

## Research Highlights for Children's Online Gambling: A brief overview of the empirical literature

### Aims

A systematic literature review has been carried out into online gaming addiction in children and adolescents in order to (i) assess the scale of the issue, and (ii) identify behaviours which demonstrate a susceptibility to online gambling.

### Key Findings

- Although there is variation in the participation rates reported in the published studies to date, the small number of surveys showed that a small but significant minority of adolescents gamble online.
- Several studies reported a prevalence rate of around 4% for adolescents who have gambled in the 12 months prior to the study (8% in the UK). However, some have reported a slightly lower figure and others report the rate as being considerably higher (between 8% and 24%). Lower rates of participation were found for the United States and English speaking Canadian provinces, with higher rates being reported for Quebec and Europe (including the UK).
- Evidence suggests that online 'money free' gambling plays an important role for adolescents in conceptualizing and experiencing internet gambling. Over one in three adolescents have been reported to gamble in money-free mode with one large UK study reporting that 28% of 11- to 15-year olds had done so within the last week. Money-free gambling (using social networking sites or 'demo' modes of real gambling sites) introduces children and adolescents to the principles and excitement of gambling without experiencing the consequences of losing money.
- Adolescent internet gamblers were significantly more likely to be problem gamblers compared to those who had never gambled online. This suggests problem gamblers may be more susceptible and/or vulnerable to gambling online. However, it may also be that adolescent problem gamblers gravitate to the internet, adding it as an additional mode of gambling to their general repertoire of gambling behaviours
- The largest and most robust UK adolescent gambling survey of 8,985 schoolchildren (aged 11-15 years) reported that playing money-free gambling games was the single most important predictor of whether the child had gambled for money, and one of the most important predictors of children's problem gambling. However, it should be noted that this relationship is correlational and not causal.
- Young people appear to be very proficient in using and accessing these media and are likely to be increasingly exposed to online gambling opportunities. These young people will therefore require education and guidance to enable them to cope with the challenges of convenience gambling in all its guises. The same information also must be made aware to parents, teachers, health professionals and other practitioners.

## Policy Context

Children and young people spend increasing amounts of time online and have access to many types of online gambling experience. There is concern that risks may be associated with excessive online gambling and that engaging in gambling-like activities are highly associated with problem gambling.

## Methodology

A literature search was conducted using the database *Web of Knowledge*. The following search terms (and their derivatives) were entered in relation to online adolescent gambling: 'adolescent' or 'youth' and 'gambling' or 'gaming' and 'internet' or 'online'. In addition, further studies were identified from supplementary sources, such as *Google Scholar*, and these were added in order to generate a more inclusive literature review. Studies were selected in accordance with the following inclusion criteria. Studies had to (i) contain empirical data (including everything from case studies through to surveys with thousands of participants), (ii) have been published after 2000 (as there were no studies on this topic prior to that date), and (iii) contain some kind of analysis relating to online gambling in adolescence.

## Background

The Internet offers a wide variety of different gambling websites in addition to gambling opportunities via social networking sites. A number of studies have reported that a minority of children and adolescents gamble online including the opportunity to gamble for free (i.e., without money) via the 'demo' or 'practice' modes. There are also many instances of online activities that blur the line between gambling and gaming such as gambling within online video game environments and commercial enterprises such as online penny auctions.

## Sources

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