

## **A Phenomenological Inquiry into the Psychosocial Effects of Gambling and the Coping Strategies Adopted By Gamblers at Mucheke Africabet in Masvingo Town, Zimbabwe**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The aim of the study was to explore the psychosocial experiences of gamblers at AfricaBet, Mucheke Suburb in Masvingo town. The study scrutinized the perceived psychosocial effects of gambling and the gamblers' coping strategies. A qualitative research approach was used, utilizing the phenomenological research design. The sample for the study comprised thirteen gamblers at AfricaBet, Mucheke Suburb and two key informants who were purposively sampled. Data were collected using in-depth interviews with the aid of semi-structured interview guides. The data were then analyzed using interpretive phenomenological analysis. It emerged that gambling breeds a myriad of psychosocial effects, including addiction, suicidal ideation, emotional hot-bloodedness, and black shading of familial and social relations. However, established psychosocial coping strategies employed by gamblers, such as rumination and alcohol and substance use, appeared maladaptive owing to the non-visibility of professional clinical services. As such, the study recommended that clinical social workers should provide professional services to the gamblers. Furthermore, flighting of "gamble responsibly" advertisements on television, radio and social media should be ensured to manage gambling behavior and also lessen the effects of gambling. The study also recommended that further studies be carried out to ascertain the magnitude and impact of gambling.

**Key Terms:** Gambling, rumination, emotional hot-bloodlessness, sexual dysfunctionality, suicidal ideation, maladaptive

### **INTRODUCTION**

Latvala et al. (2019) describe gambling as placing a bet with an unknown outcome in an effort to gain financial gain. Every gambling activity involves a certain amount of luck, including ones that are often thought of as being more skills-based, such as

poker and sports betting. For most individuals, gambling starts as a form of entertainment and afterwards becomes an addiction (Latvala et al., 2019). Some gamblers' motivations are affected by social connections since gambling establishments provide social environments where people

can meet. Other gamblers, however, are primarily motivated by the desire to become wealthy. According to Oksanen (2021), the gambling habit can range from being merely harmless or amusing to being at-risk and even pathological. The latter habit can have detrimental psychological, social, and financial repercussions for the individual, family, and society. Usually, this habit starts as a thriller. However, because of its addictive nature, it has become prevalent as a disorder in many countries (Oksanen, 2021).

According to Ssewanyana and Bitanihirwe (2018), the gambling sector is thought to contribute to the economy through taxation and creation of jobs. Unfortunately, Sub-Saharan Africa has seen an increase in the prevalence of gambling addiction (Ssewanyana & Bitanihirwe, 2018). In Zimbabwe, the gambling business is sanctioned by the Lotteries and Gaming Act [Chapter10:26] of 2000, and has significantly expanded as a result of the number of individuals who wager on sports, lotteries, casinos, scratch cards, and bingo (McHale et al., 2015). The growth of gambling is attributable to the socioeconomic effects of the post-2000 Zimbabwe crises that turned gambling into a source of income (Chiweshe, 2020). Punters bet on soccer games, roulette, as well as live horse and dog races. However, no clinical exploration has been done in Zimbabwe, to specifically establish the magnitude of the malady, its impact severity and the possible psychosocial coping strategies that gamblers employed.

The most successful, yet difficult treatments of gambling disorder and its associated problems combine psychotherapy,

financial education, and self-help initiatives. Ssewanyana and Bitanihirwe (2018) however, found that widespread stigma associated with gambling might discourage people from getting therapy. As such, gamblers remain a vulnerable group experiencing a myriad of psychosocial challenges.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Psychosocial Effects of Gambling**

Gambling addiction is a chronic and recurrent maladaptive gambling activity characterized by obsession with gambling, the drive to gamble more and more, the inability to quit or reduce one's playing, "chasing" losses, lying about gambling, and other negative social and financial repercussions (Comer, 2016). A study done in Malawi by Ndala (2021) shows that people are unaware that gambling addiction is a real thing, just like addiction to alcohol or drugs. Even those who are heavily involved and have a difficult time due to their gambling believe that their financial difficulties or strings of poor luck are to blame. They simply do not think of themselves as having a possible addiction to this behavior. Most people equate addiction only with a chemical, not an activity. According to Henrietta and Sanju (2012), cited in Ndala (2021), gambling addiction can have a negative impact on a person and can lead to psychological issues, including depression, anxiety spectrum disorders, and substance abuse. This is in addition to physical issues such as stress-related symptoms or conditions. Gamblers are also very reluctant

to seek help due to guilt, shame, or a fear of being judged.

Mehari and Koye (2019) contend that gambling is among the several social problems that have been discovered in Ethiopia and have impacted on people's personal, social, and psychological well-being. According to Mehari and Koye (2019), gamblers are in such a terrible psychological state that they cannot escape. Gamblers also report suffering various harmful effects as a result of the lack of help-line services. Gambling is associated with noticeable impacts such as an increase in psychological symptoms, including insomnia, irrational outbursts, sadness, anxiety, and a lack of interest in daily activities, which eventually lead to gambling addiction (Clark, 2016). Comer (2016) asserts that individuals with gambling disorders are preoccupied with gambling and are frequently unable to disengage from a betting establishment once they get addicted.

Ronzitti et al. (2019) found that even after adjusting for depression, anxiety, and substance abuse, gambling severity ratings increased the likelihood of present suicidal thoughts among treatment seekers. Similarly, Wardle et al. (2020) contend that financial stress, interpersonal strife, and other variables explicitly related to gambling were the leading causes of suicide among gamblers in the United Kingdom. Nevertheless, a number of studies on gambling and suicidal behavior have concentrated on non-fatal suicide attempts or suicidal ideation, and have consistently documented elevated rates of suicidal ideation or suicide attempts among people with gambling disease

compared to the general population (Kaggwa et al., 2022).

It has been determined that gambling puts people's emotional relationships with their families and friends in danger. Mallard (2020) asserts that gambling causes many family problems since it affects young children and produces emotional problems. Problems such as child abuse, intimate partner violence, assault, as well as alcohol and drug misuse are significant issues that are often associated with gamblers. According to Langham et al., cited in Hunt and Blaszczyński (2019), emotional discomfort is caused by emotions of hopelessness that are brought on by uncontrollable activity, a lack of security as a result of financial and interpersonal disruptions, and shame or stigma connected with gambling.

Moreover, Mehari and Koye (2019) argue that gambling can sever family ties. They also assert that participants in their study admitted that gambling activities were to blame for the breakdown of their family ties (Mehari & Koye, 2019). Gamblers' marriages were found to be always rife with arguments, disagreements, dishonesty, infidelity, and deceit. Participants also mentioned how their slow household management skills caused their children to suffer. Kaggwa et al. (2022) argue that there is a proven link among the problem of gambling and divorce, child abuse, crime, addiction to different psychoactive substances, and family dysfunction. Accordingly, family members of gamblers have reported excessive conflict and aggression, sexual resentment, rage, loss of

private funds or home goods, lies and deception, as well as separation or divorce.

The literature reviewed shows that gambling contributes to social challenges such as crime. According to Dowling et al. (2019), stressors associated with gambling such as monetary setbacks, mistrust and poor communication can cause chronic stress, family strife, and the use of violence by the gambler or by family members against the gambler. Due to stress, rage, and financial hardships in the home, gambling losses and other issues can also cause people with gambling addictions to act violently towards their family members. According to these justifications, there are higher chances of family violence when a family member who gambles excessively is present (Dowling et al., 2019). According to the Oregon Health Authority (2021), pathological gambling is more likely to result in criminal activity. Gambling, according to Barthe and Stitt (2007), increases the likelihood of illicit activities such as the sale of counterfeit goods, loan sharking, theft, and fraud. In the last phases of a gambling addiction, a gambler might turn to criminal activities, including theft, fraud, and misappropriation of funds.

Rumination was mentioned as one of the unhelpful coping mechanisms. Gamblers were shown to mostly use ruminative coping strategies. Rumination, which focuses on the symptoms and the possible origins and implications of those symptoms, has been defined by Nolen-Hoeksema (2004) as a maladaptive coping mechanism, characterized by problem-solving in the absence of activities intended to change the

situation or relieve distress. It is expected that over time, depression symptoms may worsen in gamblers who concentrate on their downbeat feelings in order to obtain insight. In essence, it has been suggested that one of the mechanisms that turns normal pain, particularly sadness, into melancholy, is ruminating (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2004). Rumination's detrimental impact on problem resolution is thought to contribute, at least in part, to the maintenance or escalation of depression symptoms (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2004).

## **OBJECTIVES**

1. To examine the psychosocial effects of gambling at Mucheke AfricaBet in Masvingo town.
2. To identify the psychosocial coping strategies employed by gamblers in Masvingo town.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### **Approach and Design**

In order to investigate and comprehend the participants' individualized interpretations and perspectives of the phenomenon of gambling, the study adopted a qualitative research approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Ideally, the research paradigm predominantly pivoted on establishing and familiarizing with the thoughts, perspectives and feelings of participants (Belotto, 2018). It enabled the researcher to explore the psychosocial effects of gambling and the coping strategies adopted by participants. The research adopted a phenomenological design, which is defined by Giorgi (2009) as an approach to

inquiry that combines psychology and philosophy and entails the researcher outlining participants' accounts of a phenomenon from their own lived experiences. The flexible nature of phenomenology allowed the researcher to reflect on how the participants interpreted and explained gambling.

### **Population and Sample**

The study targeted gamblers at Mucheke AfricaBet, who were 18 years and above, as well as key informants, namely, a clinical social worker from the Midlands State University Game Changers Therapy clinic and a family therapist from a local Private Voluntary Organization. The research used convenience sampling, which, according to Neuman (2014), is also called accidental, availability, or haphazard sampling, where readily available participants were conveniently selected. A phenomenological design calls for an in-depth and extensive study of a small group to gain an understanding of lived experiences. Hence, the study was framed on a sample size of 15 participants where 13 gamblers were selected at Mucheke Suburb's AfricaBet shop and 2 key informants were purposively sampled. An inclusion criterion for gamblers was that they had to be 18 years and above, as stipulated by the gaming and lottery law. Participants were willing to give information voluntarily. Key informants had to be active mental health practitioners and be flexible to participate in the research, at no cost to the researcher.

### **Data Collection**

In-depth interviews were conducted to gather qualitative information from participants. Interviews frequently appear to be the preferred approach for qualitative researchers and it was crucial to use them in this study that aimed to gain a thorough knowledge of subjective interpretations, attitudes, and beliefs (Smith, 2009). Furthermore, the researcher conducted key informant interviews with experts who were better placed to give professional opinions on the phenomenon under study. Key informant interview guides were also used as tools for data collection from key informants.

### **Data Analysis**

The researcher analyzed data through interpretative phenomenological analysis. This type of analysis was chosen since it encourages users to reflect on their own experiences (Streubert & Carpenter, 1999). The established qualitative methodology of interpretative phenomenological analysis was created to explore participants' actual experiences in an effort to comprehend their lived experiences. It is focused on the unique experiences that people have and the meanings that people infer from those experiences. Interpretive phenomenological analysis is integrated because it investigates experience implications via the interpretive work between the researcher and the participant, rather than being a theory-driven investigation (Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). In the current study, the researcher captured meanings of respondents and learnt their mental and social world, and looked for



themes and the connections between the themes.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Psychosocial Effects of Gambling**

The first objective focused on establishing the participants' insights concerning psychosocial effects of gambling. Even though gamblers admitted that they frequently gambled at AfricaBet in Mucheke Suburb, they acknowledged that the practice bore with it some negative effects to their psychosocial wellbeing. The research noted some sub-themes as presented below.

#### **Addiction**

Participants emphasized that they were having trouble quitting gambling despite concerted efforts. The majority of gamblers revealed that they gambled on a daily basis, even in the face of huge losses. They even felt uncomfortable when a day passed without them placing a bet.

During the first days I thought it was spiritual until a friend told me that it's simply an addiction. I am gainfully employed and sometimes I blame myself when I lose my money but I can't just quit like that (Participant 1).

My brother sent me to the rural areas with some money for people who were constructing his house. I then decided to play roulette at an Africa bet shop in town enroute to the bus terminus. I lost all the money including the bus fare. This thing has destroyed my life but I

cannot quit. I think its Satanism. (Participant 12).

Gambling is addictive and a disorder because it causes one to be dysfunctional, distressed, dangerous, deviant, a qualifying criterion for maladaptive behaviours as stipulated in the DSM 5. Even if gamblers try to quit, they are bogged by withdrawal effects ... they escape withdrawal efforts by keeping the gambling behaviour (Key informant 2).

The lamentations by Participants 1 and 12 above confirm Comer's (2016) assertion that individuals with gambling disorders are preoccupied with gambling and are frequently unable to disengage from a betting establishment once they get addicted. Similarly, the findings corroborate the American Psychiatrist Association's (2013) description of persons with a gambling disorder, which states that when individuals consistently lose money, they frequently increase their gambling in an effort to win it back, and that they sometimes keep gambling in spite of financial, social, economic, educational, and health issues. The aforementioned association also highlights that when gamblers attempt to reduce or stop gambling, they may experience restlessness or irritability, get absorbed with gambling thoughts or plans, or repeatedly go back to gambling to try to make up for the money lost. That idea was also revealed by the gamblers in the current study. It also emerged that gambling was interfering with every aspect of their lives but they could not help themselves out of it. The researcher learnt that such debilitating effects were anchored

on the addictive nature of gambling. The findings further confirmed that gambling addiction was a chronic and recurrent maladaptive activity characterized by obsession with gambling, the drive to gamble more and more, the inability to quit or reduce one's playing, "chasing" losses, lying about gambling, and the negative social and financial repercussions (Comer, 2016).

### **Suicidal Ideation**

Participants highlighted that there was a correlation between gambling and suicide. A majority of them revealed that at one point since their gambling debuts, they had harboured thoughts of suicide though none of them ever made an attempt at it. From the chronicles, the researcher noted that loss of money was key among other cited factors that predisposed gamblers to suicidal thoughts. Participants echoed that due to the gnashing effects of the economic downturn in Zimbabwe, they were sometimes compelled to use some of the money they had been entrusted with and when they lose, ending own life appears a better option.

I lost USD 600-00 to virtual horse race and the money was not even mine. I then decided to throw myself under a moving car at Glow Petroleum service station and to this day, I still don't know what stopped me (Participant 3).

I borrowed money from a bank and a friend referred me to an illegal foreign currency dealer nearby. Right after the transactions I decided to try my luck with a dollar and all the money was wiped off

through virtual dog race... everything looked gloomy and I wanted to die (Participant 8).

I stayed late to bet live champions league games and found later that burglars had broken into my room. They took everything including the money I had saved to pay lobola yet I had made arrangements with the would-be in-laws. For a while I thought of killing myself... (Participant 11).

The narratives above show how the preoccupation with gambling has increased the gamblers' vulnerability as they are faced with a number of antagonising situations that are way beyond their coping aptitudes. The findings concur with Kaggwa et al. (2022), who assert that financial debt, family and social problems, as well as psychological discomforts such as depressive symptoms that typically co-occur with the illness, are factors that contribute to suicide ideation and attempts in gamblers. The key informants' contributions relating to the connectedness of gambling and suicide indicate the extent to which gambling is a social malady. This could explain why it is done in secrecy and is considered some kind of social misfit, as also revealed by some gamblers at Mucheke AfricaBet shop. For gamblers, suicide appealed as the 'best' way to cope with the stress and depression that comes with gambling. The finding is consistent with one by Wardle (2020), who found that suicide among gamblers in the United Kingdom was caused by the experience of financial stress, marital strife, and other causes, especially tied to gaming. As such, gamblers should be

seen as a high-risk group for experiencing suicidality as a result, and local and national suicide prevention initiatives should take this into account. People who work with problem gamblers should inquire about their suicidal behaviours and create proper safety precautions.

### **Emotional Hot-Bloodedness and Numbing**

The study revealed that gamblers are afflicted with emotional instabilities due to a number of factors. The gamblers narrated that if they lose their money after high expectations, they become very angry and sad. As a result, they become so emotionally overloaded that others vent their anger through smoking, drinking beer or even shouting for no apparent reasons.

I always throw tantrums to whoever, appearing provocative even if they have not done me anything wrong (Participant 7).

Some even become social terrorists when they have a bad day in a bet house and that can even cascade to intimate partner violence, and emotional blackmailing, simply in their pursuit of purging and catharsis (Key Informant 1).

For gamblers, anger displacement in the face of a loss is very normal. Participants stated that the anger was always short-lived, especially after they have activated displacement as a defence mechanism. Mallard (2020) highlights that emotions of this nature were prevalent when gamblers were dealing with complex issues that would

have emerged as a result of gambling. Emotional instabilities exposed gamblers to problems such as child abuse, domestic violence, assault, as well as alcohol and substance abuse. The sentiments from mental health practitioners highlight the emotional jeopardy gamblers find themselves in as a result of gambling. The researcher also noted that participants spent most of their time in the betting house and that caused emotional cut offs from their significant others. Gamblers spent less time with their families compared to the time they invested in the bet shops. That compromised the eminence of time they spared for child nurturance. The researcher also found that the behaviour was becoming a threat to the existence of peaceful families. Similarly, Mallard (2020) argues that for married gamblers, such behavioural patterns were responsible for frustrating members of the gamblers' family or even caused intimate partner violence and monetary embezzlement. Some participants reaffirmed how they always felt hopeless as a result of poorly-managed behaviour, a lack of safety due to financial and relational commotions, shame or stigma connected with gambling, and swift fluctuations from happiness when gamblers won, to misery when they lost.

Due to continued losses, some gamblers admitted that they were way past the stage where mere losses could stop them from keeping up their gambling behaviour. Although this behaviour could be attributed to the addictiveness of gambling, the researcher learnt that the majority of gamblers had become so emotionally numb that they were only partially sensitive to the problems that they encountered. The



researcher also found that despite the excruciating nature of the experience of losing their hard-earned money through gambling, there was no more overt avoidance. This finding seems to be contrary to Barlow (2021), who argues that in the midst of emotional overload, humans directly avoid a situation, a task, a person, or a place because of the anticipated emotion it may trigger.

### **Black Shading of Familial and Social Relationships**

Participants testified that gambling strained their relationships in different ways. For them, spending more time in the betting house means less time spent with their loved ones. As shown in the responses below, time spent in the betting house had become a threat to marital and family relations:

My wife left me for her maternal relatives because she would always complain that I was always not available for her and our child. I knock off at 1700Hrs everyday but I hardly go home right after that because of gambling (Participant 3).

My brother, gambling has destroyed my life. All my friends are well up but no one wants to assist me because I betrayed the trust we had and used to share. I would fake problems to get money from them and when they realised that I was lying all along, they all stopped picking my calls (Participant 11).

I was entrusted with USD 70-00 to pay for water bills and lost all

the money through gambling. The landlord got so angry and evicted me from his apartment. I became so deceitful that even my wife could no longer believe a single word I uttered. Eventually, we parted ways and I always regret that (Participant 7).

Some participants indicated that most of the times they got home way after children had slept. Such behavioural tendencies have been noted to strain the family and diminish its normal role of primary socialisation and stabilisation of adult personalities. Others even confessed that they had broken some very critical social relationships due to their gambling propensities. The findings are confirmed by Oregon Health Authority (2021), which claims that gambling may lead family members to experience mental stress, housing troubles, financial challenges, strained relationships and social networks, health concerns, intimate partner or family violence, and failed social networks. As evidenced by the excerpts above, unfaithfulness and deceit are key characteristics of gamblers as they deceive in order to cover up for lost time and lost money. However, that has not been enough to sever their important relationships.

### **Intimate Partner Violence and Sexual Dysfunctionality**

Due to the emotional overload and continued stress, gamblers got embroiled in intimate partner violence and sexual dysfunctionality. Some gamblers had the habit of inflicting violence on people who were very closely related to them. Others reported loss of sexual appetite. Participants

narrated that violence and sexual dysfunctionality emanated from their inability to handle their losses. They, however, noted that they did not condone that kind of behaviour.

My girlfriend asked me why I was not always available for her and I beat her up because I was still trying to process my emotions after having lost some money that was meant for paying rent... Sex is a second-class story ...you cannot think of having sex when you have lost your money. Here, winning is sporadic and that means we are always stressed (Participant 4).

Gambling is an emotional game and when the gambler incurs losses, he or she becomes susceptible to violence (Key Informant 1).

Due to the pressures that come with gambling, individuals may develop no interest in sex. Males who persistently lack or have reduced interest in sex and engage in little sexual activity are said to have male hypoactive sexual desire disorder. Women who lack the typical desire in sex and infrequently initiate sexual activity may develop female sexual interest/arousal problem. But when they have sex, their physical reactions might be normal, and they might like it (Key Informant 2).

Families with gambling-disordered persons also experience higher levels of resentment and conflict, lower levels of effective and clear communication, lack of commitment

and support, lack of independence, lack of participation in intellectual and cultural pursuits, as well as lack of direct emotional expression (Dowling et al., 2014). The lamentations provide a distinct deviation from Devereux, cited in Chiweshe (2020), who argues against viewing gambling as deviance and social pathology, but rather as a positive societal function for being a safety valve for tensions and frustrations felt by individuals.

The study established that sexual starvation was another negative effect of gambling that strained intimate relationships. Participants revealed that gambling was stressful and they could hardly think of having sex as most of the times they would be preoccupied, hatching plans to recoup lost money. Preoccupation with gambling thoughts is also explained by Comer (2016), who states that gamblers think less of anything else than of gambling. From the narratives above, the researcher noted the extent to which gambling had jeopardised intimate relations by relegating sex, which usually plays a connecting role. To that end, participants, however, admitted the side effects of sexual starvation on their partners. Overall, participants' intimate and sexual lives were found to be characterised by disagreement, lying, deceit, and dishonesty (Mehari & Koye, 2019).

### **Crime**

Participants asserted that they had become exposed to criminal activities. Some even admitted having either harboured plans to commit a crime or actually having committed one. They revealed that the need

to conceal incidences of misappropriated funds or the need to recover lost money and/or property were key reasons they committed other crimes. The most noted crimes were fraud, extortion and violence.

I sold a single car radio set to two different people because I needed the money urgently (Participant 3).

My brother advised me to stop gambling when actually I wanted to recover my money ... For days, he kept referring to the issue and I felt like he was nagging me and a fight erupted (Participant 9).

Sometimes, I only think of using illegal means to recoup the lost money ... I have not yet done anything illegal, but I have heard the story of a man who broke television sets at Moors bet shop in Hatcliffe after losing so much (Participant 7).

Mehari and Koye (2019), who posit that gamblers will utilise whatever method at their disposal, including financial crime, gaming fraud, support the above excerpts and other forms of cheating in order to satiate their desire to gamble. Oregon Health Authority (2021), which notes that disordered gambling is more likely to lead to crime, confirmed the findings. It is possible that there is a link between gambling losses and crime, since these factors put pressure on people to commit income-generating crimes. However, there is a possibility that gambling and crime co-occur as a set of behaviours with shared risk factors that feed off one another. Other participants admitted that they had never committed a crime but they also

admitted that whenever they lost money, they always considered committing a financial crime. Yet other participants in the current study confessed to having stolen money or other valuables from friends and family members. The findings confirm Mehari and Koye's (2019) study, which posits that due to emotional turmoil, gamblers usually become violent when they are confronted with a challenging situation. They can even beat up a child even if the child has not done anything wrong. Key informants highlighted that gamblers were a very vulnerable group that needed clinical assistance as evidenced by their violent behaviour both in public and in private. Irritability because of loss, emotional cut off and poor social support system were identified as other causes of violence among gamblers.

### **Over-borrowing**

Whenever all available and possible money-generating means are exhausted, gamblers resort to borrowing. The study established that over-borrowing was one of the reported causes of broken social and familial relations. Participants revealed that sometimes they borrowed money hoping to pay back after a win, which was not always the case. The uncontrollable urge to keep gambling forced them to borrow more and more, even without any solid plan to pay back the credit.

I borrowed USD 45-00 from a friend and struggled to pay back the money. I realised that our friendship was on the brink of ending and I borrowed again from my landlord to settle my debt. (Participant 11)

I always feel restless if I spend a day without gambling for not having the money... As such, I borrow even if I don't know how to pay back the money (Participant 6).

The narratives above show the level of financial entrapment gamblers find themselves in as they ply their trade. Similarly, Oregon Health Authority (2021) states that pathological gambling is more likely to result in criminal activity. Gambling losses and loss of control may lead to the pressure to commit non-violent financial crime such as theft, selling drugs, forgery, and embezzlement. Barthe and Stitt (2007) argue that gambling offers increased opportunities for illegal activities to occur, for example, loan-sharking, theft, and fraud. The current researcher noted the connectedness between financial misappropriation and over borrowing, in the sense that when gamblers steal or misuse money from family members, they find it difficult to explain that they later lost the money to gambling. In such cases, they resort to borrowing in order to conceal their carelessness. The same revelations were also noted in Ethiopia (Mehari & Kore, 2019). However, since winning, is sporadic borrowing becomes a pattern. The majority of gamblers revealed that they were wallowing in debt. To that end, some confessed that they had to avoid the people who lent them money. The researcher found this strange and stressful.

### **Depression**

Participants stressed that they were always depressed because of the number of

issues brought about by gambling. It emerged that parting ways with their hard-earned money or that money they would have borrowed was stressful and depressing. The researcher noted that reported cases of suicidal ideation were a result of depression. It emerged that watching other peers winning raised the participants' hope of also winning a jackpot. However, when the gamblers lost their money continuously, they were shattered, and this could result in depression. Some of the participants made the following remarks:

This thing (gambling) has brought misery in my life and I wish the responsible authority could ban it. Sometimes I hardly sleep when I think of the losses that I have incurred (Participant 4).

Gambling may result in a truncated, sad state in which life appears murky and its challenges devastating. As a result, gamblers are more likely to acquire depressive illnesses such as unipolar, which cause them to feel intense, continuing psychological suffering that could get worse over time. People with these conditions may lose the motivation to do even the most modest of life's tasks, and some may even lose the desire to live (Key Informant 3).

Sadness, lassitude, and cognitive decline, as well as a standstill social life, are some depressive symptoms for gamblers. Some may feel dejected, miserable and blank. In some circumstances, they parade anhedonia or failure to

experience any pleasure at all, anxiety, rage, or nervousness (Key Informant 2).

The above statements are testimonies of the lived experiences of gamblers at Mucheke Africa Bet shop. Due to depression, the participants/gamblers exhibit a plethora of clinical problems such as emotional overloading, domestic violence, suicide, and criminal behaviour among other psychosocial effects of gambling. A person's intention to engage in (or refrain from engaging in) a particular behaviour is seen in the theory of reasoned action as an immediate determinant of the action (Lindberg, 2017). According to Ajzen and Fishbein, cited by Quinton (2017), "Intention is a function of two primary variables, one representing societal influence and the other being personal in origin." In the current study, personal factors have emerged as self-contradictory as they push participants to gamble, but fail to influence actions to stop gambling despite the impact severity of depression.

### **Absenteeism and Loss of Efficiency**

The participants revealed that gambling was spilling over to their workplaces and informal economic activities. They indicated that despite the terrible effects of gambling, they had social pressures to recover the lost money. That purpose alone made them spend more time in the bet house. Both the formally- and informally-employed participant-gamblers noted that due to the overwhelming nature of stress, they sometimes did not report for work. This is reflected in the following:

I am an auto-electrician, but I lost my job because my former employer could not cope with my habitual absenteeism...My wife has even warned me ... (Participant 7).

I sell fruits and my trade requires me to be available all the time. But ever since I started gambling, I have lost a significant number of clients because of my continued unavailability. I used to realise a lot from selling fruits ...As you can see, I am struggling (Participant 9).

An uncontrollable urge to gamble, inability to stop, and chasing losses make those with gambling disorders, and who are so engrossed in their bet games unable to leave a betting establishment. Subsequently, they become habitual absentees (Key Informant 2).

Some participants reported that they sometimes did not report for work in order to gamble. They said that they believed that the more they gambled the better chances they stood of winning. Asked if they condoned such behaviour, the majority of participants indicated that they disliked the propensity, but found themselves still gambling because of addiction. The researcher learnt that some participants do not report to work because they would have misused the money for transport. Langham et al., cited in Hunt and Blaszczyński (2019) support the finding, adding that absenteeism is a result of not being able to pay for transport or pay for work and study tools when the money has been misused. Evidence gathered from



participants revealed that due to the addictiveness of gambling, punters often gamble even during working hours. The stated loss of productivity was a result of a compulsive gambling obsession.

### **Psychosocial Coping Strategies**

The second objective of the study was to identify psychosocial coping strategies employed by gamblers. The study revealed a number of psychosocial effects of gambling and the researcher noted that some effects were also maladaptive ways to manage the maladaptive behaviour. The majority of participants narrated that theft, rumination, repression and anger displacement, alcoholism and substance use were ways used to manage their problems.

### **Repression and Displacement**

The research uncovered that participants made use of defensive mechanisms, repression and displacement to manage the stress and strains that emanated from their gambling behaviour. Participants revealed that whenever they incurred losses, they would employ avoidant stress coping skills through repressing lurking anxiety.

I avoid thinking of loses and I will be fine like that ... (Participant 3).

I shouted at everyone in a commuter omnibus after having lost some money that was not even mine...I did not regret...Instead, I felt better right after that (Participant 8).

Bottling up unsolved issues manifests in aggression, which half of

the times, is misdirected (Key Informant 2).

The excerpts above reflect the correlation between repression and anger displacement. Participants highlighted how they were prone to violence as a result of shelving a lot of unprocessed emotions. To that end, the researcher learnt that misplaced violence and anger outbursts provided a therapeutic effect to gamblers. The findings speak to the transactional theory of stress and coping where emotion focused coping could be linked to distress, producing negative defence strategies such as repression-based avoidance and flight (Cooper & Quick, 2017). As evidenced in the lamentations above, anger outbursts and displacement played a purgative and cathartic role for gamblers. When asked how they perceived such behaviour, the majority indicated that they disliked the pain they were causing to people who had never wronged them.

By employing repression as a defence mechanism, gamblers tried all means to bury unwanted thoughts and, thus, cushion themselves from pain. However, participants revealed that inasmuch as they were repressive, the coping skill was only temporary. The finding is supported by Lindberg (2017), who asserts that persons who are more inclined to engage in displaced aggression and angry rumination are those who have higher levels of maladaptive metacognitive. Some gamblers resorted to anger outbursts in order to purge the pressure that came with losses.

## Alcoholism and Substance Use

The other theme that emerged on psychosocial coping strategies employed by gamblers involved alcoholism and substance use. Participants revealed that they at times resorted to alcohol in order to manage the pain of losing.

I started drinking beer in 2016 as a result of continued losses at this bet shop.... I had never tasted beer before but I felt the stress was too much.... Every time I encounter a huge set back, I drink opaque beer. Sometimes, I feel very weak and I drink Dragon (highly caffeinated drink) to feel better (Participant 11).

The brain regions that regulate judgment and reticence are suppressed by alcohol. In reality, when inner control crumbles, people become more outgoing and amiable and may even feel at ease, confident, and euphoric. This makes them numb-minded to even think of the repercussions in the long run. Cocaine produces an ecstatic flash of comfort and confidence.... This flash can be almost as pleasurable as the one heroin causes. Cocaine stimulates the brain's higher centres, giving users a jubilant, energising, and euphoric feeling (Key Informant 1).

Gamblers constitute a good fraction of people who use drugs. The recent upsurge of drugs such as crystal meth has not spared most gamblers as they take drugs to handle their day-to-day losses. Gambling is

lucrative to government through revenue generation and I don't think it has benefits at individual level (Key Informant 2)

The researcher noted that due to the magnitude of stress and depression, participants drank alcohol. Alcohol could numb their emotions. The researcher also found that some participants were using performance enhancing drugs such as blue diamond and wild horse to crank up their lost sexual appetite. Although the Theory of Reasoned Action supports that the coping strategy appeared maladaptive, Ajzen and Fishbein (1977), quoted in Quinton (2020), state that whatever human beings do, good or bad, it is as a result of some calculations. The narratives above show how detrimental gambling could be to individuals' psychosocial homeostasis. This is because gambling was observed to coexist with alcoholism and substance use. Reasons for substance use varied. Some participants highlighted they abused substances in order to cope with the stress of losing while the other significant fraction hinted on the need to cushion themselves from maladaptive behaviours that would have stemmed from gambling itself. The latter behaviours included physical and emotional abuse, narcissistic tendencies, theft and absenteeism from work. People utilise a variety of coping mechanisms based on the situation and the issue at hand (Chowdhury, 2020). Key informants also corroborated, saying that gambling predisposed individuals to alcoholism and substance use. Key informant 1 reiterated that when gamblers take alcohol after losing, they become numb-minded. However, they fail to extricate themselves

from the gambling behaviour because of the effects of alcohol.

### **Stealing to Recoup Losses**

As indicated earlier, some participants revealed that they, at some point in time, have stolen from people very close to them. The researcher learnt that the practice was actually a coping strategy to recoup lost money and property. Participants highlighted that after gamblers incur serious losses, their need to maintain their social relationships still forces them to steal so that they conceal the losses.

I condemn crimes but sometimes stealing appears the only way out if one loses money (Participant 4).

I stole 2 kilograms of washing powder from a friend and sold it because I seriously needed money to gamble (Participant 9).

I am yet to confirm that gamblers are crime prone but from the information gathered through state media, I remember The Herald, sometime in February this year, reporting that the Zimbabwe Republic Police was on a move to close unlicensed gambling machines. The police were citing that gambling houses were responsible for a spate of crimes such as shoplifting, fraud and robberies. Gambling remains the same thing, licensed or unlicensed ... (Key Informant 2).

Key informants also revealed that gambling instigated a spate of crimes,

including theft, fraud and robbery as gamblers tried to keep themselves active in their trade. Mehari and Koye (2019), who contend that there is a nexus between gambling behaviour and crime, support the findings. According to Folkman, cited in Cooper and Quick (2017), in some cases, people can be overwhelmed by stress and this results in “meaning focused coping” in which an individual judges the stressor to be beyond his or her aptitude to control it and, therefore, employs other means to eliminate cognitive dissonance. Other participants said that gambling had made them more likely to commit fraud, for example, stealing money from a spouse or business.

### **Rumination**

The researcher found that some participants were ruminative thinkers due to continued immense stress, anxiety and depression. Participants were also observed to have repetitive and passive thoughts that focused on the causes and effects of gambling. However, such kind of thinking could never lead to meaningful problem-solving strategies that could relieve distress and improve their situation. In the current study, the researcher discovered, from respondents’ comments below, that rumination was a maladaptive way of responding to the futility brought about by gambling.

I did a cost and benefit analysis and realized that gambling has brought sordidness and torridness in my life... I can’t stop thinking of things that went wrong as a result of my gambling. (Participant 11)

I tried everything I could to stop gambling, but I failed. The problem is that every time I always think of gambling... I realize it's not good for my life, but when I think of the losses I have so far incurred, I always feel bad. That has even affected the way I relate with other people. Sometimes, I need to concentrate on my life, but I cannot ... I am always stressed, my brother (Participant 9).

Rumination is a maladaptive stress coping skill that converts normative grief, especially sadness, into depression (Key Informant 1).

Ruminating is a relatively stable maladaptive coping strategy that involves "focusing on the symptoms and the conceivable sources and penalties of those symptoms" (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2004). This differs from problem-solving in that it does not involve intentional actions meant to improve the situation or lessen distress (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2004). The findings speak to the second tenet of the "emotion focused" psychological stress and coping theory (Folkman, cited in Cooper and Quick, 2017) where individuals appraise the situation to be way above their aptitude level, and where efforts are channelled towards minimising effects instead of addressing the real problem. In as much as gamblers tried to make sense of their social world, attempting to learn from it, rumination was noted to lead not to any solution but only amplified their misery, instead. According to Long (2023), gamblers are usually introduced to self-exclusion even though it is not an absolute

panacea for gambling addiction. Despite its limits, however, self-exclusion is generally considered somewhat effective in assisting problem gamblers in managing their addiction, and it continues to enjoy a burgeoning popularity.

## CONCLUSION

The study concluded that gamblers were bedevilled by an array of psychosocial problems including addiction, suicide, emotional hot-bloodedness and numbing, black shading of familial and social relationships, intimate partner violence and sexual dysfunctionality, crime, over borrowing, depression, absenteeism and loss of efficiency. These problems make gamblers a very vulnerable group in dire need of clinical services. Paradoxically, mental health practitioners' services are not easily accessible to gamblers, and gamblers are not so easily visible to clinical services as they are stashed in betting house corners. As a result, they are left alone to deal with their mental health problems using psychosocial coping strategies that have been found to be maladaptive, including rumination, stealing, alcoholism and substance use.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that:

- Clinical social workers should make their services available and accessible to gamblers through issuing out promotional material (fliers, business cards, shirts) and being active on radio and TV programmes

- State and private owned media houses could flight “gamble responsibly” adverts via television, radio and newspapers in order to lessen impact severity.
- An inter-ministerial committee to reduce effects of gambling could be established as well as possibly erect recreational facilities in urban and peri-urban centres.

### **Implications of the Study to Social Work**

The study orbited on psychosocial effects of gambling and the psychosocial coping strategies employed by gamblers. As such, the findings provide a departing step for social workers, both clinical and developmental. Clinical social workers` visibility is so feint. That could be why individuals are resorting to maladaptive strategies to bail themselves out of the effects of gambling. As such, clinical social workers could handle the responsibility to cushion the community from the debilitating effects of the psychosocial malady discussed. The findings also direct developmental social workers towards concerted efforts to nip the identified clinically manifesting socio-economic scourges in the bud.

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