

Understanding sports betting among young male student-teachers in Ghana

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Abstract

Drawing on sports betting, leisure studies and the rationality concept provide information to understand how those training to be teachers are gradually gravitating towards gambling to the detriment of their studies at the university. A thorough analysis of 42 young male adults interviewed at betting shops in the university community revealed how they have become involved in sports betting activities for additional financial rewards. Results show that peer pressure is a strong persuader drawing new student-teachers to sports betting activities, which makes it difficult for them to effectively focus on their studies. This has resulted in certain of the students getting poor grades, loss of concentration in class, strained relationships, increased exclusion or rejection from study groups, as well as significant negative effects on academic work, health and well-being, family, and society at large. This study recommends that stakeholders in education address this increasing social issue among young male adults through effective preventive strategy and educational promotion as an intervention to avoid thwarting the progress of the new educational reforms in Ghana.

Keywords: academics, leisure activity, gambling, rationality theory, university students

Introduction

Sports betting¹ is becoming prevalent among youth in Ghanaian communities (Ofosu & Kotey, 2020), particularly among young adults with secondary and tertiary

¹“Sports betting” is defined as the act of risking money, etc. on the unknown result of an event (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary). The term “betting” can be used interchangeably with gambling in this study.

(i.e., college or university) education (Aflakpui et al., 2016; Ofosu & Kotey, 2020, p. 78). This could support concerns raised by certain opinion leaders, educationists, and community heads or chiefs on the advent of gambling activities among the youth in Ghanaian communities (Daily Searchlight, 2019; Jackson, 2019; Mwesigwa, 2018; Ofosu & Kotey, 2020). These people view sports betting as a potential threat if more youth become preoccupied with this activity as they represent the future workforce needs for the country's development.

Certain studies have explained betting in the context of different societies, with others reporting how tough economic conditions and lack of social care for people in communities could drive many to bet on sports to improve their social welfare because they recognise betting as a potential source to alleviate their poverty (Mwesigwa, 2018; Sammut, 2010). In Kenya, certain students committed suicide after losing bets, while others withdrew from university after betting with their school fees (Koross, 2016). Sports betting is gradually becoming a popular leisure activity among young men in many countries, including Ghana (Delfabbro, 2012; Hing et al., 2014).

The increasing popularity of sports betting in the Ghanaian communities raises alarm for betting-related harm and its gambling problems for the young adult population (Gordon et al., 2015; Sproston et al., 2015). For instance, particular problems related to gambling can have effects on a person's health and well-being, relationships, families, and society (Gambling Commission, 2019). Certain of these concerns raised linking Ghanaian youth to sports betting inspired the study to examine the rationality behind the drift of certain young adult men being trained and developed as professional teachers (student-teachers) into betting and how their frequent visits to betting shops (that is betting centres where people go to watch live matches or events and bet at the same time) can have effects on their studies. Such a determination is essential to this research. It is of great social interest to the country that invests in public universities and the families that finance the education of their young male adults.

In this study, we used Weber's (1978) concept of rationality, which explains how people attach significant meaning to their actions or behaviours. To Weber, this can be exhibited in four different ways: (1) purposeful or formal rational action that involves a decision directed towards achieving certain purposeful desires to maximize returns on investment, (2) value-oriented action, when a person may adopt an effective means that are in coherence with their values to achieve their goals, (3) traditional or cultural action, including how the individual's social and economic behaviours are oriented towards customs and traditions not limited to habits and cultural norms, and (4) affection or emotional action, in which a person makes decisions to reflect his feelings in response to a certain situation at a point in time. Weber's concept helps to gain meaningful insight into student-teachers' sports betting based on the rationale behind their activity.

Literature on leisure studies and types of sports bettors was examined to help to explain the underlying behaviours of student-teachers' sports betting activities

(Custer & Milt, 1985; Sirgy et al., 2018). The study adds to the literature on the behaviour of student-teachers towards sports betting and provides valuable information for stakeholders in education to address certain of these betting behaviours among young adults in Ghanaian communities. It also improves our understanding of sports betting among young adults in African communities.

Easy access to their leisure activity via various websites and mobile apps (Hing et al., 2016) can provide insight into student-teachers' betting behaviour in the university. The study's context focuses on students and sports betting and other contributing factors to understand its operationalization and influence on the leisure lives of young male adults. Lastly, it discusses how regular engagement at the betting shops can affect the academics of student-teachers in the universities. This study was designed to identify the rationale behind the drift of certain male student-teachers into betting and how their regular visits to betting shops can in turn affect their academic work.

Students' sports betting and leisure activity

Sports betting has become a highly popular social activity (Walker & Dickerson, 1996). Derevensky and Gupta (1998) report how certain students were exposed and lured into betting in schools by their peers and as a result became addicted to it. Students may choose to bet on the outcome of games and sports (Engwall et al., 2004), provided they are of legal age. Gambling in schools is illegal, but students playing card games and dice are accepted as a form of leisure and recreation activity during hall week events.

Research conducted in America, Canada and Australia has suggested that some university students bet on sports online and are attracted to online betting because of technological advancement (Petry & Weinstock, 2007; Wood & Williams, 2009). In the United Kingdom, some studies report the increasing participation of students in sports betting leads them to become bettors in the universities, which poses a serious threat to their future and their country—as they are an integral part of the country's manpower (Wood et al., 2007).

Tertiary students have increased freedom at school because of the lack of supervision and restrictions from parents. In Ghana, betting shops are located in the communities, with some being in the neighbourhood of schools and universities, which can attract youth. The theory of leisure explains how leisure activities meet people's satisfaction in their free time (Sirgy et al., 2018). It states that leisure is not made “in itself” but has been found in human domains since history (Marcellino, 2012). This may reflect how young adults engaged in betting on sports to achieve their enrichment and pleasure (Haywood & Henry, 1986). In their studies, they report that the leisure activity of individuals should offer leisure comfort by satisfying certain basic and growth needs (Sirgy et al., 2018). The basic needs include, but are not limited to, benefits related to economic, sensory, escape, or sensation or stimulation needs, while growth needs provide benefits related to symbolic, aesthetic,

moral, mastery, relatedness, or distinctiveness needs. To them, engagement in leisure activities should conform to personal characteristics situated in safety consciousness, health consciousness, price sensitivity, pleasure-seeking, escapism, sensation-seeking, status consciousness, artistic, moral sensitivity, competitiveness, sociability, and need for distinctiveness (Driver et al., 1991; Edginton et al., 2006; Liu, 2014; Mayo & Jarvis, 1981).

Every leisure activity corresponds to certain goals-benefits related to basic and growth needs previously defined above. Therefore, individuals betting on sports have a certain goal to achieve that can satisfy their respective basic and growth needs. This reflects the view of Lee and colleagues (2015, p. 4) that “the more a leisure activity delivers benefits related to basic and growth needs, the greater the likelihood that such an activity would contribute significantly to satisfaction in leisure life and subjective well-being.”

Winning a bet on sports may offer individuals satisfaction in leisure activity. Satisfaction in leisure activity, according to Sirgy (2012), influences domain satisfaction, which sequentially influences personal happiness in life. This demonstrates how people can derive value from sports betting in their communities. Sports bettors can also derive economic and escape benefits from their leisure activities. Thus, increased economic benefits associated with sports betting should also increase positive drive and decrease negative distress in leisure life affecting personal well-being (Sirgy et al., 2018; Fox, 2012). This can make some sports bettors more financially prudent than others (Eakins, 2016; Lusmägi et al., 2016). As a result, some may bet on sports frequently, provided it meets their satisfaction, while others may be cautious in their approach.

Sports bettors and their rationality

The study used Custer and Milt’s (1985) definitions of different rationality underlying bettors’ behaviour. We relied on bettors’ rationale for engaging in any form of gambling that corresponds with their interest, value, objective or conception (Acheampong et al., 2019; Bouhaouala, 2007, 2008). This supported categorizing their gambling behaviours in line with Custer and Milt’s (1985) taxonomy, including (1) professional bettors, (2) antisocial bettors, (3) casual social bettors, (4) serious social bettors, and (5) escape and compulsive bettors.

They classified those skilled or competent in making a successful bet as professional bettors because they can carefully undertake a cost-benefit analysis of their leisure activity. Participants often decide when to bet after undertaking cost-benefit analyses of the activity. Thus, they exercise a high degree of self-control and self-regulated behaviour of their betting activities (Bergen et al., 2014; Sirgy et al., 2018; Unger & Kernan, 1983, p. 383). Professional bettors’ may assess the economic benefits of their leisure activity and whether it offers them the needed value they seek (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). They exhibit purposeful or formal rational action because of the associated economic benefits derived from their betting activity (Sirgy et al., 2018;

Weber, 1978). This offers them economic rewards that satisfy their self-actualization, self-enrichment, self-exploration, and self-gratification likened to higher-order needs (Hall & Weiler, 1992).

Antisocial bettors derive satisfaction from the money gained after betting. Participants may cheat or scam people to achieve the goal of their activity (Custer & Milt, 1985). They take satisfaction in achieving economic gains (Weber, 1978) through every means possible and dislike losing. Antisocial bettors' rationality may be strategy-based on accruing economic benefits from their betting activity (Acheampong et al., 2019; Weber, 1978).

Casual social bettors bet for relaxation, fun, or on a social event. Participants obtain satisfaction from betting that gives them excitement, socialisation, enhancement, avoidance, and amusement (Lee et al., 2007; Stewart & Zack, 2008) that supports their social interactions, resulting in satisfaction of a variety of social needs: affiliation, belongingness, social recognition, cooperation, and competition (Brajsa-Zganec et al., 2011; Leung & Lee, 2005). Here, participants bet with friends or based on the magnitude of sporting events, for example, the FIFA World Cup or Olympic Games (Custer & Milt, 1985). Their behaviours may reflect affection and cultural influence action (Lamont & Hing, 2018; Weber, 1978) because their betting activity often results from social emotions, emotions of excitement, amusement, etc. (Acheampong, 2020, 2019; Acheampong et al., 2019; Stewart & Zack, 2008). Beyond that, betting among friends may be a norm or social behaviour culturally accepted by peers (Acheampong, 2021; Acheampong et al., 2019; Lamont & Hing, 2018).

Serious social bettors bet as a hobby or for leisure or for recreational purposes. These participants give priority to their job and familial responsibilities and have control over their betting activities (Custer & Milt, 1985). Participants exhibit a formal strategy based on respecting family responsibilities and their profession ahead of betting (Acheampong et al., 2019). Betting, to them, is not of paramount importance but for amusement, excitement, socialisation and avoidance motives (Brajsa-Zganec et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2007; Leung & Lee, 2005; Stewart & Zack, 2008).

With escape bettors, participants do not need to believe they have special skills, and thus requires less effort and decision making (Custer & Milt, 1985; Lamont & Hing, 2018). The main goal is overcoming feelings of anxiety, depression, boredom, coping with stress and loneliness (Custer & Milt, 1985; Grant & Kim, 2002; Walker et al., 2005). Betting permits them to relax and escape from work, family, or other sources of noxious stimuli (Acheampong, 2020; Sirgy et al., 2018). Thus, betting offers them the opportunity to rest, without obligation to perform work-related activities (see Sonnentag, 2012).

For compulsive bettors, betting activities control every aspect of their lives as a result of the addiction (Custer & Milt, 1985). They may lie, cheat, and even steal to satisfy their betting activities (Custer & Milt, 1985). They have also endorsed greater

sensation seeking and may experience a loss of control over their gambling behaviours (Shumlich et al., 2017). The sole difference from professional bettors is that they show emotional attachment to their leisure activity because of their habit and social norm (Acheampong, 2021, 2019; Lamont & Hing, 2018). Participants may exhibit Weber's (1978) four categories of rationality. However, based on the gambling literature, student-teachers' rationale for sports betting may differ regarding their subjective betting behaviour.

Method

A qualitative approach was adopted to analyse the rationality behind student-teachers' sports betting at the betting shops or centres in the University of Education, Winneba (UEW) township and how sports betting can affect their studies. It was based on an inductive approach to develop a new theory that can be generalized for this study (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This (higher) institution was chosen because of its role in the development of teacher education via building human capital for the country. Therefore, this study is highly important for the growth of the teaching profession as the country is introducing new educational reforms. UEW also has department for training and developing student teachers with disabilities including visually impaired. The data included interviews and observations on sports betting activities of student teachers in the community. The data collection, sample, interview schedule, and data analysis are covered under this section.

Data collection

The sample covered student teachers in the university who are being trained as professional teachers for the country. As a public university, it accepts qualified applicants from different communities of Ghana as well as international students. After securing ethical approval from the Ad Hoc Committee of the Science Education Faculty of the University, we ensured that other ethical guidelines including informed consent, participant debrief, secure and confidential storage of data followed for the study. To ensure uniformity in the data collection, twelve visits were made to the two main betting shops in the university township. This provided insight in understanding why student-teachers bet on sports, particularly football (soccer) matches. These betting shops attract more viewership because of their size, comfortability, and popularity. For anonymity, the two main betting shops are labelled "East" and "West" shops. The authors relied on a qualitative survey with semi-structured interviews, informal deliberations, and observations. Data on participants were collected and analysed in the early part of April 2018 to June 2019. The authors ensured that a considerable number of participants were captured, which fits into the qualitative approach adopted for the study. Although the student population is large, it did not mean that all of them are engaged in sports betting activities.

In sampling participants to be interviewed, we stood at the entrance of the betting shops and engaged them. Through that, we identified students who were willing to share their experiences on sports betting with the research team. All the participants

were made aware of the study's rationale and gave their verbal consent to be interviewed. There was no incentive for the sampled students because they voluntarily accepted to be interviewed. We identified ourselves as student researchers to prevent any form of influence on their narrations. To avoid disturbances and a noisy background, the interviewers moved a considerable distance away from the betting shops to engage the participants. We employed a convenient sampling technique to select students who had voluntarily accepted to be interviewed. Interviewers explained to participants what the rationality concept means in the context of this study—that is, the significance meaning a person attaches to his or her sports betting behaviour (Weber, 1978).

Participants

Forty-two participants were interviewed, comprising of first-year students to fourth-year students across the five different faculties (see Table 1). This provided diversity among the student-teachers to enhance the study's results. They constitute the largest student-teachers' population as compared to the one satellite campus-Ajumako in the Enyan/Essiam district in Central region of Ghana. Participants included only male teachers with an age range of 19 to 34 and a mean age of 25.86 years, who are considered as young male adults. This aspect of the research was considered because it was difficult to find female student teachers watching live matches at the betting shops, owing to a likelihood of them being “stigmatized” or otherwise ridiculed (Ofosu & Kotey, 2020) as social sports bettors.

Participants report following sports, particularly football (soccer), for two years or more. They are from the diverse regions of Ghana without any international students captured for this study. The majority were Level 200 students, representing 30.95% of the sample; and the least were Level 100 students, representing 19.05% as newcomers in the university environment. Further classification of participants is outlined in Table 1.

A few of the participants are trained teachers who had completed Teacher Trainee Education, which is termed as College of Education (CoE) in Ghana), representing 21.43% and had study leave grant-with-pay while the majority are untrained teachers representing 78.57% who have yet to be graduate teachers. UEW has the primary mandate of preparing and developing professional teachers for the country's educational needs. Therefore, it is expected that these student-teachers are professionally trained and groomed to support the educational direction of the Ghana Education Service (GES) via the Ministry of Education. More importantly, the Ministry of Education is introducing new educational reforms to make teachers more creative, critical thinkers and innovation-driven to meet the technological changes and the needs of the globalized world (NTS Guidelines, 2017).

Table 1 shows the distribution of student-teacher bettors from the various faculties. Most of them were found in the West Betting Shop, representing 64.29 % and 35.71 % in the East Betting Shop within the township of the university. The West Betting Shop

Table 1
Distribution of student gamblers from different faculties by number of years spent in university and location of betting shop (East versus West).

Faculty	Number of years in university								Total	
	L100		L200		L300		L400			
	East	West	East	West	East	West	East	West		
Educational Studies	2		1	2		2		2	2	9
Foreign languages, Linguistics and Communication		2		2		2				6
Science Education		1	2		1				3	8
Social Science	1		2	2		3		2	2	12
School of Creative Arts		2	1	1		2		1		7
Total	3	5	6	7	3	8	3	7		42

attracts more students because of its friendly environment, comfortability and access to big TV screens and prompt payment of winnings, according to the participants. The majority of second-year student betting activity is concentrated in the West Betting Shop with the least number of bettors being the first-years as they are newcomers to the university environment.

Interview schedule

The interview method was used to obtain highly personalized data, which provided opportunities for further probing to obtain underlying views of student-teachers conveniently sampled. The authors also clarified any issues raised by the respondents during the interviews. Random visits were made to the betting shops, especially on UEFA Champions league days with few matches from the “top five” in Europe. The interviews lasted between 15–35 mins for each participant. Participants have diverse backgrounds, ranging from sports fans to athletes, with different rationales for sports betting.

Participants at the betting shops shared their views regarding their rationale for sports betting and how they can combine it with their academics. Interview questions were developed from the theoretical framework via the construction of the analysis grid or table (Table 2). These were based on variables or characteristics identified from the literature on the study. They supported in framing the interview questions to include, but not limited to: (1) “How many years have you been following football (soccer) and how did you get into sports betting,” (2) “Could you explain your rationale for sports betting and how much do you roughly spend in a week,” and (3) “How do you combine sports betting with your studies on campus,” etc.

Data analysis

To gain insights into the rationale for the behaviours of student teachers, we employed Weber’s (1978) rationality concept to analyse the significant meaning they attach to their sports betting activities in the university community. This feature was important to our method because it contributes to understanding the types of student bettors (Custer & Milt, 1985) and that provided a framework to explain their sports betting behaviours. Data triangulation was also used to reaffirm the narrations of the participants, but nuances emerged in their rationality for betting on sports apart from the potential financial rewards. Our engagement with different participants was relevant as it supported the gathering of credible and valid data that enriched the study’s findings. Students gave valuable information on their sports betting experiences and their effects on their studies on campus.

Participants offered interesting revelations into their sports betting experiences and activities leading to identifying key concepts and fascinating themes. Interviews were tape-recorded with the prior consent of respondents and transcribed to reflect their

Table 2
Analysis Grid / Table.

Sub-theme	Characteristics / variables	Interview questions	“Prompts”
Student’s profile	Age, schools attended, career goals, academic path, etc.	Could you tell a bit about your academic career path?	What is your department and which programme are you studying? Which level you are in the university? Are you on study leave with pay or scholarship? Are you a trained teacher?
Sport profile	Sports fan (both local and foreign clubs), years of being a fan, other sports, rationale for watching live football matches on TV	Explain how you got into sports and which clubs do you support both local and foreign?	How many years have you been a fan of your clubs? What is your reason for watching live football matches on TV?
Rationality	Sports betting, a leisure activity, reason for sports betting, economic interest, social, cultural, hobby, entertainment, years of betting, family, friends, etc.	Could you tell us why you bet on sports and how often do you engage in sports betting?	How many years have you been betting on sports? How did you get into sports betting? What is your lowest and highest amount you often bet while in school? Where do you often bet on sports and why?
Betting shop	Place of betting, years of betting, motivation for betting there, amount spend, discovery of the betting shop, etc.	Explain why you always visit that particular shop to place your bet?	How much do you roughly spend in a week? What is your motivation for choosing that betting shop?
Studies	Private studies, group, assignment, lectures, quizzes, field trips, etc.	Could you tell us how you manage your studies schedules including your time, group work / assignment and lectures?	How many days do you study in a week including Saturday and Sunday? How are you able to combine betting activities with your studies? What has been your academic progress after joining the social bettors?

(Continued)

Table 2 Continued.

Sub-theme	Characteristics / variables	Interview questions	“Prompts”
Experience in sports betting		Could you share your experience with sports betting?	How do you feel when you win or lose a bet on sports? How are you able to manage your betting activities?
Lesson		What lesson can you share with the youth in your community?	What lesson can you share with the youth in your community?
Advice for those not into sports betting		What advice will you have for those who are not into sports betting?	What advice will you have for those who are not into sports betting?

views on the subject matter. The qualitative data set was analyzed using Braun and colleague (2021) six steps of thematic analysis. These different steps combined data and theory processes to identify patterns and interpret data that could align with pre-existing patterns (Braun et al., 2019; Nikander et al., 2020). In the six-phases of thematic analysis, the third author generated verbatim transcriptions of each recorded audio interview, which was further examined by the first and second authors for consistency. This approach helped us to familiarise ourselves with the data to transcribe those parts of the interviews related to the topic.

In the next step, each author read thoroughly several times to generate initial codes from the raw data after which we agreed on specific themes that were sorted into codes. The rest of the steps were thoroughly carried out with the development of themes, refinement, and labelling to reflect the codes and the qualitative data. For instance, the data was analysed both inductively and deductively (Sparkes & Smith, 2014), as the authors sought to make sense of the student-teachers' sports betting experiences and its relationship with the research literature. Each author tried to identify meaningful data items from the raw quotations, which we later coded to reflect the participant's rationale for gambling and grouped into sub-themes. This process was to help arrive at an inductive approach considering the patterns and observation of code groupings. The sub-themes were derived inductively from the data on student bettors' narration to align with the literature (e.g., typology of bettors, student betting and leisure activity, and sports bettors and their rationale).

Results and Discussion

This section presents three key concepts and themes derived from the narrations of participants based on their experience in sports betting: (1) first exposure or introduction to it, (2) regular engagement in it, and (3) its long-term consequences. Within each of these sections, we applied leisure and rationality theory to understanding and making sense of each gambler's experience. The empirical themes derived contributed to describing participants' betting behaviours and engagement with sports betting that aligned with their feelings and concerns as evident in the data. Again, these empirical themes supported an understanding of how some students tend to spend more time on their betting activities than the personal time allocated for their studies.

Introduction to sports betting

Certain students explained how they were exposed and lured into betting in schools by their peers and later became hooked to it (Derevensky & Gupta, 1998). A third-year student, on a stipend, shared his introduction to sports betting: "I have been a sports fan for over ten years and, my friend introduced me to sports betting, but I was motivated by my uncle due to the huge amount he won" (interview, East Betting Shop, 8 February 2019). This statement shows how peers and family members can influence their young one's betting activity (Derevensky & Gupta, 1998;

Lamont & Hing, 2018; Vitaro et al., 2018). A fourth-year student without a stipend and a fan of Manchester United over seven years recalled:

I started betting *since* 2014 and I feel good whenever I place my bet, because I want my team to win so I always want to watch their matches. I *can't really* tell the rationale, but *I think it's* for the love of the game. (Interview, East Betting Shop, 25 March 2019)

His leisure activity linked to sports betting is based on his passion for foreign football (Ofosu & Kotey, 2020). This reflects his affection rationality towards receiving satisfaction from betting activities (Weber, 1978). Fandom can influence the leisure activity of students to sports betting in the communities. Certain of the subjects started betting on sport from the senior high school (SHS) level. A sponsored first year recounted his introduction to sports betting:

I got into betting when I was in SHS 2 and I was very renowned as the “king of betting.” A friend introduced me to betting. He used to pretend he was going to learn but *rather* carry his books into the classroom and sneak out to *bet* instead of learning. (Interview, East Betting Shop, 25 March 2019)

His friend introduced him, as a minor, to sports betting at the SHS level, which confirms the study of Ofosu and Kotey (2020). This gambler is seriously hooked to betting pathology (Shumlich et al., 2017) as he often moved out to bet on sports from school. During preps, he sneaked out to satisfy his betting addiction to sports, leading to the detriment of his studies. A sponsored first-year student shared his induction experience after accompanying his friend to the betting shop:

I heard of betting from a friend of mine when I accompanied him to the betting shop, and I was inspired by the environment in 2016 as well as the monetary issues, that is why am into betting. I spend \$1.92 every week on betting, and I *roughly* bet twice *in* a week *unless* weekdays when there are no matches. (Interview, East Betting Shop, 23 February 2019)

Peer influences are a stimulus for ushering new friends into sports betting activities. Engaging in the same leisure activity can offer social needs such as affiliation, belongingness, peer recognition, cooperation, socialisation and altruism (Brajsa-Zganec et al., 2011; Leung & Lee, 2005). This student was gambling for growth needs, specifically, for relatedness or distinctiveness needs (Sirgy et al., 2018). Betting shop decorations also served as a positive attraction for some students, since they can deliver economic benefits for them (Sirgy et al., 2018).

Most (95%) interviewees admitted that their friends or peers introduced them to sports betting and since then, has become an integral part of their leisure activities and social life (Sirgy et al., 2018). This shows how sports betting is becoming socially institutionalized among these young adults in tertiary institutions, and that contradicts the assertion that it is a foreign concept, which is unusual within the Ghanaian cultural landscape (Appiah & Awuah, 2016; Tolchard et al., 2014).

Regular engagement in sports betting

Here, Max Weber's four categories of rationality based on purposeful action, value-oriented action, cultural and emotional rational action contributed to understanding student gamblers' regular engagement with sports betting. Thus, the gamblers based their respective bets based on either (1) their decisions directed towards achieving certain purposeful desires to maximize returns on investment (*purposeful or goal-oriented action*), or (2) a perceived effective means nevertheless consistent with their values to achieve their goals (*value-oriented action*), or (3) their decisions oriented towards customs and traditions, not limited to habits and cultural norms (*traditional or cultural action*), or (4) making decisions to reflect their feelings in response to a certain event or situation at a point in time (*affection or emotional action*). The categories of rationality offered relevant information to explain student gamblers' rationale for engaging in sports betting activities. For instance, certain gamblers started sports betting in their communities as a leisure activity which continued through university. A second-year student with sponsorship recapped his experience:

I was trying my luck when I was in the house and I advised myself if this continues, I might end up somewhere not until I got into the university where students were betting everywhere, and this activated my betting spirit. (Interview, East Betting Shop, 12 May 2018)

Sports betting on the university campus is gradually becoming a social norm among student teachers (Acheampong, 2019; Acheampong et al., 2019). Enjoying his leisure pursuit as a casual social bettor (Custer & Milt, 1985), the respondent suddenly became engrossed in sports betting after spending two years in the university. The "betting spirit" affects his self-control, leading him to become seriously hooked to betting pathology (Shumlich et al., 2017). The respondent has become embedded to gambling to where it has taken over every aspect of his life. Beyond the financial benefits from sports betting (Lamont & Hing, 2018; Sirgy et al., 2017), he explained the rationality for his leisure activity as follows:

I have friends and classmates who were needy students and I could not stand and watch them suffer when teachers are maltreating them because of school fees, motivation *fee* and other dues. So, sports betting helped me to support them with their fees and I made it my priority to pay their fees every year. (Interview, East Betting Shop, 15 April 2018)

As a sponsored first-year student, the economic gains from his sports betting enabled him to help certain needy friends, which contradicts his core responsibilities at the senior high school. He exhibited formal rationality to solve a social issue (Acheampong, 2019; Weber, 1978) as a minor. The non-economic action reflects his emotional or affection rationality (Weber, 1978), which is not an accepted cultural norm in Ghanaian communities. Among the interviewees, he bets the highest amount (\$112 a day) and reports winning the largest amount (\$1,344) from his sports betting activity. This gambler's achievement satisfies his growth needs as it

offers him self-enhancement, self-exploration, distinctiveness, and self-gratification, together with economic rewards (Hall & Weiler, 1992).

The overarching dream of winning money from sports betting (Lamont & Hing, 2018) continues to drive and expose student teachers' rationale for their leisure activity. With over four years of betting experience, another student recapped his rationale:

Because I want the money, that is why I do bet on sports. Sometimes, I spend \$1.92, and I bet four times a week for the past 3 to 4 years of my life. And after betting, I feel like I have won already, so I always stay cool and calm for victory. (Interview, West Betting Shop, 21 October 2018)

This sponsored third-year student spends more than \$7.68 in a week on sports betting. The gambler rationality depicts formal rational action as it reflects a strategic approach to achieve economic benefits from the leisure activity (Acheampong et al., 2019; Sirgy et al., 2018; Weber, 1978). A first-year student, with a stipend and an ardent follower of European football, described his rationale for rejecting the sports betting idea from his closest friend, who bets regularly:

I'm not into betting because I fear I can end up stealing. I had a friend, who is into sports betting who was caught stealing his *classmate's* money to go and bet. With this, I know I could end up like him, *that's* why *I'm* not into betting. I think he has been betting for over 6 years now and he is addicted to it. (Interview, East Betting Shop, 13 October 2018)

This student, realizing what sports betting can do to his life, avoided being lured into it. Simply because it can distract him from his studies. He said, "I want enough time to research my studies" (Interview, West Betting Shop, 10 November 2018). However, his friend's inclination towards stealing to spend on sports betting provided negative feedback to him. His friend, a gambler, is a compulsive bettor who shows emotional attachment of habit and a norm towards sports betting can link him to gambling pathology (Acheampong et al., 2019; Lamont & Hing, 2018; Shumlich et al., 2017).

Interviewees' whose rationale for gambling was to make additional income from their leisure activities cannot guarantee success from gambling or provide them with social upward mobility (Wood et al., 2007). Another sponsored student shared how social media and friends inspired his sports betting activities:

It helps me to get money because I can use some to purchase academic items such as books, pens, *calculator*, etc. You cannot count always on your parents to provide these items for you, therefore, I try and [*sic*] find ways and means to also help myself... Although, I want money I do not involve myself much *into* betting. I do not spend more than \$1.92 *in* a week. I bet throughout the week and if I bet and do not get the returns, I stop betting for some days. (Interview, East Betting Shop, 18 November 2018)

Economic benefits from leisure activity (Lamont & Hing, 2018; Sirgy et al., 2018) complement whatever the parents provide him. The money spent on the activity is a good deal compared to the expected outcomes, with which certain of the gamblers can buy educational materials. This gambler exhibits professional bettors' behaviour because his action is purposeful or goal-oriented via a strategy-based approach to get economic gains for his investment (Sirgy et al., 2018; Weber, 1978). Thus, this makes his economic assessment linked with his perceptions of the expected value from the activity (Sweeney & Soutar, 2001). Certain student gamblers believed that with betting competencies and precision (Lamont & Hing, 2018) one can become an entrepreneur because it is a high-risk activity. A casual social bettor in the second year explained his rationality for sports betting as follows. "For five years now, I feel bad at times and sometimes it changes my emotion after betting, but you know I have decided to be an entrepreneur, so I take a risk in betting" (Interview, West Betting Shop, 9 December 2018).

Developing his entrepreneurial skills through betting may be misplaced because it is not entirely a business venture that can guarantee him some considerable returns with the so-called business ideas into a by-product.

A thorough analysis of the interviewees' narrations based on their multidimensional rationalities is linked to Custer and Milt's (1985) types of bettors that include antisocial bettors, casual social bettors, serious social bettors, escape bettors, compulsive bettors, and professional bettors. However, only a select few have been outlined and explained in the text according to the key concepts and themes derived from participants' experience in sports betting.

Long-term consequences of sports betting

Easy accessibility to betting online has modernized betting, as people can bet anywhere at any time, using mobile phones or other Internet compatible devices (Hing et al., 2017a; Hing et al., 2017b; Lopez-Gonzalez et al., 2017). Yet certain student teachers with limited access to the Internet prefer visiting betting shops to bet on sports. From the literature, certain studies revealed that money derived from betting activities can solve various financial issues of participants but failed to explore the regular visits to betting shops, which are presented in this study. Student teachers' regular engagement at the betting shops can have adverse effects on their studies (Vitaro et al., 2018) through time spent waiting for outcomes and time spent betting on matches.

A fourth-year gambler in the compulsive category recalled how sports betting has taken much of his time for studying, including impacting his social relationships with friends (Derevensky & Gupta, 2005; Gambling Commission, 2019) and not attending lectures:

Since I joined this betting, things have changed, especially my relationship has been *very* poor with some friends on campus. Most often, I *have to* call some of my classmates to find out the time we have lectures and other stuff. (Interview, East Betting Shop, 15 December 2018)

Sports betting has occupied every aspect of his leisure life and personal comfort because of addiction (Custer & Milt, 1985; Lee et al., 2015), which has also impaired his ability to follow his lecture timetable. He is devoting more time to doing extensive research for his sports bets than his studies. Other respondents spend the whole weekend engaging themselves at the betting shops. One gambler recalled:

Well, looking at the time that I started betting on sports, I have realised that betting has really affected my studies, because sometimes when my team loses, I do not feel like learning, let alone attending lectures. (Interview, East Betting Shop, 9 February 2019)

This can cause emotional stress and distract him from his studies which may have negative effects on his grades (Udovicic, 1998; Winters et al., 2005). Certain subjects admitted that it is difficult to combine sports betting and learning because of time lost researching and waiting for outcomes of football matches at betting shops. Others reported allocating less time for their studies and dedicating more time to their betting leisure activity. A first-year student teacher recapped his inability to perform well in a class quiz:

This is my first semester *in* the university, but because of the betting *I'm* into, it is creating small barriers for me in terms of groups meetings, assignments, and presentations, and it has affected me in one of the quizzes I wrote this semester. (Interview, West Betting Shop, 7 March 2019)

This gambler's inability to participate in group meetings and discussions, not writing assignments, and avoiding class presentations has negatively affected his academic work. Thus, he spent more time researching and selecting his sports bets than his coursework and assignments (Mutai, 2016). A sponsored second-year gambler, who spends \$9.60 weekly shared his similar experience:

Truly, my study time has reduced because I have stopped studying on Saturdays and Sundays to concentrate on my sports bets, so I *don't* learn. Sometimes, friends get bored with me but still "*naa* I dey place my *bets*," so I have to reduce watching football by now because it is not helping me. (Interview, West Betting Shop, 1 June 2019)

As a compulsive bettor, he finds it difficult to stop visiting betting shops at weekends though it is affecting his studies. Spending regularly on sports betting can force others to either steal or borrow money and not repay or have debts that they cannot easily explain (Udovicic, 1998; Winters et al., 2005). The emotional attachment to his leisure activity (Acheampong et al., 2019; Lamont & Hing, 2018) makes it difficult for him to balance it with his studies. Those student teachers demonstrating compulsive bettor behaviours can be labelled as "lazy students"

and visionless (Acheampong, 2019) because they allow betting to control every aspect of their lives.

A few gamblers narrated how it had improved their social networks around young adult bettors at the betting shops because of interactions on outcomes. These social bettors' groups often share regular updates on sports betting activities to conclude on outcomes. One of them narrated:

Somehow, it is not well with some friends because *the* needed attention they require from me is not sufficient, and my betting friends are now my closest. Because every time they send me updates on the varieties of the betting site with bigger price tags. (Interview, West Betting Shop, 7 June 2019)

Meetings at the betting shops can promote social interaction, leading to the development of networks with other leisure participants. This reaffirms the study by Sirgy et al. (2018) that reported how people socialise while engaging in leisure, which results in the satisfaction of a variety of social needs (see Brajsa-Zganec et al., 2011; Leung & Lee, 2005). A third-year compulsive gambler without a government stipend explained how his betting activity has affected his studies and relationships on campus:

From the beginning of my school year, my academic performance was *very* good; but since I started engaging in sports betting, I have been having poor results in my exams and it is affecting my academic performance. I have also consulted my academic *counsellor* for some advice. (Interview, West Betting Shop, 4 May 2019)

After realizing his dilemma (betting and academic work), he consulted his academic counsellor for support, but it was not enough to stop him from his leisure activity. A first-year sponsored student also shared his learning experience on his betting activity:

It has affected me so much, because the last time I placed a bet and did not win, psychologically I was not stable. And that made me not perform well in the quiz that I wrote. Besides, the money was *my* last pocket money that I used to place the bet and I had to struggle to survive. (Interview, East Betting Shop, 8 June 2019)

As a compulsive bettor, he experienced psychological effects because of loss of recovery from betting (Lamont & Hing, 2018) the last bit of money he had, and this affected his quiz too. Others becoming dependent on sports betting may have serious consequences for their lives. Those strongly hooked to sports betting can confirm tertiary students' categorization as a risk group because of their association with the Internet (Wood et al., 2007).

In sum, the behaviours of student-teacher bettors can negatively impact their studies, leading to exclusion and other high-risk behaviours (Enwereuzor et al., 2016; Goodie,

2005). Therefore, the university management, parents, families, and stakeholders in education should join hands in dealing with this emerging social canker among young adults via educational campaigns and create awareness in the communities.

Conclusion

The study brought to light the rationality behind certain student-teachers' engagement in sports betting to the detriment of their academic learning in the university. These teachers are potential professional teachers. Certain of their sports betting behaviours exhibited can shift their perspectives from teaching to becoming compulsive bettors as they shuttle between betting shops in the communities. This finding was revealed through various leisure activity behaviours they exhibited. Peers continue to serve as a strong persuader, introducing new students into sports betting as reported by certain scholars like Lamont and Hing (2018). However, over-reliance on sports betting can become detrimental to the students' future or learning goals. Families' investment in their students' academic development may not be capitalized on since sports betting has preoccupied their minds at the expense of their studies, which can also affect their expected return on investment, a cultural norm in many African communities (Acheampong, 2019). Furthermore, the State may not benefit from its funding to public universities as well if student-teachers become engaged in sports betting and neglect their academic works. The notion that sports betting provides them with entrepreneurial skills should not be a contending factor for students as it is rarely the case.

The theoretical contributions supported (to understand) the rationality behind student regular engagement in sports betting while spending more time on their leisure activity at the expense of their academic work. Most student bettors obtained satisfaction, using extensive time and efforts researching on their leisure activity reaffirms the study by Lamont and Hing (2018). Certain studies (e.g., Koross, 2016; Ofose & Kotey, 2020; Sirgy et al., 2018) emphasized on financial gains from sports betting as an incentive for many young men, which was replicated by this present study, thus making sports betting becoming more socially institutionalized among these young adults at the university.

Our study focused on students interviewed at the betting shops and did not represent those that bet on campus via their mobile phones and online platforms. This makes it difficult to generalise the findings; however, the study provides insight into perspectives on the student-teachers' betting activities. The study was conducted on students being prepared to pioneer the new educational reforms in Ghana and therefore, may not represent the entire population involved in sports betting at the university's satellite campuses. The student's betting on various campuses may not be fully captured in this study. Further research is recommended to capture the views of students on the University campus including those with visual impairments betting on sports through their mobile phones and online platforms. The study is limited because it could not cover those remote betting shops of which there are ten in the University township. A few student bettors declined to share their experiences on

sports betting and academics, but it did not affect the purpose of the study—unfortunately refusal was not recorded although they numbered around ten. Another limitation of the study is that student teachers could not provide concrete information on their financial status because most of them are sponsored by their parents, families, and relatives. This also includes those on stipends who receive between \$220–250 monthly.

The study provides certain strengths by initiating a sociological inquiry into how sports betting is becoming a social norm among young adult men in the Ghanaian community. It also creates awareness for educational stakeholders to undertake intensive campaigns on sports betting among young adults in public universities; as sports betting can hamper the core purposes of the new educational reforms seeking to develop modern teachers, who are innovative, can think critically, be creative and inspire the students they will teach. Student bettors can engage in gambling in a compulsive manner or in a manner that displays a lack of self-control; therefore, vibrant educational programs should be organized to sensitize young adults on the dangers associated with their leisure activities. Such an implementation can minimize this worrying development because these young men constitute a considerable proportion of the country's manpower, who are being trained as professional teachers for societal growth.

Stakeholders in education, including those stakeholders in university management, should have an effective preventive strategy by relying on massive education interventions while encouraging responsible gambling on the part of young adults. This recommendation is a major part of the harm-reduction literature in gambling studies (see Gambling Commission, 2019). Such a strategy should be strongly considered as it applies to the cultural landscape of Ghana and could be beneficial for young adult sports bettors. Betting can be taught as a course in the universities to support the educational programs and awareness creation in addressing these social issues in the communities. In addition to having educational programs and awareness about problem gambling, knowledge of ways to access guidance and counselling for support could also be useful. According to many students' narrations, they were introduced to betting in several different ways, and this situation could have been reduced in intensity provided they had prior knowledge about it in school. The knowledge of betting can help certain gamblers to make responsible decisions and minimize its patronage as well. Such a progression can help reduce gambling harm among students so that they enjoy more time for their academic studies.

Also, the Ministry of Education, the Ghana Education Service, and other partners in education should collaborate to develop policy direction on sports betting in conjunction with the guidance and counselling departments at the universities. University management should try to create student jobs on its campuses that can provide some form of vacation employment for certain of them to earn some money. Moving forward, the university management, communities, parents, and partners in education should be informed concerning the effects of sports betting among student teachers so that they can avoid any harm associated with betting. Based on this

study's findings, similar research should be carried out at the senior high levels. It would be interesting to compare the rationality between student-teachers and students studying in other fields. Differences between these groups could be informative and noteworthy for designing preventative strategies or interventions in the future. Adopting the all-inclusive approach to this social issue can improve the emerging gambling behaviours of these young adults for the better.

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