

knowledge snapshot



The reliability of the South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS) as a screening tool of gambling addiction

What this article is about

The South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS) is one of the most widely used screening tools to assess gambling addiction. Despite its use in many studies, no research has been carried out to understand how reliable the SOGS is across studies. A measure is considered reliable if all of its items consistently evaluate the same thing. This is also called internal consistency. When a measure has high reliability, responses to its items will be related to each other. That is, a person who scores high on one item should also score high on the other items. The main aim of this study was to estimate the internal consistency of the SOGS across all previous studies. Another aim was to explore some possible factors that might affect its reliability.

What was done?

The researchers followed the PRISMA guidelines for systematic reviews and meta-analyses. They searched for relevant studies using four academic databases (Medline, PsycInfo, Scopus, and Web of Science). They also searched Google Scholar for study reports not published in an academic journal. The search looked for studies that had been published by January 2021.

Studies had to meet the following criteria. They must apply the SOGS in its original version, and not a modified version. They must be written in English or Spanish. They must be experimental, quasi-experimental, or prevalence studies. The participants must be adults over the age of 18 years, and the number of participants (i.e., the sample size) must be reported. Also, studies must report the reliability of the SOGS based on their sample of participants, and not a value from a previous research.

Why is this article important?

The South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS) is widely used in research as a screening tool of gambling addiction. The researchers analyzed whether the SOGS is a reliable measure and what study characteristics might affect its reliability. The researchers found 63 studies that applied the original version of the SOGS. Some studies recruited more than one sample of participants. Thus, there were 65 samples with a total of 26,743 participants. The results show that the SOGS is a reliable measure for use in research. Several study characteristics could affect its reliability. The continent in which the study took place, whether the SOGS was applied in person or online, whether the participants were recruited from a clinical population, and the standard deviation of the SOGS score all had an effect. Standard deviation is a statistic that measures how widespread participants' scores are from the average.

The researchers found 63 studies that met their criteria. Some studies recruited more than one sample of participants. Thus, there were 65 samples with a total of 26,743 participants. All studies used the Cronbach's α (alpha) as an estimate of the internal consistency of the SOGS. Cronbach's α is a statistic that ranges between 0 to 1, with higher value indicating better reliability. The researchers obtained the Cronbach's α from each study for their analyses.

The researchers coded the following study characteristics as possible sources that could affect the reliability estimate of the SOGS:

a) Year of publication.

- b) Year in which data were collected.
- c) Continent in which the study took place. The samples were recruited from four continents: Asia (1), Africa (1), North America (54), and Oceania (9).
- d) Whether the SOGS was applied face-to-face or not.
- e) Whether participants were from a clinical or non-clinical population.
- f) Percentage of women as a sign of gender balance.
- g) Average age and the standard deviation. Standard deviation is a statistic that measures how widespread the data are from the average. If the standard deviation is small, that means most participants' ages cluster around the average age. If it is large, participants' ages are spread out far from the average.
- h) Average SOGS score and the standard deviation.

What you need to know

From the 65 samples, the researchers estimated the average Cronbach's α for the SOGS to be .86. This suggests the SOGS is a reliable measure for use in research. However, the researchers would not recommend its use in clinical setting. In a clinical setting, the recommended value of internal consistency for a measure is .90. The average value for the SOGS is close but does not quite reach that.

The researchers found a wide range of Cronbach's α values across the different samples. The continent in which the study took place affected the value. Studies from North America and Oceania reported higher values than studies from Asia and Africa. The differences could be because there were few studies from Asia and Africa, or because of different cultures.

The clinical condition of the participants and how the SOGS was administered also had an impact. Studies that recruited participants from non-clinical populations reported similar values as studies that recruited from clinical populations. Studies with a mixed sample reported somewhat higher values. Studies that applied the SOGS online reported higher values than studies that applied the SOGS face-to-face. This suggests the SOGS can be used in research even when data are not collected in person.

The standard deviation of the SOGS score also explained why there were different reliability values reported in previous studies. The other study characteristics did not have an effect.

Who is it intended for?

This research can be relevant for researchers and clinical professionals. The researchers recommended that studies report the reliability values for their samples. Future research could explore other psychometric properties of the SOGS.

About the researchers

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Citation

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