

research snapshot

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GameSense may be an effective program to prevent gambling problems

What this research is about

GameSense is a problem gambling prevention program that is available to residents in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, Canada. The program has also been adopted by MGM Resorts International, an American company. GameSense features nine interactive online videos that describe gambling biases (e.g., believing wins will follow a series of losses), tips to keep gambling fun and non-problematic, and resources if gambling becomes a problem. Gambling problems can lead to other problems such as debts and relationship troubles.

Previous studies have found that gambling problems are more common in university students compared to other age groups. The aim of this study was to examine if GameSense could reduce gambling biases and intention to gamble among undergraduate students. The researchers developed a novel gambling game to more accurately control the game outcomes and to remove any expectations that people might have about real gambling games.

What the researchers did

The researchers randomly placed 122 undergraduate university students into six groups. Three groups contained participants who completed the GameSense program before playing a gambling game. The other three groups contained participants who did not complete the program before playing.

Before playing, all participants completed the South Oaks Gambling Screen-Revised for Adolescents (SOGS-RA) and Gambling Cognitive Questionnaire. The SOGS-RA has 16 items and assesses gambling problems. The Gambling Cognitive Questionnaire contains three measures: 1) Gambling Knowledge Measure (GKM), 2)

What you need to know

This study sought to evaluate the GameSense prevention program's success in reduce gambling biases and the intention to gamble among undergraduate students. Students who completed the GameSense program reported more knowledge about gambling, fewer gambling biases, and fewer intentions to gamble in the short- and long-term. These intentions did not differ whether they won, lost, or broke even when gambling. Students who did not complete the GameSense program were more willing to gamble in the future if they won during the game. These results suggest that GameSense may be an effective program to reduce gambling biases and intentions to gamble. However, more research is needed to examine the efficacy of Gamesense with real gambling games and with people who have gambling problems.

Gambling Fallacies Measure (GFM), and 3) Attitudes Towards Gambling Scale (ATGS-8). The GKM has 10 items and assesses knowledge of legal gambling, forms of gambling, risk factors, and resources for help. The GFM has 10 items and assesses knowledge of gambling myths. The ATGS has eight items and assesses attitudes towards gambling. Participants also reported their ethnicity, gender, and age.

After completing these two questionnaires, the participants played a gambling game that the researchers developed. Each participant was given eight gold chocolate coins to use for betting. The experimenter showed each participant two cups, one with 48 blue gems and one with 48 white gems. Each

participant was asked to select a colour to bet on for the entire game and to pour all of the gems into a pouch that could not be seen through. The experimenter shook the pouch and the participant selected one of the gems inside. If the colour of the gem matched the colour they picked, the participant would win a coin. If the colour did not match, then they would lose a coin.

Each participant played four rounds of the game. The outcome of each round was pre-determined, as the pouch had a secret compartment for the experimenter to manipulate which coloured gem would be selected. The participants were randomized to three different outcomes: 1) winning, 2) losing, and 3) breaking even. Those in the winning outcome won all four rounds of game play, whereas those in the losing outcome lost all four rounds. Finally, those in the breaking-even outcome won two rounds and lost two rounds.

After completing the game, the participants completed the Post-Gambling Questionnaire (PGQ). This questionnaire was developed to assess their gambling cognitions, behaviours, and intentions to play the game again in the future.

What the researchers found

Participants who completed the GameSense program reported more knowledge about gambling and less gambling biases than those who did not complete the program. GameSense participants were also less likely to want to continue playing after the fourth round. In addition, these participants wanted to play for fewer additional minutes. Participants in the losing outcome bet more coins when compared to those in the winning or break-even outcome. Those in the break-even outcome also bet more coins than those in the winning outcome.

When asked if they would like to return to play the game in a month's time or some time in the future, GameSense participants were less likely to want to play again compared to those who did not complete the program. Gambling intentions for GameSense participants did not differ whether they won, lost, or broke even. Non-GameSense participants, however,

were more willing to play again in the future if they won during their four rounds of play.

How you can use this research

The results suggest that GameSense may be able to reduce gambling biases and intentions. Gambling prevention and treatment specialists may benefit from this knowledge and may wish to recommend the GameSense program to student gamblers. Researchers could examine if Gamesense works with real gambling games and people with gambling problems. More research is also needed to examine the efficacy of the GameSense program when compared to other prevention programs.

About the researchers

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Citation

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