

research snapshot

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Adolescents' esports betting, gaming, and gambling behaviours

What this research is about

Esports events are professionally organized video game competitions. Players or teams compete in different types of games (e.g., shooter, sports, action) to win prize money and/or a championship title. The growth of esports has created new forms of gambling.

Esports betting involves placing bets using cash or alternative currencies, such as 'skins.' Skins are cosmetic virtual in-game items. Skins can enhance a player's avatar, weapons, or equipment in a video game. They may have monetary value because they appeal to game players, especially rare or valuable skins. Esports skin gambling websites allow people to wager the skins they obtained on the outcomes of esports events or on games of chance (e.g., roulettes). Skin gambling websites often are unregulated. Esports cash betting is offered by gambling operators or esports betting operators. These operators may or may not be licensed to provide gambling services.

The purpose of this study was to examine the characteristics of adolescents who engaged in esports betting. The researchers also wanted to understand whether adolescents who bet on esports also participated in other forms of gambling. Finally, the researchers wanted to know about the relationship between esports betting and problem gambling severity.

What the researchers did

Australians aged 12 to 17 years were recruited in two different ways. A total of 1,667 adolescents participated in this study. Of those, 841 adolescents who were recruited through advertisements. Advertisements were placed on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, newsletter communications, and emails.

What you need to know

Esports events are professionally organized video game competitions. Esports betting involves placing bets using cash or 'skins.' Skins are virtual in-game items. They can enhance a player's avatar, weapons, or equipment in a video game. The purpose of this study was to examine the characteristics and gambling activities of adolescents who engaged in esports betting. A total of 1,667 Australians aged 12 to 17 years completed a short survey. Participants who played and watched esports were more likely to bet on esports. Those who recently bet on esports were more likely to have recently participated in traditional types of gambling (e.g., lotteries, bingo). Those who recently bet on esports were also more likely to have at-risk or problem gambling. After controlling for recent monetary gambling, those who recently bet on esports using skins were over three times more likely to have at-risk and problem gambling.

Another 826 adolescents were recruited through Qualtrics, an online panel provider.

Participants completed a short online survey. They were asked to answer questions about:

- (1) When they last bet on esports for real money.
- (2) When they last used in-game items (e.g., skins) to bet on esports.
- (3) How often they used real money in the past month to gamble on 10 different gambling activities.
- (4) Any problem gambling symptoms (assessed using the DSM-IV-MR-J).

- (5) If and when they last played an esports video game, watched an esports competition, and competed in an esports competition.
- (6) Any problematic gaming symptoms (assessed using the Internet Gaming Disorder (IGD) scale).
- (7) General well-being (assessed using the Personal Wellbeing Index-School Children questionnaire).
- (8) Impulsivity, which is a tendency to act rashly and to act without planning (assessed using the Barratt Impulsiveness Scale-Brief).
- (9) Demographic information, such as age, gender, parental living situation, and whether they identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent.

What the researchers found

Participants were mostly male (62.2%). On average, they were 14.7 years old. The parents of most participants were living together (70.1%). Gender and parents' living situation did not differ between those who recently bet on esports using cash or skins in the past month and those who did not. Adolescents who identified as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander were more likely to engage in esports betting.

The researchers did not find consistent results regarding general wellbeing and impulsivity. Among the Advertisement participants, those who bet on esports using cash were more impulsive and had poorer wellbeing than those who did not. Those who bet on esports using skins were also more impulsive than those who did not. Among the Qualtrics Advertisement, those who bet on esports using cash were less impulsive.

Participants who played and watched esports were more likely to bet on esports, especially through skin betting. Those who recently bet on esports were more likely to have recently gambled on lottery-type games, bingo, and informal private betting. Also, those who recently bet on esports using either cash or skins were more likely to have at-risk or problem gambling. After controlling for recent monetary gambling, those who recently bet on esports using skins were over three times more likely to have at-risk and problem gambling.

How you can use this research

The researchers suggested that esports betting using skins poses unique risks for youth. Policy makers can use this information to create targeted educational programmes for youth who play and bet on esports.

About the researchers

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Citation

Hing, N., Lole, L. Russell, A. M. T., Rockloff, M., King, D. L., Browne, M., Newall, P., & Greer, N. (2022). Adolescent betting on esports using cash and skins: Links with gaming, monetary gambling, and problematic gambling. *PLoS ONE*, 17(5), e0266571. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0266571>

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Information item	Value
Title	Adolescent betting on esports using cash and skins: Links with gaming, monetary gambling, and problematic gambling
Article URL	https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0266571
Authors	“Hing, Nerilee”, “Lole, Lori”, “Russell, Alex M.T.”, “Rockloff, Matthew”, “King, Daniel L.”, “Browne, Matthew”, “Newall, Philip”, “Greer, Nancy”
Journal	PLoS ONE
Year published	2022
Keywords	Betting; sports betting; adolescent gambling; esports; skin gambling; gaming; problem gambling
Geographic coverage	New South Wales, Australia
Study population	Australians aged 12 to 17 years were recruited to participate in this study (N = 1667). Participants were mostly male (62.2%) and were about 14.7 years old on average. Most participants said that their parents were still living together (70.1%). In both samples, gender and parents’ living situation did not differ by past-month esports cash and skin betting.
DOI	https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0266571
Citation	Hing, N., Lole, L. Russell, A. M. T., Rockloff, M., King, D. L., Browne, M., Newall, P., & Greer, N. (2022). Adolescent betting on esports using cash and skins: Links with gaming, monetary gambling, and problematic gambling. <i>PLoS ONE</i> , 17(5), e0266571. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0266571
Sampling procedure	Australians aged 12 to 17 years were recruited using two different recruitment strategies. A total of 1,667 adolescents participated in this study, including 841 adolescents who were recruited through advertisements. Advertisements were placed on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, newsletter communications, and emails. Another 826 adolescents were recruited through Qualtrics, an online panel provider.
Response rate	N/A
Study design	Descriptive (survey)
Snapshot written by	Kristen Morrison

