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Do limit approaching pop-up messages work for people with financial focused self-concepts?

What this research is about

Responsible gambling (RG) tools exist to help prevent people from developing gambling problems. RG tools include spending limit reminders through pop-up messages. When people set limits on how much money they would like to spend, they get messages on their electronic gaming machine (EGM) to remind them when their limit is reached.

Research on pop-up messages has revealed that they may not always be effective. Some people do not adhere to limits. For instance, people with a financially focused self-concept (FFS), who see financial success as a part of who they are, may have trouble adhering to limits. This may be because they like to gamble to get financial gains and may have more gambling problems. Limit adherence may also be ineffective because the pop-up message only happens once. To improve this, there could be an additional pop-up message that would notify players that they are approaching their limit. This may increase players' likelihood of making a better-informed decision about their gambling. Taken together, this study aims to examine what an additional pop-up message can do to players with high and low FFS. Moreover, it aimed to assess whether there was an optimal time for displaying the secondary pop-up messages.

What the researchers did

The researchers recruited 88 community players who ranged in age from 20-81 years old. To assess FFS, the researchers used five items (e.g., 'My value as a person depends upon the amount of money I have', 'How I feel about myself is largely based on the amount of money I have', 'Money is a large part of

What you need to know

This study examined pop-up messages and how effective they were at informing players that they were reaching their spending limits on EGM machines. It also explored whether spending limit pop up messages were ineffective for people with high financially focused self-concept (FFS). The researchers recruited 88 players from the local community. The study found that players who received two messages instead of one were more likely to stop playing before they reached their limit. Second, players with low FFS who received two messages were more likely to stop before they reached their limit. For people with high FFS, it did not matter how many messages they have received; they were more likely to continue to play. However, in this study, FFS did not relate to limit adherence. The reasons for limit adherence included wanting to stick to their limit, not winning, and not liking to play. The reasons for playing beyond one's limit included the possibility of winning and having fun.

who I am', etc.). To assess the presence of disordered gambling behaviours, the researchers used the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI). This measure had nine items (e.g., 'Have you needed to gamble with larger amounts of money to get the same feeling of excitement?').

After the questionnaire, participants played on a Virtual Reality (VR) slot machine. The researchers gave participants $20 and told them that they can use half as their set limit and the other half as their compensation. The researchers then randomly split

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them into three groups. The first group (n = 28) received a pop-up message about their approaching limit when they had played 70% of their limit and another pop-up when their limit was reached. The second group (n = 30) received a pop-up message about their approaching limit when they had played 90% of their limit and another when their limit was reached. These two groups made up the 'experimental group'. The third group, the control (n = 30) received one pop-up message when their limit was reached. The final pop-up message (about the reached limit) notified participants that they could either quit or continue to gamble. At the end, the researchers asked the participants why they chose to stop or continue to gamble.

What the researchers found

Results revealed that over half of the participants (56.8%, n = 50) played until they reached the limit and 43.2% (n = 38) stopped before they reached their limit. Participants who received two messages instead of one were more likely to stop before they reached the limit. Participants who were low on FFS were more likely to stop before their limit if they had received two messages instead of one. For those who were high on FFS, it did not matter whether they received one or two messages. In both cases, they were more likely to continue to play to the limit.

When the researchers examined limit adherence, only 11.4% (n = 10) of participants played beyond their limit. The majority (88.6%, n = 78) did not want to play after they reached their limit. Their choices did not relate to their FFS or how many messages they had received. Those who adhered to their limit reported that this was because they wanted to stick to their limit, they were not winning, and they did not like playing slots. Those who played beyond their limit reported that they did so because they felt they still had a chance of winning and because they were having fun.

How you can use this research

This research could be used by people who develop responsible gambling initiatives, as well as for treatment and prevention service providers. RG tools

could include features that send out multiple messages instead of relying on just one. Prevention programs could teach players about how to set limits and adhere to them. Treatments could target why people continue to play past their limits. Service providers could also target people with high financially focused self-concepts (FFS) who may be a vulnerable group. Future research could examine whether FFS relates to limit adherence in a natural setting where people use their own money.

About the researchers

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Citation

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Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (GREO) has partnered with the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University to produce Research Snapshots. GREO is an independent knowledge translation and exchange organization that aims to eliminate harm from gambling. Our goal is to support evidence-informed decision making in responsible gambling policies, standards and practices. The work we do is intended for researchers, policy makers, gambling regulators and operators, and treatment and prevention service providers. Learn more about GREO by visiting greo.ca or emailing info@greo.ca.