

# Youth and Gambling: A Sociological Analysis of Causes, Effects, and Preventive Strategies

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## Abstract

## Case Studies

Gambling has increasingly become a widespread activity among youth in both urban and rural communities. This study examines the sociological underpinnings of youth involvement in gambling, the psychological and socio-economic consequences, and potential preventive strategies. Using a conceptual framework that draws from the strain theory and social learning theory, the paper examines the motivations behind gambling such as unemployment, peer influence, media exposure, and the desire for quick wealth. The merits and demerits of gambling are discussed to provide a balanced perspective. While some view gambling as a recreational activity or a source of income, its negative consequences including addiction, academic decline, and criminal behavior pose significant societal challenges. The paper concludes with recommendations for education, regulation, and family-based interventions to curb the rise of gambling among young people.

**Keywords:** Gambling, youth, sociological analysis, addiction, peer influence, Nigeria.

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## INTRODUCTION

Contemporary society, the overwhelming desperation and pressure among youth to escape economic hardship and improve their social standing have led many to engage in gambling, particularly betting, as a perceived shortcut to wealth. With high unemployment rates, limited access to quality education, and the glamorization of instant success through social media and celebrity culture, many young people view gambling as a viable means of achieving upward mobility. Scholars such as Oloyede (2019) argue that economic insecurity and peer influence are critical motivators for gambling among Nigerian youth, who often see it as a practical response to limited opportunities. Similarly, Chikwendu (2022) observes that the normalization of online betting among urban youth is reinforced by aggressive marketing strategies and media portrayals that associate gambling with success and fame. While a few individuals may attain temporary financial gains through these activities, the majority are plunged into deeper financial instability, emotional distress, and compulsive behavior patterns. In many cases, gambling has not only failed to alleviate poverty but has exacerbated it, leading to reckless spending, debt accumulation, academic decline, and even criminal behavior. This paradox highlights the need for a critical sociological analysis of gambling among youth, examining both its causes and far-reaching consequences

## Definition of terms

□□**Gambling:** The act of risking money or valuables on an event with an uncertain outcome in hopes of winning additional money or material goods (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). This entails that it is win loose situations. That is in gambling it is either the person wins or loose the prize kept as collateral for winning or gaining. Hence, a game of chance.

□□**Youth:** Individuals between the ages of 15 and 35, as defined by the African Youth Charter (African Union, 2006).

□□**Addiction:** A chronic condition characterized by compulsive engagement in rewarding stimuli despite adverse consequences (World Health Organization, 2020).

□□**Betting:** A specific form of gambling where a person predicts the outcome of an event and places a wager on that prediction

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous studies have examined the growing trend of gambling among young people, revealing its complex relationship with societal, economic, and psychological factors. However, economic instability has made some to venture in

quicker route to financial breakthrough in order to liberate themselves from hardship. According to Okafor (2020), gambling has emerged as a coping mechanism for Nigerian youth facing widespread unemployment and poverty. This is consistent with Merton's Strain Theory, which suggests that societal pressure to achieve financial success leads some to seek alternative, often deviant, methods.

Additionally, Bandura's Social Learning Theory underpins the influence of peer behavior and media in shaping gambling tendencies. Youth who observe peers engaging in gambling are more likely to imitate the behavior. Online platforms and celebrity endorsements further normalize gambling in the youth's social environment.

Internationally, studies by the World Health Organization (2020) and other bodies show similar trends, with youths increasingly turning to gambling for entertainment, socialization, and perceived economic benefit. However, this often leads to mental health issues, academic decline, and strained family relations.

Despite the existing research, there is a lack of comprehensive studies addressing the cultural and religious contexts that influence gambling behavior in African societies, particularly Nigeria. This gap underlines the importance of a sociological approach in examining both the causes and consequences of youth gambling.

## Conceptual Framework

This study is guided by two main sociological theories: Robert K. Merton's Strain Theory and Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory. These theories help explain the motivations and social conditions that lead youth to engage in gambling. Strain Theory, propounded by sociologist Robert K. Merton in 1938, argues that individuals experience strain when they are unable to achieve culturally accepted goals, such as wealth and success, through legitimate means. This strain may lead them to adopt alternative behaviors, such as gambling, which appears to offer a shortcut to economic gain.

Social Learning Theory, introduced by psychologist Albert Bandura in 1977, posits that people learn behaviors by observing and imitating others, especially when such behaviors appear to be rewarded. Youth who see peers, celebrities, or family members participating in gambling are more likely to imitate the behavior, particularly if these role models seem to benefit from it.

The interaction of these two theories provides a framework for analyzing the causes and consequences of gambling among youth. Strain creates the push toward deviant behavior, while social learning provides the pathway through imitation and reinforcement.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methods to explore the causes, effects, and preventive strategies related to youth

gambling. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The population consisted of Nigerian youth aged 15 to 35 across selected urban and semi-urban areas.

A total of 300 respondents were selected using purposive and random sampling methods. The questionnaire assessed gambling frequency, motivations, perceived benefits, negative consequences, and awareness of existing regulations. Interviews with 20 youth and 5 experts (educators, counselors, and religious leaders) were conducted to provide deeper insights.

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation analysis, while qualitative data were subjected to thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and narratives. Ethical approval was obtained, and participants were assured of confidentiality and voluntary participation.

The analysis of the quantitative data revealed that 68% of the respondents had engaged in some form of gambling, with sports betting being the most common. Of this group, 41% reported gambling at least once a week, while 27% admitted to daily gambling. The primary motivations cited were financial desperation (45%), peer influence (30%), and entertainment (25%).

Qualitative interviews highlighted how unemployment and social expectations drive youth toward gambling. One respondent noted, "Everyone wants to make money fast. When there are no jobs, betting looks like the only option." Several interviewees emphasized the normalization of gambling, particularly through social media and celebrity endorsements.

Notably, 36% of respondents reported experiencing negative academic impacts, while 22% admitted to borrowing or stealing money to support their gambling habits. Nearly half (48%) expressed regret or a desire to stop gambling, indicating a level of psychological distress and awareness of its harmful effects.

## Discussion

The findings of this study affirm the relevance of Merton's Strain Theory and Bandura's Social Learning Theory in understanding youth gambling. Economic hardship and limited employment opportunities create a sense of strain among young people, pushing them toward gambling as an alternative income source. This supports the theoretical framework that deviant behavior emerges when legitimate means to success are blocked.

Additionally, the strong influence of peers and celebrities underscores the role of social learning. Youth are not only exposed to gambling behaviors in their immediate environment but are also bombarded with media content that glamorizes betting as a normal and even desirable activity.

However, religious teachings have critically objected and address the illegal quest of quicker route to financial breakthrough. Colossians 3:23 (NIV)

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters.



This affirms that our efforts matter to God and should be done wholeheartedly, not replaced by gambling. Hence, 1 Timothy 6:9–10 (NIV) emphasizes that those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap... For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. However, wealth in itself is a good thing because it helps people solve problems of life while over desperation makes them venture in quicker routes to wealth which gambling is not exempted. Nevertheless, the surprising thing is that while some desperados embrace gambling at the verge of it are scammed unknowingly.

The psychological consequences, including guilt, regret, and addiction, reveal that many young gamblers are aware of the risks but feel powerless to stop. This illustrates the complex issues between social pressure, economic need, and individual choice. The findings highlight an urgent need for preventive measures that address both economic and social influences.

## Merits and Demerits of gambling

While gambling is often criticized, some respondents noted a few perceived benefits. These include:

**Economic Opportunity:** Some youth see gambling as a means to alleviate financial hardship. A small portion reported occasional winnings that helped them settle bills or support their families. This reflects in “trying lucks and gesture that enables one to win games of chances.”

**Entertainment and Social Bonding:** Gambling venues and betting activities serve as recreational outlets, providing excitement and bonding moments among peers.

**Employment:** The gambling industry has created job opportunities for agents, online betting staff, and vendors, especially in urban areas.

## Demerits

Despite these perceived merits, the negative effects of gambling overwhelmingly outweigh any advantages. The key demerits include:

**Addiction and Mental Health Issues:** A significant number of youth reported signs of compulsive gambling and associated psychological stress.

**Academic Decline:** Many student gamblers admitted to missing classes and performing poorly in school. Financial Loss and Crime: Continuous losses led some to borrow, steal, or engage in other risky behaviors to fund their gambling.

**Social and Family Disruption:** Relationships with parents and siblings often deteriorated due to lies, debts, and neglect of responsibilities.

## Recommendations and prevention strategies

Based on the findings, the following strategies are recommended to reduce youth gambling:

**Public Awareness Campaigns:** Government and NGOs should educate youth on the risks of gambling through media, schools, and community events.

**Educational Reform:** Schools should incorporate topics on gambling and financial literacy into their curricula.

**Parental and Religious Engagement:** Families and religious institutions should offer mentorship, emotional support, and moral guidance to at-risk youth.

**Job Creation Programs:** Government should invest in skill development and employment schemes that offer alternatives to gambling.

**Policy and Regulation:** Stronger enforcement of gambling age restrictions and advertisement policies is crucial to limit youth access.

## CONCLUSION

Youth gambling in Nigeria is a complex issue driven by a mix of socio-economic pressures and cultural influences. While gambling may offer temporary excitement or economic relief, its long-term consequences such as addiction, academic failure, and social instability are damaging. By applying sociological theories and analyzing real-life data, this study highlights the urgent need for multi-stakeholder intervention. Through policy reforms, education, employment programs, and strong family support, the trend of youth gambling can be mitigated for the benefit of individuals and society at large.

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