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### **Evidence-based player protection communication - key findings of a focus group study on gamblers' use and evaluation of player protection measures in Germany**

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## Declarations of Interest

- The Competence Centre for Player Protection & Prevention (KSP) supports state-licensed gambling providers in the development, implementation and evaluation of player protection measures. We receive third-party funding for this scientific support.
- The KSP is independent in the selection of research questions, the analysis and interpretation of data and the publication of results.
- We received partial funding from Land Brandenburg Lotto GmbH for the focus group study.
- The authors declare that they have no financial or non-financial conflicts of interest.

## Introduction

- Various player protection measures have been implemented worldwide with the aim of preventing or reducing excessive gambling and gambling-related harm
- **But**: Various studies revealed that only a small proportion of gambling participants used player protection measures and RG tools (Engebø et al., 2022; Gainsbury et al., 2019; Heirene, 2021; Quack et. al, 2022)
- Hardly any use of addiction treatment services due to player protection advice from gambling providers in Germany
- No inclusion of gamblers' perspectives in the development process of player protection measures to date (in accordance with the guideline on evidence-based health information)

## Research Subject and Questions

- Conducting focus group discussions with gamblers of different gambling intensity
- Qualitative research approach: in-depth analysis of attitudes and derivation of practical optimization approaches

### **Research Questions:**

- What attitudes do the study participants have on the subject of player protection and responsible gambling?
- Which player protection measures and responsible gambling messages do the study participants know?
- How do study participants evaluate exemplary player protection measures and messages?
- What would study participants improve in order to increase the reach of player protection measures and messages?

## Methods

- Video recordings (image and sound) of the focus groups; transcription using f4transcript software
  - Evaluation of the transcripts using the qualitative content analysis method (Mayring, 2010; Kuckartz, 2020)
  - Creation of a category system based on the interview guide and the material
- (1) General attitudes towards player protection
  - (2) Awareness, use and evaluation of player protection measures
  - (3) Evaluation and identification of optimization potential of player protection information (online and landbased).

# Sample

	<b>FG1 (n= 6)</b>	<b>FG2 (n= 6)</b>	<b>FG3 (n= 7)</b>	<b>total (n= 19)</b>
<b>Sex</b>				
female	4	0	3	7
male	2	6	4	12
<b>Age</b>				
mean age	35.7	26.2	40.1	34.3
range	20 - 62	19 - 33	25 - 63	19 - 63
<b>Problem Gambling Severity Index</b>				
Score of 0 (non-problem gambling)	0	1	2	3
Score of 1 - 2 (low-risk gambling)	2	1	2	5
Score of 3 – 7 (moderate-risk gambling)	1	3	3	7
Score of 8 or more (problem gambling)	3	1	0	4
<b>Preferred form of gambling (multiple answers)</b>				
Lottery products	3	1	5	9
Slot machines casinos and gaming arcades	5	1	3	9
Online casinos	0	3	3	6
Sports betting	3	1	1	5

# Results

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**Awareness, use and evaluation  
of player protection measures**



## Information on player protection are barely noticed

- The participants were only able to name a few player protection measures spontaneously and could not describe them in detail.
- Warning notices are often overlooked due to their inconspicuous design or presentation:

***'I don't read through that. It's in such small print and it's dark in the casino. And when I'm gambling there, I'm not going to read through such a small piece of paper, to be honest.'* (RG1, Group 1)**

***'It's in the small print, whether it's in adverts or leaflets in gambling shops.'* (PathG2, Group 1)**

## Information on player protection is not read

- Memories of materials and their messages are rather superficial and diffuse:

**‘There might be something on the counter at the venue, but it's definitely not particularly noticeable. I may have looked through it once, but I haven't actively read through it.’ (RG1, Group 2)**

**‘In the lottery shop, there's also the big notice board with very small lettering. I can't say exactly what it says, but I think it goes in the direction of player protection. But I think that very few people actually read the whole text.’ (ProbG1, Group 3)**

## Product advertising more present than player protection

- Participants often complained about an imbalance between advertising of gambling products and player protection messages or potential danger of gambling:

**'The advertising is more present than the prevention measure. You see a big red button that says 'Three free spins' and then you click on these three free spins. There might be a small button next to it that doesn't flash and it might say something about protective measures. It's often a visual overload on the relevant websites.'** (RG2, Group 3)

**'Radio adverts then tout how many millions are in the jackpot, with sound effects and excited voices, and then at the very end comes "gambling can be addictive", that's how dryly it's presented. And usually very quickly, because it takes up airtime.'** (ProbG3, Group 2)

## Help and counselling services unknown

- Hardly any recollection of specific addiction counselling services. In radio adverts, for example, the standard German warning 'Gambling can be addictive' was recalled, but not the reference to the 'Federal Centre for Health Education' (BZgA)

**'The phrase stays somewhere in your head, but on which site you can look it up already doesn't.'** (ProbG1, Group 3)

- When asked by the moderator, the majority of participants were not familiar with the BZgA's telephone counselling service:

**'I can't think of an official name. And that's a problem, you have to say. (...)  
Something like that should already be known, such as the emergency number.'**  
(ProbS2, Gruppe 2)

# Results

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**Evaluation of exemplary player protection measures: Criticism & suggestions for improvement**

## Information on player protection should be short, concise & interactive

- Content, recommendations for action and offers of help could hardly be named. The amount of text in particular has an unfavourable effect on readability:

**‘There's far too much text. Nobody reads it.’ (RG1, Group 3)**

**‘I also noticed it straight away when reading: too long sentences, too much text. You lose interest in reading through it.’ (ProbG2, Group 3)**

- In this context, the desire was often expressed for information on player protection to be short, concise and interactive:

**‘I like interactive offers. I also enjoy that kind of thing, and I obviously like to play, so I would also like to play with player protection measures.’ (ProbG2, Group 3)**

## Utilising new media in player protection communication

- The integration of new media that address the recognisable features of gambling addiction and offers of help could also contribute to making player protection information more attractive:

**‘Nowadays, everything is actually also explained in videos, why can't you also use a video for player protection? You have one click and then you can address and thematise everything in the video, perhaps from a more neutral perspective. [...] I think a lot more people would watch it. Nowadays, people just tend to watch videos rather than read through something.’ (ProbG1, Group 2)**

## Avoiding counterproductive player protection messages

- Criticism of phrases which may trivialise the potential dangers of gambling:

**‘Such words as ‘gambling is a harmless leisure activity’ are very expressive words that do not actually correspond to addiction prevention.’ (PathG1, Group 2)**

**‘It says something about thrills and feelings of happiness, entertaining, social, memorable pastimes. That's just the wrong message.’ (RG1, Group 1)**

- Phrases such as **‘Playing the lottery is hardly addictive for anyone’** or **‘Most people are able to control their gambling behaviour’** gave the study participants the impression that they were one of the few people affected:

**‘That sentence doesn't help me to admit my addiction. I'm one of the very few, so I want it even less.’ (PathG3, Group)**



## Communicate the risks of gambling and the benefits of player protection measures

- Participants often suggested that the risks of gambling and the specific benefits of the player protection measures and RG-Tools should be communicated more clearly:

**‘You should always make a connection between an action and its consequences. As a player, I want to know what the positive benefits [of the gambling ban] are. What do I get out of it? Why do I have a benefit?’ (PathG1, Group 1)**

- Call-to-Action

**‘If I tick [self-test] “yes” here, there is already the potential for an addiction problem. I should actually get a clear message: ‘Contact an addiction counselling centre’. But it just says something like ‘Then you should change your gambling behaviour’ [...].**

**(PathG1, Group 2)**

## Player protection information should be eye-catching and prominently displayed

- The participants very often called for player protection information to be displayed more prominently in order to improve its visibility:

**‘I noticed that the information is well hidden. So much so that you could almost mistake it for the legal notice. If you just click through the page and scroll around a bit, you'll end up at the bottom of the page without ever having paid attention to it. It's done in such a way that it's hidden so that it's completely overlooked, even in terms of contrast. In principle, they really try to hide it.’ (UG1, Group 2)**

**‘Nobody scrolls all the way to the bottom. You need a direct link. When I open the page, it always catches my eye. [...]. Or a link that always moves with me when I scroll down the page. It always stays in the same place, but always travels with me and I can't close it.’ (PathG1, Group 2)**

## Conclusion

### **Player protection measures and messages are...**

- barely noticed landbased and online
- described as inconspicuous, small and hidden in relation to product advertising and are therefore often overlooked or ignored

### **Player protection measures and messages should...**

- be formulated briefly and concisely, designed conspicuously and placed prominently
- incorporate interactive elements and new media
- be advertised in the same way as gambling products

## Future Research

- Limitation: results are not representative due to the qualitative research approach.

### **Research Innovation Fund Strategic Award 2024/25:**

Gambling addiction prevention: How do gamblers assess the content and design of messages and measures for player protection - results of an online survey in Germany



**Bristol Hub for Gambling  
Harms Research**

# Thank you for your attention!

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