

The WAGER, Vol. 22(2) - Why do people experiencing gambling problems use social casino games?

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For a long time, excessive gambling meant spending too much time or money at casinos or slot parlors. Today, the gambling environment extends into our home computers and mobile devices. Recently, [The WAGER](#) reviewed a [study](#) that described high risk patterns among social casino gamers. An unanswered question concerns why and how problem gamblers use social casino games. This week, The WAGER reviews a [study](#) by Sally Gainsbury and her colleagues that examines problematic social casino game use among at-risk gamblers.

What was the research question?

Why do people who have problems with gambling say that they use social casino games?

What did the researchers do?

Gainsbury and her colleagues selected a sample of 176 adult social casino gamers from [a previous study](#) about Internet use. All of the selected participants reported having a current gambling-related problem based on a score of 3 or more on the [Problem Gambling Severity Index](#). For the study we're reviewing today, the researchers created a new scale called the Problematic Social Casino Game Use Screen. Participants indicated whether, in the past year, they had experienced five symptoms of DSM-5 Internet Gaming Disorder in relation to their social casino gaming.^[1] The researchers calculated the percent of participants who endorsed each criterion and summed the number of criteria each participant endorsed.

What did they find?

The researchers found that almost half of their sample used social casino games to escape from problems or relieve negative moods (see Figure). Participants endorsed this criterion [significantly](#) more often than the others. In addition, participants who endorsed more criteria played social casino games more often, and spent more money on them, than others.

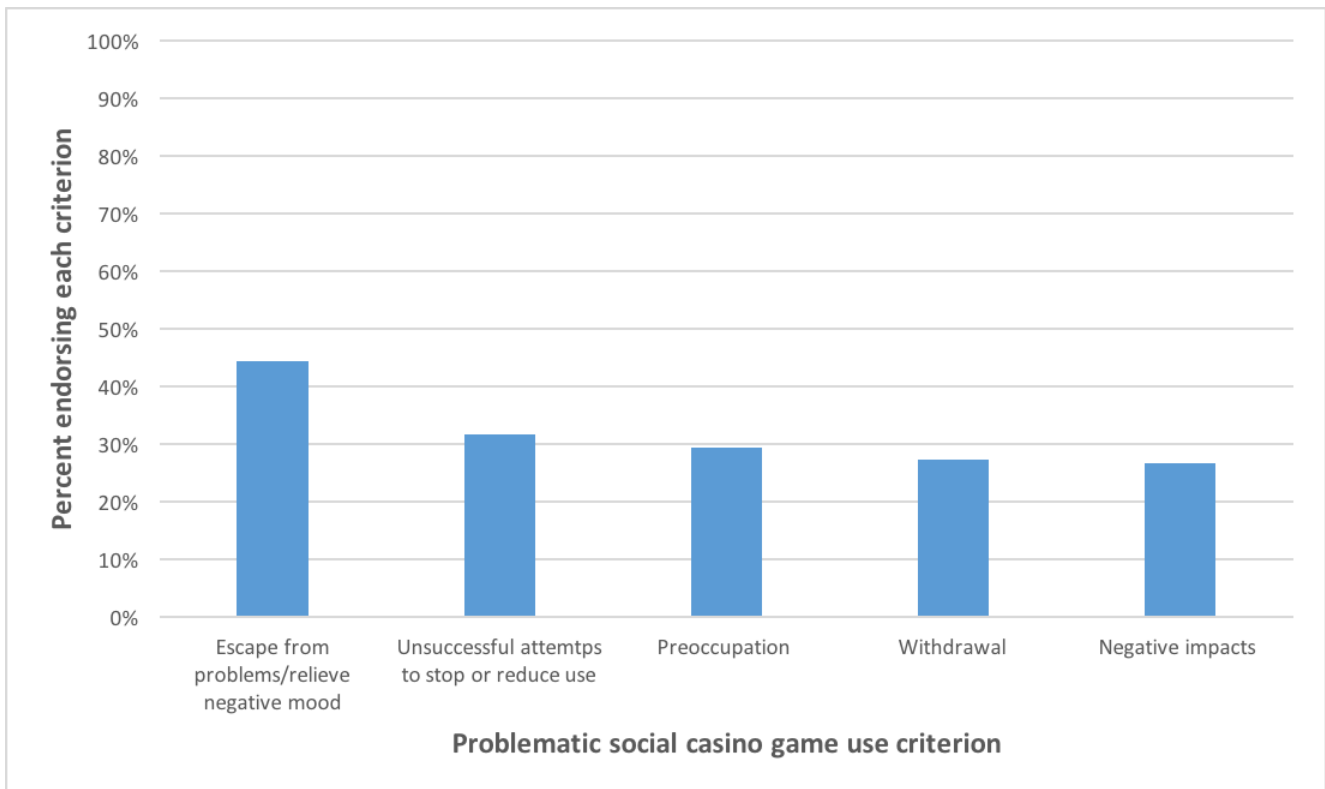


Figure. Participants thinking about their social casino game use in the past 12 months (N = 176). Figure adapted from [Gainsbury et al. \(2016\)](#). It is important to note that the Problematic Social Casino Game Use Screen has not been validated and was not intended to provide a clinical diagnosis, but to measure how problem gamblers interacted with social gambling games. Because this study used a sample of people with high problem gambling scores, these results are also not representative of the general public. [Click image to enlarge.](#)

Why do these findings matter?

This research tells us that some at-risk gamblers are turning to social casino games to cope with their problems and escape from bad feelings, even though social casino games don't give them the opportunity to win real money. And, many at-risk gamblers are experiencing negative consequences from playing social casino games. This is potentially a public health concern, given that we can access social casino games in the palm of our hands. Clinicians who treat people with gambling problems might want to warn their clients of these risks

For more information:

Worried you or a loved one has a gambling problem? Check out the [National Council on Problem Gambling](#) for screening tools and resources. For more of our resources, including gambling screening and self-help tools, [click here](#).

What do you think? Please use the comment link below to provide feedback on this article.

[\[1\]](#) Specifically, participants answered these 5 questions: *Have you used social casino games to escape from problems or to relieve a negative mood? Have you made many unsuccessful attempts to limit time spent on social casino games? Have you had frequent thoughts about or frequent strong urges to use social casino games? Have you felt sad or irritable when you could not use social casino games? and Have you experienced any negative consequences due to social casino games use? (e.g., relationship problems, poor school or work performance, worse physical health).*