

research snapshot

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Poor emotional control and impulsive personality traits increase the risk of suicidal thoughts in gambling disorder patients

What this research is about

Gambling disorder (GD) is repetitive gambling behaviour that affects a person's everyday life and causes severe suffering. Impulsive personality traits may make someone more likely to develop GD. Impulsivity is when a person behaves without thinking about the consequences of their actions. People who have GD tend to have impulsive behaviour, especially when they feel negative emotions.

Research suggests that people who have GD are more likely to have problems with emotion regulation (ER). That is, they have more problems controlling their emotions. They often use poor strategies to deal with their emotions, such as suppressing them. People with GD are also more likely to have suicidal thoughts or have attempted suicide. Certain situations may cause people with GD to have suicidal thoughts. These situations include having debts from gambling, relationship problems with friends and family, problems at work or with the law, and mental health issues. It is important to understand how impulsivity and ER problems influence suicidal thoughts in people with GD. This could help when designing programs for people with GD.

In this study, the researchers investigated how impulsive personality traits and ER problems might affect the severity of GD, presence of suicidal thoughts, and comorbid mental health issues in people being treated for GD. Comorbid mental health issues are those that a person experiences at the same time as GD.

What the researchers did

Participants were 249 adults being treated for GD at Bellvitge University Hospital in Barcelona, Spain.

What you need to know

In this study, the researchers investigated how impulsive personality traits and emotion regulation (ER) problems might affect gambling disorder severity, presence of suicidal thoughts, and comorbid mental health issues. Participants were 249 patients being treated for GD. They answered several questionnaires and had face-to-face interviews with clinical psychologists. There were 166 patients with suicidal thoughts and 83 without suicidal thoughts. Patients with suicidal thoughts were older, had GD at a later age and had more severe GD symptoms. People with impulsive traits and problems with emotion regulation had more severe GD and worse mental health. Having worse mental health increased the risk of suicidal thoughts. Treatment service providers can use this research to help patients deal with their ER problems and impulsive personality traits during GD treatment.

Participants completed several questionnaires. The Symptom Checklist-90-Revised questionnaire assessed participants for mental health issues. The UPPS-P Impulsive Behaviour Scale assessed participants for five impulsive personality traits (e.g., acting rashly when feeling negative or positive emotions). The Difficulties in Emotion Regulation Scale assessed participants for six ER problems (e.g., not being aware of or understanding one's emotions). The Emotion Regulation Questionnaire determined if participants tended to use reappraisal or emotion suppression to regulate their emotions. The Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test assessed how often participants drank alcohol and problems caused by

drinking. The Drug Use Disorders Identification Test assessed if they had a drug use problem.

Participants also had two face-to-face interviews with clinical psychologists. During the interviews, the clinical psychologists assessed participants for GD using the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5). They asked participants whether they had suicidal thoughts in the past or recently. The clinical psychologists also asked participants if they had attempted suicide in the past. The researchers sorted participants into two groups. One group had had suicidal thoughts and the other group did not.

What the researchers found

There were 166 participants with suicidal thoughts and 83 without such thoughts. Participants with suicidal thoughts were older and had GD at a later age. They were more likely to have a history of attempted suicide. Participants who had suicidal thoughts were more likely to have comorbid mental health issues and more severe GD. They were also more likely to have impulsive personality traits and emotion regulation problems. There were no differences between the two participant groups in the ER strategies they used to control their emotions. The two groups were just as likely to use reappraisal and emotion suppression to deal with their emotions.

Participants who had more impulsive personality traits had more severe GD. Further, participants who had impulsive traits and problems with emotion regulation had more severe GD and worse mental health. Having worse mental health increased the risk for suicidal thoughts.

How you can use this research

Treatment service providers can use this research to inform how they treat people with GD. For example, their treatment protocol could include helping patients deal with their problems in regulating emotions and impulsive personality traits. By taking this approach, service providers may reduce the risk of suicidal thought in patients with GD.

About the researchers

Núria Mallorquí-Bagué, Teresa Mena-Moreno, Cristina Vintró-Alcaraz, Jéssica Sánchez-González, Fernando Fernández-Aranda, Amparo Del Pino-Gutiérrez, Gemma Mestre-Bach, Neus Aymamí, Mónica Gómez-Peña, José M. Menchón, and Susana Jiménez-Murcia are affiliated with the Department of Psychiatry at the University Hospital of Bellvitge-IDIBELL in Barcelon, Spain. **Roser Granero** is affiliated with Ciber Fisiopatología Obesidad y Nutrición (CIBERObn) at the Instituto Salud Carlos III in Madrid, Spain. For more information about this study, please contact Susana Jiménez-Murcia at sjimenez@bellvitgehospital.cat.

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