Cognitive distortions influence gambling involvement over time

What this research is about

Cognitive distortions are false beliefs that gambling outcome can be predicted and controlled by luck or skills. Problem gamblers and pathological gamblers often have more cognitive distortions than non-problem gamblers. This puts problematic gamblers at a higher risk for spending more time and money on gambling. A number of studies found gambling can be influenced by certain cognitive distortions, but less is known about the relationship between cognitive distortions and gambling behaviour over time. Thus, this question arises: Does gambling involvement influence beliefs about gambling over time, or do cognitive distortions influence gambling behaviour? Also, limited research has been done to see if cognitive distortions or gambling behaviours are stable over time. Thus, this research explores the relationship between cognitive distortions and gambling involvement over a 5-year period.

What the researcher did

A total of 1,372 participants were recruited from Alberta, Canada, and were followed up over a 5-year period.

The researchers examined participants’ gambling involvement (e.g., range, frequency, and money spent on gambling) and gambling cognitions (distortions in cognitions). Models were created to investigate the relationship between gambling involvement and cognitions. Analyses were also done to see if participants’ gambling involvement and cognitive distortions are stable over time.

What the researcher found

Cognitive distortions predicted future gambling involvement, rather than the other way around. This means that gamblers with more cognitive distortions would become more involved in gambling. They

What you need to know

This is a longitudinal study that examined the relationship between cognitive distortions and gambling involvement over a 5-year period. Participants were recruited from the general community in Alberta, Canada. The research found that cognitive distortions predicted future involvement with gambling. This means that participants with more cognitive distortions became more involved with gambling over time. Over the 5-year period, participants’ gambling behaviours did not change, but their cognitive distortions had declined. Decline in cognitive distortions might be due to reasons such as becoming more aware of random chance and the odds of winning in gambling. Overall, these findings suggest that prevention and treatment methods should target cognitive distortions.
would spend a greater deal of time and money on gambling over time, as well as be involved in more gambling activities. While gambling behaviour did not change over time, participant’s cognitive distortions declined after five years. Results suggests that cognitive distortions do change, perhaps due to gaining a greater awareness regarding gambling, but involvement in gambling remains unchanged.

How you can use this research
Clinicians who treat problematic gamblers can use this study to understand the relationship between cognitive distortions and gambling involvement, and how cognitive distortions change over time. These findings suggest that targeting peoples’ thoughts and beliefs about gambling may be the key to changing gambling behaviour and preventing it from becoming pathological. Also, policies and educational campaigns could be developed to change peoples’ cognitions and raise public awareness about the odds of winning, random chance, and any other false beliefs about gambling. Future studies could examine if cognitive distortions predict future gambling involvement equally across all gambling possibilities (e.g., EGMs, sport betting, lottery tickets, etc.).

About the Researcher
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