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The Gambling Craze in America

Even though gambling is not a new thing to American society, its adoption has been a prolonged process. Originally, gambling in the United States was mostly illegal outside the state of Nevada. However, as time went by and new laws were passed, sports betting became a legal activity in some states with Las Vegas boasting the larger share of the gambling population. Las Vegas has been known to host enormous sports betting events such as boxing, the Superbowl, and major UFC (Ultimate Fighting Championship) fights drawing attention from extremely enthusiastic fans and high-stakes bettors from America and worldwide. Even though gambling has become a profitable business in the United States, its impact on American society has not been pretty. In this paper, I will discuss the US gambling craze, focusing on its impact on society and possible measures to curb it.

In 1992, the United States Congress passed the PASPA (Professional & Amateur Sports Protection Act) effectively banning sports betting in the United States (Meer 281). During this period, many betting organizations settled in countries neighboring the USA and set up their gambling business since gambling was legal outside US borders. These firms which pretended to operate in countries outside the US targeted gambling enthusiasts from the United States. This resulted in US citizens creating off-shore accounts which essentially took money out of the economy into the neighboring countries. To prevent this situation, the United States government decided to legalize sports betting in 38 states. This resulted in a sports betting boom that created a source of revenue for the US national government and local state and county governments.

Even though the legalization of sports betting in most states in the USA has boosted the economy, it has come at a societal cost with the emergence of gambling addicts. As we all know, gambling is an addictive behavior and without discipline and financial literacy, it can become a burden to both the gambler, and their immediate friends and or family. Some people have reportedly gone as far as committing suicide due to debt distress, a debt they incurred gambling. Gambling is somewhat of a necessary evil depending on your financial status and your perspective on it. Some people might say that gambling is bad due to its highly addictive nature and the financial strain it puts on individuals affected by it, whether directly or indirectly. Other people might say that gambling is fun because it allows them to earn some money while enjoying their favorite sport.

Gambling has become part and parcel of the US sports culture with different sports franchises, players, and networks partnering with betting firms to cash in on the growing market and integrate betting seamlessly into the spectator experience. In recent years, Las Vegas, a city known for its extensive network of gambling facilities and platforms such as huge casinos has used its influence in boxing, UFC, and other major sporting events to attract NHL, NFL, NBA, and other major sporting corporations to secure viewership. This move has been met with a lot of criticism from the media and the public citing concerns about gambling, its infrastructure, and whether or not it is capable of hosting large sporting events (Knight).

Apart from Las Vegas, other states such as New York, Indiana, and Ohio have recorded large sports betting tax collections. In the year 2023, the states of New York, Indiana, and Ohio recorded significant tax returns from sports betting with New York having collected 1.55 billion dollars in taxes up from 862 million dollars in 2022 from mobile betting alone (United States, Census Bureau). These significant figures are a testament to just how much the nation is engaging in gambling activities. While these revenue collections have boosted the support for youth sporting activities, it has done little for gambling prevention treatment in different parts of the country.

Many citizens have reported huge amounts of losses due to gambling activities associated with major league sports such as the NBA or the NFL with experts citing unclear laws and policies to control gambling activities across different states. It is also estimated that an average of 2.5 million adults in the US suffer from gambling or gambling-related addictions yearly (United States, Census Bureau). The betting craze in America has become a societal disaster with the lack of proper laws to keep betting firms in check. According to reports most gambling addicts start by wagering as little as $10 in a single bet, then move on to hundreds of dollars and before they know it, they are staking as much as a thousand dollars on a single bet.

Gambling is an addiction just like any other addiction. Therefore, it is possible to mitigate the effects of gambling addiction in society and promote responsible gambling activities. To help people overcome their gambling habits and become more productive members of society, proper laws and regulations need to be structured and enforced. This will ensure that betting organizations adhere to the law when rolling out betting offers and that consumers are protected from fraudulent or unethical practices in the gambling industry. Another way to help people suffering from gambling addiction is to create rehabilitation programs for gamblers where we can have support groups with sponsors. The gambling boom in the US has come at a time when the US economy is unstable and the country is facing different challenges such as civil rights issues, climate crisis events, and post-COVID-19 pandemic recovery. This has created a holistic environment for vulnerable individuals to succumb to addictive behaviors, including chronic gambling.

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