

Harm reduction strategy in casinos customer readmission after exclusion of one year or more

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Context and aims

In 2005 at the Casino of Lugano, the 21% of customers readmitted after a period of exclusion had a relapse within a 12-month period (Sani 2006, unpublished).

In the 3 casinos of Ticino (Lugano, Locarno and Mendrisio) before 2006 a customer excluded from gambling was readmitted, after a period of exclusion of at least one year, on the following conditions:

Required by the law:

1. The customer must not have any debts
2. The situation which caused the exclusion must no longer exist.
3. The customer must demonstrate an adequate gambling budget with respect to the person's regular earnings

Required by casino's social concept

4. Working and financial: the customer has a satisfying job and no important financial burdens (e.g. leasing).
5. Interview to evaluate risk and protection criteria, like family history of gambling, other addictions, personality, family situation, stressing events, psychological support/therapy, hobbies and personal interests, understanding of gambling probabilities, magic thoughts, social vs. solitary gambler, gambling during the exclusion period.

The aim of the study was to examine whether the introduction of additional procedures in Casinos would decrease harmful relapses.

Methods

New readmission procedure were introduced gradually in the 3 casinos of Ticino in the period 2005-2007:

Before the interview

1. Delivering of the financial documents already when requesting the readmission.

Additional criteria during the interview

2. At the moment of exclusion, the customer must fill out the DSM-IV form on pathological gambling. During the readmission interview, a specialist discusses with the customer the past situation and how the customer will manage risks in future.
3. Marriage with a common property agreement: the partner must give his or her consent
4. Marriage without a common property agreement: the partner should give his or her consent.
5. For students that are financially dependent on their families: the family's consent is required.
6. A precise calculation of income and expenses: disposable income.
7. Gambling plan: How much does the customer want to spend at most per month? How many gambling sessions per month? Maximum 10% of disposable income

After the interview

8. Supervision: each case is discussed with another specialist IRGA before delivering report with expert advice

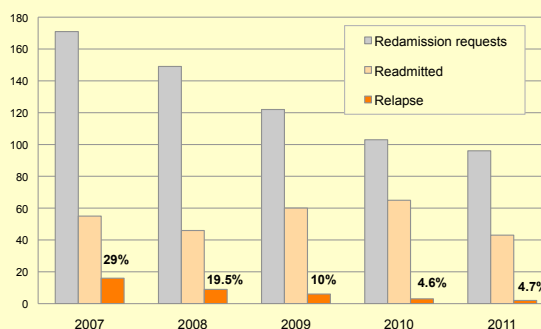
If the customer is readmitted

9. Monitoring for 2-6 months: the number of gambling sessions must match the number that was decided on during the interview and the gambling behaviour should be adequate
10. Interview after monitoring, in order to evaluate the results of the readmission

The success of the measures is assessed by analyzing the number of readmission requests, readmitted customers and relapse rates.

Results and discussion

The barplot shows the situation of the readmissions in the casinos of Locarno, Lugano and Mendrisio after the introduction of the new procedures (percentages express the rate of relapses over the number of readmitted customers).



A significant group of casino customers have increasingly managed to resume their gambling activity without a relapse during this period (only 2 relapses in 2011). It has been possible to regain control of their gambling.

The number of readmission requests nearly shrank to half from 2007 to 2011, while the number of readmitted customers remained fairly constant. A possible explanation could be the introduction of the new procedure of presenting the financial documents already by the readmission request, which could have discouraged some customers to try for a readmission.

The number and the rate of relapses was decreasing from 2007 to 2011, proving the effectiveness of the introduced new procedures.

Conclusions

Our renewed procedure has proved to be effective in minimizing the risk of relapse within one year after resuming gambling.

The new proposed criteria are kept simple and are easily applicable in the framework of a readmission procedure.

The inclusion of some of the proposed new criteria in the present legal framework is desirable to reduce the risk of relapse, thus improving the effectiveness of a social concept of preventative measures.

In future research it will be important to statistically compare the characteristics and situations of the customers which were successfully readmitted and those who had a relapse.

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Declaration of interests: IRGA has been commissioned to provide training to the three casinos in Ticino (Locarno, Lugano, Mendrisio), and provides support regarding psychological matters for the preventative measures in these three casinos.