

research snapshot

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How maladaptive personality traits and low mindfulness explain gambling problems

What this research is about

In Italy, gambling has expanded and increased the risk for many people to develop problem gambling. Problem gambling has been linked to many negative outcomes. For instance, people with gambling problems experience financial, social, and psychological difficulties. Problem gambling also co-occurs with other mental disorders, such as depression, anxiety, and personality disorders.

Personality traits that are maladaptive may result in a higher risk of problem gambling. Past research has examined personality traits via the Five Factor Model (FFM) and the Big Five Model (BFM). The dimensional trait approach using the DSM-5 Brief Form (PID-5-BF) is less popular, but includes similar characteristics to the FFM and BFM. Overall, past research has shown that people with problem gambling are more neurotic, less agreeable, less conscientious, and less open to new experiences. They also have trouble with self-control. Importantly, people with problem gambling may have lower levels of mindfulness. Mindfulness is the ability to self-regulate one's attention to the present and deal with negative emotions.

The goal of the present study is to test a model proposing that maladaptive personality traits affect mindfulness, which in turn affects problem gambling. It focuses on three personality domains of the PID-5BF, including antagonism, disinhibition, and negative affectivity. Antagonism involves feelings of grandeur and a tendency to manipulate others. Disinhibition involves a tendency to be impulsive and take risks. Negative affectivity involves traits such as hostility and rapid changes in mood or emotion.

What you need to know

This study examined the role of mindfulness in the link between maladaptive personality traits and problem gambling. The researchers recruited 326 adolescent gamblers to complete a survey. The results revealed that adolescents who had higher levels of antagonism, disinhibition, and negative affectivity traits had lower levels of mindfulness, which led to problem gambling. Thus, adolescents with these maladaptive traits may be less aware of their present thoughts and feelings and have more difficulty regulating their attention. These adolescents may have more trouble understanding why they engage in risky behaviours like gambling. They may also gamble to escape negative emotions. This helps explain why they are more prone to develop problem gambling.

What the researchers did

The researchers recruited 326 adolescent gamblers from betting and bingo halls in five big cities in Italy. The participants completed questionnaires about their gambling, mindfulness, and maladaptive personality traits.

To measure personality traits, the researchers used the Personality Inventory for DSM-5-Brief Form (PID-5-BF). They used the version for children. The PID-5-BF assessed five personality domains: negative affectivity, detachment, antagonism, disinhibition, and psychoticism. To assess gambling severity, they used the South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS). The SOGS was used to assess participants' type of gambling. It also assessed frequency and behaviours related to gambling. To measure mindfulness, the

researchers used the Child and Adolescent Mindfulness Measure (CAMM). It assessed participants' awareness of present moment and their responses to thoughts and feelings.

What the researchers found

The results revealed that problem gambling was related to lower levels of mindfulness. Problem gambling was also related to three maladaptive personality traits: antagonism, disinhibition, and negative affectivity. Lower levels of mindfulness were related to all maladaptive traits except for detachment.

The researchers tested three models involving antagonism, disinhibition, and negative affectivity. Participants who had higher levels of these three traits had lower levels of mindfulness, leading to problem gambling. Thus, adolescents with these maladaptive traits may be prone to experience trouble with regulating attention. They may lack an awareness of their present feelings and thoughts to help understand them why they engage in risky behaviours like gambling. They may also gamble to escape negative emotions. As a result, they may be more prone to develop problem gambling.

How you can use this research

This research could be used by treatment and prevention service providers. They could integrate mindfulness into treatment and prevention programs for adolescents. Future research could examine whether the skills of mindfulness could help reduce the risk of problem gambling. Longitudinal research designs could explore the relationships between personality traits, mindfulness, and problem gambling over time.

About the researchers

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