

## Option 3: Addiction

### Cognitive Explanations for Gambling

#### Example Essay

#### Discuss the cognitive explanation for gambling addiction. (16 Marks)

The cognitive explanation for gambling addiction is based on cognitive biases and irrational expectations. Gamblers have irrational ideas of expectancy and they believe that the benefits of gambling outweigh any associated negative impacts. This is emphasised by their tendency to focus on the positives- the rewards of their addiction, like winning money rather than on any losses, this is known as the recall bias. **AO1**

Cognitive biases play an important role in their distorted views of expectancy (Rickwood, 2000). There are four types of cognitive biases which include faulty perceptions- the gambler's fallacy in which gamblers believe that their losses cannot last forever and that they inevitably must be 'due' a win. Another cognitive bias is the 'near miss bias'. This bias is founded on the belief that an unsuccessful outcome, ie getting 2 out of 3 matching fruits on a slot machine, is akin to 'nearly winning'. The gambler therefore doesn't view it as a loss and is not discouraged, but rather encouraged to keep playing. **AO1**

A final cognitive bias is 'illusions of control' which is illustrated typically through the performance of superstitious rituals which to the gambler aid their performance. Such gamblers believe that gambling successfully is a skill and that losses are due to bad luck. **AO1**

To illustrate the effects of cognitive biases, Griffiths conducted research with 30 regular gamblers and 30 non-regular gamblers playing slot machines. It was found that the regular gamblers demonstrated 11.5% more instances of 'irrational verbalisations', compared to the non-regular gamblers, even though between the two groups there were no observable differences between the number of wins attained. Verbalisations included statements like 'I'm good at playing this machine!'. Griffiths research showed that irrationality and holding cognitive biases are characteristic of problem gamblers. **AO1/AO3**

There are individual differences between each gambler's cognitive distortions, as suggested by Burger and Norris (1985). The extent to which they believe they have control over events in their life differs, those who believe they have a high degree of control, may displace their feelings to random events such as winning the lottery. Therefore, in an attempt to prove that they still have this degree of control, continue to partake in gambling behaviours that lead to addiction. **AO3**

Evidence does exist to support the irrationality and impulsive nature of gamblers. Michalczuk et al (2011), used a group of 30 gamblers and 30 non-gamblers. It was found that the gamblers all had an increasingly impulsive nature- demanding instant rewards rather than waiting for smaller rewards that are more likely to occur. This suggests that alongside the

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cognitive distortion of a deluded illusion of control, there is another cognitive element of gambling which is displayed through traits such as impulsivity. **AO3**

Furthermore, this explanation for gambling addiction has real life implications. Clark (2010) found that the cognitive theory has sparked new research into the biological basis of gambling and improved understanding of CBT as a potential treatment for gambling addictions- particularly the illusion of control aspect which is more identifiable to therapists. As a result of this, it is also now more easily rewarded by them, highlighting the practical and theoretical merits of the cognitive explanation of gambling. **AO3**

**Teachers Comment:**

Brilliant essay. Admirable level of detail and expiation of the cognitive explanation, with four well-ordered discussion points that build a persuasive argument.

Level 4  
16

