Reviewer's report

Title: An analysis of Problem Gambling among the Finnish working-age population: A Population Survey

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Reviewer: Sally Gainsbury

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Review of An analysis of Problem Gambling among the Finnish working-age population: A Population Survey

1. Is the question posed by the authors well defined?
This manuscript aims to describe the prevalence of problem gambling in Finland and its relationship between sociodemographic variables. The aim is defined, but it is not justified by the literature review or introduction.

2. Are the methods appropriate and well described? – fine with minor edits

3. Are the data sound? – the results are not particularly clear, but the data appears to be appropriate

4. Does the manuscript adhere to the relevant standards for reporting and data deposition? – appears to

5. Are the discussion and conclusions well balanced and adequately supported by the data? – no, see notes below

6. Are limitations of the work clearly stated? – no

7. Do the authors clearly acknowledge any work upon which they are building, both published and unpublished? – no apparent conflicts, but other Finnish prevalence studies are mentioned, details of these and their relation to the current study must be described to determine the relevance of these results

8. Do the title and abstract accurately convey what has been found? – no, major revisions needed

9. Is the writing acceptable? It could be made more specific, it is fairly descriptive with a lack of critical analysis

General comments

The introduction needs significant reworking. It is currently repetitive and confusing as multiple definitions and prevalence rates are given. The literature needs to be critically reviewed, preferably with an international context before describing the Finnish situation. The aims – to examine sociodemographic factors associated with problem gambling, are not justified as no evidence has been provided related to these. The background literature must be presented to justify the aims, objectives and methods of the current study. For example, how will understanding sociodemographic factors assist in treating problem gambling?

The methods section can be clarified based on the comments below. It is noted
that the survey was sent and completed in 2010, yet the introduction provides Finnish prevalence data from 2011 – if there has been a more recent prevalence survey that is already published this questions the relevance of this manuscript. The presentation of the results could be clarified.

The lack of context provided in the introduction limits the discussion of the results. The discussion of the results is descriptive and simplistic and would benefit from greater critical analyses. The discussion basically restates the results and should do this in the context of previous findings demonstrating how the results add to and advance the field and the understanding of gambling. This section brings in literature that should have been presented and critically analysed in the introduction. As a result, the discussion and conclusions tend to overextend the results by discussing variables such as impulsivity that were not measured. Similarly, the different use of gambling types based on gender seems speculative as no evidence is presented for why gamblers choose one type over another. These problems stem from the lack of literature provided as a basis for this manuscript. The conclusions are limited to a single sentence that repeats the abstract. The implications of the results should be explored in more detail with specific examples given for how the results advance the field and what policy and practice should result. The limitations of the study must also be discussed.

Specific comments:

1. In the abstract the description of the results should be more specific, it is not meaningful to say that age and gender were associated with problem gambling, the authors should specify the direction of results. The brief discussion of the implications should be stronger and more specific – how will the results contribute to policy and practice and advance the field?

2. The opening paragraph of the introduction is repetitive and the varied terminology and definitions creates confusion, just one definition should be given that will be used for this study.

3. Further details are required to justify the statement that PG rates have increased, with examples – the references provided only relate to studies in US and Canada therefore cannot be applied to all developed countries. Most prevalence studies have shown stable rates of PG. Similarly, the reference [11] is inconsistent with previous statements and further confuses the prevalence estimates provided.

4. The factors and relationships proposed to be studied have not been described or justified.

5. Specific months should be used as ‘Spring’ varies between hemispheres.

6. This survey was completed in 2010, yet the introduction describes prevalence data from 2011 – this must be explained and justified, are there already more recent prevalence figures published than these results?

7. How were completed surveys returned?

8. The frequency of gambling measure is highly skewed towards frequent (i.e., at least weekly) gambling, this is likely to confound results of those who gamble less than once a week, but may still gamble regularly with very infrequent (e.g.,
once yearly) players.

9. Alcohol consumption is also very skewed with teetotalers vs. occasional and regular drinkers. This will not enable very informed results based on this variable. Also, it is not clear how this variable was included in the results – was this part of the ‘risk level of alcohol consumption’?

10. The PGSI categories are repeated twice in the methods, just once is sufficient.

11. In the methods PG is used to refer to problem gambling, but in the introduction it is used to refer to pathological gambling – this abbreviation must be used consistently.

12. Do the demographic characteristics of the sample of participants match nationally representative samples? If the sample was skewed this should be described.

13. It is surprising that the age difference between males and females was significant as the means were 42.3 vs 43.6 and the standard deviations were very similar. Was age measured categorically or as a continuous variable?

14. Table 1 claims to report age differences, but these are not included in the table; how is alcohol risk level defined?

15. The use of gambling types should be presented in a table for clarity.

16. The association of gambling problems with gender and types of gambling should be presented in a table or figure for clarity.

17. The results for the model must be clarified, it is not useful to say that ‘age’ was associated with gambling problems, it must be specified whether this refers to younger or older age, or which specific age groups.

18. The discussion of the differences between the current results and previous (an subsequent) studies is not very sophisticated or clear. The differences between measures should be explained in more detail. Also, it is not possible to determine what may have impacted prevalence as no context or description of gambling or changes in gambling in Finland have been provided. This should have been done in the introduction, and would enable more detailed discussion of the results.

19. Similarly, as no previous literature related to sociodemographic characteristics was included in the introduction, it is difficult to interpret the results in any context. Therefore, the statement that the results resemble previous findings is not meaningful as these have not been described.

20. The discussion of impulsivity is interesting, but unfortunately cannot be substantiated by the results so risks overextending the findings and is therefore unsuitable.

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**Quality of written English:** Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited
**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I do not have any competing interests to declare in relation to this manuscript.