

The Socioeconomic Impact of Sports Betting on Education and Food Security Among Youth in Aweil Town, Northern Bahr El Ghazal State (NBeGs), South Sudan

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Abstract

The study explored the intricate dynamics of the socioeconomic impact of sports betting on education and food security among youth in Aweil town, Northern Bahr El Ghazal State (NBeGs), South Sudan. The primary aim was to examine the socioeconomic impact of sports betting on education and food security among youth in Aweil Town. The objectives include examining the extent of youth involvement in sports betting and its underlying socioeconomic drivers, assessing the impact of sports betting on educational attainment and food security, exploring community perceptions and institutional responses to the effects of sports betting on youth welfare and examining the relationship between sports betting and key socioeconomic outcomes. This research held significant value, offering insights into the socioeconomic impact of sports betting on education and food security among the youth. The findings are anticipated to contribute to the understanding of the socioeconomic impact of sports betting on education and food security. A case study descriptive methods approach was employed, encompassing surveys to gather quantitative data and interviews for qualitative insights. The study revealed an alarmingly high level of youth engagement in sports betting, with 90.6% of respondents. It also illustrated that sports betting has a notable impact on educational attainment (61.9%). Most respondents (62.5%) equally believe that sports betting has a positive impact on their lives. The study equally revealed a positive relationship between sports betting and socioeconomic outcomes among youth in Aweil town. The study concluded that sports betting is predominantly practised by young, unemployed males, with a significant portion having secondary-level education. Most respondents engaged in daily betting, mostly motivated by the desire for financial gains and as a coping mechanism against unemployment. While some respondents believe that betting offers positive outcomes mainly through the occasional financial wins, quantitative evidence suggests detrimental effects on educational attainment, food security, livelihoods, and overall financial well-being.

Keywords: Socioeconomic impact, Sports Betting, Education, Food Security, Youth, Aweil town, NBeG State, South Sudan.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the rapid expansion of the sports betting industry has raised critical concerns about its socioeconomic implications, especially in low-income and fragile contexts. Globally, sports betting has transitioned from a recreational activity to a widespread economic and social phenomenon, particularly among youth (Brevers et al., 2022; Lopez-Gonzalez et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2011). According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2022), the global sports betting market is valued in the billions of dollars, with a significant portion driven by young populations in developing regions (Helgren, 2023, 2024). While it offers opportunities for entertainment and informal income generation, it has also been linked to several adverse outcomes, including gambling addiction, financial distress, educational disruption, and food insecurity (Koomson et al., 2022; Mihret & Eskezia, 2024).

In Sub-Saharan Africa, the popularity of sports betting has surged due to the increasing penetration of mobile technology, unemployment, and the aggressive marketing strategies of betting companies (Bitanihirwe et al., 2022; Simon, 2024). The youth, who constitute the majority demographic in the region, are especially drawn to betting platforms in search of quick financial returns. However, this trend has raised concerns over its broader social and economic impact. Research by Adieme & Subramanian (2020; Gathuru, 2021; Simon, 2024) in South Africa and Kenya indicates a direct correlation between frequent sports betting and school dropout, increased debt, and a shift in household spending from essential needs, such as food, to gambling.

In post-conflict settings like South Sudan, the issue is more pronounced due to limited employment opportunities, poverty, weak regulatory structures, and underdeveloped educational and mental health support systems (Atem, 2022; De, 2024; Haider, 2021; Van Deetjen, 2020). Aweil Town, located in Northern Bahr el Ghazal State, is one such area where sports betting has become increasingly prevalent among youth. Anecdotal evidence suggests a shift in behavioural and socioeconomic patterns, including reduced academic engagement, increased absenteeism, and compromised household welfare. Yet, empirical research exploring the impact of this trend on education and food security remains scarce.

This study, therefore, seeks to fill this gap by investigating the socioeconomic impact of sports betting on education and food security among youth in Aweil Town. The research aims to provide evidence-based insights into how sports betting is influencing youth behaviour, educational attainment, and household food consumption, as well as the perceptions and responses of key stakeholders. The findings are expected to inform policy, guide community interventions, and contribute to the discourse on responsible betting and youth welfare in fragile and resource-constrained environments.

1.1. OBJECTIVES.

The main objective of the research was to examine the socioeconomic impact of sports betting on education and food security among youth in Aweil Town, Northern Bahr el Ghazal State, South Sudan.

1.2. Specific Research Objectives

The study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine the extent of youth involvement in sports betting and its underlying socioeconomic drivers in Aweil Town, Northern Bahr el Ghazal State.
2. To assess the impact of sports betting on educational attainment and food security among youth in the study area.
3. To explore community perceptions and institutional responses to the effects of sports betting on youth welfare.
4. To examine the relationship between sports betting and key socioeconomic outcomes.

1.3. Significance of the study.

This study is significant as it seeks to generate an in-depth understanding of the socioeconomic impact of sports betting on youth, specifically focusing on education and food security in Aweil Town, Northern Bahr el Ghazal State, South Sudan. As youth constitute a large proportion of the population and the future workforce, understanding how sports betting affects their educational attainment and access to food is critical for sustainable development and social stability.

The findings will provide valuable insights for policymakers, government institutions, civil society organisations, educators, and community leaders by identifying the underlying drivers of sports betting among youth and its broader socioeconomic consequences. This knowledge can inform the development of targeted policies and interventions to mitigate the negative impacts of betting, especially those that compromise education outcomes and food security at the household level.

Moreover, the study will benefit development partners, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and advocacy groups working to improve youth welfare by providing evidence-based recommendations on how to address the rise in betting-related vulnerabilities. It will also contribute to the academic discourse on behavioural economics, youth livelihoods, and social protection mechanisms in post-conflict societies such as South Sudan.

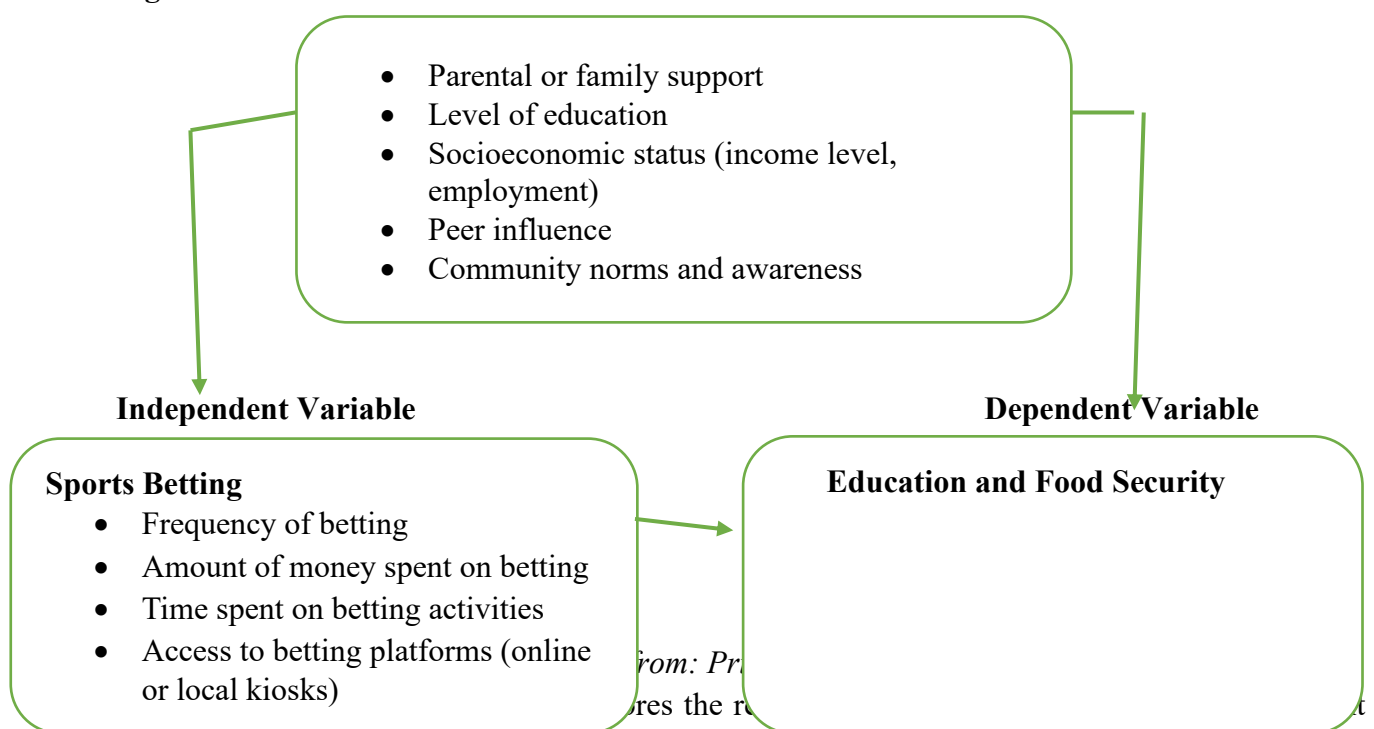
Ultimately, the study aims to guide the formulation of strategic responses that promote responsible behaviour, strengthen regulatory frameworks, and enhance socioeconomic resilience among young people in Aweil Town and similar contexts across the region.

1.4. Conceptual Framework

The study was guided by the following conceptual framework, which shows the independent variables and the dependent variables.

1.4.1 Conceptual framework

Mediating Variable



variable) and its socioeconomic effects on youth, particularly focusing on education and food security (dependent variables), with socio-demographic and community factors serving as mediating variables.

The framework posits that the increasing participation of youth in sports betting affects their school attendance, academic performance, and household food availability due to diversion of financial resources, time, and psychological focus. Mediating variables such as unemployment, peer influence, parental supervision, and access to betting platforms can either exacerbate or buffer these effects. For instance, in communities with high unemployment and weak social support systems, youth are more likely to engage in betting as a coping mechanism, leading to compromised investment in education and nutrition. Understanding these dynamics is essential for designing informed policy interventions and community-based strategies to mitigate the negative outcomes of sports betting on youth welfare in Aweil Town.

1.5. Scope of the Study

The scope of the study comprises three dimensions: content scope, geographical scope, and time scope.

1.5.1 Content Scope

This study focused on assessing the socioeconomic impact of sports betting on education and food security among youth in Aweil Town. Specifically, it examines how involvement in sports betting affects school attendance, academic performance, and the availability of food within households of betting youth. The study also investigates the motivations driving youth participation in sports betting, the socioeconomic conditions that facilitate it, and the potential consequences on long-term educational outcomes and household welfare. Furthermore, it explores community perceptions and coping mechanisms, aiming to provide evidence-based recommendations for policy and youth support programs.

1.5.2. Geographical Scope

The study was geographically confined to Aweil Town, the capital of Northern Bahr el Ghazal State (NBeGs), South Sudan. This area was selected due to the growing popularity of sports betting among youth and the visible socioeconomic challenges affecting education and food security within the region.

1.5.3. Time Scope

The research covers the period from **April to June 2025**, during which data were collected and analysed to reflect current trends in youth engagement in sports betting and its effects on education and food security. The selected timeframe was intended to capture up-to-date information and provide a relevant understanding of the ongoing situation in Aweil Town.

2.0. LITERATURE REVIEW.

2.1 Theoretical review

This study was anchored in two major theoretical frameworks: the Rational Choice Theory and the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, which together help explain the decision-making processes and socioeconomic consequences of sports betting among youth (SULEIMAN & ADUKE, 2025; Tribe, 2020). The Rational Choice Theory (RCT) posits that individuals make decisions based on a calculated assessment of perceived benefits versus costs (Burns & Roszkowska, 2016; Chan et al., 2024; Herfeld, 2020). Applied to this context, youth in Aweil Town may engage in sports betting as a rational economic strategy to cope with poverty, unemployment, or lack of educational opportunities. RCT helps to explain why betting is increasingly perceived as a viable means of quick financial gain, despite its associated risks. Complementing this is the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework (SLF), developed by the UK Department for International Development (DFID, 2001), which considers the resources (human, social, financial, physical, and natural capital) that individuals utilise to pursue livelihood strategies. The SLF framework is particularly useful in analysing how sports betting may deplete financial capital, erode educational

investment (human capital), and reduce access to food (physical capital), thus undermining long-term youth development and household resilience (Kaplanidou & Potwarka, 2024; Melkamu, 2020; SULEIMAN & ADUKE, 2025). Together, these theories provide a lens to critically evaluate how the pursuit of short-term financial rewards through sports betting potentially compromises youth educational advancement and food security in economically vulnerable contexts like Aweil Town.

2.2 The extent of youth involvement in sports betting and its underlying socioeconomic drivers

Youth involvement in sports betting has grown significantly in many parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, and Aweil Town in Northern Bahr el Ghazal State is no exception (Christelle, 2018; Gizachew, 2023). This trend is largely driven by socioeconomic challenges such as high unemployment, poverty, and limited access to quality education and recreational opportunities (Bayat et al., 2014; Habiyaemye et al., 2022; Lubowiecki-Vikuk et al., 2021). Many young people, especially those who are school dropouts or underemployed, view sports betting as a quick and accessible means of earning income (Karuma, 2023; Niwagaba, 2017; SULEIMAN & ADUKE, 2025). The proliferation of mobile money platforms and betting outlets has made gambling more accessible, while the lack of economic alternatives reinforces its appeal as a coping mechanism (Bank, 2023; Simon, 2024; Toklo, 2024; YONAH, 2024).

Studies have shown that youth are particularly vulnerable to gambling due to their developmental stage, where risk-taking behaviors are more common and future-oriented thinking is still maturing. According to (Deressa, 2022; Fletcher et al., 2024; Mcobothi, 2025), the promise of instant financial gain, peer influence, and aggressive marketing by betting companies all contribute to high levels of youth participation in betting. In regions like Aweil Town, where employment prospects are scarce and educational resources are underfunded, sports betting often becomes a perceived opportunity for social mobility, albeit with significant risks.

The socioeconomic environment plays a critical role in shaping this behavior. Youth from low-income households are more likely to engage in betting due to financial desperation and the absence of structured livelihood support systems. Moreover, many youths lack proper financial literacy, which makes them susceptible to the illusion of "easy money" promoted by betting advertisements. Research by (Felsher et al., 2004; Kisska-Schulze & Holden, 2020) indicates that youth who spend significant time on betting often divert funds that could have supported education or food needs, thereby exacerbating household food insecurity and reducing educational attainment.

Additionally, peer pressure and social influence are strong motivating factors (AMFO, 2023; Lamont & Hing, 2020; MUKABI, 2022; Wassie, 2025). In tightly-knit communities like Aweil Town, the success stories of a few youths who claim to have won substantial amounts from betting can create a ripple effect, encouraging others to engage despite repeated losses (Madara & Chang'orok, 2024; Mugalo, 2018). This herd behavior is further reinforced by cultural narratives that equate wealth with social status, pushing youth to participate in betting as a means of gaining respect or recognition within their social circles.

Underlying all these drivers is the absence of adequate regulatory and preventive mechanisms. The limited enforcement of age restrictions and lack of community-based awareness campaigns allow underage and vulnerable youth to access betting platforms freely. As noted by (Kerr et al., 2021; Shaffer et al., 2019; Torrance, 2023; van Schalkwyk et al., 2022), weak institutional oversight, combined with poor public sensitization, fuels the normalization of betting among young people, transforming what may have started as recreational play into habitual or even compulsive gambling.

In summary, youth involvement in sports betting in Aweil Town is shaped by a complex interplay of socioeconomic factors—unemployment, poverty, limited educational opportunities, peer influence, and

weak regulation. Understanding these underlying drivers is crucial in designing targeted interventions that address the root causes and offer sustainable alternatives to gambling, thereby safeguarding the educational futures and food security of the region's youth.

2.3 The impact of sports betting on educational attainment and food security among youth

The rise of sports betting among youth in Aweil Town, Northern Bahr el Ghazal State, has profound implications for both educational attainment and household food security. As gambling becomes increasingly accessible and normalized in communities grappling with socioeconomic challenges, many young people are diverting their time, attention, and limited financial resources toward betting, which undermines their ability to pursue education and maintain basic nutritional needs (TARIMO, 2024; Wassie, 2025).

One of the most direct impacts of sports betting on education is school absenteeism and eventual dropout. Youth who are heavily involved in gambling often skip classes to engage in betting activities or recover from gambling losses (Adu & Sarpong, 2024; Machoka, 2020; Rocque et al., 2017; TARIMO, 2024). This habitual absenteeism leads to poor academic performance and declining interest in schoolwork. According to (Wang & Fredricks, 2014; Washor & Mojkowski, 2013), youth who prioritize betting over school commitments are more likely to disengage from the learning process, resulting in lower academic achievement and increased dropout rates. The financial allure of betting often eclipses the long-term value of education, especially in economically marginalized areas where immediate monetary gain appears more attractive than the distant benefits of formal schooling (Kisska-Schulze & Holden, 2020; Raento & Schwartz, 2016).

In many cases, the money meant for school fees, learning materials, or transportation is redirected to betting activities (Adu & Sarpong, 2024; Kisska-Schulze & Holden, 2020; Niwagaba, 2017; Yawe & Ssengooba, 2014). Parents and guardians who struggle to support their children's education may give financial allowances intended for school use, only for youth to spend it on gambling. This behavior is further exacerbated by peer pressure and the belief that betting is a viable source of income (Agius, 2024; Deans et al., 2017; Lamont & Hing, 2020). As a result, the financial burden of sustaining education becomes even heavier for families, particularly when betting leads to debt or further economic loss. Consequently, families may be forced to withdraw children from school to reduce costs or reallocate resources to meet more pressing household needs.

Beyond the classroom, sports betting also affects food security among youth and their households (Gordon et al., 2015; Maziku & Kisongo, 2022; Simiyu, 2022). Many young people, particularly those unemployed or out of school, use the little money available to them—often from petty trade, family support, or informal labor—on betting rather than securing basic necessities like food (Christelle, 2018; Hamilton-Wright et al., 2016; Mwesigwa, 2018). This pattern of spending diminishes household food reserves and exacerbates food insecurity, especially in already vulnerable communities. A study by Anyuon (2021) in South Sudan found that households where youth were involved in habitual betting experienced more frequent food shortages and inconsistent meal patterns (Clement, 2023; Sommers, 2015). These households also reported increased stress and conflict over finances, further deteriorating the social fabric needed to support food stability.

Moreover, the psychological effects of continuous gambling losses can lead to stress, frustration, and, in some cases, depression, especially when youth are unable to meet their basic needs or fulfill family expectations (Fong, 2005; Mathews & Volberg, 2013; Rogier et al., 2019). Such emotional distress can reduce their capacity to focus on studies, participate in productive labor, or seek healthier coping

mechanisms, thereby perpetuating the cycle of poverty and insecurity (Ridley et al., 2020; Smith & Mazure, 2021; Wadsworth, 2012). The pressure to recover lost money often drives youth deeper into gambling addiction, compromising both mental well-being and rational decision-making.

Another key factor is the lack of awareness among youth regarding the long-term consequences of gambling on their personal development and future opportunities. Without effective educational campaigns, many young people perceive sports betting as harmless entertainment or a quick escape from poverty. In reality, it erodes their academic potential and threatens their nutritional well-being. As betting becomes a daily habit, some youth develop dependencies that further alienate them from constructive social and economic engagements, including vocational training, apprenticeships, and entrepreneurial ventures (Christelle, 2018; Mugalo, 2018).

Furthermore, the absence of strong regulatory enforcement and community-level interventions in Aweil Town allows underage betting to flourish. The minimal oversight of betting companies, along with widespread unemployment and limited recreational alternatives, creates an enabling environment for youth to spend countless hours and scarce financial resources on gambling (Niwagaba, 2017; Osodo, 2022; Wheaton, 2021). This not only affects their education and access to food but also undermines national efforts toward youth empowerment and sustainable development.

Sports betting among youth in Aweil Town presents a significant barrier to educational attainment and food security. It redirects essential financial resources, disrupts academic engagement, reduces household stability, and impairs youth productivity. Addressing this growing problem requires a multi-sectoral approach involving education stakeholders, policymakers, community leaders, and families to promote awareness, implement strict regulations, and provide alternative opportunities for youth engagement and livelihood development.

2.4 Community perceptions and institutional responses to the effects of sports betting on youth welfare

In Aweil Town, Northern Bahr el Ghazal State, community perceptions surrounding sports betting and its impact on youth welfare reveal a growing concern over its socio-economic consequences. Sports betting is often seen as a double-edged sword: while some community members view it as a form of entertainment or a temporary financial relief strategy, many others perceive it as a serious threat to the moral fabric, education, and food security of young people (SULEIMAN & ADUKE, 2025; Woods & Butler, 2020; Yeola et al., 2025). According to community elders and local leaders, youth involvement in betting has resulted in increased cases of school dropout, neglect of familial responsibilities, and declining agricultural participation (Khin, 2017; Niwagaba, 2017). These outcomes have triggered anxiety among parents and guardians, who express fear that the normalization of betting will derail the younger generation's chances for a stable future.

The cultural attitudes toward gambling, particularly among elders and religious leaders, also influence these perceptions. In the predominantly conservative communities of Northern Bahr el Ghazal, betting is often considered a morally and spiritually detrimental activity. Faith-based organizations and traditional authorities have consistently condemned sports betting as a vice that not only diverts youth from productive paths but also encourages idleness, dishonesty, and dependency. These negative perceptions are often amplified by visible evidence of youth spending long hours at betting centers or misusing money that could otherwise support education or household food needs.

Despite the public concern, institutional responses to mitigate the effects of sports betting on youth welfare have been relatively limited and inconsistent (Livingstone et al., 2019; Tak et al., 2018). While a few civil

society organizations and NGOs in the region have initiated campaigns to raise awareness about the dangers of excessive gambling, there remains a lack of comprehensive, government-led interventions to regulate the industry or support at-risk youth (Blythe, 2024; Jawad, 2017; Kingma, 2008). Schools and educational authorities, for instance, rarely include gambling awareness in their curricula, and there is little evidence of coordinated efforts to rehabilitate students who have dropped out due to betting-related issues. According to community feedback, the absence of structured policies targeting the regulation of sports betting in Aweil Town has allowed the practice to proliferate with minimal oversight (López Jiménez et al., 2025; Miller & Cabot, 2017).

Another institutional challenge lies in the inadequate collaboration between stakeholders such as schools, local government, religious institutions, and community-based organizations (Waddell, 2017; Walker & McCarthy, 2010). While each of these entities recognizes the impact of sports betting on youth welfare, their efforts to address the issue are often fragmented and lack a shared strategy. This disjointed response reduces the effectiveness of community-level interventions and contributes to the persistence of betting-related problems among the youth population. For example, while some churches may provide moral guidance and counselling, and certain NGOs may conduct sensitisation workshops, the lack of integration into broader youth development policies limits the overall impact of these actions (Trivelli & Morel, 2021).

Additionally, institutional responses are hindered by a lack of resources and technical capacity. Local authorities often struggle with inadequate funding, personnel, and training necessary to implement behavior change programs or enforce existing laws related to underage betting and gambling regulation (Blythe, 2024; Carran, 2018; Livingstone et al., 2019; Rolando et al., 2020). In rural and economically disadvantaged areas such as Aweil Town, these constraints are even more pronounced, making it difficult to develop sustainable programs aimed at curbing youth involvement in sports betting. Moreover, many betting businesses operate informally or semi-legally, complicating enforcement efforts and enabling easy access for underage individuals (Livingstone et al., 2019; Osodo, 2022; Rabinovitz & Packin, 2025).

Lastly, cultural stigma and denial surrounding the issue further impede institutional intervention. Many families are reluctant to acknowledge that their children engage in betting due to shame or fear of reputational damage (Carran, 2018; Choi, 2018; Osodo, 2022; Rabinovitz & Packin, 2025). As a result, parents may not seek support or report problems, thereby preventing institutions from responding proactively. This reluctance also extends to local policymakers who may downplay the issue to avoid political controversy or social backlash. Overcoming this barrier requires community sensitization, open dialogue, and the framing of sports betting as a public health and development issue rather than merely a moral failing (Blythe, 2024; David et al., 2019; Livingstone et al., 2019; van Schalkwyk et al., 2021).

While the community in Aweil Town is increasingly aware of the adverse effects of sports betting on youth welfare, especially in relation to education and food security, the institutional response remains underdeveloped. A multi-sectoral and coordinated approach, including awareness campaigns, regulation, youth empowerment programs, and parental engagement, is urgently needed to address the growing threat posed by sports betting to the future of the region's young population.

2.5 The relationship between sports betting and key socioeconomic outcomes

Sports betting has emerged as a rapidly growing economic activity globally, particularly among youth in low- and middle-income countries (Manu et al., 2024; Wardle et al., 2024). While it provides opportunities for entertainment and informal income, its socioeconomic consequences have raised growing concern. Literature exploring this phenomenon reveals a complex relationship between sports betting and key

socioeconomic outcomes such as education, employment, food security, and overall well-being (Khoo, 2024; Min, 2024; Wassie, 2025).

Education is one of the most affected areas. Sports betting among young people often leads to poor academic performance, reduced school attendance, and increased dropout rates (Espadafor & Martínez, 2021; Kitole et al., 2025). Youth who become overly invested in betting frequently prioritise gambling activities over academic responsibilities, resulting in lower educational attainment. In some cases, limited financial resources meant for tuition or school materials are redirected towards gambling, weakening long-term human capital development.

Employment and productivity are also influenced by betting behaviour. As noted by Okoye and Udeh (2020), many unemployed youths in sub-Saharan Africa are drawn to betting as a perceived shortcut to wealth. However, rather than improving their financial stability, excessive betting often leads to increased economic vulnerability, indebtedness, and reduced motivation to pursue stable employment. In this context, sports betting may reinforce cycles of poverty, especially among those who experience repeated losses.

Food security is another critical area impacted by sports betting. Research by Mugo and Wamue-Ngare (2022) in Kenya indicates that the financial strain caused by excessive gambling habits can result in food deprivation. Households where youth are addicted to betting may experience irregular access to food due to misallocation of household income, thereby exacerbating food insecurity among already vulnerable populations.

In broader terms, the relationship between sports betting and well-being has been characterised by increased levels of stress, anxiety, and social conflict. Studies (e.g., Williams et al., 2017) highlight that persistent gambling losses can deteriorate mental health and strain familial and community relationships. Youth engaged in betting may develop addictive behaviours that lead to isolation, loss of purpose, and a decline in quality of life.

However, not all literature portrays betting in a wholly negative light. Some scholars (e.g., Nwachukwu & Ekwem, 2019) argue that when done responsibly, sports betting can serve as a source of informal income, social bonding, and digital engagement among urban youth. Nonetheless, the positive outcomes tend to be limited and overshadowed by the broader social and economic risks, especially in contexts of high poverty and weak regulatory enforcement.

The existing literature underscores a strong and generally adverse relationship between sports betting and socioeconomic outcomes. While some youths may perceive it as a source of livelihood, the broader evidence points to its negative implications for education, food security, and long-term economic well-being, making it a critical area for policy intervention and further academic inquiry in regions such as Aweil Town, Northern Bahr el Ghazal State.

2.6 Research gaps

Despite the growing interest in understanding the socioeconomic implications of sports betting in sub-Saharan Africa, several critical research gaps remain, particularly within the context of youth welfare in Aweil Town, Northern Bahr el Ghazal State, South Sudan (Gizachew, 2023). One of the most notable gaps is the limited exploration of the long-term socioeconomic consequences of sports betting on youth education and food security. While some studies have focused on the behavioural aspects of gambling or its prevalence, few have rigorously investigated how sustained involvement in sports betting affects educational attainment and access to basic needs such as food over time (Espadafor & Martínez, 2021;

Lopez-Gonzalez & Griffiths, 2018; Owonikoko, 2020). This lack of longitudinal data makes it difficult to assess the enduring impact of betting practices on the developmental trajectory of young people.

Another significant gap lies in the limited contextual research focused on low-income, post-conflict settings like Aweil Town (Bwirire et al., 2022). Much of the existing literature on gambling and its social effects is derived from relatively stable or urbanised environments in East or Southern Africa. These studies may not adequately reflect the unique social, economic, and institutional dynamics of Northern Bahr el Ghazal, where poverty, unemployment, weak educational infrastructure, and limited regulatory frameworks present a distinctive environment for youth gambling. As a result, there is a pressing need for localised studies that examine how community-level factors shape betting behaviour and its outcomes in such fragile contexts.

Additionally, research is scarce on the lived experiences and perceptions of youth engaged in sports betting, particularly with regard to how betting influences their decision-making, school participation, and household food contributions (Wardle, 2019; Wassie, 2025). Existing studies often treat youth as a homogenous group, overlooking differences in age, gender, educational status, or family background. Capturing the subjective experiences of young bettors could reveal nuanced motivations and coping mechanisms that are critical for designing effective interventions.

Furthermore, institutional responses to youth betting remain underexplored. There is limited empirical evidence assessing how local governments, schools, religious institutions, and civil society organisations are addressing the growing influence of sports betting (Bunn et al., 2020; Okoti & Munyua, 2020). Research is especially lacking on the effectiveness of regulatory measures, community sensitisation campaigns, and support programs aimed at reducing youth vulnerability to betting-related risks. Without such information, it is difficult to evaluate the adequacy or impact of current policy responses in safeguarding youth welfare.

Finally, there is an absence of interdisciplinary studies that link sports betting with both education and food security outcomes in an integrated framework. Most existing literature treats these issues in isolation, thereby missing the interconnectedness of economic behaviour, school engagement, and household nutrition. Filling this gap would require cross-sectoral analysis and a systems-based approach to better understand how youth betting influences broader development indicators.

While awareness of sports betting among youth in sub-Saharan Africa is increasing, there is an urgent need for context-specific, longitudinal, and interdisciplinary research that examines its full socioeconomic impact, particularly in underrepresented regions like Aweil Town, NBeGs. Addressing these gaps will be essential for informing effective policy and community-level interventions aimed at mitigating the adverse effects of betting on youth welfare.

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a survey research design, which was appropriate for collecting and analysing quantitative data to assess the socioeconomic impact of sports betting on education and food security among youth in Aweil Town, Northern Bahr el Ghazal State (NBeGs), South Sudan. This design enabled the systematic collection of data through structured questionnaires that were administered to a representative sample of youth participants. The survey method facilitated the gathering of data on key variables such as educational attainment, food security status, and the level of engagement in sports betting. This approach ensured that the findings are statistically valid, reliable, and generalizable, thereby

providing meaningful insights into how sports betting was likely to affect the welfare and socioeconomic conditions of young people in the study area.

3.2 Data Collection Methods

The study employed the survey method as the primary approach for collecting quantitative data, using structured questionnaires to obtain insights from a diverse group of respondents. This method was appropriate for gathering detailed and standardised information on the socioeconomic impact of sports betting on education and food security among youth in Aweil Town. The survey targeted youth involved in or affected by sports betting, key informants such as the State Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture, Youth & Sports and Betting Companies. This diverse respondent pool provided a comprehensive understanding of how sports betting influences educational outcomes and household food security within the local context.

Structured questionnaires were carefully designed with open-ended questions to ensure the collection of objective responses. These questions focused on key issues such as the frequency and extent of sports betting among youth, its impact on school attendance and academic performance, the diversion of financial resources from essential needs such as food, and perceptions regarding community responses to the growing betting culture. This format standardised the responses, allowing for easier quantification, comparison, and statistical analysis across different respondent groups.

The survey also allowed the researchers to assess the perceived relationship between sports betting and its effects on educational commitment and food sufficiency. Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with various statements regarding behavioural changes, financial habits, school dropout risks, and household nutrition challenges resulting from sports betting activities. This structured survey approach enabled the collection of reliable and representative data, which was instrumental in drawing meaningful conclusions about the socioeconomic consequences of sports betting on youth in Aweil Town.

3.3 Data Analysis

Data analysis for this study was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), a robust software tool for handling and analysing quantitative data. The process began with data preparation and entry, where responses collected through structured questionnaires will be systematically coded and inputted into SPSS. This stage included data cleaning procedures to identify and rectify any missing values, outliers, or inconsistencies, thereby ensuring the reliability and integrity of the dataset.

Descriptive statistics were employed to summarise the demographic characteristics of the respondents, such as age, gender, education level, income source, and betting frequency. Frequencies, percentages, and means were used to provide a general overview of youth engagement in sports betting, its prevalence, and initial observable patterns relating to its impact on educational progress and food security in Aweil Town. To examine the relationships between sports betting and key socioeconomic outcomes—namely, education and food security—inferential statistical techniques were applied. Specifically, correlation analysis was used to determine the strength and direction of relationships between the extent of sports betting and indicators such as school attendance, academic performance, and frequency of food insecurity. Regression analysis was employed to evaluate the predictive influence of sports betting on educational attainment and household food availability among the youth population.

SPSS was also utilised to assess the reliability and validity of the research instrument. Cronbach's Alpha was calculated to measure the internal consistency of the scales used in the questionnaire, confirming whether the instrument reliably captures perceptions and experiences regarding sports betting, education,

and food security. Where necessary, factor analysis may be carried out to validate that the items align with the core constructs under investigation.

The results of the analysis were presented in the form of tables, charts, and graphs, enabling clear interpretation and visual understanding of the data. This structured analytical approach supported the study in drawing meaningful conclusions about how sports betting is shaping the socioeconomic realities of youth in Aweil Town, particularly in relation to their educational opportunities and access to adequate food.

4.0. Results, Observations and Analysis:

Chapter Four of the study provides a detailed analysis, presentation, and interpretation of the findings of the study on the socioeconomic impact of sports betting on education and food security among youth in Aweil Town, Northern Bahr el Ghazal State, South Sudan. The researchers conducted a thorough examination of the data collected, employing various analytical tools. The analysis was carried out using Microsoft Excel 2016 for quantitative data, IBM SPSS version 24 for statistical analysis, and MAXQDA for thematic analysis of qualitative data. The findings are presented in the form of charts and tables to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the data. This chapter focuses on elucidating the insights derived from the data, aligning them with the study's objectives, and interpreting their implications in the context of Aweil town, NBeG.

4.1 Data Presentations, Analysis and Interpretations of Findings

The results are organised thematically to align with the study objectives and include quantitative data drawn from a sample of 200 respondents. Key areas of focus include demographic profiles, betting habits, motivations for gambling, and the perceived impacts of betting on education, dietary habits, livelihoods, and financial well-being. The section also captures community perceptions, reported negative and positive outcomes, and proposed mitigation strategies. These findings provide critical empirical insights that form the basis for the subsequent discussion and interpretation in the next chapter.

The study was based on empirical evidence from the field in which youth (bettors) and key informants (government officials) play their greater role in day-to-day activities by providing the researchers with data and information concerning the study without prejudice.

4.2 Rate of Return

In examining the response rate for the study, a total of 186 questionnaires were distributed, with 160 being successfully returned. This return rate is critical in evaluating the extent of participation and the representativeness of the sample.

Table 4.1: Rate of return for the distributed questionnaires

Description	Quantity	Percentage (%)
Questionnaires Distributed	186	100%
Questionnaires Returned	160	86.0%
Questionnaires Not Returned/Spoiled	26	14.0%

The rate of return is calculated as $\left(\frac{160}{186}\right) \times 100\%$ is approximately 86.0%. This high rate of return is indicative of a substantial level of engagement from the participants and lends credibility to the analysis conducted. Such a response rate enhanced the reliability and validity of the findings, providing a solid foundation for the interpretation of the data in relation to the socioeconomic impact of sports betting on education and food security among youth in Aweil town, Northern Bahr el Ghazal State, South Sudan.

The low percentage of spoiled/unreturned questionnaires (14%) further reinforced the robustness of the study's data collection process

4.3. Summary of the findings on objectives.

This section interprets the key findings of the study on the socioeconomic impacts of sports betting among youth in Aweil Town, Northern Bahr el Ghazal State (NBEGS), South Sudan. Drawing from both quantitative data and relevant literature, the discussion explores four thematic areas corresponding to the study's objectives: youth participation in sports betting and its drivers; the effects on educational attainment and food security; community perceptions and institutional responses; and the relationship between betting and broader socioeconomic outcomes.

4.3.1. Youth Involvement in Sports Betting and Its Socioeconomic Drivers.

The findings from this study objective revealed an alarmingly high level of youth engagement in sports betting in Aweil Town, with 76.9% of respondents reporting daily betting practices. This frequency is symptomatic of a broader socioeconomic malaise, driven largely by economic deprivation and unemployment, with nearly half (38.1%) of the respondents being unemployed. A substantial portion of the respondents (63.1%) cited financial gains as the primary reason for betting, illustrating how economic instability propels youth into gambling behaviours in search of quick financial relief. Similar patterns have been observed in Kenya and Uganda, where economic hardship and joblessness were found to be major motivators for youth engagement in betting (Ochieng & Mugo, 2021; Abdu et al., 2022). These insights align with the social disorganisation theory, which posits that socioeconomic instability leads to deviant behaviour, such as gambling (Moro et al., 2023).

However, other studies provide a more nuanced perspective, suggesting that beyond economic motives, psychological and social factors play an equally important role. For instance, peer influence, entertainment, and escapism are cited as significant drivers of betting in Nigeria and Ethiopia (Ndegwa & Kamau, 2023; Yilma et al., 2021). In the present study, 15.1% of the respondents mentioned peer influence, and another 1.3% indicated leisure and enjoyment as key motivators. This underlines that while financial insecurity is a predominant factor, the decision to engage in betting is often multifaceted, involving social dynamics and personal gratification.

The demographic composition of the respondents provides additional context for understanding betting behaviours. The predominance of males (90.6%) and the concentration in the 25–34 age group (31.3%) suggest a gendered and age-specific engagement with gambling. This age group is often marked by economic responsibilities and transitional life phases, making them more susceptible to risky economic behaviours (Mutua et al., 2024; Dube et al., 2020). Yet, critics argue that this perspective might ignore the agency of individuals who choose betting as a form of recreation or investment, rather than out of desperation (Mohammed & Adeola, 2023; Kioko & Nyangweso, 2021).

Furthermore, the long duration of betting engagement—where nearly 60% of participants had been involved for over six years—points to a systemic normalisation of betting within the community. This normalisation may be fueled by the increasing accessibility of betting platforms like "Winwin," used by 39.4% of respondents. While proponents argue that digital platforms democratise economic opportunities (Ogwang & Kiyangi, 2022), others warn of the addictive potential and socio-economic erosion caused by such pervasive technologies (Edewor & Okonkwo, 2023; Omitola et al., 2021). Thus, youth involvement in sports betting in Aweil is not just an economic issue but a complex interplay of structural, technological, and psychosocial elements.

4.3.2. Impact on Educational Attainment and Food Security

The study's findings illustrate that sports betting has a notable adverse impact on educational attainment among youth in Aweil Town. A combined 61.3% of respondents admitted to having reduced class attendance, and a complete dropout from school (3.8%), demonstrating the gravity of gambling-related educational disruption. These statistics resonate with findings in Zambia and Tanzania, where youth reported prioritising gambling over academic responsibilities (Mwansa & Kavishe, 2021; Kalisa & Nkundabanyanga, 2024). These disruptions are especially concerning in a region where secondary education is already the highest attained by 49% of respondents, suggesting a ceiling in academic progression exacerbated by gambling.

Contrarily, some scholars argue that the correlation between gambling and poor academic performance is not necessarily causal but influenced by pre-existing socio-economic conditions, such as poverty and lack of school infrastructure (Tumwine et al., 2020; Ayenew & Belay, 2023). This view implies that while betting may aggravate educational challenges, it is not the root cause. Indeed, 38.1% of respondents who reported no academic impact from betting could support this argument. Therefore, educational setbacks among bettors may be symptomatic of deeper systemic inequalities, rather than purely a consequence of betting.

In terms of food security, more than half of the respondents (64.4%) reported reduced food purchases due to sport betting, while 35.6% experienced no noticeable impact. These figures echoed findings from similar low-income communities in Sierra Leone and Liberia, where gambling households reported lower food consumption and higher malnutrition risks (Johnson et al., 2022; Mendy & Conteh, 2023). The redirection of household income from food to gambling reflects a direct trade-off between basic needs and speculative gains, highlighting a dangerous economic misprioritization.

Nonetheless, not all research supports this negative link. For example, some studies have found that occasional gamblers reported improved food access through sporadic winnings, temporarily alleviating household financial stress (Ogututu & Were, 2021; Bako & Lawal, 2023). In this study, 3.1% of respondents reported improved financial situations, potentially supporting this claim. Thus, while the overarching trend leans toward negative impacts on food security, a small segment of the population might experience short-term benefits that mask long-term vulnerabilities. This duality underscores the unstable and unpredictable nature of betting as a financial strategy.

4.3.3. Community Perceptions and Institutional Responses

Community perceptions toward sports betting in Aweil Town are ambivalent, reflecting a complex reality where perceived benefits coexist with significant social costs. Despite the well-documented negative consequences—ranging from financial loss (41%) to addiction (30%) and family conflicts (23.1%)—majority of respondents (62.5%) still believe betting has a positive impact on their lives. This paradox is reflective of findings from studies in Ghana and South Africa, where community members view betting both as an economic opportunity and a social ill (Mensah & Ndlovu, 2022; Phiri & Baloyi, 2021). In Aweil, the allure of quick financial gains appears to outweigh the perceived risks for many individuals. Yet not all perspectives are as accommodating. Critics argue that community normalization of betting desensitizes individuals to its harms, creating an environment of passive acceptance rather than proactive intervention (Adamu & Gimba, 2023; Njeri & Mutiso, 2021). This could explain why institutional responses remain limited. The findings shows that majority of respondents (43.8%) do not agree with immediate government intervention to regulate the betting. This could be attributed to the fact that bettors would fear for taxes payment as that may be levied on them by the government. The second majority

respondents (35.0%) showed a preference for government action through regulation through permits and licenses (33.1%) job creation (14.4%), and awareness campaigns (6.9%). These recommendations align with policy frameworks suggested in studies from Malawi and Mozambique, which advocate for multi-sectoral responses involving education, employment, and regulation (Chihana & Banda, 2022; Siteo & Langa, 2023).

However, the efficacy of these proposed interventions is contested. While some believe that legal restrictions and economic empowerment can curb betting (Kassahun & Gebremedhin, 2024; Muriuki & Thuo, 2021), others argue that such measures may inadvertently drive betting underground, especially in contexts where enforcement is weak and alternative livelihoods are scarce (Adebayo & Chukwuma, 2020; Wanjohi & Makori, 2023). This dichotomy suggests that institutional responses must be nuanced, community-informed, and adaptive to local contexts.

Interestingly, betting companies themselves are seen as potential stakeholders in mitigation, with suggestions including timely payment of winnings (32.5%), payment of bonuses (10.6%), and client monitoring (14.4%). While this points to a corporate social responsibility (CSR) angle, critics caution that CSR initiatives by gambling firms may be performative rather than transformative (Amadi & Okoro, 2023; Teklemariam & Ayana, 2024). Thus, both community and institutional responses to sports betting in Aweil are characterised by a tension between perceived benefits and actual harm, necessitating a balanced, evidence-based approach.

4.3.4. Relationship Between Sports Betting and Key Socioeconomic Outcomes

The study reveals a complex and often contradictory relationship between sports betting and socioeconomic outcomes among youth in Aweil. While 46.3% of respondents reported a worsened financial situation due to betting, 3.1% cited improvement, and 50.6% observed no change. These findings mirror those of research in Nigeria and Rwanda, where outcomes of betting ranged from financial ruin to temporary economic relief (Osaghae & Ighodaro, 2022; Habimana & Ndoli, 2021). The unpredictability of these outcomes highlights the inherent risks associated with gambling and its limited reliability as a financial strategy.

Yet, proponents of betting argue that it offers economic opportunities in contexts where formal employment is scarce. For example, some studies indicate that winnings from betting have enabled individuals to start small businesses or support family obligations (Mburu & Okello, 2020; Chimwaza & Kalua, 2024). In this study, 13.1% of respondents mentioned business, and another 58.8% cited family needs as motivations for betting, hinting at a perceived utility of gambling revenues. However, critics note that such benefits are often anecdotal and non-replicable, as the majority of bettors incur net losses over time (Mekonnen & Tilahun, 2021; Mugisha & Ndeti, 2022).

The effects on livelihoods are similarly mixed. 25.6% of respondents identified changes in market conditions as an impact of betting, while others reported negative effects on salaried work (26.8%) and agriculture (15.0%). These shifts may reflect opportunity costs, where time and resources devoted to betting detract from productive economic activities (Nyang'oro & Limo, 2023; Kaberia & Chomba, 2022). Conversely, studies from urban Ethiopia and coastal Kenya found that some youths use betting to complement rather than replace existing livelihoods (Abate & Kassaye, 2023; Mwangi & Adan, 2020), complicating the binary narrative of loss versus gain.

Moreover, the broader social impacts of sports betting, such as addiction, family conflict, and even divorce, suggest that its socioeconomic costs extend beyond individual finances to household and community well-being. With addiction reported by 30.0% and family conflicts by 23.1% of respondents, the ripple effects

of gambling are profound. These findings are consistent with studies in Sierra Leone and Sudan that link gambling to increased domestic tensions and mental health issues (Kamara & Bah, 2024; Elrayah & Osman, 2023). Still, some argue that with proper regulation and public education, betting can be a form of responsible entertainment (Kiplagat & Wekesa, 2022; Bayeh & Alemu, 2021).

The relationship between sports betting and socioeconomic outcomes in Aweil Town is marked by both risk and reward. While some individuals report financial or emotional benefits, the broader pattern reveals instability, loss, and negative externalities. A multifaceted intervention strategy, grounded in education, economic development, and regulation, is essential to mitigate harm and promote healthier alternatives for socioeconomic advancement.

5.0 Conclusion, Recommendation and suggested areas for further studies

5.1 Conclusions

The study on the socioeconomic impact of sports betting on education and food security among youth in Aweil Town, Northern Bahr el Ghazal State, South Sudan, revealed a complex interplay of factors driving gambling behaviours and their associated consequences. The findings showed that betting is predominantly practised by young, unemployed males, with a significant portion having secondary-level education. The majority of respondents engaged in daily betting, mostly motivated by the desire for financial gain or as a coping mechanism against unemployment. While some respondents believed that betting offers positive outcomes mainly through the occasional financial wins, quantitative evidence suggests detrimental effects on educational attainment, food security, livelihoods, and overall financial well-being.

Notably, a small percentage of respondents reported dropping out of school due to betting, and a large number experienced reduced food purchases, suggesting an adverse reallocation of household resources. Financial loss and addiction emerged as the dominant negative impacts, affirming the high-risk nature of gambling in vulnerable populations. Sports betting has become deeply entrenched in the socioeconomic fabric of Aweil Town's youth, driven by economic hardships and the hope of quick financial rewards. While some perceive short-term gains, the broader evidence points to significant negative repercussions on education, nutrition, and livelihoods. Multi-sectoral efforts, spanning regulation, education, technology, and employment, are needed to reverse the adverse impacts and promote more sustainable avenues for youth development.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on these findings, the study makes several recommendations for policymakers, community leaders, and stakeholders. Firstly, the government should establish and enforce regulatory frameworks that restrict access to betting among underage individuals and control the proliferation of betting centres. This includes limiting operational hours and enforcing permit systems. There is also a clear need for job creation programs and livelihood support initiatives that address the root causes driving youth into betting, particularly unemployment. Awareness campaigns should be launched to sensitise the public on the risks of gambling, with particular attention to its impact on education, health, and financial stability. Furthermore, schools and community institutions should incorporate education on responsible financial behaviour and the consequences of betting to equip young people with better decision-making skills.

Technology developers and betting companies have a critical role to play in mitigating the harms of betting. Platforms should integrate responsible gaming features, such as betting limits, self-exclusion tools, and warning notifications for excessive use. Regulatory agencies must monitor betting companies

to ensure fairness and transparency in their operations. Additionally, corporate social responsibility initiatives could be directed toward supporting education, youth empowerment, and mental health services for affected bettors.

5.3 Suggestions for further studies

The study recommends that future research build upon these findings through longitudinal studies that track the long-term impacts of betting on youth and household stability. Qualitative investigations should explore the psychological dimensions of gambling, including addiction patterns, emotional triggers, and the role of peer networks. Further, comparative studies between urban and rural settings in South Sudan could help contextualise regional differences in betting behaviour and inform more localised interventions. Exploring the effectiveness of mitigation strategies, such as government regulation and awareness campaigns, would also offer valuable insights into best practices for addressing gambling-related harms.

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