Perceptions of and Exposure to Games of Chance, Gambling, and Video Gaming: Self-Reports of Preadolescents and Parents

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## Authors

Zaman B.;Van Mechelen M.;De Cock R.;Huyghe J.

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* Social mediation
* Literacy and skills
* Risks and harms

## Sample

10 white, middle-class families living in the wider area of the city Leuven, Belgium of which the parents consisted of seven mothers and three fathers and the group of preadolescent participants which consisted of three girls and seven boys, all aged between 11 and 12 years old

# Abstract

Although gambling-related behavior develops in preadolescence, there is a scarcity of research into the early socialization processes in this specific age cohort. For this study, preadolescents’ early perceptions of and practices relating to games of chance, gambling, and video gaming were explored. To account for the perspectives of preadolescents and their parents, we administered semi-structured in-depth interviews with elicitation prompts to 10 Flemish (i.e., Belgian) families with 11- to 12-year-olds. The findings show that different socialization dynamics are at play for the examined media genres. Families were relaxed about young people’s involvement in traditional games of chance activities in a familiar context, pointing to early socialization and cultural normalization dynamics in preadolescents who have not yet reached the legal minimum age. Moreover, the parents were not fully aware of the first gambling and games of chance activities of the preadolescents or of some of their in-game micropayments. They did not yet consider active mediation on these matters to be relevant. Because of this, preventive parental mediation efforts cannot reach their full potential; we call upon future researchers to explore ludoliteracy programs that can increase the resilience of young players in a world of increasingly converged media entertainment.

# Outcome

"All interviewed parents guided the video game behaviors of their children. For most parents by giving them their
teenage son or daughter a certain level of autonomy, for instance, by providing space for discussion, looking for ways to reach a common agreement, establishing a climate of trust, explaining the rationale behind decisions, and relying on monitoring rather than proactive restrictions. Families characterized by a harmonious relationship between parents and children are more likely to explain the rationale for their media education and s and monitor their online use without necessarily intervening. Yet, parents were way more negative about gambling games and none of the parents thought that their teenage child had ever made micropayments in games, whereas half of the preadolescents reported doing so.
This implies a risk of the normalization of games of chance activities as part of youth entertainment culture but also warn us about the negative effects of the social acceptance of gambling, the gambling activities of young people with family members at home, and the lack of concern that parents have about this. If parents are unaware of preadolescents’ exposure to covert gambling mechanics, such as simulated gambling and predatory micropayments, parental monitoring and supervision based on trust and dialogues will get lost. We recommend not only focusing on the protective role of parental mediation, but also considering young people’s ludo literacy capacities. Possessing a critical form of game literacy can help to heighten awareness and resilience and can be a way for players, as digital consumers, to detect predatory monetization techniques and gambling mechanics in the virtual economy surrounding games, rendering them less addictive.