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**ADOLESCENT GAMBLING IN NEW ZEALAND:
AN EXPLORATION OF PROTECTIVE AND RISK
FACTORS**

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**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Behavioural Science,
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ABSTRACT

Despite a growing appreciation in New Zealand of the harms arising from gambling, there remains a lack of knowledge and awareness of the dangers associated with participation in gambling by young people. Although international research has demonstrated that young people are a high-risk group with regard to problem gambling, research in New Zealand has only investigated the gambling behaviour of those aged 18 and over.

This thesis explores a topic that has been largely neglected within New Zealand: the relevance of gambling and problem gambling for New Zealand adolescents. A questionnaire consisting of both standardised and non-standardised items, was administered to a random sample of more than 2000 secondary school students in the Upper North Island. The role of gambling in adolescent life, the prevalence of adolescent problem gambling, and associated risk factors were investigated. This research also adopted a largely unique perspective within the youth gambling field, extending investigations to include the role of protective factors, particularly social connectedness. This investigation of protective factors supports strengths-based approaches to youth behavioural issues, with the potential to aid in the prevention or minimisation of harm, as opposed to approaches that focus upon responding to problems, as is encouraged by dysfunction-based models.

This research demonstrates that gambling is part of youth culture in New Zealand. It provides the first body of data detailing the practices, beliefs, and other factors associated with adolescent gambling behaviour within New Zealand. The findings indicate that choices around gambling are strongly influenced by contextual factors and that young New

Zealander's participate in a wide variety of gambling modes. While most gamble safely, approximately four percent were observed to satisfy the problem gambling criteria. Social connectedness was strongly correlated to problem gambling behaviour and the research points towards the investigation of protective factors, resiliency, and strengths-based strategies in the future. The continuing exploration of common denominators between gambling and other dangerous consumptions also offer promising avenues for future research within the gambling field.

This research demonstrates that youth gambling is an issue requiring the attention of families, communities, schools, researchers, government departments, and members of the gambling industries.

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