

Research article

Psychosocial and economic impacts of betting among the youth and adults in Bahir Dar City, Ethiopia

Alemu Lake Mihret ^{*1} and Almaw Tsegaye Eskezia ²

Department of Social Work ¹ and Department of Social Anthropology ², Faculty of Social Sciences
Bahir Dar University, Bahir Dar, Ethiopia

* Corresponding author's email: lakemihret@gmail.com

Abstract: Sports betting has become rampant and negatively affected the lives of people in Ethiopia. This research aimed to assess the psychosocial and economic impacts of betting on the youth and adults in Bahir Dar city. The study utilized qualitative research methods and cross-sectional design. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and observation. Both purposive and convenient sampling techniques were used to select informants who were asked open-ended and probing questions. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the collected data. The research findings reveal that individuals who engaged in betting were more prone to experiencing depression, financial instability, and strained relationships that disrupted parent-child relationships and

contributed to divorce. Moreover, economically, adults often suffered substantial financial losses due to their involvement in virtual, football, and lottery betting, leaving them empty-handed. The study concludes that betting has substantial negative impacts on the mental health, social interactions, and economic stability of both the youth and adults. The findings indicate that appropriate interventions are needed to address the rise of betting and its negative psychosocial and economic impacts.

Keywords: Adult, betting, economic impact, psychosocial impact, youth

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1. Background and Justification

Globalization has led to rapid development, economic growth, and socio-cultural exchange, facilitated by the presence of modern technological equipment and widespread internet connections in our daily lives. One notable phenomenon resulting from this is the widespread prevalence of betting among both the youth and adults, which is evident in various parts of the world (Haji et al., 2022).

According to Ermias (2021), betting involves staking something of value with an awareness of risk and the hope of gain based on the outcome of uncertain events. It includes wagering money or valuable items to win more (Williams, 2017). Participants predict outcomes set by an organizer, ensuring fairness by keeping winning or losing conditions unknown. This form of gambling shares similarities with other types but has unique characteristics. As noted by Binde (2005), betting is a widespread social, economic, and cultural phenomenon globally.

Historically, betting and gambling were seen as socially deviant, but they are now accepted as entertainment (Torre, 2017). The World Health Organization (2017) reports a significant rise in commercial gambling globally, reflecting its growing popularity (Abbott, 2017). Research indicates that 60% to 75% of adults engage in some form of betting or gambling (Wardle, 2010). However, standardized rates of gambling allow winners to receive rewards ranging from 0.5% to 7.6%, with higher prevalence among adolescents and youths (Derevensky & Gupta, 2000; Korn, 2000). Problem gambling is associated with various issues, including substance use, mental disorders, and family conflicts (Petry, 2005; Smith et al., 2003; Shaffer et al., 2004; Pietrzak et al., 2005). This addiction poses significant public health, economic, and social challenges, contributing to depression, suicide, and financial troubles (Neighbors, 2007).

The legalization of various betting platforms, including online and virtual platforms, have ignited debates over their economic viability and societal effects (Basham & White, 2002). Governments must navigate the balance between regulations and harm reduction while considering liberalizing gambling to alleviate budget deficits (Orford, 2010; Young & Markham, 2015). Critics argue that gambling is inherently risky and should not be promoted, whereas supporters contend that individuals should have the freedom to participate in gambling as a form of entertainment (Basham & White, 2002; McGowan, 2014).

In Ethiopia, betting has expanded significantly since 2012, when Dagoo Sport Bet became the first registered online sports betting company (Wondimagegn, 2023). The growth of sports betting firms has been fueled by urbanization, population growth, and improved internet connectivity, leading to an increase in gamblers, particularly among the youth and adults. Betting on foreign football and virtual games has gained popularity, although virtual games are perceived to offer lower chances of winning compared to traditional sports betting (Ermias, 2021).

Gambling, including sports betting, was traditionally viewed as unlawful and immoral in the Ethiopian society. However, recent developments have led to rapid growth in the sports betting industry across various cities (Haji et al., 2022). The Ethiopian government has enacted legislation to involve the private sector in lottery activities, with the National Lottery Administration serving a regulatory role. A sport betting is classified as a form of lottery, and individuals seeking permits must follow the designated application process (National Lottery Administration Re-establishment Proclamation No. 535/2007).

The increasing acceptance of betting and gambling reflects changing societal attitudes but introduces significant psychological, social, and economic challenges. Research by Getahun and Koye (2019) in Bahir Dar city reveals that problem gambling negatively affects personal health, relationships, and financial stability, leading to distress and indebtedness. Getu (2018) and Sewanyana and Bitanirwe (2018), highlight that problematic gambling significantly predicts drug abuse and psychological issues among adolescents in sub-Saharan Africa. Ermias (2021) analyzed Ethiopia's new sports betting directive, focusing on investment implications but primarily relying on document analysis, which limits insights into real-world impacts. In contrast, Haji et al. (2022) conducted a quantitative study on problematic gambling among sports bettors in Jimma, yet this approach missed the nuanced experiences of affected individuals. Wondimagegn (2023) explored the prevalence of sports betting and its psychosocial effects on adults in Hawassa, finding that gambling addiction can lead to various psychological problems, though it lacked a thorough examination of the social and economic consequences of sports betting.

Despite the negative consequences highlighted in these studies, many individuals perceive gambling as a source of recreation and leisure, often disregarding its potential harms. Consequently, schools and religious institutions, which mainly engage the youth and adults, are increasingly overshadowed by the rise of virtual and online sports betting platforms. There is a significant data gap regarding the impact of virtual and online sports betting in Bahir Dar city, which hampers the development of informed policies and interventions to mitigate betting's adverse effects. A comprehensive examination of the psychosocial and economic impacts of betting in Bahir Dar is essential for effective regulation and support systems for affected individuals. To gain a clearer understanding of this phenomenon, the researchers propose the following research questions:

What are the psychological impacts of betting among the youth and adults in Bahir Dar City Administration?

What are the social consequences of betting among the youth and adults in Bahir Dar City Administration?

How does betting influence the financial stability and working practices of the youth and adults in Bahir Dar City Administration?

1.1.Theoretical perspectives

The study utilizes three key theoretical frameworks to examine the consequences of betting. The bio-psychosocial model (Blaszczynski & Nower, 2002) highlights the interplay of biological, psychological, and social factors. The social practice theory (Shove et al., 2012) emphasizes addressing broader social norms in interventions. Lastly, cost-benefit analysis theory (Grinols, 2004) assesses the economic and social costs of gambling against its benefits.

2. Methods

The study site of this research contains eight kebeles selected from Bahir Dar city because of the rapid growth of betting industry in the areas. The target population for this study was the youth and adults who were frequently engaged in betting. The approach of this research is qualitative through which more personal interaction is required and detailed data is gathered from the experiences and feelings of informants and discussants (Cress well, 2009). Purposive and convenience nonprobability sampling techniques were used to select informants and discussants. Convenience sampling was employed based on the easy accessibility and availability of the betting houses to the researchers. In addition, purposive sampling was used to select participants based on their alignment with the research objectives and their willingness.

The data were collected using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions which are advantageous to yield full information. The interview was important to catch the feeling of informants in a face-to - face interaction. Focus group discussion is also important to gather data when discussants are similar and cooperative among themselves (Creswell, 2009). A total of thirty-three participants were selected from purposively chosen betting houses for this study. This group comprised twelve informants and twenty-one discussants involved in three FGDs. The informants were bettors, betting business owners, cashiers, and experts from the National Lottery. The discussants were sports bettors believing that they were relevant to the research focus. The number of participants was limited based on data saturation. In

addition, observation method was held to observe the betting activities and overall interactions of the youth and adults. The data were gathered by the researchers from October 13 to November 20, 2023, using open-ended, semi-structured, and probing questions and checklist. During data collection, audio records and field notes were used to record the expressions of participants. In this study, thematic data analysis was used to organize qualitative data based on emerging themes and sub-themes. Thematic analysis is particularly effective for identifying patterns in qualitative data, allowing for rich insights into complex social phenomena (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Audio recordings from in-depth interviews and discussions were transcribed and translated from Amharic to English. The researchers employed open coding to analyze the data and identify manageable themes that reflect the experiences of participants engaged in betting. This was followed by selective coding to explore interrelationships among these themes during the axial coding process, ultimately revealing the psychosocial and economic impacts of betting on adults.

The researchers prioritized sensitivity and respect for the rights of participants. Before conducting interviews and focus group discussions, they explained the study's purpose and confidentiality, obtaining verbal informed consent. Participants were assured that their information would be kept confidential and that they could withdraw at any time or skip questions they preferred not to answer. Verbal informed consent was secured from each participant prior to data collection, allowing them to share their experiences solely for scientific purposes.

3. Result

3.1. Rising of Virtual Betting

This study found that the rapid rise of virtual betting in Bahir Dar City is driven by low entry barriers, with many establishments requiring minimal initial investments, often fewer than 50,000 birr for essentials like televisions and storefronts. This ease of access has led to a surge in betting operations, becoming integrated into the local economy. However, significant concerns emerged regarding illegal operations, with many businesses reportedly lacking the necessary licenses as required by Proclamation No. 535/2007, raising issues about consumer protection and responsible gambling. Despite existing regulations aimed at safeguarding vulnerable populations, particularly the youth, enforcement was weak, allowing underage individuals to participate in betting. Discussants highlighted the tension between economic opportunity and social risk in the virtual betting landscape. Experts from

the National Lottery Administration also said that betting houses should be located away from educational and health institutions, yet many are disturbingly close. According to them, the lack of licensing and effective monitoring exacerbated the risks of illegal betting.

3.2.Impacts of betting

This study found that betting has positive and negative effects on individuals and society. On the positive side, according to informants, it generated income for the government, particularly through collecting a 15% tax from legally registered betting businesses. However, the informants indicated that much of this revenue went uncollected due to the prevalence of unregistered and unlicensed betting operations. Despite the lack of tax contributions, business owners in the betting sector continued to benefit financially from their customers. Moreover, it also provided job opportunities for unemployed adults. The participants in the research noted that many betting establishments hired female graduates, offering them valuable employment. Observations confirmed this trend, revealing that women were commonly employed as ticket sellers across various betting outlets.

The informants also explained that betting could be viewed as a form of refreshment, providing individuals enjoyed spending their time and engaged in entertainment with others. For them, participating in betting activities served as a social outlet, fostering connections with friends and creating a sense of excitement. This viewpoint emphasizes the recreational aspect of betting, framing it not only as a financial endeavor but also as a means to enhance social interactions and leisure. However, while these positive aspects are noteworthy, many participants including experts from the National Lottery Administration concurred that the negative impacts of betting, particularly virtual betting, outweighed the benefits. They pointed to the significant expansion of illegal betting activities and the poor implementation of existing regulations as major concerns. The proliferation of illegal betting houses has surged in recent years, largely attributed to the withdrawal of regulatory oversight due to the political crisis affecting the region and the country as a whole. The participants in the research emphasized the necessity of recognizing the potential negative consequences of betting, which can include betting addiction, social crises, and financial distress. These issues not only impact the lives of individuals but also extend their effects to families and the wider community.

Psychological impact: The findings of this study revealed that there were various psychological problems associated with betting. These effects were numerous with some bettors unable to control

their betting behavior. According to discussants, bettors were unstable, careless, and reluctant which were linked to their betting behavior.

Behavioral change: The study found that individuals who engaged in betting often experienced depression and aggression, as reported by respondents. The observations revealed poor physical hygiene and inappropriate behavior, such as loud speech and disruptive actions. Bettors frequently faced low self-esteem, stress-related disorders, heightened anxiety, and issues with sleep and appetite, along with substance abuse. The participants confirmed that beyond financial losses, betting negatively impacted behavior in both adults and the youth, leading to increased stress about lost money and future betting prospects, which could result in conflicts with family, partners, and friends.

Similarly, betting activities significantly impacted the behavioral well-being of both adults and the youth. According to discussants, beyond financial losses, betting led to heightened irritability and physical deterioration, as individuals often neglected proper nutrition due to time and money spent on it. The informants reported conflicts with family, partners, and neighbors, highlighting the behavioral effects of betting, particularly the increased risk of aggression. The study also identified that young bettors developed addictive behaviors and compulsive tendencies, adversely affecting their overall well-being and quality of life. A 17-year-old participant shared his concerning experiences related to these issues;

I have noticed a significant change in my behavior since I started betting. I have become increasingly aggressive, and my sleep patterns have been disrupted. My relationships with my family have become strained, and I have even resorted to engaging in illegal activities, such as looting. It is alarming that, despite my daily intentions to quit, I find myself unable to do so. I have reached a point where I spend my entire day fixated on betting, even when I don't have the money to bet.¹

The expression highlights the negative behavioral impacts of betting, including increased aggression and irritability due to emotional turmoil. Disrupted sleep patterns and anxiety affect bettors and their loved ones, fostering isolation and guilt. Compulsive betting leads to legal issues and emotional distress, illustrating its multifaceted consequences on relationships and morality

Emotional distress and decision-making: The study found that both youth and adults engaged in betting frequently experience negative emotional states. Stress and anxiety from financial losses lead to increased emotional distress and impair decision-making abilities. A 34-years man expressed it as;

¹ An interview conducted with 'T'12 in Kebele 04 (October, 2023)

"I always regret losing my money and time. I have lived with depression and stressful conditions. I usually lose all my salary within a day and worry about what to eat, what to pay for house rent, etc. It is very difficult. ...I want to stop betting and to get married, but I can't....you see how much I depressed?"²

The informant experienced profound emotional distress from betting, marked by regret and anxiety, leading to financial instability and impaired decision-making. The rhetorical question, "You see, how I am depressed?" highlights feelings of helplessness, while constant survival concerns hinder pursuit of meaningful relationships and life milestones like marriage.

Losing life: The findings indicate that the youth and adults were especially vulnerable to the negative consequences of betting, including an increased risk of suicide. Psychological distress from financial losses and feelings of desperation can lead to tragic decisions. This study revealed that the youth and adults involved in betting often experienced a decline in their quality of life. One interviewee recounted a tragic incident from last August as follows:

A young girl from a disadvantaged, female-headed household tragically lost her life while working as a cashier in a betting house to support her mother. After a customer absconded with 5,000 birr he had borrowed from her, she found herself unable to recover the lost amount. Overcome by fear of the potential repercussions for her family, she ultimately committed suicide. This heartbreaking case underscores the severe psychological distress and life-altering consequences that can arise from involvement in betting, especially for vulnerable individuals.³

This tragic case shows the devastating effects of betting on vulnerable individuals, especially young people from disadvantaged backgrounds. A young girl working as a cashier in a betting house faced overwhelming distress. Fearing the repercussions of this loss, she took her own life, highlighting the severe mental health impacts of betting pressures.

Another interviewee expressed the following scenario on the tragic event of betting as follows:

..., a tragic event occurred involving a 25-year-old man from Kebele 03 who committed suicide after losing his Bajaj vehicle to betting, a vehicle that had been purchased by his family. His attempt to achieve financial gain through gambling resulted in severe consequences... This heartbreaking situation highlights the profound psycho-social and economic impacts that betting can have on individuals and their families.⁴

This unfortunate event illustrates the devastating effects of betting on individuals and their families, symbolizing the tragic consequences of pursuing quick financial gain. His decision to bet led him to sell a vital work asset, causing emotional turmoil for himself and his loved ones. Ultimately, his suicide underscores the profound psychological impacts of betting and how it can lead to despair and loss.

² An interview conducted with 'I'8 in Kebele 15 (November, 2023)

³ An interview conducted with 'I'10 in Kebele 07 (November, 2023)

⁴ An interview conducted with 'I'11 in Kebele 03 (October, 2023)

Social impact: The study findings indicate that excessive betting negatively impacts the social well-being of the youth and adults, leading to social isolation and stigma. As individuals become more preoccupied with betting, they often withdraw from social interactions and relationships, exacerbating feelings of loneliness and disconnect from peers, family, and support networks. This cycle of isolation severely affects their psychological health.

Family disintegration: The participants noted that betting discourages their social lives and distances them from partners and loved ones. They described virtual and online football betting as difficult addictions to break. Betting disrupts relationships between children and parents, as well as the institution of marriage and family, often leading to conflict and economic crisis. While some participants found a sense of unity in the betting environment, they acknowledged detachment from their families and community members. One interviewee shared his experience as follows;

... Initially, I made some money, but soon I became addicted and lost more than I ever gained. This addiction cost me my job and strained my family, leading me to moving out from my family due to my changed behavior and lack of attention towards them. My obsession with betting overshadowed everything else. I urge concerned authorities to take action against betting to prevent generational decay, as it affects not just adults but even students in our community.⁵

The above anecdote illustrates that virtual betting is not just a personal struggle but a catalyst for family disintegration. The cycle of addiction leads to intense emotional and financial consequences that affect both individuals and their families.

Many participants expressed a desire for betting shops to close, acknowledging the negative impact on family disagreements. Such conflicts can result in lasting consequences, including strained relationships and even criminal behavior. Furthermore, participants also highlighted the devastating effects of betting on their relationships. It often leads to conflict with partners and family members over money, reduced quality time spent with loved ones, and difficulty focusing on daily tasks. They admitted to stealing from friends and family to fund their betting and lying about their losses. Consequently, friends and family feel neglected, leading to broken trust and strained relationships that are challenging to repair.

Divorce : The study revealed that excessive betting leads to financial instability, causing individuals to fall into debt and poverty, impacting not only their own lives but also their families and communities,

⁵ An interview conducted with 'T'11 in Kebele 03 (October, 2023)

and straining relationships with family and romantic partners, that leads to conflicts, trust issues, and social isolation. One of the participants revealed the following experience:

My marriage ended in divorce, primarily due to my involvement with betting. ..., as my gambling habits worsened, stop visiting her, I found myself avoiding spending time with her, even when she came to visit. The strain of losing money affected me to the point where I lost interest in intimacy and began borrowing money from her to sustain myself. Eventually, she discovered the extent of my betting, and we divorced as a result.⁶

This explanation highlights how marriage can end in divorce due to betting addiction, demonstrating the profound effects of compulsive behaviors on relationships. As the addiction worsened, physical and emotional distance grew between partners, exacerbated by financial instability and avoidance of intimacy. The resulting dependency on borrowed money created toxic dynamic, fostering feelings of betrayal and rejection. Ultimately, discovering the extent of the betting addiction acted as a catalyst for divorce and family disintegration.

Stigma and social isolation: The study highlighted that bettors often experience social isolation, as neighbors distrust them and avoid interaction due to concerns about potential criminal behavior. Discussants revealed that betting had significant social impacts, particularly contributing to increased crime rates, stigma, and social isolation. In communities where betting is prevalent, there is often a correlation with higher rates of crime, including conflict, theft, fraud, and other illegal activities. Individuals resort to these measures to fund their betting habits, leading to a loss of emotional control. One informant said:

I have observed a significant change in my behavior since I began betting. I have become increasingly aggressive and even resorted to illegal activities like looting. Additionally, most of my former friends have distanced themselves from me since I started betting, and their families have also prohibited them from associating with me due to the fear stemming from my experiences.⁷

This expression underlines addiction creates barriers between individuals and their social support systems, resulting in isolation. Stigmas around betting addiction lead to social rejection and alienation, as families discourage associations with affected individuals, reinforcing feelings of worthlessness and fear of being labeled untrustworthy.

Dropping out of school: Betting has also a potential negative impact on the academic performance of students because they spend much of their time on betting rather than studying. As the data revealed self-sponsored students were unable to pay education fees since they used their money for betting. In line with this statement, an informant shared the following experience:

⁶ An interview conducted with 'I'2 in Kebele 16 (November, 2023)

⁷ An interview conducted with 'I'1 in Kebele 06 (November, 2023)

I'm 26 years old who used to rely on shoe-shining for my living expenses and school fees. Unfortunately, the rise of virtual and online football betting changed my life for the worse. ...I bought a hand cart and stopped shoe cleaning for better income and also attended college, but I had to withdraw from my studies because I couldn't afford the fees. To fund my betting I sold the cart, but I have only faced losses...., I was even struck by a vehicle while lost in thought about my situation, ... Now, I turned to cleaning shoes and gambling, ending up with nothing. I truly believe that betting is jeopardizing my life and those of others in my community.⁸

This experience highlights the devastating impact of betting addiction on educational aspirations, as losing money for betting left him with empty pockets and prevented him from going back to school. He was even struck by a vehicle while distracted by his circumstances, illustrating how deeply this struggle had affected his life and threatened not only his future but also his well-being. Other informants also revealed that it was impossible to attend school and study on time due to the proximity of betting establishments to the school. One of the interviewees expressed his experience as:

..... Last year, as a grade 9 student, I found studying increasingly difficult, which caused conflicts with my parents. Eventually, they kicked me out of the house due to our disagreements. Now, I am living in the streets and surviving by looting. This drastic change in my life has been overwhelming. I have faced significant challenges in a very short period.⁹

This highlights the struggles faced by the youth dealing with academic difficulties and family conflicts. Such tensions lead to expulsion from home, resulting in homelessness and a desperate need to loot for survival. Overall, this narrative emphasizes the vulnerability of young individuals under academic pressure and family breakdowns, revealing the harsh realities of street life and the significant challenges that can arise quickly.

Economic impact: The economic impact of betting is both significant and complex. While some business owners and experts from the National Lottery Administration highlighted the positive aspects such as job creation and tax revenue, they were reluctant to discuss the negative consequences on participants' economic lives. Informants recognized that while legalized sports betting can generate substantial revenue and job opportunities, it must be weighed against its potential negative social impacts. However, bettors themselves disagreed with these positive contributions, citing issues like wasted time and energy, loss of assets, and job loss as significant negative economic impacts.

Time wastage and loss of assets: Discussants in this study indicated that betting negatively impacted the economy by wasting workers' time and energy, which could otherwise be used for productive work. Individuals reportedly lose an average of 150 to 300 birr per day to betting, with many claiming they never see profits; any small winnings are quickly lost again. They argue that betting yields no benefits

⁸ An interview conducted with 'I'6 in Kebele 16 (November, 2023)

⁹ An interview conducted with 'I'7 in Kebele 04 (October, 2023)

economically, socially, or psychologically. Many workers have lost money earned from their salaries and previous assets, while unemployed adults have squandered funds provided by their parents. One interviewee shared a specific scenario illustrating these challenges as follows:

... One of my friends was found guilty because of betting. He was a chat trader. He even had his own motorbike. Unfortunately, one day he sold it to bet and then lost all 80,000 birr within four hours. In the end, he lost control of his emotions and broke two televisions that were used for playing. No one could stop him. When the owner of the betting house tried to intervene, he kicked him. Then, the owner called the police, and then he was arrested.¹⁰

The expression indicates the economic impact of betting is significant, as individuals often sell assets, like motorbikes, to recover losses, perpetuating financial instability. Arrests related to betting behavior consume valuable time and energy, disrupting income and productivity, which not only affects personal finances but also contributes to broader economy instability.

Loss of job and income: The participants also stated that they were fired from their former job because they bet while they spent the work time to bet. Most participants confirmed that they did not gain more than they lost. An interviewee who was betting during this interview said the following to express his feelings about the influence of betting on the economy of adults:

... Especially virtual betting has damaged me in many ways. After I started it aimlessly, it made my life tough, and now it is difficult for me to stop. That is why I am here at this midday. In the beginning, I was making a lot of money. Hence, I decided to sell my Bajaj (a vehicle with three wheels) and bet more money to buy a minibus. I sold it ..., and I started to bet with a large amount of money. I bet and lost 40,000 birr in a day, but I was not lucky to get it again. I reputedly bet a large amount of money to return it, but I was not successful. I lost all of the money that I gained from selling the vehicle. Even now, I am not capable of buying a hand cart. As a result, all of my family stood against me and stigmatized me for living alone. Now I don't have any income sources.¹¹

This case illustrates the significant economic impact of betting on adults, particularly highlighting the destructive cycle of addiction associated with virtual betting. Individuals may initially experience early success in betting, prompting impulsive decisions like selling valuable assets, such as a vehicle, leading to significant losses. Later, attempts to recover losses through further betting often result in complete financial ruin, causing job losses and an inability to afford basic necessities.

Likewise, another informant shared his experience as follows:

...I was once employed in a reputable government organization with a good salary, but I lost my job due to my betting habit. Now, I am unemployed.... One of my friends, who struggle with betting, has also gone missing. His family has searched everywhere but has not been able to locate him. He, too, is fired from his job....¹²

¹⁰ An interview conducted with 'T'1 in Kebele 06 (November, 2023)

¹¹ An interview conducted with 'T'6 in Kebele 16 (November, 2023)

¹² An interview conducted with 'T'10 in Kebele 07 (November, 2023)

This expression highlights the devastating impact of betting on an individual's employment and life stability. The informant lost a stable job in a government organization due to absenteeism from his betting habit. His friend's disappearance highlights the extreme consequences of addiction, illustrating how betting can lead to job losses, financial ruin, and personal crises.

4. Discussion

The study discloses a growing prevalence of various betting activities in Bahir Dar City, notably virtual betting, online football betting, and lottery betting. This trend is largely driven by security challenges and political instability, which have facilitated the rise of illegal betting houses and hindered effective regulatory enforcement. Supporting this observation, research by Gainsbury et al. (2015) indicates that socio-economic factors and inadequate regulatory frameworks play a significant role in the proliferation of illegal gambling in urban areas. These findings suggest that without addressing the underlying socio-economic conditions and strengthening regulatory measures, the trend of illegal betting is likely to continue, posing further risks to vulnerable populations in the city. This trend can be understood through the lens of the bio-psychosocial model, which highlights how individual predispositions, social contexts, and environmental factors contribute to gambling behavior.

Similar to this result, previous studies done by Korn (2000) and Derevensky et al. (2003) also found that adults and youth have the highest rate of betting in the absence of controlled situations. Similarly, the findings of Wondimagegn (2023) revealed that the rise of online gambling opportunities has led to a significant increase in regular gambling among young people, with prevalence rates for gambling practices being higher in adolescents and young adults. Haji et al.'s (2022) study also revealed that problematic gambling among sports bettors is very high and it is significantly associated with the age group of 25 to 31 years and unemployed. Unlike Haji et al.'s (2022) study, the present study found that employed individuals and students above and below the stated age groups were also highly engaged in betting. However, this finding contradicts the findings of the study by Getahun and Koye (2019) in Bahir Dar city who found that playing pool and cards are the most common gambling practices.

The emotional distress associated with betting has emerged as a significant concern among Bahir Dar city youth and adults, profoundly impacting their decision-making abilities and overall life trajectories. Recent studies corroborate the findings of this research, demonstrating that individuals engaged in betting often grapple with heightened levels of stress and anxiety, which detrimentally affect their

mental health and decision-making processes. A study by Biruk et al. (2023) revealed that many young bettors experience chronic emotional turmoil stemming from financial losses, leading to a cycle of regret and despair. The study of Getahun and Koye (2019) revealed that problem gambling has an impact on personal (health and emotional wellness), social (family, interpersonal relations, work and crime) and economic (indebtedness, losing savings and assets) aspects. This is similar to the sentiments expressed by one of the participants in our study.

Similarly, studies by Ayele et al. (2023) and Champion (2021) emphasized the psychological and mental health repercussions associated with betting. These studies indicated that individuals who frequently engaged in online betting often reported increased levels of anxiety and depression. Notably, studies pointed out that while some participants viewed betting as a coping mechanism for stress, it ultimately led to a cycle of addiction where the initial relief is transformed into heightened psychological distress.

Moreover, Hailu and Tesfaye (2023) and Ayele et al. (2024) found that the emotional distress stemming from compulsive betting is often manifested as depression, significantly impairing individuals' ability to make rational decisions. Similarly, this study found that the overwhelming worry about meeting basic needs such as food and housing diminish their capacity to think clearly about their future including significant life milestones like marriage. The impulsivity associated with gambling further complicates decision-making processes by prioritizing immediate gratification that leads to neglecting long-term well-being and stability.

The findings of this study also revealed many adults and youth spend their work and school time in betting. It exposed them to sleeping disorders, feeling depressed or anxious, and having suicidal thoughts, involving in substance abuse, mental disorders, and criminal offenses. Similarly, studies of Gedefaw and Hailu (2022) revealed the complex relationship between betting and social life. While betting fosters solidarity and social networks, it also poses risks of financial strain and emotional distress, particularly for excessive bettors.

The study revealed that adults involved in betting face conflicts with fellow gamblers, friends, families, and social groups due to significant monetary losses in a short time. Many resort to criminal activities, stealing from relatives and passersby to fund their betting. Some individuals isolate themselves from

families or end even in divorce. This aligns with Thompson et al. (2019), who noted that bettors exhibit increased aggression, including verbal and physical altercations. Wondimagegn (2023) found a positive correlation between sports betting and negative psychological and social behaviors. Excessive betting leads to serious psychosocial issues, highlighting its impact on societal dynamics through social practice theory.

This idea is also supported by Williams et al. (2018) that examined the relationship between gambling and interpersonal conflicts and revealed that adults involved in betting activities are more likely to experience conflicts with their close relationships including partners, family members, and friends. This study found that betting engagement and betting house locations highly affected students' school work and academic performance which causes them drop out of school. Many students compromise their academic responsibilities to dedicate more time to betting activities. Similar results are found in Tesfaye and Melaku (2023), Smith et al. (2020), and Brown (2018), who discovered the significant effect of gambling behavior on educational performance. These findings align with the findings of this study which found the allure of betting overshadows the essential life activities leading to poor academic outcomes and long-term socioeconomic challenges.

In addition to psychological and social problems, betting has also financial and economic problems. Many self-employees lost much of the money generated from their business capital, daily labor workers lost their salary, employed workers lost their jobs and assets, and even unemployed adults and students also lost much of the money taken from their parents.

There is a debate over the argument that betting has both positive and negative economic impacts on the lives of adults and the youth. This study discovered that, some people, including betting business owners and members of the national lottery administration office shows the positive impact of betting in terms of income generation, as a means of creating job opportunities, and enjoyment. Similarly, some researchers conducted in the past ((Basham & White, 2002) and (McGowan, 2014)) stated that betting serves as a form of enjoyment. Likewise, Wondimagegn's (2023) and Haji et al.'s (2022) studies reveal that young individuals often engage in sports betting primarily for entertainment and as a potential source of income. This aligns with the finding of this study which found that participants are primarily engaged in betting to earn money, to enjoy, and to alleviate boredom.

However, the consequences of betting on the lives of people, especially on the youth and adults, are negatively affecting the lives of people by leading them to addiction and financial risks. This trend can be understood through the lens of the cost-benefit analysis approach that raises critical questions about the balance between the perceived benefits of betting, such as entertainment and revenue generation, and its detrimental effects on individuals and communities, further emphasizing the need for a nuanced understanding of betting as a psychosocial and economic problem.

Moreover, the economic impacts of betting, as revealed in this study, resonate with the adverse effects since the legalization of sports betting has gaps and can't stimulate economic growth through tax revenues and job creation. Similar to the findings of Getachew et al. (2023), this study also emphasizes how betting often leads to significant financial losses, waste of productive time, and ultimately job losses. The findings of this study also align with Tesfaye's (2023) findings on the financial distress linked to gambling. Likewise, a qualitative study by Abebe and Desta (2024) among young adults in Ethiopia indicated that while betting could be a source of excitement and thrill, it often masked deeper issues such as unemployment and loss of assets.

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

The investigation of betting practices in Bahir Dar City reveals a concerning landscape characterized by unregulated and illegal betting activities, particularly in the realms of virtual and online football betting. The rapid growth of betting establishments can be attributed to low entry barriers, yet this expansion poses significant risks, especially to vulnerable populations like the youth, who often access these platforms. With many betting operations lacking the necessary licenses, there is an urgent need for stronger regulatory framework and enforcement mechanisms to address consumer protection, responsible betting, and the overall safety of the community.

The findings of this study highlight the severe psychological, emotional, and behavioral consequences of gambling both on the youth and adults, revealing a troubling association between betting and deteriorating psychosocial health. The youth and adults experience aggression, anxiety, depression, suicide, and strained relationships, indicating that the compulsive nature of gambling significantly impacts their daily lives and decision-making abilities.

It also illuminates the profound social repercussions of excessive betting, revealing its detrimental impact both on the youth and adults in various aspects of life. Betting can lead to social isolation and stigma, as individuals withdraw from relationships, exacerbating loneliness and disconnection from support networks. This addiction not only strains familial bonds, leading to conflicts, divorce, and family disintegration, but also results in financial instability, compelling individuals into debt and poverty. The stigma associated with gambling further alienates bettors, perpetuating cycles of worthlessness and rejection, which hinder recovery. Additionally, betting adversely affects academic performance, with students dropping out due to financial struggles and time mismanagement, ultimately jeopardizing their future and well-being.

The study's findings reveal the complex economic impact of betting, highlighting both its potential benefits and significant drawbacks. While some participants acknowledge the economic contributions of betting through job creation and tax revenue, the negative consequences on individuals' financial stability are profound. Many bettors experience a cycle of financial ruin, losing assets and jobs due to compulsive gambling behaviors. The sale of valuable assets and loss of income lead to severe economic instability and isolation from family and community. The anecdotes of individuals who lost jobs, savings, and social connections due to betting illustrate the destructive cycle of addiction and its wide-reaching implications.

The investigation into betting practices in Bahir Dar City reveals alarming impacts on individuals and the community, particularly among vulnerable youth and adults. It leads to severe psychological consequences, social and economic crisis resulting in depression, anxiety, job losses, asset liquidation, and family disintegration. This underscores the urgent need for stronger regulatory measures to protect consumers and promote responsible betting practices.

- Government authorities and regulatory agencies should strengthen regulatory frameworks by reviewing and updating existing regulations, particularly Proclamation No. 535/2007, to address online betting. Implementing a robust licensing system and enforcing age restrictions for betting participation are crucial steps. Additionally, regulations should ensure that betting establishments are located away from schools and sensitive areas.
- Community organizations should collaborate with local authorities to launch educational initiatives that raise awareness about the risks of gambling and promote responsible betting practices. Targeting both the youth and adults will help foster a more informed community.

- Counselors and social workers should establish counseling and support systems for individuals struggling with betting addiction. This includes providing access to psychological support and financial counseling to mitigate the impacts of betting on individuals and their families.
- Governmental and non-governmental organizations should encourage community involvement in discussions about the impacts of betting. Engaging local leaders, educators, and families will help build a collective effort towards creating a safer and more responsible betting environment.
- Finally, immediate and effective action from these concerned bodies is imperative to address the challenges posed by the rapid rise of virtual betting in Bahir Dar City.

Availability of Data and Materials

The data sets used and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflict of Interest

There are no relevant financial or non-financial competing interests to report.

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Authors' Contributions

Writing the original draft and design of methodology was done by Alemu Lake by editing and revising it critically for intellectual content, and editing the overall improvement of the manuscript was made by Almw Tsegaye. Data collection, data analysis, interpretation and manuscript preparation were carried out by both authors. All authors read and approved the final manuscript and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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