

# How hope can make you happier with your lot

December 16 2020

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Having hope for the future could protect people from risky behaviors such as drinking and gambling—according to new research from the University of East Anglia. The researchers studied "relative

deprivation"—the feeling that other people have things better than you in life.

They wanted to find out why only some people experiencing this turn to escapist and risky behaviors such as drinking alcohol, taking drugs, over-eating or gambling, while others do not, and they found that the answer lies in hope. Postgraduate researcher Shahriar Keshavarz, from UEA's School of Psychology, said: "I think most people have experienced relative deprivation at some point in their lives. It's that feeling of being unhappy with your lot, the belief that your situation is worse than others, that other people are doing better than you.

"Roosevelt famously said that 'comparison is the thief of joy.' It's that feeling you have when a friend buys a new car, or your sister gets married, or a colleague finds a better job or has a better income. Relative deprivation can trigger [negative emotions](#) like anger and resentment, and it has been associated with poor coping strategies like risk taking, drinking, taking drugs or gambling.

"But not everyone scoring high on measures of relative deprivation makes these poor life choices. We wanted to find out why some people seem to cope better, or even use the experience to their advantage to improve their own situation. There is a lot of evidence to show that remaining hopeful in the face of adversity can be advantageous, so we wanted to see if hope can help people feel happier with their lot and buffer against risky behaviors."

The research team carried out two lab-based experiments with 55 volunteers. The volunteers were quizzed to find out how much they feel relative deprivation and hope.

The researchers also induced feelings of relative deprivation in the volunteers, by telling them how deprived they were compared to their

peers, based on a questionnaire about their family income, age and gender. They then took part in specially designed gambling games that involved risk taking and placing bets with a chance to win real money.

Dr. Piers Fleming, also from UEA's School of Psychology, said: "The aim of this part of the study was to see whether feeling relatively deprived—elicited by the knowledge that one has less income than similar others—causes greater risk-taking among low-hoppers and decreased risk-taking among high-hoppers. We looked at the people who scored high for relative deprivation, the ones that thought their situation in life was worse than those around them. And we looked at those who also scored high for hope. We found that the volunteers who scored high for hope were much less likely to take risks in the game. Those who weren't too hopeful were a lot more likely to take risks."

Another experiment looked at whether hope helped people in the real world. They worked with 122 volunteers who had gambled at least once in the last year. The volunteers took part in questionnaires to gauge how hopeful they are, whether they feel relatively deprived and to measure [problem gambling](#).

Of the participants, 33 had no gambling problems (27 percent), 32 had low level of problems (26 percent), 46 had moderate level of problems leading to some [negative consequences](#) (38 percent) and 11 were problem gamblers with a possible loss of control (9 percent).

Mr Keshavarz said: "When we looked at these scores compared to scores for hope and relative deprivation, we found that increased hope was associated with a decreased likelihood of losing control of gambling behavior—even in those who experienced relative [deprivation](#).

Interestingly, our study found no significant relation between hope and gambling severity among relatively privileged persons. We don't know why this is, but it could be that they are gambling recreationally or better

able to stop when the fun stops."

The research team say that nurturing hope in people who are unhappy with their lot could protect against harmful behaviors like drinking and [gambling](#).

**More information:** Relative Deprivation and Hope: Predictors of Risk Behavior. [osf.io/dy7cg/](https://osf.io/dy7cg/)

Provided by University of East Anglia

Citation: How hope can make you happier with your lot (2020, December 16) retrieved 6 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2020-12-happier-lot.html>

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