



FACULTY OF EDUCATION  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SPECIAL EDUCATION

# ADOLESCENTS' ENGAGEMENT IN SPORTS BETTING IN MALAWI

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Master's thesis:	30 credits
Programme/course:	L2EUR (IMER) PDA184
Level:	Second cycle
Term/year:	Spring 2021
Supervisor:	Susanne Dodillet
Examiner:	Daniel Bergh

## Abstract

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- Aim:** This study investigated the activities in sports betting involving adolescents in Malawi and the meaning that the adolescents attach to betting.
- Theory:** The study adapted two theoretical perspectives to explore the phenomenon. These are social capital and social practice theories. The social capital lens adopted Putnam's interpretation of social capital, especially bonding social capital.
- Method:** This study is based on the qualitative research approach of ethnography, where data is collected through observations of betting structures and sites and activities that take place there. Also, informal interviews are used to collect data from participants. Both purposive and snowball sampling techniques are used to select fourteen adolescent study participants for the interviews. Before doing observations and interviews with the adolescents, an informant interview was conducted to get a prior understanding of the phenomenon. Field notes were taken, and the interviews were also audio-recorded and transcribed. The responses are coded and thematically analysed to generate patterns, similarities, differences, and frequencies.
- Results:** The study's findings revealed that adolescents engage in sports betting physically (at betting kiosks and betting halls) and virtually (using smartphones). They reported that sports betting is a means of trying to win money and socialise with peers; others perceived the phenomenon as time-wasting and frustrating, and negatively affects their studies. The notable factors that influence them to start engaging in the practice are peer influence (from both family and nonfamily members) and widespread betting promotions, which come in varied forms such as print and electronic media advertisements, roadside billboards, and sports betting branded materials like kiosk umbrellas.

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## Foreword

This research was motivated by the researcher's experience (as a science teacher) of encountering adolescent student bettors who showed each other betting vouchers in class during Biology and Mathematics lessons. This prompted me to conduct this research and contribute to scholarly literature.

Cliff Chinyama

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## Abbreviations

IMER:	International master's in educational research
WHO:	World Health Organization

# CHAPTER ONE

## Introduction

### 1.1 Background

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines adolescents as people between 10 and 19 years of age (WHO, 2011). Adolescence is a period where one engages in different social activities for pleasure, rewards involved, or just for knowledge (Schreuders, 2019). However, some activities have a set minimum legal age at which engagement is allowed; one such activity is gambling. Different countries have varied age limits where gambling becomes legal such as 18 years, 21 years, 23 years, or 25 years; some countries ban the practice altogether. There are different forms of gambling, such as casino gambling, sports betting, and lottery, among others. Previous studies have reported that most people who engaged in gambling did not perceive any positive outcomes of engaging in the practice (McClellan & Winters, 2006; Sherba & Gersper, 2017). If not adequately managed, one can become addicted to gambling, end up in severe trouble, or be pressured to commit criminal offenses to sustain the habit.

Gambling in Malawi was legalized in 1996 for people who are 18 years and above (Bunn, Mtema, Songo, & Ude, 2020). The Malawi gaming board oversees and regulates all gaming activities in the country. Since 2015 there has been a surge in online and offline gambling activities, especially sports betting, due to several betting companies. One group that has embraced this practice is school-going adolescents; it is common to see those supposed to be in school busy placing bets and spend hours in the betting houses to get results of ongoing games while their fellow students are in school.

There are different types of gambling activities that adolescents are engaged in in the country. However, sports betting (mainly soccer result predictions, spin machines, animal racing, and lotteries) is common in Malawian cities. Both physical and online sports betting have gained popularity recently.

During the 2020/2021 fiscal year national budget presentation, the government of Malawi introduced a 20% withholding tax on all winnings from sports betting. This, they claimed, will help the country generate revenue from an industry that is not being taxed but is generating substantial income. During the 2016/2017 financial year, the gross revenue from the sports betting market was MK933.3 million (\$1, 189, 025), but it rose to MK2.1 billion (\$2, 675,599) in 2017/2018 (Bunn et al., 2020). The betting companies employ a wide range of advertising, branding, and outreach campaigns to penetrate the market. These include a mobile network of roadside booths, running extensive advertisements in print and electronic media and billboards, organising photo and interview opportunities for sports bettors who win vast sums

of money, sponsoring local football teams (ibid, p. 3). Betting companies in Malawi seek to build a broad market and encourage a perception that gambling is a reliable way of making money (ibid, p. 6). However, this is misleading and can easily entice the populace whose majority live in poverty with reduced household spending power due to low income.

Malawi is a southern African land-locked country with an estimated population of 18.6 million as of 2019 (World Bank, 2020). The economy relies heavily on agriculture for both subsistence and exports. According to the 2018 population and housing census, 51% of the population is below 18 years (National Statistical Office, 2019).

Malawi follows the 8-4-4 education system where learners are expected to complete eight years of primary school and four years each of secondary and university education (those who choose to go to colleges spend either 2 or 3 years depending on the field of study). Tuition fees for primary and secondary school education are free since 1993 and 2018 (Zaman, 2007; Kadzamira et al., 2019). Conventionally, learners are supposed to be admitted to standard one from 6 years of age (many are now admitted below this age). Succession to the following classes depends on passing the preceding class; if one fails a class in primary school, they must repeat until they pass to proceed to the next class. Learners are not forced to repeat failed classes in secondary school. However, they can repeat classes to improve their grades for national examinations. Thus, some students can spend long years in one class than others. There are both boarding schools and day-schooling in both primary and secondary schools. Learners start higher education at or after attaining 18 years due to the academic cycle for transitioning from secondary school (although some learners enter higher education before the age of 18).

## **1.2. Problem statement**

Despite numerous literature pointing to the adverse effects of gambling on the education of adolescents and life in general (Bunn et al., 2020; Gupta et al., 2012), there are reports of an increase in sports betting involving school-going adolescents in Malawi. This is also illegal since the laws prohibit any form of gambling involving people below the age of 18 years. News articles have reported how adolescents are flocking to sports betting houses and kiosks to place bets or play lotto (Mkweu, 2020; Malawi news agency, 2018). However, there have been no empirical studies focusing on getting views from these youths on why they are involved in the practice and what betting means to them. Furthermore, there is a lack of an account of the activities in sports betting involving these adolescents.

## **1.3. Research question**

This study explores three areas related to adolescents' engagement in sports betting; activities at betting sites, how the adolescents understand sports betting, and the onset of sports betting for the adolescents. Therefore, the research questions are:



1. What type of activities do adolescents engage in during sports betting in Malawi?
2. What is the meaning of sports betting to adolescents in Malawi?
3. How do adolescents start engaging in sports betting in Malawi?

## 1.4. Relevance of the Study

Although gambling is illegal for people under 18 years in Malawi, recent research shows that the industry lacks regulation in this regard (Bunn et al., 2020). Unlike other countries that either banned the practice altogether or put a higher legal age, there is laxity in enforcing the legal age of 18 years at which people can bet legally. This has allowed adolescent students to get involved in the practice. Although such is the case, there is a knowledge gap concerning the phenomenon, especially in-depth empirical research investigating the phenomenon from educational science perspective where pedagogy and sports betting interact. The practice has negatively affected schooling in similar ways as teen drug and substance abuse (Celio & Lisman, 2014). Students who engage in sports betting find little time for studies and abscond classes or may even drop out of school in extreme cases (McClellan & Winters, 2006). This is evidenced by the large number of adolescents seen at betting kiosks and shops during school learning hours in Malawi. This increases illiteracy rates, especially in underdeveloped countries such as Malawi. Thus, sports betting poses a barrier to adolescent students accessing education. Currently, the phenomenon is new in Malawi and focus is on how lucrative the industry is and how those who engage in it benefit.

Furthermore, the existing corpus of research on sports betting involving adolescent students tends to focus more on the consequences of the practices and less on why those who bet do so. Focus has primarily been given on the prevalence of the phenomenon, factors that lead people into the practice, and psychosocial models that try to help those involved not become pathological betters or stop the practice altogether (Ariyabuddhiphongs, 2013). Such studies are extensively quantitative designs (Donati et al., 2018; Sherba & Gersper, 2017); other researchers used qualitative designs such as document analysis (McClellan & Winters, 2006). The general risk of gambling is tackled from a medical and psychological perspective (Celio & Lisman, 2014; Jackson et al., 2008; Derevensky et al., 2003; Korn and Shaffer, 1999).

This study adds to earlier research by Bunn et al. (2020), which explored the growth of sports betting in Malawi by focusing on corporate strategies, public space, and public health; the present study focuses on the activities that are involved in adolescent sports betting and the meaning they attach to it. The target is adolescent students, which helps the study understand how the phenomenon also affects their education. The interpretivism paradigm was used since the aim is not to generalise or quantify the findings of this study but to get a deep meaning of the phenomenon. The study notes that sports betting is a multi-layered and complex phenomenon with multiple interpretations by different participants in different environments. No research is value-free, and "all studies include assumptions about the world and knowledge that informs the inquiries" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p. 20).

It is envisaged that this research will contribute to educational science by explaining the impact of sports betting on adolescents' education. The findings of this study may confirm or refute earlier findings on adolescent students' engagement in sports betting which reported that truancy and school dropping out can result from the practice (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Rohde,

Seeley & Rohling, 2004a). The findings may also provide a springboard for further research on adolescent betting in relation to their education.

Also, the findings may help inform policy makers and stakeholders in understanding what type of activities the adolescents are involved in and how they negotiate meaning for those activities; this is vital for designing youth intervention programmes or socialization activities. Furthermore, it will also shed light on the phenomenon and provide valuable information to the adolescents concerning the practice; this information is missing in existing literature.

## CHAPTER TWO

### 2.1. Literature review

Sports betting is one form of gambling that adolescents actively engage in; gambling encompasses a wide range of activities that involve wagering money for different purposes but whose outcome relies on chance. Lottery, card games, and sports betting are the most frequently chosen gambling activities for adolescents (Jackson, Dowling, Thomas, Bond & Patton, 2008; Valentine, 2008; Delfabbro, 2012; Derevensky, Sklar, Gupta & Messerlian, 2010). Thus, although the terms gambling and sports betting are used interchangeably, they are not the same. However, gambling has been found to have adverse effects on adolescents' education (Bunn, Mtema, Songo & Udedi, 2020; Gupta et al., 2012). Despite this, there are general observations and reports of an increase in sports betting involving adolescent students in Malawi despite all forms of gambling being illegal to people below 18 years in the country.

Despite the widespread practice, only one traceable empirical study by Bunn et al. (2020) was done in Malawi and explored the phenomenon in general in response to widespread news reports about the phenomenon. Although much research has been conducted on different forms of gambling in different countries, not much has focused on the effects of the practice on educational science. For example, Celio and Lisman (2014) discovered that sports betting affects schooling in the same way teen drug and substance abuse do.

Adolescents have different views of gambling; some of these perceptions are positive while others are negative. A study by Tolchard (2014), which sought the attitudes of Ghanaian adolescents towards gambling, reported varying perceptions about gambling such as 'Gambling is a risky activity,' 'You can lose all your money gambling,' 'Gambling is a waste of money,' 'Gamblers usually lose in the long run,' 'To gamble is to throw away money,' 'You can make a living from gambling,' 'Gambling is a good way to get rich quickly,' 'Gambling is a better way to make money than working,' and 'Gambling can give high returns' (p. 45).

Research has so far focused on the prevalence of gambling, factors that make people gamble, and the psychosocial interventional models to stop pathological or problem gambling (Ariyabuddhiphongs, 2013).

#### **a) Factors influencing adolescents to bet.**

One of the significant reasons adolescents engage in sports betting is to win money (Loba,

Sherry, Raymond & James, 2001). Adolescents who start sports betting regard it as a means of making ends meet and as a get-rich-quick scheme. Tolchard (2014) found that Ghanaian adolescents considered sports betting as a positive way out of poverty. Some even perceive gambling as an investment made to get more money back. However, adolescents avoid using words such as risk and instead use more soft words such as luck and chance. This shows that sports betting preoccupies the economic sphere of those involved in the practice. No wonder some countries like Malawi introduced a levy on all sports betting winnings since betting is regarded as a revenue-generating activity for the winners. Research has focused on the individual as seeking financial gains from betting, but governments and the betting companies are also in for business.

Valentine's (2008) review of children and young people's gambling found that apart from seeking money, the other reason for adolescents' engagement in sports betting is entertainment through social and peer-group interactions. Pastime recreational pursuit was also reported as the main aim for sports betting in a study by Williams, Volberg, and Stevens (2012) and Ayandele (2019). Bussu and Claudio (2013) warn that sports betting may start as recreational for adolescents but can become pathological if not controlled. Although gambling activities are illegal for adolescents, they remain a popular recreation and socialization outlet for them. Whether the phenomenon is pathological or not, if it involves underaged adolescents, then it is illegal. Therefore, before the focus goes on the consequences of the practice, the legality of the youth engaging in the practice should be prioritized.

Ladouceur (2004) surveyed factors that lead the youth into gambling found that some of them gamble to mitigate social stressors such as family problems, emotional pain, unemployment, depression, poverty, and loss.

Sherba (2017) reported that frequent positive display of gambling promotions during televised sport entices adolescents to engage in gambling; thus, advertising exposure shapes youth attitudes and behaviors on sports betting. This arouses curiosity and passion for football to start sports betting. Watching sport has also been linked to a propensity to gamble. Adolescents now consider sports betting a new norm that should go hand in hand with sports watching.

Although genetics has also been linked to play a part in engaging in the practice, this is debatable since males and females are exposed to different environments, which may present factors that in turn influence them to start betting. Therefore, the finding that male adolescents gamble more and with larger sums of money than their female counterparts (Lostutter, Lewis, Crounce, Neighbors, & Larimer, 2014) should be taken as a result of other underlying factors that may not be evident directly.

## **b) Marketing Promotions**

Hing (2014) found that adolescents are constantly exposed to gambling promotions while watching televised sports. Derevensky et al. (2010) examined the impact of gambling advertisements on adolescent gambling attitudes and behaviours and reported that media depiction of gambling seems to shape adolescents' attitudes toward gambling. Although some adolescents question the portrayed positive returns depicted by the advertising messages, they

reported that the messages prompted them to place bets (Gavriel, Teichman, & Rahav, 2010). Even adults who suffer from problem sports betting admit that watching betting commercials makes them continue with the practice.

Other studies indicate that gambling companies have devised novel ways of getting their advertising messages to target groups in subtle ways, such as becoming significant sponsors of sporting teams, events, competitions, and stadia and commercial partners of sports organizations, and gaining celebrity endorsements (Lamont, Hing & Gainsbury, 2011; Lamont, Hing, & Vitartas, 2012; McMullan, 2011). These findings are collaborated by Appiah and Awuah's (2016) study, which investigated socio-cultural and environmental determinants of youth gambling in Ghana, which discovered that media promotions about gambling paint a glamorous, fashionable, and sensual picture that attracts many young people.

It is worrisome for young people to be exposed to gambling promotions embedded in sports broadcasts during televised sports because this can breed a generation of problem gamblers (Hing 2014; Derevensky et al., 2010; Lamont et al., 2011). Studies that reported this aspect did not include the standpoint of the gaming regulatory authorities to find out what they do to regulate the practice so that adolescents should be protected from these sports betting promotional campaigns.

Messages promoting sports betting are widespread, including televisions, computer screens, sports matches, roadside billboards, newspapers, and supermarkets. This has also spilled over to socio-cultural contexts such as conversations with peers and family members.

In a study that asked parents' perceptions on media advertisement of betting, Thomas (2014) reports that most of them showed concern that the messages were enticing yet misleading and harmful to some population subgroups such as adolescents. It has been argued that just as there is a regulation on the advertising messages about alcohol, tobacco, and junk food, similarly, forms of gambling should not be reinforced as fun, harmless, leisure, and profitable (Derevensky et al., 2010; Hastings & Saren, 2003). Mateo (2020) suggests that it is better to bar media messages seeking to lure young people into betting than merely encouraging responsible gambling. There seems to be a deliberate ploy by regulatory authorities to leave a loophole so that more people engage in betting for revenue generation of the companies and the governments through levies. Studies have primarily explored the phenomenon, and only a few have tried to emancipate those involved through action research. These are primarily from a clinical psychological perspective and not educational science.

Since some adolescents have access to the internet, they are now at greater risk of these unmonitored promotions since virtual betting seems more private and more challenging to detect than physical one. Online betting companies present bonuses, enticing mobile applications, and activities that capture the interests of unsuspecting adolescents.

### **c) Weak regulation**

Although many developing countries set the legal age of gambling at 18, this is rarely enforced. This is exacerbated by the increase of online sports betting, which makes age verification more challenging. Hing et al. (2014) suggest that a prudent approach would be restricting some types of gambling promotions during sport or ensuring these are not televised during general viewing

times to minimize harm for adolescents who are lured into the practice before the legally acceptable age. Instead, health and well-being promotion messages should be used to combat gambling promotions and safeguard the future well-being of today's young people. Through the study, which explored adolescent exposure to gambling promotions during televised sport, Hing further notes that since adolescence is a time of identity formation and the cultivation of values, attitudes, and intentions, authorities should monitor media promotions since some youths depend on it for socialization. After investigating problem gambling among adolescent students in the Atlantic provinces of Canada, Poulin (2000) proposes more stringent enforcement from governments to help exclude adolescents (who misrepresent their age) from betting. This proposal depends on the nations since others do not have legal documents that stipulate their ages (such as national identity cards, birth certificates, or passports); hence, this can still be challenging in some developing countries.

Welte, Barnes, Tidwell, and Hoffman (2009b) looked at legal gambling availability and problem gambling among adolescents and young adults and proposed that the age limit to gamble and the number of types of legal gambling must be revised for the youth, which in turn may lower the frequency of gambling in the youth thereby averting problem gambling. Chaumeton (2011) found that some legal statutes allow youth younger than 18 to participate in charitable gaming, but not in commercial forms of gambling. However, this opens a door for the youth to step into illegal gambling.

Chizoma et al. (2020) recommend adequate social policies and practices to help curb adolescent engagement in sports betting. Their research on youth gambling in Nigerian schools found that sports betting, if poorly regulated, poses a threat to the core fabric of African society. They further found that both parents and adolescents wished governments would put more regulation on the gambling industry. Such research unearths moral values upheld by different societies, which may be threatened by practices such as betting.

Thomas (2014) studied the beliefs, motives, and behaviours of community college and university students. He observed that betting regulation has not kept up with the rapid diversification of marketing tactics used to advertise newer forms of gambling, such as online sports wagering. Instead, governments rely on industry self-regulation to keep advertising to reasonable levels.

In their survey, which investigated youth gambling problems, Winters et al. (2000) found that adolescents who are given access to materials that sensitize them about the dangers of sports betting before the legal age stay away from the practice. These materials can be in the form of pamphlets and literature that can be made available at campuses and other public centres. Warning signs (like anti-smoking campaigns) about possible betting risks should also be visible the same way pro-betting advertisements are displayed.

Mateo (2020) proposes that research papers on the dangers of the phenomenon should be publicized to make known the reality and raise awareness of the real problem that exists and carry out much stricter and more effective regulatory measures to reverse the problem. Mateo's proposal seems helpful as many research findings are presented to a few conference attendants. The rest of the papers either sit in library repositories or are published in journals. However, the message does not reach a more extensive section of the public that needs it. When it comes to certain phenomena (like sports betting), researchers should not just aim to publish the findings in journals for academic accolades.

#### **d) Peer influence**

Among the determinants for adolescents' engagement in sports betting is peer influence. This influence may affect the male and female adolescents differently. For example, Chalmers and Willoughby (2006) noted that parents who bet and peers exert a more significant influence on females' gambling behaviour than males' gambling behaviour. This is collaborated by findings from Campbell's (2011) research on the influence of cultural background on Canadian parental perceptions of adolescent gambling behaviour, which reported that parents' attitude towards adolescent engagement in gambling activities is an essential determinant of the adolescents' gambling behaviour. Thus, some parents reported not considering adolescent gambling as a severe issue, thereby giving the adolescents freedom to either engage in the practice or not. Adolescents whose parents engaged in gambling also spent their time gambling and ended up with gambling-related problems (King et al., 2010).

Also, adolescents engage in betting to fit in with their peers and maintain their circle of friends. This gives the adolescents a sense of belonging, which becomes an identity and provides a sense of 'we' to the peer subculture (Keene, James & Willner, 2009; McComb & Sabiston, 2010; Tolchard, 2014). Jacobs (2000) observed that an adolescent with peers that gamble is at increased risk of gambling.

#### **e) Sports betting consequences**

Much research has focused on the adverse effects of engaging in gambling and related activities. Gambling is associated with various problems, which are financial, psychological, interpersonal, occupational, cultural, and legal. Poulin (2000) found that adolescents who engage in sports betting illegally start lying about their age and easily slip into problem gambling. It is common for adolescent gamblers to indulge in health risk behaviors such as tobacco, alcohol and drug use, violent behavior, and truancy, leading to poor academic performance (Chaumeton, 2011; Welte et al., 2009b). The socio-economic lives of adolescents are also negatively affected by indulgence in sports betting. A study that looked at public perception and the socio-economic effects of sports betting in Nigeria established that sports betting is generally culturally incompatible with the African culture and encourages laziness, idle living, greed, and conflicts with values of hard work (Chizoma et al., 2020). Sports bettors quickly accumulate debt due to overspending, and adolescents are at higher risk of gambling-related problems than adults (Derevensky & Gupta, 2006; Hardoon & Derevensky, 2002). In extreme cases, adolescents who experience problem gambling may be involved in physical violence, vandalism, shoplifting, truancy, and conduct problems (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Rohde, Seeley & Rohling, 2004a; Wood et al., 2004). Sports bettors start viewing school with lower levels of commitment, and they may quickly drop out.

Jacobs (2000) predicted that legalizing more forms of gambling will lead to an increase in recreational and problem gambling among adolescents. Parents view gambling by adolescents as addictive, dangerous, illogical, harmful, and damaging, and that it causes harm to the community. This shows that the phenomenon not just affects individuals but societies as well.

Thomas (2014) reports that both parents and adolescents acknowledged the adverse effects of gambling, including not buying food, depression, or experiencing reduced self-worth, losing

your job, house, money, or everything. These findings have made some nations ban the practice at all levels to safeguard the citizenry from slipping into gambling-related problems; the damage that comes with the phenomenon is greater than the perceived benefits that some individuals claim to get from sports betting.

Problem gambling is measured by whether an individual's life is disrupted in any way by it. If gambling takes precedence over other important activities, then that becomes problem gambling. For example, if a student loses money for tuition or upkeep, misses classes or study time, and sleep deprivation, there is a severe gambling problem. Pathological gambling may occur if one is overly preoccupied with gambling, loses control of own gambling habits, and continues to gamble despite losing large sums of money (Winters et al., 2000). The American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders recognizes gambling behaviour as the only non-substance addition (Gonzalez, Estévez & Griffiths, 2017). The adverse effects of the practice influence much research on gambling. Although some people win big through different forms of gambling, most have gone back to lose what they won or lost their other investments through gambling.

#### **f) Interventions**

A correlational survey of gambling among eighth-grade boys and girls by Chaumeton (2011) established that sports betting should be included in school programs targeting health risk reduction among adolescent students; while Chizoma et al. (2020) recommended that governments and civil societies should use public sensitization and education programs to educate the masses on the harm related to sports betting.

Sports betting activities can be reduced through education about unrealistic beliefs about the benefits of gambling (Tagoe, 2018). Adolescents have optimistic but unrealistic beliefs about what sports betting can offer. Efforts to stop adolescent sports betting should target providing education and life skills at the individual level. There should be programs aimed at creating employment to help society stop youth sports betting. This suggests that gambling should be looked at from the harm that can befall the individual and entire society.

#### **Discussion.**

The literature on recent trends in adolescent gambling is scarce due to the fast-changing landscape of gambling, coupled with applied legal age limits ([Raisamo, 2019](#)).

Some researchers use the term gambling in general to mean different aspects of the practice instead of using specific terms. Gambling is the overarching term that may be confusing if not specified. Similarly, terms such as "youth" in gambling research should be clearly explained since they mean different age groups in different places. Different age groups enter different forms of gambling for different reasons. There also seem to be variations in which gambling activities different communities engage in. For some, sports betting is prominent, while for others, lotteries are popular. Most forms of gambling activities have been around since old times and have been practiced by different age groups. Governments instituted gaming boards to regulate gambling activities by, for example, setting age limits for who is legally eligible to engage in gambling activities.

Upon discovering the adverse effects that gambling brings on individuals, much research has focused on the effects of the practice and interventions. This is also in line with the reviewed

literature, which points towards the consequences of engaging in gambling activities.

Research on sports betting from developing countries focuses on the prevalence of the phenomenon and problem gambling (Bussu & Detotto 2013; Shehu 2004). In high-resourced countries, research has focused on the determinants and motives for gambling and associated consequences. Most studies had more male participants than women. The studies have mainly been quantitative in design (Donati et al., 2018; Sherba & Gersper, 2017), while other researchers adopted qualitative designs like document analysis (McClellan & Winters, 2006). Gambling risk is tackled from a medical and psychological perspective (Celio & Lisman, 2014; Jackson et al., 2008; Derevensky et al., 2003). Thomas (2014) observes that gambling research methodologies focus on the scope of the problem and not the depth of the phenomenon. There is a need, therefore, to adopt qualitative methodologies when researching the phenomenon. Some studies also adopted behavioural addiction theory, prevention theory, and change theory for theoretical perspectives.

Few studies are devoted to investigating adolescent students' engagement in sports betting since the practice is considered illegal to such under-aged individuals. However, this has led to more adolescents practicing betting and eventually ending up as problem gamblers (Tagoe, 2018). Future research on gambling and related activities may explore why the phenomenon is on the rise despite being illegal, yet there are regulatory agencies in almost all countries. Studies that focus on student engagement in betting mix the participants since different individuals attain school levels at different ages. Thus, some can be in college and be allowed to bet due to their age, while others enter college before attaining the legal betting age. Therefore, much of the research has generalized the participants, provided they are students. Celio and Lisman (2014) point out that studies on gambling need to adopt a more holistic approach to discover its different perspectives and orientations.

On the other hand, there seems to be a knowledge gap in research that collects data from the gambling companies on how their products end up in the wrong hands, the under-aged adolescent students. The companies have new modalities of ensuring their products are visible and reach as many people as possible. Apart from physical products, there is now a myriad of online gambling products available. Regulations work differently in different countries based on the systems put in place, for example, age verification. For under-developed nations, regulations remain a challenge, and gambling information is shared anyhow, thereby luring innocent adolescent students into the practice before their rightful age; consequently, affecting their education.

Through this review, factors that compel adolescents to engage in sports betting, which is a form of gambling, have been explored. The adolescents' perceptions about sports betting were also investigated; finally, the effects of betting have also been explained. Individuals, societies, and nations are affected by sports betting in different dimensions.

The review shows that there is a lot more to be investigated in terms of gambling practices, especially on studies conducted. More research on under-aged adolescent gambling should focus on the education of the youth and the legality of them being engaged in the practice. Although the practice is now widespread globally, there is a knowledge gap in under-developed nations. There is also a need to use research designs that capture the deep meaning of those



involved in the practice and what happens during the betting; methodologies such as ethnographies can achieve this.

## **2.2. Theoretical framework**

Cohen (1980) defines a theory as "a set of interrelated universal statements, some of which are definitions and some of which are relationships assumed to be true, together with a syntax, a set of rules for manipulating the statements to arrive at new statements" (p.17). Theories are derived from concepts which are the variables that classify similarly related phenomena within a field of study (Turner 1989). This study adopted two theoretical perspectives to guide data collection. These are social capital and social practice theories.

The social practice theoretical lens directed the study in observing the activities that happen in sports betting; on the other hand, Putnam's interpretation of social capital, more especially the concept of bonding social capital, was adopted to explore the meaning that the adolescents attach to sports betting and how they start engaging in sports betting activities.

Theories of everyday social practice have gained prominence across the social sciences. These have been building upon ideas from scholars such as Bourdieu, Giddens, de Certeau, and Ortner (Gordon & Reith, 2019). Practice theory refers to a broad paradigm of theoretical and methodological socio-material approaches to understanding everyday social practices using a socio-cultural lens (Reckwitz, 2002). The theory provides a springboard for understanding interactions between individuals, contexts, and structures in which they function. On the other hand, a social practice is defined as 'a routinized way in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described, and the world is understood' (ibid, p. 250); the focus is on the practice and not on the performers of the practice. This current study focuses on the practice of sports betting and what is involved in it than on the adolescent bettors. The theory helps us understand how complex and embedded social practices like sports betting become habitual and routinised in social contexts. Social practice theorists argue that although actors and entities interact when practices occur, the essence is on the practice and not on the performers of the practice; thus, individuals are perceived as agents of the practice. Through the lens of practice theory, sports betting is not considered a discrete behaviour but a social practice. Practice theorists propose that research on gambling and related activities should focus on how gambling practices develop and how policies can be developed to avert any problem gambling (Shove, 2010).

Practice theory presents a new dimension of approaching complex behaviours such as sports betting, which are routine and involve mental activities, materials, social spaces, places, and group agency. In order to perform a practice, many things are involved: the body and the mind use available resources around using language or the rules necessary to achieve the task. Gordon and Reith (2019) observe that "social norms, which can be explained as informal and unwritten rules that govern people's behaviour, are an element that can also shape practices, especially in gambling-related activities. Such social norms can influence whether the practice is

performed in the first place, and how the practice is performed" (p. 9). Furthermore, power and agency are essential elements of practice. Thus, through the perspective of practice theory on sports betting, researchers understand the phenomenon as a social practice and not perceive it as discrete behaviour.

There are several vital elements of social practice that are useful in gambling research. These include embodiment, materiality, language discourses, social structures, spaces and places, and power and agency. These are evident in the current study since the adolescent bettors use various materials to place bets, have a unique language, use time and spaces, and follow a set of norms for smooth betting.

However, advancements in technology have an impact on the spatial aspect of gambling. Nowadays people can place bets using mobile phones or computers. Thus, the practice of betting is now considered as both a socio-cultural activity and a unique psychological phenomenon (Gordon et al., 2015).

On the other hand, the concept of social capital is multidimensional and is getting attention in the social sciences since it can be applied to a wide range of study fields (Requena, 2003). The overarching idea of this concept is that networking in life matters (Field, 2003). Networking is said to be "a process that translates into an individual's effectiveness in the community and workplace, and a resource that ties communities together" (Grisworld & Nichols, 2006). Three notable figures behind the study of social capital include Pierre Bordieu, James Coleman, and Robert Putnam (Field, 2003).

Generally, both Bordieu and Coleman posit that social capital is a resource that helps individuals to better themselves, either socially or professionally. In contrast, Putnam espouses social capital as a resource that functions at the community and society levels. Although Putnam's work was at the aggregate level, the theory fits well with the current study which collected data from individuals who belong to aggregated groups that engage in sports betting. This group of adolescents form a community of bettors as they come together to bet and interact. Although they do not gather in large numbers at once to bet, but they belong to a larger group by virtue of being adolescent bettors.

Putnam (2000) employs social capital theory to explain connections between individuals and the formed networks, and the norms and trust that arise from those connections. Grisworld and Nichols (2006) observe that gambling can be a social activity, with the power of bringing members of the community together, thereby enhancing social capital. Bonding social capital and bridging social capital explain the connections that individuals engage in when negotiating social capital. Bonding social capital explains the connections within a group or community that share similar interests, characteristics, and values; bridging social capital, on the other hand, promotes links between diverse individuals. Putnam (2000) explains that bonding is inward-looking and suitable for "getting by" while bridging is outward-looking and essential for "getting ahead." This study envisages that adolescent bettors create social capital through bonding while socialising with their peers.

Putnam expanded the social capital theory by exploring fundamental questions about civic life in regions of Italy; the central question in his work sought to establish the conditions for creating strong, responsive, and effective representative institutions (Putnam, Leonardi & Nanetti, 1993). The concept of social capital that was developed was not merely applicable to the Italian case but was intended to be used in understanding institutional performance and public life in many cases. Salient aspects of the theory describe features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions (ibid, p. 167). Also, social capital facilitates spontaneous cooperation (like the ones that occur during sports betting) which is based on mutual value to the participants.

The trust is based on norms of generalised reciprocity and civic engagement. When this norm is followed, then communities move efficiently since opportunism is restrained. Also, the individuals who act in reciprocity do so for short term altruism and long-term self-interest.

Societies exhibit either vertical or horizontal networks depending on the members and players involved. Vertical networks link unequal agents in asymmetric relations of hierarchy and dependence; on the other hand, horizontal networks bring together agents of equivalent status and power (ibid, p. 173). In the present study, horizontal networks are assumed among the adolescents while vertical ones exist between adolescents and adults during sports betting. No matter how dense or important to the participants, vertical networks cannot sustain social trust and cooperation (ibid, p. 174).

Individuals who participate in organized clubs create connections with others based on reciprocity and potential future benefits or establish trustworthiness within those connections. The main factors central to building social capital include informal social engagement, civic participation, and tolerance. Informal social engagement refers to ongoing interactions between individuals and groups in an environment that is purely neither individual, commercial, nor governmental (Grisworld & Nichols (2006).

As Bourdieu's theory is perceived as reductionist for privileging economic capital as the ultimate source and eventual form of all other capitals (Alexander, 1996), it did not fit well with this current study since this is not the only reason why adolescents connect during sports betting. Coleman's interpretation was not adopted as his argument is seen to be circular and tautological (Quibria, 2003). Thus, social capital seems to exist only when it is positively seen at community level outputs (Tzanakis, 2013).

On the other hand, although Putnam's theory is sometimes criticized as being simplistic by having an *a priori* assumption that trust has pro-social consequences, it explains well the social practices that happen during adolescents' engagement in sports betting. However, the present study slightly deviates from this notion as adolescent sports betting is a practice that is socially problematic because it is illegal to them.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **3.1. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This chapter presents the methodology that was adopted to collect and analyse the study data. Wilkinson (2000) defines research methodology as the specific procedures or techniques employed to identify, select, process, and analyse topical information.

### **3.2. RESEARCH DESIGN**

This is a qualitative ethnographic study. The qualitative methodology of inquiry is proper when little is known about a topic, the research context is poorly understood, the boundaries of a domain are ill-defined, the phenomenon under investigation is not quantifiable, the nature of the problem is not explicit, or the researcher suspects that the phenomenon needs to be re-examined (Morse, 2003, p. 833). Furthermore, researchers need a clear picture of the issues and questions they want to investigate and how they will investigate them, but always with an openness of mind to improvise, revise and adjust (Klopper, 2008). As observed by Jones (1995), qualitative research begins by accepting that there is a range of different ways of making sense of the world and accepting that the truth is only valid in a specific context and is concerned with discovering the meanings seen by those who are being researched and with understanding their view of the world rather than that of the researcher. This approach is suitable for this study to investigate the phenomenon in Malawi. The same approach may not be ideal in other contexts or may produce different results; qualitative approaches do not aim to generalize the findings.

On the other hand, ethnography is a design of inquiry where researchers study the shared patterns of behaviours, language, and actions of an entire cultural group in a natural setting over a prolonged period; data collection often involves observations and informal interviews, which are also called conversations with a purpose. The goal is to establish the meaning of a phenomenon from the participants' views (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p. 55). Thus, the focus is on the emic rather than the etic. Past researchers proposed using ethnographic and visual ethnographic methods when investigating gambling-related activities since this helps the researcher capture mundane, fleeting, and unspoken events of practice (Pink, 2007; Gordon & Reith, 2019). Since this study sought to understand the meaning of sports betting from the adolescents' perspective and observe the activities that occur at the betting sites, the qualitative ethnographic approach was ideal. The bettors spend considerable time at the betting sites; therefore, observation was necessary to understand the phenomenon. Furthermore, since the phenomenon is new in Malawi, it has not been explored in-depth, as evidenced by the lack of empirical research study documents.

### **3.3. AREA OF THE STUDY**

Data were collected from adolescents below the age of 18 from Bangwe township in Blantyre city, Malawi. Bangwe is a high-density township located in the outskirts of Blantyre city,

which is in the southern part of Malawi. The study area spanned from Banana market square to Bangwe market square up to the Mvula market area. Mostly, the study was done along the main road where betting kiosks were erected, and shopping locations where betting halls were located.

### **3.4. POPULATION SAMPLE AND SAMPLING PROCEDURE**

Both purposeful and snowball sampling were used to recruit participants. Purposive sampling is used to choose a case because it illustrates some feature or process in which the researcher is interested; the technique demands that we think critically about the population parameters we are studying and choose our sample case carefully on this basis (Silverman, p.193). Purposive sampling was used since the study sought to collect data from adolescent bettors only. Although adolescent students were the preference, even those who dropped out of school were also included.

Snowball sampling was instrumental in this study since some of the adolescent bettors did not bet physically but used smartphones to bet; hence could not be located by the researcher at betting kiosks or betting halls. These online bettors were only interviewed and not observed betting.

Although several bettors were present at times in the betting halls or betting kiosks, the focus was on the adolescents. About 28 male and two female adolescents were observed at the betting spaces. However, informal interviews were conducted with only 18 of these adolescents (15 male and three female). One of the males and one of the girls were interviewed after the researcher was referred to them through snowballing. Thus, the interviews with these two adolescents were more structured than the informal conversations with the rest.

### **3.5. METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION**

First, an informant interview was conducted with two adults who knew very well and practiced sports betting. These adults were frequent bettors from Bangwe who sold used clothes around Bangwe township and were not related to the adolescent bettor participants. Merriam (1998) describes an excellent key informant as someone who "understands the culture but is also able to reflect on it and articulate for the researcher what is going on" (p. 23). Initially, the interview was planned for one person, but his friend accompanied him, and he proposed that both should participate in the interview so that they could give in a rich account as they could remind each other of things that might escape their minds. The researcher agreed to this arrangement, and the interview took about 40 minutes. The researcher took notes and audio recorded the conversation after getting permission from both the informants.

Next, observations were made of the adolescent participants in public betting spaces, which were roadside kiosks and betting halls. The observations were divided into different periods on different days. These were morning session (08:00 – 1:45), afternoon session (12:00 – 16:00) and evening session (16:30 – 19:00). Sometimes the evening session ended when the betting shops

closed, or the betting kiosk where the data collection took place stopped operating. These shops and kiosks did not have fixed operating hours.

Then, informal interviews were conducted with those willing to participate in the study. All the interviews were audio-recorded using a smartphone when the participant permitted the researcher. When data saturation was reached, the researcher stopped collecting the data. Creswell and Creswell (2018) state that one stops collecting data when gathering new data no longer sparks new insights or reveals new properties. Since these were public spaces, the researcher observed the activities taking place at the betting sites without revealing the underlying motive of data collection. This helped capture the practice in its original form without causing the Hawthorne effect. Individuals tend to modify some aspects of their behavior when they discover that they are being observed. Thus, the researcher tried as much as possible not to raise suspicion, for example, by dressing casually after noticing that the bettors quickly identified the researcher as peculiar in the first days due to dressing and a bag that was carried along; they withdrew from the researcher, but this changed when the researcher adjusted clothing and stopped carrying the bag. However, the researcher's research motives were disclosed to those who were approached for interviews. The researcher approached the seemingly adolescent bettors (due to their appearance) and started a conversation where age was asked early to affirm the participants' age. Most of them first said that they were either 18 or 19 years old (above the legal betting age), but when they were asked about their date of birth, it did not match with the age they claimed, and thus they then gave their actual age, which was below 18 years and thus eligible for the study.

The data collection exercise was conducted from mid-January 2021 to the end of February 2021, and both English and Chichewa languages were used. There were no interpreters during the interviews since the researcher knows both languages, and the participants were also fluent in either of the two. It is also common to mix the two languages during conversations in Malawi. The informal conversations lasted from 12 – 18 minutes.

Data transcription and coding were done using Nvivo software. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the data, and the study followed an iterative inductive approach. Creswell and Creswell (2018) note that "data analysis is an ongoing process during research, and it involves analysing participant information. Researchers typically employ general analysis steps as well as those steps found within a specific design. More general steps include organizing and preparing the data; an initial reading through the information; coding the data; developing from the codes a description and thematic analysis; using computer programs; representing the findings in tables, graphs, and figures; and interpreting the findings. These interpretations involve stating lessons learned, comparing the findings with past literature and theory, raising questions, offering personal perspective, stating limitations, and advancing an agenda for reform" (p. 342).

### 3.7. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Researchers must pay attention to ethical issues before conducting the study, beginning the study, during data collection and data analysis, and in reporting, sharing, and storing the data (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, p. 170). Ethics are a set of moral principles which guide the researcher on what to do and what not to do in a study (Gilbert, 2005). This study was conducted with adherence to all possible ethical considerations. Atkinson (2009) observes that "ethnographic field research does not merely pose practical problems about anticipatory regulation, but also exposes the inadequate understanding of social life embedded in the assumptions of contemporary regulatory regimes" (p. 1).

First, the purpose of the study was explained to the participants in clear and easy-to-understand terms, and then informed consent was sought from them before collecting data; However, there was a prepared form for consent; most of the participants opted for verbal consent and did not sign the forms. This confirms what Metro (2014) described that both ethnographers and anthropologists face challenges using written consent forms in the field with people who may feel uncomfortable signing them.

They were also notified that they were free to withdraw the consent (if they so wished) at any point during the research process. Thus, participation was voluntary, and there was no coercion of participants into the study. Furthermore, the researcher declined to offer monetary rewards to the adolescents for betting as a token of appreciation. That would paint a picture of sponsoring them to engage in the practice; this could be unethical.

Second, permission to record interviews was obtained from the participants. Furthermore, the study ensured no harm to the participants' life, relationships, or networks. This was partly achieved by conducting the interviews around the betting premises than the adolescents' homes. That would raise suspicion to their relatives or friends who do not engage in the practice. Also, the researcher allowed some of the adolescents to hold the conversations in pairs as they felt safe that way.

Confidentiality in handling and processing of data and dissemination of findings was also guaranteed. This was partly achieved through the anonymization of respondents' identities by using pseudonyms.

Since the study involved minors, the researcher did not participate in the betting act with them. That would raise ethical concerns and influence them to engage in the practice; the researcher observed the betters in public spaces over time and then engaged them in informal conversational interviews.

As Silverman (2010) posits that research should benefit both the participants and the researcher, the findings of this study will enlighten adolescent sports betters and non-betters on issues that they never gave notice to concerning sports betting; the participants were asked if they wished to have access to the findings of the study to which all of them declined. The researcher realises that during ethnographic research, knowledge is co-created between the researcher and the researched in specific social situations. Thus, questions of who owns the data may arise and should be dealt with appropriately. In this study, the participants do not own the data.

Despite the above ethical considerations, researchers should always expect to meet new ethical challenges in their research since ethnography is unpredictable and ethical dilemmas cannot always be foreseen in advance of fieldwork (ibid, p. 168). Therefore, ethics should not be viewed as a set of rules for expected behaviour but as an ongoing dialogical social practice (Canella & Lincoln, 2011). Siouti (2018) argues that it may be appropriate to gain verbal consent rather than written consent during informal interviews in ethnographical studies. This is backed by Guillemin and Gillam (2004), who note that signed consent forms do not always constitute informed consent but merely provide evidence that consent was granted since procedural ethics demands documentation for consent (p. 272). It also depends on the data collection method and research setting (as some are public spaces whose social situation may not be feasible to negotiate for consent without raising unwarranted suspicion). For example, it is not practical for a researcher to observe in a marketplace to solicit consent from those being observed.

Fujii (2015) observes that researchers should take advantage of "accidental ethnographies," which are unexpected opportunities that occur outside planned data collection moments or schedules. In such instances, it is challenging to start with gaining consent. Ethical decisions need to be made in the field as issues arise, and there is no "one size fits all" approach to ethical issues in qualitative research (Van Den Hoonaard & Hamilton, 2016). Since ethics is a field where there is often no agreed single right, ethical issues broadly fall back to the researcher. Furthermore, conducting fieldwork in natural settings presents unanticipated ethical dilemmas which require immediate decisions and resolution. In this study, the researcher often stopped by kiosks or betting halls that were not on the schedule provided there was a group of adolescent bettors around. This was beneficial because sometimes, the scheduled data collection site did not have adolescent bettors involved in the practice on specific days. Thus, these unexpected opportunities helped in collecting vital data. However, no matter the situation, the researcher still obtained consent before proceeding with data collection.

Ethnographic research takes unpredictable directions. There are also ethical dilemmas concerning power relations when ethnographers research powerful or vulnerable participants such as teens, as was the case in this study. Lederman (2006b) notes that ethnographies are also challenged where there are pre-existing relationships with participants. There is a need to delineate ethical researcher-participant relationships to constitute valid research. Lederman continues to observe that often research questions arise while already in the field when conducting ethnographic studies. The researcher in this study did not use power to force participants to participate in the study out of fear. Some adolescent bettors were friends of the researcher, but they declined to participate in the study, saying they felt uncomfortable doing so; the researcher did not force them. Also, the researcher wanted to interview adolescents who stated that they stopped betting. However, they too declined, saying they did not want to discuss anything related to gambling as it reminded them of their past.

The agents operating the betting shops and kiosks gave verbal consent to the researcher to conduct the research but not behave in a way that would scare the bettors. It was not allowed to paste non-betting content on the notice board (such as the researcher's notice of conducting research).



## CHAPTER FOUR

### 4.1. Presentation of results

This chapter presents the most significant findings of the study, which are grouped into two parts. The first part is an account of observations made to answer research question one investigating adolescents' activities during sports betting. The next part reports findings from interviews that answer research questions two and three; this part was categorized into themes that depict the participants' understanding of sports betting and the meaning they attach to the phenomenon. Pseudonyms have been used to conceal the identities of the participants.

### 4.2. Describing structures and resources used for betting activities

The researcher identified two physical structures that adolescents used in betting practices. Both structures sold betting products from one company: Premier bet company. At the time of the research, there were two licensed betting companies in Malawi: Premier bet company and World Star betting company. However, the World Star betting company offered only online betting services while Premier bet company offered physical and online betting services.

#### *i. Betting kiosks*

These were roadside benches with a chair, and a large summer premier bet branded umbrella, which shielded the betting agent from direct heat from the sun. The agents receive commissions for working on behalf of the betting company to offer betting products to customers. There was a betting machine that measured 50cm x 40cm x 15cm big. All the kiosks belonged to one company called Premier bet company. The company provided the betting machines and the umbrellas while the agents sourced the tables (or bench) and chairs. At some kiosks, there was no chair; thus, both the agent and bettors were standing throughout. The machine had a keypad, LCD screen, and embedded printer, fed with a thin printing paper roll for producing bet slips. All kiosks were movable, and the agents brought them in the morning, assembled them, and started operations; in the evening, they dismantled the kiosks and kept them at nearby shops.

All the kiosks were stationed at trading centres or along tarmac roads where people came to do various things such as buying groceries, boarding public transport, buying fast foods or drinks. A bustling trading centre, the kiosks were as close as 40 meters apart. In some locations, the kiosks were put side by side (2 meters apart). Most of the kiosks were erected close to mobile money kiosks. Thus, sometimes one must approach the kiosk to know whether it was a betting kiosk or mobile money kiosk. Some mobile money kiosks also used Premier bet branded umbrellas to shield the mobile money agent from the sun. These umbrellas, however, act as units of advertisements for betting.

During the evening, the agents used solar-powered lamps to get light. Sometimes they also used a phone torch to supplement the light from the solar lamp. When it rained, they carried the machine to a nearby building's veranda and continued operations there.

Every betting kiosk printed and stapled each day's international soccer fixtures; no local fixtures were used for betting. The agents also kept a ballpoint pen and some plain papers that customers

used to write their match combinations using match codes from the fixture printout. All the agents in the sampled kiosks were male.

## *ii. Betting halls (shops)*

The betting halls (locally commonly called shops) were either small (3m x 4m) or big (7m x 8m) in size. Depending on the size of the shop, the agents operating it ranged from 1 to 3 people. All the shops were painted and branded with Premier bet company colours. They were located around busy business premises or marketplaces. The shops had no side rooms; they were just one big hall with a long counter in front of where the agents operated from. Behind the counter, there were betting machines, computers, and four giant screens mounted on the walls. These screens displayed different types of betting games such as horse racing, spin, and colour games. There were also other screens (2 or 3 depending on the size of the shop) that displayed some results of ongoing games.

The following were pasted in all the shops on one of the walls: rules for placing bets, a sign prohibiting those below the age of 18 from betting, guidelines on how to avoid being addicted to betting, advert calling for those who wished to become betting agents to call the company using a toll-free number, and guidelines for preventing Covid-19 pandemic (such as wearing a face mask, washing hands, and keeping some distance from each other). There were chairs behind the counter for the agents to sit on and two chairs at the shop's back for customers to sit on (only about eight people could sit comfortably on those chairs). There were notice boards on one of the walls where daily fixtures and match results were pasted. If there happened to be a big winner that week this was also pasted to motivate other bettors. For example, one person won 56 Million Kwacha (\$71,960) after placing a K150 (\$0.19) bet. These big winners were from across the country. It was not allowed to paste anything else not related to betting without authorization from the company.

All the shops were powered by electricity from the national grid, but they also had standby generators for power back up in a power outage. Some had fans for cooling, while others just used windows for ventilation. In some shops, both males and females worked as agents, and they wore branded golf shirts. Some big shops had a security guard just outside the entrance.

## **4.3. Describing activities involving adolescents in sports betting**

There were similarities and differences in the activities at betting kiosks and betting halls depending on the available structures and the services offered to the adolescents. Male and female adolescents were observed placing bets at betting kiosks, but only males were observed placing bets inside the betting halls. Also, the girls spent less time transacting at the kiosk than boys. Once they placed bets, they departed immediately, unlike boys who hanged around the kiosks for some time, inspecting their tickets.

### *i. At betting kiosks*

Betting kiosks were mounted in the morning at the agent's convenient time; there was no set time for them to be mounted, and they were also dissembled in the evening at the agent's convenient time. However, when there were not many soccer games in the evening, most of them stopped operating around 18:00, as there were no customers. During weekends they

operated beyond 18:00 hours but no later than 20:00 hours due to the government's curfew concerning Covid-19 pandemic restrictions. Some kiosks operated daily while others operated on some days but were not found on their premises on other days.

In all the kiosks that were observed, both adolescents and adults were seen placing bets. These places only offered purchases of soccer match bets. Adolescents approached the kiosks and asked for a fixture printout of that day's and week's soccer matches or a results sheet. Then they sat nearby on dusty ground with either one of the printouts (or both), pen, and small, slender piece of plain paper.

If they had a betting ticket of matches that were already played, they checked the results sheet against their tickets to see if they had won or lost on their bet. If they lost, then they tore the ticket into pieces while expressing dissatisfaction (for example, blaming the team that made their ticket lose, or by saying the money lost could have been used for other purposes); if they lost by one game on a ticket that had several games, they received their stake back from the agent (a stake is the amount of money risked or invested on the success or outcome in a sports match). Similarly, if they won, they celebrated, showed the ticket to other bettors standing nearby (regardless of their age), and cashed out their money from the agent, and shared some of it with their friends at the kiosks. If the amount that was won was not available at the kiosk, the winner was referred to other kiosks or betting halls to collect their winning.

Once the adolescents decided which betting options they wanted and which games they wanted to select, they wrote the game codes and outcome selections on a small piece of plain paper and indicated the amount they would stake. Then they handed the paper and the money to the agent. They also returned the printout or passed it on to other customers who were waiting for it. The agent then keyed in the codes into the betting machine and printed a ticket that showed the customer's selection, the amount staked, and possible winning amount. The adolescents inspected the slip critically to confirm that what had been communicated to the agent was printed out. Then they would leave the kiosk. Sometimes before leaving, two or more adolescents showed each other their tickets to admire or just mock each other's selection. It was also common to see two or more adolescents use the fixture printout and direct each other on which selections were best to win. Some adolescents came with already written choices and did not require the printout; they said they checked the fixtures on the internet with friends and made their selections. This way, they say they do not spend much time at the kiosks considering that they were betting illegally. They explained that they do not bet on the internet because it requires more internet data bundles that were not affordable. Those in a hurry or rushing to go somewhere dictated their choices to the agent from the fixture printout directly to the betting machine. Depending on how many combinations the bettor wished to make, one could take between 15 to 30 minutes to check the fixture, select the games, give the selection to the agent, and get their printout from the agent.

Occasionally, the agent received phone calls from adolescent bettors who dictated their choices over the phone, and the agent produced the ticket on their behalf. They paid when they came to collect the ticket. Sometimes, the adolescents sat far from the kiosk towards noon and wrote their combinations, then sent one seemingly older adolescent to place the bets for them. In this case, the one who was sent spent over 30 minutes placing the bets for all his friends. This tactic ensured that the agent was safe from would-be inspectors who could come or other citizens who

might report the agent to authorities and eventually lose his licence. Throughout the data collection period, the researcher did not see any such inspectors.

Since there were many kiosks and betting halls, the adolescents did not always use one place to bet. They could bet at any convenient place; thus, it was not possible to observe them at the same place over several days. Also, depending on the location of the kiosk, some kiosks were more frequently patronised than others.

Many adolescents patronised the kiosks in the evening since they knew that no official could come to bar them from betting as those were beyond regular working hours. Although the agents seemed not to bar the adolescents from betting, the adolescents themselves seemed to bet with some caution.

## *ii. At betting halls*

Adolescents who entered to bet in betting halls had different options depending on what they wanted to bet on. Those who wanted to place match bets or check game results went straight to notice boards where printed results sheets and match fixtures were pasted. They checked the results against their betting ticket; if their ticket won, they then collected the money from the agents. If the ticket was a loss, they shredded it and threw it on the floor, thereby making the inside of the betting hall very dirty.

If they wanted to bet, they checked the fixtures on the notice board and wrote the codes on a small piece of plain paper and the amount of money they were staking, and gave these to the agents who produced a ticket for them. Then, most of them stood and watched horse or dog racing and a spin machine on the screens; Some betted on these machines as they waited for the results of the football matches. Those who wanted to play the spin machine or the horse/dog racing paid a minimum of k300 (\$0.39). Occasionally, a group of bettors (both adolescents and adults) counted their loose change, and sometimes they shared their small changes with their friends. When one won on the spin machine or the horse racing, the others admired him, and the winner shared part of the money with his circle of friends. Some adolescents entered the building, watched the screens, discussed the day's matches with their friends while standing, and then went out without betting. When some bettors got tired of standing, they went to the back of the room and sat on the long benches that faced the counter; they could follow the racing on the screens. Others came to sit on the chairs to inspect their ticket(s) thoroughly.

Many food sellers entered the buildings to advertise their merchandise during lunchtime, but the bettors mostly ignored them; the researcher did not see any person buying from these sellers. The people inside the hall were busy discussing betting and watching the screens.

Occasionally, those who were deemed very young were barred from entering the halls. Nevertheless, they could stand by the window and watched the screens. If these barred adolescents wanted to place bets (mostly spin machine, horse racing, or colours machine), they gave the stake money to fellow adolescents who had a giant stature (and thus deemed over 18 years old) and were thus allowed to enter the halls to bet on their behalf. If the ticket won, the money was delivered to the youngster by the window, and he would share some of it with the one who did the actual betting.

The adolescents who lost all their money for the day hung around for some minutes and then exited the hall. Occasionally, their peers offered them some loose change to try their luck again, and if they lost again, they looked dejected and went out. Some people entered the buildings, placed their bets, and then went outside to play a local game called *bawo* as they waited for the result of their ticket. Most of the people who were found inside the halls were shabbily dressed.

Some small-scale business operators also left their merchandise benches and entered the halls to place bets. Some bettors brought energy drinks or other foodstuffs to eat when they felt hungry; they also shared the same with their friends. The researcher was also given cooked maize by one of the bettors one day; there existed a culture of sharing inside the betting halls. The bettors also assisted each other to make the most of their betting by teaming up to choose and make a substantial selection of matches for a ticket.

The researcher used his smartphone to record the informal conversations upon getting permission and wrote some notes on the smartphone using an application called notes. During observations, some notes were made by speaking to the phone's Microsoft office word application, which typed the researcher's words; this is called voice typing. This was helpful because sometimes many activities took place simultaneously and quickly; therefore, the researcher needed to capture as many details as possible.

The researcher would first wait for the adolescents to place their bets, and when they were leaving the betting hall, they were approached and asked for consent to participate in the study through an informal conversation. Some accepted a one-on-one conversation, while others preferred to be together with their peers (mostly in pairs so that they could handle the conversation together, this way, they felt safe). Sometimes younger adolescents were in the company of older adolescents because they belonged to the same class at school; the researcher did not object to this arrangement.

In the four halls observed, entering and exiting bettors were frequent, especially in the morning and afternoon and mostly during weekends. In one of the shops (hall), two women were sitting on the benches for about 2 hours just watching the screens. They were food traders who plied their trade at the market through canvassing; they had their food baskets in the betting halls.

#### **4.4. Findings from informal conversations**

This section presents the findings from informal conversations looking at the meaning of sports betting to adolescents and how these adolescents start the practice of sports betting.

##### **A. The meaning that adolescents attach to sports betting**

###### **i. Quick means of earning a fortune**

Most of the participants explained that they perceived sports betting as a means of earning a fortune or at least winning some money. This is an easy way of winning large amounts of money by investing small amounts of money into them. The publicity given to bettors who win millions of kwachas (on television and billboards) motivates the adolescent bettors to continue betting despite losing money regularly.

Benjamin's (15 years old) perception of sports betting was explained in this way:

I was intrigued by the money that others were winning, so I wanted to try my luck. Although I do not win regularly or win just small amounts, I continue coming here to bet, hoping that someday I will make it and win big like others. This will change my livelihood.

This was corroborated by 17-year-old William, who was a Form 4 student:

Mostly it is about the money, although I do not win as I wish. I "*scanned*" (won) K29,000 (\$37) on 4th January this year, but the past two years, I did not *scan*; I was losing my money, but I keep on coming hoping that someday I will *scan* millions.

This was also reiterated by Henry, 16 years old and in form 2, who said:

We win some money, though very little we are getting there; someday, we will win big. This thing requires patience. Last year I bought a pair of slippers, a shirt and a sweat jersey using the money I won. I went straight to town to purchase these things when I won.

Some stated that they were willing to stop betting only when they win significant (referring to millions), and then they will start a business when they finish their studies using the money obtained from betting. As form 1 student Simon, who was 15 years old, narrated:

I was motivated by guys who won big through betting. One man *scanned* 109 Million Kwacha (\$140,000) and bought three mansions; his life was instantly transformed! Another guy won 54 Million Kwacha (\$69,000). Their stories are posted on the notice boards inside the betting halls; you can read them if you wish. So, these have inspired me a lot even up to now. I have hope that one day I will win. If I win millions, then I will stop betting and establish some businesses.

However, some perceive the practice to make ends meet and not necessarily win millions of Kwachas. If they win some cash and manage to buy basic needs, then they are fine. As 14-year-old Ryan, who was in standard 8, explained:

Sometimes betting helps me financially. When I need money, I come here to bet, hoping to win and then use the money for my needs.

Rose and Juliet (11 and 12 years old respectively), who were both in primary school (standard 6) and who bet on behalf of parents and their behalf, had a similar perception about betting:

we bet to win some money. Our parents sometimes win, so maybe we will someday also win.

One of the bettors felt that he was hooked to betting due to one winning that he experienced and thus kept on betting thinking that if he once won, then he is likely to win again: this was his narration:

I was motivated by how people were winning, and when I tried, I *scanned* k7,000 (\$9). So, I got hooked on the practice.

Arthur (17 years old and in form 3) feels there are monetary returns in sports betting despite losing some money through the practice:

...on that day, I had K70,000 (\$90), but I lost K40,000 (\$51) and remained with K30,000 (\$38). But I did not give up seeing many testimonies of peers who win big, I keep on betting hoping that someday I will make it. Now the government has introduced a 20% levy on our winnings. The going is becoming even more challenging. The government has realized that this is a lucrative business.

Despite frustrations due to persistent loss of money, the adolescents still felt they should carry on with the practice as there will be good returns eventually:

So far, I find no tangible benefits from betting apart from the k7,000 that I once won. Sometimes I win k300 (\$0.40) or k500 (\$0.60), but it is nothing compared to what I lose to betting regularly. I have lost quite a lot to betting, but I hope that someday I will *scan* it. Nevertheless, it pains *kufa ndi imodzi* (to lose by one game) when I could get millions had I won.

Although some of the adolescents stopped betting at some point, they explained that they resumed it after some time, especially when they thought about how their lives could be transformed in case of a big win. When they meet friends, who bet and are shown betting vouchers, they get some motivation to continue betting despite the risk of losing is higher than the potential of winning. This perception of viewing betting as a way of making money is consistent with Orford's (2010) study on negative public attitudes toward gambling. Most adolescents viewed gambling as an easy means of making money for their daily needs. Wickwire, Meyers, and Leullen (2007) add that adolescents engage in gambling activities to win money while socializing with friends since gambling offers some excitement.

## **ii. Betting offers fun and friendship**

The data show that sports betting offers adolescents some fun and space for socializing with friends. They are thrilled with different activities, especially inside betting halls, as they watch live virtual races and spin machines. They also enjoy discussing game outcomes, friend's betting tickets, and betting news. As they enjoyed the betting activities, they reported that they meet their friends who also bet. Thus, their regular meetings and interactions strengthen their friendship bonds. Most of the participants cited horse racing and the number spinning machine as fascinating to watch, especially with friends. Most adolescents are initiated into gambling through the socialization avenue provided by gambling companies. Adolescents are motivated by the feeling of being around people and sharing their joys and pains with others (Tagoe, Yendork, & Asante, 2018). Loba (2001) noted that "people invest money in a game not only to increase their expected income, but also to gain intangible benefits, like entertainment, excitement, and enjoyment. Among the needs that gambling can satisfy, the search for pleasure is perhaps the most obvious" (p. 23).

Through their interactions, they developed a unique vocabulary that is specific to betting. For example, "*kufa ndi imodzi*" is widely used in betting circles and even those who do not bet. The term means losing a bet because of just a single lost match on a voucher with several matches.

The other term is "*to scan*," which means to win on a bet.

When responding to how he perceives betting and why he bets, 13-year-old Jones, who was in standard 7, explained:

I come here to interact with friends and have fun playing games. I have never won anything, but I just play because these things interest me a lot and I meet friends here. People give me some money to use for betting on the spin machine and racing. Although I am young, I enjoy being here watching the screens and interacting with friends.

Both James and Horace reiterated this (14 and 16 years old respectively, and in standard seven and form 2 respectively) who explained that they enjoy interacting with others while betting and having fun:

we enjoy being here, playing around and interacting with friends". We do not take betting seriously as others do; we use it to pass the time and chat with friends. We do not have anything else enjoyable to do apart from betting.

Some adolescents seem to have heeded the betting companies' recommendation for bettors not to rely on betting for their livelihoods or become addicted to it. As Mike explained:

I make sure I follow the recommendation that I should not take betting seriously. It is just for pleasure and not for breadwinning. Always use money that is not for other things. It is a game of chance where you can win or lose. So, you do not have to rely on it too much lest you be frustrated. Only use it leisurely and not thoughtfully. Moreover, do not try to immediately recover what you lost because you end up losing more.

Mike's account is part of the list of pasted recommendations on notice boards in the observed betting halls to help bettors bet responsibly.

It was also evident that the adolescents encourage each other to take risks and manage their losses individually and as a group. They help each other in time of need at the betting centres; this strengthens their friendship ties. Peter's explanation shows this notion:

I take betting to interact with friends and passing the time away because I do not have anything else to do after school. I am now connected to my peers through betting, but my relationship with my siblings and parents is not that good because I once used their money for betting, and I lost it all.

When I am with friends who do not bet, then I leave them and come here alone. Some friends offer me money when I do not have one, especially when they see that I am not placing bets. If I happen to win, I am obliged to share with the one who gave me the money as a token of appreciation. For example, when I won K25,000 (\$32), I distributed about K10,000 (\$13) to my peers inside the hall to strengthen our ties. However, some of those I helped repay me evil; they never help me back.

Oscar's perception was related to Peter's account:

Sometimes I collaborate with my friends by discussing which games to bet on and how to choose



the outcomes. We then contribute small amounts of money for the stake and mitigate losing large sums of money alone. Of course, we still lose with just one game in most cases, but then we encourage each other and get over it quickly. We now have stronger friendship ties because sometimes we bet against the teams we love and support to make sure our ticket wins. We seldom quarrel about soccer matches on which team will win or lose as we used to do before starting betting.

The friendships being pursued by the adolescent bettors from betting places cost them money. Although they seem to meet friends and pass the time together, they risk losing their money along the way, which may accumulate to substantial amounts over time.

As explained by Stephen (17 years old):

I lose much money, and that affects me a lot. Sometimes I anxiously follow the games to see how my ticket is fairing because I can cancel some remaining games and get my stake back. I do not see any significant benefits in betting. However, sometimes my friends share with me some money here when they win. We have that culture here that when one wins, they share a small proportion of their winning, and that way, they get assisted too when they are in need. Of course, you share with your friends, not just with everyone.

On the other hand, female adolescent bettors lost previous friendships at the expense of betting as parents cautioned their friends to stay away from the girl bettors. It is considered strange for girls to bet in the Malawian culture. Rose and Juliet (who were not related) had this to say:

Our mothers bet, and they are the ones who send us to bet on their behalf; we stay with our mothers only. Some of our classmates also bet, especially boys. They always carry tickets with them, but we do not bet together with them. We enjoy playing around and interacting with people.

We walk together and feel safe. However, some of our friends no longer interact with us because their parents cautioned them since we bet, and they are afraid their kids can learn it. So, in a way, we have lost some of our friends at home. However, we have some friends at school.

Juul (2008) observed that parents are better positioned to restrict their children's exposure to gambling activities or teach them the principles of responsible gambling.

To avoid losing friends through stereotypes, 17-year-old Mercy, a Form 3 student, resorted to using the internet for betting. This way, she kept her friends as they do not know that she was involved in betting:

I started betting while living in Lilongwe and did not have a phone then, so I went to buy the vouchers from the agents. When some of my friends discovered this, I noticed signs of withdrawal from me. My two brothers also bet, and they have no problem with me betting. When I moved to Blantyre, I got a phone, and I now bet online, and there are many options in the online betting platform than at the agents. I follow betting news on the betting companies' Facebook pages, where I read and enjoy the comments from bettors.

Stewart's experience slightly resembles that of Mercy. However, his account reflects how betting is perceived and treated in Malawi from a religious perspective. It is not a welcome

practice by churches and mosques:

... I do not do this thing openly, you know. I cannot visit the betting halls or kiosks for fear of reprisals from church members and even friends who are not from the church. Our church leaders do not condone betting. Therefore, I just bet on my phone, and that way, I maintain my friends, and life goes on. Of course, I feel that betting is not good, but I bet anyway: it offers some fun, and it is just for passing the time.

Stewart's account shows how sports betting is perceived in African traditional solid and religious societies as unethical and stirs social stigma (Masaba, 2016; Malatest, 2013). However, Basha and White (2002) and McGowan (2014) challenge this approach and argue that the bettors themselves are the best judges of their activities since they bet willingly and rationally for entertainment which must not be deprived. There can be differing views on this, especially on sports betting involving adolescent students who bet illegally. Smith, Schopflocher, and Wood (2011) state that there has not been any consensus among scholars on the morality and rightness of sports betting, especially among the youths.

### **iii. Time wasting and frustrating**

The adolescents noted that sports betting wastes their valuable time and can be frustrating, especially when they lose back. They explained that they spend time betting instead of doing schoolwork. Furthermore, when they bet, they were always conscious of their vouchers, and they always thought about what outcomes their ticket would bring. When results start coming in, and they lose on some games (hence ticket being a loss), they are frustrated and do not concentrate on studying as they think about the stake they lost and the possible return they could have made had they won. Sometimes they thought about their tickets while in class instead of concentrating on the lessons. Gordon, who was a Form 2 student, showed his dismay of sports betting when asked to reflect on sports betting and his studies:

I spend about 5 hours during weekdays and more during weekends betting. This disturbs my studies a lot because I am obsessed with betting. Betting and schooling do not go together; I plan to suspend my betting once schools open, lest I fail the impending national examinations. You see, when I bet and lose, I always want to bet again to recover my money, and this time I bet with frustration and end up losing more. I am losing time, money, and peace of mind.

Mercy's narration of betting and its impact on schooling was similar:

most of the time, my eyes are on the phone betting, and I constantly check game results or match proceedings if it is a live match because I can cancel the bet and earn a considerable refund. I am now spending more time concentrating on betting than on my studies. Therefore, although betting offers some fun, it can reach levels where it starts eating up time for schooling. Also, I spend more money buying internet data bundles for live match betting; these bundles could be used to search for some academic content.

Monaghan and Wood (2010) note that “adolescent gambling is an evolving field of research where much has been learned but much more remains to be explored because the subjects and the environment are always changing. Adolescents in the 1990s differ from today's adolescents, and the gambling environments in the 1990s have undergone a dramatic change. Adolescents in the 1990s grew up with lottery and scratch cards, and they had to make a trip to lottery stalls to buy tickets. Today's adolescents grow up with computers, and they do not even have to leave their desks to gamble. The introduction of cellular phones also turns online gambling into an anytime, anywhere activity that requires an internet-based intervention to control, minimize, and reduce gambling-related problems” (p. 34).

The same was Maxwell's (15 years old) ordeal of betting:

This disturbs education a lot because you become obsessed with it; therefore, betting and schooling are not compatible. I have been contemplating quitting this thing altogether for some time now. It is pretty risky and not suitable for students. It also makes you lose money quickly, and you suddenly become sad.

The data show that the adolescents risk losing both money and time, which could be used in their studies. Thus, both the actual betting practice and the aftermath of the practice (such as losing regularly) negatively impact the education of adolescent students. When they bet with high expectations of winning money but lose, the frustration spills to other areas of their lives, including studies. Gerald, who was 15 years old, recounted how his perception of betting transformed over time:

when I started betting, it looked funny, and I thought it was just a harmless activity until I discovered that I was spending more time betting and following the results with friends than studying. It is like my whole life hinges on betting; I always think about betting and less about my studies. Moreover, I get frustrated when I place many bets and lose on them; I do not even study in that case.

However, some adolescents divide their time for betting and studying, but they use the money to be used in school for betting. When they lose this money, frustration sets in. Rose and Juliet lamented on how they skip food in school during school breaks to save money for betting:

... it does not affect our studies much because we spend just a little time here. However, sometimes we do not buy food during break time at school, and we go hungry to save money for betting, and then we lose the money to betting; this makes us very upset. We feel that we could benefit at least if we had just used the money to buy snacks. Losing to betting is the same as someone stealing our money at school.

## 4.5. Exploring how adolescents start engaging in sports betting in Malawi

### i. Influenced by betting advertisements

Massive advertising and promotional campaigns by the betting companies expose adolescents to betting information. Several billboards along roads and trading centres promoted betting products where this research's data were collected. Also, several adverts on betting were aired on both public and private radio and television stations. For example, one central television station conducted live lotto and jackpot shows and betting promotions every 15 minutes. Those who won millions in betting were also beamed on television, and their stories were portrayed as heroes in the print media. Many mobile money agents also used large umbrellas branded with betting companies' logos and information. Thus, betting information was widespread. There seemed to be no practical regulation to the industry concerning underaged bettors as they were exposed to undue betting information. Lamont, Hing, and Gainsbury (2011) noted that the proliferation of gambling promotions on television exposes adolescents to consider engaging in the practice even before reaching the legal age. Since advertising portrays gambling as a fun, exciting, and glamorous lifestyle with promising financial success, adolescents are easily enticed into the practice. The results are consistent with previous findings that betting advertising exposure can shape adolescent attitudes and behaviours towards betting (Lee, Lemanski, & Jun, 2008; Korn, Hurson, et al., 2005; Derevensky et al., 2010). Thus, gambling advertisements act as triggers (besides enticement of peers, stressful situations, and personal anxiety) for adolescents' engagement in sports gambling activities.

Responding to how he started betting, William narrated that:

... I read in the newspaper about a young man who won millions, they also showed him on television. This aroused something in me to join betting and try my luck. There are so many stories about people who win millions through betting.

Mike started betting after seeing several billboards along the roads:

...you cannot travel 300 meters without seeing either a small or large billboard promoting betting. So, when I saw these in town, I asked a friend if he knew what they meant and how to do it. He thus taught me how to do it, and that is how I joined betting; joining is simple but getting out of this practice is difficult.

Mercy also hinted that the media played a role in her joining betting activities:

... while watching television two years ago, I saw a betting advertisement and later they interviewed several people who had won large sums of money through betting. Most of them looked young; their lives were transformed through winning. So, I decided to give it a try.

### ii. Peer influence

Other adolescents noted that their friends played a significant role in them starting betting. Thus, they were introduced to the practice through step-by-step guidance on placing different types of bets. In most cases, these peers became a group of bettors, and they bet together. The influence of environmental variables such as peers might significantly influence making

adolescents start engaging in gambling behaviour (Chalmers & Willoughby 2006). This is in line with Jacobs' (2000) observation that an adolescent with peers that gamble is at increased risk of gambling. As explained by Gerald:

I did not have any idea of betting until my friend Paul showed me his betting voucher. He explained what it was and showed me the amount he expected to win from that ticket. I was taken up and wanted to learn the practice and start to bet right away. Of course, Paul now stopped betting, and I am also contemplating stopping.

Others, however, had to go against their convictions to join betting as Stewart narrated:

I was just hearing about this thing happening in other countries. I had reservations about it when I read about its adverse effects. So, I did not even imagine myself engaging in the practice at any time. However, when I met my friends at school and showed me tickets, they persuaded me to try betting. It took some time for me to finally give in and started betting.

While some had the pressure from friends to start betting, others joined the practice to keep up with their circle of friends. Arthur's account belongs to this category:

... I discovered that my peers had started betting; this was when betting was getting popular, and I did not have much information about it, but I joined them so that we could still belong together. Some of them were older than me then.

On the other hand, parents (as significant others) also influenced some peers to engage in betting indirectly. This was evident in Rose and Juliet, who were sent by their mothers to bet on their behalf (parents). In the process, the girls also placed bets for themselves. Chalmers and Willoughby (2006) posit that parents and peers might significantly influence females' gambling behaviour.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **5. DISCUSSION**

#### **5.1. Gambling as a social practice**

The observed betting spaces, structures, and activities give insight into adolescent engagement in sports betting. Using the lens of social practice theory, we can understand the mutual interactions between various elements that facilitate action. These are actors, contexts, and physical structures where operations take place. Although this study only observed physical sports betting, the gambling environment is now dynamic with new products and services coming in and technological advancements such as mobile phones or computer betting.

Reckwitz (2002) premised that a practice comprises bodily and mental activities, materials, knowledge, language, discourse, norms, social structures, spaces and places, power, and individual or group agency. In this study, the above was portrayed by the adolescent bettors in various ways. First, the adolescents went to betting sites physically to access betting facilities, products, and services and place the bets. Next was the use of fixture/results printout, choosing the matches to bet on, writing their choices using a pen and a piece of paper, sitting down to

make the selection, and writing it properly, giving the paper to the agent and stake money, waiting for the agent to produce a ticket for them, inspecting their tickets and moving away when satisfied. Some could dictate their choices directly to the agent using the language and terminologies that both could understand; others could also dictate via the phone. At times the adolescents stayed away from the betting sites and sent one to bet on their behalf to avoid any betting regulators that might inspect age limits. Even when placing bets on racing or spinning machines, they followed the rules by placing the bet and waiting for the result to be out and see the outcome right away as these could not be recorded. The nexus of activities and practices were suitable for each type of betting activity and betting structure. For example, activities at betting kiosks were slightly different from those taking place in betting halls, yet the bettors adjusted to both environments. Power relations were also at play as some could direct others on what type of bet to place to win. This shows that at times, the horizontal networks that existed among the bettors, switched to vertical ones as explained by Putnam's social capital theory (Putnam, Leonardi & Nanetti, 1993). By sharing money to enable one to bet or when one won, their groups' relationships were strengthened. This was not done merely as a norm, but the adolescents expected reciprocity in turn. Also, the development of betting vocabulary helped the group members understand each other easily.

The betting companies made their betting services available to their customers by ensuring they had agents in all strategic places to increase revenue generation. Youth policymakers can use this knowledge when developing gambling intervention programs or adolescent socialization charters, which can help keep underaged bettors from the practice. By studying how the adolescents used their bodies, time, materials and how they reacted to a win/loss during their betting, it can become easy to bring in similar benign programs suitable for adolescent students in sports betting. This can give the adolescents meaningful ways to spend time and engage with the community and pursue their studies.

Social norms existed that the adolescents and other bettors followed in betting. Despite them breaking the rule of not betting before age 18, they adhered to other rules that governed the betting practices for the smooth running of the practice. This is also explained by the social capital theory which advances that group participants must adhere to group norms for them to remain part of the group and maintain the trust that exists therein.

However, the spatial element of sports betting varies with the use of mobile applications or computers to bet virtually. Nonetheless, this still means materials are used, and the body is involved in carrying out the task. Casey (2008) observed that sports betting often occurs while socialising among friends, with some group members influencing others to place bets. Sports betting shops hold the promise of social and peer-group interactions (Masaba, Sekakubo, Blaszczyński & Kuka, 2016).

No matter where or how the phenomenon occurs or who is involved in it, Breen et al. (2010) suggest that sports betting should be perceived as a continuum with problematic and unproblematic engagement on both ends than viewing it as a discrete dichotomy.

In this study, the problematic part of the betting continuum was displayed when some of the adolescents were observed early in the morning at betting centres placing bets and following activities there until late afternoon. Lack of regulation meant that the adolescents had access to a practice that was not suitable for them.

## 5.2. The meaning that adolescents attach to sports betting

The findings revealed that the adolescents perceived sports betting as a means of gaining money through winnings. Despite most of them losing small sums of money consistently, which eventually adds up to a considerable sum over time, they continued to engage in the practice hoping that someday they might win large sums of money and change their wellbeing. Although this study did not look at the participants' socio-economic status, it was evident that most of them were from low-class family backgrounds and were trying to invest in betting to uplift themselves from poverty. Accounts such as “last year I bought a pair of slippers, a shirt and a sweat jersey using the money I won; I went straight to town to purchase these things when I won” show that the respondent needed these things but did not have the means to meet the need and sports betting catered for it. This supports past research reported in the literature review, which shows that adolescents engage in betting to win money (Loba, Sherry, Raymond & James, 2001). The findings also confirm Tolchard's (2014) study findings on Ghanaian adolescents' engagement in sports betting, which reported that adolescents considered sports betting a positive way out of poverty. By looking at how the money won at sports betting was utilised, some adolescents had challenges accessing basic needs for their livelihood. While trying to improve their lives, they reported that the practice negatively impacted their studies. For example, spending time meant for studies at betting halls, failing to concentrate on studies both at home and during lessons because of being preoccupied with betting results. Thus, when viewed concerning educational science, sports betting interferes with adolescents' schooling, although indirectly.

As the adolescents are busy pursuing financial gains out of betting, they waste time and are often frustrated. Most of them seem to overlook the amount of time that might be invested in the practice. An opportunity cost is an opportunity lost. The time spent at the betting halls placing bets, watching animal racing on screens can not be used for other things such as studying. This, however, does not mean one has to be studying every time; there is also a need for recreation. Generally, the adolescents become frustrated due to the loss (of money and time) they encounter since they highly expect to win. Past studies revealed that adolescents who experience problem gambling might be involved in truancy (Langhinrichsen-Rohling, Rohde, Seeley & Rohling, 2004a; Wood et al., 2004). As sports betting preoccupies the lives of adolescents, their education is viewed with lower levels of commitment. This frustration can affect other spheres of their lives, but those areas are not the focus of this present study; only their education is being referred to. As the adolescents spend time placing bets and waiting for the results, they might fail to engage in other income-generating activities that do not depend on luck and whose risk of losing the investments is minimal. Besides, betting is illegal for adolescents as they were below the acceptable legal age to engage in the practice.

On the other hand, some of the respondents' accounts show that sports betting is a means of socialisation as it offers friendship and fun. The activities involved in betting seem fascinating to some of the bettors as they could not compare them to other activities. Others, however, lacked other avenues of socialisation hence sports betting seemed to be the best option for them. Betting brought the adolescents together and helped them strengthen their friendship bonds through consistent interactions. This is consistent with other studies that reported that

adolescents' engagement in sports betting is influenced by seeking money and entertainment through social and peer group interactions (Valentine, 2008). Thus, pastime recreational pursuit drives adolescents to engage in sports betting (Williams, Volberg & Stevens, 2012; Ayandele, 2019). Since the adolescents engage in the practice anyway, Bussu and Claudio (2013) caution that the activity may start as recreational but can become problematic if not checked. This was evident in some of the respondents' narration, such as "when I started betting, it looked funny, and I thought it was just a harmless activity until I discovered that I was spending more time betting and following the results with friends than studying...". Such accounts show that some adolescents begin sports betting without thoroughly considering any adverse outcomes from the practice. The social interactions among the adolescents during sports betting accord them space for building strong links with their peers, thereby establishing friendship bonds within the betting community. In the lens of the social capital theory, as espoused by Putnam (2000), interactions within a group create bonding of the members, which is inward-looking and suitable for "getting by." However, it can be seen here that the adolescents' engagements are not entirely beneficial to them; although the members strengthen their friendship bonds, the consequences are not what they desire.

The respondents cited how they got help from their peers with loose cash when they needed it for placing bets. There existed a culture of helping each other within the betting community. The adolescents create social capital as advanced by social capital theorists who note that when individuals participate in some activity within a club, connections are created based on reciprocity and potential future benefits or establishing trustworthiness (Grisworld & Nichols, 2006). The adolescents find betting fascinating because it connected them to their friends while also offering them fun when playing and watching the racing and spin machines, thereby passing the time in a meaningful way for them. The connections created were not only among the adolescents but also with adults at the betting centres. Applying the lens of social capital theory, this means both horizontal and vertical networks exist in adolescents' engagement in sports betting. This finding shows that the adolescents require some activity for socialising with peers and for building friendship bonds. In the absence of other non-risky activities, they resort to betting as it is popular and fills the gap. It should be noted that the social capital theory explains how connections bring positive outcomes among group members. However, some connections may lead adolescents to engage in undesirable actions and activities, as seen in this study; to keep up with their peer groups, the adolescents find themselves engaging in illegal activities such as underaged sports betting.

### **5.3. How adolescents start engaging in sports betting in Malawi**

The adolescents singled out betting promotions from the betting companies as one factor that made them start engaging in sports betting. These promotional messages came in different forms and could reach both the target and unintended masses, such as those below the legal betting age of 18. Sports betting promotional billboards in strategic places such as roadsides,



marketplaces, and trading centres made the information spread quickly. Also, radio and television promotions of betting spread the messages widely and without regulation. As reported in the reviewed literature, this finding confirms past studies such as Derevensky's (2010) study that examined the impact of gambling advertisements on adolescent gambling attitudes and behaviours, which found that media depiction of gambling seems to shape adolescents' attitudes toward gambling. Gavriel, Teichman, and Rahav (2010) collaborate this by explaining that adolescents still place bets despite having reservations about the portrayed positive returns depicted by advertising messages. Having seen how advertising promotions influence young people to engage in betting, some researchers propose a ban on such promotions, especially if the messages can reach those who are not supposed to engage in the practice. Mateo (2020) suggested that media messages that seek to lure young people into betting should be banned. Mateo further observed that there seems to be a deliberate ploy by regulatory authorities to leave a loophole so that more people engage in betting for revenue generation of the companies and the governments through levies.

Similarly, Hastings and Saren (2003) advance that betting advertising messages should be regulated and not be reinforced as fun, harmless, leisure, and profitable. The Malawian adolescents seemed vulnerable to the betting message promotions due to weak government regulation; no wonder the adolescents found their way to place bets in betting halls and at kiosks despite being underaged. The industry seemed to focus on increasing revenue generation without enforcing laws to help school-going adolescents stay away from the practice. The phenomenon is complex since it is left to the individual to decide whether to join it regardless of age. Furthermore, it is only the positive side of sports betting portrayed to the masses, and hence decision-making is mainly done using that corpus of knowledge. As the adolescents seek some form of socialisation, they fall victim to such promotional messages. When they start engaging in the practice, other areas of their lives are negatively affected, for example, their education. Thus, betting promotions latently have an impact on adolescents' education. When the adolescents who do not engage in the practice come across the promotional messages (in whatever form), they ask their peers who bet about the messages. The peers most likely also have one side only of these promotions, the positive side. The regulatory agencies have a role to play to regulate this present situation. McMullan (2011) noted that gambling companies had devised novel ways of getting their advertising messages to target groups in subtle ways (such as becoming significant sponsors of sporting teams, events, competitions, and stadia and commercial partners of sports organizations, and gaining celebrity endorsements). Therefore, they should also find ways to ensure that their promotional messages do not directly reach the wrong group or mitigate this possibility.

In a study by Thomas (2014), which sought views from parents concerning sports betting promotional messages, the parents were concerned that the messages were enticing yet misleading and harmful to some population subgroups such as adolescents. Hing (2014) noted that adolescents are constantly exposed to gambling promotions while watching televised sports; those whose households do not have televisions or radios still get these messages from billboards along the road.

Although the adolescents claimed that the betting agents bar them from betting at certain times, the researcher did not witness such things happen during the data collection period. Thus, there

is laxity and weak regulation of underaged bettors from the government and the betting companies. Instead, betting promotions are rampant. However, if adolescents can access materials about the negative impact of engaging in sports betting at an early age, the current situation might improve. As Winters et al. (2000) found in a survey that explored youth gambling problems, youth stayed away from gambling-related activities if they had access to materials that sensitized them about the dangers of sports betting before the legal age. It should be noted that even if one reaches the legal betting age, but if that person is still not able to manage their betting behaviour, their education can still be negatively affected. However, this current study does not aim to delve into whether one should or should not engage in betting when they reach a legal betting age.

It was not surprising for the adolescents to mention peer influence as one factor that made them start engaging in sports betting. Adolescence is a period of discovering and trying various things, and peer pressure plays a role in the adolescents to start doing things. This is a stage where socialisation takes centre stage, and the kind and quality of friends determine what one will likely be involved in. The youth must have the correct information about the things that their peers try to introduce them to. They need to critically assess the impact of activities on their education or general wellbeing. However, this critical analysis attribute might not be present in all adolescents. Jacobs (2000) posits that an adolescent with peers that gamble has an increased risk of engaging in gambling.

Furthermore, different people have differing likes and dislike; therefore, it is impossible to prescribe adolescents' activities. However, thorough research on certain things before involvement is recommended. For example, they can inquire why they are barred from certain activities (like betting) until they reach a certain age despite having friends' influence. One explanation on the rise of adolescent involvement in gambling activities is that gambling behaviour among adolescents is part of adolescent experimentation with adult behaviour together with peers who hold the same interests (Delfabbro et al. 2006b; Stinchfield 2000).

However, the case becomes even more complex when family members influence the adolescents into betting (directly or indirectly), as reported by the two girls who started sports betting because their mothers sent them to bet for them. A study by Chalmers and Willoughby (2006) specifically found that parents and peers highly influence females' gambling behaviour; however, parenting issues are beyond the scope of this study.

This finding of adolescents being influenced by peers is consistent with what Tolchard (2014) found in a study that looked at attitudes to gambling in Ghanaian adolescents where it was reported that to a large extent, peer influence forced some of the adolescents to join in the betting practice to fit in the group. This peer influence can sometimes be subtle, for example, if the peers withdraw from a non-bettor. This can force the secluded adolescent to remain part of the group, thereby joining sports betting.

## CHAPTER SIX

### 6.1. Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to examine the meaning that adolescent bettors in Malawi place on sports betting. Also, the study explored the factors that influenced them to join the practice. To better understand the above aims, observations into what was involved in the practice (including the structures used) were made. The study explored the phenomenon of adolescents' engagement in sports betting in relation to educational science.

The study found that adolescents perceive sports betting as a means of winning money (large sums or just some money). Also, they take betting as a way of socialising with peers and passing the time. On the other hand, others felt that betting is a way of wasting time and inviting frustrations into their lives. Most of them were influenced by peers and sports betting promotional messages that came in different forms to them (such as through print and electronic media, roadside billboards). This study has revealed a lack of regulation from the government and betting companies to curb betting by underaged bettors by barring them from the practice. Unregulated promotions are an excellent example of how the phenomenon is being promoted. Both adolescent males and females were observed placing bets, although mostly the males were seen in large numbers. Some bettors preferred betting virtually than physically, too; for example, they evade the stigma that society attaches to sports bettors.

Different structures were used for the betting practice. These included betting kiosks, betting halls, betting machines, spin machines, computers, and monitors. Various activities took place at the betting sites, and there was a culture of sharing things at the betting centres. Also, the bettors developed new terminologies that were used during the betting activities.

The study has established that sports betting indirectly negatively affects the education of adolescents. The adolescents' narrations and the researcher's observations revealed that the adolescents spend time at betting sites engaging in the practice than devoting that time to studies or being in school. This truancy may result in poor school grades since they miss class sessions or study time. In extreme cases, they may end up dropping out of school. Also, the frustrations they get when their bets lose negatively affects their studying since they are preoccupied with the bet. Thus, besides the practice being illegal to the adolescents, it also poses a threat to their education. As a new phenomenon, with largely positive information exposed to the adolescents about the practice, sports betting proves to be a barrier to Malawian adolescents' education.

Using these findings, teachers may also try to establish if an adolescent student's academic performance is being affected by engagement in sports betting once they observe changes in the performance. Thus, sports betting should also be considered as a potential factor negatively impacting adolescents' education when helping the adolescents with their studies.

Furthermore, the findings of this study are also helpful to agents and players working with adolescent socialisation programmes since they get an understanding into the adolescents' engagement in the practice and the meaning, they attach to it. These unique contributions to

educational research and youth socialisation were missing in existing literature especially regarding Malawian adolescent students.

## **6.2. Recommendation for future research**

Since the current study sought to establish the meaning, activities, and factors surrounding sports betting involving adolescent bettors (presumed to be students), future research should explore intervention strategies that can help keep these adolescent student bettors out of the phenomenon. Also, there is a need to investigate the extent of adolescent students' engagement in practice by, for example, using quantitative methods. In addition, future research should incorporate other stakeholders concerned with adolescent students' engagement in sports betting. These may include (but are not limited to) parents, teachers, betting companies, and government officials involved in gambling regulation. Furthermore, there is also a need to explore what knowledge adolescents acquire from school (for example, through statistics) concerning the risks of losing or the potential of winning during sports betting.

## **6.3. Limitation of the study**

The qualitative design of this study generated data that can not be generalised to other settings. The observations made may be different from other betting environments, such as rural or cities; the data for this study were collected from a peri-urban area. Also, since most of the data were collected using informal conversations, there were challenges sustaining the conversation to get a deep understanding of the phenomenon from the adolescents since they did not prepare for the interviews. As most of them were found at the betting sites, there is a possibility that some of their responses might have been influenced by what they went through in their betting before our conversation.

On the other hand, the observations were limited to physical spaces and activities for sports betting, yet online betting is on the rise now. However, it was not feasible to observe online betting activities.

Also, data collection was done when schools were closed for three weeks due to Covid 19 pandemic. Therefore, it was impossible to isolate those who were betting during school hours and those who just bet after knocking off from school. It would be more informative to observe the bettors while school was in session, but the researcher's schedule would not accommodate this.

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# Appendices

## Appendix I: Introductory letter



GOTHENBURG UNIVERSITY  
Box 100, 40530 Gothenburg

### DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SPECIAL EDUCATION

International Master in Educational Research (IMER) Programme

#### INTRODUCTORY LETTER FOR DATA COLLECTION

I am a student in the international master's in education research program at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. As part of my studies, I must conduct independent research that will be examined in partial fulfillment for the master's degree award. Currently, I am collecting data for a research study that attempts to understand adolescents' engagement in sports betting in Malawi; this study seeks to understand the meanings that adolescents place on sports betting.

Data will be collected through observations and interviews of the adolescents.

For further inquiries, please contact me using the following details: 0888695599/0996917599 or [cliff\\_chinyama@yahoo.com](mailto:cliff_chinyama@yahoo.com).

Signature of researcher \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix II: Consent form

### Consent Form

#### Adolescents' engagement in sports betting in Malawi study

Dear Participant, you are invited to participate in a research study that explores adolescents' engagement in sports betting in Malawi.

This study seeks to understand the meanings that adolescents place on sports betting. This will be done by getting information in an interview. If permission is granted, the interview will be audio-recorded and can take approximately 30 minutes.

The information obtained from this study will help understand how sports betting affects adolescents' education and daily life, thereby helping policymakers shape suitable interventions where necessary. You are free to use either English or Chichewa languages.

Your identity will not be revealed, and the information obtained will be handled securely to avoid disclosing your identity. There are no known adverse effects you will suffer from taking part in this study.

You will not get any kind of reward for participating in this research. You may ask any questions concerning this research before or during the study; you may also contact me at +265 888 695 599 or [cliff\\_chinyama@yahoo.com](mailto:cliff_chinyama@yahoo.com).

You can choose not to participate or to withdraw your participation in this study without any consequences.

If you agree to participate in this study, then I will have an interview with you.

Please sign below to show that you have decided to participate, having read and understood the information above. You will be given a copy of this consent form.

Signature of participant\_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of researcher \_\_\_\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix III: Guiding Questions For Interview With Informant**

1. Tell me about yourself
2. How did you start sports betting?
3. When did you start sports betting?
4. What activities are involved in sports betting?
5. Which types of sports betting are famous?
6. Which age groups actively engage in sports betting?
7. What perceived benefits are there in sports betting?
8. What challenges exist in sports betting?
9. How does one start sports betting?
10. How does sports betting affect those who engage in it?
11. Tell me any unique vocabulary that is used in sports betting and their meaning.
12. What other activities go hand in hand with sports betting?
13. Anything else you would like to tell me about sports betting?

## **Appendix IV: Guiding Questions For Informal Conversation With Participant**

1. Tell me about yourself
2. How old are you?
3. Which school grade are you in?
4. When did you start sports betting?
5. How did you start betting?
6. Why did you start betting?
7. Do your peers and/or family members also bet?
8. On average, how much time do you spend on betting?
9. What resources do you use when betting?
10. Have you ever used the internet for betting purposes?
11. What benefits or challenges do you attach to sports betting?
12. Describe the impact of betting on:
  - a) your studies
  - b) Your relationships
13. How do you perceive sports betting?
14. What other forms of gambling do you engage in?
15. Anything else you would like to tell me?

## **Appendix V: Observation Schedule**

1. Where is the betting activity taking place?
2. What time is the activity taking place?
3. What is the physical setup of the place?
4. What is taking place?
5. What are the identities/characteristics/statuses of those engaged in the betting activity?
6. How do different players behave towards each other?
7. What resources are being used in betting activities?
8. How do participants come to start doing the betting activity?
9. What sort of relationships exists among the participants?
10. What type of verbal and nonverbal communication is taking place?
11. Who is making decisions and for whom?
12. How long does the betting event/activity take?
13. What rules/norms seem to govern the betting activities?
14. How frequently/routinely are participants placing bets?
15. How are the individual elements of the betting event connected?
16. What meanings do participants seem to attribute to what is happening?
17. What other activities are participants engaged in besides the betting?