

# research snapshot

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## Gambling alone may intensify gambling behaviour

### What this research is about

Gamblers frequently socialize during gambling. The presence of others may influence gamblers' behaviour. This process is known as social facilitation. Past research has found that the presence of others increases performance on easy tasks. Gambling on electronic gambling machine (EGM) is chance-based and requires little thinking. This form of gambling can be considered an easy task. Therefore, gambling with others, compared to gambling alone, may lead to more intensive gambling behaviour. There is limited research with mixed findings on the effects of social facilitation on gambling behaviour, however.

While the presence of others may influence gambling behaviour, other research suggests that features within the game also impact gambling behaviour. For example, winning early in a game may result in a longer gambling session. It is important to consider within-game features when studying the effects of social facilitation in gambling.

The current study investigated the influence of social facilitation on gambling behaviour. The researchers compared gambling behaviour between gamblers who gambled alone, with two familiar others present, or with two unfamiliar others present. They also manipulated the part of the gambling session in which the gamblers received most of their winnings to compare the effects on gambling behaviour.

### What the researchers did

Participants were 136 students, between the ages of 18 and 28, from two universities in Bergen, Norway. The researchers placed participants in one of three conditions: (1) gambling alone ('alone'); (2) gambling with two other unfamiliar participants ('unfamiliar');

### What you need to know

This study examined if the presence of others had an effect on gambling behaviour. On average, participants who gambled alone gambled on more trials and placed their bet faster compared to participants who gambled with either two familiar or unfamiliar others. But participants who gambled alone lost fewer credits over time for each additional trial gambled. Also, participants who received winnings early tended to gamble for longer compared to those who received winnings at a later stage of the gambling session. This study suggests that gamblers exhibit greater self-control and more restrictive gambling behaviour when gambling in the presence of others.

or (3) gambling with two other familiar participants ('familiar'). Furthermore, within each condition, the researchers placed them within one of three winning sequences: (1) winnings were mainly at the beginning ('early'); (2) winnings were mainly toward the middle ('middle'); or (3) winnings were mainly at the end ('late').

All participants played 75 trials of an EGM game. All participants experienced 6 medium rewards, 14 small rewards, and 55 losses. Participants wore earphones during the trials as to not hear, or be influenced by, other participants. Participants were assessed for the severity of their gambling problems, as well as past-month gambling frequency and money spent on gambling. The researchers compared participants in the three conditions to ensure no group differences existed in these measures.

Finally, the researchers compared the following gambling behaviours between groups: (1) reaction time (time between knowing an outcome and starting the next bet); (2) number of trials gambled; (3) credit (cash at the end of each trial); and (4) bet size (amount of money wagered at each trial).

### What the researchers found

Participants gambling with unfamiliar others had a 483 millisecond (ms) slower reaction time than participants gambling alone. Participants gambling with familiar others had a 504 ms slower reaction time than participants gambling alone. Females gambling alone had a faster reaction time than men gambling alone. There were no differences in reaction time based on when participants received winnings.

Participants gambling with unfamiliar others placed 7.8 fewer bets than participants gambling alone. Participants gambling with familiar others placed 7.2 fewer bets than participants gambling alone. But participants gambling alone lost less money per additional trial gambled, compared to those gambling with either unfamiliar or familiar others. There was a trend for participants who received winnings late in the game to gamble fewer trials than those who received winnings early in the game.

There were no differences in credit left for participants in the three conditions. But, for each additional trial gambled, participants who gambled alone lost less credit compared to participants who gambled with others. Participants who received winnings mainly at the middle or end of the game had fewer credits left compared to participants in the 'early' winning sequence. Also, participants receiving winnings late in the game placed smaller bets compared to those in the 'early' and 'middle' winning sequences.

### How you can use this research

The findings suggest that gambling alone may increase risk taking (i.e., longer gambling sessions and faster bets). Treatment providers and public health should promote responsible gambling interventions

(e.g., mandatory breaks, upper loss limits). This is particularly important for gamblers who often gamble alone, such as Internet gamblers. Future research should replicate the current study across various types of gambling and among different populations.

### About the researchers

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### Keywords

Gambling, social facilitation, experiment, EGM, slot machine

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