

THE RAVAGING EFFECTS OF ONLINE GAMBLING ON THE SOCIAL FUNCTIONING OF MALE BREADWINNERS IN AFRICAN FAMILIES. A CASE OF AVIATOR AND SOCCER BETTING

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Abstract

Online gambling has emerged as a pervasive social challenge in many African societies, particularly through platforms such as Aviator and soccer betting. This study investigates the ravaging effects of these gambling practices on the social functioning of male breadwinners within African families. Anchored in a qualitative case study approach, the research explores how gambling undermines financial stability, erodes family cohesion and reshapes traditional gender roles. Findings reveal that male breadwinners often divert household income toward gambling, leading to economic strain, marital conflict and diminished capacity to fulfil paternal responsibilities. The addictive nature of Aviator and sports betting exacerbates psychological distress, fostering secrecy, mistrust and social isolation. Moreover, the normalisation of gambling within peer networks intensifies its impact, creating cycles of dependency that destabilise family structures. The study concludes that online gambling not only threatens individual well-being, but also compromises the collective resilience of African families, necessitating urgent policy interventions, community sensitisation and culturally

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grounded support systems to mitigate its destructive consequences.

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years, online gambling has become a rapidly expanding phenomenon across Africa, fuelled by increased internet penetration, mobile phone accessibility and aggressive marketing by betting companies. Platforms such as *Aviator*, regarded as a high-risk, fast-paced online crash game and soccer betting have gained immense popularity among young and middle-aged men. These forms of gambling are often presented as opportunities for quick financial gain, yet they carry devastating consequences for individuals, families and communities (Gainsbury, Abarbanel and Blaszczynski, 2019). For male breadwinners, who traditionally shoulder the responsibility of providing for their households, the lure of online gambling introduces a paradox: the pursuit of wealth through chance often results in financial instability, strained relationships and diminished social functioning.

Recent scholarship underscores the gravity of this trend. Studies on gambling in Africa highlight that the rapid growth of online betting is not merely a recreational activity but a structural issue tied to economic precarity and unemployment. For instance, scholars have noted that the popularity of *Aviator* in South Africa surged by more than 50% in 2025, reflecting how digital gambling platforms exploit the hopes of financially vulnerable populations (Masama, 2025). Soccer betting, similarly, thrives on the continent's deep cultural passion for football, with betting companies strategically embedding themselves into everyday

sports consumption. Researchers argue that this normalisation of gambling within popular culture intensifies its impact, particularly on men who are socially expected to provide for their families.

The breadwinner role in African families is deeply embedded in cultural expectations and social norms. Men are often perceived as the primary providers, protectors and decision-makers within the household. However, the rise of online gambling challenges this traditional role by diverting financial resources away from essential family needs. Scholars such as Nzimande (2024) and Olojede (2025) have observe that gambling addiction among male breadwinners leads to marital conflict, neglect of children's welfare and erosion of trust within households. These findings resonate with broader sociological theories of social functioning, which emphasize the ability of individuals to meet societal expectations in areas such as work, family and community participation. When gambling disrupts financial stability and emotional well-being, male breadwinners fail to meet these expectations, leading to social dysfunction.

Furthermore, the addictive nature of *Aviator* and soccer betting is reinforced by the design of these platforms. *Aviator's* crash mechanics, which encourage players to “cash out” before the multiplier collapses, exploit psychological vulnerabilities by creating cycles of anticipation and loss. Scholars such as Moyo (2025), argue that these mechanics mirror the principles of behavioural conditioning, trapping players in compulsive patterns of play. Soccer betting, on the other hand, leverages the illusion of skill and knowledge, where bettors believe their understanding of football gives them an edge, yet outcomes remain largely unpredictable. This combination of chance and perceived control

makes soccer betting particularly insidious, as it sustains hope while draining financial resources.

The consequences extend beyond the individual gambler to the family unit. The Family Systems Theory explains how individual behaviours reverberate across the household (Stamp, 2003). A father's gambling addiction can trigger marital conflict, reduce emotional support for children and destabilise household dynamics. Recent African case studies by Hing *et al.* (2025) reveal that children in gambling-affected households often experience reduced access to education, healthcare and emotional stability, as financial resources are diverted toward betting. Scholars such as Adeyemi (2023) emphasize that gambling-induced poverty exacerbates intergenerational cycles of disadvantage, weakening the resilience of African families.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The framework is built around four interrelated constructs:

- **Online Gambling Platforms (*Aviator* and Soccer Betting):** These platforms represent the independent variable. *Aviator*'s crash mechanics and soccer betting's illusion of skill are designed to exploit psychological vulnerabilities. Moyo (2025) highlights how *Aviator* fosters "near-miss excitement", while Olojede (2025) explains that soccer betting sustains hope through perceived control.
- **Male Breadwinner Role:** The breadwinner role is the cultural and social expectation that men provide financially and maintain household stability. Nzimande (2024) argues that gambling undermines this role by diverting resources away from essential needs, eroding trust and authority within families.

- **Social Functioning:** Social functioning refers to the ability of individuals to meet societal expectations in areas such as work, family and community participation. When gambling disrupts financial stability and emotional well-being, male breadwinners fail to meet these expectations, leading to dysfunction. This construct is informed by the Social Functioning Theory (Parsons, 1951) and the Family Systems Theory (Bowen, 1978).
- **Family Outcomes:** Family outcomes include economic stability, marital cohesion, child welfare and community resilience. Adeyemi (2023) notes that gambling-induced poverty reduces access to education and healthcare, while Rammutla (2024) emphasizes that secrecy and mistrust destabilise marital relationships.

The conceptual framework posits the following relationships:

1. Online Gambling → Male Breadwinner Role: Gambling undermines the breadwinner's financial capacity, eroding his ability to fulfil cultural expectations.
2. Male Breadwinner Role → Social Functioning: When breadwinners fail to provide, their social functioning diminishes, leading to marital conflict, mistrust and reduced community participation.
3. Online Gambling → Family Outcomes: Gambling directly impacts family welfare by diverting resources, fostering secrecy and normalising risk-taking behaviours.
4. Social Functioning → Family Outcomes: Dysfunctional social functioning leads to weakened family cohesion, reduced child welfare and diminished community resilience.
- 5.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored in Social Functioning Theory and Family Systems Theory. The Social Functioning Theory emphasizes the ability of individuals to meet societal expectations in areas such as work, family and community participation. When gambling disrupts financial stability and emotional well-being, male breadwinners fail to meet these expectations, leading to social dysfunction. The Family Systems Theory explains how individual behaviours reverberate across the family unit. A father's gambling addiction, for instance, can trigger marital conflict, reduce emotional support for children and destabilise household dynamics. These frameworks provide a lens through which the destructive ripple effects of online gambling can be understood.

SOCIAL FUNCTIONING THEORY

The Social Functioning Theory originates from the work of Talcott Parsons (1902-1979), a prominent American sociologist who developed structural functionalism in the mid-20th century. Parsons argued that society is a system composed of interdependent parts, and individuals must fulfil certain roles to maintain social equilibrium. His theory emphasizes that social functioning involves meeting expectations in areas such as work, family and community participation. When individuals fail to perform these roles, dysfunction occurs, destabilising both the individual and the larger social system. In the context of gambling, scholars such as Adeyemi (2023) and Nzimande (2024) highlight that male breadwinners in African families are expected to provide financial stability and emotional support. Online gambling disrupts this role by diverting resources away from essential needs, leading to financial instability, marital conflict and diminished community participation. This aligns with Parsons'

framework, as the failure of breadwinners to meet societal expectations results in social dysfunction that reverberates across families and communities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

GROWTH OF ONLINE GAMBLING IN AFRICA

The growth of online gambling in Africa has been both rapid and transformative, reshaping social and economic landscapes across the continent. A 2025 industry report estimated the African online gambling market at \$1.85 billion in 2024, with projections to exceed \$2.36 billion by 2028. This expansion is driven by rising mobile penetration, youthful demographics and the ubiquity of mobile money services, which have made gambling platforms accessible to millions of users. South Africa, Nigeria and Kenya stand out as leading markets, each with unique regulatory frameworks and cultural dynamics that shape gambling practices. Scholars have emphasized that this growth is not merely economic, but deeply social. Bitanihirwe *et al.* (2022) argue that the intensification of commercial gambling in sub-Saharan Africa reflects broader shifts in leisure and consumption, where gambling is increasingly normalised as part of everyday life. They highlight that traditional forms of gambling, such as lotteries and informal betting, have been overtaken by digital platforms that exploit technological innovations and cultural passions, particularly football.

South Africa provides a striking case study. Between 2020 and 2024, the country's online gambling industry expanded by 550%, reaching a turnover of R1.14 trillion in 2023-24, equivalent to nearly 17% of its GDP. Analysts attribute this surge to aggressive

marketing, attractive bonuses and seamless integration with digital payment systems. However, scholars warn that such growth comes with risks, including capital flight, household debt and exploitation of vulnerable populations. Kenya and Nigeria also illustrate the scale of this phenomenon. In Kenya, mobile-based betting dominates, with platforms like SportPesa leveraging the country's strong mobile money infrastructure. Nigeria, with its large youth population and passion for football, has seen exponential growth in soccer betting, particularly among unemployed men who view gambling as a potential escape from poverty. The British Academy (2023) notes that gambling has become a highly lucrative industry across sub-Saharan Africa, but one that disproportionately targets young people, embedding risk-taking behaviours into youth culture.

The growth of online gambling in Africa reflects a convergence of technological innovation, cultural passion and economic vulnerability. While it has created new markets and revenue streams, scholars consistently highlight its destructive consequences for households, particularly male breadwinners, whose gambling habits destabilise family finances and erode social functioning. This duality economic expansion alongside social harm underscores the urgency of further research and policy intervention.

MALE BREADWINNER ROLE IN AFRICAN FAMILIES

The male breadwinner model has historically been central to family organisation in Africa, reflecting both cultural traditions and socio-economic realities. Rooted in colonial and postcolonial labour structures, this model positions men as the primary providers of financial resources, while women are often tasked

with caregiving and domestic responsibilities. Scholars such as Angélique Janssens (1998) have traced the rise of the breadwinner family in global contexts, noting that it became a powerful image used to justify the gendering of public and private spheres. In African societies, this model was reinforced by patriarchal norms and economic systems that privileged men in formal employment, while women's contributions were often undervalued or confined to informal sectors.

In many African households, the breadwinner role is not only economic but symbolic. It embodies masculinity, authority and responsibility. Nzimande (2024) argues that gambling undermines this symbolic role by eroding men's credibility as providers. When male breadwinners divert income into gambling, families experience financial strain, marital conflict and diminished trust. This destabilisation of the breadwinner role has ripple effects across households, weakening family cohesion and resilience. The breadwinner model also intersects with broader theories of social functioning. Parsons (1951) emphasizes that individuals must fulfil societal roles to maintain equilibrium. In African contexts, the breadwinner role is a key societal expectation. Failure to meet this expectation-due to gambling losses or economic instability, results in social dysfunction, affecting not only the household, but also community participation.

Recent African scholarship highlights how economic precarity intensifies reliance on the breadwinner role. Chiweshe (2025) notes that, in contexts of high unemployment, men often turn to gambling as a perceived means of fulfilling their breadwinner responsibilities. However, instead of alleviating financial hardship, gambling deepens poverty and destabilises families.

Similarly, Adeyemi (2023) observes that gambling-induced poverty reduces access to education and healthcare for children, perpetuating intergenerational cycles of disadvantage. Comparative studies show that while the breadwinner model has declined in Western societies due to women's increased labour force participation, it remains resilient in African contexts. Janssens (1998) and other feminist scholars argue that the persistence of this model reflects deeply rooted gender norms and limited social safety nets. In Africa, where extended kinship networks often rely on male provision, the erosion of the breadwinner role through gambling has far-reaching consequences for family and community stability.

UNDERSTANDING HOW AVIATOR AND SPORTS BETTING OPERATE

AVIATOR

Crash betting games such as *Aviator* have emerged as one of the most popular yet dangerous forms of online gambling in Africa and globally. These games are characterised by their fast-paced mechanics, where players bet on a rising multiplier that can “crash” at any moment. The simplicity of the design masks complex psychological triggers that make them highly addictive. Scholars and analysts have increasingly examined *Aviator* and similar crash games to understand their impact on gambling behaviour, addiction and family dynamics. Crash games exploit the brain's reward system by manipulating dopamine release. Headroom (2025) explains that, *Aviator* taps into psychological triggers such as impulsivity and risk-taking, creating a potent cycle of anticipation, risk and loss. The unpredictability of when the multiplier will crash mirrors variable reinforcement schedules found in Skinner's behavioural experiments, which are known to

sustain compulsive behaviours. This intermittent reinforcement ensures that even after repeated losses, players remain engaged, hoping for the next big win.

LunaGlade (2025) highlights that *Aviator* fosters an *illusion of control*, where players believe that their timing in pressing “cash out” reflects skill rather than luck. This agency bias sustains engagement, as bettors feel they can influence outcomes despite the game’s reliance on random number generators. Additionally, the *near-miss effect*, when a player narrowly misses a higher multiplier, triggers irrational doubling-down behaviour. Neuroimaging studies show that near-misses activate reward pathways in the brain similar to wins, reinforcing continued play. In Kenya, *Aviator* has been described as a “silent epidemic” devastating families. Kenya Insights (2025) reports that players often lose significant sums, selling household assets to sustain their gambling habits. One case involved a man losing Ksh220 000 after chasing multipliers, leading to the sale of his television and other possessions. Scholars argue that *Aviator*’s accessibility through mobile phones makes it particularly dangerous in African contexts, where unemployment and economic precarity drive men to seek quick financial gains. Unlike traditional casino games, crash games are faster, more interactive and more psychologically manipulative. They combine elements of chance with perceived skill, making them more engaging than slot machines or lotteries. Griffiths (2005) classifies such games under behavioural addiction, noting that their design sustains compulsive play through intermittent reinforcement. Scholars argue that *Aviator* represents a new frontier in gambling addiction, one that is harder to regulate due to its digital nature and widespread accessibility.

For male breadwinners in African families, the *Aviator* game poses unique risks. The breadwinner role is culturally tied to financial provision and household stability. When men divert income into crash games, families experience economic strain, marital conflict and reduced child welfare. Rammutla (2024) emphasizes that secrecy and mistrust arising from gambling habits destabilise marital relationships, while Adeyemi (2023) notes that, gambling-induced poverty reduces access to education and healthcare for children. The scholarly literature on *Aviator* and crash games highlights their addictive design, psychological manipulation and devastating social consequences. By exploiting cognitive biases such as the illusion of control and near-miss excitement, these platforms entrench gambling behaviour. In African contexts, where male breadwinners face cultural expectations to provide for families, the impact is particularly severe, leading to financial instability, family dysfunction and community-level disruption.

SPORTS BETTING

Sports betting, particularly soccer betting, has become a widespread phenomenon across Africa, often marketed as a quick path to wealth. For many male breadwinners, the lure of turning a small wager into life-changing money is powerful, especially in contexts where unemployment and financial instability are common. However, the constant accessibility of betting platforms, combined with the emotional highs and lows of wins and losses, respectively, can foster addictive behaviour. This addiction not only drains household income, but also destabilises families, as men who are expected to provide may instead funnel resources into chasing uncertain outcomes. The cultural passion for soccer intensifies the cycle, making betting feel like part of the sport itself rather than a financial risk. Ultimately, soccer betting can trap

breadwinners in a cycle of hope and loss, undermining their role as providers and creating ripple effects of hardship within their communities.

ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF ONLINE GAMBLING

The economic implications of *Aviator* and sports betting in African contexts are profound, extending from household-level financial strain to broader national economic challenges. Scholars consistently highlight that gambling functions as a false economy (Chikafu, 2024), where resources are drained from families into betting companies, many of which are foreign-owned. This dynamic undermines household welfare, reduces disposable income and contributes to capital flight, weakening national economies.

At the household level, gambling erodes financial stability. Male breadwinners, who are culturally expected to provide for their families, often divert income into *Aviator* and sports betting. This diversion leads to chronic debt, reduced savings and poverty. Rammutla (2024) emphasizes that gambling-induced financial strain destabilises marital relationships, erodes trust and diminishes the breadwinner's authority. Families experience deprivation, with reduced access to food, healthcare and education. Adeyemi (2023) adds that children in gambling-affected households suffer disproportionately, as resources meant for their welfare are consumed by betting losses, perpetuating intergenerational cycles of disadvantage. At the community level, gambling normalises risk-taking behaviours and fosters dependency. Daniel *et al.* (2024) argue that sports betting has become embedded in urban economies, shaping youth culture and weakening collective resilience. Communities lose cohesion as

gambling fosters secrecy, mistrust and isolation. Male breadwinners who fail to provide due to gambling addiction withdraw from community participation, reducing social solidarity and weakening informal support networks that are vital in African societies.

At the national level, the economic implications are equally significant. The rapid growth of online gambling has created lucrative markets, but much of the revenue flows to foreign-owned companies. Glozah *et al.* (2023) highlight that this capital flight undermines local economies, as profits are not reinvested domestically. In South Africa, for example, the gambling industry reached a turnover of R1.14 trillion in 2023-24, equivalent to nearly 17% of its GDP. While this reflects economic expansion, scholars caution that it represents a redistribution of household income into speculative markets, rather than genuine wealth creation. The design of *Aviator* and crash games exacerbates these economic consequences. Moyo (2025) explains that *Aviator*'s crash mechanics foster compulsive play, encouraging players to chase multipliers even after repeated losses. This addictive design ensures sustained financial losses, trapping households in cycles of debt. Similarly, soccer betting thrives on the illusion of skill, with bettors believing their football knowledge gives them an edge. Olojede (2025) argues that this illusion sustains hope and encourages repeated betting, draining household resources over time.

From a policy perspective, scholars note that regulatory frameworks in many African countries remain inadequate. Onyango (2025) observes that governments have struggled to regulate online platforms effectively, leaving households vulnerable to exploitation. Tax revenues from gambling are often

insufficient to offset the social costs, including poverty, family breakdown and reduced productivity. This imbalance underscores the need for stronger regulation and culturally grounded interventions to mitigate the destructive economic consequences of gambling. The literature shows that *Aviator* and sports betting gambling have devastating economic implications for African families. At the household level, they erode financial stability and perpetuate poverty. At the community level, they weaken cohesion and normalise risky behaviours. At the national level, they contribute to capital flight and undermine genuine economic development. Scholars such as Adeyemi (2023), Chikafu (2024), Rammutla (2024), Moyo (2025) and Olojede (2025), consistently emphasize that gambling represents a false economy, one that destabilises breadwinner roles and erodes family resilience.

IMPACT OF AVIATOR AND SPORTS BETTING ON MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS

The impact of *Aviator* and sports betting on marital relationships in African families is profound, as gambling undermines trust, communication and the stability of the breadwinner role. Scholars emphasize that marital cohesion depends on financial provision, emotional support and shared responsibility. When male breadwinners divert household income into gambling, these foundations are destabilised, leading to conflict, secrecy and eventual breakdown of marital ties. Financial instability is one of the most immediate consequences of gambling on marriages. Rammutla (2024) argues that, gambling-induced poverty erodes marital trust, as spouses often discover that household income has been consumed by betting losses. This financial strain leads to arguments over resource allocation, unmet family needs and resentment. In households where men are expected to provide, the

failure to meet these obligations destabilises marital relationships and diminishes the breadwinner's authority.

Gambling fosters secrecy, as men often conceal their habits from spouses to avoid confrontation. Nzimande (2024) highlights that secrecy undermines marital communication, creating mistrust and emotional distance. Spouses may suspect infidelity or mismanagement of resources, further straining relationships. This aligns with Bowen's Family Systems Theory, which emphasizes that dysfunction in one member reverberates across the family unit, weakening emotional ties and cohesion. The psychological stress associated with gambling also impacts marital relationships. Adeyemi (2023) notes that gambling addiction fosters anxiety, depression and irritability, which spill over into marital interactions. Emotional disconnect arises as gamblers withdraw from family life, focusing instead on betting activities. This withdrawal reduces intimacy and companionship, both of which are essential for marital stability.

The erosion of the breadwinner role through gambling also destabilises gender dynamics within marriages. Nzimande (2024) argues that gambling undermines traditional masculinity by diminishing men's credibility as providers. This shift destabilises marital power relations, as women may assume greater financial responsibility, leading to role conflicts and resentment. In patriarchal contexts, where male provision is central to marital cohesion, the disruption of this role has particularly severe consequences. Marital conflict arising from gambling also affects children, who experience reduced emotional support and stability. Adeyemi (2023) emphasizes that children in gambling-affected households suffer from neglect and reduced access to education

and healthcare. The weakening of marital ties thus reverberates across generations, perpetuating cycles of disadvantage and family dysfunction.

At the community level, gambling-induced marital breakdowns weaken social solidarity. Daniel *et al.* (2024) argue that gambling has become embedded in urban economies, normalising risk-taking behaviours and eroding collective resilience. Marital instability contributes to broader social dysfunction, as families are the basic units of community cohesion.

IMPACT OF AVIATOR AND SPORTS BETTING ON CHILD WELFARE

Contemporary scholars such as King and Delfabbro (2020) argue that, the gamification of betting platforms blurs the line between gaming and gambling. *Aviator*, with its crash-game mechanics, resembles video games but embeds real-money wagering. This normalisation increases the likelihood that children exposed to such platforms perceive gambling as a harmless leisure activity rather than a high-risk behaviour. The accessibility of sports betting apps further reinforces this cultural shift, embedding gambling into everyday entertainment.

Studies by Dowling *et al.* (2021) emphasize that parental gambling addiction often leads to financial instability, which directly impacts child welfare. Families affected by betting losses frequently struggle to provide adequate nutrition, healthcare and educational resources. *Aviator's* rapid, repetitive betting cycles exacerbate financial losses, creating conditions where children experience neglect or reduced quality of life. Scholars in social work note that gambling-related debt is a growing factor in family breakdowns and child protection cases.

Research by Sharman *et al.* (2019) highlights that children in gambling-affected households often suffer from anxiety, insecurity and disrupted emotional development. Exposure to betting environments fosters stress and, in some cases, intergenerational transmission of gambling behaviours. *Aviator's* design fast-paced, unpredictable and addictive mirrors mechanisms studied in behavioural psychology that heighten compulsive tendencies, making it particularly dangerous for impressionable youth. Contemporary educational studies, such as those by Griffiths and Nower (2021), show that adolescents who engage in sports betting or crash games often underperform academically. The lure of quick financial gain distracts from studies, while losses contribute to absenteeism and disengagement. In some cases, children misuse school funds or sell personal belongings to sustain gambling habits, signalling a direct erosion of educational stability.

REGULATORY AND POLICY CHALLENGES WITH REGARDS TO ONLINE GAMBLING EFFECTS ON MALE BREADWINNERS

The rise of online gambling has created profound regulatory and policy challenges, particularly concerning its effects on male breadwinners. Contemporary scholarship highlights how gambling harms intersect with family responsibilities, economic stability and social functioning, making regulation both urgent and complex. Below is a synthesis of recent academic perspectives in five extended thematic paragraphs. Rammutla (2024) emphasizes that online gambling disproportionately affects male breadwinners in African families, undermining their ability to fulfil traditional roles of financial provision and social leadership. The study reveals that gambling losses often destabilise household economies, leading to food insecurity, debt accumulation and strained marital relationships. Male breadwinners, who are

culturally expected to safeguard family welfare, experience heightened shame and psychological distress when gambling erodes their capacity to provide. This dynamic illustrates how gambling harms extend beyond individual addiction to systemic family breakdowns.

Fisher *et al.* (2025), argue that regulatory responses to online gambling remain fragmented and insufficient, particularly in addressing harms experienced by breadwinners. Their scoping review highlights challenges such as cross-border accessibility of gambling platforms, weak enforcement of age and identity verification and inadequate taxation regimes. For male breadwinners, these gaps mean that gambling remains easily accessible, unmonitored and often marketed aggressively. Scholars note that existing policies tend to prioritise revenue generation over harm reduction, leaving families vulnerable to the cascading effects of financial instability.

Contemporary sociological research highlights that regulatory challenges are compounded by cultural expectations of masculinity and breadwinning. Male breadwinners often perceive gambling as a means of fulfilling financial obligations quickly, especially in contexts of unemployment or economic precarity. However, when losses occur, the stigma attached to failing as a provider intensifies psychological harm. Scholars argue that regulatory policies must be sensitive to these gendered dynamics, incorporating culturally tailored interventions that address both the economic and emotional dimensions of gambling harms. This includes community-based awareness programmes and targeted support for men in vulnerable socioeconomic positions.

COPING MECHANISMS IN FAMILIES WHERE MALE BREADWINNERS ARE BEING AFFECTED BY ONLINE GAMBLING OF AVIATOR AND SOCCER BETTING

The expansion of online gambling platforms such as *Aviator* and soccer betting has created unique challenges for families, particularly where male breadwinners are central to household stability. Contemporary scholarship explores how families cope with the financial, emotional and social disruptions caused by gambling addiction, offering insights into resilience and vulnerability. Scholars such as Dowling *et al.* (2021) highlight that, families often respond to gambling-related financial strain by re-allocating household resources. Wives and partners may take on additional income-generating roles, while children may be forced to forgo educational or recreational expenses. This coping mechanism, though pragmatic, often leads to long-term instability, as the breadwinner's gambling losses continue to erode savings and increase debt. In contexts like South Africa, where *Aviator* and soccer betting are popular, families sometimes rely on extended kinship networks for financial support, reflecting a communal coping strategy rooted in cultural traditions.

Research by Sharman *et al.* (2019) emphasizes that families affected by gambling often develop emotional coping mechanisms such as denial, minimisation, or emotional distancing. Partners may attempt to shield children from the psychological turmoil by concealing the extent of financial losses or addiction. However, this often results in heightened stress and anxiety within the household. Contemporary family psychology literature suggests

that resilience is fostered when families openly acknowledge the problem and seek counselling, though stigma around male breadwinners failing in their provider role often prevents such openness.

Contemporary sociological research highlights the importance of community-based coping strategies. Families often turn to religious institutions, local support groups, or extended kinship networks to manage the fallout of gambling addiction. King and Delfabbro (2020) argue that, community solidarity provides both emotional and material support, buffering families against isolation. In regions where *Aviator* and soccer betting are prevalent, informal savings groups (*stokvels*) and community lending practices serve as critical coping mechanisms, though they can also be strained when gambling losses are recurrent.

Scholars such as Griffiths and Nower (2021) emphasize that coping mechanisms are shaped by the availability of institutional support. Families in jurisdictions with strong regulatory frameworks such as mandatory self-exclusion programmes, counselling services and financial literacy initiatives, are better equipped to manage gambling harms. In contrast, weak regulation exacerbates vulnerability, leaving families to rely solely on informal coping strategies. For male breadwinners, institutional support is particularly vital, as it reduces stigma and provides structured pathways to recovery. Families that engage with these supports demonstrate greater resilience, highlighting the need for integrated policy responses.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the ravaging effects of online gambling, specifically *Aviator* and soccer betting, on the social functioning of male breadwinners in African families. A qualitative approach is most appropriate because it allows for an in-depth understanding of lived experiences, perceptions and social consequences that cannot be fully captured through quantitative measures alone. By focusing on narratives and case studies, the research seeks to uncover the psychological, economic and relational dimensions of gambling addiction and its impact on family structures.

POPULATION AND SAMPLING

The target population for this study consists of male breadwinners in selected African communities who actively engage in online gambling platforms such as *Aviator* and soccer betting. Purposive sampling is employed to identify participants who meet the criteria of being primary providers within their households and have direct experience with online gambling. This sampling method ensures that the study captures relevant insights from individuals most affected by the phenomenon. In addition, key informants, such as spouses, community leaders and counsellors, may be included to provide complementary perspectives on the broader social implications.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and participant observations, enabling the research to gather rich, contextual information about gambling

behaviours and their effects on family functioning. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns and themes across the data, such as financial strain, marital conflict, social withdrawal and psychological distress. This analytical approach ensures that findings are systematically organised and interpreted in relation to the research objectives. Ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality and sensitivity to participants' experiences, were strictly observed throughout the study to protect the dignity and well-being of all involved.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

FINANCIAL STRAIN AND HOUSEHOLD INSTABILITY

One of the most prominent findings of this study is the financial strain and household instability caused by online gambling, particularly *Aviator* and soccer betting, among male breadwinners in African families. Participants consistently reported diverting household income toward gambling, often at the expense of essential needs such as food, education and healthcare. This diversion of resources created cycles of debt, poverty and economic insecurity, destabilising the household's financial foundation. As Dowling *et al.* (2021) argue, gambling harms are relational, meaning that the financial losses of one individual reverberate across the entire family unit. In this context, the breadwinner's inability to fulfil his financial responsibilities undermines trust and erodes the family's collective resilience.

The addictive design of *Aviator* and soccer betting exacerbates this strain. King and Delfabbro (2020) highlight that online gambling platforms employ fast-paced, repetitive mechanics that encourage continuous play and repeated losses. Breadwinners described

chasing losses in hopes of recovery, often leading to deeper financial crises. This pattern aligns with Griffiths and Nower (2021), who note that gambling addiction fosters irrational financial decision-making, where individuals prioritise betting over household obligations. The result is a destabilised household economy, where basic needs are neglected and long-term financial planning becomes impossible.

The findings also reveal that financial strain is not limited to the nuclear family, but extends to kinship networks. In many African contexts, extended families provide financial support during crises. However, repeated gambling losses strained these networks, leading to resentment and reduced willingness to assist. This aligns with Wardle and McManus (2022), who argue that gambling harms weaken social cohesion by eroding trust within communities. Breadwinners who repeatedly sought financial help due to gambling debts were often stigmatised, further isolating them and destabilising household functioning.

MARITAL CONFLICT AND FAMILY COHESION

The interviews revealed that online gambling has deeply disrupted marital relationships among male breadwinners in African families. Wives consistently described a growing sense of mistrust, largely stemming from financial secrecy. Many men concealed their gambling activities, often hiding losses or diverting household income toward *Aviator* and soccer betting. This secrecy created suspicion and frequent quarrels, with women reporting that arguments over missing money had become a daily occurrence. Several participants noted that communication within the marriage had deteriorated, with conversations reduced to

confrontations about finances, rather than constructive dialogue about family matters.

Emotional withdrawal was another recurring theme. Respondents explained that after experiencing losses, husbands often became irritable, short-tempered, or emotionally distant. Some women described their partners as “present but absent,”, physically in the home but disengaged from family life. This emotional gap widened marital conflict, as wives felt unsupported and children sensed tension between their parents. In extreme cases, participants reported verbal aggression and threats, which further eroded trust and intimacy within the marriage.

Patterns emerging from the interviews suggest a vicious cycle: gambling leads to financial loss, which triggers secrecy and conflict, ultimately weakening family bonds. Women bear the dual burden of emotional strain and financial responsibility, while men grapple with shame and diminished authority. The erosion of marital trust and family cohesion was described not as a sudden collapse but as a gradual unravelling, with *Aviator*’s fast-paced losses and soccer betting’s long-term obsession both contributing to the destabilisation of family life.

RESHAPING OF GENDER ROLES AND PATERNAL RESPONSIBILITIES

The interviews revealed that online gambling has significantly altered traditional gender roles within African households, particularly undermining the paternal responsibilities of male breadwinners. Respondents consistently described how men’s preoccupation with *Aviator* and soccer betting led to a withdrawal from their expected roles as providers and protectors. Instead of fulfilling financial obligations, many fathers diverted household

income toward gambling, leaving wives to assume the role of primary providers. Women reported taking on additional work, borrowing from relatives, or managing household budgets alone, thereby reshaping the traditional gendered division of labour.

Participants highlighted how this shift created a reversal of roles that was both burdensome and disorienting. Wives expressed frustration at having to shoulder responsibilities that were culturally and socially expected of men, while simultaneously managing their own domestic duties. Several women described feeling “like both mother and father” in the household, as they not only provided financially, but also offered emotional support to children who felt neglected by their fathers. This dual role, while necessary for survival, was experienced as exhausting and unfair, further straining marital relationships.

PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS AND SOCIAL ISOLATION

The interviews revealed that online gambling has profound psychological consequences for male breadwinners, often manifesting as stress, anxiety and feelings of hopelessness. Respondents described how the unpredictability of *Aviator* and soccer betting created cycles of anticipation and disappointment, leaving men emotionally drained. Several participants noted that their husbands experienced sleepless nights, irritability and mood swings after gambling losses. Women reported that these emotional changes spilled into family life, creating an atmosphere of tension and unease. In some cases, men themselves admitted to feeling ashamed and overwhelmed, particularly when they failed to meet household responsibilities.

Psychological distress was closely linked to the erosion of self-identity. Breadwinners expressed feelings of inadequacy, describing themselves as “failures” when they could not provide for their families. This loss of confidence was compounded by the stigma surrounding gambling, with men reluctant to discuss their struggles openly. Respondents highlighted that shame and guilt often led to withdrawal, as men avoided conversations with their spouses and children. The interviews suggest that gambling not only undermines financial stability, but also corrodes the psychological resilience of men, leaving them vulnerable to depression and emotional breakdown.

PEER INFLUENCE AND NORMALISATION OF GAMBLING

The interviews revealed that peer influence plays a central role in encouraging and sustaining gambling behaviour among male breadwinners. Respondents consistently noted that men were introduced to *Aviator* and soccer betting through friends, colleagues, or social groups. Several participants explained that gambling was often framed as a harmless form of entertainment or a quick way to make money, with peers sharing stories of occasional wins to entice others. This social encouragement created a sense of belonging, where gambling was not only accepted, but celebrated within male circles.

Normalisation of gambling emerged as a recurring theme. Participants described how betting had become embedded in everyday social interactions, with men discussing odds, sharing tips and comparing winnings during casual conversations. In some communities, gambling was perceived as a marker of masculinity and modernity, reinforcing the idea that participation was expected rather than optional. Respondents highlighted that

this normalisation made it difficult for men to resist peer pressure, as abstaining from gambling was often ridiculed or interpreted as weakness.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The first major theme concerns marital conflict and family cohesion. The interviews highlighted that gambling often leads to financial secrecy, mistrust and escalating arguments between spouses. This aligns with prior studies that link gambling addiction to marital breakdown and divorce. The erosion of communication and intimacy reported by participants reflects a broader pattern in which financial instability undermines emotional bonds. Families that once relied on collective planning and shared responsibilities, now find themselves fractured, with gambling dominating household tensions. The findings suggest that online gambling is not merely an individual problem, but a relational one, destabilising the very foundation of marital trust and family unity.

The theme of psychological distress and social isolation underscores the mental health consequences of gambling. Participants described cycles of shame, anxiety and depression among men who failed to provide for their families. This distress was compounded by social withdrawal, as men avoided family interactions and community gatherings. The findings highlight a vicious cycle: gambling leads to losses, losses lead to shame, shame leads to isolation and isolation reinforces further gambling. This cycle reflects the addictive nature of online platforms like *Aviator*, which exploit psychological vulnerabilities through rapid, high-risk betting. The erosion of psychological resilience among breadwinners has far-reaching implications, not only for

individual wellbeing, but also for family stability and community cohesion.

Another critical theme is peer influence and the normalisation of gambling. The interviews revealed that men are often introduced to gambling through friends and social networks, where betting is framed as entertainment or a marker of masculinity. This normalisation makes gambling appear socially acceptable, reducing resistance and reinforcing cycles of addiction. The findings suggest that gambling is not only sustained by individual choices, but also by collective practices and cultural narratives. Peer groups provide both initiation and reinforcement, encouraging men to chase losses and legitimising the diversion of household income. This dynamic underscores the social dimension of gambling addiction, where cultural acceptance perpetuates harmful behaviours.

Taken together, these findings illustrate that online gambling destabilises African households at multiple levels: financial, relational, psychological and cultural. The erosion of the breadwinner role undermines male identity, while the reshaping of gender roles places disproportionate burdens on women. Children experience neglect and diminished paternal presence, while families as a whole suffer from weakened cohesion and escalating conflict. The normalisation of gambling within peer networks further entrenches these patterns, making intervention more complex. These results highlight the need for a holistic response that addresses not only individual addiction, but also the social and cultural contexts that sustain gambling.

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