



Mandatory pop-up messages have a modest effect on EGM gambling behaviour in New Zealand

What this research is about

Pop-up messages are used to minimize harms due to excessive gambling in many countries. In New Zealand, electronic gaming machines (EGMs) are required by law to include a pop-up message feature since 2009. Pop-up messages interrupt gamblers at random time after 30 minutes of continuous gambling. They provide gamblers with information about their current gambling session, the amount of money they had spent, and net wins or losses. After 15 seconds, gamblers can choose to continue or stop gambling. To date, New Zealand is the only country in which EGMs in every gambling venue must include pop-up messages. This study investigated the effects of mandatory pop-up messages on amount of money spent on gambling. It also explored how EGM gamblers interacted with pop-up messages.

What the researcher did

The researchers recruited 460 adult EGM gamblers in areas near gambling venues in two cities in New Zealand. Gamblers were contacted by telephone within 2 weeks after they had given their consent to complete the survey. The Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) was used to assess problem gambling behaviour and consequences of gambling in the last 3 months. The participants were also asked about how often they gambled and the amount of money they had spent on gambling in the last 3 months.

In addition, the researchers asked the participants about their awareness of pop-up messages, how they responded to pop-up messages, and if pop-up messages had any impact on their control over money spent on gambling. They also asked the participants about their coping responses to stressful life events.

What the researcher found

What you need to know

In New Zealand, electronic gaming machines (EGMs) are required by law to include pop-up messages. This study investigated the effects of mandatory pop-up messages on amount of money spent on gambling. It also explored how EGM gamblers interacted with pop-up messages. A total of 460 adult EGM gamblers completed the telephone survey. More than half of the gamblers reported that they had seen pop-up messages while gambling. About half of the gamblers who had seen pop-up messages would read the information. Many gamblers considered pop-up messages to be accurate and have no negative impact on their enjoyment of gambling.

While most gamblers did not believe that pop-up messages were helpful, a quarter believed that pop-up messages helped them control the amount of money they spent on gambling. Most gamblers also indicated that they were unlikely to stop gambling in response to a pop-up message. However, a small number of gamblers indicated that they would be likely to stop gambling. Gamblers who were likely to stop gambling after seeing a pop-up message spent less money on gambling than those who were unlikely to stop. Overall, the results suggest that mandatory pop-up messages have a modest effect on EGM gambling behaviour.

Many participants (57%) had seen pop-up messages while gambling in the last 3 months. Over a third (38%) reported seeing them often or always. Among the participants who had seen pop-up messages, about half said that they would read the information. While most

participants (75%) did not believe that pop-up messages were helpful, a quarter (25%) believed that pop-up messages helped them control the amount of money they spent on gambling. Only a few participants (15%) believed that pop-up messages provided inaccurate information.

Many participants (63%) reported that pop-up messages had no impact on their enjoyment of gambling. About a quarter (25%) reported a negative impact and a few (9%) reported a positive impact.

Most participants indicated that they were unlikely to do anything in response to a pop-up message. However, about 18% indicated they would change EGMs, 10% would consider their level of gambling, and 8.8% would reduce their gambling. When asked if they would stop gambling, most participants (84.9%) said they were unlikely to stop gambling in response to a pop-up message. But a small number of participants (6.4%) said they would be likely to end their current gambling session. Gamblers who were likely to stop gambling after seeing a pop-up message spent less money on gambling than those who were unlikely to stop or were neutral.

How you can use this research

Policy makers and gambling intervention providers can use this study to understand the effects of pop-up messages on gambling behaviour. This study has shown that mandatory pop-up messages in New Zealand have a modest effect. Further research should be done to improve the impact of pop-up messages. At present, the New Zealand pop-up messages provide only information about current gambling session. The messages do not prompt gamblers to consider their gambling behaviour. Future research should investigate the effects of message content and other features of pop-up messages.

About the Researcher

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Citation

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Keywords

Electronic gaming machines, problem gambling, pop-up messages, harm minimisation, New Zealand

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