The WAGER, Vol. 15(3) – Problem gambling associations: Gambling motivations and perceptions of money-limiting strategies

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Research has indicated that electronic gaming machines (EGMs) are associated with higher rates problem gambling (e.g., Breen & Zimmerman, 2002; Cox, Kwong, Michaud, & Enns, 2000). However, new research reveals that this association is not causal. When we take the extent of gambling into account (i.e., involvement), this association disappears (LaPlante, Nelson, LaBrie, & Shaffer, In press; Welte, Barnes, Tidwell, & Hoffman, 2009). Consequently, a growing body of research now indicates that EGMs are not inherently "addictive" (e.g., Blaszczynski, Sharpe, Walker, Shannon, & Coughlan, 2005; Dowling & Thomas, 2005). This week the WAGER reviews a study that considers whether self-reported EGM playing motivations and perceptions of EGM money-limiting strategies might correlate with certain players experiencing gambling problems (Nower & Blaszczynski, 2010).

Methods

- Investigators recruited study participants (n=127) as they entered the gaming area of one of four venues in a metropolitan area of Australia.
    - Research assistants approached consecutive patrons and asked them to participate.
    - The authors did not randomly select participants or calculate a response rate.
- A series of pen and paper questionnaires, nearly all of which were designed by the authors, assessed the following:
    - Gambling preferences (i.e., amount spent gambling, times gambled per month, favorite gambling form, reasons for playing machines).

- Perceptions of money-related harm reduction strategies (i.e., setting limits, using pre-loaded smart cards instead of cash).
- Gambling severity via the Problem Gambling Severity Index of the Canadian Problem Gambling Index (Ferris & Wynne, 2001).
    - Participants were dichotomized into the following severity groups: non-problem, low risk, moderate-risk and problem.

- The researchers conducted bivariate analyses (i.e., Pearson Chi-square, ANOVA and ANCOVA) to examine the relationships between independent variables and gambling severity groups.

Table 1: Primary reasons for gambling on EGMs by gambling severity group (adapted from Nower & Blaszczynski, 2010)

	Non-problem gambler (n=58)		Low-risk gambler (n=25)		Moderate-risk gambler (n=20)		Problem gambler (n=19)	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
For fun and enjoyment	40	64.5	18	72.0	15	75.0	8	42.1
Because it is exciting and entertaining	1	1.6[1]	6	24.0	3	15.0[1]	9	47.4
To socialize with others	7	11.3	6	24.0	2	10.0	3	15.8
To earn additional income	2	3.2[2]	3	12.0	1	5.0	5	26.3
To get away from daily hassles and problems	5	8.1[2]	4	16.0	3	15.0	8	42.1

[1]Problem gamblers versus non-problem gamblers ($p < .001$) and moderate risk gamblers ($p < .001$)

[2]Problem gamblers versus non-problem gamblers ($p < .05$)

Results

- Compared to their non-problem gambling counterparts, those in the problem gambling group were significantly more likely ($p < .001$) to indicate that they played EGMs to earn additional income and to escape daily hassles and problems (see Table 1).
- In general, those in the problem gambling group were less likely than those in other groups to endorse using monetary limit-settings, such as smart cards, prior to EGM gambling and more likely to indicate they lost track of money spent during a session.

Limitations

- The authors utilized a convenience sample of casino patrons; the results might not be representative or generalizable to other populations.
- The power to detect significant group differences was limited by the study's small sample size.

Discussion

Nower and Blaszczynski (2010) found that participants classified as problem gamblers were more likely to report playing EGMs to earn income or to escape daily troubles than non-problem gamblers. In addition, this study reported that problem gamblers had less favorable impressions toward EGM money limiting strategies. These characteristics might influence gambling more than interest in, or the characteristics, of a particular game. These findings are consistent with other research that has indicated gambling involvement is a better predictor of gambling problems than participation in a particular game (e.g., LaPlante et al., In press; Welte et al., 2009; Welte, Barnes, Wieczorek, Tidwell, & Parker, 2004).

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