

knowledge snapshot



Attachment and gambling: A systematic review

What this article is about

Early experiences with caregivers, or attachment figures, affect attachment styles. Attachment styles affect how an people view themselves and others, and affects their relationships. A secure attachment style means that the person thinks of themselves as someone worthy of love and respect, and is able to rely on other people. Someone who is insecurely attached does not view themselves as loveable or worthy and thinks that other people are not safe. Attachment styles affect how people regulate their emotions. Since addictions are characterized by difficulty in regulating emotions, researchers have been examining the role of attachment style in addictions. The aim of this article was to review the available research studies that examined attachment styles and gambling.

What was done?

The authors searched the databases Scopus, PubMed, PsycInfo, and Web of Science. The search strategy looked for relevant studies on attachment and gambling. The inclusion criteria were as follows: 1) original research that collected quantitative data; 2) written in English; 3) published in a peer-reviewed journal; 4) examined how attachment and gambling are related; and 5) used reliable measures to assess attachment and gambling.

A total of 266 articles were identified. After removing duplicates, the authors reviewed the titles and abstracts of 146 articles to determine whether they met the eligibility criteria. Finally, a total of 13 articles were included in the systematic review.

The authors then examined each article for the following information: authors and year it was

Why is this article important?

Attachment styles refer to the ways that people think of themselves and how they relate to other people. Attachment styles affect how we regulate our emotions. People with gambling disorder often struggle to regulate their emotions in a healthy way. So, researchers have been investigating whether attachment styles play a role in gambling disorder. The authors searched for empirical studies on this topic. They identified 13 studies and summarized the results. Many of the studies linked an insecure attachment style to gambling disorder. Other studies demonstrated that having a secure attachment style is protective against gambling disorder.

published, country, study design, participant characteristics, measures used to assess attachment and gambling, how attachment was conceptualized, and results. The authors also assessed each article's quality. The quality of one article was in the medium range, and the rest had a high quality. Thus, there was a low risk of bias among the included articles.

What you need to know

Six studies were from Italy, two were from Spain, one included participants from both England and Portugal, and one study each from the US, Canada, Turkey, and England. Various measures were used to assess gambling, including the South Oaks Gambling Screen-Revised for Adolescents, the South Oaks Gambling Screen, and the DSM-5 diagnostic criteria for gambling disorder. Attachment was also measured using eight different measures. The most common measures used included the Inventory of Parent and

Peer Attachment, the Experiences in Close Relationships-Revised questionnaire, and the Adolescent Attachment Questionnaire.

Adolescents/young adults

Two studies used a trait model to conceptualize attachment (i.e., attachment as a stable trait). These studies found that insecure attachment was related to gambling. Essentially, adolescents with or who were at risk for gambling problems displayed higher levels of insecure attachment than non-gambling adolescents. Five studies examined attachment to parents in adolescents. The three studies that examined attachment to parents did not find a relationship with gambling. However, one study that contrasted attachment to mothers with attachment to fathers found that attachment to fathers was negatively related to gambling disorder. Two studies that examined peer attachment and gambling in adolescents did not find a relationship between these factors.

Adults

Two studies examined the trait model of anxiety and its relationship to gambling in adults. While one study found that adults with gambling disorder had lower levels of secure attachment style, another study did not find this relationship. One study examined attachment to parents in adults who gambled. This study found that people with pathological gambling trusted their parents less than people without gambling problems. The same study also examined attachment to peers and found that people with pathological gambling communicated less with peers. Four studies examined attachment to partners. Three found evidence that insecure attachment to partners was associated with gambling.

Mediators

The authors found several factors that help explain how attachment affects gambling. These factors included emotion-focused coping, sensation-seeking, and difficulty in identifying emotions. The identified factors depended on how attachment was examined (i.e., as a stable trait or being context specific) and the relationship under study (e.g., parents, partners, or peers). Overall, attachment styles appear to influence

how people regulate their emotions and how they cope, which in turn influence gambling behaviours.

Who is it intended for?

This research could be useful for gambling researchers and clinicians interested in the effects of attachment on gambling. This review shows that having a secure attachment can protect someone from developing gambling disorder, while having an insecure attachment can leave someone vulnerable to disordered gambling behaviours.

About the researchers

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