

Behind the Illusion of Instant Wins: The Financial and Psychosocial Impact of Online Gambling Addiction on Students in Ruteng City

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the gambling behavior of university students in Ruteng, NTT, as well as its impacts. The research was conducted using a mixed-method approach, consisting of questionnaires to obtain quantitative data, and in-depth interviews with participants to gain deep insights into their motives, processes, and the implications of gambling. The study involved active students spread across several campuses in Ruteng. The results showed that 83% of students had gambled online. Most gambled for reasons like entertainment, stress, and economic pressure. 34.9% never sought professional help, which was supported by interviews showing low awareness/access to psychological support services. Almost all felt regret or emotional disturbance, even though they continued to gamble. These findings indicate the need for early detection by both campuses and the community to minimize the potential for widespread gambling among educated youth

INTRODUCTION

The evolution of information and communication technology in today's era of globalization has brought radical changes to the social, economic, and cultural structures of societies around the world, including in Indonesia. On one hand, digitalization offers easier access to information, efficient financial transactions, and the democratization of knowledge that drives the advancement of civilization. On the other hand, this development is like a double-edged sword that opens the door to various forms of cybercrime and increasingly sophisticated deviant behaviors. One of the fastest-growing and most disruptive digital-based social deviance phenomena in society today is online gambling. In the past, conventional gambling required physical interaction in hidden places like illegal casinos or dice gambling spots, which naturally limited the number of participants due to real social and legal sanctions. Online gambling, however, has broken down all those physical, spatial, and time barriers. Online gambling uses simple internet-connected gadgets, allowing anyone, anytime, anywhere to access hundreds of gambling sites that offer the illusion of instant wealth. The shift from conventional gambling to digital platforms not only expands the market reach of the gambling industry but also makes it accessible to various demographic groups previously untouched by the gambling world, especially tech-savvy young people.

In the national context of Indonesia, online gambling is no longer just a matter of legal or ordinary criminal issues – it has escalated into a national socio-economic emergency threat. Empirical data released by the Financial Transaction Reports and Analysis Center (PPATK) paints a very alarming picture of the level of penetration of this illegal activity. Throughout 2024, PPATK recorded that the total value of online gambling transactions in Indonesia reached a massive figure of around IDR 359.81 trillion. This number reflects the huge amount of public funds being sucked into the whirlpool of online gambling, most of which flows to international bookies abroad. Entering 2025, even though the nominal turnover dropped to around Rp286.84 trillion – a decrease of about 20% which was claimed as a success of stricter regulations and law enforcement – the transaction frequency statistics actually showed a very worrying anomaly. The number of online gambling transactions in 2025 shot up to 422.1 million times, marking an increase of 101% compared to 2024. This data contradiction, where the nominal rupiah value decreases but the number of transactions doubles, clearly shows that gambling patterns have aggressively shifted towards micro transactions. This means that gambling is no longer dominated by big bets from a handful of wealthy people, but rather by small bets worth tens of thousands of rupiah that are played massively and repeatedly by millions of ordinary people, including school kids, teenagers, and especially college students who have limited funds but unlimited access to technology.

In responding to this emergency situation, the Indonesian Government has actually tried to take firm action by forming the Online Gambling Eradication Task Force (Satgas) in 2024, involving various important ministries and agencies, including the Indonesian National Police (Polri), the Financial Services Authority (OJK), Bank Indonesia, and the Ministry of Communication and Digital

(Kemkomdigi). Efforts to block online gambling content have been carried out massively; by mid-2025, the government reported that it had cut access to more than 1.3 million online gambling contents in cyberspace. Nevertheless, the fight against online gambling faces very complex technological challenges because the online gambling industry uses highly adaptive digital infrastructure. When one website is blocked, hundreds of mirror domains immediately appear within hours to facilitate access again for active players. Moreover, online gambling promotions are no longer done openly on dedicated sites, but are subtly and aggressively slipped in through popular social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube. These ads are often disguised as promotions for skill games (online games), no-capital investment apps, or spread through suspicious links in WhatsApp and Telegram groups. Collaborations between gambling agents and local influencers or celebs with millions of young followers further strengthen the social legitimacy of online gambling in the eyes of young people, creating the mistaken perception that this activity is a cool, modern, and profitable lifestyle.

Amid this wave of online gambling expansion, college students are the population most vulnerable to exposure and addiction traps. As part of the young adult age group (ranging from 18 to 24 years old), students are in a crucial phase of psychological development. Young adulthood is marked by a strong search for self-identity, a tendency to act impulsively, high curiosity, and a strong urge to seek new sensations and experiences without thinking about the long-term consequences. At the same time, students often face various heavy psychosocial pressures, such as a packed academic workload, anxiety about post-graduation life, social demands from peers, and financial pressure to cover increasingly expensive daily living costs. In vulnerable situations like this, online gambling comes in offering a very tempting instant way out: cheap entertainment to relieve stress and a quick chance to make extra money without hard work. This psychological vulnerability is further worsened by the ease of digital financial transactions in Indonesia today. The use of digital wallets like GoPay, OVO, Dana, and LinkAja, as well as the integration of QRIS payment systems and mobile banking, makes the process of sending money (deposits) to gambling accounts very practical, fast, and discreet. Students can carry out transactions anytime, even during class or in their own bedrooms, without worrying about being detected by parents or the campus authorities.

Recent academic studies from 2023 to 2025 have mapped this phenomenon by examining various psychological and cognitive dimensions that trigger online gambling addiction. One important finding in gambler behavior research is the presence of strong cognitive distortions in the minds of gamblers. The most commonly encountered distortion is the Gambler's Fallacy, which is the irrational belief that the probability of an independent random event is influenced by previous random events. Students caught in this distortion believe that after experiencing several consecutive losses, their chances of winning in the next round will automatically increase. This logical mistake makes them keep depositing more money to cover previous losses (chasing losses), which eventually just drags them into even deeper financial trouble. On top of that, a

cognitive distortion called the Illusion of Control is also super common, where players feel like they have special skills, instincts, or some math formula to beat slot machines or gambling algorithms, even though the whole game is purely controlled by a computer's random number generator that always benefits the house in the long run.

From a neuroscience perspective, online gambling addiction has a biological mechanism very similar to addictive substances or drugs. Every time a player places a bet and waits for the outcome, the brain releases the neurotransmitter dopamine, a chemical responsible for feelings of pleasure, excitement, and reward, in large amounts. The euphoria felt when winning, even if the amount is small, is strongly embedded in the player's emotional memory. Over time, the brain's tolerance to dopamine increases, so players need to bet more frequently or with larger amounts to reach the same level of satisfaction. When they can't play or experience big losses, dopamine levels drop drastically, triggering withdrawal symptoms like acute anxiety, stress, depression, uncontrollable anger, and deep restlessness. This unstable mental health condition directly affects all aspects of a student's life. Academically, their focus on studying is disrupted because their minds are constantly obsessed with the next bet. Their sleep time is eaten up from staying up late to monitor online gambling sites that operate 24/7. A drop in academic performance, lower GPA, skipping classes, and even dropping out of college become inevitable logical consequences.

Even though the theoretical mapping of the psychosocial impact of online gambling has been well documented, most scientific literature in Indonesia today still shows significant research gaps. Previous studies have mostly been urban-centric, focusing on students studying at major universities in metropolitan cities like Jakarta, Bandung, Yogyakarta, Surabaya, or Medan. Semi-peripheral areas located far from the national technology growth centers are often overlooked in academic discourse. In fact, the dynamics of digital technology distribution and its impact on communities in semi-peripheral regions have unique characteristics that are very different from those in large urban areas. Therefore, research focusing on online gambling behavior among university students in Ruteng City, East Nusa Tenggara (NTT), comes to fill that gap in empirical data.

The novelty of this research lies in the socio-cultural context of the specific research area, which is the city of Ruteng. As the capital of Manggarai Regency, Ruteng is a semi-peripheral mountain town characterized by a society with very strong communal kinship ties, high compliance with ancestral customs (Manggarai tradition), and the influence of religious values (Catholic Church) that are highly dominant in daily life as well as in the formal education system. Theoretically, strict socio-religious control and strong communal bonds in traditional societies serve as an effective social shield against deviant behavior. However, the presence of internet technology and online gambling has silently breached that social shield. Digital online gambling acts as a very personal and hidden penetration agent. In the quiet dorm rooms of students in Ruteng City, through their smartphones, gambling interactions happen without physical barriers and without social oversight from pastors, traditional leaders, lecturers,

or close family. This penetration creates an interesting behavioral anomaly: how students can maintain adherence to cultural and religious norms in public spaces, while at the same time extremely violating those norms in private digital spaces. This study explores this sociocultural contradiction, which is never found in the context of large urban societies that tend to be individualistic and secular.

The second novelty, which is an original and very important contribution of this research, lies in the characteristics of the respondent sub-population studied. Based on the demographic data collected, most respondents in this study (covering 72.3% of the total sample) are active students in the Elementary School Teacher Education program (PGSD) at the Indonesian Catholic University Santu Paulus Ruteng. This empirical reality presents a very deep and concerning dimension of ethical, moral, and pedagogical analysis. PGSD students are being prepared to become elementary school teachers, who professionally and morally are not only responsible for teaching basic academic knowledge but also serve as primary role models of morality, character builders, and protectors of ethical values for young children. The finding that most online gamblers in this area are future educators creates an extraordinary role conflict. The online gambling addiction they experience not only wrecks their personal future but also has the potential to undermine the integrity of the primary education system down the line. If a prospective teacher is used to making quick money through illegal speculation and has a mindset focused on instant gratification because of gambling, how can they instill values like honesty, hard work, and moral integrity in their future elementary students? This critical dimension has never been adequately explored in previous studies on student online gambling, making this research highly urgent both academically and socially.

To fully unpack the complexity of this phenomenon, this study uses a mixed methods approach. Combining quantitative and qualitative methods is really important because each method complements the other in answering complex research questions. The quantitative approach uses structured survey questionnaires to map out the macro landscape of this phenomenon, including student participation rates, gender distribution, frequency of playing, monthly spending, types of online gambling favored (like dingdong and slots), as well as the numerical impact on academic performance and social relationships. However, statistics alone can't capture the depth of human suffering experienced by the participants. This is where the qualitative approach, through in-depth interviews, comes in to explore subjective micro-narratives. In-depth interviews reveal the emotional side of the perpetrators, showing the psychological dynamics when they experience the euphoria of false victories, guilt and depression after losses, tactics to hide debts from their parents, misuse of college tuition money for gambling deposits, interpersonal conflicts with family and dorm mates, as well as structural obstacles like the lack of professional psychological support services in semi-peripheral campuses. So, integrating this mixed-method approach not only provides an accurate statistical picture but also brings out the human voices behind the digital screens, which in turn can lead to concrete, practical, and recovery-focused policy recommendations for student psychosocial support in Ruteng City.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent academic studies from 2023 to 2025 have mapped this phenomenon by examining various psychological and cognitive dimensions that trigger online gambling addiction. One important finding in gambler behavior research is the presence of strong cognitive distortions in the minds of gamblers. The most commonly encountered distortion is the Gambler's Fallacy, which is the irrational belief that the probability of an independent random event is influenced by previous random events. Students caught in this distortion believe that after experiencing several consecutive losses, their chances of winning in the next round will automatically increase. This logical mistake makes them keep depositing more money to cover previous losses (chasing losses), which eventually just drags them into even deeper financial trouble. On top of that, a cognitive distortion called the Illusion of Control is also super common, where players feel like they have special skills, instincts, or some math formula to beat slot machines or gambling algorithms, even though the whole game is purely controlled by a computer's random number generator that always benefits the house in the long run.

METHODOLOGY

The subjects of this study are students in Ruteng City from various majors and year groups. Students are a very dynamic group and are vulnerable to various influences, both internal and external. This study is expected to provide deep insights into how widespread online gambling is among students in Ruteng City, as well as its impact on their academic performance, psychological well-being, and finances.

This research method uses a mixed method that combines quantitative and qualitative approaches. In the initial stage, a quantitative survey is conducted to collect data from a larger number of respondents and to observe general patterns related to online gambling among students. The survey can be carried out directly on campus or online through platforms like Google Forms. Questionnaires are chosen as the main data collection method because of their flexibility in reaching a wide range of respondents and their ability to collect relevant quantitative data in a relatively short time.

The questionnaire used has several sections to gather specific information. The first part deals with demographic questions, such as age, gender, major, and year of study, which aims to see the distribution of students involved in online gambling based on their demographic characteristics. The second part focuses on gambling experience, where respondents will be asked whether they have ever participated in online gambling, how often they gamble, and what types of gambling games they play the most (for example, poker, sports betting, online casinos, or other forms of gambling). The third part explores the motivations behind students' involvement in online gambling, such as personal interest, peer influence, seeking entertainment, or even financial pressure that drives them to gamble in hopes of quick gains. The final part focuses on the impact of online gambling on respondents, in terms of academics, psychological state, and

financial situation. These impacts are measured using a 1-5 Likert scale, where respondents are asked to rate based on the intensity of the effects they feel.

After collecting quantitative data, qualitative interviews were conducted to explore the more subjective and in-depth aspects of online gambling. The interviews aimed to uncover motivations, reasons, and more complex impacts that might not be fully revealed through surveys. Some students who had participated in the survey were selected for further interviews using semi-structured techniques. The interviews allowed the researchers to delve into the respondents' personal experiences and understand the broader context of how online gambling affects their social, academic, and psychological lives.

For data analysis, the quantitative approach uses descriptive statistics to calculate the frequency and percentage of each variable related to students' gambling experiences. The results are then presented in tables and charts to make it easier to visualize and understand the data. Meanwhile, qualitative data from interviews are analyzed using thematic analysis to delve deeper into the reasons behind gambling behavior, as well as impacts that are harder to measure numerically. Correlation tests are also conducted to evaluate the relationship between gambling frequency and the effects felt by students, especially regarding its influence on academic performance, mental health, leisure time, and other daily activities. The analysis results are then interpreted in the context of existing literature to compare the research findings with previous studies on online gambling among college students or other young groups. These findings are expected to provide useful recommendations for campus authorities, such as education policy managers, counseling institutions, and the students themselves. The recommendations can help in preventing and addressing the growing issues of online gambling among students.

RESEARCH RESULT

Respondent Characteristics and the Prevalence of Online Gambling Behavior (Quantitative)

This study involved 83 active students from various universities in Ruteng City as research samples. Based on demographic characteristics, the majority of respondents were male at 59% (49 respondents), while the rest were female at 41% (34 respondents). This data indicates that although online gambling, traditionally in public spaces, is dominated by men, this illegal digital activity has quietly made significant inroads into female students as well.

Table 1. Involving 83 active students from various universities in Ruteng City as the research sample.

		Jenis Kelamin			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Laki-laki	49	59.0	59.0	59.0
	Perempuan	34	41.0	41.0	100.0
	Total	83	100.0	100.0	

The sample distribution based on institutions shows that the largest concentration is at Universitas Katolik Indonesia Santu Paulus Ruteng (91.6%, 76 respondents), followed by STIPAS Santo Sirilus Ruteng (7.2%, 6 respondents), and STIE Karya Ruteng (1.2%, 1 respondent). By semester level, this phenomenon is dominated by students in the early semesters, namely Semester 2 at 50.6% (42 respondents) and Semester 4 at 31.3% (26 respondents), while the higher semesters (Semester 6 and 8) only make up 18% of the sample cumulatively. This situation reflects the vulnerability of new students who are still in the transitional adaptation phase of campus life and have not yet fully adjusted socially. Looking at the study programs, most respondents (72.3%, 60 respondents) are pursuing education in the Primary School Teacher Education program (PGSD), which raises deep pedagogical concerns for the integrity of educators' character.

In terms of gambling behavior, findings from quantitative research show a very worrying prevalence rate: as many as 83% of total respondents said they have been or are currently involved in online gambling, while only 17% of respondents admitted they have never tried it.

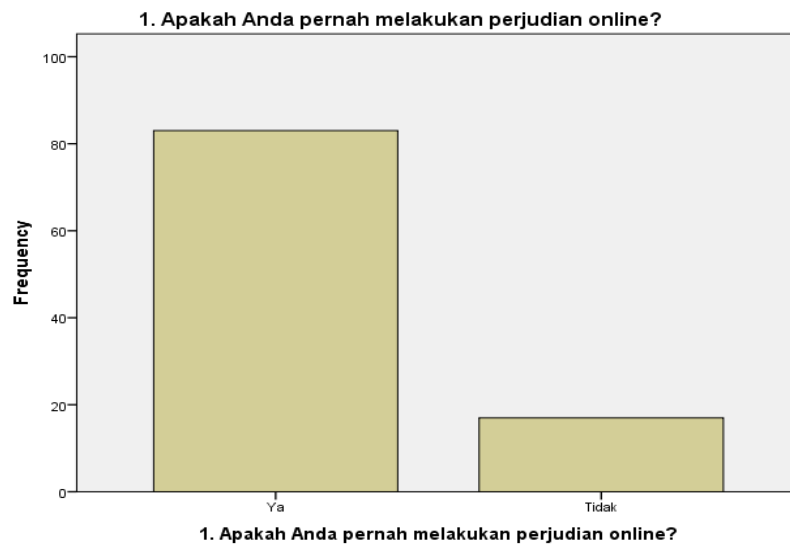


Figure 1. In terms of gambling behavior, the findings from quantitative research show a very concerning prevalence rate.

This phenomenon shows that online gambling has become a highly widespread and popular behavior among college students in Ruteng City. Interestingly, 88% of the students involved reported that they only started actively gambling online in the recent period. This illustrates an exponential surge in online gambling penetration happening massively in a short time among local students. In terms of playing frequency, the majority of respondents (88%) gamble periodically with a low frequency (once a month or less), while the rest (12%) show a more intensive playing frequency, including 2.4% of respondents who admit to playing actively every day.

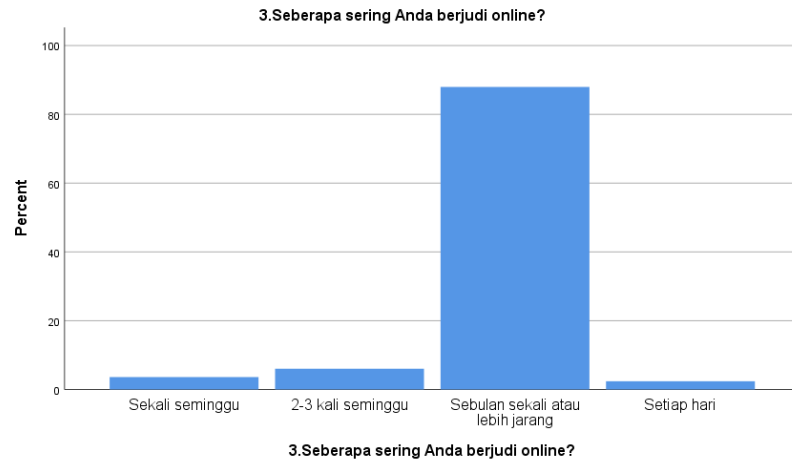


Figure 2. Shows that online gambling has become a very widespread and popular behavior among students in Ruteng City.

The most accessed type of online gambling by college students is online dingdong (chosen by 50.6% of respondents), followed by online slots (24.1%), sports betting (15.7%), and online card games (9.6%).

Table 2. The type of online gambling most accessed by college students is online dingdong

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Slots (slot)	20	24.1	24.1	24.1
	Cards (kartu)	8	9.6	9.6	33.7
	Sports (taruhan olah raga)	13	15.7	15.7	49.4
	dingdong	42	50.6	50.6	100.0
	Total	83	100.0	100.0	

Regarding financial spending, most students (88%) limit their expenses to under Rp100,000 per month, while 4.8% spend Rp100,000 to Rp500,000, and 2.4% spend Rp500,000 to Rp1,000,000 per month. A small number of students even spend more than Rp1,000,000 per month. The sources of funds that students use for online gambling come from their own part-time/daily work (44.6%) and allowance from their parents (38.6%), while 4.8% of respondents admitted to using money borrowed from relatives or friends, and 12% of respondents chose to keep their sources of funds secret.

Psychosocial, Financial, and Support Failure Narratives (Qualitative)

In-depth interviews with several student informants provided a richer narrative that clarifies the psychological dynamics behind the quantitative data. The informants revealed that their involvement in online gambling often started with the euphoria of initial wins. When players won some money on their first bets, their brains recorded an incredible sense of satisfaction and happiness. These wins were even often seen as an emergency financial solution to cover urgent needs like rent or daily meals. However, that euphoria quickly turned into

a psychological disaster when a losing streak happened. Students went through cycles of frustration, self-directed anger, deep regret, and extreme sadness over losing valuable money.

What's concerning is that online gambling is no longer seen as an individual shame that must be completely hidden among peers; instead, it has gone through a process of social normalization in residential areas (boarding houses) and on campus. Students admit that they know, discuss, and even exchange online gambling strategies with classmates and dorm mates. Online gambling activities are positioned as a normal conversation topic during students' daily hangouts. To fund this activity, students addicted to it sabotage their personal finances. They misuse money sent by their parents, which should be used to pay tuition, rent, or basic meals, to turn it into gambling deposit balances. This triggers a tendency to lie periodically to hide financial losses from their parents and relatives.

The impact of this deviant behavior disrupts daily routines and the mental health of those involved. Students report being unable to control their gaming time, staying up late at night to track bets, which leads to physical exhaustion, sleepiness in class, loss of focus, decreased academic performance, as well as chronic anxiety and prolonged stress. The main trigger for their involvement often stems from academic pressure and daily boredom, where online gambling appears as a form of maladaptive coping promising instant escape. Ironically, despite the high psychological stress experienced (80.7% of respondents admitted to feeling stressed/anxious), only a small number of students actively seek professional help. As many as 34.9% of students said they never seek professional help and tend to avoid it. Most choose to keep this addiction problem to themselves because of strong social stigma barriers or not knowing about the availability of psychological counseling services at their local campus.

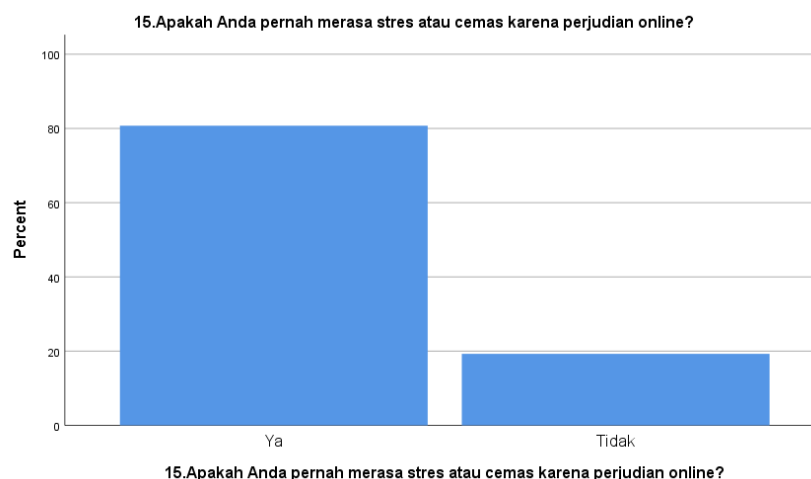


Figure 3. The presence of strong social stigma or ignorance about the availability of psychological counseling services on the local campus

DISCUSSION

Cognitive Dissonance and Behavioral Control Failure

One of the main issues found in this study is the huge gap between students' cognitive awareness and their behavioral responses (cognitive-behavioral gap). Quantitative data shows that 83.1% of students are aware that online gambling is a harmful and damaging activity, and 74.7% of students understand the legal risks associated with such behavior (like criminal penalties under the ITE Law). However, as many as 83% of students still actively engage in online gambling. In social psychology studies, this contradictory phenomenon can scientifically be explained through Leon Festinger's Theory of Cognitive Dissonance (1957). Cognitive dissonance happens when someone has two conflicting cognitions (knowledge, attitudes, or values), or acts in ways that contradict their cognitive beliefs. Students feel psychological tension because they know gambling is wrong and can ruin their future (cognition), but they still do it for entertainment satisfaction or the expectation of instant profit (behavior). To ease this dissonance tension, they rationalize their behavior (neutralization techniques), like thinking their bets are small and harmless, or believing that gambling is just a form of entertainment to relieve academic stress without directly hurting anyone.

This phenomenon also shows a failure in Icek Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) from 1991. According to TPB, an individual's behavior is determined by intention, which is influenced by three main variables: attitude toward behavior, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control. In the case of students in Ruteng City, negative attitudes toward gambling (gambling is bad) and prohibitive subjective norms (Catholicism and Manggarai customs strictly forbid gambling) are completely overridden by very strong perceived behavioral control in the digital era. The anonymity offered by smartphones, digital wallets, and the ease of digital transactions (QRIS) creates the illusion of control that their actions won't be known by anyone, are free from social sanctions by the real community, and are beyond the reach of law enforcement. This ease of digital access cuts across all the traditional external control mechanisms that usually limit students' deviant behavior in the real world.

The Hidden Dangers Behind the Illusion of Microtransactions

The second crucial issue lies in students' perception of the financial impact of online gambling. Data shows that 88% of students spend less than IDR 100,000 per month on online gambling, and the majority (59%) do not agree that gambling is a short-term financial solution. This small nominal spending creates a cognitive illusion of safety, making them feel their gambling activities are "safe" and "controlled" because it doesn't immediately trigger large-scale financial ruin. However, scientifically, this small amount is a very dangerous cognitive trap designed by the online gambling industry. Microtransactions lower the moral and financial sensitivity of participants; since the stakes are small, the guilt felt when losing is minimal, which instead encourages students to place bets repeatedly at a very high frequency (compulsive repetition).

The shift toward micro-transactions is in line with the PPATK data from 2025, which recorded a decrease in the total national fund turnover but a surge in transaction frequency by 101% to 422.1 million times. Online gambling has evolved into a micro-scale addiction that builds up over time. A lack of digital financial literacy means students don't realize that dozens of impulsive transactions worth Rp10,000 to Rp20,000 each month can cumulatively drain their primary funds. Qualitative interviews confirm this. Even though their average monthly spending seems small, during certain addictive moments (like trying to chase losses), students end up having to siphon off their rent money, tuition fees, and even go into debt to cover their losses. Small amounts are just bait used by digital casino algorithms to keep players engaged long-term, slowly messing with students' financial stability.

Peer Group Normalization and Social Stigma Barriers in Semi-Periphery Areas

The sociocultural context of Ruteng City as a semi-peripheral area presents deep social contradictions. On one hand, Ruteng has very strict religious social control (the Catholic Church) and Manggarai customary community rules, where gambling is considered a serious moral violation and a social sin. However, interview results show that online gambling has been internalized and normalized in the micro social environment of students, especially in boarding houses and among classmates. Peers act as the main agents of socialization who trigger, spread, and legitimize gambling behavior through peer pressure and communal sharing of information. Discussions about slot sites, winning patterns, and betting results are conducted openly in communal spaces at boarding houses without any embarrassment.

The contradiction between society's macro values that reject gambling and the micro normalization within peer groups creates a new problem in the form of barriers to seeking help. Even though 80.7% of students experience stress and anxiety due to online gambling, very few seek professional help (34.9% reported never seeking help). The moral stigma attached to gamblers in the religious Ruteng community makes students feel extremely scared to be honest. They worry about being ostracized from the customary community, socially punished by their extended family, or reported to the university if their involvement is revealed. As a result, students choose to hide their addiction, get stuck in social isolation that triggers depression, and avoid accessing campus counseling services. The campus itself is experiencing a 'counseling gap' because the existing counseling unit tends to be less effective at detecting social issues like online gambling.

Moral Decline of Prospective Teachers: Pedagogical Implications for Primary School Teacher Education

The most fundamental issue with long-term social implications is the demographic profile of the respondents, where 72.3% of them are students in the Primary School Teacher Education (PGSD) program at the Indonesian Catholic University of Saint Paul Ruteng. PGSD students are trained to become elementary school teachers, a profession historically and culturally seen as a pillar of community morality (role model) and a shaper of young people's character at the primary education level. The majority of these future educators being involved in online gambling shows a really serious split in moral identity. Elementary school teachers are supposed to instill values like hard work, honesty, discipline, and social ethics in children at a critical age. The fact that these prospective teachers are caught up in online gambling addiction signals a real danger of transferring an instant-gratification mentality into the future primary school system. PGSD students who are used to gambling online are vulnerable to bringing a get-rich-quick mindset without hard work into their professional work ethic as educators. Physical exhaustion and emotional instability from staying up gambling can also potentially damage their professional and pedagogical competence in the classroom, hinder knowledge transfer, and lower the quality of students' moral supervision. This is no longer just a matter of typical deviant student behavior, but a systemic threat to the decline of moral character quality in the basic education system in East Nusa Tenggara. Higher education institutions that train these future teachers need to recognize this ethical crisis immediately and carry out curriculum reforms for counseling as well as strict and preventive moral supervision.

CLOSING

This research shows a few findings:

- 83% of students have gambled online (confirmed from the normalization of gambling through friends/environment).
- Most people gamble for entertainment, stress, and economic pressure.
- 34.9% never seek professional help, which is backed up by interviews showing low access/awareness of psychological support services.
- Almost everyone feels regretful or emotionally disturbed, even though they keep playing.

This study reveals the complex and worrying reality of online gambling practices among university students in Ruteng City. Based on quantitative data from questionnaires and qualitative insights from in-depth interviews, it was found that online gambling is no longer a fringe phenomenon but has become integrated into students' social, emotional, and even academic lives. Students get caught in unstable emotional cycles, feeling euphoria when they win and frustration when they lose, which over time shapes addictive behavior patterns. Their main motivation to gamble often stems from psychosocial factors: academic pressure, economic needs, peer influence, and even unmanaged boredom. Online gambling appears as a shortcut for entertainment, stress relief, or a hope to get out of financial difficulties, even though it actually makes things worse. Interview findings show that most respondents are aware of the risks and negative impacts they experience, including losing money, disrupted academic activities, and worsening social or family relationships. However, the lack of education, access to professional help, and the absence of comprehensive campus policies often leave students facing these problems alone, in the dark without guidance. Through this research, it is hoped that a collective awareness will emerge from all parties, especially campuses, families, communities, and the government, to take the online gambling phenomenon more seriously and openly.

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