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SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND GAMBLING BEHAVIOUR AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN OYO STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The prevalence rates of gambling behaviour among undergraduates in Nigeria are alarming, raising serious concerns due to its strong association with substance abuse, which poses risks to their physical, emotional, and academic wellbeing. In the light of this, this study examined the relationship between substance abuse and gambling behaviour among undergraduates in Oyo State, Nigeria. The study adopted a correlational survey research design, and a total of 420 undergraduates were selected from three universities in Oyo State using a multistage sampling procedure. A research instrument, titled Substance Abuse and Gambling Behaviour Questionnaire (SAGBQ), was used for data collection, with reliability coefficients of 0.81 and 0.87. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive and inferential statistics, including percentages, Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC), and Correlation Matrix. Three null hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance. The findings of the study revealed that the majority (86%) of undergraduates in Oyo State had a high level of substance abuse and 85% were involved in gambling behaviour. The study further revealed a significant predictive relationship between substance abuse and gambling behaviour among undergraduates in Oyo State ($R = 0.183$, $p < 0.05$). Further findings revealed that gender, age, place of residence, and course of study had significant predictive effects on substance abuse and gambling behaviour among undergraduates. It was recommended that undergraduates struggling with gambling problems should seek guidance and counselling, as well as other support services such as mental health services from professionals in school, as this will help to prevent incidents that could lead to substance abuse and its negative effects on their academic activities.

Keywords: gambling behaviour, substance abuse, undergraduates, Nigeria, correlational study

Introduction

The rapid expansion of online betting platforms and sports gambling outlets has increased undergraduates' access to gambling activities, making it easier for them to engage in high-stakes betting. Gambling has become a prevalent behavioural concern, often co-occurring with substance abuse and influencing academic performance, mental health, and financial stability. Defined as the act of staking money or valuables on uncertain outcomes with the expectation of profit, gambling takes forms such as sports betting, casino games, online gaming, and lotteries, often driven by financial aspirations, peer pressure, and the thrill of risk. While commonly seen as recreation, its compulsive nature raises concerns about risky behaviours, particularly when tied to substance abuse. Excessive gambling can lead to academic failure, financial distress, and mental health issues including anxiety, depression, and chemical dependency (Adekunle & Alade, 2023). Substance abuse, defined as the harmful use of psychoactive substances such as alcohol, cannabis, stimulants, and tobacco, has been shown to significantly contribute to gambling tendencies among Nigerian undergraduates (Fadipe, Okesina, Kayode & Uwadia, 2023). Both behaviours share risk factors such as peer influence, financial hardship, and the need for escapism, and they reinforce each other; students may use substances to cope with gambling losses or celebrate wins, fuelling cycles of addiction (Fadipe, Uwadia & Adebayo, 2024).

Psychological distress also plays a role, as undergraduates experiencing anxiety or depression often turn to both gambling and substance use for relief. Research shows that students who abuse substances are more likely to gamble excessively due to impaired judgment, increased impulsivity, and greater tolerance for risk (Akanbi & Adebayo, 2010). Demographic variables further moderate these patterns. Male students are more likely to gamble than females, partly due to risk-taking tendencies and cultural acceptance of betting (Aderinto et al., 2025). Impulsivity,

peer pressure, and social media usage jointly predict addictive gambling behaviour, with peer pressure being the strongest independent predictor. (Ajayi, Lawal & Uye, 2024). Similarly, academic discipline influences exposure; students in fields like Business Administration, Economics, and Engineering, where risk-taking and probability are emphasized, tend to gamble more than peers in health or social sciences who may be more aware of addiction risks (Adebayo & Yusuf, 2022). Place of residence also matters, with students in hostels or urban centres more exposed to gambling opportunities, while those living with parents experience closer supervision (Michael & Shaltz, 2010; Adekunle & Alade, 2023). Year of study shapes vulnerability too, as first- and second-year students adjusting to independence are more prone to peer influence, while final-year students may gamble to cope with financial stress (Akintayo & Dada, 2022).

In Oyo State, the severity of this problem is evident in the documented consequences of gambling among students. Research indicates that severe gambling losses frequently lead to academic discontinuation, as students who lose essential funds like tuition are forced to suspend their studies (Olawale & Ajayi, 2022). In 2020, a second-year student resorted to theft to sustain gambling, while in 2023, a final-year student at Ajayi Crowther University dropped out entirely due to gambling debts. Such cases highlight the destructive consequences of gambling when compounded by substance abuse. Empirical studies confirm that substance abuse predicts excessive gambling and that shared triggers include stress, economic hardship, and peer influence (Michael & Shaltz, 2010; Adekunle & Alade, 2023; Adedayo & Ibe, 2023; Olawale & Ajayi, 2022; Taiwo & Adedoyin, 2022). Yet, most prior research has focused on urban centres like Lagos and Abuja, leaving Oyo State underexplored. Furthermore, limited attention has been given to how gender, age, academic discipline, and residence interact with substance abuse and gambling.

This study therefore examines the relationship between substance abuse and gambling behaviour among undergraduates in Oyo State, considering the moderating roles of demographic factors. In doing so, it addresses critical gaps in existing literature and provides insights for policymakers, counsellors, and university administrators. The central questions guiding this inquiry are: what is the level of substance abuse among undergraduates in Oyo State, and what is the extent of their gambling involvement? The study also tests whether there is a significant relationship between substance abuse and gambling, and whether demographic factors such as gender, age, course of study, and place of residence significantly predict these behaviours.

Method

The study employed a correlational survey research design to examine the predictive relationship between substance abuse and gambling behaviour among undergraduates in Oyo State, while also considering the moderating effects of gender, age, course of study, and place of residence. The population comprised all undergraduates in Oyo State universities, with the target population drawn from the University of Ibadan, Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, and Ajayi Crowther University. Using the Research Advisor (2006) sample size table, a sample of 383 was recommended from a population of approximately 74,870, but to account for attrition the number was increased to 420 respondents. A multi-stage sampling technique was applied: purposive sampling identified one university from each senatorial district based on population and accessibility, followed by proportional sampling to allocate respondents across the universities, and finally simple random sampling ensured each student had an equal chance of selection.

Table 1. Proportional Percentage of Undergraduates in Selected Universities

S/N	Institution	Target Population	Sample
1	University of Ibadan, Ibadan	33,420	187
2	Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso	30,177	170
3	Ajayi Crowther University, Oyo	11,273	63
Total		**74,870**	**420**

Data were collected using the *Substance Abuse and Gambling Behaviour Questionnaire (SAGBQ)*, adapted from validated instruments including the Drug Abuse Screening Test (Skinner, 1982) and the Problem Gambling Severity Index (Ferris & Wynne, 2001). The questionnaire covered demographics, substance abuse, and gambling behaviour, with responses on a 4-point Likert scale. Validity was established through expert review (Taherdoost, 2021), and a pilot study with 30 students yielded reliability coefficients of 0.81 and 0.87, confirming internal consistency (Creswell & Creswell, 2024). Data analysis employed descriptive statistics, Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC), and correlation matrix, with hypotheses tested at the 0.05 significance level. Ethical procedures were observed by securing informed consent, ensuring voluntary participation, and protecting confidentiality.

Results

Out of 420 questionnaires distributed, 414 were valid for analysis. Table 2 shows that 282 (68.1%) respondents were female and 132 (31.9%) male. Most were aged 18–25 years (57.2%), followed by 26–35 years (35.0%) and 36 years and above (7.7%). A total of 91 (22.0%) lived on campus

while 323 (78.0%) resided off campus. By course of study, 138 (33.3%) were in sciences, 156 (37.7%) in arts, and 120 (29.0%) in social/management sciences.

Table 2. Percentage Distribution of Respondents by Demographics

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Female	282	68.1%
Male	132	31.9%
18–25 years	237	57.2%
26–35 years	145	35.0%
36+ years	32	7.7%
On campus	91	22.0%
Off campus	323	78.0%
Sciences	138	33.3%
Arts	156	37.7%
Social/Management Sci.	120	29.0%

As shown in Table 2, substance abuse prevalence was high: 86% of respondents reported behaviours such as using non-prescribed substances, health complications, withdrawal symptoms, and unlawful activities to obtain drugs. Only 14% reported low involvement.

Table 2. Level of Substance Abuse

Level	Frequency	Percentage
High	356	86%
Low	58	14%

Table 3 indicates that gambling behaviour was also prevalent, with 85% of respondents showing high involvement, including spending essential funds, borrowing money, or lying about gambling. Only 15% reported low levels.

Table 3. Level of Gambling Behaviour

Level	Frequency	Percentage
High	351	85%
Low	63	15%

Hypothesis testing revealed a significant positive correlation between substance abuse and gambling behaviour ($r = .814$, $p < .05$) (Table 4). Correlation matrices (Tables 5 and 6) further indicated that gender, age, place of residence, and course of study significantly predicted both substance abuse (mean = 36.29) and gambling behaviour (mean = 38.95), leading to the rejection of the null hypotheses.

Discussion

Findings showed that a substantial proportion of respondents involve in substance abuse. This supports the findings of Shuaibu and Musa (2023), who reported that undergraduates often resort to gambling when experiencing severe stress and depression. Substance abuse has been

identified as a significant psychological challenge that negatively impacts both the emotional and physical well-being of individuals. Olawale and Ajayi (2022) found that students struggling with depression in school tend to engage in gambling at a higher rate. The reason for supporting this finding could be that some students turn to drugs as a way to escape personal problems, trauma, or mental health issues like depression and low self-esteem. Also, students from families where substance use is common or where parental supervision is weak are more likely to engage in substance abuse.

Results revealed that the majority of respondents had high level of gambling behaviour in schools. This finding suggests that substance abuse is prevalent among undergraduates, with 92.8% engaging in it at a high level. This aligns with the study by Adigun and Taiwo (2020), which found that undergraduates often engage in gambling as a coping mechanism. The reason for high level of gambling behaviour could be due to fact that some undergraduates turn to gambling as a way to relieve stress, especially when struggling with academic pressure. Also, many students see gambling as an easy way to make money, especially in the face of financial difficulties.

Further findings revealed a significant relationship between gambling behaviour and substance abuse among respondents in Oyo State. The results indicated that the calculated p-value was below the 0.05 significance level, confirming a strong relationship between gambling behaviour and substance abuse among undergraduates. This finding aligns with Adigun (2022), who reported a strong association between the pressure to excel academically and substance abuse among university students. Adenuga and Mustapha (2018) found that students experiencing high levels of gambling behaviour are more likely to engage in substance abuse. The reason for this finding could be that students struggling with depression, anxiety, or other psychological problems may engage in gambling and substance use as forms of self-medication. The addictive nature of

both behaviors reinforces their co-occurrence. Also, many undergraduates face academic pressure, financial struggles, and emotional distress. Both gambling and substance use serve as escape mechanisms to relieve stress and anxiety.

Findings confirmed that gender, age, place of residence, and course of study had no significant predicted substance abuse among undergraduates in Oyo State. Findings revealed that gender, age, place of residence, and course of study significantly predicted substance abuse among undergraduates in Oyo State due to high means value. This agrees with Taiwo and Adedoyin (2022), who found that age, and gender had no significant influence on substance abuse among undergraduates. Olatunji (2023) discovered that undergraduates who were dissatisfied with their course of study and place of residence exhibited low involvement in substance abuse than those who were satisfied.

Findings also found that gender, age and course of study, place of residence had no significant predicted gambling behaviour among respondents. This is consistent with the findings of Adebayo and Soyemi (2021), who reported that gender, and place of residence significantly influenced gambling behaviour among undergraduates. Moreover, Adebayo and Soyemi (2021) found that age, gender and course of study were negatively correlated with gambling behaviour, suggesting that these factors also contribute to abusive substance usage among students. The reason for this finding is that, the motivations for gambling, such as stress relief, thrill-seeking, and escapism, are common across various student groups, making demographic factors less significant in determining gambling behaviour.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study revealed that most respondents exhibited high levels of substance abuse and gambling behaviour, with a significant positive relationship established between the two. Gender, age, place of residence, and course of study significantly predicted these behaviours among undergraduates in Oyo State. These findings underscore the widespread prevalence of substance abuse and gambling in Nigerian universities and highlight the need for early and targeted interventions to address underlying demographic and psychosocial factors.

The implications are substantial for counselling practice, institutional policy, and student welfare. University counselling centres and psychological clinics can play a pivotal role in screening students, providing timely support, and offering preventive programmes (Creswell & Creswell, 2024; Taherdoost, 2021). Assessment tools tailored to detect early signs of excessive gambling and substance abuse could enable timely referrals. At the educational and organisational levels, the study emphasises the importance of designing interventions sensitive to demographic differences such as gender and place of residence, ensuring equitable access to support services across diverse student populations. This evidence can also guide school administrators and policymakers in developing structured responses that integrate awareness, prevention, and recovery strategies.

Based on the findings, several recommendations are proposed. Universities should prioritise awareness programmes, including workshops and seminars, to educate students about the academic, mental, and career-related risks of substance abuse and gambling. Institutions should also strengthen initiatives that build resilience, self-regulation, and decision-making skills, equipping students with coping strategies to navigate academic and social pressures. Undergraduates already struggling should be encouraged to seek counselling and mental health

services to prevent further harm to their academic and personal lives. In addition, government agencies, counsellors, and university authorities should collaborate in creating comprehensive intervention frameworks that address these behaviours across all demographic groups. By implementing these strategies, institutions can foster a healthier academic environment, reduce the incidence of risky behaviours, and enhance the overall well-being and academic success of undergraduates in Nigeria.

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