

research snapshot

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The links between adolescents' engagement with simulated gambling games, monetary gambling, and problem gambling

What this research is about

Simulated gambling games take many forms. They do not reward players with real money. Many video games have 'mini' gambling aspects where gambling simulations are included as part of gameplay. Another example is slot machines that can be played for points instead of for real money. Around two-fifths of adolescents play simulated gambling games.

The researchers of this study wanted to examine the links between youth participation in simulated gambling games, monetary gambling, and problematic gambling. The researchers also examined whether spending money and time on simulated gambling games is linked with problematic gambling.

What the researchers did

The researchers surveyed two samples of adolescents in New South Wales, Australia. Participants had to be between 12 and 17 years. Participants also had to have permission from a parent/guardian to participate and provide their own informed consent.

The researchers recruited two nonprobability samples. This helped to make sure that there were enough participants with symptoms of problematic gambling to conduct the planned analyses. In the first sample, the researchers recruited 1098 adolescents through Qualtrics. After they removed responses that failed data quality checks, 826 completed responses were included in the data analysis. This is a completion rate of 78.2%.

In the second sample, the researchers recruited 1401 adolescents through emailing and asking past gambling research participants to invite adolescents in their household, and through online advertising (e.g.,

What you need to know

Many adolescents play simulated gambling games. This study examined the links between youth participation in simulated gambling games, monetary gambling, and problem gambling. The researchers surveyed two samples of adolescents (12 to 17 years) in Australia. One sample was recruited through an online panel aggregator (Qualtrics), and the other was recruited through advertising. The findings in both samples showed that youth who play simulated gambling games are more likely to participate in monetary gambling. Participating in simulated gambling games is linked to a higher risk of problem gambling. Spending more time and money on simulated gambling games is linked to a higher risk of problem gambling. This held true even after taking into account the number of gambling activities played, age, gender, and impulsivity.

Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter). Of the eligible individuals, 841 completed the survey. This is a completion rate of 60%.

In the online survey, participants were asked about the following:

- Problematic gambling was measured using the DSM-IV-MR-J. Respondents who endorsed 4 or more items were classified as experiencing gambling problems. Those who endorsed 2–3 items were classified as at-risk. Those who endorsed 0–1 items were classified as not experiencing problems.
- How often they participated in 11 types of monetary gambling activities in the past 12 months (e.g., poker, bingo). The breadth of monetary gambling

was calculated by summing the number of activities they played.

- Engaging in four types of simulated gambling games: (1) video games with 'mini' gambling features; (2) games with gambling themes from app stores; (3) social casino games; and (4) free demo games available on real gambling websites.
- Time and money spent playing simulated gambling games.
- Impulsivity was measured using the Barratt Impulsiveness Scale-Brief.
- Demographics (e.g., age, gender).

What the researchers found

Over half of the participants were male (55% in the Qualtrics sample vs. 69% in the Email/Advertisement sample). On average, participants were about 15 years old. Participants in the Email/Advertisement sample had higher rates of problem gambling (50%) than the Qualtrics sample (15%).

In both samples, adolescents who engaged in simulated gambling games in the past month were more likely to participate in monetary gambling. Participating in social casino games on apps or social networking sites, free demo games, or games with 'mini' gambling components was linked to all forms of monetary gambling in the Qualtrics sample. Participating in these simulated gambling games was also linked to most of the gambling forms in the Email/Advertisement sample.

Adolescents who participated in simulated gambling in the past month had more problematic gambling symptoms. Spending more money and time on simulated gambling games in the past month was also linked to problem gambling in both samples. This was true even after taking into account the number of monetary gambling forms they played, impulsivity, age, and gender. In addition, adolescents who engaged in more monetary gambling forms were more likely to be at risk of problem gambling.

How you can use this research

Policy makers can use this research to create harm minimization measures targeted to adolescents who play simulated gambling games.

About the researchers

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