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**Children and Natural Disasters:
An investigation of cognitions, knowledge and
emotions in Wellington Year 5 students.**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of**

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in

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New Zealand.**

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the present study was to examine children's cognitions (thoughts, expectations, beliefs and values), knowledge (education and experience), and emotions (feelings) regarding natural disasters. The sample consisted of 30 Year 5 students (9-10 years) from four primary schools in the Wellington Region. Schools were ethnically, socioeconomically and geographically diverse. Students participated in a 60 minute focus group, consisting of three to five students in each group. Focus groups used open ended questions to facilitate conversation, guided by the interviewer. Thematic analysis was used to explore the data and identify key themes, based on guidelines suggested by Braun and Clarke (2003). The analysis identified that many students believe an earthquake to be the most likely disaster to occur in Wellington, and many of the students discussed having serious fears about this. Students also identified a number of positive coping methods for use when experiencing fears about disasters, suggesting some ability to protect themselves from negative emotions. Students displayed pride in preparation and were able to clearly identify a number of positive preparatory behaviours, as well as behaviours during and after a disaster. Students were held a great deal of general knowledge about disasters, such as different types, as well as the causes of some disasters, and had knowledge of a large number of current events, which they had largely viewed on television and discussed in classes. Participants discussed having been involved in emergency management classes and drills within their schools, and had an interest in improving these classes to make themselves feel better prepared for a disaster. Overall, students had considerable interest in disasters, which provides an opportunity to foster preparedness in young New Zealanders.

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