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**Gambling among university sport students: a preliminary analysis**

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**Gambling among university sport students: a preliminary analysis**

For Peer Review Only

## Gambling among university sport students: a preliminary analysis

The aim of this study was to explore risks associated with the gambling habits and attitudes of sport students governed by betting integrity rules. Using focus groups and semi-structured interviews with male and female student rugby and football players and their coaches, we identified four areas of concern. First, participants considered gambling as a ‘normal’ pastime – a largely harmless form of communal entertainment. Second, we found that participants’ gambling behaviour was influenced by marketing strategies and by peers. Third, although participants were aware of some of the potential risks of gambling, they had a limited understanding of how problem gambling and addiction might develop. Taken together, we believe these encourage gambling and increase risks of gambling related problems. The fourth concern relates to breaking integrity rules. Although we found no evidence of intentional corrupt behaviour, participants had a casual attitude towards gambling regulations, and some broke the betting rules in ways they deemed trivial. Moreover, participants did not seem to take anti-corruption education/intervention particularly seriously.

Keywords: Gambling; risk; sport students; integrity

[Word count: 8018]

### Introduction

Our aim in this study was to explore risks associated with the gambling habits of a hitherto unexplored and unique population, namely student athletes. We know that university students gamble (two in every three undergraduate students have gambled in the last month [The Gambling Commission, 2017]) and that there are associated problems (Buckle et al., 2013). Some student athletes belong to elite or quasi elite sporting environments and perform social identities that emulate their professional counterparts (Bowles, 2018). Gambling is a common collective activity in many professional teams – a part of the culture – a way to pass time during periods of non-activity<sup>i</sup>. It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that several elite athletes have developed

1  
2  
3 gambling problems (including gambling addiction)<sup>ii</sup>. We do not know whether a similar  
4  
5 gambling culture (risk) exists in student sport. Some student athletes, like their  
6  
7 professional counterparts, are part of, and thereby in a position to manipulate, the  
8  
9 gambling market. They are subject to gambling regulations because they represent a risk  
10  
11 to the integrity of the market<sup>iii</sup>. We don't know how they relate to these regulations.  
12  
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### 16 ***Why worry about gambling?***

17  
18  
19 In Great Britain (GB), a recent Gambling Commission (2019) survey found that 46% of  
20  
21 the 4009 respondents aged 16 and over had gambled in the last 4 weeks, with 52% of  
22  
23 gamblers gambling at least once per week. Moreover, increasing concerns about the  
24  
25 impact of marketing in general (Binde, 2009; Derevensky et al., 2010) and through  
26  
27 sport in particular (Jones et al., 2019, Jones, 2015) have been raised. The rapid  
28  
29 expansion of the gambling industry since the 2005 Gambling Act, coupled with  
30  
31 technological advancements, have made gambling increasingly accessible, much  
32  
33 simpler, and less stigmatized (Orford, 201). The growth in gambling opportunity and  
34  
35 gambling behaviour has fuelled a growth in gambling problems (including gambling  
36  
37 disorder or addiction). The “total population consumption model” (Orford, 2010, p.  
38  
39 110) predicts that an increase in the population's consumption of a product leads to an  
40  
41 increase in problematic consumption. Gambling is a major public health concern  
42  
43 because so many are getting into difficulties with their gambling<sup>iv</sup>. Harms include debt,  
44  
45 crime, job losses, relationship breakdown, anxiety, depression, alcohol and substance  
46  
47 misuse and suicide (Orford, 2020, Abbot et al., 2013). Each problem gambler effects  
48  
49 between 10 and 17 other people (Orford, 2010).  
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56  
57 Technology plays an important role in the growth in gambling. Gambling  
58  
59 increasingly takes place online through mobile technology. Online gamblers (including  
60

1  
2  
3 young people) use mobile devices, and many have multiple accounts (Deans et al.,  
4  
5 2016a; Gambling Commission, 2019; Griffiths et al., 2011). Young people are  
6  
7 particularly vulnerable to the risks of online gambling (Griffiths & Parke, 2009; King et  
8  
9 al., 2010). Moreover, the younger people start the more likely they are to develop  
10  
11 gambling (and other) problems (Sharman et al., 2019; Buckle et al., 2013). Adolescents  
12  
13 and young adults who gamble have been found to have lower self-esteem, and higher  
14  
15 state and trait anxiety, as well as displaying depressive symptomology (Delfabbro et al.,  
16  
17 2006; Shead et al., 2011). Young gamblers are vulnerable to other high-risk behaviours,  
18  
19 including alcoholism and substance misuse (Delfabbro et al., 2006; Ste-Marie et al.,  
20  
21 2006, Kessler et al., 2008). University students who participate in gambling (frequently  
22  
23 or infrequently) are more likely to suffer from mental health issues including anxiety  
24  
25 and depressive symptoms (Scholes-Balog & Hemphill, 2012).

### 31 32 ***The normalisation of gambling***

33  
34  
35 Despite the risks, gambling is heavily promoted and endorsed. Orford (2020) argues  
36  
37 that in the UK, the gambling establishment – a powerful alliance of interests – works to  
38  
39 ‘normalise’ (and thereby minimise the perception of risk) gambling in a variety of ways.  
40  
41 The gambling establishment includes the gambling industry (the companies which  
42  
43 supply products), but also governments whose policies have allowed/encouraged  
44  
45 expansion and de-regulation, and non-government organisations such as football and  
46  
47 rugby clubs (and governing bodies and league and cup competitions) who play a role in  
48  
49 promoting gambling (see below). The ‘establishment discourse’ influences policy  
50  
51 decisions and collective and individual gambling behaviour. Orford (2020) discusses  
52  
53 five ‘types’ of discourse which contribute to, or perhaps embody the normalisation of  
54  
55 gambling<sup>v</sup>. Three of these are particularly relevant for our study in the way that they  
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1  
2  
3 frame individual behaviour, namely the ‘harmless entertainment’, the ‘freedom to  
4 choose’ and the ‘personal responsibility’ discourses. The establishment discourse  
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8 perpetuates an entrenched way of thinking, talking, and acting positively in relation to  
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frame individual behaviour, namely the ‘harmless entertainment’, the ‘freedom to choose’ and the ‘personal responsibility’ discourses. The establishment discourse perpetuates an entrenched way of thinking, talking, and acting positively in relation to gambling (Cassidy, 2020). People (adults) can (and should be free to) exercise their personal choice to consume these harmless products according to their own desires and financial means. Marketing plays a crucial role in delivering this message frequently and powerfully to the population, young and old (Jones et al., 2019).

The ‘freedom to choose’ and ‘personal responsibility’ narratives also work to promote a particular conception of problem gambling, namely that the explanation for problem gambling lies with the person not the product (Orford, 2010). Responsibility for problem gambling, therefore, is placed squarely at the feet of a minority of individuals who, for some reason, will not exercise restraint. Space does not permit us to discuss gambling disorder in any detail here but suffice to say there are a number of contributing factors including facts about the individual, the type and availability of gambling options, and the prevailing gambling culture (Flanagan 2011; Jones, 2020; Orford 2010).

### ***Betting on sport – the new normal***

Betting on sport in general and on football in particular, however, (using online betting accounts) has grown significantly in recent years with 5.8% of the UK population regularly betting on football<sup>vi</sup>. The expansion of sport betting and its unabashed marketing through sport is a cause for concern (Orford 2020; Jones et al., 2019). Watching and betting on sport is an important risk factor of problem gambling, particularly for young men and is a potential gateway to gambling related harms for this group (McGee, 2020). Hing et al. (2013) found that greater intention to gamble was

1  
2  
3 associated with watching televised sports, and that males watched more sport more  
4 often than females (females who watched sport also showed a greater intention to  
5 gamble). Hing et al. (2016) also found that in Australia, men betting on sport who are  
6 young, single, educated, employed or full-time students were particularly vulnerable to  
7 high-risk gambling because of their exposure to certain risk factors (media and  
8 family/friend influences).  
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18 Marketing strategies utilised by the sports betting industry are specifically  
19 targeting young males (Lopez-Gonzalez et al., 2017). They focus on “sports fans rituals  
20 and behaviours; mateship; gender stereotypes; winning; social status; adventure; thrill  
21 and risk; happiness; sexualised imagery; power and control; and patriotism” (Deans et  
22 al., 2016b, p.1). Consequently, young males are increasingly incentivised to gamble  
23 (Thomas et al., 2012b). Gambling promotion and marketing have become ‘part of the  
24 furniture’ of consuming sport and fandom (Lamont and Hing 2020; McGee, 2020;  
25 Thomas et al., 2012a).  
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36 Online sports gambling present different risks to other forms of land-based  
37 gambling such as bingo or horse racing, and is arguably riskier (Cassidy, 2020). The  
38 gambling industry seek to maximise profit through creative and technologically  
39 advanced ways to entice and sustain game play and encourage extended bouts or binges  
40 (Schüll, 2014). The methods for paying and receiving winnings (cash or tokens), the  
41 speed of play, maximum stake, prize, the frequency of small wins and the ambience of  
42 the betting environment may all exacerbate risky gambling (Orford, 2010, p. 114).  
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52 Online sport gambling is characterised by a lack of restrictions on the ability to place  
53 immediate bets and the opportunity to chase losses (Lopez-Gonzalez et al., 2017).  
54

55 Participants in McGee’s (2020, p. 91) research mentioned that the ‘facelessness’ of  
56 online betting as a risk factor – the fact that you don’t have to interact with another  
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1  
2  
3 person who may judge your behaviour. According to Schüll (2014), technology  
4  
5 enhanced gambling is ‘addiction by design’ and much of the industry’s profits comes  
6  
7 from ‘the addiction surplus’ – the income generated from the consumption of addicts  
8  
9  
10 (Adams, 2016).

### 11 12 13 14 ***Peer Groups***

15  
16 Key ‘socialising agents’ such as peers and family members influence, directly and  
17  
18 indirectly, the gambling of young adults (Abbot et al., 2013; Deans et al., 2017b; Hing  
19  
20 et al., 2016). Gambling with others often leads to gambling more than if alone (Abbot et  
21  
22 al., 2013). Within ‘friendship’ or ‘team’ groups, betting and discussing ‘odds’ become  
23  
24 part of the everyday narrative (McGee 2020, Hing et al., 2016; Pitt et al., 2016) and can  
25  
26 generate social pressure to gamble (Deans et al., 2017a). This link between peer  
27  
28 influences and gambling activity often manifests as a form of subcultural identity  
29  
30 (Iwamoto & Smiler, 2013). Gordon et al. (2015) describe a ‘consumption community’  
31  
32 among peers in relation to sport gambling. In other words, specific friendship groups or  
33  
34 teams might be characterised by a gambling ethos that normalises, values and rewards  
35  
36 certain betting habits.  
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### 43 44 ***Integrity***

45  
46 In the UK, the governance of sport betting integrity is multi-layered comprising a  
47  
48 collection of public bodies and private organisations. The Sport Betting Integrity Forum  
49  
50 (SBIF) and the Sport Betting Integrity Unit (SBIU) form Britain’s national platform for  
51  
52 managing sport betting integrity. Sport National Governing Bodies are expected to play  
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54 a central role by developing clear rules, reporting mechanisms and proportionate  
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56 sanctions with regards to betting (including the misuse of inside information), together  
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3 with education programmes designed to raise awareness among athletes, coaches,  
4  
5 officials and administrators.  
6

7  
8 Athletes and coaches involved in elite university sport in the UK are subject to  
9  
10 similar gambling regulations. For example, players, students and staff associated with a  
11  
12 British University and Colleges Sport Super Rugby member institution (BUCS/ BSR)  
13  
14 are prohibited from: placing a bet (or asking someone to place a bet for them) on any  
15  
16 BUCS Super Rugby match; misusing or passing on information to any third party, such  
17  
18 as injuries or selection, that is not already public knowledge; accepting money or gifts  
19  
20 from any third party in return for inside information or performance manipulation in a  
21  
22 match. Under the guise of player welfare, the BSR Minimum Operating Standards  
23  
24 (2019/20, p. 8) explicitly states: ‘It is imperative that any individual aware of any of the  
25  
26 above [rules] should report this confidentially to BUCS. BUCS takes a zero-tolerance  
27  
28 approach to any form of corruption within BSR.’  
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32  
33 There is a long history of ‘event manipulation’ in sport (Higgins, 2018) ranging  
34  
35 from the spot-fixing scandal in cricket<sup>vii</sup>, to the farcical incident featuring Wayne Shaw  
36  
37 the former reserve goalkeeper for Sutton United<sup>viii</sup>. Lastra et al. (2018) report that the  
38  
39 closed environment of sport, financial issues and comparative earning from sport are  
40  
41 among the risk factors for susceptibility to corruption. Individuals involved in lower-tier  
42  
43 sport (e.g. sport students) are at a greater risk of corruption because they have more to  
44  
45 gain, less to lose and less chance of detection (Forrest et al. 2008). Being tempted to  
46  
47 spot fix (or pass on information) is a bigger risk because it can be done without the  
48  
49 collusion of any other participant in the game and it need not impact the result (Misra et  
50  
51 al., 2013).  
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55  
56 Given gambling regulation, risks of corruption and the pervasiveness of  
57  
58 gambling culture, it is our view that student athletes (specifically team-based athletes)  
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3 are a particularly vulnerable population to gambling related harms. The aim of the  
4  
5 research therefore was to explore the gambling habits of student athletes. We were  
6  
7 specifically interested in concerns around the role betting played in their lives, how they  
8  
9 viewed betting, what role (if any) gambling promotion and peer influences had in their  
10  
11 gambling, how they viewed or conceived 'problem gambling' and how they navigated  
12  
13 through/ related to the gambling restrictions they faced.  
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## 18 **Methods**

### 21 *Participants*

22  
23 Student athletes (male and female rugby and football players) were purposefully  
24  
25 recruited from one university in the United Kingdom with a reputation for elite student  
26  
27 sport (i.e. the sample would be subject to betting regulations). Participants were  
28  
29 sampled from the university's men's and women's rugby and football clubs all of which  
30  
31 competed in the premier divisions of their respective BUCS championships and fielded  
32  
33 sides in non-student National leagues and competitions. Through a combination of  
34  
35 purposive and snowballing sampling techniques, a total of fourteen athletes were  
36  
37 recruited. The sample consisted of undergraduate and postgraduate students as well as  
38  
39 two alumni athletes who continued to compete for their respective university sport clubs  
40  
41 (see Table 1 below). Two (out of four) Performance Directors (head coach) also agreed  
42  
43 to take part in the study.  
44  
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50  
51 Table 1. Descriptive summary of student-athlete participants

52  
53 [Insert Table 1 Here]  
54  
55

### 56 *Method and procedure*

57  
58  
59 Qualitative data were collected using a focus group interview method for the students  
60

1  
2  
3 (one for each club) and individual interviews for the performance directors (see Table  
4  
5 1). Focus groups were arranged in this way to ensure individuals felt comfortable  
6  
7 discussing the subject of gambling in front of teammates. According to Kitzinger  
8  
9 (1994), organising focus groups around pre-existing relationships (e.g. peer-groups)  
10  
11 helps to generate the type of ‘natural’ interactions which may otherwise occur among  
12  
13 friends around subjects related to their daily lives (such as gambling). It also enabled the  
14  
15 interviewer to probe specific manifestations of gambling practice during the interview  
16  
17 process.  
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22  
23 Participants were assured that only anonymised data would be used in the  
24  
25 reporting of the study’s findings and that their participation in the research would not be  
26  
27 disclosed. The focus group method, however, creates ethical difficulties in upholding  
28  
29 individuals’ right to privacy. In response to this challenge, verbal assent to Chatham  
30  
31 Rules was established prior to the start of each interview whereby participants agreed  
32  
33 not to divulge the contents of discussions outside of the interview, unless done so in an  
34  
35 appropriately anonymised manner (Bloodworth & McNamee, 2010).  
36  
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38

39  
40 Performance Directors were interviewed using the same interviewing strategies  
41  
42 to build trust, establish rapport and encourage open dialogue described above. A  
43  
44 modified interview guide was used to support the interview process focusing  
45  
46 specifically on the Performance Directors’ perceptions on the prevalence and  
47  
48 manifestations of gambling practice among their athletes and the wider sport student  
49  
50 population, rather than their own gambling behaviours. Interviews were audio recorded  
51  
52 using a digital Dictaphone and transcribed verbatim.  
53  
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### 56 57 *Analysis and interpretation*

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60 Data were interrogated through an iterative process of open coding to examine how

1  
2  
3 gambling risk manifests in the attitudes and behaviours of student athletes. A  
4  
5 combination of inductive and deductive reasoning was applied to identify and label  
6  
7 content and categorise data into salient themes (a form of patterned response) and  
8  
9 concepts. Analysis was performed at a semantic and latent level of the text to  
10  
11 understand both the explicit and surface meaning of the data and the underlying ideas  
12  
13 and conceptualisations informing the semantic content (Braun & Clarke, 2007).  
14  
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17

18 The researchers approached the task of analysis independently to establish an  
19  
20 initial reading of the data. Preliminary descriptive interpretations were then shared and  
21  
22 discussed among the authors to begin the process of developing more meaningful units  
23  
24 of analysis and interpretation. Through a continual process of examination, organisation  
25  
26 and cross-checking, a series of overarching themes were determined from which a  
27  
28 representative sketch of participants' attitudes and experiences was constructed and  
29  
30 refined.  
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### 35 **Findings**

36  
37  
38 Our data has given us a thumbnail sketch of some of the areas of concern associated  
39  
40 with the gambling behaviours and attitudes of this specific group. We discuss three  
41  
42 broad themes that relate to increased prevalence of gambling (and thereby increasing  
43  
44 risk of developing problems) – 'gambling as normal', the impact of socialising agents  
45  
46 (media and peers) and poor understanding of problem gambling. We also discuss  
47  
48 gambling in relation to the integrity rules.  
49  
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#### 53 ***Gambling as a normal and largely harmless form of communal entertainment***

54  
55  
56 All participants saw gambling as a normal budgeted activity like going to the pub or  
57  
58 cinema. For many it was a shared interest that served to ease boredom and pass the  
59  
60

1  
2  
3 time. Spending money on gambling was a personal choice like shopping for clothes or  
4 going out for a meal with friends. There was no stigma associated with gambling per se.  
5  
6 Visiting casinos or online gambling on sport (using mobile phone apps – Griffiths &  
7  
8 Parke, 2009; King et al., 2010) were the most frequently mentioned forms. The casino  
9  
10 satisfied the urge to “get out of the house”, to socialise and have some fun “without  
11  
12 having to get drunk”. Gambling was perceived as less harmful compared to ‘risky’  
13  
14 forms of consumption, like drinking alcohol. A sober outing to the casino was less  
15  
16 detrimental to performance than a night out drinking. Indeed, gambling was something  
17  
18 that friends, family and coaches might encourage as an alternative to drinking.  
19  
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25 Nick [MR]: My dad has the view [that]... if you're going to the casino – rather than  
26 going to the pub – it's probably actually better for you because you're not actually  
27 getting drunk or anything.  
28  
29  
30

31 Here the well-documented risks of gambling are downplayed relative to alcohol  
32 illustrating how participants ‘bought’ the establishment discourse and were  
33 insufficiently aware of gambling risks (Orford 2020). Casinos and online products are  
34 carefully designed to maximise play (profit) (Schüll, 2014) and this population are  
35 particularly vulnerable (Griffiths & Parke, 2009; King et al., 2010). We also know that  
36 the ‘socialising influence’ of peers looking to have fun and the motive to ease boredom  
37 are known risk factors (Hing et al., 2016).  
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48 It was noticeable that Women’s rugby players gambled differently to the other  
49 groups. They did bet on events like the Six Nations or Grand National, but routine  
50 collective gambling on sport was not common. We did not explore this difference in  
51 detail, but the ‘socialising agents’ (exposure to advertising, peer pressure, social media  
52 and so forth) were not so prevalent in women’s rugby. We suspect that a number of  
53 factors might explain this, for example less interest in watching sport (predominately  
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1  
2  
3 male sport and particularly football) where advertising/sponsorship is rife, a different  
4  
5 culture with fewer gambling role models and perhaps even relative earnings at the  
6  
7 professional level<sup>ix</sup>.  
8  
9

### 10 11 12 *The impact of socialising agents – friends and family* 13

14  
15 Research shows that peer influence is significant in gambling behaviour (Abbot et al.,  
16  
17 2013; Deans et al., 2017b; Hing et al. 2016; McGee, 2020). Our research showed  
18  
19 specific ways others influenced the gambling of participants. Those who did gamble  
20  
21 started after turning 18 joining in with the behaviours of other (peers) players, whereas  
22  
23 some talked about following the example of parents or family members.  
24  
25

26  
27  
28 Tina [WF]: I am an occasional gambler. I started a few years ago via an app on my  
29  
30 mobile and I probably started because my brother always wins and was making lots  
31  
32 of money and I wanted to join in.  
33

34  
35 Other than women's rugby participants, gambling was a common shared experience (a  
36  
37 consumption community, Gordon et al., 2015) within and between teams. It was a  
38  
39 quasi-ritual to fill time before fixtures. Players discussed bets and accumulators before  
40  
41 placing bets (mainly on football) using apps on their mobile phones (McGee, 2020;  
42  
43 Hing et al., 2016; Pitt et al., 2016). One Performance Director, Polly, described this type  
44  
45 of gambling-related activity as "background noise" suggestive of its regularity and  
46  
47 normality among her players. For the other Performance Director Craig, gambling was  
48  
49 acknowledged as an inevitable part of wider student culture that neither he, nor his  
50  
51 assistant coaches, sought to encourage nor actively police.  
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56 In amongst the "background noise" we identified some specific influencing  
57  
58 'mechanisms'. Social media groups were used to discuss and 'encourage' gambling  
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3 when players were not together.  
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7 Jane [WR]: I know like I've got a group chat with all the boys they're like,  
8 "Alright boys. Let's go get your bets in." Like, it's just a huge thing for them...  
9

10  
11 There was also evidence of direct and deliberate peer pressure to gamble.  
12  
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14  
15 Tina [WF]: I've actually encouraged my partner to put bets on so that she might  
16 watch the football with me.  
17

18  
19 [Laughter]  
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21

22  
23 Tina [WF]: If I really want to watch football, I'll be like 'aw put a bet on, put a bet  
24 on' and then she actually will watch it because she's put a bet on.  
25

26  
27 Lea [WF]: And then they [partners] start counting the corners, so it makes it  
28 exciting for them.  
29  
30

31  
32 Our data illustrates a specific peer influence 'mechanism' at work here, perhaps a  
33 unique kind of gateway (McGee, 2020) where individuals start gambling to fit in or to  
34 'please' a partner even though initially they have no real interest in the activity. In this  
35 instance the 'partner' (not included in the study) was a female rugby player not really  
36 interested in gambling on sport.  
37  
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44  
45 We found no evidence of gambling culture or gambling 'clubs' as reported by  
46 Deans et al. (2017b). We acknowledge, however, the possibility of different gambling  
47 habits than those reported here (e.g., the second or third team's ethos might be different  
48 to the first team and teams at other universities might be different). Nevertheless, a  
49 gambling culture may quickly develop in peer groups given certain factors (Lamont &  
50 Hing, 2019). Spijkerman et al. (2007) found that a 'prototype' – someone who  
51 displayed a certain type of drinking (alcohol) behaviour could be very influential on  
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3 their peers. Factors such as the presence of gambling ‘prototypes’ along with a shared  
4 sense of identity, social capital and gambling can all contribute to the emergence of a  
5 collective gambling habit (Deans et al., 2017b; Spijkerman, et al., 2007).  
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### 10 11 *The impact of socialising agents – marketing* 12

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14 Participants in this study were aware of, and somewhat susceptible to, marketing –  
15 including TV commercials, sponsorship of sport’s teams, events and competitions, and  
16 social media (Twitter and Instagram).  
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22 Tina [WF]: I think that when I watch men's football, I am encouraged to gamble.  
23 Just because you see it so often and it's more fun to bet on...  
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26  
27 Participants were also cognisant of ‘free’ bets marketing that incentivised downloading  
28 apps or setting up accounts.  
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31  
32 Simon [MF]: There's loads of little things where you don't even have to bet with  
33 money anymore. So, like on a Saturday there's a thing called Super Six where Sky  
34 give you six games to correctly predict the score. [If you win], you get 250k... It's  
35 like a little teaser. Once you're on that app, after you put all your scores in, they'll  
36 say “if you actually put money on this you will get this much value”. So, it kind of  
37 gets you into thinking “I might as well put a fiver on it” anyway.  
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43  
44 Participants did respond to certain promotions if an attractive market was  
45 offered (Thomas et al., 2012b). They were aware that gambling could become a  
46 problem and recognised (particularly in relation to some marketing strategies) a more  
47 sinister and cynical industry trying to encourage gambling (Cassidy, 2020; Orford  
48 2020), but didn’t feel unduly threatened by this. There are many features of online  
49 gambling that increase risks. The ‘facelessness’ and lack of scrutiny of the technology  
50 (McGee, 2020) and availability of digital money, access to credit, unlimited access day  
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3 and night and the fast speed and wide range of betting opportunities, and tempting  
4 promotional offers (Hing et al., 2013).  
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8  
9 Participants were aware of intelligent or targeted marketing using social media  
10 and revealed a sense of brand loyalty based on “sassy” advertising strategies, incentives  
11 (e.g. free bet “boosts”) accessibility (facilitated by mobile apps and social media  
12 communications) and social media-based features such as “#YourOdds” that enable the  
13 creation of personalised betting markets<sup>x</sup>. Gainsbury et al. (2016) note gambling  
14 companies use social media extensively to market their products (especially Facebook  
15 and Twitter). They found that gambling-related content was often included alongside  
16 other content (information such as team news) and rarely featured responsible gambling  
17 information. In the UK, the GambleAware organisation is tasked with keeping people  
18 safe from gambling harms. There is widespread criticism that this body (funded by the  
19 gambling industry) does not sufficiently challenge the industry’s harmful promotion  
20 (Orford, 2020). Moreover, research has shown that gambling warnings did not promote  
21 more responsible gambling (Newall et al., 2020) and there was no suggestion in our  
22 data that such warnings acted as deterrents.  
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#### 42 *Awareness of vulnerability*

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45 Participants suggested that ‘problem gamblers’ displayed distinctive forms of behaviour  
46 such as solitary gambling, loss of control over finances, debt, borrowing, chasing losses  
47 and jeopardizing friendships/relationships.  
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52  
53 Simon [MF]: There's a lad called Jason. He used to like to bet a lot. He was putting  
54 on like £50 a week and then he'd win big but because he keeps putting so much  
55 money on, he'd just lose big as well. And then he bet on like random games... But  
56 then I think he owed quite a lot of money because he was gambling.... He got  
57 really bad at one point and then started betting on like Arabian football and like  
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3 random tennis matches and at like 1am in the morning  
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6 Although participants had a reasonably ‘accurate’ view of problem gamblers (many of  
7  
8 their observations fit with the DSM-5’s criteria), most did not feel particularly  
9  
10 vulnerable<sup>xi</sup>.  
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13

14 Sam [MR]: Well I would never, 'touch wood', get addicted. I know myself; I would  
15 never be addicted to gambling.  
16  
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18 Cain [MR]: I suppose it just depends on how strong you are as a person. If you  
19 earn X amount of money a month and you say, "I'll limit myself to X amount",  
20 then I'm fine.  
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24  
25 Some participants, however expressed concerns about their own gambling behaviour  
26 and/or failed to give sufficient weight to some ‘red flags’ when it came to their own  
27 gambling.  
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33 Tina [WF]: If I knew someone that gambled as much as me... I would just think  
34 that they were sensible and that they fit into the 'average gambler [bracket]'... My  
35 partner would disagree and say that I have a problem because she made me delete  
36 my betting app... She said I was spending money when I didn't have the money to  
37 spend...  
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42 One participant [Lacie] was concerned about susceptibility to addiction because of an  
43 addictive personality and/or history of addiction in the family. Others felt that individual  
44 attributes like being “stingy” or choosing behaviours like avoiding betting when drunk,  
45 setting limits, and deleting apps helped them control spending. Some admitted that  
46 boredom often tempted them to reinstall apps or re-open accounts they had deleted.  
47  
48 Boredom was frequently mentioned as a motive for gambling when watching a football  
49 match on TV. Placing a bet would induce feelings of heightened involvement as other  
50 research has highlighted (Lamont & Hing, 2020). ‘Mood manipulation’ is a common  
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3 motive for gamblers and problem gamblers (Ainslie, 2013).  
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6 Alice [WF]: I don't like having betting apps on my phone because I know that  
7 when I'm bored, I will just go on there and bet. So I delete. Then when I'm bored I  
8 just download them again [laughs].  
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10

11  
12 Levy (2011) argues that self-control is a depletable resource and many people, including  
13 addicts, find it very difficult to resist temptation for too long without re-engaging (re-  
14 installing apps and/or creating new accounts). In fact, the inability to stay away from  
15 gambling having made a decision to do so is a potential indicator of problem gambling.  
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23 Problematic gambling behaviours lie on a continuum (Orford, 2020). The DSM-  
24 5 description classifies gambling disorder as a matter of degree ranging from mild,  
25 moderate to severe. Moreover, becoming an addict is a result of a process involving  
26 several stages, including placing your first bet (Orford, 2010). Furthermore, research  
27 suggests patterns of gambling behaviour (specifically online sport betting) are not  
28 perceptively different between 'recreational' and 'problem' gamblers other than  
29 frequency (Braverman et al., 2011). Classification is more complex among young  
30 people with the 'qualities of youth' (e.g. emulation, impulsivity, risk taking,  
31 experimentation, emotional distress) camouflaging features of gambling disorder  
32 (Shaffer, 2011). Evidence from our study suggests some participants (and their  
33 acquaintances) displayed characteristics of problem gambling (mood manipulation,  
34 difficulty in regulating betting, deleting and reinstalling apps).  
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### 51 ***Betting regulations***

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54 There are four specific areas relating to betting regulations that drew our attention. First,  
55 participants betting on games that they can't possibly influence or have inside  
56 knowledge about but may nevertheless be prohibited from doing so. Second, betting on  
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3 games that they may be able to influence that they should not bet on. Third, being in  
4  
5 possession of information that may be used to profit from gambling (inside  
6  
7 information). Finally, deliberate manipulation of events in a game.  
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10  
11 Despite receiving 'education' on the rules to which they were subject,  
12  
13 participants displayed an ambivalence towards betting regulations. Most participants  
14  
15 were aware that they were subject to certain betting restrictions both as players and as  
16  
17 individuals working within the sport industry. Participants reported having received  
18  
19 annual gambling education in the form of a "leaflet," "conference" or "workshop,"  
20  
21 however, there was uncertainty about the 'authority' (i.e. illegality versus codes of  
22  
23 conduct) of gambling regulations and a general ignorance of betting rules and their  
24  
25 scope. Most participants routinely bet on elite televised football even though at certain  
26  
27 times they are not permitted to do so<sup>xii</sup>.  
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32  
33 Lea [WF]: I'm not actually allowed to bet on football so it's more 'under the radar'  
34  
35 betting... when I see other people going to bet I think, "why not, I might as well do  
36  
37 it." But then obviously if I did win big, I wouldn't tell anyone because I'm not  
38  
39 allowed to<sup>xiii</sup>.  
40

41 The likelihood of getting caught was downplayed and only became 'risky' in the  
42  
43 unlikely event of winning a significant amount of money. Such risks could be mitigated  
44  
45 by limiting the size of stake (Forrest et al., 2008).  
46  
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48  
49 Lea [WF]: We had to sign a code of conduct and the rules that said that we aren't  
50  
51 allowed to [bet] because we do have exposure to people who could look at match  
52  
53 fixing...  
54

55 Interviewer: What would happen if you broke that code of conduct?  
56

57  
58 Lea [WF]: Like I do? [Laughter]. I would probably get sacked...  
59  
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3 Interviewer: Does that not scare you?  
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6 Lea [WF]: No because I always think that I'm not going to win a ridiculous amount  
7 of money, I only bet £5, £10 here and there. So, it's not a life-changing amount.  
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11 Our data reflects concerns raised by Forrest et al. (2008). The comparative low profile  
12 of women's football was a factor in minimising the risk of getting caught for women  
13 football players.  
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18 Participants mentioned match fixing as the 'paradigm' offence and there was  
19 some discussion about other ways of falling foul of the rules.  
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23  
24 Alice [WF]: I don't think we are at the level that people bet on us.  
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27 Tina: [WF]: Although my brother did bet on us when we went to the Champions  
28 League when we won 2-1.  
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31  
32 Alice [WF]: I don't think he's allowed, is he?  
33  
34

35 The potential issue here is profiting from 'inside information'. These  
36 participants are uniquely placed *vis a vis* information (knowledge) not in the public  
37 domain. The regulations are breached even if the information is 'innocently' passed to a  
38 third party (brother) who then profits from it (Gambling Commission, 2018). The  
39 'minimising' risk strategy would apply in relation to profiting in this way too.  
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47 Participants felt that certain bets were less risky or more likely to be successful  
48 than others. 'Knowing' the sport and betting on outcomes that might be reasonably  
49 predicted, given some knowledge about a team's form or a particular player's goal  
50 scoring record or disciplinary record, shifted the balance in favour of the 'punter'.  
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3 David [MR]: I'd definitely feel more confident if I was to bet on rugby now, like  
4 I'd have a better idea of what was going to happen. I feel like I could be able to  
5 predict it more accurately now, because you just know it better.  
6  
7

8  
9 Sam [MR]: I definitely only bet on the things that I know, as David said. I would  
10 never bet on like women's badminton - I don't know, I have no idea what's going to  
11 be the outcome of it.  
12  
13

14  
15 Knowing the sport was also a temptation to bet closer to home:  
16

17  
18 Tina [WF]: ...the odds for women's football make me want to gamble because I  
19 don't think the betting companies have a good understanding of who the good  
20 teams are.  
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24  
25 These participants are different to many gamblers because they *are* in a situation  
26 to exploit knowledge and place bets based on information not in the public domain. We  
27 took knowledge to mean superior insights into certain 'form-based' factors that may  
28 help predict match outcomes, rather than inside information. However, there is a fine  
29 line between knowledge deemed in the public domain and not in the public domain  
30 (subject to gambling regulation). Participants were unconcerned and naïve about the  
31 ways in which they might intentionally or unintentionally break the rules by passing  
32 information to a third party.  
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44 Encouragingly none of the participants admitted to more serious breaches of the  
45 regulations (although we have no way of knowing whether this is true) and in some  
46 cases explicitly rejected the proposition:  
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51  
52 Alice [WF]: I would never bet on one of my mates who plays in the WSL 1  
53 (Women's Super League),  
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56  
57 We were, however, informed of a student athlete (outside this sample) who was  
58 asked by a relative (somewhat tongue in cheek) to get a yellow card early in a game.  
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3 The relative had come across an opportunity to bet on this outcome (using an app that  
4 allowed customers to create their own bets). If the stake was small, it is unlikely that  
5 such ‘conspiracies’ would be discovered, but a decent return could be made,  
6  
7 nonetheless. We are particularly concerned about these kinds of ‘low risk’, but ‘high  
8 consequence’ opportunities to manipulate the rules and make ‘easy money’.  
9

## 16 **Conclusion**

17  
18 This preliminary analysis adds to a body of literature which has identified gambling’s  
19 popularity and normalisation as a serious public health issue. Specifically, we set out to  
20 explore the gambling habits and attitudes of a hitherto unresearched group, namely sport  
21 students subject to gambling integrity rules. We found several areas of concern:  
22  
23

- 24 (1) Most of the participants engaged in some forms of gambling. Gambling on sport  
25 using online accounts was a regular activity. They largely bought into the  
26 ‘establishment discourse’ that gambling was a relatively harmless leisure  
27 activity with minimum risk. In this sense, participants’ attitudes reflected the  
28 discourses of the gambling establishment that have successfully normalised  
29 gambling as a legitimate, freely chosen and harmless form of entertainment in  
30 liberal gambling jurisdictions such as the UK (Cassidy, 2020; Orford, 2020).  
31  
32
- 33 (2) Participants were influenced by certain socialising agents previously identified  
34 as risk factors (McGee, 2020). Specifically, they were susceptible to peer  
35 pressure to gamble exercised through, or embodied in, a gambling culture or  
36 ethos (although we did not identify a problematic or excessive culture). There is  
37 also clear evidence that participants were susceptible to the pressures of  
38 gambling marketing in and through sport.  
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3 (3) Although participants were aware of signs and signals of problem gambling,  
4  
5 they did not realise how their own gambling might become a problem. In fact,  
6  
7 some admitted to showing signs of diminished control over their own gambling.  
8  
9  
10 Though aware of gambling's addictive potential and the capacity for gambling  
11  
12 to develop into an individualised 'problem' (e.g. through a lack of self-control),  
13  
14 participants were largely uncritical of their own gambling practices and choices.  
15  
16  
17 (4) Though we found no evidence of systematic attempts to break the integrity rules  
18  
19 – which is perhaps unsurprising given that betting-motivated corruption is a  
20  
21 hidden behaviour reliant on secrecy (Lastra et al., 2018; Numerato, 2016) – our  
22  
23 findings are a valid cause for concern. Participants lacked detailed appreciation  
24  
25 of the regulations to which they could (willing or unwillingly) fall foul,  
26  
27 particularly about the sharing and use of inside information for 'spot fixing'. For  
28  
29 student athletes whose participation in leagues and competitions is exposed to  
30  
31 minor betting markets (in terms of liquidity), it is easy to envisage situations  
32  
33 where betting-related malpractice, brought on by financial stress, changes in  
34  
35 career, identity and life aspiration, or simple opportunism, might occur. This is  
36  
37 consistent with the consequentialist argument that gambling and non-gambling  
38  
39 related corruption are decisions driven by rational evaluations of personal and  
40  
41 situational constraints and incentives (Forrest et al., 2008; Lastra et al., 2018). It  
42  
43 is our view that a central limitation of anti-corruption education is its failure to  
44  
45 develop a reflexive awareness about their positionality in relation to gambling,  
46  
47 risk, temptation and the rules.  
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55 Though confined to a specific group, our qualitative insights provide a foundation for  
56  
57 future research into how gambling affects this vulnerable student population. To inform  
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59 policy, education and harm prevention, research should seek to produce fine-grained  
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3 and longitudinal insights into the ways gambling is embedded as a form of social and  
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5 cultural practice among students. This study also identifies an opportunity for future  
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7 research to examine nuances of gambling practices including gender differences.  
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10 Finally, we consider it an integral part of the future research to begin from a position of  
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12 criticality in interrogating the ethical dimensions of the ‘gambification’ of sport and the  
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14 production of (young) sports men and women who gamble.  
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- <sup>i</sup> A number of former and current football players and rugby players testify to this, e.g. Kieron Dyer <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/football/article-5378823/England-squad-gambling-addicts-says-Kieron-Dyer.html>, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/51184273>, Lee Byrne (Byrne, L. 2017. *The Byrne Identity*: Talybont: Y Lolfa). See also, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/51184273>
- <sup>ii</sup> Tony Adams describes a current “epidemic” of gambling in football with many players seeking treatment at the Sporting Chance clinic. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/tony-adams-my-greatest-achievement-is-saving-lives-3wqs9wj9d>
- <sup>iii</sup> <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/football/2019/06/27/cardiff-met-university-team-whose-players-pay-150-subs-prepare/>
- <sup>iv</sup> <https://www.bangor.ac.uk/psychology/research/gambling/docs/Gambling-as-Public-Health-Issue-Wales.pdf>
- <sup>v</sup> The five discourses discussed by Orford (2020, 44) are the ‘harmless entertainment’, the ‘ordinary business’, the ‘social and cultural benefits’, the ‘freedom to choose’ and the ‘personal responsibility’ discourses.
- <sup>vi</sup> <https://www.gamblingcommission.gov.uk/PDF/survey-data/Gambling-participation-in-2019-behaviour-awareness-and-attitudes.pdf>
- <sup>vii</sup> <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-15573463>
- <sup>viii</sup> <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/football/2017/07/14/former-sutton-united-goalkeeper-wayne-shaw-charged-fa-pie-gate/>
- <sup>ix</sup> In comparison to men, there is a paucity of research into the gambling habits/behaviours of young women. It would be good to explore some of the differences we observed here in more detail.
- <sup>x</sup> #YourOdds is marketed by William Hill as ‘our way of making your quirkiest punting premonitions a reality.’ To create a bet, punters can simply Tweet William Hill a scenario who will return a price on it happening. <https://promotions.williamhill.com/offer/yourodds>
- <sup>xi</sup> The DSM-V lists 9 characteristics of problem– these include ‘concealing gambling activity’, ‘asking others for money to help resolve gambling debt’, ‘chasing losses’, repeated unsuccessful attempts to cut down’. A diagnosis of gambling disorder is given when 4 out of 9 are present. <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/gambling-disorder/what-is-gambling-disorder>
- <sup>xii</sup> Uefa’s code of conduct discourages players to bet on football. Specifically, players (including coaches, partners and family members) in European Leagues are not permitted to bet on themselves, their opponents or any match within a competition they are involved in. [https://www.uefa.com/MultimediaFiles/Download/uefaorg/Clubs/02/14/97/66/2149766\\_DOWNLOAD.pdf](https://www.uefa.com/MultimediaFiles/Download/uefaorg/Clubs/02/14/97/66/2149766_DOWNLOAD.pdf)
- <sup>xiii</sup> Lea works for a football club so is prohibited from gambling on all football in the UK on that basis.

Table 1. Descriptive summary of student-athlete participants

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Graduate Status</b>	<b>Team Affiliation</b>
Lea	26	Graduate	Women's football
Tina	26	Postgraduate	Women's football
Alice	21	Undergraduate	Women's football
Dave	21	Undergraduate	Men's football
Simon	20	Undergraduate	Men's football
Cain	22	Graduate	Men's rugby
Alec	21	Undergraduate	Men's rugby
Nick	20	Undergraduate	Men's rugby
Luke	20	Undergraduate	Men's rugby
Sam	20	Undergraduate	Men's rugby
David	21	Undergraduate	Men's rugby
Sarah	26	Postgraduate	Women's rugby
Lacie	20	Undergraduate	Women's rugby
Jane	23	Postgraduate	Women's rugby