

What do children observe and learn from televised sports betting advertisements? A qualitative study among Australian children

Hannah Pitt,¹ Samantha L. Thomas,¹ Amy Bestman,¹ Mike Daube,² Jeffrey Derevensky³

Sports betting is a rapidly emerging sector of the gambling industry. In Australia, which has the largest per capita gambling spend in the world,¹ sports betting is one of the few forms of gambling that has shown a substantial increase in participation in recent years.² For example, although sports betting is not the largest sector of the gambling industry, in 2014-2015 Australians spent more than \$800 million on regulated sports betting – a 30% increase from the previous time period.³ Although there is very limited research into sports betting, the recent Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia project (a nationally representative longitudinal study) found that 3% of participants gambled on sports at least monthly.⁴ A Victorian study by Thomas and colleagues [2017] found that one-third of participants had gambled on sports during the past twelve months, with 14% of these people gambling on sports at least weekly.⁵ Roy Morgan Research [2016] found that 1 in 15 people who watched either the Australian Football League (AFL) or National Rugby League (NRL) grand finals placed a bet.⁶ Young men (aged 25–34 years) reported the highest gambling rates on these events, with just under 10% of viewers gambling on at least one of the grand finals.⁶ Increases in consumer spending on betting have been matched by significant increases in the amount of money spent by the betting industry on the marketing of its products. In Australia, Standard Media Index figures

Abstract

Objective: To explore children's awareness of sports betting advertising and how this advertising may influence children's attitudes, product knowledge and desire to try sports betting.

Methods: Semi-structured qualitative interviews were conducted with 48 children (8-16 years) from Melbourne, Victoria. The interview schedule explored children's recall and interpretations of sports betting advertising, strategies within advertisements that may appeal to children, children's product knowledge and understanding of betting terminology, and factors that may encourage gambling. Interviews were transcribed and thematic analysis was conducted.

Results: Children recalled in detail sports betting advertisements that they had seen, with humour the most engaging appeal strategy. They were also able to describe other specific appeal strategies and link these strategies to betting brands. Many children described how advertisements demonstrated how someone would place a bet, with some children recalling the detailed technical language associated with betting.

Conclusions: Children had detailed recall of sports betting advertisements and an extensive knowledge of sports betting products and terminology.

Implications for public health: To protect children from the potential harms associated with sports betting, governments should consider changing regulations and implementing evidence-based education campaigns to counter the positive messages children receive from the sports betting industry.

Key words: children, advertising, sports betting, gambling

showed a 160% increase in advertising spend (2011-2015), with \$236 million spent on gambling advertising in 2015, the majority from sports betting companies.⁷ Many sports teams or sporting organisations across the AFL, NRL, Tennis Australia and Cricket Australia benefit financially from lucrative sponsorship deals,^{8,9} with sporting codes receiving a percentage of revenue from every bet placed on matches with official betting partners of the code.

The rapid expansion of marketing for betting products and the increased consumption of these products has led to concerns about the short and long term health and social impacts of sport betting on population subgroups, and particularly on children (although the legal gambling age is 18 years old).¹⁰ This has led to some consideration about the restriction or banning of betting promotions during sports events, with most recommendations in Australia focusing on closing regulatory loopholes that allow the

1. Centre for Population Health Research, School of Health and Social Development, Faculty of Health, Deakin University, Victoria

2. Faculty of Health Sciences, Curtin University, Western Australia

3. International Centre for Youth Gambling Problems and High Risk Behaviours, McGill University, Montreal, Canada

Correspondence to: Ms Hannah Pitt, Centre for Population Health Research, School of Health and Social Development, Deakin University, Locked Bag 20001, Geelong, Victoria 3220; e-mail: hpitt@deakin.edu.au

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promotion of sports betting products before the watershed (the time at which adult content is allowed).^{11,12} Currently, restrictions on gambling advertisements are limited to regulatory Codes of Conduct, which stipulate the times advertisements can be shown and very broad statements about the content of advertisements.¹³ For example, gambling advertisements cannot be shown during children's viewing hours except for during news, current affair and sporting programs. Industry codes have agreed to ensure marketing does not contain themes that may be directed at children and must not show young adults (under 24 years) gambling.¹⁴ The Australian government has recently made a commitment to restrict advertising during live sporting matches up to 8.30pm, although as yet this is no more than a commitment.¹⁵ Recent research has shown that there is significant community support for complete bans of gambling advertising during sporting matches, including at sports stadiums, and strong public agreement that sporting organisations should take more responsibility for the promotion of gambling in sport.⁵ While debates surrounding changes and updates to current regulations are ongoing, researchers have sought to identify: a) the range of specific creative strategies within advertisements that may appeal to children and; b) how promotional strategies used by the betting industry may shape the gambling attitudes and consumption intentions of children.^{10,16,17}

Advertising strategies and the impact on children's attitudes and consumption intentions

Research in other areas of public health, such as tobacco and alcohol, has demonstrated the link between advertising strategies, children's levels of exposure to these strategies and their intentions to consume these products.^{18,19} For example, research has indicated that some specific types of strategies, including humour, the use of characters, including cartoon characters, and promotions that are either directly or indirectly aligned with celebrities and sports heroes may have an additional influence on children's brand awareness and preference.²⁰⁻²²

There have been some attempts to explore the impact of different gambling advertising strategies on children, largely focused on children's recall and interpretation of the messages within advertisements.^{10,16,17,23,24}

These studies demonstrate that children perceive that advertising depicts gambling as a fun activity, an exciting and easy way to win money, and a form of entertainment.^{23,25} Research focusing on newer forms of gambling, such as online sports betting, shows that children have a significant recall of sports betting brands when they are aligned with culturally valued activities such as sport, as well as specific recall of advertising creatives, plot lines and promotions.^{11,16} Researchers have also demonstrated that the alignment of marketing for these products with sport may be having an influence on normalising children's perceptions that gambling is a 'normal' or 'common' part of sport,^{10,26,27} and that children's recall of inducement and incentive promotions used by sports betting companies, such as 'free' bets and 'cash back' offers, may reduce children's perceptions of the risks associated with gambling.²⁸

What is less clear from existing research is whether the marketing tactics used by the gambling industry may also be role modelling gambling behaviours. Are strategies used within marketing campaigns creating processes whereby children are being 'educated' about the more technical aspects of gambling, including gambling markets, odds, and how to practically place bets on mobile devices?

Observational learning and the role of the mass media

Researchers have argued that the mass media (including advertising) play an influential role in observational and social learning processes associated with unhealthy products.²⁹ For example, researchers termed tobacco advertising as a "super peer" because of its ability to demonstrate products, align these products with positive values, and constantly reinforce products to children and adolescents.^{29(p428)} Advertising may be particularly influential in positively shaping children's attitudes if they are not exposed to behaviours via other role models (such as parents), or have not been exposed to the negative attributes associated with using a product.²⁹ While previous gambling research has suggested that parents are a primary role model for gambling behaviours,³⁰ some research has found that adults over 35 years of age do not have very high participation rates for sports betting.² There is emerging evidence to suggest that children are able to recall and interpret basic betting

terminology,¹⁶ and are able to indicate different events they would gamble on.²⁸ How then are children learning this very specific information about betting?

The following study aimed to address this gap by exploring how marketing processes may contribute to children's awareness and engagement with advertisements, their attitudes and desires to reproduce sports betting behaviours, and their specific knowledge about the technical aspects of betting. Four research questions guided this research:

1. To what extent do children recall specific appeal strategies within advertisements, and are they able to distinguish promotions used by different brands?
2. Are there factors within advertising that may create an exaggerated perception that sports betting is a common or normal activity for sports fans?
3. Does advertising influence children's technical knowledge about betting?
4. Are there specific factors relating to advertising that may influence children's willingness to engage in betting on sports?

Methods

Approach

This study took a qualitative approach. Qualitative approaches allow researchers to explore a "complex setting and complex interaction."^{31(p1105)} This is commonly found through qualitative techniques such as interviews where participants, and in this study children, are able to explore and explain their attitudes and behaviours more openly than quantitative methods.

Sample

As part of a broader study,²⁸ we recruited family groups in Melbourne, Victoria, comprising of at least one child aged 8 to 16 years old, and one parent or caregiver (with this paper presenting only the data collected from children). To be included in this study, children were required to be self-identified fans of the AFL. This recruitment criterion was employed, as researchers have demonstrated a significant amount of promotions for sports betting aligned with televised AFL matches,³² as well as prominent sponsorship relationships between the AFL and online gambling companies.⁹ Research has also demonstrated that children who are fans of the AFL have high levels of exposure to, and

recall of sports-based advertising, and some children perceive that gambling is a 'normal' or 'common' part of sport.¹⁰

Recruitment strategies

We utilised a range of convenience, snowball and purposive recruitment techniques to identify family groups.³³ Information about the study was initially distributed via local community and sporting groups, with participating parents asked to share information about the study with others. Written consent was obtained from parents, and verbal consent was received from children. All children were given a \$30 gift voucher for participation. Ethical approval was received from the University Human Research Ethics committee.

Data collection

Two researchers conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews between April and July 2016. One researcher conducted interviews with the parent or caregiver, while the other conducted interviews with the children. All interviews were performed out of hearing distance from other family members and mostly occurred within residential houses.

For the data presented in this paper we were particularly interested in children's knowledge of sports betting products, the marketing for these products, and betting attitudes. We structured this part of the interview into a number of different sub-sections. The first set of questions explored children's recall, attitudes and interpretations of sports betting advertising. Examples of questions included "can you tell me any ads you have seen for sports betting?", "are there any deals or promotions that you can remember", and "what do you think those deals and promotions mean?" Children were also asked about the different strategies within sports betting advertisements that may appeal to children, increase children's perception's that gambling is a normal behaviour and encourage people to want to try gambling. We then asked questions to assess children's knowledge of sports betting products and behaviours, including how they thought an adult might place a bet on sports.

Data interpretation

Interviews were transcribed by a professional transcription company and were uploaded to the data management software program QSR NVivo 11. Thematic analysis was

conducted whereby transcripts were read and re-read to establish main themes, notes were continuously made, and the themes were compared and contrasted across the children.³³ Open coding was used to identify the key themes from the data and was conducted throughout the data collection process to ensure that coding could evolve and to ensure that all data were represented in the themes.³⁴ Data interpretations were led by Authors One and Two, with regular meetings with the co-authors used to discuss the key themes and their meanings.

Results

Demographics

Thirty family groups (comprised of 48 children) participated in the study. The mean age of the sample was 11.4 years old (SD=2.1), and was skewed towards boys (n=41, 85.4%). All children identified that they were AFL fans. More than half the children said that they watched sports once a week (n=25, 52.1%), a further 20 children said they watched sports more than once a week (41.7%) and only three children reported watching sports less than once a month (6.3%). Four main themes emerged from the data.

Advertising strategies that influenced children's attention towards, and recall of, betting brands

There were a range of strategies that influenced children's awareness and retention of information about gambling advertising, and gambling brands. Some children in this study were able to describe specific attention strategies and/or messages that they had seen within gambling advertisements. Children were aware of and recalled strategies that included humour, distinctive voiceovers, and celebrities, with some children able to align these strategies with specific brands. Humour was the appeal strategy that led to the most awareness of gambling brands. Children in this study stated that they recalled advertisements that were funny or believed that sports betting companies "make them [advertisements] really funny". Some children recalled storylines within advertisements, particularly from the sports betting company Sportsbet. For example, a few children described an advertisement that showed two men gambling, and the children then recalled, "one guy gets locked outside in the pouring rain" and "the guy outside was getting soaking wet". Another child recounted

a different advertisement that also featured slapstick humour:

I do remember one that was funny, it was one where they were watching sport and they were on their phones and they bet and then they were like, 'if you win then like I'll take off my pants' or something stupid like that. (13-year-old girl)

A few children also had an awareness of advertisements that contained very distinctive voices or voiceovers. This was often associated with the betting company Ladbrokes. For example, children described the British accent used by actors within Ladbrokes advertisements as "hard to forget" and one girl said, "I liked the Ladbrokes ads because of the accents, it kind of engaged me". Sportsbet advertisements were also remembered as being "loud", "rough" and "shouty":

Well, most of the ads, the person that's saying the stuff has like a really memorable voice, like the guy from Ladbrokes has an accent and the guy from Sportsbet has like a shouty sort of voice. (13-year-old boy)

Children also remembered brands that contained recognisable celebrities, in particular from Ladbrokes, and Bet365. A few children described characteristics associated with Australian actor Gary Sweet, who featured in advertisements for Ladbrokes. For example, children described, "the guy with the bald head" or "the guy from House Husbands (an Australian prime time television program)". Hollywood actor Samuel L. Jackson was also identified by some children as featuring within the Bet365 advertisements, with a few children describing the specific impact this would have on other children. For example, one child thought that by using Samuel L. Jackson children would remember the Bet365 advertisements because, "most kids would remember seeing him from superhero movies" (Jackson also appears in The Avengers movie series). Another child thought people would want to copy Samuel L. Jackson because "they would probably do what he does, because they want to be like him".

Children in this study were able to identify brand names, and brand-specific advertisements. While brand recognition and recall was more common among children over 12 years old, children as young as eight years old were able to link specific promotions with brands, or note that there were different advertisements within a broader campaign:

In the Bet365 one, there's like a man that runs the Bet365 [company] and then there are some other people that are members of Bet365 – there's two different ads of them. One of them is where there are different people saying, 'I am a member of the world's favourite online sports betting company'. And then the guys sitting on the couch saying 'I am a member of Bet365.' (8-year-old boy)

Some children recalled more sophisticated promotions, particularly aligned with bookmakers Ladbrokes and Sportsbet. For example, children described that the Ladbrokes “odds boost” promotion was activated by pressing a button on the app and you could get increased odds for that event, “there's a new Ladbrokes ad and there's an odds boost thing where you press a button and it makes your odds go higher”. While children repeated the catchphrases or taglines for these promotions, they rarely understood what these promotions meant in practice. For example, some of the children who identified the odds boost promotion thought it was, “boosting your odds but I don't know how”.

Advertising strategies that increased the perception that sports betting was a normal activity

The second theme to emerge from the data related to how messages within advertising created a perception that betting on sports was normal behaviour for sports fans. The first factor related to the positive framing of gambling as an easy, fun and social activity. Children perceived that betting was a normal activity for sports fan because sports betting companies “make it easy”, and that sports betting advertisements show “how easy it is to bet”. One child recalled how the advertisements linked the message that gambling was easy with the image of an actor demonstrating the behaviour on their mobile phone:

Then he's got his phone and then he like says 'You should bet now it's really easy' and then he switches his phone a bit and then he gets it up and pretends to click the team. (13-year-old boy)

Children also described the positive messages about winning within advertisements. For example, some children described that betting advertisements consistently “shows people winning”, “someone wins and they all go crazy” and “they always show at the end [of the advertisement] people winning”. A few children reflected that there were “no

ads about if you lose”, and that sports betting advertisements “make it sound like it's fine and nothing will happen”, with a few children perceiving that the advertisements portrayed gambling as an easy and fast way to earn large amounts of money.

The second factor influencing children's perceptions that sports betting was a normal activity was the social messages within betting advertisements that portrayed sports betting as an activity associated with friendship. This commonly included children retelling advertisements that showed mostly groups of men gambling together. Children said sports betting companies showed “everyone having fun”, people betting while “socialising with their friends” and “people having a good time while doing it [sports betting]”. When talking about sports betting advertising a few children thought that it gave the impression that betting was a fun thing to do with your friends:

They [the sports betting advertisements] usually involve a group of people having a lot of fun, watching it [sport] and then it shows them actually placing their bet online and they make it seem like it's really normal and just a fun thing to do with your friends. (12-year-old boy)

Finally, children described that these positive messages about gambling were given frequently during sporting events and that this exposure made betting appear like a ‘normal’ activity. Some children said they thought that because there were more advertisements for betting, including discussions by commentators, this meant that betting was an activity that was popular or ‘normal’. As an example, one girl stated that the frequency of commentary about sports betting made her feel that more people were gambling on the sport:

When there are ads and stuff on TV or the commentators say the odds, it makes you feel like there are a lot more people doing it. (15-year-old girl)

Advertising strategies that influenced the technical knowledge of betting

Many children described knowing where they could bet because of marketing that they had seen on television or from the presence of sports betting operators at different community venues they had visited (such as sports stadiums). Most children recalled that people bet on sports via mobile or Internet based technology. Children's knowledge about online gambling came from a range

of sources. A few children had seen apps for sports betting providers promoted on the app store. One boy commented:

Apps on the featured charts on the app store of like sports bet and stuff and it says free downloads and get this game so that people get the app and bet on the app (10-year-old boy)

Children described how the messages within sports betting marketing demonstrated how to bet on sports: for example, one child described that the advertisements “show you how to do it”. Children described the steps involved in placing bets: first that you would download an app - it's “easy to download the app” and to then “just go on an app”. Older children described the processes associated with creating an online account for a sports betting company, stating that people would, “log in and put in their credit card details”. Some children demonstrated specific knowledge of selecting markets to gamble on, stating that you would add money to your betting account, select a price and then select a team or a player to bet on. Children used their recall of the content of advertising to describe the range of betting options that were available, with some commenting that you could bet on anything. Some children also described the factors that people would have to consider when placing a bet, such as which team would win, what they thought the final score would be, who would be the first goal scorer, who might get injured during the game, and “what the ladder is going to be like at the end”.

Many children also remembered seeing or hearing technical aspects associated with gambling and had particular recall of betting odds. Children remembered hearing the odds of teams or outcomes of the game while watching television and sporting broadcasts. There were a few children who identified that sporting commentators provided the odds – “the footy commentators normally say the odds”. While younger children were less aware of the specific term ‘odds’, some indicated that there were “numbers at the bottom of the screen” that were linked with betting. Other older children demonstrated their knowledge of betting markets by discussing and describing the term ‘odds’. Some children described odds as “the chance of something happening” while other descriptions were often associated with winning or money. For example, one child thought odds were a “way of telling who would win”, while another said it tells you “how much money you could

win". Some children could describe the lower odds as being the option that was most likely to win and others had a relatively accurate understanding of how odds were generated. One boy reported that he had seen odds on an app and explained that if a team had low odds it meant that they had a better chance of winning:

"Like on the AFL app, I tapped on a team to see when [AFL team] Hawthorn was playing and it came up with the odds and I think they were playing some other team and they were like \$1.35 and the other one was like \$4 something. So the lower the money, the better chance they have of winning. So when Hawthorn was really low, it means that everybody thought that they'd win. And if you bet \$1, you might only get \$1.35 back." (10-year-old boy)

Finally, there was evidence that a few children were applying gambling information to non-gambling-based football tipping competitions. For example, children stated that they checked the odds to help guide them with their 'footy tipping' selections, with one child saying they would pick the team with the "least amount of money next to it", or that "the odds will help me" when they did not know which team to tip. The following boy described using odds as a way of clarifying who he thought might win:

"Yeah, with my footy tips I use the odds sometimes, like if [the odds] say that someone's going to win, I go, oh yeah maybe they will." (13-year-old boy)

Advertising strategies that specifically shaped intentions to gamble

Recall of promotions that created a reduced perception of the risks associated with sports betting appeared to have the most influence on children's attitudes towards, or desire to replicate, the betting behaviours observed in advertisements. These promotions included monetary incentives for betting, or created a perception that the individual would receive their money back if they lost. Most children recalled at least one of these types of promotions, particularly aligned with sporting events. Children had very accurate but 'face-value' descriptions of these promotions - "if your team was winning by half time you get cash back", "if your team leads at any break but loses you get cash back up to \$50 bucks", "if your player doesn't kick the first goal, but then they do kick a goal in the game, you get your money back". Children of all ages had recall of the monetary values associated with

these promotions, with \$50 recalled by many children - "you get \$50 back" and "if you paid \$50 to them they'll give you \$50 back". A few children perceived that these promotions were positive and could be examples of bookmakers giving people a "great offer", particularly relating to more complex forms of gambling such as multi-bets (described by bookmakers as combining different individual bets ('legs'), together into a single bet).³⁵ As an example, children described the conditions of the multi-bet promotions:

A lot of the time it [the advertisement] says, in the [advertisements for] multis, if one leg fails you can get your money back and a lot of the time it says if there's a certain margin but your team loses, then you can get your money back. A lot of the time it's money back. (13-year-old boy)

Some children perceived that these promotions meant that you could never lose your money, with some describing them as a "safety net" for gamblers. Children described that cash back and refund offers enabled people to "get your money back without losing money", or that if someone "changed their mind" they could get out of the bet. One child stated that the term 'cash back' "seems like a good word even if you don't understand it", while other children thought the sports betting advertisements made it appear that "it's hard to lose", that the ads, "say you're very unlikely to lose", or that these promotions gave them the belief you could "get some money even if you don't win". There were a few children who rationalised which scenarios would be the best option to 'take up' these promotions. For example, one child described how the 'cash back' option could be a good idea for him because he had knowledge about his team's usual performance:

Well with the cash back one it's like, if I know my team is a good starter so they will definitely win the first quarter but not a good finisher I'll just take my cash out. And with cash back if I think it's not looking too good I'll just get my money. (14-year-old boy)

Although most children did not indicate an intention to use these promotions, there were a few children who did believe that promotions could encourage adults and some children to gamble. Several children described that these types of deals would be influential in encouraging children or adults to place bets in the future, with one child stating that if you received this type of offer it meant that betting was probably "worth a try". One child thought the promotions

showed gambling to be a "good and normal thing to do" and another thought the promotions might "raise children to be more positive about gambling".

Discussion

This study aimed to explore whether there are certain aspects relating to the promotion of sports betting that may influence children's recall of specific gambling brands, their perception that betting on sports was a normal activity, their knowledge of the technical aspects of betting, and their intention to gamble. The findings from the study raise a number of points for discussion.

First, while there have been previous studies that have demonstrated children's ability to recall sports betting company brands,^{10,11} this study demonstrates that some children were able to recall specific strategies used within advertising messages and correctly link these strategies to specific brands. Children have been described as a "lucrative target consumer group" [p. 324],³⁶ because of both the consumption behaviours as children and their future consumption behaviours as adults. As demonstrated in relation to tobacco, building brand loyalty - particularly during adolescence - was an important part of industry strategy in developing brand preferences into adulthood.³⁷ While there is no evidence to indicate that sports betting brands are specifically seeking to build brand loyalty with children before they are legally able to gamble, the strategies utilised within their advertising nevertheless had a strong impact on attracting children's attention and recall of specific brands. Four strategies emerged as the most influential - humour, strong voiceovers, celebrities and catchy promotions. While each of these strategies had very clear impacts, humour was the strategy that appeared to have the most influence on children's brand awareness and recall. Humour has regularly been identified as an attention strategy in promotions for other unhealthy products (such as alcohol), and as having a significant appeal and persuasive impact on children.^{20,21} Research indicates that humour is a regularly used strategy in both television and online advertising for sports betting agencies.^{38,39} It is therefore concerning that humour had the strongest influence on children's recall of advertisements. Children were attracted to the wit, physical humour and jokey voiceovers used within these advertisements. While

voluntary codes of conduct developed by the advertising industry state that advisements must not be directed at minors, humour is not specifically identified in this code.¹⁴ This appears to be a glaring omission, providing additional evidence in support of a revision of government advertising standards that do not comprehensively address strategies used by gambling companies that may appeal to children.¹³ Given that research into cigarette advertising shows a link between exposure, liking, and the appeal of smoking,¹⁹ future research should further investigate the links between specific advertising strategies, their 'likeability', brand loyalty, and children's intentions to gamble.

Second, there were also elements within betting advertising that created a perception among some children that gambling was a normal or common activity for individuals to engage in. Consistent with other gambling research,²³⁻²⁵ these strategies were primarily linked to the perception that advertising portrayed gambling as easy, with a certainty of winning, and that betting was an integral part of friendships. Despite regulations that prevent sports commentators from providing odds during the match,¹³ children still perceived that members of the commentary team provided odds. This could mean that bookmaker commentary-style advertising is still being perceived by children as sports commentators providing odds-based commentaries. These factors, coupled with saturated marketing during sports coverage, created a perception that many people gambled on sports. These are similar findings to those that have been identified for decades in both tobacco and alcohol research, indicating that children who were exposed to advertising were more likely to have positive beliefs about the product or wanted to try that product when they were older.³⁷ Recent research has found that young adult males believed that sports betting was a normal activity, and something that most sports fans would participate in, with some males indicating that this was because of the amount of sports betting marketing within sport.⁴⁰ We would argue that there is a clear role for governments, policy makers and public health professionals to identify a range of strategies (including regulatory action and education), that seek to denormalise the perception that gambling is a 'normal' activity, particularly aligned with sport.

Third, this study also demonstrates that processes of observational learning were occurring for some children in this sample, whereby children were learning about the technical aspects of betting via the marketing observed. This was particularly evident from older children who could identify the ways somebody could access sports betting products, and the decisions and processes they would need to make when placing a bet. Most of the recalled betting terminology was from advertising on television or from what children had heard while watching sporting events. Unlike cigarette advertising, which largely avoided the promotion of information about the physical characteristics of the product, gambling advertising links the social aspects of betting with specific technical information about the product. This is a potentially powerful mix, which links the social acceptability of gambling with technology – both of which have strong appeals for children.

Lastly, there were specific promotional strategies used within advertising that reduced children's perceptions of the risks associated with betting. Perceptions of the harms associated with products have been shown to have a significant impact on young people's beliefs and intentions to use products.^{41,42} If advertising creates a perception that betting on sports may not be an activity associated with risk or harm (for children most commonly conceptualised as monetary losses), and in the absence of comprehensive independent mass media campaigns to counter-frame these assertions, it is perhaps not surprising that some children indicate that they would like to try gambling.²⁸ Recent research has also indicated that there is strong community agreement that there should be increased education and messaging for children about the harms associated with gambling products, as well as support for the banning of gambling advertising during children's viewing hours.⁵ This is especially important given that international research has found that many of the advertisements for sports betting companies are for complex bets or outcomes that will most likely result in a profit for the betting company.^{43,44} Researchers and governments should examine the types of harm prevention messages that have the most impact on children's attitudes towards gambling products, including restricting

promotions that may reduce the perception of risks associated with betting, such as inducement and incentive offers.

This study has a number of limitations. First, this was a small convenience sample of children and their parents in one geographical location of Victoria, Australia. While it provides important information that should be tested with much larger samples of children, this study cannot claim to represent the views or experiences of all children. The sample was also significantly skewed towards boys. While it has been assumed that boys are the most 'at risk' of transitioning into betting as adults, the seven girls in this study had similar recall and knowledge of betting. This may suggest that the risk factors associated with betting advertising may relate to being a fan of sports where there is significant exposure to promotions. This is an important area for future investigation. Finally, a recruitment criterion for this study was that children self-reported as being 'fans' of the AFL. This self-definition led to a range of children included in the study who had varying levels of engagement with AFL. Further comparative studies of children who are fans of sporting codes that have significant amounts of betting advertising and sponsorship, sporting codes with limited betting advertising and sponsorship, and children who are not fans of sports will be important in further identifying potential risk factors for different sub-groups of children.

Conclusion

The effect of sports betting marketing on children is a growing area of research. This study demonstrates children's engagement with, and recall of, strategies used within sports betting advertisements and the influence betting advertising has on children's understanding of betting behaviours and terminology. Australia, along with other countries that allow the promotion of gambling, should be exploring evidence-based best practice to reduce the potential harms associated with these promotions for children. Governments should consider changes to regulations, along with evidence-based education campaigns, to counter the positive messages children are exposed to about sports betting, and to ensure children are not being educated about how to gamble through marketing campaigns.

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