WHO ARE ABUSING OUR CHILDREN?

An exploratory study on reflections on child abuse by media commentators

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Social Work
at
Massey University, Albany,
New Zealand

by

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August 2010
Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION ................................................................. 1
  1.1 Background..............................................................................................1
  1.2 Research questions ..................................................................................2
  1.3 Thesis organisation ..................................................................................3
  1.4 The scope of this study ............................................................................3
  1.5 Definitions and conceptual issues ............................................................4
  1.6 Conclusion ..............................................................................................6

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW .................................................. 7
  2.1 Introduction ..............................................................................................7
  2.2 Historical context .....................................................................................7
  2.3 Newspaper media ....................................................................................8
  2.4 Role of the Media ....................................................................................10
  2.5 Child abuse in relation to the media coverage ........................................12
    2.5.1 Crime reporting ...................................................................................12
    2.5.2 Perceptions of child abuse as represented in the media ......................14
    2.5.3 Do the media reflect or affect the world? ............................................15
    2.5.4 Effects of newspaper coverage of child abuse ....................................16
    2.5.5 Are there racial or racist assumptions made by newspaper media? ......17
    2.5.6 Media coverage of Māori issues .........................................................19
    2.5.7 The “warrior” gene .............................................................................22
    2.5.8 Alternative responses to media coverage of physical child abuse ......23
2.5.9 The role of professionals in media coverage of child abuse .............................24
2.6 Conclusion .........................................................................................................25

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY ___________________________________________ 27

3.1 Introduction .......................................................................................................27
3.2 Epistemology and theoretical paradigms ...........................................................27
3.3 Methodologies ...................................................................................................30
   i) Newspaper articles 30
   ii) Interviews 36
   iii) Statistical data 39
3.4 Ethical issues .....................................................................................................41
3.5 Conclusion .........................................................................................................41

CHAPTER FOUR: THE FINDINGS FROM THE NEWSPAPERS 2000-2007 _____ 42

4.1 Newspaper Data ..................................................................................................42
4.2 Distribution of articles .......................................................................................42
4.3 Content of articles ..............................................................................................45
   i) Type of article 45
   ii) News Angles 46
4.4 What children are mentioned in the newspapers? .............................................48
   i) Newspaper coverage 48
   ii) Demographics of children mentioned in media 51
   iii) Ethnicity 51
   iv) Age and Gender 53
   v) Relationship of perpetrator to child 54
   vi) Outcome of the physical abuse 55

CHAPTER FIVE: THE VOICES OF THE WRITERS ______________________ 56

5.1 Introduction .......................................................................................................56
5.2 Why did you write about child abuse? ..............................................................57

5.3 What influences your writing? What informs you? .........................................58
   i) Personal interests 59
   ii) Current events 59
   iii) Public issues and campaigns 60
   iv) Professional issues about child abuse 61
   v) Public demand 63

5.4 What type of writing do you do? .....................................................................64

5.5 What is the role of a journalist? .....................................................................67

5.6 Who is your audience? .................................................................................68

5.7 What do you believe that your readers want/ expect/ like? ...............................69

5.8 Who/what decides content of what you write? ...............................................71

5.9 What other sources of information do you access? Why? ...............................74

5.10 How much of yourself do you put into your writing? ....................................75

CHAPTER SIX: PERCEPTIONS OF THE WRITERS ABOUT PHYSICAL ABUSE ____ 79

6.11 What are your perceptions of perpetrators of physical abuse of children? ......79

6.2 Who are the abusers? .....................................................................................80
   i) Socio-economic factors 80
   ii) Drugs and alcohol: 81
   iii) Ethnicity of abusers: 82
   iv) Family: 90

6.3 Did anything change your views having written this article? Do you write differently now? .................................................................93

CHAPTER SEVEN: FINDINGS FROM KNOWN STATISTICAL DATA IN NEW ZEALAND 2000-2007 ............................................................95

7.1 Introduction ....................................................................................................95

7.2 Child homicides and infanticide. .................................................................95

   iii
7.3 Substantiated physical abuse or serious assault requiring hospitalisation

- i) Age Distribution
- ii) Gender
- iii) Ethnicity

7.4 Convicted offenders of homicide or serious assault on children less than 14 years

- i) Adults convicted of physical assaults on children under fourteen years
- ii) Murders of children
- iii) Gender of perpetrators
- iv) Ethnicity of perpetrators
- v) Method of assault
- vi) Sentencing outcomes

CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

8.1 Introduction

8.2 Part one: Newspaper content

- i) What or who influences what is written about child abuse?
- ii) Peaks and troughs of reporting
- iii) Topics and news angles
- iv) Why do a few children get most of the publicity?

8.3 Part two: Relationship between official data and newspaper data- what does it mean?

- i) The subjective versus objective debate
- ii) Which demographics are important?
- iii) Public perception of physical child abuse

8.4 Part three –Bringing it together, making sense of the meanings
i) To what extent does media representation of physical child abuse reflect or represent racial or racist assumptions about the causes and incidence of child abuse?

8.5 Summary and Conclusions ................................................................. 126
8.6 Potential significance of the study ...................................................... 127
8.7 Limitations of the study ................................................................. 127
8.8 Future research opportunities .......................................................... 128

BIBLIOGRAPHY ........................................................................... 129

APPENDIX I: LETTERS TO PARTICIPANTS ...................................... 133

APPENDIX II: ETHICS APPROVAL .................................................. 137

APPENDIX III: DATA FROM CYFS ...................................................... 138

APPENDIX IV: DATA FROM IPRU ...................................................... 140

APPENDIX V WOMEN’S AFFAIRS DATA ........................................... 143

APPENDIX VI: NZ POLICE STATISTICS .............................................. 145

APPENDIX VII: DEMOGRAPHICS OF CHILDREN IN THE MEDIA .......... 147

APPENDIX VIII: NEWSPAPERS ...................................................... see enclosed CD
Abstract

This research explores what has been published in the print media on the topic of physical child abuse over an eight year period of time. The study encompasses news reports, feature articles, opinion columns and editorials written on the issue of physical child abuse in New Zealand from 2000 to 2007. Using inductive and exploratory research, qualitative data has been collected by capturing the voices from a range of media commentators and comparing these with data from newspaper articles and other sources of statistical data obtained from a statutory child protection agency, hospitals and police.

The research looks at how physical child abuse is represented in the newspaper media and explores whether there are accuracies or deficiencies in this reporting that may impact on public perceptions of child abuse. In particular, the study explores whether what is being written in the newspaper is objective or whether there is an in-built ethnic or social bias in the reporting of child abuse.

The findings of the three parts of the study are integrated and it is determined that there is a disproportionate reporting of child abuse based on a) the ethnicity of the child or perpetrator, b) the seriousness of the abuse, and c) the sensationalist nature of the incident of child abuse. Another significant finding is that media reflects and reinforces common views and perceptions of physical child abuse and that the public are exposed to only the “tip of the iceberg” in terms of accurate and balanced reporting.

The report concludes with a discussion about whether the media affects or reflects the worldview of physical child abuse. A symbiotic model is proposed which uses voices from the writers themselves to support the argument that there is a bi-directional relationship between the media and the public.
List of Tables

Table 3.1 Database Categories used to record newspaper articles: ..................................................... 33
Table 3.2 Sources of Data ........................................................................................................................ 40
Table 4.1 Time each case was in the media spotlight ............................................................................ 50
Table 5-1 Demographics of Participants ................................................................................................ 56
Table 5-2 Participant Ideas ..................................................................................................................... 70
Table 8.1 Headlines From the Media...................................................................................................... 120
List of figures

Figure 2.1  Model of the Media ............................................................................................................. 16
Figure 4.1  Articles on physical abuse per year 2000-2007 ............................................................... 42
Figure 4.2  Articles written in each newspaper studied 2000-2007 .................................................... 43
Figure 4.3  Number of physical abuse cases in news each month 2000-2007 ................................. 44
Figure 4.4  Distribution of articles on physical abuse according to type ............................................ 45
Figure 4.5  Primary angles in the newspapers studied ........................................................................ 47
Figure 4.6  Subordinate angles in the newspapers studied ................................................................. 47
Figure 4.7  Number of articles written per child ............................................................................... 49
Figure 4.8  Media Coverage by Ethnicity of Victims ......................................................................... 52
Figure 4.10 Media Coverage by Age .................................................................................................. 53
Figure 4.11 Media Coverage by Gender ............................................................................................ 53
Figure 4.12 Relationship of Perpetrator and Victim .......................................................................... 54
Figure 4.13 Outcome of the Assault .................................................................................................. 55
Figure 7.1 Mortality by ages of victims 2000-2005 .......................................................................... 96
Figure 7.2 Total numbers of victims by age groups (Data for 2000-2007) ......................................... 97
Figure 7.3 Victim Mortalities by gender each year 2000-2005 .......................................................... 97
Figure 7.4 Deaths of Victims 2000-2005 by Ethnicity .................................................................... 98
Figure 7.5 Ethnicity of Child Victims 2000-2007 ............................................................................ 99
Figure 7.6 Deaths of Child Victims 2000-2005 by Ethnicity ............................................................. 99
Figure 7.7 Numbers of Physical Abuse Victims by Age 2004-2007 ............................................... 101
Figure 7.8 Distributions of Ages of Victims Per Year ........................................................................ 101
Figure 7.9 Numbers of Physical Abuse Cases Per Year by Gender .................................................. 102
Figure 7.10 Hospitalised Victims by Gender 2000-2007 ................................................................ 103
Figure 7.11 Hospital Discharge Statistics by Ethnicities 2000-2007 ................................................ 103
Figure 7.12 Hospital Discharge Figures on Victims's Ethnicities 2000-2007 ...................................... 104
Figure 7.13 Ethnicities of Child Victims 2004-2007 .............................................................. 104
Figure 7.14 Assaults on Child Victims Under 14 Years of Age 2000-2007 ....................................... 106
Figure 7.15 Numbers Murdered in Family Violence Incidents 2000-2004 .................................... 106
Figure 7.16 Gender of Convicted Assault Offenders 2000-2007 ...................................................... 107
Figure 7.17 Gender of Adults who murdered Children 2000-2004 .................................................. 107
Figure 7.18 Ethnicity of Convicted Offenders of Child Assault of 2000-2007 ............................. 108
Figure 7.19 Modes of Assault on Child Victims 2000-2007 .............................................................. 108
Figure 8.1 The logic flow of the discussion ..................................................................................... 111
Figure 8.2 A Proposed Model of Awareness in Physical Child Abuse .............................................. 118
Figure 8.3 Ethnicity imbalances between media and official statistics .......................................... 120
Figure 8.4 The proposed model of symbiosis between the media and public .................................. 124
Acknowledgements

This thesis has been an interesting journey and I could not have achieved it without the help and support of many people. Firstly, I would like to thank the journalists and media commentators who willingly gave their time and shared their experiences with me. Child abuse can be a difficult and emotionally demanding topic to write about, and I admire the honesty and integrity shown in the interviews.

To my supervisors, Dr Mike O’Brien and Dr Fiona Te Momo, thank you for your support and academic guidance in this venture, and for your flexibility and understanding when a final thesis seemed less than likely.

I am indebted to the never-ending support of my children, their men-folk, my sisters and my colleagues who have been with me steadfastly throughout the times when the end of the tunnel seemed a long way off, and more recently, with proof-reading, helpful critique and coffee.

Most importantly, I wish to acknowledge my husband Ray, and Lauren, Philippa, Erin, Ngaire and Anna who believed in me from the beginning. Ray, nothing would have been achieved without your total support, understanding, love, and hours and hours of being a patient listener to my ideas as I worked.

Finally, as I have been on this journey, I have become aware of the need for all people to work together to address the horror of child abuse in this country, and to this end, I hope that this study can be used somehow to help achieve this.

Naku te rourou nau te rourou ka ora ai nga tāmariki – with your basket and my basket, the children will live.