

research snapshot

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Examining different classes of safer gambling messages for sports and race betting

What this research is about

Many people who gamble regularly experience some form of harm related to their gambling. In an attempt to reduce gambling harm, safer gambling messages have been used by gambling policy makers and regulators to encourage people to think about their gambling habits. The gambling industry also uses these types of gambling messages, but usually due to policy mandates. These messages tend to be general (e.g., “gamble responsibly”), and research suggests that more targeted messages may be beneficial to people who gamble.

Messages can be norm-based to guide people about safe levels of gambling play. Messages can also be positive-emotional by leading people to reflect on how gambling habits impact their life. These gambling messages are often directed towards people who gamble on Electronic Gaming Machine (EGMs) and have not been focused on sports and race betting. Scholars have expressed doubt about the effectiveness of commonly used standard safer gambling messages, as they are quite general and do not provide any real advice.

In this study, the researchers examined the usefulness and value of various classes of gambling messages (general, norm-based, and positive-emotional). This research was commissioned by Gambling Research Australia. The goal was to inform safer gambling messaging focusing on sports and race betting. The researchers tested three hypotheses. The first was that norm-based and/or positive-emotional messages would be associated with lower gambling-related outcomes compared to general, standard (control) messages. The second was that norm-based and/or positive-emotional messages would be rated as more

What you need to know

Safer gambling messages are used by gambling policy makers and regulators to reduce gambling-related harms. In this study, the researchers surveyed people who bet on sports or racing over a five-week period. They examined how participants understood and rated different classes of gambling messages (norm-based, positive-emotional, and general). In weeks 3 to 4, participants were exposed to three messages of the same class each week. The researchers found that gambling-related outcomes (e.g., amount and time spent gambling, gambling urges) decreased over time. But there were no differences between message classes on these outcomes. Positive-emotional messages were rated as the easiest to understand and most helpful. In terms of specific message, the control message “only bet what you can afford” was rated the highest.

understandable. Finally, it was hypothesized that norm-based and/or positive-emotional messages would be rated as more effective.

What the researchers did

This study included 2,074 participants who resided in Australia, were 18 years or older, and had bet on sports or racing within the past 12 months. Participants were randomly assigned to a message condition: norm-based, positive-emotional, or control. Norm-based and positive-emotional messages were developed by the researchers. Control messages were gathered from an internet search of safer gambling messages used around the world. In total, 27 messages were tested in this study.

Participants completed five weekly online surveys. They completed a baseline survey in week 1. They were then exposed to three messages of the same class over a three-week time span (week 2 to week 4). They were asked to evaluate each message and rated its ease of understanding and helpfulness. Participants completed an end survey in week 5. In each weekly survey, participants reported the amount they bet, time spent gambling, and gambling urges. They also completed the Gambler's Belief Questionnaire on beliefs about gambling risk and the Short Gambling Harms Screen. Week 1 survey also included the Problem Gambling Survey Index (PGSI). In total, 836 people completed all five surveys.

What the researchers found

The researchers found that there was a decrease in all gambling-related outcomes between weeks 1 and 5. That is, participants reported betting smaller amounts of money, spending less time gambling, and having fewer gambling urges. They also reported less false beliefs about gambling risk and fewer gambling harms over the five weeks. The researchers did not find any significant differences between norm-based, positive-emotional, and control messages. The researchers suggested that perhaps just participation in the study caused people to reflect on their gambling habits, leading to a decrease in gambling over time.

The positive-emotional messages were rated as most helpful and easiest to understand, followed by the control messages. The norm-based messages had the lowest ratings. In terms of specific messages, the control message "only bet what you can afford" was rated the highest.

Overall, although no differences between message classes were found, the researchers found that messages that encouraged people to think about their gambling spending were rated the highest.

How you can use this research

Gambling policy makers, regulators, and researchers can use this research. The results suggest that self-reflection about gambling spending is most helpful to people who gamble. Additional research is needed to examine different contexts that may improve the

effectiveness of safer gambling messages. For example, messages should be delivered at optimal times and frequencies so people who gamble are motivated to pay attention to them. Messages should also be formatted in an appealing way (e.g., images and animations) and may need to be tailored to increase engagement with these messages.

About the researchers

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Citation

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