

# research snapshot

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## Evaluation of a youth gambling prevention program

### What this research is about

Youth are at increased risk of experiencing harms from risky behaviours, like gambling. Harms may include poor mental and physical health, money problems, and issues at school. Some youth develop addictions from their gambling. So, it is important to protect youth from gambling and its related harms.

One type of intervention to prevent youth problem gambling is called 'primary prevention'. These programs target youth who do not gamble, to prevent problems from arising in the first place. Some primary prevention programs address risk and protective factors related to gambling. For example, they might address false beliefs about gambling. Other primary prevention programs address more general factors linked with risky behaviour. These might include coping skills, decision-making skills, impulsivity (i.e., a tendency to act without thinking about the consequence), and sensation-seeking (i.e., a tendency to seek excitement and novel experiences).

Little research has evaluated how well primary prevention programs impact youth problem gambling. Few prevention programs include both gambling risk and protective factors, as well as general risk and protective factors. Also, few prevention programs have measured their effects on actual gambling behaviours or their impact over time. The current study evaluated a new youth gambling prevention program that addresses these limitations.

### What the researchers did

Participants were 111 high school students in Lisbon, Portugal. At the beginning of the study, they reported their age and gender, how often they had gambled during the past two months, how many hours they

### What you need to know

This study evaluated how well a new program prevented youth problem gambling. In both the short- and long-term, the program increased correct knowledge of gambling and reduced false beliefs about gambling. It also decreased the hours spent gambling per week. These effects were found among both youth with non-problem and at-risk/problem gambling. The program also reduced the number of youth with at-risk/problem gambling. This study provides important suggestions for future programs.

gambled during the week, and the most amount of money they had ever spent on gambling. They completed the Questionnaire of Misconceptions and Knowledge about Gambling, a measure of knowledge and false beliefs about gambling. They completed the DSM-IV-Multiple-Response-Juvenile (DSM-IV-J-MR), a measure of youth problem gambling. They also completed the Attitudes Towards Gambling Scale (ATGS8) and the Brief Sensation Seeking Scale (BSSS).

The researchers randomly placed participants in two groups: experimental and control. The experimental group completed the above measures one week before the intervention (pre-test), at the end of the last session (post-test), and six weeks after the intervention ended (follow-up). The control group completed the pre-test and post-test measures, but did not receive the intervention.

The five-week intervention used interactive learning such as quizzes, discussions, and team learning. It aimed to: 1) increase correct knowledge of, and reduce false beliefs about, gambling; 2) decrease

gambling behaviour; and 3) impact factors linked with risky behaviours in youth, such as sensation-seeking.

The researchers evaluated the short-term effects of the program by comparing pre- and post-test scores in the experimental vs. control group. They compared the short-term effects based on problem gambling severity (youth with non-problem vs. at-risk/problem gambling). The researchers also evaluated the long-term effects by comparing post-test and follow-up scores of the measures for which the program was found to be effective in the short-term. They also examined changes in the percentage of youth with at-risk/problem gambling from pre-test to follow-up.

### What the researchers found

Youth who received the intervention increased their correct knowledge about gambling. They reduced their false beliefs and attitudes about gambling. They also reduced the total hours they spent gambling per week. The control group did not show a change in these measures from pre-test to post-test. The program did not have any impact on gambling frequency or amount of money spent gambling.

The short-term improvements on correct knowledge of, and false beliefs, about gambling were found in both youth with and without problem gambling. The program only reduced the total hours spent on gambling per week among youth with gambling problems. The program only reduced positive attitudes towards gambling among youth without gambling problems.

Thirty-nine participants who received the intervention completed the follow-up. For those youth, the effects of the program were stable over the long-term. Follow-up scores did not differ from post-test scores for the measures for which the program was found to be effective in the short-term. There was also a decrease in the percentage of youth with at-risk/problem gambling from pre-test to follow-up (from 21.4% to 7.7%).

### How you can use this research

The findings suggest that the youth gambling prevention program was effective in correcting some

gambling-related behaviours. Future programs could be developed that improve on its content. Future research could also study the program's effects over a longer follow-up period in a larger sample.

### About the researchers

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### About Gambling Research Exchange (GREO)

Gambling Research Exchange (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 safer 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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