

# research snapshot

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## Is temporary self-exclusion from Internet gambling effective for at-risk gamblers?

### What this research is about

Responsible gambling strategies aim to help gamblers control their gambling and prevent the development of gambling problems. An example of these strategies is self-exclusion. Self-exclusion involves gamblers voluntarily banning themselves from gambling venues (online or offline) for a set period of time.

In France, there are two types of self-exclusion programs. The first one lasts for three years and requires legal action. The second one applies only to online gambling. It lasts for at least seven days and applies to gambling websites chosen by the gambler. Few research studies have evaluated the effectiveness of self-exclusion from online gambling. The current study evaluated the effectiveness of the online temporary and voluntary 7-day self-exclusion program for at-risk gamblers in France.

### What the researchers did

Participants were 60 at-risk gamblers, aged 18 or older, who had gambled at least once during the past month on a licensed website in France. At-risk gambling was determined by the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI; scoring 3-7).

All gamblers reported the following: sociodemographics (age, sex, education level, etc.); gambling characteristics (type of game, frequency, money wagered, etc.); severity of gambling problems; gambling-related beliefs; gambling craving; and opinion and use of online gambling protection strategies and gambling account information.

The researchers randomly assigned 30 gamblers to either the self-exclusion program or the control condition (no self-exclusion). The researchers ensured

### What you need to know

This study evaluated the impact of a temporary 7-day self-exclusion program for at-risk gamblers in France. The self-exclusion from Internet gambling sites did not modify gambling habits in the short term (15 days after it ended). The impact was greater in the medium term. After two months, the self-exclusion gamblers had less irrational belief that they could control the outcomes of gambling games and believed more in their ability to stop gambling, compared to gamblers who did not use the program. The self-exclusion gamblers also decreased their desire to gamble more.

that each type of gambling game was evenly represented in each condition. The three types of gambling games were: pure chance games (lottery or scratch tickets); skill and chance bank games (sports betting or horserace betting); and skill and chance social games (poker).

Gamblers in the self-exclusion condition started the 7-day self-exclusion program for their favourite gambling websites. Gamblers in the control condition gambled as usual. At 15 days and two months after the self-exclusion program ended, all gamblers reported the same information as before the study began. The self-exclusion gamblers also reported the impact of self-exclusion on their gambling behaviour.

The researchers analyzed the impact of the self-exclusion program on gambling behaviour (money wagered and time spent) for self-exclusion gamblers, compared to the control group. They also evaluated the impact of the self-exclusion program on the severity of gambling problems, gambling beliefs and

craving. The researchers assessed the impact 15 days (short-term) and 2 months (medium-term) after the end of the self-exclusion program.

### What the researchers found

Self-exclusion had no short-term impact for at-risk gamblers. Fifteen days after the self-exclusion ended, there were no differences between the self-exclusion gamblers and the control group for money wagered, time spent gambling, gambling beliefs and craving. However, the self-exclusion gamblers reported that it allowed them to move away from gambling to do other things. Most of the self-exclusion gamblers thought that the experience was positive.

The impact of self-exclusion was greater in the medium term. Two months after the self-exclusion ended, the gambling-related cognitions “illusion of control” and “perceived inability to stop gambling” decreased more for the self-exclusion gamblers than the control group. The “desire” to gamble (a sub-factor of gambling craving) also decreased more for the self-exclusion gamblers. In other words, the self-exclusion gamblers had less irrational belief that they could control the outcomes of gambling games, were more likely to believe they could stop gambling, and had less desire to gamble.

The self-exclusion gamblers noted many limitations to the program. For example, it does not prevent gamblers from gambling somewhere else. It is unknown by most gamblers and may be difficult to undertake oneself. In particular, gamblers with severe problems may be less motivated to use the program.

### How you can use this research

The findings suggest that even a short period of self-excluding from online gambling can be beneficial for at-risk gamblers. Treatment providers can recommend self-excluding from online gambling for at-risk gamblers. Future research can evaluate the effectiveness of longer self-exclusion periods on gambling behaviour.

### About the researchers

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