Reviewer’s report

Title: The Impact of Pop-up Warning Messages of Losses on Expenditure in a Simulated Game of Roulette: A Pilot Study

Version: 0 Date: 11 Sep 2018

Reviewer: Samantha Thomas

Reviewer's report:

This paper addresses whether pop up warnings on gambling machines (such as FOBTs) may be an effective Responsible Gambling tool. The study looks specifically at whether expenditure warnings are effective. The population for this study was a lab based setting with university students.

The key problem with this paper is the underlying assumption that Responsible Gambling measures are an impactful public health tool. Responsible Gambling as a concept has been significantly critiqued by academics in public health. I was very surprised (given that this is a Public Health journal) to not see any discussion of these critiques. Responsible Gambling measures which aim to encourage individual responsibility have been critiqued as being ineffective in preventing or reducing gambling related harm.

There is also very limited discussion of how this paper sits within a broader public health framework of gambling harm reduction and prevention. It seems to have been written more for the benefit of gambling operators?

The researchers argue that ultimately if gambling operators want to 'protect customers without compromising enjoyment or profit' then measures such as pop ups should be used. There is a flaw in this argument from a public health perspective. Given that losses are linked with harm, effective measures to reduce harm will necessarily impact on the profits of the gambling industry. So surely the fact that you are arguing for measures that don't impact on profit is somewhat problematic? Public health research to date has argued for reduced density of machines, caps on max stakes ( or losses per hour) as effective public health responses for harm prevention. Importantly, as part of a comprehensive public health approach, messaging should be designed and tested independently of industry, and regulated by governments (as per tobacco control initiatives).

As such, it is hard to see how this paper fits into a broader public health approaches relating to gambling harm prevention and reduction.

As per other journals, it is important for the authors to declare any funding sources for gambling research in the last 3 years. There is no information that I could easily locate regarding the funding source for this study.
Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
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No

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I have received funding for gambling harm research from the Victorian Responsible Gambling Foundation and the Australian Research Council.

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