

Risk and Protective Factors of Gambling Among Young Adults: Analysis of the Manitoba Longitudinal Study of Young Adults (MLSYA) Data

Summary Report for the Manitoba Gambling Research Program

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Funding:

Focused Research (\$57,500)

Research Priority:

Explore what risk and protective factors influence the movement back and forth between no risk and problem gambling risk levels.

Our research consisted of 3 separate studies that examined several questions that focus on three risk factors from the MLSYA database -- namely, gambling motives (Studies 1 and 2), personality (Study 2) and depressive symptoms (Study 3) -- in terms of their cross-sectional and/or longitudinal associations with problem gambling among emerging adults. Our studies extended research in other areas of addictive behavior risk in young people which has shown these risk factors to be related cross-sectionally to substance abuse and/or to growth in substance use over time (e.g., Mackie, Castellanos-Ryan, & Conrod, 2011). Findings from these studies have helped gain a better understanding of risk factors associated with problem gambling among young adults, that can be useful in future prevention and treatment approaches.

Study One - The Gambling Motives Questionnaire (GMQ) assesses levels of three gambling motives: enhancement (to increase positive emotions), coping (to decrease negative emotions), and social (to increase affiliation). Study 1 tested the psychometric properties of the GMQ in a community sample of emerging adult gamblers using data from the Manitoba Longitudinal Study of Young Adults. Participants ($N = 487$; 73.9% Caucasian; 52.6% female; mean age 22 years) completed the GMQ and questionnaire measures of gambling behaviour and problems. Our results suggest the GMQ is a valid measure for tapping motives in emerging adults, and that gambling to increase positive emotions (enhancement) is particularly predictive of gambling problems in this developmental period. Future prevention and treatment efforts should specifically target enhancement motives in emerging adults. Specifically, enhancement motivated emerging adult gamblers might be given motivation-matched treatments and/or prevention strategies, such as treatments that focus on finding more adaptive ways of achieving stimulation and excitement.

Study Two - The second study was conducted in an attempt to replicate previous findings regarding relations between specific personality domains in the five-factor model (FFM) of personality -- namely high Neuroticism and low Conscientiousness -- and gambling behavior/problems, and to examine the potential mediating role of the internal gambling motives of coping and enhancement in explaining hypothesized relations between personality variables and gambling behavior/problems. A sample of 487 emerging adult gamblers (73.9% Caucasian; 52.6% female; mean age 22.23 years) participated in this study as a part of the fourth wave of the Manitoba Longitudinal Study of Young Adults. Multiple mediator analyses revealed a significant indirect effect of high Neuroticism on amount of money spent gambling that was mediated through coping gambling motives, as well as significant indirect effects of low Conscientiousness on gambling problems, money spent gambling, and gambling frequency, that were mediated through enhancement gambling motives. Unexpectedly, the significant indirect effect of low Conscientiousness on money spent gambling was also independently mediated through coping gambling motives. These findings suggest two distinct pathways to excessive and problematic gambling among emerging adults. These findings have implications for intervention. Problem gamblers spend more money on gambling relative to non-problem gamblers (Nower & Blaszczynski, 2010), and thus the link between coping motives and money observed in the present study may be an early indicator of problem gambling among coping-motivated gamblers. Young adult gamblers who are high in Neuroticism would benefit from interventions focused on their tendency to gamble to cope as a way of preventing excessive spending over time. In contrast, young adult gamblers who are low in Conscientiousness would benefit from interventions focused on their tendency to gamble for excitement as a way of preventing adverse gambling outcomes in future. However, low Conscientious young adult gamblers could also benefit from additional focus on their higher levels of coping motives as another way of preventing excessive spending on gambling over time.

Study Three - Our third study concerned the potential risk factor of depressive symptoms. We assessed symptoms of depression and problem gambling across four time periods to see whether their relationship is directional (with one reliably preceding the other), bidirectional (i.e., reciprocally related over time), or whether increases in one result in increases in the other and vice versa. We used prospective data from the Manitoba Longitudinal Study of Young Adults, collected on Canadian young adults' (Wave 1: $N = 679$, 51.8% female, ages 18-20) tapping depressive symptoms, involvement in gambling, and risky gambling behaviour. Our results showed that depressive and problem gambling symptoms were correlated at Wave 1. However, neither disorder was found to be a risk factor for the other. Moreover, increases in one disorder did not result in increases in the other. Therefore, while depression and problem gambling are related, their co-occurrence may be better explained not by depressive- or gambling-related risk, but by the presence of a common underlying factor (like substance abuse). Clinical implications would suggest active screening for and treatment of concurrent mental health disorders like depression among young adult problem gamblers.

References

- Mackie, C. J., Castellanos-Ryan, N., & Conrod, P. J. (2011). Personality moderates the longitudinal relationship between psychological symptoms and alcohol use in adolescents. *Alcoholism: Clinical and Experimental Research*, *35*, 703-716.
- Nower, L., & Blaszczynski, A. (2010). Gambling motivations, money-limiting strategies, and precommitment preferences of problem versus non-problem gamblers. *Journal of Gambling Studies*, *26*, 361-372. doi: 10.1007/s10899-009-9170-8



This research was funded by the Manitoba Gambling Research Program of Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries; however, the findings and conclusions of this paper are those solely of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of Manitoba Liquor & Lotteries.