



Venue and Online-based Self-Exclusion as Harm Reduction: What we know and what we need to know

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Outline

- Describe VSE and its variants and how it fits with other harm reduction initiatives
- Who participates? Who breaches?
- Do land-based and online programs work?
- Using SE as a teachable moment
- What do participants think?
- Recommendations



- This review relies on my search of the published literature so may be spotty in places. Hard to know what creative initiatives exist if they are not recorded
- Recommendation 1: Build in evaluation, partner with academics
- Hierarchy of evidence



Hierarchy of Evidence

Observational naturalistic study

Randomized trial

Systematic review

Umbrella review



VSE development and spread

- Early schemes in casinos Austria – 1934 and Germany since WWII.
- Introduced in Manitoba land-based casino in 1989
- Spread throughout land-based casinos Canada, Australia, USA, and Europe (1990s)
- Online versions more recently.



VSE programs vary.....

- How you enroll – onsite, offsite, online, single option, multiple options
- Length of term: days, weeks, months, years, lifetime
- Revocability
- Single site/venue or multiple sites/venues
- Single gambling type or multiple



- Government regulated or industry service
- Whether they offer support/treatment/referral
- How they are enforced
- Severity of sanctions
- End of term process – passive or active?
- Extension options
- Marketing



Where does SE fit?

Supply reduction Strategies

- Restricting licenses.
- Pricing & taxation
- Limiting venue hours
- Age restrictions

Demand Reduction Strategies

- Advertising
- Awareness campaigns
- Educational interventions

Risk Reduction Strategies

- Restricting access to cash
- Machine location
- Clocks, time awareness, natural lighting
- Smoking and alcohol restriction

Harm Reduction Strategies

- Staff training
- Screening
- Helplines
- Precommitment
- Self-exclusion



Who signs up?

- Motka et al (2018) SR found 16 published studies- 12 land-based and 4 online.
- Most participants have gambling disorder (51% to 95%).
- Mostly male EGM players,
- Most frequent goal- to stop or reduce gambling – often first serious attempt
- Motivations- financial and family problems



Journal of Gambling Studies

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10899-022-10149-z>

ORIGINAL PAPER



Predicting self-exclusion among online gamblers: An empirical real-world study

Niklas Hopfgartner^{1,2}  · Michael Auer² · Mark D. Griffiths³ · Denis Helic¹

Accepted: 26 June 2022

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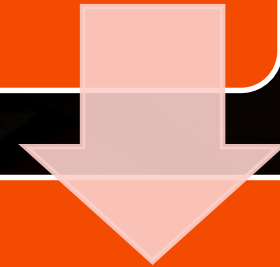


- $N = 25,720$ customers
- 3 operators across 6 countries
- Austria, Germany, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Slovenia
- What predicts SE (24 hrs to unlimited time)



Design

Characteristics of play
during Nov. and Dec. 2020



Self-exclusion in Jan.
2020?



Results

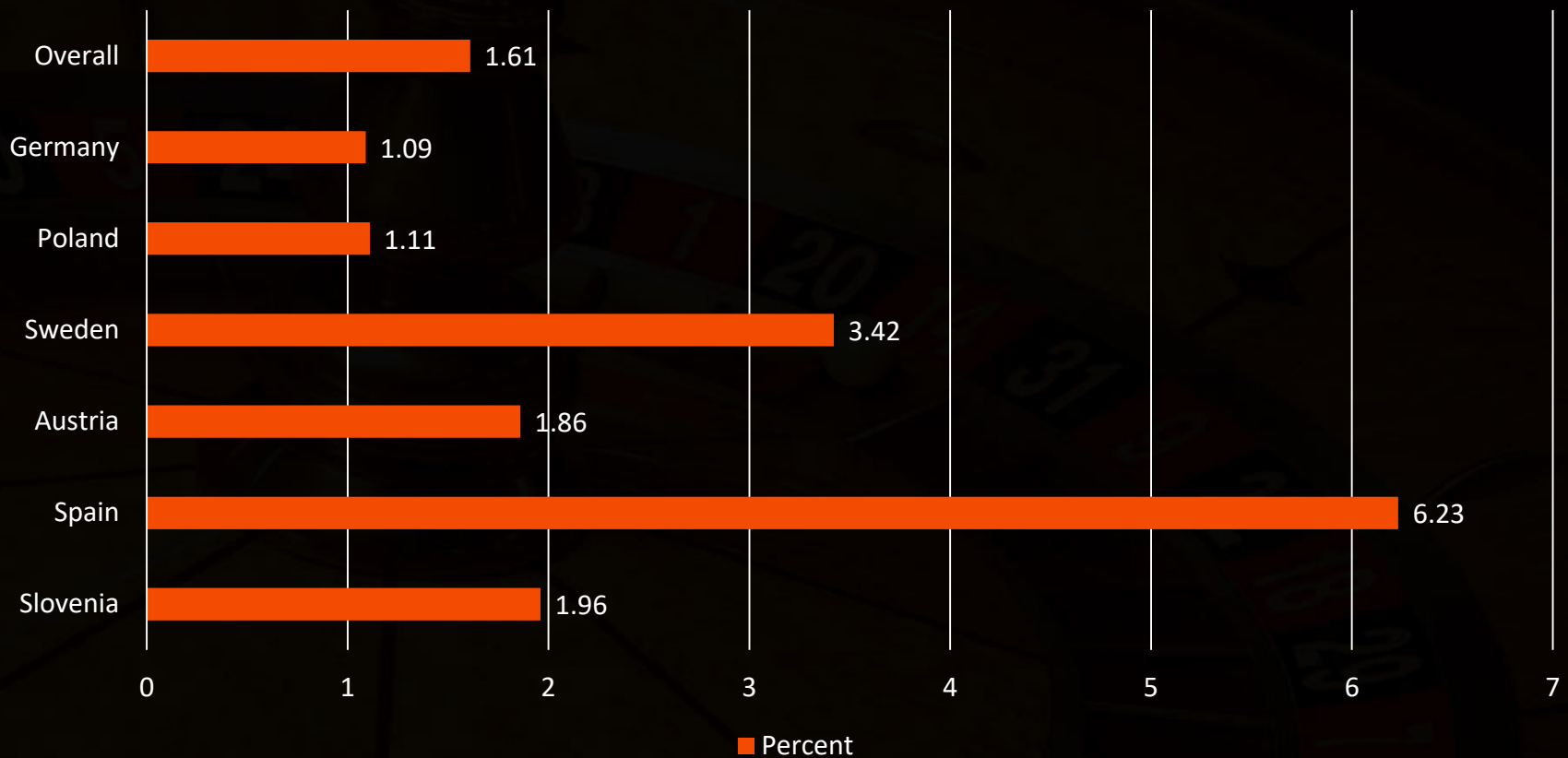
N = 25,720



414 self-exclusions
(1.6%), varied by
country



Self-exclusion Rates





Predictors of SE

- Greater # of previous limit changes and SEs
- Higher # of payment methods
- Higher average # of deposits per session
- Higher # of types of games played
- In 5/6 countries expenditure did not predict.



Implications

- Machine learning models can identify people who may later need/want to SE. Can these people be targeted in marketing of SE for earlier and increased uptake?



Uptake is low

- Nowatzki & Williams (2002) – 9-17% of past year problem gamblers.



Uptake is low

- But higher than treatment-seeking.

TABLE 3 | Formal treatments accessed (*N* = 909).

Treatment	%
Self-help materials	22.0
Self-exclusion program	15.7
Psychologist, psychiatrist, counselor – In person	10.4
Primary care physician	10.1
Online or telephone service	9.6
Gamblers anonymous or other support group	8.8
Clergy	5.2
Medication	4.6
Residential program	2.0
Other	17.7

Weighted data.

Hodgins et al., 2022



Does land-based SE work?

- Kotter et al (2019) SR of land-based programs
- 19 studies, mostly naturalistic, generally “moderate” quality.
- Reduced gambling, reduced expenditure and losses, increased mental health and quality of life – longer term effects less studied
- Breaches are common



People who Breach

J Gambl Stud


<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10899-018-9743-5>



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ORIGINAL PAPER

Differential Effects of Formal and Informal Gambling on Symptoms of Problem Gambling During Voluntary Self-Exclusion

Amanda V. McCormick^{1,2}  • Irwin M. Cohen^{1,2} • Garth Davies^{2,3}



Who breaches the conditions?

- British Columbia VSE Evaluation – land-based casinos province-wide - Typically 340/month
- N = 269 recruited from 3100 enrollees.
- Followed at 6 and 12 months.
- 15% violated, 9x on average
- 97% of attempts were successful. – most changed casinos.
- No strong predictors of who violated



- People who violated showed less PGSI change
- People who sought treatment showed more change



Common Recommendation

- Better venue access controls
 - Facial and print recognition
 - License plate recognition
 - Mandatory ID



Does online SE work?

- Limited data base
- Three interesting studies



Journal of Gambling Studies (2020) 36:259–276
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10899-019-09859-8>

ORIGINAL PAPER



Use of Consumer Protection Tools on Internet Gambling Sites: Customer Perceptions, Motivators, and Barriers to Use

Sally M. Gainsbury¹ · Douglas J. Angus¹ · Lindsey Procter¹ · Alex Blaszczyński¹

Published online: 22 May 2019

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Method

- Online survey of 564 customers of 6 Australian online sites about use, attitudes, experience with responsible gambling tools, including SE
- 12,000 approached



VSE Results

- Awareness of 'Time out' feature- 66%
- Of those:
 - 8% had used time out in the past year
 - 20% of problem gamblers
 - Motivations- take a break, limit spend, to gain control over gambling



User Impressions & Limitations

- 61% satisfied or very satisfied
- 70% thought it impacted their gambling
- Low response rate, self-reported gambling.




Journal of Gambling Studies (2019) 35:601–615
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10899-018-9782-y>

ORIGINAL PAPER



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Effectiveness of At-Risk Gamblers' Temporary Self-Exclusion from Internet Gambling Sites

J. Caillon^{1,2,3,4}  · M. Grall-Bronnec^{1,2} · B. Perrot² · J. Leboucher¹ · Y. Donnio¹ · L. Romo³ · G. Challet-Bouju^{1,2}

Published online: 4 July 2018

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Methods

- Rationale: French law requires that requires sites to offer a 7day (minimum) non-revocable VSE.
- Experiment to see if it is associated with reduced gambling after it ends.
- $N = 60$ randomly assigned to use or not use SE on their favorite sites
- 15 and 60 day follow-up



Results

- Volunteers- 68% gambled at least weekly, 22% daily. Average session- 59 minutes
- 66% also gambled in land-based venues
- 42% current or past gambling problem
- VSE rated as positive and helpful
- No differences in gambling or craving at 15 days, at 60 days, VSE group cited better control, less desire.



Implications

- Period of abstinence seems to be helpful-opportunity to re-consider gambling style.
- 7 days may be too short for behaviour change
- Participants were not taking the initiative to use the SE program.




International Journal of
*Environmental Research
and Public Health*



Article

Self-Exclusion among Online Poker Gamblers: Effects on Expenditure in Time and Money as Compared to Matched Controls

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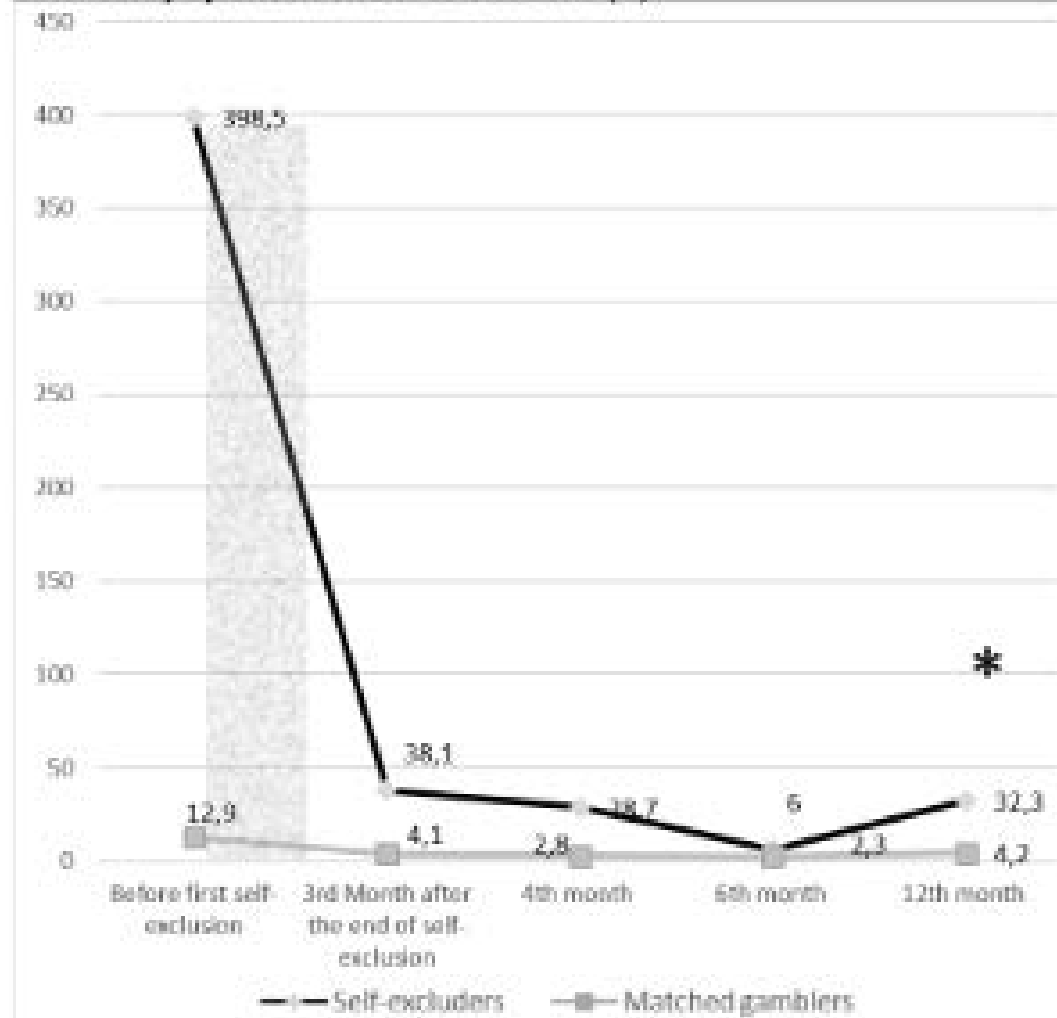


Methods

- What happens after VSE?
- 7-year window of online poker players who self-excluded from Winamax (N = 4451)
- Matched for age, gender and account duration
- Examined gambling 3,4,6,12 months after the end of SE period. (1 day to 3 years).

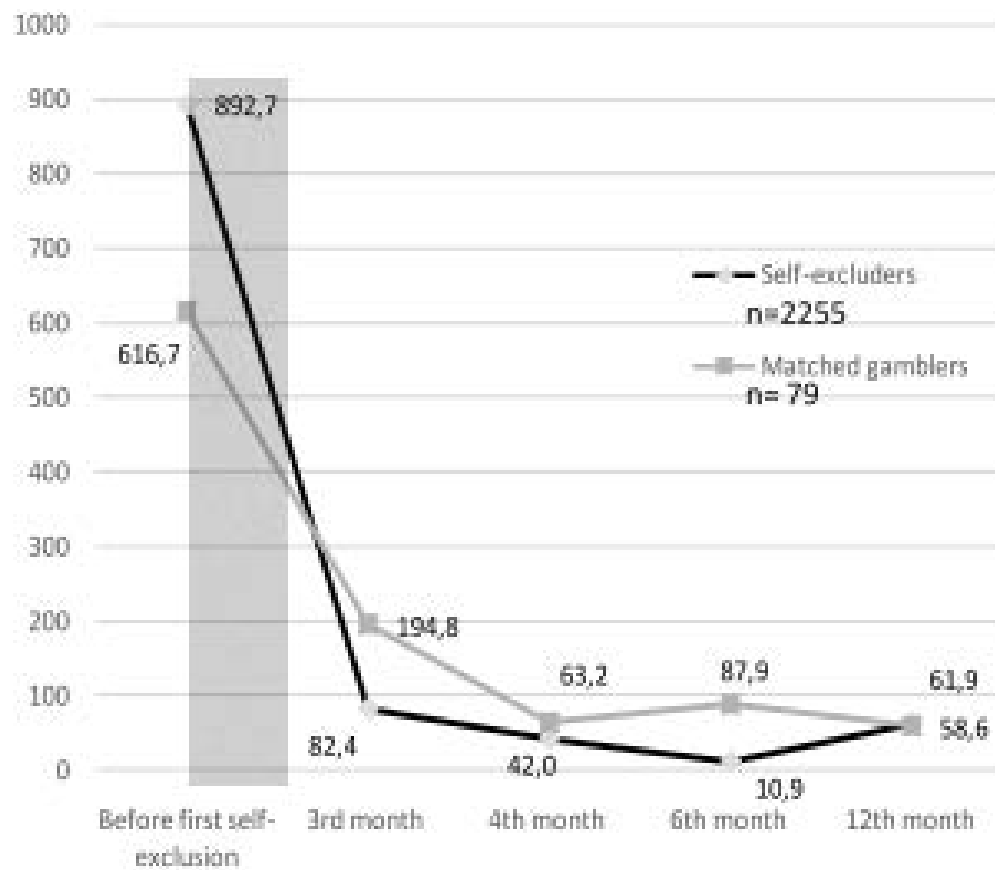


money spent in the last 4 weeks (€)



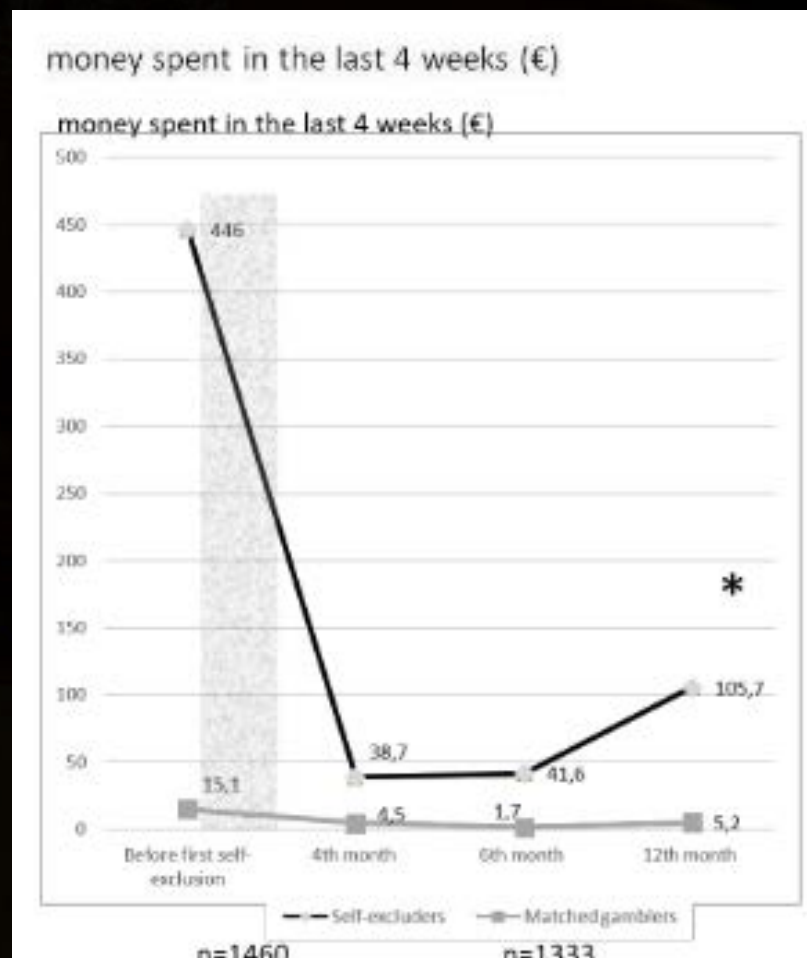


money spent in the last 4 weeks (€)





Short-exclusions





Implications

- One company only- no information on gambling on other sites.
- Illustrates the need for RCTs to show causality



Using SE as a teachable moment or stepping stone

- French system involved VSE for self-selected term
- No support is provided
- At the end of the term , individual receives an email welcoming them back to play ,and sometimes incentives (Luquiens et al., 2019).



Best practice

- Provide the opportunity to self-reflect, reconsider the term end, and to seek further help if needed (Price, 2016)
- Any evidence?



Re-instatement Interventions

- Re-instatement can be passive or require action on the part of the individual.
- Best practice recommendation: a mandatory service such as safe gambling plan or brief educational course, brief counselling.

Price, 2016



Journal of Gambling Studies (2021) 37:1245–1262
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10899-021-09998-x>

ORIGINAL PAPER



Efficacy of a Voluntary Self-exclusion Reinstatement Tutorial for Problem Gamblers

Nigel E. Turner^{1,2}  · Jing Shi^{1,3} · Janine Robinson⁴ · Steve McAvoy¹ · Sherald Sanchez¹

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Interactive Online Video

- Practical information about gambling, (how games work), harm reduction, and counselling
- Quiz with feedback
- 20-30 minutes at PlaySafe Centre or at home



- Conducted in Ontario, 6, 12 or indefinite terms offered.
- Can apply for re-instatement after end or term (or after 6 months with indefinite term)
- Requires face-to-face meeting with casino staff – provides with information, pamphlets.



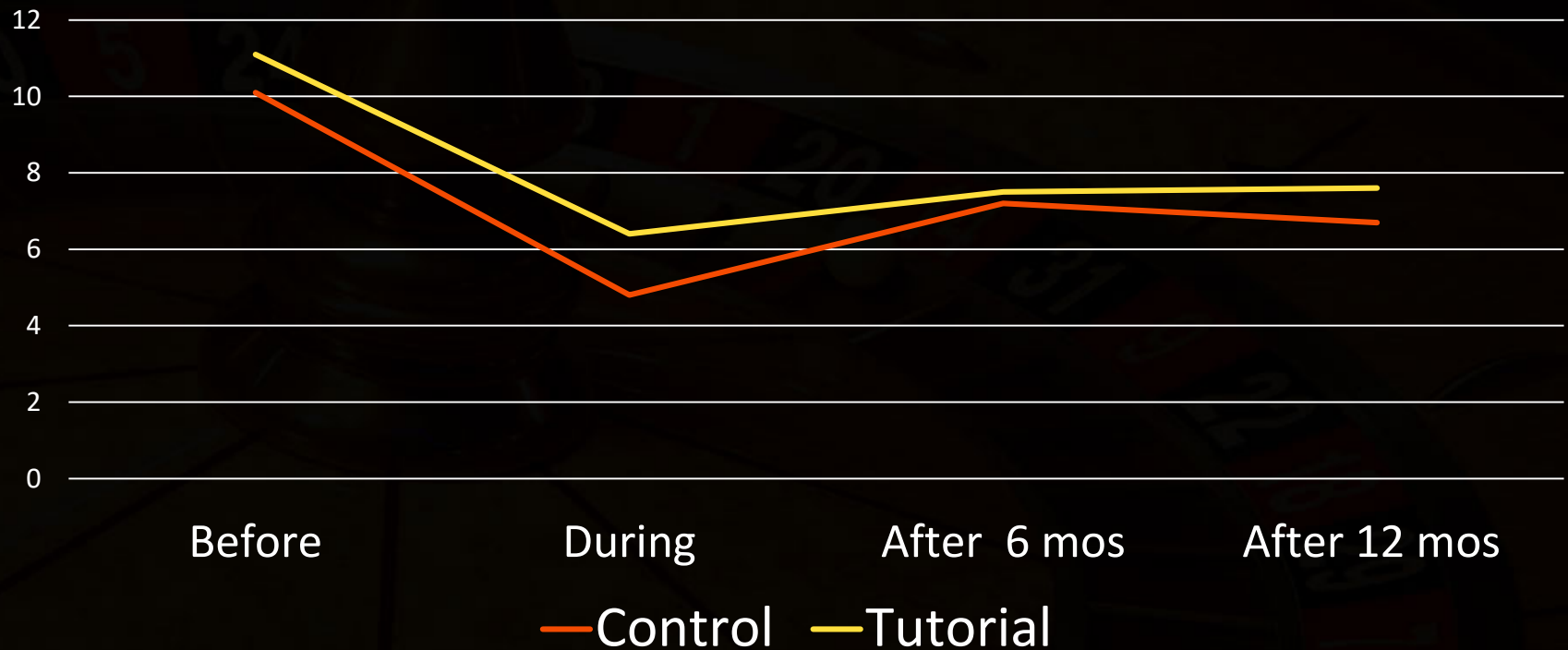
Design

- $N = 235$; 131 prior to implementation and 104 afterward
- Follow-up at 6 and 12 months ($N = 130$)



Results

PGSI Scores





Results – Other Actions

- Help-seeking – 19% overall
- New SE term- 21% overall
- Either action
- Tutorial- 30%
- Control – 25%
- No evidence that the educational tutorial had an impact over the routine provision of information.



Internet Interventions 23 (2021) 100354



Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](https://www.sciencedirect.com)

Internet Interventions

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/invent



Effectiveness of a voluntary casino self-exclusion online self-management program[☆]

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VSE online program goals

1. Facilitate access
2. Include motivational and self-management tools
3. Make tools and support available immediately and continuously
4. Encourage assessment and evaluation at the end of the exclusion term



Online Program Structure

Online workshop



Monthly emails



Online workshop



Study Design

- 200 participants randomly assigned to new online program or face-to-face program
- 3, 6, and 12 months telephone follow up

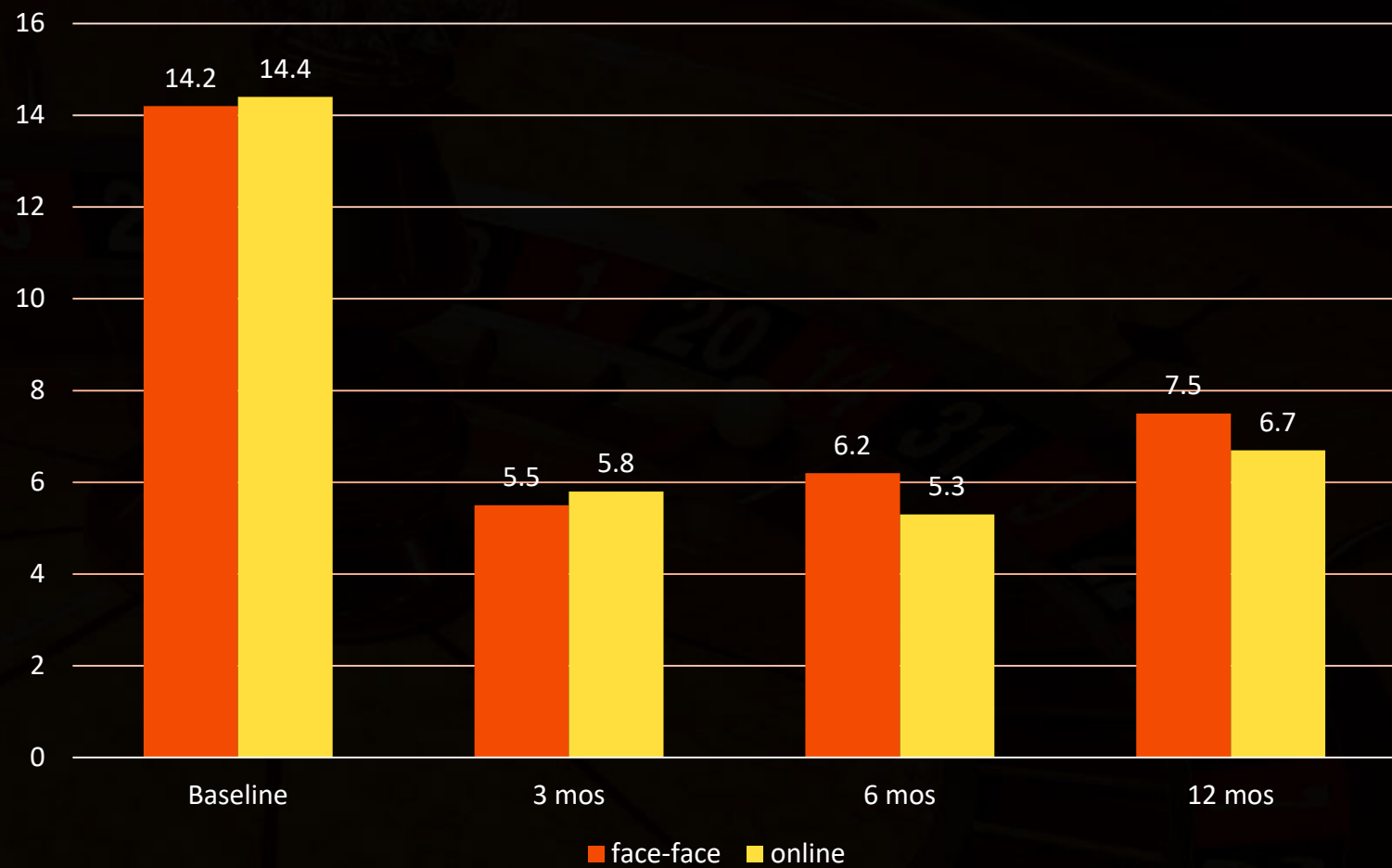


Participants

- Male- 59%
- Age $M = 42$
- Employed full-time 77%
- Previous VSE enrollment? 45%
- PGSI = 15 ($SD = 6$)
- Days of gambling (past 3 months) $M = 24$
- Expenditure $M = \$18,264$.



PGSI





Summary

- The online program is a good alternative to face-to-face
- Over time, participants in both groups gambled less, reported greater control over their gambling, and reported greater quality of life
- Uptake is limited – needs improvement
- Main feedback from online users:
 - more interactivity, variety, and stimulation
 - clarifying registration and objectives
 - content quality is good



The consumer perspective

- Aligns well with the recommendations of researchers
- Good examples: Pickering at el. Co-design project in NSW.
- UK Gambling Commission Evaluation
- BC study-



- Easy enrollment through multiple platforms
- Better venue detection
- More linking to treatment or other resources
- Multi-site externally regulated programs
- Positive, optimistic messaging
- Better marketing



Better Marketing to increase uptake

GAME BREAK



If you're experiencing difficulties associated with gambling, our self-exclusion program, Game Break, may be a great way to help you take a break and regain control.



Better Marketing to increase uptake

- Simple model: Contacts with Big Losers - (Jonnson et al, 2020,2021)
- Sophisticated model: Machine learning studies to identify people at risk (e.g., Hopfgartner et al., 2021)



Conclusions

- People see VSE as a tool to quit gambling and to reduce related problems
- Some use it as stepping stone to treatment
- Some see it as useful tool in the long-term
- There is evidence of effectiveness but room for improvement



Recommendations

- Focus on increasing uptake and earlier uptake
- Further investigation of repeated use of SE
- Further investigation of online play breaks
- Build in evaluation including random assignment, partner with academics

