Adolescents with good coping skills and consistent parenting have less gambling problems, if they do not gamble frequently

What this research is about

Adolescent gambling is common in many countries. In recent years, a higher rate of problem gambling has been reported for adolescents than adults. Research indicates that several factors may be linked to adolescent problem gambling. These factors include having a positive attitude about gambling and gambling often. Poor coping skills with a tendency to avoid, rather than focus on solving, problems may be linked to gambling problems. Poor parenting styles that involve a lack of communication and inconsistent discipline may also be related to problem gambling in adolescents. The researchers investigated how gambling attitudes, coping strategies, gambling involvement, and parenting styles might act together to encourage or protect from problem gambling among high school students in Australia. They explored whether positive attitudes about gambling led to more gambling problems. The research team also looked at whether effective coping skills and parenting styles protected adolescents from developing gambling problems.

What the researcher did

The research team recruited 240 male and 371 female students, aged 12 to 18 years, from 17 high schools across the state of Victoria in Australia. The students completed a survey, either on paper or online. The survey measured how often they gambled on a number of gambling activities (e.g., scratch tickets/lottery, sports betting, casino table games). The students were also asked about their gambling attitudes, coping strategies, and experiences with parenting styles. Adaptive coping strategies involve focusing on solving the problems at hand. Non-productive coping strategies involve a tendency to avoid, rather than solve, the problems.

What you need to know

Adolescent gambling is common in many countries. The research team investigated how gambling attitudes, gambling involvement, coping strategies, and parenting styles might act together to encourage or protect from problem gambling. The researchers recruited 612 high school students from Victoria, Australia, to complete a survey. Students who had positive gambling attitudes gambled more often and, thus, were more likely to have gambling problems. Students who had adaptive coping strategies and consistent parenting discipline were less likely to develop gambling problems if they did not gamble often. Adaptive coping strategies involve focusing on solving the problems at hand. Child and youth counsellors can use this research to create effective early interventions. Programs to limit gambling involvement may help adolescents who have poor coping skills or are exposed to inconsistent parenting practices.
What the researcher found

Over two-thirds of high school students had gambled in the past year. The most common gambling activities were scratch/lottery tickets and private card games. The majority of students were non-problem gamblers, with 4.4% being at-risk and 0.7% being problem gamblers.

Students who had more positive gambling attitudes gambled more often and, thus, were more likely to have gambling problems. Further, frequent gamblers reported more severe gambling problems. Students who had adaptive coping strategies and who received consistent discipline from their parents were less likely to develop gambling problems if they gambled occasionally. However, if students were frequent gamblers, adaptive coping strategies and consistent parenting discipline did not protect them from gambling problems.

The relationship between gambling involvement and problem gambling was not affected by the use of non-productive coping strategies. Parental involvement and use of positive reinforcement also did not have an effect.

How you can use this research

Child and youth counsellors can use this research to create effective early intervention initiatives. Programs to limit gambling involvement may help students who have poor coping skills or are subject to poor parenting. Future studies should follow adolescents over a long period of time to identify factors that contribute to or protect adolescents from the development of problem gambling.

About the Researcher

Ramsay W. Dixon, George J. Youssef, and Murat Yücel all work at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia, as a Research Assistant, Research Fellow, and Professor, respectively. Penelope Hasking is an Associate Professor at Curtin University in Perth, Australia. Alun C. Jackson is a Professor at the University of Melbourne in Australia, and Nicki A. Dowling is an Associate Professor at Deakin University in Victoria, Australia.

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