

**INVESTIGATING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
GENDER, LONELINESS AND PROBLEM GAMBLING: A
CROSS-SECTIONAL STUDY OF UNDERGRADUATES IN
OWERRI MUNICIPALITY, IMO STATE, NIGERIA**

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ABSTRACT: The study investigated whether gender and loneliness are related with problem gambling. Data was collected using cross-sectional survey design from a sample of 200 (80 female and 120 male) undergraduates of Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri. The participants' age ranges from 18 to 31 years of age. The study was conducted using only the participants whose responses indicated the possibility of both moderate risk of problem gambling and a high risk of problem gambling in the instruments administered. The Participants completed self-reported measures of the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) by Ferris and Wynne (2001) and the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale by Russell *et al.*, (1980). Both instruments were used to conveniently sample participants. Hierarchical multiple regression results showed that loneliness ($\beta = .20, p < .01$) had a predictive positive relationship with problem gambling but gender ($\beta = .03, p > .005$) had no significant predictive relationship with problem gambling. Discussion highlighted the need for well-equipped indoor games houses in tertiary institutions to enable undergraduates slowly make friends and connect with each other and as friends, seek peer supports when need arises. This finding further upholds the relevance of Psychological Units in health centres owed by the tertiary institutions in Owerri Municipality.

Keywords: Loneliness, Gender, Moderate Risk, Problem Gambling, Imo State

INTRODUCTION

Despite being a popular form of recreation, gambling encompasses a source of harm due to its negative impact on individuals, families and communities through problem gambling. Hence gambling has received a lot of attention from the public. Problem gambling has done more harm than good to an individual and society at large. As a popular form of recreation in the world, the act of gambling has gained more acceptability in many countries of the world due to the desire of government to create jobs, generate revenue and a cities' unending desire to encourage economic development (Bjelde, Chromy, & Pankow, 2008). In Nigeria, gambling is now a common activity among the youths. Following a progressive hike in the unemployment rate and an ever dwindling economy inherent in a country like Nigeria, the youths are left with no choice than to seek for a way out. Some end up engaging in various risky behaviours as a way to survive. Scholars like Oyebisi, Alao and Popoola (2012) views gambling behaviour as one of the different risky behaviours engaged by the youth. The researchers further reported gambling behaviour to be related to some criminal related behaviour in the society today. The discouraging situations in the country have led to the establishment and maintenance of many gambling sites here in town and with the use of internet enabled smart phone devices, gambling is just a dial away from the smart phone users. With

the easy access to engaging in gambling, it is important to state that while few individuals control their gambling behaviours, others seem to get addicted to the act of gambling.

The act of gambling has led to unnecessary financial distress and debt, problems in relationships and social isolation and impairments to physical and mental health and wellbeing. Slade and McConville (2003) views gambling “as staking of money on the outcome of games or events involving chance or skill”. According to the most recent Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR), pathological gambling disorder (PGD) is defined as a condition in which an individual exhibits five or more DSM-IV-TR diagnostic criteria such as showing persistent and recurrent maladaptive gambling behavior, resulting in impairments in the areas of work, studies, and social and family relationships (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). The Productivity Commission (2009) has found that men are more likely than women to gamble on sports, casino, card games and racing, whereas few sex differences in participation tend to be observed in relation to gaming machines and lotteries. This study undoubtedly lends credence to the assertion that gambling participation rates may vary significantly according to the gamblers age and gender.

A number of factors have been suspected as contributing to problem gambling in the society. Loneliness is one of the suspected factors. There is empirical research which has suggested that loneliness is a risk factor for gambling behaviour (Scull & Woolcock, 2015). Research literature suggests also that this may be particularly true for adolescents (Gupta & Derevesky, 2014), women (Thomas & Moore, 2010) and older adults (Zaraneck & Lichtenberg, 2016). Research suggests that adolescents gamble to escape real life problems including emotional and social isolation (King, Delfabbro, & Griffiths, 2010). Sirola, Kaakinen, Savolainen, and Oksanen (2019) have observed that a sense of loneliness is caused by a person’s disconnectedness, perceived solitude and inadequate social relationships. Loneliness, defined as the subjective perception of a lack of contact with other people, is associated with premature mortality, physical and mental ill-health, worse cognitive function and increased use of health services (Hawkey and Cacioppo, 2010; Elovainio, Hakulinen, Pulkki-Råback *et al.*, 2017; Dreyer, Steventon, Fisher, & Deeny, 2018). Perception of loneliness can vary from one person to another; it can be short term or long lasting and of course have equal varying reasons and consequences. In their study, Thomas & Moore (2010), who explored if women gamble for the same reasons as men, observed that loneliness, boredom, and stress predicted problem gambling for both genders. The question this study seeks to enquire is if loneliness contributes to problem gambling. In this study, therefore, the researcher aims to explore the extent to which an individual’s gender orientation and perceived loneliness may be associated or related to problem gambling among undergraduates in tertiary institutions.

Statement of the Problem

The prevalence of disordered gambling among youths and adults has increased significantly (Dreyer, Steventon, Fisher & Deeny, 2018). Gambling and problem gambling have been associated with risky personality, risky decision making, and pro-risk behaviour. But unfortunately, most of the researched statistical report on prevalence and patterns of problem gambling are foreign based. In some other cases, a different methodology was adopted in the study of problem gambling behaviours. Several researchers have adopted different instruments to measure the problem gambling behaviour and in Nigeria just few works exist leaving a gap in the knowledge of the social-environmental determinants of the behaviour. There are also

inconsistencies in several psychological reports. Therefore, this study is aimed at filling the observed gaps and contributing to the wealth of knowledge in Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The broad purpose of this study is to determine the extent to which gender and loneliness predicts problem gambling behaviour. In the same vein, the specific purposes of the study are to determine if;

- i. Gender will significantly predict gambling behaviour.
- ii. Loneliness will significantly predict gambling behaviour.

Hypotheses

Consequently, the following hypotheses were tested in the course of this study;

1. Gender will be a significant predictor of gambling behavior.
2. Loneliness will be a significant positive predictor of gambling behavior.

METHOD

Participants

The researcher employed two hundred (200) undergraduates of Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri Imo State to participate in the study using convenience sampling method. The participants for the study were selected from both the Social Studies Department and French Departments of the institute. Only participants who showed both moderate risk of problem gambling and high risk of problem gambling were used for the study. The participants comprised of both genders and undergraduates ranging from the age of 18 to 31 years of age. Alvan Ikoku is a Federal College of Education situated in Owerri Municipality along Orlu Road. Among the participants, the female comprised of 80 participants (40%) while the male comprised of 120 (60%) participants. In terms of religious groups of participants, Catholics constituted of 78 (39%) participants whereas Anglicans constituted of 31 (15.5%) participants. Other religious groups seen in the survey conducted were Protestant 72 (36%), Pentecostal 18 (9%) and others 1(0.5%). The participants hailed from various states like Imo 115 (58%), Abia 34 (17%), Ebonyi 23 (11.5%), Enugu 14 (7%) and Anambra 13 (6.5%). While 193 (96.5%) participants were single, 7 participants (3.5%) were married.

Instruments

Two instruments were utilized to collect the data namely: the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) and the Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale.

The Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI): The nine standard items of the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) from section 2 of the Canadian Problem Gambling Index was utilized to assess an individual's level of problem gambling behaviours. The instrument was developed by Ferris and Wynne (2001) with reliability Cronbach's alpha coefficient of $\alpha = .94$. The PGSI measures problem gambling on a continuum from no-risk to high risk and is suited for use with community gambling samples. Each item is rated on a 4-point scale ranging from

0 (Never) to 3 (Almost Always). The total score is calculated by summing the scores of the 9 items. A total score of 0 indicates no risk of problem gambling, 1-2 indicates low risk of problem gambling, 3-7 indicates moderate risk of problem gambling, and a total score of 8 or more suggests high risk of problem gambling. The researcher revalidated the scale in Nigeria using undergraduates of Imo State University, Owerri and reported reliability Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .80.

The Revised UCLA Loneliness Scale: this instrument was developed by Russell *et al.*, (1980) and will be used to assess an individual's subjective feelings of loneliness. This scale consists of 20 items, with each item rated on a 4-point scale ranging from 0 (Never) to 3 (Often). Items 1, 5, 6, 9, 10, 15, 16, 19, 20 are all reverse scored. The total score is calculated by summing the scores of the 20 items, with higher scores indicating higher levels of loneliness. Past research has found this scale to be a reliable measure of loneliness (Knight, Chisholm, Marsh & Godfrey, 1988) with good concurrent and discriminant validity, and high internal consistency of ($\alpha = .94$; Russell *et al.*, 1980). The researcher obtained a Cronbach alpha of .92 from undergraduates of Imo State University, Owerri.

Procedure

The researcher sampled the tertiary universities in Owerri municipality, Imo State, Nigeria. The universities include; Imo State University and the Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education. The Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education was randomly selected for the study. Both the School of Social Sciences (Social Studies Departments) and School of Languages (French Department) were randomly selected. Convenience sampling method was further used to recruit the participants from the selected Departments. After the selection phase, the researcher established rapport with the subjects before commencing the distribution of questionnaires to the participants. Of the 480 copies of questionnaires distributed, 420 were returned and only 200 questionnaires showed both moderate risk of problem gambling, and a high risk of problem gambling. Therefore, they were used for further analysis.

Design and Statistics

Cross-sectional survey was employed in this study for data collection and hierarchical multiple regression analysis was utilized for data analysis.

RESULTS

Table 1: Inter-variable Correlations using Pearson Product Moment Correlations

	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1 Problem Gambling	29.69	.491	-				
2 Gender	1.60	1.065	0.48	-			
3 Religion	2.17	4.778	-.128	-.142*	-		
4 Marital Status	1.04	10.981	-.016	0.44	-.004	-	
5 Loneliness	29.64	.184	.197**	-.015	0.21	-.033	-

* = $p < .05$ (two-tailed), ** = $p < .01$

The results in Table 1 indicated that none of the demographic variables significantly correlates with problem gambling. However, there was a significant negative correlation between gender and religion ($r = .142, p = .00$). The correlation between loneliness and problem gambling was positive and significant ($r = .197, p = .00$)

Table 2: Hierarchical multiple regression for predictors of Problem Gambling

	Step 1	Step 2
	β	β
Gender	.05	0.5
Loneliness		.20**
Adjusted R ²	-.00	.32
ΔR	.00	.04
ΔF	.449	8.064

Note. ** = $p < .001$ DV = Gambling behaviour

The results of the hierarchical multiple regression in Table 2 in which problem gambling was the criterion variable indicated that the demographic variables, gender entered in Step 1 of the equation accounted for 0.2% variance in problem gambling which was not significant. When the predictor variable (loneliness) was entered in Step 2 of the equation, it accounted for 39% variance in problem gambling which was significant. Therefore, loneliness was the only significant positive predictor of problem gambling behaviour ($\beta = .20, p < .005$). Based on this, H_2 was confirmed. This means that for every .20 unit rise in problem gambling behaviour, loneliness increased.

Considering the hierarchical multiple regression coefficients, loneliness positively predicted problem gambling behaviour among undergraduates. Hence the hunch of the researchers that loneliness is related to problem gambling behaviours of undergraduates was confirmed.

Discussion of Findings

The researcher hypothesized that gender will be a significant predictor of problem gambling behaviour among undergraduates. The results of this study indicated that gender did not predict problem gambling behaviour among undergraduates. This finding is of the view that a person's sexual characteristics or inclination has no relationship in maintaining a problem gambling behaviour and does not predict gambling behaviour. Gambling in the past has been viewed as an activity peculiar to the men. The result of this study could be possible because of the rise of feminism and its associated principles today. The feminists' view themselves as equal with the men and capable of executing functions or duties previously done by them. Hence there is no longer duties reserved for a particular gender but rather one can do that which he or she determines to engage in irrespective of ones' sexual inclination and or gender orientation. This finding is in contrast with previous findings (Bankole, 2019; Stark, Zahlan, Albanese, &

Tepperman, 2012) who found that independent variables (age, personality traits, depression and gender) had significant relationship with the dependent variable (gambling). Other researchers (such as Stark, Zahlan, Albanese, & Tepperman, 2012; McQuade & Gill, 2012) also found significant differences in scores for gambling between males and females suggesting that males gamble more often than females.

The findings of this study indicate that the position of the author after the review of related literatures that loneliness would be a significant predictor of gambling behaviour. The result showed a positive relationship between loneliness and problem gambling among undergraduates in tertiary institutions, an increase in loneliness increases problem gambling tendency. This literally implies that the more disposed the undergraduates are, the more the chances that they will engage themselves in gambling and its related activities causing a possible development of problem gambling amongst undergraduates. Gambling is almost as old as man. The finding of this study is in consonance with the previous findings by Ann, Sze, Heather, Sally, and Simon (2019). The researchers compared non-gamblers or gamblers with a DSM of zero to at-risk gamblers and found that problem gamblers were more likely to feel lonely from other people. Thus, the researchers affirmed that there exists an association between problem gambling, suicidal behaviours and perceived loneliness. Other scholars (McQuade & Gill, 2012; Gill & Romez, 2015), in their studies, found that loneliness plays a primary and important role in all levels of problem gambling behaviour.

Recommendations

In the light of the foregoing, the researcher encourages the management teams of various tertiary institutions to introduce extra-curricular activities and maintain indoor game houses. This is expected to attract undergraduates who have little works doing and sustain their attention instead of feeling lonely and withdrawing from everyone. With well-equipped indoor games houses, undergraduates, instead of feeling lonely, and bored are expected to slowly make friends and connect with each other and as friends, seek peer supports when need arises. Problem gamblers may feel that gambling helps them feel connected to the community and further distracts negative thoughts and feelings which they wish to avoid. So, maintaining an indoor game house is necessary as gambling could be perceived as a noble way to escape loneliness.

On the other hand, establishing and funding therapeutic centres in various tertiary institutions will avail the undergraduates an avenue to seek for professional help. Loss of close relationships and other opportunities and interests can exacerbate feelings of loneliness and as a way to cope, undergraduates might engage in gambling hence the need to seek for help. Speaking to a professional about the feelings of isolation and loneliness which often accompany problem gambling may be a useful strategy in breaking the cycles of loneliness. The author further opines that banning of gambling centres within school premises will go a long way towards discouraging problem gambling among undergraduates. This is quite necessary as most undergraduates who are suffering from problem gambling may be seeing gambling as a way to escape feelings of loneliness temporarily.

Conclusion

Researchers like Trevorrow and Moore (1998) have observed that loneliness can be both a consequence of and a cause of harmful gambling. Therefore, establishing well equipped indoor

games facilities in various tertiary institutions will expose undergraduates who feel lonely to make friends, seek peer supports and get busier while in school. And in the case of the undergraduates, who are in dire need of professional help, incorporating psychological and therapeutic units in various tertiary institutions health centres will go a long way in ameliorating the impacts of problem gambling and gambling related problems.

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