

# research snapshot

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## Breaks in play without warning messages increase cravings to continue gambling

### What this research is about

Responsible gambling strategies aim to minimize harms due to excessive gambling. One of these strategies is 'breaks in play'. Breaks in play involve any action that interrupts, suspends, or stops gambling. When people gamble, they may experience dissociation. Gamblers may become so immersed in the game that they lose awareness of how much time and money they have spent. Breaks in play aim to interrupt dissociation and return the players to a state of full awareness. Often, breaks in play include responsible gambling messages, or warning messages, that prompt the players to think about their gambling behaviour. Though, this is not always the case. The current study investigated the effects of breaks in play without warning messages on cravings to continue gambling. The study also examined if the length of the break in play had an impact on cravings.

### What the researchers did

Participants were 141 university students, aged 18 to 32 years. The researchers randomly placed participants into one of three conditions: no break, 3 minute break (short), and 8 minute break (long). Participants were first assessed about problem gambling and familiarity with Black Jack. They then played a Black Jack game on a computer individually. After 15 minutes of play, the game was interrupted.

During the break, material unrelated to gambling was displayed on the screen for 3 minutes in the short break and 8 minutes in the long break. After the break, participants completed a questionnaire about their cravings to continue playing Black Jack and dissociation. They were also asked about negative feelings they felt towards the break in play. In the no break group,

### What you need to know

Breaks in play are a responsible gambling strategy aimed to disrupt dissociation. When people gamble, they may experience dissociation that results in loss of awareness of time and money spent. The current study investigated whether breaks in play without an accompanying responsible gambling message could reduce cravings to continue gambling. Participants randomly received no break, a short break, or a long break while playing Black Jack. Cravings to continue playing increased rather than decreased with breaks in play. Longer breaks resulted in greater cravings. The findings suggest that breaks in play should be accompanied with responsible gambling messages to be effective.

participants completed the questionnaire before immediately resuming Black Jack. All participants played Black Jack for 15 more minutes. After completing the game, participants indicated their desire to continue playing if there was an opportunity to do so.

### What the researchers found

After the break, participants in the long break condition had increased cravings to continue playing Black Jack. They reported higher cravings to continue playing than participants in the short break and no break conditions. Participants in the short break condition also had increased cravings. They reported higher cravings to continue playing than those in the no break condition. The desire to continue playing at the end of the game was greater for those participants who had higher cravings during the break. This suggested that the craving caused by the break in play continued to affect

the player even after the break had ended and play had resumed.

Participants who reported greater cravings to continue play also experienced more dissociation. The break condition did not have an effect on feelings of dissociation. Therefore, the break in play did not reduce dissociation and return the gambler to a state of being aware of his or her action. Finally, negative feelings towards the breaks mediated the relationship between the breaks and cravings. This suggested that the breaks in play caused negative feelings (e.g., irritation), which then resulted in greater cravings to continue gambling.

### How you can use this research

Policy makers and industry operators can use this study to design more effective responsible gambling strategies. The findings suggest that breaks in play by themselves do not achieve their intended effects. In fact, they may produce negative, unintended effects by increasing cravings to continue play. Breaks in play should be accompanied by responsible gambling messages to be more effective in reducing time and money spent gambling.

### About the researchers

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### Keywords

Responsible gambling, Black Jack, breaks in play, dissociation, cravings

### Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (GREO)

Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (GREO) has partnered with the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University to produce Research Snapshots. GREO is an independent knowledge translation and exchange organization that aims to eliminate harm from gambling. Our goal is to support evidence-informed decision making in responsible gambling policies, standards and practices. The work we do is intended for researchers, policy makers, gambling regulators and operators, and treatment and prevention service providers.

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