

Effects of a deposit limit prompt in an online gambling platform for reducing gambling intensity: A randomized controlled trial

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Conclusions

- A one-time prompt for setting a voluntary deposit limit of optional size had no effect on the gambling intensity of the users of an online gambling service.
- Pre-commitment tools in gambling must be properly evaluated before they can be promoted as tools for prevention of unsustainable gambling patterns.
- Setting a deposit limit without a prompt can be a predictor of future unsustainable gambling patterns, the same applies to removing an earlier set limit.

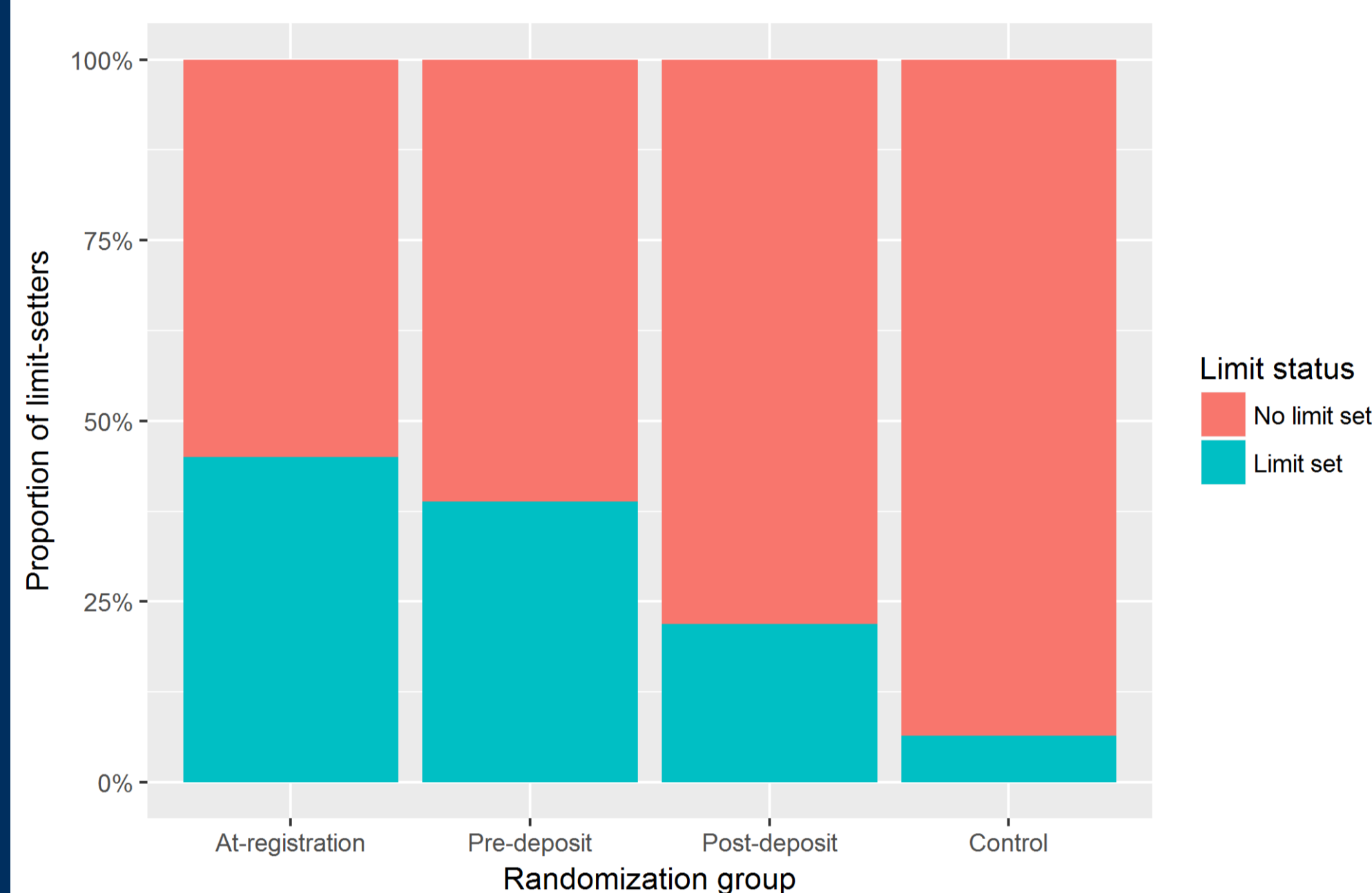


Figure 1. Proportion of the participants who chose to set a deposit limit divided by the randomization group.

Introduction

Precommitment tools – such as pre-setting a limit for how much money one may deposit, bet, loose and even win while gambling – are relatively common in both land-based venues and online gambling services, yet their effectiveness for preventing unsustainable gambling behaviors is unknown (Ladouceur, Blaszczynski, & Lalande, 2012).

Aim and hypothesis

The aim was to investigate the effectiveness of a prompt to set a limit for how much money one may deposit in one's gambling account – a deposit limit - among users of an online gambling service (paf.com).

The participants randomized to be prompted to set a deposit limit were expected to have lower gambling intensity compared to the unprompted participants.

Method

In 2016 all the prospective customers at paf.com who started creating a new account at the website were randomized into one of the four groups:

- *At-registration-group*: prompted to set a deposit-limit during their registration process (N=1098)
- *Pre-deposit-group*: prompted to set a deposit-limit when they are about to make their first deposit (N=1110)
- *Post-deposit-group*: prompted to set a deposit-limit right after they made their first deposit (N=1055)
- *No prompt*: control group (N=1065)

The study focused on 4328 randomly selected slot-machine players. The participants' activity in the platform was tracked during 90 days starting at the registration. Player net loss (NL = money wagered – money won) was used as a primary outcome measure.

Results

Being part of the control group was associated with a lower probability of setting a deposit limit (6.5% of the group set the limit) in comparison to the pre-registration group (45.0%), the pre-deposit group (38.8%), and the post-deposit group (21.9%, Figure 1).

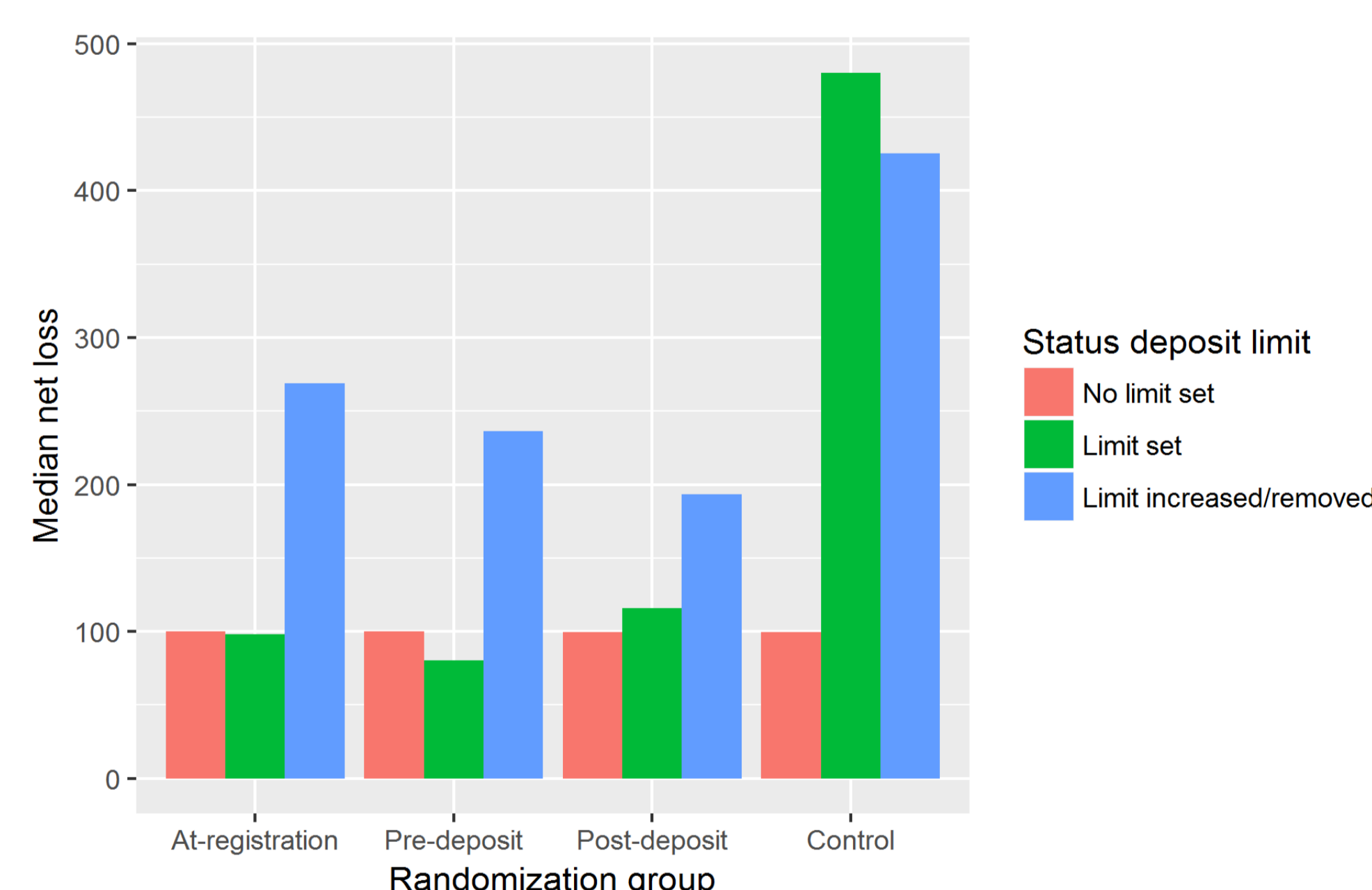


Figure 2. Median NL for customers who did not set a deposit limit, those who set a deposit limit (without removing it), and those who increased or removed a deposit limit. The numbers for the non-setters/limit-setters/limit-increasers in the intervention groups are: at-registration group (604/339/155), pre-deposit group (679/305/126), post-deposit group (824/141/90), and control group (996/41/28).

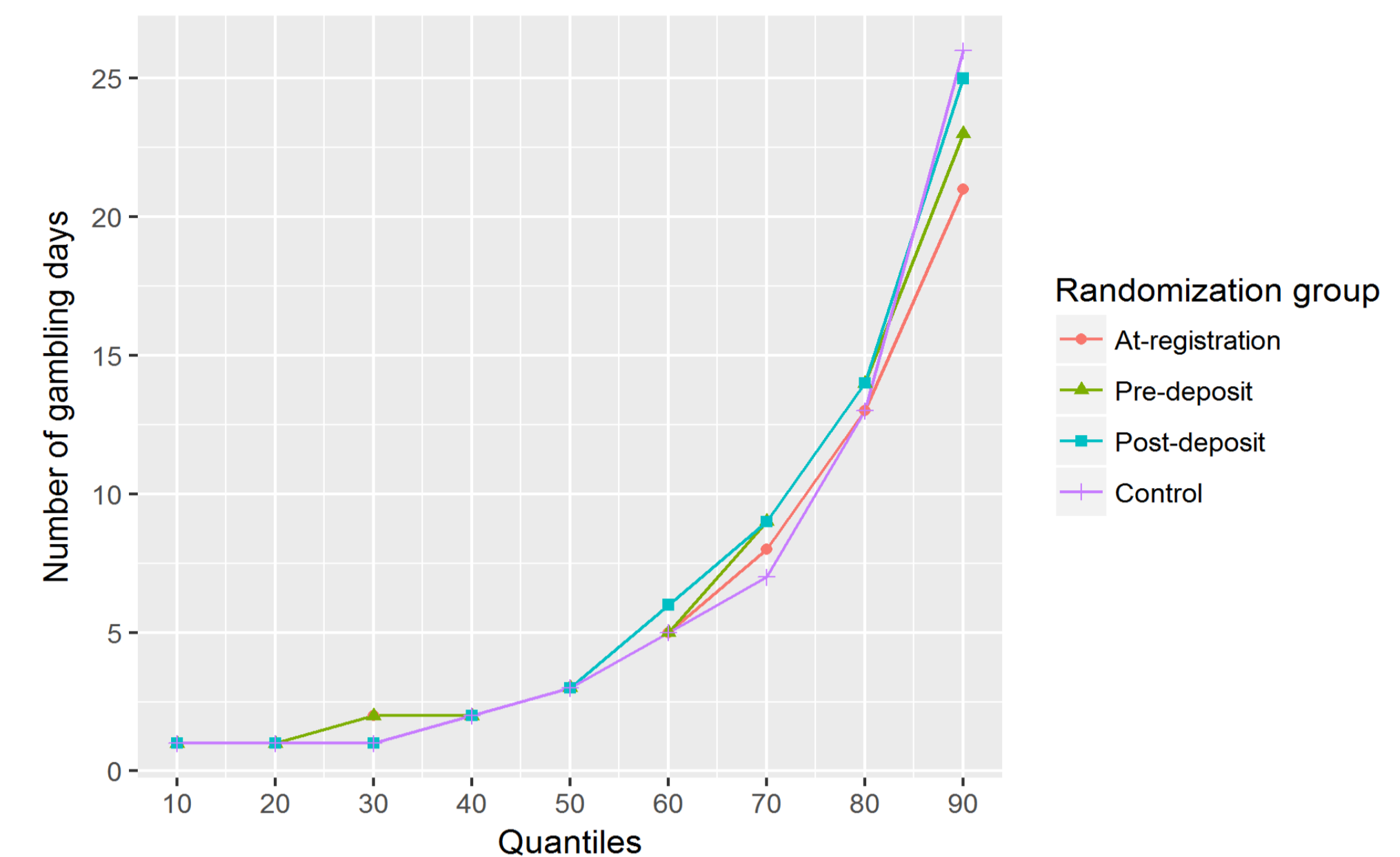


Figure 3. Quantile distribution of total number of gambling days in the randomization groups

NL was significantly higher among limit-setters in the control group, and among limit-increasers/removers in all the randomization groups (Figure 2). Median number of active gambling days during the 90-days data collection period was 3 (Figure 3).

There were no significant differences in NL between the three intervention groups, and the pooled intervention group did not differ significantly from the control group, neither regarding proportion of participants with positive NL (OR (95% CI) = 0.991 (0.836 – 1.176); p = .921; BF₁₀ = 0.054), nor regarding the size of the NL among the participants with positive NL (B (95% CI) = -0.080 (-0.229-0.069); p=.291; BF₁₀ =0.064).

Limitations

The intervention was very non-invasive and it was relatively easy to increase or remove the limit - with a seven day cooling down period – making it harder to adhere the limit. The individuals analyzed in the current study had online slots as preferred gambling category and the results do not generalize to other categories of gamblers.

References

Ladouceur, R., Blaszczynski, A., & Lalande, D. R. (2012). Pre-commitment in gambling: A review of the empirical evidence. *International Gambling Studies*, 12(2), 215–230.

Declaration of interests

Ålands Penningautomatförening finances the current PhD-project and provides data on its customers gambling activity for the project.

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