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How expectations about the effects of alcohol impact gambling behaviour among people who gamble frequently

What this research is about

People's expectations about the effects of alcohol might impact their gambling behaviour. The alcohol outcome expectancy theory states that a person's experience with alcohol informs their expectations and influences future behaviour. The purpose of this study was to examine how people who gamble frequently expect alcohol use to affect their gambling.

What the researchers did

The researchers recruited participants through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk). Participants had to be U.S. residents, be at least 18 years old, and gamble at least once per week.

A total of 502 people provided consent to participate in the study. But 15 did not pass the manipulation checks used to ensure people were paying attention when completing the survey. Another 15 were excluded because they either provided extreme amounts on daily money wagered or inconsistent responses. The final dataset included responses from 472 people.

The survey asked participants about the following:

- Demographics, such as age and gender.
- Current gambling behaviour: Four questions were asked, including (1) how many days per week they currently gamble; (2) how many hours on a gambling day they typically gamble; (3) how much money they wager on an average gambling day; and (4) gambling activities in the past 12 months.
- Alcohol use: Four questions were asked, including (1) whether participants ever drank alcohol; (2) how many days in the past month that they drank alcohol; (3) what percent of the time they drank

What you need to know

People's expectations about the effects of alcohol might impact their gambling behaviour. The purpose of this study was to examine how people who gamble frequently expect alcohol use to affect their gambling. A total of 472 participants completed an online survey. Participants had to be U.S. residents, at least 18 years old, and gamble at least once per week. The findings show that most participants (79%) drank alcohol while gambling in the past month. Most participants believed that drinking while gambling allowed them to be more focused (59%), have greater skills (59%), and enjoy their gambling experience more (57%). Participants' expectancies regarding alcohol's effects on gambling could be classified as positive or negative. Positive expectancies included beliefs that they would be more focused, win more, and have more luck while gambling under the influence of alcohol. Negative expectancies included beliefs that gambling under the influence of alcohol would cause loss of control and loss of alertness. Both types of expectancies were linked to greater alcohol use and gambling problems. Both types were also linked to more time spent drinking while gambling. But positive expectancies had a stronger influence on the percentage of time spent drinking alcohol while gambling.

- alcohol while gambling in the past month; and (4) how many standard alcoholic drinks they typically have while gambling.
- Alcohol expectancies while gambling was assessed using a 13-item scale based on the Alcohol

Expectancy Questionnaire and the Gamblers' Beliefs Questionnaire.

- The Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) was used to assess hazardous drinking habits. Participants were considered at high risk for alcohol use disorder if they scored 15 or higher.
- The Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) was used to assess gambling problems. Participants were considered at high risk for gambling disorder if they scored 8 points or higher.

What the researchers found

On average, participants were 35 years old. Most participants were men (58%), white (95%), heterosexual (67%), and married (86%). Most had at least a bachelor's degree (96%). Participants gambled an average of 4 days per week. Most participants (94%) were at high risk for gambling disorder. Most participants (71%) were at moderate to high risk for alcohol use disorder.

Most participants (81%) reported alcohol use. On average, participants drank alcohol 14 days per month. About 79% drank alcohol while gambling in the past month. These people spent an average of 48% of the time drinking while gambling.

Most participants believed that drinking alcohol while gambling allowed them to be more focused (59%), have greater skills (59%), and enjoy their gambling experience more (57%). Over half of participants said that they felt calmer (56%) and that they won more (55%) when gambling under the influence of alcohol.

Participants' expectancies regarding alcohol's effects on gambling could be classified as positive or negative. Positive expectancies included beliefs that they would be more focused, have greater skills, win more, and have more luck while gambling under the influence of alcohol. Negative expectancies included beliefs that gambling under the influence of alcohol would cause loss of control, loss of alertness, and anxiety. Overall, participants held more positive expectancies than negative expectancies.

Both types of expectancies were linked to more severe alcohol use and gambling problems. Both types

of expectancies were also linked to greater time spent gambling while under the influence of alcohol. But compared to those with more negative expectancies, those with more positive expectancies reported more frequent alcohol use while gambling. In particular, participants who held expectancies of "winning more", "more luck", "loss of control", and "loss of alertness" drank more frequently while gambling.

How you can use this research

Clinicians can use this research to screen for and treat both gambling disorder and alcohol use disorder.

About the researchers

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