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Gambling, Faith, and Identity among Youths in Nigeria: A Seventh-Day Adventist Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study examined how gambling intersects with faith and identity among Nigerian youths from the Seventh-day Adventist perspective, focusing on how religious beliefs shape attitudes and behaviours related to gambling. Motivated by the rising prevalence of gambling driven by economic hardship, peer pressure, and online accessibility, the research addresses the largely unexplored spiritual and moral dimensions of gambling in this context. Using a survey of 50 youths aged 16-35, the study collected data on gambling participation, motivations, religious perspectives, and support preferences. Results showed that 54% had gambled, primarily motivated by financial need, though most (67.7%) had ceased gambling. A majority recognized gambling as conflicting with their faith (84%) and detrimental to their relationship with God (88%), yet over half reported limited church engagement on the issue. Counselling and spiritual mentorship were identified as key support mechanisms. The findings reveal a tension between personal faith convictions and institutional silence, highlighting the need for integrated interventions combining spiritual guidance with practical support such as financial education and counselling. The study suggests that the Seventh-day Adventist Church can play a pivotal role in fostering resilience and ethical decision-making among youths. Future research should explore how faith-based communities can better align doctrine and practice to effectively address gambling's social and spiritual challenges among Nigerian youth.

Keywords: Gambling, Faith, Identity, Youths, Nigeria, Seventh-day Adventist

INTRODUCTION

The pervasive allure of gambling, driven by easily accessible online platforms, aggressive marketing, identity crisis, peer pressure, high unemployment rates, and an unhealthy quest for wealth, is increasingly ensnaring Nigerian youths. The economic and psychological consequences of gambling addiction are well-documented. Several studies explore the under-researched spiritual and moral dimensions within the context of Seventh-day Adventist beliefs, highlighting how faith influences identity and responses to gambling among Nigerian youth (Daniel, 2024; Azogu-Adigwe, 2020; Lungu, 2020; Mustapha & Enilolobo, 2019).

Globally, the gambling industry is experiencing exponential growth, driven by technological advancements (Carter, 2024) and shifting societal attitudes (Morgan, 2024). In Nigeria, this expansion is particularly pronounced, with a proliferation of betting shops and online platforms targeting vulnerable populations, including youth (Aguocha, 2021). Studies highlight the significant socio-economic and psychological impacts of gambling on Nigerian youth, including financial instability (Bankole, 2019) and addictive behaviors (Lungu, 2020). However, limited research exists on the intersection of faith, and gambling behavior, as well as the implications it has on the religious identity of youths. This gap necessitates a deeper exploration of how biblical principles and missiological strategies can effectively address this growing concern.

The following sections examine biblical perspectives on gambling, relevant SDA teachings, the missiological implications of this issue, contributing factors influencing gambling behavior among youth from a religious perspective, the effects of gambling on faith and identity, and the crucial role of the church in addressing this challenge through youth ministry initiatives. The paper concludes with recommendations for a holistic response to gambling within the youth community in Nigeria from a Seventh-day Adventist perspective.

Overview of Gambling and Its Prevalence Among Youths In Nigeria

The rising phenomenon of gambling has increasingly captured the attention of scholars and practitioners from the fields of Education, Psychology, Economics, Accounting and finance, sociology, Management, and medicine, particularly concerning its impact on vulnerable populations such as youths. In Nigeria, the rapid expansion of the gambling industry has paralleled the proliferation of mobile technology and Internet accessibility, thereby creating an environment where betting activities are not only prevalent but also deeply embedded in the culture (Abang et al, 2023).

Study indicates that a significant proportion of Nigerian youths engage in various forms of gambling, from traditional betting on sporting events to engaging in online casino games (Aguocha & Sanju, 2021). This trend raises concerns about the socio-economic implications and the psychological effects of gambling, which may lead to addictive behaviors and financial instability. However, as the debates continue, less attention has been given to the Biblical and Missiological response and implications on the subject matter. Therefore, addressing these challenges requires a holistic approach that integrates moral, social, and spiritual perspectives, particularly from the context of faith-based communities like the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which can play a crucial role in countering the lure of gambling among their youth.

Biblical Perspectives on Wealth, Stewardship And Gambling

The topic of gambling presents complex theological implications within the biblical narrative, primarily concerning stewardship, temptation, and the nature of wealth. Scripture admonishes against the love of money and the potential idolatry associated with materialism (1 Timothy 6:10), which can be pertinent to understanding gambling allure among youth. While the Bible does not explicitly prohibit gambling, it does offer caution against the pursuit of quick riches and the moral degradation often accompanying such activities. The teachings of Scripture prominently highlight the importance of stewardship, which stands in stark contrast to the impulses driving gambling behaviors. Biblical principles advocate for responsible management of resources, urging individuals to utilize their finances in ways that honor God and benefit their communities.

The account of Jacob and Esau's birthright saga (cf. Genesis 25: 29-34; Hebrews 12:16) is an example of gambling. The inability of Esau to control his desire for instant gratification and despise for his birthright led him to gamble his birthright thereby entering the snare of Jacob's unscrupulous and contemptible desire fueled by a spirit of impatience and a lack of confidence in the overruling providence of God to fulfill that which He had promised. This, however, has the backdrop of their father's partiality which led to the division of the family leading to jealousy, bitterness, and misery among the children (Nichol, 1978). While Jacob's conduct cannot be condoned, that of Esau deserves severe condemnation. According to Ellen G. White (1958) Jacob repented and was forgiven; Esau was beyond forgiveness because his repentance consisted only of regret for the results of his rash act, not for the act itself (Hebrews 12:16, 17).

Another account of the Old Testament about the frailty of the human mind that is not subject and brought captive to the will of God on wealth, greed, and lust for materialism is the story of Prophet Balaam who was lured into going against God's will by Balak the king of Moab in an attempt to curse the people of God for material gain (Numbers 22). Thus the prophet gambled his obedience to the commands of God

for the alluring gifts that the king promised. The prophet's thoughts were set on worldly wealth. Avarice was his besetting sin (Nichol, 1978).

The Gospels(cf. Matt. 4:1-11; Mark 1:12, 13: Luke 4:1-13) present the account of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness which was an attempt of the devil to lure the Messiah into gambling His authority, mission, and identity for alluring benefits and gratifications. Ehioghae categorized the temptation under three major divisions: Appetite; leveraging on hunger and lack of food, the devil chose to strike. Something he often does:is take advantage of us at the point of our greatest weakness or need. Afterwards, Presumption; which is an expectation for God to do what he has not promised especially when the expectations fall short of the premise (conditions) to which they are given in the scriptures which is fraught with danger. Then, Compromise; is an attempt to waver or negotiate our allegiance to God and morality for selfish gain which makes one subject to the seductive power of materialism. Christ's ability to discern and not yield to these subtly attempts to deviate Him from his mission stems from a deep relationship with the Father rooted in love and obedience, through constant communion in prayer and study of God's word. Christ applied scriptural principles which helped him discern the snares of the enemy. This we can do when we surrender to God and daily apply biblical principles through the help of the Holy Spirit and resisting the devil and his alluring benefits (James 4:7, 8; Prov. 18: 10) to remain steadfast in the path of righteousness. According to Ehioghae (2014) "We have the assurance that we can overcome because Jesus our perfect example overcame temptation and the Devil." Christ can help and save us in our temptations (Heb. 2:18; 4:15; 1 Peter 2:22).

In the inaugural sermon (countercultural teachings on various issues) of Jesus Christ as recorded in Matthew 5-7 records specifically in chapter 6:19-34 Christ addressesthe prevalent issues on attitude to wealth such as laying up treasures in heaven against the order of the day which was to secure their treasures in places that are prone to looting and destruction,eye as the lamp of the body; emphasizing the need for sound doctrine, an attempt of dual allegiance (serving two masters; God and Mammon) and worry for the cares of life which at the climax in verse 33, Christ makes a call to "*Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness"* which if faithfully done God promises to provide the basic requirement for survival and sustenance. He further assured this provision to those who would earnestly seek God's kingdom and His righteousness by drawing object lessons from nature to buttress the point that, believers who put God first need not worry about the future because God who has overtime provided can do that today and even for tomorrow (Akpa, 2013).

While there is no express command in the scriptures against gambling, it falls under the cares and worries for today and tomorrow as well as seeking to store up treasures on earth which often sways focus away from seeking God's kingdom and His righteousness stemming from unhealthy desires to acquire

wealth thereby passing a vote of no confidence in God as the heavenly father powerful and sufficient enough to provide for His children this then supports this idea that God is aloof from His creation; an absentee landlord who created and left his creations to survive on its own. White (1898) asserts the theory that the end justifies the means does not have the approval of Heaven because believers are to imbibe biblical principles in personal and professional life to serve as guides in decision-making (Matt. 4:3, 4).

Christian Education, therefore, plays a pivotal role in shaping children's understanding of these values, encouraging them to reflect on their actions and decisions through a biblical lens (Nyoka, 2024). Moreover, the culture surrounding gambling often exploits human vulnerabilities, promoting a reliance on chance rather than divine providence. This becomes particularly relevant in Nigeria, where the potential for gambling to undermine spiritual growth and ethical living must be addressed. Emphasizing biblical teachings about wealth and stewardship can foster greater awareness among youth, enabling them to discern and resist negative influences while cultivating a lifestyle that reflects their faith commitment, and values.

Seventh-Day Adventist Church Belief in Stewardship

One of the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the belief in Stewardship which affirms that we are God's stewards, entrusted by Him with time and opportunities, abilities and possessions, and the blessings of the earth and its resources (Vyhmeister, 2000). We are responsible to Him for their proper use. Stewardship is a privilege to nurture in love and the victory over selfishness and covetousness (Bradford , 2000). The steward rejoices in the blessings but comes to others as a result of his faithfulness in the appropriate and effective use of his time, talent, treasure, and temple as he puts total trust in God for provision, protection, sustenance, and direction (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2005). In her official statement on the subject matter, the church identified gambling as the concept of winning at the expense of others which has become a modern curse and has eroded the quality of life. It violates Christian principles of stewardship. The idea that gambling operations can have a positive economic benefit is an illusion. In addition, gambling violates the Christian sense of responsibility for family, neighbors, the needy, and the Church (cf. 1 Thess. 4:11; Gen 3:19; Matt 19:21; Acts 9:36; 2 Cor. 9:8, 9).

The gambling dream of "winning big" replaces true hope with a false dream of a statistically improbable chance of winning. Christians are not to put their hope in wealth. The Christian hope in a glorious future promised by God is "sure and certain"- unlike and opposite to the gambling dream. The great gain that the Bible points to is "godliness with contentment (1 Tim 6:17; Heb. 11:1; 1 Tim 6:6). The addictive quality of gambling is incompatible with a Christian lifestyle. The Church seeks to help, not blame, those suffering from gambling or other addictions. Christians recognize that they are responsible

before God for their resources and lifestyle (1 Cor. 6:19, 20). The Seventh-day Adventist Church organization does not condone raffles or lotteries to raise funds and it urges members not to participate in any such activities, however well-intentioned. Neither does the Church condone state-sponsored gambling (General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2000).

MISSIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF GAMBLING

Given the prevalence of gambling among youth in Nigeria which plagues faith and identity, the Missiological implications are profound. The church must recognize that gambling often cultivates a culture of materialism and instant gratification, which stands in stark contrast to the values of stewardship and patience encouraged in Christian teachings. Gambling and other vices could become strongholds for the devil to hold captive the young people of the church. This quest subtly emerges from untamed desires, thoughts, or footholds such as greed, laziness, and desire to get rich quickly defying the command of God for hard work and dependence on the divine for blessings (Onongha, 2023).

This deviation presents a unique opportunity for missional engagement, as faith communities are called to reclaim the narrative around risk and reward from a biblical perspective. By fostering discussions that encourage critical thinking about the moral and spiritual consequences of gambling, church leaders can guide youths toward healthier, more constructive forms of engagement with their faith and community. Such initiatives could not only deter gambling tendencies but also reinforce the theological understanding of dependency on divine providence over chance, illustrating the practical implications of faith in everyday choices. Fostering robust dialogues around these issues empowers young people to navigate the challenges of modernity and postmodernity with a biblically grounded worldview. The missiological perspective emphasizes the necessity of fostering spiritual resilience among youth in Nigeria, ensuring they are equipped to discern the temptations of gambling as a form of misaligned prosperity.

SUMMARY OF EMPIRICAL SURVEY

The empirical survey was carried among 50 youths ranging from age 16-35 by Onongha (2023). It revealed that most respondents were aged 28-35 years (42%), predominantly male (72%), and well-educated with 62% being undergraduates and 32% postgraduates. More than half (52%) were employed, while 24% were students. Regarding gambling behaviour, 54% of respondents admitted to having participated in gambling activities, though interestingly, 67.7% of these individuals reported they had gambled in the past but no longer do so, suggesting gambling is often a temporary behaviour rather than a persistent practice. Only 6.5% gambled daily, while 25.8% did so occasionally. Financial expenditure on

gambling was generally modest, with 75.8% spending less than ₦10,000 ($6) monthly, indicating that gambling did not constitute a major financial priority for most participants.

Financial need emerged as the primary motivator for gambling among respondents, followed by entertainment, while other factors like desire for quick wealth, peer pressure, and unemployment were less frequently cited. A significant majority (86%) believed that gambling negatively impacts financial stability, demonstrating awareness of potential harmful consequences. From a religious perspective, the survey showed strong church attendance, with 74% of respondents attending all church services or SDA youth programs. Religious beliefs played a crucial role in shaping attitudes toward gambling, with 84% agreeing or strongly agreeing that gambling conflicts with their religious beliefs, and 88% believing it affects one's relationship with God. Despite these convictions, 58% reported that gambling issues are rarely addressed within their church communities, highlighting a discrepancy between personal beliefs and institutional discourse.

The survey identified several effective support mechanisms for overcoming gambling temptations, with counselling services and spiritual or professional mentorship within the church being most highly recommended (74% each). Other valuable supports included financial literacy programs (58%), employment or vocational training opportunities (54%), and peer support groups (46%). The findings suggest that SDA teachings on wealth and stewardship were beneficial in resisting gambling temptations, with 94% of respondents agreeing with this sentiment. The research indicates that a comprehensive approach combining spiritual guidance with practical interventions such as financial education and professional counselling would be most effective in addressing gambling issues among SDA youth in Nigeria, addressing both the moral and practical dimensions of gambling behaviour.

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN ADDRESSING GAMBLING WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF YOUTH MINISTRY

Engagement with youth within the church context presents a pivotal opportunity to address the growing concern about gambling among adolescents. By fostering an environment that prioritizes biblical teachings, the church can effectively counteract the allure of gambling, which often stems from peer pressure and societal influences thatfall under the broader discourse on Christian Education (Nyoka, 2024). Educational initiatives, such as empowerment workshops and mentorshipprograms, facilitate an understanding of the ethical implications of gambling and the importance of making spiritually informed choices. Moreover, engagement in regular prayer and Bible study, mentorship,and skill acquisitionhelps cultivate resilience against temptations, providing youths with the tools necessary for navigating modern

challenges. The church must also guide its members away from potentially harmful behaviors and towards a more profound relationship with God and community-based activities that foster genuine economic and spiritual growth (Kamara, 2014).

Ultimately, by emphasizing the role of a supportive community and active parental involvement, the church can create a robust framework that not only discourages gambling but also promotes a holistic, faith-based lifestyle among Seventh-day Adventist youth in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A HOLISTIC RESPONSE TO GAMBLING YOUTHS IN NIGERIA

The findings presented in this study highlight the multifaceted nature of gambling's impact on youths in Nigeria, underscoring the necessity for a comprehensive approach to address this pressing issue. Data reveal a concerning prevalence of gambling behaviors among this demographic, often exacerbated by socio-economic factors and the influence of peer pressure. Furthermore, the research illustrates a disconnect between faith-based teachings and these young individuals' pragmatic realities, indicating an urgent need for alignment between doctrine and practice.

Recommendations for a holistic response include;

1. Implement engaging, faith-based educational programs that weave biblical principles of stewardship and responsible resource management into youth activities, while fostering open dialogue and supportive community networks that provide counseling, spiritual guidance, and practical awareness of gambling’s moral and financial consequences.
2. The establishment and sustenance of mentorship and empowerment programs that will help youths in their chosen fields will help curb the high impact ranging storm of gambling.
3. Partner with educational institutions and faith leaders to deliver age-appropriate gambling awareness modules and mentorship, reinforcing ethical values and purposeful living.
4. Establish accessible, confidential counselling and peer-support networks in churches and schools, training leaders to identify and address gambling-related challenges.
5. Utilize digital tools such as age verification, parental controls, and targeted social media campaigns to limit access to gambling platforms and promote healthy alternatives.
6. Reaffirm and publicize the church’s stance against gambling, while mobilizing members to advocate for stricter regulations on gambling advertising and online betting.
7. Implement programs that build life skills, financial literacy, and resilience, and support ongoing research to evaluate and refine faith-based interventions for youth gambling and other vices.

CONCLUSION

Addressing the gambling issue among Nigerian youth requires an integrated approach that combines education, community support, and religious teachings, especially from the Seventh-day Adventist perspective. By leveraging biblical principles of wealth and responsible resource management, and emphasizing the dangers of gambling, the Seventh-day Adventist Church can play a pivotal role in fostering spiritual resilience and healthier decision-making among youths. Implementing the proposed multi-pronged strategy; encompassing educational programs, counseling, and mentorshipcan significantly mitigate the adverse socio-economic and psychological impacts of gambling. This holistic approach not only aligns with the church's values but also offers a robust framework for nurturing a resilient, morally grounded, and financially responsible youth community in Nigeria.

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