

Acculturative stress and problem gambling among immigrants in Australia

What this research is about

Many immigrants experience acculturative stress. This term refers to the challenges of adapting to a new culture, including language barriers, discrimination, social isolation, and conflicts between cultural values. These challenges may place immigrants at greater risk of problem gambling, particularly when gambling is used to cope with distress or feelings of isolation. Past studies have linked acculturative stress to a higher risk of problem gambling, but the psychological processes underlying this relationship are not fully understood.

In this study, the researchers looked at the extent to which emotion regulation difficulties and escape motivation explain the link between acculturative stress and problem gambling. Emotion regulation difficulties refer to difficulties with understanding, managing, and responding to one's emotions. Escape motivation refers to beliefs that gambling can help relieve or avoid negative emotions.

What the researchers did

The researchers carried out an online survey with 70 first- and second-generation adult immigrants living in Australia who had gambled at least once in the past year. Participants were recruited through social media platforms and completed an online survey.

The online survey included the following self-report measures:

- Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) to assess gambling behaviour and problems in the past year.

What you need to know

Immigrants often experience acculturative stress, which has been linked to a higher risk of problem gambling. In this study, the researchers looked at the extent to which emotion regulation difficulties and beliefs that gambling can help escape negative emotions explain the relationship between acculturative stress and problem gambling. The researchers recruited 70 first- or second-generation immigrants living in Australia who had gambled at least once in the past year. Participants completed an online survey.

The researchers found that while acculturative stress initially predicted more severe problem gambling, this relationship weakened after accounting for emotion dysregulation. When escape motives were further considered, they became the strongest predictor of problem gambling. In other words, acculturative stress may contribute to problem gambling by increasing emotion regulation difficulties, which, in turn, foster the beliefs that gambling can help escape negative emotions.

The findings can inform problem gambling prevention and intervention efforts for immigrant populations. These could address acculturative stress, emotion regulation difficulties, and escape motives for gambling.

- Emotion Regulation Scale – Short Form (DERS-SF) to assess emotion dysregulation (i.e., an inability to understand and manage one's emotional responses).

- Gambling Outcome Expectancies Scale (GOES) to assess motives for gambling. This study focused on escape motives.
- Social, Attitudinal, Familial, and Environmental Acculturative Stress Scale – Short Form (SAFE-13) to assess acculturative stress.

What the researchers found

Participants ranged in age from 18 to 88 years old. The average age was about 33 years old. There were 39 men (55.7%) and 31 women (44.3%). Most participants reported they had immigrated from Asia (42.9%), Oceania (34.3%), or Europe (12.9%). Most participants identified as first-generation immigrants (64.3%). The most common gambling activities were bingo/raffle tickets (50%), playing cards for money (50%), casino table games (48.6%), and sports betting (42.9%).

According to the PGSI, over half of the participants experienced no problem gambling (37.1%) or low-risk gambling (15.7%). But almost half of the participants were at moderate risk (24.3%) or high risk of problem gambling (22.9%).

The researchers found that acculturative stress, emotion dysregulation, escape motives for gambling, and problem gambling were all positively related to one another. In other words, participants who reported greater acculturative stress tended to have more difficulties with regulating their emotions, stronger motivation to gamble to escape negative feelings, and more severe problem gambling.

Acculturative stress on its own predicted more severe problem gambling. When emotion dysregulation was considered, the relationship between acculturative stress and problem gambling weakened. Finally, the researchers added escape motives to the model. In this final model, escape motives were the strongest predictor of more severe problem gambling, while acculturative stress and emotion dysregulation were no longer significant predictors.

Overall, the results suggest that acculturative stress may contribute to problem gambling by increasing emotion regulation difficulties. This, in turn, fosters

the beliefs that gambling can help escape negative emotions.

How you can use this research

The findings can be used to develop problem gambling prevention and intervention programs for immigrant populations. Programs can address acculturative stress, emotion regulation difficulties, and reliance on gambling as a way to escape distress. The findings can inform immigrant support services, policy makers, clinicians, and researchers.

About the researchers

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