



Effect of Peers' Urge to Model Fellow Peers' Behaviour on Gambling Motivation Among Students in Universities in Kericho County, Kenya

Owuor Arnold Odhiambo, Amos Magut, & Pamela Wadende
School of Arts and Social Sciences, Department of Psychology
Kisii University
Email: arnold.owuor45@gmail.com

Abstract: *The increasing prevalence of gambling among students has raised questions about the underlying factors contributing to these behaviours. One critical factor that has emerged is the influence of peers' behaviours and the urge to model fellow peers' actions. This study's aim was to examine peers' urge to model fellow peers' behaviour and cognitive motivation tendencies during peer interaction on gambling motivation. The study was grounded in Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory and Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory. The study used mixed method research design. The study targeted all third-years students from two universities in Kericho County, and university counsellors from these institutions. The study used Yamane's formula to recruit a sample of 353 students and census to recruit all the 3 counsellors from the two universities. For key informants, the study used snowballing to recruit 7 students self-presenting with gambling problems. Quantitative data was analyzed using statistical package for social science (SPSS) (Version 23.1) to produce descriptive and inferential statistics. Qualitative data was reported in narrations and direct quotations reinforced the quantitative outcomes. The findings revealed that peers' urge to model fellow peers' behaviour have a positive and significant effect on gambling motivation among students in universities. Universities should, therefore, develop counseling services and programmes that highly focus on building awareness on gambling consequences among students. The programmes should prioritize educating students on the addictive nature of gambling and its adverse effects on mental well-being, personal relationships, and academic performance.*

Keywords: *Peers' urge to model, Peers, Behaviour, Gambling, Motivation, University students, Kericho County*

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1. Introduction

Gambling is defined as the act of wagering money or something of value on an event with an uncertain outcome, with the primary intent of winning additional money or material goods. This activity typically involves elements of chance, risk, and prize, and can take various forms, including lotteries, sports betting, casino games, and online

gambling. The outcome of gambling is often immediate and determined by a combination of skill and luck, though the degree of each varies depending on the type of gambling involved (Griffiths, 2019). On the other hand, peers' urge to model fellow peers' behaviour refers to the psychological and social tendency of individuals to imitate or adopt the behaviours, attitudes, and actions of their peers. This urge is driven by a desire for social acceptance,

conformity, or identification with a particular group. It often stems from the need to belong, gain approval, or align with the perceived norms within a social circle. In the context of behaviours like gambling, this urge can lead individuals to engage in similar activities as their peers, even if they might not have independently chosen to do so.

Peer modeling, where individuals imitate the behaviour of their peers, is a critical factor in the development of gambling habits. The desire to fit in, be accepted, or gain approval from friends can lead students to gamble, even if they may not have a strong personal inclination toward such activities. This modeling behaviour is reinforced by the perception that gambling is a common and socially acceptable activity among peer groups. Recent studies highlight that the normalization of gambling within peer groups significantly increases the likelihood of individuals engaging in gambling (Moore et al., 2023). Additionally, the competitive nature of some gambling activities can further entice students, as they strive to emulate the success or thrill experienced by their peers (Smith & Anderson, 2022). The influence of peers is particularly potent in the university setting, where students are navigating new social dynamics and are often away from the direct supervision of family. This environment, coupled with the availability of online gambling platforms, creates an accessible and tempting avenue for students to experiment with gambling. Moreover, the social reinforcement and validation received from peers who gamble can lead to the development of problematic gambling behaviours. The presence of peers who frequently discuss or engage in gambling can normalize the behaviour, making it seem less risky or harmful (Williams & Leonard, 2024).

Among the countries in sub-Saharan Africa, Kenya is leading with the number of the young ones involved in gambling and students in universities form the bulk (GeoPoll, 2019). Statistics show that at least 12 million Kenyans gamble every month, with majority being the youth in universities (Mwadime, 2017). Larimer (2012) estimated that about 2.6 million students in tertiary institutions in Kenya can be classified as problem gamblers often with serious effects of gambling. Koross' (2016) study established that majority of students in universities in Kericho County, Kenya, gamble, and their main motivations to gamble are perceived benefits such as money and enjoyment, and peer group conformity. There are a number of betting companies registered in Kenya including Sports Pesa, Bet yetu, Betway, Betin, Mcheza, Elitebet, Justbet, and Eazibet among others (Mwadime, 2017). Students in universities have been identified as the biggest customers to these betting companies (Koross, 2016). Students in universities in Kenya appear to experience a variety of issues as a result of gambling. For instance, a student at the University of Kabianga in Kenya took his life after losing a wage, while others have left school after using their tuition money to gamble (Koross,

2016). There have also been instances of students in universities abusing drugs and drinking excessively after winning thousands of dollars in wagers. Given these alarming trends, it is crucial to understand the underlying motivations driving students to engage in gambling. Peer influence, particularly the urge to model fellow peers' behaviour, appears to play a significant role in encouraging gambling among students in universities. This study is motivated by the need to explore the extent of peer influence on gambling behaviour, as understanding this dynamic could inform more effective interventions and policies aimed at reducing gambling-related harm among students.

This study was guided by the following research objectives:

1. To examine the influence of observing peers who are rewarded for gambling behaviors on the likelihood of students adopting similar gambling behaviors.
2. To investigate how students' social comparison with peers of higher status or those who share similar characteristics influences their gambling motivation.

2. Literature Review

Over the past decade, gambling has grown to become a popular recreational activity particularly among the youth (Calado, Alexander and Griffiths, 2020). New gambling technologies like online gambling using smartphones and computers have made it easy even for the young individuals to access various forms of gambling (Canale, 2016). Gambling motivation, however, varies according to the status of gambling, gambling activities and gender (Delfabbro et al 2012). Various factors including social, psychological, and economic factors have been identified as common triggers for gambling motivation (Ssewanyana and Bitanihirwe, 2018). Machoka (2020) positions the financial gain as a worldwide trigger for gambling behaviour, while other triggers may or may not apply to all gambling activities or gamblers. Gambling motivation are the underlying reasons and driving forces that lead people to engage in gambling activities (Molinaro at al, 2018). Gambling is defined as staking money or something of material value on an event having an unknown result with a view to getting more money or the material goods (Williams, 2017). Gambling motivation involves the psychological factors and personal desires that influence decisions of individuals to participate in gambling. Understanding gambling motivation is crucial for comprehending the complex nature of gambling behaviours and developing effective interventions for

individuals who are at risk of developing gambling problems (Ferrara, 2018).

The effect of peers' urge to model fellow peers' behaviour on gambling motivation among students in universities has been of concern in recent researches. Peer influence, particularly in the context of behavioral modeling, is a crucial factor in understanding gambling behaviours among university students. Recent studies have established that peer behaviour significantly impacts individual gambling tendencies. For instance, a study by Liu et al. (2023) found that university students are more likely to engage in gambling activities if they perceive their peers as frequently participating in such behaviours. This aligns with the social learning theory, which posits that individuals often emulate the actions of those around them, particularly when these actions are perceived as normative or rewarding (Bandura, 1977). The study highlights that the perceived prevalence of gambling among peers increases the likelihood of an individual participating in gambling themselves, driven by a desire to conform to group norms.

Another relevant study by Lee and Kim (2022) examined the psychological mechanisms underlying peer influence on gambling motivation. They found that students who are exposed to gambling behaviour in their peer groups are more susceptible to developing gambling problems. This is attributed to the social validation and perceived acceptance associated with gambling within the peer group, which creates a reinforcing loop that exacerbates gambling behaviour. The study emphasizes the role of peer approval and group dynamics in amplifying gambling motivations among students.

Moreover, research by Singh et al. (2024) extended these findings by exploring the role of peer pressure in gambling motivations. Their study revealed that direct peer pressure, such as invitations to participate in gambling activities or discussions about gambling experiences, significantly impacts students' likelihood to gamble. They also noted that indirect pressure, through observing peers' gambling behaviours and successes, can subtly influence individuals to engage in similar behaviours, driven by the desire for social acceptance and perceived enjoyment.

The interplay between peer influence and gambling behaviour has also been explored in the context of social media and digital platforms. Johnson and Davis (2023) investigated how online social networks contribute to gambling behaviours among university students. Their research indicates that exposure to gambling-related content and peer gambling behaviours on social media platforms can increase gambling motivation by creating an environment where gambling is normalized and celebrated. This digital exposure amplifies traditional peer influence by providing constant reminders and social validation of gambling activities.

Gambling motivation among the youth is higher than that in adults (Molinaro et al 2018). Derevensky's et al (2015) study indicates that gambling motivation is quite high among the United States youth, and approximately 2.1 percent of the youth struggle with consequences of gambling such as gambling addiction. Majority of United States adults who gamble were introduced to gambling at youthful stage. According to Machoka (2020), gambling motivation is quite high particularly among students in universities. A study by Jaehyun et al (2021) in Korea shows that many students in universities gamble and the number of university youth with gambling related problems has increased from 4.0% in 2015 to 4.9% in 2020. McBride and Derevensky et al (2015) also note that universities across the world have the highest number of those perceived to be at risk when it comes to gambling activities.

Lungu (2020) indicates that gambling is high among students in universities in Nigeria and it is widely regarded as an acceptable social form of recreation. Lungu (2020) notes further that, in Nigeria, gambling is believed to be enjoyable and harmless for many, but for others it has been addictive and with serious negative results. Oyebisi et al (2020) argues that the high levels of gambling motivation among Nigerian students in universities come with negative consequences such as gambling dependence which predisposes the young people towards various health-related problems like depression and use of psychoactive substances (Lungu, 2020).

According to Killick and Griffiths (2021), peers' urge to model fellow peers' behaviour shapes not only university students' beliefs, but also behaviours such as gambling motivation. Once a student in the university socially identifies with a group of other students who are gamblers, the student feels motivated to act in accordance with the group's gambling culture (Turner, 2008). This modelling effect may be even more common among students who have not fully matured (Machoka, 2020). According to Njonge and Ronoh (2022) students in universities are motivated by the decisions they see their friends make in public, especially in ambiguous contexts such as gambling.

Derevensky (2015) argues that socialization process may be a remarkably powerful determinant of gambling motivation among students in universities. He further indicates peers as agents of socialization. Conformity among peers is on the rise as a result of exposure to online content such as online gambling, peers' social status and/or popularity (Obebo, 2019).

Foster et al. (2015) indicate that gambling motivation among students in universities is associated with peers' urge to model fellow peers' behaviour. This urge has been established to be having influence on the relationship

between perceived university culture and gambling, as students who engage in gambling are in a high position to view gambling as a normal behaviour among their friends. Foster *et al*, further indicate further that individuals imitate and adopt behaviour of others when they are uncertain about their decisions and when they need to be accommodated by them.

Toneatto (2016) indicates that simultaneous gambling with peers increases gambling urge and excitement and triggers gambling motivation among students unlike when they gamble on their own. Gambling companies also create conducive gambling environment to customers which makes them more comfortable and gamble more. Moreover, gambling has been commercialized in the media with famous personalities and entertainment industries endorsing betting thus making it a common activity which can be emulated (Toneatto, 2016). Such activities motivate university students, who look up to these celebrities as role models, to gamble.

2.1 Theoretical Review

This study was based on two theories, Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory and Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory. Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory emphasizes the role of observational learning, imitation, and modeling in behavior development. According to this theory, individuals learn and adopt behaviors by observing others, especially those they view as role models. In the context of this study, Social Cognitive Theory can be applied to understand how students' gambling behaviors might be influenced by observing their peers who engage in gambling activities. Bandura's theory suggests that if students see their peers participating in gambling, they are more likely to emulate these behaviors, especially if the peers are perceived as successful or influential. Previous research supports this application, indicating that peer modeling significantly impacts gambling behavior among adolescents and young adults (Derevensky & Gilbeau, 2015).

Ryan and Deci's Self-Determination Theory (SDT) focuses on the role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations in driving behavior. According to SDT, individuals are motivated to engage in activities that fulfill their psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. This theory can be used to explore how students' motivations for gambling are influenced by their need for social acceptance and belonging. If gambling is perceived as a way to gain approval or integrate into a social group, students may engage in these behaviors to satisfy their social needs. Studies have shown that gambling can be driven by a desire to meet social needs and achieve a sense of belonging, particularly among individuals who experience lower self-

determination in other areas of their lives (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

3. Methodology

The study employed a mixed-method research design, focusing on third-year students from two universities in Kericho County, as well as university counselors from these institutions. Using Yamane's formula, a sample of 353 students was selected, while all three counselors from the two universities were included through a census approach, meaning that every member of this small and specific population was surveyed. This method was chosen to ensure comprehensive data collection from all available counselors, providing a complete and accurate understanding of their perspectives on gambling issues among students. For key informants, the study utilized snowball sampling to recruit seven students who self-identified as having gambling issues. Snowball sampling was used because it allows the researcher to locate individuals within a hard-to-reach population by leveraging referrals from initial participants, which is particularly useful when studying stigmatized or sensitive behaviors like gambling. Data collection involved self-administered questionnaires for students without gambling problems and interviews for those who self-identified with gambling issues, as well as for the university counselors. Validity of the instruments was determined through expert judgment from the researcher's university supervisors while reliability was determined using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of ≥ 0.7 . The overall Cronbach's Alpha value was .819 indicating good to excellent reliability. This suggests that the research instrument was reliable in measuring the intended constructs. Quantitative data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23.1, generating both descriptive and inferential statistics. Qualitative data was presented through narrative accounts, with direct quotes enhancing the interpretation of the quantitative results.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Peers' Urge to Model Fellow Peers' Behaviour

The purpose of this study was to determine effects of peers' urge to model fellow peers' behaviour on gambling motivation among students in universities. To achieve this objective, respondents were asked to indicate the level of agreement to which peers' urge to model fellow peers' behaviour affect gambling motivation among students in universities in Kericho County, Kenya using descriptive statistics (No Extent (NE), Little Extent (LE), Moderate Extent (ME), Great Extent (GE), and Very Great Extent (VGE)). The study findings are presented in table 1.

Table 1: Peers' Urge to Model Fellow Peers' Behaviour

		NE	LE	ME	GE	VGE	Total
When students see those who gamble being rewarded for their behaviour, then they are more likely to model that behaviour.	F	18	12	36	96	132	294
	%	6.1	4.1	12.2	32.7	44.9	100
Students look up to, and model gambling behaviours of peers in higher social status.	F	24	30	84	102	54	294
	%	8.2	10.2	28.6	34.7	18.4	100
Students observe and model gambling tendencies of those who are similar to them in terms of age, sex, and interests.	F	30	42	42	102	78	294
	%	10.2	14.3	14.3	34.7	26.5	100
If a student lacks confidence, they are likely to observe and model peers to understand what to do.	F	36	6	30	60	162	294
	%	12.2	2.0	10.2	20.4	55.1	100
If a student is unfamiliar with a situation, they are likely to observe and model behaviours of peers.	F	30	24	30	78	132	294
	%	10.2	8.2	10.2	26.5	44.9	100
When popular peers engage in gambling behaviours, others are motivated to model them.	F	24	36	54	96	84	294
	%	8.2	12.2	18.4	32.7	28.6	100

The results presented in Table 1 highlight the impact of peers' behaviour on motivation to gamble among students in universities. Majority of the respondents 228(77.6%) on a greater extent accepted that when students observe their peers being rewarded for gambling behaviour, they are more likely to model that behaviour. Moreover, 36 respondents (12.2%) held a moderate acceptance of this idea, and 30 respondents (10.2%) accepted it to a lesser extent. This finding stresses the perceived influence of positive reinforcement and rewards within peer groups in shaping students' gambling motivation. The findings agree with Darden and Rockey (2006) that when the media commercializes gambling with celebrities, it becomes a credible activity that is worth emulating. This motivates the students in universities who view the celebrities as their role models.

The study also reveals that, majority of the respondents 156(53.1%) on a greater extent accepted that students tend to look up to and emulate the gambling behaviours of their peers in higher social status. In addition, 84 respondents (28.6%) held a moderate acceptance of this idea, and 54 respondents (18.4%) accepted it to a lesser extent. This

finding implies that, according to the respondents, there exists a perceived influence of social status on students' gambling behaviours, with those in higher social positions potentially serving as role models in this context. The findings are supported by Jetten et al. (2014), who note that peers' urge to model fellow peers' behaviour shapes not only university students' beliefs, but also behaviours such as gambling motivation.

The study findings indicate that, majority of the respondents 180(61.2%) on a greater extent accepted that students observe and model gambling tendencies of those who share similarities with them in terms of age, sex, and interests. Similarly, 42 respondents (14.3%) held a moderate acceptance of this statement, and 72 respondents (24.2%) accepted it to a lesser extent. This result implies that respondents believe there is an observational and modeling aspect to how students develop their gambling habits, particularly influenced by peers who are similar to them in demographic and interest-related characteristics.

The results indicate that majority of the respondents 222(75.5%) on a greater extent accepted that if a student lacks confidence, they are likely to observe and model their

peers to understand what actions to take. Also, 30 respondents (10.2%) held a moderate acceptance of this statement, and 42 respondents (14.2%) accepted it to a lesser extent. This finding suggests that, according to the surveyed individuals, there is a perceived relationship between a student's lack of confidence and their inclination to observe and imitate the behaviours of their peers. Also, findings by Foster et al. (2015) indicate that gambling motivation among students in universities is associated with peers' urge to model fellow peers' behaviour.

The study findings reveal that, majority of the respondents 210(71.4%) on a greater extent accepted that if a student finds themselves unfamiliar with a situation, they are likely to observe and model the behaviours of their peers. On the same statement, 30 respondents (10.2%) held a moderate acceptance of this statement, and 54 respondents (18.4%) accepted it to a lesser extent. This result suggests that, according to the surveyed individuals, there is a perceived tendency among students to look to their peers for guidance and behaviour modeling, particularly in situations where they lack familiarity or experience. Study by Pettifor *et al.*, (2017) indicates that individuals imitate and adopt the behaviour of others when they are not sure of how things are done and when they expect accommodation from friends.

Further, the study results indicate that, majority of the respondents 180(61.2%) on a greater extent accepted that when popular peers engage in gambling behaviours, others are motivated to model them. Similarly, 54 respondents (18.4%) held a moderate acceptance of this statement, and 60 respondents (20.4%) accepted it to a lesser extent. This finding implies that, there is a perceived influence of popular peers on motivating others to emulate their gambling behaviours. The findings concur with Helms (2014) that students are motivated to gambling by their closest friends' broader friendship groups and popular peers.

The study findings are supported by university counselors' response on an interview. A counsellor stated that students, especially the First Years, learn gambling activities from friends they find in the university ignorantly without clear goals:

Some students join university already aware of gambling behaviour. However, they learn more

forms of gambling from friends in the university, those they have not tried. Others get to learn gambling for the first time in the university. Most of them just gamble because they see others gambling, even without clear goals. (Counsellor#3)

This is supported by Machoka, (2020), who notes that students in universities are motivated to gamble when they see their friends gambling in public, especially when they are ignorant about gambling effects.

A student narrated how being in an environment with fellow students who become rich as a result of gambling motivates them to gamble:

Some of our friends we joined university with are driving and living posh life because of gambling. They serve as our role models and we get encouraged to gamble hoping that one day we will get where they are. (Student#7)

This assertion concurs with Nesi *et al.* (2019), who note that gambling motivation among students increases when there is high level of exposure to gambling related activities in places where gambling is a normal activity and those who win become popular.

4.2 Hypothesis testing on the effect of peers' urge to model fellow peers' behaviour on gambling motivation

Hypothesis H₀₁ stated that peers' urge to model fellow peers' behaviour has no statistically significant effect on gambling motivation among students in universities in Kericho County.

To test Hypothesis a regression analysis was conducted. The purpose of this analysis was to determine the relationship between the predictor variable (peers' urge to model fellow peers' behavior) and the dependent variable (gambling motivation).

The results of the regression analysis are presented in the table 2

Table 2 Regression analysis

Hypothesis	Predictor Variable	Dependent Variable	Beta (β)	p-value	Significance
H01	Peers' urge to model fellow peers' behavior	Gambling motivation	0.160	< 0.05	Significant

Findings in table 2 revealed that peers' urge to model fellow peers' behaviour has a positive and significant effect on the gambling motivation among students in universities in Kericho County ($\beta_2=0.160, p<0.05$). The null hypothesis H_{01} was rejected, indicating that peers' urge to model fellow peers' behaviour had a significant effect on gambling motivation. The findings from the hypothesis testing indicate a significant relationship between peers' urge to model fellow peers' behavior and gambling motivation among students in universities in Kericho County. The rejection of the null hypothesis (H_{01}) suggests that the urge to emulate peers who engage in gambling does indeed play a crucial role in shaping gambling motivation among students. This result supports the notion that students are influenced by their peers' behaviors and are more likely to develop gambling motivations when they observe or feel compelled to follow the gambling actions of their peers.

The positive effect implies that as peers' gambling behaviors become more evident or prevalent, students may perceive gambling as a normative or acceptable activity, thereby increasing their own motivation to participate. This finding points out the significance of peer dynamics in understanding gambling behaviors among university students. It highlights the need for targeted interventions that address peer influence, aiming to mitigate its impact on gambling motivation. Strategies could include promoting awareness about the risks associated with gambling, creating peer-led support systems, and fostering environments that challenge normative gambling behaviors. By focusing on peer dynamics and addressing the urge to model such behaviors, universities can better manage and reduce gambling-related issues within their student populations.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

There is a significant impact of peers' urge to model fellow peers' behaviour on gambling motivation among students in universities. Students, especially those new in university, imitate gambling behaviours from friends they find in the university ignorantly even without clear goals.

Students who lack confidence are more prone to observing and modeling the behaviours of their peers as a means to understand and navigate situations. Additionally, when students find themselves in unfamiliar situations, they tend to resort to observing and modeling the behaviours of their peers, suggesting a reliance on peer behaviour as a source of guidance.

5.2 Recommendations

Given the findings on the awareness of gambling consequences among students, the study made the following recommendations:

1. Educational institutions should implement a comprehensive awareness and prevention programme addressing the potential legal, financial, and interpersonal ramifications of gambling. The programme should prioritize educating students about the addictive nature of gambling and its adverse effects on mental well-being, personal relationships, and academic or professional performance.
2. Universities should establish peer education programs where trained student mentors can guide their peers, especially first-year students, on making informed decisions and understanding the consequences of gambling. These programs can provide positive role models, reducing the likelihood of students imitating harmful behaviors such as gambling.
3. Universities should also provide robust support systems, including counseling services and confidence-building workshops, aimed at helping students who lack confidence. By addressing issues like low self-esteem and social anxiety, students may be less likely to rely on peer behavior for guidance and more likely to make independent, informed decisions.

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