

research snapshot

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Do limit-setting tools help reduce online gambling intensity?

What this research is about

Online gambling has become very popular. Many gambling activities that are available in person are now also available online. Some people may be able to gamble online without experiencing harm. However, about 5% of people who gamble online experience problem gambling. Problem gambling is when someone's gambling habits harm them and those close to them. For example, problem gambling can harm someone's personal relationships or their mental health. It can also disrupt their work or education.

Some online gambling operators offer their customers tools that may help reduce their risk of problem gambling. For example, limit-setting tools allow a gambler to limit the amount of money they can spend with that gambling operator. If a gambler chooses to use a limit-setting tool, it may help keep them from spending more money than they can afford.

Although limit-setting tools are common, few studies have looked at how effective they are. The goal of this study was to see if people who chose to use a voluntary limit-setting tool would spend less money on gambling over a one-year period. The researchers also tested to see if there was a link between age or gender and online gambling intensity.

What the researchers did

The researchers used data from 49,560 people across seven different countries. All participants had gambled with the online gambling operator *Kindred*. About 90% of the participants were men, and the average age of the participants was 33 years old.

What you need to know

Online gambling has become very popular. About 5% of people who gamble online experience harm from gambling. Some online gambling operators offer their customers tools that may help reduce their risk of problem gambling. For example, limit-setting tools allow a gambler to limit the amount of money they can spend with that gambling operator. This study tested how effective limit-setting tools are in reducing gambling intensity.

The researchers found that only 1.3% of online gamblers used the limit-setting tool. Overall, people who set limits did not spend less money on gambling over time. However, high-intensity gamblers who set limits did spend less over time. Therefore, limit-setting tools may help people who gamble intensely to reduce their gambling.

First, the researchers determined each participant's gambling intensity from January to March 2017. Gambling intensity was the amount of money a participant spent gambling on *Kindred* over a three-month period. They also noted which participants chose to use the voluntary limit-setting tool. The researchers divided the participants into 10 groups, ranging from low to high gambling intensities, to test which groups were more likely to use the limit-setting tool.

The researchers determined each participant's gambling intensity a year later (from January to March 2018). They then checked if participants who used the limit-setting tool decreased their gambling intensity from 2017 to 2018. They also checked if someone's gambling intensity was related to their age or gender.

What the researchers found

Overall, only 1.3% of the participants chose to use the limit-setting tool. Gamblers who set limits did not spend less on gambling than those who did not set limits. However, 2.9% of the participants with the highest gambling intensities chose to use the limit-setting tool. Additionally, these gamblers did spend less money gambling in the second year than in the first year. Thus, overall, people who set limits did not spend less over time, but high-intensity gamblers who set limits did spend less over time. High-intensity gamblers may be at a higher risk of problem gambling. So, limit-setting tools may help reduce their risk of problem gambling.

The researchers found that gamblers who chose to set limits did not differ in age or gender compared to those who did not. Gambling intensity was also not related to gender. Gambling intensity was related to age; older gamblers tended to spend more money than younger gamblers. This may be because older people tend to have higher incomes.

How you can use this research

This research shows that limit-setting tools may help some online gamblers reduce their gambling intensity. However, few gamblers choose to use them. Thus, gambling operators should encourage their customers to use such tools. Future research could test if other tools are more effective at reducing online gambling intensity. For example, they could test self-exclusion tools or pop-up messages that remind players how much time or money they have spent.

About the researchers

Michael Auer and **Niklas Hopfgartner** are affiliated with neccton GmbH in Müllendorf, Austria. **Mark D. Griffiths** is affiliated with the International Gambling Research Unit in the Psychology Department at Nottingham Trent University in Nottingham, United Kingdom. For more information about this study, please contact Mark D. Griffiths at mark.griffiths@ntu.ac.uk.

Citation

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About Gambling Research Exchange (GREO)

Gambling Research Exchange (GREO) has partnered with the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University to produce Research Snapshots. GREO is an independent knowledge translation and exchange organization that aims to eliminate harm from gambling. Our goal is to support evidence-informed decision making in safer gambling policies, standards, and practices. The work we do is intended for researchers, policy makers, gambling regulators and operators, and treatment and prevention service providers.

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