

CORRELATION BETWEEN SPIRITUALITY AND GAMBLING BEHAVIOUR AMONG STUDENTS IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN ABEOKUTA METROPOLIS, OGUN STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigated the relationship between spirituality and Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) among students in public higher education institutions in Abeokuta metropolis. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. Public higher education institutions within Abeokuta metropolis were purposively selected, while the snowball sampling technique was used to recruit 219 student participants. Two standardized instruments: the Spirituality Scale (SS) and the Canadian Problem Gambling Index (CPGI) were used for data collection. Data were analyzed using frequency counts and Pearson Product–Moment Correlation. The findings revealed notable gender differences in gambling severity, as a higher proportion of male students (73.7%) fell within the problem gambling category compared to female students (41.1%), while female students were more represented within the low and moderate gambling categories. The findings also showed that female students reported relatively higher spirituality levels than their male counterparts. Furthermore, a very weak negative relationship was found between spirituality and problem gambling severity ($r = -.052$, $n = 219$, $p > .05$), indicating that spirituality did not significantly influence gambling behaviour among the students. The study therefore recommended preventive counseling, value-based orientation programmes, and financial literacy interventions to reduce problematic gambling behaviour among students.

Keywords: Counseling, Gambling Behaviour, Gender, Spirituality.

Introduction

There are several behaviours youths and students indulge in largely due to youthful exuberances. However, among the behaviours that appear most common are risky sexual behaviours and gambling behaviours. The focus of this study is on problematic gambling because gambling appears to have become woven into the social life of many youths and students across cultures and nations. This trend has become a source of concern due to the psychological and mental health consequences associated with gambling disorder.

Among young people, gambling has become increasingly accessible through favourable policies, online betting platforms, and widespread advertising. Recent studies have linked problem gambling with suicide and suicidal ideation among youths (Van der Maas et al., 2024). Also, excessive gambling has been associated with several psychosocial and academic challenges among students (Allen et al., 2025). Although gambling itself may not necessarily be destructive, excessive involvement can result in gambling problems and disordered gambling behaviour (Johnson, 2021).

Gambling behaviour refers to a continuum ranging from low-risk gambling to moderate gambling and problem gambling (Derevensky et al., 2017; Johnson et al., 2025). Spirituality, on the other hand, refers to beliefs, values, and existential orientations that give individuals meaning, hope, purpose, and

connectedness (Spaniol, 2001). Studies have shown that spirituality may influence psychological functioning and serve as a protective factor against addictive behaviours (Bergin, 1991; Koenig, 2012; Pargament et al., 2004; Payne et al., 1991).

Within Nigeria, gambling participation among university students appears to be increasing. Victor-Aigbodion (2022) reported high rates of problem gambling among Nigerian university students, while Adeyemo and Aluko (2023) identified factors such as greed, poor self-control, unemployment, and economic hardship as predictors of gambling behaviour among youths. Although recent studies have investigated factors influencing gambling behaviour among students (Abimbola, 2024; Daniel et al., 2025; Oyinlola & Agbalaja, 2025), there is still dearth of studies examining spirituality and gambling behaviour among Nigerian students.

Nigeria is a highly religious society where religious activities are prominent even within higher institutions of learning. Therefore, there is the need to examine the relationship between spirituality and gambling behaviour among students in higher education institutions. Thus, this study examined the relationship between spirituality and gambling behaviour among students in public higher education institutions in Abeokuta metropolis.

However other objectives of the study are as follows:

- i) Establish the level of spirituality of male and female students in public higher education institutions;
- ii) Examine the distribution of Canadian Problem Gambling Index (CPGI) Levels by Gender
- iii) Investigate the relationship between spirituality and gambling behaviour of students in public higher education institutions.

The research questions that guided the study were as follows:

1. What is the frequency and percentage distribution of student's spirituality by gender?
2. What is the distribution of Canadian Problem Gambling Index (CPGI) Levels by Gender?
3. What is the relationship between students' spirituality and problem gambling as measured by the Canadian Problem Gambling Index (CPGI)?

Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant relationship between students' spirituality and problem gambling as measured by the Canadian Problem Gambling Index (CPGI).

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey design. The population comprised students engaging in gambling activities across public tertiary institutions within Abeokuta metropolis. Data were collected using a structured self-report questionnaire. A multistage sampling technique was employed. First, three public tertiary institutions—Federal College of Education, Abeokuta; Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta; and Moshood Abiola Polytechnic, Abeokuta were purposively selected. Subsequently, respondents were recruited through snowball sampling, yielding a total of 219 participants. Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study.

Inclusion criteria required respondents to be enrolled students in a public tertiary institution within Abeokuta metropolis, to have engaged in gambling (occasionally or frequently), and to provide informed consent. Exclusion criteria included non-students, non-gamblers, and individuals unwilling to participate.

Validated standardized instruments were used. Gambling behaviour was assessed using the Canadian Problem Gambling Index (CPGI) developed by Ferris and Wynne (2001). The CPGI consists of nine

items assessing gambling behaviours and consequences, rated on a four-point Likert scale (0 = never to 3 = almost always), yielding a possible score range of 0–27. Spirituality was measured using the 23-item Spirituality Scale (SS), which assesses expressive individual, interpersonal, and transpersonal dimensions (self-discovery, relationships, and eco-awareness). Responses were rated on a six-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagrees to strongly agree. Both instruments have demonstrated good internal consistency, with Cronbach’s alpha coefficients of .86 (SS) and .87 (CPGI) reported in a Nigerian sample (Johnson, 2021).

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 25. Research questions 1 and 2 were addressed using descriptive statistics (frequency counts and percentages), while Pearson Product–Moment Correlation was used for research question 3 that has a corresponding null hypothesis to examine the relationship between the variables. This statistical method was deemed appropriate due to its suitability for assessing the direction and strength of relationships between continuous variables (Field, 2018; Pallant, 2020).

Results

Research Question 1

What is the frequency and percentage distribution of students’ spirituality levels by gender?

Table 1

Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Students’ Spirituality Levels by Gender

Sex	Spirituality Level	<i>f</i>	%
Non-response	Very low spirituality	5	16.7
	Low spirituality	17	56.7
	Moderate spirituality	4	13.3
	High spirituality	4	13.3
	Total	30	100.0
Male	Very low spirituality	13	9.8
	Low spirituality	16	12.0
	Moderate spirituality	59	44.4
	High spirituality	45	33.8
	Total	133	100.0
Female	Low spirituality	3	5.4
	Moderate spirituality	18	32.1
	High spirituality	35	62.5
	Total	56	100.0

Note. Percentages were calculated based on the number of respondents within each sex category.

Table 1 showed the distribution of respondents according to their levels of spirituality by sex using frequency counts and percentages.

Table 1 revealed that the male students, with the largest proportion (59; 44.4%) reported moderate levels of spirituality, while 45 participants (33.8%) reported high levels of spirituality. A smaller number of male students showed low levels of spirituality (16; 12.0%), and 13 participants (9.8%) reported very low levels of spirituality.

As regards the female students, the results showed a relatively higher level of spirituality compared to their male colleagues. The majority (35; 62.5%) reported high levels of spirituality, while 18 respondents (32.1%) indicated moderate levels of spirituality. Only 3 respondents (5.4%) reported

low levels of spirituality, and none of the female participants reported very low spirituality. In all, the finding seems to suggest that female students tend to exhibit higher levels of spirituality compared to their male counterparts, while male students seem to be more distributed across the moderate and high spirituality groupings.

Research Question 2

What is the distribution of The Canadian Problem Gambling Index (CPGI) levels by gender?

Table 2

Frequency and Percentage Distribution of the Canadian Problem Gambling Index (CPGI) Levels by Gender

Gender	CPGI Category	F	%
Non-response	Moderate level of problems leading to some negative consequences	2	6.7
	Problem gambling with negative consequences and possible loss of control	28	93.3
Male	Total	30	100.0
	Non-problem gambling	2	1.5
	Low level of problems with few or no identified negative consequences	10	7.5
	Moderate level of problems leading to some negative consequences	23	17.3
	Problem gambling with negative consequences and possible loss of control	98	73.7

Gender	CPGI Category	<i>F</i>	%
Female	Total	133	100.0
	Non-problem gambling	4	7.1
	Low level of problems with few or no identified negative consequences	13	23.2
	Moderate level of problems leading to some negative consequences	16	28.6
	Problem gambling with negative consequences and possible loss of control	23	41.1
	Total	56	100.0

Note. CPGI = The Canadian Problem Gambling Index (CPGI). Percentages were calculated based on the number of respondents within each gender category.

Table 2 showed the distribution of participants according to their The Canadian Problem Gambling Index (CPGI) levels by gender using frequency counts and percentages.

As regards the male students, the majority (98; 73.7%) scored high in their problem gambling index, showing that their gambling behaviour highly associated with negative consequences and possible loss of control. Although a smaller percentage reported moderate gambling problems (23; 17.3%), while only 10 participants (7.5%) reported low-level gambling problems index with few or no negative consequences. However, a very small percentage of the males (2; 1.5%) were categorized as non-problem gamblers.

Among the female students, the distribution revealed relatively lower levels of severe gambling behaviour when compared with their male counterparts. Also, 23 female participants (41.1%) were classified as problem gamblers, while 16 participants (28.6%) reported moderate gambling problems. Moreover, 13 participants (23.2%) reported low-level gambling problems, while 4 participants (7.1%) were classified as non-problem gamblers.

In all, the findings suggest the male counterparts seem to display higher levels of severe gambling behaviour compared to female students, while females revealed relatively higher representation in the low and moderate gambling classifications.

Research Question 3

What is the relationship between students' spirituality and problem gambling as measured by the Canadian Problem Gambling Index (CPGI)?

Corresponding Null Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant relationship between students' spirituality and problem gambling as measured by the Canadian Problem Gambling Index (CPGI).

Table 3

Pearson Product–Moment Correlation Showing the Relationship between Students' Spirituality and Canadian Problem Gambling Index (CPGI)

Variables	Statistics	Spirituality	Problem Gambling Severity Index
Spirituality	Pearson	1	–.052
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	—	.441
	N	219	219
Problem Gambling Severity Index	Pearson	–.052	1
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.441	—
	N	219	219

The result in Table 3 revealed the relationship between students' spirituality and their problem gambling severity index. The Pearson correlation analysis showed a very weak negative relationship between the two variables ($r = -.052$, $n = 219$, $p = .441$). This revealed that as the level of spirituality among student's increases, their level of problem gambling severity tends to decrease to some extent. Nevertheless, the relationship was not statistically significant because the p-value (.441) is greater than the significance level of .05.

Again, the finding revealed that the obtained p-value (.441) was greater than the .05 level of significance; therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected. Consequently, there was no statistically significant relationship between students' spirituality and problem gambling as measured by the Canadian Problem Gambling Index (CPGI) among the sampled students in public higher education institutions in Abeokuta metropolis. Although the direction of the relationship indicates that students with higher levels of spirituality may tend to report slightly lower levels of gambling severity, but the strength of the relationship is extremely weak and may have occurred by chance.

Therefore, the result indicates that spirituality only may not be a strong determinant of gambling behaviour among students in higher education institutions within Abeokuta metropolis. Besides, other variables such as peer pressure, financial difficulty, easy accessibility to betting platforms, and individual personality traits may play a more significant role in influencing gambling behaviour among students.

Discussion

One of the major findings of this study revealed that female students recorded higher levels of spirituality than their male counterparts, with the majority of female participants falling within the high spirituality category. In contrast, male students were more represented within the moderate spirituality category, although a substantial proportion also reported high spirituality. This pattern aligned with global studies which suggest that women generally report higher levels of religiosity and spirituality than men (Koenig, 2012; Pargament, 2013). Similarly, Miller and Hoffmann (1995) reported that women participate more frequently in religious programmes and spiritual activities,

while Beit-Hallahmi (2014) observed that women generally demonstrate stronger spiritual orientation across cultures. Within the Nigerian setting, the strong presence of Christian and Islamic institutions may partly explain the relatively high spirituality levels reported among students, particularly females who may be more actively involved in religious activities.

However, although the students reported relatively high spirituality levels, particularly females, this did not necessarily translate into reduced gambling involvement. Previous studies have shown that behavioural choices among young adults are often influenced by factors such as peer pressure, financial motives, and environmental opportunities. Consequently, counseling services, religious organizations, and student support units should collaborate in promoting ethical awareness and responsible decision-making among students.

Another important finding of the study revealed that male students showed higher gambling severity than female students, as 73.7% of the males fell within the problem gambling category compared to 41.1% of the females. Conversely, female students were more represented within the low and moderate gambling categories. This finding is consistent with studies by Håkansson and Widinghoff (2020) and Calado and Griffiths (2016), which reported that males are more likely to engage in gambling activities and develop gambling-related problems. Gender-related tendencies such as higher risk-taking, sensation-seeking, and competitive behaviours among males may partly explain this pattern. Hing et al. (2016) also noted that males are more frequently targeted by sports betting advertisements, thereby increasing their gambling involvement.

The finding further aligned with Nigerian studies which revealed higher gambling participation among male undergraduates (Eze et al., 2024; Ojo et al., 2023). Studies have equally identified peer influence, unemployment, financial pressures, aggressive betting advertisements, and easy accessibility of online betting platforms as major predictors of gambling behaviour among Nigerian youths (Adeoye et al., 2025; Okafor & Folayan, 2022). Nevertheless, the findings also suggest that female students are gradually becoming more involved in gambling activities, especially within the moderate and low gambling categories, supporting earlier submissions that the gender gap in gambling participation is gradually narrowing (Calado & Griffiths, 2016).

Furthermore, the study revealed a very weak negative relationship between spirituality and problem gambling severity ($r = -.052$, $p > .05$). Although students with higher spirituality levels appeared to report slightly lower gambling severity, the relationship was not statistically significant. This suggests that spirituality did not significantly influence gambling behaviour among the students investigated.

The finding is somewhat consistent with studies suggesting that spirituality may serve as a protective factor against risky behaviours, including gambling (Griffiths, 2012; Pargament, 2013). Koenig (2012) and Walker and Pitts (2006) also submitted that spirituality often promotes self-control, moral consciousness, and personal accountability, which may indirectly reduce vulnerability to addictive behaviours. However, the non-significant relationship observed in this study suggests that spirituality alone may not sufficiently predict gambling behaviour among young adults. Studies by Calado and Griffiths (2016) and Hing et al. (2016) revealed that gambling behaviour among university students is influenced by several psychosocial and environmental factors including peer pressure, financial difficulties, sensation seeking, and the easy accessibility of online betting platforms.

Within the Nigerian context, the rapid growth of betting platforms such as Bet9ja, SportyBet, and 1xBet, alongside aggressive gambling advertisements and mobile betting applications, may have weakened the behavioural influence of spirituality among students. Gambling may increasingly be perceived as entertainment or an avenue for quick financial gain rather than as a morally questionable behaviour. Therefore, although spirituality may contribute to moral development, it may not

independently determine gambling behaviour among students. This highlights the need for multidimensional interventions involving counseling services, financial literacy education, institutional policies, and value-based orientation programmes to address the growing prevalence of gambling among higher education institution students.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Counsellors should encourage students to periodically assess their gambling behaviour to enhance self-awareness and enable early identification of risky or disordered patterns.
2. Students exhibiting signs of disordered gambling behaviour should be encouraged to seek professional counselling support, including psychological interventions such as behavioural therapy and structured guidance programmes.
3. Higher education institutions should regularly organize sensitization programmes on gambling and other addictive behaviours, highlighting their psychological, academic, social, and financial consequences.
4. Campus religious leaders should strengthen value-based and spiritual guidance through teachings and mentorship, to reinforce students' resilience against addictive behaviours, including gambling.

Conclusion

The study revealed that spirituality was not a significant predictor of gambling behaviour among students, although female students reported higher spirituality levels while male students showed higher gambling severity. The findings highlight the need for preventive counseling, awareness programmes, and institutional interventions targeted at reducing problematic gambling behaviour among students.

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