

# research snapshot

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## Breaching of voluntary self-exclusion in a national Swedish sample

### What this research is about

Gambling disorder (GD) is a behavioural addiction that involves problem gambling. Voluntary self-exclusion is a common harm reduction tool people use to manage GD. It is a self-help measure in which people choose to be 'excluded' from various gambling activities.

The Swedish self-exclusion service, *Spelpaus*, is a national service that allows people to self-exclude from all licenced gambling operators. This stops people who have registered from accessing land-based gambling venues or online gambling platforms that are licensed in Sweden. People can self-exclude for 1 month, 3 months, 6 months, or 12 months. After registering with *Spelpaus*, people are prevented from accessing various forms of gambling, except for retail lottery tickets, land-based bingo venues, and limited-stake casino table games offered in some restaurants.

Research suggests that many people who have registered for self-exclusion continue to gamble (i.e., 'breach' their self-exclusion). This typically occurs through online gambling websites outside of the jurisdiction in which they are self-excluded.

In this study, the researchers aimed to examine self-exclusion and the breaching of self-exclusion in Sweden. The purpose of this study was to provide follow-up data after the implementation of *Spelpaus* in Sweden in 2019.

### What the researchers did

The researchers administered an online survey to 1505 people who had gambled in the past year. The survey took place in May 2022. Participants responded to various questions about their demographic information, gambling habits, gambling

### What you need to know

Voluntary self-exclusion is a commonly used gambling self-help tool. A nationwide self-exclusion service, *Spelpaus*, was implemented in Sweden in 2019. *Spelpaus* allows people to exclude themselves from licensed gambling operators, preventing them from accessing land-based and online gambling activities. However, research suggests that many people breach their self-exclusion agreement and continue to gamble.

In this study, the researchers investigated self-exclusion and breaching of self-exclusion in Sweden. A total of 1505 people who had gambled in the past year completed an online survey. About 9% had self-excluded using *Spelpaus*. The researchers found that about half of the people who engaged in self-exclusion breached their self-exclusion. People who breached their self-exclusion were more likely to gamble on online casinos, bet on sports, and online lotteries. The findings also indicate that people who breached their self-exclusion had more intense gambling patterns compared to those who did not breach their self-exclusion.

problems, and self-exclusion via *Spelpaus*. Gambling problems were assessed using the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI).

Participants who reported self-exclusion were compared to people who did not report self-exclusion. Among people who reported self-exclusion, those who breached their self-exclusion were compared to those who did not breach.

## What the researchers found

Of the 1505 participants, the majority were male (61%). The researchers found that 9% of participants had registered for self-exclusion. When compared to previous studies, this finding suggests that the popularity of self-exclusion in Sweden may have increased.

Self-exclusion was significantly associated with gambling problems and gambling on online casinos. Additionally, the researchers found that among people who self-excluded, mental health problems were more common. But people who gambled on online poker were less likely to engage in self-exclusion.

Breaching self-exclusion appeared to be a common occurrence. Among people who self-excluded, 49% breached their terms of self-exclusion and gambled. The most common gambling types among people who breached their self-exclusion were online casino (82%), sports betting (47%), and online lotteries (43%). The researchers suggested that these gambling forms might have been popular among people who breached self-exclusion because they are more accessible and rapid forms of gambling compared to traditional land-based gambling.

People who breached their self-exclusion were more likely to experience moderate-risk or problem gambling. They were also more likely to engage in several gambling types. These included casino games, online and land-based poker, online bingo, and gambling within video games. These findings suggest that people who breached and gambled during self-exclusion had more intense gambling patterns compared to those who did not breach their self-exclusion.

## How you can use this research

Gambling regulators and policy makers can use this research. The findings imply that self-exclusion continues to be a popular gambling harm reduction tool. Online casino gambling appears to be the most common form of gambling breached during self-exclusion. Thus, policy makers may want to address and find ways to mitigate the risk of people who

breach their self-exclusion, especially those who gamble on online casinos. Although self-exclusion appears to be popular, the high rate of breaching suggests that interventions need to target the risk of breaching.

## About the researchers

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