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**A Profile and Longitudinal Evaluation of Multiple Risk
Factors, Protective Factors, and Outcomes for Suicidal and
non-Suicidal out-of-home Adolescents who applied for the
Independent Youth Benefit (IYB)**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

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ABSTRACT

This research contributes new knowledge to those working in the areas of welfare, child and adolescent safety, and suicide prevention. The aim of this thesis was to succinctly provide clinicians, government and community agencies, researchers and policy advisors, with a snapshot profile of 2029 welfare seeking young people who were homeless and frequently discouraged by negative life events. The research aim was to identify risk and protective factors that impact life outcomes for those seeking the Independent Youth Benefit (IYB), and particularly, to scrutinize salient factors that led a vulnerable group of IYB applicants to die by suicide. It was further aimed that by documenting comments from 200 young adults from this population across a span of seven years, both gaps within the IYB process, as well as useful resources, could be identified in order to improve life outcomes for other homeless youth. For those who attempted suicide and survived, file records and interviews have indicated the triggers and life histories that potentially impacted their decision to try to end their pain of life, and factors that influenced survival and recovery.

Four separate studies were included in this thesis. Study 1 profiled 2029 IYB applicants and determined the most potent risks that led to the granting of the IYB. Study 2 revealed the salient factors that related to the suicide of 6 IYB applicants. Study 3 investigated the outcomes for those who were granted or declined a benefit across the variables of education, employment, income, adverse life circumstances, wellbeing, and family relationships. Study 4 examined a psychological construct, termed cynical distrust, which appeared to be a characteristic trait in welfare seeking youth.

Conclusions from this research provided indicators of youth who will usually be granted an IYB, they are, those who report bullying, abuse, parent psychopathology, single parent homes, a parent on a benefit and foster placement. Applicants who reported suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts and had contact with Police and Child Youth and Family Services also were more likely to be granted an Independent Youth Benefit (IYB). If the applicants were Maori and had previously seen a counsellor for a mental health problem, they also were more likely to receive the IYB. However, when applicants were referred to Family Reconciliation Counselling (FRC), there was a statistically significant association between benefit application and benefit declined.

A unique finding from this population related to the association of 'unknown fathers' with suicide. Absent father literature is now extensive, however, little research has been conducted into the effects of 'unknown fathers', particularly for Maori youth who place much of their strength and wellbeing in their genealogy. Other salient factors leading to suicide for IYB applicants included, previous suicide attempt, co-morbid disorder, unresolved anger, no identified caring adult, foster placement and an impending legal or disciplinary event. Maori males with such factors posed the greatest risk for suicide. Counsellors, psychologists, families and policy analysts need to acknowledge that IYB applicants who attempted suicide, show cynical distrust, and were declined a benefit, had extremely poor life outcomes. The New Zealand youth welfare system could be functioning far more efficiently if documented recommendations become realities.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Cassie, whose file recorded the words, “I’m just a black bitch, I’ve become the monster he created, I’m directionless, Godless, and fatherless.” Cassie died by hanging after she had been sexually abused for years by her step-father who was consumed by pornography, yet publicly admired for his sporting prowess. For all who support the pornography industry, and who keep secrets about abuse within families, you carry the guilt of her death on your shoulders.

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