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To Get High or to Get Out? Examining the Link between Addictive Behaviors and Escapism

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ABSTRACT

Background: Escapism is a tendency to seek escape and distraction from reality or real-life problems. Past research regards escapism as a negative inducement that leads to adverse consequences when combined with substance use and other addictive activities. Existing knowledge on escapism's connection to addiction is mostly based on studies with restricted populations and lacks a comprehensive view. **Objectives:** Using an extensive data set, our aim was to investigate whether escapism has a consistent association with different types of addictive behaviors. In this study, we examined (1) the extent to which escapism is related to alcohol consumption, smoking, drug use, and gambling and (2) whether escapism moderates the relation between problem drinking and life satisfaction. **Methods:** We used cross-sectional survey data from a nationally representative stratified random sample of 2,285 respondents aged 16 to 80 years (mean [M] 45.18; standard deviation [SD] 18.75; 51.25% males) living in Finland. Linear and logistic regression models estimated the association of escapism and alcohol consumption, smoking, drug use, and gambling. The second part of the analysis focused on life satisfaction. **Results:** Escapism was associated with alcohol consumption, smoking and drug use, but not with gambling. Escapism moderated the association between life satisfaction and problematic alcohol use, indicating that problem drinking with escapist motives predicts lower life satisfaction than problematic alcohol use alone. **Conclusions/Importance:** Escapism bears a consistent relation to substance use and is a particularly strong predictor of alcohol consumption. Escapism can serve as an initial motive, a reinforcer, and an amplifier of addictive behaviors.

KEYWORDS

escapism; alcohol consumption; drinking; drug abuse; smoking; gambling; addictive behavior

SHORT SUMMARY

This study investigated the association of escapism with alcohol consumption, smoking, drug use and gambling. Escapism had a consistent relation to drinking, smoking and drug use. Problem drinking with escapist motives predicted lower life satisfaction than problematic alcohol use alone. The results suggest escapism can serve as a motive or an amplifier of addictive behaviors.

Introduction

Escapism is a tendency to seek escape and distraction from reality or real-life problems (Hirschman, 1983; Woody, 2018). The psychological concept of escapism has various origins and, depending on the underlying causes, may be understood as escape from the self (Baumeister, 1991), escape from everyday life (Cohen & Taylor, 1992), or escape from freedom of choice (Fromm, 1994).

Escape theory by Baumeister (1991) views escapism as escape from the self. It involves decreasing self-awareness and forgetting the meaningful aspects of the self. By contrast, high self-awareness makes individuals compare themselves to standards that may evoke feelings of inadequacy. According to the escape theory, escapism is a means of letting go of high-level conscious thinking and turning to bodily sensations and impressions. In this way, escapist

behavior is meant to free people from incessant self-evaluations, analyses, comparisons, and judgment (Silvia & Duval, 2001; Baumeister, 1991).

Another common approach to escapism, the need to escape from everyday life, may be understood as a disengagement-based stress coping strategy, where the individual escapes from the stressor or the emotions evoked by it (Carver & Connor-Smith, 2010). The root causes of stress and the subsequent need to escape from the daily course of life can be explained by an identity mismatch with prevailing constructions of society or forced adaptation to a uniform way of life. When identity and an individual's sense of separateness do not develop in a sane, sustainable way, escapism may appear to protect against neuroticism and mental disorders (Cohen & Taylor, 1992).

The escape-from-freedom approach is based on the theory of Erich Fromm (1994), originally introduced during

the Second World War. The need to escape from freedom stems from the inability to handle the expanding freedom of choice characteristic of modern life. Increasing freedom from former authorities, such as church, family, or traditions, may not only facilitate mental liberation, but also cause anxiety about feeling alone and being entirely responsible for one's thoughts and deeds (Fromm, 1994). To find relief from psychological isolation, individuals escape their true selves by submitting to new power structures in society.

It is worth noting that escapism may also be understood as an exploration of the adventurous side of life. In this respect, escapism is not a move away from pain or anxiety, but rather a life-affirming move toward pleasure, excess and indulgence. This adventure-seeking approach to escapism is characteristically related to youth and early adulthood, and to distinctive settings like tourist holidays (Tutenges, 2012). To adopt a more universal view on the concept in our analysis, we treat escapism as distraction from reality, real-life problems and unpleasant emotions.

Previous research indicates that addictive behaviors are closely related to the idea of distancing oneself from the reality. Coping with unpleasant emotions has become a well-established approach to escapism in alcohol research. Evidence across numerous studies demonstrates how drinking to cope is associated with alcohol abuse (Cooper et al., 1988; Neff, 1997). Particularly after experiencing a personal failure, people with a lower capacity for constructive emotion regulation are more likely to indulge in binge drinking (Poncin et al., 2017). It is also argued that severe drinking and gambling problems are more probably associated with escapist coping approaches than with reward-seeking behavior (Atkinson, 2019). The tension-reducing and stress-dampening properties of alcohol consumption were challenged and reevaluated in past decades (Polivy et al., 1976; Stockwell et al., 1982; Young et al., 1990). In addition to alleviating external stressors, alcohol offers psychological relief by decreasing higher-order evaluations of one's past or immediate activities (Hull, 1981), thereby providing an escape from self-awareness, consistent with the principles of Baumeister's (1991) escape theory.

Gambling disorder includes a diagnostic criterion related to alleviating distress by gambling (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), and mood regulation appears as one of the motivations for compulsive gambling in the research literature (Blaszczynski & Nower, 2002). This analysis has been expanded by showing how escapism moderates the relationship between impulsivity and problem gambling (Flack & Buckby, 2020). Escapist motives, relative to entertainment or social motives, are more strongly associated with problem gambling (Nower & Blaszczynski, 2010). Among different forms of gambling, escapism is a notable predictor of gambling on electronic gaming machines (Rockloff et al., 2011). Furthermore, it is possible to distinguish from alcohol abuse problems the type of escapism traits that are unique to problem gambling (Rockloff & Dyer, 2006). Considering the distinction between skill-based and chance-based gambling in terms of addictions, evidence

suggests competent gamblers are more prone to make impulsive decisions and engage in addictive behaviors than those who gamble for entertainment (Oksanen et al., 2019).

Escapism is an essential motivation for illicit drug use, as identified in studies involving socially deprived populations (Kaló et al., 2017), adolescents (Skrzypiec & Owens, 2013) and party context (White et al., 2006). The self-medication hypothesis of substance use disorders (Khantzian, 1997) bears a resemblance to escapist drug use, as they are both based on relieving painful affects through intoxication. In recent years, escapist motives have been connected to the abuse of prescription opioids and subsequent transitions to heroin use (Cicero & Ellis, 2017).

Smoking a cigarette is typically viewed as a moment of escape from daily routines or stressful situations. Evidence from smoking research suggests that escape from negative affect becomes the most important motivation, over pleasure seeking, as nicotine dependence increases (Mathew et al., 2014). In the context of addiction persistency, escapism may be regarded as a negative reinforcement motive that causes people to resume addictive behaviors to avoid negative affect. A body of research considers negative reinforcement the predominant addiction motivation, as opposed to the pleasure-seeking positive reinforcement approach (Baker et al., 2004). The case for negative reinforcement in nicotine addiction is further strengthened by evidence suggesting that positive reinforcers such as high immersion in smoking related cues do not increase cigarette craving among current smokers (de Bruijn et al., 2021).

Conceptually, escapism and addiction appear to overlap. Categories such as "secondary addictions" (Griffiths, 2013) represent excessive behaviors motivated by the avoidance of unpleasant thoughts, anxiety, or problems. A secondary addiction can thus be understood as a symptom of unresolved disorders or conflicts. Even though similar qualities may characterize escapism, there are important differences between escapism and addiction. Escapism is more naturally defined as the initial motivation (Rockloff et al., 2011), whereas addiction is a state of affairs along a continuum (Skog, 2003). It is natural to consider escapist activity as a momentary episode (Cohen & Taylor, 1992), but addiction involves the idea of a chronic condition developed due to repeated engagement in the behavior (West & Brown, 2013). Furthermore, escapism is not only about instant relief. It may also take the form of self-handicapping or self-defeating behaviors (Baumeister, 1991; Baumeister et al., 1994).

The concept of life satisfaction has been defined as an evaluative component of subjective wellbeing. As for escapism's connection with life satisfaction, previous research indicates that escape from self-awareness and escape from negative aspects of real life are strong predictors of lower life satisfaction. (Hagström & Kaldo, 2014; Błażek et al., 2015).

Existing research on escapism and recent developments in the field of addiction studies indicate that the significance of escapism has not been fully utilized in contemporary addiction research. Distraction from unpleasant emotions is a relevant function for various addictive behaviors (Orford, 2001). Given the length and weight of the research tradition,

the existing knowledge on escapism's connection to addiction still lacks a comprehensive view. Our aim is to investigate whether escapism has a consistent association with different types of addictive behaviors. We believe a study with nationally representative data will yield new insight into the role of escapism in the development of addictions.

For the sake of clarity and scientific rigor, we limited the present study to the forms of addiction included in DSM-V and ICD-11 disease classifications. Our principal research question is as follows: To what extent is escapism related to alcohol consumption, smoking, drug use, and gambling? We also examine whether escapism with or without problematic alcohol use is connected to general life satisfaction.

Methods

Participants and procedure

This study's participants included 2,285 Finns aged 16 to 80 years (mean [*M*] 45.18; standard deviation [*SD*] 18.75; 51.25% males) who participated in the nationally representative Finnish Drinking Habits Survey 2016 (Mäkelä et al., 2016). This survey was part of a series that has been conducted every eight years since 1968 to analyze the consumption of alcohol, tobacco, and illegal drugs, as well as gambling habits, across the population.

The interviewed respondents were chosen using stratified random sampling based on age groups. A gross sample of 3,870 cases was reduced to a net sample of 3,823 after eliminating overcoverage due to deceased, institutionalized, or permanently emigrated individuals. The number of accepted interviews corresponding to survey observations was 2,285 (response rate 59.8%), and the total number of variables in the original data set was 521. Register data and structured forms were used as part of the data acquisition. The survey was conducted between 29 August and 18 November 2016 using computer-assisted face-to-face interviews (CAPI or CAMI), and 159 respondents were interviewed by telephone. After the verbal interview, respondents were given an additional paper form to complete and return through the mail. In total, 2,150 such forms were returned.

Variables

Independent variable

Escapism. Escapism was measured by combining three variables, each answering a different question about drinking motives: "How often do you drink alcohol to alleviate depression or nervousness?"; "How often do you drink alcohol to relax from work-related stress or other everyday concerns?" and "How often do you drink alcohol to forget about your worries?" The answers to escapism questions were divided into five categories: *hardly ever or never* (1), *sometimes* (2), *around half of drinking occasions* (3), *more often than not* (4), and *always or almost always*

(5). Missing cases were removed from each of the three variables, leaving a total of 1,948 valid observations per variable. Cronbach's alpha of the escapism variable was 0.66. The reliability was further checked using McDonald's omega coefficient (Hayes & Coutts, 2020), that produced a value of 0.72. We treated the escapism variable as continuous with a range of 3 to 15 (*M* 4.67, *SD* 1.97).

Dependent variables

Alcohol consumption. In the Finnish Drinking Habits Survey 2016, the 3-item AUDIT-C test measured alcohol consumption while problem drinking was studied using the full 10-item AUDIT questionnaire. The full AUDIT test has better screening performance for the detection of more severe drinking problems, even if both tests identify at-risk drinking habits adequately (Moehring et al., 2019). For these reasons, we used data from the AUDIT-C to analyze the association between alcohol consumption and escapism. Data from the full AUDIT was applied to examine the connection of escapism and problem drinking with life satisfaction. AUDIT-C test questions produced 2,145 observations with values between 0 and 12 (*M* 3.32, *SD* 2.48), Cronbach's alpha 0.70, and they were used as a dependent variable for alcohol consumption. The full AUDIT questions involved 2,145 observations with values between 0 and 30 (*M* 4.87, *SD* 4.55), Cronbach's alpha 0.80, and they were used as a dependent variable for problematic alcohol use.

Smoking. Information on smoking prevalence was derived from the survey data. We wanted to focus on people who smoked daily at the time of the survey. Out of 2282 respondents 367 indicated they smoked daily. The responses were categorized into two groups with the values "does not smoke daily" (0) and "smokes daily" (1).

Drug use. Use of illegal drugs was included in the analysis in the form of a categorical variable. Again, we aimed to concentrate on cases with ongoing habits or a very recent history of drug use. The survey data provided yes-or-no answers to the question "Have you tried or used any drug during the past 30 days?" from 2,150 respondents. The answers were encoded with values "no" (0) and "yes" (1).

Gambling. The tendency to engage in gambling activity was described using the following question: "How often have you gambled during the past month?" The gambling question produced 1,694 observations with values between 1 and 5 (*M* 2.29, *SD* 1.15). We inverted

the scale of the answers to better reflect a greater desire for gambling: *more rarely or not at all* (1), *2–3 days a month* (2), *once a week* (3), *2–5 days a week* (4), and *6–7 days a week* (5).

Life satisfaction. To study the connection between escapism and general life satisfaction, a single question from the data set was selected to represent overall life satisfaction: "How satisfied or dissatisfied with your life are you at the moment?" After reversing the variable's scale, the question produced the following answer categories: *very dissatisfied* (1), *quite dissatisfied* (2), *neither satisfied nor dissatisfied* (3), *quite satisfied* (4), and *very satisfied* (5). With four missing cases, the total number of observations in the life satisfaction variable was 2,281 (M 4.17, SD 0.73).

Life satisfaction is typically evaluated against personally relevant and individually chosen standards instead of a universal scale (Diener et al., 1985). One of the debates in the domain concerns the extent to which self-reported life satisfaction can be generalized over time. Schwarz and Strack (1999) argued that perceived life satisfaction scales are often guided by momentary, context-bound, or mood-based information, which is why their reliability and other methodological aspects may be compromised. However, there is evidence showing that situational and contextual factors are not able to override the effect of more consistent influences on perceived life satisfaction (Schimmack et al., 2002). Hence, survey-based assessments of life satisfaction should be considered acceptable. Single-question measures for life-satisfaction have given reliable results in several panel studies with nationally representative data (Lucas & Brent Donnellan, 2012).

Control variables

Age, gender, marital status, education level and socio-economic position were used as control variables across the analysis. This set of background factors provided a useful way to verify the relation of escapism to addictive behaviors. Marital status included both marriage and common law marriage. Divorced or widowed respondents were assigned to a separate category. Education level was broken down to primary, secondary and higher education with primary school as a baseline, whereas socio-economic position included distinct categories for employees, managers and workers as a comparison category.

The outline of variables is presented in Table 1.

Statistical methods

We analyzed our main research question (i.e., whether escapism predicts alcohol consumption, smoking, drug use, and gambling) using two linear and two logistic regression models. Three additional linear regression models were used to describe how escapism with or without problematic alcohol use is related to general life satisfaction.

The choice of linear regression (ordinary least squares regression) was justified for model 1 (alcohol) and model 4 (gambling) as dependent variables were continuous. Model 2 (smoking) and model 3 (drug use) used logistic regression as dependent variable was categorical. Models 1–4 included escapism as the main independent variable, but they were controlled for socio-demographic background. Models 2–4 also included alcohol use as control variable.

The tables report unstandardized regression coefficients (B) and their 95% confidence intervals (95% CI), as well as standardized regression coefficients (β) for linear regression models. The effects of logistic regression models are

Table 1. Descriptive statistics.

Descriptive Statistics	n	%	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Dependent variables						
Alcohol consumption	2145		0	12	3.32	2.48
Problem drinking	2145		0	30	4.87	4.55
Drug use	2150		0	1	0.02	0.13
Smoking	2282		0	1	0.16	0.37
Gambling	1694		1	5	2.29	1.15
Life satisfaction	2281		1	5	4.17	0.73
Independent variables						
Escapism	1948		3	15	4.67	1.97
Control variables						
Age [†]	2285	100.00	16	80	45.18	18.75
Gender						
Women	1114	48.75				
Men	1171	51.25				
Marital status						
Unmarried	629	27.53				
Married ^{††}	1387	60.70				
Divorced/widow	269	11.77				
Education						
Primary school ^{†††}	438	19.17				
Secondary school	932	40.79				
Higher education	915	40.04				
Socio-economic status ^{††††}						
Worker	682	37.97				
Employee	672	37.42				
Manager	442	24.61				

[†]Age: in the end of 2016.

^{††}Married: marriage or common law marriage.

^{†††}Primary school: primary education or unknown.

^{††††}Socio-economic status: $n = 1796$.

presented as unstandardized regression coefficients (B) and their 95% confidence intervals (95% CI), as well as odds ratios (OR). The coefficients of linear and logistic regression are not comparable across models. The assumptions of both linear and logistic regression were checked. The robustness of the analysis on escapism and drugs was tested further using penalized maximum likelihood logistic regression. All analyses and variable processing were performed with Stata version 16.1 software. Analytic weights were used.

Results

Statistical analysis involved analyzing risk factors for alcohol consumption, smoking, drug use, and gambling in linear and logistic regression models that adjust for confounding factors. The results for Model 1, as reported in Table 2, show that escapism is strongly associated with alcohol consumption ($B=0.51$, 95% $CI = 0.45, 0.57$; $\beta=0.43$). Males and younger participants reported higher alcohol consumption than others.

Model 2 was based on logistic regression and described the relationship between a continuous escapism variable and a categorical smoking variable. Escapism was associated with smoking ($B=0.08$, 95% $CI = 0.002, 0.16$; $OR = 1.09$). In addition, higher alcohol use, younger age and divorced or widowed status and were associated with higher propensity to smoke, whereas highly educated respondents and managers were less likely to smoke than workers. Model 3 showed that drug use was associated with escapism ($B=0.18$, 95% $CI = 0.01, 0.36$; $OR = 1.20$). Younger age was associated with lower inclination to use drugs.

In contrast to models 1–3, we did not find statistically significant association between escapism and gambling in the model 4. Gambling was associated with higher alcohol use. Males and older people reported gambling more than others. Although married people had a higher chance of engaging in frequent gambling compared to unmarried people, even higher gambling rates were reported by divorced or widowed individuals. Those in managerial positions gambled less than others did.

The final research question about the connection between escapism and life satisfaction was addressed using three linear regression models (Table 3). The first one was applied to study the connection between overall life satisfaction and escapism (Model 1). Another model was run to examine the relationship between overall life satisfaction and problematic alcohol use (Model 2), and a third examined the interaction between escapism and problematic alcohol use in explaining life satisfaction (Model 3). Again, age, gender, marital status, education level and socio-economic position served as control variables. The results indicate that escapist drinking motive alone ($B = -0.05$, 95% $CI = -0.07, -0.03$; $\beta = -0.14$), as well as problem drinking ($B = -0.02$, 95% $CI = -0.03, -0.01$; $\beta = -0.11$), independently explained lower life satisfaction. Moderation analysis showed that the interaction between problem drinking and escapism was statistically significant ($B = -0.004$, 95% $CI = -0.007, -0.001$; $\beta = -0.08$), indicating that, when combined using an interaction model, problem drinking with escapist motives predicts lower life satisfaction than problematic alcohol use alone (Figure 1). The results also suggest that, at very low

levels of escapism, higher alcohol consumption predicts slightly higher life satisfaction. Being married was associated with higher life satisfaction in all models.

Discussion

This study analyzed how escapism is associated with alcohol consumption, smoking, drug use, and gambling. The additional analysis examined whether escapism moderates the relation between problematic alcohol use and life satisfaction. The results indicate a clear connection between escapism and alcohol use, smoking and drug use. The strongest association was identified between escapism and alcohol consumption. Escapism was related to lower life satisfaction and problematic alcohol use with escapist motives predicting even lower life satisfaction than problem drinking alone.

It is natural to explain addictive habits in terms of their consequences, such as the relaxing effect of a cigarette or a drink. The concept of escapism constitutes an important contribution to the addiction debate by diverting attention from the desired end state of any particular addictive behavior and focusing on the anxieties modern individuals experience. From the escapist perspective, one does not engage in addictions “to get high”, but rather “to get out.” Willingness to escape from everyday life by distancing oneself from reality is a widely recognized need of modern human beings (Baumeister, 1991; Cohen & Taylor, 1992; Fromm, 1994).

Although it may seem reasonable to draw parallels between escapism and addiction, they are distinct concepts. The frequently cited criteria that apply to most addictions include salience, euphoria, tolerance, withdrawal symptoms, conflict, and relapse (Orford, 2001). Apart from conflict, these features do not relate to escapism. Instead, escapist motives for a behavior seem to predict addiction, as our analyses show.

Another key finding of this study is escapism’s role as an amplifier. The combination of problem drinking and escapism was associated with lower life satisfaction than problematic alcohol use without escapism. According to the literature, escapism in connection with alcohol consumption occurs especially when a person undergoes misery, a setback or stress, involving a threat to self-esteem (Poncin et al., 2017). Other types of misfortunes may invoke varied reactions, but they normally do not induce binge or heavy drinking. Indeed, getting drunk on purpose is not the only form of alcohol-related escapism. Using alcohol to escape from the everyday burden of selfhood typically involves consuming alcohol in moderate amounts during the normal course of life. By making people forget the broader contexts of their lives and set aside their inhibitions, alcohol provides a way to escape from excessive self-awareness (Baumeister, 1991). However, our results underscore the importance of restraint, as escapist drinking motives are associated with higher alcohol consumption than drinking without escapism.

Smoking was responsive to escapism in the present study. As tobacco consumption has declined in the Western world, smoking has steadily lost its role as a social facilitator. However, smoking remains a deep-rooted habit for many. It has not been eradicated from our communities, despite its undeniable health hazards or social disapproval. The

Table 2. Models 1–4: The association of escapism with alcohol consumption, smoking, drug use and gambling.

	Alcohol consumption			Smoking			Drug use			Gambling		
	B	CI95%(B)	β	P	B	CI95%(B)	OR	P	B	CI95%(B)	β	P
Escapism	0.51***	0.45, 0.57	0.43***	0.000	0.08*	0.002, 0.16	1.09*	0.043	0.18*	0.01, 0.36	1.20*	0.035
Alcohol consumption												
Age [†]	-0.02***	-0.03, -0.01	-0.13***	0.000	0.21***	0.13, 0.29	1.23***	0.000	0.07	-0.09, 0.23	1.07	0.395
Gender/M	1.21***	1.00, 1.43	0.27***	0.000	-0.01*	-0.02, -0.002	0.99*	0.016	-0.08***	-0.11, -0.04	0.93***	0.000
Married ^{††}	-0.29	-0.59, 0.01	-0.06	0.060	-0.09	-0.43, 0.25	0.91	0.593	0.89	-0.16, 1.93	2.43	0.096
Divorced/ widow	-0.14	-0.53, 0.24	-0.02	0.470	0.13	-0.28, 0.54	1.14	0.541	-0.60	-1.52, 0.32	0.55	0.200
Education/ ref. Primary school					0.59*	0.03, 1.14	1.80*	0.038	(empty)			
Secondary school	0.19	-0.15, 0.53	0.04	0.268	-0.46*	-0.92, -0.01	0.63*	0.044	-0.56	-1.94, 0.83	0.57	0.430
Higher education	0.09	-0.26, 0.44	0.02	0.602	-1.14***	-1.69, -0.59	0.32***	0.000	-0.50	-2.15, 1.15	0.60	0.550
Socio-economic status/ ref. Worker												
Employee	-0.12	-0.40, 0.15	-0.03	0.379	-0.25	-0.62, 0.12	0.78	0	0.09	-1.06, 1.23	1.09	0.879
Manager	-0.05	-0.38, 0.28	-0.01	0.764	-0.86**	-1.44, -0.26	0.43**	0.005	-0.30	-1.80, 1.21	0.74	0.699
Constant	1.80***	1.15, 2.45		0.000	-1.48***	-2.32, -0.65	0.23***	0.000	-2.19	-4.49, 0.12	0.11	0.063
N												
R ²												
Chi2												

* $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, *** $p \leq 0.001$ B=unstandardized regression coefficient CI 95%=95% confidence interval β =standardized regression coefficient OR=odds ratio[†] in the end of 2016 ^{††} marriage or common law marriage ^{†††} Cragg-Uhler/Nagelkerke R²

1269

0.21^{†††}

60.36

1153

0.14

Table 3. Life satisfaction as predicted by escapism, problem drinking and their interaction.

	Life satisfaction											
	Model 1: Escapism				Model 2: Problem drinking				Model 3: Interaction			
	B	CI 95%(B)	β	P	B	CI 95%(B)	β	P	B	CI 95%(B)	β	P
Escapism	-0.05***	-0.07, -0.03	-0.14***	0.000								
Problem drinking	-0.01	-0.02, 0.00	-0.04	0.186	-0.02***	-0.03, -0.01	-0.11***	0.000	-0.04***	-0.06, -0.02	-0.11***	0.001
Escapism x Problem drinking									-0.004*	-0.007, -0.001	-0.08*	0.017
Age [†]	0.00	-0.002, 0.003	0.01	0.621	0.00	-0.002, 0.003	0.02	0.463	0.00	-0.001, 0.004	0.03	0.371
Male	-0.05	-0.13, 0.03	-0.04	0.207	-0.04	-0.12, 0.04	-0.03	0.287	-0.06	-0.14, 0.02	-0.04	0.125
Married ^{††}	0.29***	0.18, 0.39	0.19***	0.000	0.29***	0.19, 0.39	0.19***	0.000	0.28***	0.18, 0.38	0.18***	0.000
Divorced/ widow Education/	0.10	-0.04, 0.24	0.05	0.175	0.10	-0.04, 0.24	0.05	0.178	0.09	-0.05, 0.23	0.04	0.206
ref. Primary school												
Secondary school	-0.02	-0.15, 0.10	-0.02	0.684	-0.00	-0.13, 0.12	-0.00	0.936	-0.03	-0.15, 0.09	-0.02	0.583
Higher education	-0.04	-0.17, 0.09	-0.03	0.514	-0.04	-0.17, 0.09	-0.03	0.583	-0.05	-0.18, 0.08	-0.03	0.456
Socio-economic status/												
ref. Worker												
Employee	0.05	-0.04, 0.15	0.04	0.280	0.06	-0.04, 0.16	0.04	0.216	0.05	-0.05, 0.15	0.03	0.307
Manager	0.06	-0.05, 0.18	0.04	0.280	0.08	-0.04, 0.20	0.05	0.195	0.06	-0.06, 0.18	0.04	0.319
Constant	4.21***	3.99, 4.43		0.000	4.00***	3.80, 4.20		0.000	3.95***	3.76, 4.13		0.000
N												
R ²												

* $p \leq 0.05$, ** $p \leq 0.01$, *** $p \leq 0.001$ B= unstandardized regression coefficient CI 95%=95% confidence interval β = standardized regression coefficient
[†] In the end of 2016 ^{††} marriage or common law marriage

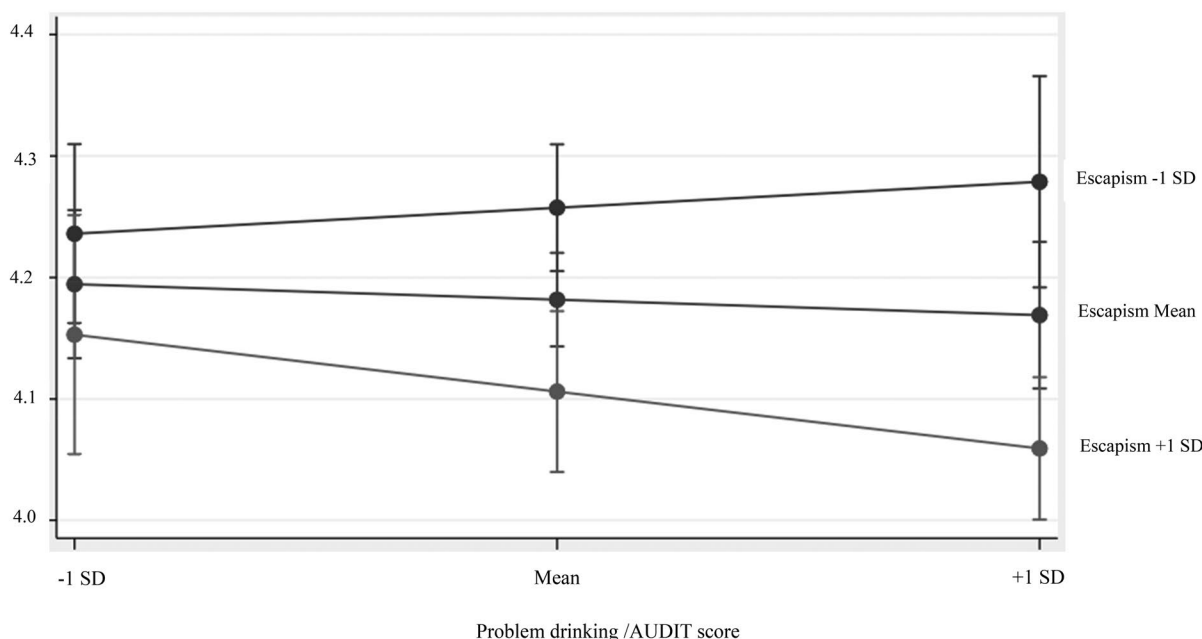


Figure 1. Problem drinking with escapist motives predicts lower life satisfaction than problematic alcohol use alone.

addictive potential of nicotine is very strong (Le Foll & Goldberg, 2009), which obviously makes quitting smoking difficult. It is equally true that some people quit with minor effort, whereas others struggle for years with nicotine replacement therapies and still fail. Could it be that people with different levels of escapism have an unequal chance of withdrawing from smoking? One way to find out would be to measure the prevalence of escapist tendencies among people who have quit smoking successfully and those who have not been able to drop the habit despite trying.

Escapism also explained drug use. It is intuitive – and has been noted by past research – that people use drugs to escape from reality. However, continued drug use, not to mention drug addiction, can hardly be explained by escapism alone. Whether stimulation, sedation or an altered state of consciousness, the effects of many illegal drugs on the central nervous system are so intense that, presumably, long-term use is driven principally by physical and mental addiction instead of an individual's need to lower their self-awareness or stress levels. Buying illegal drugs requires clandestine measures and a certain level of participation in a criminal subculture, which can involve an intrinsic feeling of escape from the regular course of life.

In our study we did not find association between escapism and more frequent gambling. However, it is noteworthy how the results highlight the similarity of the relationship between escapism and use of different substances, much as the components model (Griffiths, 2005) posits that all addictions include a range of shared components like salience, tolerance, withdrawal, or relapse. By the same token, comorbidity (Grant et al., 2010) hints at the shared etiology of addictions.

An interesting continuum appears when we examine the interplay between escapism and addictive behaviors. On one hand, it is natural that escape serves as the initial motivation to engage in excessive activity. On the other, escapism as a negative reinforcer becomes increasingly important as

addiction progresses (Mathew et al., 2014). However, the development of an addiction is a more complex matter. What makes people return to the activity and start repeating it uncontrollably most likely involves both negative and positive reinforcers combined with neuroadaptation.

The current study has limitations. First, that escapism in this study was defined using alcohol-related questions may account partly for the strength of the positive association between escapism and drinking. Second, the AUDIT-C test may identify risky drinking habits less ambiguously than the questions used in this study, pertaining to smoking, drug use, or gambling. Third, the escapism variable was based on three questions, which is a relatively concise representation, and may not capture all aspects of the phenomenon. Fourth, the large data set did not allow us to consider situational factors that presumably affect escapist motives. Despite these limitations, the strength of the study is the high quality nationally representative data.

In all escapist activity, physiological and psychological aspects are intertwined, as understood in the sequence of mental suffering caused by burdensome self-awareness and the relief that comes from abandoning it (Baumeister, 1991). As the direct consequence of escapism is often a warm, fulfilling, or blissful experience that makes one forget the distress of self-actualization, it is quite plausible that escapism develops toward and sustains addiction in its various forms.

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