The roles of personality and luck beliefs in lottery gambling

What this research is about

Gambling in state-sponsored lotteries is very common. In some countries, up to 80% of people participate in lottery gambling. Government-encouraged lottery gambling is often most common with people who have lower incomes and lower educational attainment.

Some studies have looked at how personality affects gambling behaviour. Many of these studies look at the five-factor model of personality. This model describes five basic personality traits known as extraversion (e.g., being social and outgoing), openness (e.g., being curious and imaginative), neuroticism (e.g., being anxious and emotionally unstable), conscientiousness (e.g., being organized and reliable), and agreeableness (e.g., being kind and cooperative). Studies have found that different personality traits are related to gambling behaviour. For example, low scores for openness are more likely to correlate with problem gambling. However, past research has mostly focused on problem gambling.

This study tests how personality factors relate to presumed non-problem lottery gambling in the general public. It also looks at how belief in luck and belief in personal luckiness relate to lottery gambling. The researchers predicted that the pattern of associations of personality traits and luck beliefs with presumed-harmless government-encouraged lottery gambling would be dissimilar to patterns of association evident between problem gambling and personality and luck beliefs.

What the researchers did

The researchers recruited participants from an English-language university in Hong Kong. The participants were either current or previous students of the University. Eight-hundred and forty-four people participated (623 women and 221 men). All participants were of Chinese background and between 18 to 59 years old.

Participants filled out an online questionnaire. First, the questionnaire asked them whether they bought government-sponsored lottery tickets in the past year. Next, participants filled out the International English Big-Five Mini-Markers Scale. This scale measures the five big personality traits:

- Extraversion: how social and outgoing a person is
- Openness: how intellectual, imaginative, and curious a person is
- Neuroticism: how anxious and emotionally unstable a person is
- Conscientiousness: how organized and reliable a person is
- Agreeableness: how kind and cooperative a person is

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The researchers found that several personality factors were related to lottery gambling. However, people’s luck beliefs were even more strongly related. Lottery gamblers were more likely to believe that luck influences future events, but were less likely to believe themselves personally lucky. The broad pattern of relationships found for presumed-harmless state-sponsored lottery gambling with both personality and luck beliefs paralleled those found in studies of problem gambling, suggesting implications for public policy in relation to government-encouraged lottery gambling.

What you need to know

Many studies show that certain personality traits (e.g., neuroticism) can be linked to problem gambling. However, no studies have tested how personality traits relate to general lottery gambling. Since lottery gambling is often state-sponsored, presumed harmless, and very common, it is important to understand the factors that affect it. This study looked at how five main personality factors and trait luck beliefs relate to lottery gambling.

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Neuroticism: how anxious, moody, or emotionally unstable a person is

Conscientiousness: how organized, diligent, or reliable someone is

Agreeableness: how kind, compassionate, and cooperative someone is.

The researchers predicted how personality traits would be related to general lottery gambling behaviour. For example, people who score higher for openness may be more likely to understand winning odds. Therefore, they may be less likely to gamble in lotteries, since the odds of winning are low. Similarly, people who score higher for conscientiousness tend to take fewer risks. Therefore, they may also be less likely to gamble.

Finally, the participants completed the Belief in Luck and Luckiness Scale. This scale separately measures belief in luck and belief in personal luckiness. Belief in luck means that someone believes luck is an external force that influences future events. Belief in personal luckiness means that someone believes they are personally lucky or unlucky.

The researchers divided participants into two groups: those who bought lottery tickets in the past year, and those who did not. Then, they predicted lottery buying using personality factors and luck beliefs, controlling for confidence in winning, age and sex.

What the researchers found

Personality
Participants who bought lottery tickets scored higher for extraversion and neuroticism than participants who did not buy tickets. In contrast, they scored lower for openness and agreeableness. There was no difference in conscientiousness between the groups.

Luck Beliefs
Participants who bought lottery tickets had higher belief in luck than participants who did not buy tickets. However, they scored lower for belief in personal luckiness. In other words, lottery gamblers were more likely to believe that luck influences future events, but were less likely to believe they were personally lucky. Luck beliefs were stronger indicators of lottery gambling than the personality traits.

How you can use this research

This is the first study to show that luck beliefs are strongly related to lottery gambling. So, researchers who want to understand why people participate in lotteries could further research luck beliefs.

The patterns of relationships found between state-sponsored lottery gambling are similar to the patterns found for problem gambling. Hence, this study raises questions for future research about the social, economic and public welfare effects of government-encouraged lottery gambling.

About the researchers

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Citation


Study funding

The authors received no funding for this study.

About Gambling Research Exchange (GREO)

Gambling Research Exchange (GREO) has partnered with the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University to produce Research Snapshots. GREO is an independent knowledge translation and exchange organization that aims to eliminate harm from gambling. Our goal is to support evidence-informed decision making in safer gambling policies, standards, and practices. The work we do is intended for researchers, policy makers, gambling regulators and operators, and treatment and prevention service providers. Learn more about GREO by visiting greo.ca or emailing info@greo.ca.