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The State and Online Gambling: The Economic Impact of Online Gambling - A Case Study of Indonesia

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Abstract

This study explores the social and economic impacts of online gambling in Indonesia, and how this phenomenon affects the nation's sovereignty and stability. Grounded in the Quranic prohibition against gambling, this research highlights that online gambling poses threats not only to individuals but also to society at large and the nation as a whole. Online gambling in Indonesia has reached alarming levels, with promotions spreading across various media, including government and academic websites, and involving public figures in advertising campaigns. The consequences of this practice include outflows of funds to foreign countries, an increase in addiction within society, and negative impacts on the national economy, leading to inflation and a decrease in purchasing power. Through a qualitative case study approach, this research reveals that globalization and the advancement of information technology facilitate the spread of online gambling, which in turn weakens the state's control over this illegal activity. The study also highlights government efforts to address this issue through regulations and website blockades, but significant challenges remain, particularly in controlling the flow of funds and access to cross-border online gambling sites.

Keywords:

State, Online Gambling, Economy Politics, Globalization

Pendahuluan

This paper begins by referencing a verse from the Qur'an, Chapter 5, verse no. 90-91:

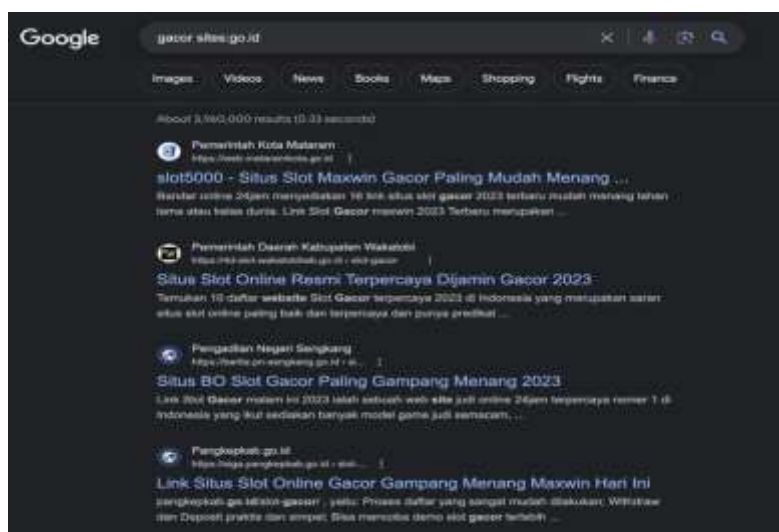
“O believers! Intoxicants, gambling, idols, and drawing lots for decisions are all evil of Satan’s handiwork. So shun them so you may be successful. Satan’s plan is to stir up hostility and hatred between you with intoxicants and gambling and to prevent you from remembering Allah and praying. Will you not then abstain?”

The Qur'an, which was revealed 14 centuries ago, prohibited gambling. However, the prohibition is specifically addressed to believers, emphasizing avoidance of gambling to achieve success. Gambling is often viewed as an activity that only affects the individual gambler. However, this study aims to demonstrate that the impact of online gambling extends beyond the individual and affects the nation as a whole. In other words, the consequences of online gambling are widespread, affecting both individuals and society at large.

The motivation for this study arises from the growing number of online gambling users in Indonesia, which has reached alarming levels. The promotion of online gambling has gone beyond conventional means, extending into advertisements in cyberspace and even enlisting celebrities to promote online gambling. According to Republika Online, 26 individuals, including celebrities and influencers, have been summoned by the Cybercrime Directorate of the Indonesian National Police (Ditipidsiber Bareskrim Polri) in response to reports of suspected online gambling promotions on social media. (Ali Mansur, Muhammad Noor Alfian Choir, Fauziah Mursid, 2023)

A further concern is that online gambling websites have infiltrated official government sites. A Google search revealed that online gambling sites are being promoted on government websites (Figure 1). These include the websites of the City of Mataram, Wakatobi Regency, Pangkajene Regency, and the Sengkang District Court. While these sites may not actively promote gambling, it is possible that they were hacked or left unsecured, or that their management contracts were not renewed. (Ismail, 2023)

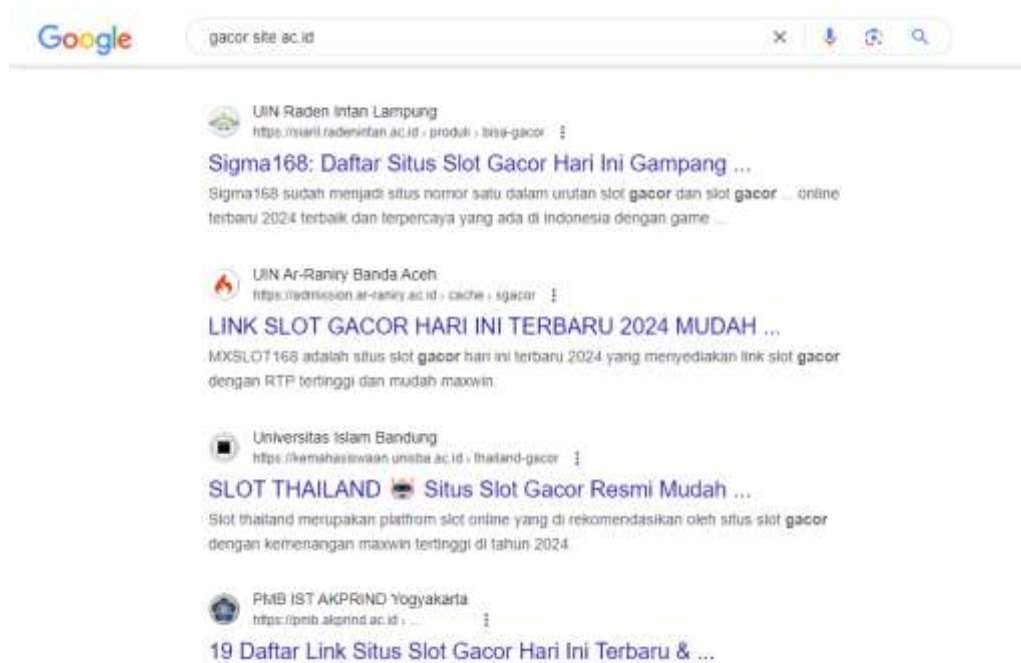
Figure 1. The Search Results of Online Gambling Sites on Government Websites



Source: Google

Online gambling sites are not only targeting government websites but also academic institutions. When academic websites are hacked to promote gambling, the primary targets are academics and students, meaning that they are targeting the youth. Figure 2 shows several academic websites infiltrated by online gambling, including UIN Raden Intan Lampung, UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh, Universitas Islam Bandung, and AKPRIND Yogyakarta.

Figure 2. Search Results of Online Gambling Sites on Academic Websites



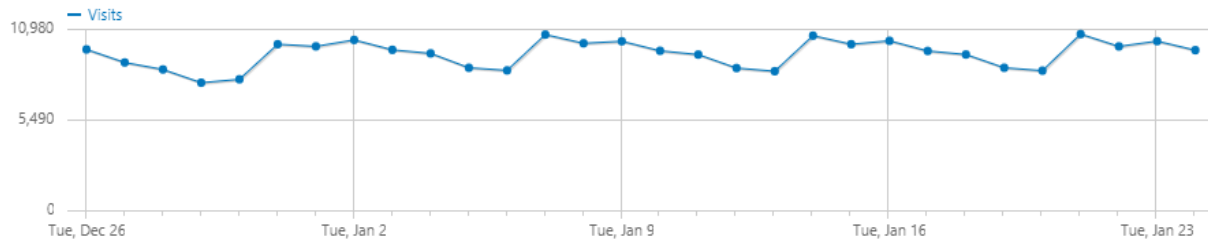
Source: Google

The Indonesian Ministry of Communication and Information (Kominfo) has declared that Indonesia is in an online gambling emergency. Minister Budi Arie Setiadi has voiced concerns about the growing number of online gambling victims, particularly among the younger generation. Since July 2018, Kominfo has blocked 886,719 online gambling-related contents, and daily, they disable access to 1,500 to 2,000 websites and dozens of gambling-related apps. (Dmi, 2023).

The state, particularly Indonesia, should be concerned about the rise of online gambling, as it affects both access to gambling platforms and the revenues generated by these websites. Based on data from Google Analytics (Figure 3), daily visits to the online gambling site dewapoker.com range from 8,000 to 10,980 visitors. Dewapoker is one of the largest online gambling sites catering to Indonesians, despite being hosted on a server in San Francisco, USA. According to Viva.co.id (Nur Agazis, 2012), Dewapoker ranks in the top ten in terms of revenue and users among online gambling sites in Indonesia. If we look at the Australian-

based online gambling site Unibet.com, its revenue reached 130 million pounds in 2009 (equivalent to IDR 2.6 trillion at an exchange rate of IDR 20,000) (Nur Agazis, 2012).

Figure 3. Daily Visitors to Dewapoker (Dec 26, 2023 - Jan 23, 2024)

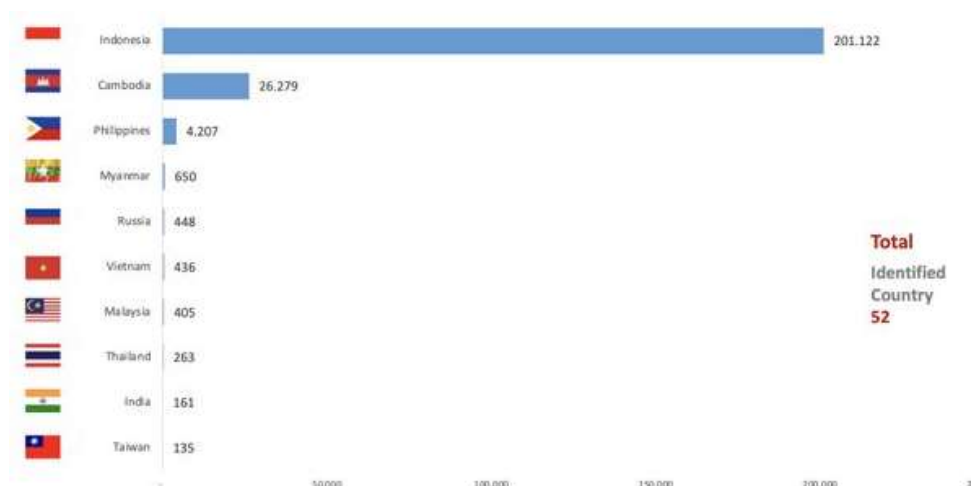


Source: Google Analitik

According to Indonesia’s Financial Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre (PPATK), online gambling is rampant across the country, with significant amounts of money involved. The funds flowing through online gambling transactions in 2022 were estimated to be in the hundreds of trillions of rupiah, and much of this money is transferred to tax havens, making repatriation difficult and potentially contributing to inflation. (PPATK, 2022)

Indonesia ranks as the largest online gambling player globally. As seen in Figure 4, Indonesia tops the list of 52 countries identified as engaging in online gambling, with 200,000 active players. Following Indonesia are Cambodia, the Philippines, Myanmar, and Russia.

Figure 4. Countries with the Largest Online Gambling Participants in 2023



Source: Ismail Fahmi, droneemprit.id

The total volume and value of online gambling transactions in Indonesian society have become increasingly alarming, as they have continued to rise from 2017 to 2023. This indicates that the number of online gambling users has also increased each year. According to a report by the Indonesian Financial Transaction Reports and Analysis Center (PPATK), Indonesian citizens spent 190 trillion rupiah on online gambling in 2022. From 2017 to 2022, there were 156 million online gambling transactions, as reported by PPATK. The number of transactions grew from 250,000 in 2017, steadily increasing each year. In 2018, there were over 600,000 transactions, which is a threefold increase compared to the previous year. In 2019, the number of online gambling transactions tripled again, reaching 1.8 million. The upward trend continued, with 5.6 million transactions in 2020 and 43.5 million in 2022. In terms of transaction value, online gambling reached 2 trillion rupiah in 2017 and 3.9 trillion rupiah in 2018. By early 2023, the transaction value had already reached 200 trillion rupiah. (Detik, 2023).

Online gambling is a borderless activity conducted via the internet, raising concerns about national economic impacts. If the IDR 200 trillion spent on online gambling in early 2023 were converted into gold reserves, it would equate to 192,000 kilograms of gold being drained from Indonesia. Alarmingly, the majority of online gamblers in Indonesia belong to low-income groups, including students, workers, farmers, housewives, and private employees (Detik, 2023). PPATK also revealed that funds from online gambling flow to several Southeast Asian countries, including Thailand, Cambodia, and the Philippines (Kamil, Irfan; Meiliana, 2022).

Given the background outlined, this study seeks to examine the impact of online gambling on Indonesia's economy and society. As online gambling crosses national borders, systematic strategies are needed to address its implications.

Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative methodology, which is well-suited for case studies. The study seeks to explore how online gambling affects the economy and society in Indonesia. Creswell (2002) notes that qualitative research is typically used to investigate social life, history, behaviors, social activities, and organizational functions. Alan Bryman (2005) suggests that qualitative research emphasizes understanding and interpreting phenomena

rather than focusing on numerical data. Hence, this study employs a qualitative approach to identify the broader impacts of online gambling on Indonesia

Conceptual Framework

In contemporary times, international politics can emerge from the development of technology. Telecommunication and the internet have transformed global societies, influencing both behavior and identity, as individual interactions have transcended geographical boundaries. Information technology has its own unique power, influencing not only the function of information but also the role of culture within international relations. High-quality and powerful information technologies are at the core of globalization, significantly impacting the principles of identity among people who communicate and interact across spatial and temporal boundaries. (Goldstein, 2017)

The strength of information technology can serve as a tool for bolstering a nation's power, while conversely, it can also be used as a weapon against states. The development of technology is intricately linked to political, economic, social, and cultural dynamics. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok exemplify this influence, as they create communities and facilitate the exchange of ideas that transcend national borders, often beyond the control of governments or state institutions.

Online gambling uses the internet as its primary medium, spreading across borders through online advertisements and networks. According to Goldstein and Pavehouse, globalization brings both benefits and challenges. While it facilitates communication and the exchange of ideas, it also makes it difficult for authorities to control cross-border crimes like online gambling. (Goldstein, 2017)

Globalization leads to the emergence of actors beyond the state, such as online gambling platforms. These platforms operate in ways that disrupt national sovereignty and undermine state control. Governments must take proactive steps to regulate harmful technologies, particularly online gambling, by monitoring digital financial transactions and preventing money laundering. Additionally, authorities must address the outflow of digital currency, which can destabilize domestic economies.

In the concept of globalization, Goldstein and Pavehouse elucidate that globalization encompasses both benefits and drawbacks. Among the advantages of globalization in international relations are the high-level technologies that facilitate communication,

transportation, and the expansion of connections between individuals across different countries. Furthermore, globalization broadens the exchange of ideas across national boundaries. However, globalization also presents certain disadvantages. One significant drawback is that it can make it more challenging for authorities to apprehend individuals engaged in fraud and criminal activities, as the transnational nature of globalization often complicates law enforcement efforts. (Goldstein, 2017).

Goldstein and Pevehouse articulate that globalization encompasses both advantages and disadvantages. The benefits of globalization in international relations include advanced technologies that facilitate communication, transportation, and the expansion of connections between individuals across various countries, as well as the dissemination of ideas across national boundaries. However, globalization also presents drawbacks. For instance, it can sometimes hinder the ability of authorities to apprehend individuals involved in fraud and criminal activities. Goldstein and Pevehouse further explain that globalization involves an increase in global integration within the realms of communication, culture, and economics. They argue that, in the context of globalization, the state may lose its authority as a supranational institution. This implies that the sovereignty of a state is no longer absolute, which means that a state's power does not necessarily become stronger but rather shifts into a new context. Additionally, globalization introduces actors beyond states that operate on a global scale and can have disruptive impacts on the globalization process itself. (Goldstein, 2017)

Online gambling is an example of a negative impact of globalization. As previously explained, the challenges of detecting fraud and criminal activities within globalization arise from difficulties faced by national authorities. Similarly, online gambling, when not regulated by government authorities, becomes difficult for national authorities to control, encompassing both the creators and users of online gambling platforms.

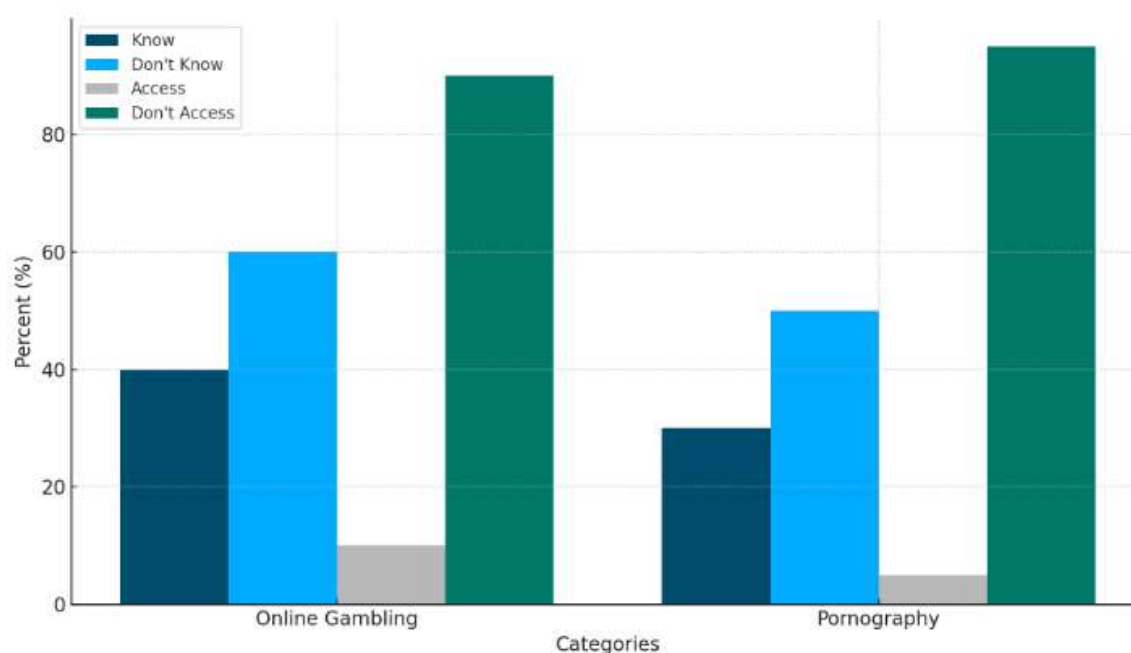
Governments should bear the responsibility of regulating the advancement of information technology that poses risks to national security and sovereignty. It is essential for governments to oversee online gambling, including both users and operators of online gambling sites, as well as the dissemination of information related to online gambling. Equally important is the monitoring of digital financial transactions used for online gambling, as there are indications that such transactions may be linked to money laundering. Moreover, there is

a concerning trend of digital funds used for online gambling being transferred abroad, which could jeopardize domestic financial stability.

Discussion

The prevalence of online gambling users, creators, and consumers remains widespread in Indonesia. These individuals are not limited to men but also include women. Much like consumers of pornographic websites, online gambling participants come from both genders. Online gambling becomes a serious issue when it turns into an addictive activity. According to a study by Richard Rosenthal (Savelle-rocklin & Akhtar, 2019), gambling is addictive not only because it involves winning or losing but also due to its unique nature. It is considered unique because gambling is unpredictable, thrilling due to the risks involved, and stimulating because of the tension and fear it induces. Richard Rosenthal concluded that individuals who become addicted to gambling are not just drawn to the game itself, but also to its masochistic nature—a disorder where individuals derive pleasure from experiencing cruelty or violence. Gambling offers an escape from problems and acts as a form of self-medication, akin to the fantasy of winning. The pain, suffering, and guilt from losses lead the gambler to continue gambling as a way to numb the effects of these negative emotions. Thus, gambling becomes addictive and is considered a form of masochism.

Figure 5. Respondents Related to Online Gambling and Pornography Sites in 2023



Source: *Kata Data*, download at <https://databoks.katadata.co.id/datapublish/2023/06/14/beberapa-warga-ri-akui-masih-mengunjungi-situs-judi-online-dan-pornografi>

The Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (APJII) conducted a survey in 2023 on internet penetration and behavior involving 8,510 respondents across Indonesia, consisting of 4,004 males and 4,506 females, during January 10-27, 2023. The survey showed that a significant portion of Indonesians were aware of and accessed online gambling and pornography websites. According to the survey, 34.26% of respondents knew of online gambling sites, while 65.74% did not. Of the 8,510 respondents, 5.61% had accessed online gambling sites.

The Indonesian government has issued regulations regarding online gambling under Law No. 11 of 2008 on Information and Electronic Transactions. Article 27 of the law prohibits any person from intentionally and unlawfully distributing, transmitting, or making accessible information or electronic documents that contain gambling content. Those who violate this law can face a maximum imprisonment of six years or a fine of up to one billion rupiah. Additionally, the Indonesian Penal Code (KUHP) Article 303 states that anyone who engages in gambling can be sentenced to up to 10 years in prison or fined 25 million rupiah. This means that when compared to the 200 trillion rupiah generated from online gambling transactions in 2023, the one-billion-rupiah fine represents a mere 0.00002% of the total revenue, highlighting the inadequacy of the penalties.

The United States also experienced widespread online gambling in 2002, when 2 million people spent a total of 3.5 billion USD on online gambling, with around 2,000 virtual casino websites. By 2003, the online gambling industry saw an increase in revenue to 4.1 billion USD, and by 2004, there were 15 million online gamblers generating 6 billion USD in revenue. The history of online gambling in the United States began with prohibition, followed by strict regulations, and eventually evolved into a legitimate business subject to taxation. The U.S. government realized that controlling online gambling required more than just domestic regulations—it had to be viewed as an international issue since many Americans used foreign-based online gambling sites. Therefore, even if online gambling was banned domestically, these offshore sites continued to operate (Savelle-rocklin & Akhtar, 2019)

The Social and Economic Impact of Online Gambling

This study categorizes the impact of online gambling into two categories: social and economic. The social impact is linked to societal development, while the economic impact is tied to the overall economic growth of a country.

Social Impact

Richard Rosenthal (Savelle-rocklin & Akhtar, 2019) classified masochistic tendencies into two types: sexual and non-sexual. In gambling, masochism is of the non-sexual variety, manifesting as a personality disorder rooted in unconscious patterns of hardship and failure. For addictive gamblers, victory comes through defeat, thus categorizing them as non-sexual masochists. This dependency on suffering and victimization affects their relationships, as those close to them often become victims of their self-destructive behavior.

The social impact of online gambling becomes evident through rising divorce rates in several regions of Indonesia. In Bandung, West Java, the Soreang Religious Court handled 2,800 divorce cases from January to June 2024, with 20% or around 560 cases attributed to online gambling (Detikjabar, 2024). In Bojonegoro, East Java, more than 20% of divorces in 2023 were linked to online gambling, amounting to 179 cases (Achyar, 2024). In Kudus, Central Java, 376 divorces were caused by online gambling addiction (Miranti, 2024). Similarly, in Muaro, Jambi, there were 559 divorces in 2023, and 207 more by mid-2024, all due to online gambling (Nurhadi, 2024). In West Jakarta, out of 1,731 divorces in 2024, 30% or 522 cases involved online gambling, with both husbands and wives partaking in the activity (Triatmojo, 2024). In Sambas, West Kalimantan, there were 238 divorces caused by online gambling in 2023, and 163 cases by mid-2024 (Media Kalbar, 2024).

Economic development relies on factors such as population growth, education, and human resources. Thus, for economic development to progress, a country must ensure population growth, quality education, and the development of skilled human resources. Educated populations contribute to a country's productivity, with organizations like the World Bank noting a positive correlation between women's education and reduced child mortality rates in countries such as Indonesia, Kenya, Morocco, and Peru. Quality human resources are essential for structural transformation, as developing countries shift from

agricultural-based economies to those based on industry and services. (Cypher & L. Dietz, 2014)

Economic and human development are closely interrelated, particularly in the context of structural transformation in developing countries, where productive activities have shifted from an agriculture-based economy to one centered on industry and services. This transformation necessitates a well-educated and skilled workforce to enhance the quality of human resources. As the production model shifts from agriculture to industry, the demand arises not only for a larger workforce in terms of quantity but also for higher-quality human resources capable of utilizing advanced technology to increase productivity in the industrial sector. The importance of enhancing the quality of human resources is underscored by its direct relationship with higher per capita income, increased economic growth rates, and overall advancements in human capital. Ultimately, improving the quality of human resources will contribute to the overall development and growth of a nation.(Cypher & L. Dietz, 2014)

When online gambling becomes addictive, it can negatively affect a person's quality of life, even impacting human resources as a whole. It is not only the quality of life of the individual engaged in online gambling that suffers but also those closely connected to the gambler, who may experience suffering, violence, or victimization. This can be observed in the rising number of divorce cases across various regions in Indonesia, which are attributed to the involvement of one family member in online gambling. As previously mentioned, the quality of human resources influences a country's economic development. Consequently, the widespread growth of online gambling in Indonesia could also have a detrimental impact on the nation's economic progress.

Economic Impact

Before discussing the economic impact of online gambling, it is important to explain inflation, monetary policy, and foreign exchange reserves, as these factors help illustrate how online gambling affects a country's development.

Inflation is a sustained increase in the prices of goods. The social impact of inflation arises when rising prices prompt producers to increase production, resulting in an oversupply of goods that is not matched by consumers' purchasing power. The effect of inflation is particularly detrimental for individuals with low incomes, as the rising prices of goods

continually erode their purchasing power. Inflation also occurs when public demand exceeds the supply of money in circulation.(Wibowo, 2020)

Monetary policy implemented by the central bank will have a direct impact on the money supply. When the money supply increases without a corresponding rise in the production of goods and services, it will lead to inflation, causing a decline in consumer purchasing power. (Natsir, 2014)

Foreign exchange reserves are the amount of foreign currency held by a central bank to manage the exchange rate of the domestic currency and ensure economic stability. These reserves can be utilized when the domestic currency depreciates, allowing the central bank to sell foreign exchange reserves to purchase domestic currency and strengthen its value. For example, during periods of high inflation and a weakening domestic currency, the central bank may raise interest rates to lower inflation and use its foreign exchange reserves to stabilize the currency exchange rate. (Boediono, 2013)

Online gambling can affect the money supply, consumer purchasing power, and foreign exchange reserves. As explained earlier, with online gambling transactions amounting to 200 trillion rupiah, there are significant implications for the country. If online gambling operators, often foreign-based, earn 50% of the transaction value, 100 trillion rupiah would be required to cover the shortfall in the money supply and the loss of foreign exchange reserves. Since these gambling operators are based outside of Indonesia, the money is held as foreign exchange reserves in the operator's country of origin. This results in a weakening of the domestic currency and inflation in Indonesia. To compensate for the shortage in the money supply caused by online gambling, an increase in circulating currency may be implemented without a corresponding increase in the production of goods and services. This will further lead to inflation and a decline in consumer purchasing power, ultimately disrupting the economic development of the country.

Conclusion

In conclusion, online gambling has far-reaching and destructive consequences, not only for individuals involved but also for society and the nation. As noted in Surah Al-Ma'idah (from the Qur'an, Chapter 5, verse no. 90-91), gambling causes significant harm, including severe social and economic losses. This research highlights how online gambling has become a serious issue in Indonesia, with wide-ranging effects on various sectors of society, including

governance and academia. The issue extends beyond individual behavior and threatens national sovereignty through uncontrollable financial outflows.

This study emphasizes the need for a systematic approach to addressing online gambling, considering its cross-border nature and destructive impact. Online gambling not only damages social structures by increasing divorce rates and causing personality disorders but also has alarming economic implications, with billions of rupiah flowing out of Indonesia annually. Therefore, it is crucial for the government to take decisive action to control and curb online gambling while raising public awareness of its dangers.

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