Reviewer's report

Title: Assisting an Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person with gambling problems: A Delphi study

Version: 1 Date: 28 Jan 2017

Reviewer: Tobias Hayer

Reviewer's report:

The manuscript "Assisting an Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person with gambling problems: A Delphi study" basically aims at developing a set of guidelines to assist individuals with gambling problems that belong to a special ethnic minority in Australia. Based on the lack of scientific evidence, a Delphi Study with N = 22 experts was conducted. This panel had to rate a total of 407 helpline statements according to their relevance for the guideline. Taken together, the methodological approach is very similar (not to say identical) to a recent publication by the same research group (Bond et al., 2016, BMC Psychology) with one exception: While the target group in the former publication are relatives of problem gamblers from the general population, the manuscript now deals with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in particular.

Without any doubt, the submitted manuscript has many strengths including the academic writing style, the study's rationale, the data-analytic strategy and the discussion section that is fair and balanced. Furthermore, to provide details about the questionnaire and the process of item selection as supplementary materials is an excellent idea and enhances the scientific rigor of the research study at hand. Despite the overall positive impression, I also identified some shortcomings that need to be addressed by the authors before publication:

(1) Introduction: The introduction gives a good and very condensed overview of relevant issues such as the increased risk for becoming a problem gambler in the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, low rates of treatment seeking by problem gamblers in general and by Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander in particular, and the role of family and friends in motivating problem gamblers to seek professional help (i.e. "external" pressures by third-parties). However, no information can be found with regard to structural barriers and individual thresholds that may hinder problem gamblers from ethnic minorities to make use of outpatient or inpatient treatment services. Thus I recommend to prepare a short passage on this issue.
(2) Methods - Panel formation: It seems that the expert panel represents a very homogenous group and reaching a consensus therefore was obviously not a big challenge. Or to put it in other words: To recruit only two stakeholder groups minimizes the opportunity to cover a wide range of individual / different perspectives. Why did the authors restrict their search for experts to gambling help professionals and gambling researches and thus exclude other important stakeholder groups such as gamblers themselves or family members (the "real" experts), regulators or members of the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community without extensive gambling experiences (but with a deeper understanding of special cultural features)?

(3) Methods - Sample size (related to the point mentioned above): The authors wanted to recruit a minimum of 30 experts (p.6) but failed to reach this goal. What was the main reason for this failure? In addition, information about the participation rate should be provided (i.e. how many experts were contacted and how many accepted/declined to participate?).

(4) Methods - Definition of problem gambling (p.8): The correct diagnostic term is Gambling Disorder (DSM-5, 2013) and not problem gambling. Commonly 'problem gambling' is used as (1) either as a general term to indicate all of the patterns of disruptive or damaging gambling behaviour including at-risk and pathological gambling or (2) to solely describe subclinical relevant gambling patterns. Thus I suggest a rewording of the passage beginning with "in this study ..." (line 16ff).

(5) Methods - Item categorization (p.9): The authors introduce a classification scheme with three categories (endorsed vs. re-rate- vs. rejected) but without any empirical or theoretical justification for the chosen cut-offs. To reject an item although the majority of participants (e.g. 75%) judged a statement as essential or important, seems uncommon and a bit arbitrary.

(6) Results - participants (p.10): All information on the sample should be deleted here and should be instead placed in the methods section under the subheading "Step 1 - Panel
formation". In addition, Table 2 can be deleted; all relevant demographic information should be presented within the text.

(7) Discussion: My major concern here is related to the length of the guideline with 225 (!) items that may prevent its use in practice. Thus the authors definitely need to discuss the issue of practicability of an "instrument" that covers such a wide variety of contents in detail.

(8) Discussion - Limitations (p.16). I suggest a re-wording of the sentence beginning with "Although a panel" ... line 27). This sentence suggests that a minimum of 23 individuals is ideal for a Delphi survey study. However the paper cited (Akins et al., 2005) simply demonstrated that response characteristics of a small expert panel produce stable results.

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Unable to assess

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

Not relevant to this manuscript
Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

Declaration of competing interests
Please complete a declaration of competing interests, considering the following questions:

1. Have you in the past five years received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

2. Do you hold any stocks or shares in an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

3. Do you hold or are you currently applying for any patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

4. Have you received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organization that holds or has applied for patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

5. Do you have any other financial competing interests?

6. Do you have any non-financial competing interests in relation to this paper?

If you can answer no to all of the above, write 'I declare that I have no competing interests' below. If your reply is yes to any, please give details below.

I declare that I have no competing interests

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal. I understand that my name will be included on my report to the authors and, if the manuscript is accepted for publication, my named report including any attachments I upload will be posted on the website along with the authors' responses. I agree for my report to be made available under an Open Access Creative Commons CC-BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). I understand that any comments which I do not wish to be included in my named report can be included as confidential comments to the editors, which will not be published.

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal