

Online Betting Addiction in Higher Education: Effects on Academic and Mental Health

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effect of online betting on university students in Bangladesh and provides a multifaceted analysis of its prevalence, academic and psychological impact, associated deviant activities, relationships between drug addiction and family dynamics. The research uses a mixed method approach and includes data from surveys and case studies, with a focus on two universities in Rajshahi City, Bangladesh. A purposive sampling method was used and 37 students from different departments were surveyed using the snowball sampling technique. The results show alarming trends, including high participation in sports betting, significant financial losses, reduced academic performance, increased psychological distress and drug addiction. The study recommends a collaborative approach between educational institutions, policymakers and families to mitigate the harmful effects of online betting on student well-being.

Keywords: Gambling, Online Gambling, Online Betting, University students.

INTRODUCTION

Online betting involves placing bets or wagers on events such as sports or casino games over the internet through websites or mobile apps. Online betting, a form of online gambling has become increasingly common in modern society (Lopez-Gonzalez & Griffiths, 2018). This expansion is due to enticing advertising on various social platforms, making it a highly lucrative industry worldwide (European Gaming & Betting Association, 2016). There are now numerous digital gambling options available to us. The widespread availability of digital gambling options has not only changed the landscape of recreational activities but has also raised concerns about their potential impact on various aspects of individuals' lives (Gainsbury, 2015).

As digital technologies change leisure habits, the use of online betting by university students raises concerns about the impact on academic performance, mental health and social dynamics. Excessive debt and money disputes lead to family disruption. Students struggling with addiction often lie about their behavior. Eventually the truth comes out and undermines the family's trust. Beyond the financial losses, it is a heartbreaking betrayal that affects families (Sobrun-Maharaj, Rossen, & Wong, 2013).

In a study by Kaggwa et al. (2022), 18 gambling-related suicides were identified in East African Community (EAC) states, mainly due to financial losses. Kenya had the most cases, followed by Uganda and Tanzania. Football betting was widespread and hanging was the main method of suicide. Hossain (2024) conducted a study on online gambling among university students in Bangladesh. The survey included 100 participants from six public and private universities. The results showed that students are

significantly involved in various forms of gambling: 45% participate in sports betting, 35% participate in online casino games, 15% participate in fantasy sports and 5% participate in other forms of gambling part of gambling. A 2014 study by Nowak and Aloe in the United States, Canada, and five other countries (China, Singapore, Scotland, Japan, and Nigeria) examined the prevalence of gambling disorders among college and university students. The study found that about 75% of college students have gambled legally or illegally. Additionally, college students have the estimated highest rates of pathological gambling (Nowak & Aloe, 2014). Labrador & Vallejo-Achn (2020) conducted a study on the sports betting behavior of teenagers in Madrid. Their study found that 42.6% of respondents bet at the same time, with men betting more often and spending more money than girls. Avenyo et al. (2024) identifies online sports betting addiction as a national security risk in Ghana and other African countries. The study, which involved 245 students from five universities, concludes that sports betting addiction leads to limited time for academic activities, leading to poor exam results and overall academic performance. In addition to the academic impact of addiction to online sports betting, students also struggle with limited social interactions and health issues such as sleep disorders and obesity (Avenyo et al., 2024).

In a study by Lason et al. (2010), the research focused on Icelandic adolescents and included 1,537 participants aged 13 to 18 years, including 786 boys and 747 girls. The results showed that 56.6% of participants gambled at least once in the previous year, while 24.3% prefer to online gambling. According to the results of a study by Canale et al., in 2016, problem gambling was shown to be five times more common among internet gamblers among 14,778 Italian teenagers aged 15 to 19. Several factors contributed to this risk, including living with non-biological parents, perceptions of higher family socioeconomic status, increased engagement in gambling activities, and the platforms preferred by long-distance gamblers such as digital television, Internet cafes, and video game consoles. As an alternative to restrictions on land-based gambling establishments, the COVID-19 epidemic has given an additional boost to online gambling and betting (Brodeur et al., 2021). As lockdowns have given many teenagers and adults more free time and time at home, some have turned to online gaming to cope with boredom, social isolation and psychological discomfort (Wardle et al., 2021). In their 2016 study, Islam and Hossin examined the prevalence and risk factors of problematic internet use and its association with psychological distress among 573 graduate students at the University of Dhaka in Bangladesh. The research found that approximately 24% of participants had problematic internet use as measured by the IAT scale. The frequency of this behavior showed significant variation based on factors such as gender, socioeconomic status, smoking habits and level of psychological distress.

The academic sectors in Bangladesh, especially those dealing with higher education, despite its rapid rise, seem to be completely uninformed about the impact of online betting. Bangladesh has banned all forms of gambling. However, betting is done both online and offline on sports like cricket (domestic leagues like IPL, BPL, PCL, etc.), football, carom and others. According to BTRC, all online gambling operations are still illegal in Bangladesh. The Supreme Court of Bangladesh ordered the BTRC to block online gambling sites, yet unexpected new sites continue to appear (Ovi, 2023). However, students continue to access various betting sites on foreign websites. According to a report by The Telegraph, Bet365, Paddy Power, BETFRED, Sky Bet, Unibet, 1xbet, BETUK and others are among the most popular online mobile betting platforms for players worldwide in 2024 (Whitley, 2024). The present study examined why students from universities in Bangladesh are attracted to betting platforms, what factors influence their decisions, and how these digital activities affect their academic, psychological and social lives.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To determine the types of online betting platforms preferred by university students.
2. Analysis of the academic and mental health effects of online betting on students

Research Methods

This study adopts a mixed methods approach, using social surveys as the primary method as well as case studies to examine specific cases in depth. Data is collected using a structured questionnaire that includes both open and closed questions. Detailed interviews with respondents are recorded using an audio recorder. Secondary resources, including a comprehensive literature review, academic papers, journals, articles, newspapers and books, are also included. The study focuses on two universities within the Rajshahi City of Bangladesh: Rajshahi University (a public university) and Varendra University (a private university). A targeted sampling method is used in which 37 male students from different departments are approached using snowball sampling techniques. Aware of the sensitivity of the topic and the reticence of the students, the researcher facilitated the relationship to obtain candid responses regarding their involvement in online betting. The data is processed using simple statistical methods such as tabulation, frequency distribution, percentage, mean and ratio. Detailed interview data are transcribed and thoroughly analyzed. The primary data collected is subjected to rigorous checks and editing before final processing. Ethical considerations, particularly regarding confidentiality and anonymity, are carefully maintained at every step of this study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Online betting site Bet365 is proving to be the preferred choice for almost 65% of participants, highlighting its dominant presence in the online betting landscape. The appeal of online betting is further enhanced by social media advertising, attracting approximately 38% of participants. This finding resonates closely with the study by Lopez-Gonzalez & Griffiths (2018). **Table 1** presents detailed data on the preferred betting sites and the media of online betting among participants.

| Betting sites | | | Media of online betting | | |
|---------------|----|--------|--------------------------------------|----|--------|
| Sites name | f | (%) | Media of betting | f | (%) |
| Bet365 | 24 | 64.90 | Social media ads | 14 | 37.83 |
| 1xbet | 13 | 35.13 | Influence by friend | 12 | 32.43 |
| 22 bets | 06 | 16.21 | Idea of effortlessly earn more money | 11 | 29.72 |
| bet way | 04 | 10.81 | Total | 37 | 100.00 |
| Total | 37 | 100.00 | | | |

Table 01

Preference for sports betting is particularly high: an overwhelming 94.60% of students take part in it, and more than half engage in it on a daily basis, often starting with modest amounts under 500 Taka. In this study, students predominantly bet on cricket, particularly in domestic T20 cricket leagues such as IPL (Indian premier league), BPL (Bangladesh Premier League), BBL (Big Bash League) and CPL (Caribbean Premier League). IPL (Indian premier league) emerged as the main betting focus as respondents noted significant losses and gains in this league. **Table 2** provides a breakdown of engagement frequency and types of betting.

| Engagement in online betting | f | (%) | Types of Betting | f | (%) | Duration of weekly Engagement in online betting | |
|-------------------------------|----|-------|---|----|-------|---|----------|
| Never | 00 | 00.00 | Online Casinos | 01 | 02.70 | SpendingTime | f (%) |
| Rarely (Ones a month or less) | 01 | 02.70 | Sports Betting (domestic T20 cricket leagues) | 35 | 94.60 | Less than 1 hours | 04 10.81 |

| | | | | | | | | |
|------------------------------------|-----------|---------------|--------------|-----------|---------------|--------------------|-----------|--------------|
| Occasionally (a few times a month) | 06 | 16.21 | Poker | 00 | 00.00 | 1-5 hours | 22 | 59.45 |
| Frequently (Several time in week) | 11 | 29.72 | Lotteries | 01 | 02.70 | 6-10 hours | 07 | 18.91 |
| Very Frequently (Daily) | 19 | 51.40 | Others | 00 | 00.00 | More than 10 hours | 04 | 10.81 |
| Total | 37 | 100.00 | Total | 37 | 100.00 | Total | 37 | 100.0 |

Table 02

The case study findings display that participants show a higher inclination towards gambling in T20 leagues compared to ODI or test matches in cricket. This preference is attributed to the shorter duration and heightened excitement of T20 matches. Common betting activities include predicting the winner, identifying the best scorer, selecting the top sixer, and engaging in bets per ball, per over, or during the powerplay.

| Starting amount of money for betting | | | Gained money | | | Lose money | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|---------------|---------------|-----------|--------------|-------------------|-----------|--------------|
| Amount (Taka) | f | (%) | Amount (Taka) | f | (%) | Amount (Taka) | f | (%) |
| Less than 500 | 23 | 62.16 | 20,000-30,000 | 17 | 45.94 | 40,000-50,000 | 08 | 21.62 |
| 1,000 | 10 | 27.02 | 40,000-50,000 | 07 | 18.91 | 60,000-70,000 | 07 | 18.91 |
| Above 1500 | 04 | 10.81 | 60,000-70,000 | 02 | 05.40 | 80,000-90,000 | 06 | 16.21 |
| | | | 80,000-90,000 | 11 | 29.72 | More than 10,0000 | 16 | 43.24 |
| Total | 37 | 100.00 | Total | 37 | 100.0 | Total | 37 | 100.0 |

Table 03

It’s also evident from the study that most of the respondents admit to losing more money than they gain. After winning a bet in a match, they subsequently lose in two or three consecutive matches. The drive to recoup losses pushes them to participate in more matches to minimize losses.

However, the appeal of betting comes with significant pitfalls. A staggering 43% of participants suffered significant financial losses of more than Taka 100,000. **Table 3** presents the financial impact of online betting by analyzing the initial betting amounts, as well as the money gained and lost by the participants. In third world countries, this amount is significant because the cost of public universities is low and caters primarily to lower-middle class students. Students at private universities generally come from wealthier backgrounds.

| Academic Impacts | f | (%) | Psychological impacts | f | (%) |
|---|-----------|---------------|---|-----------|---------------|
| Less class attendance | 13 | 35.13 | Lack of sleep | 12 | 32.43 |
| Discollegiate for examination | 05 | 13.51 | Stress and anxiety | 03 | 8.10 |
| Unsatisfactory results | 11 | 29.72 | Becoming more stubborn and lonely | 04 | 10.81 |
| No engagement in extracurricular activities | 05 | 13.51 | Depression | 16 | 43.24 |
| Semester Drop | 03 | 8.10 | Idea of committing Suicide or doing self-harm | 02 | 05.40 |
| Total | 37 | 100.00 | Total | 37 | 100.00 |

Table 04

This financial burden is reflected in their academic life: about 30% report unsatisfactory academic results and 35% take fewer courses, even if some of them are not promoted to the next semester. Mental health distress is also concerning, with over 43% of students struggling with depression, a reflection of the broader mental health crisis. This mirrors the broader mental health crisis underscored in studies by Gainsbury (2015) and Sobrun-Maharaj et al. (2013). **Table 4** reflects the broader academic and psychological impacts of online betting.

The desperation to fund betting activities has led a significant 73% of participants down the dangerous path of deviant and criminal activities, primarily engaging in fraud, theft, and the sale of property, either from their own homes or from others. **Tables 5 and 6** presents the deviant or criminal activities and drug addiction associated with online betting.

| Opinion | f | Committed crime for Betting | | | (%) |
|---------|----|--|--|----|--------|
| Yes | 27 | Types of Criminal activities | | f | (%) |
| | | Stolen and sell property from home and other places | | 14 | 51.85 |
| | | Borrow money from friends or others and never returned | | 07 | 25.93 |
| | | Online fraudulent | | 04 | 14.81 |
| | | Extortion | | 02 | 07.40 |
| No | 10 | | | | 27.03 |
| Total | 37 | | | | 100.00 |

Table 05

This alarming trend comes with a strong link between betting and drug addiction, observed with 86% of participants using substances, particularly marijuana, to cope. Sleep deprivation is also common at 32.43%, consistent with the the study by Avenyo et al., (2024). Additionally, a new concern emerged in this study: 5.43% of participants expressed thoughts of suicide or self-harm. This is associated with significant financial losses, fear of discovery by parents and depression.

| Taking Drugs | f | Betting and Drug Addiction | | | (%) |
|--------------|-----------|----------------------------|--|----|---------------|
| Yes | 32 | Types of Drugs | | f | (%) |
| | | Chain smokers | | 09 | 24.32 |
| | | Marijuana | | 13 | 35.13 |
| | | Sleeping pills | | 03 | 08.10 |
| | | phensedyl | | 05 | 13.51 |
| | | others | | 02 | 05.40 |
| No | 05 | | | | 13.52 |
| Total | 37 | | | | 100.00 |

Table 06

Despite these challenges, the study reveals a bright spot: the supportive role of parents and guardians. The researcher found that half of the respondents admitted to receiving compensation from their parents or guardians to cover financial losses on the condition that they stop betting online. However, it was found that some students gave up and others did not. On the other hand, this betting topic often leads to family

conflicts, as stated by 59% of participants. **Table 7** demonstrates the parental support and family conflicts arising from online betting.

| Parents role to give-up Betting | | | Conflict issues in family regarding betting | | |
|---------------------------------|-----------|---------------|---|-----------|---------------|
| Parents role | f | (%) | Conflict issues | f | (%) |
| Very supportive | 19 | 51.35 | frequently | 22 | 59.45 |
| Somewhat supportive | 05 | 13.51 | Occasionally | 09 | 24.32 |
| Neutral | 09 | 24.32 | Rarely | 06 | 16.21 |
| Not supportive | 04 | 10.81 | Never | 00 | 00.00 |
| Total | 37 | 100.00 | Total | 37 | 100.00 |

Table 07

The results are consistent with the study of Hossain (2024) and Avenyo et al. (2024) paints a clear picture of the diverse effects of online betting. The high prevalence of betting, particularly sports betting, highlights the urgent need for comprehensive interventions. The study not only reinforces the literature’s position on the addictive nature of betting, but also highlights its ability to cause financial instability, academic decline, psychological stress and involvement in deviant activities.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The present study focuses on a small sample of respondents, which limits the ability to generalize the findings to a broader population. Additionally, the study specifically examines the attachment of male students to online betting, escaping to explore the perspectives of female students. This omission inhibits a comprehensive understanding of how online betting addiction affects both genders simultaneously.

CONCLUSION

The increasing rates of online gambling, particularly among university students in Bangladesh, points to a growing problem that transcends geographical boundaries and represents a global dilemma. The lure of quick financial gains and the convenient availability of digital platforms lead to multiple problems that gradually affect academic concentration, financial security and mental health. While supporting family members is critical to reducing these impacts, the scale of the problem requires an integrated strategy. A collaborative approach involving educational institutions, policymakers, and families may help mitigate the harmful effects of online betting on student well-being. To secure the future of young people and ensure that digital advancements are properly integrated into society, everyone should work together to address all the consequences of online gambling.

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