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Modifying the Gambling Fallacies Measure for different groups of people who gamble on poker

What this research is about

People with gambling disorder often have irrational beliefs about how gambling works. These beliefs are called gambling fallacies and are measured using questionnaires such as the Gambling Fallacies Measure (GFM). This questionnaire addresses six fallacies or thinking styles related to gambling.

A previous study examined how amateur and skilled people who gamble on poker may answer the GFM. Although the two groups responded to the questions in the GFM differently, both groups showed similar responses to item 5. This item asks people to rate their agreement with the statement: “a positive attitude or doing good deeds increases your likelihood of winning money when gambling.”

The researchers of the current study proposed that the reason for the above results may be because people who gamble on poker professionally interpret “a positive attitude” to mean emotional and psychological control. This would provide a justification for why they would respond “agree”. By contrast, “doing good deeds” has less of a rational justification. Hence, people who gamble on poker professionally would be less likely to “agree” on this aspect. This study compared how amateur and skilled people who gamble on poker answered altered versions of the GFM, with item 5 focusing on “positive attitude” or “doing good deeds”.

What the researchers did

Participants included a sample of people who gamble on poker professionally. This “professional sample” was recruited via a discussion forum for people who gamble on poker. A total of 686 responses were gathered. Only complete responses from participants with an equivalence of at least one year of self-reported

What you need to know

Gambling fallacies are irrational beliefs about how gambling works. They are measured using questionnaires such as the Gambling Fallacies Measure (GFM). This study compared how people who gamble on poker professionally and people who do not gamble on poker professionally answered altered versions of item 5 of the GFM. Participants were randomly assigned to complete either (1) the original item 5 of the GFM (the control condition); (2) a modified version of the item focusing on positive attitude only; or (3) a modified version of the item focusing on good deeds only. People who gambled professionally had higher scores on the GFM than people who did not gamble professionally. Compared to those in the control condition, participants were more likely to disagree with the version stating, “doing good deeds increases your likelihood of winning money when gambling.” They were less likely to disagree with the version stating, “A positive attitude increases your likelihood of winning money when gambling”. Responses to the “good deeds” version were more strongly associated with responses to other GFM items among professional players. The “good deeds” version may be more useful to assess gambling fallacies among people who gamble on poker professionally.

professional playing status were kept. This left a final sample size of 379. On average, participants in this sample were 42 years old. Most participants (94%) were male. Half of the participants had three years professional and five years of semi-professional poker gambling.

A second sample (“broad sample”) was recruited from the crowdsourcing platform Prolific.co. Participants could be from Australia, Canada, the UK, and the US. They previously indicated to Prolific that they gambled on online poker. No further inclusion criteria were used. On average, participants in this sample were 38 years old. Most (77%) were male. Over half (60%) did not have professional poker experience, and 31% had one year or more of professional experience.

The researchers assigned participants randomly to one of three conditions. Participants either completed (1) the original item 5 of the GFM (the control condition); (2) a modified version of the item focusing on positive attitude (“A positive attitude increases your likelihood...”); or (3) a modified version focusing on good deeds (“Doing good deeds increases your likelihood...”). Participants in the professional sample were asked to explain their answer. All participants then completed the remaining questions of the GFM.

What the researchers found

Professional players had higher scores on the GFM than those in the broad sample. About 76.1% of the professional sample who completed the original item 5 disagreed with the statement. About 76.6% of the broad sample who completed the original item 5 disagreed with the statement.

Compared to the control condition, participants in both samples were less likely to disagree with the version focusing on positive attitude (58.4% of the professional sample and 60% of the broad sample). Both samples were more likely to disagree with the version focusing on good deeds (91.3% of the professional sample and 90.5% of the broad sample).

Among the professional sample, responses to the altered version of item 5 focusing on good deeds were most consistent with the rest of the participants’ GFM scores. Among the broad sample, responses to all versions of item 5 were consistent with the rest of the participants’ GFM scores. But this link was not as strong in the positive attitude condition.

Participants in the professional sample could explain their answers to item 5. There were three main themes: (1) a positive attitude can improve poker success

because it is important to maintain strategic thinking; (2) superstitious beliefs (good deeds) do not affect gambling outcomes; and (3) good deeds can create a positive attitude which improves success.

Overall, the findings suggest that the “good deeds” version of item 5 may be more useful to assess fallacies among people who gamble on poker professionally.

How you can use this research

This study can inform the measurement of fallacies among groups of people who gamble on poker.

About the researchers

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Citation

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