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The role of socioeconomic status, perceived deprivation, and financial gambling motives in predicting problem gambling among U.S. adults

What this research is about

Problem gambling can cause financial distress and other harms. Social and economic circumstances can influence risky behaviours, such as problem gambling. A low socioeconomic status (SES) is linked to a higher risk of gambling-related harms. However, there is not much research on how SES impacts gambling motives and how this relationship predicts problem gambling.

Furthermore, perceived deprivation may play a role in predicting problem gambling. Perceived deprivation refers to the belief that one is financially worse off than others. It may motivate people to gamble to reduce their financial disadvantages, especially among those with lower incomes. The purpose of this study was to examine the links between financial gambling motives, perceived deprivation, and SES in predicting problem gambling.

What the researchers did

The researchers recruited respondents using YouGov Opinion Polling. The sample included 2,806 American adults recruited in March 2022. The sample was matched to the U.S. norms for age, gender, education, census region, and race/ethnicity based on the 2019 American Community Survey.

Gambling measures were only completed by the 1,348 respondents who had gambled in the past year. In the survey, the respondents completed the following measures:

- Annual income, as an objective indicator of SES.
- Perceived relative deprivation, measured using an abbreviated version of Callan et al.'s (2008) Personal Relative Deprivation Scale.
- Gambling problems, measured using the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI).

What you need to know

The purpose of this study was to examine the links between financial gambling motives, perceived deprivation, and socioeconomic status in predicting problem gambling. Perceived deprivation refers to the belief that one is financially worse off than others. A sample of 2,806 American adults was recruited using YouGov Opinion Polling in 2022. The sample was matched to the U.S. norms for age, gender, education, census region, and race/ethnicity based on the 2019 American Community Survey. The respondents completed a questionnaire asking about annual income, perceived deprivation, gambling problems, and gambling motives.

Overall, this study found that financial gambling motives were linked to more severe gambling problems. Respondents with higher levels of perceived deprivation were more likely to have financial gambling motives and lower income. Lower income and perceived deprivation were linked to more severe gambling problems. Income did not influence whether financial gambling motives increased the risk of problem gambling. But perceived deprivation influenced whether financial gambling motives increased the risk of problem gambling. Among respondents with high levels of perceived deprivation, gambling for financial reasons was more strongly associated with problem gambling.

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- Gambling motives, measured using the Gambling Motives Questionnaire-Financial (GMQ-F). Only financial gambling motives (e.g., to win money) were considered in this study.

What the researchers found

About half of the respondents were female (52%). Most of the respondents were white (67.5%), married or in a relationship (54%), and employed full-time or part-time (50%). One-quarter of the respondents were retired. The median annual income was between $50,000 and $59,000. The median income is the income amount that divides the top half of the sample from the bottom half.

Overall, this study found mixed results with respect to the relationship between financial gambling motives, income, and problem gambling.

Financial gambling motives were linked to more severe gambling problems. Respondents with higher levels of financial gambling motives were more likely to have a lower income. They were also more likely to feel deprived financially compared to others. Additionally, lower income and perceived deprivation were linked to more severe gambling problems.

The researchers found that the interaction between financial gambling motives and income did not impact problem gambling. This means that income did not influence whether financial gambling motives increased the risk of problem gambling.

But the interaction of financial gambling motives and perceived deprivation had an effect on problem gambling. This means that perceived deprivation influenced whether financial gambling motives increased the risk of problem gambling. Among respondents with high levels of perceived deprivation, gambling for financial reasons was more strongly associated with problem gambling.

How you can use this research

Policy makers can use this research to inform responsible gambling initiatives that highlight how unlikely it is that gambling leads to positive financial outcomes. This research can also be used to inform problem gambling treatment and intervention approaches. For example, cognitive behavioural therapy can be used to address feelings of perceived deprivation and the importance of financial success in self-worth.

About the researchers

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Citation

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