

Impact of Gambling Addiction on the Behavior and Mental Health of Adolescents

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Abstract

Gambling is a phenomenon increasingly affecting adolescents. The aim of this study was to examine the impact of gambling addiction on the mental health and associated behaviors of adolescents receiving care at the SAHM. This was a descriptive, prospective, cross-sectional study involving 16 adolescents under care at the SAHM. The study lasted one month. The Goodman scale was used to assess the level of gambling addiction among the adolescents. The results indicated that all participants were male, aged between 16 and 19 (45%). Sports betting (1XBET) was the primary form of gambling (43.75%). Gambling frequency was nearly daily in 62.50% of cases. Observed deviant behaviors included psychoactive substance use (100%) and theft (56.25%). The psychiatric impact of gambling on these youths manifested as anxiety disorders (81.25%) and sleep disorders (62.50%). It is necessary to raise awareness among adolescents regarding the dangers of gambling.

Keywords

Gambling, 1XBET, Addiction, Adolescents

1. Introduction

While games of chance and gambling are often perceived as recreational activities, they can frequently lead to genuine addiction [1]. Gambling addiction extends beyond mere leisure activity; it can have significant repercussions on behavior and mental health, such as social isolation, loss of interest in studies, family conflict, delinquency, substance use, and sometimes anxiety or depressive disorders [2] [3].

In Europe, a study by Griffiths and Parke (2021) revealed that 12% of British adolescents reported having engaged in online gambling, with an associated in-

creased risk of developing compulsive gambling habits [4].

In Côte d'Ivoire, this issue is gaining momentum, with a noticeable rise in sports betting and games of chance among adolescents. Given this situation, we ask: What is the impact of gambling addiction on the mental health and associated behaviors of these adolescents?

The answer to this question motivated the present study, the general objective of which was to examine the impact of gambling addiction on the mental health and associated behaviors of adolescents receiving care at the SAHM.

2. Materials and Method

This was a quantitative case series study involving 16 adolescents treated at the Addiction and Mental Health Department (SAHM) of the National Institute of Public Health (INSP). The study included adolescents aged 10 to 19 receiving care at the SAHM for gambling addiction characterized by problematic behaviors; patients with unusable medical records and adolescents with severe psychiatric disorders—whether or not associated with gambling—were excluded. The study was conducted over a period of one month, from October 16 to November 13, 2024. Data collection was carried out using a survey form, medical records, and the Goodman scale.

3. Results

3.1. Sociodemographic Characteristics

All respondents were male; 56.25% were aged 16 to 19, and half (50%) were in middle school.

3.2. Characteristics Related to Gambling

The primary form of gambling was sports betting (1X-BET) (43.75%); the frequency of play was nearly daily (62.50%); the lure of financial gain was the main reason for starting to gamble (56.25%); and the hope of winning (40%) drove continued participation. These adolescents exhibited severe addiction (68.75%) to games of chance and gambling (**Table 1**).

Table 1. Distribution of respondents by sex, age, and level of education.

Sociodemographic characteristics		
Sex	(n = 16)	%
Male	16	100
Age group	(n = 16)	%
[10 - 12 years]	2	12.50
[13 - 15 years]	5	31.25
[16 - 19 years]	9	56.25

Continued

Education level	(n = 16)	%
High school	3	18.75
Middle school	8	50
Primary school	4	25
No schooling	1	6.25

3.3. Impact of Gambling on Mental Health and Behavior

50% of the adolescents had a history of police encounters. More than half (68.75%) displayed delinquent behavior, 81.25% exhibited anxiety disorders, and 62.50% suffered from sleep disorders (**Table 2, Table 3**).

Table 2. Distribution of surveys according to characteristics related to games of chance and gambling.

Characteristics related to games of chance and gambling		
Main games played	(n = 16)	%
Sports betting (1X-BET)	7	43.75
Casino	1	06.25
Konami	4	25
Bucket	1	06.25
Others	3	18.75
Circumstances of discovering the game	(n = 16)	%
Personal research	1	16.66
Chance	4	25
Through a third party	11	68.75
Reason for starting to gamble	(n = 16)	%
Desire for financial gain	9	56.25
Curiosity	4	25
Entertainment	3	18.75
Fréquency of JHA meetings	(n = 16)	%
Daily	10	62.50
2 - 6 days / weeks	3	18.75
Occasional	1	06.25
Once a month	1	06.25
Once a week	1	06.25
Reason for continuing to play	F	%
Hope of winnings	10	62.50
Consistency of winnings	2	12.50
Source of distraction	2	12.59

Continued

Source of income	6	37.50
Others	4	25
Adolescents addiction level (Goodman scale)	(n = 16)	%
Score < 2	1	06.25
Score de 2 à 3	2	12.50
Score de 4 à 5	2	12.50
Score ≥ 6	11	68.75

Table 3. Distribution of respondents according to the impact of games of chance and money on mental health and associated behaviors.

Impact of gambling on mental health and behavior		
Criminal history	(n = 16)	%
None	08	50
Incarceration	05	31.25
Police custody	03	18.75
Impact gambling on behavior	F	%
Professional	03	18.75
Délinquant behavior	11	68.75
Family conflicts	08	50
School dropout	01	06.25
Economic	02	12.50
Delinquent behavior	F	%
Theft	15	93.75
Use of psychoactive substance	16	100
Trafficking in psychoactive substances	03	16
Other	02	12.50
State of anxiety	(n = 16)	%
Yes	13	81.25
No	03	18.25
Sleep disorder	(n = 16)	%
Yes	10	62.50
No	06	37.50

4. Discussion

The addicted adolescents were primarily aged between 16 and 19, accounting for 56.25% of the cases. Our results align with studies by Gebreslassie M in Ethiopia [5] and Wardle *et al.* in South Africa [6], which highlighted that young people aged 15 to 19 are more vulnerable to gambling due to their search for identity and

the challenges associated with the transition to adulthood. Furthermore, this age group is characterized by increased exposure to external influences—such as peers or the media—that can encourage gambling behavior. Regarding education level, 50% of the adolescents were attending secondary school. Mwangi also noted that adolescents with a secondary education were particularly affected by the phenomenon of gambling; this could be explained by peer influence and easier access to online gambling platforms, especially in urban areas [7].

The study reveals that sports betting (1X-BET) was the primary form of gambling engaged in by the adolescents (43.75%). Online gaming and sports betting were also identified as a pastime and as a way to combat boredom.

Abdulqadir reports on this in Nigeria [8]. In Côte d'Ivoire, the popularity of these games may be attributed to their accessibility via mobile phones and the Internet—enabling mass participation among youth—as well as widespread media advertising featuring celebrities (from football, music, basketball, etc.).

The results showed that 68.75% of the adolescents were introduced to gambling by a third party. This supports the findings of Williams *et al.*, who observed that the initiation into gambling among adolescents was often linked to the influence of friends or family members [9]. Regarding motivations, 56.25% of the adolescents had started gambling out of a desire for financial gain, and 40% continued to gamble in the hope of winning money. Meyer *et al.* indicated that the desire to improve one's financial situation—albeit often an illusory one—was a primary reason for continued gambling among adolescents, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds [10].

Based on Goodman's criteria, the majority of adolescents with a score of ≥ 6 (68.75%) suffered from severe gambling addiction [11]. This profile is concerning, as problematic gambling during adolescence is associated with significant psychological, social, and financial consequences [12], including in sub-Saharan Africa [6].

The fact that 62.50% of the adolescents gambled daily and 56.25% relied on theft as their primary source of funding was a concerning indicator. Similar findings were reported in Uganda (Kiconco *et al.*), where gambling addiction was linked to an increase in petty crimes among youth, particularly theft. This demonstrates that addiction can lead to severe financial distress due to the constant need for funds to support the gambling habit [13].

All adolescents in this cohort engaged in psychoactive substance use. According to Kiconco *et al.* [13], drug use among young gamblers is common and often exacerbated by their exposure to gambling, creating a vicious cycle of addiction. Furthermore, in our study, 50% of the adolescents had begun to exhibit addictive behaviors before the age of 15. This finding aligns with literature from sub-Saharan Africa, which highlights that early initiation into gambling is associated with an increased risk of gambling disorder [6]. Additionally, citing Abdi *et al.*, Ssewanyana and Bitanirwe report that 73% of high school students in Addis Ababa had gambled, with 37% at risk of severe problematic gambling and 7% al-

ready classified as problematic or pathological gamblers [6]. Eleven adolescents (68.75%) displayed delinquent behaviors, a finding consistent with the increased risk of criminality associated with gambling among youth in this region [6].

Of the respondents, 31.25% had a prior history of incarceration. This correlation between gambling and juvenile delinquency was studied in Uganda by Kiconco *et al.*, where games of chance were frequently linked to criminal activity among young people, a situation exacerbated by the need to fund their gambling habits [13].

The impact of gambling on mental health is evident. Indeed, 81.25% of the adolescents suffered from anxiety (62.50%) and exhibited sleep disturbances, specifically insomnia. These findings were comparable to those of Cardoso *et al.*, who demonstrated that gambling addiction leads to significant psychological and psychiatric effects in young people, including anxiety, depression, and sleep disorders [12].

5. Conclusion

Games of chance and gambling can have significant repercussions on both the mental health and behavior of adolescents. Strengthening the enforcement of age-based access regulations and adopting responsible gaming practices appear essential. Early prevention and awareness-raising measures are necessary to limit risky behaviors and their consequences.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, GAHY Gnonsian Estelle-Kévine; Methodology: Son G.J-P. Software: Kouassi MRF; validation, Traoré Brahim Samuel. formal analysis, X.X.; investigation: Ago Bertine; resources: Son Gbolérou Jocelyne-Prisca; writing—original draft preparation: GAHY Gnonsian Estelle-Kévine; visualization: Traoré Brahim Samuel; supervision: YEO-TENENA Y.J-M. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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