

knowledge snapshot



Voluntary vs. mandatory responsible gambling limit-setting systems

What this article is about

Pre-commitment or advanced limit-setting is one of the most widely discussed strategies to reduce harms from gambling. In limit-setting, people set money or time limits before they gamble. Limit-setting can be used for any type of gambling. But, limit-setting is typically found in technology-based gambling such as electronic gaming machines. Recently, limit-setting tools have been used in online gambling.

Limit-setting has been implemented since the early 2000s by both Canadian and Australian gambling operators. A review in 2011 concluded that limit-setting tools were generally not effective. This was due to the low use of these tools and the high cost of implementing them. Since the review in 2011, advances have been made in limit-setting tools and more research has also been conducted in this area.

In this study, the researchers provide a concise review of what is known about limit-setting. The researchers aimed to summarize the main findings in research literature in a way that could be useful for researchers and policy makers.

What was done?

The researchers searched the peer-reviewed literature for studies on limit setting using the database Scopus. They also looked at the references of relevant papers. Major studies from government bodies were located using Google. The researchers looked at conference papers as well.

Studies were included if they tested the efficacy of limit-setting tools in either land-based or online casinos. The researchers also categorized studies based on if the limit-setting was mandatory or

Why is this article important?

Limit-setting strategies have been discussed as potential tools to minimize problem gambling. But, previous reviews have suggested that asking players to voluntarily set either a time or money limit may not be effective. This article provides an updated review of the efficacy of limit-setting tools. The results of previous studies suggested that only 1 to 3% of people set voluntary limits, although one study reported a rate of 26%. After 6 to 12 months, voluntary limit-setting drops to almost zero. Only a few studies in Norway had tested mandatory limit-setting. These studies all involved customers of *Norsk Tipping*. The results of these studies provide preliminary support that requiring players to set limits can help to reduce spending on gambling. Overall, this review is in line with previous studies that suggest voluntary limit-setting may not be effective. But, mandatory limit-setting may have potential benefits in reducing harm from gambling.

voluntary. In mandatory limit-setting, people cannot avoid setting a limit or the limit is already set. Voluntary limit-setting is when people have a choice to either set a limit or not.

Three main outcomes were of interest and summarized. The first was how many people chose to set a limit. The second was how many people reported that limit-setting was useful. The third was how effective the limit-setting feature was in reducing harmful gambling behaviour, such as gambling spending and losses.

What you need to know

The researchers found 25 papers and reports which described trials involving limit-setting. The majority of the studies relied on convenience samples (i.e., recruited participants who were easy to reach). Studies conducted in casinos had mixed success in being able to recruit participants. In many studies, the number of responses to the surveys were poor.

In studies where participants had a choice to set limits, the rates of participants who did so ranged from 1 to 3%. One study reported a rate of 26%. In studies which followed participants over a period of time, voluntary limit-setting dropped to almost zero after 6 to 12 months. Players generally reported that limit-setting features were useful. But these players might not be representative of the broader gambling population. The impact on actual gambling behaviour was only modest. One study in Australia reported that gambling venues struggled with implementing voluntary limit-setting. This was due to either a lack of staff knowledge or a lack of customer interest. Overall, the results are similar to the earlier review on limit-setting conducted in 2011.

The only country where a mandatory limit-setting trial took place was in Norway. All studies in Norway involved one operator, Norsk Tipping, and provided some support for mandatory limit-setting. For example, one study found that mandatory limit-setting could reduce money spent on gambling. The majority (79%) of Norsk Tipping customers reported stopping to gamble once they reached their limits.

Based on their review, the researchers suggest that voluntary limit-setting has limited support. Voluntary limit-setting may be better used alongside other responsible gambling tools in online gambling environments. Mandatory limit-setting appears promising based on the studies in Norway. However, there is a need for further investigation into possible unintended consequences. For example, it is unknown whether mandatory limit-setting may push people who gamble at a high risk level to use unregulated sites with fewer restrictions.

Who is it intended for?

This research is intended for gambling operators and policy makers who may wish to consider mandatory limit-setting tools. This research is also intended for researchers to examine ways to maximize the uptake of voluntary limit-setting tools.

About the researchers

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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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