

WHO ARE ABUSING OUR CHILDREN?

An exploratory study on reflections on child abuse by media commentators

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Raema Lesley Merchant

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Abstract

This research explores what has been published in the print media on the topic of physical child abuse over an eight year period of time. The study encompasses news reports, feature articles, opinion columns and editorials written on the issue of physical child abuse in New Zealand from 2000 to 2007. Using inductive and exploratory research, qualitative data has been collected by capturing the voices from a range of media commentators and comparing these with data from newspaper articles and other sources of statistical data obtained from a statutory child protection agency, hospitals and police.

The research looks at how physical child abuse is represented in the newspaper media and explores whether there are accuracies or deficiencies in this reporting that may impact on public perceptions of child abuse. In particular, the study explores whether what is being written in the newspaper is objective or whether there is an in-built ethnic or social bias in the reporting of child abuse.

The findings of the three parts of the study are integrated and it is determined that there is a disproportionate reporting of child abuse based on a) the ethnicity of the child or perpetrator, b) the seriousness of the abuse, and c) the sensationalist nature of the incident of child abuse. Another significant finding is that media reflects and reinforces common views and perceptions of physical child abuse and that the public are exposed to only the “tip of the iceberg” in terms of accurate and balanced reporting.

The report concludes with a discussion about whether the media affects or reflects the worldview of physical child abuse. A symbiotic model is proposed which uses voices from the writers themselves to support the argument that there is a bi-directional relationship between the media and the public.

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Finally, as I have been on this journey, I have become aware of the need for all people to work together to address the horror of child abuse in this country, and to this end, I hope that this study can be used somehow to help achieve this.

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

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Physical child abuse, and in particular fatal child abuse, has become a hot topic in the media in recent times. Because of the emotive elements in the issue, and the human need for the ascribing of fault and blame, much inflammatory and evocative material has appeared in print. In New Zealand, the media interest in child abuse has steadily increased since 1990 following the release of Alan Duff's book and then movie, *Once Were Warriors*¹, which graphically depicted Māori males as being excessively violent and abusive people.

Many people's perceptions of physical child abuse are influenced by knowledge they gain from reading their local newspapers, or through other mass media such as television or radio. For some people, such as social workers, doctors, nurses, teachers and academics, the information about child abuse gained from the media is secondary to knowledge from official sources or published literature. However other people do not always have means, desire, or need to access material that the professionals are able to, with the outcome that their understanding and worldview of the issue may be limited and possibly with inaccuracies.

This topic as a potential research opportunity first came to my attention in the mid-nineteen-nineties. My work as a front-line social worker in a statutory child protection agency brought me into close contact with many victims and perpetrators of physical child abuse. At the same time I became aware that what was being written in the newspapers about child abuse did not always represent what I considered to be balanced factual reporting and commentary. This raised the question that if this is what the general public are reading and being exposed to, then how balanced or accurate are their

¹ *Once Were Warriors*, published in 1990, was New Zealand author Alan Duff's best selling first novel. It was the basis for the 1994 film directed by Lee Tamahori.

perceptions of who are the perpetrators of the ever increasing problem of physical abuse of children?

The death of the Kahui twins² in June 2006 heightened an awareness of physical child abuse in New Zealand, and with this came increased media exposure about the issue. The way in which child abuse is reported by the media has also become a concern. There appears to be a trend towards “sensationalising” child abuse in a manner which fuels the preconceptions of many people that almost all child abuse is perpetrated by Māori, and that Māori, as a race, are inherently violent. That is, physical child abuse is being racialised through the media.

1.2 Research questions

The primary research questions are:

- 1) What is being written in mainstream newspapers about physical child abuse?
- 2) How does the written media compare with known statistical data?
- 3) What factors or influences have informed the writer or determined why a specific article has been written on the topic?
- 4) To what extent does media representation of physical child abuse reflect or represent racial or racist assumptions about the causes and incidence of child abuse?
- 5) What worldviews about the nature of physical child abuse do the media reflect or affect?

² Three month old twins, Chris and Cru Kahui, suffered fatal head injuries whilst in the care of their parents and other family members. Their father was charged and later acquitted of murder. No one else has been charged with the murder of the twins.

1.3 Thesis organisation

The thesis is divided into three sections:

Part 1 sets the foundation for the study by: establishing the reason for the research and the key research questions; examining the literature that has been written on the topic in both the New Zealand and international arena; and providing an outline of the breadth of physical abuse of children in the New Zealand context in the period 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2007.

Part 2 examines the methodologies used for the study and the methods employed. The research is divided into three sections:

- (a) selected newspaper articles written on the subject of the physical abuse of children are analysed and discussed, with reference to key events of child abuse within the selected timeframe, and with parallels drawn between patterns and themes identified in the statistical data and the literature.
- (b) a sample of journalists who have been interviewed about what they have written on the topic, with a focus on interpretation, meanings and the cultural significance of their voice.
- (c) Statistical data on the physical abuse of children in New Zealand to identify emerging trends, with a focus on the demographics of the perpetrators of the abuse.

Part 3 integrates the qualitative and quantitative data to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between the voice of the media and the statistical evidence concerning the perception of child physical abuse in New Zealand.

1.4 The scope of this study

Selection of a time frame to consider in this study has been difficult because child physical abuse is an ongoing issue of public and political concern in New Zealand. The scope chosen for this study is from 2000 to 2007. The reason for choosing this time

period is that the beginning of 2000 saw several children being killed through physical abuse that raised the awareness of child abuse in New Zealand. Throughout the next seven years, children continued to be unnecessarily killed or seriously injured, and there were times when the media coverage became almost saturated with coverage of specific incidents of child abuse. The past decade also heralded considerable media debate about the repeal of Section 59 of the Crimes Act 1961³, and this has been another reason for including the years 2003 to 2007 in the study.

1.5 Definitions and conceptual issues

There continues to be worldwide discrepancies in the definitions of what constitutes child abuse or child maltreatment. This is also true for Aotearoa New Zealand. However, it is necessary to find a clear definition for our context that is accepted by both the public and professionals. Although I recognize the importance of the other forms of child maltreatment such as emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect, it would be too large a task to include all forms within the scope of this research.

For the purposes of this thesis the following definitions will be used:

Child abuse / child maltreatment is “the harming (whether physically, emotionally, or sexually), ill-treatment, abuse, neglect, or deprivation of any child or young person” (Children, Young Persons, and their Families Act 1989,s.2(1)).

Physical child abuse is physical assault on a child, by using, or threatening to use, physical force that results in physical pain, injury or confinement. One of the most severe forms of physical child abuse is violence against a child or children that leads to a fatality.

³ In May 2007 the New Zealand Government passed the Crimes (Substituted Section 59) Amendment Act following a repeal of Section 59 of the Crimes Act 1961 which had allowed for a defence by parents charged with assault of children that “reasonable force” had been used. The amendment has essentially made physical punishment of children in New Zealand legally indefensible (Wood, Hassall, & Hook, 2008). There has been considerable public debate both before and after the passing of the Act.

Physical child abuse varies in both its nature and degree of severity and there are differing degrees of the severity of physical abuse that are subject to different interventions by different agencies and under different legislations. For example, the police may not choose to arrest a perpetrator under the Crimes Act 1961 for using “unreasonable force” to harm a child as there may not be sufficient evidence to take the matter to trial. The same incident of physical abuse, however, may be substantiated by Child Youth and Family, and the Family Court may take action against the perpetrator by reducing access to the child.

Child is a boy or girl aged between birth and under fourteen years of age. A young person is a boy or girl of or over the age of 14 years but under 17 years. (Children, Young Persons, and their Families Act 1989,s. 2(1))

This study has focused on boys and girls aged between birth and fourteen years. Given the nature of the material studied, there may be a child or young person referred to within the data or literature whose age means that they fall outside of the parameters of the study.

Media is the means of mass communication, especially newspapers and broadcasting, regarded collectively. In this research I shall be focussing on newspaper media coverage specifically. There is, however, considerable further research fields relating to my topic in other forms of media, such as through television, radio and internet.

Māori is defined by Statistics New Zealand as: “a person has Māori descent if they are of the Māori race of New Zealand; this includes any descendant of such a person” (Statistics New Zealand, 2010, para. 1). The definition of who is able to be identified as Māori has undergone several terminology changes over the past two decades, with the most recent change being incorporated in the 2001 Census. In the New Zealand Census Māori are counted in two ways: “through ethnicity and through descent...the former refers to cultural affiliation, while the latter is about ancestry” (para. 4).

For this study, there is no uniform definition of Māori able to be used in the research, because each source of data may have used different collection methods with different definitions of ethnicity. Over the past five years Statistics New Zealand have attempted to ensure that the collection of ethnicity data is consistent for all Government statistics,

taking into account multiple ethnicities and self-identification of ethnicity. However, ethnicity data may still “reflect collection and collation procedures...and may change over time at both individual and/or societal levels” (Statistics New Zealand, 2005, p. 19).

Pākehā / European is generally considered to be a person of Caucasian or European or British descent living in New Zealand.

Pacific Islander is a person who is a descendant of a Polynesian or Melanesian from an island group in the Pacific Ocean.

1.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, the foundation and rationale that led to this study have been presented, and the structure for the thesis and the scope of the study outlined. The following chapter will provide a review of the literature that informs and supports the rationale of why a study of the way that physical child abuse is presented by the media is important in the understanding of child abuse in New Zealand today.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The media play a significant role in shaping and influencing public attitudes about most current issues, and this includes child abuse. In New Zealand, as in the international media, the physical abuse of children regularly features in the newspapers, magazines, radio and television. In particular, child deaths due to physical abuse are given considerable coverage both in the news and feature articles, frequently triggering a “media frenzy, followed by a public outcry, calls for accountability, and expectations of statutory reform” (Connolly & Doolan, 2007, p. 60). This public response comes in the form of media commentaries, opinion columns, and in letters to the editor of newspapers. There is also similar coverage given to the alleged or convicted perpetrators of the child abuse, with public attention being drawn to their arrest or court appearances.

2.2 Historical context

The reporting of news and crime such as is common in today’s newspapers is believed to have had its origins in the mid-nineteenth century. In the 1850s there was a change in journalism away from the previous “penny broadsides”⁴ This was driven by increased public demands for information, coupled with the availability of more advanced printing options. This heralded changes in both content and style of reporting of crime (Archer & Jones, 2003), and was helped by more regular publications and the ability for the newspapers to present both local material and also news telegraphed to the regions from London. Archer and Jones comment that at this time newspaper reporting was also influenced by the popular style of fiction writing:

⁴ These were single sheets of printed material sold by hawkers or pedlars, often advertising what was happening that day in court.

The reports of some news stories [in the mid nineteenth century] took on the hallmarks of fiction, deploying narrative, melodrama and plot in which the forces of good and evil were played out to a reading public who may have had little direct experience of interpersonal violence (p. 19).

Then, as today, the newspaper writer holds the interest of the readers by appealing to the appetite of people who are not directly involved in the crimes. This is apparent in the way that public respond to a particular sensational incident of child abuse, by reading and re-reading the content. With online technology today, it is possible for newspapers to monitor the number of “hits” given to stories such as little Nia Glassie⁵ being put in a clothes dryer, and to tailor the reporting to suit public demand. This is explained by Stuff editor, Mark Stevens:

We report what people want to read; what is in the public interest, as well as what is interesting to the public. We do not set out to be sensationalist but if our most popular story on any day is about ‘tits and arse’, as they put it, well it is the readers who put it there rather than the editors (Stevens, 2009, para.6).

This view that the media respond to the demand from the public is echoed throughout this study and will be discussed in depth later in the thesis.

2.3 Newspaper media

O’Shaughnessy and Stadler (2008) state that current newspaper media in Australasia are “owned, controlled, and created by certain groups who make sense of society on behalf of others” (p. 36). O’Shaughnessy and Stadler add that many of these business managers, editors and financial backers for the newspapers are “white, middle-class and male” (p.37), and as such, tend to prioritise views and beliefs with which they feel most comfortable. The outcome of this may well be conflict between the writers for the news media and their management if their own world view or ideology differs significantly from the editor or owners.

⁵ Three year old Nia Glassie was fatally injured in August 2007 following serious and ongoing physical abuse at the hands of family members. The abuse included being spun in a clothes dryer, being battered against wall, and being swung on a rotary clothes line. The child’s mother was convicted of manslaughter and the mother’s partner and partner’s brother were convicted of murder.

A similar control of newspaper ownership is seen in New Zealand. There is essentially a duopoly of metropolitan and provincial newspapers in New Zealand, with ownership by John Fairfax Holdings Ltd, and APN News and Media (ANM) accounting for more than 90% of the readership circulation (Rosenberg, 2007). This limited ownership means that there is more likely to be limited variation in reporting than if the newspaper ownership was more diverse.

Newspaper media in New Zealand are monitored by the New Zealand Press Council, a body established in 1972 to deal with newspaper complaints, to uphold the freedom of the press, and to ensure that standards are professionally maintained. The NZ Press Council has outlined principles which the newspapers are expected to uphold. Principle 5 relates to children and young people and states that “editors should have particular care and consideration for reporting on and about children and young people” (NZ Press Council, 1972, Principle 5).

Complaints from the public frequently involve complex ethical issues which need to be debated by the Press Council prior to the delivery of a ruling. In cases where there is a conflict between “public interest” and “what the public is interested in”, the editor of the newspaper is asked for a full explanation (New Zealand Press Council, 2007). The Press Council state that media law expert, John Burrows, comments that “the line is to be drawn when the publicity ceases to be the giving of information to which the public is entitled, and becomes a morbid and sensational prying into private lives” (p. 11).

There is little current research about what informs journalists and writers for the media in respect of writing about child abuse. Although the writers are bound by the ethics of their profession, they still may experience ongoing conflict between their professional obligation and the demands of an economy-driven employer (White, 2008). In White’s research on representations of children in the print media in Australia, she has explored some of the struggle experienced by journalists and the lack of research to inform their writing about children:

We sometimes stumble all over ourselves trying to gauge the right level of sensitivity and directness, and we only have our instincts and experiences to rely on (Silvestrini, 2005, cited in White, 2008, p8).

As will be shown later in this study, maintaining the balance between objectivity and subjectivity in writing for any newspaper continues to be a source of angst and debate.

2.4 Role of the Media

The New Zealand Press Council (2000) describes the role of a daily newspaper as being to “provide news and information on a wide range of subjects...to engage and provoke their readers, and help them participate in their own communities, and the world in which they live” (p. 9). O’Shaughnessy and Stadler (2008) on the other hand, consider that the role of newspaper media is to give the public an impression of what is happening in the world, and to make sense of that information for the public. To achieve this, three processes are used: (a) the representation of the information, (b) the interpretation by the media of that information, and (c) the evaluation and the giving of a “judgmental view”. It is through the use of these three processes that the media is able to reinforce and maintain public perceptions of what may be considered “normal” in terms of gender, ethnicity, or other social identities (O’Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2008).

International literature shows that there are similar trends in media reporting of child abuse to what has been observed in the New Zealand media. In the United States, research has shown that most members of the public are informed about child abuse through media reporting. This includes in-depth individual cases of child abuse, and the consequent court cases (Greek & Cochrane, 1997). Greek and Cochrane list the characteristics of any child abuse case that makes it newsworthy: 1) having trials involving public issues such as domestic violence, 2) being cases with well-known personalities involved, 3) being cases involving any manner of deviancy or where the judicial sentencing is unusual or bizarre, 4) presenting cases that have gone to trial, as they “present the opportunity for dramatic story-telling”, and 5) comprising pure entertainment cases where either the case or the judgment is presented as being trivial or “silly” (p. 2).

The role of the newspaper media in Australasia is primarily to report on current events, to provide editorial opinion, and to inform, educate and entertain (White, 2008). White’s study about media representations of children, was “informed by the physical format of

newspapers and their identified potential to influence an external environment” (p. 35). White explains that newspapers provide a permanent and official record and, because of the wide readership of newspapers relative to other news media, there may be a wider potential for the newspaper media to have a social influence.

Sensationalist reporting of child abuse by the media may also become a source of “entertainment” in addition to providing information for the reader. This is particularly true in cases where child abuse is “different” in some way, due to of the horrific nature of the abuse, or factors that are uncommon to other reports of child abuse. As a consequence, Miller-Perrin and Perrin (2007) sum up the situation about child abuse and the media by writing: “despite frequency of occurrence...their sensationalistic nature has made them popular subjects of the news and entertainment media” (p. 233).

The media also has a role in raising the awareness of the public through community media campaigns, such as the “It’s Not OK” campaign which focused on addressing family violence and in encouraging “others to ask for help” (Ministry of Social Development, 2008). This style of media exposure to educate and inform the public is seen as “one of the easiest and most cost-efficient child maltreatment prevention techniques” (Miller-Perrin & Perrin, 2007, p. 26). Community awareness campaigns have also been explored in terms of how Māori attitudes towards child abuse can be influenced through the media (Blank, 1999). Although Blank made these comments a decade ago, it appears that there is still much to be learned from his writing. That is, there may be positive potential for the media to be the instruments of change of public behaviour by the way in which they address the issues of child abuse and to target the public awareness of child abuse. Further exploration of what has been written in the literature on the matter of racial reporting of child abuse will be discussed in the following section.

There has been little literature produced on the relationship of media to other cultures within New Zealand. Two decades ago, a Pacific Island view on media responses to Pacific Island issues was provided by a former journalist, Samson Samasoni who wrote of his concerns about the mono-cultural and ethnocentric nature of media:

New Zealand media have unconsciously perpetuated the notion that Pacific Island people are a blight on society. The reason for this is simple: news

editors, chief reporters, reporters...all bring with them their personal fears and prejudices” (Samasoni, 1990, p. 134).

It is difficult to know, given the paucity of literature located whilst researching for this study, whether the views of the Pacific Island community have essentially changed since Samasoni wrote on the topic, or whether the attitude of the media has shifted and is now more fairly representing the worldview of other cultures, such as Pacific Islanders, in New Zealand.

A study of Australian journalists (Hanusch, 2007) researched the roles that personal ideologies or values of the journalists play in what is written and, further, what part ethical journalism plays in their writing. The study also looked at the demographics of the journalists. The conclusions drawn are summarized below:

- Australian journalists follow the traditional values of the media, which are embedded in a belief that they can objectively report on reality.
- The most important values are seen as being passive, adversarial and objective reporting.
- They believe that some ethical rules are universal, yet are prepared to make an exception if it produces a greater good.
- Demographically, Australian journalists are young, fairly well educated, middle-class with liberal social values and left-of-centre views.

(Hanusch, 2007, p. 107).

2.5 Child abuse in relation to the media coverage

2.5.1 Crime reporting

Reporting and commenting on physical child abuse in the media is not dissimilar to the reporting and commentary on general crime in the community. The literature about societal attitudes towards crime is therefore relevant to use in this discussion. Irving (2009), and O'Shaughnessy & Stadler (2008) posit that theorist Michel Foucault, in his post-structuralist studies of criminality, argues that legal, medical, religious and moral discourses are all linked to ways in which society is able to construct and thereby

“normalise” ways to deal with criminal behaviour, such as punishing the criminals, rehabilitating them, or restricting their freedom.

Foucault’s theory was that the “dominant discourse changes over time; it incorporates the possibility of social change” (O’Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2008, p. 175). Media discourses may similarly be linked to different constructs of society. A more recent theory developed is the “tipping point theory”, a concept about the effects of “social epidemics” developed by Gladwell (2000). In this theory, media will continue to construct a particular discourse on child abuse to maximize readership until at some point, the discourse either peters out or changes (tips over) to fit a new dominant discourse. The discourses may also reflect and challenge different ideologies of how society deals with the issue of child abuse and how these discourses may also change over time.

In its coverage of crime stories, the media present their take on the issues around crime and can influence the public in a variety of ways, not only by the manner of conveying of information but also by influencing how the reader can understand and respond to the issue. Roberts, Stalans and Indemaur (2002) outline methods by which media can shape how the general public perceives the portrayal of crime and justice. Firstly, a role of the media is to construct a worldview of the crime for the reader. This would include a decision from the media about what part of the crime to portray, who they interview for the story, and where the focus of the story will be. Secondly, the media role is to frame how the public will see and understand the issue. One example of framing is to not look at a problem or issue thematically but rather present as an individual “stand-alone” episode which:

...has been shown to engender individualistic attributions of responsibility...Episodic presentation encourages the view that crime is the result of individual deviance rather than wider social problems...[it] has the potential to promote the thinking that crime has to do with problem people and not problematic systems (p. 92).

Roberts et al. further purport that newspaper recording and reporting can be much distorted at times, which has the effect of influencing public perceptions of crime and the fairness of punishments meted out to perpetrators of the crime. This concept of how

media coverage of issues such as child abuse can frame what the public perception may be, is an important factor to keep in mind throughout this study.

Child abuse and other forms of interpersonal violence can also be presented to the public by media as a “moral tale, social commentary and graphic and gripping details of horror...to remark on social relations, roles, rules and social privilege” (Stanko, 2003, p. 5). Again, this view reinforces the significance of how crimes such as child abuse are presented to the public by the media.

2.5.2 Perceptions of child abuse as represented in the media

The literature reviewed below shows that historically the media have played a considerable role in the shaping of public attitudes and perceptions, often with damaging or negative results. Ayre (2001) has explored the media’s contribution to “the creation of the climate of fear, blame and mistrust which seems to have become endemic within the field of child protection”(p. 887). This view has been supported by Connolly (2004), who reviews the impact of media violence in relation to child abuse and its consequences. Connolly writes that “public perception is shaped by the high profile cases that frequently reveal system failure”(p. 23).

In her study into the role of the media in child abuse, Kitlinger (2004) concluded that our individual view and sense of the world are a social construct, and the media are an important resource to help us construct that worldview. She further states that the media can play an important role in exposing the issues and perceptions of child abuse, either confronting or evading certain aspects of the abuse. Although Kitlinger is specifically speaking about sexual abuse rather than physical abuse, her research demonstrates how media reporting can impact on people’s knowledge of the ‘facts’ and the presentation of who are the perpetrators of abuse of children.

Woods (2007) examines the contribution that the media makes as to how discourses on debates about specific incidents of child abuse may “frame the debate and influence audience perceptions”(p. 43). Woods also focused on the impact that media reporting had on professionals as well as the general public:

It was through these channels that many members of the public and health care professionals came to know about and interpret the details of the cases as they were presented in court (Lupton, 2003, cited in Woods, 2007, p43).

Barrister Paul Treadwell (2006) writes that the media informs the public about the “gruesome horror” of incidents of child abuse, often at a time when a perpetrator is convicted and “locked away for a long stretch” (p. 103). This can provide an opportunity for the media to become a conduit for the public to gain a better understanding of what child abuse means to them and their community, by “acknowledging our national responsibility to become involved in the whole longitudinal history and causes of child abuse in New Zealand” (p. 103).

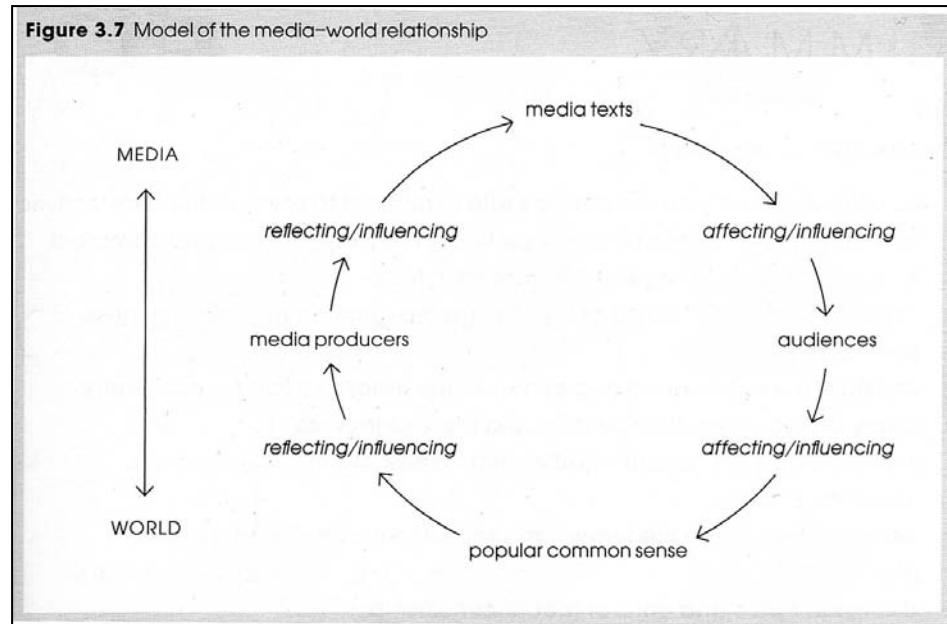
2.5.3 Do the media reflect or affect the world?

In media studies, there are two schools of thought about the relationship of the media to society. One school argues that the media “reflect the realities, values and norms of a society” (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2008, p. 41), as through a mirror. Another school argues that media affects thoughts, beliefs and actions of society by “[constructing] our values for us and [having] a direct effect on our actions” (p. 42).

O'Shaughnessy and Stadler (2008) have depicted this as a model (Figure 2.1) to provide a way of understanding this double concept. As can be seen in the model, the audience and the producers of the media are intertwined with what is written in the media, and societal ideology or ‘common sense’.

An example of how this dichotomous model works in practice could be seen in the media coverage during the Section 59 Repeal of the Crimes Act 1961, where the media “played a critical role in the public debate by reporting the arguments put forward by proponents and opponents and by publishing the views of commentators”(Wood, et al., 2008, p. 150).

Figure 2.1 Model of the Media



(Source: O'Shaughnessy and Stadler (2008, p59))

Throughout the Section 59 repeal debate, the media constructed stories, reflecting ideas and beliefs from different social groups on opposite sides. The public read these stories, and reacted to them either positively or negatively, depending on how they were influenced or affected by the media coverage. These influences were then discussed within the different communities, and played a part in the formation of popular or “common sense” ideas about the issue. The communities then reflected these mores and beliefs they had developed back to the media, and the cycle continued (Wood, et al.).

2.5.4 Effects of newspaper coverage of child abuse

Some literature focuses on the power of the media to cause harm via misrepresenting and reinforcing negative and sometimes damaging media content (Pritchard, 2004). Pritchard believes that the media is seldom challenged and is therefore able to continue to fuel public responses that sometimes engender irrational and potentially harmful responses from the members of the public. This problem of the negative influence of media on public perceptions of child abuse has also been addressed in other literature.

For instance, Connolly and Doolan (2007) focus on “scandal politics” of the media in respect of child homicides and children at risk:

A sensationalist media that fosters community panic and a ‘seek-the-culprit’ mentality has to accept some responsibility for ultimately working against the interests of the children (p. 110).

This view is further elaborated upon in overseas studies where findings are that the media decide what is “normal” or “deviant”, and then use the power of “being the expert” to persuade the public about what constitutes child abuse, and who is responsible (Goddard & Saunders, 2001). Goddard and Saunders describe this as “legislation by tabloid” and claim that the media “has appeared, at times, to have more influence on child protection policy and practice than professionals working in the field” (p. 1). An awareness of this influence exercised by the media may assist child protection workers and other advocates for children and their families to better understand, and hence to work with, child abuse in the community (Saunders & Goddard, 2002). Woods (2007), in his writing about the media response to parents resisting medical assistance for their children, added to this concept:

Public acceptance or rejection, uncertainty, indifference or resistance to media representations of complicated issues is in itself an expected societal norm (p. 106).

That is, media discourses may be accepted or rejected depending on both “how the issue is framed” (p. 106), and on what interpretations the reader extracts from the newspaper.

2.5.5 Are there racial or racist assumptions made by newspaper media?

In October 2006 a press release entitled “*Study release: NZ shamed by our child abuse record*” was printed in newspapers around New Zealand. The purpose of the press release was to provide a “comprehensive global view of the range and scale of violence against children” (UNICEF, 2006) from a United Nations International Study on Violence against Children. The report concludes that “violence against children is endemic” in New Zealand, as well as in other countries. To support the content of the press release, the unnamed writer has used figures from a 2005 UNICEF / INNOCENTI report and has made the following two statements in consecutive paragraphs:

- a) that “New Zealand ranks 3rd worst out of 27 OECD⁶ countries in terms of children’s deaths from maltreatment” and
- b) that “being indigenous significantly increases the likelihood of being violence...and as the UN study predicts Māori children are twice as likely to be assessed as abused or neglected”

(UNICEF, cited in Scoop, 2006, p.1).

Although it is not written specifically, there appears to be an assumed connection made by the writer of this article that Māori are more likely to be child abusers than non-Māori. The writer also makes an association to Māori families of other possible risk factors of physical child abuse such as socio-economic issues.

The above article and several similar ones were written in the second half of 2006, following the death of the Kahui twins in Auckland. Within these newspaper articles, several things stand out as being links to the fundamental questions posed in this study:

- a) Is physical child abuse being ‘racialised’ in New Zealand?
- b) Is this an issue that has been prevalent in the media for some time, or is it a relatively new phenomenon?
- c) Is this style of journalism seen as the ‘norm’ or are there other factors informing the writers?

The media article example quoted above conflicts with the standards and codes written as guidelines for journalists and media commentators. Principle 1 of the New Zealand Press Council’s statement of principles states that “publications...should be guided at all times by accuracy, fairness and balance, and should not deliberately mislead or misinform readers by commission, or omission” (NZ Press Council, 1972, para.1). The section below will further explore how this conflict relates to the media coverage of Māori issues in New Zealand.

⁶ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

2.5.6 Media coverage of Māori issues

As seen above, news media has historically had a significant impact on the views and perceptions of society in the western world. The construct of media coverage and how it is framed is linked strongly to Western discourses, ideologies and world views, with little apparent heed being given to the incorporation of Māori ideologies and worldviews (Maharey, 1990; O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2008; Spoonley & Hirsh, 1990; Stuart, 2002). Examples above have shown that newspapers are able “to shape and lead public opinion...to enlighten on the one hand and to perpetuate prejudices on the other” (Trlin, 1990, p. 90), and as such, “the news media can do much good or harm, and cannot escape a central role in race relations” (Tully, 1990, p. 141). Indeed, some media reports are recorded by the Broadcasting Standards Authority (BSA) as being “unwarranted generalizations, stereotypical constructions...and at worst, racist” (BSA, 2009, p. 6).

In 2009, the BSA produced a report on commissioned research on the relationship of New Zealand media with Māori worldviews. Although the report focused on broadcasting standards, many of the findings are relevant to this literature review as well. The conclusion from the BSA report is summarized below:

Eurocentric conventions and news values are deeply embedded. The different worldviews of Pākehā and Māori impact in the news media notably in relation to: concepts of time with different views of history and historical concepts; appropriate spokespeople; appropriate means of arriving at understanding; Pākehā debate versus Māori discussion/korero; Pākehā focus on events, against Māori focus on issues (BSA, 2009, p. 8).

The report goes on to say that this is not a problem confined to Māori, but also to other cultures and ethnic minorities. The main conclusions from the BSA report is to highlight the need for mainstream media to be aware of the contribution that it can make to influencing and changing public attitudes, such as people's worldview of child abuse. In order to achieve this, the report states, it is necessary to “develop ‘best practices’ for the portrayal of minority groups” (p. 28) and for the writers and owners of the media in New Zealand to develop further knowledge and understanding of Māori society, culture, and of New Zealand history.

Ranginui Walker, in his book, *Māori News is Bad News*, has written about the “sensationalist media coverage of Māori over the years” (Walker, 2002, cited in BSA, 2009, p. 6), arguing that there is frequently a “one-sided discourse about Māori...the way that news is selected, constructed and presented” (p. 6).

A common reason given for this concept that mainstream media coverage has a monocultural bias, is the effect of colonialism on New Zealand society. Historian Angela Ballara has traced this from some of the earliest newspapers in New Zealand and has commented about “racial dichotomies” apparent right up to the nineteen eighties (Keenan, 2000). Keenan further expands on this notion by examining the tendency that newspapers have, when reporting or commenting on child abuse or family violence, in “laying undue emphasis on a predetermined set of notions about Māori people and their behaviour” (p. 5). An example given by Keenan is the way in which in August 2000, the Evening Post likened the family of dead toddler Hinewaoriki Karaitiana-Matiaha (also referred to as Lilybing)⁷ to the fictional family in Alan Duff’s novel *Once Were Warriors*. Similar connections were made by other newspapers at that time to other Māori children killed or injured by family members, where the “readers were invited to draw logical connections between domestic violence and Māori families” (p. 7).

The early part of this century saw the growth of a Māori media that complemented the existing mainstream media, and arguably, opened the doors for the news media in New Zealand to take biculturalism into account for perhaps the first time since colonization (Stuart, 2002). According to Stuart, there are differences in interpretations and perspectives between mainstream and Māori media coverage, with stories that “construct Māori as a ‘them’” (p. 46) whereas to the Māori reading the same media coverage, “this is a story about ‘us’” (p. 46). That is, due to the “dominant culture” still seen in mainstream newspapers, both Māori and Pākehā journalists are expected to write for the “mainstream media’s community that is largely white and middle class” (p. 54), and to “reinforce a particular worldview and marginalise other views” (Maharey, 1990, p. 19).

⁷ In July 2000, twenty-three month old Hinewaoriki Karaitiana-Matiaha (also referred to as Lilybing) died following serious physical abuse over a three-day period culminating in a fatal head injury caused by shaking. Two of the child’s aunts were convicted of manslaughter.

Some Māori leaders have expressed their concern about the way Māori are represented in the mainstream media. Sir Paul Reeves addressed a Journalists Training Organisation in 2006 and stated that “the media tends to regard Māori as an entity or phenomenon that their readers need to know more about. The relationship with Māori is at arm’s length. Māori are not seen as part of the core readership” (Reeves, 2006, cited in Archie, 2007, p. 76).

Carol Archie (2007) has provided a set of “good practice” guidelines for the media to use when writing on Māori issues. As a Pākehā herself, and long-time journalist in New Zealand, Archie challenges how some Pākehā journalists fail to practise “inclusive” journalism:

Some Pākehā have chosen to view the world from one perspective only...they find it difficult to shift their thinking to include worldviews from Māori – as well as those of a host of cultures and beliefs in this country (p. xiii).

Archie’s practice guidelines include comment on the prejudicial way that journalists “use their own cultural values to judge something and don’t see that there might be another way to look at it” (p. 74). Archie also encourages journalists to consider their audience and in mainstream media to avoid the trap of “writing about Māori issues to inform only Pākehā” (p. 75).

Other literature also positions media coverage of Māori as being a cause for concern because of the subjectivity frequently injected into the writing. Sue Abel discusses the way that the media may disproportionately focus on descriptions of Māori and their involvement in criminal activities or gangs that “creates fear of Māori” (Abel, 1997, cited in Archie, 2007, p. 78).

A choice of terminology may make the difference between what is considered to be fair and objective, and what is subjective and biased in the way that Māori issues are written about. According to Archie, examples of negative words used are “Māori radical”, “activist”, “disruptive”, “threatening”, or phrases such as “the police are looking for a part-Māori man” rather than “part-Pākehā man” (p. 78). Similar terminology is used in newspapers articles referring to perpetrators of child abuse. For example, Māori whānau of Hinewaoriki Karaitiana-Matiaha were described as “tattooed men in torn jeans”

(Keenan, 2000, p. 6), and the whānau of the Kahui twins were frequently described by the media as being beneficiaries.

2.5.7 The “warrior” gene

A similar trend to what was described in the literature between 1990 and 2001 was observed in the media following the death of the Kahui twins in June 2006. At this time, the media focused on several main issues arising from the deaths: the facts that the Kahui whānau were Māori, that most of the household were beneficiaries, that the family members were non-cooperative with the police, and that Māori children rank higher than non-Māori in child abuse statistics.

In 2006 a genetic epidemiologist Dr Rod Lea presented a paper at the 11th International Congress of Human Genetics about the effect of the Monoamine Oxidase (MAO) gene and its relationship to certain behavioural traits such as risk taking and aggressive behaviour (Lea, 2007). From this, the media then began a campaign to debate whether a possible cause of the poor record of child abuse for Māori is a direct result of a gene linked to aggressive behaviour. Labelled as the “*warrior gene*”, there was an influx of media articles speculating on the apparent genetic disposition of Māori to violence. For example, The New Zealand Herald ran a series of articles over a period of a week under the title “*Warriors Still*” (New Zealand Herald, 2006). (A comprehensive list of media articles on child abuse in the period covered in this thesis is in Appendix VIII.)

Another such article appeared on the front page of Mail and Guardian Online, an international online African newspaper, with the headline “*New Zealand battles dark secret of family violence*”, and began with the following paragraph:

New Zealand has a dark secret, an epidemic of domestic violence which has brought to life the wrenching story of abuse in a dysfunctional Māori family depicted in the landmark movie ‘Once Were Warriors’ (Stutchbury, 2006, p. 1).

Stutchbury further elaborated about the “warrior gene”, with no fewer than six direct references to “warriors” within the article. He also supported the article with a series of facts about the prevalence of Māori in child abuse statistics, together with comments

such as “the twins’ Māori family refused to cooperate with the police” and “clouding the domestic violence epidemic is the over-representation of indigenous Māori, proud descendants of a warrior race” (p. 1).

Dr Lea (2007) expressed his concern in the New Zealand Medical Journal about the way that the media had misrepresented his research by making a direct link of the “warrior” gene to Māori criminality. Dr Lea stated that “much of the controversy was unjustified because it stemmed from a combination of misquotes and misunderstandings printed in the original article released by the Australian Press Association” (p. 9). Despite this explanation, the media does not appear to have refuted the previous claims of Māori having a warrior gene. This concept of the link between a Māori child and the gene that predisposes Māori men to violence is still revisited by the media from time to time when there is another child abused.

2.5.8 Alternative responses to media coverage of physical child abuse

Murray Edridge, Chief Executive of Barnados New Zealand, expressed his concern that the death of two Māori children “has been used to point the finger at selected parts of our New Zealand society” (Edridge, 2006, para.1). Edridge points out that while Māori rate highly in statistics of abused children, there is also another side of the issue:

Māori involvement may be high, but CYFS statistics reported ...show that some 60% of abuse notifications involve non-Māori families. Why then are we being encouraged to largely ignore this? (para. 3).

Edridge asks that the real risk factors in child abuse be critically debated, and with social policies and “other societal shortcomings” such as education, parenting and economic issues being addressed.

When a Māori child is killed or is seriously injured, there can be a tendency for the media to focus on social issues that emphasise that the child or whānau are Māori. This became evident when the Kahui twins were killed:

A number of people, both Māori and non-Māori, were quoted as saying Māori have to ‘front-up’ to child abuse...perhaps so, but when Pākehā beat their children...no-one says Pākehā should front-up to the child abuse in their community” (Wynd, 2006, p. 3).

Although ethnicity of the child or the perpetrator may be portrayed by the media as being a key indicator in child abuse and child deaths, Connolly and Doolan (2007) note that “no discussion should ignore the underlying differences in socioeconomic status...Māori are more likely to experience the socioeconomic factors associated with increased risk of death from child maltreatment” (p. 57). That is, it is important that the media, when discussing child abuse, does not focus on ethnicity alone but looks at other demographical and social indicators.

2.5.9 The role of professionals in media coverage of child abuse

As seen above, the ethics of newspaper reporting is to “do no harm” when writing about children. However, in its endeavour to provide a balanced and objective view the media may at times negatively portray the professionals involved with the children or families, such as social workers, doctors, lawyers, and police. This has been described as “iatrogenesis”⁸ or systems abuse (Pritchard, 2004; Tomison & Tucci, 1997). The media are sometimes quick to point out where child protection agencies may have failed to keep a child alive, through commission or omission of the agency’s services. An example of this is seen in the media coverage of the deaths of Saliel Aplin and Olympia Jetson⁹ in 2001. Throughout the following two years there were a number of articles focusing on the involvement that Child Youth and Family had had with the children prior to their deaths. The following articles are a sample of these:

13 February 2002: *CYFS slain sisters report awaited* (Scanlon, 2002)

16 November 2002: *CYF failed my children, mother tells High Court* (Unnamed, 2002).

14 November 2003: *CYFS "crucifying" social workers* (Haines, 2003) and *Girls "might still be alive today" if CYF followed procedure* (Berry, 2003).

⁸ Iatrogenesis is from the Greek ‘iatro’ (physician) and ‘genesis’ (to cause) and is used to describe a situation where a professional inadvertently causes pain or distress (Pritchard, 2004).

⁹ Sisters Saliel Aplin (12 years) and Olympia Jetson (11 years) were killed in their home in December 2001. Their mother’s partner, Bruce Howse, was convicted of their murder.

As can be seen, the public were exposed to a construct of the media that continues to reinforce that the children in question may well have lived if the child protection system and professionals involved with the family had not had any involvement. That is, the perception being highlighted is that the actual involvement of the professionals instigated the deaths of the children.

Sometimes it seems that the often negative coverage media gives to “failures” by agencies to keep a child safe from physical abuse or death may be seen by professionals as one-sided. Doolan (2004) suggests that “child protection errors, seemingly evident to clients and media commentators may be regarded as something entirely different by the involved professionals” (p. 52). Doolan further comments on the rigorous investigations that follow any child death when there has been involvement by a child protection agency:

The process generally fails to satisfy the public or the media. It can be perceived as punitive by staff and result in defensive, risk averse practice (p. 138).

Another potential source of harm to children and their families is seen in “trial by media”, where the public are exposed to an intense and often subjective debate about who or what agency is guilty of the child abuse in question. Recently trial by media was apparent in Britain with the case of “Baby P”, a child who was killed by a stepfather after intensive involvement of social service agencies and other professionals. Even before the alleged killers were convicted, the public demanded via a petition in The Sun tabloid newspaper that several of the professionals who had been involved with the child should lose their jobs (BBC News, 2009). Some defend this, however. For example, Wellington lawyer, Steven Price, believes that “some reporting of allegedly criminal conduct is unfair, inaccurate or unbalanced...but trial by media is exactly what the media is for” (Price, 2009, para.1).

2.6 Conclusion

In New Zealand there has been considerable research in the child protection arena on the causes of physical abuse and the risk factors contributing to the abuse. There has

also been research on the profiles and demographics of the perpetrators of abuse. However, there are gaps in the current scholarship about how the media reports physical child abuse.

This study is an initial exploration of how the voices of the media commentators can help our understanding of some of the issues raised in the literature. The review of the literature has provided a framework on which this exploratory research is based. It has shown the scope of the topic and introduced concepts and raised questions that form the basis of this thesis. The literature shows that it has long been known that the media has the power to construct and frame people's perceptions of child abuse. However, the mechanism of how this operates appears to be less well documented, and elements of this will be explored in this research. The role of the media and the ways in which the media reports child abuse is critiqued in the literature. The literature review indicates that child abuse is frequently reported in a style designed to be sensationalist or to shock. There are also indications in the literature of issues of racialisation arising from media reporting; that will also be addressed within the parameters of the study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the broad epistemology and the methodologies used to explore the research questions identified in Chapter 1.2. The key elements and the rationale of the research design will be explained, including an outline of the worldview informing the research design, the methods of inquiry, and specific methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation. The chapter will conclude with a brief explanation of the ethical issues pertaining to the study.

Identification of the epistemology, or the philosophical worldview, is important in the development of research design as it influences social research and provides “a basic set of beliefs that guide action”(Guba, cited in Creswell, 2009, p. 236). I have therefore identified an epistemology that is shaped by the experience, knowledge and assumptions I bring to the study of child abuse.

3.2 Epistemology and theoretical paradigms

For this study two things have been important, to select a research method that will increase understanding of how physical abuse of children in New Zealand is represented by the news media, and to determine whether there are accuracies or deficiencies in this reporting that may impact on public perceptions of child abuse. There has been increasing awareness of physical abuse of children in New Zealand and overseas over the last decade. This has generated considerable debate about who the perpetrators of the abuse are. The research design therefore takes into account these factors.

Inductive and exploratory research has been employed in this study by collecting qualitative data through semi-structured interviews with key media commentators who have written about child abuse, quantitative data from newspaper articles, by reviewing and analysing both sets of data and comparing this information with sources of

statistical data. This has been described as grounded theory, or a post-positivist paradigm, where analysis of the data requires a search for emerging themes and concepts in order to develop a theory (Morris, 2006).

Exploratory research is appropriate when there is a paucity of previous research on a specific topic. Exploratory research can therefore be applied with the objective of gathering information to “help define problems and suggest hypotheses” (Kotler, Adam, Brown, & Armstrong, 2006, p. 73). There have been previous studies about the effect of media on perceptions of child abuse, as demonstrated in the literature. However, there do not appear to have been any studies on the factors that contribute to, or inform, what a media commentator or journalist has written in respect of child abuse or the perpetrators of that abuse. The post-positivist view uses constructivism to say that we all have a biased construct of our own world, based on our experiences and perceptions (Trochim, 2006). The post-positivist paradigm therefore allowed for the interviews in this study to be conducted without preconceived theories of impact. It is from this paradigm that phenomenological knowledge and emergent theories can be generated, and application of these concepts to a study of media perceptions and coverage of physical child abuse may contribute to future scholarship on this issue.

Inductive research is frequently used in social science research to seek patterns from interviews and observations, and to then generate theory that supports the observation of these patterns (Davidson & Tolich, 2003). Through the use of inductive processes and thematic analysis, it was possible in this study to develop emergent theories from the data gathered.

The method used in this research is a mixed-method approach, which uses both qualitative and quantitative data “in tandem”(Creswell, 2009). The use of mixed methods is typically used in social science research as this approach is able to use the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research to address complex research problems found in the discipline (Creswell). The value of using qualitative research becomes apparent when complex and sensitive issues such as child abuse are investigated. While quantitative methodology could be used to summarize some of the key aspects of this issue, the qualitative approach can provide a more in-depth understanding of how people think about the topic.

In a mixed method research study, the weighting or priority given to qualitative versus quantitative methods of data collection may be determined by what emphasises the researcher is seeking to develop from their study (Creswell, 2009). In this study the qualitative data is mixed with the quantitative data at the stage of analysis and discussion, with the quantitative data supporting and informing the qualitative analysis.

The types of mixed methods used in this study have been described by Creswell (2009) as being a sequential exploratory study. The first phase of this type of research is to collect and analyse qualitative data through semi-structured interviews. The second phase is the collection and analysis of quantitative data that can be used to “assist in the interpretation of qualitative findings” (p. 211). A recognised benefit of this type of research design is to enable the researcher to further explore themes that have emerged from the qualitative research (Morgan, 1998, cited in Creswell, 2009).

The main methodological approach in this study is to focus on capturing the voices of people who had previously made their opinions public through written media, the media commentators referred to above. The analysis of the qualitative phase of the study has been informed by the use of the theory of phenomenology, which can be defined as “that which appear real to the senses, regardless of whether their underlying existence is proved real or their nature understood” (Bridgman, 2002, p. 59).

One purpose in undertaking one-to-one qualitative interviews is to develop a picture of the participant as a person with his or her own way of understanding the world and the issues discussed. Therefore, within the analysis of the qualitative data there will be a focus on interpretation, meanings and the worldview of the media commentators. Bridgman (2002) identifies four central assumptions of phenomenology that assist with this analysis: 1) the perceived meanings from the participants assumes more importance and relevance to the research than objective reality; 2) an understanding of themes and descriptions of the participant’s experiences and views is important; 3) the multiple and different perspectives of each individual participant are equally valid to the research; and 4) the participant’s perceptions of their individual “self-world” is based on often unspoken or hidden assumptions that the researcher is then able to try to understand. By taking into account these assumptions, it may therefore be possible to determine

whether the “exterior” public opinions expressed by the participants in their published articles have a correlation with their inner beliefs and worldviews.

3.3 Methodologies

The methodology has been divided into the following three areas:

- i) Newspaper articles
- ii) Interviews with media commentators and writers
- iii) Statistical data

i) Newspaper articles

Analysis of newspaper articles is suited to both quantitative and qualitative research methods. In this study, this analysis is primarily based on quantitative research, although there is also some qualitative analysis included in the discussion. The purpose of data collection using these methods is to (a) identify the number and type of articles written about physical child abuse during a specific timeframe and (b) to show the dominant messages being given about physical child abuse by examination of the articles that specifically reference the demographics of the children who are the subjects of the articles. The following section outlines the process of the data collection from newspapers.

A comprehensive search was conducted for newspaper articles published between 1 January 2000 through 31 December 2007, using the Knowledge Basket Newztext data base (<http://library.eit.ac.nz:2116/newztext/>). A national database was used for this process to ensure uniformity and consistency with the articles accessed.

The search was restricted to the following New Zealand newspapers:

1. New Zealand Herald
2. The Dominion Post (formerly The Dominion and The Evening Post until July 2002)

3. The Manawatu Standard (formerly The Manawatu Evening Standard until May 2004)
4. The Sunday Star Times

This specific sample was chosen to incorporate a cross-section of New Zealand newspapers. The New Zealand Herald and The Dominion Post, from Auckland and Wellington respectively, are the country's daily papers with the highest circulation. The Evening Standard is a provincial daily paper based in Palmerston North. The Sunday Star Times is one of the two main Sunday publications in New Zealand. The New Zealand Herald is published by APN News and Media Corporation, and the other three papers are published by Fairfax Media Corporation. My data collection was restricted to four newspapers for two reasons: this number provides a manageable sample to provide sufficient data for an exploratory study, and the readership of the selected newspapers covers much of the country.

The sample articles were selected from the newspapers through an initial broad search of the database using the keywords "child and abuse or maltreatment or physical abuse or homicide or infanticide or smacking or hitting or discipline". The purpose for using a wide range of keywords was to ensure that no key articles were omitted in this initial search. The first five keywords, "child abuse", "maltreatment", "physical abuse", "homicide" and "infanticide", exemplify the more common generic terms used in the literature to describe child abuse, and may describe a wide spectrum of abuse and neglect (Connolly, 2006).

The keywords "smacking", "hitting" and "discipline" were selected because of their relevance to the high media interest in New Zealand about these terms as a consequence of the repeal of Section 59 of the Crimes Act 1961. This was debated in both the political and public arena during the timeframe for the data collection of the newspaper material. During this time there was increased interest of the media in the link between the physical discipline of children and child abuse. This debate became widely known in the media as the so-called "smacking debate" and the Bill presented to the New Zealand

Parliament was referred to as “the anti-smacking Bill” (Wood, et al., 2008)¹⁰. The keyword “hitting” was included because the media terminology also included debate about whether or not it is acceptable to hit children. One example of this debate was seen in an editorial in The Dominion Post with the headline “*Good parents don’t hit their children*” (Editor, 2005, p. B6).

The data collection of newspaper articles span a seven year period from 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2007. In early 2000, the media highlighted the issue of child abuse following the highly publicised, non-accidental deaths and serious injuries of several young children. It was at this time that I became aware, both personally and professionally, of the impact of the media on the reporting of child abuse. As a result, I began to accumulate material pertinent to this study. The end-date for the study was determined by the research progress.

There were 8832 articles meeting the search criteria in Newztext. These articles were further reduced to 2105 relevant articles in the following way. (See Appendix VIII for a full list of the articles finally drawn on).

Following the initial selection of newspaper articles, the sample was further defined in terms of the merit of their content relating to their relevance to the topic of physical abuse of children. The criteria used for this were that the article met at least one of two factors: 1) to be specifically on the topic of physical abuse; and/or 2) to relate to the physical abuse of a child or children younger than 14 years old.

The articles were then sorted by date, and the data recorded on an Access database using the range of criteria as outlined in Table 3.1.

¹⁰ All three of these terms will be used in this paper when referring to the Section 59 Repeal of the Crimes Act 1961.

Table 3.1 Database Categories used to record newspaper articles:

Category	Definition of the category
1. Newspaper name:	One of the four newspapers searched.
2. Date of publication:	
3. Headline:	
4. Author:	The by-line of the article if given.
5. Type of article:	See explanation (a) below
6. Specific child / children:	Yes / no
7. Name of child /children:	Named if identified as such in the article
8. Primary news angle:	See explanation (b) below
9. Subordinate news angle:	See explanation (b) below
10. Comments:	Any defining features of the article not otherwise identified in the above categories.

Explanatory notes for Table 3.1:

(a) The ‘Type of Article’ category was divided into four areas. These areas have been defined from an Australian on-line resource for journalists and the media:

- 1) **Editorial:** An article written by, or on behalf of but with supervision by, an editor, giving the news organisation’s opinion on an issue.
- 2) **Feature article:** A longer article or story, usually in greater depth and complexity than a simple news item. Features may grow from a current news event or simply be examining a timeless issues such as general interest topics.
- 3) **News story:** A piece that describes and explains a current news event.

- 4) ***Opinion pieces:*** Articles written that express an opinion but written by contributors other than the editor, and most commonly submitted by parties independent of the newspaper. These can be regular columns in the newspaper. (Ingram, n.d.).

(b) A **news angle** is defined in the Journalism and Media Glossary as “that aspect of a story which a journalist chooses to highlight and develop” (Ingram, n.d.). O’Shaughnessy and Stadler (2008) define a news angle as “the central focus or the main idea in the organisation and presentation of a story” (p. 89). Both of these definitions provided a basis with which the newspaper articles were able to be sorted thematically.

For each article, a **primary news angle**, or the main topic of the article, was identified. Many articles had one angle only, but others had a **subordinate news angle** that was identified as well. Prior to entering the newspaper articles into the Access database, a six month samples of articles were read and the angle of the article noted. It became apparent that the news angles were able to be categorised into ten areas which are described as follows:

- 1) ***General child abuse:*** An article primarily about child abuse, including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse or neglect, but with no specific cases mentioned. Some examples may be the effects of family violence on children, parenting or signs of abuse.
- 2) ***General content:*** General content which includes non-specific comment about physical abuse of children or adults—many in this category may be political, moral or religious commentaries.
- 3) ***Specific incident of abuse on a child:*** An article is written about a specific incident of child abuse, mentioning an individual child or children, and/or details of the actual incident of abuse.
- 4) ***Family/whānau/ community impacts/reactions:*** This grouping includes articles that refer specifically to incidents of physical child abuse, but not with a focus on the children themselves. Articles may include discussion about the perpetrators of abuse, the impact on families or

communities, or commentary about why so many children are being physically abused.

- 5) ***Court or police action:*** Court hearings or police arrests or other action for child physical abuse are collected under this category. This may include news items such as appeals for sentences or outcomes from parole hearings.
- 6) ***Statistics/summaries:*** These articles may include summaries of statistical data or commentary on some aspect of physical child abuse from New Zealand or overseas. There may also be statistics related to the frequency of abuse or commentary on factors that increase the risk or likelihood of further abuse.
- 7) ***Media campaigns, education or government initiatives:*** The articles in this category may be commentaries or news releases about media campaigns such as the “It’s not OK” campaign ref, media initiatives or educational commentary.
- 8) ***Section 59 Repeal:*** These articles all focused on aspects of the repeal of s59 of the Crimes Act 1961.
- 9) ***Child Youth and Family (CYF) issues:*** These articles have a focus on issues related specifically to the actions or responsibilities of Child Youth and Family and their staff.
- 10) ***Other:*** Articles with a news angle that does not fit readily into the previous nine categories.

This Access database was then used to analyse the content of the newspaper articles. There are three components to the analysis of the newspaper database. Firstly, the details of newspaper names, dates of publication, and types of article provide an indication of the range and number of the relevant articles. Secondly, the identification and frequency of specific children named in the media can be explored. Thirdly, the frequency of the different themes of the articles is able to be identified and explored in the context of the discussion emanating from the interviews with the writers of the articles.

ii) Interviews

The purpose of individual, semi-structured interviews with media commentators and journalists was to enable each participant to have the opportunity to tell their own story, and for the researcher to “elicit views and opinions from the participants” (Creswell, 2009, p. 232). By using a semi-fixed framework (discussed below), it was possible to explore and comment on similarities and differences expressed by the participants.

Following the listing of the newspaper articles as outlined above, the authors of the articles were identified. Priority was given to those articles that proffered a commentary or opinion by the author about their perceptions of physical child abuse, especially those containing comments or opinions about the perpetrators of that abuse. It was this final selection of approximately 800 articles that provided the names of commentators or journalists who would be considered for participating in the research.

A list comprising people that had published either an opinion piece or a commentary on the subject of physical abuse of children in the period since 1 January 2000 was then drawn up from the newspaper articles reviewed. The names were ordered by the number of articles the individual had written during this period, with the people who had written the greatest number at top.

This list was used systematically to invite participation in the study. The reason for this form of selection is that those who had written more frequently and over a greater number of years may be able to offer a fuller and richer insight into the issues being discussed in the interviews.

Invitations to participate in the research were emailed to the first 25 names from each of the five newspapers on the list, together with a comprehensive information pack about the study. When it became apparent that the desired quota of at least eight to twelve interviews was not likely to be met through this process, further invitations were sent to the next names on the list, until sufficient numbers were reached.

The technique used for this form of participant selection is non-probability sampling, using an availability sample. That is, although the authors were contacted by the researcher through a systematic selection process, the participants self-selected, and

therefore were not a representative sample of the chosen “population” for the study (Davidson & Tolich, 2003). This process is frequently used in social science qualitative research where the focus is on understanding the “lived experience” of individuals and of hearing the personal voice of the participants. (Bridgman, 2002).

This sampling method is appropriate for this study because exploratory research lends itself well to a more flexible and evolving inductive form of research where the voice of the participants is able to form a strong foundation for emergent theories (Rubin & Babbie, 2007). Given the wide parameters of the “population” of writers of child maltreatment, it would be extremely difficult to use probability sampling where the participants are selected expressly to accurately represent a cross-section of the group. (Davidson & Tolich, 2003).

Semi-structured interviews were then conducted with eleven people. This number of interviewees allowed for a range of experience and type of writer, and represented all four newspapers in the study. Bridgman (2002) discusses the issue of how many interviewees are sufficient to ensure that the views of the participants are different enough to generate. He states that the sample size needs to allow for enough divergent opinions to be “sufficiently different for the researcher to suggest generality” (p. 62). After eight to nine interviews had been completed, it became apparent that to interview many more people was not likely to generate further variation in the themes that were appearing. The final two interviews endorsed this view, and the number of interviews remained at eleven.

The length of each interview was flexible, and they ranged from thirty to eighty minutes in length. The format of each of the interviews involved the same set of key topics for discussion, although the actual order and wording of the questions varied depending on the personal circumstances and personality of the interviewee. The participants were also encouraged to raise their own issues about the topic, as these created additional and possibly invaluable insights for the study.

For each interview, I used as a basic template the following interview framework:

- Who or what was your primary influence when you wrote the article?
- What audience was your article/s aimed at?

- When you wrote the article what did you use as your source/s of information?
- When your article is read, what do you think the readers will understand about your perceptions on who are the perpetrators of child abuse?
- If you were to write another article about child abuse again today, would your views expressed be essentially the same or different?

The questions for the interviews incorporated cognitive variables such as thoughts, attitudes, expectations and memory, and also affective variables such as feelings, emotions and moods. Because the ethics approval for the study was a low-risk notification, it was important that the interviews be managed carefully, with consideration being given to the need to ensure that potential risk to each participant is minimised. An acknowledgement of the importance of obtaining informed consent from each participant prior to the interview ensures that the rights of each participant is able to be fully protected (Creswell, 2009). In this study, it was important to adhere to the low-risk ethics application that “personal issues that have not already been presented in the articles will not be discussed in the interview” (see ethics application, Appendix I, and approval Appendix II).

All interview participants had been given a copy of the above interview framework prior to the interview. The interview framework was used primarily as a prompt for the questions in the interview. The framework questions were not prescriptive; and the questions were neither asked in sequence nor were they used as a structured set of questions to define the narrative.

The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed after the interview. Also, as soon as was reasonably practicable after each interview, I wrote a brief summary of the main discussion points and any specific observations I had made during the interview that would not be captured by the oral recording.

Coding and analysis: Following the interviews, the data was systematically recorded. Qualitative thematic content analysis was conducted to identify and to group themes which emerged from the discourse of the participants. Although there are computer software programmes, such as NVivo readily available for qualitative analysis, it seemed appropriate that an exploratory study such as this be coded manually. According

to Davidson and Tolich (2003), manual coding allows the researcher to have increased “familiarity with the content of data” (p. 173) and to make analytical decisions about the thematic sorting of the data.

For this study, manual coding enabled me to explore and consider the content of the interviews in depth, whilst thematically grouping the data. The process undertaken to draw out the themes from the interviews was to break up the individual interviews into smaller component parts with a single idea being expressed in each segment. The segments from all of the interviews were then grouped to determine where the commonalities of topic or concept existed. The groups arising from this exercise were then collated and formed the basis of the thematic discussion in Chapters Five and Six.

iii) Statistical data

In this study, existing data was used to enable comparison and discussion with the data collected from the newspapers and interviews. That is, the known statistical data was a research tool that enabled comparative analysis of data collected for the study.

The collection of the statistical data was divided into three categories:

1. Child homicides and infanticide.
2. Substantiated physical abuse or serious assault requiring hospitalisation.
3. Convicted offenders of homicide or serious assault on children less than 14 years of age.

A summary of these sources of data follows in table 3.2:

Table 3.2 Sources of Data

<i>Type</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Time Interval</i>	<i>Age of Victim</i>	<i>Statistic Obtained</i>
1. Death/Homicide	1. IPRU	2000-2005	0-14	Age, Gender, Ethnicity
	2. Ministry of Women's Affairs	2000-2007	0-14	Age, Gender, Ethnicity
2. Substantiated Physical Abuse	1. CYF	2004-2007	0-16	Age Gender, Ethnicity
	2. IPRU	2000-2007	0-14	Age Gender, Ethnicity
3. Perpetrators	1. Police NVCL (Assaults on children)	2000-2007	0-14	Age Gender, Ethnicity
	2. NVCL Family violence murders	2000-2004	0-17	Gender of perpetrators, number of children physically assaulted.
IPRU = Injury Prevention Research Unit; CYFS= Child Youth and Family Service NVCL=National Clearing House				

The reason for the inclusion of this statistical data is to provide a sample of official data in relation to recent physical abuse of children in New Zealand. The first two categories reveal the number of non-accidental injuries or homicides of children in the timeframe relevant to the study. When a child suffers a serious injury or death, and is believed to be non-accidental, this information is likely to be recorded by a public hospital or the statutory child protection agency of Child Youth and Family. Because the data is taken from two distinct agency sources, there may be differences in the definitions used in the database. The hospitals and Child Youth and Family may also have clients in common, or a child may be the subject of more than one incidence of physical abuse, or may have had multiple hospital admissions. The possible overlap of data was taken into consideration when the data was analysed.

The third category relates to the perpetrators of the physical abuse of children. The data records the demographics of perpetrators charged with assault of a child under 14, and homicide and infanticide statistics for the period 2000 to 2007. The data is derived from

police statistics, obtained from Statistics New Zealand and the New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse through the public domain. As mentioned above, a difference in definitions and collection methods used may mean that it is not possible to make a comparison that links these databases to other statistical data used in the study. An individual perpetrator may have been convicted once yet have either physically abused or assaulted more than one child, or have abused the same child on more than one occasion. A child may also have been assaulted or killed by more than one adult.

3.4 Ethical issues

Before the individual interviews, the participants were fully informed as to the aims and purpose of the study, and were offered confidentiality. However, they were also cautioned that given the small sample and the fact that the interview questions focus on what has already been printed in the public media, their identity was likely to be able to be known.

The informed consent of the participants was obtained prior to individual interviews. The participants were provided with information about the study and their role within it, and the participants were given the opportunity to see what has been written from their interview prior to the thesis being submitted.

3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodology used in the study together with the theoretical context underpinning the methodology. In the discussion chapter, documented statistical data and the data from the newspapers are used to establish a framework of fact that is then compared with the perceptions and attitudes being publicly expressed by the media commentators and writers.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE FINDINGS FROM THE NEWSPAPERS 2000-2007

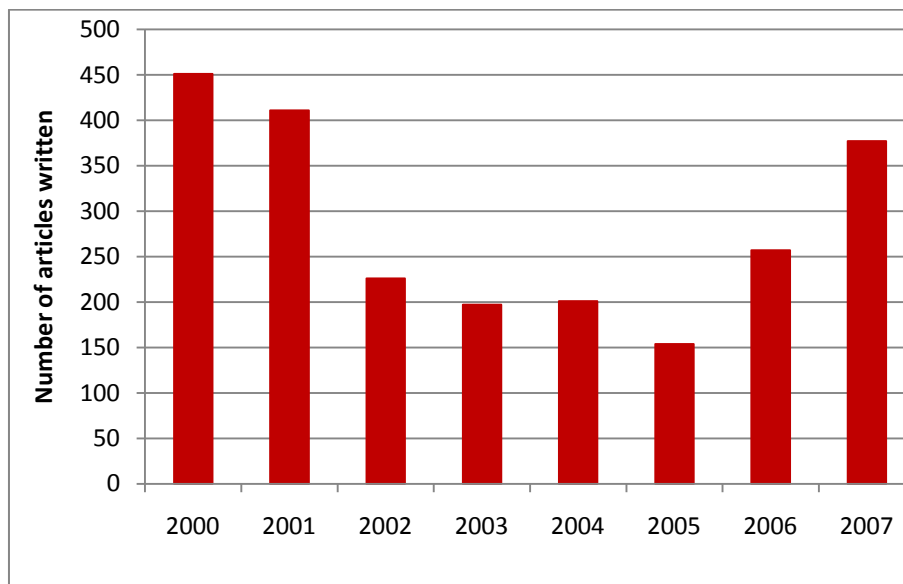
4.1 Newspaper Data

Using Newztext database, a total of 2105 articles from the four newspapers were analysed as described in the methodology. The time period for the search was between 1 January 2000 and 31 December 2007. From this analysis the following information was obtained.

4.2 Distribution of articles

Figure 4.1 shows the distribution of articles written during each calendar year for the time period. The chart shows a peak of articles in 2000, and the lowest number of articles in 2005. There appears to have been a steady increase of the number of stories written about physical child abuse in 2006 and 2007.

Figure 4.1 Articles on physical abuse per year 2000-2007

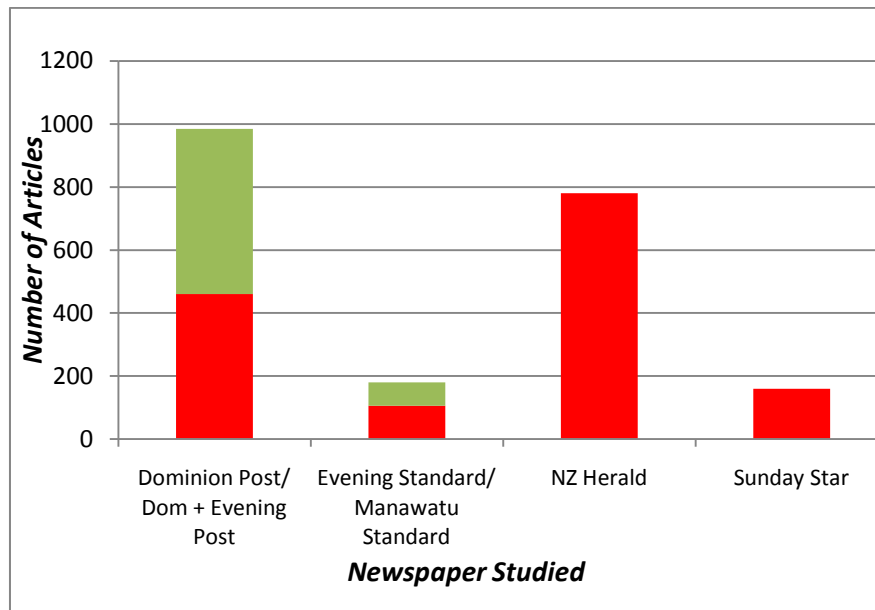


Source: Newztext

Figure 4.2 examines the number of articles written on the topic of physical child abuse in each of the four newspapers looked at in the study. The combined total articles from the Dominion, Evening Post and the Dominion Post accounts for 46.8% (n=985) of the

total number. The New Zealand Herald printed 37% (n=780) of the articles, the combined Manawatu Evening Standard and Manawatu Standard printed 8.6% (n=180) articles, and the Sunday Star Times printed 7.8% (n=160).

Figure 4.2 Articles written in each newspaper studied 2000-2007



Source: Newztext

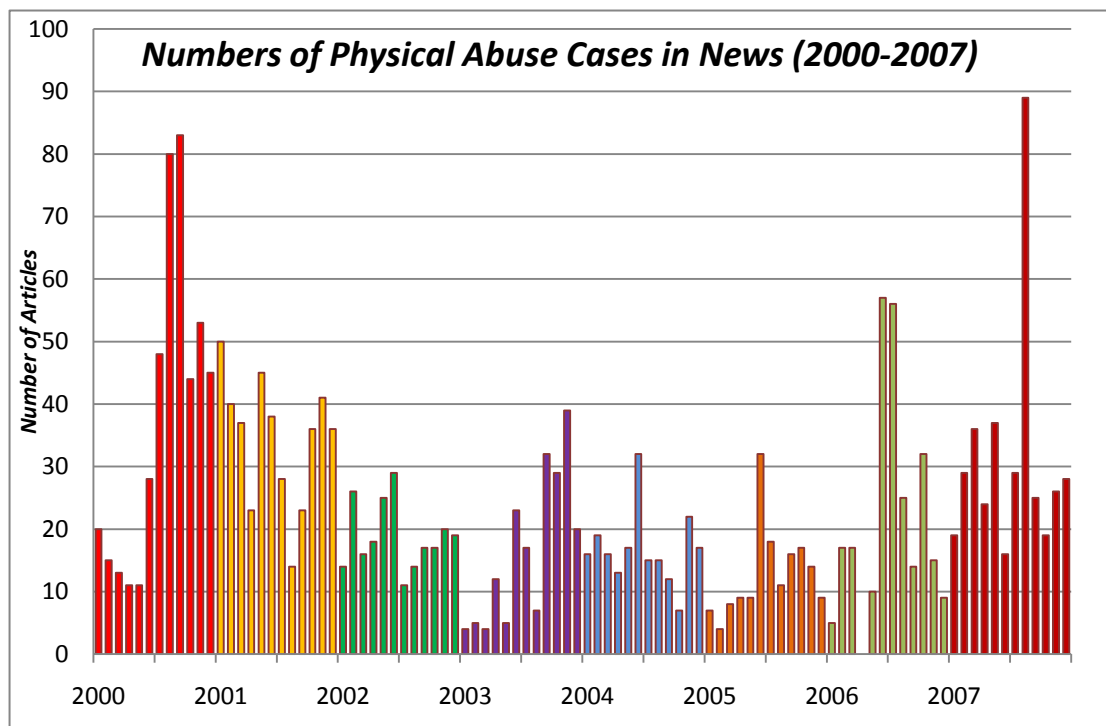
The Dominion and Evening Post were separate publications until their merger in July 2002 to form the Dominion Post. The Dominion was a morning publication, and the Evening Post an evening publication, and were both based in Wellington, with a similar circulation area. This may have meant that there was the same material presented in both newspapers, and provides an explanation for the distribution of numbers shown in respect of these newspapers in Figure 4.2. Similarly, this possible duplication of articles in the Wellington region may also account for the large number of articles in 2000 and 2001 shown in Figure 4.1.

The Dominion Post and the NZ Herald have the largest national readership and circulation area of the four newspapers studied, and therefore it is not unexpected that the number of articles on a specific topic may exceed the two newspapers with the smaller readership numbers and circulation.

Figure 4.3 represents the number of articles written per month throughout the eight year period being studied. As can be seen, there is a considerable variation from month to month.

Two peaks are apparent in the graph: August and September 2000 (n=80 and n=83 articles respectively), and August 2007 (n=89 articles). There were also smaller but significant peaks in June and July 2006 (n=56 and n=57 articles respectively).

Figure 4.3 **Number of physical abuse cases in news each month 2000-2007**



These peaks correlate with some specific cases of child abuse that appear to have elicited a high media response. August 2007 was the month in which Nia Glassie died, and the Kahui twins were killed in June 2006. The second half of 2000 heralded several child abuse incidents, all of which contributed to the high number of articles written. There was the murder of Amber Lundy¹¹, the high-profile injury of Sade Trembath¹²,

¹¹ In August 2000 seven year old Amber Lundy and her mother were murdered with an axe. Amber's father, Mark Lundy was later convicted of their murder.

¹² In mid-2000, Child Youth and Family placed two year old Sade Trembath with her grandmother who seriously physically abused her, leaving the child with permanent physical and intellectual disabilities.

and the court appearances of the killers of James Whakaruru¹³, Hinewaoriki (Lilybing) Karaitiana-Matiaha and Mereana Edwards¹⁴.

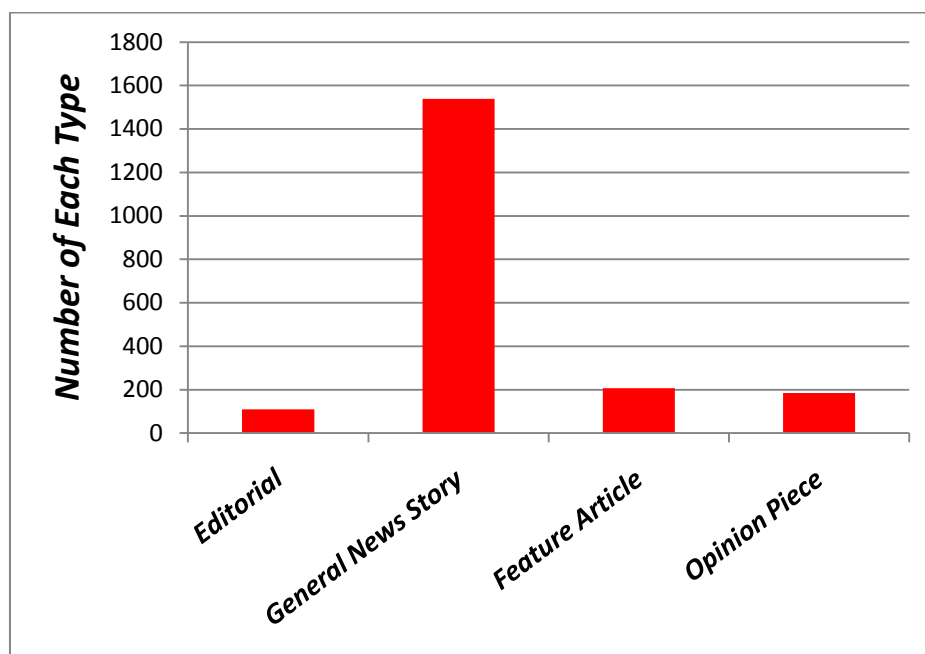
Interestingly, although the first half of 2003 appears to have a low incidence of articles pertaining to physical abuse of children, this was a period when there were high numbers of articles written about sexual abuse of children, in relation to the Christchurch Civic Crèche case.¹⁵

4.3 Content of articles

i) Type of article

The four main types of articles identified in the data are editorials, news stories, feature articles and opinion pieces. (See Chapter 3.3(i) for a definition of these terms).

Figure 4.4 Distribution of articles on physical abuse according to type



¹³ Four year old James Whakaruru was beaten to death by his stepfather, Benny Haerewa in April 1999. Although the death of this child falls outside of the time frame of this study, the recency of the death meant that there was considerable ongoing media coverage in 2000.

¹⁴ Six year old Mereana Edmonds was killed in 1999 by her mother and mother's female partner, The trial of her killers was in 2000.

¹⁵ This refers to a 1991 incident when a childcare worker was convicted of sexually abusing children in his care at the Christchurch Civic Crèche. This has been subject to a High Court trial, two Court of Appeal hearings, and a Ministerial Inquiry, on each occasion attracting considerable media attention.

Figure 4.4 shows that seventy-five percent (n=1539) of the articles are general news stories. Feature articles account for 10% (n=207); opinion pieces account for 9% (n=185); and 5.5% (n=110) are editorials. These figures are consistent with the principal role of a newspaper to provide a balanced and objective story that is newsworthy and current (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2008). Feature articles and opinion pieces are, by definition, likely to be subjective, with the content of the article being a personal discourse of the writer (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler). Within the parameters of a daily or weekly newspaper, it would therefore be more likely for the majority of articles about child abuse to be within news stories rather than in feature articles or opinion writing.

Editorials are written either by the Editor of the newspaper, or sanctioned by the Editor, and tend to be commentary on current topics, and as such, tend to be subjective and reflect the ideology of the particular newspaper, or of the editorial writer. Because of the diverse range of topics covered by each newspaper, it would be expected that the number of editorials written on a specific topic such as physical child abuse to be fewer than other types of articles. Figure 4.4 shows this to be the case.

ii) News Angles

As part of the analysis of the newspaper articles, a primary news angle, and when applicable, a subordinate news angle was identified for each article. The ten thematic categories used in the study are explained in the methodology chapter above.

Figures 4.5 and 4.6 represent the distribution of these angles over the time period 2000-2007. As can be seen in these figures, the most common themes are specific stories about incidents of physical child abuse, either focusing on a specific child or on a specific incident of abuse. Examples of these are seen in the following New Zealand Herald articles. The first story, headlined "*Tot's injuries due to a fall, says mother*" is specifically about the injuries sustained by toddler Nia Glassie (Cook & Marshall, 2007, p. 2). The second story "*Kahui silence disgusting, says Sharples*" is a story about the family of the Kahui twins, with a focus on the response of the Māori Party co-leader, Pita Sharples, to the reported lack of cooperation with the police inquiry into the death of the children. (NZPA, 2006, p. 3).

Figure 4.5 Primary angles in the newspapers studied

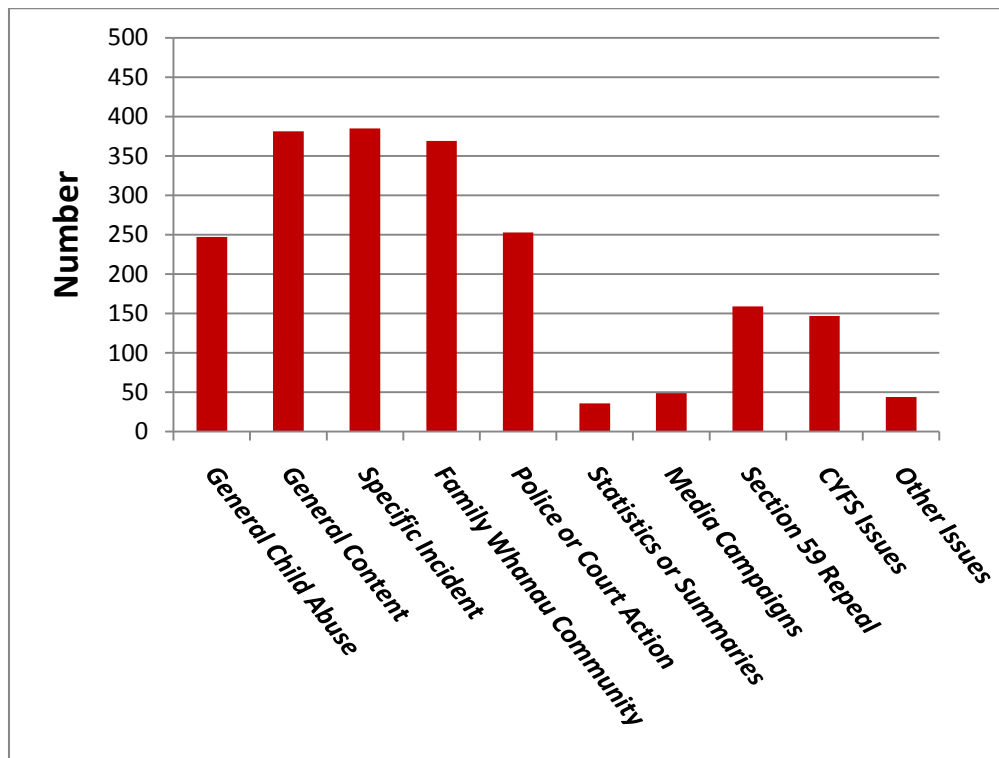
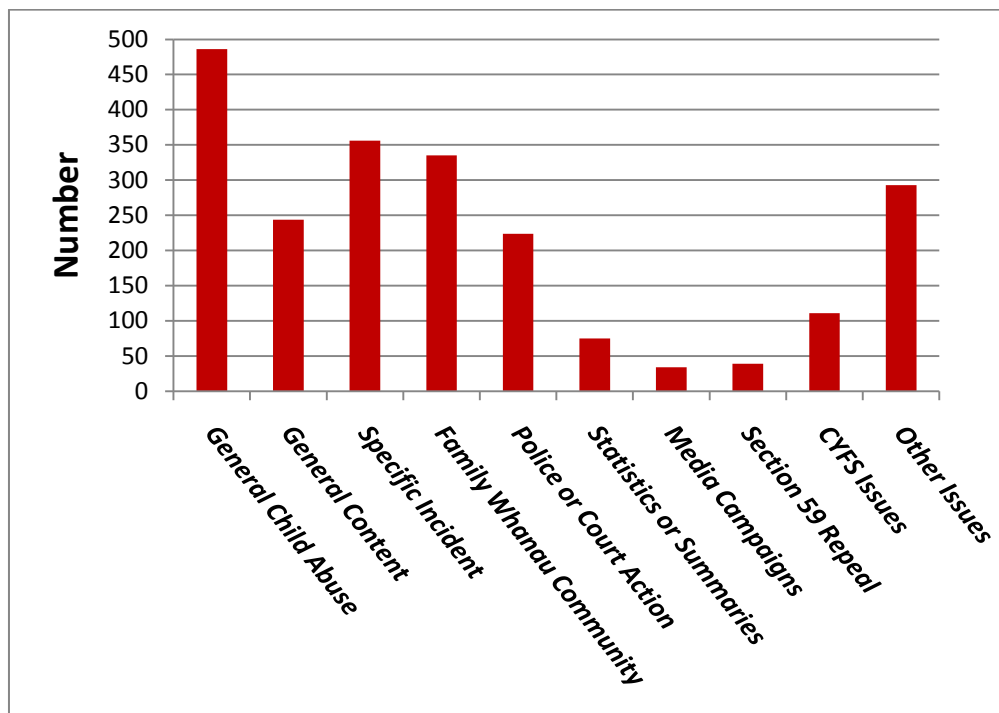


Figure 4.6 Subordinate angles in the newspapers studied



Stories about non-specific and often general aspects of physical and other types of abuse tend to rank highly but are more likely to be a subordinate or supporting angle to the main angle presented in the story. For example, Māori academic Rawiri Taonui wrote an opinion piece, “*Not a race issue*” in the Sunday Star Times with a primary focus on the deaths of Nia Glassie and Jhia Te Tua¹⁶, but with a supporting commentary about factors contributing towards child abuse that are not based on race or ethnicity alone (Taonui, 2007, p. 6).

Many articles focus exclusively on court or police action taken in respect of the perpetrators of the abuse, and although these may be very brief articles, they were included in the newspaper samples when they met the criteria for selection about their connection to physical child abuse.

As can be seen in Figures 4.5 and 4.6 articles with a focus on issues related to Child Youth and Family and to the debate on the repeal of S59 of the Crimes Act 1961 are in the lower figures. These figures may not fully represent, however, the public interest that is frequently generated following the publication of some more contentious or debatable topics. These issues may be debated and discussed in other forums such as Letters to the Editor or other forms of media.

4.4 What children are mentioned in the newspapers?

i) Newspaper coverage

Within the 2105 articles written about physical abuse of children in an eight year period, four hundred and eighteen children were mentioned by name in the sample. Many children were referred to minimally with no details or were mentioned in conjunction with other children. That is, a single article may refer specifically to more than one child. An example of this is seen in Keri Welham’s feature article “*A brutal trail of failed promises*” (Welham, 2007) where the writer summarises the deaths of fourteen children.

¹⁶ In May 2007, two year old Jhia Te Tua was fatally shot during a drive-by gang shooting. Three men from a rival gang were later convicted of her murder.

The physical abuse of twenty-one of these children warranted more than one article to be written about them, with only thirteen having ten or more articles in which they were the subject. These twenty-one children are listed in Appendix VII.

Figure 4.7 illustrates the number of articles written in respect of these twenty-one children. For the purposes of this study, incidents where two siblings have been killed at the same time will be treated as an individual case. This applies to the deaths of sisters Saliel Aplin and Olympia Jetson, in December 2001, and twins Chris and Cru Kahui, in June 2008.

Figure 4.7 Number of articles written per child

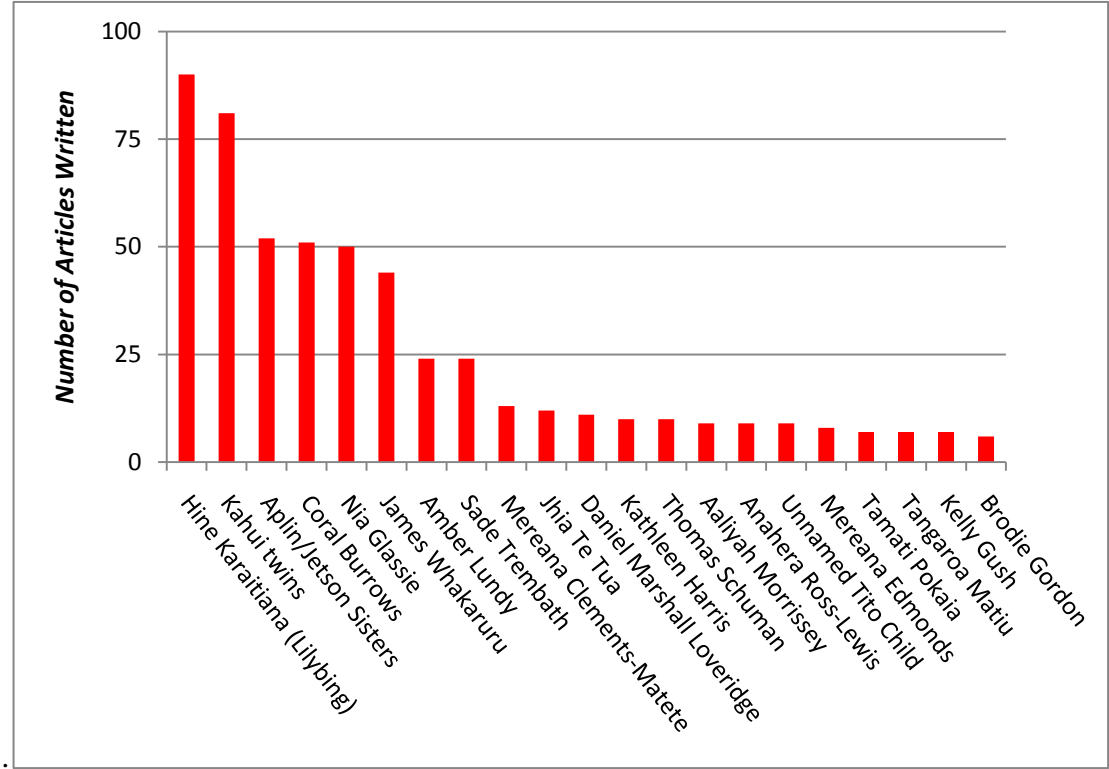


Figure 4.7 shows that some children attract much more media attention than others. Some possible explanations for this situation will be discussed at a later stage in this thesis.

Table 4.1 (on fold-out on next page) indicates the time period that each child has remained in the news. This shows that there appears to be a finite time period for each incident of child abuse to be the focus of media attention.

Table 4.1: Time each case was in the media spotlight (Fold-out):

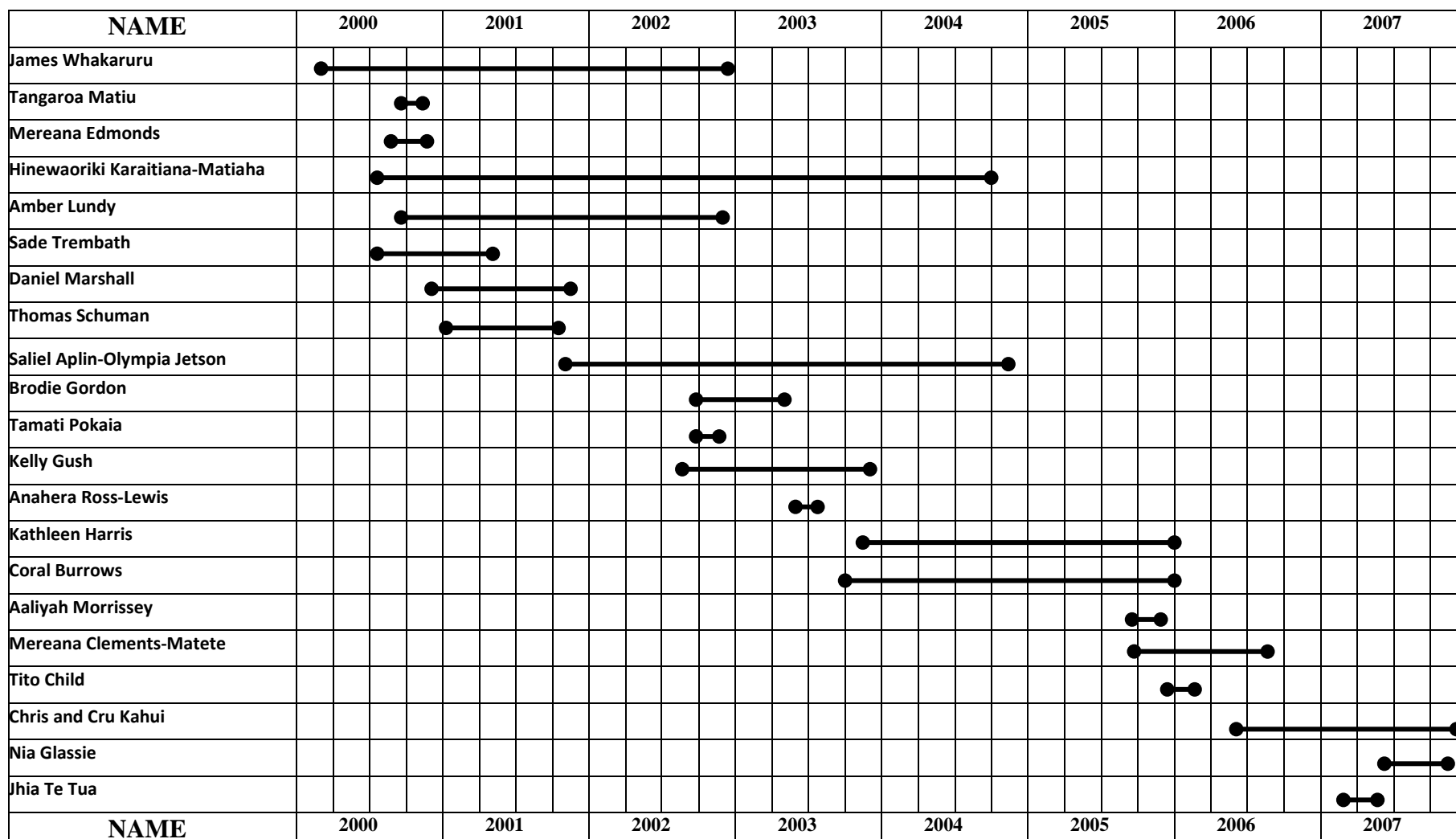


Table 4.1 Time each case was in the media spotlight

As can be seen in Table 4.1, some children, in particular Hinewaoriki Karaitiana-Matiaha (Lilybing), are the subject of a high number of articles as well as occupying more time in the media than other children. A similar pattern is seen with James Whakaruru and the Aplin / Jetson sisters. For these children the coverage includes not only the child's death but also has increased coverage around the arrests and court hearings of the perpetrators of the abuse.

Other children, such as seven month old Kathleen Harris, appeared intermittently in the newspapers over almost two years, but there were no more than ten articles specifically mentioning her death at the hands of her stepfather. There was relatively a long duration of media coverage mentioning the death of Amber Lundy, but as discussed in the write-up of the interviews her death did not appear to be considered by the media as being an incident of child abuse. The volume of media coverage tended to focus more on the arrest and subsequent trial of the child's father than focusing on the death of the child.

For some of the later incidents, such as the death of Jhia Te Tua, Nia Glassie, and the Kahui twins, the duration of time in the media and the number of articles written about them may be less accurately portrayed than other children in the sample. This is because media coverage of the deaths and issues related to their deaths continued in succeeding years.

ii) Demographics of children mentioned in media

A summary of the demographic data relating to the twenty-one children mentioned above can be found in Appendix VII. Graphical analysis of the demographic data is outlined below:

iii) Ethnicity

The ethnicity of the children given media coverage is shown in Figure 4.8 below. Fifty-nine percent of the children were identified in the media as being Māori, and thirty-six percent as being Pākehā. The five percent identified as being of Pacific Island origin refers to one child, Nia Glassie, who is recorded by the media as having a Māori mother and a Pacific Island father. Note: because of the size of the sample, the percentages presented here may be a true representation of the wider spectrum of media coverage of child abuse.

Figure 4.8 Media Coverage by Ethnicity of Victims

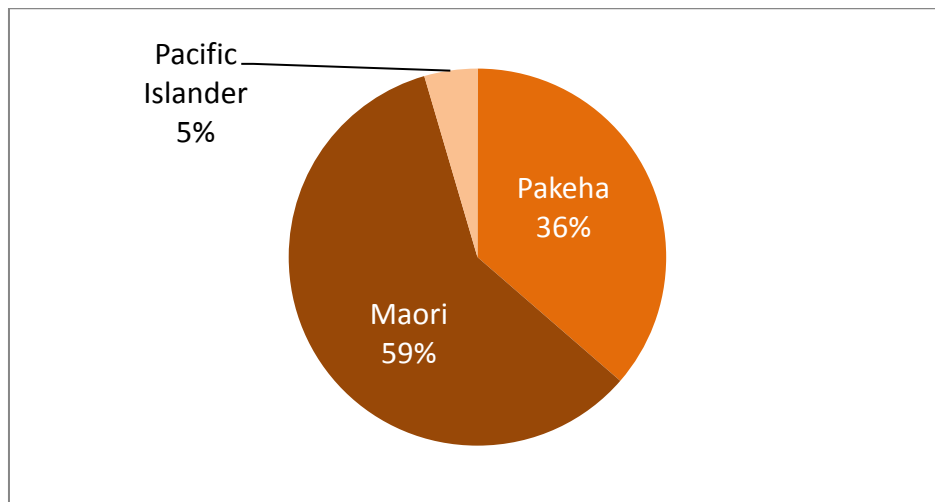


Figure 4.9 depicts the breakdown of the two main ethnic groups identified in the group of the highest profiled children. There have been more than twice the number of articles written about the Māori children in the sample than have been written about the non-Māori children.

Figure 4.9 Media Coverage and Ethnicity

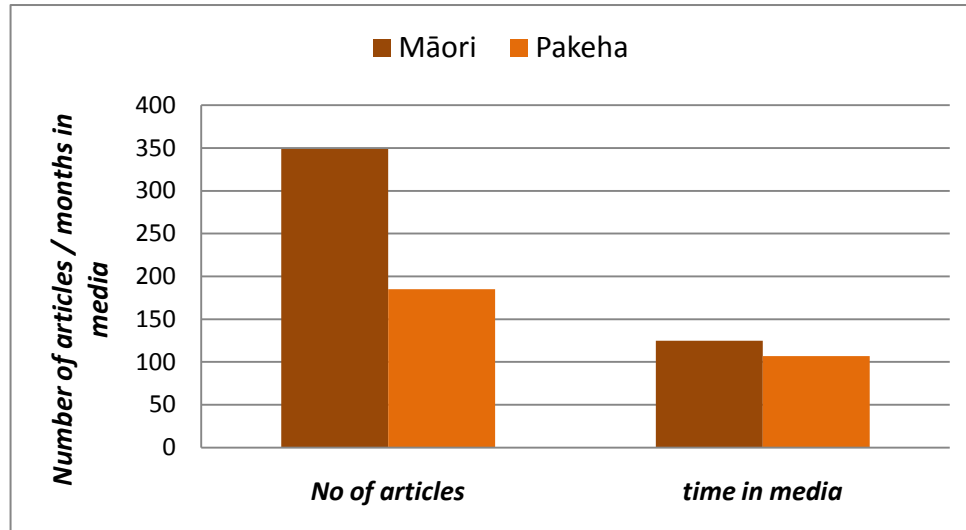


Figure 4.9 shows that there is little difference between the number of months that Māori children and Pākehā children have occupied the media spotlight. This points to the possibility that media attention about a physical child abuse case occupies the same duration regardless of ethnicity, although the number of articles written within that duration may differ significantly.

iv) Age and Gender

Figure 4.10 shows the distribution of age of the sample group of children written about in the media. Preschoolers (n=16) far outnumber both five to nine year olds (n=3) and ten to fourteen year olds (n=2). This indicates that in the eight year period studied the media gave considerably more time and space to the younger children who were physically abused than was given to older children.

Figure 4.10 Media Coverage by Age

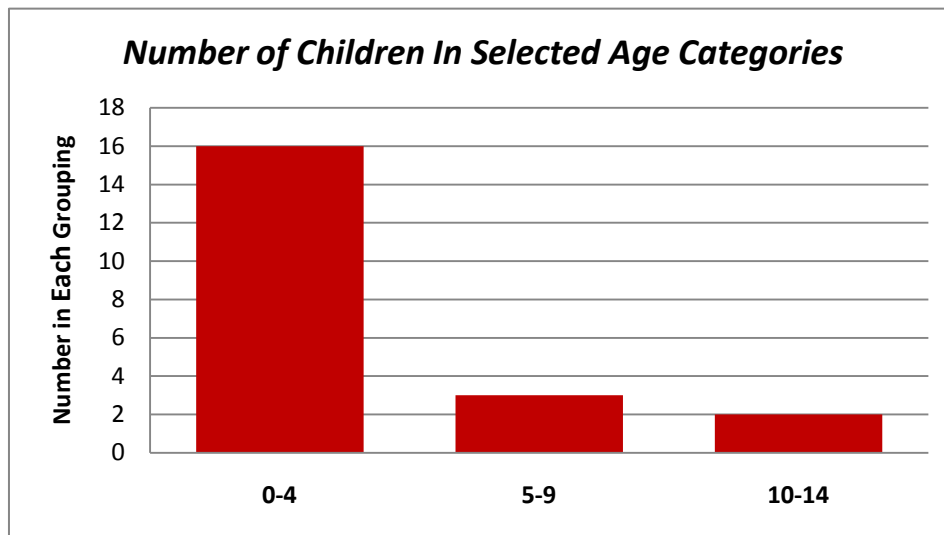
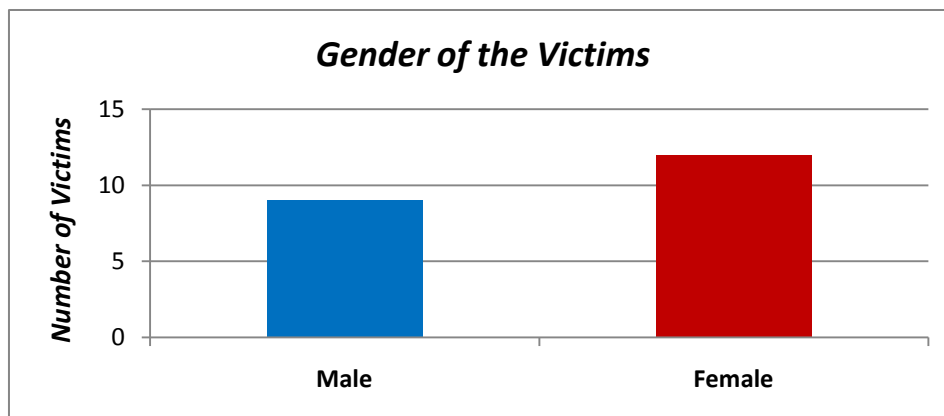


Figure 4.11 shows that the gender of the children mentioned by the media indicates that girls (n=12) just outnumber the boys (n=9). Statistically, this is not considered to be a significant difference for the size of the group.

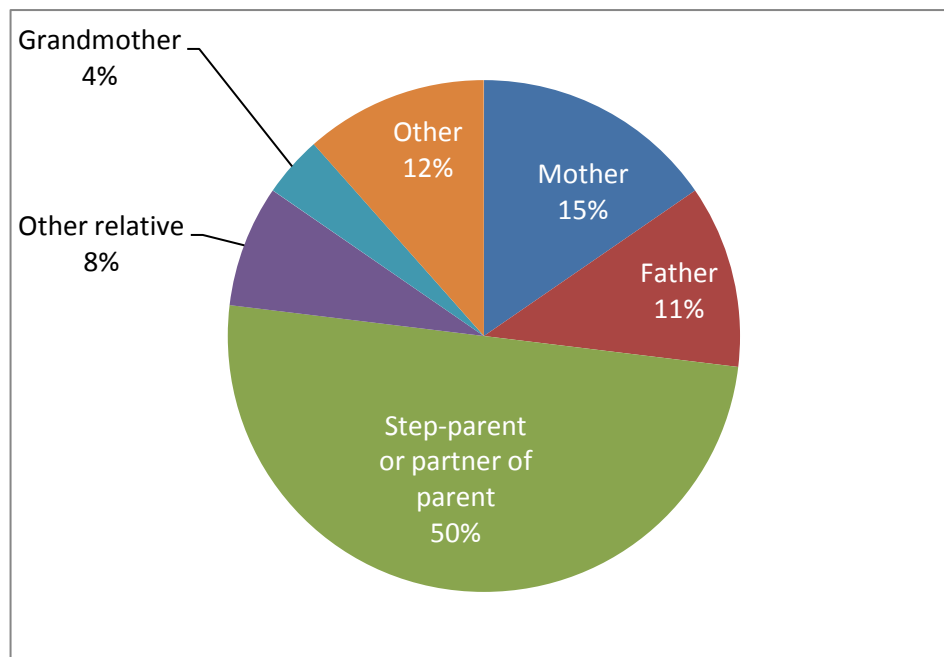
Figure 4.11 Media Coverage by Gender



v) Relationship of perpetrator to child

This study explores public perceptions of who the perpetrators of physical abuse are, and in figure 4.12, the relationship of the perpetrator to the twenty-one children identified by the media is shown. One question to be considered about this data set is whether this relationship influences the media when they choose which child to write about. For example, is there a worldview that mothers do not hurt their children, or could a step-parent killing a child make more sensational press than a parent?

Figure 4.12 Relationship of Perpetrator and Victim

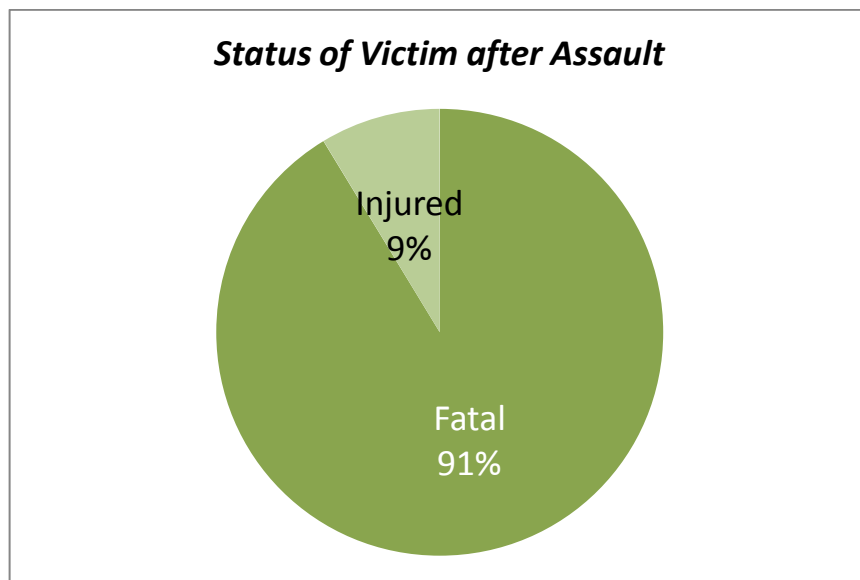


The step-parent or partner of a parent accounted for the abuse of half of the children. Mothers outnumbered fathers as perpetrators. Together, birth parents of the children accounted for only approximately half of the step-parents or partners identified. The graph shows that other relatives, including a grandparent in one case, were responsible for 12% of the abuse. Finally, 12% of the perpetrators were either non-family members of the child, or had not been identified by the media at the time of the study. The perpetrators of the abuse of some of the children, such as the Kahui twins, are not known at all to date. These relationships were compared with the known statistical data and were explored in the interviews, and the findings contribute to the discussion.

vi) Outcome of the physical abuse

Figure 4.13 shows that, for the twenty-one children given media coverage for having been victims of physical child abuse, ten times as many children suffered fatal injuries to the children who were injured and lived. It is notable that the two children in the group who were injured and survived both had familial links to the Manawatu area, and may have had media coverage in the regional Manawatu Standard with details that may not have been covered in the larger national newspapers.

Figure 4.13 Outcome of the Assault



The purpose of this data set is to show that the newspaper coverage of physical child abuse is almost exclusively given to children who have died rather than been seriously injured. Because of this, the known statistical data from hospitals and Child Youth and Family may not be able to be accurately compared to the data arising from the actual media coverage of child abuse.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE VOICES OF THE WRITERS

5.1 Introduction

For this study, I interviewed eleven people who have written about physical child abuse in the time period and the newspapers selected for this study. The following table summarises the known demographical spread of the eleven participants.

Table 5.1 Demographics of Participants

Gender	7 Female 4 Male
Ethnicity	9 Pākehā 2 Maori
Type of writer	7 News Reporters 5 Opinion / Columnist writers 2 Editorial Writers ¹⁷
Types of newspapers represented by the participants	2 Weekly Newspapers 9 Daily Newspapers 3 Regional Newspapers 8 National Newspapers

The participants were recruited as outlined in the methodology. Not all the participants agreed to be identified for this study, so the decision has been made to keep the identities of all eleven participants confidential. In the following chapter, quotes from

¹⁷ Several of the participants interviewed had written articles on physical child abuse in more than one category of writing throughout the eight years. For example, one participant is a columnist who sometimes writes editorials, but has also been a news reporter.

each participant are given a number and they are referred to as Participant 1, Participant 2, and so forth.

The following two chapters summarise thematically the semi-structured interviews with the participants. As described in the methodology, the participants were each given a framework of “starter questions” prior to the interview. The following discussion is based on this interview framework, with each section addressing a different question. The main themes that were identified from the thematic analysis of the interview transcripts have been linked to one of the interview questions, and will be discussed within that section.

Chapter Five looks at the responses of the participants to questions pertaining to what they write and why, together with their understandings about the media organisation, roles and so forth. In Chapter Six the flow of discussion is directed towards more personal reflections of the participants about physical child abuse and the perpetrators of that abuse.

5.2 Why did you write about child abuse?

Each of the participants had a story of their own to tell about why he or she wrote about physical child abuse for the newspaper. One columnist explained that he writes about child abuse when something has been in the news or been published about child abuse that week. He said:

...it's something that's on my heart at the time...we have had horrendous single events and we had had horrendous serial events...two or three at a time...I cannot understand why any human being can abuse a child...and that's why I have written about it. (Participant 10).

On a personal level, one participant hoped that through his writing he would be able to achieve something important in someone's life (Participant 5). Another participant believed that he has the power to influence people. He also wrote his articles on child abuse because he wanted to explore what the thought processes are for the perpetrators of violence (Participant 2). Other participants write about child abuse hoping to raise public awareness about the issue:

- *I'm a bit of a moralist...I get fired up by things that reflect cruelty to humans...and I want to say 'what the hell are we doing...why are we doing it?'. And if the public are more aware of the issues, they are less likely to hit their kids in public (Participant 3).*
- *I try to find the human element in the story... [I] try to connect with people so they start to care about the issues (Participant 8)*

For one columnist, her purpose for writing on the topic of child abuse is to provide information for the reader:

People can't get information about child abuse readily; children don't have a voice; abused children are the most powerless (Participant 9).

Other participants, most often news reporters, write about child abuse because their job is to cover whatever is considered newsworthy at the time of writing. One participant said that in his role of court reporter he was aware that child abuse is “always sensational stuff...it is the saddest reporting any reporter can ever cover” (Participant 5) and his reason for writing is to convey the impact that the abuse has on the victims.

5.3 What influences your writing? What informs you?

Many of the writers interviewed were very clear about the factors that influenced their writing. It became apparent that although there are external factors, such as expectations from employers or assignments by the editor of the newspaper, all of the writers indicated that they had an inherent interest in the subject of child abuse at the time they wrote the articles discussed.

The participants all spoke about what influences or has influenced their writing on the topic of child abuse. These identified influences fitted into five broad themes:

- i. Personal interests
- ii. Current events
- iii. Public issues and campaigns
- iv. Professional issues about child abuse
- v. Public demands

i) Personal interests

Many of the participants identified a primary influence for their writing to be personal experiences, values or belief systems. The primary influences for three of the participants are:

- *...being moved by the idea of children being hurt” (Participant 8)*
- *fired by things that reflect cruelty to humans (Participant 3).*
- *a belief that people need to understand the reality of the issues” (Participant 5).*

For some of the participants, being a parent is a major influence affecting the content of their writing. A personal trigger colouring the writing of one participant is

When you have children of your own... you’ve got to start having a look at how you parent, and whether you are going to choose to hit your kids or not (Participant 7).

For one participant, this was a very ‘close to home’ experience when the police arrived at her door following a call about her own children. Although she was initially upset by the fact that a neighbour had called the police to investigate a crying child in her not-impooverished neighbourhood, she was pleased that there are neighbours who care enough to be proactive about getting help. As a result of this incident, the participant was motivated to make a point via her opinion column that, although there may be a public perception that it is only Māori and Polynesian families abusing their children, child abuse is not “so much a racial issue as an economic one, and a social issue” (Participant 1), and that child abuse may occur in any suburb, in any town, in New Zealand.

ii) Current events

For those participants who are primarily news reporters, the content of their writing is likely to be informed by current events. This may be in response to a press release by the police or a statutory agency such as Child Youth and Family following a significant event such as the death or serious injury of a child. (Participants 4 and 11).

A primary influence for those participants, who write feature articles, opinion pieces, or editorials, is what current news issues are topical at the time of writing. Because of their type of journalism, these participants are able to explore the current issues in greater depth than the news reporters are able to. Opinion writers may read what has been written in the newspaper that week and use the material as a foundation for their opinion piece (Participants 3 and 10). One participant, an opinion columnist, wrote about her own parenting at a time when the s59 debate was in full swing. She said the public controversy at the time influenced her to write her own “take” on the issue:

...I was informed by all the ‘white noise’ around me which I felt was really critical...I decided to put myself on the line, and write what I felt was the truth about the way people really treat their kids (Participant 9).

Current court issues and proceedings are also an important influence on what was written by several of the participants. One of the participants, who has been a court reporter for many years, explained that when criminal charges are made against an alleged perpetrator, the case usually goes to trial. At the trial, what the court reporter writes is influenced and coloured by what takes place in the courtroom, by the opening addresses for the Defence and Crown, and the cross-examination. More importantly however, the biggest influence for the reporter is the verdict. Once the verdict is announced, the news reporter is able to make a judgment call about what weighting or focus he or she is able to give different aspects of the case (Participant 5).

iii) Public issues and campaigns

For some of the participants, their writing is informed by public interests and political issues centring on child abuse.

One major influence for writing about child abuse is public campaigns to raise awareness of issues such as child abuse or domestic violence. One participant wrote a feature article focusing on perpetrators of child abuse. The topic was assigned to him by a features editor following the “It’s Not OK” Government campaign against family violence in 2007. Also influencing this article was the impending White Ribbon Day, an annual campaign to raise public awareness of male violence against women. The participant said that he tried to look at issues raised by the “It’s Not OK” campaign and to put these issues into the context of the perpetrators of the abuse:

...as a society, it should be one of society's accepted norms that you don't abuse and assault children...so what is the thought process, what is in the minds of people who do this...for whom is it 'OK' to do that? (Participant 2)

One of the opinion columnists stated that he believes his primary influence when writing about child abuse is his upbringing, which has provided him with a solidly-based value system together with a good sense of what is right or wrong with society today. The participant explained that his writing as a columnist is heavily influenced by factors such as changes in society, watering down of morality, constant attack on family life, the Pill, decriminalisation of adultery, lack of moral guidelines (Participant 10).

For one participant, a sense of social justice, and the need to “*say something that I believe needs to be said*” (Participant 9) is her motivation for writing about child abuse. She described two columns that she had written as a direct response to another newspaper “*who had done a particularly patronising piece [about the Kahui twin's killing] suggesting that because the family were poor, ergo they were also child abusers*” (Participant 9). The participant said that her primary influence for writing about child abuse is to “*get the real story, try to find the truth*” (Participant 9). However, this participant feels that child abuse is a particularly difficult topic to be honest about, due to the inability to access the alleged abuser, or due to the legal constraints of what is or is not able to be reported.

iv) Professional issues about child abuse

Although the stories of the victims and perpetrators of physical child abuse, together with their families, play a major role in influencing media attention about child abuse, many writers may be influenced by the wider sphere encompassed by public policy and professional responses to child abuse.

Parliamentary debates influence some writers, particularly if they work in the Parliamentary Press gallery as Participant 2 did in 2003. At this time, the participant became aware of the debate around the reform of s59 of the Crimes Act 1961. He said that he wanted to focus on some of the issues being discussed at that time, particularly in relation to the Māori and Pacific Island views expressed about anger management in the context of parenting and “*the need to provide their people with the tools to parent without physical discipline*” (Participant 2).

The writing of other participants focuses on how professionals such as social workers are responding to physical child abuse in New Zealand. An example of this was an article written by one participant, who used statistics from the Ministry of Social Development, other annual reports, and discussions with Ruth Dyson, the then Minister of Social Development, to develop a timeline that examines the involvement Child Youth and Family have had with children seriously harmed or killed through physical abuse. She described her rationale for writing as:

*...just a look at CYF, a stocktake...like, 'what is this agency doing?'
How can they give us some confidence that they can look after our
kids any better than they have in the past when we have all these
horrific examples of when they haven't quite done things the right
way (Participant 8).*

The efficacy of statutory social work appears to have been an influencing factor for several of the participants to write about child abuse. One participant purported that although there may be historical injustices, intergenerational poor parenting within a family group, lack of support for families, or poverty, it is very difficult for journalists to unwind the complexity of child abuse to find black and white issues that the media is able to accurately and fairly report on:

*It's so much easier to say 'look at this deadbeat dad who killed his
kid'. Rain down on him, rain down on the caseworker who knew there
was an issue in the family... (Participant 9).*

Several participants commented about the negative coverage that professionals working with child abuse receive in their articles and in other media. For one participant, this is because sometimes the only comments reported on by the media are by parents or advocates for the parents of the abused children. Because of privacy and policy regulations, social workers are not able to speak for the abused child. Furthermore, the participant says, "the more you try and argue the *caseworker's case*, the more you are opening yourself up to criticism just by raising issues" (Participant 9).

This view is reinforced by another participant, who has written several articles about Child Youth and Family, who believes that public policy drives what may or may not be written:

...a struggling Department, understaffed, under pressure to perform, barely able to keep on top [of referrals]...being hammered by people saying they are not doing their job well...but because of confidentiality [the social workers] couldn't defend themselves...not allowed to say anything. (Participant 7).

This participant has also written articles as a response to media releases by politicians. She discussed one such article where a Member of Parliament in Opposition had made negative comments about Child Youth and Family, seemingly to make a political point to her counterpart in Government:

You get an uneasy feeling sometimes that some of these politicians are really taking you for a ride...they've got a big political agenda...a political patch to protect...and that's where truth can become a casualty (Participant 7).

The participant said she attempts to provide a balanced fair and accurate representation of the facts. For example, for her articles in response to the political media releases, she also contacted the Minister of Social Welfare and the Manager of Child Youth and Family.

v) Public demand

Another area of factors that influence writers is members of the public, the primary consumers of the newspapers. For one participant, her main influence for the content of her articles was very clear stated as *"the reader. I want to know that someone's going to read this story. That's it, really"* (Participant 7).

Also influencing the writing of this participant are non-custodial parents complaining and blaming the other parent or caregivers of abuse of the child or children. She realises, however, that a degree of caution needs to be exercised in these situations as the view of the parents complaining may be driven by an agenda that may not be balanced (Participant 7).

Once an article has been written about child abuse, there may be a response from members of the public. One participant wrote a story about a child abuse case in the newspaper, was then contacted by the father of the child who wanted to tell his side of

the story. As a result, the participant produced a follow-up article which was published a week later (Participant 2)

5.4 What type of writing do you do?

The participants for my research write a wide range of types of story, from news reporting to feature articles and opinion pieces. Many of the participants have written editorials at some time throughout their career. Editorials are opinion writing, and are usually anonymously written on behalf of the editor of the newspaper.

At least three of the participants have written articles on child abuse in their roles as court reporter for their newspaper(s). These articles are often anonymous; the Dominion Post has a policy that the court reporter is not named and this anonymity may also apply to other newspapers. One participant explained that anonymity is important to ensure the court reporter's identity is protected, as there can be a lot of intimidation following a court hearing:

There's a lot of nasty stuff in the courtroom, and you don't want people knowing your name and finding out where you live (Participant 4).

For the news writers, there is emphasis on writing as accurately as possible, and with an expectation by the journalist that no personal views are included, although this is not always easy:

As a reporter, you need to record events that have happened; try to present it impartially, but it can be difficult (Participant 5).

Although news writers are not told what to write, there is an expectation that “*we can't put our own opinion into our writing*” (Participant 6), and that ethically, the stories must be objective.

Four of the people interviewed are feature writers. One is identified as being solely a feature writer, two identified as being news reporters and feature writers, and the fourth participant is a feature writer and opinion columnist.

The feature writers discussed different challenges and expectations of their writing, with feature writing sitting on the continuum of subjective versus objective writing between straight news writing and opinion writing. One writer described feature writing as “*a*

medium to explore issues” (Participant 4). Three of the participants spoke about how they approach the writing of feature articles, by targeting the content towards their own interests, and by the inevitability of their own value judgments and beliefs coming into the article.

One participant said that her feature-style writing:

...can be real tear-jerkers, you say ‘let’s stir them along...let’s make everybody feel this person’s pain...but you are still constrained by what you can write about names and details of people (Participant 7).

Four of the participants write regularly for opinion columns. By way of contrast with feature writers and news reporters, opinion writers have more freedom to express their own views and opinions. Other participants also have written opinion pieces throughout their careers, but as this aspect of their writing was not explored further it was not relevant to their writing in relation to child abuse.

Opinion columnists described the style of their writing as being “*subjective and emotive*” (Participant 10). Because personal views are welcomed, and “*no-one tells me what to write*” (Participant 1), writers of opinion columns are better able “*make inferences and judgement calls*” (Participant 6) when writing about a specific issue or event.

The columnists all expressed that their writing tends not to be edited to the extent that news and feature articles are. Two of the participants said they are not edited at all, and one of these two spoke about sending her finished column to the main editor and to a lawyer who may say “*you can’t say this...you can’t say that...*” (Participant 3). *However, unless there is a possibility of a law suit because of the content, “the column has to be in your voice. And other people can’t do that” (Participant 3).*

With opinion pieces, there also appears to be an expectation for the writer to “*do your homework well*” (participant 7) and to exercise good personal judgement on what to report. This was mentioned by two participants, one of which commented on examples where opinion pieces have been written about a specific child with serious medical issues. The participant questioned how columnists may sometimes abuse their power to write freely and without censure, and voiced concern that this type of writing is in itself abusive to the child concerned. She said:

It's different, it's not some poor unwanted kid getting bashed, it's a very much wanted child being treated like a performing poodle. This child still has to go to school with her head shaven and so on (Participant 7)

A columnist also has the freedom to express alternative views, to write about issues that do not necessarily follow the political leanings of the newspaper they write for. One columnist described this freedom to express her own opinion as her opportunity to offer alternative coverage. For example, she quoted:

I mean, if there's a big issue in the media, and the media is all running and galloping in one direction and I feel uneasy about that, I sometimes try to offer a contrary point of view, because we tend to be bandwagon people...we can be, if you don't watch it; there become certain sacred topics, and sacred people (Participant 3).

Another participant, a columnist and feature writer, stated that she is “*paid to be honest and provocative...very few boundaries or censorship imposed*” (Participant 9).

For one opinion writer, it is a challenge to find a new topic each week, and also to find a topic that is not being addressed by another opinion writer at that time. This means that many of the regular columnists of the major publications consult one another about the subject matter, to avoid either repeated topics or two columnists having the same opinions.

One participant interviewed spoke about the type of writing that she does in respect of her own ethnicity. She considered that “*I don't have a Māori by-line but I do write from a Māori perspective*” (Participant 8). To this writer, it is significant that although the reader may not be aware that the column or feature is written by a Māori, that perspective is still embedded within her work.

Another participant also commented on the advantage of newspaper reporting compared to radio and television reporting. She said that:

Newspapers, at least, you have the luxury of space, so you can say more...radio, you get three sentences, TV, you get four sentences (Participant 7).

Regardless of the type of writing, one common factor for all the participants is that their stories are written for daily or weekly newspapers. As such, the articles are described as

“a story written in time...it informs the ongoing debate about child abuse” (Participant 2). This view is summarised by another participant:

News media is a snapshot of the present- it is not history. You can do the same story a year later and it can be totally different (Participant 9).

5.5 What is the role of a journalist?

During the interviews, the participants were asked what they, as experts in the field of journalism, perceived their role to be. Three main themes relevant to this thesis emerged: (a) to write a story about child abuse, (b) to increase public awareness about what is happening and (c) to philosophise about child abuse.

The news reporters feature and opinion writers interviewed for this research all expressed similar views on what they considered to be the role of the writers of written media. One news reporter described his role as being *“a journalist, lawyer, advocate, investigator, and a support for people in their grief”* (Participant 6), a view that appears to signify that the job is not always a straightforward task.

For many of the participants their role is to simply write a story about child abuse. One stated:

The aim is to make stories clear, accurate, readable; to write with vim...to hook [the reader] in and keep them hooked (Participant 7).

To do this, there is the *“need to write a good, clear, concise (sic) story giving balanced information”* (Participant 11). Another participant said that she considered her role to be *“to tell the story, to weave the facts into a readable story”* (Participant 4).

Because the participants are professional writers, they acknowledged their strengths *“to use the power of words to create a picture”* (Participant 5). In terms of writing about child abuse, one participant says that he *“looks to shock, but not support child abuse”* (Participant 6).

The second dominant theme about the role of the writers was the aim of the participants to raise an awareness of some aspect of child abuse. This may be by confronting the

issue by reporting the facts (Participant 4) and by putting the issue of child abuse into a context that makes sense (Participant 9).

The importance of this role of the media is to make people realize that child abuse is happening (Participant 6) and to help society to understand the hard reality of what is happening in New Zealand (Participant 5).

One participant felt that there is a valuable role in providing something that is of use or value to the community, but that the “*reporter needs to fit the community in terms of values and beliefs*” (Participant 5). The role of the journalist could also be to provide a message through the use of an anti-violence tone (Participant 2)

Several of the participants considered their role to challenge the readers to think about the impact and issues of child abuse without becoming complacent or just accepting whatever is being written (Participants 3 and 10). This can be achieved by the writer representing the facts, and also being very specific about why a reader should care about child abuse (Participant 4). Another way that a reader can be challenged is for the writer to source and write using reputable statistics. This may also emphasise the realities of child abuse so that the “*average person does not go quickly back into a middleclass slide...and think that things are getting better because the media are not highlighting [child abuse] so much*” (Participant 8).

A columnist considered that the role of the media is to “protect the establishment” by being critical:

...always holding a mirror up to it and by saying ‘are you doing as good a job as you might, or are you losing track of what ordinary people think, or feel...it’s not our job to sell the role of the Government departments, it’s our job to stand on the side and snipe at the Government department, or the justice system, or whatever (Participant 3).

5.6 Who is your audience?

The participants all expressed that they do not aim their writing for a specific audience, but for a broad, disparate readership. This was described by one news reporter as:

Writing for the public, average, reader... if you’re a professional journalist, you are never writing with a particular person in mind, you are writing to accurately convey the story (Participant 4).

One participant said that he tended to “skew” his writing towards the middle-aged, older readers, while several other of the participants described their audience as being “the over-forty’s” or as “mostly over-fifties”. Another participant described her “average reader” as being “*a greying bunch, with strong views*” (Participant 7). Because of their older age, this participant is reluctant to shock her audience too much, as “*they tend to have strong views on bad language and nudity, and all sorts of things*’ (Participant 7). One opinion writer expressed the view that the readership of the NZ Herald “*could be anyone*” but that the average reader is unlikely to be perpetrators of child abuse because “*they are uneducable*” (Participant 10). This participant further elaborated by discussing how the opinion pieces written by the participant were likened to “*preaching to the converted...those who need to know [about child abuse] don’t or can’t read the paper*” (Participant 10).

Almost half of the participants spoke that the broad readership base of the selected newspapers means that there may be a need to write for a non-specific audience, and to “*take a more general tone*” (Participant 9). One of the participants discussed that the official readership statistics of the paper she writes for indicates that the readership tends to be middle class. She said that in her writing, she will “*try to be mindful of this, but not play to the middle-class*”. (Participant 8)

One participant, a news reporter, said that she has no real view of who is going to be reading her articles:

To me, something is either newsworthy or it isn’t, so I don’t have this perception of who is going to be reading it...the reader is anyone who picks up a paper that day...the readers are the people you see on the buses and trains, and at the dairy, and a cafe, and people who get the paper delivered, people who just find it lying around in a doctor’s waiting room...there is just a big audience of disparate people... (Participant 11).

5.7 What do you believe that your readers want/ expect/ like?

Most of the participants agreed that the readers want something that is coherent, interesting and informative, with some entertainment content (Participant 5). One participant added that the information needs to include:

Something they need to know, or that they're going to want to know about for some reason, or something that they should know about (Participant 7).

The participants expressed a wide range of views about what they believe their readers may be wanting or expecting. These ideas have been summarised in the following table:

Table 5-2 Participant Ideas

- *Media choose the most interesting story or picture- this is not always fully representative of what happens ((Participant 7)*
- *Child abuse becomes a form of entertainment...there has been a steady shift towards infotainment and entertainment over the past decade (Participant 5)*
- *Shock value and a high level of gruesomeness is important to the reader...if the story does not measure up to that level of gruesomeness, then [the story] is not perceived as newsworthy (Participant 11)*
- *Death and tragedy-type stories appeal to most people, and there is always one on the front page of the Sunday papers (Participant 6)*
- *The most bizarre, or nasty, or worst cases are the most interesting to the reader (Participant 11)*
- *People like villains and heroes (Participant 9)*
- *There needs to be something new, or different, or worse in the story...perhaps like the child who was put in the drier (Participant 6)*
- *The child abuse has to be different to be noticed by the reader. But this [abuse] could be cumulative abuse that makes it newsworthy (Participant 8).*
- *A connection to notable people goes in the first paragraph, even if the connection is not important...because people love that (Participant 6).*
- *A headline or picture that grabs the audience is important to the reader (Participant 7).*

Overall, there appears to be consensus that the reader wants to read all the details of a crime, but this information is rarely released in full by the police or Child Youth and Family (Participant 8). The details of the child's death or abuse are more likely to be written at the time of a Court hearing. One participant, a former court reporter states that *"these days we can be more specific about what is written- society can read the hard things"* (Participant 5).

5.8 Who/what decides content of what you write?

When a newspaper goes to print, there are many factors that contribute to the final product. One such factor contributing to what is written appears to be what is needed to sell the newspaper (Participant 5).

The news reporters and feature writers stated that the editor of the newspaper may dictate the content (Participant 6) or the story line may be assigned by the editor or feature editor (Participant 8). One participant described what happens sometimes when she suggests a storyline to the editor:

the editor can say 'no, it's been done one hundred times already'...then the next week that story may be relevant and the editor will assign a reporter to cover it (Participant 11).

Although the editor or sub-editor are able to shape what is written (Participants 4 and 6), one feature writer feels that there is sufficient leeway for her to be mainly self-driven in respect of her writing, but with a collaborative, two-way approach with the editor (Participant 8).

Policy pertinent to a specific newspaper is another factor determining what is able to be written. An example of this was a policy the Manawatu Standard had for many years that the newspaper would report any incident where a soldier appeared in court, regardless of the severity of the offence. The participant said he had successfully challenged this policy as he felt that it had unfairly stigmatised a specific group of people (Participant 5).

In considering who or what determines the content of their writing, several of the news reporters discussed the technicalities necessary for the production of the newspaper. Space constraints can mean that an article that has been written can be shortened to fit

what space is available in that particular edition of the paper. Time constraints are also relevant as *“there is a need to have a printable result at the end of the day”* (Participant 5).

The time and space constraints appear to have a significant impact on what is able to be produced:

- *It means that you are more likely to have a less rounded story, less realistic and honest* (Participant 4)
- *Junior reporters don’t have the luxury of time...there is huge deadline pressure. The beast has to be fed.* (Participant 7)
- *Because of the deadlines and how a newsroom operates generally...all the information coming in constantly...it depends on who is available to write the article in the timeframe available* (Participant 11)

In the media, the priority is always to publish what is considered to be newsworthy and relevant at that particular time. This is, once again, frequently due to space constraints. For several of the participants, this means that a story about child abuse may not be printed in the newspaper in favour of a news item that is considered by the editorial team to be more important, such as an election, a big fire or a car accident (Participant 7). Another participant feels that this can be frustrating when *“your story can be rejected if something else is happening, even if you have done the research”* (Participant 11).

Other factors determining what is written in the newspaper on the topic of child abuse are the severity of the abuse. The participants say that *“only the worst cases- or most bizarre abuse –gets to the top...so many bad cases don’t make it”* (Participant 11) and *“an injured child gets less coverage than when a child dies”* (Participant 6). However, even some serious child abuse cases are less likely to be printed in the newspapers if the geographic location of the crime or incident is outside the circulation area covered by a particular newspaper. That is, *“things that happen in Auckland are more likely to get in the Herald than things that happen in Kaitia, even if they are equally serious crimes...out of sight, out of mind”* (Participant 11).

Budget restrictions for the individual media organisations also shape what resources a journalist is able to put into the research and writing of an article. One participant commented that over the past decade, *“New Zealand media has been dumbed down...there is more and more cost-cutting, corners cut, no resources, more and more pressure on existing staff...”*(Participant 4). And with the “dumbing down”, according to this participant, there is an effect on reporting of cases such as child abuse that has *“little or no analysis...it’s a ‘once over lightly’ story...probably a lot more emotive, but it’s what sells”* (Participant 4).

What journalists write about child abuse issues can also be determined by external factors such as legal or political issues:

- *Good journalism means getting a balanced view but this can be really difficult because just about every person you want to interview is clamped under a silence law by their employment contract.*(Participant 7)
- *You need to watch for defamation...lawyers read and edit [my column]* (Participant 3).
- *There are very, very tight rules about reporting what you personally think...so while you may think anyone foul enough to abuse a child is a scum-sucking low-life...you damn well better be on the editorial page writing an editorial, not a news story* (Participant 7).
- *Sometimes your hands are tied by dynamics such as incidents where one party tries to cover up an incident...the media is stonewalled. ..that can be an ethical dilemma of what or what not to write* (Participant 5).
- *Your hands are tied by what the court allows to be printed* (Participant 11).
- *You need to verify your information or you may be sued* (Participant 6).
- *The Press Council may become involved if there are formal complaints from a reader about your writing* (Participant 5).

5.9 What other sources of information do you access? Why?

What is being written in the newspapers about the topic of physical child abuse is also determined by the sources of information used by the writers. Several participants said that, whenever possible, they tried to obtain factual information from professionals who work in the child abuse field. This includes the police, paediatricians or doctors. Other participants (Participants 11 and 7) said that they try to interview researchers, or authorities on the subject of child abuse, so “*you can get a real picture*” (Participant 7).

One participant wrote a feature article with a focus on the perpetrators of physical child abuse. When researching for the article, he firstly read academic studies about child abuse and perused Cabinet Papers to get recent statistical data, then identified key sources such as Dr Patrick Kelly¹⁸, and Cindy Kiro¹⁹, whom he considered to be experts on the topic. He then met with a community group who work with perpetrators of abuse, and a former perpetrator of physical child abuse (Participant 2). All of this contributed to what the participant considered to be a balanced and well researched article.

Many of the participants indicated that they try to “*use people to talk about personal experiences*” (Participant 11), and to “*interview anyone relevant within the time constraints*” (Participant 9).

One participant, a feature writer for a weekly newspaper, described the process he uses when he is first assigned a story:

You start with the same sort of template...you work out who the key players are, who the police are looking at, why they are looking at them, what do you think the police really know, so you might go and talk to neighbours...you go to Birth Deaths and Marriages, get the birth certificates of children...get the names of parents, of grandparents, so you can talk to them (Participant 6).

The participants appeared very aware of the limitations that they experience in trying to speak with people about physical child abuse:

¹⁸ Paediatrician, Starship Hospital, Auckland.

¹⁹ The then Children’s Commissioner for New Zealand.

- *Who is able to talk? About the only people who are really free to speak are academics...victims approach us and want to talk...but their view is so highly coloured by their experience (Participant 7)*
- *One thing I find concerning is the ease with which you can grab uneducated people and exploit them or exploit their situation because they are unwise enough to talk to you when they shouldn't...people who are much more savvy shut up. Wisely.(Participant 3)*
- *Whatever sources you get information from, you need to realise that everyone has their own axe to grind (Participant 9).*

Obtaining statistical data to inform their writing is important for the feature writers and some of the news reporters. Sources of statistical data may be from the Ministry of Social Development, Child Youth and Family and annual reports available from other government agencies (Participants 2, 8, 9 and 11).

5.10 How much of yourself do you put into your writing?

As noted earlier, all six news reporters interviewed made it clear that their brief is to convey facts, not opinion, with straight news writing ideally being:

Accurate, fair representations of the facts...for feature writing you can explore issues in a certain way, or target towards your own interests, but a news story should be based on fact, they should be standard... my opinion doesn't matter because my professional job is to convey the story (Participant 4).

For one reporter, this means that she always believes that she writes objectively rather than subjectively:

I am not paid to have an opinion, I just report and try and cover both sides, and give everyone a chance to defend any accusations that are put to them...I just put the facts and let the readers draw their own conclusions (Participant 11).

Her justification for this is twofold. Firstly, she considers that she wants to retain her personal privacy outside of her professional life. Secondly, she makes the point that

“child abuse is so revolting, you don’t want to exaggerate – facts speak for themselves” (Participant 11).

Another news reporter has a similar point of view, and advises to:

“always report straight facts...I have always been suspicious of journalism which has been done out of passion and attitude. Because when passion and attitude take over, integrity and balance go out of the window” (Participant 5).

This view was supported by another participant, who although she is now an opinion columnist and feature writer, has also written extensively as a news reporter. She said that, although you can rarely consciously put yourself into your writing, everything is written through your own perception, albeit dispassionately. She explained the need for a writer to put his or her writing into context in order to make sense, but inevitably this means that the content is filtered through the writer’s background:

Subconsciously, of course, you put your own prejudices in, whether they are race, or class, or money, or whatever, but you’d not be aware of that (Participant 9).

This participant spoke about the way in which it may be very difficult to paint an honest picture when reporting news. She gave an example of news reporting for a high profile court case involving abuse of children, where she personally had interviewed some of the children involved:

One reporter seemed to be extraordinarily partisan, and even though he probably felt that he had been very even-handed, it was extremely clear within a few days of the trial what he felt about what the verdict should be. And so all his readers would, probably without realising it, get a very clear steer from him, from his news reporting, of what the specific verdict should be (Participant 9).

As an opinion columnist, the same participant feels that there is much more freedom in the personal content in her writing:

I can bare all...you can write entirely what you believe. I often write inflammatory things, I've had lots of threats, a lot of negative feedback, but I have never been censured (Participant 9).

The columnists and opinion or feature writers all agreed that it is important that their work be their own voice, and that they be given the freedom to express as much of their own self as they wish: *"I can and will write what I like" (Participant 1).*

Another columnist stated:

My columns are quite emotive and extraordinarily subjective, because it's opinion. And you never let the facts stay in the way of a good opinion (Participant 10).

Several of the participants discussed the way that a feature story can be written differently from a news story, and that there is a place for the writer to bring in his or her *"own perceptions...you let some of your judgment come in" (Participant 9).* She added that this allows for the writer to be able to include more emotive and subjective content in the story that is not likely to be apparent from the words:

You can say 'this guy was shiftily moving around in his seat when he was telling me this'...,or 'this is what the setting is like, what the environment is like....' So, consciously or subconsciously, the readers are absorbing your impressions (Participant 9).

Even for news stories, however, it appears that there are ways to inject one's self into objective writing. In the words of one news and feature writer:

The challenge of journalism is that every single time you write a story, every time you write a single word, it's a word you have chosen – coloured by your vocabulary, your background, your views. There are ways of slanting, but it's so much more subtle and, almost in spite of yourself, you use words that show some bias- it's not intentional. (Participant 8)

This participant further explained that when she was writing some of her stories about child abuse, and how horrific it was, she did not hold back with her language when she was explaining some of the beatings. She also admits that she instinctively injects some of her own feelings into her writing:

...to say that 'XX beat James with a steel vacuum cleaner pipe and a jug cord for refusing to call him Daddy' –there's a lot of emotion loaded into that. I could have said 'the man beat his stepson'. Factually that's the same (Participant 8).

One of the feature writers described that, although his own views on an anti-violence message can come through in his articles on child abuse, he will always “*try to write from a factual basis to present the facts*” (Participant 2). To this, however, he added later in the interview that:

While you write with a balanced perspective, you can't help but be a human being inside...believe it or not, journalists are human beings, and we come to this job with our own experiences and backgrounds (Participant 2).

One news reporter spoke about the ease in which she was able to write dispassionately, but not coldly, when she was a young and childless journalist. She explained that many of the articles we spoke about in the interview had been written before she had had children of her own:

...this makes me not to want to do that work anymore –it's too hard, it's too personal, it's too close...before I had children, in lots of ways, I think I was very naïve, and blasé. I couldn't do it dispassionately now, I have too much emotion invested in little people to do that (Participant 4).

All of the people interviewed appeared to have a good understanding of the degree to which their personal beliefs, values and opinions are appropriate for specific types of articles. This was summarized by one participant:

The rules are actually very, very tight. So while you may personally think that anyone who is foul enough to abuse a child is a scum-sucking low-life...there's a repugnance, perhaps, that comes through in court reporting, but that kind of emotion, if you think you want to write about that, you damn well better be on the editorial page writing an editorial, not writing a news story (Participant 7).

CHAPTER SIX: PERCEPTIONS OF THE WRITERS ABOUT PHYSICAL ABUSE

6.11 What are your perceptions of perpetrators of physical abuse of children?

The participants all have their personal and professional views and beliefs about the perpetrators of abuse. Throughout the interviews, it became apparent the writers felt that there is not a single or specific factor that identifies a child abuser, but there are multiple layers and factors involved. The following quotes reflect the view that, although some ethnicities or socio-economic groups, or other factors may be more apparent than others, perpetrators are not easily able to be profiled:

- *It's all kinds of historical injustices, intergenerational poor parenting and lack of parenting skills, lack of support for families, poverty...how do we unwind that complex web to find the black and white issues that the media can report on in an accurate fashion? (Participant 9).*
- *Anyone could be a child abuser – that's the scary thing...the public face that people present is not necessarily who they are, or what they are, or what they are doing...I think that child abuse is a concatenating thing...it's not just one thing that causes these people to lose their tempers and fire...there's a whole heap of shit: you have debts, your house is rotten, the kids are screaming, you haven't slept, you've just been sacked...and then, Boom! Up it comes. And maybe add into that someone who isn't good at sitting down and talking about stuff...who maybe grew up in a household where dad routinely belted mum and everyone else...(Participant 7).*
- *New Zealand is a very angry society, and there is a lot of anger towards children, and a lot of abuse, and unless we face up to the fact that it is not just a problem for disadvantaged, poorer, brown families...that it's a problem for everyone, to varying levels, then what hope have we of doing anything else but speaking a lot of nonsense, really (Participant 9).*

6.2 Who are the abusers?

This question elicited a considerable and animated response from all of those interviewed. Within the interviews, the writers were all given the opportunity to comment on general factors and issues that, for them, may describe or define their perception of the perpetrators of physical abuse of children.

The responses ranged from very general issues to very specific and detailed descriptions. There are four basic areas in which the responses to this question can be placed:

- i) Socio-economic factors
- ii) Users of drugs and alcohol
- iii) Ethnicity
- iv) Family / whānau

i) Socio-economic factors

According to some of the participants, socio-economic factors are the main cause of child abuse. One participant attributed poverty, with the associated factors of poor housing, overcrowding and lack of education, as a prime trigger for people to maltreat children:

...you need money to do things like sending the kids to clubs after school...when you look at the income splits in New Zealand, it does look like a lot more whiter people earn a lot more money than a lot of brown people. Not saying its right, just saying it's where it is (Participant7).

Another participant feels that for many people, child abuse is seen as being a socio-economic problem, and as such, seems to be restricted to only certain geographic locations:

Subconsciously, it seems like a provincial problem...it seems to be another town's problem –people think that the Wairarapa is a very weird place and that is because of this type of press. People assume that in Wellington it wouldn't

be the same [because] it's a middle class society with very good incomes...when they hear on the radio 'Wellington child blah blah...' the assumption would be that the second sentence would be 'taken from her home in...' and they would not be expecting to hear Brooklyn or Mt Victoria, but would expect Taita or Naenae.

So I think that New Zealand has very much a class society, there is a middle class distinction, and child abuse is something that happens to other people, it only happens to people in a lower socioeconomic group" (Participant 8).

These views were echoed by a participant who also spoke about class differentiation in terms of child abuse and the socially advantaged:

There is an assumption that the rich don't abuse their kids. And there's also that thing about the rich abuse their kids in different ways...all those kids never seeing their parents, kids who are lonely and deprived of contact, whose parents are more interested in making money than spending time with them...that's a form of deprivation as well, and a form of child abuse (Participant 9).

In our interview, the same participant talked about an article she had written which disputed the suggestion that socioeconomic factors are indicative of child abuse:

I wrote one about the Kahui twins' killing – I was particularly centring on the Herald, who had done a particularly patronising piece, suggesting that because the family were poor, ergo they were also child abusers (Participant 9).

ii) Drugs and alcohol:

One writer considered the role that alcohol and drugs play in the lives of the perpetrators of child abuse:

The thing that really worries me about child abuse, is kids whose parents use drugs, particularly while Mum is pregnant...you end up with defective child, growing up in a drug-addicted household...We don't seem to be doing anything about drugs, not really. I don't know how you stop it. I think that all these things are interconnected – you

can't just look at child abuse without looking at the chain of events that lead to it. (Participant 7).

The participant also commented that a main cause leading to death of the Kahui twins was not because they were Māori, but it was “*more a drug addiction issue, when you read what Mum was up to, and what Dad was up to...*” (Participant 7).

iii) Ethnicity of abusers:

There seemed to be a perception out there, particularly in light of the Nia Glassie case, that it is only Māori and Polynesian families that seem to be abusing the children (Participant 1).

For several of the participants this perception was supported by statistical evidence that they had located:

- *In my article I'm quoting from a Cabinet committee paper which I've obtained under the [1981 Official Information] Act, and there I quote Ministers Goff, Maharey and Tamihere as saying that Māori and Pacific Island people note the importance of focusing on anger management in the context of parenting, and the need to provide their people with the tools to parent without physical discipline...and then you've got Goff saying that bit about the Māori and Pacific Islanders being the perpetrators of abuse (Participant 2).*
- *Māori child abuse is five times higher...those are figures I pick up from research that's published in the paper. Most of the facts and figures I refer to in my column have been taken from that week's or very recent copies of the Herald or Sunday Star Times (Participant 10).*

For others, there is an acceptance that the statistics about the ethnicity of the perpetrators of abuse are correct, but they also rationalize why this may be so:

- *The child abusers are Māori. Is child abuse happening in nice, white, middle class neighbourhoods? I don't know, I can only go from what I've seen firsthand, and that is low socioeconomic, sometimes Pacific Islanders...but more Māori, predominantly Māori. And the statistics back that up.*
- *You don't want to identify Māori as the perpetrators of that kind of behaviour, even though the statistics back this up, because you know that there's a whole raft of issues underlying that...there's poverty, there's crappy housing, there's low standards of education...many, many factors involved...there's cultural acceptance that [child abuse] is all right.”(Participant 4).*

Despite these statistics, however, this participant believes that this information is not often accessed by many people, and as a result, public perception of who the abusers are is not based on statistical and verifiable evidence:

We look at OECD child abuse statistics, and New Zealand ones are bloody awful, terrible. Lots of New Zealanders probably never look at these statistics. I think that New Zealanders probably have a perception that it's clean, green, wonderful ground...and then they read about child abuse in the newspapers, and they think that it's not them, it's other people, brown people (Participant 4).

Statistics, says another participant, are easy to misinterpret:

What about the statistics? They say [about] child abuse and child abusers-there are a certain percentage that have a poverty problem, or are Māori, or Polynesian –but what about the percentage that do not fit into these categories? People assume that it is all-inclusive, but what about the people who are not Māori or Polynesian? Do we assume that it is all-inclusive, that these are the only people who abuse their kids? (Participant 9).

Sometimes, also, it may be unclear what is public perception of child abuse, or to what extent that perception is able to be supported by statistical data:

I do think that there is an interesting perception...I'm not so sure about Māori because the stats might verify it...but I know with Pacific Island people there is a perception that they are abusive of children more than maybe the average, white person, but when you look at the statistics, they are a bit lower, from memory. That could be a case of under-reporting, anyway. I mean, I've literally seen the classic jandal slap across the head (Participant 11).

Whether or not the ethnicity of the perpetrators or children is included into a newspaper article is a decision made by the individual writer or editorial team. Two of the people interviewed mentioned their views on this issue:

- *There are no hard and fast rules, but it has been discussed in media commentary and that...if you are going to bring people's race into it, either be consistent and always mention race if you think it's relevant, or not at all. But that's a problem that Māori have had with crime reporting for decades...there's a lot more awareness of falling into that trap than there used to be.*

I hope I wouldn't do it, but I wouldn't be surprised if some people still do...fall into the trap of going: 'a Pacific Islander hit their kid'. Whereas, they wouldn't necessarily go: 'a sixth generation New Zealander hit their kid with a spatula'(Participant 11).

- *If there was a reason to mention [ethnicity], I would. I certainly never stress the race aspect that it's more Polynesian children, or I try not to. To be honest, have I done so? Point it out to me and I'll cringe (Participant 3).*

Almost all of the participants interviewed referred to the popular perception in New Zealand that child abuse is a Māori issue. Although there was some mention of Pacific Island families being involved in some incidents of physical child abuse, most of the participants did not consider that this is a key consideration for themselves as writers.

One participant, who writes from a Māori perspective, has written several articles where she has commented on this issue. She spoke about how she found the media coverage following the death of Nia Glassie to be an interesting portrayal of the perception of Māori versus Pacific Islanders as perpetrators:

There was an outcry after her death about Māori. And she was half-Polynesian! But this came out at her funeral when her family turned up, and we realised that there was a Polynesian feel to it...actually, there were a lot of clues before that, people who rang Nia Glassie's paternal grandparents and they couldn't speak fluent English –that should have been a signal for someone to say 'where are you from?'. But that didn't get in the papers.

And that was just reinforcing people to say: 'why is it Māori children and not Pacific children? Pacific children are poor, and they manage to love their children and they are virtually not seen in any of the statistics'.

And then it turns out that the little girl at the very centre of this case is half-Polynesian. And yes, it is the Māori half of the family she was with at the time of the abuse, but where was the rest of the family?

I think that there are definitely cultural elements to the child abuse story, but I don't think it's the main thing (Participant 8).

This participant also made the point that she received information from the Family Violence task group that, in the three months around the time of Nia Glassie's death, there were 4 children who were killed by family members:

...only Nia Glassie got the publicity, and they said that three out of those four were non-Māori. And I said, 'that's fascinating, get me the statistics', and they couldn't.

I guess if you just don't know about it, if we're not being told about these cases, if there isn't some sort of way where every child death

has to passed to the media for scrutiny, then we're never going to know (Participant 8).

One participant made a connection between the public perception of child physical abuse in relation to other forms of abuse such as domestic violence and sexual abuse of children. She said:

Everyone makes assumptions, it's our perceptions. And journalists are the same. You look around, and you think, if a kid is white, and well-dressed, and the parents have money for food, and they may take the kids to the doctor, and the kids go to soccer every Saturday, you assume that everything's fine.

I think that the message for domestic violence has got through –that it's people from all classes. But I think that for child abuse, people just assume poor and brown.

...for sexual abuse, convictions tend to be white, middleclass, maybe IT geeks earning \$100,000 a year. But in terms of physical abuse, the perception is still there: poor and brown (Participant 9).

There can be a flurry of media coverage following the death of a child or children, and this can also prompt journalists to respond to some of the themes that appear to be prevalent in the media. Following the death of the Kahui twins in June 2006, one participant wrote an opinion column because she felt very strongly about some of the views being expressed about the public perception about the ethnicity of child abusers:

There was an enormous amount of racism around at that time –I think it was the poor, brown, disadvantaged thing...and some reporters went out the back and looked at the broken-down clothesline, and a broken-down tricycle...the implication, the assumption by a lot of journalists...you need to pigeon-hole people so that they fit in certain concepts (Participant 9).

This implication that abusers fit into a particular ethnic group has been noticed by this participant, who comments about the reporting of non-Māori child abuse:

There was a baby who drowned in the bath in Nelson –race was never mentioned, which means that it therefore was almost certainly Pākehā. And the father was convicted...it was a particularly horrific case. It was a shame; it got very little coverage (Participant 9).

Another high-profile case that this participant believes may be affected by the ethnicity of the perpetrator is that of Amber Lundy. The participant believes that the media did not portray the child's death as being child abuse or child homicide at any time, but as murder:

"...and that case has now entered the pantheon of 'did he or didn't he?' cases along with Peter Ellis and a few others, rather than centring on the child's death. Perhaps there wouldn't be that degree of uncertainty about the father's role if he was brown, and poor, rather than a white, middle class person in a job where he works hard"(Participant 9).

Other participants also commented on the death of the Lundy child in terms of the case being seen differently, possibly due to the ethnicity of the parents and child. One participant covered the Lundy trial, conviction and wrote a feature for the Dominion Post. She spoke about how the child's death was not considered by the media to be child abuse:

It was a child murder. Should be included in the statistics as child abuse, but wasn't. I don't know why, I've never thought about that...it's not considered child abuse...and she is white, middle class. [The Lundy family] had a pretty seedy lifestyle, it wasn't all roses there, but it was below the surface (Participant 4).

Another participant also covered the Lundy trial for a regional newspaper, and makes the distinction that because the family are Pākehā, the murder of Amber Lundy was not only child abuse, but that the murder of the child and mother was also domestic violence:

I had a call the day after the verdict came in...it was Women's Refuge and they said 'has it occurred to you that now this verdict is in, that this is the most gross case of domestic violence we've ever had in this city?'

And I thought ‘no, I’ve been looking at it from the point of view of straight murder’...and a few things went ‘click’ in my head, I must admit...I suppose from then on I tried to go: ‘Okay, you’re calling it domestic violence, you’re calling it a murder, you’re calling it child abuse...what is it really? It’s Mum and kids being belted around’ (Participant 7).

Several of the participants made a link between the numbers of Māori child abuse cases that come to media attention because of a court appearance:

What I’ve seen in court, it’s certain socioeconomic and cultural groups and it stands out...Maori, low socioeconomic, Pacific Islanders, but mostly Māori. You see them in court (Participant 4).

One participant said that she does not fully understand why, for most of the child abuse cases going through the courts for physical abuse of children, “*the babies tend to be brown*” (Participant 7). The participant gave a possible explanation for this observation as being connected to historic cultural behaviours:

... Māori warriorism, and the Māori warrior gene...and the whole slave-taking mentality...We are only five generations removed from slave-taking...I sometimes think the whole gang movement, the gang brotherhood nonsense is warrior culture (Participant 7).

This participant considered that this concept of a “warrior culture” may be linked to another important factor, that of disconnection from previously strong cultural roots. She asked:

What you’ve got to do is ask the questions...why are so many brown babies being abused? What’s going on in Māoridom? It goes back maybe two generations when everyone left extended families and moved to cities...so we’re probably into the third generation of disconnection, from being raised in a very family-culture...that disconnection must have been cruel...I don’t know if Māoridom have replaced that (Participant 7).

The perception that this sense of disconnection may contribute to the high rate of child abuse among Māori was supported by another participant who had been a court reporter for many years for a regional newspaper. In the job, the reporter had been able to learn a great deal from a team of local Māori wardens who looked after court security:

When you look at Māori who have grown up in a secure whānau / iwi background, then you look at the stateless, urban Māori...they are simply poles apart (Participant 5).

The same participant does not consider that child abuse is essentially a Māori issue, and believes that the main issue is the difference between the offending and the reporting of the offending:

When you get down to the serious abuse of children, that really nasty child abuse as opposed to 'casual' child abuse... I don't think that there is great variation between Māori and non-Māori...I think I have seen more Māori before the court, but as a reporter, I've also known of cases that never got to court...and they have tended to be non-Māori. And maybe tend to have a good lawyer (Participant 5).

Other participants also discussed their thoughts that perpetrators of child abuse are not, as may frequently be perceived by the public, to be Māori rather than non-Māori. One participant explained that some of the bigger abuse cases may not necessarily get to a court conviction, nor are they reported to the same extent:

Pākehā child abuse, I suspect, is hidden...I just have a feeling (nothing to back this up), but if Dad's a fairly good, high-flyer, he can probably do what he likes to his little children, because he's probably got a good enough lawyer to move that out...If you've got a good lawyer, they can swear that black is purple and pink and yellow and green-spotted, and mum doesn't have a leg to stand on... (Participant 7).

The concern of another participant is that the public perceptions that child abusers are more likely to be Māori or Polynesian are constantly being reinforced by publicity campaigns such as the "It's Not OK" family violence campaign. She points out that we are being informed by the media that the perpetrators of family violence are Māori that

it is a Māori problem, but that is because the media may reflect only the perpetrators who admit and recognise they may need help, as a result of the campaign:

[statistics] may say 40% of the perpetrators are Māori, but if 80% of the people who come forward are Māori, if they are the ones who are prepared to admit they have a problem...Family Violence people and people on the front line are starting to suspect that Pākehā don't want to be muddled up in that dirty little rabble...and when they are a perpetrator of physical abuse, they cannot own up to it the way that other cultures can...Reputation-wise, when you are a white man, you have more to lose than a brown man. And what's unfair is that everyone 'expects' it of a brown man, anyway (Participant 8).

What then, about ethnic groups other than Māori? This was discussed with most of the participants, and the primary focus was discourse about the interface between Māori and Pākehā in respect of child abuse in New Zealand. Several participants mentioned Pacific Islanders, or more generally, about “brown” babies and children being abused, or “brown” perpetrators of the abuse. Other ethnicities did not appear to rate more than a minimal mention in any of the interviews. This view may be summed up by the following statement:

When you sectionalise the community on an ethnic basis, there are parts of the community which very rarely appear in criminal matters. Very rare. (Participant 5).

iv) Family:

Three of the writers interviewed spoke of their perception, from their role as a journalist, that many perpetrators of child abuse are family members of the child involved. For one journalist, both parents can be equally culpable of the child abuse:

My experience is that they are young unmarried couples. Usually quite young. And when young people get into this parenthood situation (by accident, as it often is)...the support networks are not there within the family or anywhere else (Participant 5).

This participant attributes the apparent lack of social support for the young parents to factors such as a family background of “*generational unemployment, three generations on a benefit, etc, etc*” (Participant 5). As a court reporter, the participant said that he has seen cases where both parents have been convicted and sent to prison following a jury trial for abuse of their child. He explained how he has seen juries take the view that both parents are guilty, because:

Both are aware that the child has been abused, and whichever one that has not been involved in the abuse has done nothing about it (Participant 5).

One opinion writer considers that in her years of journalism, stepfathers appear to feature highly in many cases of child abuse. She says that although there is a “*perception out there that only Māori and Polynesian families abuse their children*” (Participant 1), and there are also frequently economic issues, stepfathers appear to be a common factor in many cases written about in the media:

We kind of forgot about Coral Burrows and the high profile cases like that... (Participant 1).

One columnist wrote in one of her articles discussed at the interview that the perpetrators of the abuse tend to be boyfriends, or partners, and mothers. The participant said that this information was based on her experience of having seen a pattern emerging in the newspapers:

You see it time after time that it's the mother's boyfriend. It's very worrying. It's my perception, but I do think that there's been research, and I do have reason to think that happens. That so often it is. Sadly. (Participant 3).

Mothers also get a mention by the same participant as being perceived as being perpetrators of child abuse, but there may be external factors, often a boyfriend or partner, which explains why this may occur:

...and the poor women, have obviously had the children very young and then they move in with somebody else, and things go from bad to worse. I try not to moralise...I would never sit and judge upon anyone

as an individual. I mean, if I'm talking about women who pick bad partners, well we've all picked bad partners, and we go on doing that. But it's very sad to note the recurrence of that theme, that's all (Participant 3).

Three of the participants have written articles based on their own experiences as parents, and were able to directly identify with some of the stressors in a family that may lead to the perpetration of child abuse. One of the participants said that her article was triggered by what she perceived to be hypocrisy about the “anti-smacking” debate, that “*bad parents smack a lot, the rest of us smack a couple of times...never when we are angry*”(Participant 9). She wanted to point out to her readers that child abusers are essentially ordinary people, parents who are experiencing conditions that are complex and stressful:

When I wrote that piece about hitting my kids, pretty mild on a scale of child abuse, this is the stuff that goes on in most New Zealand homes...we were so broke, no family support, and knew hardly anyone [in New Zealand]...mostly piffling things, but they mount up...even with those small things, I could see how a couple more factors piled on me...as it was, I smacked my kids in the supermarket, but a few more factors, I would have done worse. No one is super-human, everyone cracks under strain...and kids are bloody hard to raise (Participant 9).

Another participant related her own experience of parenting to back up her perception that child abusers, particularly young mothers, may lack social supports:

My little girl had given me a hard night, she was teething, she was unhappy...it was all too hard...I put her in her cot, I shut the door, I hurdled the back fence, and I said to my good neighbour Belinda ‘please go and pick my baby up’...I was crying my eyes out...she just tucked me into bed and looked after my baby for the afternoon.

Now, I had Belinda. But lots and lots of ‘pushed too far’ mums and dads don’t have a Belinda...I think they just ‘pop’...with sleep deprivation, and the lack of any adult to talk to, and just the sheer

craziness that's in bringing up a little baby (Participant 7).

The same participant expressed her concern that the media do not often portray child abusers as being “ordinary” family members, and that women “*have taken it on themselves to hide [child abuse], to feel shame for it*” (Participant 7) and as a result, the women may frequently be standing between their children and a possible violent offender.

6.3 Did anything change your views having written this article? Do you write differently now?

At the end of each interview, each participant was asked to comment about their current views on writing about child abuse, and to consider whether they would still express the same views if they were to write on the topic again. A summary of some of the comments follows:

- *I have not ever changed anything that I write about child abuse...that sort of thing doesn't change. Abuse is abuse, whether it happened in 2000 or 2008...I don't get angry, I get sad that things appear to be getting worse rather than better...because we never attack the fundamental causes [of child abuse](Participant 2).*
- *I would still write the same but I'm a different person now than I was then...now I have a deeper and more holistic understanding of the issue...I won't ever cover child abuse now I have my own children...I'd prefer to focus on policy and governance (Participant 4).*
- *We'd still report the same sort of abuse now as we did ten years ago, because it was bad ten years ago and it's bad now...potentially, you could almost get child abuse fatigue where particularly gruesome cases, if they don't measure up to that level of gruesomeness, they might not be perceived as newsworthy (Participant 11).*
- *In order to succeed in what appears to be a highly competitive field, it may be necessary to “always look for a new angle...to give you an edge... there is then a danger of integrity and balance disappearing*

(Participant 9).

- *Whenever you enter people's lives to write a story on child abuse, you win their trust...there is always an inherent power imbalance going on... young journalists are less troubled by ethics of journalism, you are so keen to get the story when you are young (Participant 3).*
- *I would change nothing because my role is to report what there is to be reported. And I still do that. Society is more able now to read the hard things...you can be more specific about what happened to that child...[However],there is a danger of desensitization to violence...we are feeding it to young people as entertainment... Reporting child abuse, you can either get desensitised or alternatively it goes the other way...reporting gets hold of you, it becomes your life-it can destroy you (Participant 5).*
- *I like cover-ups and stuff, investigating police-type stories, things involving courts-it's a challenge...I know that next time there is a Nia Glassie, or there is a Chris and Cru Kahui, yeah, I'll be assigned to it...when something involves child abuse, I'll be on it (Participant 6).*

Finally, one participant offered the following advice for journalists who write about child abuse issues:

- *Be honest about what you can include- needs to be what you can justify*
- *Ignore the easy sound bite*
- *Be honest, not grand and sweeping*
- *Don't make sweeping generalisations*
- *Don't judge*
- *Need to realise that you can't come out in absolutes – the conditions that created the abuser are so complex (Participant 9).*

CHAPTER SEVEN: FINDINGS FROM KNOWN STATISTICAL DATA IN NEW ZEALAND 2000-2007

7.1 Introduction

Statistical data were collected for comparison with those obtained from the newspapers and the interviews conducted (Refer chapter 3) and information gathered will be used in the discussion (Chapter 7) where comparisons are made.

The statistical data were divided into three categories:

1. Child homicides and infanticide,
2. Substantiated physical abuse or serious assault requiring hospitalisation, and
3. Convicted offenders of homicide or serious assault on children under 14 years.

All of the statistical data in this chapter have been gleaned from reports from a range of official sources. These data are able to provide an indication of the range of the demographic factors about child physical abuse in New Zealand.

It should be noted that because the data have been obtained from different sources the same children or perpetrators may be included in more than one data set.

7.2 Child homicides and infanticide.

The following data in this category came from the following sources:

- a) Injury Prevention Research Unit (IPRU), University of Otago. A total of forty-seven children are recorded as having been killed in the period 2000-2005 through intentional injury (assault)²⁰ (Appendix IV).

²⁰ Fatalities are where death has occurred as a result of an injury regardless of whether the victim was hospitalised or not. The assault cases are recorded using the e-codes X85-Y09 (ICD10-AM, 2nd edition).

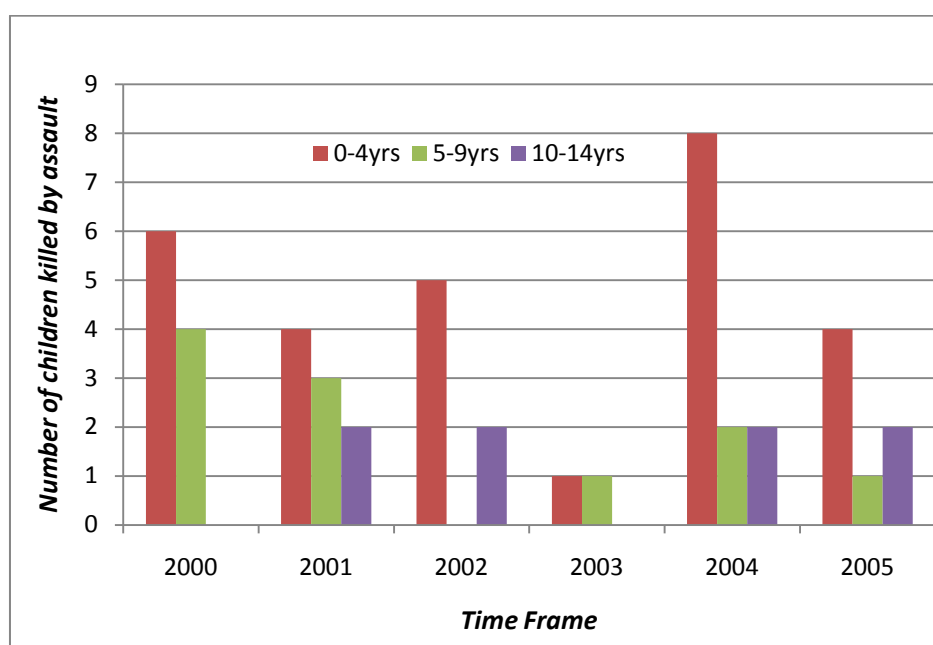
- b) Ministry of Women's Affairs (MWA). Sixty-two children are reported to have been killed in domestic violence homicides in the period 2000-2007. (Appendix V)

The main aspects of the data from these two sources are discussed below.

i) Age Distribution

Figure 7.1 shows that in the six years covered by the IPRU data, 59.6% (n=28) of the children killed by assault were aged between birth and four years, 23.4% (n=11) were aged between five and nine years, and 17% (n=8) of the children were between ten and fourteen years. 2004 showed the greatest difference between the age groups with the pre-school deaths registering four times higher than children in the other two age-groups, but other years showed a similar trend.

Figure 7.1. Mortality by ages of victims 2000-2005



(Source: IPRU, 2009)

Figure 7.2 shows a similar picture with the data recorded in the MWA database. The majority of children recorded are aged under four years old, with 66.6% (n=40) being in this age range. Children aged five to nine years account for 21.7% (n=13), and children aged ten to fourteen years account for 11.7% (n=7).

Figure 7.2 Total numbers of victims by age groups (Data for 2000-2007)



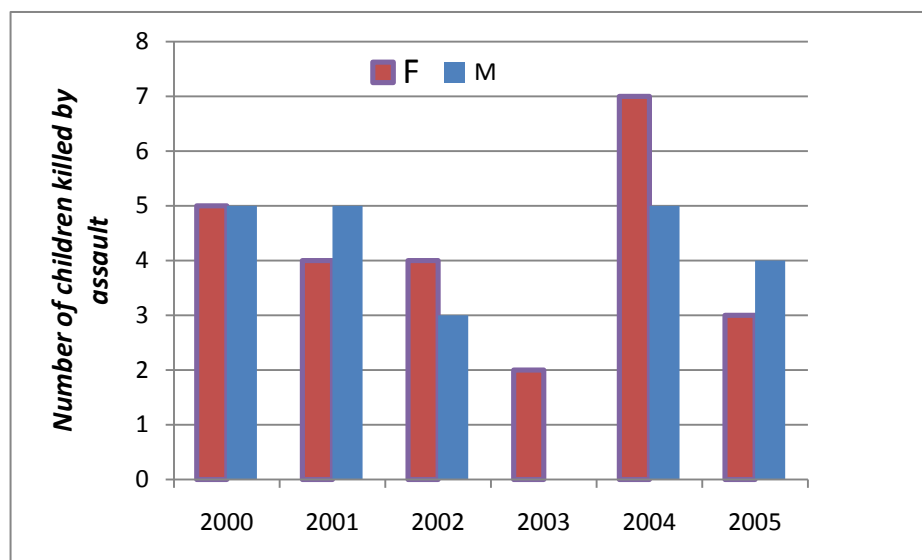
Source: Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2007

On looking at both sets of data above it becomes apparent that many more younger children and babies are being killed than older children. A difference seen in the two data sets is that while children between ten and fourteen years appear to be less at risk of being killed in domestic incidents, they are still as likely as five to nine year olds to be admitted to a hospital with fatal physical injuries.

ii) Gender

Figure 7.3 shows that there is not a large difference between the numbers of male and female children killed in the six year period covered by the IPRU data.

Figure 7.3 Victim Mortalities by gender each year 2000-2005



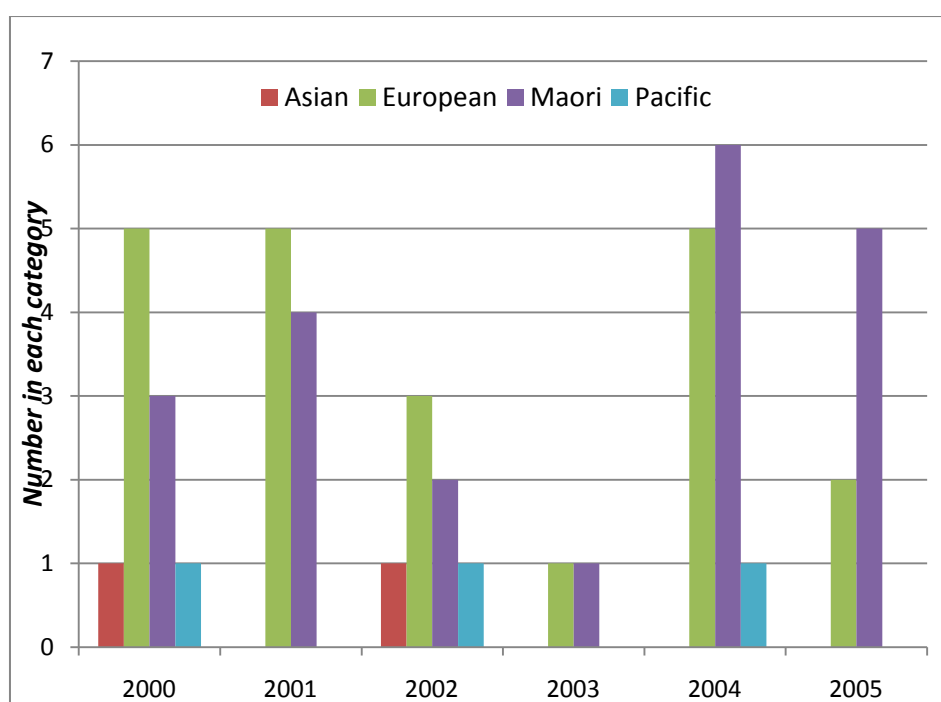
(Source: IPRU, 2009)

Girls numbered 53.2% (n=25) compared to the boys numbering 46.8% (n=22). The MWA data shows that 55% (n=34) of the children killed were female, 32% (n=20) were male, and there were 13% (n=8) whose gender was not recorded in the data.

iii) Ethnicity

As can be seen in Figure 7.4, the IPRU data shows a year by year variation in the ethnicities of the children killed between 2000 and 2005 inclusive. In 2000, 2001 and 2002, European children outnumbered Māori, and other groups, but there were comparatively more Māori children killed in 2004 and 2005.

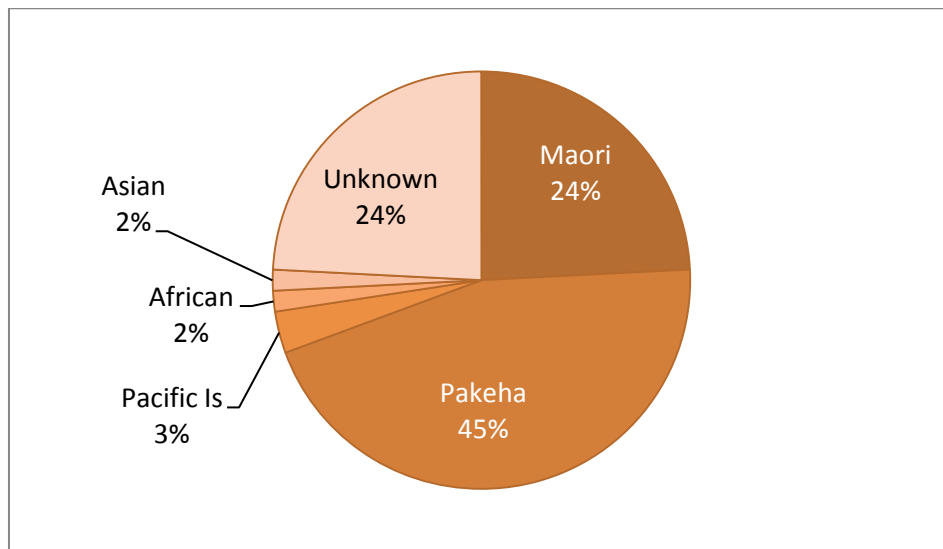
Figure 7.4 Deaths of Victims 2000-2005 by Ethnicity



(Source: IPRU, 2009)

The following two figures show the total distribution of the deaths by ethnicity from the two data sources. As can be seen in Figure 7.5, MWA data shows that Pākehā children significantly outnumber Māori children with 45% (n=28) Pākehā compared to 24% (n=15) Māori children being recorded. In the sample, there were also 3% (n=2) Pacific Island children, and 2% (n=1) of each of Asian and African ethnicity. In this data set, there are 24% (n=15) with unknown ethnicity, sometimes because the identity of the child is given in the data base is not specified at all.

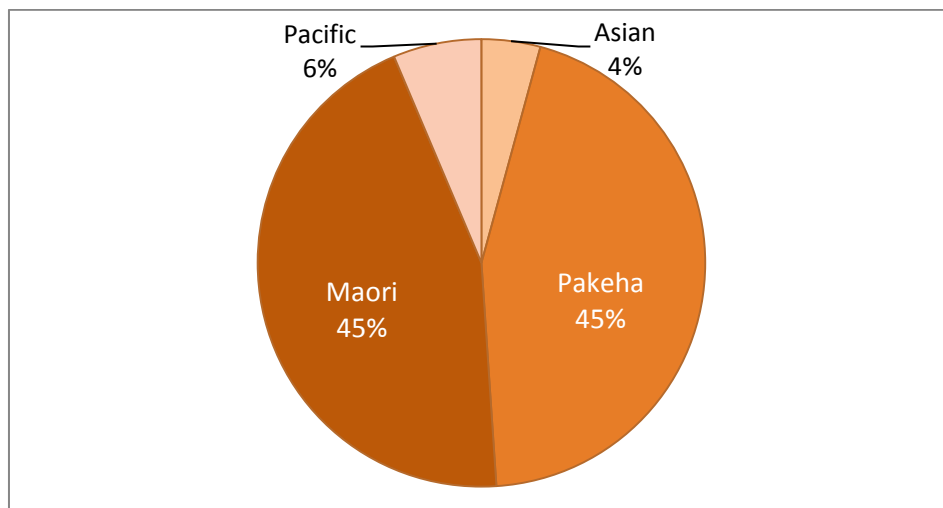
Figure 7.5 Ethnicity of Child Victims 2000-2007



(Source: Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2007)

In Figure 7.6 below, the data from IPRU, shows equal numbers of Māori and Pākehā child deaths at 45% (n=21) from each. Pacific Island children are recorded as being 6% (n=3) of the children killed, and Asian children represent 4% (n=2).

Figure 7.6 Deaths of Child Victims 2000-2005 by Ethnicity



(Source: IPRU, 2009)

These two data sets show that equal numbers of Māori and Pākehā children were admitted to hospitals with fatal injuries, and almost twice as many Pākehā children than Māori children were killed in incidents of family violence.

7.3 Substantiated physical abuse or serious assault requiring hospitalisation.

The following data has been retrieved from these sources:

- a) Child Youth and Family (2009). The data records the number of children for whom there was a substantiated finding of physical abuse following a care and protection notification to Child Youth and Family (CYF) in the period 2004 to 2007 inclusive. The full data is available in appendix III.
- b) Injury Prevention Research Unit (IPRU), University of Otago.(2009). This data records the number of children discharged from a public hospital in New Zealand following admission due to a serious assault ²¹. The data is available in Appendix IV.

The most important points and conclusions from the data from these two sources are discussed below.

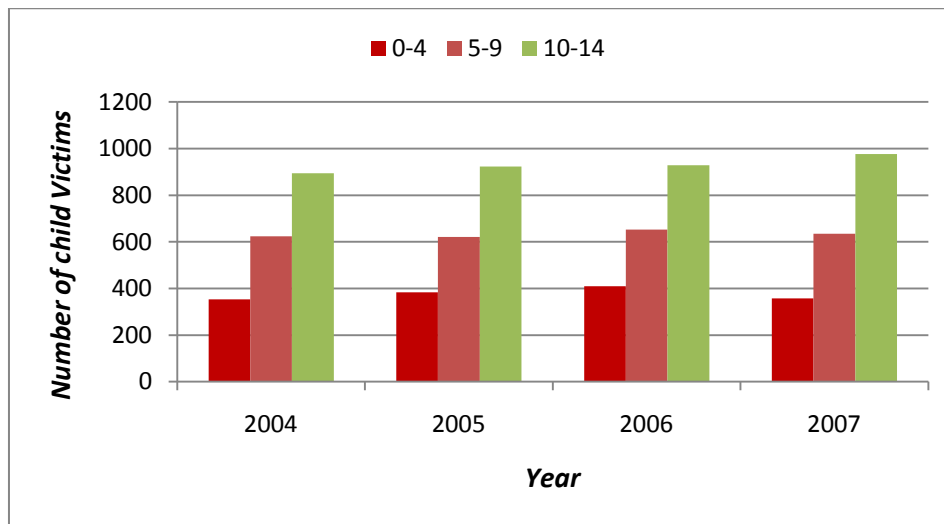
i) Age Distribution

The data from Child Youth and Family in Figure 7.7 below records that 48% (n=3721) of children who were victims of substantiated physical abuse between 2004 and 2007 were aged between ten and fourteen years at the time of the incident of abuse. Children aged five to nine years account for 32.7% (n=2533) of the group, with children aged between birth and four years old accounting for just 19.4% (n=1503).

These statistics indicate that more physical abuse of older children is being substantiated than for primary school age children or babies and pre-schoolers.

²¹ Data has hospital readmissions excluded, zero day in hospital excluded, seriousness is based on ICISS (a threat-to-life based injury score). (ICISS≤0.941 is serious, ICISS>0.941 is non-serious). Assault cases are codes X85-Y09 (ICD10-AM, 2nd edition). According to the ICISS scale, a serious non-fatal injury is one which has an estimated probability of death of greater than 5.9%, and there is a very high likelihood of hospital admission. Age and frequency of the injury is also considered. (The Injury Prevention Research Unit, 2008)

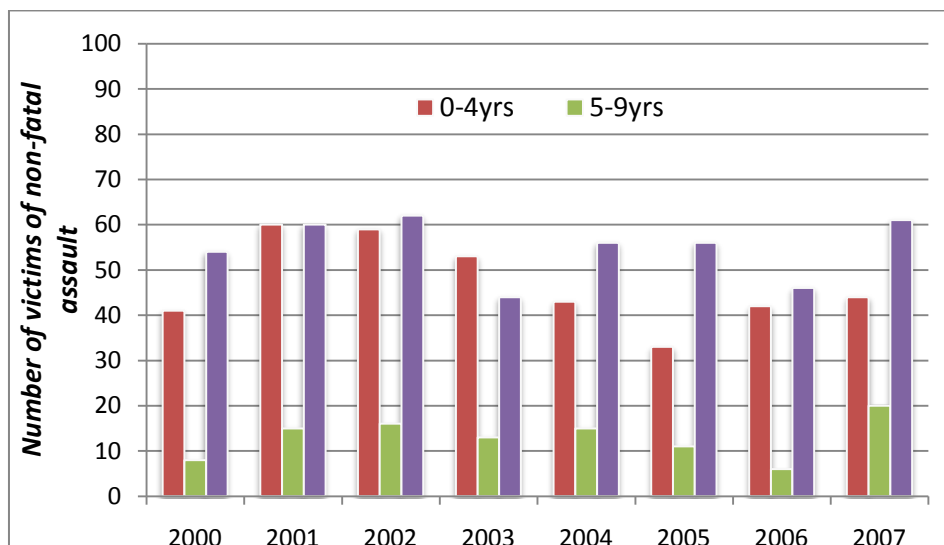
Figure 7.7 Numbers of Physical Abuse Victims by Age 2004-2007



(Source: Child Youth and Family, 2008)

In contrast to the Child Youth and Family data, the age distribution of children hospitalised with non-fatal injuries resulting from physical abuse is quite different. Figure 7.8 below shows that the biggest group with 47.8% (n=439) is again ten to fourteen year olds. However, 40.9% (n=375) of the children are aged from birth to four years. Children aged between five to nine years account for just 11.3% (n=104) of the data.

Figure 7.8 Distributions of Ages of Victims Per Year



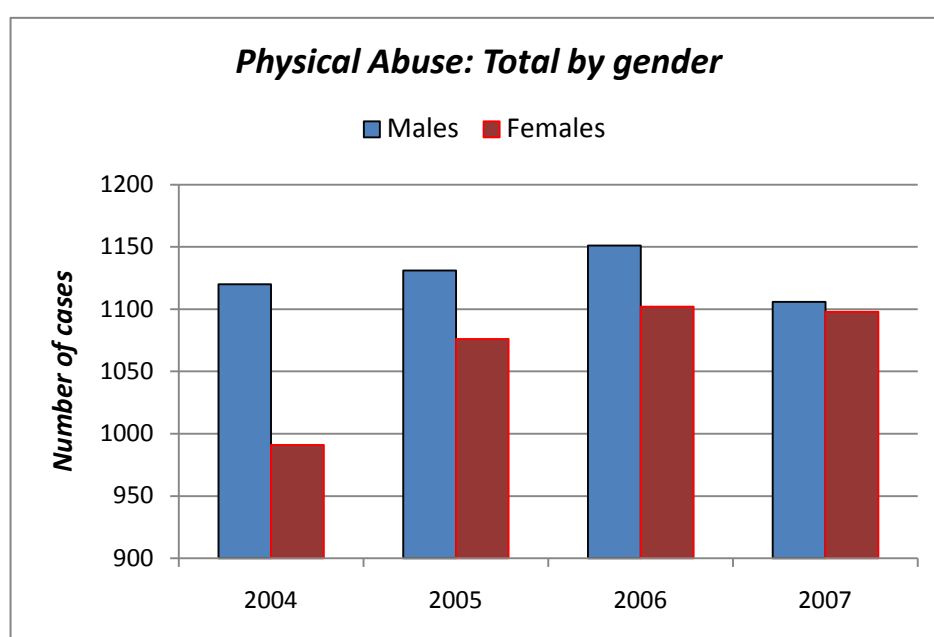
(Source: IPRU, 2009)

Although many of these children in the two data bases are likely to be the same children, the difference in the two sets of data may indicate a difference in severity of the physical abuse that is more likely to result in the need for hospitalisation.

ii) Gender

Figure 7.9 shows that the number of boys who were victims of substantiated physical abuse barely outnumbers that of girls, with 51.4% (n=4508) boys compared with 48.6% (n=4267) girls being recorded.

Figure 7.9 Numbers of Physical Abuse Cases Per Year by Gender

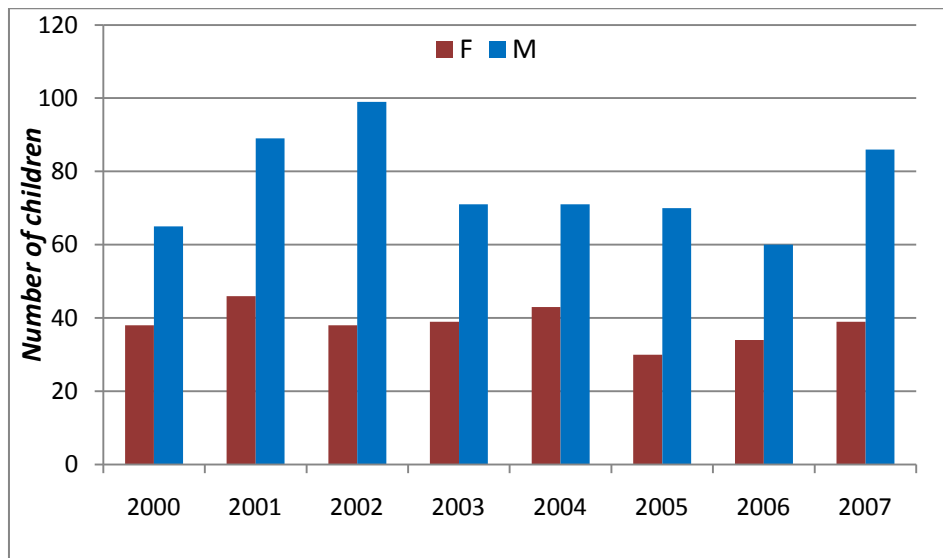


(Source: Child Youth and Family, 2009)

One trend that can be seen over the four year data collection period is that there is significantly less gender difference in the substantiated cases of physical abuse in 2007 than in previous years.

In Figure 7.10 below, the hospitalisation data tell a different story, with twice as many boys, accounting for 66.6% (n=611) of the group compared to 33.4% (n=307) of girls being admitted to hospital after being physically abused. Once again, as discussed above, the difference in the data may suggest that the injuries inflicted onto boys may be more serious than those inflicted on girls.

Figure 7.10 Hospitalised Victims by Gender 2000-2007

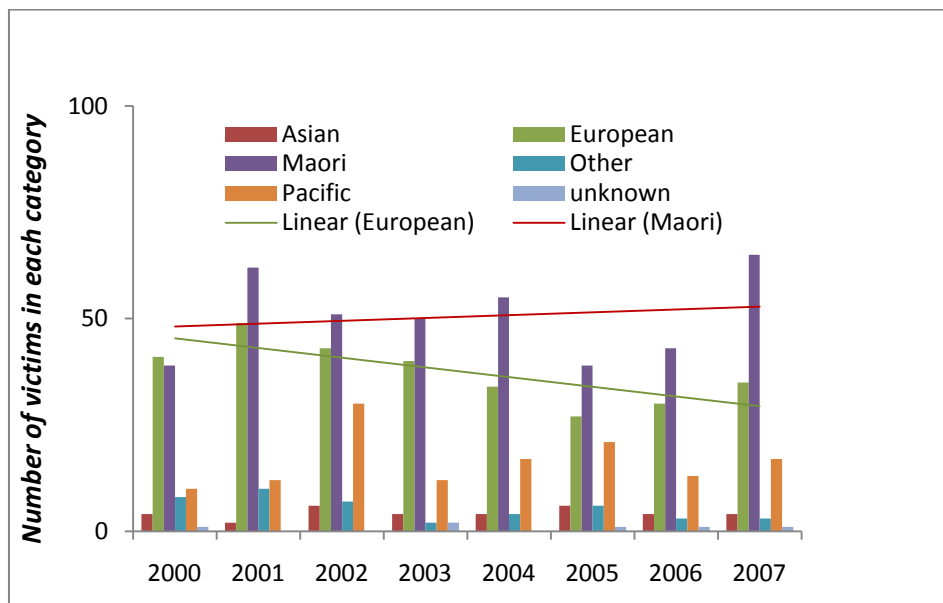


(Source: IPRU, 2009)

iii) Ethnicity

The Child Youth and Family data show that ethnicity demographics in the sample are relatively consistent from year to year. In Figure 7.11, the data from IPRU show a general trend for the number of Māori children hospitalised to increase slightly over the eight year period being studied, and for the European or Pākehā numbers to decrease over the same period. The linear lines in Figure 7.11 show these trends.

Figure 7.11 Hospital Discharge Statistics by Ethnicities 2000-2007

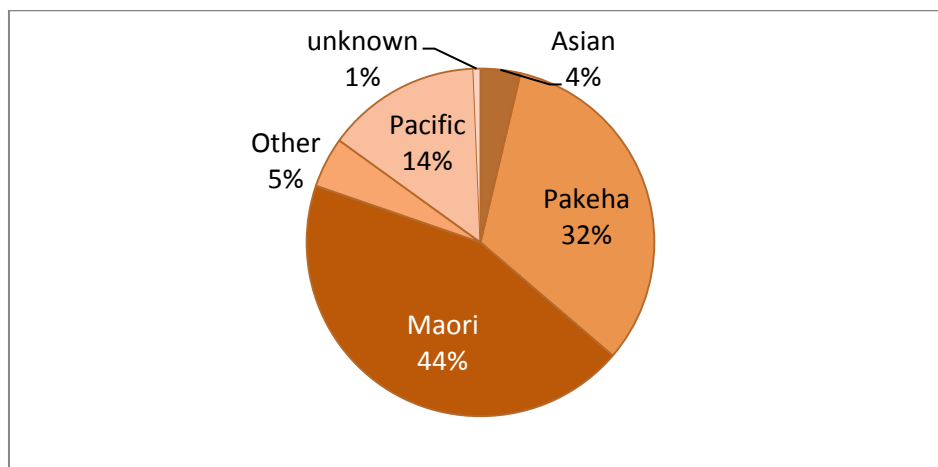


(Source: IPRU, 2009)

Figures 7.12 and 7.13 below show ethnicity data from the IPRU and CYF sources.

In Figure 7.12, the IPRU statistics record that the ethnicity of 44% (n=404) of children admitted to hospital following a physical assault compared are Māori relative to 32% (n=299) children identified as European. Children identified as of Pacific Island descent account for 14 % (n=132) of the group.

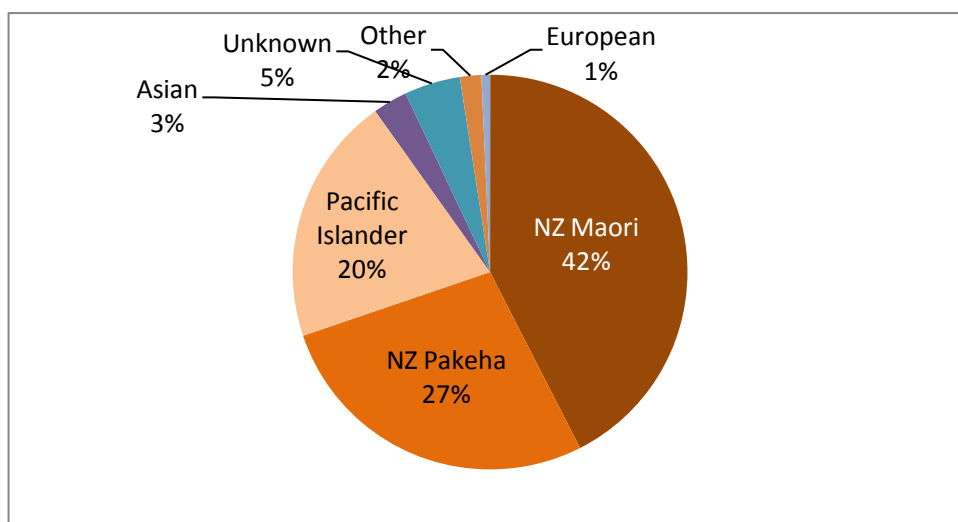
Figure 7.12 Hospital Discharge Figures on Victims's Ethnicities 2000-2007



(Source: IPRU, 2009)

The data from Child Youth and Family are depicted in Figure 7.13, and show the distribution of ethnicity of the children who have been victims of substantiated physical abuse.

Figure 7.13 Ethnicities of Child Victims 2004-2007



(Source: Child Youth and Family, 2009)

The ethnicity breakdown appears similar to that seen in Figure 7.12, with 42% (n=3712) of the children being identified as Māori. New Zealand Pākehā account for 27% (n=2462) of the group, followed by Pacific Island children accounting for 20% (n=1790) of the group.

In the data from Child Youth and Family, there is a distinction made between New Zealand Pākehā, and European. This distinction is not made in the data from IPRU, who record all children not being included in the ethnic groupings of Māori, Pacific Island or Asian as being labelled European.

7.4 Convicted offenders of homicide or serious assault on children less than 14 years.

The following data has been obtained from these sources:

a) The National Family Violence Clearinghouse statistics fact sheet (2007). The data obtained from this source was taken from New Zealand Police statistics and New Zealand Court statistics in relation to perpetrators of family violence where children were physically assaulted or murdered.²²

b) Statistics New Zealand Crime and Justice Records. (Refer to Appendix V for the full transcript of the data). This is a record of convicted offenders of serious assault on children under 14 years for the years 2000 to 2007 inclusive. The figures for convicted offenders of homicide were not readily accessible because a homicide conviction in New Zealand for a child is not specifically recorded separately to the convictions for adult homicide.

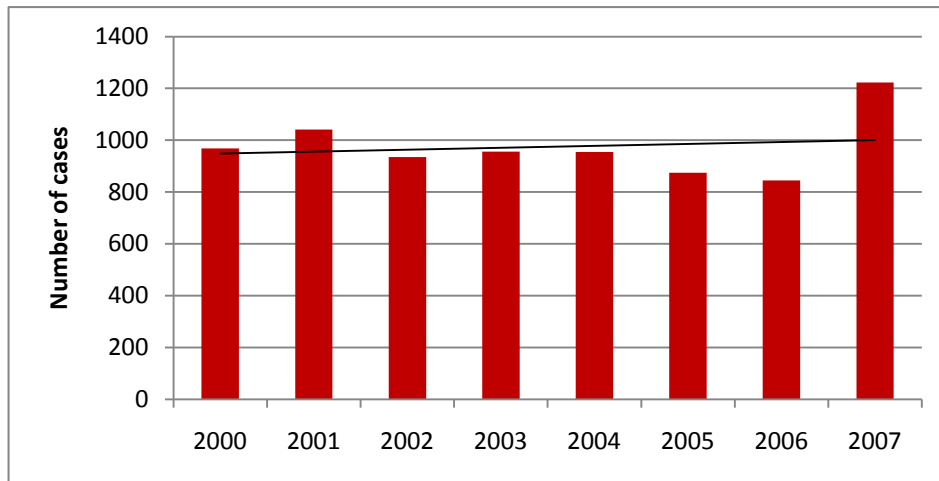
i) Adults convicted of physical assaults on children under fourteen years.

Figure 7.14 shows little variation in the trend line for the eight year period. This indicates that there has been little change in the number of adults convicted of physical

²² a Police do not maintain official statistics on the gender and age of those involved in family violence-related murders, but in a one-off exercise, this information was collated by the Police for the period 2000-2004.

abuse of children. The total number of convictions was 7797. This being said, however, there does appear to have been a marked increase (n=1223) in convictions in 2007. Further research using data from subsequent years would indicate whether or not this is a real trend.

Figure 7.14 Assaults on Child Victims Under 14 Years of Age 2000-2007

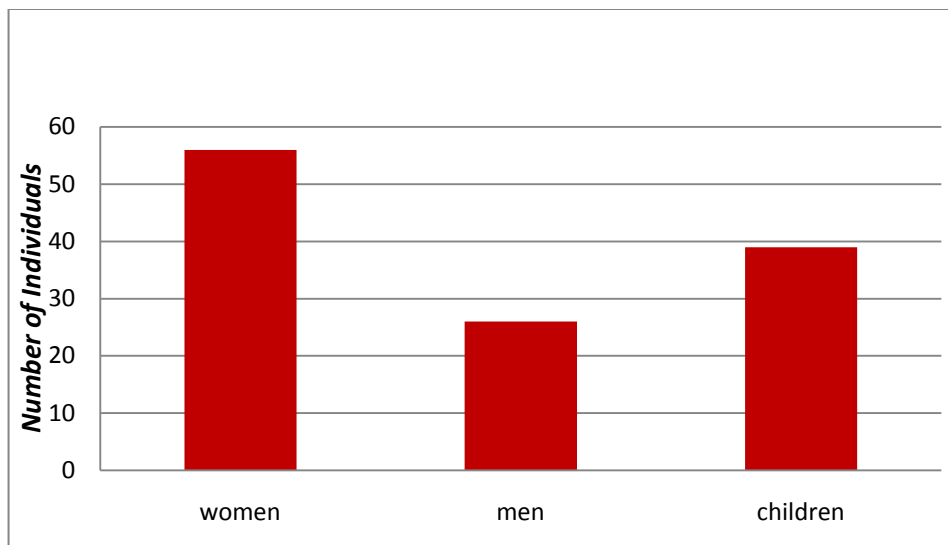


(Source: Statistics NZ: Crime Stats, 2009)

ii) Murders of children

Figure 7.15 shows the number of children (n=39) murdered in family violence-related incidents between 2000 and 2004. The number of children is compared to women (n=56) and men (n=26) also murdered in same time frame.

Figure 7.15:Numbers Murdered in Family Violence Incidents 2000-2004

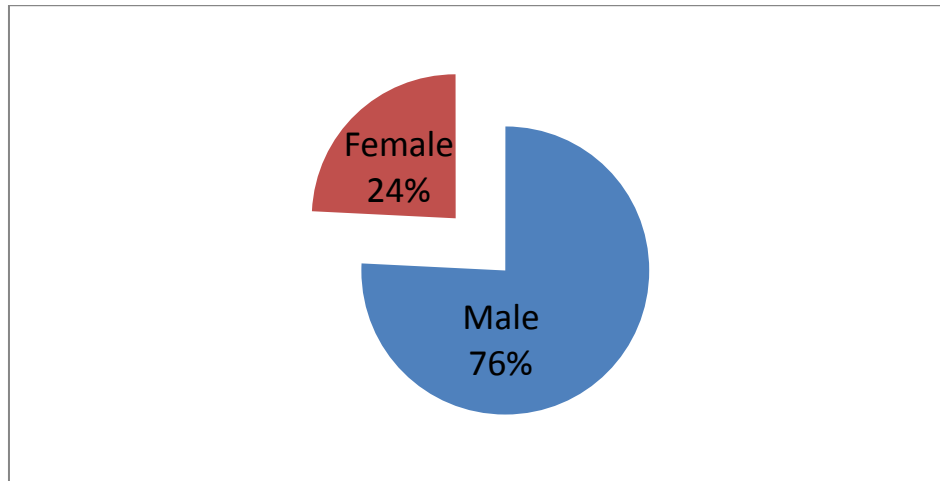


(Source: NZFVC, 2007)

iii) Gender of perpetrators

The following two figures show the gender of convicted perpetrators of physical abuse of children. Figure 7.16 demonstrates that more than three times more men are convicted of assault of a child than women.

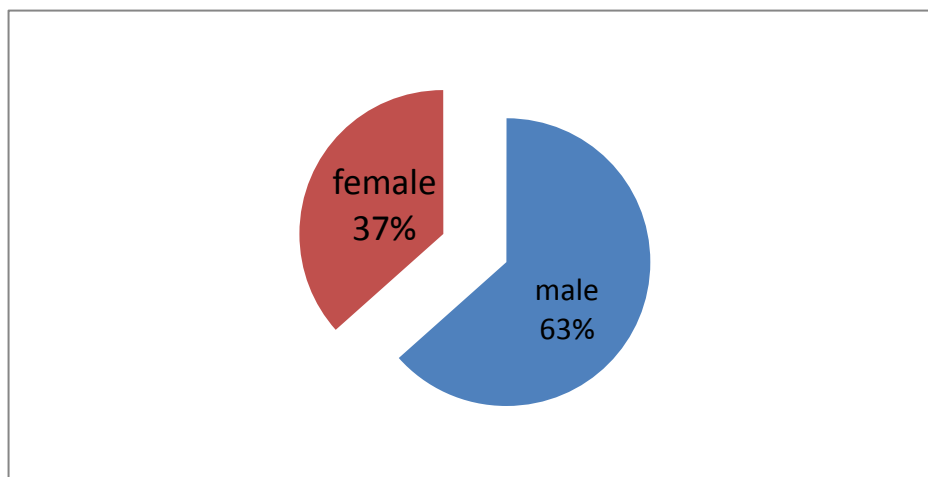
Figure 7.16 Gender of Convicted Assault Offenders 2000-2007



(Source: Statistics NZ: Crime Stats, 2009)

Figure 7.17 shows that almost double the number of men to women killed children in family violence-related murders in 2004.²³

Figure 7.17 Gender of Adults who murdered Children 2000-2004



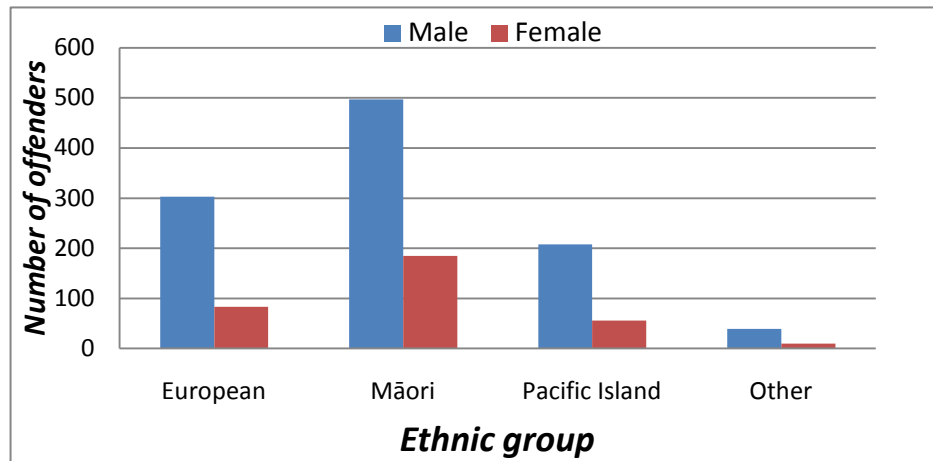
(Source: NZFVC, 2007)

²³ Some children were killed by more than one adult.(NZFVC, 2007).

iv) Ethnicity of perpetrators

Figure 7.18 shows the ethnicity of convicted offenders of assault on children. There are significantly higher numbers of Māori with 48% (n=682) convictions than European who have 28% (n=386) convictions. Pacific Islanders account for 19% (n=264) of the group.

Figure 7.18 Ethnicity of Convicted Offenders of Child Assault of 2000-2007

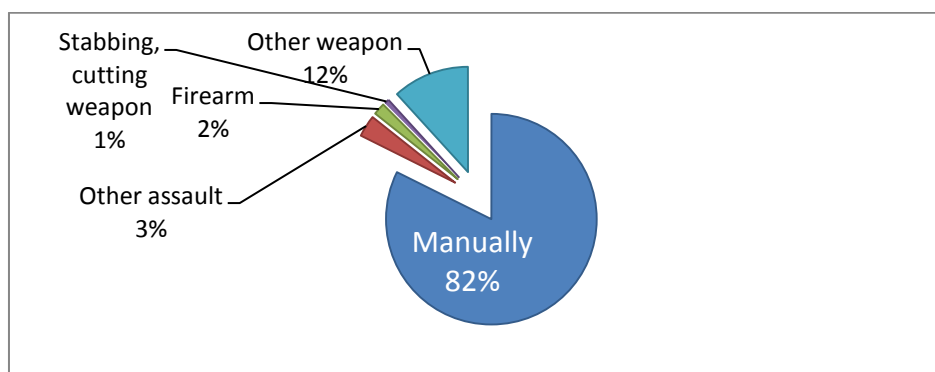


(Source: Statistics NZ: Crime Stats, 2009)

v) Method of assault

In figure 7.19, there is a breakdown of the types of weapon recorded as having been used in the incidents where a child was physically assaulted, and the perpetrator of the abuse was convicted of the crime. There is no indication of which gender or ethnic group is statistically predominant, but this could perhaps be a topic for future research, to further enhance the understanding of child abuse patterns.

Figure 7.19 Modes of Assault on Child Victims 2000-2007

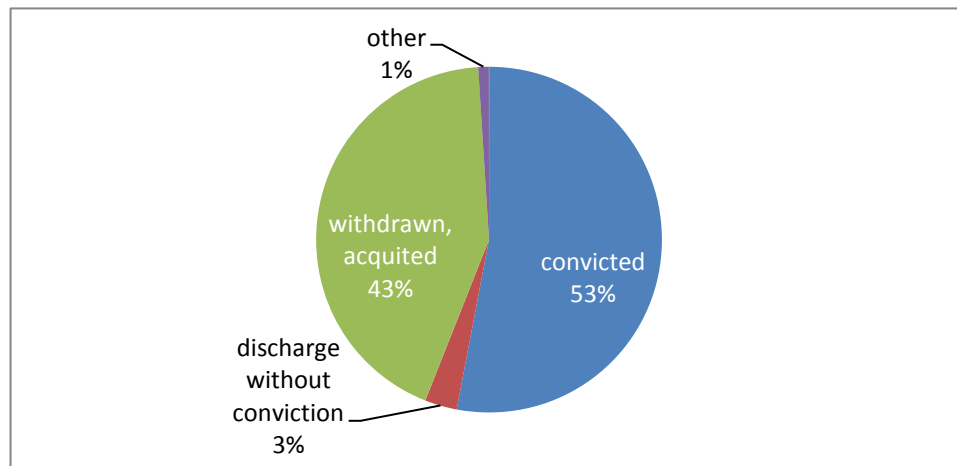


(Source: Statistics NZ: Crime Stats, 2009)

vi) Sentencing outcomes

Not all people charged with assault on a child are convicted of the crime. Figure 7.20 shows that in 2004, only 53% of alleged offenders were convicted, with the charges for 43% being withdrawn, dismissed, struck out or acquitted.

Figure 7.20 Sentencing of Accused Assaultants over 2000-2007



Source: NZFVC, 2007

CHAPTER EIGHT: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

8.1 Introduction

This discussion is in three parts as detailed below. This structure is shown diagrammatically in Figure 8.1 below and will use the material from the previous chapters to build the discussion.

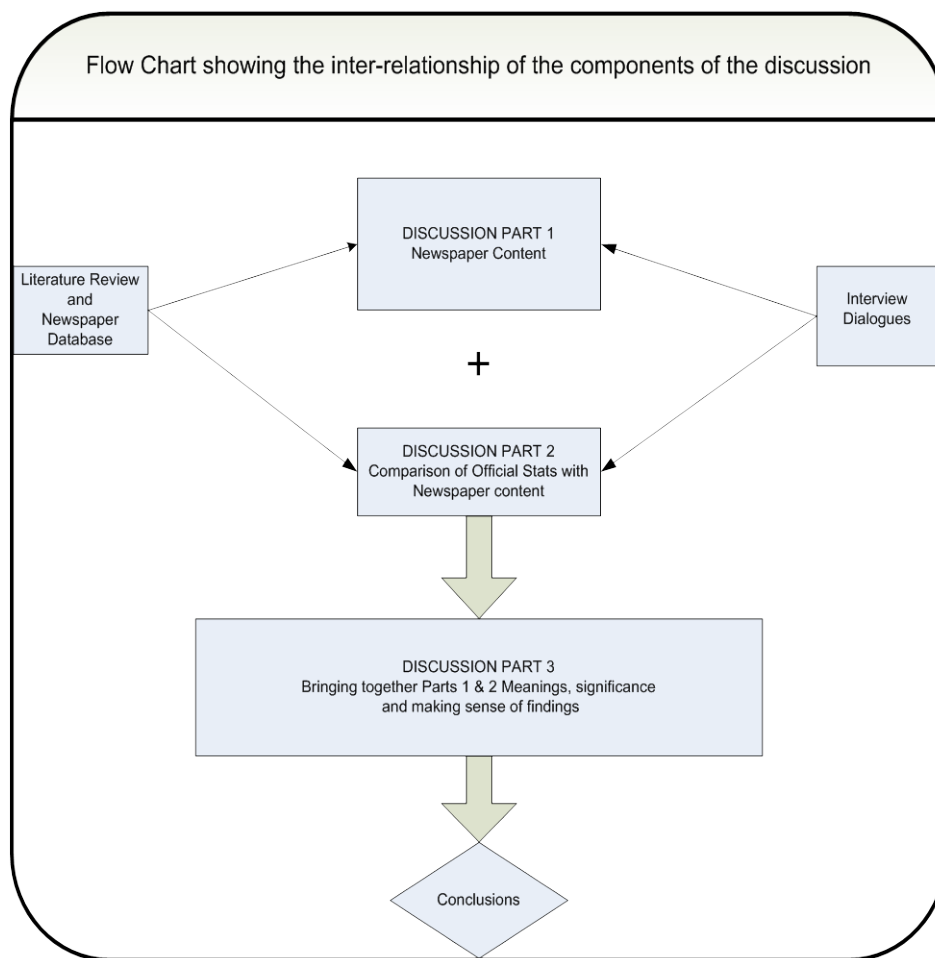
Firstly, I will provide an overview of my research into what has been written about child physical abuse in selected New Zealand newspapers between 2000 and 2007. I will also comment on the themes I identified as prevalent in the written media during this time. This discussion will be interwoven with my insights extracted from the semi-structured exploratory interviews with contemporary writers of such articles and underpinned by what has been written in published literature. I will then identify and discuss factors which may influence the media portrayal of physical child abuse.

Secondly, I will focus on the data extracted from the selected newspapers; that includes the quantity, gender, age and ethnicity of the children who have been the subjects of articles on child abuse throughout the selected time period.

I will then compare this information to data from official sources, using the same key demographics over the same time period. The discussion will then explore and consider similarities and differences between these data sets. Again, insights from the writers interviewed for the study, together with commentary gleaned from the literature will support the discussion.

Thirdly, I will link my findings and discuss the development of popular beliefs about child abuse and comment on whether the media reflects or affects the worldview perceptions on physical child abuse. In particular, the discussion will focus on the extent to which media representation of physical child abuse reflects or represents racial or racist assumptions about the causes and incidences of the abuse.

Figure 8.1 The logic flow of the discussion



8.2 Part one: Newspaper content

i) What or who influences what is written about child abuse?

A variable amount is written in the newspapers on physical child abuse. As was explored above, this often depends on what else is happening in the world at that time, and may be influenced by events such as general elections, world crises or other significant events that take precedence in the newsroom over child abuse issues.

As seen in the discussions with the writers and media commentators, five principle factors that influence or inform the writers of the articles are identified. Notably, personal interests, current events, public issues and campaigns, professional issues about child abuse, and public demand all influence what is written in the media.

The media are also heavily influenced by limitations in both time and publication space. This was repeated frequently in the interviews and is supported by the literature. O'Shaughnessy and Stadler (2008) write that: "the way news is organised on a daily basis, with limited time and a need to maintain popular ratings, leads to simplification and sensationalisation of events" (p. 26). Although the interviewees showed themselves to be personally committed to maintaining their professional integrity, the media argument appears to be that frequently the writers are expected by the editor or owners of the newspapers to write whatever is necessary to sell the papers. However, the more experienced and senior the writer is, the more likely they are able to have a higher degree of freedom with what they are able to write. Columnists, in particular, do not appear to be tightly bound by the same limitations as junior reporters.

ii) Peaks and troughs of reporting

There are peaks of articles related to child abuse when there is a sensational child death or a controversial court hearing. At this time, there is also often an influx of opinion pieces or feature articles, as well as editorials. The reason for this may be explained by Gladwell's (2000) "tipping point theory" which was introduced in Chapter Two. For example, what is considered by the newspaper to be newsworthy and important is covered in the newspaper as soon as possible after the event, and will remain in the media until a new or more sensational event occurs, or the public become saturated with the content and indicate the need for a new topic to be constructed within the media.

iii) Topics and news angles

The topics and news angles in the articles studied focus predominantly on specific incidents of child abuse, although there are also general articles that are non-specific to particular children or to a specific incident of child abuse. These general comments tend to be subordinate to the main angle of child abuse, and are used to support the news item or main topic of the article. As seen earlier in the study, the newspaper content is determined primarily by what is likely to sell the newspaper. The literature and the interviewees agree that stories that are "different" or more sensational are more likely to

“hook” the interest of the public, so it is not surprising that the media write more about the gruesome or shocking aspects of child abuse than an article about a government initiative to educate people.

Another common angle of stories published in the newspapers appears to be court or police action, and the focus of the media is on the perpetrators of the abuse. These articles are often news articles written by the anonymous court reporter to ensure the personal safety of the writer. Once again, the public are seen by the media to be avid consumers of crime and grisly details of child abuse.

Within the stories relating to court or police action of perpetrators, attention is often given to the ethnicity of the perpetrator, particularly if he or she is Māori or of Pacific Island origin. The media also frequently comments on the relationship of the perpetrator to the child victim. Some of the interviewees feel that this is an important factor to make known to the readers, a possible reason for this being to inform the public that parents, step-parents and other relatives do harm their children. This also expels the long-held and popular view of “stranger-danger” that many were taught about at school.

Surprisingly, the debate on Section 59 Repeal of the Crimes Act 1961 did not specifically prompt a large number of articles on the topic compared to other themes. This debate appeared to have had more coverage in public debate via letters to the editor, but these are outside the scope of this study.

One unexpected result is that critiques of Child Youth and Family were less frequent than may be expected. More often it was a subordinate theme, although public criticism was a trigger for at least one of the interviewees to put pen to paper. Articles such as press releases and government initiatives, as well as the publication of official statistics play a minor role in the media coverage of physical child abuse in the period studied. Few of the writers interviewed had written articles with these topics, but the overall view was that stories about “real” people are more important and more newsworthy than bare facts.

iv) Why do a few children get most of the publicity?

There is a tendency for the same children to be mentioned and re-mentioned at subsequent child deaths, which creates a number of “household names” that are synonymous with child abuse. Once again, the few children who are mentioned frequently tend to be those whose death or injury has captured the public imagination because of the defining features of the abuse. This may be because the abuse has been of particularly long duration as for Hinewaoriki Karaitiana-Matiaha, particularly severe as seen for Nia Glassie, or because the children were tiny twins and both died in the case of Chris and Cru Kahui.

The articles written about these few children tend to fall into one of two styles. The first type has a tendency to be highly subjective and emotively written, frequently with specific and often gruesome details of the abuse. The other style of story tends to be more objectively crafted, with a more unbiased and rational approach to the incident of abuse. In the latter type of story, it is sometimes possible to get a better sense of the beliefs and values of the writer, as the writing reflects more considered and thoughtful content rather than content designed to shock or merely entertain. Many of the stories written by the people interviewed for this study fall into the second category of article. Following the interviews, I felt that one possible explanation for this is that almost all of the people interviewed are experienced writers with a mature and empathetic approach to the issue of physical child abuse.

8.3 Part two: Relationship between official data and newspaper data- what does it mean?

i) The subjective versus objective debate

The subjective versus objective debate continues to be a focal point in this discussion. In both the literature and the interviews, the tension between fair and objective writing and the more sensationalist subjective writing continues to be apparent in the print media. One significant difference observed between statistical data and the newspaper representation of physical abuse is the degree of subjectivity that is able to be injected into the media reporting of the abuse.

Police data can be more specific about the cause of injury than data from Child Youth and Family or the data from IPRU. However, the cause of injury from the Police data tends to be blunt and to the point, for example statements such as “cause of injury was manual assault”. This is in contrast to many newspaper stories which are frequently more graphic and sensationalistic.

An example of these two different approaches can be seen in reporting about the s59 Repeal debate:

The Police write:

All 13 child assault events involving "smacking" and 65 of the 69 "minor acts of physical discipline" events against children, resulted in a warning or no further Police action. Of the 69 "minor acts of physical discipline" events against children four were prosecuted as follows:

Two were charged with Assault Child (manually)

Two were charged with Common Assault

These prosecutions were spread nationally and not concentrated in any one district.

(Deputy Police Commissioner, Rob Pope, 2008).

The media write:

Child beaters have struck their children with riding crops or wood and walked free from court...struck a defiant 6-year-old with a leather belt...hit a girl with a hose pipe several times...disciplined a boy with a piece of kindling wood...

("Both sides of the smacking argument," 2007)

As can be seen, there is considerably more subjective writing in the second example to the first. On studying such comparisons, a concern that arises from this study is that the general public are exposed to subjective descriptions writing significantly more frequently than objective and factual statements unless they actively seek them out on, for example, the police website.

At times it seems that there is not a clear distinction between objective fact versus subjective description. This is seen in situations where the news reporter or columnist quotes facts and statistics to support his or her writing. That is, the journalist does the

research, gets information from a range of sources, and then sells the story to the reader as fact. According to some of the interviewees in the study, these facts are not always from “official” or verified sources, yet they are presented in such a way as to make the reader of the newspaper confident that what they are reading is factual.

ii) Which demographics are important?

When examining similarities and differences between newspaper content and demographics of the abused children, several important points stand out. Firstly, the numbers of children who have been recognised specifically by the media are minimal compared to the number of children noted in the statistical data. As seen in Chapter Four the data from the newspapers over an eight year period focuses on only twenty-one children who are victims of physical child abuse. This means that the public reading the newspapers are exposed only to details of very few children.

When looking at demographic comparisons between the official data and what is written in the media, there are similarities in many areas. Gender distribution of victims of homicide is similar across the data accessed, with girls slightly outnumbering boys. However, only two injured children were identified in the media data, which means that a comparison with official data is not possible for these children.

Gender and age of children are mentioned frequently in the newspaper articles, but other demographic details tend to be referred to obliquely if at all. Ethnicity is seldom mentioned, although it is frequently referred to in more circuitous ways. For example, an article about a dead child may describe the body being taken to the marae; or the names of the family may be mentioned, and one or other parent, or even a grandparent, may have a Māori name that is written more often than any other name in the story. One explanation for this is that journalists have at times been criticised for being racist, and are less likely to be challenged than if there is an obvious reference to the child being non-Pākehā.

The newspaper has a greater focus on children aged from birth to four years old. This is comparable to the data obtained from IPRU and the Ministry of Women’s Affairs which records non-accidental child deaths or homicides of children. However, data from IPRU recording discharges of children from hospital and from Child Youth and Family

recording substantiated physical abuse shows a different distribution of age to the newspaper coverage. Although there are a high proportion of very young children being recorded there are also a high number of older children being physically abused as well, a fact that is largely omitted from the media. One possible reason to explain this omission may be that an injured child is less likely than a dead child to be named by the media due to confidentiality and privacy issues pending investigation of the abuse. In addition, a story about a cute and vulnerable infant or toddler appeals to the reader in a way that an older child may not.

Another possible reason to explain which demographics are important arises from the discussions of the data from the interviews. There appears to be a correlation between the degree of drama or sensationalism of the situation of child abuse and the amount of media coverage that the incident provokes. Shocking or horrific accounts of abuse of a child appears to satisfy some basic human need for people to vicariously experience an event in a way that may be safe and remote from their own world. By reading about a Māori child being put in a clothes dryer or thrown against a wall, the reader can then reinforce his or her own worldview of who are abusing the children, or perhaps add to their personal knowledge about how violent Māori really are.

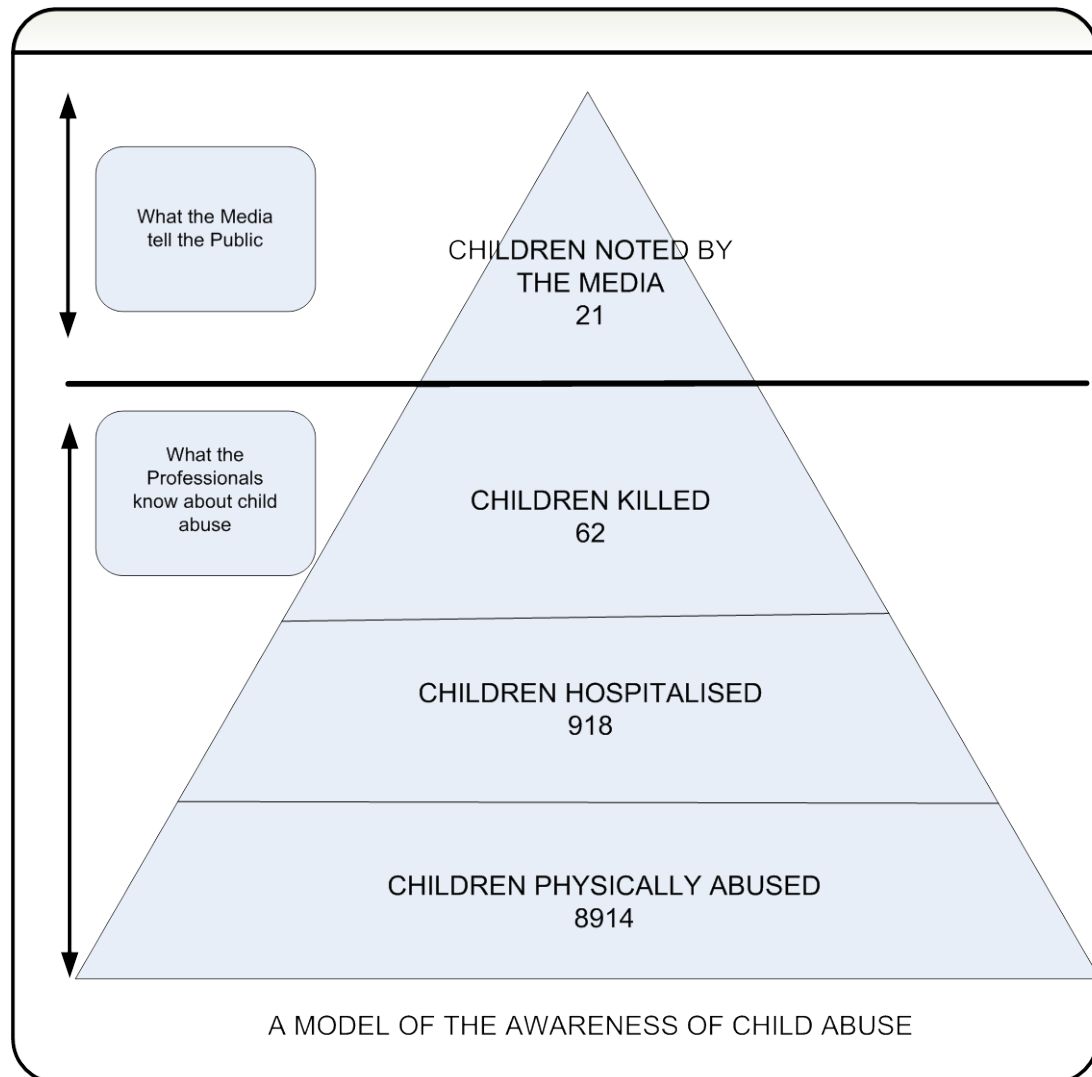
iii) Public perception of physical child abuse

Over all, there are significant aspects of physical child abuse that are rarely acknowledged by the media. For example, the chronic pandemic affecting hundreds of children each year who are hospitalised or for whom physical abuse is substantiated by Child Youth and Family is rarely picked up in the media, and only the sensationalist beatings or deaths of children are written about.

The relationship between the numbers of children physically abused, hospitalised or killed with the number of children written about in the newspapers has been represented diagrammatically in Figure 8.2 below. This figure highlights the disparity between the number of children in New Zealand who become “household names” or become the “faces” of physical child abuse and the children who are also victims, known to professionals in hospitals or child protection agencies. Beyond the immediate family or

community of these children few members of the public are aware of the extent of the abuse.

Figure 8.2 A Proposed Model of Awareness in Physical Child Abuse



The reasons for this disparity of awareness is not clear. On one hand, it appears that the professionals do not inform the public about the extent of child abuse in this country, possibly because of limited resources or privacy concerns. On the other hand, the question must be raised whether the media are aware of what is happening in the community, but ignore the information, choosing instead to focus on issues that are more sensational or newsworthy.

The concept of this model can be explained by the Pareto Principle, also commonly referred to as the 80-20 principle. The Pareto principle states that 80% of the effects come from 20% of the sources (Koch, 2006). In this study, considerably fewer than

20% of the officially recorded child abuse statistics make it to the newspapers. This means that the general public is exposed to only a small proportion of the information or knowledge that is specific. That is, the social construction of media reporting is essentially skewed.

In the literature review we saw that one role of the media is to construct a worldview of a crime such as child abuse for society, then to frame the issue into a form that society can make sense of (Roberts, et al., 2002) It could be argued that the media consider that it is only necessary for the public to have a limited understanding of the child abuse issue. That is, the media will inform the public on a “need to know” basis, and the general population need only be given information about the most serious or sensational child abuse incidents.

As discussed in Chapter Five the media writers themselves struggle to locate factual information to inform their own writing, and they understand the extent that the media are responsible for raising public awareness of the child abuse issue. My argument is that unless the newspaper reader is exposed to specific and accurate demographic information, then that reader is likely to be less well informed than if he or she is provided with factual and objective data. It is only if this occurs that the public would be able to gain a better understanding of the scope of child abuse in New Zealand today.

8.4 Part three –Bringing it together, making sense of the meanings

i) To what extent does media representation of physical child abuse reflect or represent racial or racist assumptions about the causes and incidence of child abuse?

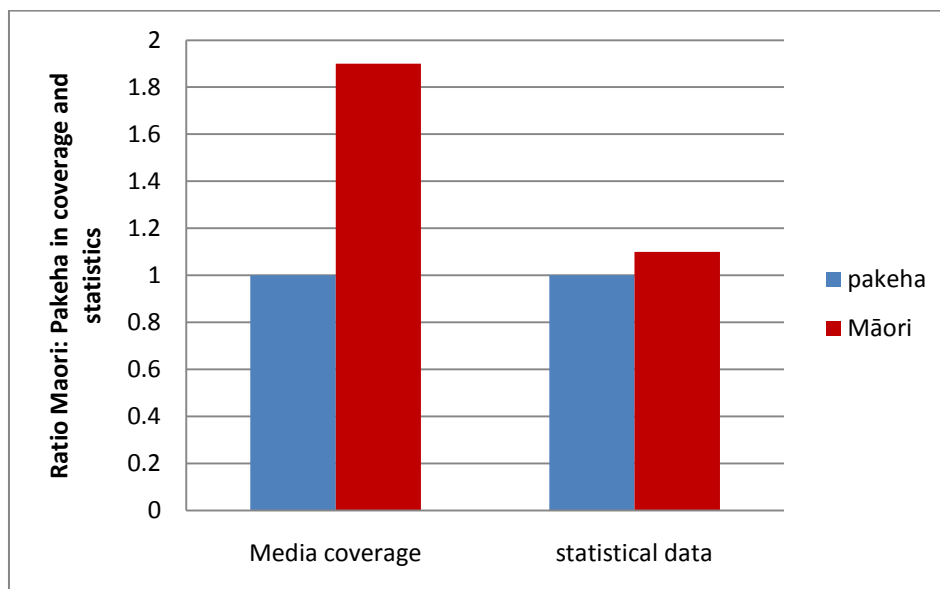
According to the newspaper database, some of the most sensational child abuse cases in recent New Zealand media history have been perpetrated by Māori, for example, James Whakaruru, Hine Karaitiana-Matiaha, and Nia Glassie. Both the literature and the writers interviewed make the comment that there appears to be an assumption on part of the public that most child abuse is essentially Māori. This is reinforced by newspaper headlines such as in Table 8.1 below:

Table 8.1 Headlines From the Media

- *Time for a clear Maori message*
 - *Getting to the very heart of Maori angst*
 - *Harawira wants Maori abusers castrated*
 - *Maori told to take abuse responsibility*
 - *Tackling abuse by 'adopting' whānau*
 - *The year for Māori*
 - *Majority of shaken babies Māori*
 - *Maori perspective needed*
 - *Maori tackle abuse secrecy*
 - *Toddler Torture Absolutely intolerable Maori leader slams abusers*
- (Newztext, 2000-2007)

The correlation between statistical data and what is written in the media has been shown in the results of this study. Figure 8.3 shows the ratio differences in the ethnicity of the children between the number of articles written about physical child abuse throughout the given time period and the data about the number of child abuse cases obtained from official sources. As can be seen in Figure 8.3, the official data records a 1 to 1.1 ratio between Pākehā and Māori in the statistical data, and a 1 to 1.9 ratio in the media coverage of physical child abuse. This indicates that there is a forty-two percent over-reporting of Māori physical child abuse than would be statistically expected.

Figure 8.3 Ethnicity imbalances between media and official statistics



Other demographics, such as the age, gender, or geographical location, seldom provoke the same volume or content of commentary or media coverage as does the ethnicity of the child or perpetrator. We may read the occasional newspaper story commenting that yet another baby or toddler has been physically abused or killed, but seldom see other than passing references made to the gender of the children. In 2001 and 2002 there was a flurry of stories pointing out the sudden increase in child deaths in the Wairarapa at that time. Articles with headlines such as “*Enough! Child killing must stop, says Beyer*” (Scanlon, 2001, p. 1) and “*Wairarapa gathers for frank talk on violence*” (Groser, 2001, p. 3) pointed out the sudden increase in the number of children killed in the district within a short period of time. Similarly, when another toddler was admitted to Starship Hospital in 2007 within weeks of Nia Glassie’s death, the media pointed out the fact that there was another incident of child abuse in Rotorua. In general, however, there were no significant increases in media coverage because of where the abuse took place.

Although the ethnicity of the child or perpetrator plays a significant role in the media coverage of the physical abuse of the child, there is, however, one important fact that has become apparent in this study: almost without exception, ethnicity is given increased media coverage if that ethnicity is Māori, Pacific Island or another minority ethnic group. In the eight year sample of newspapers I did not see any reference to an abused child being Pākehā or European.

Some of the possible reasons contributing to this situation have been broached in the review of the literature in Chapter Two and has also been supported by the many of the writers interviewed. For example one participant reflected that the ethnicity of an unnamed toddler killed by drowning in the bath was not mentioned by the media. Another participant spoke of the media perception that Amber Lundy, as a Pākehā child, was not considered to be a victim of child abuse (Ch.6.2.iii).

One possible explanation for such obvious weighting to be given to Māori cases of child abuse by journalists may be due to public demand. That is, the newspaper content is clearly written for consumption by a specific audience and the market driver is to satisfy that audience, to sell the newspaper. The writers interviewed all expressed a perception of what the reader is likely to want to read, and they are likely to endeavour to satisfy that expectation.

Another explanation for the over-reporting Māori or Pacific island children may be the effects of colonialism, as posited by Ballara and Keenan (2000) in the literature. Or perhaps there is still an “us” and “them” culture as proposed by Stuart (2002). This attitude may be reinforced by the writers for the media themselves. The writers incorporate their own beliefs and values into their writings, even though this may not always consciously be so. This view was reinforced by the participants in the interviews, several of whom discussed the inevitability that whatever they write, their own values and belief systems are exposed in some way to the reader. (Ch. 5.1).

On one hand, the writers tend to have a particular audience in mind when they write, but on the other hand, there is a strong impression gained from the study that the writers themselves may be victims of the public perception that perpetrators of physical child abuse are primarily Māori, that it is a Māori problem or issue. The demographics of the writers interviewed for the study show that nine of the eleven participants are Pākehā and two are Māori. This division of ethnicity of the sample interviewed is comparative to recent research which shows 82% of newspapers journalists in New Zealand to be Pākehā, 5.8% Māori, 3.4% Asian and 1.8% Pasifika (Hollings, 2007).

The literature also shows that journalists tend to reflect the dominant ideologies of their newspaper (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2008), and as such, are likely to write for a “mainstream” or “middle of the road” readership, although one of the interviewees stated that “the reader is anyone who picks up a paper that day” (Participant 11). This may mean that the writer needs to construct the content of their writing to meet the expectations of that audience and also to meet the hegemonic and westernised expectations of the media moguls.

ii) **What worldviews about the nature of physical child abuse do the media reflect or affect?**

This study has seen how the media constructs and frames physical child abuse for its public audience. The final question to be answered is “what worldviews about the nature of physical child abuse do the media reflect or affect?”

As seen in the literature, there are two models that have been used to explain and to make sense of the ongoing relationship between what is written by the media and how society understands and perceives what is being written, namely whether the media reflects or affects society (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2008).

The first model suggests that the media is able to reflect the “norms, values and realities” (O'Shaughnessy & Stadler, 2008) that the public have in relation to their perceptions and experiences of child abuse. The model allows for these views and beliefs to be able to reinforce and influence these perceptions. One limitation to this model is that in real life situations, the media is not able to “mirror or reflect [the situation] innocently since they become part of the events and change them” (p. 44).

The second model suggests that the media has the power to socially construct a concept of physical child abuse that shapes and moulds the perceptions of the public. The model influences how people understand the construct of child abuse as portrayed by the media today, and also can play a powerful role in triggering public responses to the media discourses. A limitation to this model is the assumptions made about the power of media influence on people's construct of events and perceptions.

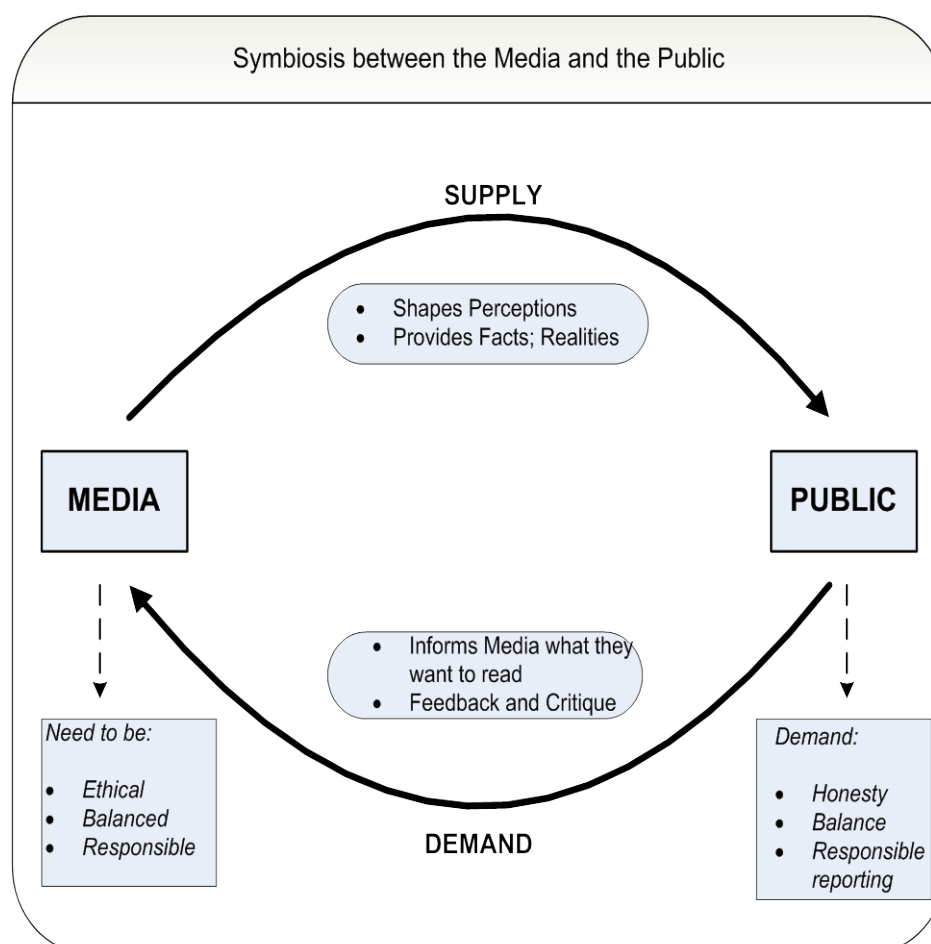
Based on the findings from this study, one concept that may help explain this is to consider that the media and the public share a symbiotic and mutually reinforcing relationship. This can be explained as a supply and demand paradigm (see figure 8.4 below). This symbiotic model shows that the media has the power to steer public demand and the public responds accordingly. On the basis of the public responses and perceptions, the media will then shape a revised construct of the public's demands and supply this back to them.

For example, the media shapes the public views and beliefs of child abuse by providing facts and realities. The public then digests the material supplied to them by the media and decides whether or not this material is what they really want to read. The public then provides critique and feedback to the media.

On one hand, the media have the power to affect and to persuade the public, but they are dependent on the public to reflect their worldview back to the media. On the other hand the public hold the power to affect what the media will write, based on whether or not

they buy the newspapers. The media then reflect this information back to the public, and so forth.

Figure 8.4 The proposed model of symbiosis between the media and public



This ideal symbiotic model also suggests that the public are able to make demands of the media to maintain honesty in their writing, to keep an objective balance between fact and sensationalism, and to ensure that media reporting is ethical and responsible and minimises potential harm to the children and their families. There is also a two-way supply and demand element between the public demanding interesting stories and the media catching and holding the interest of the public. The public also are able to provide the media with the “interesting” material which means that the media are better able to produce type of writing that appeals to the readers.

From listening to the voices of the media in the study, it also is apparent there is a two-way and mutually beneficial relationship between the media and the public, which can enhance the continued discourse and understanding of child abuse in our community

today. Although there are frequently external factors influencing what the writers are able to produce, the writers themselves appear committed and passionate about helping the readers to better understand the issue of child abuse. It is through this symbiosis that the public will be able to inform and educate the media as well, a process that ideally will be able to allow a focus on the real issues of child abuse uncluttered by racial or racist overtones, fear or ignorance by both the media and the public.

8.5 Summary and Conclusions

The study set out to answer the five research questions presented in Chapter 1.2. From the findings, the following conclusions have been drawn:

- 1) There is a disproportionate reporting of physical child abuse, with only a handful of children receiving the bulk of the media attention. These children are more likely to have been killed than injured, to be Māori, and to have been the victim of a crime that stands out as being “different,” possibly more gruesome or horrific, than other incidents of physical abuse.
- 2) Principal factors influencing the writers of the newspaper articles are meeting the administrative requirements of their publication such as writing for time deadlines, and in writing what the consumers of the newspapers are perceived to want to read. There is also pressure for the writers to produce material that is going to sell the newspaper.
- 3) When comparing what is written in the media with known statistical data, there appears to be differences in several key demographic areas. The most significant demographic is with ethnicity, where Māori children are notably over-represented in the newspaper data compared with what would be expected statistically. Ethnicity of a child is unlikely to be brought to the attention of the public unless that child is Māori or of Pacific Island descent.
- 4) The media rarely mention children who are victims of substantiated physical abuse or hospitalised for non-accidental injuries, unless the child dies as a result of the abuse.
- 5) The over-reporting and focus on Māori children as being victims of physical abuse or of Māori whānau as being the perpetrators of that abuse points to a bias in the way that the media represents physical abuse to the public. The comparison with the official data indicates that there may be instances of selective, conscious exaggeration in the newspapers based on the preconceptions of the media themselves.
- 6) Whilst the writers are aware of their power to affect the worldview of physical child abuse there is an apparent tendency for media articles and stories to reflect and reinforce common views and perceptions of physical child abuse. There is also a large field of

child abuse that the public do not become aware of through media coverage. The public therefore are exposed to only the “tip of the iceberg” in terms of being able to accurately perceive the extent and nature of the child abuse problem in New Zealand.

- 7) The study suggests that there is a symbiotic relationship apparent the media and the public that is bi-directional. The media are able to shape public perceptions of physical child abuse, and to provide ethical and balanced facts and realities to the public. The public are then able to critique and provide feedback to the media which will inform the media of what the public want and expect.

8.6 Potential significance of the study

The study is considered significant for several reasons:

- 1) Through a better understanding of the relationship between the media and the public, and by listening to the voice of the media writers, professionals working in the child abuse field may better be able to work with both the media and the public to address child abuse in our communities.
- 2) The study sheds some light on “popular” myths or beliefs in society that are providing the public with incorrect impressions or misconceptions that put children at risk of ongoing physical abuse.
- 3) The study highlights areas in which there needs to be further social development or social policies that will be beneficial for the victims, perpetrators and families.

8.7 Limitations of the study

Because the research was exploratory there were some limitations identified in the scope and possibility of the study:

- 1) The small number of people interviewed meant that there was a lack of true representation of the voice from the media. Further research would ideally incorporate a larger sample of both participants and number of newspapers analysed.

- 2) The study covered an eight year period, and the newspapers analysed were from that full period. However, some of the official data used for comparative analysis was limited. For instance, Child Youth and Family were only able to release accurate data for the period 2004 to 2007. This limited the nature of the comparisons that could be made.

8.8 Future research opportunities

Possibilities for further research in this field could be:

- 1) To advance our knowledge of how people's perceptions of who are the perpetrators of abuse may be influenced to engender positive change to address this issue.
- 2) To explore the extent to which the perceptions held by professionals such as doctors, lawyers, teachers, police, are affected by the media representation of child abuse.
- 3) To research the question of how the public could best use the media in relation to informing and shaping their views about child abuse?
- 4) To examine the accuracy of understanding by journalists of child abuse as judged by professionals. For example, to compare the "boil-over" theory versus calculated cruelty of perpetrators of abuse.

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APPENDIX I: LETTERS TO PARTICIPANTS

Dear

I would like to invite you to participate in a research project I am doing for my Masters of Social Work. I have been working at the frontline of social work for many years, and am now moving into the field of lecturing social work and further research.

In brief, I plan to talk with some of the prominent journalists who have written articles on the subject of physical child abuse /child deaths etc over the past seven years.

I would like to discuss what prompted you to write what you have, and what you wanted the general public to get out of your articles in terms of their understanding of child abuse and who the abusers are etc.

It would be invaluable to have your input into this research. The interview would be approximately 1 hour and can be held wherever is suitable for you.

If you are interested, please let me know and I can send you further details of the research, ethics approval etc, and plan when we can meet.

Thanks

Raema Merchant

06 8434958

021 1686649.

INFORMATION SHEET TO PARTICIPANTS

Researcher Introduction

Kia Ora. My name is Raema Keenan Merchant. I am a social worker completing a thesis for Master of Social Work at Massey University. My supervisors are Dr Mike O'Brien and Dr Fiona Te Momo.

I have been a social worker in both statutory and non-statutory child care and family agencies for the best part of 30 years, and over this time I have realised that the media play a significant role in shaping and influencing public attitudes about most current issues and this includes child abuse. The public are reading some very different commentaries and opinion pieces about different aspects of the physical abuse of children. The sheer variety and diversity of the opinions expressed in these articles has raised the question about what is really being understood in New Zealand in regard to public attitudes about child abuse.

My research is therefore an exploratory study of what is being said to the general public by the media, and to relate these commentaries to the official statistical data. The aim of the study is to gain a better understanding of some of the dynamics of child abuse, and in particular, a look at who are perceived by the general public as being the perpetrators of child abuse.

Participant Recruitment

For this project, I have read opinion pieces and commentaries written about the physical abuse of children in newspapers in New Zealand since 2000. From this I have compiled a list of the authors of these articles and selected those who have written the greater number over the time period, and I will be offering those thus selected the opportunity to participate in the study. I hope to interview 12-15 people.

What will it mean for you?

If you chose to participate in this research, I would need approximately an hour to an hour and a half in a semi-structured one-on-one interview. The interviews would take place, by arrangement, in May and June 2008.

The discussion would be specifically focused on the article/s that you have written, looking at questions such as who was your anticipated audience, what you were trying to say to that audience, and what or who influenced the content of what you wrote.

Participant's Rights

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study any time before December 2008.
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.
- ask for the audio tape to be turned off at any time during the interview.

The data collected will be stored securely and will be accessible only to myself and my supervisors.

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher named above is responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher please contact Professor Sylvia Rumball, Assistant to the Vice-Chancellor (Ethics & Equity), telephone 06 350 5249, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz.

If you wish to discuss the process with either myself or my supervisors, please feel free to contact either myself, or Mike or Fiona:

Raema Keenan 19 Jadewynn Drive, Massey East
Auckland
Ph 09 8331330 / 021 1686649
raemakeenan@hotmail.com

Mike O'Brien School of Health and Social Services
Phone (09) 414 0800, Extn 9161
Email M.A.O'Brien@massey.ac.nz

Fiona Te Momo: School of Health and Social Services
Phone (09) 414 0800, Extn 9043
Email F.TeMomo@massey.ac.nz

Yours faithfully

Raema Keenan

APPENDIX II: ETHICS APPROVAL



Massey University

11 March 2008

Raema Keenan
19 Jadewynn Drive
Massey East
AUCKLAND

OFFICE OF THE ASSISTANT
TO THE VICE-CHANCELLOR
(Research Ethics)
Private Bag 11 222
Palmerston North 4442
New Zealand
T 64 6 350 5573/350 5575
F 64 6 350 5622
humanethics@massey.ac.nz
animalethics@massey.ac.nz
gtc@massey.ac.nz
www.massey.ac.nz

Dear Raema

Re: Who Are Abusing Our Children? An Exploratory Study as to Whether the Perceptions Held by People Who Inform the Public Via Media Reporting and Commentary are Consistent with Known Statistical Information

Thank you for your Low Risk Notification which was received on 10 March 2008.

Your project has been recorded on the Low Risk Database which is reported in the Annual Report of the Massey University Human Ethics Committees.

Please notify me if situations subsequently occur which cause you to reconsider your initial ethical analysis that it is safe to proceed without approval by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees.

A reminder to include the following statement on all public documents:

"This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research."

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor Sylvia Rumball, Assistant to the Vice-Chancellor (Research Ethics), telephone 06 350 5249, e-mail humanethics@massey.ac.nz".

Please note that if a sponsoring organisation, funding authority or a journal in which you wish to publish requires evidence of committee approval (with an approval number), you will have to provide a full application to one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. You should also note that such an approval can only be provided prior to the commencement of the research.

Yours sincerely

Sylvia V Rumball (Professor)
**Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and
Assistant to the Vice-Chancellor (Research Ethics)**

cc Assoc Prof Mike O'Brien
School of Health and Social Services
Albany

Prof Carol McVeigh, HoS
School of Health and Social Services
Albany

Dr Fiona Te Momo
School of Health and Social Services
Albany

APPENDIX III: DATA FROM CYFS

TABLE ONE: Number of investigation findings of abuse or neglect for children and young people aged 0-16 years, for the period 1 January 2004 through to 31 January 2008, broken down by abuse type and age

Calendar Year	Age	Finding Type				Total
		Emotionally abused	Physically abused	Sexually abused	Neglected	
2004	0	260	74	4	362	700
	1	253	48	6	282	589
	2	292	74	11	318	695
	3	283	83	41	270	677
	4	269	74	59	261	663
	5	229	86	61	206	582
	6	243	104	91	225	663
	7	213	140	55	209	617
	8	221	148	73	213	655
	9	221	146	85	206	658
	10	206	129	96	197	628
	11	185	168	88	176	617
	12	169	182	126	151	628
	13	176	205	171	168	720
	14	138	210	165	121	634
	15	118	194	142	76	530
	16	53	87	68	32	240
2004 Total		3,529	2,152	1,342	3,473	10,496
2005	0	414	86	1	417	918
	1	441	64	2	336	843
	2	447	63	6	338	854
	3	432	82	31	324	869
	4	418	89	59	294	860
	5	375	126	63	275	839
	6	354	108	67	266	795
	7	327	111	70	252	760
	8	320	141	89	242	792
	9	296	135	79	209	719
	10	277	143	77	230	727
	11	266	170	87	212	735
	12	246	191	117	192	746
	13	237	202	138	209	786
	14	209	217	152	165	743
	15	182	207	133	107	629
	16	89	102	68	42	301
2005 Total		5,330	2,237	1,239	4,110	12,916
2006	0	542	113	1	471	1,127
	1	645	69	1	375	1,090
	2	571	72	9	323	975
	3	529	83	31	289	932
	4	541	72	48	285	946
	5	507	110	58	282	957
	6	479	139	67	264	949
	7	416	121	55	252	844
	8	395	137	85	246	863
	9	366	146	92	237	841
	10	371	190	80	230	871
	11	324	154	96	194	768
	12	320	168	122	201	811
	13	272	191	171	161	795
	14	239	225	150	155	769
	15	194	199	128	114	635
	16	137	106	59	52	354
2006 Total		6,848	2,295	1,253	4,131	14,527

Table one (cont)

TABLE THREE: Number of investigation findings of abuse and neglect for children and young people aged 0 - 16 years, for the period 1 January 2004 through to 31 January 2008, broken down by abuse type and ethnicity

Calendar Year	Ethnic Group	Finding Type				Total
		Emotionally abused	Physically abused	Sexually abused	Neglected	
2004	Asian	78	67	33	52	230
	European	15	7	14	26	62
	New Zealand Maori	1,571	843	384	1,566	4,364
	New Zealand Pakeha	1,255	653	616	1,138	3,662
	Other	51	46	21	44	162
	Pacific Islands	292	415	129	386	1,222
	Unknown	267	121	145	261	794
2004 Total		3,529	2,152	1,342	3,473	10,496
2005	Asian	142	51	22	85	300
	European	20	19	8	19	66
	New Zealand Maori	2,489	957	408	1,966	5,820
	New Zealand Pakeha	1,584	586	528	1,247	3,945
	Other	66	52	25	51	194
	Pacific Islands	497	424	106	404	1,431
	Unknown	532	148	142	338	1,160
2005 Total		5,330	2,237	1,239	4,110	12,916
2006	Asian	160	78	17	78	333
	European	41	10	12	18	81
	New Zealand Maori	3,206	890	406	1,967	6,469
	New Zealand Pakeha	1,803	644	512	1,249	4,208
	Other	108	51	17	45	221
	Pacific Islands	968	471	150	457	2,046
	Unknown	562	151	139	317	1,169
2006 Total		6,848	2,295	1,253	4,131	14,527
2007	Asian	240	59	35	62	396
	European	46	21	11	30	108
	New Zealand Maori	4,646	1,022	384	2,202	8,254
	New Zealand Pakeha	2,282	579	495	1,435	4,791
	Other	163	23	25	71	282
	Pacific Islands	1,485	480	115	548	2,628
	Unknown	257	46	48	105	456
2007 Total		9,119	2,230	1,113	4,453	16,915
	Asian	14	6	1		21
	European	6			1	7

TABLE TWO: Number of investigation findings of abuse and neglect for children and young people aged 0-16 years, for the period 1 January 2004 through to 31 January 2008, broken down by abuse type and gender

Calendar Year	Gender	Finding Type				Total
		Emotionally abused	Physically abused	Sexually abused	Neglected	
2004	Female	1,713	991	1,033	1,619	5,356
	Male	1,717	1,120	291	1,750	4,878
	Unknown	99	41	18	104	262
2004 Total		3,529	2,152	1,342	3,473	10,496
2005	Female	2,521	1,076	926	1,926	6,449
	Male	2,697	1,131	305	2,092	6,225
	Unknown	112	30	8	92	242
2005 Total		5,330	2,237	1,239	4,110	12,916
2006	Female	3,224	1,102	982	1,956	7,264
	Male	3,390	1,151	256	2,072	6,869
	Unknown	234	42	15	103	394
2006 Total		6,848	2,295	1,253	4,131	14,527
2007	Female	4,339	1,098	854	2,081	8,372
	Male	4,557	1,106	247	2,281	8,191
	Unknown	223	26	12	91	352
2007 Total		9,119	2,230	1,113	4,453	16,915
Jan 2008	Female	310	73	58	141	582
	Male	361	75	12	158	606
	Unknown	16	1	1	6	24
Jan 2008 Total		687	149	71	305	1,212

Note:

A client can have one or more abuse findings in a period so the number of findings will not be distinct per client

APPENDIX IV: DATA FROM IPRU

DATA from Injury Prevention and Research Unit; Otago University NZ

Fatality

Assault cases are ecodes X85-Y09 (ICD10-AM, 2nd edition).

Table of DODYEAR by age grp				
DODYEAR(Date of Death - Year)	Age grp			Total
	0-4yrs	5-9yrs	10-14yrs	
2000	6	4	0	10
2001	4	3	*	9
2002	5	0	*	7
2003	*	*	0	*
2004	8	*	*	12
2005	4	*	*	7
Total	28	11	8	47

Table of DODYEAR by GENDER			
DODYEAR(Date of Death - Year)	GENDER(Gender)		Total
	F	M	
2000	5	5	10
2001	4	5	9
2002	4	3	7
2003	*	0	*
2004	7	5	12
2005	3	4	7
Total	25	22	47

Table of DODYEAR by ethnicity					
DODYEAR(Date of Death - Year)	ethnicity				Total
	Asian	European	Maori	Pacific	
2000	*	5	3	*	10
2001	0	5	4	0	9
2002	*	3	*	*	7
2003	0	*	*	0	2
2004	0	5	6	*	12
2005	0	*	5	0	7
Total	*	21	21	3	47

* Numbers smaller than 3 are concealed for confidentiality.

Readmissions excluded.

zero day stay in hospital excluded.

Seriousness in based on ICISS. (ICISS<=0.941 is serious, ICISS>0.941 is non-serious)

Assault cases are ecodes X85-Y09 (ICD10-AM, 2nd edition).

Table of DISCHARGEYEAR by age grp				
DISCHARGEYEAR(Year of Discharge)	Age grp			Total
	0-4yrs	5-9yrs	10-14yrs	
2000	41	8	54	103
2001	60	15	60	135
2002	59	16	62	137
2003	53	13	44	110
2004	43	15	56	114
2005	33	11	56	100
2006	42	6	46	94
2007	44	20	61	125
Total	375	104	439	918

Table of DISCHARGEYEAR by GENDER			
DISCHARGEYEAR(Year of Discharge)	GENDER(Gender)		Total
	F	M	
2000	38	65	103
2001	46	89	135
2002	38	99	137
2003	39	71	110
2004	43	71	114
2005	30	70	100
2006	34	60	94
2007	39	86	125
Total	307	611	918

Table of DISCHARGEYEAR by seriousness of injury			
DISCHARGEYEAR(Year of Discharge)	serious		Total
	Minor	Serious	
2000	82	21	103
2001	99	36	135
2002	98	39	137
2003	89	21	110
2004	84	30	114
2005	73	27	100
2006	64	30	94
2007	92	33	125
Total	681	237	918

DISCHARGEYEAR(Year of Discharge)	By ethnicity					
	Asian	European	Maori	Other	Pacific	unknown
2000	4	41	39	8	10	1
2001	2	49	62	10	12	0
2002	6	43	51	7	30	0
2003	4	40	50	2	12	2
2004	4	34	55	4	17	0
2005	6	27	39	6	21	1
2006	4	30	43	3	13	1
2007	4	35	65	3	17	1
Total	34	299	404	43	132	6

APPENDIX V WOMEN'S AFFAIRS DATA

WOMEN'S AFFAIRS DATA

<http://www.mwa.govt.nz/CuttingEdgeExecSummary/>

<i>Year</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>
2000	Tangaroa Matiu	3	M	Maori
	Alice Perkins	8	F	Pakeha
	Maria Perkins	6	F	Pakeha
	Hinewaoriki Karaitiana-Matiaha	23mths	F	Maori
	Cherie Perkin	23mths	F	Pakeha
	U/N	11mths	M	
	Amber Grace Lundy	7	F	Pakeha
	Liotta Leuta	5	F	Samoan
2001	Daniel Marshall Loveridge	13mths	M	Pakeha
	Thomas L D Schuman	2	M	
	Levi Wright	10mths	M	Pakeha
	Caleb Moorhead	6mths	M	Pakeha
	Dominique Hingston	6	M	Pakeha
	Nikita Hingston	5		Pakeha
	Ryco Lance Mauri	10mths	M	Maori
	Saliel Aplin	12	F	Pakeha
	Olympia Jetson	11	F	Pakeha
	Jaelyn A Ngatai-Maxwell	6	F	Maori
2002	Tamiti Pokaia	3	M	Maori
	Kalin St.Michael	2		Pakeha
	Brodie Gordon	2mths		Pakeha
	Shontelle Marks	4mths	F	Pakeha
	Kelly Paula Gush	6	F	Pakeha
	Coral-Ellen Burrows	6	F	Pakeha
	Weng Di Dai	10		Chinese
	Iris Kathleen Davidson	23mths	F	Pakeha
2003	U/N	11	F	
	U/N	6	M	
	Anahera Ross Lewis	3	F	Maori
	Randwick Aholelei	3mths	M	Tongan
	Caleb Trimble	4mths	M	Pakeha
2004	Gabriel Harrison-Taylor	8mths	M	Pakeha
	U/N		?	
	U/N		?	
	Raiden Niania	4mths	M	Maori
	Will Mercer	6mths	M	Pakeha
	U/N	4mths	?	
	Te Hau Te Horo O'Carroll	10	M	Maori
	Ngamata O'Carroll	2	F	Maori

	Molly Rose McRae	6	F	Pakeha
	U/N	7mths	F	
	Cameron Fielding	10	M	Pakeha
	Kathleen Harris	7mths	F	Pakeha
	Krystal Fielding	8	F	Pakeha
Year	Name	Age	Gender	Ethnicity
	Mereama Clemment-Matete	14mths	F	Maori
2005	U/N	6days	M	
	Sarah R Haddock-Woodcock	3mths	F	Pakeha
	Britney Angelique Abbot	9	F	Pakeha
	Aaliya Morrissey	2	F	Maori
2006	Ngatikaura Ngati	3		Maori
	Staranise Waru	7mths	F	Maori
	Arwen Fletcher	2	F	Pakeha
	U/N	14mths	F	
	U/N	3	M	
	Chris Kahui	3mths	M	Maori
	Cru Kahui	3mths	F	Maori
	Alyssa P Little-Murphy	7mths	F	Pakeha
	Alex McRae	2	F	
	U/N	Newborn	F	
2007	Charlene Makaza	10	F	African
	U/N	18mths	F	
	U/N	Newborn	F	

APPENDIX VI: NZ POLICE STATISTICS

Family Violence Murders (a)

Description	Figures	Year
Numbers murdered in family violence-related incidents	121 total 56 women 26 men 39 children under 17	2000-04
Number of women murdered by their male partner or ex-partner	45	2000-04
Number of men murdered by their female partner or ex-partner	3	2000-04
Gender of adults who murdered children (b)	26 men 15 women	2000-04

(a) Police do not maintain official statistics on the gender and age of those involved in family violence-related murders, but in a one-off exercise, this information was collated by the Police for the period 2000-2004. The NZ Police National Statistics Manager notes that: "This data is provisional and drawn from a dynamic operational database. It is subject to change as new offences are continually recorded. Provisional data cannot reliably be compared to official statistics."

(b) Some children were killed by more than one adult.

<http://www.nzfvc.org.nz/PublicationDetails.aspx?publication=13955>

National Annual Recorded Offences for the Latest Calendar Years								
Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Offence								
Assaults Child (Firearm)	40	41	31	10	9	3	4	4
Assaults Child (Other Weapon)	129	136	106	98	132	106	81	128
Assaults Child (Manually)	753	815	774	808	776	737	722	1037
Assaults Child (Stabbing/Cutting Weapon)	6	11	6	13	9	5	4	4
Other Assault On Child (Under 14 Years)	40	38	18	27	29	23	34	50

Convicted Offenders of assault on a child under 14 yrs										
Ethnicity	European		Maori		Pacific Peoples		Other		Total Ethnicity	
Gender	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Year										
2007	39	14	67	34	29	6	4	0	147	58
2006	37	10	56	18	22	7	2	0	121	37
2005	27	10	63	31	19	8	11	1	121	51
2004	44	12	62	13	28	11	9	3	148	40
2003	39	9	49	27	22	7	2	2	113	45
2002	35	6	75	20	26	5	3	0	142	31
2001	46	13	62	18	32	6	8	3	149	40
2000	36	9	63	24	30	6	0	1	130	40

APPENDIX VII: DEMOGRAPHICS OF CHILDREN IN THE MEDIA

<i>Name of Child</i>	<i>Year of</i>	<i>Age at</i>	<i>Ethnicity</i>	<i>Sex</i>	<i>Death</i>	<i>Perpetrator</i>
James Whakaruru	1999	4yrs	M	M	D	Stepfather
Mereana Edmonds	1999	6yrs	M	F	D	Mother and mother's
Tangaroa Mahiu	2004	3yrs	M	M	D	Stepfather
Sade Trembath	2000	2yrs	NZE	F	I	Grandmother
Hinewaoriki (Lilybing)	2000	2yrs	M	F	D	Aunt
Amber Lundy	2000	7yrs	NZE	F	D	Father
Liotta Leuta	2000	5yrs		M	D	Mother
Saliel Aplin / Olympia Jetson	2001	12 /	NZE	F	D	Mother's partner
Thomas Schuman	2001	2yrs		M	D	Mother / mother's
Tamiti Pokaia	2001	3yrs	M	M	D	Stepfather
Daniel Marshall Loveridge	2001	1yr 1		M	D	Mother
Coral-Ellen Burrows	2001	6yrs	NZE	F	D	Mother's partner
Anahera Ross-Lewis	2003	3yrs	M	F	D	Warwick Kershaw/
Kelly Paula Gush	2003	12		F	D	Mother's partner
Kathleen Rebecca Harris	2004	7mths		F	D	Stepfather
Mereana Clements-Matete	2004	1yr	M	F	D	Mother's partner
Aaliyah Morrissey	2005	2yrs	M?	F	D	Mother's male friend
Unnamed Tito child	2005	2yrs	M	M	I	Mother's partner
Chris and Cru Kahui	2006	3mths	M	M/M	D	Father ?
Ngatikaura Ngata	2006	3yrs	M	M	D	Mother & Mother's
Nia Glassie	2007	2yrs	M/P	F	D	Mother's partner
Jhia Te Tua	2007	2yrs	M	F	D	Gang drive-by shooting

APPENDIX VIII:NEWSPAPERS

This appendix is a comprehensive list of the newspaper articles accessed for the study. Because of the large number of articles, the appendix has been provided on an enclosed compact disc.