COMMENTARY

Commentary on Horn *et al.*: The outcome expectancy in the 'alcohol-gambling cocktail'

Within the framework of alcohol outcome expectancy theory, Horn and colleagues provide strong empirical evidence that alcohol outcome expectancy is a pathway for the effect of alcohol intake on gambling behaviour.

Gambling and alcohol intake often co-occur in gambling venues such as casinos and pubs. As acute alcohol intake increases risk-taking behaviour [1–3], there is concern that the 'alcohol-gambling cocktail' leads to increased risk-taking in gambling. Horn and colleagues [4] bring clarity to this concern and the mixed evidence on the topic by conducting a systematic review and meta-analysis of the empirical literature on the effect of acute alcohol intake on risk-taking in gambling. Based on 20 articles containing 47 alcohol-versus-control group comparisons, they found no significant effects of either acute alcohol intake or blood alcohol concentration on risk-taking in gambling. However, increased risk-taking in gambling was found when the control group drink is a non-alcoholic beverage (e.g. fruit juice), but not a placebo drink. Simply put, in control group comparisons acute alcohol intake increases risk-taking in gambling only when the control group consumes a non-alcoholic beverage rather than a placebo drink.

This finding signals the effect of outcome expectancy in experimental studies on the effect of acute alcohol intake on risk-taking in gambling. Rooted in social learning/cognitive-behavioural theories [5–7], outcome expectancy theory explains behaviour as a product of 'if-then' contingencies shaped by reinforcement history [8, 9]. Extended as alcohol outcome expectancy theory [9], behaviour following acute alcohol intake is explained not only as alcohol effects or intoxication [10, 11], but also expectations of such effects primed by social learning and cognition [12]. Alcohol outcome expectancy is, therefore, defined as a long-term memory function about alcohol effects that have automatic activation in alcohol-related situations and have immediate or future behavioural effects [8, 13]. In other words, alcohol outcome expectancy denotes expectations of the immediate or future consequences of alcohol intake [8, 14, 15]. Alcohol outcome expectancy theory [9], therefore, provides apt elucidation of Horn and colleagues' [4] finding on the implicit significant effect of alcohol outcome expectancy on risk-taking in gambling.

In short, within the framework of alcohol outcome expectancy theory [9], Horn and colleagues' [4] meta-analysis provides strong empirical evidence that alcohol outcome expectancy is a 'theoretical software or pathway' [16], through which alcohol intake affects gambling behaviour. In the gambling field, Horn and colleagues [4] partly answer the recent call [12] for a systematic review of literature on alcohol outcome expectancy theory. Importantly, they show the indispensability of alcohol outcome expectancy assessment and control in experimental studies on the effect of acute alcohol intake on gambling behaviour. Furthermore, they underscore the importance of developing alcohol outcome expectancy measures specific to the gambling context as a compliment to measures of gambling outcome expectancy [17, 18] in experimental studies on this topic. Such work will elevate the evidence base on the effect of alcohol intake on gambling behaviour.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

None.

Dominic Sagoe[1,2]

[1]*Department of Psychosocial Science, University of Bergen, Bergen, Norway*

[2]*Norwegian Competence Centre for Gambling and Gaming Research, University of Bergen, Bergen, Norway*

Email: dominic.sagoe@uib.no

ORCID

Dominic Sagoe https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1902-9378

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