

# Gambling Addition among University Students in Nigeria: The Impact on their Mental Health and Academic Performance

Dr. URIEN, James

Department of Psychology, Delta State University, Abraka

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## ABSTRACT

The study examined gambling addition among university students in Nigeria: the impact on their mental health and academic performance. Gambling addition is a growing concern among university students in Nigeria, with significant implications for their mental health and academic achievement. Three research questions were raised in the study. Survey design was adopted for this study. The population of the study consists of all students of Delta State University, Abraka. Simple random sampling technique was used to arrive at a sample size of 600 out of the total population. A self structured questionnaire titled “Gambling Addition among University Students Questionnaire - GAUSQ”. The researcher administered a total of 600 questionnaire to randomly selected respondents in the study area. Simple percentage, mean scores, standard deviation were used to provide answers to the research questions. Descriptive statistics was used to test the hypotheses formulated. The study therefore concluded that gambling addiction among university students is a multifaceted issue that requires a comprehensive approach to address its far-reaching consequences. This study has highlighted the alarming prevalence of gambling addiction among university students with significant implications for their mental health and academic performance. Based on the conclusion, it therefore recommended that government, parents, policy-makers and other stakeholders should implement evidence-based gambling education programs to raise awareness about the risks and consequences of gambling addiction among university students. Develop and enforce policies and regulations to restrict access to gambling venues and online platforms, particularly among university students.

**Keywords:** Gambling Addition. Mental Health, Academic Performance, Nigeria

## INTRODUCTION

A growing concern among university students in Nigeria is gambling addiction, which has significant implications for their mental health and academic achievement. Hughes (2023) reports that approximately 23% of Nigerian university students experience problem gambling. This is a disturbing trend, given the impact of gambling addiction on students' mental health and academic performance. Furthermore, gambling addiction is widespread among secondary school students across Nigeria, reflecting the nationwide phenomenon of gambling. The most popular forms of gambling in Nigeria today are online betting and platforms such as Sportybet, Bet9ja, MerryBet, Betking.

However, some experts argue that gambling in Nigeria will soon pose a greater public health threat than substance misuse (Chin and Sanju, 2020). Since the inception of sports betting in the gambling industry, competition has intensified with the emergence of numerous sports betting companies, including Nairabet, Saharabet, Bet9ja, 1960Bet, and many others. Having visited a sports betting viewing center or shop, one can attest that sports betting is increasingly becoming entrenched in the minds of youths, who now perceive it as a normal business venture. This trend of seeking financial gain has significantly impacted university students (Alabi, 2014).

According to Jaho (2022) betting is perceived by Nigerian youth as a means of empowerment, as they believe it will enable them to win millions and become independent. Nevertheless, the impact of gambling on university students' health and wellbeing has become a significant public issue. The advent of new

technologies has increased the accessibility of gambling products and opportunities, prompting governments to consider how to address the potential risks and benefits associated with these potentially harmful products. Gambling has been identified as a behavior with negative consequences, including serious repercussions on bettors' health, study habits, and academic performance, as well as reported connections to criminal behavior (Oyebisi, Alao, & Popoola, 2012).

The growing trend of online betting, a form of online gambling, has become a pressing concern in modern society (Lopez-Gonzalez & Griffiths, 2018). As digital technologies continue to shape leisure habits, the use of online betting among university students raises concerns about its impact on academic performance, mental health, and social dynamics. The consequences of excessive debt and financial disputes can be severe, leading to family disruption, mental health issues, and poor academic achievement. Furthermore, students struggling with addiction often resort to dishonest behavior, ultimately eroding trust and compromising mental health and academic achievement (Sobrun-Maharaj, Rossen, & Wong, 2013).

The proliferation of online gambling platforms has facilitated increased student engagement in gambling activities, potentially as a coping mechanism for financial stress and economic instability. According to Hughes (2023), gambling addiction can have severe repercussions on students' mental health, including anxiety, depression, and substance abuse. Students struggling with gambling addiction may experience diminished academic performance due to decreased engagement in academic activities and increased time devoted to gambling. Furthermore, gambling addiction can undermine students' motivation to study, as they become increasingly fixated on financial gains. In extreme cases, students may resort to stealing, borrowing, or undesirable associations to sustain their addiction, which can further exacerbate mental health issues and diminish academic achievements.

### **Statement to the Problem**

Gambling addiction among university students in Nigeria has become a pressing concern with significant implications for their mental health and academic achievement. Despite the growing occurrence of problem associated with gambling addition university students perceive gambling as an empowerment or a way to reduce financial stress. This could be as result of easy access of online gambling platforms, peer influence and social pressure, financial stress and economic instability, high rate of unemployment. Therefore, there is need for universities, parents, teachers and policy-makers to take proactive measure to address this issue

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the factors contributing to gambling addition among university students in Nigeria and the impact on their mental health and academic performance?
2. What are the impact of gambling addition among university students in Nigeria on their mental health and academic performance?
3. What are the strategies to reduce gambling addition among university students in Nigeria and the impact on their mental health and academic performance?

## **REVIEW**

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework of this study is hinged on Self-Determination Theory propounded by Deci & Ryan (2000). Self-Determination Theory (SDT) posits that human behavior is motivated by three innate psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). It is a theory in psychology that focuses on human motivation, personality and well-being. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) represents a broad framework for understanding why we do what we do and what leads to flourishing. SDT articulates a meta-theory for framing motivational studies, a formal theory that defines intrinsic and varied extrinsic sources of motivation and a description of the respective roles of intrinsic and types of extrinsic

motivation in cognitive and social development and individual differences. Perhaps more importantly, SDT propositions also focus on how social and cultural factors facilitate or undermine people's sense of volition and initiative in addition to their well-being and the quality of their performance.

### **Factors contributing to gambling addiction**

According to Obi (2020), students characterized by impulsivity, sensation-seeking, and competitiveness traits are more likely to develop gambling addiction. Students struggling with mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and stress may use gambling as a coping mechanism. Students with low self-esteem may also gamble as a means of enhancing their confidence and self-worth. Additionally, students who have experienced trauma or adversity may be more vulnerable to gambling addiction. As Alabi (2014) notes, the ease of access to online gambling platforms, casinos, and betting shops can contribute to the development of gambling addiction among students. Peer influence can also contribute to students engaging in gambling activities, potentially leading to addiction. Students from families where gambling is normalized or encouraged may also be more likely to develop a gambling addiction. Furthermore, a campus culture that promotes or tolerates gambling can contribute to the development of gambling addiction among students.

According to Oyebiri, Alao, and Popoola (2012), students may hold cognitive distortions, such as the illusion of control, gambler's fallacy, or the belief that they are "due for a win." Students may use gambling as a means of regulating their emotions, such as stress, anxiety, or boredom. Students may also use gambling as a way to escape or avoid problems, emotions, or responsibilities. The thrill and excitement of gambling can activate the brain's reward system, potentially leading to addiction. The aggressive marketing and advertising tactics employed by the gambling industry can contribute to the normalization of gambling and the development of addiction among students. A lack of education and awareness regarding the risks and consequences of gambling can also contribute to the development of addiction among students. In addition, students may feel pressure to gamble due to financial difficulties or the promise of easy money. A culture that promotes or tolerates gambling can also contribute to the development of addiction among students.

### **Impact of gambling addiction**

The effects of gambling on the health and wellbeing of individuals, families, and communities have emerged as a major public issue. The advent of new technologies has enhanced the accessibility of gambling products and opportunities, leading governments to consider the most effective ways to mitigate the potential risks and maximize the benefits associated with these products. While a substantial body of evidence exists regarding the harms caused by certain forms of land-based betting, such as electronic gaming machines (Agbala 2016), relatively limited research has been conducted on the impact of newer forms of gambling, including online sports betting.

The importance of addressing the issues surrounding online betting is heightened by the fact that many jurisdictions that have it are now scrambling to implement regulatory frameworks to mitigate its harmful effects (Hughes, 2016). Gambling has far reaching negative consequences, including adverse effects on bettors' health, study habits, and academic performance, as well as links to criminal behavior (Oyebisi, Alao, & Popoola, 2012). According to Sanga (2017), gambling addiction can have devastating effects on academic performance, including decreased focus, absenteeism, and poor time management, ultimately leading to lower grades and academic underachievement. In extreme cases, gambling addiction can result in students dropping out of school or being academically dismissed.

Moreover, gambling addiction can lead to decreased motivation and interest in academic pursuits. Gambling addiction can also result in significant financial debt, including credit card debt, loans, and unpaid bills, leading to financial instability and difficulty paying for tuition, room, and board. In severe cases, gambling addiction can lead to the loss of financial aid, scholarships, or grants. As noted by Chambers (2011), gambling addiction can lead to increased anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues. In severe cases, it can lead to suicidal thoughts and behaviors. It can also lead to decreased self-esteem, confidence, and self-worth.

Moreover, it can cause strained relationships with family, friends, and romantic partners. Students with

gambling addiction may experience social isolation, including withdrawal from social activities and events. It can also lead to a loss of trust among peers, family, and friends. Additionally, it can result in sleep disturbances, including insomnia and sleep deprivation. Students with gambling addiction may experience nutritional deficiencies due to poor eating habits and decreased interest in self-care. Furthermore, it increases the risk of substance abuse, including alcohol and drug addiction.

**Strategies to reduce gambling addiction**

Alabi, (2014); Sanga (2017) & Cutlog (2020) highlighted strategies to reduce gambling addiction among students as follows:

1. **Gambling Education Programs:** Implement evidence-based gambling education programs that teach students about the risks and consequences of gambling addiction.
2. **Workshops and Seminars:** Organize workshops and seminars that provide students with information about gambling addiction, its signs, and its consequences.
3. **Curriculum Integration:** Integrate gambling education into the school curriculum, ensuring that students receive comprehensive education about gambling addiction.
4. **Early Intervention:** Identify students who are at risk of developing gambling addiction and provide them with early intervention and support.
5. **Peer Support Groups:** Establish peer support groups where students can share their experiences and receive support from their peers.
6. **Parental Involvement:** Encourage parental involvement in gambling education and prevention efforts.
7. **Counseling Services:** Provide students with access to counseling services, including individual and group therapy sessions.
8. **Gambling-Free Campuses:** Establish gambling-free campuses, prohibiting gambling activities on school premises.
9. **Restrict Access to Gambling Venues:** Restrict students' access to gambling venues, including online gambling sites.
10. **Promote Healthy Alternatives:** Promote healthy alternatives to gambling, including sports, recreational activities, and creative pursuits.
11. **Monitor and Evaluate:** Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of gambling prevention and education efforts.

**METHODOLOGY**

Survey design was adopted for this study. The population of the study consists of all students of Delta State University, Abraka. Simple random sampling technique was used to arrive at a sample size of 600 out of the total population. A self structured questionnaire titled “Gambling Addition among University Students Questionnaire - GAUSQ”. The researcher administered a total of 600 questionnaire to randomly selected participants in the study area. Inferential statistics Simple percentage, mean scores, standard deviation and coefficient of determination using 2.50 as benchmark to provide answers to the research questions. Inferential statistics of Descriptive statistics was used to test the hypotheses formulated.

Table 1: Response to factors contributing to gambling addiction

Factors contributing to gambling addiction	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std	Remark
Students with competitiveness traits are more prone to gambling addiction.	129	187	81	203	3.16	.94	Agreed

Students with mental health issues may turn to gambling as a coping mechanism.	221	65	160	154	2.16	.60	Disagreed
Students with low self-esteem may use gambling as a way to boost their confidence and self-worth.	97	301	100	102	2.78	.79	Agreed
Easy access to betting shops can contribute to gambling addiction among students.	165	150	0	285	2.98	.82	Agreed
Students may be influenced by their peers to engage in gambling addiction	145	100	150	205	2.24	.89	Disagreed
Students who grow up in families where gambling is normalized may be more likely to develop a gambling addiction.	150	151	150	149	2.38	.78	Agreed

Table 1 shows factors contributing to gambling addiction among university students in Nigeria and the impact on their mental health and academic performance. From the remark, the respondents agreed on items 1, 3, 4, 6 and disagreed with items 2, 5.

Table 2: Response to impact of gambling addiction among university students

Impact of gambling addiction	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std	Remark
Gambling addiction can lead to decreased focus, resulting in academic underachievement.	285	20	145	150	3.13	.82	Agreed
Gambling addiction can lead to students dropping out of school	102	301	100	97	2.94	.77	Agreed
Gambling addiction can lead to decreased motivation.	250	100	50	200	2.84	.79	Agreed
Gambling addiction can lead to significant financial debt.	187	203	129	81	2.90	.74	Agreed
Students with gambling addiction may experience financial instability.	250	250	40	60	2.86	.78	Agreed
Gambling addiction can lead to increased mental health issues.	285	165	50	100	2.92	.83	Agreed

Table 2 shows the impact of gambling addiction among university students in Nigeria on their mental health and academic performance. From the remark, the respondents agreed on all items.

Table 3: Response to strategies to reduce gambling addiction

Strategies to gambling addiction	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std	Remark
Implement evidence-based gambling education programs.	90	284	100	126	3.10	.94	Agreed
Organize workshops and seminars.	150	149	150	151	2.46	.70	Disagreed
Integrate gambling education into the school curriculum.	50	60	250	240	2.18	.77	Disagreed



Identify students who are at risk of developing gambling addiction and provide them with early intervention and support.	301	100	97	102	2.98	.82	Agreed
Establish peer support groups.	165	150	85	200	2.94	.89	Agreed
Encourage parental involvement.	221	65	160	154	2.38	.78	Disagreed

Table 3 shows strategies to reduce gambling addition among university students in Nigeria and the impact on their mental health and academic performance. From the remark, the respondents agreed on items 1, 4 & 5 and disagreed with 2, 3 & 6.

Table 4: Descriptive Analysis showing factors contributing to gambling addition among university students in Nigeria and the impact on their mental health and academic performance

Variables	N	X	STD	DF	P-value	Level of Sign	Decision
Factors contributing to gambling addition	600	2.62	0.15	5	0.01	0.05	Significant
Mental health and academic performance		2.98	0.06				

A descriptive analysis predicts factors contributing to gambling addition among university students in Nigeria and the impact on their mental health and academic performance. The statistics in the table showed mean score of 2.62 and 2.98 respectively, standard deviation of 0.15 and 0.06. Since the p-value < 0.05, therefore null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 5: Descriptive Analysis showing the impact of gambling addition among university students in Nigeria on their mental health and academic performance

Variables	N	X	STD	DF	P-value	Level of Sign	Decision
Impact of gambling addition	600	2.95	0.25	5	0.002	0.05	Significant
Mental health and academic performance		2.39	0.14				

A descriptive analysis showing the impact of gambling addition among university students in Nigeria on their mental health and academic performance. The statistics in the table showed mean score of 2.95 and 2.39 respectively, standard deviation of 0.25 and 0.14. Since the p-value < 0.05, therefore null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 6: Descriptive Analysis showing strategies to reduce gambling addition among university students in Nigeria and the impact on their mental health and academic performance

Variables	N	X	STD	DF	P-value	Level of Sign	Decision
Strategies to reduce gambling addition	600	3.72	1.15	5	0.001	0.05	Significant
Mental health and academic performance		3.60	0.14				

A descriptive analysis showing the strategies to reduce gambling addiction among university students in Nigeria and the impact on their mental health and academic performance. The statistics in the table showed mean score of 3.72 and 3.60 respectively, standard deviation of 1.15 and 0.14. Since the  $p$ -value  $< 0.05$ , therefore null hypothesis is rejected.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Findings revealed that the factors contributing to gambling addiction among university students in Nigeria and the impact on their mental health and academic performance. This is in line with Obi (2020) who asserted that students with impulsivity, sensation-seeking, and competitiveness traits are more prone to gambling addiction. Students with mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, and stress may turn to gambling as a coping mechanism. Students with low self-esteem may use gambling as a way to boost their confidence and self-worth. Students who have experienced trauma or adversity may be more vulnerable to gambling addiction.

The findings also showed that the impact of gambling addiction among university students in Nigeria on their mental health and academic performance. This is in line with Sanga (2017) who noted that gambling addiction can lead to decreased focus, absenteeism, and poor time management, resulting in lower grades and academic underachievement. In severe cases, gambling addiction can lead to students dropping out of school or being academically dismissed. Gambling addiction can lead to decreased motivation and interest in academic pursuits. Gambling addiction can lead to significant financial debt, including credit card debt, loans, and unpaid bills. Students with gambling addiction may experience financial instability, including difficulty paying for tuition, room, and board. In severe cases, gambling addiction can lead to the loss of financial aid, scholarships, or grants.

In another development, the findings revealed that the strategies to reduce gambling addiction among university students in Nigeria and the impact on their mental health and academic performance. This is in line with Cutlog (2020) who highlighted strategies to reduce gambling addiction among students such as implement evidence-based gambling education programs that teach students about the risks and consequences of gambling addiction. Organize workshops and seminars that provide students with information about gambling addiction, its signs, and its consequences. Integrate gambling education into the school curriculum, ensuring that students receive comprehensive education about gambling addiction. Identify students who are at risk of developing gambling addiction and provide them with early intervention and support. Establish peer support groups where students can share their experiences and receive support from their peers.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study therefore concluded that gambling addiction among university students is a multifaceted issue that requires a comprehensive approach to address its far-reaching consequences. This study has highlighted the alarming prevalence of gambling addiction among university students with significant implications for their mental health and academic performance. Based on the conclusion, it therefore recommended that government, parents, policy-makers and other stakeholders should implement evidence-based gambling education programs to raise awareness about the risks and consequences of gambling addiction among university students. Identify students at risk of gambling addiction and provide early intervention and support services to prevent the development of problem gambling behavior. Offer counseling and support services to students struggling with gambling addiction, including individual and group therapy sessions and referrals to specialized treatment services. Develop and enforce policies and regulations to restrict access to gambling venues and online platforms, particularly among university students. Those already addicted would need to be attended to by clinicians and counselors. Lecturers can also instill confidence in students to seek for other better alternatives than gambling to solve their financial problems.

## ABOUT AUTHOR

### Brief Academic Biography of the Author

URIEN, James is lecturer in Department of Psychology, Delta State University, Abraka. He has his B.A in

Philosophy, University of Benin, M.Sc in Psychology, Delta State University, Abraka and Doctorate Degree in Psychology, Walden University, Minneapolis, United State of America

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