Hidden stories: Exploring teachers' experiences of family violence response and inter-agency collaboration in schools

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Susan Neilson-Dyer, 2025

Abstract

The introduction of the Family Violence Act (2018) marked a significant shift in legislative guidance for information-sharing and inter-agency collaboration, for the first time, naming schools as social agencies taking an active, collaborative role in family violence response, opening spaces to privilege the knowledge of teachers, positioning them as valuable stakeholders in inter-agency working. The current research aimed to explore teachers experiences of family violence response and collaborative opportunities through listening to the lived experiences of six primary school teachers who worked prior to and since the introduction of the Family Violence Act (2018), analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. The identified themes of Spaces and Islands, Doing What is Right and Best, and Travelling with the Trauma revealed the isolation, institutional and professional limitations, and pain teachers experience when supporting children who have experienced family violence in their classroom due to a lack of information-sharing capabilities and collaborative interagency networks of support that persist despite the potentials the Family Violence Act (2018). The adaptive and creative strategies teachers employ to protect and support their students was also acknowledged, where they do what they can with heart and with passion within the limitations and constraints they face, at times placing themselves at risk to protect their students. The findings from this study highlight the commitment of teachers to student wellbeing, and the under-utilised, detailed student knowledge they can contribute to inter-agency family violence response measures in Aotearoa. Systemic change is required to recognise teachers and schools as valuable stakeholders in inter-agency networks of family violence response, and to mobilise their expert knowledge and experience to better support and protect children experiencing family violence in our communities. As the first research study in Aotearoa New Zealand to explore teachers' lived experiences of family violence response, it is recommended that further study of teachers' lived experience is required to continue contributing to our collective knowledge of inter-agency family violence response.

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Chapter 1: Literature Review

My interest in family violence responses, and the potentials and constraints of those responses in educational settings, emerged from personal experience as a primary school teacher in Scotland and Aotearoa New Zealand. Early in my career, I encountered a young girl, Lily[1], new to the school, who acted differently to the other children in the class. She was inattentive, had great difficulty following instructions, and often acted like a much younger child. Most noticeably, and concerningly, was her tendency to become 'unreachable' in one-to-one conversations. When asked a direct question, or challenged in any way, Lily would turn her face away, and tell stories of unicorns and princesses. After initial reports were made to senior management, Lily's behaviours prompted concerns about global learning difficulties. Her assessments returned no obvious cognitive problems, and focus turned to the possibility of physical or emotional conditions. Her parents could not shed light on her situation, but they attended a play therapy session to try and find out the cause of Lily's unusual behaviour. In her first session, Lily revealed, through play, that she had been sexually abused by a family member, possibly for several years. The disappearance into fantasies was disassociation; a coping mechanism Lily had adopted to remove herself from the trauma she was experiencing.

Over the next 5 years, I taught no fewer than ten children who had experienced family and sexual violence. Jack, I remember so clearly, was found by police, sitting with his grievously wounded mother, after his father had attempted to murder her. Jack would always sit in class with his back to the wall, watching the doors and windows. He struggled to

[1] The names used are not the real names of the children. Pseudonyms have been used to protect the identity and privacy of the children affected.

manage the unpredictability and noise of a classroom environment, and could be clingy with teachers and other adults. Another boy, Liam, was so affected by his frightening home situation that he directed violence towards his classmates, and eventually towards staff, up-turning tables and ultimately being excluded from school and charged with assault. He was only 10 years old.

I did not know any of the violence they were experiencing in their homes when I was teaching those children. I received all of that context later, and often in fragments from educational psychologists or the social worker managing a child's foster care. Every one of those children displayed concerning signs that in isolation made little sense, and, as a teacher with no training in family violence, I could not identify what was happening for them. I raised my suspicions, and wrote reports, and kept working with them, but I did not receive updates and I could not request more information about their situations due to confidentiality constraints. These experiences stayed with me and I often wondered about how I might have supported those children better, had I known more about their home-lives at the time.

When Aotearoa New Zealand's Family Violence Act (FVA) (2018) was legislated in 2019, the scope for teachers to knowledgeably and actively provide support for their students who may be experiencing family violence became a real possibility. The Act extends agencies' power for interagency collaboration and information-sharing, and the listed agencies recognised in the Act as 'social agencies' who can collaborate are extensive. For the first time, the Ministry of Education, schools, and teachers are included in the list of those able to share and receive information in collaborative responses to family harm. To me, the possibilities this Act potentially enabled for building supportive frameworks for vulnerable children from frontline community hubs, such as schools, was exciting and aspirational.

Reflecting on my own experiences of frustration and sadness when I was unable to provide that support through lack of information sharing, the FVA (2018) appeared to be a significant progression in Aotearoa New Zealand's approach to preventing and responding to family violence, and one that offered schools a systematised process for gaining greater insight and knowledge about their most vulnerable students.

Knowing that classroom teachers engage with children more often than any other service, and those teacher-student relationships are built on trust and nurture, I was curious to understand how teachers were experiencing changes in the FVA (2018) on the ground. I wanted to know more about how those changes had improved schools' ability to provide care and support to students experiencing family violence. Naming schools and teachers as social agencies in the FVA (2018) demonstrates some recognition of the unique insight and background knowledge of students they hold, and the protective influence a supportive teacher-student relationship may have. The current study aimed to explore teachers' experiences of responding to children who are experiencing family violence in light of recent legislative changes that have increased teachers' opportunities for collaboration and information-sharing; gaining unique insight into how teachers create and maintain collaborative, inter-agency relationships in order to support student welfare.

In order to understand the possibilities and potentials that the FVA (2018) opens up for teachers responding to children experiencing family harm in their classrooms, I first begin, in this chapter, with an exploration of the complexities of family violence in Aotearoa New Zealand, examining past and current government-level responses, and exploring the complexities of collaborative working, while questioning how teachers' unique contribution as educators can best be harnessed and enabled through inter-agency partnerships. Currently,

there is no research attending to Aotearoa New Zealand teachers' experiences of family violence responses in schools, despite teachers' potentiality to recognise signs that children require additional support, which leads me to consider international studies as a starting-point for understanding school responses and concerns. International inter-agency and government collaborative policies are also included as signposts for possibilities in Aotearoa's own responses.

The Gendered Nature of Family Violence

Aotearoa New Zealand's family violence statistics highlight a grim social epidemic, accounting for 50% of annual reported homicides and violent crime (New Zealand Government, 2023). Statistics reveal that females are twice as likely as men to be victims of family violence (New Zealand Government, 2023) and, in 2020, 98% of intimate partner violence deaths were female victims of male-perpetrated violence (NZ Family Violence Clearinghouse, 2023). Across a lifetime, 55.8% of Aotearoa New Zealand women report experiences of family violence, and ethnic-specific statistics of family violence prevalence showed that Māori women are disproportionately represented, with 64.6% of Māori women reporting experience of physical, sexual, psychological, and emotional abuse from a male partner or family-member across a lifetime (Fanslow et al., 2023). In 2023, there were 177,452 family violence investigations by New Zealand Police, and 71,616 reports of concern made to Oranga Tamariki | Ministry for Children (New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse, 2023).

Since the mid-1970s, female advocates have fought for gender equality as a means to prevent violence in the home, insisting that family violence is "both a cause and a consequence of inequality" (Lombard & Whiting, 2015, p.156). Gendered violence emerges

from gender inequalities fundamentally embedded in westernised, neoliberal societies, where men's dominance places women in a dependent and subordinate position. Circumstances of family violence are inextricably linked with inequality within the home and from wider systems, which allow violence to continue. Systemic structures which uphold neoliberal patriarchal practices (Tolmie et al., 2024) produce gendered expectations and normative assumptions of man-woman relationship dynamics, which dismiss, condone and conceal men's violence against women and children (Gavey et al., 2021). Family violence encroaches on all aspects of a victims' lives, isolating women from help and support, and removing their right to security. Women enduring violence are often judged for remaining in a violent relationship, despite the evidence that suggests they are at highest risk when they try to leave, with three quarters of family violence homicides occurring at or after the time of attempted separation (Wilson et al., 2019). Furthermore, women may also fear the responses and reactions from support agencies, who may have responded poorly in the past. For instance, women can also be constructed as complicit in the violence enacted on them when their responses to men's violence are not recognised as resistance and self-defence (Herbert & Mackenzie, 2014).

Family violence is perpetrated with the sole purpose of routinely controlling and undermining another person (Tolmie et al., 2024), the highly gendered nature of family violence places women and girls at greater risk of victimisation by men through coercive control, sexual assault, and emotional or psychological harm (Wilson et al., 2019; Stark, 2007. The cumulative effect of patterns of control in family violence is captured in the growing understanding of coercive control (Stark, 2007). Coercive control attends to the patterns of psychological and emotional abuse men use to establish their control over their partners, such as physical or threatened violence and manipulation. The relentlessly all-

encompassing nature of coercive control ultimately undermines women's autonomy, shrinking her world, and reducing her ability to act or escape (Tolmie et al., 2024). Women have described escalation in men's violence when men perceive their control over women is weakening, and where control and manipulation are played out through physical and sexual violence, creating a terrifying system of fear (Wilson et al., 2019). The insidious nature of family violence in the form of coercive control, undermines a victim's personhood (Herbert & Mackenzie, 2014) to such a degree, that it becomes impossible to reach out for help, fearing that she will not be believed.

Violence Against Children

When turning attention to children's experiences of family violence in Aotearoa New Zealand, national statistics paint a stark picture. In the period between 2017-2023, statistics show a 49% rise in family violence reports made to police and Oranga Tamariki (NZFVC, 2023). Oranga Tamariki also revealed rising numbers of child harm concern and notifications, where 7% of children in Aotearoa New Zealand were experiencing family violence in their homes (Oranga Tamariki, 2022). 1 in 5 Aotearoa New Zealand children have endured sexual abuse, and one child dies of intentional injuries every five weeks (New Zealand Family Clearinghouse, 2017). Two thirds of those fatalities are children under 2 years old, and 71% percent of perpetrators in those circumstances are parents or partners of parents (New Zealand Family Clearinghouse, 2024). Aotearoa New Zealand is ranked 7th highest of 35 countries on the *UNICEF Innocenti Report* for child homicide rates (UNICEF, 2020) with an average of ten child abuse fatalities annually.

These statistics are confronting and harrowing, yet it is estimated that they represent only one third of the children and young people who are enduring violence in their homes,

with Police estimating that approximately two thirds of family violence incidences go unreported (NZ Police, 2021). Statistical evidence relating to Aotearoa New Zealand's family violence problem is limited, due the reliance on police, criminal justice, Oranga Tamariki, or refuge sources that cannot account for the women and their children who have the financial resources, or secure support networks to avoid attention from formal reporting and. Those children who are vulnerable but not yet recognised in formal system responses, can remain unseen and unsupported, due to single-access routes to family violence welfare support, through official reporting pathways to police or Oranga Tamariki.

Reports to police and Oranga Tamariki is the only route into institutional support and intervention, yet there are inconsistencies in this process, with a high proportion of those reports rejected as being unsubstantiated by Oranga Tamariki (Oranga Tamariki Evidence Centre, 2020). The criteria attended to for substantiated or unsubstantiated evidence is detailed in the Oranga Tamariki Act (1989) and defines the reasons for a child or young person to require care and protection from the state. These include evidence or concern of a child being subjected to physical, mental, emotional, physical, or sexual violence, or evidence or concern of cumulative harm being subjected on a child or young person. The large number of reports submitted (2023) suggests that a high proportion of children and young people are displaying signs of the abuse and neglect detailed in the Oranga Tamariki Act; signs which have been noticeable and concerning enough to prompt a professional or member of the public to submit a report. Alarmingly, given that only an extremely small percentage of reports are substantiated as abuse, these concerns have often fallen short of the threshold for further intervention. One reason that reports may not be substantiated is the over-reliance on physical evidence of violence to conclude that family harm has taken place (Fanslow et al., 2021), raising questions about whether formal agencies – and the structures within which

they function – are able to account for intangible, non-physical, forms of abuse and coercive control in their understandings of, and responses to, family violence.

Legislation in Aotearoa New Zealand has attempted to increase our ability to respond to non-physical forms of violence, with the Domestic Violence Act (1995) moving forward understandings of family violence to explicitly recognise psychological and sexual violence, and the FVA (2018) further developed this understanding, including a consideration of coercive control and defining family violence as multiple, cumulative violent events, of physical, emotional, psychological, and sexual abuse. Despite recognition in the legislation, we continue to see a prioritisation of violence that results in physical and visible injury, and a difficulty to account for, and response to, coercive control, and as a result, women and children are often left without support and intervention, or facing further harms through normative agency structures (Herbert & Mackenzie, 2014). The disproportionality of reports made against those deemed substantiated casts doubt on whether investigations by external agencies can attend to the subtle signs and behaviours, that are beyond physical evidence, which have been reported by teachers or other professionals. The process for investigations and consequent action are complex and rely on written reports, substantiated by other parties, before being submitted to the care and protection co-ordinator (Oranga Tamariki Act, 1989, s. 19), and are launched, in part, according to the veracity and detail of written or verbal information received from a school or agency. Gaining further insight from teachers into a child's behaviours and interactions, could prove invaluable to agencies' understanding of, and response to, family violence investigations. Aroturuki Tamariki (2024) states that the criteria and threshold for Oranga Tamariki investigations are too high, and leaves many children vulnerable to continued abuse. The value of school's day-to-day contact with these children, and the privilege of the teacher-child relationship, places schools in a pivotal

position for family violence recognition and response, particularly in the detection of coercive control, through intimate knowledge of their students' everyday behaviours. The disproportionality between reports of concern and substantiated reports must ring alarm bells about the effectiveness of external agencies' ability to detect subtleties of family violence without further inter-agency communication and collaboration.

Children's Experiences of Living with Family Violence

Child homicide and abuse are most often perpetrated by a man who has inflicted control and violence over their mother (Stark, 2023), showing that intimate partner violence and child abuse do not only co-exist, they are part of the same abuse pattern of family violence. Previously, children had been considered as 'witnesses' to violence, or 'affected by' violence, in particular intimate partner violence, but contemporary research recognises the direct victimising and the subsequent trauma of family violence on children and young people, even when they are not the direct target of the violence that occurs (Callaghan et al., 2018; Stark, 2023). Children's experiences of family violence are "beyond witnessing" (Callaghan et al., 2018; p. 1552), and they directly experience traumatic responses to violence and controlling behaviours that occur in the household. To suggest that children only witness violence inaccurately represents family violence as dyadic, where children are not directly harmed, and not only misunderstands the complex dynamics of family violence, but fails to account for the reality of living in environments of fear, intimidation, manipulation, and control (Callaghan et al., 2018). Indeed, Øverlein (2014) found that children's descriptions of violence occurring in their households were detailed and nuanced, and they often described abuse beyond physical harm, such as manipulation and control, and the constant fear living in those environments provoked.

Stark (2023) confrontingly argues that coercive control is "the most important cause and context of child abuse and child homicide outside of a war zone" (p.1), recognising that children do not passively witness violent events in their homes; they do not exist outside coercion and fear of family violence. Children experience violence 'with all their senses' (Øverlein, 2013, p.2), and live each day with the threat of violence. Interviews with children have revealed that the fear the experienced in violent households was not a singular event, but a constant, pervasive reality of intimidation and unpredictability (Øverlein, 2014). Their everyday life was saturated with an atmosphere of ever-present threat (Thornton, 2014). They had endured control, cruelty, and violence, and lived in a state of hypervigilance. Parent-child relationships can be confusing, particularly for younger children, who have become their mother's protector instead of being protected. Unpredictability and abrupt changes in behaviour from violent fathers, left children uncertain about how to behave, as fathers moved from frightening to loving and gentle (Noble-Carr, Moore, & McArthur, 2019). Individual experiences of family violence showed distinct variations, with some describing relentless, controlling behaviours, to unpredictable and extreme violence (Noble-Carr, Moore, & McArthur, 2019). The relentless fear and insidious anxiety endured at home, can continue even after children have escaped violence, always fearing that they would be found and their mother would be killed (Øverlein, 2014; Noble-Carr, Moore, & McArthur, 2019).

Far from family violence and intimate partner violence only existing within the dyad of a partnership, the 'triangulation' (Callaghan et al., 2018) of the parent-parent-child relationship increases risk of conflict, through split-loyalty, or protectiveness. Children had sophisticated comprehension of the dynamics of family violence and coercive control, with children as young as nine able to navigate circumstances which might trigger violent responses from fathers or partners (Callaghan et al., 2018). Children living in environments

of family violence often actively monitor for danger; whether conversations or actions are safe or unsafe, and have developed strategies to escape or protect their siblings (Lombard & Whiting, 2015). Children may engage in 'management' strategies shaped around keeping quiet, and staying small, to avoid becoming involved in the violence. They may place themselves as the protectors of the abused parent or a sibling, attempting to manage the situation through resistance or escape. Older children can move themselves and siblings to safe spaces in the home, placing themselves in protective roles against the abuser (Øverlein, 2014).

The presentation of children as passive 'witnesses' has continued to be reproduced in contemporary research (Graham-Kevan, 2024), despite significant arguments and evidence to the contrary (Callaghan et al., 2018; Noble-Carr, Moore, & McArthur, 2019; Selvik & Øverlein, 2024). This flawed representation often works to dismiss children's voices and experiences from family violence investigations, interventions, and support. A unique aspect of children's family violence experiences is the feeling of powerlessness. Children's powerlessness differs from that of victim-survivor women, and exists in the inability to make decisions for themselves, and being always at the mercy of adults' choices and decisions. Children rely on adults for security and protection, and in contexts of family violence, that security is complicated by the unpredictability of their environment. This lack of power extends beyond the home environment, and children and young people have spoken strongly about frustrations with social services, feeling that their needs and thoughts were not heard or responded to (Øverlein, 2024). For instance, The Backbone Collective found that children often felt dismissed and unheard by Aotearoa New Zealand's family court system in Aotearoa (Herbert & Mackenzie, 2014) and when children are not listened to, they can be forced into interventions and arrangements decided by adults who do not know them, and

have not listened to their experiences (Callaghan et al., 2018; Noble-Carr, Moore, & McArthur, 2019).

More recently, researchers have utilised qualitative methods to uncover children's individual experiences of family violence, allowing children to be heard and their stories to be valued. For instance, young children have been able to share family violence events through drawing and conversation (Thornton, 2014), while older children could share stories in interview settings (Øverlein, 2014). A small number of qualitative studies which interview children, found that the social impact of family violence on children had been grossly underestimated (Øverlein, 2014). Findings showed that children and young people experience isolation from their peers, through a sense of 'otherness' within friendship groups and their school communities (Selvik & Øverlein, 2024). Abusers constantly control and monitor children's movements, reducing their scope for socialisation, which serves to increase their isolation, reducing their confidence to share their experiences of violence. Children and young people reported navigating the early-learnt reality that family violence is a secret, and should not be shared outside the home (Selvik & Øverlein, 2024), knowing that to do so would result in repercussions from the abuser, or having their family broken apart. They also feel reluctance to share the reality of their home-life with their peers, fearing that friends might not understand their experiences, feeling that they are different, and fearing judgement (Noble-Carr, Moore, & McArthur, 2019).

The Impact of Family Violence on Children in Schools

Signs and impact of family violence and trauma that may be noticed in school settings vary according to a child's individual experience, and can also be displayed differently across age groups of children (Callaghan et al., 2018). Pre-school and early school-age children tend

to experience psychosocial and emotional difficulties, becoming clingy with staff, and suffering separation anxiety from the non-abusing parent. They might appear withdrawn, and can disappear into imaginary worlds, as a method of escape from noise and confrontation (Lloyd, 2018). Play style can be repetitive, and they may be attracted to toys and play styles younger than their age. As children move through school, coping strategies may be more complex, depending on the period and severity of family violence they are experiencing (Noble-Carr, Moore, & McArthur, 2019). Children and young people may display behaviours, such as anger and aggression, hypervigilance, and impulsiveness, while others will internalise their circumstances, withdrawing from others, which limits their engagement with school life. There may be sudden changes in behaviour if violence has increased or the abuser has altered their pattern of abuse (Lloyd, 2018). Sleep deprivation commonly occurs, either through anxiety, or through hearing violence at night or being victimised directly, which causes fatigue and an inability to focus or engage with school. Fear can reduce their mental capacity to listen and learn, while their thoughts return to violent events and worries. Furthermore, children experiencing family violence are at risk of high rates of school absence, as a result of injury or anxiety about the welfare of siblings and the abused parent at home, fearing for their safety while they are away at school (Selvik & Øverlein, 2024). Regular school changes and sudden escapes to refuges can also place children far from their schools and support networks, in places where their immediate safety is prioritised over their emotional wellbeing and support (Noble-Carr, Moore, & McArthur, 2019). It is important to acknowledge, however, that not all children experiencing family violence will have difficulties academically, and for some, school is a safe space where they can find comfort in a stable environment beyond the unpredictability of their home-lives (Lloyd, 2018).

The complexities of family violence mean that the effects and outcomes for children can vary from child to child and awareness of possible detrimental effects is an important aspect in building teachers' professional knowledge and understanding of how children experience family violence. Schools are one of the few agencies that are placed in a unique position to readily identify and report concerning patterns of behaviour displayed by children and young people, due to almost daily contact. The regularity of contact with children, and their on-going professional experience in the classroom, allows teachers to consider children's behaviours and engagement in comparison to their peers, noting changes and concerns, such as patterns of unexplained absence, or reluctance to participate in certain activities. Education and attending school are mandatory in Aotearoa New Zealand law, and patterns of absence can be quickly tracked and followed-up. Furthermore, beyond their parents, teachers are perhaps the adults that children spend most of their time with, often developing trusting relationships, and to whom they might confidently disclose their experiences. An established teacher-student relationship can have a significant impact on children and young people's confidence to disclose family violence, and teachers' responses in those moments can protect children against feelings of isolation (Münger & Markström, 2018). However, often the signs that children within the classroom are experiencing family violence at home do not appear unusual in isolation, and children may not directly disclose experiences of abuse, therefore interagency communication and collaboration is a vital component to gaining further information on family background, and responding to concerns that children in the classroom may be living with violence in their homes.

Widening Understandings of Stakeholders in Response to the Wicked Problem of Family Violence

Teachers' unique positions as trusted, secure adults in children's lives enables them to provide valuable insight in collaborative opportunities, yet they are not often considered as stakeholders in family violence response, despite being explicitly named in the FVA (2018). Priority stakeholders are primarily the criminal justice system, Oranga Tamariki, and Health, reinforcing the idea of family violence as singular 'events' that can prompt investigations due to police call-outs or reports of concern to Oranga Tamariki. The limited direct contact of these agencies with children can make it difficult to enable the time and relationship development needed to explore and identify on-going patterns of coercive violence that can have significant impact on children's social and educational outcomes.

Limiting our ideas of who can be a valuable stakeholder does not attend to family violence as a 'wicked problem' (Herbert & Mackenzie, 2018). First coined in the 1970s (Crowley & Head, 2017), a wicked problem is one which has no single cause, no single definition and no single solution, therefore solutions must be adaptable enough to allow multiple-access points to prevention and support. Any proposed responses to Aotearoa New Zealand's epidemic of family violence must attend to the complexity of the social, cultural and historical conditions, structures and systems from which gendered violence emerges, and acknowledge and challenge the power relationships which exist in Aotearoa New Zealand's social and government systems that contribute to the wicked problem of family harm. . Siloed government departments cannot offer this flexibility, resulting in fragmented support provisions, and perpetuating the conditions which enable violence against women and children to continue.

Affected families attempting to access multiple support options are restricted to those single-understandings of the problem, where individual agencies often have different objectives and priorities when responding to family violence, and communication is hindered for addressing the issues of intersectionality in relation to family violence. As an example of inter-agency complexities, consider the differences in focus between intimate partner violence specialists, child protective services, and family law. Intimate partner violence specialists are typically focused on advocating for victims, highlighting the gendered nature of family violence. Child protective services prioritise the child's safety, and may attribute blame to parents who have 'failed' to protect them (Murphy et al., 2013). Family law is bound by the legislative understanding of evidenced violence (reproducing the privileging of understanding violence as discrete acts of physical violence that produce visible injury), and often focuses on the normative ideals of the nuclear family; prioritising the presence of both parents in childrens' lives ahead of knowledge regarding the effects of violence on children (Herbert & Mackenzie, 2018). Different lenses and priorities within the problem of family violence can create tensions between stakeholders, and the siloed nature of response reduces the possibility for holistic response and intervention, attending to family violence in all its complexities.

A wicked problem is more than a complicated problem, which is quantifiable and predictable. Governments manage complicated problems constantly; problems that are challenging, and require some strategising, but can ultimately be solved in a linear fashion. Wicked problems, however, cannot be 'diagnosed' and 'cured' in a transactional way, with measurable outcomes (OECD, 2017). Family violence occurs within a complex 'system of violence', where multiple social variables interact to create violent outcomes (Carne et al., 2019). The system of violence cannot be 'solved' through a programmatic or linear response.

Regardless of how robust or effective the programme might be in isolation, it will always at some point, be derailed by existing and emerging systems, because they operate in parallel, or in addition to, the status quo of siloed government departments. Considering the 'wicked problem' of family violence through compartments (or siloes) of individual social concerns and agencies, will always result in limited, and sometimes problematic, outcomes, as one solution pulls resources from another, producing an environment of competitiveness instead of trust and collaboration (Evidence Centre, 2019). A systemic failing can only be solved through a transformative system response, not through programmatic, superficial strategies (Carne et al., 2019). The FVA (2018) appears to be an attempt to dismantle some of this siloing, encouraging collaboration across departments and agencies, by listing a breadth of social agencies, including schools and teachers, who can provide multiple forms of support to children experiencing family violence. There is space created in the act for transformative change by moving away from programmatic approaches, and building meaningful collaborations which span the complex needs of those children.

Collaboration in Response to Complexity

The potential for transformative change enabled by the FVA's (2018) focus on inter-agency collaboration has emerged from decades of government legislative change. The government of Aotearoa New Zealand have been developing systems to better manage the rising issue of family violence in since the 1980s, largely in response to the over-representation of Māori children in state care (Berrick et al., 2023), a consequence of Aotearoa New Zealand's colonial history, and the enforcement of Western norms onto indigenous Māori communities. The collective indigenous culture prioritises child wellbeing, protecting children's whakapapa by allowing open arrangements of care by other adults in the whānau or iwi. Westernised systems of adoption and child protection have slowly eroded

these indigenous norms (Wilson et al., 2019), through passing of legislation in Child Welfare Act (1925), Adoption Act (1955), and Children and Young Person's Act (1974), which focused on deficit and Western ideas of who could legally care for a child, leading to a disproportionately high number of Māori children being uplifted and placed in state care instead of being cared for within the wider whānau (Wilson et al., 2019).

A family-orientated approach to responding to children experiencing family violence was adopted in the late 1980s, through the Children, Young Persons, and their Families Act (1989), indicating a considerable shift away from medical and legal professionals' understandings of child vulnerabilities, which privileged physical and evidential harms, and towards a recognition of the social and emotional experiences of children experiencing family harm. The Children, Young Persons, and their Families Act (1989) also saw the creation of Family Group Conferences in 1989, which was a move towards opening space for multi-agency, family-focused panels focussed on assessing family and whānau needs, building action plans, and supporting in accessing service provision (Berrick, 2023; Oranga Tamariki 1989). Family Group Conferences aimed to attend to the intersecting needs of youth, children and their families, including those from Māori cultural backgrounds, who have been involved with police or corrections, through inter-agency meetings. These conferences are initiated in response to offending or care and protection concerns from a social worker. However, the focus on criminal behaviours and consequent care needs can limit the scope of Family Group Conferences, excluding some agencies from core decision-making, and unequal agency partnerships place schools as outliers in family violence response.

Despite attempts to open spaces for inter-agency collaborative partnerships, it is clear that we are still struggling to effectively achieve this in practice. In 2000, a report assessing the legislative and agency failures which had contributed to the death of 4-year-old James Whakaruru, identified cross-agency failures to identify and communicate the risk of serious harm, and recommended improvements to interagency communication and collaboration. (NZFC, 2000). Similar failings were still evidenced in 2011, after an inquiry was launched into how 9-year-old 'M' had been left to endure torture at the hands of her mother, despite being known to 25 different agencies, and having regular home visits in the month leading up to police finding her with severe injuries (NZFC, 2011). The resulting report (Smith, 2012) demonstrated that recommendations to improve inter-agency collaboration and communication made in 2000 had not been attended to in a robust, meaningful manner, and gaps remained in agencies' ability to recognise vulnerable, at-risk children. The Smith Report (2011) made further recommendations which again focused on interagency working, and legislating collaboration between agencies, to promote early identification and intervention, and holistic support for children experiencing family violence. The recommendations and addition of collaborative legislation suggested a move towards transformative system change, where agencies could work dynamically to better support our most vulnerable children.

In 2012, the Aotearoa New Zealand Government released the White Paper for Vulnerable Children (New Zealand Government, 2012), addressing some of the concerns and recommendations raised in The Smith Report (2011). The publication was the culmination a four-year consultation period with community groups, parents, and government agencies to address Aotearoa New Zealand's continuing high family violence statistics, (New Zealand Clearinghouse, 2012). The proposals that emerged from the White Paper advocated for an increase in inter-agency communication, and included a central, multi-agency database to

track vulnerable families through services, comprehensive training for teachers and doctors in recognising signs of family violence, and a phone line (Child Protect) to report concerns. Drawing on systems used in the United Kingdom, the initial proposal for a centralised, multi-agency database had been for every Aotearoa New Zealand child, holding information from pre-natal to eighteen years of age, providing a significant tracker for child welfare across the country (New Zealand Family Clearinghouse, 2012), but the final decision was to develop a database for children most 'at risk' of harm, perpetuating neoliberal assumptions about the causes of family violence based on risk models, which provide risk scores according to ethnicity, socio-economic status, and risk factors that are associated with those who are 'othered' within western, normative systems of meaning making (Coombes et al., 2016) . The introduction of the database, which was intended to be accessed and updated by schools, health professionals, police, social workers, and disability services, was indeed questioned for its use of an automated 'predictive risk model', which assessed children's vulnerability according to generalised, quantitative risk factors, based on neoliberal assumptions, rather than actual identified risk, which is subjective (Hyslop, 2013). . Therefore, while the White Paper potentially opened up the potentials for better engagement with the complexities of family violence and a shift towards increased communication and inter-agency working to ensure early intervention and better outcomes for children, its final proposals were criticised for perpetuating narrow understandings of family violence that focussed on managing risk, instead of improving or increasing overall support for and responses to family violence (Hyslop, 2013).

In 2014, the Children's Action Plan Directorate launched Children's Teams (later absorbed into Oranga Tamariki in 2017), which aimed to build inter-agency collaboration across government departments, integrating support from multiple community professionals,

including schools. The objective was to base teams within communities, to personalise responses, and enable faster identification of needs, prioritising the knowledge of families and the professionals within their communities (New Zealand Government, 2013). The initiative was in response to the White Paper for Vulnerable Children (2012), which identified the need for improved support for children at risk of maltreatment. The scheme was by referral from community professionals or self-referral, and it was aimed at children and families who had been identified as at risk and required support, but who did not meet the threshold for state care and protection. Children's Teams were intended as a way to keep children and families together, maintaining their connection with community and school. Families would be involved voluntarily in teams, and instead of being provided prescriptive support options, they had involvement in decision-making according to identified needs. The initiative aspired to increase multi-agency working, involving community professionals, including schools, community nurses, and mental health professionals, to assess needs and build an action plan in provision of wrap-around care for victims and survivors of family violence.

Children's Teams proposed to increase collaboration and agency 'buy in' to working together. However, feedback from stakeholders gathered in 2019, suggested this had not been achieved, largely as a result of a lack of shared vision, and the perception that there had been limited promotion of Children's Teams beyond those directly involved at each level of assessment and planning (Office of the Children's Commission, 2019). The result was that many community agencies continued working in isolation, within their own processes and those agencies who were not part of Children's Teams experienced limited resourcing, given the majority of government funding was directed towards Children's Teams. As a result, agencies were reluctant to share information, fearing that further resources would be

removed, and true collaboration was limited by structural barriers of siloed agencies, producing difficulties in implementation. Furthermore, Oranga Tamariki's review of Children's Teams (Oranga Tamariki Evidence Centre, 2019) found some disparities between families' experiences, and stakeholders' impressions of success. In surveys, families provided feedback that a single point-of-contact through a lead community professional helped them feel better-supported, providing a more personalised approach to their care. The relationship-based approach and increased service access were identified as having a positive impact, through increased wellbeing and overall reduced family stress, by keeping families together through the provision of a consistent point of contact and direct engagement. In contrast, stakeholders suggested these 'successes' were not consistent, and stood out as episodic success stories instead of systematic change. Conceptually, the framework was sound, with aims to provide targeted support before families required state intervention, recognising that single-agency working cannot attend to families' needs, however the initiative was implemented in parallel to existing processes, without being fully embedded across sectors, with the result that the problem of compartmentalisation of departments and agencies remained, and cross-agency collaboration was never fully realised. The initiative was discontinued in 2019 due to funding constraints, with the referral process defaulting to social-work referrals, which left many families unsupported (Oranga Tamariki, 2020).

The introduction of the Family Violence Act (2018) opened spaces to revisit collaborative partnerships in response to family violence, with drastic amendments to the Domestic Violence Act (1995), redefining legal thresholds of family violence to recognise the multiple forms of physical, emotional, sexual, and psychological violence which exist in contemporary understandings of family violence. The new legislation addresses many of the gaps and recommendations identified in The Smith Report (2011), namely legislating inter-

agency collaboration, improved resourcing for social agencies, and family violence training. One of the most significant improvements is an extension to the government agencies and social services practitioners who can be included in information sharing practice. Within the ten listed agencies are: Ministry of Education, school boards, teachers, police, school counsellors/psychologists, and Oranga Tamariki. The Act places safety and wellbeing of victims as the priority in decision-making, removing the legal barriers which previously restricted information sharing among agencies, superseding confidentiality legislation detailed in the Privacy Act (1993), thus removing the legal implications which might have influenced professionals' information-sharing decisions previously and promoting greater collaboration and transparency among agencies.

The FVA (2018) details eight principles to guide information-sharing decisions, which broadly fall under safety and protection of the victim, accuracy and immediate relevance of the information to achieve that protection, and whether consent can be or should be sought before sharing. Listed agencies have legal protection from liability under the FVA (2018), when information is shared in good faith (Ministry of Justice, 2019). Principle Four of the Act is relevant to school responses, stating that agencies may: both request information, and be asked to share information for purposes of protection of the victim; contribute to, or create, a needs assessment; and contribute to a safety plan. When considering the implementation of Principle Four in a school setting, all three purposes may be relevant, and could have immeasurable positive outcomes for students impacted by family violence. Schools already share information to Oranga Tamariki as child protection protocol, and the scope for two-way communication about students is increased through the FVA (2018). Dynamic, systematised information-sharing across agencies could help individualise safety plans and needs' assessment by accounting for the in-depth knowledge schools and

teachers hold about children. FVA (2018) legislation locates schools as important and recognised stakeholders in family violence response, which opens possibilities for increased knowledge-sharing and input to protective decisions about their students. Reporting concerns, requesting follow-up reports from agencies, formulating needs' assessments, and feeling informed and knowledgeable about students who experience family violence could contribute significantly to the way schools respond to and support their students. With such strong legislative backing, and clear inclusion in information-sharing practices, schools have the ability to make significant changes in the classroom to support vulnerable children.

Three years after the FVA (2018) was legislated, The Poutasi Report (2022) found significant gaps in child protection protocols. Commissioned as an independent review by six government agencies following an investigation into the death of Malachi Subecz, a 5-year-old boy, who was abused and ultimately murdered by his carer, Michaela Barriball in 2021. Describing Malachi as 'an invisible child', the Poutasi Report (2022) sought to identify agency failings and suggest improvements to achieve fundamental systemic change, not to assign individual blame. The Report found that poor communication, agency uncertainty regarding appropriate responses to suspected abuse, and a complete lack of inter-agency collaboration, ultimately led to a failure to identify, and respond to, the violence Malachi experienced . They draw on the case of Malachi Subecz to emphasise these gaps, and the tragic consequences of these gaps for children in Aotearoa New Zealand. Dame Poutasi (2022) referred to previous investigations and reports, with similar recommendations, and accused multiple agencies and government bodies of only attempting change while the spotlight was on them, before returning to the status quo. She stated that the cycle of outrage-inquiry-response was temporary, and had not gone far enough to prioritise the safety of

Aotearoa New Zealand's children. Malachi's case was a devastating pattern of not being seen or heard by the people and agencies whose job it is to enforce child protection laws.

The Poutasi Report (2022) identified five 'critical gaps' in relation to Malachi's case, and made numerous recommendations within each identified gap. In particular, Dame Poutasi called for a return of nationwide multi-agency teams, citing gaps in communication as a critical contributor to Malachi's death. Her calls for the return of greater inter-agency collaboration focused mainly on a select group of agencies, advising that Health be incorporated into Police and Oranga Tamariki protocols, privileging understandings of family violence as discrete, physical acts of violence that produce visible injury, and notions of 'risk' and 'lethality' (Tolmie et al., 2023) given the parameters such agencies work within and the limitations of how they are able to respond to non-physical violence and coercive control. Such prioritising works against an identified gap that understandings of risk are too narrow (Poutasi, 2022), and further limits the recognition of teachers as valuable stakeholders in family violence response. Prioritising agencies which work within understandings of physical and criminal harm serves to constrain schools' ability to be part of the multi-agency team and contribute.

Aroturuki Tamariki |The Independent Children's Commission's review (2024) reveals Dame Poutasi's accusation of government agencies' temporary commitment to change to be accurate. The review clearly indicates that temporary outrage has not produced safer environments for Aotearoa's children, starkly stating that Aotearoa New Zealand's children are no safer three years on from Malachi Subecz's death. At the time of publication, none of the accepted recommendations made in the White Paper (2022) had been implemented. Many of the recommendations made to individual agencies required government backing and

legislative change to action them, and this had not happened. Some planning and consultation had begun, but the review states that a movement towards meaningful systemic change steps have not been prioritised or actioned (Aroturuki Tamariki, 2014). Recommendation Seven of Dame Poutasi's report (2022) – to enhance understanding of information-sharing – has also not been achieved. Therefore, it is clear that greater emphasis and importance needs to be placed on developing robust, maintainable and effective inter-agency networks of collaboration and partnership, and should not be left to one or two agencies or organisations to hold sole responsibility for such network development and maintenance, as this runs the risk of reproducing siloed responses that are bound within the parameters of the agencies practices, processes and priorities. Siloed agencies work from top-down, with direct accountability to parliament. This vertical efficiency risks reinforcing existing institutional and fragmented responses, which can produce barriers to meaningful and transformative collaborations and partnership. These structures cannot attend to the complexities of needs associated with family violence, and static silos are not dynamic enough to adapt to social changes (Carne et al., 2019). Horizontal movement of information and expertise between agencies and ministerial jurisdictions, removes the barriers of siloes. Working in this way, across multiple agencies, requires a system overhaul. Initiatives launched in parallel to existing vertical systems will be ameliorative, but will not achieve true transformative change.

Reflecting on Aotearoa New Zealand's timeline of legislative changes to increase child safety and wellbeing, it is clear that there have been multiple attempts and opportunities to build more effective multi-agency networks of responses, and increase collaborative opportunities. The FVA (2018) is the first – and only – legislation focused on family violence that directly names Education as a key agency in child protection, yet a brief review of school

policies across Aotearoa New Zealand, raises concerns about how actively legislative changes are being shared with, and implemented in, schools (SchoolDocs, 2022). The MoE website (Ministry of Education, 2023), and school policy pages (SchoolDocs, 2022) provide links to legislation to guide policy writing, and to demonstrate the legal grounding for policy recommendations in order to guide schools in policy-writing. Curious as to how the FVA (2018) was being realised within school policies and practice, I explored how fifteen schools, chosen at random, across NZ had incorporated FVA (2018) legislation into school policy. However, to my surprise, legislation cited on the policies I viewed did not acknowledge the FVA (2018) in any way at all, either through the content of their policies or even through merely providing a link to the Act on their website. The FVA (2018) opens up significant child protection opportunities for schools, and its glaring absence from policies suggests that schools might not know those opportunities exist in legislation, and therefore information-sharing is not being implemented. At a governmental level, legislation changes are aspirational, but they are often not translating into action (Poutasi, 2022; Aroturuki Tamariki, 2024), and it is possible social agencies such as Education may not know the scope of the changes and what they could possibly mean for family violence response in schools.

It is clear that historical and recent legislative changes in Aotearoa New Zealand have not resulted in meaningful, sustainable responses for children experiencing family violence in our communities. In the current political climate, the opportunities and resources for developing collaborative inter-agency networks of response and intervention may be ever-diminishing. At the time of writing this thesis, the government of Aotearoa New Zealand changed from Labour to the National Party, moving from a liberal, left-wing party, to a more conservative approach. The National Party's election campaign indicated some public service cuts, but the reality has seen close to 5,000 jobs cut, with a large number of those in Ministry

for Social Development (941), Oranga Tamariki (447), and Education (755) (RNZ, 2024). Education services which provide immigration, refugee, language, and disabilities support have been reduced significantly, and child that belong to these vulnerable, marginalised groups will be particularly disadvantaged. Job cuts to Oranga Tamariki were proposed to be to 'backroom' (not frontline) services, with the aim to redirect funding to frontline services, with Minister for Children, Karen Chhour, stating that Oranga Tamariki must continue to keep the child at the centre of all its funding decisions (1 News, 2024), despite significant reductions in staff and resources. However, within months of budget cuts being actioned, Oranga Tamariki made 40% cuts to the Family Start Programme (1 News, 2024), a home visiting programme that assists parents to improve children's health, growth and learning environment. This programme is crucial for agencies to assess children's safety, and help families who are living with violence, substance abuse, or poverty, to access specialist services. With the change in government in Aotearoa New Zealand, public service cuts are leaving families and children vulnerable. Public services are vital in service-provision across the country, and extensive cuts impact frontline services, and directly puts vulnerable children at risk by reducing opportunities for agencies to collaborate, and increasing competition for diminished resources.

Learning from International Interagency Work

Beyond Aotearoa New Zealand's shores, there are significant success stories in making systemic change to tackle family violence; countries which have taken radical steps to disrupt their national understanding of abuse and have utilised multiple tools to tackle the complexities of family violence. In Aotearoa New Zealand, inquiries and legislative changes have been produced in response to highly publicised child abuse fatalities, mobilised by 'temporary outrage' (2022). These knee-jerk responses consistently privilege the physicality

and lethality of violence, resulting in mediocre, transitory attempts to improve system responses that do not implement the systemic changes required to sustain and maintain improvements in effective response. Examples from the United Kingdom, however, demonstrate the potential transformative change that is possible through systemic change that can produce consistency, commitment, and a real recognition of family violence in all its complexities.

Every Child Matters (HM Treasury, 2003) is a green paper, introduced in England in 2003, in response to The Laming Inquiry's (2003) findings into the death of 8-year-old Victoria Climbié, which identified significant failings across agencies who had been in contact with Victoria and her family. Principle failings were almost identical to those identified by Dame Poutasi (2022) in Aotearoa New Zealand: lack of inter-agency communication, the absence of agency or individual accountability, frontline under-staffing, poor agency management and a lack of effective training. The consequence was an institutional failure to recognise or appreciate the seriousness of pattern-identification regarding Victoria's experiences and those of her family. Concerning signs and patterns of abuse and neglect had been noticed in isolation by teachers, social workers, and police, without the communication required to establish a complete picture of the extensive abuse suffered by the 8-year-old (HM Treasury, 2003).

The then-Labour government had been building policies towards improving child outcomes since 1997, but Victoria's case became a turning-point for both policy-making, and public perception of family violence. Previous government initiatives had focused on inequalities, while Every Child Matters was the first reform which sought to bring agencies together under one piece of legislation, by confronting the intersections of poverty, social

marginalisation, ill-health, unemployment, family harm, and a multitude of other persistent disadvantages relevant to the wicked problem of family violence (HM Treasury, 2003). Every Child Matters aimed to go further than child protection, by introducing early intervention initiatives to help children and young people to not only survive, but to achieve. Working across agencies, Every Child Matters named Education as a core agency, intervening early with educational needs or school absenteeism. Multi-disciplinary teams worked around schools and early childcare facilities, ensuring staff concerns were heard and acted upon early. The initiative also recognised how perceived school failure or lack of school care can impact future criminal or anti-social behaviours, and overall mental and physical health (Vaughan-Jensen, 2020). Focusing on schools prioritised child safety by ensuring that children and young people are seen, and do not become invisible. To enable effective, sustainable interagency collaboration and partnership, the government developed the Common Assessment Framework database (CAF) which all social agencies utilised for clarity in assessing needs in education, health, overall wellbeing, and social concerns, such as poverty or homelessness. Built into the framework is regular monitoring and reviews, so that children receive personalised, holistic, and relevant support at every stage. A lead official was assigned to each area, with responsibility to ensure information was shared regularly between agencies, maintaining a constant flow of information about children and families, even when children change schools or district (HM Treasury, 2003). The government invested significant and sustained time and money into Every Child Matters, which ran, in name, for seven years, continuing under a different title until the Conservative government made alterations to Every Child Matters in 2012, favouring a more localised approach, to a national framework.

Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) was introduced into legislation by the Scottish Government in 2006 and is an example of systemic change which has proven to be relatively maintainable and sustainable. Scotland is in a somewhat unique position of having the same stable ruling party since 2011, providing consistency and continuity in social policy for 14 years. GIRFEC was unique from the outset, framing its aspirational policy around child well-being, not child welfare, with the objective being to provide holistic, child-centred, inter-agency support for every child in Scotland, and to provide one clear point of contact for families in order to ensure that their unique and specific needs are identified (Scottish Government, 2011). Priority has been given to early intervention and early education, with playgroups, nurseries, and schools being core to its success. The GIRFEC national framework informed Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence (2010), recognises that children's lifelong wellbeing is rooted in social and educational outcomes, where schools are central to communities, and teacher-student relationships are significant in the implementation of GIRFEC. Community schools have been built with GIRFEC in mind, offering a community hub, which is primarily a school, but which houses parent groups, healthcare advisors, and before- and after- school care.

GIRFEC's implementation has been firmly embedded in Scottish culture and attitudes. Tackling the difficulties of inter-agency working, the Scottish Government used systems thinking to 'map' the issues, gaps, and successes across the country's social agencies (Carne et al., 2019), introducing a National Practice Model and Wellbeing Assessment Wheel to build a cross-agency vocabulary of language and terms used in assessment, streamlining communication across agency boundaries (Anderberg, Jess, & Forkby, 2023). Scotland's unique policy-making style prioritised a single, cross-agency system, which works horizontally, removing the 'top-down' concept of government control, enabling continuity of

collaboration even during government change. Broad policy frameworks begin at a local level, providing a more individualised assessment and provision of needs (Coles et al., 2016), with GIRFEC being described as a golden thread, or an interweaving thread in tartan, which interconnects policy objectives for child wellbeing, providing continuity of service provision, through multiple access points (The Scottish Government, 2010).

Working hand-in-hand with GIRFEC is the Scottish Government's policy, Equally Safe, and Safe & Together, introduced in 2018 and amended in 2023 (Scottish Government, 2023). These policy frameworks firmly establish gendered violence as a specific form of violence within the criminal and social system and confront the social and political issue of gendered stereotypes, seeking to end gender inequality. Public campaigns challenge sexist attitudes towards women and girls, while also providing a wider support network for women and girls at risk of violence, entrapment, or exploitation due to their gender. The Equally Safe, and Safe & Together model (Safe & Together, 2023), aim to prioritise keeping children together with their non-abusive parent, while safeguarding them against further contact or abuse from the violent parent (a model which differs from Aotearoa New Zealand's priority of shared contact arrangements), and recognises the importance of stability and safe relationships for children experiencing family violence. All these programmes work together, not in parallel, attending to the intersectionality of poor child outcomes, which include inequality, poverty, educational attainment, and violence, while also looking forward; helping families stay together safely, should preventative measures fail. These changes have necessitated a sustained, multi-level approach, which have crucially prioritised local and regional authorities, with education centres being central hubs for accessing services and information.

As with any system overhaul, there have been difficulties to overcome in implementing and maintaining GIRFEC and Equally Safe. The most controversial plan was the Named Person policy. A Named Person takes the idea of Lead Professional further, allocating specific children to a community professional as a point of contact. Since GIRFEC is for every child in Scotland, the Named Person initiative meant that every child would have a community professional assigned to them and their families, initially a community health professional, and then, on beginning school, a teacher or headteacher who already had contact with the child. The aim of the scheme was proposed to identify vulnerabilities before they seriously impacted the child's welfare (Scottish Government, 2022). The Named Person created concerns around information-sharing laws, and whether the new scheme would undermine privacy rights of families (Black, 2020). Ultimately, The Supreme Court found that The Named Person policy breached privacy and family rights (BBC, 2019), and the initiative received such intense backlash from professionals, charities, and individuals that it was abandoned as a country-wide roll-out in 2019.

Despite controversy, the GIRFEC system has benefitted from sustained commitment, open communication, regular reviews, and honest feedback. Government commitment to remaining adaptable, and 'buy in' from agencies has built a more robust system for childhood outcomes (Anderberg et al., 2023). Fundamental changes in challenging public attitudes, improving accessibility to services, introducing a common language of assessment, a national model for good practice, and a single interagency system have all enabled significant improvements in social agencies' ability to recognise and respond to vulnerable children and families before stressors escalate to violence. The GIRFEC model shows the possibilities for successful, multi-agency working, which goes beyond initiatives implemented in Aotearoa New Zealand that have so far failed to provide sustainable and effective change.

Operation Encompass started as a single, school-based initiative in England, created by Elisabeth and David Carney-Haworth OBEs, in response to their own experiences as a teacher and police officer respectively. Elisabeth Haworth discovered, months after a child left her school, that he had been a victim of extreme family violence, and the school had known nothing about his circumstances. She felt that she, the school, and the police had failed that boy, prompting the development of a pilot project between her school and the local police. Operation Encompass has grown to become part of good practice across England and Wales, building its Police and Education partnerships. Launched in 2011, OE was intended to fill the identified gap in school's ability to respond to children experiencing family violence (Operation Encompass, 2024). Police inform schools before 9am of the next school day if a student has been involved in a family violence call-out the night before. This information, along with any other guidance about strategies, is cascaded to relevant staff, so that teachers are able to respond immediately to the needs of that child. Operation Encompass has been successful in many ways, not least as a result of growing from 'grassroots' work in schools, instead of top-down policy-making. Open communication between police and schools has increased interagency working opportunities, allowing schools to gain valuable knowledge and insight into their students' family lives. In May of 2024, Operation Encompass passed into legislation as the Victims and Prisoners Bill (2023), becoming mandatory law that police alert schools when a student has been involved in a family violence call-out (Operation Encompass, 2024). Embedding the project into statutory legislation, Operation Encompass will be applied across all police forces and schools, enabling early intervention and improving safeguarding for child victims of family violence. Given the allowance for information-sharing in the FVA (2018) in Aotearoa New Zealand, there is possibility for an initiative like Every Child Matters, GIRFEC, and OE to be utilised in order to develop, and

sustain, systemic collaborative inter-agency and stakeholder partnerships that recognise the importance of schools and teachers as valuable stakeholders in response to family harm.

It is clear from the preceding discussions that family violence holds many complexities pertaining to gendered power structures and accepted social norms and expectations. There cannot be a simplistic, linear intervention which can attend to those complexities, but transformative change is possible, as demonstrated through exploring international models promoting strong inter-agency collaborative links between schools and other agencies. Robust collaboration cannot privilege limited stakeholders in the work to prevent and reduce family violence, but must acknowledge and embrace the knowledge from all stakeholders who work with and protect children.

Teachers' voices

Reflecting on the myriad consequences of family violence on children's educational and social development, and the growing recognition of the vital role schools can play in supporting students' emotional wellbeing (Lloyd, 2018), it is surprising that the role of teachers and schools in family violence prevention and response is a neglected area of research (Selvik & Øverlein, 2024). There is very little research globally, and none currently in Aotearoa New Zealand, that listens to teachers' experiences of responding to children experiencing family violence, or locates schools as vital agencies in family violence and child protective systems. Teachers are often in the privileged position of spending the closest and longest contact time with a child living with family violence, yet research that listens to teachers' voices and experiences of family violence response is limited.

There are a handful of studies out of the United Kingdom (Ellis, 2018), Australia (Berger et al., 2022), Sweden (Markström & Münger, 2017; Münger & Markström, 2018), and Norway (Løkkeberg, et al., 2019), which attempt to understand teachers' perspectives in responding to family violence signs or disclosures. Findings suggest that school leaders felt under-trained and under-prepared to recognise signs of family violence and lacked confidence in responding correctly to student disclosures (Berger et al., 2022). Under-confidence was reported by classroom teachers without leadership roles, particularly in the practical actions they could take to support children (Ellis, 2018; Markström & Münger, 2017; 2018. Classroom teachers reported feeling emotional and overwhelmed when faced with disclosures since, without clear training and protocols, and said that their emotion often dictated their actions more than practicalities due to a lack of institutional support. Because of the lack of training in family violence and consequent response protocols, teachers were often hesitant about making reports, choosing to monitor and discuss with colleagues, for fear of making the wrong choice (Markström & Münger, 2017; 2018), or that making a report of concern cause problems for the child (Ellis, 2018).

An area of concern highlighted by schools leaders and teachers was that school responses and training input in family violence were largely influenced by how family violence is prioritised by the principal and school boards (Berger et al., 2022; Markström & Münger, 2017; 2018), revealing the possibility of family violence responses varying across schools, without specific government expectations or mandatory training. The outcome of these variations in school approaches and knowledge affects the responses teachers can make, and could leave some children unsupported due to lack of mandatory training and response across all schools. The same variation in prioritising family violence training in schools also exists in Aotearoa New Zealand, where child protection training is not mandatory for school

staff (Children's Act, 2014). Markström and Münger (2017) argued that a lack of prioritisation of child protection training was linked to limited institutional or school-based support in), where teachers then needed to turn to their colleagues for support in reducing their anxiety about their students, reporting that by sharing their concerns, individual teachers no longer held total responsibility for the students, and the accompanying emotional distress that feeling of responsibility caused them.

Emotional distress was also experienced by teachers in Norway when there were suspicions of family violence, but no evidence or disclosure (Løkkeberg, et al., 2019). Norway legislates mandatory reporting, and Løkkeberg, et al. (2019) were curious as to why teachers may not report, despite legislative expectations. Since quantitative methods were used, the teachers' voices are not heard in this study, but interestingly, there was significant discomfort reported, where reporting suspicions that do not accompany evidenced harm, can be emotionally distressing for teachers, with some experiencing feelings of inferiority and under-confidence as they try to 'make their case' for their suspicions. This presents an issue for teachers who are concerned about their students, but have not received a disclosure or have not witnessed physical harm. Suspicions can be based on professional judgement and experience of what behaviours are age-appropriate or 'usual', but it can be hard to articulate exactly what has raised concerns, leaving teachers to monitor concerning behaviours or subtle changes on their own within the classroom.

Teachers also raised concerns about reporting on suspicions with regards to damaging relationships between the school and the family (Ellis, 2018; Markström & Münger, 2017; 2018). If the suspicions are unsubstantiated, there could be backlash on the school or the individual teacher as a result. This concern may cause teachers to question whether their job

as educators should include aspects of students' social and familial life. Indeed, some teachers report concern that it is 'none of their business' to intervene or interfere, which may be the result of limited support and training which leave them feeling unprepared to provide meaningful support (Markström & Münger, 2017; 2018), undermining their confidence in their knowledge of family violence, and their ability to articulate suspicions. School leaders are assumed to have more knowledge of family violence, enabling them to decide whether further monitoring is required or whether to refer onto social services, but Berger et al.'s findings (2022) suggest otherwise. Teachers recognise their professional duty to make a report, while feeling conflicted about personal values about maintaining the teacher-student relationship, and not causing unnecessary harm to families. In cases of intangible suspicions, these values might clash, and cause teachers to hesitate in making a report, although many teachers consider allowing their emotional discomfort to interfere with their duty to report far more distressing than the potential harm that might be caused by unsubstantiated reports (Løkkeberg, et al., 2019; Markström & Münger, 2017; 2018).

The outcomes of these studies suggest that teachers feel uncertain about their knowledge of family violence, which creates emotional distress when a child chooses to disclose family violence to them. Distress, discomfort and under-confidence are increased when teachers have not received a direct disclosure, and are acting on suspicions based on their own instinct without evidence of physical signs of harm.

Despite there being a handful of international studies that look at teachers experiences of responding to family violence in the classroom, at the time of writing this project, no research has been conducted on teachers experiences in the context of Aotearoa New Zealand. It is concerning that so little attention has been given to teachers' experiences and

responses to family violence given that The New Zealand Teachers' Code of Conduct (Education and Training Act, 2020) clearly states that teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand have the responsibility to attend to children in their classroom's psychosocial needs. The psychosocial domain of teachers' roles is concerned with the wellbeing and safety of the child, and is committed to protection from harm, attending to cultural needs, promotion and protection of human rights, and building relationships with family, whānau, and community. Teachers' responsibilities to attend to these areas of children's development are not discreet, and overlap, with research recognising the positive link between healthy psychosocial wellbeing and educational progression (Münger & Markström, 2019), while evidencing that the opposite is also true (Berger et al., 2022). In cases where students are experiencing abuse or family violence, the impact on overall learning and engagement can be significant, and vary greatly. Understanding how teachers respond to children experiencing family violence within the constraints of their role is important for engaging in potential opportunities for inter-agency collaborations to enhance support for children experiencing family violence.

The current study

Aotearoa New Zealand's epidemic of family violence remains a wicked problem, despite multiple attempts by governments and institutions to create safety nets for vulnerable families. The institutionalisation of family violence response constrains service-provision possibilities within siloed government departments, creating barriers to effective inter-agency collaboration. Aotearoa New Zealand's aim to create inter-agency collaboration has not yet been fully realised, and significant gaps still exist in communication and trust between agencies. Schools are positioned in central community roles, building relationships between teachers and students, and potentially creating a bridge between vulnerable families and

named social agencies (Family Violence Act, 2018). This location within the community consciousness could be crucial in Aotearoa New Zealand's response to family violence.

The FVA (2018) offers potential for significant inter-agency information-sharing and collaboration, but it appears that these are not being included in school policies, which leaves one wondering how, if at all, the FVA (2018) is being realised in our schools. Teachers experiences and voices are conspicuously missing from Aotearoa New Zealand's family violence research, response plans, and report recommendations. In order to understand how teachers experience family violence responses in schools, it is imperative to explore how the FVA (2018) has been realised in schools, and how it has altered teachers' responses when supporting their students. Therefore, this research aimed to explore how teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand have experienced responding to, and supporting, their students who are experiencing family violence, within the context of information-sharing and collaborative opportunities, by asking how have their experiences of responding to family violence changed since the implementation of the Family Violence Act (2018). It is hoped that by doing so, we can gain valuable knowledge and insight into teachers' experiences as stakeholders in family violence response, and the importance and complexities of inter-agency collaborative opportunities and partnerships.

Chapter Two: Methodology and Method

This research was inspired by my own professional experience of teaching children who had experienced family and sexual violence. My frustrations and struggles with the systemic constraints of my role were instrumental in my decisions to study psychology, and latterly to conduct research into other teachers' experiences of the same phenomena. The effects of family violence on children spans across educational, social, psychological, and emotional domains, affecting their ability to engage in the classroom. Where evidence of physical harm is not present, teachers need to have confidence in their knowledge and ability to identify signs of family violence in order to effectively respond to, and support, their students. As identified in the literature review, teachers are in a unique position through their day-to-day engagement with children to identify and respond to signs such as being regularly fatigued, inattentive, hypervigilant, withdrawn, or any sudden changes in behaviour that might raise concerns, and can closely monitor those changes to identify patterns of behaviour which might coincide with visiting certain family members or weekend parental contact. These are signs which external agencies may miss, through limited contact, which places schools as valuable stakeholders in family violence prevention and response. The introduction of the FVA (2018) has opened possibilities for schools to have greater involvement in inter-agency collaboration and information-sharing, inviting increased agency for teachers in needs assessment and the development of safety plans that attend to the unique and specific circumstances of their students, and are inclusive of their expert and in-depth knowledge of the children and families in their care.

Research that privileges teachers' experiences in responding to and supporting their students experiencing family violence is an entirely neglected area of study in Aotearoa New Zealand, despite the vital role teachers play in children's educational and social development.

The reality of this missing research, and these missing voices, is that schools are treated as periphery agencies to family violence response, and their knowledge and experience has not been valued when considering the needs of children experiencing family violence. Therefore, the aim of this research was to gain insight into the unique phenomena of being a teacher, in a trusted position with students, and the ways in which teachers are able to meaningfully respond to concerns about family violence, through information-sharing and inter-agency collaboration, and to explore how the opportunities embedded in the FVA (2018) have changed the way schools are involved in information-sharing processes. I asked; what aspects of family violence response have improved through its implementation, and how are teachers currently experiencing responding to family violence concerns with their students? This research is the first study in Aotearoa New Zealand which seeks to privilege the meaning-making of teachers in their experiences of family violence response, engaging in exploration of convergence and divergence of those experiences. In order to do this, and privilege their voices, I have taken up a Hermeneutic Phenomenological approach that provides a space to understand how teachers make sense of their own experiences in context.

Epistemological Standpoint: Hermeneutic Phenomenology

Hermeneutic Phenomenology explores the experience of 'being', which emerges from the unconscious interconnectedness of our past experiences and knowledges, our present contexts, actions and desires, and the future possibilities for our emerging selves (Packer, 1985). According to Packer (1985), Heidegger's concept of *Dasein* (*being-there*) is the ontological core of hermeneutic phenomenology, where knowledge begins in practical activity. Hermeneutic phenomenology hold that knowledge is subjective, existing in the action of being *in* the world, interacting with it, through everyday experiences, but that this action of being is more than simple bodily existence, and involves self-awareness, intention,

and emotional engagement (Nizza & Smith, 2022). Knowledge and meaning are not found in the abstract and objective, but rather through our own intentionality as *human kinds* (Hacking, 1995), which contrasts with natural, inanimate kinds, that cannot exert any intentionality, and have no awareness of social and cultural pressures and expectations (Martin & Sugarman, 2001). As human kinds, we are *in the world* not *of the world*, as special, interacting kinds of beings, making sense of our experiences in holistic context through deep involvement in the interaction with society, cultures, and practices. Our experiences are meaningful – they matter to us, and we care about them. Human kinds are constantly engaged in conscious and unconscious reflection and questioning about what it means for us to exist in the world as individuals, and as part of a society (Dibley et al., 2022); questioning experiences, our meaningful existence, and the meaning behind our own and others' actions. These reflections and ways of being are unconsciously influenced by beliefs and values embedded in cultural and societal norms, and we, as human kinds, engage in constant questioning, back and forth between past and present experiences, as we form deeper understandings of our experiences as separate parts, and as a whole. This hermeneutic circle of reflection and new understandings, helps us move beyond our current horizons of intelligibility (or understanding), and move forward into future possibilities of self-awareness (Dibley et al., 2022; Shinebourne, 2011).

Taking up Heidegger's concept of the *Dasein*, Shinebourne (2011) understands the human experience of being-in-the-world as an ever-changing, evolving state of being, which can alter over time, through the influence of new experiences and perspectives. Far from defining us, our experiences and choices open space for new possibilities for self-awareness and meaning-making. Even when we have shared professional or personal contexts, our individual experiences of a phenomenon unfold in unique ways, shaped and influenced by

our subjective past and present experiences and social contexts. Present sense-making can only emerge from past sense-making, since our horizons of intelligibility are in constant flux, influenced by individual interactions with the world and the present context, and by examining our own biases or assumptions. Dibley et al. (2022) further describe *Dasein* as an "opening or space by which humans experience their world" (p.3), suggesting that this space is a vital component in the natural human reflective process, with the aim of producing a fusion of horizons between individuals' past and present understandings (Shinebourne, 2011). It is through the iterative process of speaking and listening that the meaning of experiences can be revealed (Smith et al., 2022).

In seeking to make sense of teachers' experiences of family violence response and inter-agency collaborative opportunities, hermeneutic phenomenology opens a space for participants to describe and reflect on their past experiences with students, from their present locations and consequent knowledge-making, in order to make sense of those experiences. Language is a central aspect of a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, and conversing about and re-telling these experiences from the location of the present, allows reflection and re-interpretion of those experiences from within the current context of their professional and personal understandings. This is an important process for teachers to make sense of their experiences of responding to children's family harm from within the context of school structures and systems in which those responses are embedded, reflecting on the interconnectedness of those systems, their own beliefs, and their present context. Understanding is the beginning of interpreting (Dibley et al., 2022), and it these interpretations, which participants can carry into their future work.

Methodology: Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Interpretative Phenomenology Analysis (IPA) is a methodology that emerges directly from hermeneutic phenomenology, and is an approach that assumes that human beings are self-interpreting, and are always actively engaged in a reflective and interpretative process. IPA research has two specific foci; exploring the experience of a specific phenomenon, and the sense-making of that experience. The aim of IPA is to understand how individuals make sense of their experiences embedded in social, cultural and relational context, asking what an experience is like for that person, at that time, and in that context. It is the 'moments of interruption' – times when the everyday flow is altered or stalled - which are of interest in IPA; those experiences which hold significance for us, because they have changed our normal pattern of being, even temporarily (Smith et al., 2022).

Given that the focus in IPA is on understanding how an individual makes sense of their experiences in context, it takes an idiographic approach, achieved through detailed, in-depth analysis of individual accounts, attending to the experience within a specific context (Larkin et al., 2019). While recognising the limitations of fully understanding another individual's subjective experience (we can never, as researchers, fully know what that experience was like for that person, with their unique and subjective backgrounds and contexts, in that exact moment), hermeneutic principles bring a dynamism to IPA, where the active interpretative role of the researcher co-produces rich understanding of subjective experience. This is referred to as the double hermeneutic: a dynamic process of interpretation between researcher and participant, as the researcher attempts to make sense of the participant's sense-making, always recognising that our interpretation as researchers is limited by the accounts given about an experience (Smith et al., 2019).

Hermeneutics suggests that genuine interpretation is only possible when the researcher situates themselves, as much as possible, in the participants' experiences and description, so that they can attempt to interpret those experiences from the participants' location and sense-making. The interpretative process attempts to view the participants' idiographic experience as if 'in their shoes', while critically examining what lies beneath the external spoken narrative (Smith, 2019). Interpretation is vital to that sense-making for both the researcher and the participant, since even the most candid interviews can be self-concealing, whether deliberately, or through social habits and convention (Shinebourne, 2011), and so it is the researchers' task to ask what meanings and understandings may also 'lie beneath' the descriptions of experiences offered within the participants accounts. Through the unfolding conversations that take place within conversations (often in the form of interviews), the sharing of experiences allows understandings to unfold and become salient, and invites meaning-making through the reflection and interpretation enabled by the dynamic researcher-participant relationship (Smith et al., 2022).

The meaning of experiences is subjective, but also located within relational context, engaging with, and embedded in, the world in a dynamic way. In this way, IPA research, having begun by examining and interpreting idiographic accounts, can then move to cautiously ascribe generalisations to a specific population and context that share concerns of the particular topic of interest. However, IPA does not seek to produce generalisations that can be applied across all peoples and contexts, but instead works to yield rich interpretations of individual experiences of phenomena that made be shared by others, and to examine convergence and divergence between individual accounts (Smith & Nizza, 2022).

IPA methodology is ideal for conducting research which seeks to gain in-depth descriptions and understanding teachers' unique experiences of responding to students experiencing family violence, because it creates space for reflection and interpretation concerning through listening to teachers' personal accounts of their experiences responding to students experiencing family violence. This study was designed to understand how teachers – whose professional expectations and assumptions might overlap– make sense of their individual experiences, from within their unique social worlds. The IPA principles of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography enable us to listen to teachers' stories of those 'moments of interruption' when they have concerns for their students, and how they have been able to respond in terms of information-sharing and collaboration.

Method

Participants and recruitment

Because this study aimed to understand teachers' experiences of responding to, and supporting, children in the classroom who may be experiencing family harm, to participate in the research study, participants had to be fully qualified teachers, with a minimum of seven years' experience. The qualification and length of service were important inclusion criteria because qualified teachers with longer experience would have the potential to share more experiences and have had greater time to reflect on their own and the schools' responses. Additionally, once qualified, teachers are in the classroom alone, without mentoring or support options available in their BT (Beginning Teacher) years, and so will have direct and active practical experience of responding in classrooms. Inclusion of 7+ years' service, was to ensure that participants could reflect on any perceived changes in their experiences of family harm response since implementation of the FVA (2018), specifically the changes to information-sharing and collaborative powers. The level at which teachers were working

within their school was not specified in inclusion criteria, and participants did not need to be current classroom teachers, only that they had classroom experience. Furthermore, teachers had to be based in Auckland so that face-to-face interviewing was viable as a practical option, while also attending to the homogeneity of the participant sample by containing the geographical context. IPA prefers homogenous sampling in order enable as rich and detailed descriptions of the specific phenomena of interest to be generated (Larkin et al., 2019), therefore although there was variation in school locations, homogeneity was enhanced through the criteria of being employed in Auckland-based schools. Lastly, given the aim of generating rich and detail accounts of experiences, participants' comfort and ability to discuss their experiences was one of the inclusion criteria.

In the initial discussions about recruitment with my supervisor, I originally planned to purposively recruit between 6-8 participants. In order to produce complex meaning-making of practical activity embedded in a holistic context, IPA researchers must ensure that descriptions gathered are rich and detailed, while also attending fully to those who have the most intimate experiences of the phenomena of interest. The idiographic approach of IPA necessitates small sample sizes (Smith & Eatough, 2012), with 3 participants suggested as an average for Masters' research, although between 4-10 is appropriate (Clarke, 2010). Since individual case studies can take time, and a Masters' thesis has its own time-constraints, 6-8 was considered manageable to achieve depth of analysis, and to privilege the idiographic experience, within the constraints of a Masters project.

Participants were initially recruited through intermediary contacts at Auckland-based schools, who had wider colleague relationships beyond their own schools established through their careers, and who distributed the Participant Information Sheet (Appendix A) to schools

and individual teachers. However, after several months of recruitment, this initial approach only yielded two participants and, after discussion with my supervisor, I wondered whether there was uncertainty from teachers about whether or not they had enough knowledge or experience to share with me on the research topic. In particular, I wondered whether the focus on the FVA (2018) in the provided Information Sheet might have made some teachers feel unsure about their ability to discuss that legislation. We decided that it might be helpful for teachers to meet me first, and to answer questions about the research focus. Therefore, I visited schools during their staff meetings, introduced myself and presented my research focus, along with the Information Sheet detailing the study, what would be expected of them, and their rights as participants if they chose to participate. This gave teachers the opportunity to ask any questions they may have about the study and what they could expect if they wished to participate, and helped us establish a rapport prior to committing to participation. Four of the six participants were recruited through these staff meeting opportunities, all of whom contacted me confidentially by email following my school visits.

All six participants were qualified primary school teachers from the Auckland region, and had between 10-40 years teaching experience. Three were classroom teachers: two of which had over 30 years' experience in classroom teaching, and one had over 10 years' experience, including one year of overseas teaching. The other three participants were currently in senior leadership roles, but had taught in the classroom for between 10-20 years prior to moving into their senior roles. Furthermore, two of the teachers in the sample were school SENCo (Special Educational Needs' Co-ordinator), and had direct oversight for receiving disclosures, and making referrals to Oranga Tamariki and other support agencies. All participants had experiences of responding to family violence concerns about students, which they were willing to share and discuss.

After making voluntary contact with the researcher directly about their desire to participate in the study, participants were sent a Consent Form (Appendix B) and Interview Guide (Appendix C). The purpose of the interview guide was to provide a pathway of question topics, allowing space for participants to seek clarification, and to prepare some discussion ideas in advance. The guide also provided an opportunity for participants to prepare themselves for describing and reflecting on potentially distressing experiences. By providing the guide in advance, participants could identify anything they were uncomfortable discussing, and provide fully informed consent to participate. Given that the interviews could potentially raise some uncomfortable discussions of family harm against children, I offered the opportunity for a pre-interview conversation to clarify the process, ensure they felt comfortable participating and for participants to ask any questions they may have, although no participants requested one.

Data collection

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured, face-to-face interviews in a location of each participants' choosing; five of the interviews took place in the participants' schools, and one was conducted in a study room at the Massey University library. Food and drinks were provided for each participant, and we opened each interview with a short, informal conversation to get to know each other. Before starting recording, I read through the Information Sheet and secured signed consent, before requesting permission to record the interview. I reassured each participant of the confidentiality of their interview, and reminded them that the interview could be stopped at any time.

Each interview lasted between 60-90 minutes, and were designed to elicit detailed personal stories of participants' experience of responding to children in their classrooms

experiencing family violence, particularly from within the context of information-sharing and collaborative opportunities provided by changes in the FVA (2018). Semi-structured interviews allowed for natural dialogue, which is flexible enough to engage with unexpected or interesting points, while keeping the research question in focus (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). In some interviews the interview guide provided the structure for our conversations, while other participants' stories unfolded into new directions, which produced surprising and interesting foci for analysis. The length of time allocated to the interviews provided space for silence, which is an important tool in IPA to allow the participant and researcher to reflect on experiences being shared (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). Given that the interview topic was potentially sensitive and emotive, often touching on deep memories from participants' careers, it was important to provide an option to pause or stop the interview for participants, should they find the conversation too distressing or uncomfortable. Following the interview, there was a time of 'debrief' which provided an opportunity to relax, check on the participant's emotional wellbeing, and provide contact details for counselling services, should they be required. I informed all participants that after the interview, they had the opportunity to edit the interview transcript if they wished, and withdraw from the study up until the transcript had been released for analysis.

Interviews were audio recorded at the time, onto a secure recording device, to enable a verbatim transcription of each interview. Before transcription began, I spent several days listening to each interview, and familiarising myself with the language, tone of voice, moments of hesitation or silence, and the overall pattern of the interview. Transcription of the interview was done manually, without the use of a transcription app, to provide further opportunity to become familiar with each participant's account, using a pseudonym to protect the identity of each participant. Transcripts were typed into a table, with a column for line

numbers and a column for the transcript. Transcription is considered the first phase of analysis, as is interpretative in itself (Smith et al., 2022). The verbatim transcript included all parts of the interview, including words, repetitions, change of tone, laughter, or hesitations, to note changes in the regular pattern of spoken word. Laughter [*laughter*], hesitations and pauses [---], and other nonverbal expression (e.g. [sigh] or [nodding] were annotated throughout the transcription. The audio recordings were kept until analysis was fully completed, so they could be returned to and re-listened to throughout the analysis process, after which they were destroyed. The transcript was then sent to each participant for approval, along with a transcript release form (Appendix D), and all returned the release form without edits or amendments to the transcript. Some participants requested a copy of the analysis or the full thesis after submission and marking.

Analysis

Rather than having a strict formula, analysis in IPA can be seen as 'unfolding', as the researcher works through each transcript and then considers all the transcripts as a whole (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). In reality, IPA analysis can be progressed in many ways, as long as it is always staying close to the stories told, and the participants' experiences (Smith et al., 2009). For the current study, I was guided by Smith et al.'s (2022) recommendation to work through four distinct phases of IPA analysis to achieve in-depth descriptive and interpretative themes: Phase 1 – familiarisation with data; Phase 2 – working towards case-level summaries and emergent themes; Phase 3 – creating cross-case themes; and Phase 4 – finalising themes and subthemes.

In the first stage of analysis, following the return of transcript release forms, I added two further columns to the transcript for descriptive note-taking, such as tone of voice and general observations like 'emotions' or 'talking about information-sharing', since Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012) recommend making descriptive notes about the tone of voice, use of language, and any hesitations or repetitions. I continued the process of familiarisation, which had begun during transcription. This stage took time, as I listened to each interview, and read through each transcript, with the recording, multiple times. Each reading or listening produced new thoughts, bringing fresh insights to early analysis. The analysis then moved from a more descriptive level (noting the content of the participants' stories) towards a more critical interpretative approach (interpreting the meaning of experiences at a deeper level). At times, phrases stood out in the transcript, and it took time to understand and interpret how those moments, which were intuitively significant, were also analytically important. An example of this, is the phrase *spaces and islands*, used by one participant, which has since become significant as a superordinate theme, as it encapsulates the isolation experienced by teachers as they try to meaningfully respond to students' experiences of family violence.

The second phase of analysis involved working towards producing case-level summaries and identifying emergent themes. In this phase, I printed each transcript and worked through similar ideas and comments with highlighters, to establish patterns of main claims and statements. I applied broad headings to these statements to begin grouping them together. As I began to cluster main statements together, themes began to emerge, which I noted on a separate document, with quotes and descriptions. I had to maintain flexibility in my interpretations to allow me to analyse detailed sections while holding onto the context of the whole transcript, and be willing to rework emerging themes throughout the process (Smith et al., 2022). Emerging themes were grounded in the participants' descriptions and

stories by constantly revisiting the recordings and the transcripts, and noting the statements participants made which related to those themes.

The next step was one which I added for my own clarification, although Smith (2019) also recommends it as a method of pulling each participant's account together. A written summary of the participants' interview was generated, providing me with an overview of the main points that had emerged for me from the interview conversation. This step helped me to 'zoom out' from the detailed analysis and view the transcript as a whole account, engaging more critically with the participants' stories. Emergent themes became clearer and more focused, while some points which had previously drawn intense focus, fell into the background as less vital points. For instance, an early theme in the analysis of one participant's account was *Changing Communities*, which reflected the complexities of immigration and multi-culturalism in schools' responses to family violence. As the transcript analysis continued, and engagement was less descriptive and more critical and interpretative, participants' conversations about Changing Communities spoke more to themes of isolation and anxiety to protect children. It was an interesting process, separating the 'wood from the trees'; bringing key themes and understandings to the forefront of the participant's case study. The interpretative process grew from the revisiting and reflecting on transcripts, as I began to read beyond the words, and drew deeper understandings of underlying meanings thematically. Emerging themes and statements were reworked and regrouped multiple times, as this interpretative process progressed. Phase one and two took several weeks to complete, and were repeated for each participant interview.

Creating cross-case themes is the aim of phase three, and this was achieved over several smaller stages. The process of IPA begins with an idiographic focus, by examining

and interpreting each individual transcript, to produce in-depth single-case studies, and then moves to analyse the whole body of transcripts, in order to bring together convergence and divergence and identify themes which link the single-case studies together (Smith, et al., 2021). Once all case-studies had been analysed, main claims and experiential themes were examined for cross-case analysis. At this point I deleted the audio recordings to ensure privacy was maintained. Having summarised each participants' emergent themes, I began to look across the cases, and identify which themes were similar, or provided divergent ideas on the same theme. For example, participants spoke about trust as an important component in their decisions to report suspicions of family violence. One participant described great trust in her senior managers, while another questioned their manager's motivations. Others indicated distrust in the referral process. These experiences are both convergent and divergent. Similarly, trust was discussed in relation to student-teacher relationships, and the trust inherent in disclosures. These experiences were drawn together under the subtheme of *Institutional Isolation,* describing how trust can have both positive and negative understandings and outcomes for teachers in the context of information-sharing. Divergence offers an idiographic perspective within a group theme, which was an interesting tension in the cross-case analysis. Divergence also provides depth to IPA analysis, by maintaining the perspectival experience of participants. There were themes which emerged easily, such as *Spaces and Islands,* while others – *Doing what is Right and Best* - were more complex, with case-level experiences emerging as simultaneously different and similar. This phase challenged me as a researcher, as I tried to remain true to the idiographic account, while at the same time identifying how different participants experienced the phenomena in similar or divergent ways. As a result of this complexity, this stage was discussed at length with my supervisor, helping me to focus on the idiographic principles of IPA, and not focusing on attempting to generalise findings by identifying themes which only 'agree' with each other.

Smith et al. (2022) call this the ‘social process’ of IPA, bringing in other interpretations and ideas, to help engage more deeply.

The results of detailed analysis can yield a rich descriptive and interpretative account of the individual experience (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). The intention of the study was to examine idiographic experience, while interpreting common themes amongst participants, which could indicate convergence in experiences of responding to family violence. The study did not aim to generalise findings, only to explore the moments of convergence and divergence across participant accounts, and the tensions these can produce teachers in their professional work with students experiencing family harm. Following several weeks of analysis and discussion, the analysis moved into the final, fourth phase, establishing superordinate and subordinate themes. The final analysis has three superordinate themes, which speak to the isolation, professional conflict, and emotional trauma experiences by participants in responding to family violence concerns. As with the first three phases of analysis, this was not a linear process, and there was revisiting of proposed themes, and the corresponding participant accounts, gradually bringing single-case studies into group analysis and then synthesising whole study themes across the participant group. This final phase provokes deeper analysis, revisiting particular phrases and accounts for their relatedness across the study. Through the reflective-interpretative process of the hermeneutic circle, themes emerged as relevant and significant for all participants. The final theme presented in the Analysis Chapter, *Travelling with the Trauma*, emerged slowly, accounting for emotional investment and for the limited opportunities to find closure through information-sharing or collaboration (Smith et al., 2022). On completion of phase four, analytical summaries and evidence of the interpretative process which led to the final themes were produced and shared

with my supervisor, with quotations and annotations, before beginning the lengthy process of producing the written analysis.

Ethics and Cultural Considerations

Research into teachers' experiences of responding to students experiencing family harm could trigger uncomfortable emotions and memories for participants. In light of this recognition, a full ethics application was submitted to, and approved by, The Massey University Human Ethics Committee (application OM3 23/44), with a later amendment submitted and approved in relation to altering my recruitment method from intermediary *referral* to *opportunities* through contacts. I was aware that the interview content could potentially raise some distressing memories and emotions, therefore consideration of the ethical concerns surrounding those conversations, and the participants' safety, was vital to my own preparation and later analysis. I provided an interview guide, and the opportunity for a pre-interview meeting to ensure participants were fully informed prior to consenting to the interview. I made contact through email prior to interview, and provided information on support agencies, in recognition of the emotive topic for discussion. Post-interview, there was a debrief discussion, and participants had opportunities to review the transcript and make edits before finalisation of the transcript for analysis.

My personal experience as a teacher responding to students who had been victims of family and sexual violence heightened the necessity not only to satisfy institutional ethical obligations, but to also attend to my personal ethical obligations as a researcher. The choice to research teachers' experiences was a very deliberate reflection of my own difficulties in processing family harm disclosures, and the frustrations of being excluded from information-sharing practices. It was important that the stories teachers shared with me were treated

ethically; that participants' voices and experiences were treated with respect, the analysis conducted was done in a respectful manner, and that the research would serve a positive purpose for those involved (Hopner & Liu, 2021), therefore relational ethics was valued in the approach to my research design and implementation. Throughout the research process, I kept in mind how the research could benefit not only the participants, but also the wider school community, and was constantly aware of the importance of this research in its contribution to Aotearoa New Zealand's understanding of family harm impact. Hopner and Liu (2021) highlight the vital importance of endeavouring to produce some benefit to the communities involved, as well as the individual participants. As the first research study in Aotearoa New Zealand to engage with teachers about this phenomena, it is hoped that findings of this study can serve as a starting-point for including school communities in family harm research, prevention, and response. As a researcher and teacher, I was committed and passionate about producing a robust, quality research project that went beyond simply hearing teachers' voices in family violence research, but that would contribute to the national understanding of family violence and the vital contribution of schools to prevention and response. I held myself accountable through maintaining contact with those participants who had requested a copy of the analysis or thesis, and by reminding myself of the importance of the study. Given the uniqueness of the research, I was certain that teachers' stories would be rich with unattended-to knowledge, which could enrich perspectives about teachers' and schools' roles in collaborative family harm responses.

Given the over-representation of Māori women and children in family violence statistics (Fanslow et al., 2023), it was particularly important to attend to Te Tiriti o Waitangi principles of partnership, participation and protection when designing the research project, ensuring that recruitment was open to all teachers that met the inclusion criteria, from any

cultural or racial heritage. The impact of colonisation and patriarchy remain an ever-present undercurrent to the subject of family harm (Wilson et al., 2019), and cannot be excluded from considerations for the study design and ethics. The research study examined partnership opportunities between schools and agencies, and teachers' experiences of those collaborations. Inter-agency working attends to the multiple intersections of circumstances which perpetuate family violence, and the Westernised power structures which continue to disadvantage Māori communities, producing the conditions of possibility for family violence. Relational ethics formed part of the attendance to cultural considerations, since normative, Eurocentric knowledge-production does not take account of the power imbalance and inequity between researcher and researched (Hopner & Liu, 2021). Prior to submission of the ethics application, a cultural advisor from a local school provided guidance on Māori cultural considerations. An advisor from an education setting was chosen to attend to school cultural considerations. These conversations focused on the importance of nurturing genuine connection with participants, building on our shared experience and empathy as teachers. To develop genuine connections and relationships with participants, I engaged with participants at repeated points over time, offering pre-interview meetings, and engaging in respectful face-to-face conversations. Manaakitanga and aroha was attended to by offering refreshments, and showing appreciation for participants' time, prioritising care, safety, and dignity at all times. Providing some of my own background experience helped build trust, based on mutual professional respect and understanding. I believe these steps also encouraged collaboration in the interview and sense-making process. The tika of the research was made clear through the initial emails and meetings, where I emphasised the importance of adding teachers' voices to the knowledge-base of family harm research in Aotearoa New Zealand. Prior to interviews, I asked participants about cultural or comfort considerations they would like included in the interview. Mana is integral to the research process, through

consideration of accessibility, awareness of emotional triggers, and clarifying the participants' ability to pause or stop the interview at any time. I treated each participant with respect, and my approach to analysis has always endeavoured to honour their stories, sense-making, and reflections.

Reflexivity

The principle challenge of conducting this research was to rigorously attend to the experiences of the participants, and not to allow the influence of my own experiences to overshadow the interpretation of participants' accounts. Reflexivity in the analysis required me to question how participants' experiences challenged or aligned with my preconceptions of the phenomena, since I had personal experience of it. As I moved through the phases of analysis, I tried to stay grounded in participants' subjective experiences and stories, and maintained a critical approach to my own assumptions. Engagement and discussions with my supervisor helped to ground the analysis in the participants' stories, to ensure that my interpretation prioritised their meaning, and was not dominated by my own bias and assumptions. The hermeneutic approach aims to understand the participants' experience by situating yourself within their location, and it was a delicate balance for me, as a researcher, to allow myself to understand their experiences so familiarly, while also holding my own experiences lightly and placing myself in *their* shoes, not my own, without prejudicing the sense-making and interpretation of their stories. Dibley et al. (2022) argue that prejudice does not need to be a negative aspect of research, but a method by which we, as researchers, can connect to the research topic. Ensuring researcher responsiveness to participants' ideas and own interpretations maintains the idiographic strength of analysis (Callary, et al., 2015).

Analysis was an emotional process at times, as I reflected on my own professional experience when listening to and interpreting participants' experiences, particularly those which raised issues of isolation and trauma. In those moments, I would take some time away from the transcripts, often arranging supervision meetings for support or to discuss some of the more emotional aspects of participants' accounts. A few moments away allowed me to re-focus on the purpose of the research and the commitment to my participants' unique stories, which became the driving-force behind the completion of analysis. Teachers' voices are rarely, if ever, heard in research. In Aotearoa New Zealand, teachers have never been asked to share their experiences about students enduring family harm, yet they have vital perspectives and knowledges to share.

Writing-up the Analysis

The analysis of participant accounts revealed three superordinate themes: Spaces and Islands, Doing What is Right and Best, and Travelling with the Trauma. Spaces and Islands is concerned with the professional and institutional isolation teachers experience when responding to family violence, and the power which exists in opportunities for partnership and collaboration. Doing What is Right and Best speaks to the conflict teachers experience in following the right protocols while balancing the best action for the child involved in family violence concerns, and the tensions when these two things do not align. The final theme, Travelling with the Trauma explores teachers' emotional investment in their students and the personal trauma they experience when their students experience family violence, and how this often stays with them long after the students have left school. The following chapter will discuss these superordinate themes, and their subordinate themes, to weave together an exploration of the complexities of teachers experiences of responding to students

experiencing family violence, and the opportunities for information-sharing and collaboration opened up by the Family Violence Act (2018) legislation.

Chapter 3: Analysis

Spaces and Islands

'It's great having that korero and that hūi, but we're all then pulling back into our spaces and islands' (Sarah)

The theme "Spaces and Islands" conceptualises the individual and institutional isolation teachers experience when responding to students' family violence disclosures or when they suspect students may be experiencing violence in their homes. Confidentiality concerns and school disclosure response policies hinder teachers' ability to seek advice or discuss the case with colleagues, leaving teachers feeling ill-equipped and insecure about how they can personally respond to, support and protect students. Institutional Isolation is experienced when teachers are unable to effectively collaborate with external agencies, such as Oranga Tamariki, and are excluded from further investigations. Strict school policy rules restrict access to follow-up information, leaving teachers in limbo, wondering about the outcomes for their students. However, in resistance to individual and institutional isolation, the development of interagency networks, grown over time through teachers' experiences and careers, provide invaluable opportunities to seek support through sharing perspectives and knowledge, thereby reducing isolation and increasing possibilities for collaborative working.

Individual isolation

Participants spoke of individual isolation in terms of both physical isolation and professional isolation. Physical isolation refers to teachers' everyday work in discreet classrooms or offices, without immediate access to guidance or support. Professional isolation speaks to the limited information-sharing within schools, and from social agencies.

Physical isolation is evident in descriptions of teachers' day to day work in the context of their physical classroom, when they are working by themselves with children who might have multiple needs, including family violence experiences. Teaching can be an isolating job due to heavy workloads, limited collaboration time, and the challenges of managing classrooms alone. This is an expectation of the job, and single-cell classrooms can provide positive outcomes for teachers, such as autonomy and scope for greater creativity. However, situations where students are presenting with complex or concerning behaviours, or displaying signs of possible family harm, there is little in-class support where teachers can ask for a second opinion, or find time to fully respond to children's individual needs:

> *"It's different in New Zealand [laughs], because---for example, if I have my own single-cell classroom, and there's five children with specific needs, that need support, I'm on my own" (Charlotte)*

Charlotte talked about experience working overseas, where she encountered family harm on a regular basis, and had a colleague in class with her every day. She compared classrooms to those in Aotearoa New Zealand, voicing alarm that teachers are often alone, in charge of a class, with students requiring individual attention, which contrasted with her experience overseas:

> *"[Overseas], we had education assistants, and they were just as important as the teacher, and they were designated to each classroom" (Charlotte)*

When students have higher needs – whether for learning and behaviour, or trauma from family harm - these needs often cannot be met when teachers work in physical isolation, unable to question or share concerns in the moment. Such constraints on collaborative communication can even result in signs of family harm being missed, through limited experience or confidence in recognising the signs. Hazel describes times when she has noticed unusual behaviours or signs, but has not felt able to take her concerns further:

> *"I just thought, to myself---and noticed that--- But, I never took it any further. Like, but---unless---you can't do it on a suspicion of your, you know---of your---what you assume---" (Hazel)*

Hazel shares great uncertainty about her own knowledge and assumptions about indicators of family violence, her hesitation suggested that reporting on unfounded suspicions might place her in an insecure situation of having to justify her suspicions, when she is unsure herself. Having another teacher to share her concerns with might alleviate her uncertainty, and provide more confidence in her suspicions when she makes a report. It might be that another teacher has prior knowledge of the child or the child's family, which could inform Hazel's responses and provide more certainty in her own suspicions, and more context for the child's behaviours.

Professional isolation emerged through participants' descriptions of their experiences of relationships with external agencies, and, at times, with senior management. Participants described receiving limited information relating to the social or familial context of students, and told of how this could leave them unprepared for responding to individual children's needs or behaviours. Throughout her interview, Laurelle described an almost constant state of

professional isolation, manifesting itself within the context of information-sharing pertinent to her students' wellbeing. She shared experiences of teaching children who displayed signs of harm, and who had suffered extensive abuse. Those students were placed in her class without any background information. It was only when she made observations, based on her own professional knowledge, that she noticed concerning behaviours, and started asking questions. At that point, very limited information was shared with her:

> *"That child was put into my class…and…no one told me about that child…I approached my senior teacher and he said, 'yes, she was an incest case', and really…that was the end of it" (Laurelle)*

There is extensive evidence about the negative effect of trauma on children's ability to learn and engage in class (Callaghan et al., 2018). For Laurelle, receiving knowledge about this student's history of trauma and abuse only after noticing unusual behaviours herself, decreased her ability to understand and respond well to her student's needs. Follow-up information about help the child had received, her current home circumstances, and how historic the abuse was, could have provided more context for Laurelle, and informed how she worked with the child in class. She was given no further training and was not provided with opportunities to collaboratively address the child's needs in responding to her trauma. As a young teacher, still early in her career, Laurelle did not feel that she was adequately prepared or supported in managing this child's needs, either from her teacher training or from the senior management at her school. This experience was isolating as Laurelle tried to process what she had learnt alone:

> *"There was no support, as a young teacher---" (Laurelle)*

Other participants gave similar accounts of feeling professionally isolated through a lack of pertinent information regarding students' circumstances, and also through the expectation to manage that information alone if it was shared. Hazel explains how she heard through another teacher that there had been family violence concerns about one of Hazel's students, the previous year. Hazel had not been provided with background information about the student's family environment, so she asked for some clarity.

> *"And all I heard back was, 'Yes, that's [family violence] been true.' And that---that was it" (Hazel)*

Similarly, Sarah, as a young teacher, felt isolated and unsupported following a particularly distressing disclosure. She felt there was an expectation for her to remain unaffected and professional, despite distress she had experienced on receiving the disclosure:

> *"There wasn't, like, a check-in, for me, as a teacher on the ground" (Sarah)*

When participants received disclosures or had suspicions of abuse, they felt further isolated by the need for confidentiality surrounding abuse claims. They shared experiences of children trusting them with disclosures, but once they had followed school policy and passed the disclosure to their senior manager as a report of concern, they had been excluded from any further developments in the child's case, with Rachel noting that she only learnt more if the child themselves provided further disclosures to her.

"Sometimes---sometimes that information is highly confidential and you wouldn't know what was going on after that conversation---that's sort of the end of the line, really" (Laurelle)

"I would say it's---around 10-20% of the time, that I hear anything back. About 80-90%, I don't get any feedback on---" (Sarah)

"I don't know if that's poor communication, or if that's intentional, because it's confidential---yeah---I don't know. That's kind of---where it stops---and you wouldn't know much more, unless---the kid---because often you find out more from the child than from anyone else in the school" (Rachel)

Constrained by confidentiality rules, teachers are left feeling isolated from the student, and the process of response, unable to provide adequate support to their student:

"How can you navigate that, as a school---as a teacher---as someone who has that child for 6 hours a day? I don't---I don't feel like the information is always very clear or detailed or---even if we are given really as much information as we should have" (Rachel)

For some, it seemed that reporting and response procedure in schools focused on the single individual child, while disregarding the value of the teacher-student relationship for support and security, or the importance of continued information-sharing for that relationship to provide that support. The teachers spoke about how when children have suffered family harm, they have been hurt, abused, or neglected by a person they trusted. A person who they

relied upon to care for them. They were aware that trust for those students was important, and so being able to trust their teacher or other school staff enough to disclose to them is invaluable in ensuring students cared for and safe:

> *"The person they trusted has done this to them. But---it's like---sexual abuse cases, isn't it? It's almost always someone who is known to them. Someone who they trust. So---it's very difficult for them to trust anyone, isn't it" (Katie)*

After a disclosure, participants spoke of needing to follow protocol and refer the child to the senior manager, knowing that by doing so, they are relinquishing any control or involvement they might have in that child's case due to limited or no information-sharing. They are required to pass on information to those authorised to respond, with the awareness that they will be isolated from any decision-making or interventions for that child. They feel like this process disconnects them from their students, releasing them into the system without the tether of relationship or trust. This disconnect can feel like a betrayal of the trust built up between teacher and student:

> *"But, um---you worry about breaking that trust with the child, and---you worry---" (Rachel)*

The isolation felt by teachers is exacerbated by this feeling of breaking trust with their students. There seems to be a constant, nagging question whether they have done the right thing for that child. Even when they know they have followed the protocol, they question whether the decision to pass information to senior management is the right thing on an individual level in terms of that specific students' safety and wellbeing. Katie spoke of

knowing she had done the 'right' thing, but she never found out what happened and whether his circumstances had improved:

> "*I was---I was satisfied that I had done the right thing---but---I didn't see him again. Never ever. No. He never came back to school" (Katie)*

Knowing she has followed professional expectations of reporting procedures is set against nagging doubts about whether those procedures are in the student's best intersts. Without any return information on the welfare of students, it is impossible for teachers to feel confident in their decisions. If the child leaves the school and follow-up information is not provided, participants are forced into trusting a system that they are not a part of, which isolates them from information-sharing and decision-making.

Anxiety for students' welfare is often heightened in circumstances where cases cannot be referred. Referrals require evidence, a specific disclosure or physical sign that abuse is occurring. When physical signs are not evidenced, anxiety bubbles consistently under the surface, as teachers continue to observe worrying behaviours alone without support, uncertain of the right way to respond:

> *"In all my times of teaching, I have not seen any physical---signs of physical harm, in terms of---bruising---or---broken bones, or anything like that, but, um---I have had very grave concerns for the children" (Laurelle)*

Often, disclosures come through hints and clues, or short conversations which might give cause for concern, but cannot be referred further. Participants described feelings of

instant vigilance and anxiety in those moments, when it was clear that something was happening for this child, but they were unable to find out more details or take any action towards protecting and supporting the child:

> *"Things have happened, and you don't always pick up on what that is, initially, so, you might have had lots of little conversations along the way, and then another alarm bell goes off in your head, and you're like, 'Oh, hold on a minute, this is not---this is going somewhere darker---now---'" (Rachel)*

Sometimes, despite reporting the information to the senior manager or SENCo, teachers are still in positions where they must monitor a child for more tangible signs of abuse:

> *"Um---this year---there was a child who---who wrote in one of their books, and---yeah---that basically---um---let's put it this way, the AP [Associate Principal] was very interested in what that child had written, and---and I was told to monitor that child---especially when we were swimming, because she wanted to know if there were any physical signs that the child was being abused at home---yeah. I didn't see anything, but I'm on red alert with that kid" (Laurelle)*

In many of the stories participants shared, they never received a direct disclosure or any additional information about those children, yet they noted and monitored everything. This approach – while methodical – is piecemeal at best. It can be time-consuming and emotionally exhausting. Here, we the difference between responses to learning needs and family harm is stark. Learning and behaviour information is shared, engaged with

collaboratively, and included in end-of-year handover, so that students receive consistent care and education. Information pertaining to family harm is often concealed, and is consistently missing from handover meetings:

> *"Sometimes we'll go through IEPs for certain students, who need extra support. And then, through RTLB---but---I mean, with that [family harm] I think we all, as teachers, have boundaries---and it's like---an unsaid thing"*

Teachers are monitoring and recording concerns throughout the year, but rarely discuss that information directly with other teachers, due to confidentiality concerns. Some information may be shared on a limited basis by senior management:

> *"I would probably write my observations on a document, and then I'd go and have a chat to her [SENCo], because sometimes---often these things are historic as well, so she might go, "Oh yeah, yeah, I know that family---you know that sounds in parallel with other teachers' experiences" (Laurelle)*

Participants recognise that information-sharing allows patterns to be identified, but that often these discussions happen outside of official staff meetings, and are at the discretion of individual teachers or SENCos. These conversations might be initiated by the class teacher seeking further information, as a result of noticing behaviours or signs that are unusual but not yet evidential. Information-sharing in this way is not mandatory or even part of regular practice, despite the value of such collaboration for the child and the teacher. Teachers are left to monitor signs, and seek out the vital background information about their students by themselves. Again, less experienced teachers may not have the relationship with colleagues

or the confidence to ask those questions, leaving them wondering and worrying alone. Disclosures can be far more nuanced than training and policies would suggest, and teachers should be adequately prepared to respond. Enhanced training for responding to disclosures could increase teachers' confidence and knowledge, while improved information-sharing procedures would prioritise student safety by providing teachers with greater insight, reducing the need for anxious hypervigilant monitoring. Proactive, procedural information-sharing between teachers and from senior management could enhance children's safety, and accelerate teachers' ability to identify patterns of abuse. Currently, these processes vary from school to school:

> *"It's [training and information-sharing] at the Principal's disclosure, you get what they deem pertinent to you. And um---yeah. Yeah, that's just how the system works---I guess if your Principal doesn't think that's a priority or doesn't think that's something you need to be privy to, you wouldn't know about it" (Rachel)*

Classroom teachers have the least control over how the child's case progresses due to the lack of involvement and information-sharing about interventions, therefore trust in their colleagues and school leaders is important when following in-school protocols, and enables them to feel confident that the student would be cared for and listened to:

> *"But---yeah---the mana of---Both of those deputy principals have so much community mana, and so much---yeah---I feel completely---safe, you know, with all the processes and yeah" (Hazel)*

When that trust was missing, concerns were raised about established procedures, and anxiety increased. Throughout Rachel's interview, there was a sense of helplessness, which was in part rooted in her distrust of other senior leaders and the wider system. Distrust for Rachel was influenced by the power structure of existing reporting procedures, where one colleague holds all the confidential information, while others are excluded from that contextual knowledge about students:

> *"Um---like I said, one person holds it, so that, that makes it hard as well, cause sometimes I think---that one person holding it---is---a power thing, rather than a---duty of care thing for the child--- Yep--- Yeah--- I don't know" (Rachel)*

Even in the presence of trusted colleague relationships, participants' trust in the wider system can be limited. Teachers follow procedure and place some trust in the child protection system through necessity, rather than a true belief in its processes. Borne from professional experience, trust does not always extend to other schools' use of system protocols, knowing that different schools' family harm processes may not be as robust or as systematic. This distrust produces a precarious pragmatism, which feels forced and unstable:

> *"But you have to, like---you have to hope that the process is being followed as much elsewhere as when you do your job" (Sarah)*

If teachers had greater trust that the system was helping children become safer and more secure, they might feel less isolated or anxious. They could feel confident to pass information to managers and agencies, knowing that children are safer as a result of rigorous protocols.

Charlotte had a slightly different experience, where she felt that there were available agencies for her to contact personally, yet there was no system in place to ensure that support was forthcoming, and any support or information she required relied upon her individual choice to reach out and make requests. An additional isolation in Charlotte's case was that she was in an independent school, which is not governed by national guidelines in the same way as state-funded schools, so in-school child protection policies were produced by the school, from within their own guidelines. This contrasted with her overseas experience, where the school had strict child protection guidelines and mandatory reporting procedures. She felt isolated in her family harm response expectations and the approaches she had learned elsewhere:

> *"So, I did have a lot of support, but it did feel like I was working on my own---and, I was an outsider, and it was an independent school anyway" (Charlotte)*

Participants who were experienced in senior management or SENCo roles found that they had more 'power' to navigate around strict protocols in order to help teachers to maintain their connection with vulnerable students. Increased job security and a level of authority within the school allowed for some flexibility in following procedure. While younger teachers felt anxiety about 'doing the right thing', senior managers could navigate around some protocols, knowing they could *"ask for forgiveness later" (Sarah)* if their decisions were questioned. Senior managers are able to implement decisions regarding staff support, and what aspects of school life should be the focus over a term or a year. Participants in these positions shared how their own experiences as classroom teachers had affected their decisions to provide better staff support. Their own professional reflexivity influenced their

focus on improving professional support networks within school and with external agencies. When they could, they would bring teachers into meetings or give them pieces of information, if relevant, to ensure continuing support:

> *"I'm aware of the impact it has as---as a class teacher… So, I try my best to ensure that the classroom teacher has as much information as they possibly can" (Rachel)*

> *"My attitude is we do what is right and best so, if there's a crisis, and a teacher needs to come out, I'm going to put maybe a teacher aide in there, or double the class size or whatever it happens to be, because that child and that family need that person at that point in time. And---I'll ask for the forgiveness later" (Sarah)*

However, senior managers are often as isolated as classroom teachers, although this isolation manifests through increased responsibility, and the enforcement of confidentiality rules. Those in SENCo positions, who are solely responsible for receiving, referring, and managing disclosures, are isolated by the barrier of the confidential knowledge they hold; set apart from other members of staff by the burden of upholding the confidentiality rules of family harm disclosures and suspicions:

> *"Previously, I have been able to pass these things on to a senior person, but these days my role is different. I am the senior person" (Katie)*

Participants in senior management also spoke of situations when they had made referrals to Oranga Tamariki, and received no more contact in relation to the case. The isolation felt by classroom teachers due to limited contextual information for some students could be because senior managers do not have the information to share, and have not been

involved in collaboration or intervention-planning for children This lack of feedback can extend as far as children being uplifted, and abruptly leaving the school without notice or communication. The level of isolation and confusion felt by participants in these circumstances cannot be under-estimated: they have spent time working on their relationship with students, developing trust over time, experiencing the personal impact on them after a disclosure, and the often fraught decision to refer that child to Oranga Tamariki, only to be left without knowledge, without closure, and without that vulnerable child in their care.

Institutional isolation

Participants felt that the isolation they felt went further than an individual and professional level, and was also experienced at an institutional level, where institutional isolation emerged from experiences of working with external agencies beyond Education, and the gulf between ministry siloes. Institutional isolation was a significant source of frustration for participants when supporting vulnerable families in their school communities, and was felt particularly by those in positions of senior management or other leadership roles across the school. Across the stories told to me, participants described making multiple attempts to place reports of concern with Oranga Tamariki, and receiving little or no feedback on the outcome of those referrals when they were finally accepted. Similarly, they spoke of how inter-agency meetings with health, police, or social work only occur when initiated by police or Oranga Tamariki. Within Education, participants talked to me about difficulties they had encountered in sharing information about family harm or other social concerns about students across schools when students have moved house or been uplifted by social services. Without information-sharing across schools, children who are experiencing family violence start at ‘square one’, with no teachers or managers possessing the knowledge of their experiences, and schools have no ability to provide support. Furthermore, the

participants stories also spoke of how institutional isolation is not only experienced when working beyond the Education department, but also within it, as schools work for their own communities. Institutional isolation was peppered in small and large ways all throughout the participants accounts, presenting various tensions in the ability to navigate and work within ministry silos.

> *"How can we provide wrap-around care, when Education is working over here, and social work is over there?" (Hazel)*

> *"There isn't much slack in the system, I know that, you know, counsellors have people – supervisors – they can go to. Ed Psychs have people they can go to. But the people at the chalk-face, be it learning support staff, or teachers, don't have people to go to---that is really missing" (Sarah)*

Wrap-around care in schools depends entirely on inter-agency communication, since schools cannot provide this care alone. For instance, supplying school stationery, school bags, contacting benefits providers, or mental health services, are common practice in schools, and all these necessitate collaboration with other agencies. In circumstances of family violence, having direct contact with agencies can help to locate refuge centres, police, financial aid, and psychological support. Participants also mentioned instances of truancy, which required input from Attendance Services, as well as information from a social worker to gain a clearer picture of the family's home situation that might be causing issues with school in-attendance. Input from health and social work might be needed when a child is a carer for a parent, and funding might be sought to support children staying at school when their home circumstances change. The participants recognised the need for wrap around care

through speaking of an awareness of spoke of an awareness of the multiple aspects of children's lives which make school attendance, secure home-lives, and educational engagement difficult or impossible :

> *"If there's actual harm that's happened, or there's psychological harm that's happened---and they're going to be isolated… As soon as that happens, then they're not going to be coming to school, and they're not going to be learning" (Sarah)*

In cases of suspected family harm, being able to request and share information across agencies such as Attendance Services, Health, Oranga Tamariki, Police or Corrections, can help build a clearer picture of that child's home circumstances and their needs. Long-term, this ability could help with early intervention plans, and construct wrap-around care protocols, but day-to-day, teachers need to know if anything has happened for that child, which might affect their ability to engage in school:

> *"It's important we know what's happening for that child, so we can--- You know, if they're coming in in the morning, we can support them" (Rachel)*

When that information is not easily accessed, participants must seek out those connections individually, through their own contacts and experience in the community, such as the personal and professional connections that experienced teachers have built over their extensive careers:

> *"That's where we really have to problem-solve, and go, 'oh, I know somebody at Attendance Services' or, 'who do you know at OT [Oranga Tamariki]?'… It's just so*

piecemeal, but you share within your own network---you build your own connections, and you make your incidental things that should be part and parcel of what we're doing---to try and achieve your own networks" (Sarah)

Building these networks is part of working in a community, and the isolation experienced by teachers creates a need to find and develop the contacts so that there is a place for advice, to find support for a child, or simply to share a difficult case. Without systemised networking, teachers must do this alone. Participants shared a perception that schools operate outside of other child protection agencies, and can only be actively involved at the initial disclosure and referral stage of the process. They felt that separation of Education from other agencies does not acknowledge the centrality of schools in the community:

"The school's function is more about creating that community to support, to hopefully---then we don't end up with family harm incidences, you know---so we can allay the stress" (Sarah)

The fragmented and disconnected structure of agencies and ministries in Aotearoa New Zealand was concerning to participants. There is a little overlap in information-sharing protocols, meaning that the intersecting social factors that contribute to family harm are not being identified or attended to collaboratively. Children can move schools and become lost in the system, due to a lack of systematised, consistent inter-agency communication. Family violence suspicions and documentation do not always follow children to new schools, so patterns of abuse can go unrecognised:

"You don't know what has happened after that [school move], or anything---so that's---very disempowering" (Rachel)

Teachers work hard to gather information, to build up a picture of their students, and are left feeling isolated and powerless when referral developments are not communicated or their knowledge is not shared with other schools and relevant agencies. The FVA (2018) potentially enables teachers to build systematised collaborative responses to students' family violence experiences and, the potential scope for information-sharing and provision of wrap-around, holistic action through its legislation is powerful. However, in the participants' experiences, schools remain excluded from vital knowledge about their students, and are still constrained from sharing relevant information to other schools and agencies. Further, they are not always consulted when safety plans are put in place for children, despite them being well-placed to work alongside families, given that they potentially have day-to-day contact with them. Sarah describes Safety Plans being 'fed' to schools, as an already-decided course of action, without consultation of what is possible within the school or what might be in the child's best interests:

"Sometimes it'll be working in partnership, depending on what it is, and I get fed a Safety Plan that's being implemented by Oranga Tamariki" (Sarah)

When directly asked about their experiences of changes to information-sharing opportunities legislated through the FVA (2018), most participants were not aware of the Act, or the changes the Act makes possible to how schools can respond to and support vulnerable children and families. Others had heard of it, but were unaware of the potential for information-sharing and information-requesting that has been enabled through the Act:

Researcher: "So, schools actually have information-sharing and information-gaining powers, which mean you can request information from OT or Health about any child in your school, if you require that information for---say, needs' assessments or child protection reasons"

Rachel: "I did not know that! But that---that's important for teachers to know! Wow"

Information-sharing is not happening consistently enough for teachers to feel informed and prepared to respond to their vulnerable students. Schools are struggling to gain a clear picture of children's circumstances, and similarly to pass pertinent information along to new schools or involved agencies. Despite the extensive changes proposed in the FVA (2018), these changes have not successfully filtered down to schools, and are not being integrated into regular inter-agency processes. The exclusion from information-sharing is creating an environment of institutional isolation for teachers and schools, where Oranga Tamariki, Police, and Health have formed inter-agency networks, while Education is still side-lined. Isolating schools and teachers in this way is not only hindering schools' responses, but must impact external agencies' ability to respond holistically to children's needs when they are experiencing family harm.

Partnership is power

The participants spoke of how powerful and empowering opportunities for collaboration with other schools and agencies, when able to be established, were for them. Isolation often had a negative effect on participants' confidence in family harm responses, but having individual contacts or agency support beyond their own working spaces provided valuable opportunities to discuss cases, and share ideas on how to respond. Different agencies

have their own expertise and resources, which can be useful for schools to access in order to provide a wrap-around responses for vulnerable children and families.

> *"To have the hook-up of agencies – multiple agencies together – is the power" (Sarah)*

The power of partnership was clear throughout the participant interviews. Concerns about disclosures, fear of children disappearing into a fragmented system, and anxiety surrounding responses, are all mediated to a degree by individual opportunities to discuss and seek advice. Isolation is reduced, and confidence in response opportunities increases, in the realisation that there are other, like-minded people, working hard to secure better outcomes for vulnerable students. Contacts in Attendance Services, Oranga Tamariki, community police, and local health professionals, as well as senior management from local schools can provide advice, support, and sometimes help fast track individual cases:

> *"Knowing they're there---yeah---it's helpful. Yeah, I think so. I can email any time, without over-loading them. And I can go to the team leader once a week, at team meetings too--- But it's good to know I have a point of contact if I need it" (Charlotte)*

Many of these contacts have been developed personally by individual teachers, and are not established through solid protocols. Participants, frustrated with the lack of systematised support, often built their own networks for contact and support over time, through their own professional experience and relationship development. In some cases, participants can utilise these individual contacts to expedite referrals or gain perspective about family harm suspicions:

"There are build-ups of contacts and people, who are allocated to different duties, and---it works--- If I already have a case or I have a worry, I do have a couple of people that I know very well, that I'll ring" (Katie)

Having individual contacts located in agencies across government systems, who teachers can contact directly, is a way of circumnavigating the constraints and limitations of official system protocols. These contacts are invaluable when participants feel they have exhausted the options available to them, or when a case is particularly complex:

"Sometimes you don't know what to do, and that's why you have to have these contacts who you can ring for advice, and ask, 'What do I do with this?' They can't really give me information, but they can say, 'you need to do this', or 'you need to contact this person,' or, 'cc me into this email and I'll deal with it'" (Katie)

Inter-agency relationship opportunities provide scope for holistic support of vulnerable families and children, which, if working within siloed departments, is not easily achieved, but is necessary. Some teachers spoke of inter-agency relationships which their schools have managed to foster, and how those relationships enable support that attends to both the practical and emotional needs of students experiencing family violence, and their families:

"What we put in place in school is that we would make sure the child is in class, they have the necessary equipment or food or uniform - sometimes OT [Oranga Tamariki] will provide the uniform and the food - and we might make sure they have other

things that are needed--- And we make sure that the child is here every day, and if they're not, who do we notify" (Katie)

The ability to make such fundamental provisions for vulnerable students is further strengthened through the commitment of individual schools to connect with charities and agencies. In cases where children have been affected by crime, schools can connect to agencies through Family Group Conferences, which are initiated by Oranga Tamariki, or through Integrated Safety Response teams, which are designed to provide multi-agency care and response for families affected by family violence:

"That [Family Group Conferences] would involve the teacher, OT [Oranga Tamariki], the police, maybe mental health workers, MoE [Ministry of Education], and there would be---they're just called family group conferences, where everyone tries to work together to provide the support this family and the children so that they can stay on track. And, it's instigated by OT" (Katie)

As Katie notes, as helpful as inter-agency collaboration can be, it often relies on other agencies leading or instigating these processes. Without direct Ministry of Justice action, participants said there are no inter-agency teams which can be initiated by schools in response to family harm, which leaves school and teachers limited in their responses and interventions. However, through The Ministry of Education, schools can initiate support which is directly linked to learning, such as IEPs (Individualised Education Plans):

"The IEPs - the Individualised Educational Plans - we just did the paperwork for the school, answered the specific questions as well, filed it in---I don't know where! And

after that all took place, we sat with Mum and a grandparent, and we sat together, about 6 of us, and talked about this one student; what their interests are, what works best for them---and we're all collaborating about ideas to keep him engaged and keep it positive" (Charlotte)

IEPs demonstrate the potential for schools to work collaboratively, and include families in the collaborative approach of identifying and responding to children's needs. Viewing Education as only concerned with teaching and learning fails to recognise the complexities of the teaching role, and the importance of schools within the wider community. Schools are a central point in communities, and accessing resources and wider contacts can help devise more effective action plans, while the ability to share responsibility through discussion minimises the physical, professional, and institutional isolation felt by teachers handling family harm concerns:

"Try and find a new strategy, and--- Try to stay positive, and, I guess---ask for help---work together--- There's only so much that we can do, but it's nice to collaborate with others who have so much experience" (Charlotte)

Those who have worked in one school or community for several years are better placed to establish secure, trusted relationships amongst local agencies, while those who are new to teaching or just recently promoted into senior management or SENCo roles are limited to the official pathways into accessing support, as they have not yet had the opportunities to develop their own personal support network. These networks are established over many years of relationship-building and trust, often reliant on the length of service of both the teacher and the agency contact. Across the participants, there was inconsistency in

the number of contacts they had grown, and also inconsistency in the professional level of those contacts, meaning that some participants had more access to higher-level support and advice than others. If those inter-agency contacts were part of a systematised approach, and schools had a specific point of contact, these networks of inter-agency relationships would not be entirely reliant on proactive individuals utilising their community and professional experience, and could become available to all teachers:

> *"But that doesn't automatically happen. And when you're new into a SENCo role, which lots of my colleagues are at these meetings, you don't have that network, you have to grow it. Meanwhile your children, and your staff, and the families are not being served in the best way that they possibly can be" (Sarah)*

> *"But I think it might be difficult for---how do I put this---for a new person to step in. Because, I've spent a long time in the community and I've built those relationships" (Katie)*

A child protection safety net that is reliant on individual effort will always have gaps, and there will always be areas which can be weakened through staff changes, as those individual contacts and years of experience in the community fall away when teachers change schools or retire. Furthermore, it places individual teachers in a precarious position of fighting a battle alone, where they hold themselves responsible for any failures. This responsibility feeds the isolation, resulting in feelings of anxiety and powerlessness for teachers. Building networks across agencies is possible, as demonstrated by teachers and

schools who are achieving it, and participants suggested that these inter-agency relationships would be easy to formalise, by utilising existing links across feeder schools[2] and Kāhui Ako[3]:

> *"You can't. You just can't do it in isolation. And I think if we can do it informally, then surely it can be done formally. It's not too difficult. It really isn't. There are people out there that. It's just about connecting people. But if that was formalised---so that was like, little hubs that were based around Kāhui Ako or feeder schools---that would be an awesome way of making things happen!" (Sarah)*

Participants passionately spoke in support of inter-agency and inter-school collaborations, which would strengthen safety nets, and reduce isolation for teachers. Legislation in the FVA (2018) provides scope for more formalised and systemic opportunities for collaborative information-sharing and response, and teachers are already conducting collaborations across agencies. Formalising the inter-agency networking already happening in schools is not only possible, but necessary. The development of networks for collaborative response would help teachers feel less individually, professionally and institutionally isolated, and more confident and comfortable in their ability to care and support for the children in their classrooms who may be experiencing family harm.

[2] Feeder schools are the primary schools within a cluster, whose students would attend the local high school or college

[3] Kāhui Ako are communities of learning, involving educators and training providers, which aim to help students achieve. Meetings include goal-setting and setting achievement challenges based on identified learning needs of children and young people. They are collaborative groups, which work with parents, whānau, iwi, and communities. www.education.govt.nz

Doing What is Right and Best

> *"My attitude is we do what is right and best, and we work out the funding and the back-fill later!" (Sarah)*

The theme *Doing what is Right and Best* emerged from participant accounts of following policy expectations through in-school reporting procedures, and the conflict they often experienced regarding the best course of action for individual children. Participants held different levels of authority within their schools, yet the experience of conflict and concern in doing what was right for their students was consistent across the group. All were clear about the reporting procedures in their schools, and knew to pass disclosures and concerns to the authorised senior leader. This linear understanding, however, was complicated by myriad grey areas: participants' confusion about family violence indicators, uncertainty about whether signs or behaviours were serious enough to report, and whether or not those reporting procedures would ultimately achieve safer outcomes for the child. Teachers' felt an immense duty to make the best decisions for their students, balanced against distrust in the performance and commitment of external agencies to care for vulnerable children. In the face of distrust and fear about children's outcomes, teachers may place themselves at risk to protect their students, physically, personally, and professionally. *Doing what is Right and Best* reflects teachers' need to place their trust in limiting and 'unhuman' policy and procedures, and the choices they are forced to make within those procedures to secure best outcomes for their students.

Doing the right thing

Across the interviews, participants demonstrated commitment to student wellbeing, showing empathy and deep concern for children experiencing family violence. *Doing the right thing* attends to the emotional investment from teachers, contrasted with their perceptions of insufficient attempts by government to confront Aotearoa New Zealand's family harm epidemic. Participants described a deep belief in the fundamental provision of a safe, healthy environment for children, recognising that, for some children, school may be the only place they feel safe. This recognition was felt as responsibility to do everything needed to uphold that sense of security for their students.

> *"If school is the only place that they feel safe, we have to make sure that that is the space that still stays safe" (Rachel)*

One of teachers' roles is to recognise and report family harm suspicions or disclosures, and to prioritise the child's wellbeing at all times. The role of prioritising the child's wellbeing is complicated by participants' uncertainty about the best course of action after receiving a disclosure or having concerns about a child's wellbeing. The conflict in these decisions is to do 'the right thing' according to protocol, and still doing 'the right thing' by the child to avoid causing further harm by saying the wrong thing, or, in Rachel's case, betraying the student's trust passing them to someone else:

> *"And I guess, you've been given that position of trust with that child---they've got that relationship and trust with you, and then you're handing it over to someone who doesn't have that same relationship or investment with that child" (Rachel)*

Rachel talks about how she has no choice but to 'betray' her students' trust by passing on the information her student has told her to someone else, given the processes in school are laid out in school policy and have come from Ministry of Education guidance. When school policies and procedures demand that teachers pass family violence reports to the authorised senior leader, teachers may need to share information entrusted to them by students, despite them feeling that this could be seen as a betrayal, and one that may not result in effective and supportive intervention and response. The need to do the right thing for the child is tied up with the need to get their response right and protect the school, and the teacher, by following procedure, even if there is uncertainty about the outcome:

> *"…yeah, that's our school policy, and our process, and that's come from…um…the ministry…or Acts…um…and so, that's our interpretation of it…and our policy and procedure have to be followed, to ensure that we are doing the right things, in terms of what we, as a school, have chosen to do. Um…but…it's always a murky, grey area, I feel…sometimes I feel like…as a teacher, or a person who works in a school, you can feel quite helpless as to how you can…help…help a child who's…and…is that actually the right thing for that child as well? I…I don't know" (Rachel)*

Rachel's account is full of questions; her words indicating deep confusion and conflict about the best way to protect students. Describing the process as 'murky' reveals that responses and reporting protocols are not clear-cut, and are not always the best option for children, in her experience. Her helplessness is related to the complexing nature of family violence response, and the sense of unease she feels at times about reporting disclosures and concerns.

The ‘murky’ nature of reporting concerns is exacerbated by school policy rules of ‘ask no questions’, where teachers are constrained from seeking clarity or further information from children who disclose to them. The conflict teachers experienced about questioning in circumstances when they received disclosures was apparent in all participant accounts, and appeared to be consistent across all levels of teaching responsibility, from classroom teacher, to SENCo, to senior management, and across schools.

> *“Don’t ask any leading questions; don’t ask any questions; if someone discloses to you, come and tell the person that you’re supposed to tell” (Rachel)*.

Rachel’s account is particularly indicative of how she has experienced system failings; experiences which are further influenced by her previously discussed (in Spaces and Islands)distrust of her senior manager. She first states ‘*don’t ask leading questions’*, and then amends this to ‘*don’t ask any questions’*, suggesting that this directive has been further reduced to avoid any possibility of mistakes, and consequent blame. Her amendment indicates the control, power, and restriction she experiences in attempting to respond to her students in a meaningful way.

These rules regarding questioning students following disclosures are in line with guidance from Oranga Tamariki, which advises against interviewing children or investigating disclosures without appropriate training (Oranga Tamariki, 2022). The key phrase in Oranga Tamariki’s guidelines is “without appropriate training”. Teaching staff could be given training in how to question without leading, but, instead of providing teachers with the training necessary to confidently and effectively talk with children about their disclosures in the classroom, participants’ stories suggested that policies have been diminished to a fear-

driven ‘ask no questions’ rule. The purpose of Oranga Tamariki’s guidance is to avoid accusations in legal settings that the child was led towards making a disclosure or an accusation by a parent or other adult. This has been particularly problematic in Aotearoa New Zealand’s Family Court’s handling of family violence claims, where mothers have been accused of parental alienation by abusive fathers’ lawyers (Herbert & Mackenzie, 2014). Therefore, should disclosures make their way into court proceedings, the evidence must be robust and persuasive, with no scope for women and children to endure further institutional violence:

> *“We are always told, that a child can only have two interviews, and if you ask them questions or leading questions, or something, and you’ve had that discussion with them, that can count as one of their interviews. And further along the track, that can have an impact on the outcome of a legal case, or where that child ends up, or---it could have a detrimental impact on that child, so---” (Rachel)*

The *ask no questions* guidance leaves participants feeling fearful and panicked when responding to family harm disclosures. As can be understood from Rachel’s account, teachers are receiving messages from policies that even if they do the right thing, in terms of their professional values of care and protection, and comfort the child, they might be doing the wrong thing, and harming that child’s potential for future security. The weight placed on ‘not getting it wrong’ often felt like a demand that teachers do not offer comfort or discuss the disclosure, even with the child. The ask no questions rule denies the student and the teacher a genuine human response to distressing information:

"But, yeah, I guess, it's always that you're nervous when that child discloses to you, because you want to make sure that you make the right decision to help that child, and that you're not going to put them in further harm…If a child discloses to you, in your head, you're going, 'Oh my God, what do I do?'" (Rachel)

In the following quote, Laurelle's response to the uncertainty of how to appropriately respond to disclosures is to pass the student to senior management immediately, and stay uninvolved. Her pragmatism suggests that she has had to place her trust in the school processes, due to a lack of certainty in her own abilities and knowledge:

"I would say something along the lines of,… "I can help you, and I'll see what I can do", kind of thing--- Yeah. But, we're not allowed to question them--- We're not allowed to do anything. I mean, yeah---if there's one thing we're trained not to do, it's question the child. So, we don't do that. That's for the next level up to deal with really" (Laurelle)

Here, policy guidance has been altered to a diminutive 'ask no questions' in order to control and restrict the possibility of mistakes, which Laurelle suggested "*protect[s] teachers against all sorts of accusations"*. The reality for Laurelle is that her portrayal of pragmatism and lack of involvement is due to a restrictive rule, which is easier to follow by staying uninvolved. That way, the grey, murky, confusing area of family violence response can remain clear cut and manageable. Teachers are being trusted with crucial, personal, and distressing information from children in their care, but instead of being able to provide comfort or support, their first response is one of anxiety, due to the limitations of their role and their knowledge/training. The messaging they have received in policy documents is to

constantly exercise caution, and say and do as little as possible, before passing this precious disclosure to another person who the child does not necessarily trust or know. Social and legal scrutiny has fuelled a self-protective approach institutionally, producing narrow, controlling procedures, which decrease teacher autonomy and confidence, and can leave children vulnerable, without a trusted adult to speak to who can knowledgeably and compassionately guide them through the outcomes of their disclosure. This may cause teachers to feel that they are balancing between prioritising the child and protecting themselves or the school, producing anxiety about doing 'the right thing', and participants described feeling caught in procedural self-protection, feeling uncertain and anxious about the best thing to do:

> *"You have to engage with it in a super careful way, so that you aren't leading any of the conversation---[thinking] I---like---I guess, leading the child to give false details or something like that--- Yeah. I don't know---" (Rachel)*

The limitations in teachers' choices of response are echoed by Katie. Katie described feeling uncertain about how to best protect students who were experiencing family harm, sometimes reaching out to individual agency contacts for advice. Ultimately, if she was unsure, she would log a report of concern with Oranga Tamariki, feeling that if she was following expected procedure, she was taking whatever limited action she was able to in order to provide some protection:

> *"Yeah, and, as I said--- If I'm not sure, I'll report. I'd rather report, and then find that there's nothing, than to not report, and then something really bad happens"(Katie)*

The idea that a disclosure is a single, revelationary moment is often simplistic, and there are significant grey areas about observations or conversations a teacher may have with a student leading up to, or following, a disclosure. These subtle, incremental realisations that family violence may be impacting a child, can make 'doing the right thing' far more complicated and uncertain. Disclosures may be given in vague, fragmented ways, through multiple interactions. Participants described times when students would approach them multiple times, and provide information which hinted towards a disclosure, but was unclear. Due to the incremental nature of some disclosures, participants could find themselves in conversations with students which are ambiguous, but insinuate abuse. Participants described moments when students would display certain behaviours or responses, which they might notice as unusual, and would begin the process of them monitoring for signs of family harm:

> *"You always have a niggly feeling that…perhaps there is something more…but…but they have to be able to prove it" (Katie)*

Participants spoke about signs of neglect; a child repeatedly arriving at school without food or adequate clothing, or children behaving nervously around adults. Hazel spoke at length about two children who displayed behaviours she considered consistent with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, but without additional information, she was never sure:

> *"Maybe two years ago, a little girl---if like, whenever you--- And she was a little---didn't want to try, and she was teary and really quite a little mouse, but if you---if anything---anything went around her, any movement in the class or passing a book---And she would cower" (Hazel)*

Participants described noticing signs or behaviours, which would alert them to particular children. These signs ranged from clear physical evidence, which could be immediately referred, to more subtle examples, such as seeds of knowledge shared by community or the child's family. These subtle signs could not be immediately referred or acted upon, so teachers would wait and monitor:

> *"Mainly I would just note it down and say, 'this is a pattern I've noticed with this child'" (Charlotte)*

The over-simplifying of Oranga Tamariki guidance questioning limits and controls teachers' decision-making options when they have received a disclosure or have concerns about a child in their class. Additionally, lack of mandatory child protection training, has produced an environment which places teacher in a precarious position, where they cannot make knowledgeable, confident decisions, and must choose between placing children at potential risk, by referring them to agencies that might not prioritise that child in their decisions, or risk blame and accusations for mishandling disclosures. Restricting policy guidelines in this way reduces teachers' ability to respond humanly to reports of family harm, as they scramble to respond in the 'right way'; balancing child protection, self-protection and protection of the school from outside scrutiny.

Doing what they can

Participants knew the limitations of their role and the constraints of the child protection system; observing how those constraints are failing to protect the most vulnerable children. They also felt deep care and commitment to protect the children in their classrooms,

the reality of working with and caring for children is that knowledge of family harm or neglect is experienced empathetically, and experience tension when they believed that often limited or no options exist to protect their students. In such instances, teachers were determined to do what they can to prioritise the child and their safety:

> *"It's yeah…very…yeah…complicated…and it can be hard. But then, shouldn't the child be the number 1 priority?" (Rachel)*

When teachers are required to follow procedure, such as making reports of concern to senior management and Oranga Tamariki after a distressing disclosure or other evidence from a child in their classroom, the sense of un-ease or uncertainty that this is the right course of action is further increased when cases are closed and investigations are not actioned:

> *"It might be---[sighs]---it might be just a phone call to say, 'this case is closed', and I'm like, 'Arrgh! I need you to still help!---so that'll be another re-referral then!'" (Sarah)*

> *"Sometimes, there's just not a lot you can do--- And you do report things, and things go through OT [Oranga Tamariki], and they say that nothing's wrong, and actually, there is! And things happen. And more things happen. And then---yeah" (Rachel)*

Participants were understanding of the constraints experienced by child protection agencies, recognising that they faced similar challenges as schools in terms of prioritising resources:

"I'd say that the less successful times are--- lack of communication---um---that can be a problem--- But, also, staff shortages mean you have to prioritise" (Katie)

While teachers understood these constraints, they voiced serious concerns about how resources, such as staffing and finances, were distributed and utilised, expressing frustrations about allocation of resources, and the actions of some external agencies, particularly those whose core purpose is the protection of children. They shared stories about their attempts at 'doing the right thing' had been undermined by external agency protocols and decisions, such as cases being closed or the outcomes of family harm investigations being unsatisfactory, and how these decisions exacerbated the powerlessness experienced when trying to secure a safe environment for children. Powerlessness produced feelings of frustration, and sometimes anger:

"We had children last year who'd lost one parent and were about to lose another parent through terminal illness, over the course of 14 months, and, I couldn't get anybody to keep them at this school until the end of the year. The Ministry of Education wouldn't give me any funding, I couldn't get social services to, you know, give any funding, and I was like---this is the one place they have security and um, feel they belong, and everything else is going to custard in their lives. It's just---the systems. They just didn't fit the right boxes. And, how dare you, how dare you not listen to me and help?" (Sarah)

Participants' experiences of government responses, and agency inaction has led them to feel that the priorities of other agencies are misplaced, with valuable people and resources utilised in the wrong way, for the wrong purposes:

"The systems are just bonkers to work in. I think there's a whole heap of money wasted, across multiple agencies, whether it's rebranding or whatever it is. It just really gets my goat! Yeah--- I find---actually---I find completely immoral!" (Sarah)

Often, the feeling of helplessness in their ability to protect when following procedure was so strong that participants believed doing so would bring no positive outcome for that child and they would be left to protect children on their own without support. The participants spoke of how they hold themselves individually responsible for their students' protection when systems and agencies have failed to respond, despite their best efforts to follow protocol. In response to the fear provoked by the feeling of protectiveness in the context of non-response from external child protection agencies, participants talked about working around the existing protocols in order to gain some sense of control over the child's situation, and to negate some of the powerlessness they experience. They fight to reach the right agencies, and set up the right support, driven by a need to improve the lives of their students, and save them from an unconscionable outcome:

"The bureaucracy and the wait-time on Oranga Tamariki can be pretty horrendous, if they're doing it as non-urgent in 10 days---and sometimes they don't get picked up and are lost in the system. So, then you're on the phone, back to Christchurch[4]*, saying, "why are you not picking up" and you keep going, 'why are you not picking up? You need to pick up this case. I was told---and now this is 30 days. And I've been*

[4] Christchurch is the central contact centre for Oranga Tamariki | Ministry for Children www.orangatamariki.govt.nz

told 10 days, and 10 days, and now this is 40 days, and I need you to look into this'" (Sarah)

To negate some of the frustration and anxiety induced by institutional non-action, participants found methods of 'circumnavigating' procedure, in ways that they felt balanced prioritising the child and keeping within the rules. Sarah's experiences are filled with frustration about trying to follow procedure, and trying to stick to the rules, but finding them restrictive and slow. She feels compelled to do what is right for the child, but also knows that you can go through the 'right processes' and still make no progress. , and so spoke of how she quietly works around the rules; sharing small amounts of information with staff who work with that child. Sharing confidential information is risky, but Rachel, and other participants, feel obligated to do so in order to help teachers better support and understand their students:

"I feel---I feel like in terms of policy and procedure, I might be---circumnavigating that--- But, in the end---I'm actually doing the right thing, because it's the best thing for the child. We know that child better than the policy and procedure know that child" (Rachel)

Teachers described taking up the responsibility to protect children when others have failed to take action, tenaciously fighting for the protection of their students. For some, the duty to protect the child is far stronger than the duty to protect themselves or the school, and they have placed themselves at physical and professional risk to ensure the safety of a student. For instance, the bureaucracy and slow, complicated report processes forced Katie to take extreme measures. Knowing that a child was not safe at home, and therefore could not

leave the school grounds safely, Katie made the decision to place the protection of the child ahead of her own professional and personal safety:

> *"I have had incidences, where I've had to wait, when I've made an emergency call, when I don't want that child to go home from school, where I have had to wait with the child after school. And we have actually been locked in the office, waiting for someone to come. Because I have to ensure that my priority is the safety of the child" (Katie)*

Katie's use of '*incidences'* speaks of the ongoing struggle she has engaged in to initiate protection and support for this particular student. Katie followed the procedures placed on her by school policy and the Ministry of Education; did everything required of her to keep herself and her students safe. Yet, she was forced to endanger herself, both personally and professionally, by locking herself in the office with the child she was protecting, due to her duty of care and the failure of relevant agencies to respond. Having followed protocols, she felt that there was no other option available to her that would fulfil her duty of care to the student.

Similarly, Charlotte was confronted with numerous abuse cases during her overseas teaching experience. Having worked within different systems, and having had more freedom in managing family harm situations in her overseas teaching experience, she is forthright about uncovering the truth, despite the restrictions laid out in school policy that prevent her from questioning children experiencing family harm. Charlotte is prioritising the protection of the child over the protection of her job:

"If I feel the parent is lying to me, or trying to cover up with their words, I might just ask to speak to them [the child] for a second, and ask, you know, 'how did you get that bruise on your face?', and they might you know, 'I fell', or,' it happened at my Dad's house', or---yeah" (Charlotte)

While at times frustration lay in agency's failure to respond, there was equal provocation when there was some action taken, but which did not go far enough to provide long-term protection and security:

"We worked so hard, and then at the end of the year, they were given back to their families, which is probably the result you want, but in my mind, it was like---I was thinking that not much would change for them, and one especially had come out of really horrific circumstances, so that, you know, it's like, 'Oh my gosh, why would you do that?'...But yeah--- but looking at this---yeah--- It was just a transient, flow of---flow of sadness. And they might just be going back to the same situation" (Hazel)

System limitations result in children being uplifted and moved, but sometimes their circumstances are not improved, and the child may still be unsafe and unprotected. Hazel describes conflict between bewilderment at the action taken by Oranga Tamariki, while also trying to balance the ideal of children remaining with their families. Knowledge of the harm the children had experienced left her confused and fearful for the safety of those students. For Hazel, this situation was not unusual, and previous experiences with children in foster care produced similar feelings of frustration, and fuelled her internal conflict about the child protection system and whether reporting is always in the child's best interests or the 'right thing to do'. She shared a story about a foster situation which had been unsuccessful:

"But the foster care worker, her foster carer, he said, you know, 'these children so need help, but all they do is get moved on.' He was like, 'there'll be no help for her, they'll just send her to new home'---Which they did" (Hazel)

Participants voiced concerns about children being uplifted and rehomed, but without addressing the trauma they have experienced. The child discussed by Hazel was able to remain at the same school, and the school remained a stable, safe environment, but Hazel's frustration and conflict lay in that child's new situation of home insecurity; the child had been removed from her dangerous home, but was now in a precarious situation of moving from home to home within the care system. Hazel, and many of the other participants, feel helpless in such situations. They recognised that while they were able to provide a stable school environment, so they can be reliable adults in that child's life, following procedure often does not save those children from other harms:

"It's very big. I've got no idea---how to---fix---fix it. The only thing I can do is to provide an environment where the children come into my classroom and they know exactly what to do, and I'm the same person every single day" (Laurelle)

Participants' immense sense of duty to care and protect children was apparent when discussions turned to Aotearoa New Zealand's crisis of child abuse fatalities. Participants became visibly emotional in these discussions, voicing their belief that a child abuse fatality happening in their school community is a very real possibility. Laurelle feels it is a question of when, not if:

"You know, we haven't been in a situation where a child has been killed---but, I mean---that is---probably going to happen in the future, to be honest---" (Laurelle)

Laurelle's statement is complicated in its delivery. When reflecting on her tone in the interview, she stated it pragmatically and without obvious emotion, yet I remember her words as loaded with resignation, sadness, and disbelief that this is a reality she may need to face involving one of her own students. Participants know that these tragedies are far more prevalent than most people accept, with news reports emerging regularly about child deaths in Aotearoa New Zealand. As discussed in Chapter 1, the true prevalence statistic of child abuse and fatalities is unknown, however the New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse (2017) suggest it is likely that one child a week is dying at the hands of a caregiver. The participants' stories acknowledged this horrifying reality, embedded in talk of the restrictions and helplessness they face in relation to taking action to protect their students. They are following school protocols, they are doing the best they can within the constraints of their jobs, but there is fear and frustration that systems are not moving fast enough or doing enough to protect children.

Participants' concern with agencies and government systems is rooted in a lack of faith in government strategy to prevent family harm and protect vulnerable children. They see little government commitment to child protection, damaging their trust in procedural expectations. Teachers know that children have been failed by the child protection system time and again, and they are not seeing enough investment in changing the narrative for Aotearoa New Zealand's children. Again, anger erupts from the concern and fear that children – *their children* – are not being cared for or prioritised:

"I also think that every agency has amazing vision statements and value, but they're not actually living them. So, they've got these wonderful things, and little---headlines and by-lines, and things---that they have, and mission statements---which is great. But the top does not have any iota of an idea of what is happening on the ground. There's nothing actually tangible. It's all airy-fairy vision. Great, lovely; we're going to get kids out of poverty, we're going to get them back to school. Yeah, nobody is going to disagree. BUT there's no 'how'. It's all waffle and rubbish! It's bullshit. Sorry! [laughs] It's really bullshit! Because, there's no 'how'" (Sarah)

There is a fear that political point-scoring, public service cuts, and competition between agencies for limited resources is producing more harm as siloed departments struggle to work cohesively:

"We have all these systems that are separate, but we don't have this---holistic---we don't have---we don't have---I don't know--- We just don't know how to do it. We don't know how to mend. And that's how it should be done, right? Everyone pulling together. Not everybody against each other, or hiding information from each other, or--- And these kids are just victims within this system" (Hazel)

Similarly, even while recognising the failings and gaps in the child protection system, participants understand that there is no other option for them: in their role as teachers, all they are able to do is recognise and report. There is no further action they can take to protect their students, and ultimately, they need to place their trust in the system:

"We do have processes, and we do have a justice system, and---I know it might not be as effective as it could be---But there are processes that we have to respect" (Laurelle)

Following the school and system processes provides some sense of security for participants, knowing that in some small way, they are doing what they can for their student. Yet, they still experience a conflict about whether those processes do enough to help, fuelled by distrust in the system's effectiveness, and this motivates them to find ways to personally get the help children need, despite the restrictions they face in their roles. In response to discussions about fatalities, Sarah made this conflict clear:

"I'm just---deeply sad--- Deeply, deeply sad--- And---then my pragmatic brain kicks in and I tell myself that I did what I could. It actually---gives me more---dogged determination to kick against the bloody system and to fight more"(Sarah)

Teachers' duty to protect can only be actioned in limited ways, involving significant internal conflict as they weigh up the best interests of the child against the effectiveness of system processes. Following protocols does not allow participants to fully act on their duty to protect, as they lose control of a child's welfare through the recognise and report process, and even this simple process can be experienced as overly difficult, and is not a process where they can feel like they are actively working to protect the children in their care:

"I think---the amount of jumping through hoops to get access to things, even within the MoE is---just ridiculous. You're just multiple form-filling" (Sarah)

The motivation to do what is right and best for children in their classrooms can be a source of anxiety and frustration for teachers, and sometimes institutional policies and procedures appear to work against their ability to 'do the right thing'. They are instructed to be cautious, conditioned by the fear of saying or doing the wrong thing, because the wrong thing can have a detrimental impact both for the child and for the teacher. There is a constant undercurrent of concern about upholding policy rules and messaging, while navigating ways to achieve the best result for the child. Teachers' frustration and bewilderment with system structures and decisions was evident, recognising that despite the failings and problems they identify, they must continue to work within them, and do what they can to make them work to meet their students' needs. Doing what is right and best does not always provide the peace and closure teachers seek in following procedures, and they are often left knowing that, at the end of the day, they were unable to ensure that child's protection and safety.

Travelling with the Trauma

> *"You just want to know that they're secure. Um…they stick with you. I mean, that first one was in the 80s, and I still remember it. The brother and sister abuse was about 20 years ago---the separated parents was about 3 years ago---this prison one here---um---those kids are in their early twenties now, so that would have been about 10 years ago---the marijuana use would have been---about---8 years, maybe? And the food one, well, that's just on-going. I can still picture those kids" (Laurelle)*

The theme of Travelling with the Trauma speaks to the participants' accounts of family violence disclosures and concerns they had experienced over the span of their careers, and the lasting impact those experiences have had on them. For some, those experiences had shaped their careers. As conversations unfolded, participants shared their memories of family

harm stories, with accounts ranging from the week before, to more than forty years ago. Irrespective of the time, participants were visibly moved when describing those children's stories. Participants hesitated, paused, considered their words, while some had tears in their eyes as they remembered certain children, and certain situations they had faced. Laurelle had written everything down ahead of the interview so she could read each one out to me, in a way preparing herself in advance to face the emotions attached to those experiences. It was evident that participants were still invested in those children, and still carried the duty to protect them, highlighting the importance of attending to teachers' distress and well-being while working tireless and sometimes fruitlessly to protect and support the children under their care.

Holding on

During the interviews, teachers shared stories and experiences of family harm incidents they had encountered over their careers. For some, these stories had not been spoken about for decades. As they began sharing them, I noticed the participants becoming quieter, more reflective. For some, they were visibly emotional, becoming tearful and hesitant. They were able to recount, in vivid detail, these memories, still knowing those children's names, their stories and experiences, and visualising them clearly.

> *"It was in---the 70s, when we had the big immigration rush. And---I remember coming into school one day – and I've never forgotten his name – I had a little boy in my room, and his name was Tony[5]. And he came in, and he had a grey shirt on. And the sleeve of his shirt was all wet. Just one sleeve. And I said to him, "Are you ok?",*

[5] Tony is a pseudonym, used to protect confidentiality of both the participant and the child. I wanted to include a name in this quote as it was important to Katie: she was able to remember his name after so many years.

and he said, "Mmm…mmmm" [nodding]. So, we started the day, then I noticed he was sitting there with tears rolling down his cheeks, and I said, "Come and see me. Is your arm really sore?" [nodding]. I said, "Can you tell me what happened?", and he said, "My mother hit me with the wood. I've never forgotten his name--- I found out that he was in hospital, and he was removed from---from the family---because--- because the mess on his arm was that his arm had been pulped to the bone. So, for me, as a young teacher, that was really upsetting. And I have never forgotten it" (Katie)

The above story relates to a family harm event from the late 1970s, when Katie first qualified as a primary school teacher. Katie recounted the story as though it had happened yesterday, and appeared to be transported back to the moment when she heard about this child's injuries. She recalled details about the clothes the boy was wearing, with only one wet sleeve. Her detailed account of his injuries relays the importance of this story, and why it has stayed with her all this time, losing none of its vividness. After over forty years, there was still hesitancy about voicing them aloud, as she revisited the emotions of that day. This case had deeply affected her, and the memory of the child involved has stayed with her throughout her teaching career.

Katie's story and her emotional response was not unusual in the interviews. The majority of participants had extensive careers, spanning several decades, and every discussion contained accounts of family harm disclosures that were often loaded with emotion. Participants hesitated and paused as they relived those moments and told me of stories they had tried to move on from:

"This is going back quite a long time. Um---there were a couple of brothers who were in a gang situation, and I know that one---one of those boys was abused. And---um---it was---pretty unpleasant--- I've also seen an undercurrent of abuse, when parents have separated. And---there's one situation I can think of, where things got really nasty, and---there were lots of underlying issues, in particular with the father. So, those children were---emotionally and psychologically abused" (Laurelle)

"I have had Oranga Tamariki children in my care before. In classroom care. And sometimes…and that---that has been heart-breaking. And then you think about those children, um, and how---for years later" (Hazel)

Throughout our conversations, the use of particular language was indicative of participants' continued attachment to children's abuse stories. Using expressive and emotive words, participants describe the compassion they still feel for their students, and the bewildered frustration they have with the child protection system. Their words paint a picture of their pain, frustration, and loss:

"Sometimes it's heart-breaking, and I don't hear… And especially when you've put in a case and then they've moved. That is particularly heart-breaking, and then you feel that---they're lost in the system--- Our missing and invisible children" (Sarah)

"Sometimes the families move away, and then---then they're just lost in the system---and you never hear from them again" (Laurelle)

"Yeah, it's um---yeah. Hard--- But it's certainly--- I mean--- I find it the most heart-wrenching part of the job as a teacher, dealing with that---[sighs]" (Rachel)

'Heart-wrenching' (Rachel), 'heart-breaking', 'our missing and invisible children' (Sarah), 'lost in the system' (Laurelle). These words and phrases are not accidentally used. Participants describe a complex, distressing, and often frustrating aspect of their jobs. A part of their job which stays with them for decades. Their emotive language tells us of teachers' distress and personal pain when confronted with students they care about experiencing violence, embedded in a frightening and confusing system that often seems incapable or unwilling to help them. It was evident that participants still wondered about the outcomes for those particular children. In a system of response that demands confidentiality, and limits school involvement, there is little opportunity for closure, and the pain and worry teachers feel linger long after the experience,

Given the opportunity to discuss their experiences, participants were free to voice their deepest fears for those students. They may move forward in their jobs, but those children remain, always, in their minds. Charlotte shared an experience from overseas, when she was deeply involved in inter-agency care for a girl and her sister. Restructuring led to her team being abruptly disbanded, and the girls' care placed elsewhere. She had no opportunity for closure with the family, and the 'case' was handed over without consideration for the emotions and investment involved, which left Charlotte wondering what had happened to the girl. She describes a dream she had about the girl and her sister:

"I wanted closure about whether her and her little sister were ok, and no one gave me that information, because it's classified. I had a dream about her actually, recently--- She told me, you know--- 'Everything is ok'" (Charlotte)

Charlotte's dream reveals the level of care and investment she had invested in those girls' situation, and also the importance of creating opportunities for information-sharing and updates on the outcomes for students, not only to provide protection for children but also for the well-being of teachers who carry the burden of their stories.

The participants continue to carry those children' stories with them, and for some, early dealings with abuse has impacted their entire career, leading them into teaching roles involving proactive advocacy for children's welfare:

"I think that's influenced my career path and practice--- I think I think it's made me very---aware of---looking---of noting if that child is trying to cover something up, or is visibly upset" (Katie)

"We wouldn't stick in jobs like this if we didn't have some kind of value-alignment and belief for doing the best for the people that are in front of you" (Sarah)

The opportunity to discuss experiences of responding to those students who endure family violence revealed the depth of emotion teachers still carry with them. Their feelings of upset, distress, or sadness are just below the surface. Memories of abused children are still very present in their working lives, influencing their responses and decisions. Participants have moved forward in their work, and sometimes their experiences have influenced their

careers in positive ways. For some, making a conscious decision to actively advocate for vulnerable children and their families, through senior leadership, has been a way of managing and controlling the distress they have encountered. Belief that others are working for the same positive outcomes as them provides some relief from the burden they carry.

Compartmentalise the pain

Compartmentalising emerged as a response to the pain that participants experience and hold onto when their students are being harmed through family violence. Compartmentalising represents the conscious decision by teachers to accept that they did what they could, within their limited procedural capacity, and to move on despite the knowledge that following those constrained procedures may not bring positive results for that child, placing their fears and concerns for the children aside as much as possible. This was sometimes a necessary response to enable them to manage the distress and conflict they encounter with school and system procedures, balanced against the need to protect their students, and to keep working in their role of teaching and helping the other students in the class or school. Participants' ability to compartmentalise their encounters with children experiencing family harm is an attempt to move forward without being overwhelmed by emotions and worry, and for some was an inescapably necessary, albeit partial, acceptance of the constraints of their role in the protection and care for children experiencing family harm.

> *"Ok, I've done the best I can, and I've got to get back to the learning piece, and the wrap-around support in school. Sometimes you just have to go, right, I've passed that on---and stop there" (Sarah)*

Participants have spoken of this emotional conflict of accepting their limitations previously in the theme Doing What is Right and Best, and here we see acceptance of limitations as a self-protective strategy to release themselves from the role of protector, and continue with the role of educator. As Charlotte explains, recognising current protocols, and knowing the steps have been followed can allow some closure, especially when she has no other options for closure provided:

> *"At what point do you say, 'This is too much or me?' Where's the cut-off point? And it's hard, because you are invested---but---yeah---finding a point to draw a line, and say you've done your best. Because---there is only so much you can do" (Charlotte)*

Charlotte describes struggling with the juxtaposition of her role's duty to prioritise the child against the reality of her role's limitations. Charlotte shared moments from her career that she described as '*difficult*' to cope with, and where she has had to make the decision to stop fighting for a child because she must return to teaching her other students and doing her best for them. The ability to compartmentalise has been honed through necessity: the necessity to trust in others, despite doubts, because to not do so is to experience emotional distress. Necessity to teach and care for students, motivated by her commitment to their educational and pastoral needs. Necessity to protect her own health by 'drawing a line' and accepting the limits of what is possible for her to do in her role as teacher. Compartmentalisation emerges from participants' recognition that they have no role in responses to family harm beyond recognise and report, and beyond that they can only keep working hard to support and care for children in the classroom, following the expectations of school policy and child protection protocols. As Laurelle stated in *Doing what is Right and Best*, those protocols need to be followed, even when they are not perfect.

Compartmentalising is effective in day-to-day working, but those compartment walls dissolve when media coverage of child abuse fatalities reminds participants of the children who have disappeared into the system. News coverage threatens to reawaken those emotions they experienced during disclosures and reports of concern, and that they have worked hard to distance themselves from. They think about the children who moved schools, or were abruptly uplifted. Those referrals which were closed or have not been actioned niggle at the back of their minds, and they begin to wonder how those children are and whether or not they are safe. Compartmentalising offers a way to alleviate that stress and worry, reassuring themselves that they did what they could within their limits:

> *"And---and that's when---when I read one of those articles, I think about my little beans that I don't know what's happened--- You know, the really, really, really tricky ones--- And---then my pragmatic brain kicks in and I tell myself that I did what I could" (Sarah)*

Compartmentalising encompasses several coping methods which participants have employed after learning that a student is experiencing family harm. Katie described her experiences as opportunities to learn, and to be better next time. Laurelle remains pragmatic and outwardly unemotional. For Charlotte, she simply recognised that the content of a particular disclosure was too distressing for her to dwell on. Each participant described a different way of compartmentalising disclosures and family harm stories, and, despite those differences, each method attempts to serve the same purpose: to take control of an uncontrollable circumstance, and to lessen their pain and fear. As Sarah explains, compartmentalising those fears keeps her moving forward, keep teachers focussed on their jobs, and the children in front of them. The individual contacts they have made and the

networks they have created in their communities help to give them hope in those moments when emotions threaten to overwhelm. Reminding themselves that they did their best, and that they have passed the referral to people they trust, is significant in allowing them to let go and carry on with the job of teaching:

> *"I do think there is a lot of people out there doing the very best that they can, in constrained circumstances, so that's--- You just have to believe it. Because I'm one of them. And so is the team here. And you're relying on those agencies, so you have to believe they are doing their best. But you have to---like--- You have to hope that the process is being followed as much elsewhere as when you do your job" (Sarah)*

This hope is precarious and is clung to by participants so that they can move forward, but as Sarah says, they *have to hope* so that they can draw a line under that case, hoping that someone else is doing their best for the child. Sarah's hope comes in the form of determination to believe in 'the people out there doing the very best they can', because the alternative is that no one else cares, and the overwhelming feeling that she has let go of that child and no longer has the responsibility or the ability to protect that them. She needs to know she has passed the referral on as best she can, to the right person, and that the child is safe.

Travelling with the Trauma captures the difficulty teachers experience when one of their students is experiencing family violence, and when they, as valuable stakeholders in that child's welfare, are excluded from further information-sharing or collaborative roles about interventions or support. Descriptions from participants indicate an inability to fully move past family violence experiences without knowing that children are safe and cared for, with

some experiences still detailed and fresh in their minds decades later. When teachers are not included in information-sharing and are not prioritised in the provision of information from external agencies, they are left, always wondering, about the outcomes for that child.

Chapter 4: Discussion

The motivation for this research study came from my own teaching experiences of the hard reality of responding to students in my care experiencing family violence, coupled with the inability to support them due to inadequate information-sharing procedures. With the introduction of the FVA (2018), I became curious as to how this Act may have opened spaces for schools to have greater involvement in reciprocal information-sharing between key family violence agencies. I wondered how schools were experiencing the increased opportunities for inter-agency collaboration that were made possible in the legislation. The aim of the project was to open space for teachers to share and make sense of their stories of responding to students' family violence experiences, particularly focusing on the strengths and limitations in their response protocols, and the value of teachers as collaborative stakeholders in family harm response within Aotearoa New Zealand's contemporary context.

Over the course of the analysis process and write-up, I understood participants' narratives to move through a landscape from de-humanising to re-humanising, with the opening theme, Spaces and Islands, emerging as an interpretation of teachers' frustration – and, sometimes, bewilderment – at systemic procedures that left them isolated. Isolated from their students, isolated from information and updates, and isolated from any professional discussions regarding onward decision-making about their students. Much of the narrative around isolation was in reaction to the de-humanising character of faceless systems, which are designed to remove emotional responses and replace them with impersonal numbers and boxes to be ticked and set aside. The resulting failure of those systems to successfully intervene to support children in their schools left participants feeling unheard and de-valued. The de-humanising of vulnerable children as case numbers extends to the de-humanising of the teachers who are making reports of concerns, and fighting to access funding or support,

locating them as a name on a report, and not an invested, knowledgeable professional with grave, often valid concerns for a child's well-being.

Teachers' descriptions of situations when they had received disclosures from children and had felt unable to respond 'humanly' were harrowing at times. The restrictive, cautionary messaging to ask no questions and say nothing reduced these emotional, painful interactions to fearful reactions that worked only to pass on the 'dangerous information' (dangerous both in terms of children's safety, but also the teachers' professional safety) they were potentially gathering as quickly as possible; creating a conflict between the de-humanised systems and the painfully human moment of bearing witness to and understanding a child's fear. Unable to provide comfort or react empathetically to their students' pain, teachers described panicking, and being forced to push the child to talk to someone else; someone that child had not chosen to, and someone they may not, trust. The conflict experienced in Doing What is Right and Best emerges in these moments, as teachers try to follow procedural expectations, while experiencing uncertainty about the best response as a human being; responses which may provide better outcomes for students by feeling seen and supported. Those fearful, conflicted reactions are caused by the cautionary messaging which is intrinsically threaded through legislation and guidelines, consistently reinforcing that the best way to protect yourself and the child is to say nothing, and pass on the information. The refusal of some teachers to allow the cycle of de-humanising to continue sees them circumnavigate systems; sharing information when they can, communicating with colleagues and agencies, and doing what is possible within (and sometimes outside) the rules. The priority is the child, and the resourcefulness of teachers upholds that prioritisation whenever possible.

Tensions between assumptions of what is 'the right thing' humanly and procedurally often leaves teachers feeling isolated, and wondering about the outcome for a child. The immediate, emotional responses that emerged during discussions of child fatalities with participants signifies the protracted anxiety teachers experience when they are not involved in information-sharing about their own students. The level of detail in memories of students who had experienced family violence that remains clear in participants' minds serves as a reminder that receiving a disclosure or having concerns about a child is not a singular 'event' that begins and ends with receiving a piece of information. Katie's memory of the boy with one wet sleeve; Charlotte's dream about the little girl and her sister; and Laurelle's detailed memory of every family violence concern she has had over her career are not stories from professionals who are detached from their students' experiences. The stories shared by teachers indicated something deeper, something traumatic, which has affected them, and continues to affect them years later, despite their attempts to compartmentalise and move forward. The necessity for teachers to compartmentalise their pain is dictated by a system which does not recognise these effects on teachers, assuming the neoliberal position of individualism where teachers are expected to cope alone and move on, without discussing or sharing any part of their story with colleagues or agencies.

In their fight to provide for their vulnerable children and families, teachers access agencies through individual contacts, reasserting their value within a partnership, by working towards a common goal, with value-aligned professionals. These informal partnerships offer a glimpse of the possibilities for inter-agency working, which firmly centralise and prioritise the well-being of the child; pulling on agency strengths and closing the gaps where children can become 'lost in the system'. Though not often formalised, the partnerships and networks created by individual teachers and schools echo the large-scale, system-wide changes

implemented in Scotland, through GIRFEC (Scottish Government, 2023), by crossing the boundaries of government siloes. As Sarah stated, *"there are people out there, it's just about connecting them"*. Formalising inter-agency networks, could work to produce a more holistic, less 'evidential' approach to family violence, attending to the practical, psychological, and emotional needs of vulnerable children, and is a vital step in achieving transformative change in the national family violence response.

Implications and Possibilities

In the early stages of my conversations with teachers during this research, it became clear that the potential and opportunities presented in the FVA (2018) had not been realised in schools, and that teachers were often not included in meaningful information-sharing beyond sending Oranga Tamariki reports, or in inter-agency work which extended no further than the educational needs of children. Teachers had no knowledge of the changes the FVA (2018) had made possible in relation to information-sharing and gaining opportunities, and school policies made no mention of the legislation in their supporting documents. It is staggering that such vital, powerful legislation, which could enable significant changes in school response, has not been prioritised in government systems, or by the Ministry of Education, leaving the Family Violence Act (2018) encased within the silo of the Ministry of Justice. Opening space for the voices of teachers to contribute to family violence research has identified a significant gap in the implementation of the FVA (2018), and indicates that schools have not been prioritised as valuable stakeholders in inter-agency prevention, identification, and response. It is important, then, to question why, given the incredible potential offered by those legislative changes, have information-sharing and gaining powers

remained firmly in the siloes of the Ministry of Justice and Oranga Tamariki, and have not been implemented across other listed social agencies.

Controlling information-sharing within the Ministry of Justice speaks to the privileging of criminality, physicality and lethality as evidential forms of violence, without attending to the dynamics and subtleties of coercive control (Stark, 2009; Wilson et al., 2019). Focusing on tangible evidence effectively removes the 'human-ness' from family violence response, and focuses entirely on legality; a black and white lens of right and wrong, evidence or no evidence. Information-sharing and questioning is presented in guidance literature (New Zealand Government, 2018) in a way which seems designed to limit information-sharing through fear of legal repercussions, rather than open up its possibilities, listing more reasons to maintain confidentiality than promote inter-agency communication. The messaging is to exercise caution and protect yourself, despite assurances in the FVA (2018) of protection from legal implications.

The increased opportunity for information-sharing introduced in the FVA (2018) is grounded in the knowledge that prioritisation of inter-agency collaboration and information-sharing is required to improve Aotearoa New Zealand's family violence response (Poutasi, 2022; Smith, 2011). Yet one of the named social agencies – Education - within the legislation has been excluded from the significant value of those collaborations. Is the FVA (2018) just words, or is it really going to make changes in how family violence stakeholders interact and respond to concerns about child well-being? As Poutasi (2022) argues, short-term attempts to improve inter-agency collaboration and communication will not lead to the systemic change required to increase child wellbeing and close the gaps which leave children vulnerable. The themes, Spaces and Islands, and Doing what is Right and Best highlight the difficulties

teachers face in trusting government systems to prioritise child safety and welfare, and the anger they have experienced when new policies and legislation make promises that never seem to materialise. Over twenty years, government actions and interventions have ultimately failed to reduce or prevent family harm, due, in part, to the application of 'add-on' interventions alongside existing siloed systems without attending to the 'wicked' problem of family violence: a problem that cannot be solved by the addition of linear solutions to already fragmented systems (Carne et al., 2019). Children's Teams exemplified the 'add-on' model, as inter-agency teams attempted to work at a community level, inadvertently pulling resources from existing family violence community-based agencies as government departments directed funds into the new government initiative and away from grass-roots organisations (Oranga Tamariki Evidence Centre, 2019).

Exploring interventions from overseas demonstrates possibilities of alternative approaches that prioritise systemic transformation. In contrast to ameliorative attempts, which aim to 'fix' an identified problem by running in parallel or as an 'add on' intervention within the current system, international systemic changes could provide examples of pathways for how to produce transformative change. GIRFEC (Scottish Government, 2011) has been a significant, system-wide model that prioritises inter-agency communication and consistency through the government's commitment to systemic transformation. Prioritising and fully implementing inter-agency working and communication through the FVA (2018), in a similar way to GIRFEC – through a national model and communication framework – creates potential for moving responsibility away from individual teachers and schools to develop their own relationships with inter-agency contacts, towards developing maintainable networks that all teachers and schools can be part of, and that can endure through governmental change.

Moving the systemic focus to recognise and attend to knowledges of coercive control, and emotional and psychological manipulation would enable holistic responses which attend to the multiple effects of living with family violence, shifting the current lens away from privileging physical understandings of family violence (Tolmie et al., 2023). It seems apparent that the possibility to identify signs of violence in the form of coercion and manipulation is increased by the inclusion of schools as core stakeholders in inter-agency working, owing to their unique, daily contact with children, and the value of the student-teacher relationship in fostering trust. As explored in Doing what is Right and Best, teachers are constantly monitoring for behavioural changes and indications of harm, and their position, not only as trusted adult, but as community professionals, allows them greater awareness of children's family circumstances through contact with siblings and whānau. Due to the restrictions on information-sharing, that awareness is often able to be mobilised if they have developed their own personal networks of connection with other agencies, instead of being a core part of information-sharing practice that recognises the valuable role teachers could play within systems of family violence response.

Change at a systems' level is vital, and could open up space for meaningful information-sharing and inter-agency collaboration, which is robustly systematised and not reliant on individual networks and responsibility. Re-considering family violence within the context of a 'systems failure', which requires a systems response (Carne et al., 2019) opens possibilities for transformative systemic change, which can effectively address the complexities of family violence. Re-configuring systemic response to locate schools as central community stakeholders, not only recognises their valuable knowledge of vulnerable children, but shifts the lens of physicality and lethality through which family violence is viewed, and begins to consider it in a more holistic way, which aims to re-humanise and heal.

Stories emerging from conversations with teachers indicate that more research is needed in schools, with teachers and with students, not only to add their voices to the conversation, but to utilise their knowledge and insight to make real change in the way information is shared and how schools are prioritised in family violence response. The isolation teachers are experiencing in their classrooms and schools is unnecessary. Legislation exists which can reduce isolation and stress, and increase inter-agency awareness of vulnerable children's needs, but it has not been properly implemented across all named social agencies. The intention is not to create more workload for teachers, which is already under review as being a source of teacher stress and burnout (PPTA, 2024), but to centralise schools as vital stakeholders in identification and response to family violence through increased training opportunities, mandatory annual child protection and family violence training, and the enablement of school-initiated, inter-agency family violence response teams that can prioritise the holistic well-being of children experiencing family violence. As discussed in the theme, Spaces and Islands, some schools have found ways to informally grow inter-agency networks, and utilise inter-school networks of Kāhui Ako to source funding and support. Finding ways to formalise the networking which already exists in some schools could ensure that children and teachers are not facing a 'postcode lottery' for accessing inter-agency support, while also increasing scope for teachers to meaningfully contribute their professional knowledge to agency decision-making and interventions.

Limitations and Future Research

This research revealed teachers' understandings and sense-making of their experiences, recognising the isolation, conflicting ideals, and emotional toll of responding to

family violence disclosures and concerns. Given this study was conducted within the Auckland region, it cannot provide knowledge of teachers' experiences from other regions of Aotearoa New Zealand. There would be value in conducting research with teachers in other areas, particularly those in rural areas who may have reduced access to support agencies (Pitt et al., 2019). Research in other regions could attend to differences in diversity of community groups, socioeconomic concerns, local attitudes towards family violence, and other intersecting social issues that are important to consider in the field of family violence response. Exploring depth of understanding through qualitative research across a breadth of research which privileges teachers' voices to continue building knowledges of family violence experiences and response could provoke greater consideration of schools' value within the location of inter-agency working for improved family violence response.

Personal Reflection

This research project has been a rollercoaster from the start; at times exciting, then frustrating, and during analysis, deeply moving. I have found myself feeling sad and angry at system failures, while at other times, hopeful and optimistic for the children attending schools where the teachers are implementing their own inter-agency networks and fighting hard to ensure the safety and wellbeing of children in their classrooms. The research aim was to explore how the FVA (2018) had changed how teachers and schools worked with agencies when children are experiencing family harm, and the realisation that the FVA (2018) information-sharing legislation had not been implemented in schools at all concerned me. I could not but question the difference it would make to have embedded inter-agency response and collaboration. The answer is: it would make a huge difference.

The aspect of conducting this research that I have enjoyed most has been connecting with teachers and discussing the part of our jobs that is kept quiet. Creating space for teachers to share those 'hidden stories' has been a privilege, and was the motivator to keep writing and keep analysing, even in the darkest moments. I have wanted to honour those teachers and the children they discussed, understanding that some of the stories I had the privilege to hear have been untold stories. I was committed to walking the tension of honouring their stories and voices, from within my own location and position, acknowledging that this research has the potential to directly benefit my participants, and other teachers working in Aotearoa New Zealand who also 'Travel with the Trauma' and 'Do what is Right and Best' within a system that constrains their potential to humanly support their students. I have struggled with finding my 'researcher's voice', and trusting my instincts to interpret those meaningful experiences. But in the moments when I felt moved; when the participants' stories provoked sadness, anger, and hope, those moments expanded my own horizon of intelligibility, and allowed me to feel that I had done the best I could do for my participants, the children they remember in so much detail, and hopefully for other teachers. After all, in IPA, we can never understand or interpret experiences in real time, because it is only through reflection and revisiting that we can make sense of our own understandings.

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Appendix A

Teachers' experiences of responding to students who are experiencing family harm

Participant Information Sheet

Researcher introduction

Tēna koe. My name is Susan Neilson-Dyer, and I am a primary school teacher and Psychology Masters student. I am undertaking this research thesis for the fulfilment of the requirements for a Master of Arts in Psychology, under the supervision of Dr Stephanie Denne, School of Psychology, at Massey University. I am currently studying full-time in Auckland.

Please feel free to contact either myself or Steph by phone or email if you have queries or concerns about this research. Our contact details will be on this information sheet.

Project description

Aotearoa New Zealand is enduring high incidences of family violence. Family violence can impact on children's wellbeing, educational outcomes, socialisation, and sense of self, often having enduring consequences for children's lives and futures. Teachers have a unique relationship with the children in their classrooms, spending 30+ hours per week engaging in their learning, emotional wellbeing, and building consistent and supportive relationships. The Family Violence Act (2018) has increased teachers' ability to gain knowledge about students' home circumstances, through inter-agency information sharing, yet currently there is no NZ-based research which has studied how these legislative changes have impacted teachers in the classroom. This research aims to gain insight into the individual, professional experiences of teachers whose students are experiencing family violence, particularly concerning information sharing practices. Interviews will be semi-structured, meaning that there will be questions which will guide conversation, with the freedom to describe, reflect on, and interpret your own experiences and knowledges. There will be discussion about teachers' freedom to share and access information concerning students, and the effectiveness of reporting and responding procedures. These interviews are non-judgemental, and designed to allow you, as a teacher, to consider your own experiences with your students.

Participant Identification and Recruitment

To participate in this research, you need to:

- Be a qualified, primary school, classroom teacher;
- Have been working in the classroom, prior to 2018, and since 2018;
- Be working in Auckland;
- Be comfortable discussing your experiences of teaching children who have experienced family harm

You have been provided with this information sheet because you may be interested in participating; your participation will be entirely confidential. Please familiarise yourself with this information sheet so that you are fully informed of the research aims and processes, and your rights should you choose to participate.

If you are interested in participating, you can have an optional, short meeting (face-to-face, Zoom, or phone call) to discuss the study further and for you to ask questions. This initial meeting is not mandatory, but can provide an opportunity to address your needs in the interview process, including location, cultural considerations, and additional support. If you choose to participate in the study, the date and time of your interview will be agreed between us, and you will be asked to read and complete an informed consent form, which should be signed and returned prior to the interview.

What this study will involve:

The formal interview can be undertaken face-to-face or over Zoom, as is your preference. Location of the interviews will be decided, with consideration for your convenience, comfort, and safety. The proposed interview time is 60-90 minutes, which will allow time to reflect on some aspects of your experiences. Time may be extended if you require it.

Teachers become invested in their students' wellbeing, and discussing these experiences may raise uncomfortable feelings and thoughts. At the end of the interview, we will have time to debrief about these feelings. I will also offer support agencies and phone numbers to contact should you find you need to talk further. These numbers are included on this information sheet, and will be provided at the interview also.

Project procedures

If you decide to be a participant in this study, the research purpose and process will be carefully explained to you. It is important for you that you understand the aims of the research and are able to ask questions in advance. Be assured that your participation will be confidential and your privacy will be protected by use of a pseudonym, and your school and third parties (such as families or children) will not be identified. The informed consent form must be signed by you, prior to interview, when you are clear about the research aims, content, and process.

Our interview will be digitally recorded and stored on a password-protected device, under your pseudonym. The interview recording will be deleted after transcription has been completed. If the interview is conducted over Zoom, the visual recording will be deleted immediately after the interview and the audio maintained for transcription. Transcription will be completed, manually, by me, and you will be offered the opportunity to read and edit the transcript. When you have approved the transcript, you will be asked to sign a Transcript

Release Form. Up to this point, you may withdraw from the study at any point, as your participation is entirely voluntary. At no time will your name or school be detailed in transcription, records, or the final thesis.

Consent forms and transcripts will be held securely by my supervisor for five years, and then will be destroyed after this time period has elapsed. No one else will have access to the transcript and consent forms.

Once analysis and research are complete, if you have expressed an interest in the research outcomes, I will contact you, and provide either a written summary, or meet face-to-face, to discuss the study's findings. This will also be an opportunity for you provide feedback of your experience of participating in this research study. The final research findings may be summarised into academic journal articles, and shared with other agencies with interest in family violence and education.

Participation time should not exceed four hours, in total. This includes our optional initial meeting, the formal interview, and optional transcript/interpretation review.

Limitations of Confidentiality

All information obtained through this study will be treated with confidentiality and your privacy will be protected. However, if I have any serious concerns for your or someone else's safety or wellbeing, my supervisor, your support person or a support agency may need to be contacted.

Participants' rights

Participation is voluntary and you are under no obligation to participate in this research project. If you do decide to participate, you have the right to:

- Ask questions at any point in the process of the study;
- Decline to answer any question in the interview;
- Request that the recorder is turned off at any point in the interview;
- Read, reflect upon, discuss, and edit the transcript prior to analysis;
- Confidentiality and privacy, unless wellbeing and safety are a concern;
- Withdraw from the study at any point prior to the signing of Transcript Release;
- Be given access to the summary of findings when research is concluded.

Thank you for taking the time to consider participation in the research. Participation is confidential and voluntary. If you would like to discuss this research further, please contact me via email, phone, or text, to arrange a suitable time to talk.

Ngā mihi,

Susan Neilson-Dyer

Project contacts

Susan Neilson-Dyer: [redacted], neilsondyer.research@gmail.com
Stephanie Denne, 06 356 9099 ext. 85082, s.denne@massey.ac.nz

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 3, Application OM3 23/44. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact the Chairperson, Massey University Human Ethics Ohu Matatika 3, email humanethics3@massey.ac.nz

Support agencies

The following support agencies are available to you, should you find that the interview themes have triggered uncomfortable feelings for you:

Employment Assistance Programme is a free counselling service, funded by the government, so offer support and counselling to all teaching and education staff, from ECE through to tertiary education providers.
www.eapservices.co.nz
0800 327 669

Shine provide direct support to women, children, and families who are experiencing family violence, and can offer guidance, support and training to staff working with those families.
www.2shine.org.nz
0508 774 633

Appendix B

Teachers' experiences of responding to students who are experiencing family harm

Participant Consent Form

I have read and I understand the Participant Information Sheet provided. I have had the details of the study explained to me, any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study and I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any point until my transcript has been released for analysis.

1. I agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded.
2. I wish / do not wish to read and amend the transcript of the interview
4. I wish / do not wish to access a summary of the project findings when the project concludes.
5. I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Participant Information Sheet.

Declaration by Participant:

I _____ hereby consent to take part in this study. **Signature:** _____ **Date:** _____

Appendix C

Teachers' experiences of responding to students who are experiencing family harm

Participant Interview Guide

Tēnā koe. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I am interviewing you to better understand how teachers in Aotearoa New Zealand experience responding to students who are experiencing family harm. There are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions - I am interested in your own experiences. As detailed in the Participant Information Sheet, you have the right to decline to answer any question during the interview and if you at any time would like to take a break, or ask additional questions about the research, please feel free to do so. Do you have any other questions or concerns to discuss, before we begin?

Possible interview questions

Can you tell me about your experiences of when students in your class have

experienced family harm? How were you able to respond to this situation?

In your experience, what do you think has worked well in respond to students

experiencing family harm? What areas could be improved?

Can you tell me about experiences when information was shared to enable supportive

measures within school?

Can you tell me about experiences when information sharing caused any concerns for you?

How have you experienced any changes in the ability to share information and/or have

information shared with you since the Family Violence Act (2018) legislated increased information sharing capabilities for teachers and schools?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me that we have not covered?

Appendix D

Teachers' experiences of responding to students who are experiencing family harm

Authority for the Release of Transcripts

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to read and amend the transcript of the interview conducted with me.

I agree that the edited transcript and extracts from this may be used in reports and publications arising from the research.

Signature:_____ **Full name**: _____

Date: _____