



INVESTIGATION INTO THE EFFECTS OF GAMBLING GAME CHARACTERISTICS, PIDS AND POP-UP TECHNOLOGY ON GAMBLING AND PROBLEM GAMBLING BEHAVIOUR IN NEW ZEALAND

Summary

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Background

There is a strong relationship between Electronic Gaming Machines (EGMs) and problem-gambling with a range of activities used to try and address this relationship. These include regulations to limit the availability and promotion of EGMs and the use of public education campaigns to raise awareness of the harms associated with excessive use of EGMs. Other approaches have included modifying the characteristics and features of EGMs to try and make them safer. As part of this latter approach, pop-up messages and player information display systems (PIDs) have been introduced to all EGMs in New Zealand. Pop-up messages are an automatic message presented on the EGM screen that shows the time and money a gambler has spent on gambling in the current session. Pop-up messages create a brief compulsory break in play, while PIDs are a voluntary feature whereby gamblers can access the same information at any time while they are gambling.

Aim

This research was carried out to understand the impacts of PIDs and pop-up messages, and to explore the effects of EGM game characteristics and casino table game characteristics, on gambler behaviour and gambling-related harms.

Method

This project included three phases with each phase building on the last. Phase One involved a literature review and focus groups with gamblers and other key stakeholders. Phase Two was an in-venue observational study of the behaviour of 123 gamblers while using EGMs. Phase Three involved a survey to collect data from 521 gamblers recruited in gambling venues who were re-surveyed three and six months later.

Summary of key findings

Casino table games

- Focus group results combined with survey findings showed that the social nature and perceived control linked with casino table games were associated with loss of control over time and money spent gambling.
- Those for whom a croupier is important spent consistently more time gambling over the survey period.

EGMs - game characteristics

- Free spins and jackpots were both associated with loss of control over time and money spent gambling in the focus group and survey phases.
- Evidence across the focus group, observation and survey phases suggested that free spins, small frequent wins, low denominations and multiple lines operate together to disguise losses as wins and to encourage gamblers to continue to play beyond their intended time in anticipation of the highly desirable free spins.

EGMs - PIDs

- PIDs, as voluntary features, did not seem to impact on gambling enjoyment for the majority of gamblers in either the focus groups, observations or the survey phase.
- Survey and focus group results suggest that some gamblers may be using PIDs as part of analytic play strategies (linked to cognitive distortion and problem gambling), and so for a small number of gamblers there might be unintended consequences of PIDs.

EGMs - pop-up messages

- Pop-up messages were reported to aid control over time and expenditure by approximately one quarter of the gamblers surveyed who were aware of the messages.
- Reported impacts of pop-up messages in the survey (e.g. the reported likelihood that participants would read the information) generally had no effect on time spent gambling.
- Participants who reported they would likely stop gambling or consider their gambling in response to a pop-up message did, in fact, tend to spend less money gambling overall (however, as the sample size was very small these results are only indicative).
- Results from all three phases showed that the information presented in pop-up messages is attended to by gamblers and can, therefore, be used to support them in making an informed choice on whether to continue gambling.
- There was little or no evidence that the compulsory pop-up messages impacted on the gambling satisfaction of the majority of gamblers. The observations and survey results converged to suggest that where gamblers are exhibiting signs of annoyance or distress related to pop-up messages, this behaviour is not the norm and may be indicative of potential gambling problems.