

PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION OF SEPARATION ANXIETY AND GAMBLING BEHAVIOUR: AGE OF ONSET AND CORRELATIONS OF SEVERITY

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Introduction: Pathological Gambling (PG) includes extremely different types of game and many gamblers suffer from anxiety disorders. According to the self-medication hypothesis, Gambling Behaviour may be a strategy to tolerate suffering and compensate uneasiness; otherwise social problems related to gambling may lead to anxiety disorders, possibly unmasking an adult form of Separation Anxiety Disorder (SAD).

Aims: To investigate possible relationships between PG and SAD, considering the different games, the age of onset, the symptom severity, and the distinction between Adult and Child SAD.

Methods: 32 gamblers attending an outpatient psychiatric clinic completed the following tests: SOGS and ASI to investigate the kind of gambling, the age of onset and the social conditions of gamblers; SCI-SAS, SASI, ASA-27 to evaluate the Separation Anxiety in childhood and adulthood; HAM-A; GAF.

Results: There are statistically significant correlations between later age of onset of PG and development of SAD in adults. Higher scores in GAF are related to lower scores in Separation Anxiety scales and HAM-A. There is a strong inter-correlation among the Separation Anxiety scales. Higher scores in HAM-A correlate with higher scores in SASI and ASA-27. Male gamblers have an earlier onset and increasing with the age of onset increases the addiction to "dissociative" games instead of "active" ones.

Conclusions: Our preliminary data do not support self-medication hypothesis; possibly, a later-onset gambling is related to a more neurotic and less impulsive psychopathological pattern.