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Welcome to the first edition of the GIRO Research Updates. This January 2014 edition looks at four studies published in 2013. One evaluates the impact of a harm reduction strategy in Victoria, another comes from an Australia wide study of interactive gambling, and the remaining two from South Australia look at problem gambling treatment and young people and gambling.

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Evaluation of the removal of ATMs from gaming venues in Victoria, Australia

Anna Thomas, Jeffrey Pfeifer, Susan Moore, Denny Meyer, Ligia Yap and Andrew Armstrong

What was the research?

From 1 July 2012, the Victorian government introduced a prohibition on Automatic Teller Machines (ATM) in Victorian gaming venues. ATMs are no longer permitted anywhere on venue premises, including outside walls or in the car park. ATMs are also prohibited from being within 50 meters of any race track or within 50 meters of the gaming areas of Victoria's Crown Casino in Melbourne.

This research evaluated whether this removal of ATMs from gaming venues was an effective harm minimisation and consumer protection measure.

This study was conducted by a team at Swinburne University and was funded by the Victorian Government Department of Justice.

How was the research conducted?

This study used a combination of methods including:

- a pre/post implementation survey of 928 venue patrons
- a post-implementation survey of 164 venue managers or operators
- observations in 89 venues
- interviews and focus groups with problem gamblers, patrons, venue managers, counsellors and venue support workers
- consultations with stakeholders, including industry and community representatives
- detailed examination of expenditure and crime data.

Results from these activities were collected and collated in a report that evaluates the impacts of removing ATMs from gaming venues.

Limitations of this research include low numbers of participants in some groups (for example non electronic gaming machine (EGM) gamblers) and a relatively low response rate to the survey of venue managers and operators.

What were key findings of the research?

Patrons

- Higher risk gamblers reported spending less time and money on EGM gambling following the removal of ATMs.
• Approximately 50 per cent of higher risk gamblers reported increased self-control over spending and decreased overspending.

• The study found that there was a reduction in the severity of problem gambling symptoms for most higher risk gamblers, although this was not the case for all.

• Low risk gamblers spent less time playing gaming machines and reported increased control over gambling spending, with decreased impulsive overspending.

• Most patrons supported the removal of ATMs. Where negative attitudes existed, they were largely based on concerns about the removal of ATMs not being effective enough in reducing harm from gambling.

Industry

• The removal of ATMs was associated with a cost to the gambling industry.

• As well as the seven per cent reduction in gaming machine expenditure, there was a drop of approximately seven per cent in non-gaming expenditure.

EFTPOS transactions

• The study found there was an increase in EFTPOS use following the removal of ATMs as some patrons used this as an alternative way to withdraw money. However, the increase in EFTPOS use did not make up for the reduction in ATM use.

• Although venue staff have responsibilities in relation to patrons exhibiting signs of problem gambling, multiple EFTPOS withdrawals were not being noted by venue staff as a possible indicator of such problems.

• The vast majority of patrons surveyed supported an extra measure of putting limits on EFTPOS withdrawals.

How this research might be useful?

The success of the removal of ATMs from gaming venues may provide support for similar policy initiatives in other jurisdictions in Australia and overseas.

A lack of staff response to multiple EFTPOS transactions, as potentially indicative of gambling problems, suggests that changes in the content and delivery of staff training may further improve the effectiveness of ATM removals.

The study’s suggestion of a daily withdrawal limit on EFTPOS transactions, and the high support for it among all patrons, is relevant to possible future directions in gambling policy for Victoria.

Want to know more?

The full report from the study is located here.
How the internet is changing gambling: findings from an Australian prevalence survey

Sally Gainsbury, Alex Russell, Nerilee Hing, Robert Wood, Dan Lubman, Alex Blaszczynski

What was the research?

This article comes from an Australia wide study that investigated interactive gambling. Its aim is to better understand the extent of this form of gambling and the characteristics of people who engage in it.

Interactive gambling refers to a range of gambling activities that are offered through interactive media, such as computers, mobile phones, tablets and digital television. The term online gambling is often used to describe the same activities.

This article is based on research that was funded by Gambling Research Australia, a partnership between the commonwealth, state and territory governments to initiate and manage a national gambling research program.

How was the research conducted?

This study involved a nationally representative telephone survey of 15,006 adults, conducted in 2011.

The survey included questions relating to gambling behaviour, interactive gambling, attitudes to gambling, problem gambling, health and demographics.

The response rate to the survey was 26.4 per cent, which is lower than some other comparable studies. In addition, in interpreting the results from this study it is important to be aware that bias may have resulted from oversampling certain portions of the population to ensure a large enough sample of interactive gamblers.

What were key findings of the research?

- Gambling participation, including both interactive and non-interactive gambling, was 21 per cent lower than in the last national prevalence study conducted in 1999 by the Productivity Commission.

- Approximately 8 per cent of Australians had participated in interactive gambling during the past 12 months, an increase on previous studies.

- Interactive gamblers were more likely than other gamblers to participate in all forms of gambling, (i.e. EGM gambling, sportsbetting), but not lotteries and scratch tickets.
A majority of interactive gamblers participated in betting on horse or dog races (64.2 per cent), and in sports betting (54 per cent).

A majority of both interactive and non-interactive gamblers thought that the harms of gambling outweighed the benefits.

Interactive gamblers were more likely to be male, younger, have home internet access, participate in more forms of gambling and have higher gambling expenditure.

Most interactive gamblers (87.1 per cent) accessed internet gambling via a computer or laptop, with 9.5 per cent using a mobile or smart phone and 2.5 per cent using a tablet or other portable device.

Approximately 52 per cent of interactive gamblers preferred interactive gambling over land-based gambling, compared with approximately 42 per cent who preferred land-based gambling.

**How this research might be useful?**

As the first national gambling prevalence study since 1999, this research provides some insight into changes in gambling participation over time. However, that study had a different method to the study conducted in 1999 and its results are therefore not directly comparable. As a result, observations of change are indicative rather than conclusive.

In addition, as the first large, representative study of interactive gambling, this research provides valuable information on the prevalence of interactive gambling in Australia, as well as new information on the behaviour of interactive gamblers.

Future publications from this study will address the topic of the relationship between problem gambling and interactive gambling, which are not addressed in this article.

**Want to know more?**

The full article describing this study is located [here](#).

**How to cite this research**


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**Cognitive versus exposure therapy for problem gambling: A pilot randomised control trial**

Malcolm Battersby, David Smith, Peter Harvey, Rene Pols

**What was the research?**
This study from South Australia compared the two dominant approaches to treating people who have problems with their gambling. These are cognitive therapy and exposure therapy.

One of the aims of the study was to develop documented methods for the delivery of the two therapies and to test their use as a pilot for a larger trial.

This study was undertaken by researchers at Flinders University and was funded by the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation.

**How was the research conducted?**

This study was a randomised control trial, meaning participants are randomly allocated to receive a form of treatment to investigate its effectiveness. In this study, participants received either:

- cognitive therapy – a technique for correcting misconceptions about gambling and erroneous beliefs
- exposure therapy – a technique to decrease gambling urges by exposing people to characteristics of a gambling environment.

Participants received 12 weeks of treatment, with 44 receiving cognitive therapy and 43 receiving exposure therapy. Participants were not aware which of the therapies they were receiving.

In addition, a subgroup of eight participants completed semi-structured interviews to explore the process of change through therapy.

Due to the small sample size for this study, conclusions about the comparative effectiveness of the two treatments must be viewed with caution.

**What were key findings of the research?**

- Participants who received either cognitive or exposure therapy showed a substantial decrease in gambling severity symptoms following the completion of treatment.
- This reduction in gambling severity was sustained when followed up after six months.
- Despite reductions in both groups, there was no difference in the magnitude of change between the groups.
- Participants in both groups showed an improvement in other factors. For example, participants had reduced levels of psychological distress, increased work and social functionality and reduced alcohol consumption.
- There was no difference in the magnitude of change between the two treatment groups in relation to these secondary factors.
- Approximately 50 per cent of those receiving exposure therapy and 30 per cent of those receiving cognitive therapy did not complete treatment.
Factors associated with higher rates of dropout included being younger, having greater psychological distress, or experiencing work and social impairment.

How might this research be useful?

The results from this study suggest that for those who seek treatment, entering treatment is helpful regardless of which treatment is received. This finding has implications for problem gambling practitioners and treatment programs.

The sample size for this pilot study was too small to be conclusive about the efficacy of the two treatment approaches. However, the study has led to the development of robust recruitment and research protocols that can be used in future research.

The researchers intend to use this pilot to inform the development of a larger clinical trial that will enable the researchers to accurately test the efficacy of the treatment approaches.

Want to know more?

The full report from this study is located here.

How to cite this research


From adolescent to adult gambling: an analysis of longitudinal gambling patterns in South Australia

Paul Delfabbro, Daniel King, Mark Griffiths

What was the research?

The article presents results from a longitudinal study that explored the gambling activities of young people. It makes an important contribution to understanding youth gambling and identifying:

- changes in gambling participation over time
- differences for participation in different gambling activities
- differences in gambling based on gender.

This study was funded by the Independent Gambling Authority of South Australia and data for the study was extracted and compiled for analysis by the South Australian Department of Families and Communities.
How was the research conducted?

This study was a longitudinal study conducted between 2005 and 2009 in South Australia. The study involved a random sample of 256 young people who were surveyed four times; in 2005 (aged 16-19), 2007 (aged 17-21), 2008 (aged 19-22) and 2009 (aged 20-23).

Participants were surveyed in relation to gambling participation, problem or pathological gambling status, and early gambling experiences and gambling motivations.

Given the illegality of gambling under the age of 18, the participant sample was separated into two groups for the analysis and reporting on some aspects of the study.

One group comprised participants who were under the age of 18 at the first survey (142) and defined as adolescents, and the second group comprised participants who were 18 or over at the first survey (114) and defined as adults.

A number of methodological limitations should be taken into account when viewing the results from this study. These include:

- potential bias in the types of participants who continue with the study following the first survey,
- the fact that participants are self-reporting their gambling participation
- the small sample size for the study.

What were key findings of the research?

Findings from this study are diverse and extensive. This summary highlights a number of key insights from this research, however the full article should be referred to for a comprehensive set of findings.

Gambling participation and changes over time

- Young peoples’ gambling habits varied considerably between surveys and only a relatively small proportion of participants gambled on the same type of gambling activity in all four surveys.
- Gambling participation rates increased rapidly as the young people in the study transitioned from adolescents to adults.
- There was some evidence that early gambling on horse or dog racing and scratch tickets predicted subsequent gambling four years later. However, this relationship was not found for any other forms of gambling.
- Participants who had any symptom of a gambling problem were more likely to have started gambling earlier or to have experienced a big win when they started gambling.

Gambling activities

- Very few adolescents reported gambling on anything other than scratch tickets.
- The largest difference between adolescent and adult gambling participation was in EGM gambling, with adults being over 11 times more likely to report this form of gambling than adolescents.
Between the beginning and end of the study, participation in sport betting increased three times, wagering and lottery two and a half times, and EGM gambling two times.

For almost all types of gambling, participation rates recorded at the last survey were higher if the individual reported gambling on that activity in the first survey.

Gender

While females gambled more on lottery at the beginning of the study, after the first year there was no difference between males and females in relation to this form of gambling.

Keno gambling was consistently more popular with males, who had higher rates of participation in this form of gambling for most of the study.

Playing private card games was significantly more likely in male participants. At the first survey, males were over twice as likely to engage in this form of gambling and at the last survey they were around seven times more likely to engage in private card games.

Sports betting participation rates were consistently higher amongst males at all time points, although participation rates steadily increased over time for both groups.

How might this research be useful?

Findings in relation to the rapid increase in gambling participation as adolescents become young adults suggests that this age group should be an important focus for prevention and early intervention activities.

The study’s findings in relation to gambling activities and gender differences, including divergences and convergences during the adolescent to young adult life stage, should also be considered in the delivery of prevention and intervention activities.

Findings from this study weaken claims that gambling as an adolescent makes one more prone to problem gambling when older. While it does not eliminate it as a risk factor, it suggests that pathways to problem gambling are complex and involve a range of factors (including the particular gambling activity and the nature of a person’s gambling history, such as experiencing a big win).

Finally, it should be noted that this study does not reflect current gambling context for young people. This is because it was conducted in 2005-2009 before the rapid expansion of sports gambling and advertising.

Want to know more?

The full report from this study is located here.

How to cite this research