playtech protect

Self-Test Response

What happens to behaviour after players take a self-test?

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What happens to behaviour after players take a self-test?

What is the topic?

Players can access a range of tests online to self-assess the harm or risk they may be experiencing for gambling. Operators that are particularly focused on player protection might also make self-tests available to players, either anonymously or linked to the player's account, potentially providing advice and making adjustments to their services depending on the self-test result. For most robust results, tests can be administered with the support of a qualified professional. It is hoped that self-tests provide more than just diagnostic insights but can also spur players to moderate their play or take other actions that might reduce their risk levels.

Why is it important?

Understanding the extent to which self-tests provide an active contribution to a safer gambling programme will help operators decide whether to prioritise the inclusion and promotion of self-test services. Estimating the proportion of players who react in different ways following a self-test helps operators develop overall player journeys and to assess how significant a contribution self-test offer can make as part of a safer gambling strategy. The research can also prompt discussions over how to make better use of self-test results and support players as part of an overall strategy.

What did the research do?

As an initial phase of descriptive analysis, Playtech Protect worked with a large multi-vertical gambling operator with online and retail service offers to analyse the gambling activity and net daily losses (or wins) of players in the week before and after they voluntarily took a self-test, the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI).

The sample of players were those who were rated at least moderate or high risk at some point between 1st April 2021 and 31st March 2022. In total, there were 1972 such players who also took a self-test over this period. Note that their self-test timing and score would not necessarily correspond with their highest risk rating in the period, as the latter can be driven by BetBuddy player monitoring as well as by the self-test result. If two or more self-tests were taken, we focused on data from the first self-test in this period. To present the results, players' PGSI results are grouped in line with common practice:[1]

- 0 Score: no negative consequences identified from gambling ("none")
- 1-2 Score: low level of problems with few or no identified negative consequences ("low")
- 3-7 Score: moderate problems leading to some negative consequences ("moderate")
- 8-27 Score: represents a problem gambler ("PG")

For players who were identified as problem gamblers in the self-test, the operator automatically allocates them to their highest risk internal tier, which may trigger, among other checks, an exclusion of those players from any targeted marketing promotions that were going on at the time as well as implementation of RG communications on their account pages.[2] For such players, any behaviour change after self-test may reflect the combination of this operator adjustment and the self-test process/score, as well as natural or uncorrelated variation in play.

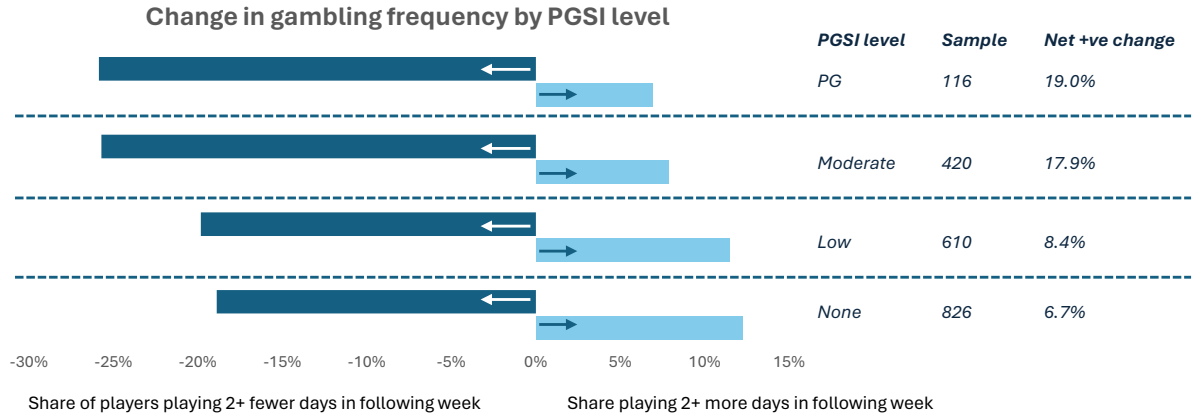
[1] https://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/statistics-and-research/publication/problem-gambling-screens

[2] Similar operator adjustments would also have occurred at times for other players, such that this comparison is approximate only. For instance, players flagged up as high risk by BetBuddy's inferred or exhibited risk algorithms would similarly be excluded from marketing activity.

What did the research find?

Daily gambling frequency declined on net after a self-test, particularly for those with higher scores.

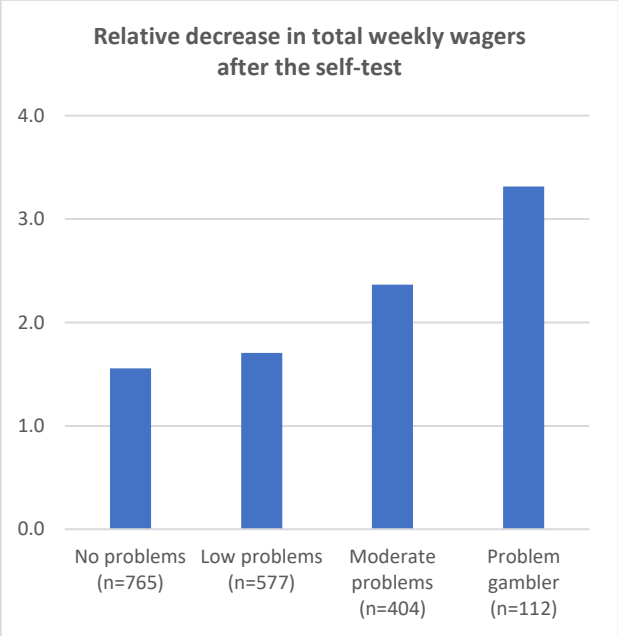
In the seven days after a self-test, 26% of players with moderate or problem gambler ("PG") ratings gambling 2+ fewer days than the week leading up to the self-test (including the self-test day itself), compared to 7% who gambled 2+ more days, i.e. a net positive change of 19%pts (26% - 7%). All other groups of players analysed also saw a net reduction in gambling frequency, with lower rates of reduction for lower risk groups (see chart below).



Total wagers decreased much more than they increased, especially for problem gamblers.

Focusing on the subsample with at least some wagers in the previous week, multiplier decreases in amount wagered over the following seven days outweigh the multiplier increases.[3]

[3] This analysis caps the decrease/increase multipliers at 10x, to reduce sensitivity to extreme swings in play. If the cap is not included the overall pattern is similar, but the extent to which decreases outweigh increases in the problem gambling cohort is over 4x higher.



This relative decrease in wagers was about twice as large for players identified as problem gamblers (3.3x) as those identified as experiencing no or low problems from gambling (1.6x or 1.7x).

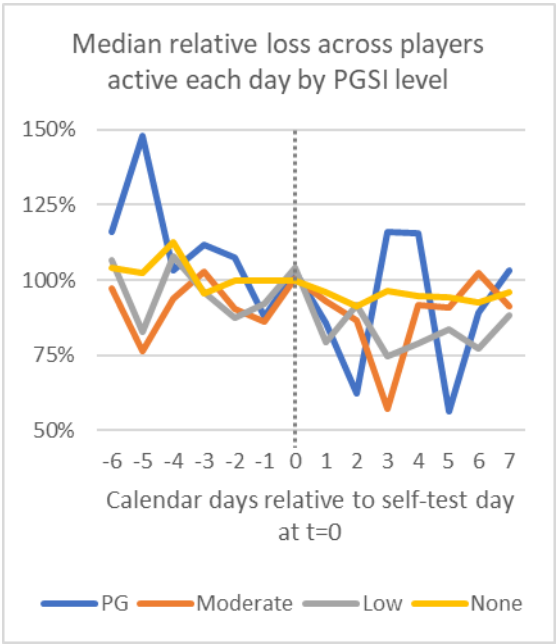
The relative decrease measure divides the total multiplier decrease across all players with decreasing wagers by the total multiplier increase across all players with increasing wagers.

For instance, if one player wagers $10 afterwards compared to $5 before, that would be a 2x increase. If a second player wagers $5 afterwards compared to $20 before, that would be a 4x decrease (i.e. 25% of the original). The relative decrease across both players would be 2x (i.e. 4x / 2x).

When they did play, players typically lost less in the following week compared to their usual play.

Analysing only players who played on the relevant calendar day relative to their self-test day, the median relative loss on that day was typically slightly lower just after a self-test than just before.[4]

For problem gamblers in particular, the median player had smaller spikes in losses after the self-test day than before. As an average, the median relative loss was 21%pts lower in the seven days following a self-test than the week leading up to it (90% vs 111% of their usual play). These trends suggest an increase in losses in the run up to a self-test, as well as reduced losses in the following days.



For other PGSI level players, the pattern was similar, but without such an increase in losses prior to the self-test. The average change in the following week was 8%pts lower relative loss for those with no apparent problems, 15%pts for

those with low/few problems and 5%pts for those with moderate problems. In other words, a self-test was followed with lower losses on average for all groups analysed.

In line with previous findings, players with less problem gambling concern have more stable financial play. The median player in each day tends to have less dramatic swings in their losses than problem gamblers.

[4] A player's loss in a given day is recorded relative to their personal 57 day average daily loss (on days played), with that average indexed at 100%.

What are the implications for industry and policy?

The results show some evidence of short-term moderation of play, estimated to be mostly self-moderation, among players with more concerning scores on the PGSI self-test. The moderation effect is particularly clear among the cohort designated as problem gamblers by their self-test, being those who would also have typically received more operator attention than the other players and been removed from below-the-line marketing campaigns. These findings support the move by operators to make self-tests available to players and integrate the results into their player support strategies. It also supports the conclusion that a sizeable proportion of players is able to self-moderate, at least in the short-term, following insights into their play provided by a self-test.

Overall moderation levels are, however, modest and a small proportion of seemingly higher-risk players also increase their play in the week following a self-test. This modest contribution reaffirms the need, already widely identified by operators and policymakers, for the adoption of broad-based safer gambling strategies, drawing on a wide range of techniques including awareness raising, tool provision, player checks, risk flagging algorithms, and interventions.

The main limitations of the study are the reliance on player self-selection into taking self-tests (e.g. no A/B testing of self-test availability), the modest sample size with respect to likely effect sizes and the volatility of gambling outcomes data, the focus on short-term moderation trends without analysis of specific actions players might have taken (e.g. repeating a self-test or using RG tools), and the inability to differentiate self-moderation from moderation induced by changes in operator behaviour.