

Briefing: Gambling and gaming harms on children and young people

Gambling and gaming have become increasingly intertwined, especially with the rise of online platforms.

Source: Kim and King, 2020.

This briefing explores the link between gambling and gaming and the potential risks for children and young people (CYP) up to the age of 17 years old. It is aimed at professionals and practitioners in Scotland who require further information on these topics.

Definition of gambling

The Gambling Act 2005 has defined gambling as 'gaming, betting and participating in a lottery'. (Source: [UK Parliament](#), 2020)

Definition of gaming

Gaming is playing a game of chance for a prize. It includes a game that involves both an element of chance and an element of skill, a game that involves an element of chance that can be eliminated by superlative skill, and a game that is presented as involving an element of chance, but does not include a sport. (Source: [Gambling Commission](#), 2024)

Regulation

- Gaming and gambling in the UK are regulated by the Gambling Commission, which operates under the Gambling Act 2005.
- It's against the law in the UK to engage in gambling activities under the age of 18; however, some activities, like playing a toy grabber game, lack age restrictions. (Source: [Gambling Commission](#), 2021, [YGAM](#), 2021)

Language is important

Often the language used in the diagnosis and research of gambling harm can be unhelpful, such as 'gambling disorder' and 'problem gambler'. This language is stigmatising and suggests an individual is to blame for the harm they are experiencing, not the gambling product or wider determinants leading to harmful gambling. Stigma and shame may stop people from seeking the support they need, so we should be mindful of the language we use. See the [gambling harms language](#) page on the Public Health Scotland (PHS) website for further information.

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Gambling harms

Gambling harms are the adverse impacts from gambling on the health and wellbeing of individuals, families, communities and society. Over 50 different metrics of gambling harms have been identified, highlighting the multi-faceted nature of gambling harms as illustrated below:

Health and wellbeing

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Mood disorders
- Sleep problems
- Shame and stigma
- Self-harm
- Suicide
- Physical ill-health (chronic physical illness)
- Substance use
- Alcohol use
- Early death
- Feelings of anger, distress or hopelessness

Relationships

- Strained/exploited
- Loss of trust
- Separation/divorce/relationship breakdown
- Domestic violence
- Neglect
- Adverse childhood experiences
- Social isolation
- Loneliness
- Cultural harm
- Age of gambling disorder onset
- Conflict relating to gambling

Resources

- School drop out/ lower educational attainment
- Work absenteeism
- Job loss and unemployment
- Financial insecurity
- Debt and bankruptcy
- Use of food banks
- Rent arrears
- Homelessness
- Criminality
- Deprivation

Sources: [McDaid et al](#), 2018; [Farhat et al](#), 2020.

Effects and risk factors of gambling on CYP

The UK Government's [Gambling White Paper](#) was published on 27 April 2023. It outlines significant reforms to the Gambling Act 2005, aiming to modernise regulations in response to the evolving digital landscape.

- The long-term effects on children in a family that includes someone experiencing gambling harm can be significant. Impacts can include anxiety, neglect and poor mental health. CYP with existing mental health issues are at a higher risk of developing gambling problems.
- Children of people experiencing gambling harm have been reported to be four times more likely to gamble themselves. Gambling Commission's research found CYP are more likely to be influenced by the gambling behaviours of their parents and family members than by gambling advertisements. (Source: [Gambling Commission](#), 2020)
- Public Health England's 2021 peer-reviewed research identified risk factors for gambling harm among CYP with varying levels of confidence. A high degree includes:
 - impulsivity (a cognitive trait), substance use (alcohol, tobacco, cannabis and other illegal drugs), being male, experiencing depression.(Source: [Office for Health Improvement and Disparities](#), 2023)

2

Gambling behaviour among CYP

Overall, there have been no significant changes in gambling activities compared to 2023. Exceptions are 'played bingo at somewhere other than a bingo club' and 'placed a bet on a betting website and/or app' where there have been significant increases.

CYP gambling activities



Source: [Gambling Commission](#), 2024.

Gambling Commission 2024 survey found the following:

- A quarter of young people in the UK spent their own money on some form of gambling activity – most likely on activities that are legal or do not feature age-restricted products.
- Children as young as 11 have been found to have issues with gambling in the UK.
- 1.5% of young people in the UK were classified as experiencing harmful gambling.
- 44% have had an experience with gambling and 27% have been actively involved in gambling. This indicates that gambling is a prevalent activity among young people. This raises concerns about the potential for developing gambling-related issues at a young age and underscores the importance of monitoring and regulating gambling with CYP.

Source: [Gambling Commission 2024 survey](#), 2024.

Health and Wellbeing Census Scotland 2021–2022 found the following:

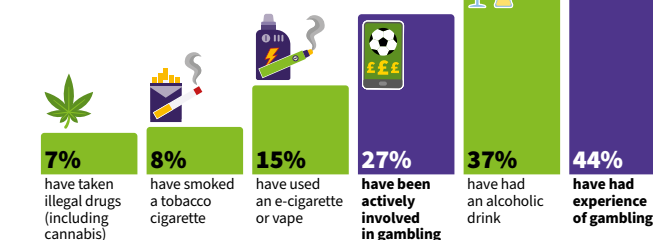
- More CYP with caring responsibilities spent their own money on any gambling activities than those without caring responsibilities.
- More boys spent their own money on any gambling activities than girls.
- More white Scottish CYP spent their own money on any gambling activities than other ethnic groups.

Source: [Health and Wellbeing Census Scotland](#), 2024.

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Comparison of gambling with other risk-taking behaviours in CYP

In 2024, the Gambling Commission found that young people were more likely to have experienced some form of gambling activity and spent their own money on gambling than other risk-taking activities, as illustrated below.



Source: [Gambling Commission](#), 2024.

The escalation of gambling advertising

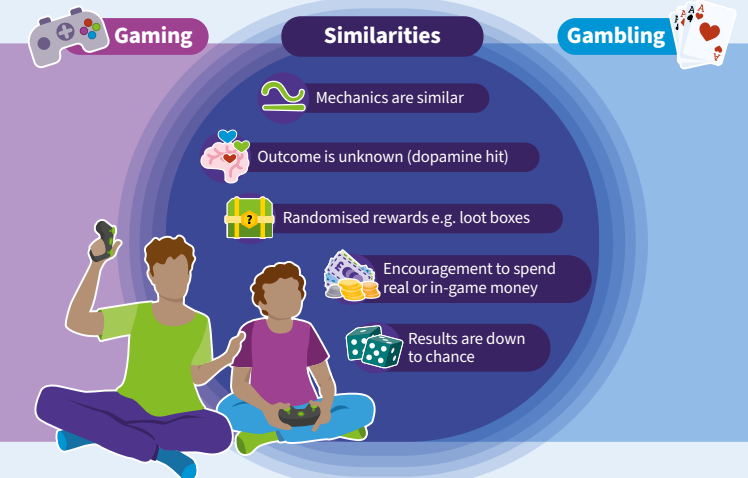
Aggressive marketing tactics from the gambling industry through television adverts (especially during sports events) and social media adverts, contribute to the exposure of children to gambling. Approximately two-thirds of children have seen gambling promotions on their social media channels. (Source: [House of Commons Library](#), 2024)



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The link between gambling and gaming

Gaming and gambling share several similarities that can blur the lines between the two activities, as illustrated below. Understanding these similarities can help in recognising the potential risks associated with gaming and gambling.



- The possible link between gaming and gambling, along with the risk of addiction, is a growing concern. (Source: [TaylorWessing](#) article, 2020)
- There has been a rise in the number of children (ages 3–17 years) who game online, rising from 57% (2022) to 60% (2023), peaking at 13 years old for boys and 11 years old for girls. (Source: [HBSC 2021/2022 survey](#) and [Ofcom](#), 2024)
- 'Loot boxes' (virtual items that players can purchase or earn) in video games and smartphone apps expose close to a million young people to gambling-like experiences. (Source: [Close and Lloyd](#), 2021)
- 68% of young people were aware that they could pay for in-game items with real or virtual money. In-game purchases increase the prevalence of internet gaming disorder in children and young people – microtransactions, social casinos, e-sports and skins. (Source: [Gambling Commission](#), 2024)
- Gaming-related harm, especially video gaming, can serve as a gateway to gambling-related harm due to similarities in their nature. (Source: [Molde et al](#), 2018).

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Gaming

Similarities



Mechanics are similar



Outcome is unknown (dopamine hit)



Randomised rewards e.g. loot boxes



Encouragement to spend real or in-game money



Results are down to chance

Gambling



The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 aims to embed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into Scottish law, ensuring that children's rights are protected and promoted in all areas of life. While the act itself does not specifically address gambling and gaming, its broader implications for children's rights can influence how these issues are managed, particularly in protecting children from related harms.

Here are some potential connections:

Protection from exploitation

- The UNCRC includes provisions to protect children from economic exploitation and harmful practices. This can be applied to ensure that children are not exposed to gambling activities or targeted by gambling advertisements.

Right to education

- The act emphasises the right to education, which can include educating children and young people about the risks associated with gambling and gaming, and promoting healthy, informed choices.

Health and wellbeing

- The act supports the right of children to the highest attainable standard of health. This can involve measures to prevent gambling addiction and gaming-related issues among young people, and provide support for those affected.

Participation in decision-making

- The act encourages the involvement of children in decisions that affect them. This can include consulting young people on policies related to gambling and gaming, and ensuring their voices are heard in creating a safer environment.

By incorporating the UNCRC into Scottish law, the act provides a framework to address various issues, including gambling and gaming, through a child rights lens. This holistic approach helps ensure that children's best interests are always a priority.

Source: [UNCRC \(Incorporation\) \(Scotland\) Act 2024](#)

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Protecting CYP from gambling and gaming risks

We can create a safer environment for children and young people by combining approaches below such as **prevention**, **staying informed** and **ensuring safety**. This would help parents/guardians and CYP stay informed, and protect CYP from the risks associated with gaming and gambling. However, some of these approaches require legislative and system-level interventions.

Prevention

Education and awareness

Implement educational programmes that teach children about the risks of gambling and how to make informed choices. (Source: [GamCare](#), 2024)

Parents and guardians should have open conversations with their children about gaming and gambling, the risks, and how to recognise gaming and gambling-related issues. (Source: [GamCare](#), 2024)

Regulation and advertising

More policy and regulatory frameworks from a public health perspective are required. (Source: [Riley et al](#), 2021)

A UK study has suggested that CYP need to be treated differently, through a specific framework, due to their life stage and potential for future gambling harm. (Source: [Blake et al](#), 2019)

The gaming industry should have its own independent regulator monitoring, for instance, loot boxes and tracking spending among children and young people. (Source: [Ash et al](#), 2022)

Enforce strict regulations on gambling advertisements, especially those targeting or easily accessible to young people. (Source: [Thomas et al](#), 2023)

Staying informed

Resources and support

Organisations such as [Fast Forward](#), [GamCare](#) and [YGAM](#) offer training, resources and support for preventing gambling harms.

Stay updated with the latest research and guidelines on gambling prevention and the impact of gambling marketing on children and young people. (Source: [Thomas et al](#), 2023)

Community involvement

Participate in community workshops and seminars that focus on gambling awareness and prevention. (Source: [Gambling Commission](#))

Encourage open conversations about online activities and set appropriate boundaries. (Source: [UK Safer Internet Centre](#), 2024)

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Ensuring safety

Digital safety

Use parental and guardian control tools to monitor and restrict access to gambling websites and apps. (Source: [Gambling Commission](#))

Parents and guardians should be aware of their children's gaming habits and monitor exposure to gambling-related content. They should also be aware of their own gambling habits. (Source: [InternetMatters](#), 2024)

Teach children about safe online practices, including recognising and avoiding gambling-related content. (Source: [GamCare](#), 2024)

Support

Seek professional help (e.g. from a GP) if a child or young person shows signs of gaming or gambling addiction.

[NHS inform](#), [Gamblers Anonymous Scotland](#), [GamCare](#), [GamFam](#) and [RCA Trust](#) offer counselling and support for CYP and parents/guardians in Scotland.

Further information

To find out more about Public Health Scotland's work on gambling harms, visit:

- [Gambling harms](#)

For help and support for people experiencing gambling or gaming harms, visit NHS inform:

- [Gambling harms: Problem gambling](#)

For further information contact:
PHS.SVGHarms@phs.scot

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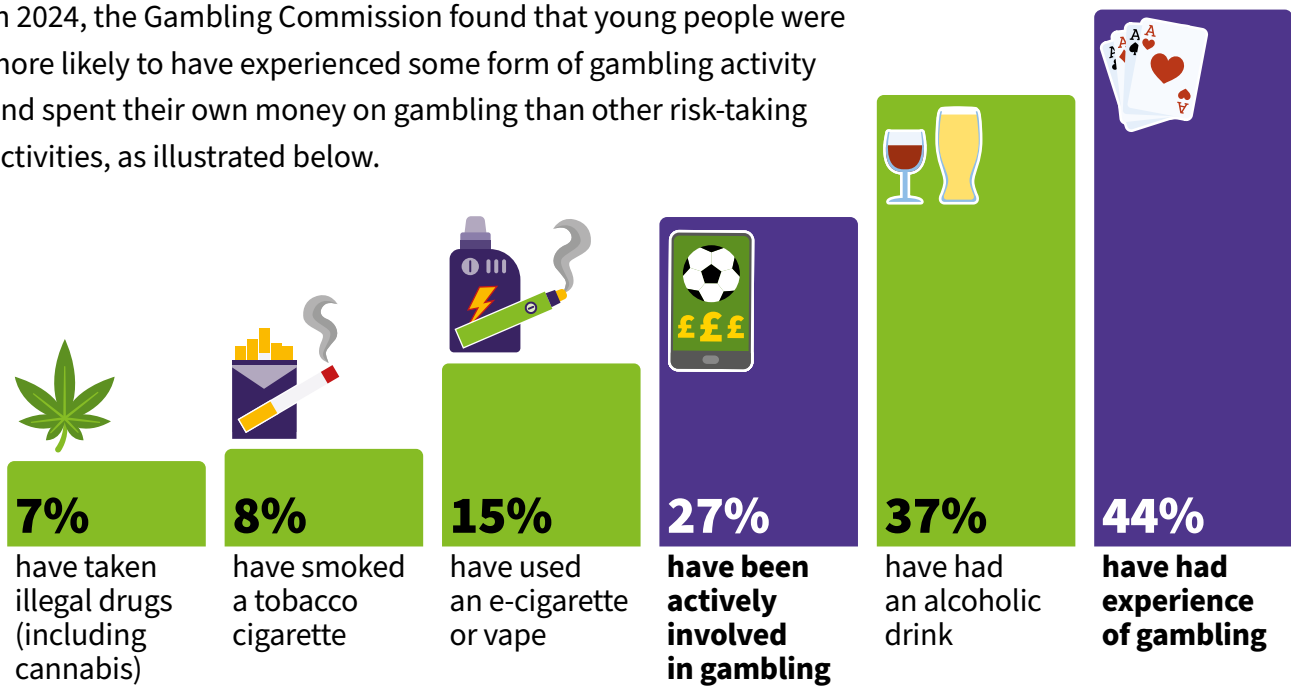
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1 in 7 gambling adverts in the UK do not feature an age restriction warning or harm reduction warning. (Source: **Critchlow et al**, 2020)

Some forms of online gambling advertising had a strong appeal to those under 18, often through the use of colourful graphics, cartoon characters and themes. (Source: **House of Commons Library**, 2024)

96% of 11-to-24-year-olds saw gambling adverts in just one month. (Source: **GambleAware**, 2020)

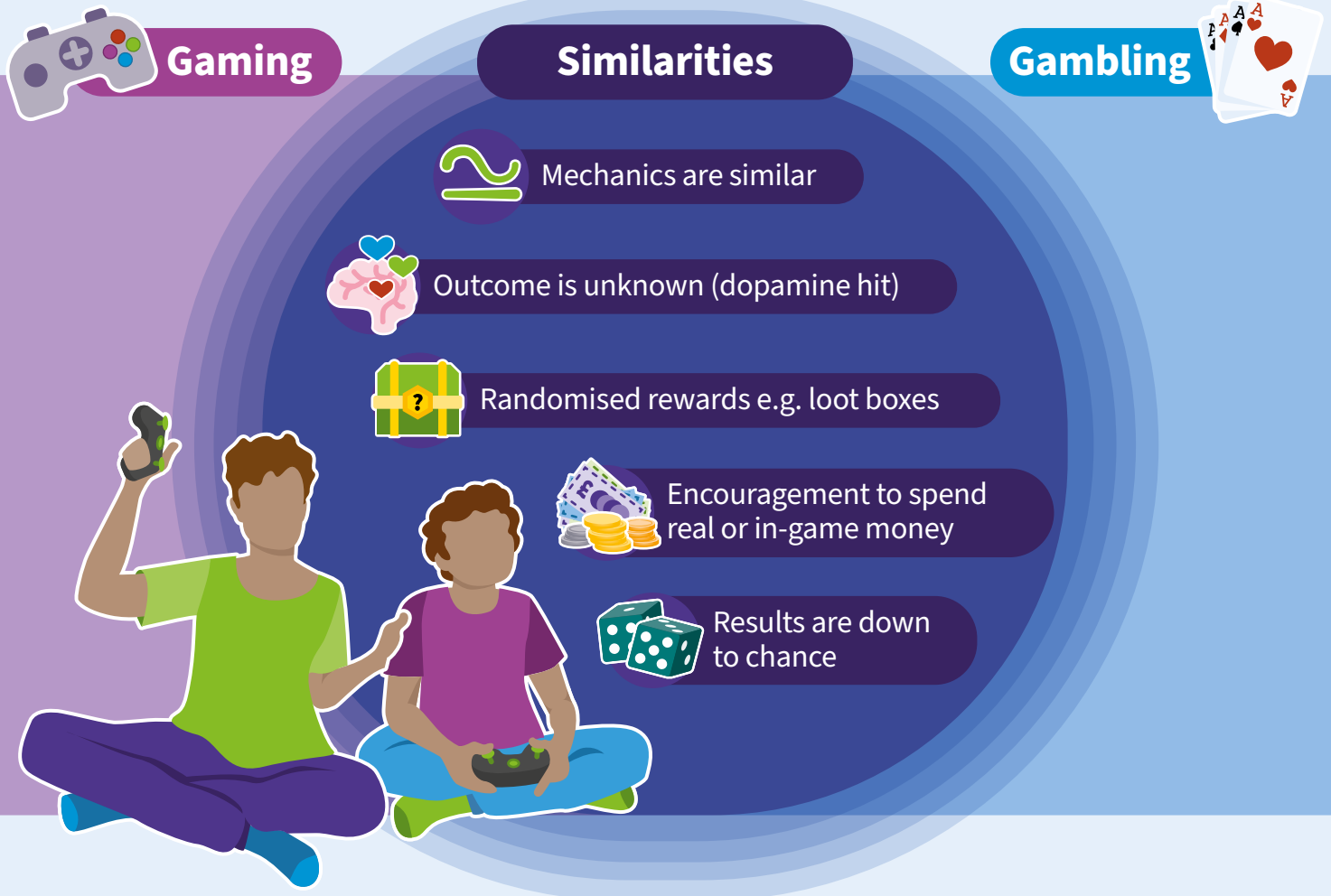
7% of young people follow gambling operators on social media. (Source: **Gambling Commission**, 2024)

The volume of gambling advertisements plays a role in normalising gambling behaviour. (Source: **Ipsos MORI**, 2020)



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