

research snapshot

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Stress strengthens the link between spending behaviour and gaming and gambling problems

What this research is about

Stress can impair people's mental processes and how they make decisions. People who are stressed may engage in buying behaviour as a way to cope with, or escape from, the stressors. Gambling and digital gaming are activities that can help distract from stressors. They also involve spending money. In this study, the researchers examined how stress influences the link between in-game buying behaviour and gaming problems. They also looked at how stress influences the link between spending money on gaming and gambling problems.

What the researchers did

Participants were recruited from an online participant panel administered by Norstat. Norstat is a data provider company. Norstat develops panels by comparing members' profiles to official demographic statistics. If there is a gap between the profiles of their members and the general population, Norstat recruits matching people from the general population.

For this study, Norstat sent an email invitation to potential participants who were adults between 18 and 75 years old. Participants had to live in mainland Finland. A total of 1,533 participants completed the online survey in April 2021. After inspecting the data's quality, the final sample included 1,530 participants.

The researchers compared the demographics of the participants with the Finnish population. They did this by using population census figures provided by Statistics Finland. They found that the sample was like the Finnish population in terms of gender distribution. The age distribution of the sample was also very similar compared to the age distribution of the general population.

What you need to know

People may cope with stress by engaging in buying behaviour. Gambling and digital gaming are activities that people may use to cope with stress. The purpose of this study was to understand how stress influences the link between in-game buying behaviour and gaming problems. This study also examined how stress influences the link between spending money on gambling and gambling problems. A sample of 1530 Finnish adults completed an online survey. The demographics of the sample closely matched the demographics of the Finnish population.

The findings show that people who spend more money on gaming are more likely to have gaming problems. Similarly, those who spend more money on gambling are more likely to have gambling problems. There is no direct relationship between stress and gaming or gambling problems. But there is an indirect relationship. When stress is high, there is a stronger link between in-game buying behaviour and gaming problems. Also, when stress is higher, there is a stronger link between spending money on gambling and gambling problems.

The survey included the following measures:

- Gaming problems were measured using the Ten-Item Internet Gaming Disorder Test (IGDT-10). Gambling problems were measured using the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI).
- Perceived stress was measured using the Perceived Stress Scale.

- In-game buying behaviour was measured by asking if participants had spent money within digital games during the past six months. Higher points indicated higher incidence of in-game buying behaviour.
- Spending money on gambling and gaming were measured by asking how much money participants spent on gambling and gaming in the past month.
- Gambling type and frequency were measured by asking participants how often they engaged in specific activities (e.g., online casinos) in the past six months. Participants were also asked what types of digital games they played during the past six months (e.g., action and adventure games).
- Compulsive internet use was measured using the Compulsive Internet Use scale. It was used as a control variable to account for heavy internet use in general.
- Other control variables were income, age, and gender.

What the researchers found

About half of the participants were men. On average, participants were 47 years old. The most popular forms of gambling among the participants were playing the lottery and raffle games. The most popular form of digital games was problem-solving games. About 22% of participants gambled on online platforms weekly. Most participants (98%) spent between 0 and 99 euros on gambling in the past 30 days. Most participants (99%) spent between 0 and 99 euros on digital gaming in the past 30 days.

Participants with greater in-game buying behaviour were more likely to have gaming problems. Those who spent more money on gambling were more likely to have gambling problems. Compulsive internet use and lower incomes were associated with both gaming and gambling problems. Male gender was associated with gaming problems, whereas younger age was associated with gambling problems.

Stress did not directly influence gaming or gambling problems. But when stress was higher, there was a stronger link between in-game buying behaviour and gaming problems. Also, when stress was higher, there

was a stronger link between spending money on gambling and gambling problems.

How you can use this research

The findings of this study can inform gambling and gaming interventions. Practitioners may want to address spending and buying behaviours, as well as stress, when treating people with gaming and gambling problems.

About the researchers

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