

WHO ARE ABUSING OUR CHILDREN?

An exploratory study on reflections on child abuse by media commentators

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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.

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