

research snapshot

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Exploring the stability of gambling motives over time

What this research is about

Gambling can be placed on a continuum from being relatively harmless to being problematic. Gambling disorder (GD) falls at the end of this continuum. Past research has noted many subtypes of gamblers. For example, the Pathways Model proposes three subtypes of gamblers: 'Behaviourally Conditioned', 'Emotionally Vulnerable', and 'Anti-social Impulsivist'. Other research has examined gamblers' motives or reasons for gambling to better understand the subtypes. The three-factor Gambling Motives Questionnaire (GMQ) yields three unique gambling motives. These include coping (e.g., gamble to reduce negative mood), enhancement (e.g., gamble to increase positive mood), and social (e.g., gamble to socialize with others). Currently, the GMQ has been revised to also include financial motives.

Most studies have examined subtypes of gamblers without considering stability or change over time. Some evidence indicates that people can switch from one subtype to another. Hence, this research aimed to explore whether gambling motives remain stable or change over time. The researchers also explored factors that could be related to the stability or change of gambling motives over time.

What the researchers did

The researchers used data from the 5-year Quinte longitudinal study (QLS) to explore the stability of gambling motives over time. Participants were surveyed every year from 2006-2011. Participants were included in this study if they gambled within the past year and provided at least one reason for gambling at all five years of assessment. A total of 2795 participants were included.

What you need to know

This study examined whether gamblers' motives or reasons for gambling remained stable over time. It also investigated factors associated with the stability of gambling motives. Participants were 2795 adult gamblers. Results revealed that only 22% of individuals remained with their primary motive for gambling over the 5-year period. This suggested that there was a great deal of fluidity across the motive categories. Most gamblers gambled for enhancement and financial reasons. Very few gamblers gambled for social, coping, or other reasons. Being resistant to gambling fallacies and engaging in more gambling activities predicted stability in gambling motives over time.

In the first year at time 1, participants were assessed for their gambling status using the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI). They were categorized into non-problem gamblers, at-risk gamblers, moderate-risk gamblers, and problem gamblers. Those who did not gamble were non-gamblers.

At each time point across the five years, participants were asked to indicate their main reason for gambling. There were seven options to choose from (i.e., excitement, to win money, to escape, to socialize, to support worthy cause, to feel good, and other). Participants were able to choose more than one reason. Their responses were then coded based on the Gambling Motives Questionnaire (GMQ) framework to become Enhancement (ENH), Financial (FIN), Coping (COP), Social (SOC), and Other (OTH).

The survey also asked participants how much money they spent on gambling in a typical month. It assessed gambling fallacies using the Gambling Fallacies Measure (GFM). Examples included having illusions of control, believing one is luckier than others, believing in superstitions, etc. The Alcohol, Smoking and Substance Involvement Screening Test (ASSIST) was used to determine tobacco, alcohol and drug use. Finally, the NEO Personality Inventory—Revised (NEO PI-R) was used to assess five personality domains. For this study, the researchers were interested in the impulsivity facet. Impulsivity refers to a tendency to act rashly without thinking of the consequences, and has been linked to problem gambling.

What the researchers found

Gambling motives varied by sex and age. Females were more likely to endorse all motives except for social motives. In both men and women, most gamblers gambled for enhancement and financial motives. Very few participants gambled for social, coping, or other reasons. Older participants were more likely to gamble for other reasons.

There was a great deal of fluidity across the gambling motives over time. Only 22% remained with their first motive throughout the 5-year assessments. Those who gambled for enhancement reasons (43.9%) showed more stability. About 43% remained in the enhancement motive category for at least the first three years of assessment.

Being resistant to gambling fallacies and engaging in more gambling activities predicted stability of gambling motives. Being male, being resistant to fallacies, and engaging in more gambling activities predicted continuing to remain in the enhancement motive category one year later. Being more impulsive predicted continuing to gamble for financial reasons, but engaging in more gambling activities predicted change from financial motives to other motives.

How you can use this research

This research could be used to enhance treatment and prevention of gambling disorder (GD). Clinicians could screen their clients for reasons why they gamble. Treatment options could include alterations

of motives that may lead to problematic gambling behaviour. Further research is needed to replicate these results regarding the stability and change of gambling motives.

About the researchers

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Keywords

Reasons for gambling, gambling motives, gambling disorder, longitudinal design, group stability

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