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Dark triad personality traits are associated with risky gambling behaviours through perceptions of benefits of risk-taking

What this research is about

Gambling is a form of risk-taking, where people use their resources to bet on an outcome than can vary in terms of payout and loss. Three dark triad personality traits have been linked to a tendency to take risks. They are Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy. Machiavellianism describes skilled manipulation of other people, with a focus on self-interest. Narcissism describes a sense of entitlement and self-centredness. Psychopathy describes a group of affective, interpersonal, and impulsive traits. These traits are marked by persistent antisocial behaviours.

People with high levels of these dark triad traits tend to be sensitive to the upside of risk-taking. Thus, their perceptions of the benefits of risk-taking are heightened. They also tend to be less sensitives to the downside of risk-taking. Each of the three dark triad traits has been linked to increased risk-taking in many domains. These include gambling, substance use, risky sexual behaviour, violence, and financial risk-taking.

Research also suggests strong gender differences in antisocial behaviours and risk-taking. It has been shown that men are more prone to taking risks in many areas compared to women. In this study, the researchers examined the associations between the dark triad personality traits, benefit perceptions of risk-taking, and gambling in a Blackjack task. They explored if benefit perceptions of risk-taking might explain the association between the dark triad personality traits and gambling behaviour.

What the researchers did

The researchers recruited 293 adults through Amazon's Mechanical Turk, an online crowdsourcing platform. Of the participants, 174 identified as men,

What you need to know

Studies have linked individual differences in dark triad personality traits with increased risk-taking. The dark triad traits include Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy. People with high levels of dark triad traits perceive more benefits from risk-taking. In turn, this may motivate risky gambling behaviours. The researchers examined if benefit perceptions of risk-taking might explain the link between the dark triad traits and gambling behaviour in a blackjack task. They found that higher levels of dark triad traits and benefit perceptions of risk-taking were associated with making risky gambling decisions in the blackjack task. The association of the dark triad traits and gambling behaviour was partly explained by benefit perceptions of risk-taking. The association between the dark triad traits and benefit perceptions of risk-taking was stronger for men.

117 as women, and 1 as non-binary. The average age was 37.2 years old. Participants mostly resided in the United States of America (98%). The rest were from Canada and American Samoa. Most of the participants were Caucasian and held at least a college or university degree. The majority were single or married participants. Most participants had an employment, either part-time or full-time. A majority had personal and household income below \$50,000. About one in eight had been charged with a crime in the past.

The researchers used the following measures in their online survey:

- The Short Dark Triad (SD3) is a measure that assesses Machiavellianism, narcissism, and

psychopathy. It has 27 items measured on a 5-point Likert scale.

- The Domain-Specific Risk-Taking Scale (DOSPERT-R) measures risk-taking attitudes. Participants evaluated the expected benefits and risks of 30 risky activities. These activities belonged to six domains: ethical, social, health or safety, recreational, gambling, and investment.
- Blackjack task: Participants were dealt 30 hands of blackjack. Two cards were drawn randomly each time, and the goal was to score as high as possible without going over 21 but with a minimum score of 17. If participants chose to 'hit', they were dealt another card. If participants selected 'hit', it was coded as 1; if participants selected 'stand', it was coded as 0. Only hands where the initial score was 17 or more were included in the analysis. This was because participants had a chance of winning by selecting 'stand' in these hands. Thus, selecting 'hit' was the riskier of the two options.

What the researchers found

Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy were positively associated with benefit perceptions of risk-taking: participants with higher levels of these dark triad traits perceived greater benefits from risk-taking. The dark triad traits and benefit perceptions of risk-taking were also linked with making more risky gambling decisions during the blackjack task.

The association between the dark triad traits and gambling behaviour during the blackjack task was partly explained by benefit perceptions of risk-taking. For both men and women, those with higher levels of the dark triad traits made more risky gambling decisions during the blackjack task if they perceived greater benefits from risk-taking.

The results differed slightly when looking at each of the dark triad traits separately. For men, the link between psychopathy and gambling behaviour during the blackjack task was partly explained by benefit perceptions of risk-taking. This was not seen in women. For both genders, the link between narcissism and gambling behaviour was explained by

benefit perceptions of risk-taking, but not the link between Machiavellianism and gambling behaviour. For men, all three dark triad traits were associated with benefit perceptions of risk-taking. For women, higher levels of psychopathy and narcissism were linked with perceiving greater benefits from risk-taking. But higher levels of Machiavellianism were linked with lower benefit perceptions of risk-taking.

How you can use this research

This research can inform gambling research and intervention.

About the researchers

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