



Factors related to risky online gaming behaviours in Taiwanese adolescents

What this research is about

Researchers are concerned about features of online video games and their negative impacts on adolescents. Online games often involve in-game purchases like loot boxes, which can be bought for real money and reward players with random items. Loot boxes might encourage risky behaviour among youth because they work in a similar way to gambling.

Many adolescents who play online games are also exposed to simulated gambling games. These mimic traditional gambling activities, like slots and poker, without involving real money. Past research has found that youth who play these games are more likely to participate in gambling activities involving real money and to experience gambling problems.

Adolescents who play online games are also likely to see advertisements for games, including those that involve simulated gambling. Advertisements for these games do not violate bans on gambling advertising in many regions. Youth are vulnerable to the impacts of advertisements and might be encouraged to gamble or play online games excessively.

In this study, the researchers looked at the relationships between exposure to advertising, in-game purchases, engagement in online simulated gambling games, problem gaming, parental mediation, and psychological distress among adolescents. They also looked at gender differences. Parental mediation includes parents talking to their children about internet use and monitoring their online activities.

What the researchers did

What you need to know

This study looked at the relationships between exposure to gaming advertisements, risky online gaming behaviours, parental mediation, and psychological distress among adolescents. The researchers collected data from 2,595 Taiwanese students between 12 and 13 years old in 2020. The results showed that risky online gaming behaviours were related to several factors, such as greater exposure to online game advertising, in-game purchases, and lower parental mediation.

The researchers collected data in 2020 from students across 30 middle schools in Taiwan. Participants were students in the seventh grade who were between 12 and 13 years old. About 96% of the students and parents who agreed to participate completed the study. The final sample was 2,595 students.

Participants filled out a questionnaire that included questions about the following:

- How often they play online games, including simulated gambling games, and make in-game purchases.
- How often they see and are influenced by gaming and simulated gambling game advertisements.
- Whether their parents mediate their internet use by asking questions about, restricting, or monitoring their online activities.
- Whether they experience poor sleep quality.

Participants also completed some standardized measures, including the Chinese version of the Ten-Item Internet Gaming Disorder Test (IGDT-10) to

assess problematic gaming. They also completed the Chinese version of the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (DASS-21) to assess psychological distress. The researchers then analyzed the survey data to look at the relationships and gender differences between the study variables.

What the researchers found

The sample was 47.2% boys and 52.7% girls. Boys played online games and simulated gambling games, as well as made in-game purchases, more often than girls. Boys also saw online gaming advertising more often and were more impacted by it than girls. Boys had higher levels of problem gaming than girls. Girls reported higher levels of psychological distress than boys.

Participants who were exposed to and influenced by online game advertising, had lower parental restriction of internet use, and had higher levels of problem gaming were more likely to make in-game purchases. Participants who were exposed to and influenced by online game advertising, had lower parental active mediation (e.g., talking and discussing about internet use), and made more in-game purchases were more likely to have problem gaming. Participants who were exposed to and influenced by online game advertising, had higher levels of problem gaming, and made more in-game purchases were also more likely to play simulated gambling games.

Participants who had problem gaming and played simulated gambling games were more likely to experience psychological distress. Those who made in-game purchases, had problem gaming, and played simulated gambling games were also more likely to have poor sleep quality.

How you can use this research

This study provides important knowledge about the factors that either increase the likelihood of or protect against risky online gaming behaviours among adolescents. Government, parental, and school interventions can be designed to protect against the risk of problem gaming.

About the researchers

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