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Coping strategies and gambling among youth

What this research is about

Youth is a critical period for developing many risk behaviours such as gambling. The prevalence of adolescent gambling varies worldwide. Some studies report up to 80% of adolescents have gambled at least once in their life. In Europe, the prevalence is very high: up to 28.1% of youth take part in gambling activities on a regular basis.

Youth are more vulnerable to the adverse effects of gambling compared to adults. This is because youth are in a stage of brain development where decision-making and impulse control are still developing. Impulse control refers to the ability to resist urges or behaviours. Excessive gambling can have severe and long-lasting effects, including effects on mental health and social functioning in this life stage. Studies have found that gambling may be used as a coping strategy among youth.

As there are detrimental effects of gambling on youth's mental and social health, this study looks at the relationship between psychopathological experiences, coping strategies, and problem gambling among youth.

What the researchers did

The researchers recruited high school and university students in Italy to complete an online survey from January to March 2023. The survey was distributed through mailing lists, social networks, and messaging apps using the Google Forms platform. The survey included the following measures:

- Lie/Bet Questionnaire. The researchers used this questionnaire to screen participants for gambling disorder. The Lie/Bet Questionnaire has 2 items.

What you need to know

Gambling poses a significant risk for adolescents and young adults, who are particularly vulnerable to the negative consequences of gambling. This study focuses on risk factors associated with gambling among adolescents and young adults. The participants filled out a questionnaire. The results show that coping strategies play an important role in determining whether youth are at risk of gambling disorder. Furthermore, youth at higher risk are also more likely to engage in other addictive behaviours.

If participants answered 'yes' to one item, they were considered to be at risk.

- The Seven Domains Addiction Scale (7DAS). This scale explores 7 psychological domains identified as determinants for developing and maintaining addictions. The 7 domains are (1) separation anxiety, which is an inability to manage relationships with significant figures in one's life (e.g., family members and friends); (2) affective dysregulation, which is an inability to recognize and communicate emotions; (3) somatoform and psychological dissociation, which refers to a feeling of being disconnected from one's surroundings, feelings, and even sense of identity; (4) traumatic childhood experiences; (5) impulse control; (6) compulsive behaviour and ritualization; and (7) obsessive thoughts.
- Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations (CISS). This scale evaluates 3 coping strategies: (1) task oriented, (2) emotion oriented, and (3) avoidance.

What the researchers found

A total of 326 participants answered the survey. The participants were between the ages of 15 and 34. About 65.5% were female. There were 12 participants who were over 25 years old. Their data were not used in the analyses.

First, the researchers assessed the group of participants with gambling risk (41 participants). They found that participants with a lower level of impulse control were less likely to use task-oriented coping. Those who relied on emotion-oriented coping scored higher on all 7DAS psychological domains. Finally, participants with a lower level of impulse control were more likely to use avoidance-oriented coping.

Then, the researchers looked at the group of participants without gambling risk (273 participants). They found that in this group, participants who relied on emotion-oriented coping scored higher on the 7DAS psychological domains. No associations were found with the other coping styles.

When comparing youth with and without gambling risk, those with gambling risk were more likely to experience dissociative feelings. They also had lower impulse control. Youth with gambling risk reported a high number of risk behaviours in other areas. These included alcohol use, drug uses (heroin and opiates, cocaine, ecstasy, MDMA, cannabis, hashish or marijuana, poppers or inhalants use), and addictive behaviours without substance use (e.g., gaming).

The researchers found that being male predicted gambling risk. Substance-free addictive behaviours and traumatic childhood experiences also placed youth at a higher risk of gambling disorder.

How you can use this research

This research can be used to improve prevention strategies. It suggests that youth gambling prevention should focus on promoting adaptive coping strategies.

About the researchers

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Elena Commodari are affiliated with the Department of Educational Sciences at the University of Catania in Catania, Italy. **Dario Alparone** is affiliated with the Department of Psychology at the University of Rennes in Rennes, France. **Pietro Crescenzo** is affiliated with the Department of Education Sciences, Psychology and Communication Sciences at the University of Bari in Bari, Italy. **Murat Yildirim** is affiliated with the Department of Psychology at Agri Ibrahim Cecen University in Agri, Turkey, and with the Graduate Studies and Research at the Lebanese American University in Beirut, Lebanon. **Francesco Chirico** is affiliated with the Post-Graduate School of Occupational Health at Sacred Heart Catholic University in Rome, Italy, and with the Health Service Department, Italian State Police, Ministry of the Interior in Milan, Italy. For more information about this study, please contact Amelia Rizzo at amrizzo@unime.it.

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