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Reasons for Gambling in University Students, Loneliness? A Study on Sports Science Students

Üniversite Öğrencilerinde Kumar Oynama Nedenleri, Yalnızlık mı? Spor Bilimleri Öğrencileri Üzerine Bir Çalışma

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ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to investigate the reasons behind university students' gambling and especially to examine the relationship between loneliness and gambling. The population of the research consists of the students of the Faculty of Sports Sciences in Istanbul. The sample consisted of 1051 volunteer students of the Faculty of Sports Sciences selected randomly. The study data were obtained through Personal Information Form, Reasons for Gambling Scale, and UCLA Loneliness Scale. The sample group of the study consisted of students from 5 private and 2 foundation universities with a Faculty of Sports Sciences who had played at least one of the online games, sports betting, horse racing, lottery, card/table games, and numerical lotto games with money in the last 3 months. The data obtained were analyzed using SPSS 25.0 package programme and the significance level was set as 0.05. According to the findings obtained as a result of the study, it was determined that students studying at private universities need to gamble for the reason of earning money, while students studying at public universities have a high urge to have fun/excitement as a reason for gambling. In addition, it was determined that students who do not work need to gamble for the reason of earning money. As another result, it was determined that students who do not do sports as licensed athlete feel themselves more lonely than licensed athletes. In line with the main purpose of the study, it was concluded that loneliness triggers the urge to gamble.

Keywords: Gambling, betting, loneliness, university, university student

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, üniversite öğrencilerinin kumar oynama nedenlerini araştırmak ve özellikle yalnızlık ile kumar oynama arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemek amacıyla yapılmıştır. Araştırmanın evrenini İstanbul'daki Spor Bilimleri Fakültesi öğrencileri oluşturmaktadır. Örneklem ise rastgele yöntemle seçilen 1051 gönüllü Spor Bilimleri Fakültesi öğrencisinden oluşmaktadır. Araştırmanın verileri Kişisel Bilgi Formu, Kumar Oynama Nedenleri Ölçeği ve UCLA Yalnızlık Ölçeği ile elde edilmiştir. Araştırmanın örneklem grubunu, Spor Bilimleri Fakültesi bulunan 5 özel ve 2 vakıf üniversitesinden son 3 ay içinde paralı online oyunlar, spor bahisleri, at yarışı, piyango, kart/masa oyunları ve sayısal loto oyunlarından en az birini oynamış olan öğrenciler oluşturmuştur. Elde edilen veriler SPSS 25.0 paket programı kullanılarak analiz edilmiş ve anlamlılık düzeyi 0.05 olarak belirlenmiştir. Çalışma sonucunda elde edilen bulgulara göre, özel üniversitelerde okuyan öğrencilerin para kazanma amacıyla kumar oynama ihtiyacı duydukları, devlet üniversitelerinde okuyan öğrencilerin ise kumar oynama nedeni olarak eğlenme/heyecan duyma dürtülerinin yüksek olduğu tespit edilmiştir. Ayrıca, çalışmayan öğrencilerin para kazanmak için kumar oynama ihtiyacı duydukları tespit edilmiştir. Bir diğer sonuç olarak spor yapmayan öğrencilerin lisanslı sporculara göre kendilerini daha yalnız hissettikleri tespit edilmiştir. Araştırmanın temel amacı doğrultusunda yalnızlığın kumar oynama dürtüsünü tetiklediği sonucuna ulaşılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kumar, bahis, yalnızlık, üniversite, üniversite öğrencisi

Introduction

Gambling has been an endeavor of humanity from the past to the present. By making a financial payment in advance in the hope of winning money or a valuable good, the situation of financial loss or financial gain with the realization of the uncertain outcome due to chance is called gambling (Karaaziz, et al., 2010). In brief, gambling is the activity of taking risks to value (Duman & Tosun, 2017). Online gambling may increase according to the frequency and preference of table gambling due to easy access, attractiveness, interfaces, advertisements, and easy spending-winning (access to money), as well as the opportunities provided by technological developments that are diversifying and multiplying day by day (Gainsbury, 2015).

In 1996, Bruce and Johnson stated that gambling involves activities that require skill and explained with the following example: "A bookmaker's knowledge of the layout of the game may increase the chances of winning in certain card games; his knowledge of horses and jockeys may improve predictions of possible outcomes in a horse race." The use of such skills can reduce losing outcomes, but other factors that cannot be predicted or are not taken into account remain uncertain (Barrett et al., 2003). While most of the games played through various machines in casinos are based on luck, games such as poker and sports betting require both luck and a certain skill (Çakmak & Tamam 2018). Betting, which is the most important gambling game, requires placing financial bets on the results of events, especially sports, horse racing, or other competitions. Betting, unlike gambling, may involve an element of skill or understanding about the event being bet on. Both activities have inherent risks because the outcome is uncertain and because players can win or lose money. Gambling and betting can provide entertainment and relaxation for some people, but for others, they can lead to addiction and financial misery. Governments often regulate and license these activities to ensure fair play, protect consumers, and address societal concerns about excessive gaming or betting. Individuals need to approach these activities with caution and be aware of the possible consequences (Mateo-Flor et al., 2020).

Until 1991, casinos in Turkey were open only to non-Turkish citizens. After 1991, they were also open to the use of Turkish citizens. Casinos were closed in 1996 due to various problems (Bayındır, 2018). In our country, some games of chance and betting are still legalized by the state. The control and operation of betting and games of chance are carried out by the National Lottery Administration. The National Lottery Administration was established in 1939. However, the history of games of chance dates back to the republican period. The first game of chance was played in 1926. Virtual gambling as a result of the determinations of the Anti-Cybercrime Branch Directorate, 2.5 million people aged between 15 and 40 years participated in virtual gambling. The reason why individuals prefer virtual gambling can be shown as easy access and difficulty of control (Babayiğit, 2018). One of the most common misconceptions of individuals is that some games of chance are not categorized as gambling. Regardless of the type, form, or name, it can be said that all of them, including sports betting, are gambling since individuals play them to obtain "financial gain" (Onal, 2023).

Gambling and betting play important roles in many areas of society, including the economic, leisure, and entertainment sectors. From an economic perspective, these activities generate significant amounts of money through taxation, license fees, and the development of employment in areas such as casinos, internet gaming platforms, and betting. Gambling and betting can provide leisure options for those seeking entertainment and excitement. Many people enjoy the ability to take risks and the possibility of financial gain, which is why these activities are considered leisure time. Sporting events can also enhance viewers' viewing experiences by adding layer of excitement and engagement (King et al., 2020).

Gambling, which is seen as a leisure-time activity and a means of entertainment in almost all cultures, can lead to personal and social problems when it reaches pathological levels (George et al., 2016). Studies have shown that there are many factors affecting the desire to gamble. These included hereditary characteristics, smoking status, alcohol and substance use status, marital and income status, and educational status (George & Murali, 2005). Studies have shown that individuals with pathological gambling disorders frequently engage in thrill-seeking behaviors.

Due to the pandemic and the economic crisis after the pandemic, middle-income families became poorer, the use of social media/internet by young people who stayed at home increased, and the air of panic and uncertainty led more people to new excitement. With the anxiety, social media addiction, and economic problems that occurred during the pandemic, people started to turn to virtual betting more than ever before. Gambling has always existed but became widespread during the pandemic (İncekara & Taş, 2022).

The shift from traditional brick-and-mortar casinos to online platforms and the introduction of online gambling platforms have removed geographical restrictions, allowing people to gamble from the comfort of their own homes or while on the road. The availability of a variety of gaming alternatives combined with convenient and fast payment methods has attracted the attention of new and diverse audiences of all age groups. This progress has not only served existing gambling fans but also new demographics, helping to expand the industry overall. Furthermore, the integration of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) technology represents a major step forward in improving the user experience. Virtual and augmented reality technologies increase player engagement by creating immersive and engaging gaming experiences. Virtual worlds mimic the atmosphere of real casinos, providing a realistic and exciting experience beyond what regular online platforms can offer (Giroux et al., 2013).

Loneliness is an emotional state that affects people psychologically negatively and causes detachment from society. Loneliness is an undesirable and unpleasant situation accompanied by feelings such as anxiety, anger, sadness, and feeling different from other people, and contrary to what is known, it occurs more often among adolescents and young adults than older people (Baltaci & Bacanlı, 2020). People who become lonely may feel restless, and various addictions may occur. People who experience intense feelings of loneliness may also fall into the network of technological addictions to eliminate this feeling for a moment (David & Roberts 2017).

The main aim of this study is to investigate the reasons for gambling among the students of the Faculty of Sport Sciences and especially to examine the relationship between loneliness and gambling. In this context, it is important to determine how important a role loneliness plays for these reasons by analyzing the factors affecting the gambling of university students of the Faculty of Sports Sciences. Our study provides insight into the relationship between loneliness and gambling. This may contribute to the development of more effective strategies for the prevention or reduction of gambling addiction.

Methods

In this section, information about the research model, study group, data collection tools, data analysis and research ethics will be presented. Ethics committee approval for this study was obtained from Istanbul Nisantasi University (Date: May 02, 2024, Decision No: 2024/05, Protocol No: 20240502-1). Written informed consent was obtained from participants who participated in this study.

Research Model

In this research, the relational survey model was used. The relational survey model is used to indicate the occurrence of a situation or event in research and to determine the interaction, effect, and degree of interaction between the variables that cause this situation (Karasar, 2020). This study was conducted with ethical approval and informed consent in accordance with the rules of the Declaration of Helsinki.

Universe and Sample

The purposive sampling method, a nonprobability sampling method, was used in this study. The purposive sampling method is defined as a sampling method in which subjects who are considered suitable for the research and have certain characteristics are included (Gürbüz & Şahin, 2016). In this context, the population of the study consisted of students studying in the faculties of sports sciences in Turkey.

The research group consisted of 1051 volunteer students studying at Marmara University, Health Sciences University, Istanbul Topkapı University, Istanbul Fenerbahçe University, Istanbul Gedik University, Istanbul Rumeli University, and Istanbul Aydın University in the 2023-2024 academic year because they have a Faculty of Sports Sciences.

The inclusion criteria for the students in the study were to volunteer to participate in the study, to be a student of the Faculty of Sports Sciences, and to have played at least one of the following online games: sports betting, horse racing, lottery, card/table games and numerical lotto games with money in the last 3 months.

Data collection tools

The sociodemographic information form, Reasons for Gambling Scale (CRS) and UCLA Loneliness Scale III were used as data collection tools in the study.

Sociodemographic Information Form

A total of eight items were included in the personal information form created by the researcher by considering the relevant literature. The variables used were sex, age, university type, employment status, place of residence, smoking status, participation in licensed sports, and type of gambling game.

Reasons for Gambling Scale (CRS)

The Reasons for Gambling Scale (REGS) was developed by Lee et al. (2007) and adapted for Turkey by Arcan and Karanci (2014). This scale is a tool that determines the motivation for gambling behavior. The subdimensions of this four-factor scale developed by Lee et al. (2007) are fun/excitement, avoidance, making money, and socialization. According to the findings obtained from the adaptation study of the scale to Turkish culture, it was determined that this four-factor model was appropriate for the scale. In addition, the gambling factors did not significantly differ for the fun and excitement subdimensions. The highest correlation values were calculated between the excitement and enjoyment factors. Therefore, in line with these findings, a quadratic scale model was proposed for the GAM (Arcan & Karanci, 2014). The items of the scale were scored on a Likert scale as "agree", "partially agree" or "disagree". The total motivation score of the participants for gambling was determined by the score obtained from the whole scale. When the internal consistency coefficients of the subdimensions of the adaptation study of the GAMS were examined, the internal consistency coefficient of socialization was calculated ($\alpha = .83$), the internal consistency coefficient of fun/excitement ($\alpha = .78$), the internal consistency coefficient of avoidance ($\alpha = .90$), and the internal consistency coefficient of making money ($\alpha = .87$) were found.

UCLA Loneliness Scale III

The UCLA Loneliness Scale Short Form was used to determine the loneliness levels of the students. The UCLA Loneliness scale is a Likert-type self-assessment scale used to determine the general degree of loneliness of an individual. It was developed by Russell in 1978 and renewed in 1980. It was renewed again in 1996 after some deficiencies were observed on the scale. The validity and reliability of the 3rd version of the UCLA Loneliness Scale were assessed by Durak & Durak (2010). The 3rd version of the scale consists of a total of 20 items, 9 of which are positive, i.e., do not contain loneliness in a semantic sense, and the other 11 items are negative, i.e., semantically lonely individuals. In each item of this scale, a situation indicating feelings and thoughts about social relations is presented, and individuals are asked to indicate how often they experience this situation on a four-point Likert-type scale. The items containing positive expressions are never: 4, rarely: 3, sometimes: 2, often: 1; the items containing positive expressions are never: 4, rarely: 3, sometimes: 2, often: 1; 2, sometimes: 2, often: 1; and the items containing statements in the negative direction, on the contrary, never: 1, rarely: 1, sometimes: 2, sometimes: 2; 2, sometimes: 3, sometimes: 3, often: 4: 4. When the individuals' scores from all the items are totaled, a total scale score is obtained for each individual. Theoretically, since the score for each item varies between 1 and 4, the highest possible score is 80, and the lowest possible score is 20. As the score increases, the level of loneliness increases.

Data collection and analysis

The analysis of the research findings was performed with the SPSS (IBM SPSS Corp., Armonk, NY, USA) 25.0 package. Frequency analyses of the demographic characteristics of the students participating in the study were performed. To determine the normality of the distribution of the data, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were performed, and the skewness and kurtosis values were between ± 2 (George & Mallery., 2010). Parametric tests were applied to the normally distributed data. According to the results obtained, independent groups t tests, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) for multiple comparisons between different variables, and Tukey's test were used to determine the source of differences. The ability of the loneliness levels of the students in the study to predict subfactors related to gambling was tested by simple regression analysis.

Results

Table 1.*Frequency and Percentage Distributions Regarding the Demographic Information of the Participants*

Variable		Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	894	85.06
	Male	157	14.94
Age	17-20	304	28.92
	21-24	422	40.15
	25 and above	325	30.92
University Type	State University	477	45.39
	Private University	574	54.61
Do you work?	Working	684	65.08
	Not working	367	34.92
Your living space	I live with the family	635	60.42
	I live in a dormitory	289	27.50
	I live in a student house	127	12.08
Do you smoke?	Yes	762	72.50
	No	289	27.50
Do you play sports under license?	Yes	612	58.23
	No	439	41.77
What games do you play?	Online games	121	11.51
	Sports Betting	611	58.14
	Horse Racing	132	12.56
	Lottery	83	7.90
	Paper/Board Games	40	3.81
	Numeric lotto	64	6.09
Total		1051	%100

In terms of demographic characteristics, 894 of the students who participated in the study were male, and 157 were female. While 304 of the students were between the ages of 17 and 20, 422 were 21-24 years old, and 325 were 25 years old or older. A total of 477 students study at state universities, while 574 students study at private universities. A total of 635 students lived with their families, 289 students lived in dormitories, and 127 students lived alone or with friends. While 762 of the students who participated in the study were smokers, 289 were nonsmokers. A total of 612 students were active and licensed for sports. While most of the students play sports betting online or in betting offices, 121 students play online table games, 132 students play horse racing, 83 students play lottery games, 40 students play card/table games and 64 students play numerical lottos.

Table 2.*T Test Results of The Students Participating in The Study According to The Variables*

		University type	n	\bar{X}	Sd	t	p
Reasons for Gambling Scale	Enjoyment/Excitement	State University	477	15.03	2.71	2.082	.036*
		Private University	574	12.04	2.61		
	Avoidance	State University	477	15.28	2.04	1.295	.198
		Private University	574	14.17	2.04		
	Monetization	State University	477	13.88	2.23	2.658	.010*
		Private University	574	16.32	1.99		
	Socialization	State University	477	14.97	2.67	1.413	.161
		Private University	574	14.13	2.23		
UCLA Loneliness Scale		State University	477	34,80	8,75	1.154	.250
		Private University	574	33,17	10,14		

As shown in Table 2, no statistically significant difference was found between the mean scores on the avoidance and socialization subdimensions of the reasons for gambling scale and the type of university ($p>.05$). There was a statistically significant difference in the subdimensions of having fun/excitement and making money according to the university type variable ($p<.05$). While students who study at private universities by paying an annual fee need to gamble for the reason of earning money, students studying at state universities have the urge to have fun/excitement as the reason for gambling.

Table 3.
T Test Results According to The Type of Study The Students Participated in

		Employment status	n	\bar{X}	Sd	t	p
Reasons for Gambling Scale	Enjoyment/Excitement	Working	684	12.24	2.18	-0.769	.444
		Not working	367	13.00	4.56		
	Avoidance	Working	684	10.43	4.01	-1.564	.121
		Not working	367	13.17	6.30		
	Monetization	Working	684	13.16	1.97	2.326	.036*
		Not working	367	15.70	3.06		
	Socialization	Working	684	10.19	4.12	-1.299	.197
		Not working	367	12.50	5.95		
UCLA Loneliness Scale	Working	684	28.20	10.55	2.33	.020*	
	Not working	367	32.48	11.69			

According to Table 3, no statistically significant difference was found between the mean scores of the participants' reasons for gambling subscale subdimensions of fun/excitement, avoidance and socialization subdimensions and their employment status ($p>.05$). There was a statistically significant difference in the subdimension of earning money according to employment status ($p<.05$). Students who do not work need to gamble for reasons related to earning money.

There was a significant difference in the loneliness levels of the students according to their working status in favor of the nonworking students ($p<.05$). It was determined that nonworking students felt lonelier.

Table 4.
One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Test Results According to The Place of Residence of The Students Participating in The Study

		Area of residence	N	\bar{X}	Sd	f	p	tukey
Reasons for Gambling Scale	Enjoyment/Excitement	I live with the family ¹	635	15.13	1.55	0.597	.619	
		I live in a dormitory ²	289	15.24	1.87			
		I live in a student house ³	127	15.28	2.18			
	Avoidance	I live with the family ¹	635	15.10	1.88	0.441	.645	
		I live in a dormitory ²	289	15.13	2.22			
		I live in a student house ³	127	15.60	1.84			
	Monetization	I live with the family ¹	635	14.20	3.76	3.017	.018*	
		I live in a dormitory ²	289	13.38	2.58			
		I live in a student house ³	127	12.61	2.43			
	Socialization	I live with the family ¹	635	14.84	2.97	3.276	.012*	
		I live in a dormitory ²	289	15.86	2.47			
		I live in a student house ³	127	16.40	4.03			
UCLA Loneliness Scale	I live with the family ¹	635	34.76	5.95	9.624	.000*		
	I live in a dormitory ²	289	38.66	5.97				
	I live in a student house ³	127	34.30	6.09				

As shown in Table 4, no statistically significant differences were found between the mean scores on the subdimensions of the reasons for gambling scale, fun/excitement or avoidance subdimensions, or the places where the participants stayed ($p>.05$). There was a statistically significant difference in the subdimensions of earning money and socializing according to the places where they lived ($p<.05$).

In the subdimension of earning money, the mean scores of those living with their families were significantly greater than those of those living in student houses. In the socialization subdimension, the mean scores of those living in student houses were significantly greater than those living with their families.

Table 4 shows that the places where the students lived differed according to their loneliness levels ($p<.05$). Students living in dormitories felt lonelier than those living with their families.

Table 5.

T Test Results According to The Athlete License Status of The Students Participating in The Study

Are you a licensed athlete?			n	\bar{X}	Sd	t	p
Reasons for Gambling Scale	Enjoyment/Excitement	Yes	612	10.27	3.84	0.214	0.644
		No.	439	10.50	4.48		
	Avoidance	Yes	612	10.28	4.06	0.026	0.873
		No.	439	10.46	4.90		
	Monetization	Yes	612	10.59	4.16	0.027	0.870
		No.	439	11.25	4.86		
	Socialization	Yes	612	10.71	3.41	0.892	0.347
		No.	439	11.17	4.65		
UCLA Loneliness Scale	Yes	612	33.30	5.94	5.73	.000*	
	No.	439	37.01	5.81			

As shown in Table 5, there was no statistically significant difference between the reasons for gambling subdimensions among the students and the variable of participating in sports as a licensed ($p>.05$).

There was a significant difference in the loneliness levels of the students according to their participation in licensed sports in favor of the students who did not perform sports as licensed ($p<.05$). Students who do not perform sports as licensed feel lonelier.

Table 6.

Simple Regression Analysis to Investigate The Effect of Loneliness on Gambling

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	β	Standard Error	Beta	t	p	F	R2	Durbin Watson
Fixed Enjoyment/Excitement	Loneliness	2.309	.191	-	12.148	.000	49.861	.312	1.161
		.379	.055	.564	7.064	.000**			
Fixed Avoidance	Loneliness	2.254	.194	-	12.158	.000	43.452	.283	1.725
		.351	.055	.538	6.601	.000**			
Fixed Monetization	Loneliness	2.288	.206	-	11.322	.000	39.863	.265	1.835
		.349	.055	.521	6.278	.000**			
Fixed Socialization	Loneliness	2.140	.202	-	11.241	.000	47.453	.306	1.763
		.378	.056	.559	6.873	.000**			

$p<0.01^{**}$, $p<0.05^{*}$

According to the regression analysis results in Table 6, Loneliness has a statistically significant and positive effect on having fun/excitement. A total of 31.2% of the change in gambling was explained (adjusted $R^2=0.312$). One unit of loneliness caused an increase of .389 in having fun/excitement ($\beta=.379$).

The regression analysis performed to determine the effect of loneliness on self-protection revealed that loneliness had a statistically significant and positive effect. A 28.3% change in gambling was detected (adjusted $R^2=0.283$). An increase of 1 unit in the loneliness variable causes an increase of .360 in avoidance ($\beta=.351$).

According to the regression analysis conducted to determine the effect of loneliness on Money, there was a statistically significant and positive effect. A total of 26.5% of the change in gambling was explained (adjusted $R^2=0.265$). An increase of

1 unit in the loneliness variable causes an increase of .349 in loneliness ($\beta=.349$).

The regression analysis conducted to determine the effect of loneliness on socialization revealed that loneliness had a statistically significant and positive effect. A total of 30.6% of the change in gambling was explained (adjusted $R^2=0.306$). An increase of 1 unit in the loneliness variable causes an increase of .393 in socialization ($\beta=.378$).

Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the reasons behind university students' gambling according to demographic characteristics and, in particular, to examine the relationship between loneliness and gambling. A high frequency of gambling at an early age may increase the risk of developing gambling problems in adulthood (Winters et al., 2002). Therefore, prevention studies should prioritize university students who can be considered at risk in terms of gambling in the transition process from adolescence to adulthood.

There are many studies in the literature on gambling addiction and loneliness. However, few studies have examined the effect of individuals' loneliness on gambling. In this respect, the study is expected to make a significant contribution to the field.

In this section, dependent and independent variables are discussed with similar examples in the literature.

While students who study at private universities by paying a certain annual fee need to gamble to earn money, it was concluded that students studying at state universities have the motive of having fun/excitement as the reason for gambling (Table 2). As a result of the literature review, no study has revealed the effects of university students studying at private or foundation universities on the motivation to gamble. In this respect, this study is expected to contribute to the literature and provide a new approach to the activities of authorities to solve the problem of gambling, which is widespread among university students.

No statistically significant difference was found in the loneliness levels of the students according to the type of university at which they studied. In his study, Mohammed (2022) did not find any significant relationship between loneliness level and university type for students of the Faculty of Sport Sciences. Although there are no other studies directly related to the results of this study in the literature, our study is unique in terms of examining university types in the national and international literature. It is hoped that these findings will serve as a basis and contribute to the studies to be conducted in this field in the literature.

Students who do not work need to gamble to earn money (Table 3). Although this is a predicted result, students' financial difficulties, such as university costs, living expenses, and personal expenses, push them to seek additional income. Gambling becomes attractive in the hope of winning fast and large amounts of money. They also interact with friends who are in a similar situation; gambling is likely normalized and even supported in friend groups, and these students are more likely to be directed toward gambling. Çakici (2012) examined the prevalence of and risk factors for gambling behavior among individuals between the ages of 18 and 65 living in Cyprus and found that the reason for gambling among nonworking individuals was to earn money. Hong (2019) stated that low-income or nonworking individuals gamble more for money-making and avoidance purposes than self-employed individuals. In another study, unemployed people gamble to earn money in a shorter way, and they also see it as a means of socialization. In addition, in the same study, gambling motivation differed more for unemployed people than for employed people (Mark van der Maas et al., 2019). According to the results of the study, unemployed people who are not motivated to have fun or excitement while gambling due to avoidance, earning money, or socialization can be handled economically. While not having money can be seen as a problem, avoiding these and similar problems and earning money can be seen as a goal. These results do not overlap with our study in general. There was a significant difference in the loneliness levels of the students according to their working status in favor of the nonworking students. It was determined that nonworking students felt lonelier (Table 3).

In the subdimension of earning money, the mean scores of those living with their families were significantly greater than those of those living in student houses (Table 4). In the socialization subdimension, the mean scores of those living in student houses were significantly greater than those living with their families. In this context, students who live in family houses may

invest money in gambling due to lower expenses such as rent and food. We can say that students living in student houses use their budgets in a correct and less risky way because they have more responsibilities. According to another result, it is thought that the motivation for gambling among students living in a student house is socialization because, compared with students living in a student house, those living with their families interact more with their families in the home environment and do not experience socialization in the crowded family environment. In Çakici's (2012) study, living alone was identified as one of the risk factors for gambling behavior. In a study conducted by Hardoon et al. (2004), perceived family support was shown to be one of the most important psychosocial factors associated with gambling problems in adolescents (Hardoon et al., 2019). It has been determined that as the level of support perceived by parents increases, the frequency of gambling among adolescents decreases, and as supportive family attitudes increase, the frequency of adolescents' gambling habits, alcohol use, and smoking decreases (Wills et al., 2004). Table 4 shows that the places where the students lived differed according to their loneliness levels. Students living in dormitories were found to feel lonelier than were those living with their families.

There was no statistically significant difference between students' reasons for gambling and the variable of participating in sports as a licensed sport (Table 5). Satılmış et al. (2024) conducted a study with university students and found that their tendency toward gambling did not differ significantly according to the variable of actively doing sports. Although there was no significant difference, it was concluded that individuals who do not actively participate in sports have greater gambling cravings (Satılmış et al., 2024). A similar result was obtained in the study conducted by Mateo-Flor et al. (2020). According to the results obtained in this study, participation in sports does not significantly affect participation in sports betting (Mateo-Flor et al., 2020). These findings are similar to our findings. In his study, İlçin (2017) did not find a significant difference between the reasons for gambling among university students who actively engage in sports and students who do not actively engage in sports. This result does not coincide with our study.

Although both groups have interests in different fields, they have commonalities. Both groups were university students and had problems such as exams, school, social life, economic problems, and future anxiety. University students may gamble to cope with these negative problems. Both groups may prefer gambling as a way to reduce the stress they experience. In addition, no difference was detected as a result of our research because both groups gamble to overcome the economic problems they experience and as leisure time activities. There was a significant difference in the loneliness levels of the students in favor of the students who did not perform licensed sports. Students who do not perform sports as license holders feel lonelier.

Students who do not play sports under license are not part of a regular sports team or a sports hall. In this case, the social connections and friendship relationships of students who do not participate in sports may be more limited than those of students who do participate in sports. Sports are thought to strengthen social bonds by facilitating frequent group activities and team spirit. Students who do not perform sports may lack the activity and movement provided by doing sports. Exercising regularly increases endorphin secretion and improves mood in general. Students who do not play sports may feel lonelier or restless in the absence of these activities. In this research, in which we examined the effect of loneliness on gambling, which is the main purpose of our research, this situation can be prevented from becoming a problem with sports activities that will make young people feel that they are not alone.

A study aiming to examine the effect of exercise on the loneliness levels of university students concluded that there was a significant difference between the loneliness levels of students who regularly exercise and those who do not regularly exercise. This result revealed that students who exercise regularly experience less loneliness than do those who do not exercise regularly (Özçelik et al., 2015). In addition, in this study, it was recommended that students be encouraged to participate in sports to reduce feelings of loneliness.

According to a study conducted by Gencil (2019) on sports department students, there was no significant difference in the loneliness levels of students who were active in sports and students who were not active in sports. This result does not coincide with our research. Since there were only recreation department students in this study and the number of subjects was limited, it is thought that there was no difference in the loneliness levels of the students. In line with the main purpose of the study, loneliness had a statistically significant and positive effect on the reasons for gambling (Table 6). In this regard, loneliness experienced by university students significantly and positively predicted gambling (Table 7).

Gambling is also used to alleviate negative emotional states such as loneliness. In the social dimensions of gambling, for example, playing in casinos or participating in online gambling communities, and participating in games in coffeehouses can provide opportunities for social interaction and a sense of belonging. Participation in gambling activities is also under the control of negative reinforcers in this context due to the ability of these individuals to establish social bonds and reduce feelings of loneliness (Thomas & Moore, 2003). Similarly, in this study, students who exhibited gambling behavior to socialize with the aim of earning fast and easy money are consistent with the literature. This is because playing poker with others or participating in online gambling communities contributes to the social aspects of gambling to function as positive reinforcement (Hing et al., 2014). Gill and McQuade (2012) examined the role of loneliness and self-control in predicting problematic gambling behavior and reported a positive relationship between loneliness and gambling (Gill, & McQuade, 2012). The finding that loneliness triggers gambling behavior supports our study. Similarly, Clarke et al. (2006) concluded that loneliness was a risk factor for starting gambling for many participants who participated in their research from ethnic minority groups in New Zealand.

Karaibrahimoglu et al. (2023) examined the relationship between loneliness and online gambling addiction in young adults and found that loneliness is a predictor of online gambling addiction. The high scores for gambling to make money observed for all participants can be interpreted as gambling in the hope of making quick and easy money or gambling to solve financial difficulties, as university students face financial difficulties.

The fact that gambling habits, which are considered leisure-time activities, become problematic when individuals are experiencing loneliness creates addiction, and increases the tendency toward other negative behaviors points to an important issue that needs to be examined in terms of leisure time. For some students, gambling may be seen as a fun social activity. In this case, gambling may be perceived as a way to spend time with friends or to relieve stress. Additionally, young people are in a period of risk taking and seeking new experiences. Some students seek excitement through gambling, and gambling is considered to be a popular activity among young people.

Recommendations

Although gambling is prohibited for individuals under the age of 18 in many countries, online gambling is a major problem for young people due to factors such as easy access and the ability to access these platforms in private in their own rooms. Although the prevalence rate of online betting or gambling in Turkey is not known, reports indicate that this rate may be higher than estimated. It is often difficult to collect data on gambling addiction among children and adolescents. This is because these age groups are hesitant to admit to such behavior. Nevertheless, research shows that there has been an increase in online gambling among young people in recent years.

The first priority in treating addictions is to take preventive measures before the addiction occurs.

Before the gambling habits of university youth become pathological, measures can be taken by raising the awareness of families during childhood. In addition, family communication should be strengthened, parents should be able to set appropriate limits on the use of technology starting at an early age, children should be informed about possible risks, and children's use of technology should be under the supervision of their parents. Having good social support for the child, spending their free time with alternative entertainment and social activities such as sports and courses that will positively affect their mental development reduce their tendency toward such addictions.

As a result of our research, to address students' motivation for gambling, first, university administrations should provide students with basic needs such as nutrition, accommodations, books and transport free of charge. It is thought that students who are provided with these expenses will avoid habits such as gambling.

Our research revealed that students gamble because they feel lonely and loneliness triggers gambling. To solve this problem, it is necessary to provide environments and activities where students will not feel lonely and where they can socialize.

University campuses are areas where students can spend their extracurricular time in a useful way, and these areas should be made available to students free of charge.

University clubs should be active and financially supported by the university.

It is thought that sports clubs providing discounts on match tickets to sports science students and attracting students to halls and stadiums will keep students away from harmful habits. In addition, it is thought that sports clubs providing job opportunities for sports science students will support the budget of the students and eliminate the motivation to earn money as a reason for gambling for students who do not work, which is the result of our research.

Universities can offer counseling services to provide psychological support to students. These services can help them cope with emotional difficulties such as feelings of loneliness.

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