What this research is about

Much of the gambling industry has accepted that there is a need to promote responsible gambling (RG). Most RG programs uphold that gamblers have to be responsible for their playing behaviours. But the gambling industry also has a duty to protect their customers from the adverse consequences of excessive gambling. RG tools have been created to provide players with personalized feedback about their gambling behaviours and to help them set money limits. Yet, little is known about what RG looks like from the viewpoint of gamblers. That is, how should gamblers think and behave to be considered responsible? The lack of input from gamblers’ viewpoint is a limitation of many RG programs.

In this research, the Positive Play Scale (PPS) was developed to assess gamblers’ RG beliefs and behaviours. The researchers did 3 studies. In the first study, the PPS was created based on existing research and consultation with gamblers and RG experts. In the second study, the researchers refined the PPS and confirmed that it was a valid tool to measure RG beliefs and behaviours. The third study further tested if the PPS was a reliable tool that could assess RG beliefs and behaviours over time.

What the researcher did

The researchers did 3 studies to develop and validate the PPS as a tool to assess gamblers’ RG beliefs and behaviours. In Study 1, the researchers reviewed research literature on RG. They developed an initial list of items or questions to assess RG beliefs and behaviours. The list was sent to 10 RG experts and 30 gamblers for feedback. Based on the feedback, some items were revised or removed.

In Study 2, a total of 1,551 gamblers were recruited through the British Columbia Lottery Corporation to complete an online survey. Participants were all regular gamblers who gambled at least once in the previous month. They completed the PPS and other assessments. These included problem gambling behaviours, beliefs in control and luck in gambling, and how often they engaged in various gambling activities (e.g., lottery, scratch cards, sports betting, and casino games). The aim of the second study was to validate the PPS as a tool for measuring RG beliefs and behaviours. The researchers further revised the PPS based on results from the second study.

In Study 3, a total of 443 gamblers completed an online survey with the PPS and some other assessments. These

What you need to know

The Positive Play Scale (PPS) was developed to assess responsible gambling (RG) beliefs and behaviours from the viewpoint of gamblers. The PPS has 7 items for positive beliefs and 7 items for positive behaviours. Positive beliefs are accurate and realistic beliefs about luck and control. Positive behaviours are gambling behaviours that are within one’s personal time and money limits. The PPS has 4 underlying components: Honesty and Control, Pre-Commitment, Personal Responsibility, and Gambling Literacy. Gamblers who score higher on the PPS have more RG beliefs and behaviours.

The current research also showed that the PPS was a valid and reliable tool to assess RG beliefs and behaviours. Specifically, gamblers who had lower scores on the PPS had more severe gambling problems and more erroneous gambling beliefs. On the other hand, higher scores on the PPS were linked to a better sense of well-being (i.e., less distress about one’s financial situation and more confidence in one’s ability to manage difficult situations). Gamblers with higher scores on the PPS were also less impulsive, less neurotic and more conscientious.
included personality traits, impulsivity, satisfaction with financial situation, extent to which one’s view about oneself was focused on financial success, and general self-efficacy (i.e., extent to which a person thinks he or she can manage difficult situations). A month later, 149 gamblers were re-contacted to complete the PPS a second time. The aim of Study 3 was to further test that the PPS could assess RG beliefs and behaviour over time. It also examined if gamblers’ scores on the PPS would correspond to known risk factors for problem gambling. Past research had shown that problem gamblers were more impulsive, more neurotic and less conscientious than non-problem gamblers. It was also expected that problem gamblers would be less satisfied with their financial situation, be more focused on financial success, and had lower self-efficacy.

What the researcher found

The final version of the PPS has 7 items for positive beliefs and 7 items for positive behaviours. Positive beliefs are accurate and realistic beliefs about luck and control. Positive behaviours are gambling behaviours that are within one’s personal time and money limits. There are 4 underlying components to the PPS: Honesty and Control, Pre-Commitment, Personal Responsibility, and Gambling Literacy. Gamblers who score higher on the PPS have more RG beliefs and behaviours.

In Study 2, gamblers who had lower scores on the PPS had more severe gambling problems and more erroneous gambling beliefs. Scores on the PPS were not associated with how often one gambled except for electronic games. More frequent players of electronic games had lower scores on Honesty and Control, Pre-commitment, and Gambling Literacy.

In Study 3, gamblers with higher scores on the PPS were less impulsive, less neurotic and more conscientious. They were more satisfied with their financial situation and had a greater sense of general self-efficacy. For gamblers who did the PPS a second time one month later, their scores on the PPS were stable and similar to the first time. Taken together, the results suggest that the PPS is a valid and reliable tool that can be used to assess RG beliefs and behaviours over time.

How you can use this research

Gambling operators and intervention providers could use the PPS to develop more effective RG programs. The PPS could help tailor RG programs for different groups of gamblers. For example, some RG strategies may work best with younger players, with women, and with slot machine gamers. Furthermore, the PPS is based on a positive play approach (i.e., how to gamble in a positive manner), rather than negative messages about problem gambling (i.e., you will experience problems if you do not gamble responsibly). A positive play approach may work better with non-problem and low-risk gamblers to prevent the development of problem gambling. This may encourage people to engage in RG, and help counter the viewpoint that RG is just for people with gambling problems.

About the Researcher

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Citation


Keywords

Responsible gambling, harm reduction, harm avoidance, gambling disorder, corporate social responsibility

Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (GREO)

Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (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 responsible 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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