements. Furthermore, participants suggested airing prevention messages early in the morning before young people go to school, after school, or later in the evening, during primetime television. However, some adolescents noted that since television is already saturated by commercials, it would be difficult for prevention messages to have any impact.

Radio

The second most popular medium recommended by youth was the use of radio for a gambling prevention campaign. Popular radio music channels among adolescents could be another effective medium to reach this audience. Adolescents nevertheless believe that there is an advantage to using television, given it is better able to depict emotions through both visuals and sound.

Magazines

Using magazines as a vehicle to implement a social-marketing campaign for gambling prevention received only limited support from focus group members. The main reasons discussed were that adolescents generally do no pay attention to print ads, and there are too many types of magazines to know which one to target. However, some groups recommended the use of teen magazines if the prevention ads are catchy, colourful and visually stimulating.

Websites/Internet

The majority of participants stated that gambling prevention advertisements on the Internet would be very ineffective. The primary reason given was that they find Internet ads annoying, especially pop-up ads. Some participants suggested that it would be very challenging to have gambling prevention messages on the web as it would be difficult to counterbalance the thousands of ads and pop-ups that promote gambling on the Internet. However, a few participants felt that the Internet allows people to access information in a confidential and anonymous manner and thought that for this reason, Internet ads could be useful.

Discussion

Lessons Learned from General Prevention Campaigns

Based on the focus group analysis of current prevention campaigns, and a review of the literature concerning the efficacy of science-based programs for other high-risk behaviours, a number of media strategies were considered ineffective and therefore should be avoided. These include the 'don't do it' approach to conveying prevention messages to adolescents is often rejected by youth as being imposing and patronizing. Many youth react to this type of message negatively, sometimes triggering defiant or rebellious behaviour. Youth suggest that campaigns inform or engage them, rather than preach about the harms of high-risk behaviours. Applying this recommendation to a youth gambling campaign would therefore suggest informing youth about the risks of gambling, and proposing alternatives as opposed to simply telling adolescents not to gamble.

Campaigns that did not present a balanced perspective were also considered ineffective. It is recommended that campaigns communicate the risks of gambling in an unbiased,

realistic and fair method, given adolescents' criticism of ads that focus primarily on the negative/harmful aspects of the behaviour.

Exaggerating or over-dramatizing an issue could also render a campaign ineffective. Some audiences lose the point of the message as a result of the overuse of humor or drama. It is recommended that if a gambling prevention campaign were to incorporate humor and/ or drama, that it carefully assesses the tone and level of the message.

Another important factor to consider is the level of exposure to advertisements. Over-saturation of campaigns, within all types of media vehicles, be it radio, television, Internet or print, lead to desensitization and habituation toward ads. Therefore, it is recommended that any prevention campaign carefully balance the frequency of exposure.

Gambling Specific Recommendations

Message Characteristics

Based on the complete analysis of this qualitative study, the following campaign strategies are recommended in order of importance:

Real-life Stories It is recommended that real-life stories be used to communicate youth gambling prevention messages as this strategy would allow young people to hear first hand how individuals their age have been affected by such a problem. Since adolescents are generally unaware of the risks and consequences associated with gambling, this strategy would help demonstrate how people their age could be affected by such a problem.

Participants were clear that they relate well to the experiences, challenges or problems of their peers and therefore this message technique could impact and reach a large audience. In addition, depicting actual life stories touches upon peoples' emotions and provokes reflection and personal analysis. The effectiveness of such a strategy could potentially be high, as prevention messages with an emotional appeal were highly endorsed by focus group participants, with little disagreement on its level of effectiveness.

Negative Effects Negative effects as a campaign strategy consists of focusing on the short- and long-term consequences of excessive gambling. This phenomenon, as described by focus groups, could include direct personal harms, consequences to family and friends, financial problems, as well as the possible risk for suicide. The findings of this study suggest that while this method could be effective in depicting the consequences of gambling, an over-emphasis on the "negative" could in fact result in a reverse effect, whereby it encourages youth to engage in the behaviour. Messages that are too dramatic or intense in their portrayal of the costs of gambling could be counter-productive. Thus, it is recommended that a campaign employing such a strategy be balanced and moderate in its approach.

Denormalization This study also revealed that denormalization messages may be more suitable for a younger audience (grades 7 and 8) as it appears that this age group may be more impressionable and more easily influenced by messages that would promote gambling as unpopular. The denormalization approach may furthermore be an effective message technique for younger youth as it aims to deglamorize gambling and counter-balance the multitude of messages, advertisements and television programming that promote gambling. However, it is important to note that this strategy not adopt an authoritative or moralizing

tone, depicting gambling as a dangerous and overly risky pursuit, as many youth believe this does not reflect the reality of the youth gambling culture.

Industry Manipulation Having a campaign strategy focus on the government and gambling industry profiting from the losses of individuals is seen as a possible prevention technique that would discourage individuals from participating in state-run gambling initiatives. However, due to the fact that focus group participants generally stated that they and their peers mainly took part in "street" gambling activities (such as playing poker or placing sports bets with friends) this approach to a youth gambling prevention campaign may have only limited use.

Other Considerations

The most successful campaigns are those presented in the form of a targeted message geared towards a specific group. While difficult to assess within this study, age, gender, and level of gambling involvement are central targeting variables that ought to be incorporated within a gambling prevention campaign. The analysis of this study suggests that younger audiences appear to prefer humor-based campaigns or those that convey simple messages and information with some emotional content. They are also more likely to be attracted to messages that are short, catchy, and colourful. Furthermore, the study suggests that abstinence-based and denormalization approaches are more likely to be successful for this age group. Older adolescents are likely to be attracted to messages that have greater emotional appeal and those more dramatic in tone. It appears that this age group can also tolerate ads that are longer in length and more serious in style. A responsible gambling-based campaign featuring real-life stories and statistics are recommended for an older target audience. However, additional research is required to validate these preliminary findings.

General gender impressions also require further evaluation in future studies. However, this study suggests that female participants preferred emotional-based campaigns and had more tolerance for longer ads with more depth within the message. Males, however, preferred messages that are more direct and appreciated campaigns using either statistics or humor.

Level of gambling engagement was difficult to ascertain within this qualitative study. However, it is deduced from the analysis that abstinence-based campaigns with basic facts about gambling would be suitable for non-gamblers, while responsible gambling messages with a greater focus on the risks of excessive gambling and the signs of problem gambling would be more appropriate for adolescents that gamble.

Overall, in comparing the finding of this study with previous work in the area, several parallels and distinctions are worthy of note. An analysis of the literature by Byrne et al. (2005) maintained that "negative health effects" was the most effective method in influencing change in substance use attitudes, knowledge and awareness. This study's focus group analysis found that the phenomenon of "negative effects" was widely endorsed as a message strategy. However, this concept was broader than health consequences and included harm caused to family and friends as well as financial/monetary consequences. Using beliefs about the negative (as well as positive) consequences as a basis for designing messages for lowering risk behaviours is supported by current theories in the area of adolescent risk prevention (Cappella, Yzer, & Fishbein, 2003). The present study recommends the use of negative effects for all age groups and among both males and females, particularly when combining this with a balanced emotional appeal.

Contrary to the popular tobacco prevention strategy (Mahood, 2002), the concept of denormalization, in this study, did not receive extensive support as a gambling prevention media strategy, except perhaps among younger adolescents. It was suggested that younger teenagers may be more affected by messages portraying gambling as unpopular, compared to older adolescents who are already exposed to the glamorization of gambling and who are likely actively engaging in gambling behaviour.

In general, findings from preliminary work by Byrne et al. (2005) were found to be fairly consistent with those revealed in this qualitative analysis. It should however be noted, that the differences that did arise, are most likely due to the fact that Byrne et al. reviewed the outcome of social marketing campaigns addressing the issues of smoking, alcohol and drug use, which are widely considered to be more serious and pressing risk-taking behaviours in comparison to the issue of youth gambling. Unlike these other high-risk behaviours that have been widely addressed by prevention campaigns, youth gambling is a relatively new area phenomenon that requires more specifically tailored prevention initiatives.

Conclusion

Social marketing as a strategy for the primary prevention of youth gambling remains a largely unexplored avenue to date. A valuable tool, social marketing has the prospect of reaching large numbers of youth with important prevention messages regarding the risks of excessive gambling (Earle, 2000). Given gambling's popularity among today's adolescents, campaigns informing youth in a realistic and balanced manner are promising new possibilities for prevention. Adolescents want and deserve to be informed, however, they remain sensitive to biased or unrealistic messages about the risks of gambling, given the rising youth gambling culture.

The focus groups conducted in this qualitative study provided rich and valuable data from which to begin to explore and better understand the salient issues and considerations in the development of an effective social marketing campaign for youth gambling prevention. The significant findings should serve as a starting point for the development of a gambling prevention social marketing campaign. Targeting variable and campaign strategies discussed within this article should be considered in the early stages of development and tested along the way. Adolescents, or the specific target audience, should be consulted throughout the process. It is clear that adolescents today are better informed and more media savvy then in the past and researchers have the opportunity to tap into this unique knowledge and the youth culture. In order to be effective however, social marketing as a public health strategy needs to be part of an integrated youth gambling prevention approach which includes the implementation of healthy public and social policy as well as the development of science-based prevention programs.

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