

knowledge snapshot



Towards online gambling harm prevention and reduction: Universal, selective, and indicated interventions

What this article is about

Gambling is widely available online, including on mobile devices. People who gamble online are at greater risk for gambling-related problems. There is an increasing interest in harm prevention and reduction efforts in online gambling. Many previous studies focused on harm reduction and harm prevention efforts in land-based gambling. It is not clear whether their findings can be applied to online gambling. In this article, the authors discuss how harm prevention and reduction efforts can be used to address online gambling.

What was done?

The authors reviewed existing literature on harm reduction and prevention efforts for online gambling.

What you need to know

The authors discuss three types of measures: universal measures, selective measures, and indicated interventions.

Universal Measures

Universal measures aim to reduce and prevent harm at the population level. They include efforts to address the delivery and availability of gambling opportunities. Greater availability of gambling is linked to greater prevalence of problem gambling among the general population. But it is not easy to restrict the availability of online gambling. One way is to close online casinos or prevent monetary deposits overnight, as implemented in Norway and Finland.

New regulations need to address the availability of online gambling apps. Mobile gambling apps can be downloaded through gambling websites or third-party distribution sites. Thus, it is not enough to just restrict

Why is this article important?

Many previous studies focused on harm reduction and harm prevention efforts in land-based gambling. But it is not clear whether their findings can be applied to online gambling. In this article, the authors review harm reduction and prevention efforts for online gambling. They discuss universal measures that aim to prevent and reduce harm at the population level. These measures include addressing the delivery and availability of online gambling opportunities (e.g., regulations to restrict availability and online marketing). The authors also discuss selective measures that target vulnerable populations at a greater risk for gambling-related problems. These measures include age restrictions, pre-commitment tools, and self-exclusion. Finally, the authors discuss indicated interventions aimed at people with a greater risk of gambling-related problems. These interventions include using artificial intelligence (AI) tools to identify patterns of problematic behaviour; personalized feedback; and online therapeutic options.

availability through gambling websites. There is a need for app stores, developers, and distribution sites to work together.

Another universal measure is to address exposure to marketing. Online marketing is often targeted and takes on complex forms. For example, people are often exposed to targeted gambling advertising on social media. This makes it harder to limit the outlets, platforms, and contents of marketing messages. It is crucial for regulators to keep pace with changes in online gambling marketing. The data that gambling

companies collect to market their products may also be put to better use to prevent and reduce harms.

Harmful product characteristics should be better regulated. One way is to make sure that regulators examine new products before they are introduced. Warning labels on products may be another effective universal measure. Personalized warnings and other information campaigns can be used in online environments. Such messages should highlight the harms that gambling causes.

Selective Measures

Selective measures are aimed at vulnerable populations at a greater risk of developing gambling-related problems. Selective measures can be targeted based on demographic or socio-economic characteristics (e.g., age and income) or gambling behaviour. Selective measures are easier to implement in online environments than in land-based gambling environments. This is because it is easier to identify people at risk using data collected by online gambling companies. Some examples of selective measures include age restrictions and pre-commitment. Pre-commitment includes tools that help people control their gambling, such as setting a limit on money spent. Self-exclusion is another measure that allows people to ban themselves from gambling websites. Self-exclusion is more effective when it is offered through a centralized system. In this way, people can self-exclude from multiple gambling sites at once. Pop-up and targeted information tools can also help people make better gambling decisions.

Indicated Interventions

Indicated interventions focus on individuals with a greater risk of developing gambling-related problems. In online gambling, problematic play can be identified using algorithms that recognize play or spending patterns. For example, artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning tools can help identify harmful behaviours. Feedback interventions are another type of indicated intervention. These interventions provide personalized feedback based on identified problematic gambling behaviours. Therapeutic interventions can also be useful. These include approaches such as web-based psychotherapy,

counselling, and online support forums. However, studies have reported mixed results regarding the effects of online therapeutic interventions.

Who is it intended for?

The article is intended for gambling harm prevention professionals, including public health policy makers.

About the researchers

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