

research snapshot

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How maladaptive personality traits and thinking styles predict gambling in adolescents

What this research is about

Many adolescents report gambling even though it is illegal for them to participate. Gambling at an early age may lead to problem gambling later in life. This could result in various negative psychological, financial, and social consequences. Past research has explored potential pathways to problem gambling. Studies have reported that people with gambling problems tend to have more irrational beliefs. For example, they tend to focus more on wins and think that they have the skills to control the game.

Another explanation for increased gambling is linked to personality traits. Past research has revealed that certain maladaptive personality traits may lead to gambling problems. The Personality Inventory for DSM-5 (PID-5) proposes five traits: 1) negative affectivity or being prone to experience negative emotions; 2) detachment or a tendency to social isolation; 3) antagonism or being prone to aggressive behaviours, self-importance, and callousness to others; 4) disinhibition or a tendency to be impulsive and seek out risky situations; and 5) psychoticism or a tendency to have irrational thoughts

Individual differences in thinking styles can change and shape one's personality. It can then affect gambling behaviours differently. For instance, maladaptive thinking styles may be associated with maladaptive personality traits. Together, this could be associated with more gambling problems. More adaptive thinking styles may be associated with more adaptive personality traits. In turn, it could result in less gambling. The aim of this study was to examine the impact of thinking styles on the relationship between personality traits and problem gambling.

What you need to know

This study examined whether thinking styles could affect the relationship between maladaptive personality traits and problem gambling. The researchers recruited 325 regular adolescent gamblers. The results revealed that thinking styles and maladaptive personality traits predicted gambling problems. Having an executive thinking style predicted more gambling problems. This might be because adolescents with this thinking style might engage in gambling without deciding on the costs and benefits on their own. Adolescents who were more prone to the personality trait of antagonism (e.g., being aggressive and callous) were more likely to have an executive thinking style, leading them to gamble problematically. However, the judicial style of thinking was an adaptive thinking style against problem gambling. Adolescents with this thinking style might weigh their choices and decide on their actions. Thus, it could help adolescents who were more prone to disinhibition (e.g., being impulsive) to make better choices and exert control over their impulses to gamble.

What the researchers did

The researchers recruited 325 Caucasian adolescents between the ages of 15 to 17 from six cities in Italy. All participants were regular gamblers at betting and bingo halls. Regular gambling was defined as playing more than once a week. To assess personality traits, the researchers used the Personality Inventory for DSM-5-Brief Form-Children (PID-5BF). This scale assesses five maladaptive personality traits: negative

affectivity, detachment, antagonism, disinhibition, and psychoticism. To assess gambling severity, the researchers used the South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS).

To assess thinking styles, the researchers used the Thinking Style Inventory (TSI). This scale assesses three thinking styles: legislative, executive, and judicial styles. Legislative style is about solving problems independently, experiencing new situations, and deciding on which actions to take. Executive style is about following established rules and solving problems under supervision. Judicial style is about evaluating existing rules and being able to critique others' work.

What the researchers found

The results revealed a sex difference with regard to gambling. In particular, males gambled more and had more gambling problems than females. In terms of personality traits, males were more prone to antagonism and disinhibition whereas females were more prone to negative affectivity.

Maladaptive thinking styles and personality traits predicted gambling problems. Thus, both could represent risk factors for problem gambling. Having an executive thinking style predicted more gambling problems, likely because adolescents with this thinking style might engage in gambling without deciding on the costs and benefits of such a choice on their own. An executive thinking style mediated the relationship between antagonism and problem gambling. In other words, adolescents who were more antagonistic were more likely to have an executive thinking style, leading them to gamble problematically.

On the other hand, the judicial style was a protective thinking style against problem gambling. Specifically, the judicial style could help adolescents who were more prone to disinhibition to make better choices and exert control over their impulses to gamble.

How you can use this research

This research could be used to increase awareness about the risk factors that are associated with

gambling problems. The findings could inform prevention initiatives for problem gambling for adolescents. Service providers could use this research to build more tailored interventions for adolescents who show maladaptive personality traits (e.g., antagonism) and thinking styles. Future research could replicate this study with different youths in other countries.

About the researchers

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