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**A Research on Processes Used to Address  
the Physical and Sexual Abuse of  
Children in Samoa.**

*This thesis is presented in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree in Masters in Social Policy.*

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## **Abstract**

This thesis looks at traditional and statutory processes that were used to address child physical and sexual abuse in communities in Samoa. The study involved interviews with individuals from government departments, independent agencies, and groups from six villages. The methods included the review of case files of convicted cases, and legislation relevant to the abuse of children.

The findings of the study indicate that child 'rights' is an issue that was perceived by participants beyond the wellbeing of the individual child. Children's rights were perceived by participants to have potential risks to collective existence and the preservation of Samoan traditional culture. Fundamental to the issue of rights was the conflict between local and state constitutions. The study found that rights were based on the country's constitution, were difficult to enforce in local communities where their own constitutions took precedent, based on customary rights and traditional social structures.

The study provides some insights into traditional practices, societal structures, beliefs, values, and elements within statutory processes that make children vulnerable to abuse. The lack of clarity between the responsibilities of customary and state authorities sometimes made it unclear who was ultimately responsible for addressing crimes against children. The study pointed to the need for legislated protocols and a shared constitution between local customary and state authorities, in order to adequately address abuse.

The thesis has implications for the social service sector, including judiciary processes. The thesis advocates for processes of 'justice' to make the safety and healing of children the priority, not the implementation of mechanisms.

**This work is dedicated to my parents Taulauniu Sumeo nee Sa'alea from Fusi Safata, and Siaso Fa'aitamai Sumeo, from Lalomanu, Aleipata.**

Ou te faatalofa ma ou faatulou atu i paia ma mamalu o Samoa. E leai so'u tomai ou te tautala ai i alagaupu matagofie a lo tatou gagana e talafeagai ma o outou paia ma mamalu, o lea ou the faamalulu atu ai. O paia o Samoa e tumau pea e oo mai le faavavau. O lenei taumafaiga na faataunuuina ma le autu tumua, o le manuia lea o fanau a Samoa. Ou te faamalie atu ona o se galuega ua lē atoatoa. Afai e a'afia se finagalo o se tasi i ni fa'amaumauga o loo saisaitia i totonu o lenei tusi, ou te talosaga atu ia fa'amagalo mai lenei auauna. Pau lenei o le faamoemoe, ia o'o mai se aso ona maua lea o se aoga o lenei taumafaiga, auā le atina'eina o fanau ma aiga o Samoa.

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## **PART I**

### **Definitions, Context, History and Literature.**

Part I contains six chapters that outline the topic, provide a background to physical and sexual abuse, research context, methodology and participant issues. This part provides the theoretical knowledge base for the study. Part I is structured as follows:

Chapter One – Introduction and the thesis structure

Chapter Two – Research context

Chapter Three – Child abuse in Samoa

Chapter Four – Why do people abuse children?

Chapter Five – Responses

Chapter Six – Methodology and methods