



SPORT BETTING AND PSYCHO SOCIAL CHALLENGES AMONG YOUTHS IN CALABAR SOUTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study investigated incidence of sport betting and psycho-social challenges among youths in Calabar South Local Government Area, Cross River State. The study adopted two research question and two hypotheses. The study adopted descriptive survey design. The population comprised youths within (25 yrs – 35 yrs) age bracket in Calabar South Local Government Area. A sample of 313 youths was selected from six political wards using stratified and purposive sampling techniques from the population. A questionnaire developed by the researcher was the instrument used for data collection. The instrument was validated by experts and reliability of the instrument was determined using the Cronbach Alpha – method with coefficient from 0.76 to 0.84. Simple linear regression was employed for data analysis. Findings among other things revealed that sports' betting significantly influence mental health and social wellbeing of youths in the study area. Based on these findings it was recommended among others that counselling services should be adequately provided for youths who are already addicted to gambling in order to prevent them from experiencing outcomes that contribute to the development of mental health illness.

Keywords: Sport betting, psycho, social, challenge, youths

Introduction

The rise of legalized gambling fueled by technology and social media has transformed betting into a risky economic and social activity that promises income and improvement in social status. This has attracted many youths to embrace this act as a quick way of generating income. In Nigeria, sports betting has become increasingly popular among youths even those in Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State. Thus, with easy online access contributing to its prevalence, however inadequate awareness of its risk and impact on psycho-social status of victims, sport betting seemed to persist as a gambling practice among youth (Adewale, Alabi & Ijaiya, 2023; Akah, Emeribe & Ahueansebhor, 2013). Inevitably, the rise of digital technology, including the widespread use of smart

phones and the expansion of online betting platforms seem to have contributed to a transformation in the way clients engage in sports betting. The shift has not only made betting more accessible, but also more socially accepted. particularly in environment with large number of youths where entertainment options are often explored and peer influence plays a dominant role. The ease of access and convenience of these digital platforms have made sports betting increasingly popular with many youths engaging in it regularly as part of their social and recreational activities (Anam & Ahueansebhor, 2017a).

The landscape of sports betting among youths is also shaped by social factors such as technological advancements, changing social dynamics and the increasing acceptance of gambling as part of popular cultures. Sports betting apps have become increasingly sophisticated, providing features such as real – time betting, live streaming of games and instant deposits and withdrawals, which appeals to the younger generation. Mobile betting in particular has become a key driver to the growth as youths can bet on the favourite sports teams and events from virtually anywhere, whether at home, social events, on the go and so on (Olunadamilola & Chukwudi, 2022; Anam & Ahueansebhor, 2017).

Peer pressure and social influence are key motivators that encourage youths to engage in betting activities. Youths are often exposed to sports betting, through their social circles, where friends and acquaintances discuss their betting experiences, share tips, and celebrate wins. These social dynamics create a sense of community around sports betting, making it more appealing as students seek social validation and the opportunity to bond with their peers (Okafor, James & Usman, 2024).

Chronic gambling is a disorder that can have many diverse and unintended consequences. From a medical perspective, chronic gamblers are at increased risk to develop stress – related conditions such as hypertension, sleep deprivation, cardio vascular diseases, and peptic ulcer disease. Common psychiatric sequelae of chronic sports betting includes exacerbation and initiation of major depression episodes; anxiety disorders or substance use disorders. Unintended psychological consequences may also include intense levels of guilt and shame, deceptive practices, and heightened impulsivity/impaired decision-making (Ahueansebhor, O'Neill & Ogabor, 2015).

Similarly, Masaba (2016) reported that the result of sports betting is often a disorder related to a range of both intrinsic and extrinsic morbidities such as anxiety, mood disorder and substance use. In retrospect, Cook (2014) stated that various disorders associated with sports



betting problems included anxiety disorder, depression attention – deficit hyperactivity disorder and suicide. Additionally, it is estimated that more than half of those who indulge in sports betting exhibited problems. Furthermore, the author also noted that those participating in sports betting have a higher probability of developing mental health related problems like depression and thoughts of committing suicide when they lose so much money. Lowry (2020) asserted that sports betting has been noted to be symptomatic and is associated with risky behaviours in general.

Youths who engage in sports betting frequently found themselves distracted from their fundamental activities with time and money being diverted toward betting activities. In many cases, youths seem to lose focus on their entrepreneurial responsibilities due to the allure of betting. Moreover, Youths who develop gambling problems may experience a decline in mental health, which further affects their careers. Research evidence shows that the mental strain caused by financial losses in betting can lead to stress, anxiety and depression, which in turn, can negatively impact on ability of youths to concentrate in their businesses or career and perform well financially. A healthy lifestyle of the youth is supposed to be an ideal choice for them and this includes sufficient sleep regular physical activities and balanced diet, which is essential for maintaining cognitive functions and emotional resilience. Unfortunately, most youths in Calabar South Local Government Area including Cross River State as a whole neglect their physical and mental health in favour of economic pressure or social activities such as late night parties, irregular sleep patterns and poor nutrition. (Odok, Osaji, Dan, Ahueansehbor Odey, 2023; and Cook, 2014). These have been attributed to chronic involvement in sports betting which is not by any means fruitful. Thus, Sports betting can interfere with healthy lifestyle choices (Akinyemi, Ogundele & Olejide, 2024).

The addictive nature of sports betting, particularly when combined with the excitement of live games or frequent betting sessions, can disrupt sleep patterns and increase levels of stress. Youths who partake in sports betting late at night may sacrifice sleep, learning and unable to do anything meaningful the next day. Similarly, the stress and emotional strain of losing bets can lead to unhealthy coping mechanisms such as poor eating habits leading to (ulcer and emaciation in stature) or sedentary behaviour, leading to (suicidal thoughts (Popoola, 2021).

With the increasing rate of youth unemployment in the country, Nigerian youths have invested their time, money and intrinsic efforts in several sports betting and other gambling ventures. These commitments provide them with financial resources to meet daily expenses, augment low incomes arising from unemployment, and help mitigate the rising cost of living (O'Neill, Ahueansebhor, 2015).

However, the fact that Sports betting gives quick and easy cash does not by any means exonerate youth who are involved in gambling activities. Indeed, victims of gambling game are usually poor and pathetic people in attitude. Sport betting leads to provocation and sometimes results into violence when financial losses are recorded. Invariably, those deeply involved in a betting activities live in fantasies that usually in mental distress, insanity and suicide. Losing a bet led to depression, frustration and anger (Lowry, 2020). It could also make youths lazy, less ambitious, violent and less imaginative, creative and innovative at least positively.

In fact, studies conducted during the coronavirus outbreak estimated that youths involved in online gambling may have been at increased risk for gambling – related depression, as blocking exacerbated established risk factors for gambling disorder, including lack of social support, social withdrawal, financial insecurity and boredom (Sharman, 2021). According to Normer (2022), there are bets players that are in the group that exhibits signs of pre-morbid anxiety depression, poor coping and problem-solving skills. Factors predisposing these sets of persons to the problem of gambling as noted by this pathway include negative family background experience, life events and developmental variables. Each of these factors produces an emotional vulnerable gambler who motivation to participate in gambling is to adjust their emotional state and/or to satisfy specific psychological needs. The conclusive position of research on these predisposing factors justify why they were not included in this study as a moderating variable.

Pathological gamblers can be described as highly disturbed individuals who are severely psychosocially disturbed by gambling as characterized by signs suggesting neurological or neurochemical disorder like other youths that are predisposed to gambling by both psychosocial and biologically – based vulnerabilities (APA, 2013). These maladjustment and impulsivity disorder affect many aspects of the general behaviour of victim including their level of psychosocial functions of the gamblers (Ogabor, Saba, Ahueansbhor & Apie, 2014).



The problems of statement for this study gambling and sports betting addiction are severe act that affect a lot of young people. Although the promise of quick cash can be alluring the reality suggest that vast majority of gamblers ultimately lose money. This may result in debts and mental health challenges. Similarly, gambling addiction can also cause people to neglect their physical and emotional health, which can result in a variety of health issues. This study addressed the challenges youths are facing when they are addicted to sports betting in Calabar South Local Government Area, Cross River State. Against this backdrop, this study investigated sport betting and psycho social challenges among youths in Calabar South Local Government Area, Cross River State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of the study was to examine the prevalence of sport betting and psycho-social challenges among youth in Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study ascertained the influence of;

- i. sport betting on mental health of youth in Calabar South Local Government Area
- ii. sport betting on social wellbeing of youth in Calabar South Local Government Area

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant influence of sports betting on mental health of youths in Calabar South Local Government Area.
2. Sport betting does not significantly influence the social wellbeing of youths in Calabar South Local Government Area.

Methodology

A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. This design was considered appropriate because it involves the collection of data that describes individuals, groups and situations. Additionally, a descriptive survey research design is situation for investigating on-going conditions, practices, and processes (Asim, Idaka & Eni, 2017).

The population of the study comprised all youth between the age of 25-25 yeas who are involved in sport betting within the study area. Stratified random sampling technique was adopted to select forty-four betting centers across six council wards in the study area. The study sample consisted of three hundred and thirteen (313) respondents that were selected through purposive sampling technique.

Instrument for data collection used was researcher's constructed questionnaire titled "Sport betting and Psycho-Social Challenges Questionnaire (SBPSCQ)". The questionnaire was developed using modified four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). It contained twenty items (20) that measured the variables of the study. Items 1-10 measured sport betting. Similarly, items 11-15 measured mental health while items 16-20 measured social wellbeing. The instrument was duly validated by relevant experts. Draft of the instrument was administered on 50 respondents in Calabar Municipality which is outside the study area. The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach alpha and reliability coefficient of 0.76 to 0.84 was obtained respectively, indicating that the instrument was reliable. Simple linear regression was employed in testing the null hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Hypothesis one

There is no significant influence of sport betting on mental health of youths in Calabar South Local Government Area. The independent variable in this hypothesis is sport betting while the dependent variable is mental health of youths. Simple linear regression statistical tool was utilized for data analysis. The result of this analysis is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Simple linear regression analysis of the influence of sport betting on mental health of youths in Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria (N = 313)

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Beta		
(Constant)	24.293		29.463	.000
1 Sport betting	-.342	-.586	-12.743	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Mental health of youths

Key: $R = .586$; $R^2 .343$; $F(1, 311) = 162.383$; $P = .000$

The result of analysis of data presented in Table 1 shows that the independent or predictor variable (sport betting) has a significant influence on the dependent or predicted variable (mental health) among youths in Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State. This implied that sport betting accounted for 34.3% of mental health of youths in the study area.



Secondly, the result of regression ANOVA presented in Table 1 revealed that there was a significant influence of sport betting on mental health of youths, $F(1, 311) = 162.383$; $p < .05$. The result of this analysis indicated that there is moderate contribution of sport betting on mental health of youths. This showed that sport betting is negatively influencing mental health of youths in the study area.

The regression coefficient shows that the independent or predictor variable sport betting ($\beta = -.586$; $t = -12.743$; $p < .05$) is significantly influencing the mental health of youths in Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State.

Hypothesis two

Sport betting does not significantly influence social wellbeing of youths in Calabar South Local Government Area. The independent variable in this hypothesis is sport betting while the dependent variable is social wellbeing of youths. Simple linear regression statistical tool was utilized for data analysis. The result of this analysis is presented in Table 2.

Table 1: Simple linear regression analysis of the influence of sport betting on social wellbeing of youths in Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria ($N = 313$)

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Beta		
(Constant)	23.247		41.160	.000
1 Sport betting	-.308	-.689	-16.748	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Social wellbeing of youths

Key: $R = .689$; $R^2 .474$; $F(1, 311) = 280.492$; $P = .000$

The result of analysis of data presented in Table 2 shows that the independent or predictor variable (sport betting) has a significant influence on the dependent or predicted variable (social wellbeing) among youths in Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State. This implied that sport betting accounted for 47.4% of social wellbeing of youths in the study area.

Secondly, the result of regression ANOVA presented in Table 2 revealed that there was a significant influence of sport betting on social wellbeing of youths, $F(1, 311) = 280.492$; $p < .05$. The result of this analysis indicated that there is moderate contribution of sport

betting on social wellbeing of youths. This showed that sport betting is negatively influencing social wellbeing of youths in the study area.

The regression coefficient shows that the independent or predictor variable sport betting ($\beta = -.689$; $t = -16.748$; $p < .05$) is significantly influencing the social wellbeing of youths in Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State.

Discussion of findings

The finding obtained from data analysis and testing of hypothesis one showed that the null hypothesis was rejected. The implication of this finding is that there was a significant influence of sport betting on the mental health of youths in Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State. This finding could be attributed to the fact that several youths are now involved in sport betting within the study area. This involvement has left many of these youths feeling frustrated and even depressed due to losses incurred through sport betting activities. There is usually an assumption that sport betting is a quick way of making money and improving the living conditions of those who engage in it. The reverse has often been the case as many of them return home feeling frustrated because of the consequences associated with losing out in their betting adventure. This has led to an increase in the incidence of mental health among youths in the study area.

This finding is in agreement with that of Masaba (2016) who reported that the result of sports betting is often a disorder related to a range from both intrinsic and extrinsic morbidities such as anxiety mood disorders and substance use. Furthermore, Cook (2014) stated that various disorders associated with sports betting including anxiety disorders, depression, attention – deficit, hyperactive disorders and suicide. Additionally, it is estimated that more than half of those who indulge in sports betting exhibits poor degree or fair physical and health related problems.

The finding of this study also supported that of Akinyemi, Ogundele and Olegide (2024) who revealed that youths who engage in sports betting frequently find themselves distracted from their fundamental activities with time and money being diverted towards betting activities in many cases, make youth less motivated to focus in their entrepreneurial responsibilities due to the allure of betting.

The finding obtained from analysis of data and testing of hypothesis two in the study revealed that the null hypothesis was rejected. This implied that there was a significant



influence of sport betting on social wellbeing of youths in Calabar South Local Government Area of Cross River State. The reason for this finding could be that youth involvement in sport betting has continued to impact on the social wellbeing as many persons see these youth who engage in sport betting as being irresponsible. This hinders their level of social interaction and in some cases lead to stigmatization of these youths. It has been observed that youths who engage in sport betting are not seen as conducting themselves in socially acceptable manner. This often influences their social wellbeing and acceptance within the society. Some of them are even associated with criminality and other social vices.

The finding of this study is in agreement with that of Lowry (2020) which asserted that although sports betting could give quick and easy cash it does not exonerate the fact that youths involved in the game are gamblers and socially irresponsible. Thus, they are usually perceived as poor and pathetic personalities in the society.

Conclusion

The essence of this study was to investigate and present findings on sport betting and psycho-social challenges among youths in Calabar South local Government Area of Cross River State. The findings of the study have conclusively revealed that there was significant influence of sport betting activities on mental health and social wellbeing of youths in the study area. In conclusion, it is therefore evident that although sports betting may be driven by some expected profits there are undoubtedly negative consequences on the Youths with respect to mental and social wellbeing.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made;

1. Counselling services should be adequately provided for youths who are already addicted to gambling in order to prevent them from experiencing outcomes that contribute to the development of mental health outcomes
2. Policy makers should formulate legislations that would regulate the participation of youth in sport betting as a precaution in order to help promote in social wellbeing.

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