

knowledge snapshot

Review of self-exclusion from gambling venues as an intervention for problem gambling



What this article is about

This article reviews evidence surrounding the effectiveness of self-exclusion programs as a strategy for people with gambling problems to avoid gambling. Self-exclusion is a formal arrangement that allows people who believe they have a gambling problem to arrange to be barred from public gambling venues for a specific time period. Although this option is widely available and even required by regulators in some jurisdictions, there are few evaluations of self-exclusion programs as a way to reduce problem gambling. Further, since policies and programs often differ between jurisdictions, it can be challenging to compare practices and evaluate how well self-exclusion works. Through a broad review of research focusing on self-exclusion programs across several geographic locations and jurisdictions, the author outlines benefits and limitations of self-exclusion programs, and offers specific recommendations for making self-exclusion programs more effective.

What was done?

A comprehensive scan of published academic articles and grey literature was conducted for research that focused on developing and implementing self-exclusion programs. Fourteen studies were identified that were sufficiently thorough to allow research results to be used with confidence for both improving existing programs and providing insights on new strategies. All of the selected studies are presented in a table highlighting the type of participants (e.g., self-excluders, regular gamblers, or casino employees), percentage of men and women in the study, average age (in years), measures to assess characteristics and behaviours of self-excluders, main findings or results, and additional comments about the study that might

Why is this article important?

Although self-exclusion programs are common, there is little research evaluating their effectiveness. By reviewing significant studies from 2000 to 2011, common elements of self-exclusion programs are identified in terms of benefits and limitations. The article also provides specific recommendations about how to ensure that self-exclusion programs are most effective.

be useful to readers. Because there is considerable geographic variation in the design, implementation, and policies related to self-exclusion programs, research highlights and descriptive information about the studies are grouped and summarized by the jurisdictions in which the studies were conducted. These include the provinces of Quebec and Nova Scotia, Canada overall, Missouri, Australia, New Zealand, and Europe.

What you need to know

The studies consistently showed that self-exclusion programs benefit most participants. People who self-exclude spend less time and money on gambling, gamble less often, and have more control of their gambling. They also report better financial circumstances, less severe problem gambling and gambling-related harms, better psychological health (including lower levels of depression and anxiety). It is important to note, however, that although there is a *relationship* between self-exclusion and these positive outcomes, more information is needed about the extent to which self-exclusion *causes* these improvements. It could be also that people who are

willing to self-exclude are already motivated to change their problem gambling behaviour.

The main limitation of self-exclusion programs is that most problem gamblers do not participate in them. Some barriers to enrollment can include admitting to oneself that gambling is a problem, feelings of embarrassment, and difficulties with complicated applications and registration processes. The studies also showed that self-exclusion programs break down at two points: (1) a substantial percentage of people breach their agreement and are not detected, and (2) self-exclusion agreements only pertain to specific gambling venues and do not cover other venues or forms of gambling (e.g., Internet gambling).

Based on evidence presented in the self-exclusion studies, nine elements are recommended as part of an effective self-exclusion program:

1. Provide and promote clear information about self-exclusion programs.
2. To increase uptake, self-exclusion agreements should be available at gambling venues and off-site; be clear, straight-forward and easy to complete; and, respect privacy at all times.
3. Offer a range of time periods for self-exclusion including longer and shorter bans.
4. Ensure self-excluders are removed from gambling venue mailing lists and not offered incentives.
5. Provide resources to help self-excluders take additional steps to reduce problem gambling.
6. Operators must be active in identifying and removing self-excluders who enter the premises.
7. Before the ban expires and a self-excluded person is permitted to return to the gambling venue, there must be a reinstatement process outlining information about what is needed to allow them to return. Additionally, self-excluders should be given the opportunity to extend their ban.
8. All staff must participate in an effective training program that teaches how to identify self-excluders, and what to do so they will stick to their agreement.

9. Self-exclusion programs need to be evaluated on an ongoing basis to make sure they are effective, cause no harm, and comply with all required policies and processes.

Who is it intended for?

This review is intended to help operators, treatment counsellors, and regulators by providing evidence about the effectiveness of self-exclusion programs, as well as ways in which they can be improved. It is also useful to researchers as a guide to areas where future study and evaluation is needed.

About the Researcher

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Gambling problems; Pathological gambling; Policy; Effectiveness; Self-exclusion; Harm minimization

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