

The WAGER, Vol. 18(2) - Potential pathways to problem gambling: The relationships among life stress, gambling motives, and gambling behavior

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Research suggests that some people might develop addictive behavior through their attempts to escape or avoid experiences associated with stressful life events (Blaszczynski & Nower, 2002; Cooper, Frone, Russell, & Mudar, 1995).

Other contributing factors to developing addictive behavior include proximity to and accessibility of potential objects of addiction (Cox, Yu, Afifi, & Ladouceur, 2005; Shaffer et al., 2004). This

week's WAGER reviews a study that examined how these factors intersect and relate to gambling motivation, frequency and gambling-related problems (Thomas, Allen, Phillips, & Karantzas, 2011).

Methods

- Three hundred forty seven (229 females) current gamblers who use electronic gambling machines (EGM) recruited through flyers in various public message boards participated in the study.
- Participants completed a survey regarding their demographic information and frequency of EGM gambling.
- Participants also reported whether they experienced stress (defined as a major life change or loss) since commencing EGM and whether they ever escaped from their problems by using behavior such as drinking alcohol, using drugs or eating (0: *never* to 4: *a lot of time*) (i.e., general avoidance

coping).

- Next, participants completed the following measures:
 - The EGM motivation scale (Thomas, Allen, & Phillips, 2009) , which consists of three subscales assessing avoidance (e.g., *Gambling provides a break from worrying*), accessibility (e.g., *Venues are close*) and social (e.g., *I can meet new people*) motivation. Response options ranged from 0 (*Doesn't apply to me*) to 5 (*Applies to me almost always*).
 - Problem gambling severity index (Ferris & Wynne, 2001) - e.g., *Have you bet more than you could really afford to lose?* Response options ranged from 0 (*Never*) to 3 (*Almost always*).

Results

- Figure 1 depicts significant ($p < .05$) correlations among measured variables. Specifically,
 1. Self-reported stress correlated with all three types of gambling motivation.
 2. Self-reported stress related to general avoidance coping, which in turn related to avoidance-motivated gambling.
 3. Those who reported stronger avoidance and accessibility motives for gambling reported having more gambling-related problems and playing electronic gambling machines more frequently.

Figure 1: The relationships among stress, avoidance coping, gambling motivations, frequency and problems.



Limitations

- This is a correlational study; therefore, we cannot conclude if avoidance motivation leads to gambling frequency and problems or vice versa, or if a third variable is related to both factors.
- Measures have the usual limitations of self-report and therefore may not accurately reflect individual's situational stressors, motivations, and actual gambling behavior.

Conclusion

The results revealed that experiencing a stressful life event was positively related to avoidance, accessibility, and social motives for gambling. However, only avoidance and accessibility motives for gambling were related to frequency of gambling and gambling-related problems; social motivation did not relate to gambling related problems. This implies that to predict how stressful life events relate to potential future gambling-related problems, it is important to understand typical gambling motivations. The results also demonstrated that the tendency to escape from problems using drugs and alcohol is related to avoidance-motivated gambling, which is in turn related to gambling frequency and problems. This supports the view of problem gambling as a phenomenon that shares common antecedents with other expressions of addiction (Shaffer, et al., 2004). Future research designs that include experimental manipulations (e.g., of stress or gambling

motivation) might shed light on causal mechanisms.

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