

research snapshot

summarize | mobilize



The relationships between life history strategies, protective gambling beliefs, and responsible gambling behaviours

What this research is about

According to the Life History Theory in psychology (LHT-P), individual differences in personality traits and behaviours can be explained by life history (LH) strategies. The theory proposes a fast-slow continuum of LH strategies. From an evolutionary perspective, humans living in an unsafe and unstable environment tend to adopt fast LH strategies that emphasize reproduction. Those living in a safer and more stable environment tend to use slow LH strategies that emphasize personal growth and long-term return.

Recent research suggests that people with slower LH strategies tend to be more emotionally stable and show self-control. Their behaviours are deliberate and occur after careful consideration. Further, they are more likely to be future-oriented. In contrast, people with faster LH strategies are more likely to value immediate rewards over long-term benefits. They tend to take risks and act impulsively. These traits are typically seen in people with gambling disorder.

Few studies have looked at gambling from a life history perspective. This study aimed to fill the research gap by examining the relationships between LH strategies, protective gambling beliefs, and responsible gambling behaviours. Here, protective gambling beliefs refer to thoughts and attitudes that protect people from gambling problems. Responsible gambling behaviours refer to positive play behaviours, including gambling within one's limits.

What the researchers did

The researchers recruited Chinese adults living in Macao, China to participate in a telephone survey. Potential participants were randomly selected from a local household phonebook. For households with

What you need to know

Life history (LH) strategies have been used to explain individual differences in personality traits and behaviours, such as risk-taking. This study aimed to extend previous research on LH strategies. It examined the links between LH strategies, protective gambling beliefs, and responsible gambling behaviours. A total of 697 Chinese adults living in Macao participated in a telephone survey. Overall, people with slower LH strategies reported more protective gambling beliefs and responsible gambling behaviours. Protective gambling beliefs partially explained the relationship between LH strategies and responsible gambling behaviours. People with slower LH strategies were more likely to endorse protective gambling beliefs. This, in turn, helped to foster responsible gambling behaviours.

more than one eligible participant, the person with the most recent birthday was invited to participate.

A total of 697 participants responded to the survey. Around 60% were women and 40% were men. Most participants had completed high school education or above (67%). Half of the participants worked full-time (52%) and one-quarter had retired (24%). The rest were homemakers, students, unemployed, worked part-time, or did not report their employment status. Ninety-four participants (13%) had gambled in the last year. Around 8.5% of these participants had probable gambling disorder according to the DSM-5 criteria.

The survey included the following measures:

- The Mini-K Scale to assess a fast-slow continuum of LH strategies. The Mini-K measures behavioural

and psychological aspects (e.g., insight, planning and control; social contact and support). Higher scores indicate use of slower LH strategies.

- The Protective Gambling Beliefs Scale to assess gambling beliefs that protect against gambling problems (e.g., “Gambling is a terrible way to make money”). The researchers adapted the scale for use with both people who gamble and those who do not gamble.
- The Positive Play Scale-Behaviour Subscale to assess responsible gambling behaviours. This subscale measures two aspects: (1) honesty and control (e.g., being honest with family and friends about the amount of money spent gambling); and (2) pre-commitment (e.g., considering how much one is willing to lose before gambling).
- The 9-item diagnostic criteria for gambling disorder in the DSM-5. Endorsing 4 or more criteria indicates probable gambling disorder.
- Demographic questions including gender, age, educational level, and job status.

What the researchers found

Participants with slower LH strategies reported more protective gambling beliefs and responsible gambling behaviours. LH strategies were not associated with gambling disorder symptoms. Thus, adopting faster LH strategies did not mean a person was more likely to develop gambling disorder. However, participants with more gambling disorder symptoms reported less protective gambling beliefs. They also showed less responsible gambling behaviours.

The researchers further found that protective gambling beliefs were associated with responsible gambling behaviours. Protective gambling beliefs also partially explained the relationship between LH strategies and responsible gambling behaviours. People with slower LH strategies were more likely to endorse protective gambling beliefs. This, in turn, helped to foster responsible gambling behaviours.

How you can use this research

The researchers suggested that the characteristics of community may be used as proxy of LH strategies to guide responsible gambling policy. People living in

community with low neighbourhood safety and quality may be more likely to show traits of faster LH strategies. These traits may influence their acceptance of different types of responsible gambling tools. There is also a need to promote protective gambling beliefs in people who gamble and those who have not yet started to gamble. Future studies could examine other factors that influence the relationship between LH strategies and responsible gambling behaviours.

About the researchers

Mu He, Juliet Honglei Chen, Anise M. S. Wu, and Kwok Kit Tong are affiliated with the Department of Psychology at the University of Macau in Macao, China. Juliet Honglei Chen and Anise Wu are also with the Centre for Cognitive and Brain Sciences, Institute of Collaborative Innovation at the University of Macau. For more information about this study, please contact Kwok Kit Tong at kktong@um.edu.mo.

Citation

He, M., Chen, J. H., Wu, A. M. S., & Tong, K. K. (2022). Fast or slow: Applying life history strategies to responsible gambling adherence. *International Gambling Studies*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14459795.2022.2035422>

Study funding

This study was supported by two Research Grants of the University of Macau.

About Greo

Greo has partnered with the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University to produce Research Snapshots. Greo is an independent knowledge translation and exchange organization with almost two decades of international experience in generating, synthesizing, and mobilizing research into action across the health and wellbeing sectors. Greo helps organizations improve their strategies, policies, and practices by harnessing the power of evidence and stakeholder insight.

Learn more about Greo by visiting greo.ca or emailing info@greo.ca.

