Exploring children's experiences in community gambling venues: A qualitative study with children aged 6-16 in regional New South Wales

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Abstract

Issue addressed: Community-based gambling venues provide a range of activities for children alongside adult products, such as gambling. However, there has been little examination of children's experiences with, and exposure to, a range of gambling and non-gambling activities within venues.

Methods: Visual sociology methods were used to measure unprompted recall, prompted recall, current use and intended adult use of activities in community gambling venues in 44 children who attended venues. Qualitative data were also collected to gain further insight into children's perceptions of the venue and the activities within.

Results: Children displayed high unprompted and prompted recall of gambling and nongambling activities within the venue. Children indicated positive perceptions of the venue overall. Just over half of the children (52.3%) reported current use of gambling activities in the venue. The large majority of the children indicated that they would attend community gambling venues as an adult (90.9%).

Conclusion: This research provides a starting point in understanding the extent to which children are exposed to gambling products in community gambling venues.

So what?: This research will be important for researchers, policy makers and practitioners in developing health promotion initiatives to prevent children from being exposed to gambling products in community settings.

Summary: This qualitative study aimed to examine children's experiences within community gambling venues. The study found that children displayed high recall of gambling and non-gambling activities within venues and indicated positive perceptions of the venue overall. Comprehensive approaches are needed to prevent children from being exposed to gambling products in community settings.

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Key words

Children; gambling; community based gambling venues; electronic gambling machines; evidence based practice; health advocacy; rural and regional health.
Introduction

Harmful gambling has been identified as an important public health problem, with gambling losses estimated at about $23.6 billion annually in Australia. While previous gambling research has been criticised for focusing on ‘responsible gambling behaviours’, more recent research has explored the range of socio-cultural, environmental, industry, and political factors that may normalise the use of gambling products and venues. Thomas and colleagues [2018], define the normalisation of gambling as:

“The interplay of socio-cultural, environmental, commercial and political processes which influence how different gambling activities and products are made available and accessible, encourage recent and regular use, and become an accepted part of everyday life for individuals, their families, and communities.” (p. 53-54, adapted from Parker [2013]).

While this definition provides an important step forward in conceptually understanding the factors that may contribute to the normalisation of gambling activities and products, there has been very limited research investigating how factors within gambling venues may shape or normalise a) gambling attitudes and behaviours, and, b) the socio-cultural acceptance of harmful gambling products within community settings. For example, research with adults has identified that increased access to and availability of gambling venues within local communities influences gambling behaviours, and that non-gambling activities may soften the perceptions of risk associated with gambling products within these venues. Other recent research indicates that while adults who attend community gambling venues primarily attended for non-gambling reasons (for example cheap meals), many of these individuals also reported using gambling products located in the venue, including electronic gambling machines (EGMs), which is associated with increased gambling harm. However, there is much less information about the range of factors that may contribute to shaping children’s attitudes and behaviours towards gambling products located within community settings. Given that young people may regularly frequent community gambling venues, understanding their perceptions of these venues and their attitudes towards the activities within venues, is important in developing comprehensive health promotion driven responses to gambling harm prevention.
Research has demonstrated that children are regularly exposed to gambling products and the marketing for these products within everyday community settings. While research has predominantly focused on children’s exposure to promotions for sports betting products, environmental cues, marketing messages, and perceptions of adults’ engagement with these products can also have a significant impact on positively shaping young people’s gambling attitudes and future consumption intentions. While some community gambling venues specifically provide a range of non-gambling activities specifically for children (for example playgrounds) there is much less understanding about how non-gambling and gambling cues may influence children’s attitudes within these venues. For example, do young people perceive community gambling venues as positive for the community because of the range of child friendly activities, and is there any evidence that children who hold positive perceptions towards these venues are also likely to say that they will attend the venue and use gambling products within the venues when they are older?

Furthermore, researchers have suggested that community gambling venues may be influential in building positive perceptions for children because of the role of these venues in the social and cultural capital of communities. This includes facilitating a sense of community belonging through a range of non-gambling activities, and through the promotion of venues as ‘safe and family friendly venues that cater for the whole community’ (p. 164).

Researchers note that:

“Even if the club environment encourages socialising through sports activities, gambling activities are an integral, a customary, and acceptable family entertainment activity, especially in areas where there is a lack of alternative affordable entertainment venues.” (p. 165).

While we do not argue that venues aim to directly encourage children’s consumption of gambling products, research indicates that children are exposed to gambling products within these community settings, and as such it is important to examine the factors that may shape children’s attitudes and behaviours towards both gambling products and the settings where these are located. Focusing on children who attend community gambling venues, the research aimed to explore three research questions:
1. What is the unprompted and prompted recall of gambling and non-gambling activities within the venue by children, and what are their attitudes towards these activities?
2. What are children’s overall perceptions of community gambling venues, including their value within community settings?
3. Is there evidence that positive perceptions towards venues may influence children’s intentions to visit community gambling venues as adults, and to use the gambling facilities within these venues?

Methods

The data used for this investigation was part of a larger project which explored the factors that shape children’s attitudes towards gambling in community gambling venues. Data collection methods were deliberately designed to be child-friendly with the interview procedure designed to allow the child to engage with the researcher and prioritised free narrative and reflection on their experiences. This research used data collection methods that have been shown to be effective with children in other gambling research studies, as well as research methodologies drawn from other public health studies involving children.

Approval was obtained from the Deakin University Human Research Ethics Committee prior to the study commencing.

Setting

This study specifically focused on children who attended community based clubs with EGMs in regional New South Wales (NSW). In regional NSW, clubs provide community sporting, recreation and cultural facilities to the communities in which they are located. Online marketing for these venues promote the clubs as family-friendly and child appropriate locations, these venues also derive an estimated two thirds of overall venue revenue from EGMs. EGMs are the gambling product linked with the most economic and social harm, with NSW residents losing $6.1 billion per year on this form of gambling. This study chose to focus on a specific regional area due to the limited research conducted on gambling in regional areas, the high concentration of EGM venues and high EGM losses in this particular area, and research with rural communities which suggests that these venues are
part of the socio-cultural capital of the community. While the majority of revenue for clubs comes from EGMs, these venues also contain a range of other gambling products including bingo, Keno, raffles and sports betting (for further description see Bestman and colleagues [2016]), and are licenced to sell alcohol products.

Recruitment

The sample included families who had visited a local club in the area studied that contained EGMs, in the previous 12 months. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling, local businesses and snowball sampling techniques. The study was explained to parents and children and verbal assent was gained from the children before the interview began. Parents provided written consent for their child’s participation in the project. Family groups were reimbursed with a $20 grocery voucher for the time taken to participate in the study.

Data collection

Face-to-face qualitative interviews were conducted with 27 family groups between April and October 2016. Each took between 45-80 minutes and with the consent of participants, interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. Data presented in this paper relate specifically to the data collected for children in the study. Demographic data were collected from parents about each child’s age, gender, postcode and frequency of attendance at venues. Data were collected from children using three specific methods. First, children were asked to draw the venue they attended. The researchers provided minimal instruction regarding how this should be done, so that children were not unduly influenced in their responses. However, given previous research that suggests not all children are comfortable drawing, participants were also told that if they did not want to draw they could write about what they saw at the venue instead. It was explained to participants that there were no right or wrong way to complete the activity, but that they should complete it based on their own experiences. Where there were multiple children from the one family, the researchers encouraged children to think about their own experiences in the venues. Children completed this activity away from parents and researchers and were given as long as they wished to complete their drawing. Following the drawing activity, children were asked to explain their drawing to the researcher. This activity was used to assess unprompted recall of the venue.
Second, children were presented with a laminated picture board containing 24 images of products and activities they might see at a community gambling venue, referred henceforth as activities. The images selected for inclusion were based on those found in a previous scan of venue websites in the local area,7 and were grouped into:

a) Children or family-related activities including, children’s areas, children’s discos, children’s meal promotions, family days, family meals, family prizes, games, and a playground.

b) Gambling or alcohol activities including bingo, EGM area, Keno, sports betting, raffles, and the bar.

c) Other recreational activities including a bowling green, cheap meals promotions, golf course, live music, meeting friends, restaurant, special occasions, sports facilities, television, and watching sport.

To assess the prompted recall of activities, researchers asked children to indicate using the picture board, the activities they had seen before in the venue. Children were also asked to identify the activities they had used before in the venue (measuring current use), and were asked which activities children intended to use in the venue when they were adults (measuring intended use as an adult). The children were told they could select as many or as few items on the picture board as they wished. A photograph of each picture board and drawing was taken before progressing to the qualitative section of the interview.

Finally, qualitative open-ended questions were used to explore children’s perceptions of the venue. These included what children liked or did not like at the venue, what they perceived the venue did for the community, whether children thought they would attend the venue as adults and what activities they would participate in. If there were more than one child present in the interview, the researcher ensured that each child had the opportunity to answer each question separately.

Data analysis

Demographic data were analysed using descriptive statistics. Postcodes were used to calculate Socio-Economic Indicators for Areas (SEIFA) status through the Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage for each family. Each postcode was given a
score between one and 10, where one represents the lowest 10% of socio-demographic areas and 10 represents the highest 10% of socio-demographic areas.\(^{29,30}\)

To analyse the drawings, the research team employed an analysis method suggested by Horstman and colleagues [2008],\(^{31}\) where each drawing was analysed as a whole and analysis included any visual aspects, written text within the drawing and verbal explanations provided by children. Drawings were initially coded based on the categories identified by a previous study of venue websites.\(^7\) Data were then further coded inductively based on the specific items children had presented in their drawings. Qualitative data based on children’s discussions of the content of the drawings were used to guide the researcher’s interpretation to identify children’s own meanings in their drawings.\(^{31}\) The research team met and discussed the coding framework. Codes were then quantified and analysed using descriptive statistics. Data from the picture board activity were quantified and entered into SPSS version 19. Descriptive statistics including frequency counts were performed to determine the activities children had identified in the three components of the picture board activity. Qualitative data were also used to provide additional insights regarding children’s experiences within venues. Transcripts were read and themes were developed and compared across children’s responses, using a thematic approach to analyse the data\(^{32}\) to identify children’s perceptions towards the venue, activities within the venue, and future use of venue.

**Results**

**Sample characteristics**

A total of 44 children from 27 families participated in the study, ranging in age from six to 16 years with an average age of 11.93 years (SD 2.6). Most children were aged 11 years or older (n=32, 72.7%) and just under two thirds of children were male (n= 28, 63.6%). Families resided in a range of SEIFA areas, with six children (22.2%) in the lowest three deciles; 19 (70.4%) in the middle four deciles and two (7.4%) in the top three deciles. All children had visited a community gambling venue at least once in the year prior to the study, with 25 (56.8%) attending less than once a month, ten (22.7%) attending once a month, and nine (20.5%) attending more than once a month with their family.
Recall of activities within community gambling venues

Table 1 presents data relating to children’s unprompted and prompted recall of activities in the venue. Just over half of children displayed unprompted recall of at least one children’s activity in their drawing (n=25, 56.8%). The most common activity included was the playground, drawn by a third of children (n=15, 34.1%). Over one third of children (n=17, 38.6%) included at least one gambling or alcohol activity in the unprompted recall activity, with the bar (14, 31.8%) being the most recalled activity, followed by Keno (n= 6, 13.6%) and the EGM area (n= 6, 13.6%). Some children included specific detail in their drawings, for example one boy aged 12 labelled an “Irish bar” in his drawing. Five children (11.4%) drew beer and wine on the bar in their drawings. Eight children (61.5% of children who referred to a gambling activity) included multiple gambling activities in their drawing.

In the prompted recall activity, children selected between two and 23 items on the picture board, with an average of 13.8 items per child (4.9 SD). Over 90 per cent of children (n=41, 93.2%) recalled at least one gambling or alcohol activity (bar) when prompted, with over half of children (n=26, 59.1%) recalling having seen more than three adult activities in the venue when prompted. Children also had high recall of other activities in the venue with the restaurant being the most recalled activity for both unprompted (n=34, 77.3%) and prompted (40, 90.9%) recall.

Table 1
Unprompted and prompted recall of activities within the venue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Unprompted recall</th>
<th>Prompted recall</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Child or family activities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any children’s activity</td>
<td>25 (56.8%)</td>
<td>44 (100.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Playground</td>
<td>15 (34.1%)</td>
<td>35 (79.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s area</td>
<td>7 (15.9%)</td>
<td>30 (68.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Games</td>
<td>5 (11.4%)</td>
<td>28 (63.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family meals</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>34 (77.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children’s meal deals</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>28 (63.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disco</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18 (40.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family prizes</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12 (27.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family days</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9 (20.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other*</td>
<td>9 (20.5%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Alcohol or gambling activities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any gambling or alcohol activity</td>
<td>17 (38.6%)</td>
<td>41 (93.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keno</td>
<td>6 (13.6%)</td>
<td>35 (79.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Children</td>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EGM area</strong></td>
<td>6 (13.6%)</td>
<td>32 (72.7%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Raffles</strong></td>
<td>3 (6.8%)</td>
<td>31 (70.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sports Betting</strong></td>
<td>1 (2.3%)</td>
<td>25 (56.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Racing*</td>
<td>1 (2.3%)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bingo</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7 (15.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Any gambling activity</strong></td>
<td>13 (29.5%)</td>
<td>39 (88.6%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bar</strong></td>
<td>14 (31.8%)</td>
<td>38 (86.4%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol*</td>
<td>5 (11.4%)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other activities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Any other activity</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Restaurant</strong></td>
<td>34 (77.3%)</td>
<td>40 (90.9%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TV</strong></td>
<td>11 (25.0%)</td>
<td>36 (81.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Watching sport</strong></td>
<td>4 (9.1%)</td>
<td>35 (79.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Live music</strong></td>
<td>1 (2.3%)</td>
<td>22 (50.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Bowling green</strong></td>
<td>1 (2.3%)</td>
<td>20 (45.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cheap meals</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>31 (70.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Special occasions</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>26 (59.1%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meeting friends</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22 (50.0%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sports facilities</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13 (29.5%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Golf course</strong></td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1 (2.3%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other</strong></td>
<td>9 (20.5%)</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number provided reflects the number of children who selected item. Percentages represent the number of children that selected item, proportional to the total sample (N=44).

*Items emerged from analysis of children’s drawings. This was not measured in picture board activity.

This measure reflects both drawing of the EGM area and EGMs.

Children’s attitudes towards the non-gambling activities within community gambling venues

Figure 1 contains children’s current use of child and family activities within the venue and their intended future use of these activities as an adult. While almost all children indicated current use of at least one child or family activity at the venue (n=42, 95.5%), children’s intended future use of these activities decreased for all activities except for family days and family prizes. Just over half of children (n= 25, 56.8%) indicated an intention to use the children or family activities in the venue as an adult. While the most commonly mentioned activity was attending for family meals (n=21, 47.7%), a small number of children indicated they would use children’s activities such as the playground (n=5, 11.4%), children’s area (n=3, 6.8%) or children’s meal deals (n=5, 11.4%) as an adult with their own children. There were no differences seen across age, gender or frequency of attendance.
Note: The numbers above each column represent the number of children who selected each activity.

Children’s attitudes towards the gambling activities within community gambling venues

Figure 2 contains children’s current use of gambling activities within the venue and intended future use of these activities as an adult. Half of children (n= 23, 52.3%) indicated that they currently used at least one gambling activity while in the venue, with raffles being the most common gambling activity used (n=19, 43.2%). Several children described participating in gambling activities with family members while in the venue:

“I do play Keno but I never hand it in. I get my pop to hand it in”. Boy, 10 years, attended less than once a month.

Some children provided positive descriptions of the gambling activities within the venue:

“I like the raffles because it’s fun to watch it.” Girl, 11 years, attended less than once a month.

In contrast to their intended future adult consumption of child and family activities, children’s intended future adult consumption of gambling activities increased for all activities, with the biggest increase seen for intended use of the gaming area (EGMs). While no differences were
seen across age, gender or frequency of attendance, children who indicated current consumption of gambling were more likely to indicate intended adult use of these activities.

Many children who indicated current use of gambling activities, for example raffles, referred to their previous experience with these gambling activities as their rationale for gambling as adults. For example, one boy aged 16 said he would participate in gambling activities as an adult because “they are enjoyable”, while another boy, aged eight years said he would use the raffles because “I like to win stuff”. Some children said they were interested in trying adult gambling products because these were activities they were not allowed to currently use. For example, one girl aged 12 who did not choose any gambling activities said she would attend the venue for special occasions because “that’s what we do with Mum and Dad”, however her brother aged 14 said he would use raffles and Keno gambling activities “because they’re what I’ve seen other adults do”. A small number of children indicated some knowledge of how they would gamble as adults. For example, one boy aged 15 said he would gamble on raffles because he perceived he would be given free raffle tickets with food receipts. Another child aged 14 who said he would try EGMs as an adult also commented on wanting to use the adult only areas in the venue:

“So if I didn’t have kids I’d go to the areas where only adults can go where you watch sport and then I think there’s sports betting in there, I’m not sure…I know that it’s sport everywhere around there so they’ve got little TVs everywhere and it’s just sport, different sort of sports on.” Boy, 14 years, attended at least once a month.
Children had positive attitudes towards the venues they had visited, including that the venue was a “nice environment”, or “fun”. When describing their attitudes, most described the playground, and the restaurant or food items as their main reasons for liking the venue. One ten year old boy said that he liked that “you can just play around wherever you want really”, while others commented that the venues were “family friendly”. Children had a range of positive associations with venues, particularly when they related to family events and activities. Some stated they attended the venue as part of family rituals such as raffle night every Friday, or special celebratory events such as birthdays. Some children specifically noted the role of the club in facilitating these activities:

“I think that it’s a nice thing to learn to get out and celebrate something or even just have a set idea of gathering with family...When someone mentions that we’re going to the club it’s often a real sense of – it’s very good to think about. Like it’s just something we all look forward to and we see it as a special occasion even though we do go quite frequently.” Girl, 14 years, attended more than once a month.
Some children described the broader positive community impact of venues for local communities. For example, children described the contributions that venues made to the sponsoring of sport (and particularly junior sport). This included one ten year old boy who referred to his local venue’s ownership of sporting fields. Other children listed specific sporting teams sponsored by the venue, including football, soccer and netball teams. One boy aged 12 years referred to school based football teams that were sponsored by venues:

“I know they support tons of schools because when we verse them in the gala days...they had their school jerseys on and it’s like ‘Sponsored by [venue]’”. Boy, 12 years, attended once a month.

A small number of children described broader community contributions from venues. For example one boy aged 16 years stated that venues “bring everyone together and raise money for local causes”.

While children were also asked about things that they did not like at the venue, few children were able to provide a response. Those who did often focused on the noise or crowds at the venue. For example, one adolescent boy stated that the activities for smaller children should be separated from eating areas so as not to disturb other diners, and an adolescent girl stated that she did not like that sport was constantly shown in the bistro. Only a small number of children stated that provision of gambling or alcohol in the venue could be negative. For example one girl aged nine years said she didn’t like gambling and betting because “some people go over the top with it”, while another boy aged 16 said he didn’t like that Keno was shown on televisions “right next to where all the kids are” because “it should be in a separate area”.

The majority of children indicated that they would attend the venue as an adult (n=40, 90.9%). Most children said without prompting that they would attend with family or friends. When prompted, some children said they would go with their families for events like special occasions or with their family if they “had to”. One boy aged 11 said he would go to the venue for dinner if he had a girlfriend. Other children said they would attend the venue as adults with their own families. For example, one boy said he would take his children to the venue for their birthday while another explained:
“It would be fun to take your kids there so you could have a little meetup with friends, and have their kids to play around in the play area.” Boy 10 years, attended less than once a month.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the factors that influence children’s perceptions of community gambling venues and the gambling products within. The study raises three points for discussion.

First, while it is no surprise that children recall children’s activities and other aspects of the venues that they attend, one third of children showed unprompted recall of gambling activities, with half indicating that they currently engage in some gambling activities within the venue. Although it is illegal for children to participate in gambling and for adults to facilitate gambling for children under 18, the reported use of products such as Keno within dining areas may be important to consider when exploring the factors that contribute to shaping children’s attitudes and behaviours towards gambling products and environments. Although, as with other research, children may not be physically placing bets within venues, children perceive that they are participating in gambling activities. While research shows that children’s initiation into gambling may often be through their family, we know much less about the social and cultural contexts behind children’s introduction to gambling. Further settings based investigations are required that examine the role of the venue in facilitating gambling behaviours through the presence of gambling in locations which are also considered to be family friendly. This could also include the potential for health promotion measures, such as eliminating the co-location of gambling in all areas that are accessible to children. We would caution that the current use of gambling products such as Keno, raffles and bingo by children and their families may play a role in normalising gambling for children by becoming part of their everyday experience within venues that are perceived to be positive locations. While EGMs are considered to be the most harmful gambling product, the emphasis on EGM product harms may create the perception that it is acceptable to expose children to other forms of gambling, such as raffles and Keno which are in areas where children attend. Further research should also specifically examine whether perceptions of lower intensity gambling products contribute to children’s perceptions of risk associated with higher intensity gambling products.
Second, children in this study had positive perceptions of the venues they attended primarily due to the non-gambling activities within venues and the social rituals associated with these activities. While research has often focused on the role of advertising,7, 15 the current research indicates that family behaviours and social rituals within venues may also contribute to shaping children’s gambling attitudes and behaviours. Further research is needed to explore the long-term effects of positive perceptions of gambling venues for children, and particularly whether children’s perceptions of venues as family-friendly and social rituals within them, act to reduce the perceived risk associated with gambling products. This will be important in understanding how social rituals may reinforce and embed gambling behaviours into the ‘habitus’ (practices) within venues.36 Future research should also observe whether there are differences in attitudes towards gambling of children who attend and who do not attend community gambling venues.

Finally, the majority of children in this study said they would continue attending venues as adults, with half of children indicating they would use gambling activities in the venue as an adult. Recent research that has found that adults primarily attended community gambling venues for non-gambling activities, such as use of the restaurant; however adults who attended venues regularly were more likely to report that they also gambled on EGMs.12 Other data also indicates that half of EGM users have dinner at venues while gambling.37 While children who indicated intended use of gambling products may be at increased risk of gambling harm, children who do not specifically indicate future participation in gambling activities may still be at risk through their exposure to gambling products within community venues. Given that exposure to advertising can increase product initiation and reduce perceptions of harm,38, 39 this research provides a starting point into the investigation of children’s exposure and perceptions of harm towards gambling products in community gambling venues. It is also useful to consider the role of children’s non-gambling activities in encouraging parents to view community gambling venues as child appropriate spaces. Given that children are not responsible for the decision to attend community gambling venues, researchers should examine how the interplay of commercial, socio-cultural and environmental factors may shape parental attitudes and encourage attendance at community gambling venues. This will be important in disrupting the pathway to normalisation and ensuring that both parents and children understand the risks associated with gambling products in environments that may traditionally be perceived as less harmful.
This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted using a small study sample in one specific geographic area of Australia. It should also be noted that this sample contained children who currently attend community gambling venues, with a high proportion of children who indicated current consumption of gambling products, with no comparison group who do not attend venues. While the methodologies employed may be time and resource intensive, further research should seek to expand this study and explore children’s recall across different geographic areas. Further, research should seek to compare children’s perceptions of gambling spaces in a sample of children who attend the same venue to determine additional factors that may contribute to children’s understanding of adult gambling products and behaviours. Finally, this preliminary research suggests that children may be aware of adult products in a setting they perceive to be positive; however further research should investigate children’s behaviour longitudinally to determine whether there is a relationship between children’s attendance at venues containing gambling products and adult gambling behaviours.

Conclusion

This research has found that children who attend community gambling venues had high recall of a range of activities within the environment, including gambling and non-gambling activities. Findings support the hypothesis that non-gambling activities in community gambling venues play a role in shaping children’s perceptions of venues and the gambling activities within. This research provides a starting point for further examination into how gambling may become normalised for children that attend community gambling venues. This will be important in developing comprehensive health promotion strategies to prevent children who are exposed to gambling environments from experiencing gambling related harm as adults.

References


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