

# research snapshot

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## Emotional and social support as a protective factor for gambling-related problems among young adult men

### What this research is about

Predictive factors reflect traits or exposures that influence the likelihood of problem gambling. Predictive factors include both risk and protective factors. Risk factors raise the risk of experiencing gambling-related problems. Examples include being male, being young, and having lower socio-economic status. In contrast, protective factors lower the risk. One example of protective factors is social support. Social support refers to the psychological and material resources provided by one's social network.

There are not many longitudinal studies that examine the role of social support in gambling behaviour and gambling-related problems. In this study, the researchers examined the relationship between gambling behaviour, gambling-related problems, and perceived emotional and social support among young adult men who gamble over a period of two years.

### What the researchers did

The researchers used data from the Munich Leisure-time Study (MLS). The MLS is an online-based longitudinal cohort study of young adult men who gamble. The researchers used data collected at three different timepoints from the MLS: at baseline in 2014 (T0), at 12 months later (T1), and at another 12 months after that (T2). Data on the following factors were collected and analyzed:

- Gambling frequency (gambling days per month).
- Gambling intensity (hours spent gambling per gambling day).
- Gambling-related problems were assessed using "Stinchfield criteria." This tool was translated into German and adapted to fit the DSM-5.

### What you need to know

Young male adults are at greater risk for gambling-related problems. Social support can help protect them from developing gambling-related problems. This study examined the relationship between gambling behaviour, gambling-related problems, and perceived emotional and social support (PESS) among young adult men over two years. The sample consisted of 169 young adult men between 18 and 25 years. Participants with low levels of PESS were less likely than those with high PESS to have a partner. They also had higher scores on depression and anxiety. Additionally, they gambled less frequently but gambled more hours per day when they did gamble. Across the 169 participants, those with higher levels of PESS had improved gambling disorder scores over time (i.e., fewer gambling problems). The results of the within-participant analysis found that over time, participants with higher PESS had fewer gambling-related problems, gambled less frequently, and gambled fewer hours than they did at baseline.

- Perceived emotional and social support (PESS) was assessed using the German version of the ENRICH social Support Instrument (ESSI). A cut-off score of 18 or lower was considered to indicate low PESS.
- Socio-demographic information and substance use (e.g., partnership status, migration background, and alcohol and tobacco use).
- Anxiety and depression were measured using the Symptom Checklist-90-revised.

Participants were recruited through two methods: (1) random sampling of 25,000 men between 18 and 25

years from the Munich citizen's registry, and (2) Facebook ads targeted to people who listed gambling as an interest on their profile. Potential participants completed a screening. Participants were then invited to participate in the MLS if they (1) met at least one criterion for gambling disorder; (2) scored positively on the Lie-Bet questionnaire; or (3) gambled once a week. The total sample size was 169. This included 110 participants from the Munich citizens' registry and 63 participants recruited through Facebook.

The researchers conducted a between-participant analysis and a within-participant analysis. For the between-participant analysis, they examined outcomes in all participants at the same time. For the within-participant analysis, they compared outcomes for the same person at different time points.

### What the researchers found

At T0, on average, participants gambled 7 days per month and spent 2.2 hours per gambling day. At T0, 23 participants (13.6%) had gambling disorder. Only 38 participants (22.5%) reported low PESS at T0. Participants with low levels of PESS were less likely than those with high PESS to have a partner. They also had higher scores on depression and anxiety. Additionally, they gambled less frequently but gambled more hours per day when they did gamble.

The results from the between-participant analysis found that participants with higher levels of PESS had improved gambling disorder scores over time (i.e., fewer gambling-related problems). The results of the within-participant analysis found that over time, participants with higher PESS had fewer gambling-related problems, gambled less frequently, and gambled fewer hours than they did at T0.

### How you can use this research

This study can inform treatment and prevention strategies. A suggestion is for practitioners to develop and strengthen the social resources of people with gambling-related problems.

### About the researchers

**Andreas M. Bickl, Ludwig Kraus, Johanna K. Loy, and Larissa Schwarzkopf** are affiliated with IFT Institut Für

Therapieforschung in Munich, Germany. Ludwig Kraus is also affiliated with the Institute of Psychology, ELTE, at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest, Hungary, and with the Department of Public Health Sciences in the Centre for Social Research on Alcohol and Drugs at Stockholm University in Stockholm, Sweden. Larissa Schwarzkopf is also affiliated with the Department of Psychiatry and Psychotherapy at the Klinikum der Universität München in Munich, Germany. **Peter Kriwy** is affiliated with the Institute of Sociology at Chemnitz University of Technology in Chemnitz, Germany. **Pawel Slecza** is affiliated with the German University of Health and Sport in Ismaning, Germany. For more information about this study, please contact Ludwig Kraus at [kraus@ift.de](mailto:kraus@ift.de).

### Citation

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