Factors Influencing College Students’ Sports Gambling Behavior: Extended Theory of Planned Behavior

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Given the lasting influence of problem gambling on younger populations and the increase in the size of sports gambling industry, it is critical to understand what influence the college-aged population's sports gambling related behavior (Martin et al., 2016; Neighbors et al., 2007). In the U.S., as the NBA commissioner mentioned, it is inevitable to have ‘expanded legalized sports betting’ (ESPN, 2017). Also, gambling on sport sponsorship has also been increased over the last few decades (Hing, Vitartas & Gainsbury, 2013). In the countries like the U.K. where the sport betting culture has been established for a long while, there are more people have problems with their sport betting and gambling issues. For example, the number of problem gamblers has been increased and, especially, many of younger adults have displayed signs of a gambling problem (Gambling Commission, 2017; Guardian, 2017).

Theory of planned behaviour (TPB; Ajzen, 1991) has been applied to understand behavioral intention and/or overt behavior, including gambling-related intention and behavior. While there are a sizable number of studies on college students’ gambling using TPB (e.g., Petry et al., 2015; Wu & Tang, 2012), not many researchers have investigate the issue of problem gambling in the context of sport-related betting and gambling (Hing et al., 2014). In addition to the TPB variables, the current study included motivation to comply with others (MCWO) because college students are still vulnerable to peer influence given their life settings and age. Also, the role that impulsive gambling plays on problem gambling was explored. Thus, the current study evaluated what predict college students' sports gambling behavior, including gambling intention, impulsive gambling and problem gambling, using an extended theory of planned behavior (TPB; Ajzen, 1991), i.e., subjective norm (SN), attitudes towards sports gambling (ATSB), perceived behavioral control (PBC), and motivation to comply with others (MCWO).

Data were collected from 334 college students from two large universities in the U.S., using a survey questionnaire. Data were primarily analyzed using a two-step approach of structural equation modeling (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). The initial measurement model yielded an acceptable fit for the data. However, two items were removed due to the low factor loadings. The research model fitted the data well, chi-square (98) = 220.77, p < .001, CFI = .955, TLI = .937, RMSEA = .061. The model explained substantial amounts of variances in gambling intention (61.8%), impulsive gambling (50.8%) and problem gambling (80.3%). Gambling intention was influenced by MCWO (beta = .407, p < .001) and ATSB (beta = .363, p = .002) while impulsive gambling was predicted by ATSB (beta = .466, p = .002) and PBC (beta = -.173, p = .015). Problem gambling was predicted by gambling intention (beta = .371, p < .001) and impulsive gambling (beta = .653, p < .001). However, none of the TPB predictors had a direct influence on problem gambling.

In case of male college students, their gambling intention was influenced by MCWO (beta = .707, p = .011) while their impulsive gambling was predicted by ATSB (beta = .605, p = .039) and PBC (beta = -.360, p = .002). Males’ problem gambling was predicted by impulsive gambling (beta = .691, p < .001). On the other hand, female students’ gambling intention was influenced by ATSB (beta = .360, p = .009) and MCWO (.344, p = .041) while their impulsive gambling was predicted by ATSB (beta = .369) and MCWO (beta = .468, p = .02). Problem gambling was predicted by both gambling intention (beta = .424, p = .012) and impulsive gambling (beta = .720, p < .001).

Further, a multiple mediation analysis with bootstrapping was conducted (Arbuckle, 2012), using ETPB variables as the predictors, gambling intention and impulsive gambling as the two mediators, and problem gambling as the criterion. The indirect effects of ATSB and MCWO via gambling intention were .170 (p = .017) and .154 (p = .011)
while the indirect effects of ATSB and PBC via impulsive gambling were .384 (p = .002) and -.272 (p = .003), respectively. Mediation analysis showed that gambling intention and impulsive gambling have full mediation effects on the relationship between ETPB variables and problem gambling.

Results highlight the importance of peer influence and attitude formation concerning sports gambling (Hing, Lamont, Vitartas & Fink, 2015). While sport gambling could be considered as a part of our sport culture and as an element to facilitate/boost the entertainment and economic aspects of sporting events. However, given the potential issues related to sport gambling, such as problem and pathological gambling, stricter policies and strategies should be implemented in order to promote a healthy sport betting culture. As the increased number of sport betting and gambling companies has utilized internet and social media to promote their service, a greater level of attention should be paid in these areas in order to promote a responsible sport betting culture.