**TITLE: Gambling as a public health ethics issue**

**Review Comments:**

Reviewer 1:

1. The paper is on a topic of concern seems to deal with it from a one-sided bias and in a prejudiced manner.
2. The information in it is new but misplaced, and the interpretation is not at all well-developed.
3. The paper does not locate the problem in a wider perspective, thus could very well be misconceived. It equates lottery to gambling and further uses all the correlates of gambling to make a case for establishing lottery engagement to have similar correlates. The primary question therefore, is to agree/disagree with the basic premise that lottery is the same as gambling. Given that the authors are right in their set premise that needs to be backed by theories of risk behavior as well as theories of lottery gambling (See the reference: Lottery Gambling: A Review’` by V. Ariyabuddhiphongs in Journal of Gambling Studies, 2011). Further, lottery can also be considered as a risk pooling mechanism where there are many winners and losers with losers exceeding the winners.
4. If one goes by the author’s arguments of lottery buying as a psychiatric or mental health concern, we might have to bring all individuals engaged in risk portfolio investments within the same bracket. Therefore, it is a little overstretching to term lottery buyers as having mental health problems. The authors have used the concept of addiction which again is contentious, in the sense that any obsessive disproportionate engagement with an act could be termed as addiction. In that sense, addiction attribute has to be accompanied with parameters of the disproportionate aspect as well as attributes of obsession. Mere buying of lottery tickets, therefore, cannot be an addiction.
5. The particular context of exposition of Karunya state lotteries is perhaps one-sided in the sense that the govt. of Kerala uses these funds in a more effective manner to cater to the genuine need of those in distress. As I mentioned earlier, risk pooling with perceived risk and expected benefit qualifies for insurance investment and risk pooling in the absence of any risk perception and expected gain alone is a case of lottery.
6. Recommendation: While the authors argue for best possible well-being without any individual harm, there is no evidence as to individual harm cited, except for the fact that there are vulnerable groups like children and adolescents developing an addiction of lottery buying. I think the stand point taken by the authors suffers from drawing parallels between lottery and gambling and not recognizing the risk pooling feature of small-scale sacrifice (with least expectation) to cater to large scale provisioning for rare emergencies. So, the alteration required in the paper is to
7. Delink lottery from gambling
8. Balance the risk and benefit of lottery venture recognizing its risk pooling feature, notwithstanding the need for regulation of its purchase by vulnerable groups like children and adolescents.

**Reviewer 2:**

1. I feel the conclusion, that gambling is a serious public health issue in India, is unwarranted from the very insufficient data that the authors have produced. Even in Kerala, where they discuss the case of the state lotteries and the Karunya lottery in particular, they have not really produced any data to show that it could lead to problematic addiction. Even a few case studies done with an anthropological approach would have brought this out: At present this is purely based on speculation.
2. While the lottery is an example of gambling in the broad sense, since this is periodical and the opportunities are limited, it cannot be equated to having open casinos or gambling houses. Moreover, the authors have admitted that the state stands to gain revenue from the lottery. As such the benefits from it have to be offset against the potential harm, for which the authors have really not produced much evidence on the ground.
3. To really make this argument, more empirical data about people who habitually buy lottery tickets, why they do that, their social, economic and other characteristics etc should have been compared. The authors here are only talking about possibilities, and not based on data.
4. Some unpublished observations from Kerala suggest that there are differences in socio-economic as well as community differences in the propensity to buy lottery tickets. The ethical implications of such differences may be interesting and may have policy bearings. The authors could explore any such data that are available.
5. While the authors’ concept of gambling as a potential harmful and addictive behaviour and hence a public health problem is very novel (at least to me), I feel they could have gone much deeper into the ethical aspects. It could be argued, as in the case of other addictive substances, that it is a matter of individual choice, and the state’s responsibility is only to point out the risk, as well as protect minors and other socially vulnerable people. Whether it has externalities- whether it harms other people such as family members- is also another question worth exploring.
6. I feel the paper requires a major revamping, taking the comments above into consideration.

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