

knowledge snapshot



How is the Internet being used to deliver problem gambling interventions?

What this article is about

Only a small number of gamblers who develop gambling problems seek treatment. There are a number of reasons that may explain why. For instance, gamblers may want to handle their problems on their own. Gamblers may not want to attend treatment because they fear judgement and stigma and do not want to be recognized. Some gamblers may have a hard time accessing treatment due to lack of transportation or busy schedules.

One solution to these barriers is the delivery of problem gambling interventions over the Internet. Internet-based interventions may be attractive to people with problem gambling because they are easy and convenient to access. Online interventions are also more anonymous than in-person interventions. This article provides an overview of research on problem gambling interventions available through the Internet. It also identifies gaps in current knowledge and possible areas for future research.

What was done?

The authors searched for relevant studies using six research databases: Web of Science, PsycINFO, Cumulative Index to Nursing and Allied Health Literature, MEDLINE, Social Science Abstracts, and Scopus. They also searched for studies that were not published in academic journals (i.e., grey literature) through MedEdPortal, Proquest: Dissertations, and OpenGrey. The researchers consulted with a team of experts for any additional studies that might have been missed.

The authors searched for studies published between 2007 and 2017. The studies could include any prevention or treatment program designed to reduce

Why is this article important?

The current review explores how Internet-based resources are used to deliver problem gambling interventions. The authors reviewed 27 studies published between 2007 and 2017. Their review shows that the Internet was mostly used to deliver some form of existing, popular treatment programs. Cognitive behavioural therapy was the most common form. The reviewed interventions were generally shown to be able to reduce gambling behaviours and problems. More research is needed to directly compare Internet-based and face-to-face interventions.

the harm of problem gambling. The interventions had to use the Internet in their delivery. Interventions using mobile apps or mobile devices were excluded.

A total of 27 studies were found to meet the criteria. The authors reviewed these studies and reported the different types of interventions available and groups of people that received these interventions.

What you need to know

Many of studies were from Australia, New Zealand, Finland, Norway, and Sweden. Several studies were from Canada and the United States. There was also one study each from France, Italy, Germany, and the United Kingdom. Seven studies were based on data collected from *Gambling Help Online*, an Australian online counselling and support website.

There was a wide range of problem gambling interventions offered through the Internet. Most of them were a form of an existing, common treatment for problem gambling. The most common treatment

was cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). Other interventions included motivational interviewing and exposure therapy. Most of the interventions connected clients to trained therapists through chat or video sessions.

Six studies were randomized controlled trials. Eight studies used qualitative analysis (e.g., online chat sessions, survey with open-ended questions). Most of the reviewed interventions showed reduced gambling problems and gambling behaviours (i.e., less time and money spent gambling) compared to receiving no intervention.

People who received the interventions were mostly those seeking help for their gambling problems. Most of the studies included more males than females. Two studies targeted females and showed that women were very interested in Internet-based treatment. Almost all of the studies focused on adults, with little concern for youth or the impact of age. The one study on youth investigated Grade 9 students.

The authors noted several challenges and concerns with using online problem gambling interventions. Many people dropped out of their online intervention early. This issue is similar to in-person interventions. Also, there may be a lack of rapport between the client and treatment provider with online interventions. Finally, there is little research that compares in-person and online interventions.

Who is it intended for?

This review is intended for gambling researchers and treatment providers. It highlights the need for more studies about online problem gambling interventions. Future research could replicate the findings of existing studies. They could extend past studies to new groups of clients and therapies. Future research could also compare in-person and online interventions.

About the researchers

Mark van der Maas, Jing Shi, Tara Elton-Marshall, Sherald Sanchez and Nigel E. Turner are affiliated with the Institute for Mental Health Policy Research at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Jing Shi is also with the

Rehabilitation Sciences Institute at the University of Toronto in Toronto, Ontario. Tara Elton-Marshall is also with the Dalla Lana School of Public Health at the University of Toronto; the Department of Epidemiology and Biostatistics at Western University in London, Ontario; and the School of Public Health and Health Systems at the University of Waterloo in Waterloo, Ontario. **David C. Hodgins** is affiliated with the Department of Psychology at the University of Calgary in Calgary, Alberta, Canada. **Daniela S.S. Lobo** is affiliated with the Campbell Family Mental Health Research Institute at CAMH and the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Toronto in Toronto, Ontario. **Sylvia Hagopian** is affiliated with the Problem Gambling Institute of Ontario at CAMH. For more information about this study, please contact Mark van der Maas at vandermaas.mark@gmail.com.

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