

THE INFLUENCE OF SPORTS BETTING ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELLBEING OF YOUTHS IN ABAKALIKI METROPOLIS: A QUALITATIVE APPROACH

EZE Ogonnia Eze and IGWE Prince Benedict

*Department of Psychology and Sociological Studies
Ebonyi State University Abakaliki, Nigeria.*

Correspondence Email: eze.ogbonnia@ebsu.edu.ng

Correspondence Phone Number: +2348034554687

ABSTRACT

The debilitating impacts of gambling behaviour such as sports betting have continued to cause chaos in the psychological wellbeing of young adults across the world. Unsuccessful gamble outcomes have left emotional scars in the psychological functioning of youths in Abakaliki metropolis. These problems are examined in this study through the narrative inquiry qualitative approach. Twenty (20) youth bettors were sampled through purposive and snowball sampling techniques. Narrative interviews were conducted with the respondents and data gathered were subjected to narrative analysis. The study was anchored on the cognitive theory of gambling. Findings indicate that the wellbeing of the participants was adversely impacted as their incomes seem to be lost to gambling which had psychological implications in their lives. Findings further revealed that participants experienced unpleasant emotions, anger, sadness and feelings of irritability. Other psychological problems experienced by participants include; alcohol and other substance abuse, sleeplessness, betting obsession, nervousness and anxiety. It is concluded that gambling outcomes has negatively affected the emotional wellbeing of the participants. We recommend that government should enforce tighter regulations on gambling while gambling education should be embraced in schools.

Keywords: Sports, Betting, Youths, Psychological, wellbeing

INTRODUCTION

Gambling has long been seen as among the few social activities that occurs in all cultures at every period in time (McMillen, 1996). It is considered a risk-taking activity because of the uncertainty of the gambling outcomes. While people often justify the reasons for their other desirable choices, its' been observed that little is known about the justificatory thoughts in gambling (Wu & Clark, 2024). However, gambling activities such as sports betting has been seen to be intrinsically motivated by perceptions that it is a quick and easy way of acquiring funds (Hosain et al, 2024).

Just as with many other parts of the world and Nigeria, youths in Abakaliki indulge in sports betting as a perceived way to better their living considering the high rate of unemployment and hardship in the region. In Nigeria, the last two decades has seen a tremendous growth in sports betting gambling. Ndukwe (2016) observed that sports betting are common in Ebonyi state where Abakaliki is the capital and where this study was conducted such that both youths and other adult males and females see sports betting as their permanent job. Meanwhile, Cosmos et al (2023) in a study on the economic impact of football betting in Abakaliki observed that sports betting contribute to significant economic engagement of youths in Abakaliki. While this may sound interesting, the study has not exposed the dangers of losing the football bets with regards to the psychological consequences of unsuccessful betting outcomes.

On the reason for increased participation of youths in Abakaliki metropolis in sports betting, unemployment and other social factors are highly implicated. As Cosmos et al (2023) noted, Abakaliki metropolis is flooded by numerous football viewing centers that also operate bet shops. The incessant advertisement and media promotion of sports betting in Abakaliki where there are bet shops almost in every street predispose the youths to believe that their lives can be changed overnight through sports betting. Leading bet sites and shops are sporty bet, bet9ja, 1xbet, betway, betwinner, parimatch, betking, nairabet, acessbet etc. Cosmos et al (2023) opined that sports betting were not responsible psychological problems of youths but factors such as harsh

living conditions, poverty, unemployment and malnutrition among other factors. Meanwhile, losing the little money they have to sports betting has the capacity of exacerbating their individual problems and affecting their psychological functioning. This is because it is established (Goodie et al, 2019) that indulging in sports betting behaviour produces irrational beliefs and cognitive bias because the focus is on the prediction which most of the time does not manifest as planned leading to psychological distress.

Gambling behaviour is in a continuum such that while some people gamble occasionally, others gamble frequently (Latvala et al, 2019). Either of these comes with a period of sadness or joy depending on the outcome of the betting. The outcome of the gamble is felt by the gambler and their significant others (Latvala et al, 2019). Where the gamble or betting outcome is successful, the gambler, including their family and friends rejoice over the win but when it is unsuccessful, everyone is also affected negatively.

Recent research has shown that gambling-related harms impact psychological, cultural, relationship, work, health, finance and crime in our societies (Marionneau et al, 2023). Gambling effects are overarching with negative consequences because their outcomes are uncertain and sometimes unsuccessful. These uncertainties have potentials for impacting psychological health and wellbeing which has attracted contemporary research interests. Just as Abbot (2020) informed, gambling is increasingly been seen as a public health issue. Thus, the need to reduce harm and prevent harms caused by gambling in our societies and population has been examined in recent research (Marionneau et al, 2023).

The deleterious effects of gambling behaviour on wellbeing have been proven to be high in terms of the negative effects, although it has also been argued to have positive effects (Blackman et al, 2019). The negative effects are higher and affect many than the positive effects. Thus, research evidence suggests that gambling problems and harms account for loss of billions of dollars annually accruing from job loss, crime, fatalities, unemployment benefits, prevention and treatment (Cho et al, 2018; Hofmarcher et al, 2020; Latvala et al, 2019).

Notable among one of the categories of gambling that is pronounced is sports betting. Sports betting behaviour has increased globally as a gambling activity which allows people to stake money on sporting events either before the sports begin or in-play while the sports is ongoing. There has been an observed development in online gambling market with sports betting been the most popular forms of gambling (Demir & Bandawe, 2024). Winters & Derevensky (2020) further observed that sports betting as a gambling activity is increasingly becoming popular. The impetuses sports betting have gained over the years have been sustained because of the revenue it generates to countries where it is legalized. Thus, Kim et al (2023) informed that sports betting will be increasingly popular in years to come due to advances in its legalization as a gambling activity across many countries of the world. The increase in public interest on sporting activities such as football, basketball, boxing, horse racing etc could also be a factor causing increased sports betting behaviour. The advent of modern technology and the integrative nature of sports betting in marketing medium have also impacted indulgence in this particularly dangerous form of gambling (Phua et al, 2022).

It is important to note that teenagers, youths and adults indulge in sports betting. Meanwhile, research has shown that young people are highly engaged in sports betting than the others which make them vulnerable or susceptible to the risks involved in sports betting as a gambling activity (Di Censo et al, 2024). The high involvement of young people in sports betting is further orchestrated by their constant exposure to the advertisements of sports betting on social media and other social gathering. Thus, sports betting behaviours are prevalent among young people particularly the male folks as research have shown (Browne et al, 2023).

Sports betting market has grown globally and while it is considered a form of gambling, researchers have argued that sports betting should be separately examined owing to its own dynamics, motives and characteristics (Gökce-Yüce et al, 2022). The motivation for sports betting

is sometimes driven by the confidence the bettors have within their capabilities to predict betting outcomes of sports they bet. Thus, as Gökce-Yüce et al (2022) noted, people who indulge in sports betting rely on their perceived expert experiences and intelligence drawing from their knowledge, familiarity and interest in the sports. They bettors sometimes get carried away by these acclaimed knowledge rather than assessing the risk dimensions of the betting (Gordon et al, 2015). This is apparently some of the reasons why sports' betting is considered different from all other forms of gambling.

The innovation in several features of sports betting has also contributed to the addictiveness of persons to sports betting behaviour. Lopez-Gonzales et al (2019) identified some of the novel features integrated into sports betting such as instant deposits, micro betting, cash-out, request-a-bet option and additional live in-play betting. Meanwhile, sports betting are not in itself an entity of its own as many studies have conceptualized it as a form of online gambling (Valenciano-Mendoza et al, 2023). It further suggests that sports betting although very popular when compared to other forms of gambling needs to be examined critically with regards how the bettors affected.

Sports betting gambling and psychological wellbeing

Gambling behaviour has obvious clinical implications for our psychological wellbeing. For instance, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual Fifth Edition (DSM-5) has already identified gambling disorder (GD) as a condition of addiction with a feature of persistent problematic gambling behaviour that generates clinically significant levels of distress and functional impairment (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Maintaining sports betting behaviour is further sustained by cognitive bias such as illusion control which results in the reduction of risk perception and significantly contributes to gambling behaviour (Valenciano-Mendoza et al, 2023). Research has suggested that the number of patients diagnosed of gambling disorder (GD) with gambling preference of sports betting is increasing (Mestre-Bach et al, 2022). This indicates that the concerns on the negative outcomes of sports betting behaviour on our mental health and psychological wellbeing will continue to be of public mental health concern. New improved features such as in-plays in sports betting, causes high impulsivity and problem gambling severity (Hing et al, 2018). Sports betting have been associated with psychological distress and other behavioral addictions (Granero et al, 2020). Sports betting behaviour diminish an individual's sense of self direction and impulse control due to the perseverance to win which elude rational thinking among the bettors. In the case of cash-out during sports betting, it has been attributed to cause psychological vulnerability and problem gambling symptomatology (Sinclair et al, 2024). Sports betting addiction has been linked to mental illness as those of depression and psychosocial functions (Uzobo et al, 2023). Gambling behaviours as those of sports betting pose a threat to the mental wellbeing of the bettors due in part to the sadness that follows losses from betting that are capable of exacerbating into other circles of problems. Uzobo et al (2023) opined that issues are surrounding distorted cognition regarding winning, poor decision making, and the thought of financial loss during sports betting account for mental disorganization. The link between gambling particularly pathological gambling (PG) and personality disorders is established such that PG has been seen as causing schizoid, paranoid, borderline and obsessive compulsive personality disorders (Moreira et al, 2023).

Sports betting considered as a dangerous form of gambling can cause severe mental health problem. Sports bettors are likely to be diagnosed with gambling disorder and people diagnosed with gambling disorder according to the DSM-5 criteria are at great risk of experiencing psychological social and financial problems capable of damaging their personal wellbeing (Phua, 2022). This form of betting can potentially produce damaging effects because sports bettors' cognition is distorted causing errors in their thought processes and consequently irrational decisions. Their irrational beliefs about the outcome of their bet activity constitute part of the

randomness in their predictions that when they fail to manifest account for psychological problems (Goodie et al, 2019)

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The cognitive theory of gambling

Cognitive distortion is seen as one of the most noteworthy traits related to pathological gamblers (Tabri et al, 2020). The purpose of this theory is to describe how the thinking patterns of gamblers are distorted with illusory control over the games of luck they undertake. The cognitive theory of gambling thus describes gambling behaviour as occurring from maladaptive irrational thought processes. In this case, cognitive distorted perceptions give rise to gambling motives (Mathieu et al, 2023). Thus, it is the distortion in the cognitive functioning of gamblers that enable bias in their thought processes and consequently gambling. Meanwhile, the various factors that drive gamblers' irrational beliefs during the different stages of their gambling activities are a major focus of the cognitive theory of gambling.

Armstrong et al (2020) while exploring the involvement of cognition in gambling observed that unsafe beliefs and irrational thoughts about gambling are endorsed by the cognitive style of a person. Thus, gamblers irrational beliefs and cognitive bias are influenced by fallacy, unrealistic optimism, entrapment illusion of control among others which makes them to believe that they have the capacity to influence random outcomes (Rao and Hastie, 2023). These dominant cognitive processes could distort their cognitions to believe that a win will follow a nearly missed event (Agbenorxevi et al, 2023). There exist a complexity in the cognitive constructs that relates to gambling because decision making including to gamble, are cognitively processed as one choose the most optical course of their action (Hales et al, 2023). Other cognitive components such as compulsivity as contained in the cognitive theory of gambling cause gamblers to repeat their gambling actions despite its negative consequences (Van Timmeren et al, 2018). Disruption in various cognitive processes can result to compulsive behaviours as those of gambling. The cognitive theory of gambling has long established a link between irrational gambling cognition and risk propensity (Zhou & Wu, 2024). Gamblers based on this inclination engage in risk taking obviously because of the error in their thinking and cognitive bias capable of resulting to impulsive gambling behaviour. These compulsive behaviours are known to characterize impulsive choices and preferences for immediate rewards (Mari et al, 2024) without proper cognitive evaluation of such rewards.

Objective

The central objective of the study is to explore the nature of experiences that youths sports bettors in Abakaliki metropolis have in relation to their psychological functioning through the examination of the influence of sports betting on their psychological wellbeing.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts the qualitative narrative inquiry approach to conduct narrative interviews that enabled an in-depth understanding of the damaging impact of sports betting gambling behaviour on the psychological wellbeing of the participants. Twenty (20) youth gamblers aged 18-35 years who live in Abakaliki metropolis and engage in continuous sports betting were sampled through purposive and snowball sampling technique. Ten (10) of the participants were government employed university graduates while Ten (10) comprised of self employed artisans. The respondents were male sports bettors only because in Abakaliki metropolis, sports' betting is generally a 'men affair'. Purposive sampling was applied to select gamblers who indulge only on sport betting while snowball sampling was applied to identify an index individual who further referred other individuals that are regular sports bettors.

The participants expressed their willingness to partake in the study after the research information was read to them. They also gave their oral consent to be part of the study as some stated that it would be a good experience to narrate their sports betting experiences. Narrative interviewing has the strength to enable the narrators make sense of their lived experiences through stories (Bamberg, 2012). Therefore, narrative interviews were conducted with the respondents at their preferred venues. Each narrative interview lasted between 30-45 minutes and participants were all able to communicate in English language. Audio tape recorders were used to record the narratives of the participants but permission to do so was obtained from them. The narrative interview guide was semi-structured to enable the narrators go on narrative tangents to convey their inner sense of meaning of their experiences with sports betting. Ethical concerns of psychological discomfort that may arise as the participants narrated their stories were considered. Participants were advised to stop narrating their sport betting experiences when they feel uncomfortable doing so. There were no interruptions as participants were allowed to start and end their stories themselves.

Narrative analysis

The narrative thematic approach adopted, are deployed in contextualizing individual case summaries (Rogers et al, 2023) and for cross thematic analysis of the emerging themes across all the narratives. The data source in this study is spoken lived experiences of participants who are chronic gamblers specifically sports betting. A verbatim transcription of narratives of the participants was conducted and data sets were grouped into agreed themes that were analyzed. Member checking and peer debriefing (Scott et al, 2023) was adopted in ensuring and in establishing data credibility.

The study participant's narratives which they used to give meaning to their individual experiences with sport betting were analysed using emerging themes that represent their stories since the mechanics of configuring the narratives were entirely theirs.

Emerging themes

From the individual analysis of the participants narrative conducted, the major themes emerged which were cross-thematically analysed. They include: seldom win but can't quit, unpleasant emotions of anger, irritable and sadness, alcohol and other substance abuse, losing sleep, betting obsession, nervousness and anxiety.

Seldom win but cannot quit: The participants in their stories recounted losing money to sports betting but were unable to quit betting which is something akin to addiction. Their narratives indicate that they seldom win but could not stop betting. These experiences were seen in all the participants' stories as they narrated their personal experiences with sport betting. See some supporting vignettes from their narratives below:

"...to be honest I can't remember the last time I won a bet but as you can see am still betting"[participant 5], *"...you see the worst part is that I keep losing and betting"* [participant 3], *"...I wish I did not start this sports gambling at all because it is not as if I am wining"*[participant 11], *"...it's a terrible thing, you can't win but you can't stop playing"*[participant 8], *"...I lose and play and continue to play which is bad though"*[participant 19], *"...gambling is eating my money and I don't even know how to stop"*[participant 1], *"... the thing eat money, if I tell you how much I have spent on this sports betting without any return you will ask me why I am still playing the game"*[participant 14], *"...just like my wife will always tell me that I am doing something that I don't succeed but cannot quit"*[participant13], *"...this thing called gambling is bad because you will be losing and still be betting more money"*[participant 7]. Narrative evidence above indicates that the narrators where at the grip of being unable to quit sports betting considering their inability to win their bets and the resources they lose to sports betting.

Unpleasant emotion of anger, irritable and sadness: Participants in the study used an experience that suggests being overwhelmed with unpleasant emotions, feeling irritable, anger and sadness to describe their experiences with sport betting. See some vignettes from their narratives below: *".....I am always angry whenever I lose my bets"*[participant 2], *".....if my game cut, I don't want listen to anybody at all even in my work place"*[participant 10], *"...if I lose, I will just be feeling angry and terrible"*[participant 5], *"...you know the thing is painful because all hope is that I will win but when it goes the other way, I feel sad always and angry with people around me"*[participant 16], *".....my sure bet once it cut, I will be so scattered because sometimes I stake big money"*[participant 9], *"....hmmn I don't like myself when I lose my bets because it normally show on my face, as in nobody is my friend at that time"*[participant 12], *"....so if one game cut then you know everything is finished, then you go carry yourself de cry"*[participant 3], *"...nothing anybody will tell me that I will listen at that time when my bet slip has lost"*[participant 8]. The lived experiences of the narrators regarding sport betting was regrettably accounted using negative emotions because in most of their gamble outing, they had lost their bets leading to psychological feelings of anger, sadness and other unpleasant emotions.

Alcohol and other substance abuse: The narrative accounts of the participants evidenced a sense of loss grounded in substance abuse as a way to escape the reality thoughts of losing their bets. Alcohol and other substances were used to form a relational home where their sad experiences with sport betting were held. These substances as told by the narrators had the potentials of temporarily helping them overcome the feeling of loss they regularly experienced with sports betting. See some vignettes below:

"...so me when it happen that I have lost my money to the game, I use the balance in my hand to drink kai kai just to forget the money"[participant 11], *"...when I lose my game, I smoke a lot because sometimes I use my last cash to bet"*[participant 4], *"...the feeling is not here oo so if the game cut I enter beer palour and forget it at that time"*[participant 15], *"...sometimes I weed just to forget the matter even though it pains to lose my money in a match that am so sure"*[participant 3], *"...if I bet and the game lose, I hummm use things like beer or cigarette to quench my fire"*[participant 18], *"...you see sometimes you see us drinking not because we are happy but just to forget the game that cut"*[participant 9], *"...I smoke janga to forget the game, that's what I do"*[participant 1], *"...this bar is where we use to come and forget our sorrow, some of these people here are people that lost money on betting"*[participant 6]. The study participants constructed their stories of sports betting experiences using leading a life of substance abuse to make sense of their lives. Majority of them storied using alcohol, cannabis, cigarette and other substances to engage themselves because of the perceived relief they get from the substances when things go wrong with their betting.

Losing sleep: Experiences that resemble those of insomnia was used by the participants to make sense of their sports betting experiences as they narrated having difficulty with sleeping especially when they lose money to unsuccessful bets. The participants recounted being awake at night reminiscing over their loss due to their confidence in their permutations and hope to win their games. This experience weaved through their narratives. See some vignettes below:

"...the pain of losing my bet make me lose sleep" [participant 7], *"...the thing is that I have played this game for long but I keep losing and it gives me sleepless nights"* [participant 13], *"...men, you can't sleep oo when the game cut, I always find it difficult to sleep"*[participant 6], *"...sometimes I will just wake up in the middle of the night asking myself why I cannot stop this betting because it's not like am winning"*[participant 14], *"...some game that I will be too sure of winning then it will just spoil, and that one will not allow sleep enter your eye"*[participant 17], *"...it's not always easy especially if it is my last cash I used to play the match and it did not enter, its midnight wake*



keeping oo"[participant 19], "...you know us that do online betting don't sleep because we are always awake checking if the games has all entered and if it did not enter which is what normally happen, you will just be awake thinking the loss"[participant 20]. Narrative evidence indicate that poor sleep habit and sometimes inability to sleep at all owing to loss of money to sport betting and staying awake to monitor the bets characterized the life experiences of the participants.

Betting obsession: the use of obsessive compulsion to make sense of their life experiences with sports betting weaved through the narratives of all the participants as they storied losing money but unable to quit sport betting. See some vignettes:

".....uhm when I lose I get sick but I continue betting" [participant 2], "...the thing use to draw like machine because the thought to play will always be there"[participant 4] "...any day I don't play betting it will seem as if it is the day I will win big money"[participant 20], "...even when I say I will not bet, I still see myself putting some games to bet"[participant 18], "...betting is difficult to leave, once you start every game looks like a sure game"[participant 19], "...I visit bet nja shop everyday trying my luck"[participant 16], "...me if I don't bet game I feel like I have missed my chance of becoming a millionaire" [participant 12], "...betting is part of me oo, I will always be betting until one day I will make it" [participant 13]. The uncontrollable urge to bet money in anticipation of winning big was used by the narrators to make sense of their sports betting experiences as seen in the vignettes above. Participants storied having obsession to sport betting and a compulsion to stake money as they constantly had the irresistible impulses to bet not minding the risk of losing their money.

Nervousness and Anxiety: Narrative analysis evidence suggests that the participants had experiences that coincided with a feeling of nervousness and anxiety. They used feeling nervous and having anxiety feelings to make sense of their sport betting outcome experiences. This was a major theme that weaved through the experiences of the participants. Some supporting excerpts from their narratives are given below:

"...each time I play a bet, my mind will be flying until the end of the game"[Participant 7], "...and when I lose, I will become restless because it can pain you such that you can't concentrate on anything except thinking about the loss"[Participant 3], "...playing betting is dangerous, because of constant panic until the match is over especially if you are watching the game"[Participant 10], "...sometimes if it is just one or two games left to win, I will be panicking and shaking"[Participant 13], "...nobody's mind jump like those of us when we bet money on a game, is has even become normal"[Participant 15], "...I don't eat or do anything unless the game I put my money has ended because I can't focus on anything that time"[Participant 9], "...one day I thought I have made it because just 5 minutes extra time to win big money I lost the game, I was shaking and sweating"[Participant 17], "...gambling is bad even though I am still playing it, you know that one called in-play bet, each time I play in-play bet I will be panicking because your money will just disappear in seconds"[Participant 11], "...sometimes it's our last money that we use to play this betting, you will just be worried and because I know there is a danger ahead that is going to happen when the money is lost"[Participant 18]. "...the fear and panicking is even the problem with this gambling because most times, the fear of whether the bet will win is the problem we have as gamblers" [Participant 20]. The vignettes above shows that the participants made use of anxiety related features to account and make sense of their gambling experiences of engaging in sport betting. Their betting experiences was one of fear of the unknown outcomes, inability to concentrate on any meaningful life activity when they stake money on sports bet, and a feeling of worry of impending danger when their projections and permutations fail.

RESULTS

The narrative analysis conducted in the study has evidenced some of the psychological disorientation that youths' sports betters in Abakaliki metropolis experienced as they indulge in

chronic staking of their meagre finances on sports bets in anticipation to win big. The result of the analysis suggests that the narrators experienced condition of fear, anger, feeling of irritability and emotional sadness due to the regular loss of their paltry money to sports betting. These conditions are worsened because of addiction such that they seldom win but could not quit betting. Narrative analysis further shows that the abuse of alcohol and other related substances to escape reality was common among the participants as recounted in their narratives. Other psychological problems that bedevilled the narrators were; lose of sleep, obsessive compulsive behaviour towards sports betting, nervousness and anxiety.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The research findings has evidenced how lived experiences can be told as stories and used to make sense of living. In particular, the study examined the lived experiences of 20 youths in Abakaliki metropolis on their experiences with sports betting and how it affects their psychological functioning and wellbeing. The rigorous processes of the narrative analysis has ultimately revealed an in-depth understanding of the most psychological challenging aspect of being a sport better as the narrators reconstructed their sense of sense using the stories of their lives as sport betters and gamblers.

The central objective of the study was to explore the nature of experiences that youths sports betters in Abakaliki metropolis have in relation to their psychological functioning through an examination of the influence of sports betting on their psychological wellbeing. This objective has been achieved as narrative data collected and analyzed has shown that the participants' psychological wellbeing is negatively affected as they stake money on sports betting, rarely win but were addicted to continue staking more money. This finding is consistent with the result of a study by Rolando and Wardle (2024) who found loss of money, chance of determining wins and risk of addiction to characterize gambling experiences of gamblers. The finding also resonates with research result from Farasa et al (2024) who found that among the negative impacts of online gambling is that the gamblers are trapped in an addiction of trying to make more money. Similarly, participants in this study notwithstanding the money they lose to sports betting continued betting in anticipation of winning which never happened. The cognitive theory of gambling assumes this hope of winning as cognitive distorted perceptions that give rise to gambling motives (Mathieu et al, 2023).

Regarding the damaging role of sports betting gambling on the psychological wellbeing of the participants, findings of this study illuminate conditions of unpleasant emotions, irritability, anger and sadness as outcomes of their gambling activities. Meanwhile, outburst of anger has been recognized as among the negative outcomes of gambling (Rolando & Wardle, 2024). Other conditions that affected the psychological functioning of the participant as findings of the study revealed were alcohol and other substance abuse, obsessive compulsive behaviour, sleeplessness, nervousness and anxiety. The cognitive theory of gambling as Van Timmeren et al (2018) informed agree that cognitive processes including perception, attention motor response regulation or cognitive response regulation can lead to compulsive behaviour. As with the findings in this study, previous research findings has shown that gambling harm a person's finance, relationship and health (Gabellini et al, 2023). Other supporting findings are those of Giansbury et al (2019) which found that sports betting were highly related to psychological distress.

Research by Gathoni et al (2024) found that regular bettors are at risk of attempting suicide because they are more prone to rage, anger, guilt after they have suffered significant loss. These findings further resonate the results of this study which revealed that the addictive nature of sports betting has caused significant distress to the participants with anger, sadness, sleeplessness and anxiety characterizing their experiences of losing money to sports betting.

Conclusions

Sports betting have been a contributing factor that adversely impacts the psychological wellbeing of youth gamblers in Abakaliki metropolis. Based on the findings, it is concluded that sports betting is ruining the future of many youths who indulge in the activity as their meager income is lost to the bet companies they patronize while their psychological health is greatly endangered. Their mental health, relationships and productivity in their various places of work are affected in addition to their financial loss. It is thus established that sports betting is addictive as the study participants had difficulties with quitting the act of betting even at the expense of their psychological wellbeing. This implies that many youths in Abakaliki metropolis are victims of problem gambling which is currently under researched.

Recommendations

We recommend that Ebonyi State government of Nigeria should enforce tighter regulations on gambling, awareness campaigns on the negative consequences of gambling should be intensified while gambling education should be embraced in schools. Further recommendation is that the government should consider collaborating with psychologists and counsellors in the state to design counselling programmes that will target youth gamblers. This will forestall future involvement of youths in chronic gambling activities and cognitively restructure those who are already victims of problem gambling. We also recommend a large scale study to expose problem gambling among youths across the entire Ebonyi State of Nigeria.

REFERENCES

- Abbott, M. W. (2020). Gambling and gambling-related harm: recent World Health Organization initiatives. *Public health*, 184, 56-59.
- Agbenorhevi, C. D., Hevi, S. S., Malcalm, E., Akude, J., & Coleman, R. K. N. (2023). Gamified problem gambling and psychological distress: the mediated-moderated roles of cognitive and economic motives. *Journal of Gambling Studies*, 39(3), 1355-1370.
- American Psychiatric Association. (2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders* (5 ed.) American Psychiatric Association.
- Armstrong, T., Rockloff, M., Browne, M., & Blaszczynski, A. (2020). Beliefs about gambling mediate the effect of cognitive style on gambling problems. *Journal of Gambling Studies*, 36(3), 871-886.
- Blackman, A., Browne, M., Rockloff, M., Hing, N., & Russell, A. M. (2019). Contrasting effects of gambling consumption and gambling problems on subjective wellbeing. *Journal of gambling studies*, 35(3), 773-792.
- Browne, M., Delfabbro, P., Thorne, H. B., Tulloch, C., Rockloff, M. J., Hing, N., ... & Stevens, M. (2023). Unambiguous evidence that over half of gambling problems in Australia are caused by electronic gambling machines: Results from a large-scale composite population study. *Journal of Behavioral Addictions*, 12(1), 182-193. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsy.2020.590554>
- Cosmos, M., Nwose, C., & Alozie, A. (2023). Football betting and Youth engagement in Abakaliki 1996-2020. *Uzu Journal of History and International Studies*, 9(1), 80-89.
- Cho, D. J., Kim, H. T., Lee, J., & Park, S. H. (2018). Economic cost-benefit analysis of the addictive digital game industry. *Applied Economics Letters*, 25(9), 638-642.
- Demir, G., & Bandawe, C. (2024). The Interest in Betting, Smoking, Alcohol, and Drugs in Malawi: Changing Trends between 2012-2022. *Malawi Medical Journal*, 36(1), 30-37. <https://doi.org/10.4314/mmj.v36i1.5>
- Di Censo, G., Delfabbro, P., & King, D. L. (2024). Mapping Youth Awareness of Sports Betting Advertising During the 2022 FIFA World Cup. *Journal of Gambling Studies*, 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10899-024-10299-2>
- Farasa, A., Hakim, I., Suryawardani, A., Romadhona, F., & Irdiana, S. (2024). The opiate toxin of online gambling: a consumer behavior analysis of online gambling users' addiction levels. *Digital Business: Tren Bisnis Masa Depan*, 15(2), 131-138.
- Gabellini, E., Lucchini, F., & Gattoni, M. E. (2023). Prevalence of problem gambling: A meta-analysis of recent empirical research (2016–2022). *Journal of Gambling Studies*, 39(3), 1027-1057.
- Gainsbury, S.M., Angus, D.J. & Blaszczynski, A. (2019). Isolating the impact of specific gambling activities and modes on problem gambling and psychological distress in internet gamblers. *BMC Public Health* 19, 1372. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-019-7738-5>.
- Gathoni, B., Munayi, S., Wanjira, J., Apaak, D., & Amakye, E. (2024). Online Sports Betting and Demographic Factors' Effects on Student-Athletes' Mental Health. *International Journal of Physical Education, Recreation and Sports*, 2(2), 1-11.
- Granero, R., Jiménez-Murcia, S., del Pino-Gutierrez, A., Mora, B., Mendoza-Valenciano, E., Baenas-Soto, I., ... & Fernandez-Aranda, F. (2020). Gambling phenotypes in online sports betting. *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, 11, 482.
- Gökce Yüce, S., Yüce, A., Katırcı, H., Nogueira-López, A., & González-Hernández, J. (2022). Effects of sports betting motivations on sports betting addiction in a Turkish sample. *International Journal of Mental Health and Addiction*, 20(5), 3022-3043.
- Gordon, R., Gurrieri, L., & Chapman, M. (2015). Broadening an understanding of problem gambling: The lifestyle consumption community of sports betting. *Journal of Business Research*, 68(10), 2164–2172. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2015.03.016>

- Goodie, A., Fortune, E., & Shotwell, J. (2019). Cognitive Distortions in Disordered Gambling. In *Gambling Disorder* (pp. 49-71). Springer, Cham, 2019.
- Hales, C. A., Clark, L., & Winstanley, C. A. (2023). Computational approaches to modeling gambling behaviour: Opportunities for understanding disordered gambling. *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews*, 147, 105083. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neubiorev.2023.105083>
- Hofmarcher, T., Romild, U., Spångberg, J., Persson, U., & Håkansson, A. (2020). The societal costs of problem gambling in Sweden. *BMC public health*, 20, 1-14.
- Hosain, M. Z., Islam, M. S., Islam, M. S., & Rahman, M. S. (2024). Online Betting Addiction in Higher Education: Effects on Academic and Mental Health. *International Journal of Research and Scientific Innovation*, 11(6), 14-20.
- Hing, N., Li, E., Vitartas, P., & Russell, A. M. (2018). On the spur of the moment: Intrinsic predictors of impulse sports betting. *Journal of Gambling Studies*, 34, 413-428.
- Kim, H. S., Coelho, S. G., Vieira, J. L., & Keough, M. T. (2023). Dispositional and contextual correlates of in-play sports betting and related harms: A 2-week ecological momentary assessment study. *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors*, 37(8), 1066–1079. <https://doi.org/10.1037/adb0000948>
- Latvala, T., Lintonen, T., & Konu, A. (2019). Public health effects of gambling—debate on a conceptual model. *BMC public health*, 19, 1-16.
- Marionneau, V., Egerer, M., & Raisamo, S. (2023). Frameworks of gambling harms: a comparative review and synthesis. *Addiction Research & Theory*, 31(1), 69-76.
- Mari, E., Cricenti, C., Boccia, M., Zucchelli, M. M., Nori, R., Piccardi, L., ... & Quagliari, A. (2024). Betting on Your Feelings: The Interplay between Emotion and Cognition in Gambling Affective Task. *Journal of Clinical Medicine*, 13(10), 2990. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jcm13102990>
- Mathieu, S., Barrault, S., Brunault, P., & Varescon, I. (2018). Gambling motives: Do they explain cognitive distortions in male poker gamblers?. *Journal of gambling studies*, 34, 133-145.
- McMillen, J. (1996). Understanding gambling. *Gambling cultures: Studies in history and interpretation*, 6-42.
- Mestre-Bach, G., Granero, R., Mora-Maltas, B., Valenciano-Mendoza, E., Munguía, L., Potenza, M. N., & Jiménez-Murcia, S. (2022). Sports-betting-related gambling disorder: Clinical features and correlates of cognitive behavioral therapy outcomes. *Addictive Behaviors*, 133, 107371.
- Moreira, D., Azeredo, A., & Dias, P. (2023). Risk factors for gambling disorder: a systematic review. *Journal of Gambling Studies*, 39(2), 483-511. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10899-023-10195-1>
- Ndukwe, C. (2016). Youth Empowerment Programmes and Unemployment Reduction in Ebonyi State: A Study of the Ministry of Youth and Sports, Abakaliki. *Journal of Current Issues in Arts and Humanities*, 2(1), 121-133.
- Phua, Y. X. P., & Leng, H. K. (2022). Cognitive Distortions and Problem Gambling in Sports Betting. *Journal of Gambling Issues*, 50.
- Rao, K., & Hastie, R. (2023). Predicting Outcomes in a Sequence of Binary Events: Belief Updating and Gambler's Fallacy Reasoning. *Cognitive Science*, 47(1), e13211.
- Rogers, M. M., Ali, P., Thompson, J., & Ifayomi, M. (2023). "Survive, learn to live with it... or not": A narrative analysis of women's repeat victimization using a lifecourse perspective. *Social Science & Medicine*, 338, 116338.
- Rolando, S., & Wardle, H. (2024). 'That's why it's gambling, because you don't know what you find in it!' Perceptions of the relationship between gaming and gambling among young adult gamers. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 27(6), 869-884.
- Sinclair, E. L., Clark, L., Wohl, M. J. A., Keough, M. T., & Kim, H. S. (2024). Cash outs during in-play sports betting: Who, why, and what it reveals. *Addictive Behaviors*, 154, 108008. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.addbeh.2024.108008>

- Scott, J., Pryce, J., Reinke, N. B., Li, D., Shuker, M. A., Singleton, R., ... & Parkinson, A. L. (2023). Towards a 'Community for Practice'—A Narrative Analysis of the Evolution of Higher Education Scholars. *Education Sciences*, 13(12), 1239.
- Tabri, N., Salmon, M. M., & Wohl, M. J. (2021). Financially focused self-concept in disordered gambling: Comparisons between non-disordered and disordered gambling subtypes. *Addiction Research & Theory*, 29(1), 18-29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/16066359.2020.1714039>
- Van Timmeren, T., Daams, J. G., Van Holst, R. J., & Goudriaan, A. E. (2018). Compulsivity-related neurocognitive performance deficits in gambling disorder: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Neuroscience & Biobehavioral Reviews*, 84, 204-217.
- Uzobo, E., Scent, G. A. T., Moroyei, B. O., & Owutuamor, E. F. (2023). Sports betting and depression among youths in the South-South region of Nigeria. *Adiktologie*, 23(2), 145–157. <https://doi.org/10.35198/01-2023-001-0001>
- Valenciano-Mendoza, E., Mora-Maltas, B., Mestre-Bach, G., Munguía, L., Richard, J., Derevensky, J. L., ... & Jiménez-Murcia, S. (2023). Clinical correlates of sports betting: A systematic review. *Journal of Gambling Studies*, 39(2), 579-624.
- Winters, K. C., & Derevensky, J. L. (2019). A review of sports wagering: prevalence, characteristics of sports bettors, and association with problem gambling. *Journal of Gambling Issues*, 43. <https://doi.org/10.4309/jgi.2019.43.7>
- Wu, R., & Clark, L. (2024). Impulse and reason? Justifications in problem gambling. *Addictive Behaviors*, 157, 108072.
- Zhou, H., & Wu, A. M. (2024). The protective effects of cognitive empathy and emotional empathy on gambling disorder are mediated by risk aversion and responsible gambling attitude. *BMC psychiatry*, 24(1), 63. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-024-05509-5>