



RESEARCH SYNOPSIS

Wood, R. T. A., Griffiths, M. D., & Parke, J. (2007). Acquisition, development and maintenance of online poker playing in a student sample. *CyberPsychology & Behavior*, 10(3), 354-361.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What are the motivators for online poker play among students? What are the levels of problem gambling among online poker playing students? What are the predictors of problematic gambling among students who play online poker? What are the average wins/losses among online poker playing students?

PURPOSE

The purpose of the present study was to establish basic information regarding Internet poker-playing behaviour among the student population, including various motivators for participation, monies won and lost, levels of problem gambling, and predictors of problematic play (i.e., an examination of the psychosocial correlates of online poker play in a student sample).

HYPOTHESIS

None stated.

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were 422 students (86% males; average age = 21 years) from a university in the United Kingdom who self-identified as online poker players.

PROCEDURE

A university-wide email was sent to approximately 10,000 students seeking online poker players. Participants followed a link to the questionnaire of online gambling behaviour and gambling-related problems.

MAIN OUTCOME MEASURES

The survey contained 67 closed questions, including the DSM-IV diagnostic criteria for pathological gambling, and four open-ended questions. Questions related to frequency of play, average wins and losses, and experience relating to a variety of gambling activities. Specific questions about online poker playing related to motivations, strategies, concerns, mood states before and after playing, and perceptions of the activity were also included.

KEY RESULTS

The sample engaged in online poker play: 33% rarely, 38% occasionally, and 22% frequently. Forty-seven percent reported winning £10–50 per month (£1 is approximately \$1.75 CDN), 39% reported less than £10, 7% £51–100, 4% £101–200, 1% £201–500, and 2% more than £500. Fifty-three percent reported losing less than £10 per month, 38% reported £10–50, 5% £51–100, 2% £101–200; 1% £201–500, and 1% more than £500. The reasons for play included excitement, winning money, socializing, escaping problems, relieving boredom, developing skills, and feeling lucky. More players reported that online poker was mainly a game of skill (38%) than mainly a game of chance (32%), or that it was equally skill and chance based (30%). Eighteen percent were classified as probable pathological gamblers, 30% may have had some gambling problems, and 52% were non-problem-gamblers. The reasons for playing differed in frequency across the three subgroups. Gambling for excitement and to win money were the most popular reasons across all categories. Problem gamblers were more likely than other gamblers to report gambling to escape from problems and playing because they felt luck. Problem gamblers reported winning and losing more per month than either of the other groups. Problem gamblers were more likely to report always or frequently spending more than they intended when playing online poker. Variables that predicted problem gambling included increased negative mood states after playing, playing to escape problems, increased gender swapping (e.g., males pretending to be females when playing), the belief that online poker was about both chance and skill equally, rating themselves as having an average level of skill, increased playing of virtual roulette in betting shops, increased playing of roulette in casinos, increased playing of private card games for cash, and decreased playing socially with friends.

LIMITATIONS

The sample was drawn from a self-selected sample of online poker players and not the general population. As such, results may not generalize to the general population.

CONCLUSIONS

The results suggest that online poker playing was undertaken at least twice per week by a third of the participants. Almost one in five of the sample (18%) was defined as a problem gambler using DSM-IV criteria. Problem gambling in this population was best predicted by negative mood states after playing,

gender swapping whilst playing, and playing to escape from problems.

KEYWORDS: online poker, undergraduate students, motivation, problem gambling, youth, sociability

URL: online.liebertpub.com/doi/abs/10.1089/cpb.2006.9944