

# research snapshot

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## Does craving for gambling predict criminal offense type?

### What this research is about

The rate of problem gambling (PG) among prison inmates is much higher than among the general population. The pathways model suggests three pathways to PG: the behaviourally conditioned, emotionally vulnerable, and antisocial-impulsive paths. In the behaviourally conditioned path, people learn excitement and false beliefs through gambling. They slowly become regular gamblers and crave gambling. This results in them losing more money than they expected. In the emotionally vulnerable path, people experience negative emotions. They gamble to reduce or avoid these negative emotions. Gamblers in this path tend to have problems with alcohol or drugs. In the antisocial-impulsive path, people suffer from antisocial tendencies and impulsivity (acting without careful thought). This often results in them engaging in gambling and other risky behaviours.

The researchers of the current study suggest that people with PG in the three paths have three motivations for gambling: solving their financial, emotional, and impulsive issues. The current study explored the pathways model to predict income-generating, drug related, and violent offenses due to craving for gambling among Japanese inmates.

### What the researchers did

Participants were 332 male inmates in a Japanese local prison mainly for repeat offenders. The inmates completed the South Oaks Gambling Screen (SOGS) to measure how severe their gambling was before they entered prison. They completed the Gambling Symptom Assessment Scale (GSAS) to capture their craving for gambling. They completed the Barratt

### What you need to know

The rate of problem gambling was at least four times higher among male inmates than the general Japanese population. Japanese male inmates' craving for gambling predicted income-generating offenses, but not drug-related or violent offenses. These results suggest that craving for gambling is linked to financial issues. Prisoners with problem gambling might commit offenses to solve their financial problems.

Impulsiveness Scale (BIS) to assess their impulsiveness, and Primary and Secondary Psychopathy Scale (PSPS) to measure psychopathic traits, such as lack of caring and manipulation of others. The inmates completed the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT) to measure their drinking behaviours. They also completed Young's Internet Addiction Test (IAT) to capture Internet addiction. It is known that the Internet can be used to cope with emotional issues.

The researchers examined the inmates' official records to collect information about their current offense, number of times in prison, education level, and Intelligence Quotient equivalence (IQ). Current offenses were grouped as income-generating (e.g., theft, fraud, robbery, tax evasion); drug-related (e.g., possessing an illegal drug); and violent offenses (e.g., injury, rape, murder, kidnapping).

### What the researchers found

Among the inmates, 128 inmates (38.55%) were considered to have PG. The rate of PG among the

inmates was at least four times higher than the rate of PG among the general Japanese population.

Compared to inmates without PG, inmates with PG had higher levels of gambling, craving for gambling, drinking, and Internet addiction. They were more impulsive and had more psychopathic traits. These findings suggest that PG behaviour among inmates was linked to other addictive behaviours, impulsivity, and psychopathic tendency.

Risky alcohol drinking, being impulsive, and having psychopathic traits were linked with more severe gambling and craving for gambling. Inmates' craving for gambling predicted income-generating offenses. This suggests that craving for gambling was linked to financial issues, and inmates carried out income-generating offenses to solve their financial problems. Low IQ was also linked with income-generating offenses. This suggests that people with a lower IQ might commit income-generating offenses more often than those with a higher IQ.

Inmates' craving for gambling did not predict drug-related offenses. However, craving for gambling was linked with drinking behaviours. This suggests that gamblers might use legal drugs such as alcohol, rather than illegal ones, to cope with negative emotions. So, they likely do not often commit drug-related offenses.

Inmates' craving for gambling did not predict violent offenses either. Also, impulsivity was not related with income-generating, drug-related, or violent offenses. However, inmates who were more impulsive had been in prison more often and had lower education.

#### How you can use this research

To prevent income-generating offenses because of a craving for gambling, treatment providers could teach strategies to control this craving both inside and outside of prison. Treatment providers could focus on alcohol control for gamblers in the emotionally vulnerable path, to prevent the use of alcohol and gambling to cope. Also, they could target gamblers in the antisocial-impulsive path. School programs could target young people who show impulsive and antisocial tendencies to prevent problem gambling.

Future research could extend the current study to Japanese gamblers without a criminal history. Future research could also consider the role of other factors which are common among prisoners, such as parental income/education levels, and childhood experiences of physical/sexual abuse.

#### About the researchers

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#### Gambling Research Exchange Ontario (GREO)

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