

Gambling Away Education: A Community-Level Analysis of Gambling and Academic Performance among Junior High School Students in Ghana

Emmanuel Angmor¹, Daniella Delali Sedegah^{2,5*}, Samuel Appiah³ & Efua Mantey⁴

Citation: Angmor, E., Sedegah, D.D., Appiah, S., Mantey, E. (2025). Gambling Away Education: A Community-Level Analysis of Gambling and Academic Performance among Junior High School Students in Ghana. Journal of Gambling Issues.

Editor-in-Chief: Nigel Turner, Ph.D.

Received: 10/09/2025

Accepted: 10/31/2025

Published: 11/25/2025



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¹Department of Sustainable Development and Policy, School of Sustainable Development, University of Environment & Sustainable Development, Somanya, Ghana

²Department of Sustainable Development and Policy, School of Sustainable Development, University of Environment & Sustainable Development, Somanya, Ghana

³Department of International Development Studies, Akwapem Campus, Presbyterian University, Ghana

⁴Department of Social Work, University of Ghana

⁵**ORCID:** 0000-0002-6761-9006

*Corresponding author: Daniella Delali Sedegah: ddsedegah@uesd.edu.gh

Abstract: This study examines the impact of gambling on the academic performance of junior and senior high school students in the Nsawam-Adoagyiri Municipality of Ghana. Using a descriptive quantitative survey, data were collected from 186 final-year students across three schools. Results reveal that 69.4% of students participate in gambling activities, primarily sports betting, slot machines, and card games, with many spending three to six hours daily on these activities. Motivations for gambling include the lure of financial gain, persuasive media advertisements and the proximity of gambling centres. While some students perceive benefits such as financial support and socialization, the study identifies substantial negative effects, including addiction, poor academic performance, excessive borrowing and engagement in risky behaviours such as criminal activity and substance use. This research makes a novel contribution by providing a community-level analysis of gambling and academic outcomes within a rural/peri-urban Ghanaian context, an area overlooked in existing scholarship. It highlights the normalization of gambling in students' daily lives and the socio-environmental and academic pressures that drive participation. The findings reveal the vital role of social work in prevention, early intervention, counselling and community engagement. Recommendations include implementing targeted school-based prevention programmes, strengthening family and community involvement, enforcing stricter regulation of gambling activities and integrating gambling-harm education into social work practice to protect students' academic success and well-being.

Keywords: Gambling, Academic Performance, Junior & High School Students, Education Policy.

Introduction

Riley et al. (2021) describes problem gambling among adolescents as gambling behaviour that becomes persistent, recurrent and maladaptive, leading to significant negative consequences for the individual, their family and their social and educational functioning. Adolescents, they note, are especially vulnerable because of developmental factors such as impulsivity, risk-taking tendencies, peer influence, and limited understanding of odds and probabilities. Globally, about 12.3% of young persons, including students, have been found to show problem behaviours in gambling (Lopez-Gonzalez & Griffiths, 2021). Huic et al. (2017) posit that gambling among students is associated with the emergence and development of technology with new gambling platforms that are accessible with mobile phones, tablets and laptops that connect to the Internet. The availability and ease of access to these gadgets serve as the underlying factor that has made more students engage in gambling in many countries.

Problem gambling among students has become a significant public health and social issue across Africa (Ssewanyana & Bitanhirwe, 2018). This widespread participation is evident in country-specific data, with Kenya reporting the highest rate at 76% among young students, followed by Uganda at 57% (Van Baar et al., 2018). In Ethiopia, studies show that 73% of high school adolescents engage in gambling, with around 37% at risk of developing serious gambling problems (Ssewanyana & Bitanhirwe, 2018). Similarly, research in Nigeria indicates a lifetime gambling prevalence of 57.2%, with most respondents having gambled within the past year (Aguocha et al., 2019). These high rates are closely linked to factors such as low self-esteem, false beliefs about winning, substance abuse, peer pressure, parental gambling habits, and easy access to gambling venues, all of which increase students' susceptibility to problematic gambling in sub-Saharan Africa (Aguocha et al., 2019).

According to Manu et al. (2024), gambling is highly prevalent among Ghanaian youth, with about 84% of participants having engaged in gambling, of whom 44% were classified as having moderate gambling problems and 40% as problem gamblers, reflecting very high levels of risk behaviour compared with international averages. Gyambibi and Appiah-Kubi (2025) argue that the rapid growth of sports betting shops in Ghana has reshaped local crime patterns, especially property crime. Drawing on geo-spatial and survey data, they show that communities located closer to betting shops report higher incidences of crime, while those farther away experience significantly lower risk, particularly for burglary and theft.

In communities such as Djankrom in the Nsawam Municipality, anecdotal reports suggest that students are spending substantial time and money on gambling activities, often at the expense of their studies. Despite the obvious risks, very little empirical research has been conducted to examine how gambling behaviour directly affects the academic

performance of students at the community level. This knowledge gap is particularly concerning because poor academic outcomes among youth can have long-term social and economic consequences for the community and the country as a whole.

Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to examine the effects of gambling on the academic performance of students in the Djankrom community of the Nsawam Municipality. Specifically, the study aims to:

- i. To assess the prevalence and patterns of gambling participation among students in the Nsawam-Adoagyiri-Municipality.
- ii. To examine the relationship between students' gambling behaviour and their academic performance indicators.
- iii. To identify the underlying factors that influence students' involvement in gambling within the municipality.

Justification of the Study

This study is crucial because it addresses an overlooked but pressing issue at the intersection of education, youth development and social welfare in Ghana. From a social work perspective, the study highlights the need for early interventions and preventive measures targeting at-risk students. Social workers in schools and communities can play a vital role by designing and implementing awareness campaigns, counselling services and life-skills training programmes to reduce gambling participation and its negative effects. The findings of this study will also inform the development of community-based strategies such as peer mentorship programmes and parental involvement initiatives that strengthen support systems for students in Ghanaian communities. The findings of this study will also provide insights for the Ghana Education Service (GES) and the Ministry of Education to enable them to enact some laws to regulate the operations and patronage of sports betting in various communities. Head teachers at Basic schools and Headmasters of Senior High schools will also be enlightened on the menace of gambling or sports betting on students so they can find ways of curbing the participation of students in it.

Literature Review

Studies (Wahlstrom & Olsson, 2023; Ramnero et al, 2010) about student gambling practices have established that there has been a substantial increase in the level of gambling activities amongst students. Langeland et al (2022) describe gambling as risking something of value on the outcome of an uncertain event and classify gamblers into non-problem, low-risk/social, moderate-risk and problem/pathological groups based on frequency and severity of gambling-related problems. This typology underpins much of the work on adolescent gambling. Latvala et al. (2017) link gambling among students to a wide range of negative outcomes including poor academic achievement, truancy, delinquency, crime involvement, familial and financial strain, depression, suicide and increased vulnerability to other addictive behaviours.

A growing body of research indicates a substantial rise in gambling among young people. Ramnero et al. (2019) and Wahlstrom and Olsson (2023) show that gambling can begin at primary school level and escalate through high school, with participation rates in some communities double that of adults (Okoti et al., 2023). Wahlstrom and Olsson also argue that gambling often functions as an emotional coping mechanism for students facing low self-esteem, stress, anxiety, and loneliness, but poor emotional regulation increases the risk of addiction and adverse outcomes (O'Loughlin & Blaszczyński, 2018; Floros, 2018).

Kaltenegger et al. (2019) observe that student gamblers frequently combine gambling with other risky behaviours such as alcohol and drug use. Beyond financial motives, students also view gambling as a means of socialising, gaining status, or improving their mood. Wahlstrom and Olsson (2023) note that neighbourhood-level factors, such as the popularity of gambling and proximity to betting outlets, predict regular participation, while Huic et al. (2017) show that personal inclination can drive gambling even without immediate problems. Peer influence remains a strong determinant, with Sewor (2019) reporting that students whose friends gamble are far more likely to participate themselves.

Research also highlights the behavioural and academic toll of gambling. Keen et al. (2017) and Andrie et al. (2019) found that addiction can lead students to steal from parents or guardians to finance gambling, skip classes, or chase losses after repeated bets, while Wangari (2018) associates gambling with depression symptoms, absenteeism and declining academic performance. The literature further categorizes gambling into chance-based and skill-based forms (Kryszajtys et al., 2018), including lotteries, raffles, casino games, sports betting and poker, each with different levels of perceived control and risk. Modern technologies and mobile platforms have increased access to these activities, broadening participation among students.

In Ghana, the regulatory framework has evolved from the National Lottery Authority (1958) to the Gaming Act 2006 (Act 721), which permits both land-based and online betting. Despite underage gambling being prohibited, studies (Glozah et al., 2019; Hayk & Sailer, 2020) reveal its persistence in both urban and rural areas. Glozah et al. (2019) found that 21.1% of youth engaged in sports betting are students, with smaller proportions involved in card games, poker machines, and lotteries. Sewor (2019) identifies associated risks such as psychological distress, substance abuse, and problem gambling.

Adolescent and student gambling is shaped by personal, social and environmental factors with significant academic, psychosocial and legal consequences, underscoring the need for studies such as this study to inform interventions and policy.

Conceptual Framework

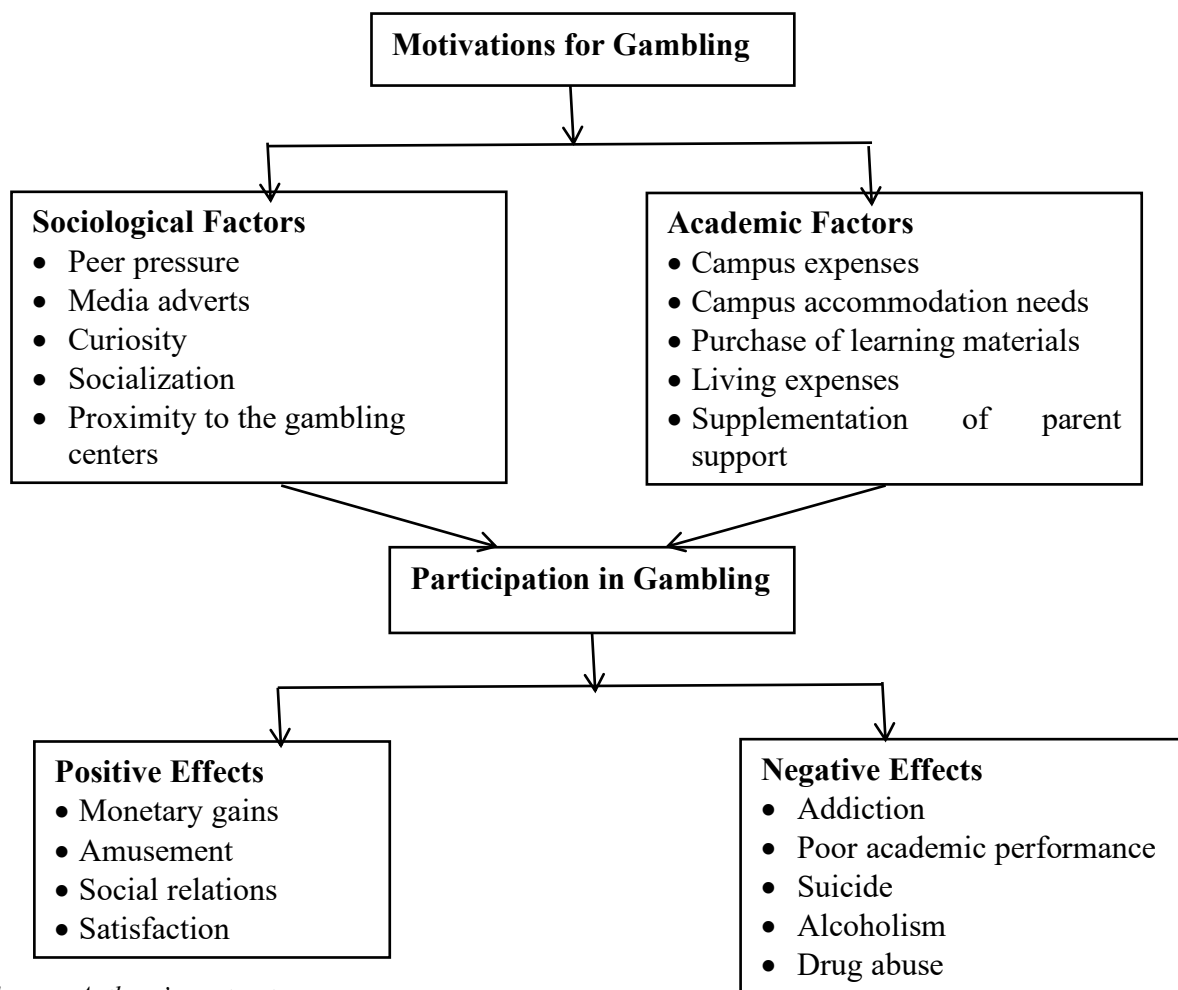
To guide this study, a conceptual framework was developed (Figure 1) to illustrate the relationships between students' motivations for gambling, their participation in gambling activities, and the resulting academic and social outcomes. The conceptual framework outlines the pathways through which sociological and academic factors shape students' gambling behaviour and its effects on their academic performance in the study community. On the sociological side, influences such as peer pressure, media advertising, curiosity, socialization and proximity to gambling centres act as powerful external drivers encouraging students to engage in gambling. These align with prior research that highlights how environmental and social cues shape adolescents' risk-taking behaviours.

Academic-related factors also play a crucial role. Pressures arising from school expenses, accommodation needs, the purchase of learning materials and inadequate parental support create financial stressors that push some students to view gambling as a coping strategy or a potential source of supplementary income. Together, these sociological and academic pressures form a complex web of motivations leading to gambling participation.

The framework further distinguishes between the perceived positive outcomes, such as monetary gains, amusement, and social relations and the negative effects, which include addiction, poor academic performance, excessive borrowing, frustration and engagement in risky behaviours like substance use and criminal activities. This duality indicates that while gambling may appear to offer short-term benefits, its long-term academic and social costs are far more significant.

By mapping these linkages, the framework provides a coherent basis for understanding how gambling undermines students' educational attainment and well-being. It also guides the study's objectives by clarifying the key factors to be examined, which are the prevalence of gambling, its impact on academic performance and the underlying motivations.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



Source: Authors' construct

Methodology

The study employed a descriptive survey design with a quantitative approach to investigate the impact of gambling on students' academic performance in Djankrom, a community within the Nsawam-Adoagyiri Municipality of Ghana. Djankrom, one of the seven major suburbs of Nsawam in the Nsawam-Adoagyiri Municipality of the Eastern Region of Ghana. According to the 2021 Population and Housing Census, Djankrom had a population of 44,522, with 49.1% males (21,860) and 50.9% females (22,662). The community is largely agrarian, with most residents engaged in subsistence farming and some in commercial farming of crops such as pineapple, cassava, pawpaw, maize, and vegetables like green pepper, okro, garden eggs and tomatoes. Additionally, there are a few small and medium-sized industries that provide employment opportunities for some residents. The target population consisted of 360 final-year students drawn from three schools. The schools are Djankrom Methodist JHS, Djankrom Anglican JHS and St. Martin's Senior High School. To arrive at a representative

sample, the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size determination table was used as shown in Table 1. This statistical guideline provides researchers with an appropriate sample size based on the population, ensuring that the selected group reflects the larger population with a reasonable level of accuracy. According to the table, for a population of 360 individuals, 186 participants are sufficient to represent the whole. Thus, 186 students comprising 73 females and 113 males were proportionally selected from the three schools using purposive sampling, which focused specifically on final-year students because of their accumulated experiences and deeper insights into school life and gambling practices. An open-ended questionnaire was used for data collection.

Table 1: The Sample Size

Schools	Target Population (Final Year Students)	Proportion (%)	Sample Size
Djankrom Methodist JHS	105	29.2 (105/360 x 100)	54 (29.2% of 186)
Djankrom Anglican JHS	87	24.2 (87/360 x 100)	45 (24.2% of 186)
St. Martin's SHS	168	46.6 (168/360 x 100)	87 (46.6% of 186)
Total	360	100	186

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Data collection relied on a structured questionnaire divided into five sections, covering demographic details, types and extent of gambling, motivations for participation, and its effects on academic performance. The instrument's validity and reliability were tested through a pilot study conducted with final-year students from a nearby school with similar characteristics, ensuring clarity and appropriateness of the questions.

The data collection process began with official permission sought from the Research Department of the University and the head teachers of the selected schools. Once approval was granted, teachers assisted in identifying the final-year students, and questionnaires were administered during lunch breaks to avoid interference with lessons. A total of three weeks was devoted to the fieldwork, one week per school. Completed questionnaires were checked, cleaned and coded before analysis. Data was entered into Excel software where averages, percentages and modes were computed, with the results displayed through frequency tables, graphs, and charts to aid interpretation. Ethical standards guided the study throughout, as students' participation was voluntary and their anonymity was guaranteed, with no requirement to provide personal identifiers. Approval and consent were secured from the students, their parents (for minors), and the school administration before their participation in the study. By combining a systematic sampling process, a carefully designed and tested instrument and rigorous ethical procedures, the study ensured that the findings would be credible and reflective of the real effects of gambling on students' academic performance in the study area.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of the study as derived from the field data. The findings are structured according to the study objectives, beginning with respondents' demographic characteristics and followed by their participation in gambling, the underlying motivations and the effects on academic performance. The results are illustrated with tables, figures, and descriptive statistics to ensure clarity and provide a basis for the subsequent discussion.

This data, as shown in Table 2, demonstrates that the males made up 60.8% of the respondents and the females made up 39.2%. This shows that the respondents were male-dominated, and this means responses for the study were dominated by male views.

Table 2: The Age Distribution of the Respondents

Age	No. of Respondents	Percentage
11 - 12 years	37	19.9
13 - 14 years	62	33.3
15 - 16 years	41	22.0
17 - 18 years	39	21.0
19 years and above	7	3.8
Total	186	100

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Students' Engagement in Gambling and Types of Games Patronized

The findings of the study revealed that gambling is a widespread practice among students in Djankrom. Out of the 186 respondents, 69.4% (129 students) reported that they had engaged in gambling activities, while 30.6% (57 students) stated that they had never participated in gambling. This indicates that gambling is a common activity among students in the community, with a majority reporting some level of involvement.

Regarding the types of gambling the students engaged in, the results show that the most popular form was sports betting, reported by 37.1% (69 students). This was followed by slot machine games at 31.2% (58 students) and card games at 14.5% (27 students). A smaller proportion of students engaged in coin flipping (10.2%, 19 students) and lottery games (7%, 13 students). These findings indicate that more than four out of every five student gamblers participated in sports betting, slot machine games, or card games.

In terms of the extent of engagement, 62.9% (117 students) rated their involvement in gambling as high, 24.7% (46 students) considered it moderate, and 12.4% (23 students) described their involvement as low. The study further revealed that most students spent considerable amounts of time on gambling activities, with the majority (75.3%) reporting gambling for between three and six hours daily. Specifically, 48.9% (91 students) reported spending three to four hours daily, while 26.4% (49 students) engaged in gambling for five to six hours a day. Only 18.8% (35 students)

reported gambling for less than two hours daily, and a small minority (5.9%, 11 students) engaged in gambling for seven or more hours a day. This finding underscores the high level of student involvement in gambling practices within the community.

Table 3 summarizes the students' engagement in gambling, the types of gambling games patronized and the time spent daily on gambling activities.

Table 3: Students' Engagement in Gambling, Types of Games Patronized and Time Spent Daily

Variable	Category	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Engagement in Gambling	Engaged	129	69.4
	Never Engaged	57	30.6
Types of Gambling	Sports Betting	69	37.1
	Slot Machine Games	58	31.2
	Card Games	27	14.5
	Coin Flipping	19	10.2
	Lottery Games	13	7.0
Extent of Engagement	High	117	62.9
	Moderate	46	24.7
	Low	23	12.4
Time Spent Daily on Gambling	Less than 2 hours	35	18.8
	3–4 hours	91	48.9
	5–6 hours	49	26.4
	7+ hours	11	5.9

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The findings highlight that gambling is highly prevalent among students in the Djankrom community, with the majority actively participating in various forms of gambling. The substantial proportion of students reporting high engagement and spending three to six hours daily on gambling activities signals a significant risk to their academic, social and financial well-being. This pattern suggests that gambling has shifted from an occasional leisure activity to a routine part of student life for many.

Students' Gambling Locations, Extent of Involvement and Reasons for Participation

The study examined not only the types of gambling students engaged in but also the locations where gambling took place, the extent of student involvement and the underlying reasons for their participation. Regarding the places where students played gambling games, the findings show that most of the students in Djankrom patronized gaming centres. Specifically, 55.9% (104 students) reported that they played gambling games at gaming centres, 26.4% (49 students) at drinking spots and 17.7% (33 students) at street corners. This indicates that gambling activities were

accessible and embedded within the students' immediate community environment.

In terms of the extent of involvement, 62.9% (117 students) reported high participation in gambling practices, 24.7% (46 students) described their engagement as moderate, and 12.4% (23 students) indicated low involvement. This demonstrates that gambling is not only common but also intense for many students.

Concerning the reasons students engaged in gambling, 33.8% (63 students) cited perceived benefits as their main motivation, while 24.2% (45 students) attributed their participation to the prevalence of media advertisements. Additionally, 18.3% (34 students) indicated proximity to gambling centres as a key reason for their involvement. Together, these findings reflect a mix of financial, social and environmental factors driving student gambling behaviour.

These findings suggest that student gambling in Djankrom is not only widespread but also socially and spatially embedded within the community. The dominance of gaming centres and drinking spots as venues highlights the easy accessibility of gambling opportunities to young people. High levels of engagement combined with long hours spent gambling point to a pattern of behaviour that may risk academic performance, social stability and financial security. The reasons for gambling, chiefly the perceived financial benefits, media influence and proximity to gambling centres, reveal the interplay of personal motivations and environmental factors.

Effects of Gambling on Students and Their Academic Performance

The study examined both the positive and negative effects of gambling on students, as well as its impact on their academic performance. Regarding the positive effects, 59.7% (111 students) reported that gambling provided them with financial gains, which they perceived as a major benefit. Another 20.4% (38 students) indicated that gambling enabled them to socialize with peers, while 11.3% (21 students) mentioned that gambling allowed them to purchase learning materials. A smaller proportion, 8.6% (16 students), reported amusement as the main positive effect. These findings highlight that, despite its risks, some students view gambling as a source of financial support, social interaction and entertainment.

In contrast, the negative effects were more concerning. About 33.9% (63 students) reported a lack of time for academic activities due to gambling, 30.6% (57 students) cited addiction as a key negative outcome and 21% (39 students) indicated excessive borrowing. Another 14.5% (27 students) reported frustration after losses as the major negative effect. These findings reveal that gambling disrupts students' academic routines and can lead to risky financial and emotional behaviours.

The study also explored the effects of gambling on academic performance. The results show that poor academic performance was the major effect, reported by 46.8% (87 students). Engagement in criminal activities was reported by 22% (41 students), while 15% (28 students) stated

that running into debts due to excessive borrowing was a key consequence. Additionally, 8.1% (15 students) reported engagement in alcoholism, 4.3% (8 students) cited drug abuse, and 3.8% (7 students) reported destruction of self and relationships with others. These findings indicate that gambling not only affects students' academic achievements but also contributes to behavioural and social challenges.

These findings show that while some students perceive financial or social benefits from gambling, the negative and academic impacts are far-reaching. High proportions of respondents cited poor academic performance, addiction and risky financial behaviours such as excessive borrowing as major consequences. The link between gambling and behavioural issues like criminal activities, alcoholism and drug abuse underscores how gambling can escalate into broader social and personal problems. Table 4 presents the effects of gambling on students.

TABLE 4: THE EFFECTS OF GAMBLING ON STUDENTS

Effects	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Destruction of self and relationship with others	7	3.8
Poor academic performance	87	46.8
Running into debts due to excessive borrowing for gambling	28	15.0
Engagement in criminal activities	41	22.0
Engagement in alcoholism	15	8.1
Engagement in drug abuse	8	4.3
Total	186	100

Discussion of the Major Findings

This study revealed that gambling is a widespread activity among students in Djankrom, with the majority participating in sports betting, slot machine games, and card games. These findings support previous studies which have identified sports betting as the most common gambling activity among young people (Pisarska & Ostaszewski, 2020; Wardle, 2019). The prominence of slot machines and card games also mirrors patterns observed in both urban and rural communities across Ghana (Hayk & Sailer, 2020; Keen et al., 2017). Although games such as coin flipping and lottery were reported, their patronage was relatively low. This suggests that gambling among students has become normalized, particularly in activities that promise quick financial returns.

The extent of student involvement in gambling was found to be high, with most respondents spending between three and six hours daily on gambling activities. This aligns with studies showing high gambling prevalence among adolescents worldwide (Van Baar et al., 2018; Dowling et al., 2017). Such a significant time investment in gambling highlights a

growing concern, as it competes directly with academic responsibilities and may contribute to poor performance in school. Furthermore, the main motivations for gambling were financial, with perceived monetary gains serving as the primary reason for participation. Media advertisements and proximity to gambling centres further encouraged students to gamble. These findings are consistent with research indicating that young people are drawn to gambling by the lure of financial rewards and entertainment (O'Loughlin & Blaszczynski, 2018; De Luigi et al., 2017).

The effects of gambling reported in this study demonstrate both perceived benefits and serious negative outcomes. On the positive side, some students indicated that gambling provided financial gains, socialization opportunities and amusement. However, the negative consequences far outweighed these benefits. Poor academic performance, lack of time for studies, addiction, excessive borrowing, and frustration after losses were identified as major adverse effects. More critically, gambling was linked to risky behaviours such as criminal activities, alcoholism, and drug abuse. These findings echo the conclusions of Olsson et al (2021), Clemens et al. (2017) and Sagoe et al. (2017) who also reported associations between adolescent gambling and academic disengagement, delinquency, and substance use. Although some scholars have noted potential cognitive or tactical benefits of gambling (Kryszajts et al., 2018), this study emphasizes that the harmful academic and social outcomes remain dominant.

Overall, the study exposes gambling as a pressing social and educational challenge within the Djankrom community. The observed patterns confirm global concerns about adolescent gambling as a public health issue and reinforce the urgent need for preventive education, family and community engagement, and stronger policy frameworks to address gambling among students.

Implication for Social Work Practice

The study's findings have important implications for social work practice, especially in educational and community contexts. The widespread gambling among students in Djankrom, with most spending three to six hours daily on it, indicates the urgency for targeted prevention and intervention strategies for adolescents. Social workers, given their expertise and responsibilities, are well-equipped to address these issues at the individual, school, family and community levels.

This study's findings have significant implications for social work practice, especially in school and community settings. The high rate of gambling among students in Djankrom, coupled with how intensely they engage in it, highlights the need for early detection and intervention. School-based social workers are well-positioned to identify gambling-related risks, such as addiction, excessive borrowing, poor academic performance and involvement in criminal activities. Emphasizing preventive education and awareness is crucial, with a focus on dispelling

myths about the financial rewards of gambling, countering the impact of media advertisements, and teaching students' decision-making and financial literacy skills. Combining these preventive efforts with evidence-based individual and group interventions such as cognitive-behavioural therapy or peer support programmes, can help students develop healthier coping mechanisms and reduce their dependence on gambling.

Outside of schools, social workers should engage families, communities and policymakers to tackle the broader environmental and systemic factors driving youth gambling. The prevalence of gaming centres and drinking venues as hotspots for gambling shows the need for community-level strategies that limit young people's access to gambling while promoting safer environments. Social workers can advocate for stronger regulations on gambling advertisements and the enforcement of age restrictions at gaming centres. Collaborating with parents, local leaders and religious organizations can also raise awareness and strengthen support systems for youth. By integrating comprehensive prevention and intervention strategies, social workers can reduce the academic, social and personal harm linked to gambling and foster healthier, more supportive spaces for students.

Although gambling-related harm has increasingly been recognized as a public health issue, the role of social work in addressing it remains largely invisible. Manthorpe et al (2018), in their scoping review of gambling-related harms and social work practice, indicated the striking absence of social workers in gambling research and policy discourse. They found that while gambling harms are widespread among adults and young people with care and support needs, there is minimal evidence documenting how social workers identify, assess, or intervene in such cases. This lack of visibility extends to social work education, where gambling and its associated harms are rarely incorporated into qualifying curricula or professional development programmes. Manthorpe et al. (2018) note that this invisibility has significant implications for practice. Without an evidence base, clear protocols, or adequate training, social workers may fail to recognize gambling harms when assessing clients, even though they routinely address related issues such as financial hardship, mental health problems and family breakdown. As a result, opportunities for early intervention are often missed, and clients remain unsupported in managing gambling-related difficulties. They argue that making gambling a recognized area of social work concern comparable to substance misuse or domestic abuse would enable the profession to fulfil its safeguarding mandate and contribute to reducing the social and personal harms of gambling, especially among adolescents.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study reveals a widespread prevalence of gambling among students in the Djankrom community, with a significant majority engaging in activities such as sports betting, slot machine games and card games.

High levels of participation, averaging three to six hours daily, reflect a normalization of gambling, often motivated by perceived financial gains and social influences like media advertisements and proximity to gambling centres. While some students report positive effects such as financial support and socialization, the negative consequences predominate, including addiction, poor academic performance, excessive borrowing, and engagement in risky behaviours like criminal activities, alcoholism, and drug abuse. These findings present gambling as a major social and educational challenge that undermines students' academic success and well-being, calling for urgent attention from community stakeholders and policymakers.

The following are the recommendations of the study.

- i. Implement targeted prevention and intervention programmes in schools, focusing on raising awareness about the risks of gambling and dispelling myths about financial gains.
- ii. Engage social workers in schools and communities to offer counselling, life-skills training, and cognitive-behavioural interventions to students at risk.
- iii. Strengthen family and community involvement by promoting parental education and community awareness campaigns to create supportive environments that discourage youth gambling.
- iv. Advocate stricter regulations of gambling advertisements, enforcement of age restrictions, and limiting youth access to gambling venues, especially gaming centres and drinking spots.
- v. Encourage policy measures by the Ghana Education Service and Ministry of Education to regulate sports betting operations and develop school-based strategies to curb student participation.
- vi. Integrate gambling harm education into social work practice and professional training to enhance early identification and management of gambling-related issues among youth.

These combined efforts can help mitigate the academic, social and personal harms associated with gambling among students in the study community and similar settings.

STATEMENT OF COMPETING INTERESTS

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

ETHICS APPROVAL

The Presbyterian University, Ghana Ethics Review Committee for Research approved the project, "Gambling Away Education: A Community-Level Analysis of Gambling and Academic Performance among Junior High School Students in Ghana", on June 5th 2024 (Approval# PUG/ERB/2024/0011).

RELATIVE CONTRIBUTIONS

Emmanuel Angmor: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing Original Draft and Supervision.

Daniella Delali Sedegah: Data Curation, Formal Analysis and Critical Revision.

Samuel Appiah: Writing Original Draft, Investigation and Methodology.

Efua Mantey: Critical Revision, Editing and Validation.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND FUNDING SOURCES

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

RESEARCH PROMOTION

High prevalence of gambling among students is linked to poor academic outcomes, addictions and risky behaviours. The study stresses the urgency for school-based prevention programmes, community engagement and stronger regulations to safeguard students' academic success and general well-being.

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