State of the art in responsible gambling practices

Macau Responsible Gambling Symposium

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An International Group on Responsible Gambling

Participants

- Alex Blaszczynski, Peter Collins, Davis Fong, Robert Ladouceur, Howard Shaffer

Aim

- To share international multidisciplinary expertise for the formulation of effective and consistent Responsible Gambling policies, programs and practices for all forms of gambling

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Funding support for the International Group

- Gambling industry operators:
  - *La Loterie Romande (Switzerland),*
  - *Club NSW (Australia),*
  - *Comelot (UK),*
  - *La Française des Jeux (France),*
  - *Loto-Québec (Québec, Canada),*
  - *National Lottery (Belgium)*

- No honorariums were paid to the International Group: Only expenses incurred in attending Group working meetings were covered

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Additional information on my work on RG

I am a member of the
Independent Assessment Panel
of the
World Lottery Association

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Presentation outline

- Provide a basic framework for responsible gambling (RG)

- Outline three moral positions towards gambling and their implications for RG

- Peer-reviewed empirical evidence underpinning responsible gambling strategies

- How to find good "scientists" and "operators" to work with

- Sources of funding and biases in RG research

- Conclusions: Two (2) avenues to keep in mind if you want to build a "muscle" RG program

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Need to adopt a framework

Responsible policies should emphasize:

- Different stakeholders should work together

- Use minimally intrusive and restrictive measures

- Guided by scientific research rather than ideology, political imperatives or anecdotes

Different stakeholders should work together

Shaffer, H. J., Blaszczynski, A., Ladouceur, R., Fong, D., Collins, P. (2019). <u>Responsible Gambling: Primary Stakeholder Perspectives</u>. Oxford University Press, England.

Stakehoders

- **Academics and Scientists**

- **Clinicians and Public Health Workers**

- **Recovered Gamblers**

- **Industry Operators**

- **Organizations**

- **Policy Makers**

- **Regulators**

- **Lawyers**

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Premise of responsible gambling

PRIMARY objective of responsible gambling is to set up policies and practices designed to prevent and reduce potential harms associated with gambling
(Blaszczynski, Ladouceur, & Shaffer, 2004)

Objective is to limit individual's expenditure *(time and money)* to personally affordable limits

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An attitude towards RG

As a great man said

If you are not sitting at the table…..
You will be on the menu
and soon or later will be consumed….

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Participants in responsible gambling

We need to admit the following two statements

- Different stakeholders have different and at times, competing interests and different desired outcomes: mainly in terms of profit, revenue, recreation, restriction of harm, resources for treatment, etc.

- Balance between socially acceptable level of harm and participation in an activity while striving for continued reduction in harm

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The six most fundamental assumptions

1. Safe levels of gambling participation are possible

2. Gambling provides a recreational, social & economic benefits to individuals and community

3. A proportion of participants, family members and others can suffer significant harm as a consequence of excessive gambling

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The six most fundamental assumptions

4. Total social benefits of gambling must exceed total social costs

5. Abstinence is a viable and important, but not necessarily essential goal

6. Controlled participation and return to safe levels of play represents an achievable goal for some with a gambling disorder

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Main issues of responsible gambling

Responsibility

Responsible Gaming Program must rely on two basic principles:

The ultimate decision to gamble or not

(1) …belongs to the individual;

(2) …must be based on informed choice.

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Main issues of responsible gambling

Responsibility

Since

The ultimate decision to gamble or not belongs to the individual

Intrusive measures should be avoided

We now know that in some cases they produce deleterious or iatrogenic effects

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Why the term « responsibility » provoques so many emotive, and at time negative reaction?

- Saying that the ultimate decision to gamble or not belongs to the individual has at times created misinterpretations by a group of individuals, mainly the anti-gambling group.

- Indeed, some individuals strongly believe that we are saying that **all** the responsibility is on the shoulders of the players

- Therefore, the operators have no responsibility in this domain !!!!!

- This is the main argument of the anti-gambling lobbyists

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Is the notion of « Responsible Gambling » as clear as we intended?

In my opinion, the problem is that
we have never clearly defined what we mean by the
"concept" of responsibility

In the next few minutes, I will give you few definitions
of responsibility

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How to define Responsability

Merriam-Webster

Definition of RESPONSIBLE

- Liable to be called on to answer

- Liable to be called to account as the primary cause

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According to Oxford

1. The state or fact of having a duty to deal with something or of having control over someone.

2. The state or fact of being accountable or to blame for something

3. The opportunity or ability to act independently and take decisions without authorization.

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Cambridge

Something that it is your job or duty to deal with

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In the context of OCD

Salkovskis, Rachman, Ladouceur, and Freeston (1996)

"The belief that one has power which is pivotal to bring about or prevent subjectively crucial negative outcomes."

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My conclusion

The pivotal issue is to clarify the concept of "Responsability"

If we take away the perception of having control or the power to act upon something, the individual will become in a state of "Helplessness"

However, this definition does not imply that the industry and the other stakeholders have **no** responsibility at all.

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The moral dimensions

Few Conflicting areas

- Business and governments have legitimate interests in profits, and taxation

- Researchers in obtaining grants, publications

- Treatment professionals in salaries and fees

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←----- Restrictivism ----→

Prohibitionism ←-------------------→Libertarianism

Collins, C., Blaszczynski, A., Ladouceur, R., Shaffer, H. J., Fong. D., & Venisse, J.-L. (2015). Responsible Gambling: Conceptual Considerations. <u>Gaming Law Review & Economics</u>, 19, 8, 594-599

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Prohibitionism

- Historically the commonest (Religion-based government, communism):
  - Gambling is a vice
  - Governments should ban vice
  - If it cannot, the less gambling there is, the better it is

- Responsible gambling is an 'oxymoron'

- Usually abandoned because it does not work

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Libertarianism

- Under a liberal regime, responsible gambling is left to the individual: There is no requirement for governments to be involved

- Provided they don't deliberately harm others, individuals should be free to spend their time and money according to their own choices (including gambling)
  - EVEN IF others think RIGHTLY that their choices are foolish, dangerous and/o wicked

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Restrictivism

- Based on view that selling gambling products has greater propensity to cause harms than sale of chocolates, movies, etc.

  Availability should be restricted and operations more strictly regulated than other retail or leisure business

- Option for governments:
  - a compromise to partially satisfy both prohibitionists and libertarians
  - to maximize public economic benefits while minimizing negative social impacts

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← - - - - -   **Restrictivism**   - - - - →

Prohibitionism   ← -**Libertarianism**

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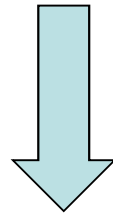
Our approach to ethical issues

- We take no collective view as scholars (rather than as individuals) on moral issues: whether gambling per se is immoral and how much governments should seek to regulate it

- The concept of gambling responsibly only applies in jurisdiction which lie on restrictivist continuum between prohibition and completely free markets

- In prohibitionist and libertarian jurisdictions, it is irrelevant to government whether people gamble responsibly or not.

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Keep in mind that your work and the work of your colleagues on responsible gambling issues will always be "coloured" by your moral position

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Are RG initiatives and programs really work?

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Main issues of responsible gambling

An empirical journey

Responsible Gambling as an empirical journey

- Program only considered Responsible if it *actually makes* consumers more responsible in their gambling behaviours

- The *intent* to be responsible is not enough

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Peer-reviewed empirical evidence underpinning responsible gambling strategies?

Many international jurisdictions have implemented programs

It would look bad if a jurisdiction is not committed to some forms of RG

Are they really committed to reducing incidence of problem gambling or simply to project a good image?

Some operators adopt the following attitude:

If we include all possible RG interventions, we will never be criticized

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Peer-reviewed empirical evidence underpinning responsible gambling strategies?

The main question is:

Do these programs work?

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Lets try to avoid thinking like this famous unknown man who always says....

I don't like **data**,
they make me insecure
because they are changing all
the time,

I prefer **opinions**,
mainly **my opinions**,
because they are
stable,
permanent
and resistant to any
changes....

An famous unknown man

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Peer-reviewed empirical evidence underpinning responsible gambling strategies?

Instead of reporting all available studies and discarding many because of methodological flaws, an *a priori* set of inclusion criteria was used:

(1) All studies must have been conducted within real gambling environments with 'real' gamblers;

(2) Included a comparison group

(3) Repeated measures;

(4) One or more measurement scales

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Method

Two approaches to retrieve RG relevant articles used:

- A systematic search of primary academic databases *PsychInfo*, *PubMed*, *Taylor and Francis Online*, and *ProQuest* for peer-reviewed publications using keywords

- References in gambling-related journals to captured those not listed in the databases. Individual journal searches were conducted for *International Gambling Studies*, *Journal of Gambling Studies*, & *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*

Method

- From 2,548 identified articles we excluded those not appearing in peer review journals

- *This decision does not in any way imply that such articles have no scientific merit; our concern was about the question of the scientific robustness & reliability of "grey"*

- We excluded 2,496 publications that were:
  - In the 'grey' literature domain
  - Duplicates
  - Not relevant to RG
  - Containing insufficient methodological information

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Method

Only 30 articles met at least one of the four criteria

- 11 used a matched-control or comparison group
- 22 were repeated measures studies
- 22 used measurement scales to evaluate participants

Only 6 of the 30 articles satisfied all key inclusion criteria

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Method

A content analysis revealed articles focused on the following five strategies:

1. Self-exclusion programs
2. Tracking behavioral characteristics or behavior patterns
3. Setting gambling limits
4. Responsible Gambling Game Features, such as warning messages
5. Training of Venue Employees Intervening with Problem Gamblers

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Conclusions

- Current evidence on RG initiatives and programs is very limited

- Using more rigorous methodological inclusion criteria, would result in less than seven studies focusing on RG

- Evidence reveals that overall effectiveness and impact of these RG activities remains uncertain

Conclusions

- Consequently, field has not yet progressed to best practices supported by scientific evidence

- We encourage all RG stakeholders to develop and implement programs that assure the wellbeing of gamblers placed in risky situations, having the potential to induce harm.

- EG; Japan, Mass

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Who should conduct evaluation and monitoring?

- We strongly believe that gambling operators, policy-makers and regulators can evaluate the evidence based supporting an initiative

- They should proactively monitor and assess

- However, there are circumstances that require stakeholders to engage external experts to conduct evaluative studies

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Essential qualities that operators need to consider when working with a scientist

1. Competence of researchers as evidenced by peer-reviewed publications

2. Credibility as an unbiased and objective researcher, that is, holding neither pro- nor anti-gambling attitudes and ideological stances

3. Ability to respect and maintain the confidentiality of commercially sensitive data

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Essential qualities that scientist need to consider when working with an operator

1. Show a real commitment to Responsible Gambling

2. Provide access to their data relevant to Responsible Gambling.

3. Be ready to modify some of their practices according to the results that will be obtained

4. Ready to provide long term funding support

5. Freedom to publish findings in the public domain regardless of the results

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Source of funding in RG research;
Conflict of interest and biaised results: opinion or empirical evidence?

Ladouceur, R., Shaffer, P., Blaszczynski, A., & Shaffer, H. J. (2018) <u>Responsible Gambling Research and Industry Funding Biases</u>. Journal of Gambling Studies.

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Empirical evidence of RG studies with different sources of funding

Goal

Compare the results of studies conducted on RG according to their sources of funding mainly by industry vs other sources of financial support.

Variables

type of design, inclusion of a comparaison group, use of a validated measure, repeated measure, source of publication, etc.

Resultats

No significant difference on any dependent variable

Empirical evidence of RG studies with different sources of funding

Interpretation

The opponents (anti gambling lobbyists !) to industry funding sources based their position on « opinions » rather than on scientific evidence.

Unexpected Resultat

1/3 of the studies did not report their source of funding

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Empirical evidence of RG studies with different sources of funding: Research in progress

We have decided to continue the examine this important question by

      1. Analysing ALL studies related to gambling
      2. Conducted over the last 10 years.

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General Conclusions

- Rigorous empirical evaluation is a central and pivotal characteristic of responsible gambling programs

- This cornerstone principle places stakeholders in a position where they can defend their efforts at consumer protection on the basis of scientific evidence

- Operators and responsible gambling program stakeholders must assure the safety of their interventions and that these programs are accomplishing clearly stated objectives

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Final word....or thought

Good judgement comes from experience

and....

Experience comes from a series of bad judgments

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Thank You

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