Measuring Gambling in Türkiye: A Critical Review of Psychometric Tools and Future Directions

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Abstract. Gambling behaviors in Türkiye are on the rise, driven largely by the growth of online platforms, despite strict legal prohibitions. This trend poses growing public health concerns, particularly among youth, who face financial, emotional, and family-related harms. This critical review examines nine psychometric tools developed or adapted to assess gambling in Türkiye, covering domains such as behavior, cognition, motivation, craving, risk, and harm. While several tools—like the Online Gambling Addiction Scale and Gambling Craving Scale—present promising frameworks, many lack validation across diverse populations (e.g., adolescents, clinical subgroups) and fail to address the unique psychological dynamics of digital gambling. The review highlights overlapping constructs, sparse normative data, and limited cultural adaptation. It calls for modular, context-sensitive instruments and expanded validation efforts targeting high-risk groups. By incorporating Türkiye's legal, cultural, and digital realities, future tools can better support clinical assessment, prevention initiatives, and policy development.

Keywords: Gambling, Psychometric Tools, Critical Review.

Introduction

In recent years, Türkiye has witnessed a notable increase in gambling-related behaviors, particularly fueled by the rapid expansion of online platforms (Karaibrahimoğlu et al., 2021). While traditional forms of gambling remain regulated, online gambling's ease of access has introduced new challenges for public health and clinical intervention. This upward trend is especially pronounced among young adults and digital-native populations, raising concerns about early onset, covert engagement, and escalating risk profiles. As gambling behaviors evolve within Türkiye's unique sociocultural and legal framework, the urgency for culturally appropriate, psychometrically sound assessment tools grows. Accurate measurement is essential to understanding the scope of gambling-related problems, identifying at-risk individuals, and evaluating prevention and treatment strategies. Without reliable, locally validated instruments, research may lack generalizability, and clinical efforts risk misdiagnosis or oversight (Arcan & Karancı, 2014; Duvarcı & Varan, 2001).

Türkiye maintains a restrictive legal stance on gambling. State-run lotteries and a limited number of betting games are permitted under strict regulation, while most other forms (including casinos and online platforms) are officially banned. Despite this, illegal and offshore online gambling activities are widespread, particularly among youth and urban populations. Studies suggest that gambling participation is rising, with increasing reports of gambling-related harm, including financial loss, emotional distress, and family conflict (Kovan, 2024; 2025). Public awareness remains limited, and stigma often discourages help-seeking, further complicating intervention efforts.

This commentary aims to critically examine the current body of gambling-related scales developed or adapted for use in Türkiye. Specifically, it reviews nine distinct instruments assessing various dimensions of gambling behavior, cognition, motivation, craving, risk, and harm (e.g., Buran et al., 2019; Karaibrahimoğlu et al., 2021; Tekin et al., 2020). Through a comparative lens, it evaluates the methodological strengths and limitations of these tools, identifies gaps in psychometric coverage, and offers suggestions for future research and clinical application.

Overview of available scales

Over the past two decades, Türkiye's psychometric landscape for gambling assessment has expanded considerably, blending locally developed tools with culturally adapted international instruments. While this diversification reflects growing recognition of gambling as a public health issue, the tools vary significantly in theoretical grounding, dimensional scope, and target populations. To assess their strengths and limitations within the Turkish context, the available measures are grouped by origin and discussed comparatively (see Table 1).

Several tools have been developed specifically for Turkish populations, responding to local cultural dynamics and emerging gambling patterns particularly in the online sphere. The Online Gambling Addiction Scale (Karaibrahimoğlu et al., 2021), for example, represents a comprehensive effort to capture the multifaceted of digital gambling. Its inclusion of sub-dimensions like "motivation" and "negative psychology" reflects a growing shift toward assessing not only behavior but also the underlying emotional and cognitive states —a direction largely absents in earlier tools. Similarly, the Gambling Craving Scale (Buran et al., 2019) introduces a focused measure of urge and compulsion. Though concise and practical, it has limited validation across diverse subgroups, which restricts its generalizability in broader clinical settings. The Gambling Disorder Screening Test (Evren et al., 2020) is notable for its alignment with DSM-5 diagnostic criteria. While clinically useful it, it would benefit from additional validation across non-clinical and community-based samples. Developed with a broader perspective, the Screening Scale for Behavioral and Socioeconomic Risk Factors for Gambling Addiction (Tekin et al., 2020) incorporates socioeconomic factors seldom addressed in diagnostic measures. Its dual emphasis on behavioral and contextual risks is commendable, although evidence on its predictive validity remains limited.

Adapted international scales have also played a key role in bridging global constructs with local realities. While they often come with solid theoretical frameworks, their cultural transferability and psychometric robustness must be carefully evaluated. The Gambling Motives Scales (Arcan & Karancı, 2014) is a strong example of successful adaptation, unpacking motivational drivers of gambling through sub-dimensions such as "entertainment/excitement," "avoidance," "earning money," and "socialization." This structure enables a detailed psychological understanding of gambling behavior. However, despite its theoretical richness, the tool remains underutilized in Turkish empirical studies, and normative data across demographics are limited as posing challenges for benchmarking. In contrast, the Short Gambling Harm Screen (Aka & Erdem, 2024) reflects growing interest in harm-focused assessment. With just nine items measuring emotional/psychological and economic harm, it presents a concise yet impactful glimpse into the lived consequences of gambling. Although its recent adaptation means psychometric validation is

ongoing, its inclusion is timely, aligning with global movements toward harm minimization in addiction research.

Another noteworthy tool, the Gambling Cognitions Scale (Arcan & Karancı, 2015), offers a theoretically grounded look into distorted gambling beliefs. With five sub-dimension (including "illusion of control" and "predictive control" it parallels well with cognitive-behavioral addiction models. This intense adds significant value to assessment but may limit usability in brief screenings or large-scale surveys unless a short-form version is developed and validated. The South Oaks Gambling Screen, adapted by Duvarcı and Varan (2001), remains one of the most historically important instruments. Though based on DSM-III criteria, it continues to be widely used due to its diagnostic utility and global recognition. Nonetheless, its dated conceptualization of pathological gambling and limited applicability to contemporary behaviors (e.g., online gambling) call for cautious, supplementary use. Recognizing adolescent vulnerability, the South Oaks Gambling Screen-Revised Adolescent Form (Erdoğdu & Arcan, 2020) was adapted to address developmental specificity. This tool marks an important advancement, yet it still requires broader validation across adolescent subgroups, especially those with co-occurring risk factors or from varied socioeconomic backgrounds.

While the breadth of available gambling-related scales in Turkish is commendable, a closer examination reveals uneven psychometric intense, conceptual gaps, and issues of redundancy and contextual misalignment. These instruments, though valuable, have limitations that must be acknowledged to guide more precise research and clinical use. Several locally developed tools demonstrate methodological rigor, particularly in their dimensional structures. The Online Gambling Addiction Scale (Karaibrahimoğlu et al., 2021), for instance, stands out for its inclusion of affective and motivational constructs often overlooked in traditional tools. Its multidimensional design makes it well-suited to capture the complicated psychological landscape of online gambling. However, as with many recently developed scales, its validation across diverse samples remains limited, reducing immediate generalizability. In contrast, concise tools like the Gambling Craving Scale (Buran et al., 2019) and the Screening Scale for Behavioral and Socioeconomic Risk Factors for Gambling Addiction (Tekin et al., 2020) present efficacy but many oversimplify the multifaceted of gambling behavior. While highly usable in high-throughput or preliminary settings, these tools may require supplemental instruments for clinical diagnosis or in-depth research.

A conceptual overlap is also evident among tools, particularly in areas such as cognitive distortion and risk perception. Both the Gambling Cognitions Scale and sub-items within the Online Gambling Addiction Scale address beliefs related to control and cessation difficulty. This overlap is not inherently problematic, but it raises questions about construct redundancy and the potential for a more integrated, streamlined assessment framework. Furthermore, while multiple tools assess related dimensions

such as risk (e.g., Tekin et al., 2020) and motivation (Arcan & Karancı, 2014; Karaibrahimoğlu et al., 2021), they often conceptualize these differently —sometimes as predictors, other times as symptoms. A clearer delineation of what each scale measures and how its constructs are theoretically grounded would enhance both interpretive clarity and cross-study comparability.

Perhaps the most significant gap lies in age-specific validation. Despite well-documented adolescent vulnerability to gambling-related harm, only the South Oaks Gambling Screen-Revised Adolescent Form (Erdoğdu & Arcan, 2020) directly targets this demographic. Even then, the tool lacks norming across subgroups such as adolescents with co-occurring risk behaviors or from varying socioeconomic backgrounds. Similarly, many tools do not offer stratified normative data by gender, education level, or region —factors that can meaningfully influence gambling behavior across Türkiye's diverse populations. Adapted scales, while methodologically sound, sometimes fall short in cultural resonance. For example, items in the original South Oaks Gambling Screen reference gambling types that are either illegal or uncommon in Türkiye, potentially skewing responses or reducing ecological validity. Even well-adapted tools such as the Short Gambling Harm Screen and Gambling Motives Scale could benefit from more profound cultural calibration. Factors like familial shame, legal consequences, and religious guilt —uniquely salient in Turkish society— may significantly shape gambling experiences and can be more explicitly integrated into future adaptations.

Table 1. *General characteristics of the gambling measures in Turkish*
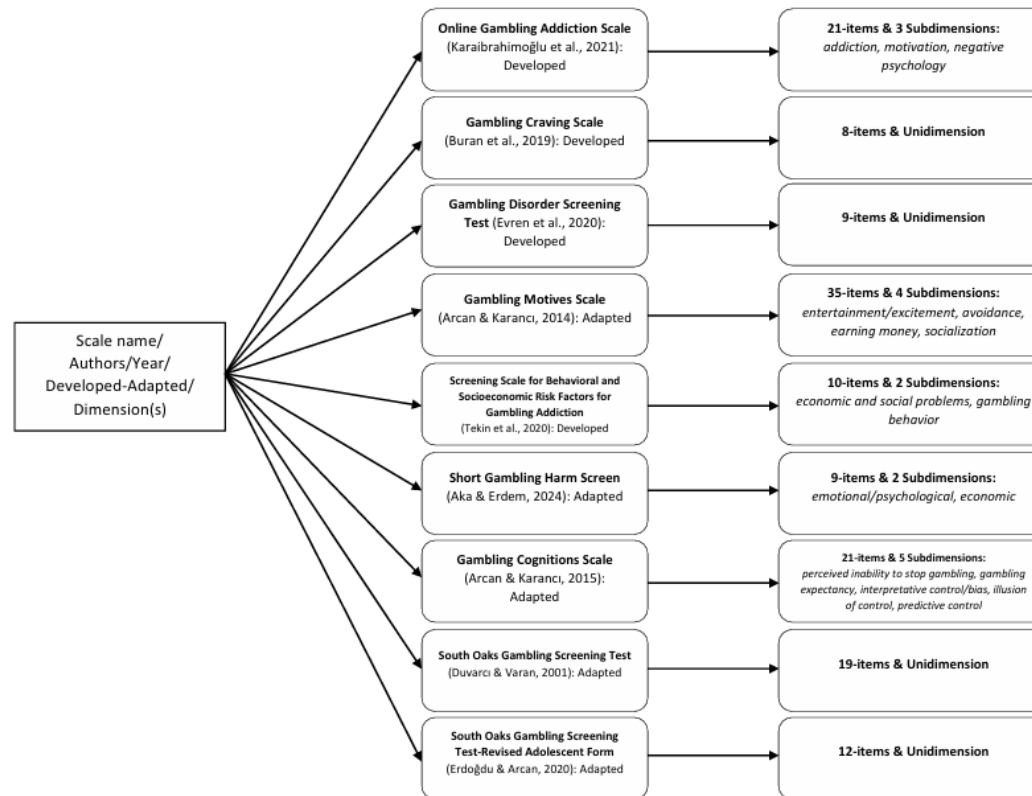
Gaps and future directions

Despite the promising range of available instruments, the current body of Turkish gambling-related scales reflects several critical gaps that limit their broader application and scientific impact. Addressing these limitations is essential for building a culturally informed, methodologically rigorous, and clinically meaningful understanding of gambling in Türkiye.

Most existing tools, particularly those developed in recent years, have been validated primarily with convenience or student samples. While these initial efforts are valuable, the lack of follow-up studies in clinical, community-based, and high-risk populations undermines generalizability. Vulnerable groups such as adolescents, unemployed individuals, online-exclusive gamblers, and those with comorbidities (e.g., substance use or psychological distress) remain largely underrepresented. Future research can prioritize population-specific validation studies to improve diagnostic sensitivity and cultural fairness. Large-scale, multi-center efforts could help establish normative benchmarks for wider implementation.

Furthermore, many instruments are unidimensional —focusing solely on craving, cognition, or risk— without presenting a modular system that adapts to varying assessment needs. This fragmentation reduces clinical efficiency and complicated comparative research. A promising future direction would be the development of a composite or modular gambling assessment battery. Such a system could include core items for general screening, along with optional subscales tailored to specific constructs like harm, cognitive distortions, or digital gambling behaviors. This approach would preserve both flexibility and consistency, enhancing both research and practice. What's more, only one tool—the Online Gambling Addiction Scale— explicitly addresses digital gambling context. This is a major oversight, given the growing dominance of online platforms, apps, and virtual games. The psychological dynamics of digital gambling (e.g., anonymity, dissociation, rapid betting cycles) differ significantly from traditional formats and require specialized measurement tools. Future scale development can focus on these digital-specific patterns, incorporating constructs such as platform engagement, online cognitive distortions, and technological accessibility as predictors of harm.

Moreover, few existing instruments address the broader legal, moral, and cultural frameworks that shape gambling behaviors in Türkiye. Religious beliefs, family structures, legal restrictions, and societal stigma can all moderate how gambling is experienced and reported. Tools that overlook these contextual factors risk underestimating prevalence or misrepresenting motivation. Future adaptations or new instruments can integrate culturally salient items and undergo qualitative validation to ensure resonance with local experiences.

As a final point, the use of these tools remains largely confined to academic or clinical settings. There is a growing need for interdisciplinary collaborations with public health agencies, educational institutions, and

digital platforms to integrate assessment tools into real-world prevention and policy efforts. Policymakers would benefit from brief, validated screening tools for use in educational and community settings, while clinicians could make use of harmonized instruments aligned with DSM-V/ICD-XI standards and national mental health guidelines.

Conclusion

The current landscape of gambling-related psychometric tools in Türkiye shows encouraging progress but also highlights critical areas for improvement. With nine distinct scales developed or adapted to assess various aspects of gambling behavior, the field has laid a solid foundation for empirical research and clinical intervention. These tools collectively address behavioral, cognitive, motivational, and harm-related domains, each presenting unique insights into the multifaceted nature of gambling. However, as this commentary has demonstrated, key limitations persist. Many instruments remain under-validated across diverse populations and contexts. There is also a noticeable gap in tools designed to capture the evolving nature of gambling particularly in digital environments. Conceptual overlaps across scales suggest the need for integration and greater theoretical clarity, while the absence of culturally and legally contextualized items threatens ecological validity and reduces relevance to local populations.

To advance the field, future efforts can focus on developing psychometrically robust, culturally responsive, and practically adaptable tools. This includes expanding validation to underrepresented groups, creating modular instruments for flexible use, and embedding emerging patterns such as online gambling into assessment models. Equally important is translating these tools into real-world applications through cross-sector collaboration—linking public health, clinical care, education, and policy. Ultimately, measuring gambling in the Turkish context requires ongoing commitment to methodological excellence, cultural sensitivity, and clinical relevance. With thoughtful innovation, the next generation of assessment tools can drive more accurate diagnosis, targeted prevention, and effective intervention—contributing to a more informed and responsive approach to gambling-related harm in Türkiye and beyond.

Author's contributions
All authors contributed equally to this work and approved the final version of the manuscript for submission

Ethics Approval
N/A

Research Promotion
This paper critically examines the validity and cultural relevance of gambling assessment tools used in Türkiye, highlighting growing online gambling trends and the urgent need for locally attuned instruments. It identifies key psychometric gaps and calls for modular, culturally sensitive tools to better guide clinical interventions and public health policy.

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