

'Intoxicated' Thailand losing billions to lottery: study

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BANGKOK – Thailand's state-run lottery has "intoxicated" the public and caused billions of dollars in losses due to lost productivity by people hoping to strike it rich, according to a study published Sunday.

Academics at a Bangkok seminar released results of a study showing that the kingdom loses about 184 billion baht (4.4 billion dollars) annually due to reduced work performance on days of lottery draws on the first and 16th of each month, the Nation newspaper reported.

"When the public becomes intoxicated with the belief that they can become rich without having to work, they work less," associate professor Warakorn Samkoset of Dhurakijpundit University was quoted as saying.

"What is most worrying is that young people have shifted from football betting to becoming hooked on the lottery because the lottery is legal."

Most forms of gambling are outlawed in Thailand. But in recent years the government brought part of the massive underground lottery system into the legal fold, operating it through the Government Lottery Office.

Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra's administration has claimed that the profits from the lottery go directly into socio-economic programmes including student scholarships.

Warakorn contends the lottery's estimated 70 billion baht annual income pales in comparison to financial losses in terms of public purchasing power.

She also said the premier is authorised to use the lottery money without the scrutiny of parliament, according to the English-language daily.

Senator Montri Sinthawichai said the Government Lottery Office should launch surveys into the effects on young people. "The lottery is a kind of gambling, which causes more social problems than corruption," the senator said.

Gambling-mad Thais bet huge sums on underground lotteries, at casinos across the border in Cambodia, on cock-fighting matches and on football games.

Last month researchers revealed that half a million Thai students were betting regularly on football matches with spiralling debts triggering murders, extortion rackets and prostitution.