

THE PHENOMENON OF ONLINE GAMBLING AMONG STUDENTS

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Received : 01 September 2025

Published : 02 December 2025

Revised : 16 September 2025

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.59733/jishup.v3i3.156>

Accepted : 29 October 2025

Publish Link : <https://jishup.org/index.php/ojs>

Abstract

The rapid development of technology and the internet has brought numerous conveniences to everyday life but has also triggered new social issues, one of which is the rise of online gambling. This activity now extends beyond adults and increasingly involves students. This study employs a qualitative research design using a literature review approach, analyzing both national and international sources published between 2013 and 2023. Data are interpreted through Max Weber's theory of social action and a phenomenological framework to understand students' behaviors and motivations in engaging with online gambling. The findings indicate that online gambling among students leads to severe consequences across social, economic, psychological, and academic domains. Addicted adolescents often experience family conflict, financial loss, poor academic performance, and sometimes criminal involvement. The ease of internet access is a primary factor facilitating this behavior, exacerbated by weak supervision from families and communities. Many students are initially drawn by the thrill of easy profits, which soon traps them in a cycle of addiction.

Keywords: *Online Gambling, Addiction, Adolescents, Social Impact*

Introduction

The rapid advancement of science and technology has acted as a major catalyst for globalization, improving many aspects of daily life. However, these technological developments also generate both positive and negative consequences. On the positive side, innovation enhances efficiency, productivity, and connectivity between individuals and institutions. Yet, negative outcomes such as privacy issues, data security risks, and the widening socioeconomic gap require serious attention. One concerning consequence is the rise of platforms offering instant cash rewards, such as online gambling websites. These platforms attract not only adults but also children and adolescents. Data from Indonesia's Financial Transaction Reports and Analysis Center (PPATK) show a steady increase in online gambling transactions from 2017 to 2023.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the volume of these transactions spiked by 300%. Ivan Yustiavandana, PPATK Director, reported that many of these activities involved young people. In 2024 alone, 1,160 children under 11 years old were involved in online gambling, with transactions worth over IDR 3 billion across 22,000 instances. Among those aged 11–16, the number reached 4,514, totaling IDR 7.9 billion, while adolescents aged 17–19 contributed to IDR 282 billion in transactions involving more than 191,000 individuals. A study by Dika Sahputra et al. (2022) in Tebing Tinggi City revealed that online gambling negatively affects adolescents in multiple dimensions. Socially, they show reduced interaction skills; economically, they face financial instability; religiously, they often neglect spiritual obligations; and academically, their performance declines due to time spent gambling.

Similarly, research by Reza Suharya (2019) in Samarinda Seberang identified several contributing factors to adolescent gambling habits, such as family environment, peer influence, academic stress, financial hardship, and psychological conditions. Muhammad Ikhsal (2024) noted that the increasing accessibility of the internet promotes deviant behaviors, including online gambling. According to the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII), in 2024 Indonesia surpassed 221 million internet users, accounting for 79.5% of the total population. Generation Z and millennials make up the majority, rendering them more vulnerable to harmful digital content such as gambling.

From a policy perspective, the Ministry of Communication and Informatics (Kemenkominfo) reported blocking 156,975 online gambling contents in 2022, a decrease from 204,917 in 2021. Since 2018, over 604,000 gambling-related contents have been removed. These measures are part of broader efforts to maintain a healthy digital ecosystem, including blocking pornography, scams, and intellectual property violations through cyber patrols and public reporting mechanisms.

Discussion

Adli (2015) defines online gambling as a form of betting conducted through internet platforms where participants place wagers based on specific rules and conditions. When their chosen team or party wins, they claim monetary rewards. Isjoni (2002) further explains that online gambling has become increasingly integrated into daily life, particularly among students who perceive it as an entertaining and easy way to earn money. According to Wahib and Labib (2005), online gambling is a social activity that involves wagering money or valuables where the winner gains at the expense of others. The outcomes depend on uncertain future events, making risk and probability central to the activity. Functionally, online gambling mirrors traditional gambling but differs mainly in its use of the internet as the operating medium. Most online gambling platforms — such as IBCbet.com, SBObet.com, Bola88.com, and Liga365.com — offer easy access and anonymity, making them appealing to young users. In Indonesia, online gambling extends beyond mere entertainment, creating widespread social, economic, and psychological repercussions.

Factors Influencing Students to Engage in Online Gambling

1. Social Factors

The social environment plays a critical role in shaping gambling behavior. Peer pressure and group influence often encourage students to participate in gambling activities. Marketing strategies by gambling operators also target younger demographics through social media advertisements and influencer promotions. Asriadi (2021) notes that many adolescents begin gambling because their peers do, or because it becomes a trend within their social circles.

2. Economic Factors

From an economic standpoint, unemployment and financial hardship are significant motivators. A lack of stable income sources leads some adolescents to seek “quick money” solutions through online gambling. Poverty and financial stress frequently push them toward risky behavior, believing that gambling offers an opportunity for easy wealth. The accessibility of gambling — requiring only a smartphone and internet connection — lowers the entry barrier. Transactions are conducted through digital payment systems such as mobile banking, credit cards, or e-wallets, further facilitating participation (Sulistyo & Ardjayeng, 2018).

3. Psychological Factors

Psychologically, online gambling can cause severe emotional distress, anxiety, and depression. Many students become trapped in a compulsive cycle, driven by the desire to recover their losses or relive the excitement of earlier wins. Over time, this dependence erodes their concentration, productivity, and motivation in academic or personal activities. The constant exposure to risk and reward mechanisms leads to an addictive mindset, where gambling becomes both an escape and an obsession.

Types of Online Gambling Commonly Played by Students

1. Pragmatic Play Slots

Pragmatic Play is a widely used gambling platform where players can start betting with minimal deposits (as low as IDR 10,000). The promise of large jackpot bonuses makes it particularly attractive to students seeking instant gratification.

2. Online Poker

Initially popularized through Facebook, online poker allows players to trade chips or credits convertible into real money. Transactions can easily be made through local banking services such as BCA, Mandiri, BRI, or BNI, which enhances accessibility for young users.

3. Online Lottery (Togel)

This type of gambling is based on predicting numbers and has long existed in traditional settings. With the rise of internet access, these games have migrated online, offering simple participation mechanics and quick results that appeal to young gamblers.

The Impacts of Online Gambling Among Students

1. Mental Health Decline

Frequent gamblers often experience anxiety, depression, and stress as they lose control over their habits. The Mental Health Foundation reports that gambling triggers dopamine production — the brain’s “pleasure” hormone — creating temporary excitement but longterm emotional instability.

2. Financial Problems

While some players experience short-term gains, most suffer financial losses over time. Addiction drives them to spend excessive amounts, borrow money, or even steal to sustain their gambling activities, worsening both personal and family finances.

3. Criminal Behavior

In many cases, the inability to repay debts or recover losses leads to delinquent behavior, such as theft or fraud. What begins as entertainment can evolve into criminal dependency, as players prioritize gambling over ethical decision-making.

4. Damaged Relationships

Online gambling disrupts relationships with family and peers. Continuous engagement leads to social isolation and loss of trust. Many addicted adolescents withdraw from meaningful interactions, preferring digital escapism over real-life connections.

5. Addiction

The repetitive nature of gambling fosters addiction. Once introduced, individuals feel compelled to continue despite negative outcomes. This dependency often results in emotional instability and an inability to focus on education or self-development.

6. Gateway to Substance Abuse

Addiction to gambling can lead to other risky behaviors such as alcohol consumption or drug use. The combination of gambling, emotional stress, and social influence often escalates into broader patterns of deviant behavior.

Efforts to Address Online Gambling Addiction Among Students

1. Strengthening Personal Commitment

The first and most important step in overcoming online gambling addiction is developing personal awareness and a strong internal commitment to change. Students must recognize the long-term dangers of gambling — such as financial losses, psychological distress, and social isolation — and make a conscious decision to stop. Building motivation from within requires emotional support from family members, friends, teachers, and counselors who can reinforce discipline and self-control. Mentorship and continuous encouragement can also help students remain consistent in their recovery journey.

2. Blocking Access to Gambling Platforms

Limiting exposure to gambling websites and applications is an effective preventive measure. Students can install website blockers, use parental control features, or report illegal gambling sites to relevant authorities. Internet service providers and the government should also enhance their cybersecurity systems to automatically detect and block gambling-related

content. Reducing access not only minimizes temptation but also interrupts habitual behavior that could lead to addiction relapse.

3. Strengthening Spiritual and Moral Values

Faith and morality serve as strong protective factors against risky behavior. Religious education and moral reflection can instill a sense of purpose, empathy, and responsibility. Activities such as spiritual discussions, charity work, and community involvement provide emotional stability and help students reconnect with positive values. By strengthening their faith and ethical awareness, students can resist the lure of instant gratification that gambling promises.

4. Cognitive and Behavioral Change

Psychological interventions like Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) have been proven effective in treating gambling addiction. CBT helps students identify and challenge irrational beliefs about luck and success, replacing them with logical, reality-based thinking. It also teaches practical coping mechanisms to manage stress and emotional triggers that often lead to gambling. This therapeutic approach encourages students to take control of their thoughts, feelings, and actions in a structured and sustainable way.

5. Finding Positive Alternatives

To prevent relapse, students must be encouraged to fill their time with productive and rewarding activities. Joining clubs, playing sports, learning music, or volunteering allows them to channel energy into healthy pursuits. Schools and communities can organize competitions, seminars, and entrepreneurship programs to engage youth in creativity and innovation. Positive alternatives not only build confidence and skills but also provide the excitement and fulfillment that gambling falsely promises.

Handling Online Gambling in Educational Settings

Schools play a vital role in preventing and addressing online gambling among students. Counseling services can raise awareness, provide personal and social support, and guide addicted students through recovery programs. Group discussions and personal development activities can redirect student focus toward constructive interests such as sports, technology, or the arts. such as:

1. Providing Accurate Information and Education

Schools play a crucial role in educating students about the risks and consequences of online gambling. Educational programs should include topics such as digital ethics, responsible internet use, and financial literacy. By discussing real-life cases and data, educators can help students understand how gambling addiction begins and why it's harmful. Awareness campaigns, posters, and seminars can serve as powerful preventive tools to cultivate critical thinking and self-awareness among students.

2. Personal and Social Guidance

Guidance counselors must provide consistent personal and social counseling to students. Personal guidance focuses on helping individuals manage emotions, build resilience, and make independent decisions. Social guidance encourages teamwork, empathy, and communication skills — all of which help students resist peer pressure and maintain healthy relationships. Through continuous mentorship, schools can foster emotional intelligence and prevent risky digital behaviors.

3. Individual Counseling and Psychological Support

Students who have already engaged in gambling require specialized one-on-one counseling. This process helps uncover the underlying causes of gambling behavior — whether stress, loneliness, or family conflict — and assists in developing personalized recovery plans. Collaboration with professional psychologists or rehabilitation institutions can further strengthen this effort, ensuring students receive proper therapeutic support and follow-up sessions.

4. Group Counseling and Peer Support Programs

Group counseling provides a safe space for students to share experiences, reflect on mistakes, and learn from others who face similar challenges. Peer support programs also help reduce stigma and promote recovery through mutual understanding. Schools can form student-led digital responsibility clubs that encourage open discussions about healthy internet habits. These groups can be guided by school counselors and educators to ensure positive, solution-oriented outcomes.

5. Personal Development and Extracurricular Programs

Sustainable prevention involves promoting students' holistic development. Schools can provide extracurricular activities — such as art, science, technology, sports, or community service — that build confidence, creativity, and leadership skills. Personal development programs should emphasize self-discipline, time management, and goal setting, helping students construct strong identities independent of harmful habits like gambling.

Conclusion

The increasing trend of online gambling among students poses a serious threat to education and social development. Addressing this issue requires collaboration between schools, parents, and policymakers. Preventive education, consistent monitoring, and counseling support are key to helping students refocus on learning and avoid digital exploitation.

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