

Hope can save people from making bad choices: study

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Hope may help prevent you from doing things that aren't good for you, a

new study claims.

The investigators wanted to find out why some people are more likely to fall into risky behaviors, such as [gambling](#), drinking too much, taking drugs and overeating.

To do this, the team at the University of East Anglia in the United Kingdom focused on something called relative [deprivation](#), which is when a person feels that other people have things better in life.

"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, " said researcher Shahriar Keshavarz, from East Anglia's School of Psychology.

"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," he explained in a university news release.

"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," Keshavarz said.

"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," he explained.

And that's just what the researchers found with volunteers who were questioned at the start of the study to determine their levels of relative

deprivation and hope.

In one experiment, participants played specially designed gambling games that involved risk-taking and placing bets with a chance to win real money.

According to Piers Fleming, also from East Anglia's School of Psychology, "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-hopers and decreased risk-taking among high-hopers."

Fleming said, "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."

In another part of the study, the researchers found that higher levels of hope were associated with a low risk of gambling problems, even in people with relative deprivation, according to the report published online Dec. 16 in the *Journal of Gambling Studies*.

The study results suggest that encouraging hope in people who are unhappy with their life situation could protect them against harmful behaviors, the study authors said.

More information: HelpGuide.org has more on [problem gambling](#).

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