

Does GameSense Make Sense in Science?

The Effect of a Gambling Intervention Program on Cognition and Behavior as a Function of Gambling Outcome

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The extensive advertising and availability of gambling have raised concerns in public health. Young adults, specifically, have the highest prevalence rates of gambling with college and university students have the lifetime rates of gambling typically ranging from 70% to 94%. Many problem gambling prevention programs created to minimize gambling-related harms have been criticized for not being designed, implemented or evaluated based on empirical evidence. Moreover, most research only measured the efficacy of intervention programs on a cognitive level, little has examined their efficacy on behavioral changes. Although these programs are generally effective in improving gambling-related cognition such as increasing gambling knowledge and reducing gambling fallacies, the most commonly used ones have been found ineffective in terms of behavioral change. The current state of knowledge on whether improvement in gambling cognition will transform to behavioral change still remains unidentified. Surprisingly, over 7 years, no studies on the efficacy of GameSense, a problem gambling prevention program, have been reported in the literature. The purpose of the present study was to examine the efficacy of GameSense on gambling-related cognitions prior to simulated gambling trials, as well as its efficacy on both the gambling-related cognitions and behaviors as a function of three gambling outcomes (winning, breaking even, or losing) in a university population.

A total of 122 participants (30 males/ 92 females) were recruited from Brandon University undergraduate programs. Participants of the experimental group first took the

GameSense program on a computer. After that, they were administered the Gambling Cognitive Questionnaire. Participants of the control group were only administered the questionnaire. After the completion of the questionnaire, participants in both groups played a simulated gambling game. At the end of 4 gambling trials, participants were administered the Post-Gambling Questionnaire which was designed to measure both their gambling cognitions and behaviors.

The result showed that GameSense impacted participants' cognitions in terms of improving their gambling knowledge and resistance to gambling fallacies. This finding was consistent with other research on gambling intervention programs. In addition, these newly improved cognitions, to a certain extent, translated to behavioral changes such as lowering participants' desire to continue playing, and decreasing their time spent on gambling. Moreover, this study found that gambling outcomes also impacted gambling cognitions and behaviors, and GameSense limited but did not eliminate such impact. This study concluded that, in general, GameSense does make sense in science.