

research snapshot

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Escape outcome expectancies help explain the stress–problem gambling relationship

What this research is about

Stress is a risk factor for developing and maintaining problem gambling. But there is not much research on the psychological processes that support this relationship. Escape from stress is one potential outcome expectancy of gambling. An outcome expectancy is an outcome that people expect to occur if they engage in a behaviour, such as gambling. It is possible that gambling is used to cope with or escape from stress. But gambling can also become a source of stress because of its negative consequences. This reinforces the need to gamble to escape stress, thus creating a cycle.

The purpose of this study was to examine the links between stress, maladaptive coping, problem gambling, and escape outcome expectancies. Maladaptive coping is a coping style that reflects how people generally respond to stress. With maladaptive coping, people typically deal with stress by engaging in avoidance behaviours, such as denial, self-blame, and self-distraction.

What the researchers did

The researchers recruited participants through an online crowd sourcing service. Participants completed an online anonymous survey. To be eligible for the study, participants had to be at least 18 years old and live in Australia. A total of 240 participants completed the online survey. The survey included the following measures:

- The stress subscale from the Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS-21).
- The Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI). A score of 0 indicates non-problem gambling, and a score of 1–4 indicates low-risk gambling. A score

What you need to know

Stress is a risk factor for developing and maintaining problem gambling. People may gamble to escape from stress. Escape outcome expectancies refer to people's expectations that gambling can help them escape from stress. The purpose of this study was to examine the links between stress, maladaptive coping, problem gambling, and escape outcome expectancies. The researchers recruited 240 Australians who were at least 18 years old through an online crowd sourcing site. Participants completed an online survey.

The findings show that escape outcome expectancies help explain the process through which stress leads to problem gambling. In other words, people who experience greater stress and expect that gambling can help them escape stress are more likely to experience problem gambling. The relationship between stress and escape outcome expectancies is stronger when maladaptive coping is high.

of 5–7 indicates moderate risk, while a score of 8+ indicates problem gambling.

- Four items from the *escape* subscale of the Gambling Outcome Expectancies Scale (GOES).
- The Brief Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced (Brief COPE), which assesses coping styles.

What the researchers found

About half of the participants were female (49.8%). On average, participants were 33 years old. Most

participants were employed (65%). About two-fifths of the participants scored as non-problem gambling (43%). About 10% had low-risk gambling. The remaining participants scored in the range of moderate-risk gambling to problem gambling.

The researchers did not find any differences in problem gambling severity by gender. They also did not find any differences in escape outcome expectancies by gender. But participants who were older were more likely to have escape outcome expectancies. They were also more likely to have more severe gambling problems.

The researchers found that escape outcome expectancies help explain the process through which stress leads to problem gambling. Participants who experienced greater stress and expected that gambling could help them escape stress were more likely to experience problem gambling.

Also, the researchers found that the relationship between stress and escape outcome expectancies was stronger when maladaptive coping was high. For participants who often relied on maladaptive coping, experiences of stress were associated with the expectation that gambling could help them escape stress. This was not observed among participants with low or moderate levels of maladaptive coping.

Overall, this means that escape outcome expectancies may be a mechanism that impacts the stress–problem gambling relationship. In addition, this relationship depends on whether people tend to rely on maladaptive coping.

How you can use this research

Practitioners can use this research to tailor interventions for problem gambling based on coping style and escape outcome expectancies.

About the researchers

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Citation

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