

Gambling-related false beliefs and a present focus influence loss chasing among adolescents

What this research is about

Chasing losses is a gambling behaviour where people keep gambling to try to win back money they have already lost. Chasing behaviour has been linked to differences in time perspective and gambling-related false beliefs. Compared to adults, adolescents may be more vulnerable to gambling-related false beliefs because of their developmental stage. Adolescents are also more prone to focus on the present over long-term consequences, which influence their decision making.

In this study, the researchers conducted an experiment to examine the effect of monetary loss on chasing behaviour among Italian adolescents. Specifically, they examined if gambling losses would increase the likelihood of initiating chasing and persisting in chasing afterwards. The researchers also examined if gambling severity, gambling-related false beliefs, time perspective, and alcohol use influenced chasing behaviour.

What the researchers did

The researchers recruited a sample of 216 adolescents aged 16 to 19 years old from public high schools in Southern Italy. They randomly assigned participants to either a control or loss condition within a computerized chasing task. Participants completed the task and self-report questionnaires measuring the following:

- Gambling severity, assessed using the South Oaks Gambling Screen – Revised for Adolescents (SOGS-RA).
- Time perspective, assessed using the Consideration of Future Consequences Scale. This

What you need to know

This study examined chasing losses in 216 Italian adolescents aged 16 to 19 years old. Participants played a computerized card game and were randomly assigned to either keep their starting €10 or lose more than that amount.

Experiencing a loss did not make participants more likely to decide to keep gambling, but among those who did choose to continue, it led them to gamble for longer. Gambling-related false beliefs and a tendency to focus on the present, rather than future consequences, were the strongest predictors of both initiating and persisting in chasing losses. Alcohol use was linked to how long participants chased their losses, but not to whether they decided to chase losses in the first place.

scale has two subscales: the Immediate subscale, which measures a tendency to focus on the present, and the Future subscale, which assesses consideration of future consequences.

- Alcohol use and related problems, assessed using the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test.
- Gambling-related false beliefs, assessed using the Gambling Related Cognitions Scale (GRCS).

Chasing behaviour was assessed using the computerized ChasIT task, which simulates a card-based gambling game. In the control condition, participants kept their initial budget of €10 after 30 rounds (phase one), while those in the loss condition were told they had lost €12. The researchers measured chasing behaviour by recording whether participants chose to gamble in phase two (i.e.,

initiated chasing) and how long they continued to gamble (i.e., persisted in chasing). Participants in the loss condition could choose to gamble on credit in phase two. Phase two consisted of another 30 trials, and participants were told what their balance was after each trial and asked if they wanted to continue.

What the researchers found

According to the SOGS-RA, most participants experienced non-problem gambling (75.5%), while 15% experienced gambling problems and 9.7% probable pathological gambling. The most common gambling activities were lottery (53.2%) and card games (51%). Many participants gambled for entertainment or fun (54.2%), and for money (27%).

Chasing initiation was defined as choosing to gamble in phase two of the ChasIT task, while chasing persistence was defined as the total number of trials played. Although more participants in the loss condition chose to gamble during phase two compared to the control condition, this difference was not statistically significant. But among those who did choose to continue gambling, those in the loss condition gambled for longer than those in the control condition. Thus, experiencing gambling losses did not influence the decision to initiate chasing, but it did increase the persistence of chasing once participants decided to chase.

Gambling-related false beliefs (specifically, predictive control and illusion of control) and a present focus predicted chasing initiation. But gambling severity and alcohol use did not predict chasing initiation. Predictive control is a false belief that one can predict gambling outcomes determined by chance, while illusion of control is a false belief that one's action can influence such outcomes.

Gambling-related false beliefs, a present focus, and alcohol use predicted persistence in chasing losses once initiated. But gambling severity was not a predictor. Gambling-related false beliefs increased chasing persistence both directly and indirectly by making youth focus more on the present instead of future consequences. This suggests that gambling-related false beliefs are the main mechanism that underly loss chasing, while a present-focused mindset helps explain part of the relationship.

How you can use this research

Practitioners can use this research to design gambling prevention programs for youth that target gambling-related false beliefs and present-focused thinking. School-based programs can pair gambling education with alcohol use interventions, as these two risk factors appear to reinforce each other in sustaining chasing behaviour.

About the researchers

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