

# research snapshot

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## Short-term use of a responsible gambling tool may not have an impact on gambling behaviour

### What this research is about

Responsible gambling (RG) includes policies and practices, to prevent and reduce harm associated with problem gambling. Several types of RG tools are made available by gambling companies. However, evidence is lacking regarding how effective these RG tools are. Some studies have reported that RG tools can decrease gambling behaviour in people with a high risk of problem gambling, but they have little impact on most other gamblers. A reason for the lack of impact may be because gamblers rarely use RG tools beyond the initial time. Thus, there is a need to investigate both the short-term and long-term use of RG tools to fully understand their impact.

Playscan is an RG tool offered on some gambling sites in Norway and Sweden. Previous research has found that repeated use of Playscan is rare among users. The aim of this study was to examine the use of Playscan functions among Norwegian gamblers who started and then stopped using the tool. Another aim was to explore if gamblers changed their gambling after having used Playscan for a short period of time.

### What the researchers did

The researchers analyzed data from 835 people who gambled with Norsk Tipping, a Norwegian government-owned gambling company. Data were supplied by Norsk Tipping and Playscan for the period from January 2014 to March 2015. Use of Playscan on Norsk Tipping site was still voluntary during that time, and people could choose to sign up and leave at any time. Playscan became mandatory after March 2015. Participants were users who voluntarily signed up for Playscan and then opted out. 835 participants were included.

### What you need to know

Playscan is a responsible gambling tool offered on many gambling sites in Norway and Sweden. This study examined the use and effect of Playscan among 835 Norwegian gamblers, who had chosen to use Playscan and then opted out. The results showed a lack of repeated use of the tool's functions. Most participants used the self-test to assess their risk level, but few requested advice on how to limit gambling. The short-term use of Playscan did not have much impact in terms of money spent or number of days gambled. Low-risk gamblers appeared to gamble more after having used the tool, but the increase in gambling was small. High-risk gamblers had a small decrease in the number of days they gambled but not in their spending. These results suggest that longer use of an RG tool and/or the use of the tool's functions several times may be needed to have a positive impact on gambling behaviour.

A popular feature of Playscan is the self-test and risk assessment based on users' gambling history. The risk assessment has three levels: 1) the "green" level means that users have a low risk of problem gambling; 2) the "yellow" level suggests a moderate risk; and 3) the "red" level suggests a high risk. Users receive feedback on their risk assessment. They can also track any change in their risk level on a weekly basis. After receiving the feedback, users can choose the advice function which provides them with suggestions on how to limit their gambling.

The researchers examined the participants' gambling history and use of Playscan functions. These included:

- The number of days the participants gambled and the total amount of money spent on gambling during the 14 days before joining Playscan and during the 14 days after opting out.
- The risk level based on gambling history.
- The length of time being a user of Playscan.
- The number of times the self-test was done, and the number of times advice was requested.

### What the researchers found

Of the 835 participants, the majority had a green risk level (69.1%). One in ten had a yellow risk level (9.9%), and one in ten had a red risk level (9.2%). Another 11.8% had not gambled enough to have a risk rating. The average time being a user of Playscan was 7.5 days.

Most participants used Playscan's self-test. Many participants started (90.4 %) and completed (79.1%) the first self-test they answered. However, few participants did the self-test two or more times. For example, one-quarter of participants (24.2%) started the second self-test, and only 9.6% completed it. Very few participants (2.2%) used the advice function.

Participants who had a green risk level appeared to increase their spending and the number of days they gambled after having used Playscan. However, the increases were small. Participants who did not have a risk rating also had a small increase in their gambling spending. These two groups of participants did not gamble intensely to begin with. Thus, any small increase could have just been normal fluctuation in their gambling pattern.

For participants who had a yellow or red risk level, there were no changes in their gambling spending before and after using Playscan. Participants with a yellow risk level also had no change in the number of days gambled. Participants with a red risk level had a small decrease in the number of days gambled.

### How you can use this research

This study could be used to inform RG initiatives. The findings suggest that gambling companies need to be more proactive in promoting the use of their RG tools.

Furthermore, targeted communication may be needed to maintain people's interest and their continued use of the tools. Future research could investigate the reasons why people start and stop using an RG tool, and which features of the tool are more helpful. Researchers could also investigate the long-term impact of using an RG tool.

### About the researchers

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### Citation

Forsström, D., Rafi, J., & Carlbring, P. (2020). Dropouts' usage of a responsible gambling tool and subsequent gambling patterns. *Cogent Psychology*, 7(1), article 1715535.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/23311908.2020.1715535>

### Study funding

This study is a part of a larger project funded by the Swedish Research Council for Health, Working Life and Welfare (Forte). The grant number is 2016-07091.

### 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. Learn more about GREO by visiting [greo.ca](http://greo.ca) or emailing [info@greo.ca](mailto:info@greo.ca).

