

Parental influences on adolescent gambling in Australia

What this research is about

Parents are likely to play an important role in influencing adolescents' gambling behaviour. However, there is little research on adolescent gambling from the perspective of parents. The aim of this study was to identify parental influences on adolescent gambling, along with adolescent factors, from an online survey of mothers and fathers.

What the researchers did

The researchers used Qualtrics to recruit parents or guardians with an adolescent aged 12 to 17 years old in their household and living in New South Wales, Australia, for an online survey. If there was more than one adolescent in the household, respondents were asked to complete the survey with the child whose birthday was coming up in mind. A total of 1,183 respondents completed the survey, which asked questions about the following:

- Demographic information about themselves and their adolescent.
- Adolescent gambling participation in 14 traditional gambling activities (e.g., lottery, sports betting) and modern forms of gambling (e.g., eSports betting).
- Adolescent problem gambling, assessed using the Diagnostic Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders-IV-Multiple Response Format for Juveniles, adapted for parent report.
- Parental attitudes towards adolescent gambling.
- Parental problem gambling, assessed using the Problem Gambling Severity Index.
- Parental facilitation of adolescent gambling (e.g., helping their child place a bet, talking about gambling wins).

What you need to know

This study examined parental influences on adolescent gambling, along with adolescent factors. The researchers surveyed 1,183 Australian parents with at least one adolescent aged 12 to 17 years old. The strongest factor linked to adolescent gambling and problem gambling, was whether parents encouraged or helped their child gamble. Parental problem gambling was also a significant predictor. In addition, adolescents were more likely to gamble and to experience problem gambling if they engaged in simulated gambling, experienced poorer parental monitoring, and had a less positive relationship with their parents. Other factors like parental attitudes towards adolescent gambling were less important. The findings suggest that what parents do with their adolescents around gambling may be more important than their own attitudes or gambling behaviour.

- Parenting practices, assessed using the short form of the Alabama Parenting Questionnaire.
- Parent-adolescent relationship, assessed using the Connectedness and Hostility subscales from the Parent-Adolescent Relationship Scale.
- Parental monitoring of online activities.
- Adolescent mental health, assessed using the Emotional Difficulties subscale from the Adolescent Functioning Scale.
- Adolescent impulsivity (i.e., a tendency to act rashly without forethought or planning), assessed using the Barratt Impulsiveness Scale-Brief.
- Adolescent participation in simulated gambling.

What the researchers found

On average, the parents of this study were 43 years old. Most respondents (98%) were the biological or adoptive parent or step-parent of their adolescent.

Adolescent gambling participation

For mothers and fathers, the strongest predictor of adolescent gambling was the extent that parents facilitated their adolescent's gambling. Adolescents were also more likely to gamble if parents reported less positive parenting, weaker parent-adolescent relationship, less consistent discipline, and poorer supervision. After accounting for other factors, mothers' positive attitudes toward adolescent gambling and poor supervision still predicted adolescent gambling. But mothers' monitoring of online activities was not linked to adolescent gambling. Mothers whose adolescent engaged in simulated gambling were also more likely to report that their adolescent gambled. Among fathers, less positive parenting and more conflict with their adolescent were linked to adolescent gambling.

Other factors like having a mother who identified as Indigenous and lower maternal education were linked to adolescent gambling. But their effects were small after other influences were accounted for. Factors like parent age, income, family structure, primary language spoken at home, and adolescent age, gender, and impulsivity were not independently linked to adolescent gambling.

Adolescent problem gambling

For mothers and fathers, parental facilitation of adolescent gambling was the strongest predictor of adolescent problem gambling. Parental problem gambling and weaker parent-adolescent relationship were also significant predictors. Adolescents who engaged in simulated gambling were more likely to experience problem gambling. For mothers, lower maternal education, poorer supervision, and adolescent mental health problems were also linked to adolescent problem gambling.

How you can use this research

This research can inform prevention programs to help parents understand how their actions can increase gambling risk for their adolescents,

strengthen parent-child relationship, and improve parental supervision.

About the researchers

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