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**MORE THAN A DEATH: Dangerous dynamics and their impact
on social work practice at the Children Young Persons and their
Families Agency.**

A thesis presented in partial
fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree
of **Master of Social Work** at
Massey University

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For Dane
1981 – 1994

Abstract

Child deaths are a tragic and sadly, all too familiar occurrence for child protection services both in New Zealand and abroad. It is the authors view that, to date, the response provided in the wake of such tragedies has been to review cases with a view to ascertaining the degree of fault or blameworthiness apparent in the manner in which the child protection service managing the case, acted. Having determined this, action is then taken to alter systems and procedures with a view to preventing future deaths. While the result of this is at times successful in rectifying elements of process or systems failure, this kind of response does not take into account the impact that a range of dangerous dynamics may have had leading up to and at the time the child died.

This research takes a fresh look at five cases known to the Children Young Persons and their Families Agency where children on the caseloads of Social Workers died from non-accidental injury. A range of dangerous dynamics are identified and defined. These are then applied to each of the sample cases with a view to determining whether or not they were apparent leading up to and at the time the children died. Conclusions are drawn on the basis of the findings and recommendations are made with respect to future management of cases where dangerous dynamics exist in the relationships Social Workers have with families with which they are working.

The purpose of this research is twofold. The author's primary intention is to contribute significantly to the body of knowledge that exists with respect to understanding child deaths and the role Social Workers have in relation to such tragedies. In addition, it is intended that the findings of this research will contribute to the prevention of future deaths of children on the caseloads of child protection workers.

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Glossary of terms

Case – For the purposes of this research 'case' will be used to refer to all persons involved in the events surrounding each child. It is in no way designed to have a depersonalising effect but is used as a means of capturing detail regarding each situation as a whole.

CFC – Commissioner for Children

CYP&F Act 1989 – The Children Young Persons and their Families Act 1989

CYPFA – Children Young Persons and their Families Agency

CYPFis – Children Young Persons and their Families information system.

CYPFS – Children Young Persons and their Families Service

FGC – Family Group Conference

KPI – Key Performance Indicator

MRES – Manitoba Risk Estimation System

NSPCC – National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

NZCYPFS – New Zealand Children Young Persons and their Families Service

OLE – 'On Line Inquiry' (computerised recording system).

PQA – Professional Quality Assurance

QPI – Quality Performance Indicator

RES – Risk Estimation System

SES – Special Education Service

SWis – Social Work information system