



International Journal of Applied Research and Technology

ISSN 2277-0585

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.esxpublishers.com>

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Available online: July 31, 2026.

To cite this article:

Akanno, K. N., Nzeakor, F. C. and Ajunwa, I. S. (2026). Effect of Involvement in Sports Betting on the Income of Rural Youths in Imo State, Nigeria. *International Journal of Applied Research and Technology*. 15(7): 29 – 35.

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Effect of Involvement in Sports Betting on the Income of Rural Youths in Imo State, Nigeria

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(Received: 27 July 2026 / Accepted: 30 July 2026 / Published: 31 July 2026).

Abstract

The study assessed the effect of involvement in sports betting on the income of rural youths in Imo State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study ascertained the level of rural youth involvement in sports betting and estimated the monthly income generated from sports betting by rural youths in the study area. Purposive and simple random sampling techniques were used to select 120 respondents for the study. Data were collected using structured questionnaire and analyzed with descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages and mean while simple linear regression was employed in testing the null hypothesis at 5% level of significance. The results revealed that rural youths were highly involved in placing bets on football matches ($\bar{x} = 4.63$), virtual soccer ($\bar{x} = 4.41$) and electronic football ($\bar{x} = 3.89$). The results also revealed a moderate level of rural youth involvement in placing bets on car race ($\bar{x} = 2.92$), baseball ($\bar{x} = 2.87$) and tennis ($\bar{x} = 2.84$). The mean estimated monthly income generated from sports betting by rural youths in the study area was ₦3,647.12. The simple linear regression result revealed that rural youth involvement in sports betting had significant negative effect (-9.842***) on their income at 1% level of probability. The study concluded that rural youths were highly involved in sports betting in Imo State and their involvement in sports betting had low effect on their income. Therefore, it recommended among others that there is need to direct more efforts to the implementation of vocational training and entrepreneurship programmes that are tailored to the needs of rural youths in order to reduce their reliance on sports betting for income generation in the study area.

Keywords: Effect, Rural Youth, Involvement, Sports Betting, Income.

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Subject: 0726-0214.

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Introduction

The rise of legalized gambling, fueled by technology and social media, has transformed betting into a risky economic activity (Daniel *et al.*, 2023). In Nigeria, sports betting has become increasingly popular among youths with easy online access and mobile technology advancement contributing to its prevalence (Odubo and Ebimene, 2025; Joel *et al.*, 2025; Ahueansehbor and Eyam, 2023).

Sports betting is placing a monetary wager on the outcome of one or more sporting events, including specific occurrences or non-occurrences within those events, or on the overall outcome of a competition (Etuk *et al.*, 2022). The proliferation of betting platforms has made sports betting a convenient and accessible activity, especially for youths seeking quick income or entertainment (Saeed and Aduke, 2025). The National Youth Policy (2019) defines youths as Nigerian citizens within the age bracket of 18-35 years. The National Youth Policy's definition takes cultural, religious, regional, social, and economic factors into cognizance. This study adopted this definition because it can be backed by constitutional provision, whereby the Nigerian constitutional age of a youth begins at 18 years and stops at 35 years (National Youth Policy, 2019).

Sports betting is legal for individuals aged 18 years and above in Nigeria (Onuche, 2020). Sports betting is more common in youths than in other age groups because of impulsivity and increased likelihood of participating in risky activities (Olaore *et al.*, 2020). Youths have a propensity to bet more as they take advantage of their technological proficiency over older adults and, thus, can access online sports betting platforms easily (Uzochukwu and Ohiri, 2021). The growth of online betting platforms such as BetNaija, BetKing, SportyBet, and NairaBet is also transforming the environment of the sports betting industry, particularly in Nigeria (Dilaku *et al.*, 2025).

Okafor *et al.*, (2022) noted that involvement in sports betting increases the income of rural youths who experience occasional wins. Similarly, Bello and Sulaiman (2022) reported that winnings from sports betting are often used to meet basic needs, such as food, transportation, and mobile data. According to Daniel *et al.* (2024), Nigerian youths also view sports betting as an avenue to boost their income. However, despite its perceived benefits, sports betting is also associated with a wide range of negative effect on the income of participants such as financial losses, financial debts amongst others especially when the participants invest or re-invest a large part of their income into sports betting with little or no reward (Saeed and Aduke, 2025; Ijeoma and Obinna, 2022).

According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2025), Nigeria's youth unemployment rate is among the highest in Africa, standing at approximately 42%. This situation of youth unemployment is further worsened by the fact that the energy and innovative prowess of the youths are not being well garnered and channeled to appropriate areas of productive ends (Attamah *et al.*, 2023). This economic reality has driven many young individuals to engage in sports betting as a coping mechanism for financial difficulties (Saeed and Aduke, 2025). As further noted by Okonkwo (2020), sports betting often appeals to rural youths in Nigeria, Imo State inclusive as it offers the promise of high financial returns with minimal investment, creating an illusion of hope amidst economic despair. However, the effect of involvement in sports betting on the income of rural youths in Imo State has not been extensively studied, hence the need to empirically investigate the effect of involvement in sports betting on the income of rural youths in Imo State, Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of this study was to assess the effect of involvement in sports betting on the income of rural youths in Imo State, Nigeria. The specific objectives include the following: ascertain the level of rural youth involvement in sports betting and estimate the monthly income generated from sports betting by rural youths in the study area.

Ho: Rural youth involvement in sports betting do not have significant effect on their income in the study area.

Materials and Methods

The study was carried out in Imo State, Southeast Nigeria. The State has an estimated population of 5,803,235 persons (National Bureau of Statistics, 2025). The National Baseline Youth Survey Report also revealed that the estimated youth population in Imo State was about 3.1 million in 2025. The State lies between Longitudes 6°35' and 7°28' East of the Equator and Latitudes 5°10' and 6°35' North of the Greenwich Meridian. It is bounded on the East by Abia State, on the West by Anambra and Rivers States and on the North by Isu and Isiala Mbano local government areas of the State (Imo State Agricultural Development Programme (ISAP), 2015). The major crops cultivated in the State include cassava, yam, maize, cocoyam, melon and vegetables (Uduma and Nwaobiala, 2024). Apart from agriculture as the mainstay of economic activities in the rural communities, youths are also involved in non-agricultural livelihood activities.

The population of the study comprised all rural youths involved in sports betting in Imo State, Nigeria. In the first stage, simple random sampling technique was used to select two (2) senatorial zones (Okigwe and Owerri) out of the three (3) senatorial zones in the State. In the second stage, there was a random selection of three (3) local government areas each from the sampled senatorial zones. Ehime-Mbano, Obowo and Ihitte-Uboma local government areas were selected from Okigwe senatorial zone while Aboh Mbaise, Ahiazu Mbaise and Mbaitoli local government areas were selected from Owerri senatorial zone. This gave a total of six (6) local government areas. In the third stage, four (4) communities with the visible presence of sports betting centres were purposively selected from each of the sampled six (6) local government areas. This gave a total of twenty-four (24) selected communities. In the fourth stage, one betting centre was randomly selected from each of the selected communities which gave a total of twenty-four (24) betting centres. In the final stage,

with the assistance of bet agents, simple random sampling technique was used to select five (5) rural youths from each of the selected twenty-four (24) betting centres, giving a grand total of one hundred and twenty (120) rural youths which constituted the sample size for the study. Primary data were obtained with the aid of structured questionnaire, and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics such as percentages, means and simple linear regression analysis.

Model Specification

To ascertain the level of rural youth involvement in sports betting was realized using mean scores. Data were generated by presenting the respondents with items rated on a Likert scale, which were based on the question options of: always = 5, often = 4, sometimes = 3, rarely = 2 and never = 1. The options were quantified as 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. The mean of 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 equals 3.0 i.e. $1+2+3+4+5/5 = 3.0$. For the purpose of decision making, class ranges for the three categories of levels of rural youth involvement in sports betting emerged as follows; $0.00 - 1.49 =$ low level of involvement; $1.50 - 2.99 =$ moderate level of involvement and $\geq 3.0 =$ high level of involvement. The hypothesis testing for significant effect of youth involvement in sports betting on their income in the study area was estimated using the simple regression model:

$$Y = f(X) \dots \dots \dots (1)$$

The model is expressed explicitly as;

$$Y = bo + b_1X_1 + ei \dots \dots \dots (2)$$

Where,

$Y =$ Income (₦)

$X =$ Level of rural youth involvement in sports betting (mean scores)

$bo =$ regression constant

$b_1 =$ slope of the regression that the extent by which the dependent variable (Y) is predicted by the independent variable (X)

$ei =$ error term.

Results and Discussion

Objective 1: Ascertain the level of rural youth involvement in sports betting in the study area.

The result in Table 1 revealed that rural youths were highly involved in placing bets on football matches ($\bar{x} = 4.63$), virtual soccer ($\bar{x} = 4.41$) and electronic football ($\bar{x} = 3.89$). This finding indicates that football recorded the highest level of rural youth involvement in sports betting in the study area. This might be attributed to the fact that football is the most popular sport in Nigeria. According to Omanchi and Dannap (2024), football wagering is a highly frequent and popular activity in many regions of Nigeria. This finding is similar to that of Olowu (2025) who reported that football (75.0%) recorded the highest level of youth involvement in sports betting in Nigeria. The result also revealed a moderate level of rural youth involvement in car race ($\bar{x} = 2.92$), baseball ($\bar{x} = 2.87$), placing bets on tennis ($\bar{x} = 2.84$), horse race ($\bar{x} = 2.75$), dog race ($\bar{x} = 2.70$), boxing ($\bar{x} = 2.66$) and basketball ($\bar{x} = 2.65$).

The grand mean score of 3.07 revealed that rural youths were highly involved in sports betting in the study area. The surge in the availability of mobile betting platforms and the widespread use of the internet and social media potentially makes it easier for youths to engage in sports betting activities regularly. According to Musa and Muhammad (2024), the increased number of sports betting platforms, high rate of unemployment and the opportunity to earn income have contributed to the high level of youth involvement in sports betting in Nigeria. This finding is similar to those of Odubo and Ebimene (2025) who reported that the majority (70.5%) of the sampled respondents in Bayelsa State were highly involved in sports betting.

Objective 2: Estimate the monthly income generated from sports betting by rural youths in the study area.

The result in Table 2 showed that the majority (65.0%) of the rural youths generated income between ₦1,000 and ₦5,000 monthly from sports betting while 30.8% generated $< ₦1,000$ monthly. In addition, 4.2% of the sampled youths generated between ₦5,001 and ₦10,000 monthly. The result also showed that the mean estimated monthly income generated from sports betting by rural youths in the study area was ₦3,647.12. This finding indicates that the income generated from sports betting was significantly low. This implies that rural youths often record financial losses in sports betting in the study area. This further implies that sports betting is not a profitable venture among rural youths in the study area.

Hypothesis: Test for significant effect of rural youth involvement in sports betting on their income in the study area.

The simple linear regression result of the test of significant effect of rural youth involvement in sports betting on their income in the study area is presented in Table 3. The r^2 value (0.451) implies that about 45.1% of the variation in the

income of rural youths was explained by the independent variable (level of involvement in sports betting), indicating goodness of fit. The F-ratio of 96.865 was statistically significant at 1% level of significance indicating that rural youth involvement in sports betting had significant effect on their income in the study area. The result further revealed a negative effect (-9.842***) of involvement in sports betting on their income. This further implies that an increase in the level of rural youth involvement in sports betting leads to a corresponding decrease in their income in the study area. This might be attributed to the fact that the income generated from sports betting is significantly lower than the amount of money invested into sports betting by rural youths in the study area. This finding is plausible in that rural youth involvement in sports betting would have negative effect on their income if they often experienced financial losses on placed bets. This finding is in consonance with Odubo and Ebimene (2025) who reported that sports betting had a significant impact on the financial status of the sampled students in Bayelsa State, Nigeria at 5% level of significance.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the study therefore concluded that rural youths were highly involved in sports betting in the study area. Rural youth involvement in sports betting also had low effect on their income. Therefore, it recommended that:

1. There is need for the State government, foreign donor agencies, rural development experts and other related stakeholders to direct more efforts to the implementation of vocational training and entrepreneurship programmes in the rural areas that are tailored to the needs of the youths. These programmes can provide sustainable employment opportunities, alternative income sources and reduce rural youth reliance on sports betting for income generation.
2. Community-based organizations, schools and other rural institutions should also collaborate with local leaders to educate rural youths on the risks of sports betting and the negative effects of betting on their income. This can be achieved by organizing financial education programmes, workshops and seminars that would teach rural youths about savings, investment and responsible financial planning.
3. Gambling regulatory bodies should also be mandated by the government to develop appropriate plans to filter access to sport betting applications and sites as well as to regulate online betting practices and formulate socially responsible betting policies that will assist in curbing the high level of youth involvement in sports betting.

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Tables**Table 1:** Distribution of rural youths according to their level of involvement in sports betting in the study area

S/N	Items on sports betting	Always	Often	Some Times	Rarely	Never	$\sum fx$	$\bar{x}$	Remark
1	Placing bets on football matches	84(420)	29(116)	4(12)	2(4)	1(1)	556	4.63	High
2	Placing bets on tennis	11(55)	20(80)	42(126)	31(62)	16(16)	341	2.84	Moderate
3	Placing bets on basketball	10(50)	16(64)	36(108)	38(76)	20(20)	318	2.65	Moderate
4	Placing bets on virtual soccer	66(330)	39(156)	10(30)	3(6)	2(2)	529	4.41	High
5	Placing bets on electronic football	36(180)	49(196)	25(75)	6(12)	4(4)	467	3.89	High
6	Placing bets on golf	2(10)	2(8)	8(24)	26(52)	82(82)	174	1.45	Low
7	Baseball	8(40)	23(92)	48(144)	27(54)	14(14)	344	2.87	Moderate
8	Dog race	6(30)	24(96)	36(108)	36(72)	18(18)	324	2.70	Moderate
9	Placing bets on boxing	8(40)	21(84)	33(99)	38(76)	20(20)	319	2.66	Moderate
10	Horse race	8(40)	24(96)	36(108)	34(68)	18(18)	330	2.75	Moderate
11	Car race	10(50)	25(100)	45(135)	25(50)	15(15)	350	2.92	Moderate
Grand mean								3.07	High

Source: Field survey data, 2025

Note: $\sum f(x)$ indicates sum total for nominal Likert values multiplied by frequencies;

$\bar{x}$ = Mean responses; 0.00 – 1.49 = low level of involvement; 1.50 – 2.99 = moderate level of involvement and ≥ 3.0 = high level of involvement.

Table 2: Estimated monthly income generated from sports betting by rural youths in the study area

Income (₦)	Frequency (n = 120)	Percentage
< 1,000	37	30.8
1,000 – 5,000	78	65.0
5,001 – 10,000	5	4.2
Mean	3,647.12	

Source: Field survey data, 2025

Table 3: Simple linear regression result of the test of significant effect of rural youth involvement in sports betting on their income in the study area

Parameter	Coefficient	Standard error	t-value
Constant	2.890	0.225	12.837***
Rural youth involvement in sports betting	-0.375	0.038	-9.842***
r-squared	0.451		
Adjusted r-squared	0.446		
F-statistic	96.865***		

Source: Field survey data, 2025

*** = significant at 1%

Ho rejected at 0.05 level.