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Gambling in Kazakhstan: Seeking a Balance Between Economic Benefits and Combating Gambling Addiction

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Abstract: Gambling, which is legal in Kazakhstan, plays a dual role in society. On one hand, it represents a popular form of leisure that brings significant economic revenue to the state. On the other hand, participation in gambling is associated with a high risk of developing gambling addiction, leading to negative psychosocial consequences, including deterioration of physical and mental health, destruction of social ties, and an increase in crime rates. The spread of gambling addiction among citizens of Kazakhstan, especially in the context of the growth of online gambling, underscores the need to find an optimal balance between the economic benefits of the gambling industry and its social costs. This study aims to analyze the current situation in Kazakhstan, identify key issues in the regulation of the gambling industry, and develop comprehensive approaches to minimizing the negative consequences of gambling for society.

Keywords: Legal Regulation, Prevention, Treatment, Gambling Addiction, Legislation, Crime Prevention.

Introduction

Gambling is a legal and economically significant industry in Kazakhstan, as it is in many other countries worldwide. As of the end of 2024, the country holds 28 licenses for activities in the gambling sector, including six casinos, nine slot machine halls, twelve bookmakers, and one totalizator. The gambling business makes a significant contribution to the country's economy; for example, in the gambling zone of the Almaty region on the shores of the Kapshagay Reservoir, there are four casinos, three slot machine halls, and ten bookmakers, which, according to preliminary results for 2023, paid taxes totaling 96 billion tenge and provided approximately 6,000 jobs in the city of Konaev.

However, the economic benefits of the gambling industry are accompanied by serious social and psychological risks. Gambling, as a form of entertainment and leisure, can lead to the development of gambling addiction, also known as ludomania. According to research, gambling addiction is associated with a wide range of negative consequences for physical and mental health, including an increased risk of depression, anxiety disorders, and even suicidal tendencies (Smith et al., 2022). Furthermore, it negatively affects social relationships, leads to financial difficulties, reduces work productivity, and increases crime rates (Johnson & Lee, 2023).

The spread of gambling addiction among youth is of particular concern. At the third session of the National Kurultai on March 15, 2024, the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan noted that online gambling is becoming a daily pastime for children, causing enormous harm to the younger generation. According to some reports, approximately 400,000 citizens are regular clients of bookmakers and casinos, which is comparable to the population of a large city (Republic of Kazakhstan, 2024).

The societal interest in Kazakhstan lies in the need to find an optimal balance between the economic advantages of the gambling business and the social costs associated with the spread of gambling addiction. International experience shows that effective regulation of the gaming industry and the implementation of comprehensive prevention programs can significantly reduce the negative consequences of gambling (Chóliz, 2023). In particular, a combination of legislative measures, educational programs, and accessible addiction treatment services has proven effective in several countries (Chóliz et al., 2022).

In Kazakhstan, steps are being taken to regulate the gambling business and combat gambling addiction. In 2024, a special law was adopted to improve legislation aimed at protecting citizens from gambling addiction. Additionally, a Comprehensive Plan to Counteract Illegal Gambling Business and Gambling Addiction for 2024–2026 was approved. However, as preliminary analysis shows, existing measures may be insufficiently effective due to the lack of a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach.

Gambling, as a legal and economically significant industry, occupies a complex position within the socio-economic framework of Kazakhstan. While its contributions to state revenue and employment are substantial, the industry simultaneously exacerbates gambling addiction, resulting in profound social and psychological repercussions. The Kazakhstani context presents distinctive challenges and opportunities in addressing this issue, highlighting the need for a nuanced analysis that integrates local realities with global insights.

The purpose of this article is to critically analyze current state measures to combat gambling addiction in Kazakhstan and to develop recommendations for achieving a balance between the economic benefits of the gambling business and the need to protect the population from the negative consequences of gambling addiction. To this end, an analysis of the effectiveness of existing legislation will be conducted, and strategic directions for improving the situation will be proposed. By critically examining the interplay between legislative frameworks, socio-cultural dynamics, and emerging trends such as online gambling, the research aims to propose evidence-based strategies for achieving an optimal balance.

This article advances the global understanding of gambling addiction by shedding light on an underexplored region. Kazakhstan's evolving regulatory environment and its socio-cultural intricacies provide fertile ground for analyzing how localized strategies can inform broader international practices. By juxtaposing Kazakhstan's experiences with established global frameworks, the study identifies both convergences and divergences, offering critical insights into the adaptability and scalability of various policy approaches.

Furthermore, this research underscores the importance of interdisciplinary strategies that combine legal, social, economic, and psychological perspectives. The findings aim to enrich the international discourse on gambling addiction, emphasizing the value of culturally informed and empirically grounded approaches in addressing this pervasive issue. By situating Kazakhstan's context within the global landscape, the study not only enhances its academic rigor but also provides practical recommendations for policymakers worldwide.

Literature Review

An analysis of publications in journals indexed in international databases such as Scopus and WoS related to the subject of the present manuscript allows us to formulate the following conclusions about the degree of scientific elaboration of the manuscript's topic.

The legal, sociological, and economic factors characterizing the development of gambling addiction in Kazakhstan have practically not been researched or studied. Publications in this area are extremely limited and are represented by a few works relevant to our country: Prilutskaya and Kuliev (2015, 2016), Berdaliyeva et al. (2023), Osik (2016), Oskembay et

al. (2016), Symonenko et al. (2023), Bulatbaeva et al. (2023), Lavrinenko et al. (2019).

Modern state policy and the work of governmental bodies, according to the directive of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, must everywhere rely on high-quality scientific support. This is an extremely important task. Decisions must be carefully developed, substantiated, and only then adopted (Kazakhstan, 2024). In this regard, high-quality scientific recommendations are needed to understand the complexities of the problem of gambling addiction in Kazakhstan, to identify risk factors, and to develop effective prevention and regulation strategies. The significance of a scientific approach to the development of state policy in this sphere lies not only in its contribution to increasing the overall effectiveness of management decisions but also in ensuring their social and economic justification, which is critically important in a rapidly changing world.

In Kazakhstan, no previous studies have been conducted or published that are based on the scientific questions of this manuscript. However, similar problems have been posed and considered in a significant number of studies conducted abroad, applicable to the conditions of specific countries and regions. The most cited and influential scientific publications on gambling addiction internationally are the works of Susana Jiménez-Múrcia (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3596-8033>), Mark D. Griffiths (<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8880-6524>), Fernando Fernández-Aranda (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2968-9898>), David C. Hodgins (<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2737-5200>), and Matthew Justus Rockloff (<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0080-2690>).

In a number of works, social participation and prognostic factors were analyzed. By studying the level of involvement of various social groups in gambling across different countries and regions, researchers identified key predictors of gambling behavior and addiction (Esparza-Reig et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2015; Black and Allen, 2021; Kim et al., 2024; Maddi et al., 2013; Esparza-Reig et al., 2023; Lelonek-Kuleta and Bartczuk, 2021; Kim et al., 2021; Gorsane et al., 2016; Aragay et al., 2021; Wartberg et al., 2021; Müller et al., 2015; Ferreira et al., 2020).

Perceptions and attitudes toward gambling have been studied. In the works of Yeung and Wraith (2017), Binde et al. (2017), Canale et al. (2016), Brosowski et al. (2015), Mazar et al. (2020), Hagfors et al. (2022), Barnes et al. (2017), perceptions, stereotypes, and the general involvement of populations of various countries in gambling were analyzed. Such analysis subsequently influenced the development of effective strategies for raising public awareness and educational campaigns (Stone et al., 2024; Gooding et al., 2024; Chóliz, 2023; Marionneau et al., 2023; Currie et al., 2021; Rawat et al., 2021).

The assessment of the economic and social consequences of gambling addiction has been the subject of study by foreign researchers

(Globan et al., 2021; Eadington, 2003; Winkler et al., 2017; Turner, 2008), providing a data-based foundation for policy formulation.

A critical analysis of the existing legal framework regulating the gambling industry in specific countries has been conducted in a limited number of publications (Gainsbury and Wood, 2011; Morse, 2016; Casey, 2023; Albanese, 2017; Littlewood, 2011). Such analysis allows not only the identification of hidden risks but also the proposal of legislative improvements for effective mitigation of these risks.

In foreign studies, authors assess the implementation of preventive measures against gambling addiction. The effectiveness of current measures for the prevention and treatment of gambling addiction is evaluated. Based on empirical data, improvements and the implementation of new preventive strategies adapted to the needs and realities of society are proposed (Chóliz et al., 2022; Jang and Kim, 2016; Chóliz, 2023; Lozano et al., 2022; Dickson et al., 2002; Rafi et al., 2017). Finally, there are studies aimed at developing guidelines for information campaigns and social programs that can significantly reduce the prevalence of gambling addiction and raise public awareness of its risks (Taylor and Hillyard, 2009; McMahon et al., 2019).

However, none of the listed research directions have been undertaken concerning the conditions of our country. Meanwhile, such analysis is of great importance for Kazakhstan, and its results have the potential to influence policy and the legislative process. Given the significance of the problem and its potential impact on the socio-economic development of Kazakhstan, it is necessary to initiate scientific research aimed at studying the legal, sociological, and economic aspects of gambling addiction in the country. The results of such studies will have direct practical application, contributing to the development of effective state policy and legislative measures aimed at achieving a balance between the economic benefits of the gambling industry and protecting the population from the negative consequences of gambling addiction.

The growing body of research on gambling addiction underscores the urgency of integrating rigorous empirical analysis with culturally sensitive interventions. Recent studies published in leading journals, such as Chóliz et al. (2023) and Marionneau et al. (2023), have highlighted the efficacy of comprehensive regulatory frameworks that combine legislative measures with public health strategies. These works demonstrate that successful interventions, as seen in countries like Sweden and Canada, hinge on robust data collection, interdisciplinary collaboration, and targeted education programs. By contrast, Kazakhstan's policies, while increasingly stringent, often lack the systemic integration required to address the root causes of gambling addiction effectively.

A significant contribution of international research lies in exploring the intersection of digitalization and gambling addiction. Kim et al. (2021) and Esparza-Reig et al. (2023) have shown how digital platforms exacerbate the accessibility and psychological impact of gambling, particularly among younger demographics. In Kazakhstan, the rapid proliferation of online

gambling platforms has outpaced the regulatory capacity of state institutions, leaving critical vulnerabilities unaddressed. This disparity highlights the need for Kazakhstan to adopt adaptive and proactive digital governance strategies, drawing on lessons from regions where such measures have proven effective.

Moreover, the cultural and socio-economic dimensions of gambling behavior receive increasing attention in global literature. Research by Lloyd et al. (2021) and Colby et al. (2022) underscores the importance of understanding how cultural norms, societal values, and economic pressures influence gambling participation and addiction. These insights are particularly relevant for Kazakhstan, where a unique blend of traditional values and rapid modernization creates complex behavioral dynamics. Incorporating these perspectives into national strategies can significantly enhance the efficacy of intervention measures.

A critical gap in the Kazakhstani approach is the underutilization of empirical data and evidence-based policymaking. While international studies, such as Siciliano et al. (2021) and Gooding et al. (2024), emphasize the centrality of longitudinal studies and predictive analytics in shaping effective regulations, Kazakhstan's reliance on anecdotal evidence and reactive measures undermines its policy effectiveness. Addressing this gap requires not only the adoption of advanced research methodologies but also the establishment of institutional mechanisms for translating scientific findings into actionable policies.

By situating Kazakhstan's experiences within the broader international discourse, this study identifies both unique challenges and shared opportunities. The integration of global best practices with localized interventions offers a pathway for Kazakhstan to address gambling addiction comprehensively. Strengthening this alignment between international research and national policy frameworks can catalyze more effective and sustainable solutions, contributing to the global understanding of gambling addiction and its mitigation.

Method

The methodology of this study was designed to comprehensively address the multifaceted nature of gambling addiction in Kazakhstan. A combination of theoretical, empirical, legal, and statistical methods was deliberately selected to ensure a robust and interdisciplinary analysis, aligned with the objective of identifying key patterns in gambling addiction and evaluating the effectiveness of state regulatory and preventative measures.

The theoretical component of the methodology was rooted in a integrative review of high-impact scholarly literature, which examined gambling addiction as both a social phenomenon and a form of social deviation. This review prioritized theoretical and empirical works published in authoritative journals indexed in Scopus and Web of Science,

underscoring its academic rigor and global relevance. Meta-analysis techniques were employed to synthesize diverse findings, enabling the identification of macro-level trends and localized nuances. The exceptional pertinence of this research focus is evidenced by SciVal metrics, which place the topic in the 99.167th percentile for global scientific impact, affirming its critical importance and relevance.

Empirical methods were tailored to capture the scope and depth of gambling addiction within Kazakhstan's socio-economic landscape. This included a detailed analysis of data derived from nationwide surveys, structured questionnaires, and targeted interviews. These tools provided insight into demographic patterns, social stratification, and economic repercussions, such as correlations with crime rates, family disruptions, and financial instability. The selection of these methods ensured a comprehensive understanding of gambling addiction's societal impact, grounded in reliable and representative datasets sourced from official statistics, government reports, and gambling industry records.

Legal analysis was a cornerstone of the study, focusing on the regulatory framework governing gambling in Kazakhstan. The application of dialectical, logical-legal, socio-legal, and system-structural methods facilitated an incisive evaluation of legislative gaps, latent risks, and enforcement inefficiencies. Particular attention was devoted to the challenges posed by online gambling and the vulnerability of youth populations. This approach provided actionable insights into the alignment (or misalignment) of legal measures with contemporary societal needs, ensuring the study's relevance to policymakers and legal practitioners.

The integration of general scientific methods—including systematic data analysis, ongoing monitoring, synthesis of best practices, and critical reviews of prior research—provided a cohesive framework for consolidating findings. Expert assessments added a vital dimension of applied knowledge, enhancing the study's capacity to propose well-founded recommendations. These recommendations are strategically designed to improve preventative, therapeutic, and regulatory interventions for gambling addiction.

By adopting this methodologically rigorous approach, the study not only achieves its stated objectives but also establishes a benchmark for future research in the field. The deliberate and synergistic application of diverse methodologies underscores the study's commitment to advancing academic discourse and contributing to evidence-based policy development in Kazakhstan.

Results

Despite the global nature of the problem, gambling addiction in Kazakhstan has its own distinctive features. Original solutions tailored to local realities are required, taking into account cultural and social characteristics as well as the unique legal and economic context of the country. This includes developing effective educational campaigns,

improving legal regulations, and providing support measures for individuals suffering from gambling addiction. The synergy of an interdisciplinary approach, a comprehensive framework, and the integration of best global practices adapted to the Kazakhstani context is crucial. Comprehensive strategies for minimizing gambling addiction, including legal, economic, and sociological aspects, must offer a competitive solution that meets both national and international standards.

Scientific research is required to explore the scale and characteristics of gambling participation among the Kazakhstani population. Using regression analysis, it is necessary to identify the predictors of gambling participation. The study should determine the perceptions, stereotypes, and attitudes of Kazakhstani citizens toward gambling, as well as the degree of their interest and involvement in gambling activities. It is important to establish the factors and potential propensity for gambling among various social groups and to study the prevalence of gambling addiction in different social groups to identify the categories of the population most vulnerable to gambling addiction.

An essential addition to this analysis involves examining the impact of gambling addiction on various socio-economic groups. Gambling addiction disproportionately affects low-income individuals, who may resort to gambling as a means of escaping financial difficulties, further exacerbating their economic instability. Conversely, higher-income groups may experience different consequences, such as social stigma or reduced productivity. Educational level also plays a significant role, with individuals from less educated backgrounds often lacking awareness of the risks associated with gambling. Place of residence introduces additional complexity, as rural populations may encounter fewer prevention and support services compared to urban areas, further limiting their access to rehabilitation programs. Addressing these disparities is vital for designing targeted interventions that cater to the specific needs of different socio-economic groups, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of policy measures.

Additionally, it is critical to explore the gendered dimensions of gambling addiction. Women and men may experience gambling addiction differently, influenced by societal roles and expectations. For instance, women may face heightened stigma in seeking help, while men might be more prone to engage in higher-stakes gambling. Understanding these dynamics will allow for the development of gender-sensitive prevention and intervention programs, ensuring inclusivity and equity in addressing the issue.

Moreover, the economic consequences of gambling addiction must be analyzed through a broader lens. For low-income groups, gambling losses can lead to severe financial crises, including homelessness and inability to meet basic needs. In contrast, for higher-income groups, the consequences often manifest in reduced savings and disrupted professional lives. These economic impacts not only affect individuals but also ripple

through families and communities, intensifying social inequality. By examining these factors, policymakers can create more nuanced approaches to mitigate the economic fallout of gambling addiction.

It is also crucial to investigate the impact of advertising and marketing in the gambling sector on the development of gambling addiction; to analyze the accessibility and prevalence of gambling in different social environments and their influence on the popularity of gambling addiction; and to analyze the gambling industry's market to determine its connection to the development of gambling addiction. Research on behavioral finance in the context of gambling addiction, the impact of financial pyramids on the spread of gambling addiction, and the development of counterstrategies is also needed.

An integrative analysis and evaluation of the effectiveness of existing measures for the prevention, treatment, and combating of gambling addiction are necessary. The main goal is to develop and test multidisciplinary strategies for minimizing gambling addiction and increasing public awareness of this issue. Recommendations should be developed for designing informational campaigns and social programs aimed at reducing the prevalence of gambling addiction and raising the level of public awareness in this area.

As a result, the following should be scientifically determined:

The scope of the prevalence of gambling addiction in Kazakhstan society, identification of the primary risk groups, and determination of the key predictors of gambling addiction;

Identification of factors contributing to the development of gambling addiction in society, along with an assessment of the social and economic consequences of gambling addiction;

Evaluation of the effectiveness of existing measures for the prevention and control of gambling addiction in Kazakhstan;

Proposals for creating tools to identify and support individuals at risk of gambling addiction, and for informing the public about the risks of gambling addiction;

Proposals for regulatory measures regarding the organization and conduct of gambling;

Formulation of practical recommendations for creating and improving social, educational, and other programs to prevent gambling addiction;

Development of a scientific and practical foundation for long-term strategies for managing and socially controlling gambling addiction.

The results presented will positively impact efforts to solve the problem of gambling addiction, reduce negative socio-economic and cultural-psychological issues in society, and implement practical measures to improve the quality of life and well-being of the population. The economic effect will be manifested through increased government revenues, as improved regulation of the legal gambling industry will increase tax revenues and reduce budget losses caused by illegal gambling

activities. The development and regulation of the legal gambling industry will create additional jobs and contribute to economic growth. Reducing the prevalence of gambling addiction will enhance the economic activity and employability of the population, which will positively affect labor productivity and overall economic stability.

The social effect will be manifested in improved effectiveness of measures for the prevention of gambling addiction, leading to a reduction in the number of individuals suffering from gambling addiction, and, consequently, improved mental and physical health of the population. Control over illegal gambling activities and a reduction in gambling addiction will decrease crime levels associated with gambling addiction. Reducing gambling addiction will also strengthen family relationships and social stability, reducing the number of divorces and family conflicts. Conducting informational and educational campaigns will raise awareness of the risks associated with gambling, which will help prevent the development of addiction.

Recommendations for improving state policy:

Establishment of a monitoring system, specifically the implementation of mandatory reporting for participants in the gambling industry, including data on the number of players, volume of bets, and debts, which will allow for a more accurate assessment of the scale of the problem.

Strengthening preventive measures, including the development of educational programs aimed at raising awareness of the risks of gambling, especially among young people.

Focus on online gambling, involving the adoption of a separate strategy for regulating internet gambling, including international cooperation and control over access to illegal platforms.

Development of rehabilitation programs, including the creation of medical and social institutions specializing in the treatment of gambling addiction, with an emphasis on psychosocial support.

Adaptation of successful practices from other countries, such as introducing self-exclusion systems, strict advertising controls, and the use of modern technologies to monitor operator activities.

Involvement of the scientific community to conduct research and develop effective, evidence-based recommendations.

Gambling addiction in Kazakhstan remains a significant social and economic problem that requires a comprehensive approach. Despite the measures already taken, the relevance of revising state policy and developing a more integrated strategy is evident. Effectively addressing this problem will not only minimize social and economic risks but also strengthen citizens' trust in the state by ensuring a balance between the economic benefits of the gambling industry and protecting the population from gambling addiction.

Discussion

Prevalence of Gambling and Gambling Addiction in Kazakhstan: Statistical Challenges and the Scale of the Industry

The study of public involvement in gambling in Kazakhstan encounters several challenges, including the lack of targeted scientific research and insufficient transparency within the industry. Currently, government agencies rely on approximate estimates derived from international methodologies. For example, according to the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the global prevalence of gambling addiction is approximately 3% of the adult population, with 12.5% gambling regularly. Applying this model to Kazakhstan, it is estimated that about 36,000 individuals acknowledge gambling-related problems (Kazakhstan, 2023).

More detailed data from the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Kazakhstan indicate that as of early 2024, approximately 350,000 individuals in the country were identified as gambling addicts. The average debt per gambler is estimated to exceed \$22,000 USD (MIA RK, 2024). These figures are supported by the Financial Monitoring Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan, which reported similar statistics as early as 2021 (FMA, 2021).

A critical indicator of the scale of the problem is the number of Kazakhstani citizens and residents who have utilized the self-exclusion service to restrict their participation in gambling. As of November 2024, over 170,000 individuals had opted for this service (Ministry of Tourism and Sports of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2024). This number reflects growing public awareness of the risks of gambling addiction but also underscores the need for improvements in existing prevention programs.

Official data from the National Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Kazakhstan provide insights into the economic scale of the gambling industry. Over the past three years, the volume of services related to gambling and betting totaled approximately \$3 billion USD (Statistics, 2023). However, despite the economic significance of this sector, detailed information on the number of players, their betting amounts, and debt levels is unavailable. This lack of data is primarily due to the absence of mandatory reporting requirements, leaving much of the relevant information within companies and unavailable for public scrutiny.

Sociological studies remain one of the few tools available for assessing the prevalence of gambling addiction. For instance, the Youth Research Center conducts annual surveys commissioned by the Ministry of Information and Social Development of the Republic of Kazakhstan. These surveys show that among those participating in the surveys, the proportion of young people involved in gambling increased from 0.1% in 2021 to 3% in 2023. The highest level of gambling addiction (4.7%) was recorded among people aged 29-34. By 2024, the share of young citizens who regularly gamble reached 6.3%. Moreover, 35% of young citizens of

Kazakhstan who participated in surveys reported that their partner's addiction to gambling was a significant reason for divorce (Survey, 2023; Survey, 2024).

The Association for the Protection of Citizens' Rights in the Gambling Business of the Republic of Kazakhstan highlights several critical issues within the industry:

- Weak legislative framework protecting citizens' rights;
- Violations of citizens' rights by foreign online gambling companies;
- Non-payment of winnings by gambling establishments;
- Negative impact of the shadow market on the legal sector;
- Widespread gambling addiction (Association, 2024).

These issues emphasize the urgent need for enhanced state control and the development of more transparent and effective regulatory mechanisms.

Cultural and social nuances specific to Kazakhstan play a crucial role in shaping public attitudes toward gambling and significantly influence the effectiveness of regulatory measures. Traditional Kazakh society, particularly in rural areas, often views gambling through a lens shaped by strong religious and moral principles, which stigmatize gambling activities as harmful or unethical. This stigma can act as a double-edged sword: while it may deter some individuals from engaging in gambling, it also discourages those suffering from gambling addiction from seeking help, thus exacerbating the problem. In urban settings, where modernization and liberal attitudes dominate, gambling is increasingly normalized as a recreational activity, especially among younger demographics. This dichotomy highlights the need for regulatory frameworks and prevention strategies that account for regional and cultural variations.

Additionally, public trust in regulatory institutions significantly impacts the success of implemented measures. In Kazakhstan, a perceived lack of transparency and accountability within government agencies and the gambling industry weakens the public's confidence in existing policies. Addressing these cultural and institutional barriers requires a participatory approach that engages local communities, religious leaders, and civil society organizations in both the design and implementation of regulatory measures. Such an approach ensures that policies are not only culturally sensitive but also widely supported.

The data on increasing public involvement in gambling, particularly among youth, demand immediate government action. The prevalence of gambling addiction, high levels of debt, and the growing number of self-exclusions highlight the need to revise current regulatory approaches. The lack of detailed statistics and insufficient transparency obstructs the formulation of effective public policies.

Given the growing influence of gambling on Kazakhstan's economy and society, it is imperative to implement more comprehensive measures, including mandatory disclosure of statistical data by gambling operators, conducting extensive sociological studies, and leveraging international best

practices. These steps will not only mitigate the adverse effects of gambling addiction but also aid in developing a sustainable regulatory model that balances economic interests with social responsibility.

The scale of gambling and gambling addiction in Kazakhstan requires a systematic approach. Strengthening the legislative framework, increasing industry transparency, and introducing effective prevention programs are essential steps to reduce the socio-economic risks associated with gambling. Incorporating a nuanced understanding of cultural and social dynamics into research and policy development will provide a more accurate and reliable basis for informed decision-making. Only through such a comprehensive and culturally informed strategy can Kazakhstan effectively address the challenges posed by gambling addiction while fostering societal well-being and economic stability.

Gambling Addiction in Kazakhstan: The Need for Rethinking State Policy and Developing a Comprehensive Strategy

The President of Kazakhstan has repeatedly instructed the government to halt the rise in crime associated with the population's gambling addiction and to adopt a comprehensive set of legislative, organizational, and informational-ideological measures to combat gambling addiction among Kazakhstani citizens.

Specifically, in September 2023, the President of Kazakhstan, Kassym-Jomart Tokayev, at a meeting of the Security Council, instructed authorities to strengthen restrictions on gambling for certain categories of citizens. The President emphasized that youth constitute a particular risk group. He also drew the attention of law enforcement agencies to the increase in crime linked to gambling addiction and instructed the adoption of preventive and other measures to ensure legality and public order. He pointed out the need to intensify efforts to prevent financial and other violations in the gambling industry.

At the third meeting of the National Kurultai in March 2024, the Head of State instructed the government to approve a comprehensive plan to combat gambling addiction, legislatively limiting this harmful dependence to address this negative phenomenon.

In 2024, a special law aimed at regulating activities in the gambling industry was adopted (entered into force on September 9, 2024—Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated July 8, 2024, No. 116-VIII "On Amendments and Additions to Certain Legislative Acts of the Republic of Kazakhstan on Issues of Gambling Business, Lottery Activities, Health Protection, State Labor Inspection, State Control, and Elimination of Excessive Legislative Regulation"—hereafter, the Law). The law is aimed at improving legislation to protect citizens from developing gambling addiction (ludomania) when participating in gambling and/or betting. The following provisions have been introduced:

Definition of a list of individuals restricted from participating in gambling and betting (individuals under 21 years of age, individuals

restricted from participating in gambling and/or betting, including through self-restriction for a period of 1 to 10 years, individuals included in the Unified Register of Debtors with outstanding obligations under enforcement documents for property recovery, and individuals who have adopted anti-corruption restrictions on gambling participation);

Establishment of procedures for the medical rehabilitation of individuals addicted to gambling and the introduction of consultative medical supervision for them;

Prohibition on sending text messages containing advertisements for electronic casinos, internet casinos, and gambling and/or betting by cellular operators to subscribers' devices;

Prohibition on advertising betting offices and totalizators, specifically: outdoor advertising on buildings, structures, and vehicles, in mass media, cinema, video, and reference services (except for advertising at the location of the betting office and/or totalizator, inside sports facilities, on athletes' equipment, and on sports TV, radio channels, and internet resources specializing in covering sports events);

Establishment of requirements for the distribution (sale) of lottery tickets (electronic lottery tickets) (only through the lottery operator and distributor (agent));

Determination of locations for the distribution (sale) of lottery tickets (electronic lottery tickets) (lottery terminals, non-stationary trading objects, postal operator branches, and lottery operator branches);

Prohibition on the distribution of lottery tickets and the installation of terminals in residential buildings and dormitories, in stand-alone buildings and structures housing cultural organizations, and in educational and healthcare institutions and religious buildings and structures;

Prohibition on the operation of foreign betting office and totalizator internet resources in the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan without a license;

Integration of hardware and software complexes of betting offices and/or totalizators with the information systems of the Committee for State Revenues.

Thus, certain legislative and regulatory measures are being taken to fulfill the directive of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan regarding this strategically important state task. However, the main direction remains outside the scope of the measures currently being implemented—the adoption of a comprehensive set of legislative, organizational, and informational-ideological measures to combat gambling addiction among Kazakhstani citizens.

By the Decree of the Government of the Republic of Kazakhstan dated May 31, 2024, No. 432, a Comprehensive Plan for Counteracting Illegal Gambling and Gambling Addiction in the Republic of Kazakhstan for 2024–2026 was approved. The plan provides for 28 measures across four areas:

Organization of gambling addiction prevention;

Identification of gambling addiction among various population groups;

Treatment and medical-social rehabilitation of individuals with gambling addiction;

State regulation of the gambling industry.

In our opinion, the main shortcomings of the plan are as follows: overall, it lacks a detailed methodology or specific, data-driven approaches tailored to the unique socio-cultural context of Kazakhstan; there is excessive reliance on legislative and punitive measures; the plan lacks a comprehensive approach to social programs for prevention and rehabilitation; it underestimates the issues associated with online gambling, which will not facilitate adequate solutions to the unique problems posed by digital gambling; the plan outlines expected results but insufficiently presents mechanisms for measuring these results or criteria for evaluating the success of various measures; and there is a lack of involvement of the scientific community in developing more holistic and effective measures. The plan does not take into account the global experience in regulating the gambling industry and combating gambling addiction, as accumulated by various countries and reputable institutions. Instead of using comprehensive measures, the plan is mainly focused on prohibitions and strict restrictions, treating all gamblers, without exception, as individuals with gambling addiction.

In the context of Kazakhstan, an interdisciplinary approach is essential for developing effective methods to prevent gambling addiction and curb its spread. While gambling addiction can arise in both illegal and legal venues, it is crucial to acknowledge that many individuals become addicted through engagement with regulated casinos. Nevertheless, illegal gambling poses a distinct risk because it generally lacks age restrictions and self-limitation mechanisms, potentially exacerbating addiction among those already prone to problematic gambling. Additionally, revenue generated by illegal platforms bypasses the state budget, unlike the legal industry, which pays taxes and operates with greater transparency. Therefore, we view the creation of a comprehensive regulatory model for the gambling industry as a strategically important task—one that both addresses the challenges posed by illegal operations and reinforces efforts to combat gambling addiction at all levels of the sector.

The Need to Improve the Regulation of the Gambling Industry in Kazakhstan: Balancing Economic Benefits and Social Risks

On one hand, Kazakhstan has had specialized legislation regulating the gambling industry for the past 17 years. Special gambling zones have been established in the country, which are considered a successful example of organizing the gambling market and include casinos, bookmakers, and other establishments. Although Kazakhstan's gambling industry is relatively small compared to other countries, it demonstrates steady growth. The process of obtaining a gambling license in Kazakhstan is characterized

by simplicity and efficiency, without requiring significant expenses. Special gambling zones encourage companies to conduct legal business by providing tax concessions.

The basis of the legal regulation of the gambling industry in Kazakhstan is the Law "On Gambling Business," adopted in 2007. The law permits casinos and slot machines to operate only in special zones, while bookmakers and totalizators can operate throughout the country, including in online formats, provided they have an official office. State control over compliance with the legislation is carried out under the Law "On State Control and Supervision." Illegal gambling activities are penalized under Article 307 of the Criminal Code of Kazakhstan, which provides for criminal liability for the illegal opening or maintenance of gambling establishments, the illegal organization of gambling activities, the provision of premises for illegal gambling, or the organization and conduct of gambling outside of locations established by the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan on gambling business, or engaging in gambling activities without a license.

However, the growing prevalence of gambling addiction in Kazakhstan creates serious social and economic challenges. Gambling addiction is associated with financial instability and reduced public participation in economic activities, contributing to broader social issues such as poverty, family dysfunction, and mental health disorders. Existing regulatory frameworks have shown limited efficacy in addressing these issues, primarily due to insufficient attention to emerging forms of gambling, such as online platforms, and the lack of a holistic, data-driven regulatory strategy.

A critical analysis of current data sources reveals significant limitations. Official statistics often fail to capture the full scope of gambling participation, particularly in unregulated and illegal markets. Moreover, there is a lack of systematic research evaluating the effectiveness of existing regulations and their impact on reducing gambling addiction. This gap underscores the need for more rigorous data collection methodologies and the establishment of comprehensive monitoring systems to inform evidence-based policymaking.

The depiction of government actions in combating gambling addiction requires a more nuanced evaluation. While the establishment of special gambling zones and the enforcement of licensing requirements have achieved some success in regulating the industry, these measures have not sufficiently addressed the rapid proliferation of online gambling. Furthermore, the punitive nature of current legislation—emphasizing penalties over preventive and rehabilitative measures—limits its effectiveness in mitigating the social and economic costs of gambling addiction.

To enhance regulatory efficacy, alternative approaches must be considered. First, integrating harm reduction strategies, such as self-exclusion programs and mandatory limits on gambling expenditures, can

directly address the behavioral aspects of addiction. Second, advanced digital technologies, including artificial intelligence and blockchain, could improve the transparency and accountability of both operators and regulators. For instance, real-time monitoring of online gambling activities can help identify problematic behaviors and ensure compliance with age and spending restrictions. Third, adopting public health-focused policies, as seen in jurisdictions like Sweden and Canada, could provide a framework for balancing economic benefits with social responsibility.

Furthermore, fostering international collaboration can support the adoption of best practices and innovative solutions. Countries with mature regulatory environments, such as the United Kingdom, have successfully implemented comprehensive frameworks that integrate industry regulation, public health initiatives, and community education programs. Kazakhstan can benefit from these experiences by tailoring such approaches to its unique socio-economic and cultural context.

The relationship between legal and illegal gambling markets also warrants closer scrutiny. Restrictions on legal gambling often drive consumers toward unregulated platforms, exacerbating the risks of addiction, fraud, and money laundering. To mitigate this, the government must adopt a balanced approach that strengthens the legal gambling industry while simultaneously targeting the shadow market through enhanced enforcement and international cooperation.

In conclusion, while Kazakhstan has made progress in regulating its gambling industry, the existing framework requires significant improvement to address contemporary challenges effectively. A more critical examination of data sources and the development of evidence-based, multidimensional strategies are essential. By adopting alternative approaches—including harm reduction, technological integration, and public health-focused policies—Kazakhstan can better balance the economic benefits of the gambling industry with its social responsibilities. Future efforts should prioritize rigorous research, stakeholder collaboration, and the adaptation of international best practices to ensure sustainable and socially responsible development of the gambling sector.

Conclusion

The issue of gambling addiction in Kazakhstan represents a profound challenge to the country's socio-economic development. Despite legislative efforts and the implementation of comprehensive plans, existing measures remain insufficient in addressing the scale and complexity of the problem. Key limitations include the lack of detailed statistical data, an overreliance on punitive methods, insufficient attention to online gambling, and inadequate integration of local socio-cultural contexts into prevention strategies.

The study identifies critical gaps in the current regulatory and preventative frameworks, emphasizing the need for targeted, evidence-based interventions. A comprehensive strategy rooted in interdisciplinary

methodologies—encompassing legal, social, economic, and psychological perspectives—is essential to effectively combat gambling addiction. For example, the creation of a national monitoring system to collect detailed data on gambling behaviors and the introduction of advanced digital tools for regulating online gambling would significantly enhance the state's capacity to address this issue.

Engaging the scientific community is pivotal in bridging these gaps. By conducting rigorous research, scholars can provide actionable insights into the prevalence and predictors of gambling addiction, as well as its socio-economic impacts. This research should inform the design of culturally tailored prevention and rehabilitation programs that address the specific needs of various demographic groups, including youth and economically vulnerable populations.

The integration of international best practices further strengthens the proposed approach. Successful strategies from other jurisdictions, such as self-exclusion mechanisms, enhanced transparency in the gambling industry, and comprehensive public awareness campaigns, should be adapted to Kazakhstan's unique context. Special focus must also be placed on addressing the rising prevalence of online gambling, leveraging global expertise to develop adaptive and forward-looking regulatory frameworks.

The connection between the identified problems and proposed measures underscores the necessity of aligning state policy with both national priorities and international standards. Addressing the gaps in prevention, regulation, and data collection will not only mitigate the negative consequences of gambling addiction but also foster public trust in state institutions. This alignment will ensure a balanced approach that reconciles the economic benefits of the gambling industry with its social responsibilities.

In conclusion, the development and implementation of a systematic, evidence-based, and culturally informed strategy to combat gambling addiction in Kazakhstan is imperative. This approach must include robust mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation, ensuring continuous improvement and adaptability to emerging challenges. Future research should prioritize longitudinal studies and comparative analyses to refine these strategies further. By adopting such a comprehensive framework, Kazakhstan can significantly reduce the socio-economic burdens of gambling addiction, enhance societal well-being, and contribute to sustainable development.

Ethics approval

The procedure received ethical approval (No. 256, date of approval: 02/06/2025) by the Ethics Council of Zhetysu University named after I. Zhansugurov.

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Relative Contributions

All authors participated in study design. ZK collected the data. All authors conducted the data analysis. ZK wrote the first draft of the manuscript. YB drafted, revised, critically reviewed the manuscript. YB drafted, revised, critically reviewed, and approved the final submitted draft

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Research Promotion

The use of augmented reality (AR) and virtual reality (VR) to address mental health issues has been growing. However, research exploring the use of AR/VR in the treatment of behavioural addictions has not been consolidated. The findings of this scoping review will benefit researchers and practitioners interested in using VR/AR to treat behavioural addictions.

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