



## GAMBLING AND DEVIANCE BEHAVIOUR AMONG YOUTHS IN AKWA IBOM STATE, NIGERIA

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**ABSTRACT:** *Gambling is a trending problem among the youths that usually result in suicide attempts and self-harm among gamblers. Gambling also prompts our youths to engage in theft and other deviance behavior. This study was conducted to investigate why gamblers are prone to suicide and other deviant behaviour. Survey research method was adopted for this study and respondents were selected using multiple sampling techniques; this include purposive, snowball and simple random sampling techniques. Primary data were collected through interview and participant observation, while secondary data were collected from extant literature. The study applied Frustration-Aggression Theory in order to explain the relationship between gambling, suicide and deviant behaviour among gamblers. The concept and empirical studies reviewed from other research works were used for inference, conclusion and recommendations. Findings from the study show that gambling related debts contributes to suicide and suicidality. The study further showed that gambling is seen as a coping mechanism to get rich very quickly. The study recommends (amongst others) that the government should ban all gambling/betting companies in Nigeria in order to reduce suicidality and criminality among gamblers. Government should subject all addicted gamblers to psychological tests to ensure that they are free from deviant behavior.*

**KEYWORDS:** Gambling, Suicide, Deviant, Theft, Indebtedness.



## INTRODUCTION

The harms from gambling are profound and can be very devastating to individuals, families, organizations and communities where gamblers belong. However, suicide and deviant behaviour is among the most severe harmful consequences that have been connected to gambling as a result of frustration. The frustration from gambling can be directly linked to the severity in suicide and deviant behaviour. A gambler is usually faced with problems, such as depression, indebtedness, drug abuse, school dropout, stigmatization and suicide. Gamblers usually commit the type of suicide called egoistic suicide. Those involved in gambling are usually depressed once they lost in gambling, especially when it has to do with a huge amount of money which may or may not be their own. They resort to suicide as the final solution to end their burdens, this ugly situation is very rampant in Akwa Ibom state and Nigeria in general.

On the economic aspect, this work shows that poverty and unemployment are factors responsible for youth's involvement in gambling. When there are little to no job opportunities for the youths and many youths are overwhelmed by the get-rich-quick syndrome, they start patronizing betting companies with the hope of becoming rich quickly. It has been observed that there is a proliferation of betting companies in Akwa Ibom State and Nigeria in general as a result of high patronage by Nigerian youths. Nigerian youths have incurred debts due to illegal gambling; some students usually stake their school fees for gambling and once they fail to win, individuals feel like suicide is the only solution. Some student gamblers usually threaten suicide if they do not receive money from their family members for gambling or gambling-related debts. The second process by which gambling appears to be connected to suicidality relates to shame. Some student gamblers who stake their resources and time in gambling usually drop out from school, because of that shame and guilt, eventually leading to suicide or a suicide attempt. Losses associated with gambling were seen as an important contributing cause for suicidal thoughts for people gambling problematically. Suicide then becomes a means to escape the difficult feelings as well as a desperate situation (Esara, 2021).

As observed by Udonwa, Effiong, Asuquo and Samuel (2022), the underdevelopment status in lack of basic infrastructures, misuse of both human and natural resources, mediocrity in professional and leadership positions, defective leadership outputs, fuel scarcity in an oil producing nation, falling standards of education and work output, high unemployment rates, the ever-widening gap between the rich and poor to mention just a few are some reasons Nigerian youths engaged themselves in frivolous actions. However, as posited by Esara, Asuquo, Ekanem and Samuel (2023), all the existing states and in the world today have an established government vested with the rights and responsibility to protect lives and property of her citizens. The government now oversees governance, maintenance of law and orderliness in the society.

Losses associated with gambling usually pushed gamblers into drug abuse and alcoholism just to do away with depression and suicidality emerged only after gambling related problems and lack of help. Gamblers are aware of the danger of drug abuse and yet they go in for it just to face depression. It is very difficult for someone to start taking drugs. There is no prior introduction to it or even some element of induction and this is done at the gambling centers by fellow gamblers. Every drug abuser starts with prior experimentation. It occurs either at a party or in the company of friends during cult initiation or political campaigns (Abdulbaqi, 2019).



Gamblers ease their losses by drinking in the company of friends until they become addicted to alcohol. Some youths gamble because of peer pressure. Anybody that is addicted to gambling can kill in order to get money for gambling and have their sense of wellbeing by taking drugs once the winning fails. Gamblers engage in deviant behavior like stealing or by deceiving their relations by telling lies or taking other people's belongings.

They can break into people's houses or offices, hospitals, shops, churches or banks. Money and drugs are the concern of a gambler, and they can cause any type of havoc if they are denied the opportunity of gambling. Gambling involves a great amount of money. It is speculated that if two million naira is put into gambling and the person wins, one can easily get twenty million naira out of the business. This type of sudden wealth makes youths see gambling as a good business. Asuquo and Ekanem (2023) aver that violence emanates as a result of lop-sidedness in indices of socio-economic development, such as unemployment, poverty, poor economic growth, and lack of comprehensive basic infrastructure, such as good road network, water supply, electricity, and industry. This has pushed some of our youth into seeking for a way of survival, thereby engaging themselves in deviant behavior.

All societies and groups throughout the world experience deviance. Deviance illustrates the line over which societies or groups members may not cross. One of the surest ways to confirm an identity of a society or a group or individuals is to find some ways of measuring what one is not. Collective representation gives room for societal sanctioning and labeling. Gamblers have been stigmatized because of their deviance tendency. The individual is used to represent all the members of the group or society (Aquocho, 2018).

According to Esara, Asuquo and Udoh (2024), societies however have devised ways and means of maintaining social order and dealing with those who deviate from the norms and values. Corruption in the education sector has contributed to this menace. As noted by Asuquo and Ekanem (2023), the consequences of corruption in the education sector are dire. The quality of education suffers, leading to a workforce that may lack the necessary skills and knowledge required for a competitive and diverse economy. When education is compromised, it becomes challenging to produce a workforce that can contribute meaningfully to various sectors, hindering economic growth and diversification, which has forced some youths into this deviant behavior.

Gamblers are harmful to the society because of the concoction they take to ease the frustration. With its stimulating effect, gamblers become very violent and tend to work down on the elderly and in the family and community as people that do not matter. This accounts for the tendency to kill and destroy since they act not with their normal consciousness, but with a bloated devaluation of human life and a suspended consciousness. Gamblers can even be unaware of the harm they have caused.

Cohesion is restored to the society when the appropriate sanctions administered to the deviants are appreciated by dealing specifically with the current problem. The social control of deviants' behavior shows how the society deals with wrongdoing as such, when deviants are controlled, the values of the society are reaffirmed and order and cohesion are somehow restored. Deviance solidifies or reinforces conformity and examines the implementation of societal norms as commensurate or under-administered or over-administered. It necessitates as conscious awareness that the deviant actively violates the societal rules and norms (Temitope, 2019).



Cultism also forced youths into gambling to enable them to pay their dues to avoid punishments (Esara, 2021).

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of the study is to investigate the relationship between gambling, suicide and deviant behaviour among youths in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are:

- i. To investigate the factors that push people into gambling;
- ii. To examine the effects of gambling among the youths;
- iii. To find out why gamblers indulge in drug abuse and high intake of alcohol; and
- iv. To make some policy recommendations that would help in the reduction of gambling menace in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The involvement of youths in gambling has brought about the menace of suicide and deviant behavior among youths in Akwa Ibom State and Nigeria in general. However, several challenges have surfaced as a result of gambling; this include suicide among youths, theft, cases of school dropout, indebtedness among youths, drug abuse and other deviant behavior. All these are necessitated by proliferation of gambling companies and high patronage by the youths. This study aims to identify and address the key factors surrounding youth involvement in gambling. By identifying the factors and challenges of gambling among the youths, this research seeks to provide insights and recommendations that would improve the perceptions and integrity of our Youths in Akwa Ibom State and Nigeria in general. As observed by (Esara, Mfon, & Walter; 2024), a good number of cultists and youths involved in deviant behaviours are used as political thugs by politicians. In most cases, their godfathers usually bail or rescue them from the police net when arrested in the state. As posited by (Esara, Mfon, & Walter; 2024), arrested persons are taken to the police station where they are asked to pay for bail, and when they are released, they continue in deviant behaviours.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

There is a high prevalence of suicide and deviant behaviour among youths in relation to gambling. Gambling has always existed in Nigeria, but in the past it was viewed as an antisocial activity and was actively discouraged by the churches, schools, families, which warned against the quest for quick wealth. In the late 1990s, the Nigerian government legalized certain forms of gambling in an attempt to generate tax revenues. This has made gambling more acceptable to the public, especially to the youths and under-aged. The most popular forms of gambling in present-day Nigeria are online sports betting. This includes football league promotions, the pools, the lottery and slot machines.

According to Esara, Asuquo and Udoh (2024), there are prevalent cases of child theft and other criminal activities in public places, such as schools, churches, mosques, hospitals, markets, and public events. It has become a social problem because it has affected a significant number of people in society. The rich and the poor are affected by this social malaise. These criminal



activities are mostly carried out by the youths. In the work of Akpan, Ekoriko, Ekanem and Ottong (2024), harassment is one of the commonest forms of violence encountered by girls and youths in their everyday lives, and it is not acceptable in our society as it is against our norms. Violence during elections and violence against women candidates is a barrier that can not be overemphasized, as this violence is perpetrated by the youths (Ekanem, Asuquo, Ogar & Ofuka, 2023).

Gambling in Nigeria is regulated by the National Lottery Regulatory Commission. The National Lottery was legalized in Nigeria in 2005, under the National Lottery Act 2005. The law distinguishes between games of skill (which is legal) and games of chance (which are illegal). Legal forms of gambling include the lottery, casinos, sport betting, whereas roulette, dice game and non-skilled card games are considered illegal. There is no specific provision in the law to regulate online gambling. The minimum legal age to be able to gamble in Nigeria is 18 years (Adenugba, 2018).

Gambling research in Nigeria has been mainly focused on the prevalence, pattern and determinants of gambling among the different subpopulations in the country. A significant relationship has been reported with suicide, drug abuse, indebtedness, depression and school drop-out. It has been argued that monetary gain fueled by greed, unemployment, economic hardship and poverty are the most potent motivating factors for gambling and may act as a springboard to fuel criminality. Other less important factors are the pursuit of enjoyment, passion for sport and peer group influence. Harms from gambling are multiple and often not as direct and visible as in substance addictions. A range of harms that adversely affect the individual, the family and society have been reported. These include suicide and suicide attempt uncontrolled gambling fuelled by desperate attempts to win and cover back their money, financial difficulties and extreme poverty, disruption of relationships within the family, loss of trust and failure to carry out expected responsibilities, involvement in deviant behaviours, such as excessive drinking, substance use and crime. Unfortunately, prevention approaches are currently almost non-existent. It is against the background that it is pertinent that the government should ban most of these gambling companies in order to reduce the aforementioned risks in Nigeria (Aguocha, 2019).

### Conceptual Clarification

**Gambling:** Gambling is the wagering of something of value on a random event with the intent of winning something else of value, where instances of strategy are discounted (Aguocha, 2018).

**Gambler:** A gambler is a person that is addicted to gambling. He engaged in gambling whether good or bad.

**Suicide:** Suicide is death caused by injuring oneself with the intent to die. Suicide is the act of intentionally causing one's own death. Some suicides are impulsive acts due to depression from failure in gambling, debts, economic hardship and academic difficulties (Oyebisi, 2012).

**Deviant Behavior:** Deviant behavior refers to the actions or behavior that violate social norms across formally enacted rules as well as informal violations of social norms and values.

**Crime:** Crime, in its most sense, denotes behaviors that are formally prohibited and punishable under criminal law. Such offenses provide the subject matter of mainstream investigation.



Miller (1996) contends that crime is the commission or omission of an act which the laws forbids or commands under pain of punishment to be imposed by the State.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study adopts Social Learning Theory propounded by Albert Bandura in 1977 which emphasizes the importance of observing, modeling and imitating the behaviours, attitudes and emotional reactions of others. Gambling has a serious relationship with deviance behaviour among gamblers. Youths that involves in gambling usually engaged in various antisocial activities as a result of peer influence through social learning and these come a problem to the society. Individuals who sees that a particular activity like gambling is rewarding are likelier to imitate them, while behavior resulting in negative outcomes is less likely to be copied.

Learning theory posit that individuals begin to gamble as they want to fit in with their surroundings, they use others getting excited when gambling and gaining rewards so they begin to learn, which leads to an addiction. Social learning theory explains human behaviour through observation and imitation. The theory states that humans learn socially, not just intellectually. This means we learn from our peers, parents, coaches among others.

Bandura's work led him to develop the concept of self-efficacy, which means confidence in one's ability to perform a task. Self-efficacy influences behaviour, including learning. The more confident we feel about our abilities, the more likely we are to try new, such as gambling. Learning is the process by which activity originates or is changed through reacting to an encountered situation, provided that the characteristics of change in activity cannot be explained on the basis of native response tendencies, maturity or temporary status of the individual.

### **METHODOLOGY**

The study adopted a survey design with data collected from primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected through interview and participant observation while secondary data were collected from extant literature. Respondents were selected using multiple sampling techniques; these include purposive, snowball and random sampling techniques.

### **RESULT**

In the course of this study, 80% of the interviewed respondents accepted that gambling and suicide has a correlation. In their various responses, they narrated how frustration from gambling force our youths and some elderly persons to commit suicide. One of the respondents from Ikot Akata in Etinan Local Government Area, narrates:

He said that his nephew that was living with him stole his money and played gambling expecting to win, but his plan suddenly failed him. Thinking about have to refund the money that frustration forced him to commit suicide in his room.



Narratives from some of the respondents 40% said that they are experiencing serious poverty in the land and this situation forces them to involve in gambling for survival. One of the respondents from Itu Clan in Itu Local Government Area, narrates:

Poverty and unemployment in Nigeria have a negative effect in the village in such a way that everybody can see it. Some people even steal from others just to gamble, expecting to make more fortunes.

One of the respondents from Uyo Local Government Area, narrates:

Mr. Eyo who is the president of Young Cooperative Society, said that one Isaac Bassey who happens to be their member, secured a loan of 1 million naira from them and placed his house as a collateral. He deposited the money in a gambling company, expecting to win the game but he failed. The frustration to pay back the money forced him to commit suicide.

One of the respondents from Ibiono Local Government Area, Bassey narrates:

Grace Bassey said that his only son was addicted to gambling to a point that he would do everything just to have some money to play gambling. He played gambling to a point that he staked his school fees expecting winning but he did not win, that frustration and shame to drop out from school pushed him in drug abuse and he eventually commit suicide as the last option to end the shame.

## **Findings**

The findings of this study have shown that prevalent cases of suicide and suicide attempts are directly linked to gambling. The study further shows that many youths in Akwa Ibom State incurred debts as a result of gambling and they resorted to taking their lives due to inability to settle such debts. It is also clear that most students drop out from schools due to their gambling addiction. The study also shows that gamblers are deeply involved in drug abuse and alcoholic consumption, once they lose out from gambling. It shows that gamblers are involved in deviant behaviors, such as theft, fraud, drug trafficking and other acts that are against the growth and wellbeing of the society.

The study shows that poverty is the reason they are involved in gambling as a way of survival. In a country as economically impoverished as Nigeria, financially bankrupt and politically unstable, the future really looks bleak; thus, many people are forced to look for greener pastures through gambling. It shows that gamblers are highly stigmatized by the society because of the deviance tendency in the society. The study shows that there is a proliferation of betting companies because of high patronage by Nigerians.

## **CONCLUSION**

There is a need for government the at all level to regulate the activities of gambling companies to ensure that underage are not allowed to participate in gambling, this would help to reduce deviance behaviour in our society. Gambling has played a negative role in the behaviour of our youths in Akwa Ibom State as it is in many other parts of Nigeria. It is critical as noted earlier that gamblers indulged in negative transactions that would give them money to play gambling



with high expectation of winning the game. Positive policy action is required to minimize gambling related harm to the people of Akwa Ibom State and Nigeria in general.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. Government should revoke licenses for gambling companies that allow under-age gambling.
- ii. Government should increase tax revenue on gambling companies to discourage proliferation of gambling companies.
- iii. Law should be enacted to prosecute any minor caught engaging in gambling activities, as this would serve as deterrence to others.
- iv. There is a need for advocacy to the citizens in order to sensitize them about the psychological effect of gambling addiction.

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