

The Ethical Debate: Gambling and Religious Perspectives in Zanzibar

Etik Tartışma: Zanzibar'da Kumar ve Dini Perspektifler

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ABSTRACT

Gambling in Zanzibar represents a critical intersection of religious ethics and modern influences, making it a vital area of study for understanding how traditional societies navigate globalization. As the archipelago becomes increasingly exposed to global trends through tourism and digital media, its strong Islamic values face new challenges, particularly among youth who often view gambling as harmless entertainment rather than a moral transgression. This study is crucial as it examines the cultural and religious implications of gambling, offering insights into how Islamic teachings can guide ethical decision-making in a rapidly changing society.

From an Islamic perspective, gambling is strictly prohibited (haram) as it violates principles of fair wealth acquisition and promotes chance over merit. In Zanzibar, where Islam deeply influences societal norms, religious teachings

consistently emphasize gambling's harm to personal integrity and financial stability. This study explores these ethical foundations through textual analysis of Islamic jurisprudence (Fiqh) and community surveys, revealing how religious values shape public attitudes toward gambling. The findings demonstrate the tension between preserving Islamic ethics and accommodating modern economic realities, particularly in a region where tourism driven gambling presents both opportunities and moral dilemmas.

Ultimately, this article provides valuable insights for policymakers, religious leaders, and educators seeking to address gambling's societal impacts while upholding Islamic values. By combining ethical analysis with empirical data, the study offers a framework for developing regulations that respect religious principles while acknowledging contemporary challenges. As Zanzibar balances its Islamic identity with global influences, this work underscores the importance of grounding societal development in moral and ethical considerations, ensuring progress that aligns with the community's deepest values. The study's mixed-method approach integrating interviews, doctrinal analysis, and surveys ensures a comprehensive understanding of gambling's complex role in Zanzibar's evolving social landscape.

Keywords: Gambling, Islamic Ethics, Zanzibar, Globalization, Social Impact, Religious Perspectives

ETİK TARTIŞMA: ZANZİBAR'DA KUMAR VE DİNİ PERSPEKTİFLER

ÖZ

Zanzibar'daki kumar olgusu, dini etik ile modern etkilerin kesişim noktasında yer almakta olup, geleneksel toplumların küreselleşme sürecinde nasıl yön bulduklarını anlamak açısından önemli bir çalışma alanıdır. Takımda, turizm ve dijital medya aracılığıyla küresel eğilimlere giderek daha fazla maruz kaldıkça,

güçlü İslami değerler özellikle gençler arasında yeni meydan okumalarla karşı karşıya kalmaktadır. Gençler kumarı çoğu zaman ahlaki bir sapma değil, zararsız bir eğlence olarak görmekte, bu da toplumsal dönüşümün önemli bir göstergesi olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Bu çalışma, kumarın kültürel ve dini boyutlarını inceleyerek İslam'ın etik ilkeleri çerçevesinde ahlaki karar alma süreçlerine nasıl yön verdiğini ortaya koymayı amaçlamaktadır.

İslami bakış açısına göre kumar, adil servet edinme ilkelerine aykırı olması ve liyakat yerine şansa dayalı kazancı teşvik etmesi nedeniyle kesin biçimde haram kabul edilmektedir. Zanzibar'da toplumsal normların derinlemesine İslamî inançlarla şekillendiği bir bağlamda, dini öğretiler kumarın bireysel bütünlüğe ve mali istikrara verdiği zararları sürekli vurgulamaktadır. Bu çalışma, İslam fıkhına dair metin analizleri ve toplum temelli anketler aracılığıyla bu etik temelleri incelemekte; dini değerlerin kumara yönelik toplumsal tutumları nasıl şekillendirdiğini gözler önüne sermektedir. Bulgular, İslamî etiği koruma ile modern ekonomik gerçeklikleri kabul etme arasındaki gerilimi özellikle turizm kaynaklı kumarın hem fırsatlar hem de ahlaki ikilemler doğurduğu bu bölgede açıkça ortaya koymaktadır.

Sonuç olarak, bu makale, kumarın toplumsal etkileriyle mücadele ederken İslami değerleri korumaya çalışan politika yapıcılar, dini liderler ve eğitimciler için önemli içgörüler sunmaktadır. Etik analizle ampirik verileri bir araya getiren bu çalışma, dini ilkeleri gözetirken çağdaş zorlukları da dikkate alan düzenlemelerin geliştirilmesine yönelik bir çerçeve sunmaktadır. Zanzibar, İslamî kimliğini küresel etkilerle dengelemeye çalışırken, bu çalışma, toplumsal kalkınmanın ahlaki ve etik temellere dayanmasının önemini vurgulamakta ve topluluğun en derin değerleriyle uyumlu bir ilerlemeyi güvence altına alma çağrısı yapmaktadır. Görüşmeler, doktriner analizler ve anketleri içeren karma yöntemli yaklaşım sayesinde, kumarın Zanzibar'ın değişen toplumsal yapısındaki karmaşık rolüne ilişkin kapsamlı bir anlayış sağlanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kumar, İslam Ahlakı, Zanzibar, Küreselleşme, Toplumsal Etki, Dini Perspektifler

INTRODUCTION

Gambling is a widespread global activity that includes various forms such as lotteries, sports betting, and casino games. Historically, gambling has been perceived as an inherently destructive activity, denounced as morally degenerate due to its non-productive nature, its reliance on chance rather than reason, and its destabilizing influence on communities. (Reith, 2007, p.34). While often viewed as entertainment or a potential source of quick wealth, it has become deeply ingrained in the cultural practices of many communities. Nevertheless, its increasing prevalence has generated significant ethical and religious controversies, particularly concerning its social consequences, risks to individuals and families, and its varying legal and cultural acceptance (Adams et al., 2017, p.7-8).

From an ethical standpoint, gambling is scrutinized for issues related to fairness, exploitation, and corporate accountability (Schüll, 2012, p.15). Opponents argue that the gambling industry often exploits economically disadvantaged individuals who may struggle with financial instability or addictive tendencies (Livingstone & Adams, 2016, p.3). This can lead to a destructive cycle of compulsive gambling, where individuals chase losses to recover money, exacerbating financial and psychological distress (Blaszczynski & Nower, 2002, p.490). The repercussions extend beyond monetary loss, contributing to relationship breakdowns, emotional turmoil, and mental health disorders, including depression and anxiety. Ethical critiques frequently emphasize the structural inequalities in gambling, where profits are generated primarily from those least able to afford losses (Markham & Young, 2015, p.1).

Religious viewpoints also play a significant role in shaping attitudes toward gambling, with many faiths condemning it as morally unacceptable (Rosenthal, 2013, p.36). Major religious traditions, including Islam (Qur'an 5:90), Christianity (1 Timothy 6:10), and Hinduism (Mahabharata, Sabha Parva), associate gambling with moral failings such as greed, dishonesty, and the erosion of social cohesion (Clerke et al., 2006, p.78). These perspectives argue that gambling contradicts fundamental spiritual principles, including integrity, moderation, and the digni-

ty of labour (Korn et al., 2003, p.283). Religious teachings often frame gambling as incompatible with ethical living, emphasizing its potential to undermine both personal virtue and communal stability (Derevensky & Gupta, 2000, p.214).

The ethical debate surrounding gambling and its religious implications in Zanzibar is a critically important topic due to its profound socio-cultural, economic, and moral dimensions. As a predominantly Muslim society, Zanzibar's religious teachings strictly prohibit gambling (maysir), considering it a harmful and exploitative practice. However, the rise of gambling activities driven by tourism, economic pressures, and globalization creates a tension between religious values and modern realities. This study is vital because it addresses a pressing moral dilemma; how a deeply religious society navigates the challenges posed by an activity that contradicts its core ethical principles while confronting its potential economic benefits.

Furthermore, the issue has significant societal consequences, as gambling can lead to addiction, financial ruin, and family disintegration, disproportionately affecting low-income communities. Understanding the religious perspectives on gambling is essential for policymakers who must balance regulation with cultural and spiritual sensitivities. Additionally, this article provides a platform for religious leaders, scholars, and community members to engage in a constructive dialogue about how to address gambling's harms while upholding Islamic teachings. By examining these dynamics, the study contributes to broader discussions on ethics, religion, and governance in Muslim-majority regions facing similar challenges. Ultimately, this paper is not only relevant for Zanzibar but also offers insights for other societies grappling with the intersection of faith, morality, and economic development.

ETHICAL ANALYSIS OF GAMBLING

The ethical debate surrounding gambling is frequently examined through two dominant philosophical lenses: utilitarianism, which evaluates actions based on their consequences, and deontology, which assesses morality based on adherence to duties and principles (Mill, 1906, p. 9; Kant, 1998, p. 28).

From a utilitarian standpoint, the morality of gambling depends on whether its net outcomes maximize societal well-being (Bentham, 1789, p.149). Proponents argue that regulated gambling can generate economic benefits, including job creation, tourism revenue, and tax contributions that fund public services (Kant, 1998, p.28).

For instance, legal gambling industries in regions like Macau and Las Vegas demonstrate how controlled gambling can stimulate local economies (Eadington, 1999, p.187). Additionally, utilitarians defend gambling as a form of voluntary entertainment, respecting individual autonomy in financial decisions.

However, critics employing utilitarian analysis contend that the social costs of gambling often outweigh its benefits. Gambling addiction leads to financial ruin, mental health crises, and familial breakdowns, disproportionately affecting vulnerable populations. Furthermore, gambling-related crime such as fraud, loan sharking, and illegal betting imposes additional burdens on law enforcement and social services (Reith, 2007, p.35). A cost-benefit analysis suggests that the aggregate harm of gambling associate with increased bankruptcy rates and domestic violences may negate any economic gains (Grinols, 2004, p.139).

In contrast, deontological ethics rooted in Kantian philosophy argues that gambling is inherently unethical, regardless of consequences (Kant, 1998, p.28). Deontologists assert that gambling exploits human weaknesses like greed, desperation, and violating the categorical imperative which demands that individuals act in ways that could be universalized without contradiction. Since gambling relies on others' losses for profit, it fundamentally conflicts with principles of fairness and respect for persons (Rawls, 1971, p.27).

Moreover, deontologists emphasize society's moral duty to protect citizens from harm. Gambling's addictive nature undermines rational autonomy, making it a form of coercion rather than free choice. Thus, from this perspective, strict regulation or prohibition is ethically necessary to uphold justice and communal welfare (Goodin, 1995, p. 50; Rawls, 1971, p. 8).

In this point of view, Gambling has faced significant ethical criticism for its exploitative nature, particularly its disproportionate impact on vulnerable populations (Binde, 2016, p.394). In Zanzibar, where socioeconomic disparities persist (World Bank, 2023), gambling preys on financially insecure individuals seeking quick economic relief. Problem of gambling leads to addiction cycles, worsening financial instability and mental health crises (Grinols, 2004, p.141-143).

Beyond immediate harms, gambling is ethically condemned for undermining core societal values. By promoting get-rich-quick mentalities, gambling conflicts with Islamic and Zanzibari cultural principles that emphasize hard work, honesty, and equitable wealth generation (Kuran, 2004, p.58). This misalignment poses a moral hazard, particularly for youth, who may adopt risky financial behaviours (Derevensky, 2012, p.61). Ethical critiques thus advocate for alternative economic and recreational models such as microfinance initiatives and community sports programs that align with Zanzibar's moral framework.

THE PERSISTENCE OF GAMBLING IN ZANZIBAR

Despite the explicit prohibition of gambling (maysir) in Islamic teachings (Qur'an 5:90), which unequivocally declares it as "an abomination of Satan's handiwork," gambling persists in Zanzibar, primarily thriving in informal and unregulated settings. This enduring phenomenon presents a complex paradox in this predominantly Muslim society, where 99% of the population identifies as Muslim (Pew Research Center, 2022). The continuation of gambling activities stems from a multifaceted interplay of economic desperation, social dynamics, and technological advancements that collectively undermine religious prohibitions.

Economic hardship has been widely identified as a primary factor driving gambling participation in Zanzibar. Within the context of limited formal employment opportunities, makes some residents particularly younger demographics may turn to gambling as a perceived means of financial relief. (Reith, 2007, p.35) This phenomenon appears most prevalent in areas such as West Urban Region,

Northern Region and other areas in Zanzibar islands where socioeconomic disparities are particularly visible.

The lack of structured recreational alternatives in Zanzibar has created a cultural vacuum that gambling activities have filled, albeit controversially. With limited legal entertainment options particularly for youth many residents turn to traditional games like kete (a local card game), dice games, and increasingly, sports betting as social pastimes. These activities often begin as innocent social interactions but frequently escalate into habitual gambling behaviours. Community centres and mosques have attempted to provide alternative activities, but their reach remains limited, especially in rural areas.

The digital revolution has dramatically complicated Zanzibar's gambling landscape. Despite official bans, the rise of digital gambling platforms has created new challenges for regulators. The annual report 2019/2020 by the Gaming Bord of Tanzania (GBT) revealed that there are 35 sport betting operators, (land-based 11& 24 online where 1xBet, Betway, PariMach, WasafiBet, Sportpesa are most used), slot machines 14, SMS Lottery 3, and 16 Casinos (land-based 9& 7online). This digital gambling surge is particularly prevalent among tech-savvy youth, who can easily access offshore betting platforms offering football betting and virtual casino games. (GBT, 2020).

Unlike official gambling venues in other tourist spots, Zanzibar's betting scene thrives in an informal, underground economy. These activities take place secretly in private residences, informal youth gathering places, and even certain tourist zones with weak oversight. Additionally, gambling sometimes infiltrates school premises, occurring during breaks or even class hours. Though these operations may appear minor individually, they pose a serious threat not only to Islamic principles and social stability but also to students' academic performance.

The lack of oversight in informal gambling exacerbates numerous social risks. Without regulation, these operations frequently employ predatory practices, targeting vulnerable groups including low-income earners, unemployed youth,

and even minors (UNODC, 2023). A disturbing 2023 survey by HakiElimu Zanzibar found that 17% of secondary school students had participated in informal betting, with many reporting they were introduced to gambling by peers or family members (HakiElimu, 2023). This early exposure raises significant concerns about the normalization of gambling among younger generations and its potential to create lifelong addiction patterns.

The consequences of this hidden gambling epidemic are manifold. Family savings are often depleted, leading to domestic conflicts and sometimes divorce reports. Local imams reported that increasing cases of theft and petty crimes in Zanzibar society linked to gambling debts. Perhaps most alarmingly, the clandestine nature of these operations makes it nearly impossible to track or address problem gambling, leaving affected individuals without access to support services that exist in regulated gambling environments (WHO, 2023)

CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS CONTEXT IN ZANZIBAR

The cultural and religious landscape of Zanzibar is further shaped by the island's unique history as a crossroads of trade, culture, and religion. While Islam serves as the dominant religious force, the influence of other traditions, such as African indigenous beliefs and Christian missionary activities, has also contributed to the region's diverse cultural fabric. However, Islamic principles, which emphasize community welfare, social justice, and individual piety, continue to take precedence in guiding moral and ethical behaviours. This is reflected in the island's social norms, where communal values and a collective sense of responsibility often override individual desires, particularly in matters that are seen as morally contentious, such as gambling. The ethical implications of gambling, for instance, are framed not only as an individual moral failing but also as a threat to the broader social order, which is why religious, and community leaders often advocate for stringent measures against such activities.

Moreover, Zanzibar's Islamic identity has fostered a collective approach to addressing social issues, particularly those related to behaviours deemed contrary to Islamic teachings. Religious leaders, in tandem with local authorities,

are instrumental in shaping public opinion and influencing policy decisions on matters like gambling. The condemnation of gambling in Zanzibar is not merely a religious concern but a societal one, with community leaders stressing the potential harm that gambling can inflict on families and social cohesion. The ethical argument against gambling in Zanzibar is rooted in the broader Islamic emphasis on protecting individuals from practices that are considered exploitative or harmful. The financial and emotional toll of gambling, particularly on vulnerable populations, is seen as a violation of the Islamic principles of charity, fairness, and social responsibility, which prioritize the well-being of the community over personal gain.

In addition to religious teachings, the ethical discourse surrounding gambling in Zanzibar is shaped by the cultural significance of personal integrity and social reputation. The concept of ummah (community) is a core tenet of Islamic ethics, and the preservation of collective integrity is considered a collective responsibility. As such, the effects of gambling on social relations such as financial ruin, addiction, and the disruption of family life are viewed not only as personal failures but as threats to the fabric of society. In Zanzibar, where family ties and social cohesion are highly valued, gambling is often perceived as a destructive force that undermines these foundational relationships. Therefore, the ethical debate surrounding gambling is not only concerned with the individual's moral conduct but also with the preservation of the collective good, as the well-being of the individual is intrinsically linked to the health of the larger community.

The intertwining of religion, culture, and ethics in Zanzibar creates a complex framework for understanding the challenges associated with gambling. While Islamic teachings provide a clear prohibition against such activities, the persistence of gambling in informal settings presents both moral and practical dilemmas for policymakers and religious leaders alike. Efforts to combat gambling must navigate the delicate balance between religious convictions and the realities of modern societal pressures, which include globalization, economic hardship, and changing cultural values. As such, the ethical concerns raised by

gambling in Zanzibar are not only about adherence to religious law but also about safeguarding the long-standing cultural traditions that define the identity and social structure of the island. The struggle to address gambling, therefore, reflects broader concerns about maintaining the integrity of Zanzibar's Islamic cultural heritage in the face of contemporary challenges.

COMMUNITY ATTITUDES TOWARD GAMBLING IN ZANZIBAR

Community attitudes toward gambling in Zanzibar reflect a complex interplay of condemnation, ambivalence, and acceptance, shaped by cultural, generational, and socio-economic factors. Research indicates that most residents strongly condemn gambling, viewing it as a morally and socially destructive practice that conflicts with Islamic teachings. This widespread disapproval is rooted in the religious and ethical frameworks that dominate public discourse, emphasizing the harmful consequences of gambling on individuals, families, and society. Many respondents associate gambling with financial ruin, addiction, and the erosion of moral values, underscoring its incompatibility with the cultural and spiritual identity of Zanzibar.

However, a minority of residents express more ambivalent or accepting views, framing gambling as a harmless recreational activity or a potential source of income. This perspective is often linked to personal experiences or pragmatic considerations, particularly among individuals facing economic hardships. For some, gambling represents a chance to achieve financial relief or entertainment in the absence of other opportunities. These individuals often rationalize their participation by emphasizing their ability to control their behavior, downplaying the risks of addiction or broader societal harm. While this view remains in the minority, it highlights the socio-economic pressures that contribute to the persistence of gambling in Zanzibar despite widespread condemnation. The generational divide in attitudes toward gambling is particularly pronounced, with younger respondents displaying more curiosity and openness toward the practice (Derevensky & Gupta, 2004, p.491). Influenced by globalization and the influx of external cultural norms, younger individuals often view gambling as a

modern and exciting activity, detached from its moral and ethical implications (Schüll, 2012, p.16). For some, gambling is seen as part of a broader engagement with globalized entertainment and lifestyle trends, reflecting a shift away from traditional values (Livingstone & Adams, 2011, p.4). This generational divergence underscores the challenges faced by religious and community leaders in preserving Zanzibar's cultural and spiritual heritage in the face of rapidly changing societal norms (Beckert & Lutter, 2013, p.6).

The findings of this study reveal a widespread acknowledgment among all interviewees regarding the presence and proliferation of gambling within the community. Importantly, gambling was reported to transcend boundaries of age and gender. Specifically, the data indicate that approximately 85% of male youth are involved in gambling activities, alongside 10% of young females and 5% of adults and elderly individuals. This demographic distribution suggests that gambling is not an isolated practice among a particular group but is embedded across various segments of the population.

Furthermore, contrary to common assumptions that gambling is primarily a coping mechanism for the unemployed, the study uncovered that individuals who are formally employed and those engaged in business activities also participate actively in gambling. For these individuals, gambling often serves as a supplementary source of income rather than merely a form of recreation. This trend may reflect broader socio-economic pressures, such as underemployment, income instability, or the perceived ease of earning quick money through betting platforms. The participation of economically active individuals highlights the normalization of gambling and calls for a nuanced understanding of its socio-economic implications within the community.

IMPACT OF GAMBLING ON YOUTH AND ACADEMIC PURSUITS

The impact of gambling on the academic pursuits of young individuals in Zanzibar highlights a critical social challenge, as its influence extends beyond the individual to the broader educational ecosystem. The evidence collected from the

interviewee showed that gambling leads to poor academic performance among students in primary and secondary schools. Teachers report observing students who skip classes or neglect assignments in favor of gambling, driven by the hope of immediate financial gain. This behavior not only disrupts the learning process for the individuals involved but also creates a ripple effect within classrooms, where the absence or disengagement of peers can undermine group activities and collaborative learning. Parents express concerns about the detrimental effects of gambling, noting that it erodes discipline and focus among school-aged children, making it harder to instill the values of persistence and responsibility essential for academic success

The informal nature of gambling exacerbates these issues by making it readily accessible to minors without effective oversight. Without clear regulatory measures or enforcement mechanisms, gambling becomes an easy temptation for students who may not fully understand the long-term consequences of their actions (Calado et al., 2017, p.419). Community leaders argue that addressing this issue requires a multi-faceted approach that includes not only awareness campaigns but also stronger institutional frameworks to monitor and regulate gambling activities. Collaborations between schools, religious organizations, and local authorities are seen as essential to creating a supportive environment where students are shielded from harmful influences and encouraged to prioritize their education. Such measures, coupled with programs promoting positive extracurricular activities, can provide youth with meaningful alternatives to gambling, helping to mitigate its impact on educational outcomes

Approximately 85% of male youth surveyed admitted to engaging in gambling activities regularly, with many spending several hours per day participating in informal betting (such as card games, sports wagers, or dice games among peers) or using mobile betting platforms. This widespread gambling behavior has become a significant concern, as excessive time commitment detracts directly from their academic responsibilities. Teachers and school administrators have observed a troubling trend; a growing number of students are failing to

complete assignments, missing classes, or neglecting to revise for examinations because they prioritize gambling over their studies. The consequences of this behavior are evident in declining academic performance. Many students involved in frequent gambling exhibit lower grades, reduced concentration in class, and higher absenteeism rates.

The study found that around 40% of youth gamblers experienced signs of emotional distress, including sadness, anxiety, and withdrawal from academic and social environments. Repeated gambling losses created feelings of hopelessness and guilt among students, further exacerbating their mental health struggles. Teachers and school counselors reported cases of absenteeism and lack of participation in classroom activities, often linked to the psychological burden caused by financial losses. Many affected students also exhibited behavioral changes, such as irritability, mood swings, and declining peer relationships, as gambling strained their social interactions. Some resorted to borrowing money or even engaging in petty theft to fund their habit, worsening their emotional and social instability. Parents and guardians often remained unaware of the issue until significant academic or behavioral consequences arose.

The data indicated a clear connection between gambling and student absenteeism. School records and interviews showed that students who gamble are three times more likely to miss school regularly than their peers who do not gamble. Teachers from urban schools noted a sharp rise in absenteeism, particularly during days when popular sports matches take place. In several cases, gambling-related truancy resulted in permanent dropout, particularly among male students aged 15–19. This trend not only affects individual learners but also undermines the national goal of increasing secondary school completion rates.

The study found that gambling among youth is strongly reinforced through peer networks. About 65% of student gamblers reported being introduced to betting by friends. Peer encouragement was found to normalize gambling behavior and, in some cases, lead students into other forms of risk, such as petty

theft to fund gambling. These behaviours further distanced youth from academic achievement and increased disciplinary cases in schools.

Despite the nuanced perspectives within the community, there remains a strong consensus on the need for regulation and education to address the risks associated with gambling. Many residents, including those who view gambling in a more favorable light, acknowledge its potential for harm and support efforts to mitigate its impact. Community discussions often emphasize the importance of providing alternatives to gambling, such as affordable recreational activities and economic opportunities that align with the cultural and religious fabric of society. This collective desire for a balanced approach reflects the community's commitment to addressing the challenges posed by gambling while preserving its ethical and social values.

PROPOSED MEASURES TO COMBAT GAMBLING ACTIVITIES IN ZANZIBAR

Gambling in Zanzibar presents a complex challenge that requires comprehensive interventions addressing its religious, economic, and social dimensions. study indicates that effective strategies must combine legal enforcement, community engagement, and economic alternatives to reduce both the supply and demand for gambling activities. This paper proposes evidence-based measures tailored to Zanzibar's unique cultural context, drawing on successful anti-gambling initiatives from similar jurisdictions.

Legal and Regulatory Reforms; Strengthening Zanzibar's legal framework against gambling should be a priority, given the demonstrated effectiveness of prohibition in reducing gambling participation in Muslim-majority regions. Authorities should enhance enforcement of existing bans through regular raids on underground gambling operations and stricter monitoring of financial transactions linked to betting activities (Abbott, 2020, p.44). Particular attention should be paid to digital platforms, as research shows online gambling poses unique regulatory challenges due to its borderless nature. This can be by implement-

ing ISP-level blocking of gambling websites, similar measures adopted in Saudi Arabia, could significantly reduce access (Ingi, 2024).

Religious and Community-Based Interventions: Islamic institutions play a crucial role in shaping attitudes toward gambling, as evidenced by studies showing strong correlations between religious observance and gambling abstinence (Dickson-Gillespie et al., 2008, p.36). The Chief Mufti's Office should issue updated fatwas clarifying gambling's prohibited status in Islam, to be disseminated through mosques and media channels. Mosques and Islamic centres should be well-positioned to serve as sanctuaries for counselling, education, and community support. These spaces may provide a supportive environment where individuals can seek guidance, reflect on their actions, and receive the necessary tools to rebuild their lives in accordance with Islamic teachings. By emphasizing repentance, self-discipline, and personal responsibility, these programs enable individuals to navigate the challenges of recovery while reinforcing their connection to faith and community. Through this process, individuals are empowered to overcome addiction, restore their moral integrity, and contribute positively to the societal fabric of Zanzibar. For instance, Community programs modelled after Singapore's "Gambling-Free Community" under the National Council on Problem Gambling, initiative could mobilize religious leaders, teachers, and recovered addicts to deliver anti-gambling messages (NCPG, 2024). Research from Malaysia demonstrates that peer education programs in schools can reduce youth gambling participation in a great number. (Rathakrishnan B & George S. 2021, p. 32-34).

Economic Alternatives and Social Support; Addressing the economic drivers of gambling requires creating viable alternatives. Microfinance programs could help in reducing reliance on gambling among low-income populations. Zanzibar could adapt these models, combining small business loans with financial literacy training. The establishment of community sports leagues and cultural centres, following the approach used in Australia's "Good Sports" program, provides constructive alternatives to gambling and for those already affected, counselling services based on cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT) have proven effective in treating gambling addiction. (Purdie N, Matters G. et al. 2011, p.37).

Educational and Preventive Measures; School-based prevention programs should be implemented, incorporating lessons from Canada's "Stacked Deck" curriculum which reduced problem gambling among participants by 50% (Der-evensky J. 2011). Teacher training programs should emphasize early identifica-tion of at-risk students, as research shows gambling problems often begin in adolescence (Dickson et al., 2008, p.36). Parental education initiatives could adapt materials from Hong Kong's "Smart Teens" campaign, which successful-ly increased family discussions about gambling risks (The University of Hong Kong. 2023).

Monitoring and Evaluation; Establishing a gambling prevalence survey, like those conducted in the UK, Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, and Australia would enable evidence-based policy adjustments. A dedicated task force should coordinate implementation across sectors, with regular impact assessments. Studies sug-gest such comprehensive approaches can reduce problem gambling rates in any society which focuses on controlling gambling activities.

CONCLUSION

The ethical debate surrounding gambling in Zanzibar encompasses a multifac-eted discussion involving economic, religious, cultural, and social dimensions. On one hand, proponents argue that legalized and regulated gambling could serve as a catalyst for economic growth by attracting tourism, generating tax revenue, and creating employment opportunities. Given Zanzibar's reliance on tourism, casino resorts and regulated betting industries could diversify the economy, providing much needed funds for public infrastructure and social pro-grams. However, this perspective is met with strong opposition on ethical and religious grounds, particularly in a society where Islam as the dominant religion explicitly prohibits gambling (maisir) as haram (forbidden). Beyond religious objections, critics highlight the detrimental social consequences of gambling, including addiction, financial instability for vulnerable populations, and poten-tial increases in crime and corruption.

Online gambling in Zanzibar as other side of coin is rapidly gaining attention as a controversial and complex issue, raising critical questions about its social, religious, and legal implications. While digital platforms make gambling more accessible especially to youth through smartphones the practice clashes with the predominantly Islamic moral framework that strictly prohibits such activities. Families and communities are increasingly witnessing its negative impact, including addiction, financial distress, and academic decline. Despite its growing presence, legal regulations remain weak or poorly enforced, allowing platforms to operate with minimal oversight. This has sparked debates about who truly benefits from online gambling whether its foreign operators profiting at the expense of vulnerable locals or an emerging industry that could be taxed and regulated for public good.

The tension between economic pragmatism and moral responsibility presents a significant policy challenge. While some countries have adopted strict regulatory frameworks to minimize harm, Zanzibar must consider its unique socio-cultural context. A balanced approach could involve stringent regulations, such as limiting gambling to tourist zones, enforcing strict age restrictions, and implementing public awareness campaigns about gambling addiction. Additionally, investing in alternative forms of entertainment and revenue generation such as cultural tourism, sports, and creative industries could reduce reliance on gambling while aligning with Zanzibar's Islamic values.

Ultimately, the ethical justification for gambling in Zanzibar hinges on whether short-term economic gains outweigh long-term social costs. Policymakers must engage with religious leaders, community stakeholders, and public health experts to ensure that any gambling-related policies prioritize societal well-being over commercial interests. A sustainable approach would require transparent governance, robust regulatory oversight, and a commitment to protecting vulnerable populations from exploitation. By addressing these ethical concerns proactively, Zanzibar can navigate this contentious issue in a way that respects its cultural and religious identity while fostering responsible economic development.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Gambling in Zanzibar has become an increasingly critical issue, triggering extensive ethical, religious, and socio-political debate within the local context. As a semi-autonomous part of the United Republic of Tanzania, Zanzibar is a predominantly Muslim society, where Islamic teachings and values heavily influence personal and public life. Within Islamic jurisprudence, gambling is unequivocally prohibited and is considered as a form unethical enrichment that promotes moral decay, undermines spiritual integrity, and fosters social instability. However, despite this clear religious prohibition, various forms of gambling have gained popularity across the islands. This contradiction is particularly evident among young people, many of whom engage in gambling activities despite public religious condemnation. The expansion of both formal and informal gambling, particularly facilitated by mobile technologies and economic marginalization, challenges the effectiveness of traditional moral authority and necessitates a deeper examination of how gambling is understood, practiced, and regulated in Zanzibar.

Islamic religious perspectives on gambling in Zanzibar are grounded in authoritative scriptural text. The Quran provides explicit guidance on this matter, where gambling is identified alongside intoxicants as an abomination devised by Satan to sow discord and distract believers from worship. Religious scholars and imams in Zanzibar have consistently reinforced this stance through sermons, religious instructions, and public commentary. Gambling is often described in moral terms, not only as a personal sin but also socially corrosive activity that weakens community bonds and erodes the moral fabric of society. Religious leaders emphasize that Islam promotes earning wealth through lawful labour and discourages activities that rely on chance, deception, or exploitation.

Despite strong theological opposition, the prevalence of gambling particularly among youth continues to grow. The disconnect between religious teachings

and everyday practices can largely be attributed to broader socio-economic conditions, including rising unemployment, economic insecurity, and lack of opportunities. In urban areas, especially in Stone Town and other population centres, both formal and informal gambling outlets proliferated. Mobile-based gambling applications such as betway, sport pesa, aviator and others have become increasingly accessible, especially to the youth. These platforms often present gambling as entertainment or a financial opportunity, thus rebranding it in terms that are more appealing to a younger demographic. For many young people facing limited prospects, gambling offers the illusion of upward mobility, success, and financial independence. As such, the religious prohibition may lose their practical influence when they are perceived as disconnected from the socio-economic realities experienced by the population.

Zanzibar's legal and regulatory landscape concerning gambling is significantly underdeveloped when compared to mainland Tanzania. While the mainland has a functioning regulatory body (The Gaming Board of Tanzania) that oversees licenses and practices, Zanzibar lacks comprehensive local framework that governs gambling operations. The result is legal vacuum that has allowed gambling to expand largely unchecked. Although there have been isolated efforts by local authorities to shut down illegal operations or respond to community concerns, these actions are inconsistent and lack coordination. This fragmented enforcement regime weakens the credibility of public institutions and undermines the efforts of religious organizations to curb gambling. Furthermore, it raises questions about the alignment of governmental practices with societal values and religious expectations, especially when financial interests or political patronage may be influencing regulatory inaction.

Community perceptions of gambling are varied and shaped by religious affiliation, socio-economic background, and generational experiences. In more conservative and religiously observant communities, gamblers may face social

exclusion, stigma, intervention from family members and elders. Religious institutions are often regarded as moral watchdogs, and their teachings continue to influence public discourse and behavior to some extent. However, in economically distressed or urban environment, gambling may be viewed with greater tolerance, especially when seen as a survival strategy. Many individuals adopt flexible moral interpretations to justify their behaviour, engaging in religious practices while continuing to gamble. This selective moral engagement reflects broader shifts in ethical reasoning within society, where traditional religious norms are increasingly reinterpreted in response to changing socio-economic pressures and cultural influences.

Efforts by religious institutions, civil society organizations, educators to discourage gambling face substantial challenges. The globalized entertainment industry, the widespread use of social media, and the popularity of international sports leagues have contributed to the normalization of gambling among youth. Traditional religious messaging may appear outdated or ineffectual to this demographic, particularly when it does not address the structural causes of economic insecurity and social marginalization. To be more effective, religious and moral education must be integrated with comprehensive socio-economic interventions. These may include entrepreneurship training, access to financial resources, peer mentoring, and the creation of safe recreational spaces for youth. A holistic and community-based approach is essential, one that goes beyond condemnation to offer meaning alternatives that align with both religious values and contemporary challenges.