

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

SELF-EXCLUSION (2019)

OVERVIEW

SELF-EXCLUSION STRENGTHS AND LIMITATIONS

- There is evidence that self-exclusion is connected with significant reductions in time and money spent gambling, stress, anxiety, depression, and alcohol use.¹⁻³
- Self-exclusion is also associated with improved relationships, self-esteem, and emotional health.³
- Self-exclusion was the only responsible gambling strategy with enough evidence to recommend in two recent reviews.^{11, 12}
- Limitations have been identified in self-exclusion programs, including:
 - A considerable proportion of participants will breach their contract (up to 33-59%) or gamble at other venues^{3, 13-16}
 - Staff have limited ability to identify or respond to breaches, partially due to insufficient training^{17, 18}
 - Optimal ban-length remains unclear^{13, 19}
- Some evidence shows that self-exclusion programs could be improved by:
 - Providing clear information about the programs^{13, 19}
 - Offering support from trained professionals²⁰
 - Removing those who have excluded from promotional mailing lists²⁰

Characteristics of self-excluders:

- Struggle with problem gambling for about six years before self-excluding⁶
 - Tend to have large debts⁷⁻⁹
 - Often prefer slot-machine play
 - More likely to be male
 - Tend to be between the ages of 30-46
- Less likely to be single compared to those who do not self-exclude

SELF-EXCLUSION PROCESS

ENROLLMENT

- It is common that players self-exclude multiple times. When a player self-excludes for the first time, the process should aim to protect the player.²¹ This may include:
 - Making the enrollment process as easy as possible,^{22, 23} such as offering options to enroll online, by email, and by regular mail.^{6, 22, 24, 25}
 - Providing resources to help people control their gambling such as information, educational resources, and referrals to (or follow-up offers of) counselling, treatment, and self-help options.^{3, 15, 16, 22, 26-28}
- Deterrents to enrolling in self-exclusion programs include:²⁸
 - A complicated enrollment process
 - Incomplete exclusion from all venues
 - Lack of information about program availability and how the program works
 - Little support from venue staff (i.e., identifying people who may have a gambling problem, and explaining self-exclusion, and the enrollment, exclusion, and reinstatement processes^{22, 27-30})
- Early evidence suggests gamblers will choose to ban themselves from multiple operators, if given the option.^{24, 29} There is a need for consistent, multi-operator exclusion schemes to be implemented over all gambling segments.³¹ Some jurisdictions are beginning to offer such schemes.

INVOLUNTARY EXCLUSION

- Some jurisdictions allow for involuntary exclusions initiated by a third party, such as a family member or the gambling operator.³² Research suggests that both self- and involuntary-excluders show similar rates of abstinence and gambling reduction.³¹
- Preliminary evidence shows that exclusions imposed by family may reduce stress and enhance wellbeing among the affected family members.³³

BANNING AND REINSTATEMENT

BAN-LENGTH

- There is limited research evidence about the most appropriate self-exclusion ban-lengths to reduce problem gambling and preventing relapses.^{10, 34} Although some evidence suggests that longer length bans (more than one year) may be better than shorter length bans,^{24, 34} even temporary self-exclusion (e.g., seven days) has been shown to be effective.³⁵
- Evidence suggests that self-exclusion programs should offer a choice of ban-lengths to let program participants choose a length of time that meets their needs.^{6, 15, 28}
- A lifetime ban, with a 24-hour cooling off period³⁶ and the ability to revoke it, may be beneficial for those with severe problems¹⁵ and those who have self-excluded before.³⁷

REINSTATEMENT

- Reinstatement in gambling after a self-exclusion ban should be a process that gives different options to gamblers with varying levels of problem gambling severity,⁵ and involve some form of engagement with staff.¹⁰
- Controls, restrictions, or conditions can be put on reinstatement (such as establishing a loss limit),¹⁰ especially if the person reinstating has demonstrated “red-flag” behavior, such as breaching the ban while excluded.⁵
- The following process for reinstatement has been recommended:⁵
 1. **Gambler requests reinstatement:** In the form of a letter or a completed form, followed by a cooling off period (e.g., one week).
 2. **Pre re-entry:** A meeting to develop a safe gambling plan, a brief educational course (either online or in person), and professional counselling is required. (If gambler shows no red-flag behaviours, these steps are optional.)
 3. **Post re-entry:** No credit is granted to the gambler. He or she is also excluded from marketing and loyalty membership (unless the gambler specifically requests to be re-enrolled and has no red-flag behaviours).
- The reinstatement process in Australian, Canadian, US, European, Asian and African jurisdictions is summarized in a [report](#) by Hing, Tolchard, Nusky and Russell.²⁵

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BREACHING

OVERVIEW

- Breaching is common, with rates ranging from 8% to 59%.^{4, 15, 16, 24, 38-42}
- Gamblers who breach multiple times is also common and ranges from roughly 1.5% to 48.0%, depending on how multiple breaching is defined.⁴³
- Some people breach because they believe that detection methods are insufficient, and that they will not get caught.⁴³

Among people who breach:⁴

- About half are men
- Most (33%) are between 25 to 35 years old
- Over 40% have a university or college degree
- More than 35% are employed full-time
- Electronic Gambling Machines (EGMs) are the most problematic type of gambling (75%)

BREACHING CONSEQUENCES

- Little evidence exists related to penalties for breaching a self-exclusion ban.⁴⁴ However, fines are generally not endorsed.^{10, 45}
- Disentitlement to winnings is a common consequence of breaching.^{25, 43, 46} Some evidence shows that this may increase compliance.³⁷
- Other consequences supported by research evidence include:⁴³
 - A meeting with a counsellor or an educational workshop
 - Increasing ban lengths, and/or making a voluntary ban involuntary
- Penalties for breaching in Australian, Canadian, US, European, Asian, and African jurisdictions are summarized in a 2014 [report](#) by Hing, Tolchard, Nuske, and Russell²⁵ (see pages 79-83).

BREACH DETECTION TOOLS

- The most common breach detection tool worldwide is the use of photographs by staff who are trained to identify excluded gamblers. Photographs can identify up to 30% of excluded gamblers.²⁰
- Limited research on mandatory ID checking shows it may detect more breaches than other tools,^{47, 48} but it can result in longer wait times for entry and a loss in revenue.⁴⁹

- Other breach detection tools include facial recognition video equipment and license plate recognition, but both have resulted in a high number of false detections. These technologies require development to improve accuracy.⁴⁹

ONLINE SELF-EXCLUSION AND RESPONSIBLE GAMBLING (RG)

- Website self-exclusion may be an adequate intervention for some online gamblers to maintain control over their gambling⁵⁰
- Most online gambling sites offer self-exclusion. A 2017 study showed that:²³
 - Most sites had RG tools such as limit-setting (90%), cooling-off period (72%), and voluntary self-exclusion (86%).
 - Temporary self-exclusion seems to be a particularly useful tool, where consumers can choose to temporarily remove access to their online gambling account.⁵¹
 - Among the 50 online operators evaluated, 72% had an option for a self-exclusion that was less than six months, and 86% offered six-month self-exclusion
- Operators should provide an easy-to-use voluntary self-exclusion system that does not involve contacting customer service or filling out a long form²³
- It may also be beneficial to offer the option to self-exclude only from certain products, as gamblers may develop problematic gambling for a certain product or game (e.g., slots), but be able to gamble recreationally on other games (e.g., weekly lottery)²³

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