

"It's just everywhere!" Children and parents discuss the marketing of sports wagering in Australia

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Gambling harm is a significant public health issue, with clear consequences for the health and wellbeing of communities.¹⁻³ While research in the area has predominantly focused on addictive and individualised behaviours,⁴ public health researchers are increasingly investigating how the tactics of gambling industries may be contributing to harm.^{5,6} Most Australian and New Zealand research has specifically investigated the extent and nature of the infiltration of gambling marketing in sport.⁷⁻⁹ This issue has attracted increasing attention in Australia due to the proliferation of sports wagering marketing aligned with professional sporting teams and matches, including through the Australian Football League (AFL) and National Rugby League (NRL).

Data released in 2015 indicated that the gambling industry was the fourth highest industry for advertising spend in Australia, with a significant increase between 2012 (\$45 million) and 2015 (\$147 million).¹⁰ Teams from Australia's two major sporting codes, the AFL and NRL, have been heavily involved in the ownership and promotion of gambling products and services. While this has traditionally involved the ownership of Electronic Gambling Machine (EGM or pokie) venues,^{11,12} researchers have also documented an increasing relationship between sporting codes and teams and the promotion of sports wagering.^{7,8} These relationships include formal sponsorship partnerships^{13,14} and uniform naming rights.^{15,16} Further, television broadcast and stadium based wagering marketing includes sponsorship announcements, signage, promotion of odds, commercial break advertising, pop ups, and field logos.^{7,8}

Abstract

Objective: To investigate how children and adults recall the content and promotional channels for sports wagering marketing.

Methods: A mixed methods study of 152 parent/child (8-16 years) dyads was conducted at AFL (Australian Football League), NRL (National Rugby League), and soccer sporting sites in New South Wales and Victoria, Australia. Questions related to the frequency of viewing AFL and NRL matches, sports wagering promotions and perceptions of the normalisation of wagering in sport. Descriptive statistics and thematic analysis were used to analyse data.

Results: Children recruited from NRL (n=75, 96.2%) and AFL (n=46, 92.0%) sites were significantly more likely to have recalled having ever seen a promotion for sports wagering as compared to children from Soccer sites (n=18, 75.0%) ($p<0.05$). Children and adults identified seeing sports wagering promotions in similar environments, most commonly on television, and at stadiums. Three-quarters of children (75.0%) and the majority of adults (90.0%) perceived that sports wagering was becoming a normal part of sport.

Conclusion and Implications: This research shows that children engaged in particular sports have high awareness of wagering marketing, particularly as seen on television or at sporting matches. Regulation should comprehensively address the placement, quantity and content of wagering marketing aligned with sport to prevent current and/or future gambling harm.

Key words: children, sports wagering, gambling, marketing, normalisation

Researchers have documented how sports wagering companies have used non-traditional media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to align themselves with match play in the AFL and NRL, as well as the use of current and ex-athletes to endorse products.¹³

There have been a number of concerns raised by politicians, academics, government organisations, and community stakeholders about the way in which the marketing relationship between gambling and sport may be positively 'shaping' or 'normalising' children's gambling attitudes and consumption intentions.¹⁷ History has demonstrated that sport is a powerful mechanism for influencing children's brand awareness and subsequent product preferences. For example, researchers showed

that tobacco sponsorship of sport created positive associations between smoking and sport among young children.¹⁸ While the wagering industry has repeatedly claimed that it does not specifically seek to target children in their advertising campaigns,¹⁷ there are strategies used within promotions (such as the use of cartoons, celebrity endorsements and humour) that may appeal to children.⁸

Robertson and Rossiter [1974] suggested that until children actually experienced discrepancies between products as advertised and as consumed, they were unable to entirely comprehend advertising's persuasive intent.¹⁹ For example, if children have not experienced losses from sports wagering, they are unlikely to understand the

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intent behind the highly positive social and financial messages about sports wagering. These include messages about winning, peer acceptance, social value and sports fan loyalty, as well as promotions that appear to lessen the perceived risk associated with sports wagering, including 'refund', 'cash out' and 'cash back' offers.¹³ Finally, sports-based wagering is different from many other types of gambling products, because in essence sport is the product with wagering as the 'service' linked to that product. We argue that promotions for wagering that are interwoven with sports that are culturally valued by children may be additionally influential in shaping their awareness of, attitudes towards, and ultimately preference to consume wagering products.

What is less clear from the current literature is how children understand and interpret the key messages presented within gambling promotions, particularly as they align with sports teams and matches. For example, there is limited research that explores whether those children who engage with sport (via participation in or viewing of sport) may have specific awareness of sports wagering brands and marketing strategies, and whether this awareness is similar to or different from that of adults. Further, do children recall seeing wagering advertisements in particular environments, and do they perceive that sports wagering is becoming a normal part of the sports fan experience?

This study investigated how children and their parents or primary caregivers who actively participate in or watch Australia's two major sporting codes – the AFL and the NRL – recall promotions for sports wagering marketing. We also aimed to propose a model to explain how children's exposure to sports wagering marketing may positively influence their future wagering consumption attitudes and behaviours. To do this, the research was guided by four key research questions:

1. What is the extent to which children and parents recall seeing sports wagering promotions?
2. Where do they recall seeing these promotions?
3. What do they specifically recall about sports wagering promotions during sporting matches?
4. Do children perceive that wagering is being normalised as part of sport, and which factors do they describe as contributing to this?

Methods

Approach

Data for this mixed methods study were collected within a broader study that explored a range of issues relating to wagering marketing within sport. Other data from this study specifically relating to sports wagering sponsorship of sport are detailed elsewhere.²⁰ The data presented in this paper specifically explores recollections of all forms of sports wagering marketing in a range of marketing environments and specifically within sporting matches. Ethical approval for this study was received from the University Human Research Ethics Committee.

Sample and Recruitment

The sample for this study was family dyads of at least one child (8–16 years) and one parent or caregiver (adults). Children and adults who could not speak English were excluded. The age group was selected to extend previous research about sports wagering marketing conducted with slightly older children (14–18 year-olds).²¹ We were interested in exploring the responses of younger children, given that research suggests that children may be able to understand the selling intent of advertising, but may not be able to understand its persuasive intent until much later in childhood.²² Given that the wagering industry has argued that a) parents should have primary responsibility for monitoring and educating children about advertising, and b) they do not deliberately target children,²³ this study explored the similarities and differences between adult and child recall. The sample was recruited predominantly from AFL and NRL community sporting sites because research indicates that these two sports are the two most highly watched sports by children in Australia and that they contain significant amounts of marketing for sports wagering outside of traditional commercial break advertising.^{7,8}

Setting

The study sample was recruited at AFL and NRL sporting sites. In addition, a sample of children was recruited from junior weekend soccer games. This group was included to explore whether children who did not actively participate in AFL or NRL would be less able to recall specific aspects of sports wagering marketing. Data were collected from nine sites in New South Wales (including Sydney and the Illawarra regional area) and Victoria

(Melbourne) to ensure that the sample came from a diverse range of socio-demographic backgrounds and geographical settings.

Data Collection

Data were collected between April and August 2015 using a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods. Children and adults were separated and completed the study out of hearing distance from each other. Participants were asked a range of questions relating to their socio-demographic characteristics. All participants were asked age and gender, and adults were also asked to state ethnicity and postcode. Participants were then asked about the amount of AFL and NRL they watched either on television or at live games. A similar study¹⁴ identified that children found it difficult to recall accurately how many times they watched sport on television each week. For this study, a five point Likert scale (Never, Not often, Sometimes, Very often, All the time) was used to assess viewing frequency.

In the first specific question relating to sports wagering, participants were asked whether they could remember ever seeing or hearing a promotion for sports wagering. This question was asked using a free recall (unprompted) method and was recorded as a yes/no answer. Participants who could not recall any sports wagering marketing were asked a question about the normalisation of gambling in sport and then went on to complete other sections of the study. Parents and children who could recall seeing or hearing sports wagering marketing were provided with a laminated picture board of different marketing environments. Picture boards were used as a way of collecting the data for this question as they were more child-friendly but still effective in also capturing environments where parents had seen sports wagering marketing. Six variations of the picture board were prepared with the images in a randomised order (to ensure there was no ordering effect associated with selections). Pictures of a television, newspaper, social media logos, a sports team, a betting venue, a stadium, billboard, radio, mobile phone/iPad, public transport (bus, train), as well as separate images of a bus stop and train station were included. The bus stop and train station images were included because, after piloting, it became clear that participants had seen sports wagering marketing either on the sides of buses or trains/trams, or on static billboards at bus stops or train stations and were

becoming slightly confused by the images of specific public transport vehicles and the billboard image. The researchers stated: "Here are some different places that you may have seen sports betting marketing. Can you remember seeing sports betting marketing in any of these places?" The researchers then asked participants to circle any environments where they had seen sports wagering marketing with a marker pen, and a photograph was taken of the completed picture board. The term 'betting' was used in the questions instead of 'wagering' because piloting showed that many children did not understand what the term 'wagering' meant, but clearly knew the term 'betting'.

Participants also completed two verbal open-ended qualitative questions. The first asked them to describe any marketing for sports wagering that they had seen specifically during a sporting match. The second explored participants' perceptions of the normalisation of wagering by asking if they thought betting was "becoming more normal or common in sport". Children were initially asked if they thought that gambling was becoming a 'normal' part of sport, but some children found this question difficult to answer and were unsure what we meant by the word 'normal'. If children appeared confused at this question they were prompted with the word 'common'. The addition of this prompt increased children's understanding of the nature of this question, and the responses from children were similar to those of other children. If they responded yes, they were asked to provide information on why they thought that and if not, why not? Answers were recorded by researchers and were repeated to participants to ensure clarity of recording.

Data analysis

Descriptive statistics were used for quantitative responses with Chi-square (χ^2) tests used to determine whether different groups of children (based on recruitment site), and children and adults, differed significantly in their responses. Postcode data were mapped to the Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA) Index of Relative Socio-Economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD) (a suburb-level measure of socio-economic advantage and disadvantage from 1, the most disadvantaged, to 10, the most advantaged).²⁴ A constant comparative approach to thematic analyses was used to explore the key themes present in qualitative

responses, with a particular focus on comparing data between children and adults, and across sample recruitment sites.

Results

Quantitative results

Sample characteristics

A total of 304 participants from 152 families participated in the study from NRL (n=78 families, 51.3%), AFL (n=50 families, 32.9%), and Soccer (n=24 families, 15.8%) recruitment sites. Most families were residents in New South Wales (n=244, 80.3%). The age of children ranged from 8 to 16 years with an average age of 10.8 years (SD 2.3). About two-thirds of children were aged 8-11 years (n=101, 66.4%) and about three-quarters were male (n=118, 77.6%). Adults were aged 29-71 years with a mean age of 43.2 years (SD 7.3). One adult in the sample was a grandparent, but was the main carer for the child on the day of the data collection. Just over half the adult sample were mothers (n=82, 53.9%). Families were distributed across SEIFA deciles, with 10.5% (n=16) in the lowest three deciles; 54.6% (n=83) in the mid four deciles; and 34.2% (n=52) in the top three deciles.

Sport viewing frequency

Table 1 reports the viewing frequency of AFL or NRL matches by child/adult and recruitment site. Those recruited from AFL sites were significantly less likely to watch NRL at least 'Sometimes' (Child n=20, 40.8%; Adult n=16, 33.3%), as compared to those recruited from NRL (Child n=76, 97.4%; Adult n=76, 97.4%, $p<0.05$) and Soccer (Child n=18, 75.0%; Adults n=19, 79.2%, $p<0.05$) sites. Those recruited from AFL sites were significantly more likely to watch AFL at least 'Sometimes' (Child n=43, 87.8%; Adult n=42, 87.5%) as compared to those from NRL (Child n=22,

28.2%; Adult n=20, 25.6%, $p<0.05$) and Soccer (Child n=9, 37.5%; Adult n=8, 33.3%, $p<0.05$) sites.

Recall of sports wagering promotions

Table 2 presents data relating to whether participants could recall ever having seen a promotion for sports wagering. The results show that the vast majority of children (n=139, 91.4%) and adults (n=149, 98.0%) could recall having ever seen a promotion for sports wagering. There were some variations according to sporting code in the child sample, with children recruited from NRL (n=75, 96.2%) and AFL (n=46, 92.0%) sites significantly more likely to have recalled having ever seen a promotion for sports wagering as compared to children recruited from Soccer sites (n=18, 75.0%) ($p<0.05$).

Participants recalled seeing sports wagering marketing in a number of different environments (Table 3). The top four most frequently recalled environments for children were: television (n=135, 97.1%), stadiums (n=105, 75.5%), radio (n=69, 49.6%), and websites (n=64, 46.0%). For adults, the top four most frequently recalled marketing channels were: television (n=144, 96.6%), stadiums (n=92, 61.7%), websites (n=68, 45.6%), and newspapers (n=66, 44.3%).

Qualitative results

Participants described specific types of marketing they had seen played during sporting matches and their perceptions of the normalisation of wagering in sport.

Recall of brand names

Some children and adults stated that they recalled seeing specific brand names during sporting matches and sporting programs. Ten brands were mentioned by children (listed from most frequently to least frequently mentioned): Sportsbet, Bet365,

Table 1: Viewing frequency of AFL or NRL matches.

Site	Amount viewed	Child			Adult			Total Child (n=151)	Total Adult (n=150)
		AFL (n=49)	NRL (n=78)	Soccer (n=24)	AFL (n=48)	NRL (n=78)	Soccer (n=24)		
NRL	Never	17	2	3	20	0	2	22	22
	Not often	12	0	3	12	2	3	15	17
	Sometimes	9	6	2	9	11	6	17	26
	Very often	6	18	8	4	18	6	32	28
	All the time	5	52	8	3	47	7	65	57
AFL	Never	2	35	10	2	35	10	47	47
	Not often	4	21	5	4	23	6	30	33
	Sometimes	16	18	6	7	14	3	40	24
	Very often	12	2	2	19	3	4	16	26
	All the time	15	2	1	16	3	1	18	20

Table 2: Recall of sports wagering promotions.

	Site	Yes (%)	No (%)	Total n=304
Child	NRL	75 (96.2)	3 (3.8)	78 (100.0)
	AFL	46 (92.0)	4 (8.0)	50 (100.0)
	Soccer	18 (75.0)	6 (25.0)	24 (100.0)
	Total	139 (91.4%)	13 (8.6)	152 (100)
Adult	NRL	76 (97.4)	2 (2.6)	78 (100.0)
	AFL	50 (100.0)	0	50 (100.0)
	Soccer	23 (95.8)	1 (4.2)	24 (100.0)
	Total	149 (98.0)	3 (2.0)	152 (100.0)

TAB, Ladbrokes, Unibet, Tom Waterhouse, Centrebet, Crownbet, William Hill, and Ubet. Brands mentioned by adults included Sportsbet, Bet365, TAB, Centrebet, Tom Waterhouse, Ladbrokes, Crownbet and William Hill.

Sportsbet was the most commonly mentioned brand by children (n=84), with 11 children specifically describing the volume of promotions for Sportsbet that they had seen, particularly when watching the NRL, or NRL related sporting shows:

"Sportsbet when watching NRL. A lot. About 10 times a day." – 8 year-old boy, Soccer.

Placement and volume of marketing

Children described seeing promotions for sports wagering when they were watching sport on television. Some descriptions related to the temporal placements of promotions "during the game". For example, some children stated that they had seen sports wagering advertisements during formal scheduled breaks in play, including "half time" breaks. Others stated that they had seen promotions prior to the start of the match:

"I've seen the TAB ads before kickoff." – 10-year-old boy, NRL

Other children described promotions during spontaneous breaks in match play, for example some said they had seen promotions after a player had scored a try or kicked a goal:

"I've seen them when someone kicks a goal and between quarters" – 12-year-old boy, AFL

Children from soccer recruitment sites rarely described seeing sport wagering promotions during soccer matches, but did comment that they had seen sports wagering promotions during NRL matches. These children often commented on the volume of marketing during matches. For example, one 8-year-old boy stated that he had seen sports wagering promotions: "on the telly, on the jerseys, it's just everywhere!"

In contrast to children, adults only described formal placements for sports wagering

marketing. For example they recalled pre-game promotions such as the odds and live crosses to bookmakers; advertising break promotions; on-field promotions including "signage" and "logos on the field"; and post-game promotions such as sports wagering marketing "during man of the match". No adults described wagering promotions during spontaneous breaks in play.

However, children and adults recalled similar types of promotions that they had seen when going to a match at a stadium. These included "signs around the ground", on "jerseys" and "on the big screen". One 8-year-old boy recruited from an NRL site specifically described the link between NRL athletes and gambling, stating: "they put player's names on the board and money next to it". Some children and adults also described seeing sports wagering promotions during sports related shows such as the AFL and NRL 'Footy Shows'. For example, one 11-year-old girl said:

"I've seen Sportsbet lots and lots and lots. I've seen them on the Footy Show, and I've seen Sportsbet a lot." – 11-year-old girl, Soccer

One adult described that she had remembered where she had seen a particular brand because it was the brand that she used for betting with her Punters Club (an organised gambling syndicate that may be either formally organised through a gambling company website or informally):

"Sportsbet on the Footy Show - that's the one I use for my Punters Club now. We all have the app it's easy. We switched from TAB because it became easier to put the money in and out." – 38-year-old female, NRL

Descriptions of marketing content

This theme showed the most differences between children and adults. Nineteen children, particularly from the NRL and AFL sites, discussed specific aspects of promotions compared to only two adults. A few children described the specific tactics used in promotions. Most descriptions of specific tactics related to advertisements that featured a 'cash out', 'cash back', or 'money

back' promotion. Some children perceived that if you were losing, then the wagering provider would give you your money back. For example, one 11-year-old girl stated "if you lose by 8 points you get your money back", and another 10 year old boy said "if you lose you get your money back".

Other children specifically recalled 'cash out' promotions. For example, one 12-year-old boy stated that he had seen "a lot of cash out ones", and a 13-year-old boy recalled that for Ladbrokes you could use a credit card and "get your money straight away". Recalling 'cash out' storylines from advertisements was not uncommon, even among the younger children in the sample:

"The man was drinking a beer, then they pressed their phone and fly out and get cash out" – 8-year-old boy, AFL

A number of children also remembered and described very specific promotions relating to the wagering provider Sportsbet. For example, one 13-year-old boy stated that marketing for Sportsbet was on "at the start of every rugby league game", while an 8-year-old boy stated "Sportsbet before the game tells you to bet money". One 12-year-old boy recalled a specific slogan "Sportsbet cash faster [sic]", while a 10-year-old boy stated "Sportsbet, go on your computer and bet now". One 11-year-old girl said that she could remember "all the Sportsbet ads". She went on to describe a creative from a Sportsbet advertisement whereby a man had only:

"5% battery left on his phone, so he did sports betting, then his wife calls and the phone dies." – 11-year-old girl, NRL.

The normalisation of wagering in sport

The majority of children (n= 114, 75.0%) and adults (n= 137, 90.1%) believed that wagering had become a normal (or common) part of sport. Children and particularly boys from AFL and NRL perceived that betting on sport was an activity that many people engaged in. Phrases such as "heaps of people do it", "everyone does it", "see a lot of people do it", and that "lots of people who watch sport like to bet" were common in children's narratives.

Children also perceived that gambling was a normal part of sport because of the amount of marketing for wagering that they had seen during the game. Children stated that they "see ads everywhere" and that advertising for gambling was "all over sport". Other children and some adults also perceived that the volume of advertising made people feel that they should gamble and that if they did not

Table 3: Number of different environments by adults and children.

	AFL Site					NRL Site					Soccer Site					Total				
	Children			Adults	Total	Children			Adults	Total	Children			Adults	Total	Children			Adults	Total
	8-11 years	12-16 years	Total	n=50	n=96	8-11 years	12-16 years	Total	n=76	n=151	8-11 years	12-16 years	Total	n=23	n=41	8-11 years	12-16 years	Total	n=149	n=288
	n=29	n=17	n=46			n=48	n=27	n=75			n=14	n=4	n=18			n=91	n=48	n=139		
Television	29 (100.0)	17 (100.0)	46 (100.0)	48 (96.0)	94 (97.9)	47 (97.9)	24 (88.9)	71 (94.7)	74 (97.4)	145 (96.0)	14 (100.0)	4 (100.0)	18 (100.0)	22 (95.7)	40 (97.6)	90 (98.9)	45 (93.8)	135 (97.1)	144 (96.6)	279 (96.9)
Stadium	23 (79.3)	14 (82.4)	37 (80.4)	40 (80.0)	77 (80.2)	37 (77.1)	19 (70.4)	56 (74.7)	36 (47.4)	92 (60.9)	9 (64.3)	3 (75.0)	12 (66.7)	16 (69.6)	28 (68.3)	69 (75.8)	36 (75.0)	105 (75.5)	92 (61.7)	197 (68.4)
Websites	15 (51.7)	11 (64.7)	26 (56.5)	27 (54.0)	53 (55.2)	17 (35.4)	15 (55.6)	32 (42.7)	35 (46.1)	67 (44.4)	3 (21.4)	3 (75.0)	6 (33.3)	6 (26.1)	12 (29.3)	35 (38.5)	29 (60.4)	64 (46.0)	68 (45.6)	132 (45.8)
Radio	17 (58.6)	15 (88.2)	32 (69.6)	24 (48.0)	56 (58.3)	22 (45.8)	9 (33.3)	31 (41.3)	30 (39.5)	61 (40.4)	6 (42.9)	0 (0.0)	6 (33.3)	4 (17.4)	10 (24.4)	45 (49.5)	24 (50.0)	69 (49.6)	58 (38.9)	127 (44.1)
Newspaper	11 (37.9)	8 (47.1)	19 (41.3)	30 (60.0)	49 (51.0)	23 (47.9)	7 (25.9)	30 (40.0)	29 (38.2)	59 (39.1)	2 (14.3)	1 (25.0)	3 (16.7)	7 (30.4)	10 (24.4)	36 (39.6)	16 (33.3)	52 (37.4)	66 (44.3)	118 (41.0)
Billboard	12 (41.4)	11 (64.7)	23 (50.0)	21 (42.0)	44 (45.8)	17 (35.4)	13 (48.1)	30 (40.0)	23 (30.3)	53 (35.1)	6 (42.9)	2 (50.0)	8 (44.4)	6 (26.1)	14 (34.1)	35 (38.5)	26 (54.2)	61 (43.9)	50 (33.6)	111 (38.5)
Betting venue	9 (31.0)	10 (58.8)	19 (41.3)	28 (56.0)	47 (49.0)	17 (35.4)	12 (44.4)	29 (38.7)	23 (30.3)	52 (34.4)	3 (21.4)	2 (50.0)	5 (27.8)	7 (30.4)	12 (29.3)	29 (31.9)	24 (50.0)	53 (38.1)	58 (38.9)	111 (38.5)
Media devices	16 (55.2)	10 (58.8)	26 (56.5)	15 (30.0)	41 (42.7)	18 (37.5)	9 (33.3)	27 (36.0)	17 (22.4)	44 (29.1)	4 (28.6)	3 (75.0)	7 (38.9)	4 (17.4)	11 (26.8)	38 (41.8)	22 (45.8)	60 (43.2)	36 (24.2)	96 (33.3)
Public transport	14 (48.3)	9 (52.9)	23 (50.0)	15 (30.0)	38 (39.6)	21 (43.8)	6 (22.2)	27 (36.0)	18 (23.7)	45 (29.8)	7 (50.0)	2 (50.0)	9 (50.0)	3 (13.0)	12 (29.3)	42 (46.2)	17 (35.4)	59 (42.4)	36 (24.2)	95 (33.0)
Sports team	11 (37.9)	7 (41.2)	18 (39.1)	17 (34.0)	35 (36.5)	15 (31.3)	11 (40.7)	26 (34.7)	14 (18.4)	40 (26.5)	5 (35.7)	1 (25.0)	6 (33.3)	3 (13.0)	9 (22.0)	31 (34.1)	19 (39.6)	50 (36.0)	34 (22.8)	84 (29.2)
Other	6 (20.7)	5 (29.4)	11 (23.9)	1 (2.0)	12 (12.5)	10 (20.8)	7 (25.9)	17 (22.7)	6 (7.9)	23 (15.2)	2 (14.3)	0 (0.0)	2 (11.1)	1 (4.3)	3 (7.3)	18 (19.8)	12 (25.0)	30 (21.6)	8 (5.4)	38 (13.2)
Total	163	117	280	266	546	244	132	376	305	681	61	21	82	79	161	468	270	738	650	1,388

gamble they were “missing out”. For example, an 11-year-old boy stated that there was so much advertising for sports wagering that it made it seem like “everyone should do it”, and another boy stated that you had to bet to enjoy sport. A few children specifically described that gambling made them want to bet. For example, a 14-year-old boy stated that because sports wagering was advertised “...everywhere, the ads make you want to bet”. One 10-year-old boy in the study talked about the amount of money he was going to bet on a national sports team:

“Because every time there is sport on, I’m like, ‘I’m going to bet \$5 for the Socceroos to win.’” – 10-year-old boy, NRL

Finally, a small number of children and adults perceived that sports wagering was positive for sport. For children, the benefits predominantly related to winning money, while some adults perceived that gambling made sport more interesting and enjoyable amongst friends.

Discussion

This study aimed to build a more comprehensive picture of the impact of sports wagering marketing specifically on those children who are interested or involved in sport. It also aimed to build methodological insights about conducting

sports wagering research with children in community settings.

Before discussing the results, it is important to recognise the study limitations and methodological learnings. First, the comparative soccer sample was much smaller than those for the AFL and NRL. Our research did show some areas of statistical significance of wagering marketing recall between the AFL and NRL, and soccer groups. Further research should seek to explore the differences between children who are engaged in sports with high and low volumes of wagering marketing. Further, while researchers have documented the amount of gambling promotions in AFL and NRL matches,^{7,8} limited research has examined the extent and nature of gambling marketing in other, less watched sports. These studies will be important in comparing the relationship between wagering marketing promotions in specific sports and the impact of this marketing on young people who watch these sports. Second, children do not clearly understand terms such as ‘wagering’. It is important that researchers use terminology that children understand, and are also clear about the meaning associated with specific terms. For example, in this study when we described ‘sports matches’, children and adults provided responses that related to a range of sports-related shows. Finally,

this study did not aim to explore wagering consumption intentions. While some children spoke about their gambling intentions, it was not measured in any systematic way. This is an important area for future investigation.

This study raises four main points for discussion. The first relates to children’s exposure to sports wagering marketing and the impact that this has on their brand awareness and recall. The findings from this research show that more than 90% of children from AFL and NRL sites recalled seeing a sports wagering promotion, and that both children and adults identified seeing sports wagering promotions commonly on television, at sporting stadiums, and on internet websites. The wagering industry may claim that they do not specifically target children per se (thus somehow implying that if children do recall wagering marketing it is not their responsibility).²³ However, this study indicates that many children commonly watch television outside G rated time periods, and watch sport and sporting programs which are exempt from regulations. Thus, they are clearly exposed to a range of industry marketing tactics. In this study most children who were recruited from AFL and NRL sites regularly watched these codes on television, and were significantly more likely than children from Soccer sites to recall having seen gambling promotions. Children in this

study (and particularly those from AFL and NRL sites) were able to recall gambling brand names, and reported that they regularly saw gambling marketing embedded within sporting programs. It may thus be naïve or disingenuous to think that only deliberate targeting will influence children's awareness of and preferences for sports wagering brands, and that responsibility can be transferred from wagering providers, sporting administrators and broadcasters, to others in the community such as parents.

This study shows that whether intentionally or not, marketing strategies used by the sports wagering industry are increasing brand awareness and recall in some children, particularly those who are engaged in watching AFL or NRL. It also shows that children recall some brands more than others – for example Sportsbet. Recent media articles report that Sportsbet spent \$76.7 million on marketing in Australia during 2015.²⁵ Brand awareness is often the first step in shaping children's brand preferences and consumption behaviours,^{26,27} and further research should examine whether children's brand awareness is higher for companies that spend the most on marketing their products. For public health practitioners the findings relating to brand awareness are concerning as sports wagering appears to be following the same 'normalisation' pathway seen with other products such as tobacco.²⁸ Based on the data in this study and a previous model relating to EGMs proposed by Bestman and colleagues,²⁹ we have proposed a model which shows how the current or future wagering consumption intentions may be shaped in children (Figure 1).

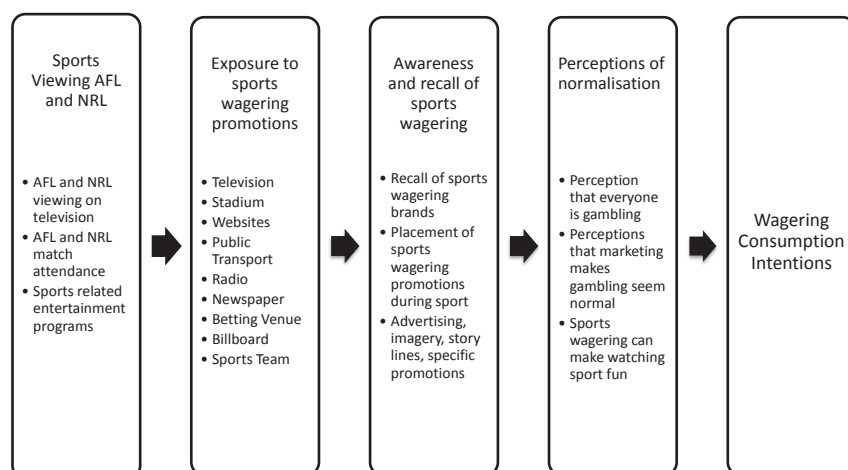
Second, children were much more likely than adults to recount descriptions of very specific marketing appeal strategies, including the creatives and incentives used within advertisements. They also more frequently described wagering promotions that were aligned with spontaneous events within sporting matches – such as the scoring of tries. This suggests that compared with adults, children are more attuned to the content of commercial break advertising and are also particularly aware of the marketing that is aligned with highly positive sporting moments. This may occur for a number of reasons, including adults 'tuning out' or engaging in other types of activities during commercial breaks. This provides further evidence in support of calls to close regulatory loopholes that allow gambling to be advertised before the watershed (the point in time after which adult programs are broadcast), as long as it is advertised during a sporting match, sports program, or news and current affairs program. While there have been repeated calls to close this loophole, the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) has been fiercely resistant, with the ACMA chairman claiming that the "the general gambling restriction is not relevant to sport".³⁰ This study's findings suggest that the general gambling restriction is very relevant to sport and that ACMA should go further in preventing children's exposure to wagering marketing. However, it is important to note that even if this regulatory loophole was closed, children would still be exposed to marketing embedded within sporting matches. Advertising regulations therefore need to be extended to consider all forms

of marketing, including sponsorship promotions. It is important for researchers to work with sporting administrators, stadiums and broadcasters to ensure that they are aware of the research evidence relating to the impact of marketing on children, and the need for action that will protect children from these impacts.

Third, this study demonstrated that children specifically recall promotions which may give a perception of lessened risk or an increased chance of financial gain. These promotions included 'cash out', 'refund bets', and 'cash back' promotions. As proposed by Robertson and Rossiter,¹⁹ and Carter and colleagues²² in relation to children's understanding of the persuasive intent of marketing, children in this study did not appear to understand the overall intent of specific promotions. In particular, this study suggests that promotions that imply 'risk reduction' (e.g. through 'refund bets') may be particularly influential in shaping children's attitudes towards sports wagering, with some children interpreting these promotions as suggesting that there was no risk of financial loss from gambling. While further research is needed to understand how a range of promotions may influence children's gambling risk/benefit perceptions, beliefs and attitudes, and future consumption intentions, these findings also have important implications for regulatory reform.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, most children and the majority of adults believed that sports wagering was a 'normal' or 'common' part of sport. Children's rationale for this was predominantly because they saw a lot of marketing for wagering during sport, and perceived that most people gambled on sport. Research on tobacco showed that children's smoking behaviours were clearly influenced by their normative perceptions, i.e. they perceived that smoking was an activity that was both common, and socially valued and attractive.²⁸ A key strategy for tobacco control advocates was to continually challenge the 'exaggerated normalisation' of smoking.²⁸ Recent prevalence studies suggest that while the number of people who wager on sports is growing, it is still only a small proportion of adults.³¹ We would suggest therefore that children's perceptions of products are highly influenced by the marketing messages and the volume of marketing they view. In tobacco, a range of strategies were employed to diminish perceptions that smoking was a common

Figure 1: Proposed shaping pathway of how children's exposure to sports wagering marketing may influence consumption intentions.



activity. These included education campaigns which emphasised that smoking was not an activity that most people engaged in,²⁸ that most people were ambivalent about smoking,^{32,33} restricting places where children could observe smoking in their everyday environments,^{34,35} and restricting tobacco advertising and promotions.³⁶ Similar initiatives could be employed to 'denormalise' wagering. This could include research-based public education, alongside regulation which restricts messages in advertising that suggest that wagering is a normal activity for individuals, peer groups and sports fans, as well as significantly restricting the places where children observe marketing for wagering. These initiatives should be developed independently of the gambling industry.

There has already been some movement from sporting administrators in relation to sponsorship relationships with wagering providers. Some Victorian sporting teams, especially in the AFL and A-League Soccer have signed charters in which they commit not to engage in sponsorship relationships with the wagering industry³⁷ (although it is important to note that many of these teams still own EGM venues). However, while individual AFL teams have taken a stand against wagering sponsorship, the AFL as a code has been less responsive, with the CEO of the AFL defending sponsorship relationships with gambling providers as "legal and part of our game", and important in accessing information for the integrity of the game.³⁸ We would argue that integrity and community welfare are two distinct issues, and that the integrity of sport can be protected without the extensive exposure of young people to wagering promotions. There is a clear imperative for governments and sporting administrators to ensure that environments such as sport are not saturated with marketing for a very adult product that may potentially cause harm.

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