What this research is about

Various factors affect the development of gambling problems, including the rapid rise of online gambling and ease of access to gambling activities. Motives for engaging in gambling behaviour (e.g., winning, for fun, and as a distraction) are also important elements for understanding why people may eventually develop gambling problems.

Extensive research suggests that gambling motives may affect the severity of one’s gambling problems. One study found that gambling to win money and to escape negative emotions predicted both current gambling problems and the development of future gambling problems. Another study found that positive expectations of gambling and gambling to escape predicted future gambling problems.

One factor that may pose a risk for developing gambling problems is the frustration of psychological needs. According to the basic psychological needs theory (BPNT), satisfaction of basic psychological needs leads to improved well-being and personal growth. These needs include autonomy (e.g., having choices), competence (e.g., confidence in one’s abilities), and relatedness (e.g., being connected to others). The BPNT posits that if these needs are not met (i.e., the needs are frustrated), it can lead to increased psychological distress. Additionally, people may develop poor coping strategies, such as gambling.

Thus, it is important to examine the long-term effects of gambling motives and how they affect the development of problem gambling. In this study, the researchers analyzed the associations between various gambling motives and problem gambling over time. They also examined the role of need frustration.

What you need to know

Research suggests that gambling motives are related to the development and maintenance of problem gambling. Therefore, it is critical to investigate the long-term effects of gambling motives. In this study, the researchers surveyed a large group of Finnish adults over three time points. They examined the associations between gambling motives (i.e., escape, money, competition, excitement, social reasons, and competence) and gambling problems over time. The researchers also looked at the influence of the frustration of basic psychological needs. This refers to when people’s needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness are not met.

The researchers found that all gambling motives predicted gambling problems over time. But only the motives to win money, to escape, and to compete predicted gambling problems over time after taking into account other factors. Moreover, need frustration had an influence on the effect of money motive: people who gambled to win money and whose psychological needs were not met had more severe gambling problems.

What the researchers did

The researchers used a longitudinal study design. They surveyed 1,022 adults from Mainland Finland via a panel of Norstat, a European data collection company. Participants were surveyed at three time points over a span of 18 months from 2021 to 2022.

The researchers evaluated various gambling motives (i.e., to escape, for money, competition, excitement,
social reasons, and competence). Problem gambling was assessed using the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI). Participants were also asked if they engaged in onshore and offshore gambling. Onshore gambling referred to gambling with Veikkaus Oy, the state-owned monopoly gambling operator in Finland. Offshore gambling referred to gambling on foreign sites or games offered by Paf. Paf is the gambling operator that provides online games and gambling opportunities on ships sailing between Finland and Sweden or Estonia. Psychological distress was assessed using the Mental Health Inventory (MHI-5). Need frustration was assessed at the first time point using the Basic Psychological Need Satisfaction and Frustration Scale (BPNSFS).

**What the researchers found**
The researchers found that all gambling motives predicted gambling problems over time. That is, people who endorsed these motives more often also had higher scores on the PGSI. However, only motives to win money, to escape, and to compete predicted gambling problems over time after taking into account other factors (need frustration, offshore gambling, income, etc.). Need frustration, having a lower education, and engaging with offshore gambling also predicted gambling problems over time.

Need frustration has an influence on the effect of money motive. That is, people who gambled to win money had more severe gambling problems, especially when their basic psychological needs were frustrated. These results are in line with previous research suggesting that different gambling motives (winning, excitement, etc.) and frustration of the basic psychological needs are important factors affecting gambling behaviours.

**How you can use this research**
This research can be used by gambling researchers and treatment providers. The findings can help develop treatment for problem gambling. Treatment programs can help people reflect on how their gambling motives may affect the development and maintenance of gambling problems. The results also emphasize the importance of evaluating and addressing a person’s psychological needs and how these needs may impact their gambling behaviour.

**About the researchers**
Heli Hagfors, Ilkka Vuorinen, Iina Savolainen, and Atte Oksanen are affiliated with the Faculty of Social Sciences at Tampere University in Tampere, Finland. For more information about this study, please contact Heli Hagfors at heli.hagfors@tuni.fi.

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