



RANDOMISED CONTROLLED TRIAL OF PROBLEM GAMBLING BRIEF TELEPHONE INTERVENTIONS: THREE YEARS LATER

Summary

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Background

The study assessed the durability of treatment effects after 36 months, for clients in a randomised controlled trial comparing the effectiveness of three brief telephone-based motivational interviewing treatments for problem gambling to standard Gambling Helpline treatment. The initial study¹ investigated treatment effects for clients after 12 months.

Main finding

The improvements in gambling behaviour that were achieved at 12 months after treatment continued over time (36 months later). While the outcomes were similar between the four treatment groups, the most intensive treatment (MI+W+B) achieved greater reductions in problem gambling severity and quitting or reducing gambling.

Aims

The main aims of the study were to assess treatment outcomes (e.g. improvements in gambling behaviour such as problem gambling severity) at 36 months and their comparison to 12 months, between treatment groups and across all groups.

Method

Participants were aged 18 years or older, had a gambling problem and called the Gambling Helpline for assistance. Four-hundred and sixty-two first-time Helpline callers were randomly assigned to one of the four treatment groups, with approximately equal numbers of participants in each group. In this study, participants were assessed 36 months after treatment. The four treatments were:

1. Helpline standard care
2. Single motivational interview
3. Single motivational interview plus cognitive behavioural self-help workbook
4. Single motivational interview, plus workbook, plus four follow-up motivational telephone interviews (MI+W+B)

¹ Abbott, M., Bellringer, M., Vandal, A., Hodgins, D., Palmer Du Preez, K., Landon, J., Sullivan, S., & Feigin, V. (2012). *Effectiveness of problem gambling brief telephone interventions: A randomised controlled trial*. Auckland: Auckland University of Technology, Gambling and Addictions Research Centre. Available at: http://www.aut.ac.nz/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/377988/Report-Effectiveness-Study-Final-13-December-2012.pdf



Summary of key findings

Sample

- At baseline N=462, at 36 months N=172. Retention in the four treatment groups at 36 months ranged from 34% to 40% of baseline.
- There was no differential loss between the four groups (i.e. the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants remaining in each treatment group were similar between the groups at 36 months and to the baseline characteristics).

Outcome measures

- Positive treatment effects noted at the 3 month assessment continued over the entire 36 month period.
- Positive treatment effects remained essentially the same from 12 to 36 months for number of days gambled per month, money lost gambling per day, treatment goal success, control over gambling, problem gambling severity (past 3 month time frame), psychological distress, motivation and major depressive disorder.
- Positive treatment effects were essentially the same between the four treatment groups for number of days gambled per month, money lost gambling per day, treatment goal success, control over gambling, psychological distress and major depressive disorder.

Findings for the most intensive treatment (MI+W+B)

- The percentage of problem gamblers (past 12 month time frame) at 36 months was lower in the MI+W+B group (24%) than the other three groups (which ranged from 41% - 48%). The median problem gambling severity score for the MI+W+B group was 1 (classified as low-risk) compared to the other groups with median scores of 3 to 7 (classified as moderate-risk).
- Participants who received the MI+W+B treatment continued to improve from 12 to 36 months for quitting or improving gambling, compared to those who received the other treatments.
- Participants with low hazardous alcohol consumption and non-Māori in the MI+W+B group appeared to have better outcomes for quitting or improving gambling, compared with those in the other treatment groups.

Receiving additional assistance for gambling problems

- At 36 months, the percentages of participants in the four groups who reported receiving additional assistance from professional (generally face-to-face counselling) sources in the past 6 months ranged from 4% to 15%. The percentages for receiving non-professional assistance (e.g. from family/friends) in the past 6 months ranged from 0% to 6.5%.