

Mental Health Impacts of Online Gambling Addiction: A Case Study in Percut Village, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the psychological impact of online gambling addiction on adults in Percut Village, Percut Sei Tuan District, Deli Serdang Regency, Indonesia. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews and participatory observation of five individuals aged 18–40 who have a history of online gambling addiction. The results show a consistent pattern of addiction, starting from small wins that trigger the desire to continue gambling, but ultimately leading to significant financial losses and compulsive behavior. The psychological impacts experienced include severe stress, anxiety, insomnia, emotional disturbances, and even suicidal thoughts. In addition, this addiction also harms social and family relationships, such as a decline in emotional closeness, conflict, and neglect of roles within the household. Although the informants are aware of the negative impacts and are trying to stop, relapses frequently occur due to social environmental influences, cognitive distortions about winning chances, and weak self-control. These findings emphasize the need for community-based mental health interventions and targeted prevention strategies to address the rampant online gambling in rural areas of Indonesia.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Mental health is a condition that allows individuals to develop physically, intellectually, and emotionally, which directly impacts their quality of life [1]. One of the threats to mental health today is online gambling addiction, which is a condition of dependence caused by weak self-control that leads to stress and discomfort when stopped [2]. This addiction is marked by psychological symptoms such as anxiety, anger, frustration when not playing, and feelings of guilt [3]. Gambling is a game that involves betting money or valuable items, and it has now become popular again in digital form [4].

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The advancement of technology has also facilitated access to online gambling for anyone, regardless of age or social status [5]. Through certain sites, one can easily start gambling [6]. Although it often gives the hope of profit, in reality, participants experience greater losses [5]. The negative impact is economic, legal, social, and psychological. Legally, online gambling violates the Penal Code Article 303 and the ITE Law Article 27, with a threat of imprisonment of up to six years or a maximum fine of one billion rupiah [7]. From a psychological perspective, people with an addiction are vulnerable to experiencing severe stress, depression, insomnia, anxiety, and emotional disturbances [8]. In many cases, this addiction drives deviant actions such as theft and debt to satisfy gambling cravings.

Online gambling is prevalent in urban areas and has spread to remote villages, including Percut Village, Percut Sei Tuan District, Deli Serdang Regency, North Sumatra. This village is one of 18 villages and two sub-districts in that district. Geographically, Percut Village is a coastal area with 19 hamlets that are classified as remote and have limited social oversight. Based on field data and reports from residents, nearly half of the population in Percut Village is involved in online gambling practices. This situation is concerning as it has widespread impacts on family economics, social cohesion, and the mental health of the community, particularly among the productive age group. Uncontrolled internet access, low digital literacy, and weak local law enforcement further exacerbate the situation. Therefore, special attention to the psychological aspects of the perpetrators is essential as a first step towards comprehensive management.

Several studies have revealed the impact of online gambling on mental health. A study by Abdullah & Sukmawati shows that online gambling addicts are vulnerable to mood disorders such as severe depression, anxiety, and dependence that is difficult to stop [9]. Research by Afriozza & Mursiah strengthens the notion that the more often and the larger the amount of money wagered, the higher the risk of experiencing mental disturbances [10]. Meanwhile, Ramadhan & Wijayani emphasize that online gambling has negative impacts socially, psychologically, materially, and even spiritually [11].

Nevertheless, there is still minimal research that specifically maps the mental health of online gambling addicts in rural areas. This represents an important research gap that needs to be filled, especially in the context of Percut Village, which has seen a significant increase in cases of online gambling addiction. This research is crucial to deeply understand the contributing factors, manifestations of psychological disorders that arise, and appropriate community-based handling strategies.

The purpose of this research is to analyze the mental health conditions of online gambling addicts in Percut Village, Percut Sei Tuan Subdistrict, as well as to identify the main factors contributing to the addiction. It is hoped that the results of this study can provide a comprehensive picture that will be useful for local governments, health workers, educators, and the community in designing more effective interventions to curb the spread of online gambling and to restore the psychosocial conditions of the victims.

2. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach aimed at understanding in-depth the phenomenon of online gambling addiction and its impact on the mental health of individuals

¹⁴ in Percut Village, Percut Sei Tuan District, Deli Serdang Regency. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows researchers to explore the experiences, perceptions, and subjective meanings experienced by research subjects within their social context. As explained by Creswell [12], qualitative research emphasizes the processes and dynamics that occur, rather than just the final results.

The research strategy used is an intrinsic case study, focusing on individuals who experience online gambling addiction. This study involves five participants aged 18–40, in the early adult phase described by Moleong [13], the transition period, and adjustment to new lifestyles and social demands. Participant selection was conducted through purposive sampling techniques with the criteria: (1) residing in Percut Village; (2) having a history of active involvement in online gambling for at least the last six months; and (3) willing to be interviewed and observed openly.

Ethical procedures are strictly implemented in this research. The researchers provided detailed explanations of the aims and processes of the study to all participants before data collection began. The researchers also ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of participants' identities by using initials or pseudonyms in all data reporting.

⁶ Data was collected through two main techniques: semi-structured in-depth interviews and limited participatory observation. Interviews were conducted to explore personal experiences, addiction triggers, perceived psychological impacts, and social responses from the surrounding environment. Observations were made to directly see participants' activities and social interactions in their daily lives.

⁶ The data obtained was analyzed using thematic analysis, with the following steps [14]: (1) transcription of interview data; (2) initial coding to identify categories; (3) grouping codes into main themes; and (4) interpretation of meaning based on theoretical perspectives and social context. The analysis is conducted inductively, so the emerging themes are sourced directly from the collected empirical data.

The selection of Percut Village as the research location is based on the rampant practice of online gambling that has become a part of the social life of the local community. This condition makes the area relevant for research in the context of addiction and the associated mental health issues.

¹⁰ 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Results

3.1.1. Addiction Patterns and Psychological Impacts of Online Gambling

Based on the observations conducted on several individuals who are online gambling addicts in Percut Village, a significantly similar addictive behavior pattern was found. This pattern begins with placing small bets that yield wins, creating a sense of satisfaction and the urge to continue playing. However, as the betting amounts increase, the chances of winning drastically decrease. This triggers a dangerous cycle of addiction, where individuals continue to gamble to recover their losses, but instead suffer even greater losses, both financially and psychologically.

The observation also noted that the form of satisfaction felt by people with an addiction is temporary and illusory, as behind the pleasure lies various long-term negative

impacts. The informants exhibited symptoms of stress, excessive anxiety, sleep and eating disorders, and even deep depression. In some cases, thoughts of ending life also emerged as a result of severe psychological burdens. Games like Higgs Domino Island have become one of the most frequently used platforms due to ease of access and the addictive nature of the game, leading them to lose control over time, neglect work, and even forget basic needs like eating and sleeping. The observation findings are also consistent with the findings from the interviews, which aim to strengthen the observation results.

Interview Result 1: Source U (25 years old, daily laborer)

At first, I played just for fun, with a small budget, but then I won. From there, I became addicted. When I win, it feels incredible, especially right after payday; playing online gambling feels like entertainment. Nevertheless, once I started betting big, I kept losing. I could recoup my losses, but it just kept getting worse. Sometimes I could play for a whole day, forgetting to eat and sleep. When I lose, I feel incredibly stressed, my head hurts, and I cannot sleep. I have also thought about taking desperate measures because my debts have been piling up.

Source U explained that online gambling provides him with a momentary thrill that keeps him coming back to play, despite the severe psychological impact. He admitted that he stopped for six months, but returned due to the temptation to win.

Interview Result 2: Source A (28 years old, mobile phone shop technician)

Every time I lose, I get more curious. I must keep playing to get back the money I lost. Nevertheless, it turns out I lose more instead of recovering it. My wife was furious because I often borrowed money without telling her. I started to talk to my children rarely, and it feels distant. My initial intention was to make them happy. However, in reality, I ended up hurting them.

A revealed that online gambling not only made him lose money, but also disrupted his relationship with his family. He realized the impact and tried to stop by redirecting his time to family, but often found himself tempted to play again.

Interview Results 3: Source G (40 years old, workshop worker)

I once won big, up to 15 million, which felt incredibly significant. I immediately treated my family and friends. However, that was just once. After that, I ended up losing up to 50 million. I sold my motorcycle, pawned my phone, and borrowed money everywhere. Now it is hard to sleep, and food does not taste good. Sometimes I feel like I have lost all hope. However, weirdly, if I do not play, I become restless and stressed.

G recounts how online gambling made him feel rich and valued at first, but ultimately trapped him in a cycle of significant losses and intense psychological pressure. Despite regret, he admits it is still challenging to stop altogether because he is already too deep in.

The results of observations and interviews show that the majority of online gambling addicts in Percut Village experience a pattern of addiction that begins with small bets resulting in initial wins, but evolves into a high-risk habit with significant losses. They become trapped in a cycle of playing to cover losses, which only exacerbates their financial situation and mental health. The psychological impacts experienced include stress, anxiety, sleep disturbances, depression, and even suicidal thoughts. Games like Higgs Domino Island have become the dominant medium due to their easy access and addictive nature. Interviews

with three informants reinforce these findings, highlighting serious impacts on individuals and family relationships, work, and overall quality of life. Efforts to quit often fail due to the temptation to win back losses.

3.1.2. The Damage to Social and Family Relations Due to Online Gambling

Based on the results of observations conducted on online gambling addicts in Percut Village, it was found that the impact of online gambling is not only on individuals but also destroys the structure of social relations, especially within the family. Informants openly acknowledged a decline in the quality of relationships with partners and children, caused by the allocation of time and attention fully absorbed in online gambling activities. When the individual's main focus shifts to gambling, the role functions in the household begin to be neglected, both as a husband, father, and breadwinner.

The observation also notes the widening emotional distance between family members, especially between fathers and children, due to the lack of interaction and the loss of emotional involvement in daily life. This psychological and physical absence impacts the family dynamics, which are no longer harmonious, creating an atmosphere of pressure, disappointment, and tension. The findings from the observation are also consistent with the findings from interviews, which aim to strengthen the observation results.

Interview Result 1: Source A (28 years old, mobile phone shop technician)

"At first, I thought playing online gambling could help the family's economy. I wanted to find extra money so my wife and children could live comfortably. However, it turned out to be the opposite. I am increasingly seldom home, more often borrowing money from here and there for capital. My wife became suspicious, often angry, and now we rarely talk. When my child asks to play, I sometimes get angry because my thoughts are jumbled. I realize our relationship is damaged because I am too busy chasing uncertain wins."

Source A stated that his initial intention of gambling was for the family, but it instead led to a rift in the relationship. He feels he has lost closeness with his wife and child due to his gambling habits that consume his time and emotions.

Interview Result 2: Source R (31 years old, trader)

"I often gamble at night, to the point of losing track of time. My wife often nags me because I do not help take care of the kids or do housework. When I lose, I bring a bad mood home. I once threw my phone because I kept losing it, and my child was scared to come near me. Since then, I realized I had become someone my child did not want. However, stopping is difficult, especially when my work friends also like to play and keep inviting me."

R revealed that online gambling caused him to lose his role as a loving father. His relationship with his family is disturbed due to the negative emotions he brings home after losing in gambling.

Interview Results 3: Source D (39 years old, public transport driver)

"My family is currently distant. My wife often says I have changed. Before, we could sit together every night, but now I am playing slots on my phone. Sometimes the kids ask why I never take them out anymore. I answer, 'Later, when I win.' However, that victory never comes. I feel guilty, but I do not know why stopping is hard. It feels like I have gone too deep."

D expresses deep regret because online gambling has turned his family's habits cold and divided. He has lost moments of togetherness because his time and thoughts are consumed by gambling.

Based on the results of observations and interviews, it can be concluded that online gambling has severe impacts not only on individual conditions but also on the structure of social relations, especially within the family environment. Online gambling addicts experience a decline in the quality of relationships with their partners and children due to the time, energy, and attention being focused on gambling activities. The role functions within the family as husbands, fathers, and breadwinners become neglected.

The decreasing emotional and physical presence causes the distance in family relations to widen. Domestic tensions increase due to the presence of negative emotions such as anger, stress, and disappointment that are brought into daily interactions. Interviews with three informants reinforce these findings, showing strained relationships, a loss of togetherness, and a deep regret. The initial motivation to "gamble for the family" ironically turns into a cause for marital breakdown. This emphasizes that online gambling not only damages individuals personally but also threatens social harmony within the smallest unit of society: the family.

3.1.3. Efforts to Quit and Challenges in Overcoming Online Gambling Addiction

The results of the observations on online gambling addicts in Percut Village reveal a complex dynamic between the desire to quit and the reality of frequent relapses. Although most informants show awareness of the negative impacts of online gambling, both financially, psychologically, and socially, efforts to quit often do not last long. Various strategies have been implemented, such as deleting gambling apps, closing website access, and redirecting time towards more positive activities. However, most of these efforts are only effective in the short term, lasting from a few days to a few months.

Observations record that several dominant factors drive relapse. One of the most prominent is the social environment that is permissive towards gambling practices. Invitations from colleagues or the surrounding environment reinforce the urge to return to gambling, even when individuals have tried to stay away. Additionally, the mistaken belief that after stopping for a long time, the chances of winning will be greater also serves as a strong trigger to re-engage in gambling activities. The findings from the observations are also in line with the results of the interviews, and these interview findings are to strengthen the observational findings.

Interview Result 1: Source U (25 years old, daily laborer)

I have deleted the app several times. Sometimes I can last a week, and there was even a time I lasted six months. However, eventually, I always come back. The temptation from my coworkers is powerful; they often show off their wins or invite me to play together. I also think, maybe it is my turn to win now. However, it turns out I keep losing.

Source U stated that he has tried to stop gambling several times, but has not been able to last long due to social influences and the belief that after a long break, the chances of winning will return. He realizes that his environment significantly affects his recovery process.

Interview Results 2: Source G (40 years old, workshop worker)

I once sold my phone and motorcycle to gamble. I realized I was losing, tried to stop, but whenever I have even a little money, I immediately think about gambling again. Even though every time I gamble, I end up regretting it. I once made a tight schedule so I would not have time to use my phone, but still, as soon as I have a little free time, I relapse. I am tired of it, but I have not been able to let go.

G expressed the desire to quit is very strong, but weak self-control and the presence of free time become triggers for relapse. He also admitted to making extreme decisions in order to continue his gambling habits, which then worsened his condition both economically and emotionally.

Interview Results 3: Informant R (31 years old, trader)

I know this is wrong. I once tried to focus on work, participate in study groups to keep my heart at peace. Nevertheless, when problems arise, like a lack of income, I seek refuge in gambling again. It feels so hard to get it out of my mind. My friend says, 'Once you break even, you can get your capital back,' but the reality is that I end up losing even more. I realize that it will be hard to recover if I don't truly distance myself from this environment.

R explains that although various strategies have been implemented to quit, such as keeping busy with positive activities and religious practices, the pressures of life and the surrounding environment remain the main triggers for relapse. He emphasizes the importance of distancing oneself from social circles that support gambling practices.

The results of observations and interviews with online gambling addicts in Percut Village show that although there is awareness of the negative impacts of gambling, efforts to quit often do not last long. Strategies such as deleting applications, limiting access, and keeping busy with positive activities are only temporarily effective. Relapses occur due to the influence of a permissive social environment, peer pressure, and the mistaken belief that the chances of winning will be greater after stopping for a long time.

The informants acknowledge that psychological urges and life pressures are triggering factors for returning to gambling. Some of them take extreme measures such as selling belongings, pawning assets, or going into debt to continue their gambling habits. Thus, online gambling addiction creates an addictive cycle that is difficult to break without comprehensive intervention, including self-awareness, environmental support, and strengthening self-control.

3.2. Discussion

3.2.1. Addiction Patterns and Psychological Impacts of Online Gambling

The results of this study reveal that the pattern of online gambling addiction experienced by individuals in Percut Village shows an addictive behavior dynamic similar to findings in various previous studies. This pattern starts with small bets yielding early wins, creating a momentary pleasure sensation (reward) that triggers the urge to keep playing. This phenomenon aligns with the Variable Ratio Reinforcement Schedule theory in behavioral psychology, where unexpectedly given rewards increase the frequency of behavior, in this case, gambling [15].

In this context, the results of observations and interviews indicate that online gambling not only has financial impacts but also creates profound psychological pressure, such as severe stress, anxiety, sleep disorders, and depression. These symptoms are also described by Maro'ah & Wibisono, who state that online gambling has the potential to cause psychological dependence because it provides instant gratification but leaves a long-term impact on mental health [16].

The research by Iskandar & Bahreisy emphasizes that individuals with low self-control are more likely to fall into the cycle of addiction, especially in digital activities such as online gambling [17]. This is reflected in informants who, despite being aware of the adverse consequences, continue to engage in gambling behavior due to strong emotional impulses and the influence of a permissive social environment. In the interview, informant G even showed signs of acute relapse by selling personal assets and going into debt to continue his addictive behavior. This phenomenon is reinforced by Elisabeth & Widjajanti, who explain that online gambling addicts often take extreme actions such as selling belongings or incurring debt to keep gambling [18].

Furthermore, Rafiqah & Rasyid showed that the illusion of control, the belief that they can control the game's outcome or are confident they will win after not playing for a certain period, becomes a significant psychological factor in the relapse process [19]. This is also reflected in the interviews with informants U and A, who expressed the hope of 'breaking even' as the main reason for returning to gambling, despite experiencing losses repeatedly.

The ease of access and addictive game design, as offered by the Higgs Domino Island app, exacerbate the situation. This game is designed in such a way as to maintain user engagement through attractive visuals, a reward system, and manipulative winning opportunities. In a study by Arimbawa & Arifin, it is mentioned that features in digital games such as near-miss, free spins, and daily rewards psychologically encourage excessive engagement and increase the risk of addiction [6].

Furthermore, the negative impact of online gambling is not limited to individuals but extends to social and family relationships. As expressed in the interviews, many informants experienced conflicts within the household, a decline in communication quality, and a loss of roles as fathers and husbands. These findings are consistent with the study by Suwari & Sahrul, which states that online gambling leads to family dysfunction, promotes emotional stress, and is one of the factors contributing to the rising divorce rate [20].

Thus, this research's findings not only reinforce previous findings but also assert that online gambling is a complex and multidimensional social phenomenon. Efforts to stop addiction are not sufficient with individual actions alone, but must be accompanied by environmental interventions, increased digital literacy, and stricter regulations on online gambling applications and sites.

3.1.2. The Damage to Social and Family Relations Due to Online Gambling

The results of observations and interviews with online gambling addicts in Percut Village indicate that the impacts of online gambling are not only personal but also seriously affect the social relationship structures, particularly within family institutions. This finding

reinforces the study presented by Fitriya, which states that digital gambling has become one of the main triggers for the breakdown of household harmony in the modern era, marked by an increase in couple conflicts and the disintegration of relationships between parents and children [21].

The informants in this study explicitly describe how intense involvement in online gambling leads to shifts in attention and roles within the family. This phenomenon aligns with the views of Ihsanudin, Dewi, & Adriansyah, who state that when individuals spend more time gambling than interacting with their families, it creates emotional absence, gradually undermining affective bonds within the household [22].

Source A illustrates this dynamic by explaining how the intensity of gambling causes him to rarely communicate with his wife and easily become emotionally triggered towards his child. This reflects the symptoms of parental emotional detachment, a condition in which parents lose emotional sensitivity due to external pressures [23]. The same thing was expressed by informant R, who explained the change in emotional atmosphere at home after experiencing a loss in gambling as a manifestation of the emotional spillover effect, where external pressures are brought into interpersonal relationships [24].

Furthermore, Mustaqilla & Sarah in their research highlight that online gambling provides a form of false satisfaction, which is temporary but has long-term effects on emotional stability and social relations [25]. This is evident in source D, who, despite being aware of the negative impacts of his habits, still cannot free himself because he is trapped in a pattern of addiction. This dependency makes him more focused on the hope of victory than on the reality of his family relationships, a phenomenon explained by Rizal, Anderson, & Melisa as cognitive distortion in addiction, which is an irrational belief that drives individuals to persist in destructive behavior [26].

In addition to psychological and emotional factors, social aspects also play a role in worsening the situation. Ruswandi & Halimah state that a social environment that is permissive towards online gambling strengthens addiction tendencies and lowers critical awareness of the resulting impacts [27]. In this case, the presence of friends or colleagues who also gamble becomes an external reinforcement that makes it difficult for people with an addiction to stop their habits, even when they realize the negative impact on their families.

Thus, this finding not only illustrates the effects of online gambling on family relationship breakdowns but also highlights the importance of environmental factors and psychosocial understanding in the recovery process. This research emphasizes that approaches to tackling online gambling addiction should not only focus on the individual but also take into account the recovery of family functions and the nurturing of a healthy social environment.

3.1.3. Efforts to Quit and Challenges in Overcoming Online Gambling Addiction

The findings from observations and interviews with online gambling addicts in Percut Village show a complex dynamic between the awareness of needing to stop and the reality of recurring relapses. Although most informants are aware of the detrimental effects of gambling, both financially, psychologically, and socially, they often fail to maintain their commitment to stopping gambling in the long term. This finding confirms the study results

of Andiani & Ruslie, which state that online gambling addicts tend to experience difficulties in controlling their urges to gamble due to social environmental influences and weak emotional regulation [28].

The strategies employed by informants, such as deleting applications, avoiding access to gambling sites, and keeping themselves busy with positive activities, can only suppress the urge to gamble for a short time. Most confess to falling back into it after a few days or months due to psychological urges, peer pressure, and the false belief that 'this time they will win.' This phenomenon is referred to as cognitive distortion in addiction by Aprilia, which is an irrational mindset that makes people with a substance use disorder believe they have a chance to win if they gamble again after stopping for a while [29].

Relapse is often triggered by external factors such as economic pressure or life difficulties. For example, resource person R explained that when experiencing a decline in income, he turned to gambling as an escape. This is consistent with the findings of Fadilla & Intan, which state that individuals experiencing economic stress tend to use gambling as a maladaptive coping mechanism, even though it worsens their condition [30].

In the interview, the informant also revealed that they had taken extreme measures, such as selling items, pawning assets, or going into debt, in order to continue their gambling habits. According to Chamil, Djuanda, & Septaviana, this compulsive behavior is characteristic of the severe addiction stage, where control over impulses decreases and actions become increasingly risky [31]. This condition is exacerbated by a permissive social environment, as conveyed by informants U and G, who claimed often to receive invitations or encouragement from colleagues or close friends.

Online gambling addiction also creates a recurring addictive cycle that is difficult to break without a comprehensive approach. Arifina, Yusnadi, & Machmud emphasize that the success of stopping addictive behavior greatly depends on three main components [32]: self-awareness, healthy social support, and strategies for strengthening self-control. This aligns with findings in the field, where some informants showed partial success when trying to avoid triggers and focus on positive routines such as spiritual activities and work.

Thus, based on the literature review and field findings, it can be concluded that the effort to stop gambling cannot rely solely on personal intent or technical strategies (such as deleting applications), but must be supported by changes in the social environment, correct cognitive understanding, and a sustainable psychosocial approach. The failure to address external and internal triggering factors significantly contributes to the high relapse rates among online gambling addicts.

4. CONCLUSION

This research shows that online gambling addiction in Percut Village has an addictive behavior pattern that begins with small bets and leads to significant economic and psychological losses. The impacts include stress, depression, sleep disturbances, and the destruction of family relationships. Efforts to quit often fail due to social environmental influences and weak self-control. These findings imply the need for interventions that are not only individual-based but also community-based. The government, community leaders, and mental health service providers must work together to provide education, counseling

services, and strengthen the role of families in supporting the recovery of people with an addiction. This study is limited by a small number of participants and a narrow geographical scope, so the results cannot be generalized. In addition, the data is subjective and highly reliant on individual experiences. Future research is recommended to involve participants from various regions, use a mixed-methods approach (qualitative and quantitative), and develop more systematic and sustainable locally-based intervention models.

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