

The reach of Gambling, its prohibition in Islam and ways to find help

Page | 1 This concept for this paper was inspired by a gambling information session conducted by:

GambleAware Gambling Information Session held on 21 October 21
For more information go to <https://www.gambleaware.nsw.gov.au/>

At the end of the article, I will address the gambling which has made its way to the video games that are played by people young and old. This was a genuinely informative session and as a Muslim community we need to be aware of the vulnerability of our community and our broader society to the allure of gambling in all its forms. We should also be aware of the resources made available to our community to raise awareness and help people who are struggling with gambling.



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Text bubbles include: "Getting support is easy", "He knows the odds - but he's only 11", "I probably bet a bit much", "I don't know how to talk to them about it", "I need to talk to someone", "He's gambling online - should I be worried?", "My culture doesn't allow gambling", "There's gambling in her game?", "I've got this under control", "They say everyone's gambling online these days", "His eyes are always on his app, not the game", "They're betting on sports they know nothing about", "I think I should say something - but what?", "She's spending a lot on loot boxes", "What are the signs it's an issue?", "I think I should say something - but what?", "I know they've been betting more in lockdown", "Does everyone gamble this much?", "It's like a casino in my pocket", "I think I should say something - but what?"

The Islamic Perspective

We find that in the Quran, gambling is mentioned alongside alcohol:

((يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنَّمَا الْخَمْرُ وَالْمَيْسِرُ وَالْأَنْصَابُ وَالْأَزْلَامُ رَجْسٌ مِّنْ عَمَلِ الشَّيْطَانِ فَاجْتَنِبُوهُ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٩٠﴾ إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ الشَّيْطَانُ أَنْ يُوقِعَ بَيْنَكُمُ الْعَدَاوَةَ وَالْبَغْضَاءَ فِي الْخَمْرِ وَالْمَيْسِرِ وَيَصُدَّكُمْ عَنْ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَعَنِ الصَّلَاةِ فَهَلْ أَنْتُمْ مُنْتَهُونَ)) سورة المائدة .91-90

O you who have believed, indeed, intoxicants, gambling, [sacrificing on] stone altars, and divining arrows are but defilement from the work of Satan, so avoid it that you may be successful. Satan's plan is to stir up hostility and hatred between you with intoxicants and gambling and to prevent you from remembering Allah and from prayer. Will you not then abstain? – Al Quran 5:90-91.

Intoxicants and gambling are mentioned together because although they are different vices, they share some heavy consequences. The consequences mentioned are that their practice tends to (among other things) cause enmity and hatred between people and distract them from the remembrance of Allah.

There is also a similarity between gambling and *riba* (usury/interest). They are alike in the sense that a person may feel that their transaction is not unlike a regular, permissible transaction. This is especially true these days where gambling can now be done anywhere and in spaces which are seemingly safe from it. This may be explored further in a future article, but for now I will share a brief measure to help people determine whether a transaction they are a part of would be considered gambling and is therefore not permitted in Islam:

- Does the money/product/in-game item you want to acquire only have a % chance of being attained?
- Is there a winner and a loser in the transaction (meaning one of the parties does not get what they want)?

If the answer to either of these questions is yes, then in all likelihood you are engaging in gambling.

Who is GambleAware?¹

GambleAware is an organisation that raises awareness about the impact of gambling on individuals and the people close to them and provides counselling treatment. The service coverage extends to 10 regions, which predominantly align with the local health districts. The University of Sydney is the source provider and there are currently 2 service providers:

- Catholic Care Sydney
- Wesley Mission

GambleAware services are free to members of the community. They are funded by the Office of Responsible Gambling. Their service offering includes:

- Counselling
- Self-help
- Therapy

GambleAware emphasized their desire to have strong links across segments of the community. Their community engagement strategy includes:

1. Effective service coverage
2. Having a dedicated community engagement officer
3. Leveraging new technology and communication strategies to link community organisations across the region to increase referrals.
4. Integration with the GambleAware Statewide Aboriginal Service and the GambleAware

¹ The information in the rest of the article was adapted from the session conducted by GambleAware.

5. Statewide Multicultural Service

GambleAware Treatment and Support Services

Page | 3

- Free and confidential face to face, online, and phone counselling
- Psychological treatment for gambling and counselling for partners and family.
- Financial counselling
- Support for self-exclusion (where the individual takes measures to have him or herself banned) from clubs, hotels and casinos.
- Outreach works to groups such as ATSI, CALD, and prison populations.
- Education and self-help resources.

Multiple entry points: The organisation has a “no wrong door” policy, meaning there are several ways you can access support, including:

- Contacting a financial counsellor directly
- Contacting a service within the GambleAware program
- Connecting with a Community Engagement Officer
- Phoning the intake line
- Contacting a gambling counsellor directly

Warm referrals (doing the referral together) from stakeholders are advised as opposed to cold referrals (giving them a phone number and telling them to call). This can be done by a family member, counsellor, or any other stakeholder.

One of the early stages of support includes identifying gambling support needs and other needs by conducting a thorough needs assessment. Part of the needs assessment includes a gambling effects measure. The measure classifies harms into seven domains. The domains are designed to reflect conceptually distinct, but likely related areas in which harms can be experienced due to gambling behaviour. Questions concern different areas of a client’s life which may have been affected by gambling.

If the client is able to more clearly identify other needs for support, GambleAware has the resources to switch and provide the other help first.

Gambling Harm Indicators

Consider:

- Types of gambling
- Frequency
- Amount of money spent (relative to income)
- Spending more money and time than intended
- Chasing losses, chasing wins
- Hiding or lying about gambling
- Failed attempts to stop on their own

Impacts of gambling on other areas

- Debt or other financial problems
- Mental health (stress, anxiety, depression, suicidal thoughts)
- Relationship problems, impacts on family
- Impacts on work (eg. Difficulties focusing) and everyday functioning (eg. Social withdrawal).
- Physical health (due to disrupted sleep, poor diet, high stress, self-neglect)
- Legal issues

The Psychological model which has been accepted for use in this space is the CBT (cognitive behaviour therapy) treatment model, and includes:

- Psychoeducation: to help the client understand the cycle of gambling
- Identifying and correcting incorrect beliefs about gambling
- Identifying and managing high-risk situations for gambling
- Building a meaningful life without gambling

How gambling problems develop and are maintained

- Positive first impressions of gambling
- Before and during a gambling session they have hopes for a positive outcome
- Short term thinking
- (misinformed) theory of winning
- Highlighting wins, forgetting losses

Counselling for affected others

For every problem gambler there are 6 people around them who are affected. Partners and family members can seek support from GambleAware for:

- Information about gambling and gambling treatment
- Guidance for how to start a conversation about gambling and encourage their loved ones to seek professional help.
- Relationship difficulties (eg trust, communication, boundaries).
- Whether or not to provide financial assistance
- Protecting themselves from the impacts of gambling (eg financial, legal)
- Support for their own mental health (eg stress, anxiety, depression).

Screening for Gambling

It is important to ask about gambling in a way that is compassionate, and non-judgmental and allows space for the client to reflect on their gambling and the impacts on their life. Avoid questions such as: do you have problems with gambling?

Raising the issue should be an explorative process.

Questions that may be asked during the mental health assessment or lifestyle assessment:

- Do you gamble?
- Can you tell me more about it? (open ended)
- What type of gambling do you engage with?
- How often?

- How much money do you spend? (in a week/month)
- Have there been times where you've spent more money than you've intended?
- Does it have an impact on other areas of your life? (e.g. finances, relationships, mental wellbeing, work)

Provide Psychoeducation about gambling

Let clients know that:

1. Gambling related concerns are common
2. Gambling can start to become a concern when a person spends more money than intended (in Islam, all gambling is prohibited as explained earlier in this article).
3. Gambling can lead to issues including finances, mental health (e.g. anxiety and depression symptoms), relationships, physical health and work
4. There are a variety of effective, confidential and free support services available that can help them to reduce or stop gambling

Gambling Permeating Other Areas of our Lives

We had an opportunity to raise questions at the end of the session. I thought it important to ask about some of the newer gambling trends which have entered our lives, specifically, in the video game space. The prevalence of randomized item packs in video games which are purchased with real money and the money I've seen people spend is quite concerning. What adds to the concern is that unlike a casino for instance where there is a minimum age for entry and that you have to leave your home to engage in it, we have people young and old who are being drawn into this trend. What further adds to this problem is that many people don't immediately identify this as gambling and as such are more susceptible. I asked if GambleAware did any work in this area. The host, Sophia, informed us that it is considered one of the emerging forms of gambling and they do provide support for people who have a problem with this form of gambling.

I think that due to our community's susceptibility to this emerging form of gambling embedded into certain video games (see issues raised on page 2) it is a matter that is deserving of attention and concerted efforts to raise awareness of the issue.

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