



Does social comparison predict gambling motivations and behaviours?

What this research is about

Gambling is a popular activity. Unfortunately, it can lead to significant negative impacts on people who gamble, their families, and communities. Despite the risks, the psychological factors driving gambling behaviours are not fully understood.

Overconfidence is a cognitive bias that has been associated with increased motivations to gamble. Overconfidence involves two different aspects: overestimation and overplacement. Overestimation refers to when people estimate their ability to be better than their actual performance. Most gambling research has focused on overestimation (i.e., when people think they are more likely to win than they actually are). Overplacement, however, is an understudied topic. It focuses on the social comparison aspect of overconfidence (i.e., when people think they are better than others).

People's self-perception, especially if they see themselves as more capable or luckier than others, can influence whether they take risks or avoid them. For example, if someone believes they are particularly skilled or fortunate, they might be more likely to gamble. In this study, the researchers examined whether overplacement affects gambling motives and behaviours in college students and people with casino gambling experience.

What the researchers did

First, the researchers conducted an online pilot survey of 129 Chinese college students. Since gambling is illegal in China, participants were asked to imagine that they were living in a city with legal gambling when answering the survey. The data of one

What you need to know

Gambling, though widespread, can negatively impact health and other areas of life. Psychological factors like overconfidence, which includes overestimation and overplacement, can affect gambling behaviours. This study examined overplacement (e.g., how people compare their earning abilities and well-being to others) and its influence on gambling behaviours among Chinese college students and people who gambled in a Macau casino. The researchers found that people who perceived themselves as having higher earning abilities than others had more gambling motivations and gambled more frequently. By contrast, those who considered themselves to have better well-being had fewer gambling motivations and gambling issues. This study highlights the importance of understanding how social comparison affects gambling behaviours.

participant were dropped because of inconsistent responses. This left 128 participants for the analysis.

For the main study, the researchers conducted a field survey at a large casino in Macau. Participants were 733 Chinese adults who had gambled in casino in the past year.

The researchers collected data regarding participants' demographics, risk preferences, temporal discounting, gambling motives, gambling behaviours, and problem gambling levels. Overplacement was assessed using two items asking participants to rate their earning ability and well-being compared to other people. For the pilot survey, college students asked to imagine

their monthly income was 10,000 RMB and estimate how much they would spend on gambling. The field survey asked how often they gambled and their average monthly spending on 13 popular games.

What the researchers found

Gender, age, income, and education shaped how likely people were to gamble and develop problematic behaviours. Men were more likely to gamble and experienced problems with gambling than women. People who were middle-aged gambled more frequently and were more likely to face gambling problems than younger or older adults. Additionally, people with higher incomes gambled more often and were more likely to have gambling problems. Those with lower education were also at a higher risk of developing gambling problems.

The researchers found that overplacement played a significant role in gambling behaviours. Participants who saw themselves as better earners reported more gambling motivations and gambled more often. Conversely, those who considered themselves to have better well-being than others had fewer gambling motivations and gambled less frequently. They were also less likely to develop gambling problems.

The findings also highlight the role of risk preferences and temporal discounting in gambling. Participants who took more risks tended to have more gambling motivations and gamble more frequently. Similarly, those who preferred immediate, smaller rewards over delayed, larger ones gambled more often and had an increased risk for gambling problems.

This research underscores the importance of understanding how people compare themselves to others and its impact on gambling. The results suggest that addressing overconfidence could be a key strategy in reducing gambling problems.

How you can use this research

This research can be used by gambling treatment providers, policy makers, and researchers. Treatment providers can use these insights to address clients' perceptions of their abilities and well-being during therapy sessions. Promoting a positive self-image may

help with reducing problematic gambling behaviours. Public health can design public awareness campaigns that highlight the risks of overconfidence. Researchers can further explore how overconfidence in other aspects (e.g., gambling skills) affect behaviours.

About the researchers

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