

The WAGER, Vol. 22(10) - Social casino games and gambling among Australian adolescents

September 13, 2017

Social casino games (SCGs) combine online gambling-style games (e.g. slots, poker) with social media (e.g. Facebook). SCGs are free to play and therefore are not technically considered gambling. However, many games feature “paywalls” that either require a user to spend real money to continue playing or offer extra content that users can purchase with cash. SCGs might appeal to young people and might be associated with other gambling activity and gambling-related problems. In a 2016 study, Daniel King and his colleagues investigated the relationship between paying to play SCGs and gambling among Australian adolescents. As part of this month’s [Special Series on Youth Risky Behavior](#), The WAGER reviews their work.

What was the research question?

Do adolescents who spend money on SCGs report more gambling activity and problem gambling symptoms compared to those who play SCGs without spending money?

What did the researchers do?

The researchers analyzed data from a larger [project](#) on social media and gambling. The parent project involved an online survey of Australian adolescents between 12 and 17 years old and their parents. A total of 555 adolescents completed the entire surveys, and 130 of those participants had played SCGs and were eligible for the current study. The authors conducted [chi-square tests](#) to determine if those who paid for SCGs responded differently from those who hadn’t on questions related to their gambling activity.

What did they find?

71.2% of paying SCG users reported that they had gambled at least once a month in the past year. In comparison, only 24.4% of non-paying users reported that they had done so. The most common reason why SCG users said that they paid to play was to avoid waiting for or having to earn free credits (42.3%). In all, 65.4% of paying users said that SCGs caused their gambling, compared to 1.3% of their

non-paying peers. Adolescents who had paid for SCGs also were more likely to have experienced all the problem gambling symptoms measured on the [Problem Gambling Severity Index](#) (PGSI) compared to those who had never paid for SCGs (see figure). These differences all were [statistically significant](#).

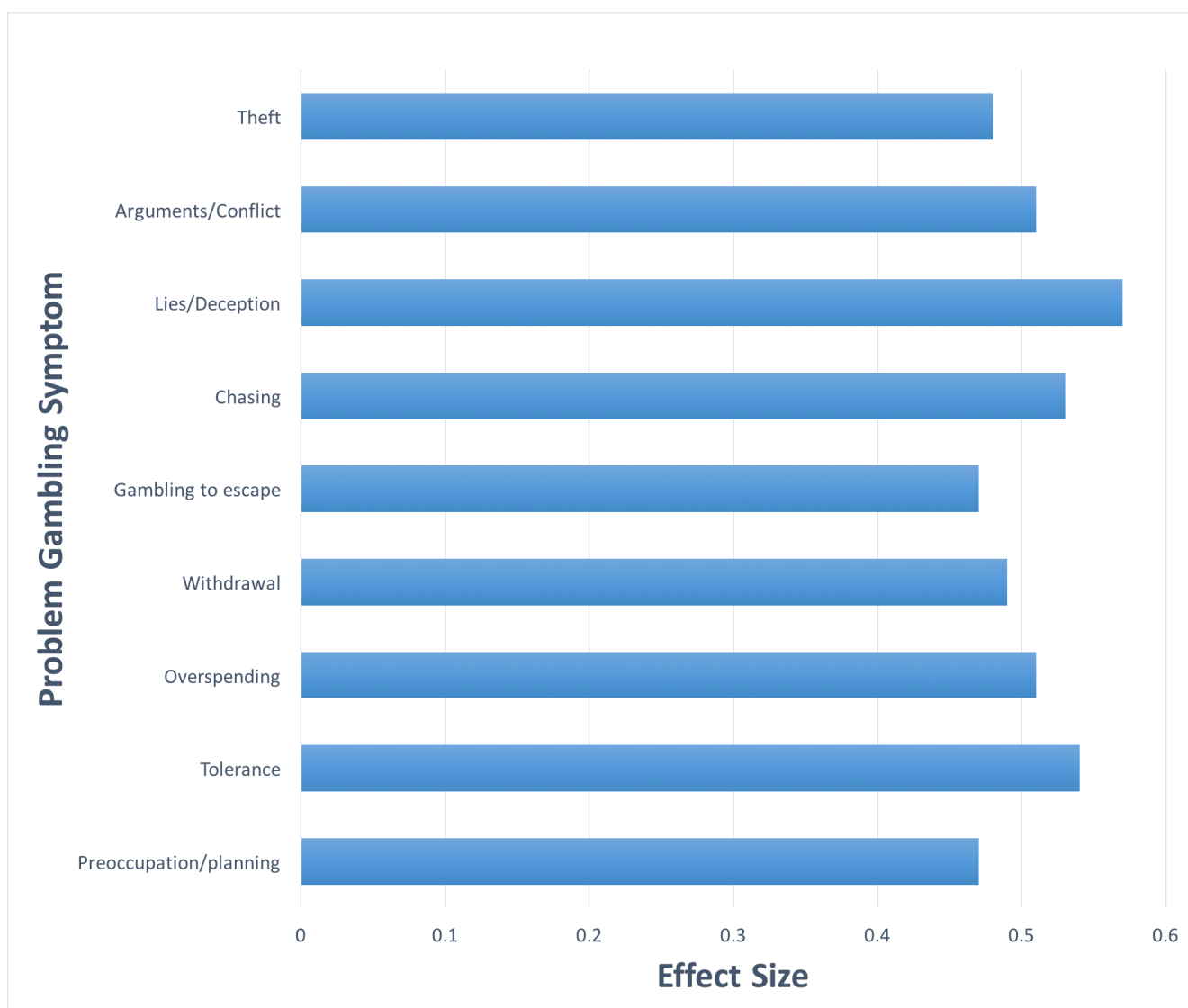


Figure. Pictured are effect sizes for each gambling problem symptom on the PGSI. An effect size greater than 0.5 indicates a large effect - paying SCG users were far more likely to report experiencing a symptom than non-paying SCG users. The specific questions that measure each symptom can be found [here](#). Click image to enlarge.

Why do these findings matter?

Adolescents who spent money on SCGs were more likely to gamble with real money and might have had a greater risk of developing gambling problems. The fact that avoiding wait-times was the most common reason participants gave for paying real money on SCGs might be revealing. If adolescents pay for SCGs to avoid distress that comes from their play being discontinued, this might be a sign

of impulsivity; further study is necessary to test if this is the case. More research will also be needed to determine if regulations would be appropriate to protect underage SCG players from harmful impacts and whether SCG paywalls are exploitative.

Every study has limitations. What are the limitations in this study?

Only adolescents whose parents were willing to let them complete the online survey completed the present study. This means that the results might not be representative of Australian adolescents as a whole. Although participants reported if they believed their SCG play preceded their gambling behavior, we cannot know if this is truly the case as the data are [cross-sectional](#) - that is, collected all at once.

For more information:

The [National Council on Problem Gambling](#) has some resources available if you are concerned about gambling problems.

— Rhiannon Chou Wiley

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