

knowledge snapshot



Innovative safer gambling campaigns to challenge harmful gambling products and industry practices: A description of 'Odds Are: They Win'

What this article is about

Safer gambling campaigns (e.g., 'Take Time to Think') have not been effective at creating behaviour change. These campaigns may actually help normalize harmful gambling. These campaigns often explain gambling harms in terms of individual responsibility. Thus, the gambling industry's role in facilitating harms is ignored. It is challenging to shift safer gambling campaigns away from focusing on individual responsibility. This article discusses an innovative campaign, 'Odds Are: They Win', which directs the focus onto harmful gambling products and industry practices instead of individual responsibility.

What was done?

The authors review evidence supporting the shift away from individual responsibility framings. They provide a rationale for a focus on harmful gambling products and industry practices in public health messaging. They present a possibly disruptive innovation called 'Odds Are: They Win.' An innovation is considered disruptive if it challenges conventional ways of thinking.

What you need to know

Support for shifting away from individual responsibility

There is some evidence that health messaging campaigns that focus on individual responsibility can prompt behaviour change in some contexts. But many studies have warned of the possibility of unintended consequences. This is because such campaigns often create a binary between responsible/controlled gambling and irresponsible/uncontrolled gambling. This binary approach may reinforce stereotypes and

Why is this article important?

This article describes a social marketing campaign launched by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) in 2022. The campaign, 'Odds Are: They Win', presented advertisements that were co-developed with public health professionals and people who experienced gambling harms. The advertisements focused on the different harms caused by harmful gambling products and industry practices. This focus differs from traditional industry-created safer gambling campaigns. The authors argue that campaigns like 'Odds Are: They Win' may be more effective and be potentially disruptive innovations to aid public health in addressing gambling harms.

social stigma. This can create barriers that prevent people with gambling problems from seeking help.

Health messaging campaigns in other areas of public health concerns (e.g., smoking) have shown that messages may be more effective if they focus on harmful products and industry practices. Studies have suggested that being educated on the social and commercial determinants of health may help drive social and political change. Educational campaigns can also help secure support for public health policies.

Why focus on the gambling industry?

Research has shown that people who gamble as well as their loved ones can be harmed by their gambling. A Public Health England report (2023) estimated that the national social cost of gambling in England is up to £1.27 billion. The gambling industry aims to shape situational factors (i.e., the supply and marketing of gambling products) and structural factors (i.e.,

features of the products themselves) to encourage people to gamble and to keep them gambling once they have started. The authors argue that educational interventions can be effective if they showcase how the gambling industry manipulates the situational and structural context of gambling.

‘Odds Are: They Win’

‘Odds Are: They Win’ is a social marketing campaign in Manchester, UK. It was launched by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) in 2022. The purpose of the campaign is to raise awareness of gambling products and harmful industry practices. The campaign was developed by collaborating with public health professionals and people with experience of gambling harms. Some people with experience of gambling harms believed that a stronger industry-oriented focus could have made a difference in their own gambling behaviours.

Advertisements for the ‘Odds Are: They Win’ campaign provided information on a diverse range of gambling harms, including financial loss, unhappiness, and health-related losses. Some advertisements focused on specific harmful products (e.g., the Fixed Odds Betting Terminal). In doing so, these advertisements emphasized that the goal of the gambling industry is to maximize profit through customer losses.

Advertisements were displayed for three months. They were shown on social media and in physical settings (e.g., Greater Manchester’s tram system and coffee shops). These advertisements reached an estimated 1.4 million people across the region.

The authors argue that the campaign is a potentially disruptive innovation. They note that the UK government recently announced an intention to replace industry-funded safer gambling messages with public health messages that have been independently developed and robustly evaluated. The authors suggest that ‘Odds Are: They Win’ can be part of this policy drive. They also suggest that the campaign’s focus is on people with lower risk, rather than people already experiencing severe harms. A future research direction is to explore how people with lower risk

respond to the campaign. Additionally, the campaign may help to counter how the gambling industry communicates about gambling harms.

Who is it intended for?

This paper is intended for policy makers, researchers, and practitioners.

About the researchers

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Citation

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