

Revised cutoff scores for the South Oaks Gambling Screen based on sex and gambling severity

What this research is about

The South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS) is commonly used to screen for the possible presence of gambling problems. The SOGS has 20 items, and possible scores range from 0 to 20. A score between 5 and 20 suggests the presence of gambling-related problems. There are some limitations to the SOGS. For example, the SOGS has a high level of false positives, as many people have scores higher than the cutoff score of 5 but do not meet the clinical threshold of gambling disorder (GD). Previous research has suggested that the SOGS cutoff for probable GD should be increased to 8. This would reduce the number of false positives.

Another consideration is that the SOGS only provides a cutoff score to assess the possibility of gambling problems. In contrast, the DSM-5 introduces three severity levels for GD (mild, moderate, and severe). Additionally, the SOGS does not have different cutoff scores according to sex, although men and women engage in gambling in different ways. The purpose of this study was to establish and validate cutoff scores for the SOGS considering sex. This study also established cutoff scores for different severity levels of GD for both men and women.

What the researchers did

The researchers used data from 4,516 patients who sought treatment in the Behavioural Addictions Unit of the University Hospital of Bellvitge, Spain, between 2005 and 2023. Most of the participants (92%) were men. Participants were assessed by clinical psychologists over two sessions before their treatment. The first session involved a clinical interview to assess the presence of GD and clinical and sociodemographic data (e.g., age at which

What you need to know

The purpose of this study was to establish and validate cutoff scores for the South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS) taking into account severity levels and sex. The researchers analyzed data from 4,516 patients who sought treatment for gambling disorder (GD) at a public hospital in Spain. Based on the findings, the researchers suggest that the cutoff should be 8 (instead of 5) to determine the probable presence of GD in men. The suggested cutoff is 7 for women. The findings also suggest that the SOGS can be used to assess levels of severity of GD. The suggested cutoff value for moderate severity is 9 for men and 8 for women. A score of 10 or greater suggests a high risk of severe GD for both sexes. These cutoff scores were validated using external measures related to GD, such as worse psychopathological symptoms and more dysfunctional personality traits.

problem gambling behaviour began, debts related to gambling, type of gambling, gambling preference, suicidal thoughts, age, marital status, and education).

In the second session, participants completed the following measures:

- The SOGS.
- The Symptom Checklist-Revised to assess psychopathological symptoms.
- The Temperament and Character Inventory-Revised to assess personality traits.
- The Spanish version of the Diagnostic Questionnaire for Pathological Gambling. The participants' responses were re-assessed according to the DSM-5 criteria for GD.

What the researchers found

On average, participants were 42 years old. Most participants (93%) met the threshold for GD according to the DSM-5 criteria (i.e., meeting 4 or more criteria). Another 7% had problematic gambling (i.e., less than 4 criteria).

Based on the data analysis, the researchers suggest raising the cutoff score of the SOGS. They also propose different cutoff scores for men and women. The researchers suggest that the cutoff score should be 8 (instead of 5) to determine the probable presence of GD in men. For women, the suggested cutoff score is 7.

The findings also suggest that the SOGS can be used to assess levels of severity of GD in accordance with DSM-5 criteria. For men, the suggested cutoff score is 9 for moderate severity. For women, the suggested cutoff score is 8 for moderate severity. A score of 10 or greater suggests a high risk of severe GD for both men and women.

The researchers then validated these new cutoff scores using external measures related to GD. People with a SOGS score above the proposed cutoffs (8 for men and 7 for women) were found to have worse psychopathological symptoms, more dysfunctional personality traits, earlier onset of problematic gambling behaviour, heavier alcohol use, and more illegal acts due to gambling. Men who scored 8 or higher on the SOGS were also more likely to have gambled for longer, report self-destructive behaviours and suicidal thoughts, report drug use, and have more debts than men who scored lower than 8.

How you can use this research

This study indicates that researchers and clinicians could consider raising the SOGS cutoff to match the diagnostic criteria and severity levels of GD as described in the DSM-5, while taking into account sex-specific cut-off points. This allows a more precise assessment of GD diagnosis and severity.

About the researchers

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Citation

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