knowledge snapshot

Review of industry strategies for reducing harm from gambling

What this article is about

The gambling industry and regulators use several strategies to reduce potential harm from gambling. These include harm reduction and consumer protection strategies. Harm reduction strategies usually focus on the individual gambler, such as the gambler can set a limit on the amount of money spent on gambling. Consumer protection strategies assign the responsibility to policy and regulators. For example, policy can limit hours of operation for casinos. Thus, these strategies are often mandatory and not optional for gamblers. Past reviews mainly examined the effectiveness of harm reduction strategies that individuals might use, or prevention efforts such as educational campaigns. This systematic review examined strategies that were implemented by the gambling industry to reduce harm from gambling. These included strategies in and across gambling venues, as well as strategies that gamblers had to experience or interact with to gamble. The review excluded strategies that were optional or had to be implemented by individual gamblers.

What was done?

The researchers examined empirical and grey literature relevant to non-optional, industry-level strategies. Studies were included if they were written in English and used quantitative methods to assess the effectiveness of the strategies. Laboratory studies were also considered. Fifteen strategies from 27 studies met the inclusion criteria. The researchers summarized these studies based on the type of strategy. All of the studies had a weak global rating according to the Quality Assessment Tool for Quantitative Studies. Therefore, the researchers did not systematically evaluate the quality of the studies.

Why is this article important?

There are a variety of strategies that the gambling industry and regulators use to reduce harm from gambling. This article provides a review of non-optional, industry-level strategies published in 27 studies. The most promising strategies to decrease time and money spent on gambling were: self-appraisal pop-up messages, $1 maximum bets on electronic gambling machines (EGMs), removal of large bill acceptors and ATMs, reduced operating hours, and smoking bans. There was evidence that on-screen clock and cash displays could help gamblers keep track of time and money spent on gambling. However, these strategies need to be evaluated with more rigorous research methods.

What you need to know

The reviewed strategies ranged from those based on a harm reduction approach, to those based on a consumer protection approach. The strategies were grouped into seven categories:

1. **Pop-up and on-screen messages.** These were the most researched strategies. A few studies showed that gamblers reduced hours and money spent on EGMs, as well as increased limit setting when factual messages appeared. There were increased recall, awareness of time, and likelihood of taking a break for self-appraisal messages as compared to informative messages. Pop-ups that showed money spent gambling increased limit adherence.

2. **Mandatory limit setting, mandatory cash-out, jackpot expiry, and regulation on winnings.** Limit setting was most effective when used with a pop-up message that reminded gamblers of their pre-

set limit. Mandatory cash-out did not seem to have an effect on playing time. A study examined regulation where gamblers could only receive non-cash payout if they won more than $1000. It found that few gamblers reached that limit.

3. **Imposed maximum bet limits and reducing maximum lines of play on EGMs.** One dollar maximum bets resulted in decreased time spent gambling, fewer bets, and fewer losses. Larger maximum bets, such as $10, were not effective. Reducing maximum lines of play had no effect.

4. **Removing large note acceptors on EGMs and ATM removal from venues.** Modifying bill acceptors to not accept more than a certain amount of money or limiting withdrawals on ATMs in a casino had mixed findings. Some studies reported few self-reported changes in gambling behaviour. But other studies did find reductions in money and time spent on gambling.

5. **Mandatory shut-down of EGMs or reduced operating hours.** Reducing operating hours on gambling venues or shutting down EGMs for a certain amount of time resulted in few self-reported changes of gambling behaviour. However, one study did find that reducing operating hours resulted in decreased expenditure across venues.

6. **On-screen clock and displaying cash rather than credits on EGMs.** Gamblers reported that both of these strategies were effective in helping them keep track of time and money spent on gambling.

7. **Other strategies: Caps on number of EGMs and smoking bans.** There were no differences in gambling expenditures when the number of EGMs was capped. There was a reduction in expenditure across venues when a smoking ban existed.

Who is it intended for?

This review is intended for gambling operators and regulators by providing evidence about the effectiveness of industry-implemented strategies, as well as ways in which they can be improved. It is also useful to researchers as a guide to areas for future

study and evaluation. Research that uses multiple research methods, pre- and post-measurements, control groups, and randomisation of participants is needed.

About the researchers

Jessica Tanner, **Alexandra S. Drawson**, **Christopher J. Mushquash**, **Aislin R. Mushquash**, and **Dwight Mazmanian** are affiliated with the Department of Psychology at Lakehead University in Thunder Bay, Ontario, Canada. Christopher Mushquash is supported by the Canada Research Chairs Program and is also affiliated with the Northern Ontario School of Medicine and Dilico Anishinabek Family Care in Thunder Bay. Aislin Mushquash is now affiliated with the Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre in Thunder Bay. For more information, please contact dwight.mazmanian@lakeheadu.ca.

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