

research snapshot

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Mandatory play breaks on video lottery terminals do not reduce money or time spent gambling

What this research is about

Many operators have introduced responsible gambling (RG) tools to help prevent problem gambling. One RG tool that is frequently used is mandatory play breaks. In mandatory play breaks, gamblers are required to take a forced break when they have gambled for a certain period of time. Forced breaks in play are thought to be particularly helpful for continuous gambling activities such as video lottery terminals (VLTs). This is because the forced breaks in play can provide gamblers with an opportunity to “cool off” and to think more clearly, before deciding if they want to continue or stop gambling.

Although the use of forced breaks in play makes intuitive sense to help people gamble responsibly, it is unclear whether they actually help to reduce problem gambling behaviours. This is due to the limited number of research studies on forced breaks in play. The researchers addressed this gap in knowledge by conducting a real-world study to examine if a mandatory forced break in play on VLTs would result in less money and time spent on VLTs following the break.

What the researchers did

The researchers were given access by Norsk Tipping, a gambling operator owned by the Norwegian government, to a random sample of 7,190 VLT players who gambled between January and March 2018. The 7,190 players gambled a total of 218,523 times on VLTs during this time. A total of 7,666 (3.51%) of the gambling sessions triggered the forced break in play as they reached the limit of 1 hour on the VLTs. The forced break lasted for 90 seconds.

What you need to know

Mandatory play breaks are a common responsible gambling (RG) tool designed to prevent problem gambling. Forced breaks in play are thought to be especially helpful for continuous gambling activities such as video lottery terminals (VLTs). The researchers examined if forced breaks in play resulted in less time and money spent gambling in a real-world setting involving 7,190 VLT players in Norway. The researchers found that forced breaks in play were associated with *more* (not less) money and time spent gambling in the session following the break, compared to gambling sessions that did not trigger the breaks. The researchers suggest this result could be due to “heavier” gamblers being more likely to trigger forced breaks in play.

The researchers then found similar sessions (i.e., money spent) that did not trigger forced break in play, to compare the two sessions. Specifically, the researchers compared the two sessions to see whether a forced break in play reduced the money and time spent during the next gambling session, as well as the total amount of money gambled in the 24 hours following the play break. Of the 7,666 sessions with a forced break in play, the researchers were able to find a match for 4,290 sessions.

What the researchers found

The researchers found that following the forced break in play, gamblers started their next gambling session earlier and spent more money and time on the next gambling session compared to players who did not trigger the forced break. Gamblers with the forced

break in play also spent more money overall in the next 24 hours. The researchers suggest that these results are likely due to gamblers who trigger forced break in play being more likely to be “heavier” gamblers.

The researchers also examined the effect of having a win before the forced break in play. They found that gamblers who experienced a win before the forced break, tended to make a larger bet after the break.

How you can use this research

Gambling operators could use this research to examine whether their own forced break in play may be resulting in gamblers spending more time and money. Researchers could extend the results of this study by examining forced break in play in a laboratory setting by randomly assigning gamblers to a mandatory break or a voluntary play break condition. This would enable a comparison of the effects of forced versus voluntary breaks in play on problem gambling behaviours.

About the researchers

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Citation

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