



Identifying low-risk gambling limits for eight specific gambling activities

What this research is about

A number of studies have identified low-risk limits for gambling. People who gamble beyond the limits are expected to be at higher risk of experiencing harm. However, concerns have been raised about the use of low-risk limits that apply to all gambling activities. Experts in the gambling field appear to be divided on whether there should be low-risk limits for specific gambling activities. In Australia, most experts and the general public appear to support the idea of activity-specific limits. In this study, the researchers aimed to develop and evaluate low-risk limits for eight gambling activities.

What the researchers did

The researchers used data from the second and third Social and Economic Impact Study (SEIS) of Gambling in Tasmania and the 2014 Survey on Gambling, Health and Wellbeing in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). The first dataset included 4,303 adults and 5,000 adults from the second and third Tasmanian studies. The second dataset included 2,294 adults from the 2014 ACT study.

The researchers developed low-risk limits for eight gambling activities: (1) EGMs; (2) horse/dog racing; (3) instant scratch tickets; (4) lottery; (5) keno; (6) casino table games; (7) bingo; and (8) sports/other event betting. They determined the limits based on five indices: (1) gambling frequency; (2) gambling spending per year; (3) gambling spending as a proportion of gross personal income; (4) spending per session (Tasmanian dataset only); and (5) duration per session (ACT dataset and for some activities only).

To measure harm, the researchers used selected items from the Problem Gambling Severity Index

What you need to know

The researchers developed low-risk limits for eight gambling activities using data from two large population-based studies in Australia. The limits were based on five indices: (1) gambling frequency; (2) gambling spending per year; (3) spending as a proportion of gross personal income; (4) spending per session; and (5) duration per session. The researchers were able to identify low-risk limits across all five indices for electronic gaming machines (EGMs) only. The limits for EGMs were generally strongest at predicting harm. This was followed by the limits for casino table games and sports/other event betting. The limits for instant scratch tickets, lottery, and keno could also predict harm. However, the limits for bingo and horse/dog racing failed to predict harm.

(PGSI). Harm was defined as endorsing two or more negative consequences on the PGSI. The researchers examined if exceeding the low-risk limits could predict harm for each gambling activity. Gambling spending and spending as a proportion of gross personal income were closely related. Thus, only the gambling spending limits were considered in these analyses. For each dataset, the researchers analyzed the group of people who played each specific gambling activity, as well as all people who had gambled in the past year.

What the researchers found

The following low-risk limits were identified:

- EGM gambling: frequency of 10 times per year, spending of AUD\$300 per year, spending of 0.63–1.04% of gross personal income, AUD\$35 per session, and duration of 40 minutes per session.

- Horse/dog racing: spending of 0.55% of gross personal income.
- Instant scratch tickets: spending of AUD\$45 per year.
- Lotteries: spending of 0.45% of gross personal income.
- Keno: frequency of 4–13 times per year and spending of AUD\$45 to AUD\$160 per year.
- Casino table gambling: spending of AUD\$345 per year and 0.36–0.76% of gross personal income.
- Bingo: spending of AUD\$150 per year, 0.49% of gross personal income, AUD\$17 per session, and duration of 90 minutes per session.
- Sports/other event betting: frequency of 14 times per year, spending of AUD\$400 per year, and 0.55–0.86% of gross personal income.

The limits were similar across the two datasets, although the ACT limits were slightly lower. Between one-quarter to one-half of people who played these gambling activities exceeded the limits for them.

Exceeding each of the five limits for EGMs predicted harm. After taking into account all the limits, exceeding the gambling frequency, session spending, and session duration limits predicted harm for both Tasmanian and ACT participants who played EGMs. Exceeding the gambling spending limit predicted harm for Tasmanian participants only.

For horse/dog racing, exceeding the one limit did not predict harm. For instant scratch tickets, exceeding the one limit predicted harm. The same was true for lottery gambling. For keno, exceeding both limits predicted harm. After taking into account both limits, exceeding the gambling frequency limit predicted harm for Tasmanian participants. In contrast, exceeding the gambling spending limit predicted harm for ACT participants.

Exceeding each of the two limits for casino table games predicted harm. For bingo, exceeding each of the three limits did not predict harm. For sports/other event betting, exceeding each of the three limits predicted harm. After taking into account all the limits, people who bet on sports/other events

experienced harm if they exceeded the spending limit. But the frequency limit did not predict harm.

How you can use this research

The low-risk limits could inform people who gamble, regulators, and gambling interventions about the risks of harm associated with different gambling activities.

About the researchers

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