



Sports Betting: Knowledge and Prevalence among Collegiate Athlete

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Abstract

Sports betting, which is a form of gambling, has become increasingly popular among collegiate athletes, and a considerable number of them bet, and most do so with their monthly income and some with their school fees. Hence, the aim of this study is to ascertain the knowledge and prevalence of sports betting among collegiate athletes in Nigeria. A descriptive survey design was adopted for the research. Data were collected from 118 collegiate athletes at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, using a survey questionnaire. The Cronbach's coefficient alpha for the questionnaire was 0.73. Frequencies, percentages, and means were used to analyse the data. The results revealed that 53.4% of the respondents were into sports betting, out of which 11.1% of them place their bet via mobile USSD or SMS, 69.8% of them via the internet online, and 19.1% of them place their bet at a betting shop. Also, almost 90% of the respondents knew that sports betting is a form of gambling activity. Based on the findings, it was recommended that the university management, sports authorities, and regulatory bodies should collaborate to implement focused educational programmes, reinforce institutional policies, and ensure consistent application of existing rules to protect athletes' welfare and uphold the integrity of collegiate sports.

Keywords: Gambling, Sports betting, Collegiate athletes, Knowledge, Prevalence

Introduction

Sports betting has become a notable social phenomenon globally. Hing et al. (2016) noted that the rapid growth of sports betting has been occasioned by the worldwide expansion of legalised betting markets and the convenience of online betting. It was reported that in the United States, the Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act (PASPA) expedited the legalisation of sports betting across most states, intensifying both participation rates and marketing influence (American Gaming Association [AGA], 2023). Sports betting income from soccer in Great Britain is over 1.58 billion Great Britain Pounds (Statista, 2024).

A survey involving 3,879 youths across select African countries revealed that Kenya recorded the highest proportion of participants who had previously engaged in betting at 76%, followed by Uganda at 57%, while Ghana had the lowest proportion at 42% (GeoPoll, 2017). Nigerians invested roughly \$5.5 million daily on sports betting,

totalling \$2 billion annually. These reports place Nigerian sports bettors as the second largest online gambling market in Africa, after South Africa (Business Day, 2020).

Collegiate athletes hold a distinct role in this setting. They are both active competitors in sports and part of a group characterised by higher tendencies toward risk-taking activities, such as gambling (Derevensky et al., 2019). It was stated that collegiate athletes may engage in sports betting more frequently than non-athlete peers, partly because of their close connection to sporting events and access to insider knowledge about game dynamics (Weinstock et al., 2022). A survey conducted by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA, 2023) revealed that many college athletes participate in sports betting, even though it is strictly prohibited by regulations. Koross (2016) concluded that there is a prevalence of sports betting among university students in Kenyan universities. While, among Nigerian collegiate students, sports betting engagement has led to poor academic performance, financial problems and mental health disorders, including suicide (Afolayan et al., 2023; Dachen, 2016; Daniel et al., 2023; Olatunji, 2023; Joel et al., 2025; Ugwu-Nwogo, 2024).

Although sports betting poses potential risks to athletes' well-being and the integrity of sports, there is still a scarcity of empirical research that specifically examines both the knowledge and prevalence of sports gambling among collegiate athletes, especially in Nigeria. Addressing this gap is crucial to designing effective strategies, ensuring adherence to institutional and legal regulations, protecting the integrity of collegiate sports, and promoting athlete welfare. Therefore, this study seeks to examine the knowledge and prevalence of sports betting among collegiate athletes in Nigeria.

Materials and Methods

Study Design and Setting

A descriptive survey design was conducted among collegiate athletes of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria.

Participants

The participants for the study comprised 216 collegiate athletes that represented the University of Nigeria at the Nigeria Universities Games 2022 in Lagos, Nigeria. 65 of the participants are male, while 53 of them are female. More than 80% of the participants are within the age range of 20-27 years old.

Sampling procedures and population

Due to the population size, the researchers proposed to use the total population (216); however, among the 216 collegiate athletes invited to participate in the study, 118 (54.6%) agreed to take part. It is possible that those who declined to participate were either struggling with pathological gambling or avoided involvement due to fear of stigmatisation.

Instrument for data collection

The instrument for data collection is a researcher-structured instrument titled Knowledge and prevalence of sports betting among collegiate-athletes questionnaire (KPSBCAQ). The KPSBCAQ comprises three sections, namely, Sections A, B and C. Section A with 2 items which sought information on the socio-demographic variables (age and gender) of the respondents with dichotomous response options. Section B comprised two questions on the prevalence of sports betting among collegiate athletes, and Section C comprised one question on knowledge of sports betting among collegiate athletes with a true dichotomy scale response option of Yes (2) and No (1).

Data Collection Procedure

The researchers engaged the collegiate athletes at the Sports Council of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. After explaining the study's purpose, assuring confidentiality, and obtaining informed consent, the team personally handed out questionnaires to the participants in Nsukka. They were instructed to respond truthfully, complete the forms individually, and return them immediately to maximise the response rate. Of the 216 collegiate athletes approached, only 118 agreed to participate, resulting in 118 completed questionnaires. The study was conducted in compliance with ethical standards.

Data analysis

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics 23.0, employing frequencies, percentages, and means to interpret the results.

Results

Table 1: Proportion of collegiate-athletes that participate in sports betting and means of placing bet in University of Nigeria, Nsukka (n=118)

S/N	Items	Frequency	Percentage %
1	Have you ever bet on Sports?		
	Yes	63	53.4
	No	55	46.6
	Total	118	100.0
2.	If yes, how do you place your Bet?		
	Via Mobile USSD Or SMS	7	11.1
	Via the Internet Online	44	69.8
	On land based shops	12	19.1
	Total	63	100

Results in Table 1 shows that 53.4% of the respondents were into sports betting, out of which, 11.1% of them place their bet through Via Mobile USSD or SMS, 69.8% of them via the Internet Online, and 19.1% of them place their bet at betting shop.

Table 2: Knowledge about the Nature of Sport betting among collegiate-athletes in University of Nigeria, Nsukka (n=118).

S/N	Items	Frequency	Percentage %
1	Did you know Sports betting is a form of Gambling Activity?		
	Yes	103	87.3
	No	15	12.7
	Total	118	100.0

Results in Table 2 shows that almost 90% of the respondents knew that sports betting is a form of gambling activity

Discussion

This study was conducted to examine the knowledge and prevalence of sports betting among collegiate athletes at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Enugu State, Nigeria. The results showed that 63 (53.4%) of the collegiate athletes participate in sports betting. Only 55 (46.6%) are not involved in sports betting. This result implies that more than half of the collegiate athletes at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, participate in sports betting. This finding corresponds with those of Benson et al. (2021), which reported that the majority of the student-athletes in Kenyan universities participate in sports betting. Similarly, Carwyn et al. (2022) concluded that most student-athletes in the United Kingdom have a positive attitude towards sports betting. Also, Eboh and Babatunde (2015) revealed that 67.5% of the students of Federal University Oye, Nigeria, engage in sports betting. While Afolayan et al. (2023) reported that a significant number of students in Osun State University, Nigeria, engage in sports betting. High prevalence of sports betting among collegiate athletes has greater negative consequences on mental health, academic work, finances and relationships.

Also, the results show that among the collegiate athletes that participate in sports betting, 44 (69.8%) of them place their bet online via the internet. While 12 (19.1%) were through land-based shops and 7 (11.1%) were mobile USSD or SMS. This result implies that the majority of the collegiate athletes in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, place their bets online, with the ease and accessibility of the internet everywhere. The finding agrees with previous studies. Lebow (2022) reported that in the US, online sports betting has become prevalent recently, with 19 million sports bettors participating via online platforms. Carwyn et al. (2022) stated that online sports bets were the most frequently patronised means of placing bets by the student-athletes. Likewise, a study conducted in Kenya by Abdille & Wakhungu (2024) found that most students participate in sports betting due to the influence of the availability of unrestricted internet access. Afolayan et al. (2023) found that advancements in modern technology, coupled with the widespread availability of internet access, have led to an increase in the number of students engaging in sports betting in Nigeria.

Furthermore, the results show that 103 (87.3) of the respondents knew that sports betting is a form of gambling activity. This implies that the majority of the collegiate athletes at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, knew that sports betting is a form of gambling. The finding is in consonance with the study of Bejtkovský and Snopek (2023) among university students in the Czech Republic, who found out that the majority of the students are aware that sports betting is a gambling activity. Carwyn et al. (2022) also ascertained that the university student-athletes in the United Kingdom are aware of sports betting being part of gambling activity. While Calado et al. (2020) stated that appropriate knowledge about sports betting among students is imperative in reducing gambling problems.

Conclusion

The study investigates the knowledge and prevalence of sports betting among collegiate athletes. Findings from this study indicate that collegiate athletes have the knowledge of sports betting being a form of gambling activity and engage in the activity extensively, which is influenced by factors such as the availability of online betting platforms, peer influence, and perceived insider advantages. And the prevalence of betting among collegiate athletes is accompanied by negative consequences, which include poor academic performance/achievement and mental health disorders, poor relationship and financial problems.

The high occurrence of betting and its negative consequences in this group highlights the importance of implementing focused educational programmes, reinforcing institutional policies, and ensuring consistent application of existing rules to protect athletes' welfare and uphold the integrity of collegiate sports. Tackling these issues requires joint action from universities, sports authorities, and regulatory bodies to effectively reduce the dangers of sports betting in college settings.

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