

research snapshot

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Evaluation of GamTest for use with people with low-risk gambling

What this research is about

Several Nordic and European gambling providers offer Playscan as a responsible gambling tool. GamTest is an online self-rating measure with 15 questions and is an important feature of Playscan. Players can use GamTest to assess their gambling behaviour and negative consequences from gambling. However, many users start but do not complete GamTest.

An evaluation of GamTest found it to be a valid and reliable tool for use with people who gamble heavily. This study also found that GamTest measures five factors: (1) negative consequences due to money spent gambling; (2) negative consequences in social area; (3) negative consequences in emotional area; (4) overspending of time; and (5) overspending of money. A second evaluation found that the five factors do not fit very well for people who gamble recreationally at a low-risk level. The aim of this study was to further explore the use of GamTest with people who gamble at a low-risk level and identify ways to improve it.

What the researchers did

The researchers recruited participants through a Swedish polling company, SKOP. The survey included GamTest along with other measures (e.g., the Problem Gambling Severity Index). The researchers focused on only the GamTest responses. Several changes were made to the GamTest version used in this study. The first was that it referred to negative consequences in the past 12 months. The timeframe for the original GamTest is past three months. The second change was the use of a rating scale ranging from 1 to 10, with 1 representing “Do not agree at all” and 10 representing “Fully agree”. The range in the original GamTest is from 0 to 10 (an 11-step scale).

What you need to know

GamTest is a feature of the responsible gambling tool PlayScan. It is an online self-rating measure to assess one’s gambling behaviour and negative consequences from gambling. GamTest has been found to work well for people with high-risk gambling, but not for people with low-risk. In this study, the researchers explored how to improve GamTest for use with people with low-risk gambling. Data from 413 Swedish adults who reported negative consequences on GamTest were analyzed. The results showed that GamTest could be adapted by shortening it to nine items (from 15 items) and using a scale ranging from 1 to 7 (instead of 1 to 10). Gender appeared to affect how people responded to three items of GamTest.

A total of 2,234 adults completed the survey. There were 1,048 (47%) women and 1,184 (53%) men. Two participants identified as “other”. The average age was 51.4 years. Participants spent a low amount of money and could be considered low-risk gambling. The researchers analyzed data from 413 participants who endorsed negative consequences (scored over 15 points on the GamTest). They used Rasch analysis to explore these participants’ response patterns to GamTest. They determined if a 10-step rating scale was appropriate and if some items should be removed to improve use among people with low-risk gambling.

What the researchers found

Rating scale and item analyses

The researchers found that a 7-step scale was most appropriate for people with low-risk gambling. Six

items did not fit the data well and could be removed. The first four items focused more on social consequences of gambling (e.g., “I sometimes borrow money to gamble”, “Others say I spend too much time on gambling”). The last two items focused on what people thought about their gambling behaviour (e.g., “I sometimes feel bad when I think about my gambling”). However, the researchers suggested that these six items should not be removed when using GamTest with people gambling at a higher risk level.

The remaining nine items showed a good fit. These items were concerned with overspending money and time (e.g., “Sometimes I gamble for longer than I intend”) and negative emotions when gambling too much or when not being able to gamble (e.g., “Sometimes I feel bad when thinking about how much I have lost gambling”). The researchers suggested that shortening GamTest might increase response rates. However, a shortened 9-item GamTest might not distinguish between different levels of risk. When a person endorses these nine items, the other six items might be administered to gain a better insight.

Gender differences in response patterns

Age did not make a difference in how participants responded to the nine items, but gender did. Men were more likely than women to agree with “I sometimes try to gamble back money that I have lost”. Women were more likely to endorse “I sometimes gamble with money that really should have been used for something else” and “Sometimes I feel bad when I think of how much I have lost gambling”. These results suggested that women might feel more social guilt as a result of gambling.

How you can use this research

This study can inform gambling providers and researchers about the use of GamTest for people with different gambling risk levels. It also suggests a need to consider gender differences in responses.

About the researchers

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Citation

Forsström, D., Rozental, A., Kottorp, A., Lindner, P., Jansson-Fröjmark, M., & Hesser, H. (2021). Further exploration of the psychometric properties of GamTest: A Rasch analysis. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(9), 4824. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18094824>

Study funding

This study was funded by the Svenska Spels Research Council. The APC was funded by the Stockholm University Library.

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Gambling Research Exchange (GREO) has partnered with the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University to produce Research Snapshots. GREO is an independent knowledge translation and exchange organization that aims to eliminate harm from gambling. Our goal is to support evidence-informed decision making in safer gambling policies, standards, and practices. The work we do is intended for researchers, policy makers, gambling regulators and operators, and treatment and prevention service providers.

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