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Effects of different durations of mandatory breaks on online gambling behaviour

What this research is about

Gambling can have a strong negative impact on the quality of life of people who gamble and their family members. Preventing problematic gambling is a major concern for gambling regulators and policy makers. Multiple strategies have been attempted to prevent problematic gambling, such as personalized messages, limit settings, and mandatory breaks. The efficacy of these strategies still need to be explored in research.

Mandatory breaks are introduced to facilitate "cooling off" from gambling. However, a few research studies that examine mandatory breaks suggest that longer breaks can increase gambling cravings. Research is still inconclusive on the effects of longer mandatory breaks and how long such a break should be.

The present research builds on a previous study using data provided by *Norsk Tipping*, a Norwegian gambling operator. Norsk Tipping has imposed a mandatory break of 90 seconds after 60 minutes of gambling. The break appears as a pop-up message with a countdown showing the time to the end of the break. People could click a button during the break that would direct them to Norsk Tipping's responsible gambling website. In the present study, the researchers conducted a randomized experiment and controlled for pre-experimental behaviour to assess who might benefit the most from mandatory breaks. Moreover, the researchers added a "logout" button, which allowed people to log out during the break. In addition, the researchers looked at people's behaviour after the intervention.

What the researchers did

The researchers used data from people who gambled with the Norwegian gambling operator *Norsk Tipping*.

What you need to know

The aim of this study is to explore the impact of duration of mandatory breaks on online gambling behaviour. It looks at how different lengths of mandatory breaks affect people's gambling behaviours during and after the experiment. The results show that the time to next session tended to increase with longer mandatory breaks.

They analyzed people who had received at least one mandatory break during the experiment of the study. The initial dataset included 23,234 people.

In this study, people were randomly assigned to one of the four following groups during the experiment:

- The control group had the same mandatory break as before. People who had gambled for 60 minutes had a 90-second break. Around 60% of the people were kept in this group.
- The Break 90 Group was like the control group, but with the additional "logout" button on the pop-up message they received.
- The Break 300 Group was identical to the Break 90 group, but the time of the break was 300 seconds (5 minutes).
- The Break 900 Group was identical to the Break 90 group, but the time of the break was 900 seconds (15 minutes).

The researchers also gathered information on people's interactions with the pop-up message. They looked at if people clicked any buttons (e.g., log off), closed their web browser, or had no interaction. The duration of the experiment was one month. Afterwards, all people received the same 90-second break as before the

study. The researchers analyzed data from 12,510 people who received at least one break before and at least one break during the experiment of the study.

What the researchers found

To begin with, the researchers explored if the duration of mandatory breaks had different effects on people depending on their time to next session prior to the study. People were divided into two categories: the "unhurried" people who took a longer time to start a new gambling session after a break, and the "hurried" people who took a shorter time. Throughout the intervention and across the two groups, the time to next session increased the longer the mandatory break was. For example, people in the hurried group with a 15-minute mandatory break increased their time to next session by 1863%. For the unhurried people in the same mandatory break group, their time to next session increased by 966%.

Next, the researchers explored the interactions with the pop-up messages. Throughout the intervention and across the groups, the people who did not interact with the pop-up messages and just waited for the break to end had the shortest time to the next session. When compared to people who did not interact with the pop-up, people who visited the responsible gambling website had a longer time to next session. Finally, people who used the "logout" button had the longest time to next session. The control group was least likely to interact with the pop-up message. People who received longer breaks interacted with the pop-up message more, and the differences between the hurried and unhurried groups became smaller with longer breaks.

Finally, the researchers found a positive association for the hurried people between the number of mandatory breaks and potential post-intervention effects. Only people who experienced more than nine 15-minute mandatory breaks retained a 66% increase in time to next session after the intervention. Across all groups, most people were still active (i.e., placed at least one bet) after the intervention.

How you can use this research

This research can be used by gambling operators who want to implement a mandatory break on their website. It can also inform policy makers regarding the effects of mandatory breaks.

About the researchers

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Citation

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