The Impact of Behavioural Addictions on Mental Health: A Focus on Gambling and Gaming

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Abstract:

Gambling and gaming have been linked to traits associated with risk-taking, including risky decision-making and behaviours that favour risk. Traits such as sensation-seeking, impulsivity, and low self-control have been linked to gambling behaviour. Individuals exhibiting sensation-seeking characteristics tend to favour diverse and stimulating experiences, demonstrating a readiness to take risks in pursuit of these encounters. Consequently, this may result in diminished mental and social well-being. The study investigates the effects of behavioural addictions on mental health, particularly concentrating on gambling and gaming. The study utilised a qualitative research design, selecting one hundred and fifty youths in Ado Ekiti, Ekiti State through purposive and convenience sampling methods. The questionnaires included sections on socio-demographics as well as scales measuring gambling addiction, social health, and mental health. Descriptive statistics and regression analysis were utilised. The study's findings indicated a positive correlation between the severity of behavioural addictions and the extent of negative mental health outcomes, including diminished emotional well-being and compromised interpersonal relationships. Educational institutions, community centers, and mental health organisations should launch awareness campaigns aimed at informing youth, parents, and educators about the dangers of behavioural addictions (such as gambling and gaming) and their effects on mental health.

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Introduction

Compulsive engagement in non-substance-related activities, despite negative outcomes, has emerged as a significant area of interest in the field of mental health studies. Engagement in activities like gambling, gaming, internet use, shopping, and social media is gaining acknowledgment for its potential to impact mental well-being negatively, akin to the effects of substance addictions (Grant, Potenza, Weinstein & Gorelick, 2010). The emergence of these addictions is frequently the result of a multifaceted interaction among psychological, biological, and environmental influences, highlighting the importance of their examination in comprehending contemporary mental health issues. Behavioural addictions are becoming more common in our increasingly digital and consumer-oriented society. The increasing prevalence of internet gaming addiction in adolescents has brought to light serious mental health issues, such as anxiety, depression, and social isolation (Király, Griffiths & Demetrovics, 2017). Compulsive gambling is associated with increased rates of depression and suicidal thoughts (Lorains, Cowlishaw & Thomas, 2011). As these behaviours become more commonplace, the distinction between recreational use and addiction becomes less clear, making early diagnosis and intervention more challenging.

Gambling, often called betting or gaming, represents a significant global commercial endeavour. The study can be carried out using materials that possess value, though they may not necessarily be actual currency. Gambling exists in various forms, primarily categorised into two main types: commercial gambling and casino table games. Commercial gambling encompasses a variety of activities, including lotteries, instant lotteries, number games like lotto and ken, sports betting, horse betting, poker, and other card games. Casino table games consist of craps, roulette, bingo, and electronic gaming machines (EGM) (Oyelade, Ojuolape, Nazeem & Fehintola, 2023). In recent years, gambling has gained significant traction as a leisure activity among young people in Nigeria, especially in urban regions (Adebiyi & Obayelu, 2020). Sports betting stands out as the predominant form of gambling among young individuals. The expansion of this sector can be linked to various elements, such as the increase in gambling venues, the emergence of online betting platforms, and the accessibility of gambling options (Oyebode, 2021). The combination of these factors, along with the enticing prospect of winning substantial amounts of money, has resulted in an increase in gambling engagement among young individuals.

Studies indicate that behavioural addictions, including gambling and gaming, exhibit comparable neurobiological mechanisms to those found in substance use disorders. Both conditions are linked to an imbalance in the brain's reward system, especially concerning dopamine pathways (Calado & Griffiths, 2016). The persistent involvement in these activities frequently acts as a means of evasion from stress, isolation, or deeper mental health issues, leading to a detrimental cycle of reliance and psychological deterioration. Numerous studies on gambling in Nigeria have primarily concentrated on economic implications and participation patterns (Adebiyi & Obayelu, 2020; Oyebode, 2021). However, there remains a significant gap in the literature concerning the potential psychological and social consequences of gambling addictions on the mental health of the youth. Addressing this gap is

essential for formulating effective prevention and intervention strategies to alleviate these adverse effects.

Statement of the Problem

Behavioural addictions are gaining recognition in clinical environments, yet there are still considerable gaps in comprehending their exact effects on mental health. The influence of cultural and societal norms on the development of behavioural addiction patterns remains insufficiently examined. Furthermore, it is essential to explore the long-term mental health consequences of behavioural addictions like gambling and gaming, as well as the effectiveness of different treatment approaches. This study seeks to fill existing gaps by examining the mental health impacts of behavioural addictions related to gambling and gaming, emphasising the identification of risk factors, comorbid conditions, and effective interventions. The lack of universal recognition of behavioural addictions in diagnostic frameworks highlights the pressing need for investigation to guide clinical practice and public health policy.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the prevalence of behavioural addictions (e.g., gambling, gaming) among youth and their association with mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and social isolation.
2. To investigate the role of behavioural addictions in exacerbating existing mental health disorders among youth.
3. To evaluate the relationship between the severity of behavioural addictions and the extent of their impact on mental health outcomes, including emotional well-being, cognitive functioning, and interpersonal relationships.

Methodology

The research methodology for this study employs a qualitative research design, specifically utilizing a survey method. The population for this study consists of youths within the age bracket of 18 and 35 residing in Ado Ekiti, the capital city of Ekiti State, Nigeria. The choice of Ado Ekiti as the site for this study stems from its status as one of the developing cities in Southwest Nigeria with a substantial and diverse youth population, where gambling has become an increasingly prevalent behaviour among young adults. However, the accessible population for this study depends on several practical factors, such as available time, resources, and accessibility to potential participants. Therefore, this study primarily focused on young adults in Ado Ekiti that can be accessed through various settings including educational institutions, community centers, and youth organizations.

The sampling technique for this study employed a combination of purposive and convenient sampling methods, which are non-probability sampling methods commonly used in qualitative research. In the first stage, purposive sampling was used to ensure the inclusion of individuals who have experienced the phenomenon under study, that is, young adults aged 18 to 35, who are involved in gambling activities in Ado Ekiti. In the second stage, convenient sampling was used to recruit participants who were readily available and willing to

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participate in the study. In all, a total of 150 respondents were selected as a sample for the study. A self-structured questionnaire was used by the researcher to collect data for the study. The questionnaire consisted of two sections. Section A was on the socio-demographic variable of the respondents while section B contained 15 items structured to elicit responses from the respondents on a four-point Likert scale. To ensure content validity, the questionnaire was designed based on an extensive review of the literature and previous research on the subject matter. Ensuring the reliability of the research instrument and the research process as a whole is crucial to provide trustworthy and meaningful results that can contribute to the understanding of the impact of behavioural addictions (e.g. gambling, gaming) on the mental health of youths in Ado Ekiti. The descriptive analysis of simple frequency count, percentage, and weighted mean was used to answer the research questions raised for the study while inferential statistic of linear regression was used to test the hypotheses formulated for the study at 0.05 level of significance using SPSS version 26.

Results and Discussion

Research Question 1: What is the level of prevalence of behavioural addictions (e.g., gambling, gaming) among youth and their association with mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and social isolation?

Table 1: Responses to the level of prevalence of behavioural addictions (e.g., gambling, gaming) among youth

S/N	ITEMS	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	Remark
1	I often feel the need to spend excessive time gaming or gambling, even when it interferes with my daily responsibilities.	98 (65.3)	33 (22.0)	12 (8.0)	7 (4.7)	3.16	Agreed
2	Engaging in gaming or gambling frequently causes me to feel anxious or stressed.	47 (31.3)	80 (53.3)	19 (12.7)	4 (2.7)	3.11	Agreed
3	I have noticed feelings of depression or low mood when I am unable to engage in gaming or gambling activities.	55 (36.7)	54 (36.0)	35 (23.3)	6 (4.0)	3.07	Agreed
4	My social life has been negatively affected due to the time I spend gaming or gambling.	52 (34.7)	58 (38.7)	28 (18.7)	12 (8.0)	2.82	Agreed

5	I believe my mental health would improve if I reduced my involvement in gaming or gambling activities.	57 (38.0)	50 (33.3)	29 (19.3)	14 (9.3)	2.91	Agreed
Weighted Mean					**3.01**		

The result in Table 1 revealed the level of prevalence of behavioural addictions (e.g., gambling, gaming) among youth and their association with mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and social isolation. Most of the respondents consistently agreed with all the items in the table. The mean score of the items 3.01 is above the fixed decision value of 2.50. In item 1, most of the respondents agreed that they often feel the need to spend excessive time gaming or gambling, even when it interferes with their daily responsibilities, and this resulted in a mean value of 3.16. In item 2, it was revealed that most of the respondents that engaging in gaming or gambling frequently causes them to feel anxious or stressed, with a mean response of 3.11. It was further revealed in item 3, with a mean response rate of 3.07 that most of the respondents held that they have noticed feelings of depression or low mood when they are unable to engage in gaming or gambling activities. Item 4 revealed that their social life has been negatively affected due to the time they spend gaming or gambling, with a mean value of 2.82, while in item 5, it was revealed that most of the respondents believe their mental health would improve if they reduced their involvement in gaming or gambling activities, and this resulted into the mean rate of 2.91. This implies that the level of prevalence of behavioural addictions (e.g., gambling, gaming) among youth and their association with mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and social isolation is high.

Research Question 2: What are the roles of behavioural addictions in exacerbating existing mental health disorders among youth?

Table 2: Responses to the roles of behavioural addictions in exacerbating existing mental health disorders among youth

S/N	ITEMS	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	Rmk
1	Behavioural addictions (e.g., gaming, gambling) worsen symptoms of anxiety in youth with pre-existing mental health conditions.	37 (24.7)	61 (40.7)	34 (22.7)	18 (12.0)	3.61	Agreed
2	Youth who engage in behavioural addictions experience increased levels of depression compared to those who do not.	47 (31.3)	61 (40.7)	28 (18.7)	14 (9.3)	3.55	Agreed

3	Behavioural addictions contribute to difficulties in managing stress among youth with mental health disorders.	41 (27.3)	43 (28.7)	43 (28.7)	23 (15.3)	2.87	Agreed
4	Behavioural addictions lead to social withdrawal, further exacerbating mental health challenges in affected youth.	43 (28.7)	56 (37.3)	33 (22.0)	18 (12.0)	2.91	Agreed
5	Behavioural addictions negatively affect emotional regulation in youth with pre-existing mental health disorders.	57 (38.0)	45 (30.0)	34 (22.7)	14 (9.3)	3.04	Agreed
Weighted Mean				3.20			

The result in Table 2 revealed the roles of behavioural addictions in exacerbating existing mental health disorders among youth. This is because the respondents consistently agreed to all the items in the table. The mean score of the item 3.20 is above the fixed decision value of 2.50. In item 1, most of the respondents agreed that behavioural addictions (e.g., gaming, gambling) worsen symptoms of anxiety in youth with pre-existing mental health conditions, and this resulted in a mean value of 3.61. In item 2, it was revealed by most of the respondents that youth who engage in behavioural addictions experience increased levels of depression compared to those who do not, with a mean response of 3.55. It was further revealed in item 3, with a mean response rate of 2.87 that most of the respondents agreed that behavioural addictions contribute to difficulties in managing stress among youth with mental health disorders. Item 4 revealed that behavioural addictions lead to social withdrawal, further exacerbating mental health challenges in affected youth, with a mean value of 2.91, while in item 5, it was revealed that behavioural addictions negatively affect emotional regulation in youth with pre-existing mental health disorders, and this resulted into the mean rate of 3.04. This implies that there was a substantial role of behavioural addictions in exacerbating existing mental health disorders among youth.

Research Question 3: What is the relationship between the severity of behavioural addictions and the extent of their impact on mental health outcomes, including emotional well-being, cognitive functioning, and interpersonal relationships?

Table 3: Responses to the relationship between the severity of behavioural addictions and the extent of their impact on mental health outcomes

S/N	ITEMS	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	Rmk
1	The severity of my	54	48	32	16	3.22	Agreed

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	engagement in addictive behaviours (e.g., gaming, gambling) negatively affects my emotional well-being (e.g., feelings of sadness, anxiety, or stress).	(36.0)	(32.0)	(21.3)	(10.7)		
2	My cognitive functioning (e.g., concentration, decision-making, memory) is significantly impaired due to the intensity of my behavioural addictions.	38 (25.3)	60 (40.0)	32 (21.3)	20 (13.3)	3.41	Agreed
3	My behavioural addictions interfere with my ability to maintain healthy interpersonal relationships (e.g., with friends, family, or peers).	38 (25.3)	53 (35.3)	43 (28.7)	16 (10.7)	2.69	Agreed
4	As my involvement in addictive behaviours increases, my overall mental health (e.g., emotional and psychological stability) declines.	55 (36.7)	50 (33.3)	28 (18.7)	17 (11.3)	2.85	Agreed
5	I find it difficult to manage my mental health because of the severity of my behavioural addictions.	54 (36.0)	55 (36.7)	25 (16.7)	16 (10.7)	3.37	Agreed
Weighted Mean			**3.11**				

The result in Table 3 revealed the relationship between the severity of behavioural addictions and the extent of their impact on mental health outcomes, including emotional well-being, cognitive functioning, and interpersonal relationships. This is because the respondents consistently agreed to all the items in the table. The mean score of the items 3.11 is above the fixed decision value of 2.50. In item 1, most of the respondents agreed that the severity of their engagement in addictive behaviours (e.g., gaming, gambling) negatively affects their emotional well-being (e.g., feelings of sadness, anxiety, or stress), and this resulted in a mean value of 3.22. In item 2, it was revealed by most of the respondents that their cognitive functioning (e.g.,

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concentration, decision-making, memory) is significantly impaired due to the intensity of their behavioural addictions, with a mean response of 3.41. It was further revealed in item 3, with a mean response rate of 2.69 that most of the respondents agreed that their behavioural addictions interfere with their ability to maintain healthy interpersonal relationships (e.g., with friends, family, or peers). Item 4 revealed that as their involvement in addictive behaviours increases, their overall mental health (e.g., emotional and psychological stability) declines, with a mean value of 2.85, while in item 5, it was revealed that they find it difficult to manage their mental health because of the severity of their behavioural addictions, and this resulted into the mean rate of 3.37. This implies that there was a relationship between the severity of behavioural addictions and the extent of their impact on mental health outcomes, including emotional well-being, cognitive functioning, and interpersonal relationships.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: There is no positive correlation between the severity of behavioural addictions and the extent of negative mental health outcomes, such as decreased emotional well-being and impaired interpersonal relationships.

Table 4: Correlation between the severity of behavioural addictions and the extent of negative mental health outcomes

Table 4a: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.653[a]	.426	.424	2.159

a. Predictors: (Constant), Severity of behavioural addictions

Table 4b: ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	838.817	1	838.817	179.943	.000[b]
	Residual	1128.102	149	4.662		
	Total	1966.918	150			

a. Dependent Variable: Extent of negative mental health outcomes
b. Predictors: (Constant), Severity of behavioural addictions

Table 4c: Coefficients[a]

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound

1	(Constant)	1.079	.271			3.973	.000	.544	1.613
	Severity of behavioural addictions	.707	.053	.653	13.414	.000	.604	.811	

a. Dependent Variable: Extent of negative mental health outcomes

Table 4 shows the relationship between the severity of behavioural addictions and the extent of negative mental health outcomes, such as decreased emotional well-being and impaired interpersonal relationships The value of R (multiple correlation coefficient which measures the quality of the prediction of the dependent variable) in Table 4a was 0.653 which indicates a good level of prediction and the coefficient of determination (R^2) value was 0.426 which indicates that the independent variables explain 42.6% of the variance in the dependent variable.

The ANOVA analysis in Table 4b showed the F-value of 179.943 and the significant value was 0.000 with a degree of freedom of 1/149 at a critical level of significance of 0.05. Since the significant value (0.000) was less than the critical level of 0.05, the null hypothesis was not upheld. This implies that independent variables (severity of behavioural addictions) can be used to predict (or determine) the dependent variable (extent of negative mental health outcomes).

The coefficient analysis in Table 4c further revealed that the severity of behavioural addictions has a Beta weight of 0.707, a t-value of 13.414, and a significant value of 0.000 which was less than the significant level of 0.05. This implies that the severity of behavioural addictions significantly impacts the extent of negative mental health outcomes. Hence the null hypothesis was not upheld. By implication, there was a significant correlation between the severity of behavioural addictions and the extent of negative mental health outcomes, such as decreased emotional well-being and impaired interpersonal relationships.

Discussion of Findings

The descriptive analysis of the study revealed that the level of prevalence of behavioural addictions (e.g., gambling, gaming) among youth and their association with mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and social isolation is high. Also, there was a substantial role of behavioural addictions in exacerbating existing mental health disorders among youth. It was also revealed that there was a relationship between the severity of behavioural addictions and the extent of their impact on mental health outcomes, including emotional well-being, cognitive functioning, and interpersonal relationships.

The inferential analysis of the study revealed that there was a positive correlation between the severity of behavioural addictions such as gambling and gaming, and the extent of negative mental health outcomes, such as decreased emotional well-being and impaired interpersonal relationships. This is in line with the findings of Adebiyi and Obayelu (2020)

who found that gambling has become an increasingly popular leisure activity among youths in Nigeria. The finding also supported the position of Király et al. (2017) who posited that the global rise of internet gaming addiction among adolescents has raised significant mental health concerns, including anxiety, depression, and social isolation. Also, compulsive gambling is linked to heightened rates of depression and suicidal ideation (Lorains et al., 2011). This underscored the fact that addiction to gambling and gaming has a significant impact on mental health problems among the youths in Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study underscores the profound impact of behavioural addictions, such as gambling and gaming, on the mental health of youth. The findings reveal that these addictions are closely linked to adverse psychological outcomes, including heightened levels of anxiety, depression, social isolation, and impaired cognitive functioning. Furthermore, the study highlights the cyclical nature of these addictions, where their severity exacerbates mental health challenges, further entrenching individuals in harmful behavioural patterns. The study revealed that there was a positive correlation between the severity of behavioural addictions and the extent of negative mental health outcomes, such as decreased emotional well-being and impaired interpersonal relationships. In conclusion, the study calls for increased focus on behavioural addictions as a critical mental health issue.

Based on the findings, it is recommended that educational institutions, community centers, and mental health organizations should implement awareness campaigns that educate youth, parents, and educators about the risks of behavioural addictions (e.g., gambling, gaming) and their impact on mental health. Also, policymakers and technology developers should collaborate to implement features such as usage time limits, reminders, and age-appropriate content filters on gaming, gambling, and social media platforms.

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