

Title: Long-term efficacy of an optimized online gambling self-exclusion procedure with extended suspension of commercial solicitations: A randomized controlled trial

Cora von Hammerstein^a, Amine Benyamina^b, Amandine Luquiens^c

^a Department of Psychiatry and Addiction medicine, Fernand Widal Hospital APHP, Paris, France Paris Cité University, INSERM, therapeutic optimization in neuropharmacology OPTEN U1144, Paris, France. (cora.vonhammerstein@aphp.fr)

^b Department of Psychiatry and Addictology, APHP, Paul Brousse Hospital, Villejuif, France. Unité Psychiatrie-Comorbidités-Addictions-Unité de Recherche 4872 PSYCOMADD Université Paris Sud - AP-HP - Université Paris Saclay, Villejuif, France. (Amine.benyamina@aphp.fr)

^c Department of Addictology, CHU Nîmes, Université Montpellier, Nîmes, France. CESP, Université Paris-Sud, UVSQ, INSERM, Université Paris-Saclay, Villejuif, France. (Amandine.luquiens@chu-nimes.fr)

Background and Aims: Most individuals who self-exclude from gambling do so after losing control over their gambling behavior. During self-exclusion, commercial solicitations are not allowed, but they resume immediately afterward. The current self-exclusion system may be insufficient, especially for shorter exclusion periods and for the heaviest gamblers. This study examines the impact of extending the suspension of commercial solicitations on gambling intensity.

Methods: In this parallel randomized study, we included 2,548 French online gamblers who self-excluded for up to three months between May and November 2022. Participants were randomly assigned (1:1) to either an optimized self-exclusion procedure with an extended ban on commercial solicitations for nine months or the standard procedure. The primary outcome was the change in total losses over the previous four weeks at nine months. Secondary outcomes included total deposits, total stakes, compulsivity, session frequency and duration, and subsequent self-exclusions, assessed at 6, 9, 12, and 18 months.

Results: Participants were allocated to the optimized (n=1,265) or standard (n=1,283) groups. Although total losses decreased more in the optimized group, this difference was not statistically significant. However, the optimized group showed significantly lower total deposits than the standard group at six months (€455.68 vs. €319.65, p=0.017), nine months (€451.92 vs. €343.21, p=0.040), and twelve months (€484.27 vs. €370.02, p=0.025), though significance was lost at eighteen months. Other outcomes showed positive trends but did not reach significance, except at nine months.

Discussion and Conclusions: Extending the ban on direct commercial solicitations for nine months after self-exclusion significantly reduces gambling deposits both during and for three months following the ban. These findings support enhancing self-exclusion procedures. Future research should investigate longer bans and the impact of indirect solicitations.

Conflict of interest: PMU (Paris Mutuel Urbain) Grant 0.02% Data sharing agreement guaranteeing the right to free data analysis and publication.