



Social casino game use in adults with gambling problems

What this research is about

Social casino games are online games that look and function like casino or other gambling activities, such as poker and sports betting. These games do not require money to play and do not provide monetary rewards. Players are given a small amount of virtual credits to start the games and can make in-game purchases with real money to enhance game play or to continue play after running out of credits. The outcomes of social casino games are not always based on random chance. Unlike gambling, the odds of winning are not disclosed and appear to be such that players have a higher chance of winning compared to actual gambling activities.

Researchers have raised concerns about the potential for addiction due to similarities between social casino games and gambling activities. Existing research on social casino games has focused on adolescents even though older adults may have greater means to spend money. It is also not known if problematic use of social casino games occurs in individuals who already have problems with gambling. The aim of this study was to examine social casino game use in Australian adults with problem gambling.

What the researcher did

Participants were 176 Australian adults who played social casino games and had problem gambling. Each participant completed an online survey. The survey assessed demographics, mental distress, and social casino game use. Demographics included age, gender, marital status, household type, education, employment, income, language, and country of birth. Social casino game use included the types of games played, frequency of play, duration of play, and

What you need to know

This study examined social casino game use among Australian adults with problem gambling. Participants with more severe gambling problems had more problematic social casino game use. Problematic social casino game use was more common in adults who were younger, were less educated, did not speak English as their first language, or had more mental distress. Playing more diverse types of social casino games, playing more frequently, and spending more money on in-game purchases led to more gaming problems.

The majority of participants had made in-game purchases. Reasons for doing so included taking advantage of an offer, buying a gift for a friend, and enhancing enjoyment. Many mentioned that they played social casino games to escape or relieve a negative mood.

problematic game use (e.g., being preoccupied with social casino games, feeling restless or sad when not playing). It also included in-game purchases, whether the cost was clear, and reasons for the purchase.

What the researcher found

Participants with more severe gambling problems had more problematic social casino game use. Further, those who played social casino games more frequently played more diverse types of games, and spent more money on in-game purchases had more gaming problems. Problematic social game use was more common in adults who were younger, were less educated, or did not speak English at home. It was also more common among adults with greater mental distress.

The majority of participants had made in-game purchases. Participants with more problematic social casino game use were more likely to report that the cost of in-game purchases was clear to them. Reasons for making the purchases were to take advantage of an offer, to purchase gifts for friends, and to increase enjoyment. Many participants reported that they played social casino games to escape or relieve a negative mood.

How you can use this research

This study suggests that clinicians may want to screen problem gamblers for problematic social casino game use. Clinicians should also educate their clients about the potential for social casino gaming to lead to problems similar to problem gambling. Future studies are needed to assess the overlap between gambling and social casino game use in more diverse groups, including non-problem gamblers.

About the Researcher

Sally M. Gainsbury, Alex M. T. Russell, and Nerilee Hing were affiliated with the Centre for Gambling Education & Research at Southern Cross University in Australia. Currently, Dr. Gainsbury is affiliated with the School of Psychology, University of Sydney and Dr. Russell and Professor Hing are associated with the School of Health, Medical and Applied Sciences, Central Queensland University. **Daniel L. King** and **Paul Delfabbro** are affiliated with the School of Psychology at the University of Adelaide in Australia. For more information about the article, please contact sally.gainsbury@sydney.edu.au.

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Problem gambling, social casino games, Internet gaming disorder, technology-based addiction, freemium, Internet addiction

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