

research snapshot

summarize | mobilize



Improving safer gambling messages from the viewpoints of academics, regulators, and treatment providers

What this research is about

Many researchers and policymakers believe that gambling should be treated as a public health issue. Safer gambling messages are commonly used as a public health intervention for gambling. Yet, there is little evidence to support the utility of messages that are widely used.

A commonly used safer gambling message is a reminder to 'gamble responsibly', despite evidence suggesting that people who gamble rarely look at such messages. Some reasons why safer gambling messages may be ignored include overexposure and the generic nature of advice.

A major challenge with safer gambling messages is to adequately reflect and address the diversity of people who gamble. Public health approaches must make trade-offs between messages catered to the large number of people who may experience a low amount of gambling harm, versus the smaller number of people who may experience a high amount of gambling harm. Safer gambling messages may be better suited to people with a low risk of harm. In contrast, stronger interventions, such as setting limits on amount of money spent, may be better suited to people experiencing more severe gambling harm.

This study aimed to evaluate a broad range of safer gambling messages through focus groups with gambling professionals.

What the researchers did

Focus groups were conducted by the researchers over video conference, and then transcribed by a professional service. People were invited to

What you need to know

Safer gambling messages are a commonly used public health intervention. Little research, however, has examined the content and utility of safer gambling messages. In this study, the researchers conducted focus groups with gambling professionals, including academics, regulators, and treatment providers. In each focus group, participants were presented with five different types of safer gambling messages. Participants discussed various aspects of these messages and how to improve them. The researchers identified five main themes from the focus groups: (1) messages may be insufficient to change behaviour; (2) messages should respect the diversity amongst people who gamble; (3) messages should not contribute to gambling stigma; (4) messages should provide norm-based information thoughtfully; and (5) messages should trigger only positive, and not negative, emotions. These findings have implications for the development of safer gambling messages. They also highlight the importance of considering various factors when designing such messages.

participate based on their professional involvement in gambling-related research, regulation, or treatment.

There were 21 participants, including six academics, six regulators, and nine treatment providers. The types of safer gambling messages covered in the focus groups were (1) messages to teach safer gambling practices; (2) messages to correct gambling misbeliefs; (3) messages to boost conscious decision making; (4) norm-based messages to let people know

how gambling may affect people on average; and (4) emotional messages. Participants were told that the overall goal of these messages was to help people assess their gambling behaviour. During a discussion about each type of message, the purpose and two or three examples were presented to participants.

The scripts for the focus groups were analyzed using thematic analysis. This means that the scripts were examined to uncover overall themes from the focus groups.

What the researchers found

The researchers found that five themes were supported by the focus groups. The themes were that (1) messages may be insufficient to change behavior, especially among people who gamble regularly; (2) messages should respect the diversity amongst people who gamble; (3) messages should not contribute to gambling stigma; (4) messages should provide norm-based information thoughtfully to avoid backfire effects; and (5) messages should trigger only positive, and not negative, emotions.

These findings could help guide the development of safer gambling messages in the future. The findings also have implications for the implementation of safer gambling messages. Given that messages may not be able to change behaviour on their own, they should not be the primary public health approach to gambling. Safer gambling messages should be used along with interventions aimed at people experiencing higher levels of harm. Messages also need to be designed thoughtfully, in ways that do not contribute to stigma. They should use norm-based information carefully and should seek to produce only positive emotions.

In summary, this research highlights the importance of considering various factors, such as the role of emotions, when designing safer gambling messages.

How you can use this research

These findings can contribute to the development of effective safer gambling messages. They can also serve as a useful public health tool for promoting safer-gambling involvement.

About the researchers

Phillip W. S. Newall is affiliated with the School of Psychological Science at the University of Bristol in Bristol, UK, and the School of Health, Medical, and Applied Sciences at CQUniversity in Sydney, Australia. **Alex M. T. Russell** is affiliated with the School of Health, Medical, and Applied Sciences at CQUniversity in Sydney, Australia. **Matthew Rockloff**, **Nerilee Hing**, and **Matthew Browne** are all affiliated with the School of Human, Medical, and Applied Sciences at CQUniversity in Bundaberg, Australia. **Hannah Thorne** and **Tess Armstrong** are affiliated with the School of Human, Medical, and Applied Sciences at CQUniversity in Wayville, Australia. For more information about this study, please contact Phillip Newall at Philip.Newall@bristol.ac.uk.

Citation

Newall, P. W. S., Rockloff, M., Hing, N., Browne, M., Thorne, H., Russell, A. M. T., & Armstrong, T. (2022). How do academics, regulators, and treatment providers think that safer gambling messages can be improved? *Addiction Research & Theory*. Advance online publication.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/16066359.2022.2148663>

Study funding

This study was supported by Gambling Research Australia.

About Greo

Greo has partnered with the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University to produce Research Snapshots. Greo is an independent knowledge translation and exchange organization with almost two decades of international experience in generating, synthesizing, and mobilizing research into action across the health and wellbeing sectors. Greo helps organizations improve their strategies, policies, and practices by harnessing the power of evidence and stakeholder insight.

Learn more about Greo by visiting greo.ca or emailing info@greo.ca.

