

The WAGER, Vol. 30(1) - Adolescent perspectives: Strategies to help protect this age group from gambling harm

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Many adolescents may be exposed to gambling without realizing it. For example, youth who play video games may encounter chance-based mini-games that resemble actual gambling activities like roulette and blackjack, or they may purchase or be rewarded with mystery, in-game prizes, like loot boxes. These [simulated gambling activities](#) can lead to [at-risk or problem gambling](#) among adolescents. But how do we effectively safeguard young people from experiencing gambling harm? This week, The WAGER reviews a [study by Lisa Lole and colleagues](#) that identified adolescents' views on how they can be better protected from gambling-related harm.

What was the research question?

According to adolescents, what strategies can be used to protect them from gambling-related harm?

What did the researchers do?

The researchers used recruitment agencies and online advertisements to obtain a [sample](#) of 89 adolescents aged 12-17 from Australia, and then surveyed them about gambling experiences via one-on-one interviews or an online discussion forum. Participants were screened for problem gambling using the [DSM-IV-MR-J](#) criteria and also answered open-ended questions about their gambling engagement. Participants then responded to questions about how adolescents could be protected from gambling harm (1) within their homes, (2) at school, (3) through advertisement/marketing practices, and (4) on a broader regulatory level. The researchers used the [thematic analysis](#) approach to analyze participants' responses.

What did they find?

The most widely-recognized theme among participants was the desire for honesty about how gambling — and its associated harms — is communicated to them and

represented in the media. Participants felt that rather than simply prohibiting gambling activities, parents can protect their children from gambling harm by including them in conversations about gambling and educating them about risks and responsible gambling practices (see Figure). Similarly, they felt that schools should use lived experience narratives to educate students about the addictive nature of gambling and the reality of gambling odds. On a broader scale, participants noted that gambling advertisements can be overly positive and misleading, and should not be broadcast on mediums that are frequently used by adolescents such as gaming and social media platforms. Instead, marketing campaigns should provide a more realistic understanding of gambling, including potentially negative outcomes, how to resist the temptation to gamble, and where to access help. Lastly, participants argued for gambling regulation reform, particularly within simulated gambling activities. They advocated for limits on in-game gambling features and in-game spending, as well as stricter age limits.

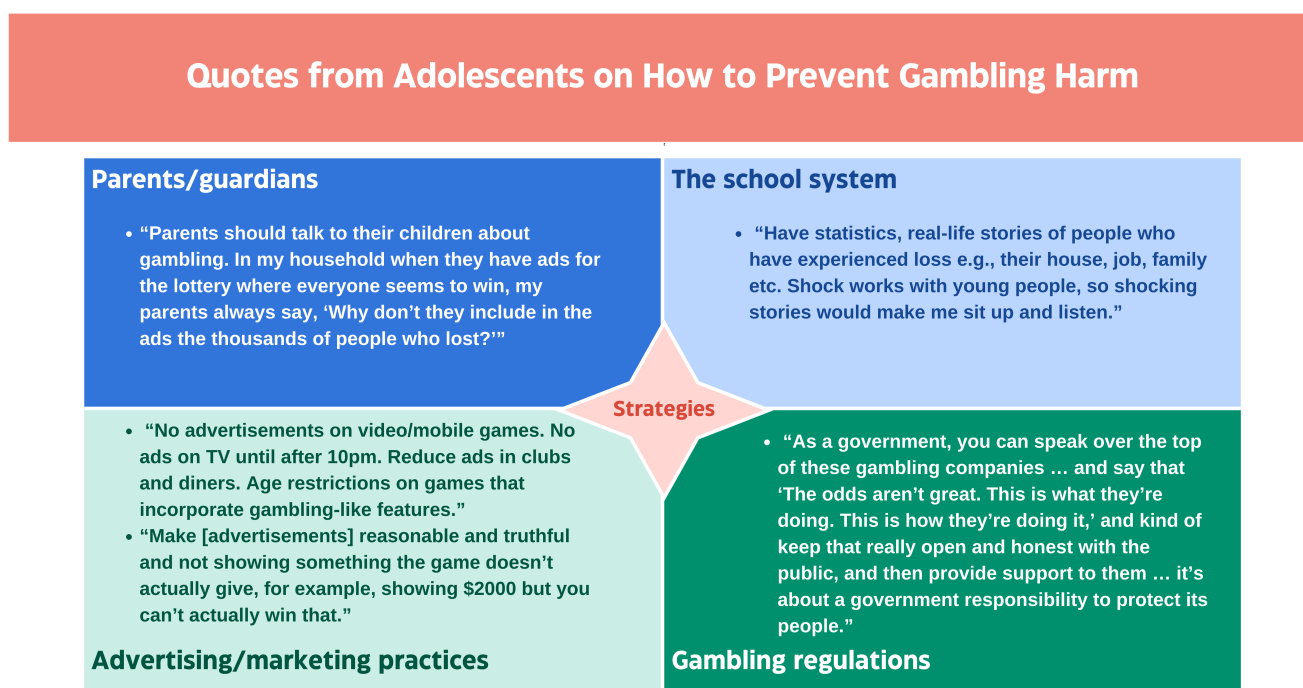


Figure. Direct quotes from participants on how to prevent gambling harm among adolescents, separated into four categories: (1) strategies that can be implemented with parents/guardians, (2) within the school system, (3) through advertising/marketing practices, and (4) through gambling regulations. Click image to enlarge.

Why do these findings matter?

These findings suggest that adolescents recognize the need for a collective response to gambling prevention and education, with special considerations for

young people. This public health effort needs to go [beyond any approach](#) that places the burden solely on the individual gambler to “gamble responsibly.” Instead, it should be the responsibility of various stakeholders to protect today’s youth from gambling-related harm, including parents/guardians, the school system (e.g., teachers and counselors), and gambling operators/regulators.

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

The researchers did not use [representative sampling](#), the sample size was relatively small, and all participants were from Australia. So, the findings might not be [generalizable](#) to adolescents from other areas. This study also relied on [self-reported data](#), which could be subject to [recall](#) or [social desirability](#) bias.

For more information:

Do you think that you or someone you know might have a gambling problem? Visit the [National Council on Problem Gambling](#) for screening tools and resources. For additional resources, including gambling and self-help tools, visit our [Addiction Resources](#) page.

— Nakita Sconsoni, MSW

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