

research snapshot

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Using real-world player data to examine the effects of a mandatory 60-minute play break in online casino

What this research is about

Online gambling has become more popular in recent years. It can pose a greater risk of problem gambling than offline gambling. When gambling online, people have to register for a player account with a gambling operator. That means their gambling behaviour can be tracked. Moreover, responsible gambling (RG) tools can be implemented to minimize harm.

A mandatory play break is an RG tool that forces people to stop gambling for a period of time after displaying excessive gambling behaviour. For example, the break may occur after a long play session or after making deposits multiple times. Two large-scale studies using player data reported mixed findings regarding the effects of mandatory play breaks.

This study investigated if a mandatory 60-minute play break influenced subsequent depositing and wagering on the day of the break, as well as on the next day. It also examined whether losing or winning prior to the break would be associated with depositing after the break. Finally, the study examined the impact on gambling behaviour and loyalty several weeks later.

What the researchers did

The researchers used player data provided by Skillonnet, a European online gambling operator. The data included 2,021 players from several UK-based online casino sites. All players had deposited 10 times or more in a single day, at least once, between July 23 and September 15, 2021. On August 20, Skillonnet introduced a mandatory 60-minute break if players had made 10 deposits into an account in a single day.

The researchers chose a 27-day control period from July 23 and August 19 (no mandatory play break).

What you need to know

This study examined the effects of a mandatory 60-minute play break after players had made 10 deposits in a single day. The researchers were given access to player data for 27 days before and 27 days after the play break was introduced by an online gambling operator. Data included 2,021 British players who deposited at least 10 times in a single day, at least once. The percentage of players who stopped depositing money after the 10th deposit rose from 27% to 68% when there was a mandatory play break. The percentage of players who stopped wagering rose from 0.1% to 45%. The play break did not have an impact on depositing money on the next day. It seemed to increase the likelihood to wager on the next day. There was no impact on gambling behaviour several weeks later.

They chose a 27-day treatment period from August 20 and September 15. Players could not play or deposit money for 60 minutes after the 10th deposit.

What the researchers found

Depositing and wagering after the mandatory break

Of the 2,021 players, 55% were women and 46% were men. The average age was 38 years old. An event was defined as a player depositing at least 10 times in a single day. There were 1,461 events between July 23 and August 18 (control period) and 1,533 events between August 20 and September 15 (treatment period). Among players who made 10 deposits in a single day during the control period, 73% made at least one more deposit and 99.9% wagered at least one more time on the same day. The percentages dropped to 32% for depositing and 55% for wagering

during the treatment period. Thus, the play break had an immediate impact in preventing overspending.

The percentage of players who made a deposit on the next day was similar during the two periods (58% and 59%). The percentage of players who wagered on the next day rose from 66% during the control period to 71% during the treatment period.

Losing/winning and depositing on the day of the break

The researchers grouped the 1,533 events during the treatment period into 10 groups. All players in Groups 1 to 9 lost, with Group 1 having the highest losses. Players in Group 10 won more than what they wagered. The 10 groups did not differ in terms of depositing money on the same day after the break. But, players who had lost less money and players who had won money were more likely to deposit money on the next day. These results suggested that players might be chasing after their winnings.

The researchers also wanted to know which gambling factors predicted depositing money on the day of the break. Only three out of 21 factors were found to be predictors. Players whose sessions were terminated between 1 and 5am and players who had a larger amount of money in their account (a higher balance), were more likely to deposit again on the same day after the break. Players who won a larger amount of money in the session before the break were less likely to deposit again. Overall, the decision to deposit on the day of the break was influenced by factors that were not examined in the current study.

Impact on gambling behaviour and loyalty over time

There were 333 players who experienced at least one play break at the start of the treatment period between August 20 and August 26. The researchers examined their gambling behaviours between September 9 and September 15. For the control period, there were 301 players who deposited at least 10 times in one day between July 23 to July 29. Their gambling behaviours between August 12 and August 18 were examined. Comparing the two groups showed that the play break did not have an impact on amount of money deposited, amount of money wagered, or session length several weeks later.

For the treatment period, two-fifths of the players (41.2%) wagered at least once between September 9 and September 15. For the control period, almost half of the players (48.9%) wagered at least once between August 12 and August 18. These results suggested the play break might have a negative impact on loyalty.

How you can use this research

This study can inform research and responsible gambling programmes about mandatory play breaks.

About the researchers

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