

Research Summary Document: The effect of sensation seeking on engagement in gambling behaviour

Sensation seeking, a personality trait defined by the need for novel, varied, and intense experiences (Arnett, 1994), has been widely studied in relation to risk-taking behaviours. Gambling is considered a form of risk-taking as it is defined as an activity that involves financial, and potential emotional, risk, and research suggests that sensation seeking interacts with psychological and environmental factors to influence gambling engagement.

Individuals who have high levels of sensation seeking are proposed to be drawn to gambling due to its inherent unpredictability and excitement (Tani et al., 2020). High sensation seekers are naturally inclined toward activities such as gambling, which provide intense stimulation and immediate gratification, in part because the high-arousal environments in which gambling takes place cater directly to the desires of sensation seekers who crave thrill and stimulation (Harris et al., 2022). Martin et al. (2010) also propose that individuals with higher sensation seeking tendencies exhibit stronger intentions to gamble, and suggest that this is driven by attitudes that view gambling as exciting and rewarding.

Farhat et al. (2022) explored the correlates between sensation seeking and gambling behaviours and concluded that excitement-seeking, specifically, was related to engagement in riskier gambling behaviours in adolescents. This supports earlier research which suggested that adolescents and young adults are more likely to engage in riskier gambling behaviour when they score high on a measure of sensation seeking, particularly when combined with maladaptive coping strategies (Nower et al., 2004).

In conclusion, research exploring the effect of sensation seeking on engagement in gambling behaviour suggests that the proclivity to seek out novel and intense experiences has an influence on the level of engagement in risky behaviours such as gambling.

References

- Arnett, J. J. (1994). Sensation seeking: A new conceptualization and a new scale. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 16(2), 289-296. [https://doi.org/10.1016/0191-8869\(94\)90165-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/0191-8869(94)90165-1)
- Farhat, L. C., Wampler, J., Steinberg, M. A., Krishnan-Sarin, S., Hoff, R. A., & Potenza, M. N. (2021). Excitement-seeking gambling in adolescents: Health correlates and gambling-related attitudes and behaviors. *Journal of Gambling Studies*, 37(1), 43–57. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10899-020-09960-3>
- Harris, M. T., et al. (2022). The role of sensation seeking in adolescent gambling. *Journal of Gambling Studies*, 38, 123–137.
- Martin, R. J., Usdan, S., Nelson, S., & Shaffer, H. (2010). Using the Theory of Planned Behavior to predict gambling behavior. *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors*, 24(1), 89–97. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0018452>
- Nower, L., Derevensky, J.L., & Gupta, R. (2004). The relationship of impulsivity, sensation seeking, coping, and substance use in youth gamblers. *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors*, 18(1), 49–55. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0893-164X.18.1.49>
- Tani, F., Ponti, L., & Ghinassi, S. (2020). Sensation seeking and gambling behavior in adolescence. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(23), 8986. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17238986>