

Half of children at risk of gambling addiction, warns study

Wednesday 28 August, 2019

Today, a survey to be launched at 10 Downing Street by the Safer Online Gambling Group exposes Britain's hidden epidemic of young people spending millions of pounds every year on in-app purchases and video game add-ons.

The survey estimates that young people and families could be losing over £270m each year through so called 'loot boxes' which offer the chance to gain greater players or upgrades in video games and mobile apps in return for cash. 1 in 2 young people (11-18) encountered in the survey had used a loot box recently and the average spend on in-game content per person was estimated at £500-600 per year.

One in ten young people are thought to have accidentally spent money on in-app purchases and 95% used gaming apps on their mobile or tablet devices according to the report. The survey also documents the rise in adverts being shown for betting to young people underage on social media and through affiliate advertising platforms inside mobile and tablet based games.

SOGG, led by entrepreneur Adam Bradford (26) and his father David (63), was born out of the pair's joint concern about gambling addiction and gaming which mimics gambling for children; after David spent time in jail for stealing money to pay for his out of control gambling addiction in 2014. The former financial controller racked up hundreds of thousands of pounds worth of debt through loans, remortgaging his house and betting for over 30 years in secret and left his family to pick up the pieces. The pair have campaigned against Fixed Odds Betting Terminals and lobby for tighter regulation on online gambling. The group has the support of the Labour party, several MPs, the NHS and leading bookmakers.

Adam Bradford, Director of the Safer Online Gambling Group said: 'It is simply absurd that young people who are not even of legal age to place a bet are being exposed to gambling content and insidious addictive gaming from the age of 3. One case study told us that his child had been playing a maths game on his iPad and was then incentivised to level up the game and at the end of each level was rewarded with casino-lookalike chips into a digital wallet. The links between gaming and gambling need to be studied carefully and the gambling industry needs to make absolutely sure that its affiliates and marketing agencies are screening out young people from digital adverts so that those who are under-age for betting are not exposed to addictive content and enthralling free bet offers before they are even legally allowed to vote.

Online gambling is a silent killer and we already know as a society how devastating the effects of a gambling addiction can be. Whilst 2 million people in the general population are at risk of developing a gambling addiction, we need to stamp out these underhanded practices from gaming and gambling companies now through introducing age requirements for digital adverts and a complete ban on in-app purchases in games licensed for children, before more families across the country are bankrupted.'

The pair will hand in the research to Prime Minister Boris Johnson and they are calling on the industry and Government to act. They believe in-game purchasing should be barred by default on games and apps and that gameplay should not mimic gambling or link social or financial success to purchases made. They also want tighter rules on advertising and affiliates, so young people have less chance of seeing gambling content under age.

A full copy of the report is available at www.saferonlinegambling.org/research.

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Press are invited to attend Downing Street at 3pm on 28th August for interviews, photo opportunities and further comment.

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