

# 'Practice' makes a perfect lure for internet gambling

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(Medical Xpress)—New research from the University of Adelaide has studied the behaviour of young people lured into internet gambling through so-called 'free-play' or 'practice' modes.

The study, by University of Adelaide Psychology student Tahnee Frahn, looked at the behaviour of 128 young people (most aged 18-24) who were playing on a simulated [internet gaming](#) site.

Ms Frahn says concerns have been raised about "dubious strategies" used by [internet gambling](#) to entice and retain players.

"Previous research has demonstrated that 'free-play' or 'practice' modes on some internet gaming sites provide unrealistically high returns to the players, who are encouraged with pop-up messages and emails to keep playing. However, those high returns are not continued when playing for actual money," Ms Frahn says.

Ms Frahn's study looked at the [psychological effect](#) of inflated returns and pop-up messages during practice modes on subsequent [gambling](#) behaviours, such as risk-taking and [persistence](#).

Those who took part in the study were offered a free-play mode on a simulated internet gaming site (a video poker machine) followed by a 'real-play' mode in which they could gamble for real money.

"Two of the three groups – those who received a high return in free-play

mode, and those who received this high return as well as pop-up encouragements – both bet significantly more credits per spin in the real-play mode than our [control group](#).

"This suggests greater risk-taking and a belief that the high returns in practice mode would continue during the real gambling phase," Ms Frahn says.

"It seems that the practice modes on internet gaming sites provide the illusion that 'practice makes perfect', but in fact, no amount of practice can make you better at chance games like poker machines – their sole purpose is to create profits, to take the players' money."

Ms Frahn says internet gambling has rapidly expanded in recent years, from just 30 sites in 1994 to more than 2200 sites in 2009. "In general, research in this area has not kept up," Ms Frahn says.

"This is a growing issue for our society and one that requires further attention, especially when you consider the issue of internet gambling addiction.

"While it's always difficult to simulate the risk and excitement of a real-world gambling experience in a controlled setting, these results help us to better understand how people respond to an internet gambling situation," she says.

Provided by University of Adelaide

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