Normal Behavior, Abnormal Industry: Exploring Adolescent Gambling Normalization in the Context of an Advertising Ban

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This research was part of the GAMSPON research project, funded by BELSPO.

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In July 2023, Belgium introduced a gambling advertising ban to protect minors and counter gambling normalization. Research primarily links gambling normalization to advertising, but knowledge lacks on how an advertising ban affects this process. This study explored adolescent gambling normalization and how commercial and legislative discourses affect it. Semi-structured interviews with twelve adolescents (16–18 years) were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Normalization was examined through perceptions of gambling as common, acceptable, and harmless. Participants were highly aware of harms of addiction and financial loss. Combined with moral concerns about sponsorships, this shaped perceptions of gambling as an abnormal industry. Knowledge of the ban reinforced these perceptions. Despite these negative perceptions, gambling was considered 'normal' when done by trusted others and under conditions of infrequency, low stakes, and social play. These insights offer implications for policy and research on harmful commodity normalization.

Keywords: gambling normalization, advertising ban, sponsorships, adolescents, norms