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A Culture of Poverty : Explaining the Increasing Propensity to Gamble in New Zealand

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ABSTRACT

This thesis presents a carefully crafted explanation of why gambling *per se* is perceived by growing numbers of New Zealanders as the only means to wealth and happiness, a legitimate alternative to fulfil a dream that cannot be fulfilled elsewhere. The thesis puts forward the notion that the dramatic growth in gambling since 1980 has been a consequence of a phenomenon known as a 'Culture of Poverty'. That is the combined social, economic and political impact of sustained declines in social, economic and political organisation; sustained levels of high unemployment; persistently declining wages and salaries and importantly dramatic increases in individual apathy and sense of hopelessness.

Demonstrated is the existence of a temporal relationship between the penetration of a culture of poverty and increasing gambling propensities. The results of a rigorous analysis of three gambling attitude and behaviour surveys carried out in 1985, 1990 and 1995 (chapter 5), show that by 1990 it was people earning around \$30,000 (the low end of the middle-income sector) who were increasingly contributing to the gambling coffers. By 1995 those earning between \$35,000 and \$40,000 (the middle of the middle-income sector) had taken over the role of fuelling the continued growth in gambling revenues. Between 1990 and 1995 low-income earners failed to contribute to the growth of gambling as they did between 1985 and 1990 whilst a culture of poverty continued to penetrate which suggests a degree of gambling saturation had occurred within this sector.

A case has also been made that gambling revenue increases will continue unabated as the 'Culture of Poverty' phenomenon continues to penetrate further into the middle-income sector. That is gambling growth will come from those individuals at the upper end of the middle-income sector, individuals that are just beginning to feel the sustained impact of a culture of poverty, and who will increasingly perceive gambling as the only way out of their declining situation.

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