



The Impact of Online Gambling on Marital Relationships and Divorce Rates: A Literature Review

Dede Irman Pirdaus^{1*}, Kalfin², Yasir Salih³

¹*Faculty of computer science, University of informatics and business, Bandung, Indonesia*

²*Statistics Study Program, Faculty of Science, Technology and Mathematics, Matana University*

³*Department of Mathematics, Faculty of Education, Red Sea University, SUDAN*

**Corresponding author email: dedeirmanpirdaus@gmail.com*

Abstract

The prevalence of online gambling has soared in recent years, posing a significant threat to marital relationships and divorce rates. This research examines the impact of online gambling on marital relationships and levels of peace through comprehensive literature insights. This study analyzes the development of online gambling, the factors that encourage participation, the psychological impact, and its influence on marital dynamics. Findings show that online gambling can significantly damage marital relationships, cause financial conflict, reduce the quality of communication, and increase the risk of divorce. Statistical data from Indonesia shows an increase in gambling-related divorce cases in the last five years, with a peak in 2023. This research highlights the need for multi-faceted interventions, including stricter regulations, public awareness campaigns and support services for affected families to reduce Negative effects of online gambling on marriage.

Keywords: Online gambling, marital relationships, divorce rates, financial impact, mental health.

1. Introduction

The online gambling phenomenon has experienced significant growth in the last few decades, with increasing accessibility and ease of playing via digital platforms. In this context, not only individuals involved in online gambling, but also their partners and their marital relationships can be affected. Research on the impact of online gambling on marital relationships and divorce rates is becoming increasingly important as society shifts to a more connected and integrated digital world (Castrén et al., 2018). Online gambling can have a significant impact on marital relationships due to its time-consuming nature and financial resources. In many cases, people who engage in online gambling may spend excessive time in front of a screen, reducing interpersonal interactions with their partners.

This can cause tension and conflict in the relationship, due to the lack of attention and involvement given to the partner. Apart from that, financial aspects are also an important factor that influences marital relationships when one partner is involved in online gambling. Online gambling often involves significant financial risks, especially when individuals engage in large or repeated bets. Losing money in online gambling can cause great financial stress on a couple, which can lead to tension, arguments, and even divorce. Not only that, online gambling can also affect an individual's mental health, which in turn can negatively affect marital relationships (Järvinen-Tassopoulos, 2020). The burden of stress, anxiety, and depression associated with gambling problems can affect an individual's social and emotional interactions in their relationships.

Couples who are unaware of or do not address these mental health problems can experience difficulty in maintaining a healthy and harmonious relationship. In addition to its direct impact, online gambling can also change the dynamics of power and control in marital relationships. When one partner engages in online gambling, they may experience changes in behavior, such as becoming more withdrawn or defensive. This can disrupt communication and trust between partners, affecting intimacy and cooperation in dealing with household problems. In psychology and sociology literature, it has been found that online gambling can be a form of escape from existing problems in one's personal life and marriage. Individuals experiencing emotional difficulties or conflict in their relationships may seek escape in online gambling as a way to deal with stress or tension (Botterill et al., 2016).

However, using gambling as a coping mechanism can exacerbate existing problems, as it only treats temporary symptoms without addressing the underlying root problem. On the other hand, there is also research that shows that

online gambling can have a positive impact on some marital relationships. Some individuals may find pleasure or emotional satisfaction in playing online games or betting with their partner, which can increase the intimacy and quality of their relationship. However, these positive effects often occur in specific cases and cannot be considered a general representation of the impact of online gambling on marital relationships as a whole. Based on the 2023 Indonesian Statistics report, divorce cases in Indonesia reached 516,334 cases in 2022. Clearly this figure has increased by 15% compared to 2021 which reached 447,743 cases (Annur, 2023). The number of divorce cases that occurred is the highest divorce rate that has occurred in the last six years. The majority of divorce cases that will occur in 2022 will be contested divorces, which means the divorce lawsuit is filed by the wife. The divorce started from continuous arguments between the couple which were triggered by economic problems, one of which was frequent divorce lawsuits because the husband was addicted to online slot gambling which had a negative impact on the family's economy.

Online or digital slot machines are virtual variations of the classic slot machines usually found in brick-and-mortar casinos. This digital version works on the same basic concept as the traditional version. Players place a bet by selecting the bet amount and the number of paylines they wish to play, and then start spinning the reels. When the reels stop, the goal is to line up certain symbols on the reels in a predetermined pattern. If this alignment is successful, it will trigger wins based on certain combinations and their associated values shown on the game's payable. The digital nature of American slots allows for a variety of themes, bonus features and innovative game mechanics that provide players with an immersive and immersive experience (Elton-Marshall et al., 2018).

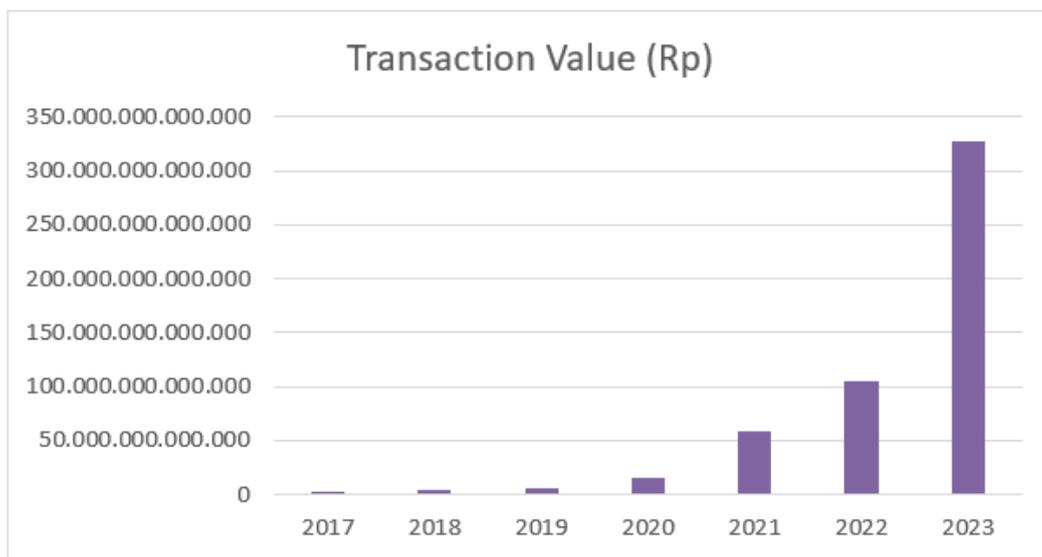


Figure 1: Total transaction value related to online gambling in Indonesia (2017-2023)

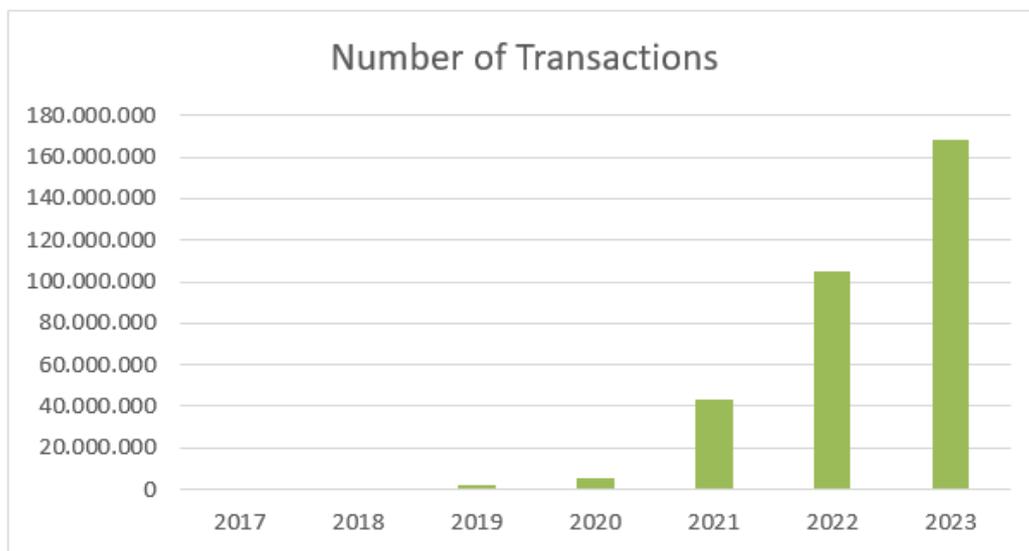


Figure 2: Number of transactions related to online gambling in Indonesia (2017-2023)

As can be seen in Figures 1 and 2, the value of online gambling transactions in Indonesia continues to increase every year, from 2017 to 2023. In 2017, the number of transactions was recorded at 250,726 transactions, and this number more than doubled to 666,104 transactions in 2018. This upward trend continued with the number of transactions reaching 1,845,832 in 2019. A sharper increase occurred in 2020, where the number of transactions jumped to 5,634,499. The following year, 2021, showed an extraordinary spike with the number of transactions reaching 43,597,112, almost eight times more than the previous year. In 2022, the number of transactions will more than double to 104,791,427 transactions. The peak will occur in 2023 with the number of transactions reaching 168,000,000, showing a very large increase compared to previous years (Ahdiat, 2024).

The escalation in online gambling transactions reflects a broader trend of increased participation and accessibility to digital gambling platforms in Indonesia. This surge can be attributed to advances in technology, widespread internet access, and the convenience offered by online gambling websites and mobile applications. The exponential growth in transaction volumes underscores the expanding reach and popularity of online gambling among Indonesian consumers. However, alongside this rapid growth in online gambling, concerns about its societal impacts, particularly on marital relationships and divorce rates, have emerged (Cowlshaw et al., 2016). Research indicates that excessive gambling behavior can strain marital bonds, leading to conflicts over finances, time management, and emotional neglect. The ease of access to online gambling platforms may exacerbate these issues by facilitating continuous and unregulated gambling activities, often without the knowledge of spouses.

Moreover, the financial implications of online gambling can be profound. Individuals may incur significant debts or losses, jeopardizing their financial stability and placing additional strains on their marriages. The correlation between gambling addiction and marital discord is further underscored by empirical evidence linking compulsive gambling behaviors to increased divorce rates in various societies, including Indonesia. Understanding the complex interplay between online gambling and marital relationships requires a nuanced examination of socio-economic factors, cultural attitudes towards gambling, and regulatory frameworks. While online gambling offers entertainment and potential monetary gains for some individuals, its adverse effects on family dynamics and personal well-being cannot be overlooked. Effective strategies to mitigate these impacts require collaborative efforts from policymakers, healthcare professionals, and community stakeholders to promote responsible gambling practices and provide support for affected families.

Through this analysis of the literature, it is important to consider that the impact of online gambling on marital relationships is complex and depends on a variety of contextual factors. Factors such as duration of gambling, frequency of participation, individual motivation, and partner response can all influence the final outcome of online gambling interactions on marital relationships and divorce rates. Therefore, further research is needed to understand in more depth these complex dynamics and develop effective strategies to prevent the negative impact of online gambling on marital relationships.

2. Methodology

This research uses a qualitative approach with a literature review method to explore the impact of online gambling on divorce rates. The main data source used was Google Scholar, where a literature search was conducted using keywords such as "online gambling," "marital dissolution," "divorce rates," "impact of online gambling on marriage," and "relationship problems due to gambling". Initial selection was carried out by reviewing the titles and abstracts of articles, followed by full text review for selected articles. Articles were assessed based on methodological quality, validity of results, and relevance to the research topic. Data from articles that met high quality criteria were compiled and analyzed to identify common themes, gaps in the literature, and the relationship between online gambling and divorce rates.

3. Literature Review

3.1. History of Online Gambling

The history of online gambling dates back to the 1990s when the small Caribbean nation of Antigua and Barbuda established a free trade zone in 1994, allowing U.S. bookmakers to accept bets by phone on horse racing and sports, circumventing U.S. gambling laws. This set the stage for the emergence of Internet gambling. In 1995, sites like Gaming Club began offering online casino games without real money wagers, followed by the first online casino accepting real money wagers in 1996 (Wood and Williams, 2007). The development of gambling software by Microgaming and encrypted communication protocols by CryptoLogic further facilitated secure online monetary transactions. The industry saw rapid expansion with the number of online sites and revenues increasing significantly over the years. Initially dominated by sports/racing books and online casinos, the introduction of online poker in the late 1990s and its popularization through events like the World Series of Poker in the early 2000s further fueled the growth of online gambling.

3.2. Factors that Drive People to Gamble Online

According to Budiman et al., (2022), there are several factors that cause Indonesian teenagers to become addicted to online gambling. These factors include:

- Lack of attention from those closest to them, such as parents who do not care about students' activities, rarely talk, and pay less attention because they are busy working or students have gone abroad.
- Stress or depression, where quiet students tend to close themselves off and feel lonely.
- Lack of control, for example parents give too much freedom in purchasing personal vehicles and cell phones.
- Lack of activity, because they don't take part in extracurricular activities so they feel bored and look for entertainment through internet games.
- Environment, where frequent association with fellow internet game addicts makes it difficult for them to escape.
- Parenting style, where parents are too indifferent and busy with their own affairs so that children feel neglected and not considered in the family.

3.3. Psychological Impact of Online Gambling

In research conducted by Ismail and Hamid (2021), individuals with gambling addiction problems have high levels of impulsivity and depression. Demographic data shows individuals with income below RM4000 are more likely to engage in gambling which ultimately leads to Addiction. This may be caused by stress factors that cause depression nowadays where the increasing cost of living has become a major problem in Malaysia.

Churchill and Farrell (2018), presented the results of their research that gambling does cause significant harm to emotional and mental health (in England and Scotland), and has a negative impact on well-being. Moreover, this impact is influenced by the environment where the activity takes place. Specifically, the results showed that online gambling poses significant additional mental health risks, compared to venue-based gambling.

In research, Sidiq et al., (2024) concluded that teenagers who are involved in online gambling tend to show higher levels of impulsive behavior, which can influence their decisions in everyday life. These findings underscore the importance of awareness of the negative impact of online gambling on youth mental health.

3.4. The Impact of Online Gambling on Marital Relationships

Situmeang et al., (2023), stated that online gambling addiction allows gamblers to use any means to obtain funds or capital for gambling, such as selling property, stealing, cheating, and even killing. In addition, this addiction affects the psychology of the perpetrator, causing an increase in emotional levels and temperamental attitudes. All of this can lead to poverty, laziness, disharmony in the family, and domestic violence, this is likely to lead to divorce.

In another study conducted by Hakim et al., (2023) stated that gambling was used as a reason for divorce, because gambling is an act that is prohibited in Islam and gambling is also prohibited in Indonesian law. Gambling is an act that will harm a person both in terms of time and in terms of economics, therefore gambling is one of the reasons for someone to divorce, whether for divorce or contested divorce.

Arifina et al., (2024) argue that online gambling will have an impact on reduced interaction and communication within the family, the loss of the husband/father's role as head of the family, the development of long-term conflicts, and the destruction of family welfare. The conclusion of this research is that online gambling addiction has a significant impact on the quality of family harmony.

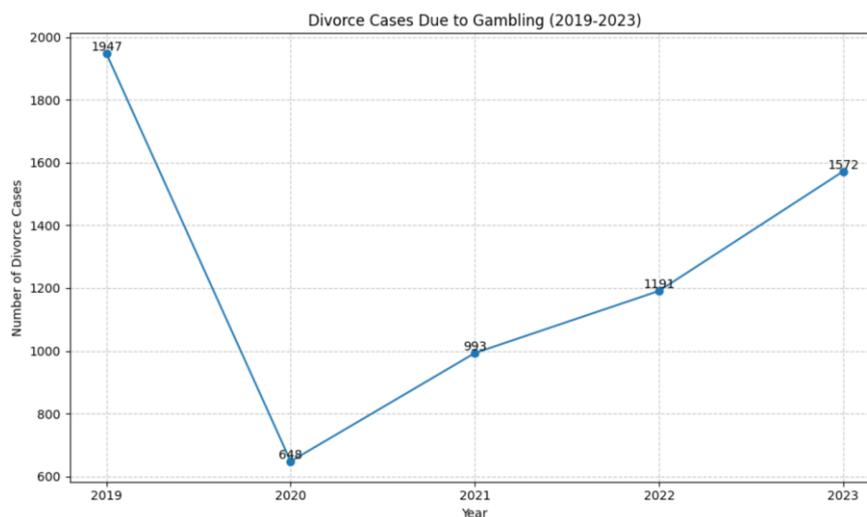


Figure 3: Data for the last 5 years of divorce cases due to gambling in Indonesia

Gambling is one of the reasons why couples divorce in Indonesia. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) shows that the divorce rate due to gambling in the country has continued to increase in the last five years. In 2023, there will be 1,572 cases of couples divorcing for gambling reasons. This is the highest after the Covid-19 pandemic. Previously, there were 1,947 cases of divorce due to gambling in 2019. Then the number dropped drastically to 648 cases in 2020. However, the number of cases continues to increase, as can be seen in the graph. By province, the most cases of divorce due to gambling in 2023 will occur in East Java with 415 cases. Followed by West Java and Central Java with 209 cases and 143 cases respectively (Muhamad, 2024).

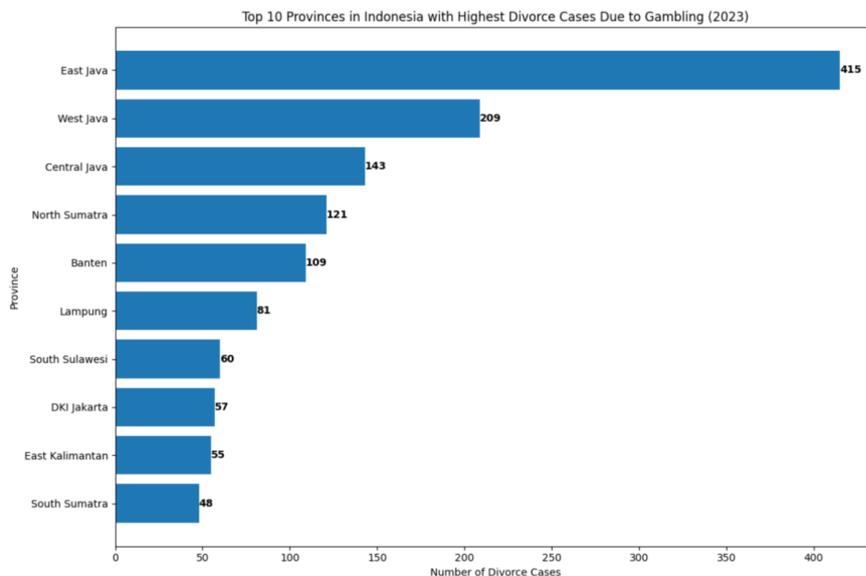


Figure 4: The 10 provinces in Indonesia with the highest divorce cases due to gambling (2023)

This figure has more than doubled compared to 2020, namely 142.59 percent. At that time, 649 cases of divorce were recorded as a result of gambling. The BPS data does not provide details of the type of gambling that caused the spike in divorce cases, so the gambling in question can be in the offline and online categories. This figure is followed by West Java with 13 percent or 209 divorce cases, and Central Java with 7.2 percent or 143 cases to be precise. Provinces on the island of Java account for five of the 10 provinces with the most divorce cases due to gambling in 2023. The remainder, divorce cases mostly occur in North Sumatra, Lampung, South Sulawesi, East Kalimantan and South Sumatra (CNN Indonesia, 2024).

The increase in gambling-related divorces underscores the complex interplay between individual behavior, societal norms, and economic pressures within marriages. For many couples, gambling can exacerbate existing tensions over financial management and trust, leading to irreconcilable differences. Moreover, the emotional toll of addiction and financial losses can strain marital bonds, often culminating in divorce proceedings. Addressing the issue requires a multifaceted approach that combines legal measures, public awareness campaigns, and support services for affected families. Efforts to regulate and monitor gambling activities, coupled with interventions aimed at promoting healthy marital communication and financial literacy, are crucial steps towards mitigating the adverse effects of gambling on marriages. Furthermore, fostering a supportive environment that encourages individuals struggling with gambling addiction to seek help is essential in reducing the incidence of gambling-related divorces.

4. Conclusion

Research shows that online gambling can guarantee marital bonds due to its time-consuming nature and financial strength. Couples may experience conflict over financial management and trust issues, which are exacerbated by the secretive and potentially addictive nature of online gambling behavior. Additionally, the mental health of individuals involved in online gambling may deteriorate, further complicating marital dynamics. Problems such as stress, anxiety, and depression associated with gambling addiction can cause emotional relationships and communication breakdowns in a marriage. These factors contribute to an increased risk of divorce among couples where one or both partners engage in online gambling.

While there are some cases where online gambling can temporarily improve the quality of a relationship, such occurrences are often the intent and not the norm. The overall impact tends to be negative, as evidenced by the increasing divorce rate related to gambling addiction in various regions, including Indonesia. Recent statistics highlight a significant increase in divorce cases caused by gambling, underscoring the urgent need for interventions and support mechanisms to reduce this detrimental impact.

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