

Online gambling regulations should be tightened to protect children and young people, research finds

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Credit: Queen Mary, University of London

Children and adolescents are being targeted by online gambling websites due to flaws in advertising legislation, according to new research from

Queen Mary University of London and City University London.

The researchers point to recent statistics from an international research review which suggest that 77 to 83 per cent of adolescents are involved in some kind of gambling, and 10 to 15 per cent of adolescents are at risk of developing serious gambling problems.

Julia Hörnle, co-author of the paper and Professor of Internet Law at Queen Mary University of London makes a number of recommendations for protecting children and adolescents from exposure to online gambling:

- Minors who register on an online gambling website and play demo games (without a monetary stake) should not be included in direct marketing campaigns
- Celebrity endorsements of gambling should be banned and no person under 25 should be allowed to advertise gambling at the point of sale
- Gambling providers should have to age-verify users before they send out targeted email advertising
- Minors on Twitter or Facebook who follow or like a football team's account should not be sent sign-up offers such as free bets
- While sign up promotional offers were removed from pre-watershed TV ads last year, a similar move should be considered for social media accounts (unless appropriate age-verification takes place)

The liberalisation by the Gambling Act 2005 led to the removal of the prohibition of advertising for hardcore forms of gambling. The policy shifted to a view that that gambling is part of the legitimate entertainment sector and that operators should be free to advertise. This approach means that the purpose of advertising regulation is no longer to limit demand but to reduce harm through marginal measures protecting

the most vulnerable consumers.

Professor Hörnle asks: "Gambling advertising is restricted if it targets children. But what if the advertising targets adults, but is equally appealing to, and consumed by, children? It is also ignorant of the many and varied ways young people consume modern media, particularly online."

She adds: "The reality is that standards are not consistently applied to the internet and a fundamental rethink and redesign of regulation is required for advertising online. Secondly, regulation currently focuses too much on the impact on the general population and is partially blind to the impact on children and vulnerable persons. Many parents will have no idea that their children are effectively at risk of a [gambling](#) habit. As is often the case with [internet law](#), we are playing catch-up."

Provided by Queen Mary, University of London

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