

# knowledge snapshot



## A review of the effectiveness of consumer protection tools for minimizing gambling harm

### What this article is about

Gambling disorder results in harmful personal and social impacts, such as family breakdown. People who gamble without meeting the clinical criteria for gambling disorder may also experience harm. It is important to consider opportunities for harm minimization, early intervention, and prevention. People who gamble may be presented with a range of harm-minimization tools, including voluntary self-exclusion programs and personalized feedback.

The implementation and promotion of harm-minimization tools are often self-regulated by gambling operators. This means that there is inconsistency in the tools offered. The purpose of this review was to evaluate the current evidence on the effectiveness of harm-minimization tools for people who gamble. Another aim was to identify gaps in current knowledge and areas for future research.

### What was done?

The authors conducted a systematic review. They searched the electronic databases Medline, PsycINFO, Emdex, and ProQuest for relevant studies. The search occurred in July 2022.

Studies were included if they met these criteria:

1. Described and evaluated a gambling harm-minimization tool.
2. Used an empirical approach to evaluate the impact of the tool on gambling behaviour.
3. Took place in a real or simulated/laboratory-based gambling environment with people who gambled or who were affected by gambling harm.
4. Published in a peer-reviewed journal. Grey literature (e.g., technical reports) was excluded.

### Why is this article important?

The purpose of this review was to evaluate the evidence on the effectiveness of gambling harm-minimization tools. Another aim was to identify gaps in current knowledge and areas for future research. The review emphasizes the importance of understanding how consumer protection tools work to develop more effective strategies to prevent and minimize gambling harm. The low uptake of these tools highlights a need to rethink how they should be communicated and marketed. It is important to ensure that these tools are seen as beneficial to all people who gamble, and not just for those who are already experiencing harm.

5. Written in English.

After removing duplicates, studies were then screened to see if they met the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The quality of the studies was assessed using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool. A total of 55 studies were included in the review after being screened. These studies were published between 2015 and 2022.

### What you need to know

A range of harm-minimization tools were examined across the studies, including voluntary self-exclusion (12 studies), voluntary limit-setting (11 studies), pop-up messages (9 studies), passive personalized feedback (8 studies), active personalized behavioural feedback (7 studies), forced breaks in play (4 studies), third-party exclusion (3 studies), and speed of play (1 study). The researchers grouped these tools as either active engagement or passive engagement. Active engagement requires users to opt in to use the tool.

**Harm-minimization tools requiring active engagement** include voluntary limit-setting (also known as precommitment), self-exclusion, and active personalized behavioural feedback. Voluntary self-exclusion initiated by people who gamble was the most studied among these tools. Previous research noted that people who voluntarily self-excluded showed fewer problem gambling symptoms. But breaches of exclusion were common and often not noticed by gambling venue staff. The authors noted that there is a gap in research on how gambling venue staff respond to breaches of exclusion order.

Precommitment and voluntary personalized feedback were the next most studied tools. Precommitment tools are promoted by online betting companies as consumer protection measures like self-exclusion. But there are inconsistencies and gaps in our understanding of the effectiveness of these tools. Opt-in behavioural feedback tools include receiving feedback about one's gambling behaviour. Users who use these tools are typically at low risk and already gambling in a safe manner. More research is needed to identify ways to promote the use of feedback tools and how to effectively provide feedback to people at higher risk.

**Harm-minimization tools with passive engagement** include pop-up messages, forced breaks in play, limiting speed of play, third-party exclusion, and passive personalized behavioural feedback. Most studies that examined pop-up messages involved electronic gaming machines (EGMs) or simulated online slots. The evidence regarding the effectiveness of these harm-minimization tools is mixed. There is also not enough research to draw conclusions (e.g., speed of play was examined in only one study).

The authors discussed how there is a conflict of interest for gambling operators, who are often tasked with implementing and regulating harm-minimization policies but are also driven by profits. Overall, the authors highlighted how people who gamble often view consumer protection tools as tools for those already experiencing harm rather than protective tools for all. This may explain the low uptake of these tools. More research is needed to identify effective

ways of communicating the importance of consumer protection tools for gambling.

### Who is it intended for?

Researchers can use this review to guide future studies around consumer protection tools. This review can also inform public health, gambling regulators, and policy makers.

### About the researchers

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### Citation

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