

The WAGER, Vol. 29(12) - What motivates adolescents to refrain from gambling?

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Although underage gambling is a prevalent [public health concern](#) in Australia, around [50% of adolescents](#) still report no past-year gambling. Understanding the reasons why those adolescents refrain from gambling is important because gambling at a young age [increases the risk](#) of potential gambling problems in adulthood. This week, The WAGER reviews a [study by Nerilee Hing and colleagues](#) that examined the social determinants that influence adolescents' decisions to not participate in gambling in Australia.

What was the research question?

What are the reasons why adolescents choose to refrain from gambling?

What did the researchers do?

The researchers recruited 14 adolescent non-gamblers aged 12 - 17 years from New South Wales in Australia. Seven participants completed individual interviews, while the other 7 participated in online group discussions. All participants were asked about their gambling-related experiences and attitudes and any factors that facilitated or hindered gambling. The researchers then used qualitative approaches to identify key themes, including [grounded theory](#) and [thematic analysis](#) methods.

What did they find?

The researchers identified 4 themes: (1) environmental, (2) peer, (3) parental, and (4) individual factors (see Figure). Environmental factors included age restrictions on gambling. Participants indicated that being under the legal age to gamble was the main reason they did not consider gambling. Peer-related factors included having friends who were not interested in gambling. One participant mentioned that they did not talk about gambling with their friends often, so they “tend not to associate with it...this has also discouraged [them] from gambling. [They] have other interests and activities to do that don't involve gambling.” Parental factors included having parents who did not gamble or had negative opinions about gambling. One participant mentioned that their “parents don't gamble, and don't

have anything good to say about gambling, [which] has influenced [them] a lot.” Finally, individual factors included not wanting to spend money on gambling, lack of interest in gambling, and fear of harmful consequences. For example, one participant noted that gambling “can ruin lives and families, it puts people in debt and ruins whatever they have built their life up to.”

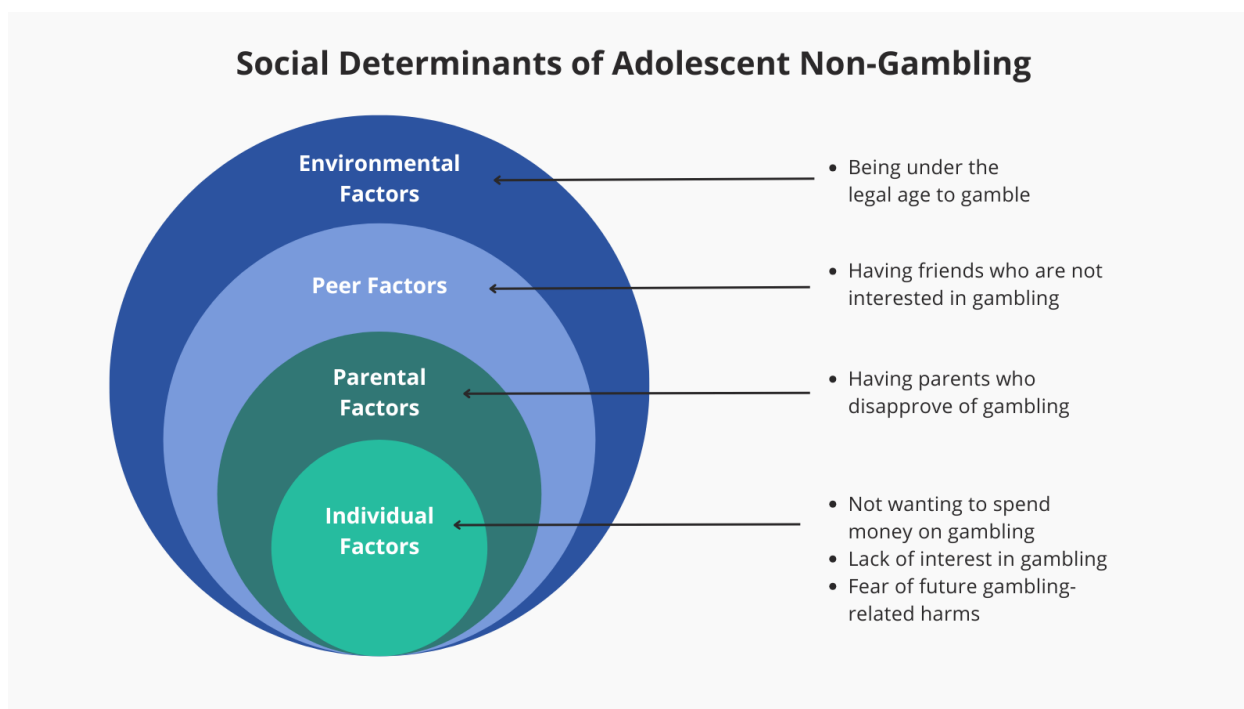


Figure. An overview of the reasons that participants identified for choosing not to gamble. Adapted from Figure 1 in Hing et al. (2024). Click image to enlarge.

Why do these findings matter?

Adolescents cited several social determinants that shaped their choices to not gamble, including parental and peer influences. These findings can be used to inform protective strategies and interventions to reduce underage gambling. Potential interventions include establishing youth education programs to increase [financial literacy](#) and to raise awareness about gambling risks, as well as disseminating resources for parents to support them in providing their [children guidance on gambling](#).

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

This study was conducted in Australia, so the findings might not [generalize](#) to adolescent non-gamblers from other countries with different gambling environments. Additionally, most participants reported having limited exposure to gambling from their family and friends, so future research and interventions should target those who may be at a higher risk of experiencing gambling harms.

For more information:

Individuals who are concerned about their gambling behaviors or simply want to know more about problem gambling may benefit from visiting the [National Council on Problem Gambling](#) or [Gamblers Anonymous](#). Additional resources can be found at The BASIS [Addiction Resources](#) page.

— Annette Siu
