



Child Abuse & Family Structure

What is the evidence telling us?

Report to Family First New Zealand 2016

About the Author



LINDSAY MITCHELL has been researching and commenting on welfare since 2001. Many of her articles have been published in mainstream media and she has appeared on radio, television and before select committees discussing issues relating to welfare. In 2009 her paper, *Maori and Welfare* was published by the New Zealand Business Roundtable. She mentored beneficiary families during the 2000's and is currently teaching literacy as a prison visitor. She has also kept a blog since 2005 and counts herself as a rarity in blog survival rates. When she isn't writing and researching, Lindsay paints and exhibits, specialising in Maori portraiture.

Her previous report *Child Poverty & Family Structure: What is the evidence telling us?* was published in June 2016.



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About Family First NZ

Family First NZ is a charitable organisation formed in 2006, and registered as a charity with the Charities Commission. Its purposes and aims are:

- to promote and advance research and policy regarding family and marriage
- to participate in social analysis and debate surrounding issues relating to and affecting the family
- to produce and publish relevant and stimulating material in newspapers, magazines, and other media relating to issues affecting families
- to be a voice for the family in the media speaking up about issues relating to families that are in the public domain

Endorsements

"Child abuse is one of the most serious issues New Zealand faces. Lindsay Mitchell is to be commended for exploring this topic, and revealing the stark correlation between family structure and ensuing child welfare. While the findings of this report may be controversial to some, they cannot be ignored. Mitchell presents a compelling, evidence-based case which gets to the root of much child abuse, and should encourage policy-makers to re-think some of their current approaches to this issue."

DR PAUL MOON – Professor of History at Auckland University of Technology, and a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society. He is an internationally-acclaimed author of several books on New Zealand history, and has worked as a historical advisor for several television documentaries, both local productions and for the BBC.

"Any discussion of child abuse and family violence is by nature fraught as we all come to it with our own set of beliefs about what might change things. Yet for the sake of our children it behoves us as a society to look at all the factors which can build joyful, meaningful and rich lives and to be honest about what are the real needs of children. Lindsay Mitchell's research adds to our knowledge and takes a hard look at family structure and resilience. It seems that as a society we might profit by listening carefully to the information on what makes children most at risk and take a more inspirational approach to the idea of committed faithful relationships while supporting those who are necessarily in imperfect and vulnerable circumstances."

IAN & MARY GRANT – In 1993 Ian and his wife Mary established Parenting with Confidence Inc. (now The Parenting Place), the first resource centre for parents in New Zealand. Mary was awarded the Queen Elizabeth Medal for Services to Youth in 1990. In April 2006 Ian and Mary were jointly awarded the Auckland Mayor's Living Legend award. Ian was awarded the Companion of the Queens Service Order in 2009, and was the Senior New Zealander of the Year in 2013. Ian and Mary have authored nine books between them, all of which have been bestsellers in Australia and New Zealand.

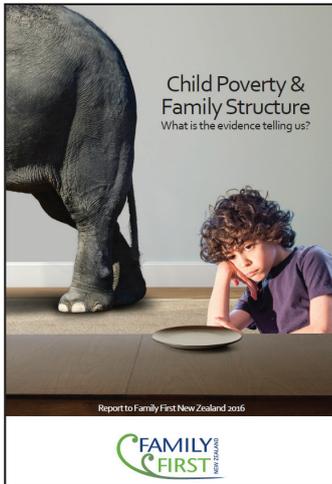
"I am not as good a statistician as Lindsay but I can almost always follow her figures and I find them compelling. This is a very worthy companion to her earlier study. I have occasionally asked questions where I was struggling to work out what she was saying, but I think it is a very worthy piece of analysis. If it were my work, I'd be a little tougher on those who let their social / political / bureaucratic agendas get in the way of sound analysis or who overlook inconvenient facts or conclusions. I think Lindsay's use of material from overseas helps her argument past some of the points made by our domestic doubters."

DR MICHAEL BASSETT – former Minister of Health and Local Government for the Labour government between 1984 and 1987, and Minister of Internal Affairs, Local Government, Civil Defence and Arts and Culture between 1987 and 1990; renowned political historian, award-winning columnist and former Waitangi Tribunal member.

"This paper is to be commended. It confirms the sad indictment on the way in which we as a society have normalised this failure and proceeded to manage it rather than address it. It is yet another wake up call to Iwi leaders that their mantra of an all-caring all-loving Iwi then filters to a Hapu and then a Whanau is a mirage. It is yet another document that tells us a problem we all know about. Let's all work on the solution. In my view, that's Whanau Ora."

HON JOHN TAMIHERE – former politician, a media personality and political commentator. He was a Member of Parliament between 1999 and 2005. He served as a Cabinet minister in the Labour Government from August 2002 to November 2004. He is currently the Chief Executive of the Waipareira Trust.

Executive Summary



This report follows on from *Child Poverty & Family Structure: What is the evidence telling us?* It covers the same period – 1961 to the present.

Compared to low income, child abuse is a less precise concept subject to changing societal norms and values, legislation, reporting and recording practices, and data dissemination procedures.

Low income affects *hundreds* of thousands of children whereas substantiated child abuse affects only *tens* of thousands. In 2014, 29% of all children lived in relative poverty but only 1.5% were found to be abused.

The vast majority of children, whatever shape their family takes, do not suffer from maltreatment.

In the year ended 31 March 1961, child welfare officers handled 6,607 cases. In 2014, 146,657 notifications were made to Child, Youth and Family yet the population aged 17 and under had grown by just 30%.

The rate of substantiated *physical* abuse grew more than ten-fold from 2.5 per 10,000 children in 1967 to 29 per 10,000 in 2014.

For the last fifty years, families that feature ex-nuptial births, have one or both parents absent, large numbers of siblings (especially from clustered or multiple births) and/or very young mothers have been consistently over-represented in the incidence of child abuse.

Maori and Pacific families exhibit more of these features and have appeared disproportionately in child maltreatment statistics since earliest data analysis in 1967.

While the incidence of child abuse has climbed, the death rate from child maltreatment has fluctuated between 0.7 and 1.4 per 100,000 children since the early 1960s. Of the seven deaths recorded in 1967, two children were European, two were Pacific, two were Maori and one was part-Maori.

The growth of child abuse has accompanied a reduction in marriage and an increase in cohabiting or single-parent families.

Over three quarters of children born in 2010 who had a substantiated finding of abuse by age two were born into single-parent families. The likelihood of abuse in this family type is almost nine times greater than in a non-single parent family.

The risk of abuse for children whose parent / caregiver had spent more than 80% of the last five years on a benefit was 38 times greater than for those with no benefit history. Most children included in a benefit appear with a single parent or caregiver.

International care and protection data shows a similar over-representation of single-parent and step / blended families in child abuse substantiations.

In 2014, 29% of all children lived in relative poverty but only 1.5% were found to be abused.

Maori and Pacific families have appeared disproportionately in child maltreatment statistics since earliest data analysis in 1967.

The growth of child abuse has accompanied a reduction in marriage and an increase in cohabiting or single-parent families.

Over three quarters of children born in 2010 who had a substantiated finding of abuse by age two were born into single-parent families.

Both sexes are responsible for *physically* abusing children. In New Zealand, males are responsible for around 60% of physical abuse findings and are more likely to *sexually* abuse children; females are more likely to *neglect* them. Females are also more likely to inflict multiple types of abuse against children.

Stepfathers – a label which today covers a variety of male care-giving relationships with children – are significantly over-represented as perpetrators of child death from inflicted injury in New Zealand and other countries.

The high rates of single, step or blended families among Maori present a much more compelling reason for disproportionate child abuse incidence than either colonisation or unemployment.

Maori children with a single parent are four times more likely to be abused than those in a non-single parent family; Maori children whose caregiver had spent 80% or more of the last five years on a benefit were 19 times more likely to suffer maltreatment than those with no benefit history.

Like non-Maori, Maori children with two-parent working families have very low abuse rates.

The likelihood of a child being in poverty and abused is smaller than the likelihood of being on a benefit and abused.

While both Maori and Pacific families are over-represented in maltreatment findings, some data shows Pacific families near to rates commensurate with their share of the population.

Asian children have disproportionately low rates of child abuse. The Asian population has the lowest proportion of single-parent families.

The presence of biological fathers matters. Generally, it protects children from child abuse. Marriage presents the greatest likelihood that the father will remain part of an intact family. When fathers are excluded from their children's lives, so too are potentially protective paternal grandparents and other family members.

Compared to married parents, cohabiting parents are 4-5 times more likely to separate by the time their child is aged five. Overseas data show a greater likelihood of child abuse in cohabiting families.

Intimate partner violence also contributes significantly to child abuse as children witness or get physically caught in the cross fire. This type of violence has its lowest incidence in marital partnerships, and highest incidence among sole parents.

New Zealand has been slow to analyse its own care and protection data relying heavily instead on reviews of international research. A reluctance remains (compared to other jurisdictions) to identify which families are disproportionately associated with child abuse and deaths.

There are certain family structures in which children will be far more vulnerable. Suspension of fact is an abrogation of our collective responsibility to children. In the same way discussions about child poverty ignore the elephant in the room – family structure – so do analyses of the incidence of child abuse.

The family model in which children are raised by their two biological parents did not evolve without reason, and it is still fit for purpose.

Both sexes are responsible for physically abusing children.

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Introduction

This report follows on from *Child Poverty and Family Structure: What is the evidence telling us?* released in June 2016 (available at www.familyfirst.nz under Research).

It covers the same period of change – 1961 to the present. This is for consistency and because useable child abuse data first appears in the 1960s.

Two important points must be made at the outset.

Firstly, compared to low income, child abuse is a less precise concept. The definition of child abuse has changed over time. Caning a young person was admissible in the 1960s; now it is against the law. In the sixties, child welfare authorities were more concerned with child *misbehaviour* – the scourge of ‘delinquency’ – than child *mistreatment*. Today, care and protection of children is the greater focus.

Compounding this, knowledge about the incidence of child abuse relies on notifications and investigations whereas incomes can be assessed fairly accurately from a number of reliable sources. The dissemination of child abuse data has not always been consistent. Drawing meaningful comparisons between the two periods presents more challenge.

Secondly, whereas low income affects *hundreds* of thousands of children, known child abuse affects only *tens* of thousands. In 2014, 29% of children lived in relative poverty¹ but only 1.5 % were found to be abused.²

If the findings of this report indicate a greater likelihood of child abuse occurring within certain family structures, it does not follow that all children in those family types are at risk. **The vast majority of parents and caregivers, regardless of family form, do not abuse their children.**

In the main, child abuse is treated here as a composite, though there are four different types: sexual, physical, emotional, and neglect. The term ‘maltreatment’ covers all forms. It is impossible to make the case that one type is worse for the child than the other³, and not infrequently, they occur simultaneously. Sexual abuse can have lifetime psychological and physical repercussions; extreme physical abuse can lead to loss of life.

Children who are emotionally abused – ignored, rejected, humiliated and verbally abused – can suffer more than if they are physically assaulted. The final form of abuse, neglect, can leave a child unable to mentally and physically thrive.

Child deaths from maltreatment are considered separately. They are very rare occurrences and not necessarily accurate indicators of the underlying incidence of abuse.

Knowledge about the incidence of child abuse relies on notifications and investigations.

Whereas low income affects hundreds of thousands of children, known child abuse affects only tens of thousands.

1 *Household incomes in New Zealand: Trends in indicators of inequality and hardship 1982-2014*, Bryan Perry, MSD, p103

2 CYF Key Statistics, Findings, Distinct children and young people with a substantiated abuse finding, by abuse type (1.5% represents 16,289 children out of a population of 1.058 million - the same denominator used for the child poverty statistic).

3 Although a 2010 MSD report, *Recognising and responding to child neglect in New Zealand* claimed, “...there is mounting evidence that neglect is more harmful to children than other forms of child maltreatment.”

Change In Known Abuse Statistics

Despite shifting norms and values, communities have long agreed that child safety and wellbeing are important enough to charge the state with monitoring and enforcing certain standards.⁴ Care that doesn't meet broadly agreed standards falls into the category of 'child abuse'.

Sometimes, due to cultural or generational differences, those standards can be controversial. But the state retains the statutory right and responsibility to create, amend and administer laws that aim to protect children.

Fifty years ago the term 'battered children' was commonly used to describe those minors who suffered from physical maltreatment. 'Battered child syndrome' described the symptoms of swelling or bleeding under the skull and "...abnormal changes in the long bones of young children" along with "...failure of the child to thrive and repeated visits to hospital for unexplained injuries."⁵

In 1961, child welfare was the responsibility of the Department of Education. The 1925 legislation that created the Child Welfare Branch provided for, "... the protection and training of indigent, neglected, and delinquent children."⁶ In 1948 the 'branch' became the 'division' which "...marked a turning point in the character of the agency."⁷ Field staff evolved into social workers as universities began offering courses in social work. The Child Welfare Division employed paid officers but also appointed 'honorary' officers:

*"Child Welfare Officers undertake a wide variety of miscellaneous investigations and inquiries concerning the welfare of children. Cases may be referred by neighbours, police, teachers, employers, doctors, solicitors, etc., or by parents themselves who are seeking advice and guidance."*⁸

In the year ended 31 March 1961, 6,607 cases were handled by child welfare officers.

No analysis of these cases is available nor whether concerns were substantiated. At that time it was still standard procedure for child welfare officers, on notification from the Registrar, to visit any mother who'd had an ex-nuptial birth, of which there were 2,911 in 1960.⁹

It is also likely that the almost two thousand adoptions in 1960 featured among the total cases handled by child welfare officers.

In 1960, the population aged 17 and under numbered approximately 845,000.

By 2014, due to an ageing population, the demographic aged 17 and under had grown by only 30% to around 1.1 million.

What had happened to the number of child welfare cases?

Neglect can leave a child unable to mentally and physically thrive.

In 1961, child welfare was the responsibility of the Department of Education.

At that time it was still standard procedure for child welfare officers to visit any mother who'd had an ex-nuptial birth.

4 "Statutory responsibility to investigate allegations of child abuse in New Zealand rests with Child, Youth and Family (CYF) and the Police", Child Protection Policy, MSD, September 2015

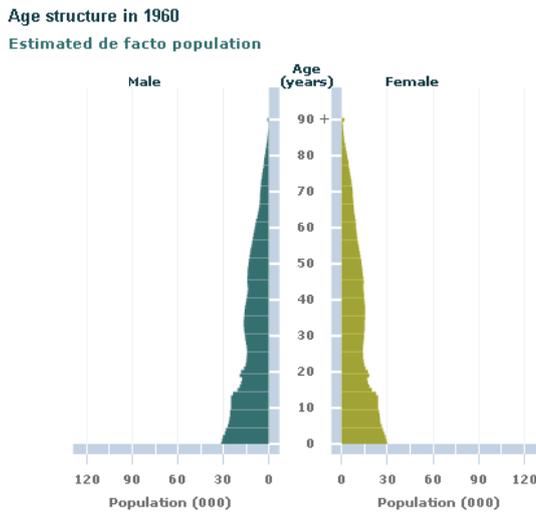
5 *CHILD ABUSE IN NEW ZEALAND, A report on a nationwide survey of the physical ill-treatment of children in New Zealand*, David M. Fergusson, Joan Fleming, David P O'Neill, Government Printer, 1972, p15

6 New Zealand Official Yearbook 1961

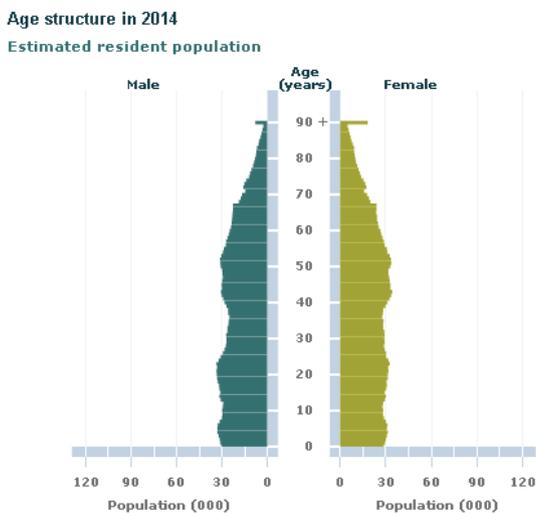
7 *Social Developments: an organisational history of the Ministry of Social Development and its predecessors, 1860-2011*, Tim Garlick, Steele Roberts Aotearoa, 2012, p59

8 New Zealand Official Yearbook 1962

9 Births – VSB: Live births by nuptiality (Maori and total population) (Annual-Dec), Statistics New Zealand, Infoshare



A comparison between cases handled in 1961 and notifications in 2014 shows a 22-fold increase.



Source: Interactive population pyramid for New Zealand, Statistics New Zealand

During the year to June 2014, 146,657 “care and protection notifications, including Police family violence referrals” were handled by Child, Youth and Family (CYF). There were just over 54,000 “reports of concern requiring further action”, and “substantiated abuse findings” numbered 19,623.¹⁰

It is impossible to know which current CYF category best matches the earlier cases. A comparison between cases handled in 1961 and notifications in 2014 shows a 22-fold increase. Comparing cases handled to reports of concern requiring further action produces an eight-fold increase. Both increases are far and above the growth in the relevant population. But apples are not being compared to apples.

A more distinct picture of child abuse emerged later in the decade from a national survey undertaken in 1967. The definition of child abuse adopted was:

“Non-accidental physical attack or physical injury, including minimal as well as fatal injury, inflicted upon children by persons caring for them.”¹¹

The survey did not include cases of neglect.

Both increases are far and above the growth in the relevant population.

10 CYF, Key Statistics, Notifications

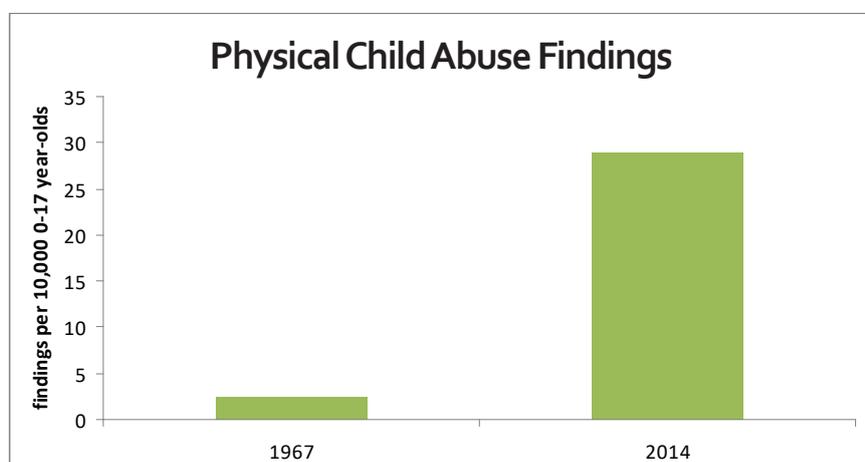
11 CHILD ABUSE IN NEW ZEALAND, A report on a nationwide survey of the physical ill-treatment of children in New Zealand, David M. Fergusson, Joan Fleming, David P O’Neill, Government Printer, 1972, p16

Bronwyn Dalley, child welfare historian, has written in detail about this survey – *CHILD ABUSE IN NEW ZEALAND, A report on a nationwide survey of the physical ill-treatment of children in New Zealand* – noting its strengths and weaknesses.

Because cases dealt with informally by “police, teachers, voluntary groups and general practitioners” were not captured, Dalley believes the actual incidence may have been masked. As there is still no mandatory requirement to report child abuse, the same speculation holds today. The report’s conclusion was, in Dalley’s words, “...in comparison with the various other forms of childhood injury, child abuse was not a problem of major importance.”¹² The downplaying of the seriousness of the problem met with disapproval from many quarters.

The survey data shows there were 363 individual children involved in suspected cases of child abuse with 255 substantiations. Hospitalised children numbered 44, though most of the abuse involved “relatively minor injuries”.¹³ Seven children died from maltreatment.

Jump forward to 2014 when there were 3,178 distinct children with substantiated findings of physical abuse by CYF.¹⁴ These findings equate to rates of 29 per 10,000 compared to 2.5 per 10,000 in 1967.¹⁵



Data source: *CHILD ABUSE IN NEW ZEALAND, A report on a nationwide survey of the physical ill-treatment of children in New Zealand*; *NZ Official Yearbook, 1973*; *CYF, Findings*; *Interactive population pyramid for New Zealand, Statistics New Zealand*

On known data then, the incidence of physical child abuse is much higher today, though seven child deaths from maltreatment is a strikingly similar toll to current numbers.

Circumstances Of Abused Children

The first nationwide survey into child abuse included every case known to child welfare officers from January 1 to December 31, 1967. About the findings, Dalley writes:

“The abused children tended to come from larger families, were ex-nuptial births, and lived in homes from which one or both parents were absent... The reported incidence of abuse among Maori children was six times

Substantiated findings of physical abuse equate to rates of 29 per 10,000 in 2014 compared to 2.5 per 10,000 in 1967.

“The abused children tended to come from larger families, were ex-nuptial births, and lived in homes from which one or both parents were absent.”¹²

“The incidence among Pacific Islands families was nine times higher... Women were identified as the majority of abusers.” (1967)¹³

12 *Past Judgement: Social Policy in New Zealand History*, edited by Bronwyn Dalley and Margaret Tennant, Otago University Press, 2004, p181-2

13 *Past Judgement: Social Policy in New Zealand History*, edited by Bronwyn Dalley and Margaret Tennant, Otago University Press, 2004, p182

14 CYF, Key Statistics, Findings

15 *CHILD ABUSE IN NEW ZEALAND, A report on a nationwide survey of the physical ill-treatment of children in New Zealand*, David M. Fergusson, Joan Fleming, David P O’Neill, Government Printer, 1972, p63 records a slightly higher figure of 2.57 per 10,000 but used the 0-16 age group.

greater than among Pakeha, while the incidence among Pacific Islands families was nine times higher... Women were identified as the majority of abusers... Single motherhood – one of the significant social issues of the period as the rate of ex-nuptial births climbed steadily during the 1960s – was regarded as especially conducive to a raft of problems.”¹⁶

The difference between rates of abuse within married and non-married families was pronounced. This applied to both Maori and non-Maori.

Any doubts regarding the robustness of findings from just one survey are addressed by Dalley who adds, “...many of the results [of the national survey] would be borne out in subsequent studies.”

The difference between rates of abuse within married (with ‘legitimate’ children) and non-married (with ‘illegitimate’ children) families was pronounced. This applied to both Maori and non-Maori. Further discrepancy between the two ethnic groups was also marked. “Speculative explanations” for “race differences in reporting rates” are given as varying cultural norms and practices in child-rearing; social and economic deprivation; family disruption due to urbanisation and possible bias in reporting procedures.¹⁷

Estimated race and legitimacy specific rates of abuse per 10,000 of population aged 0-5 years			
Legitimacy	Maori	Non-Maori	Total
Legitimate (married)	6.46	1.95	2.44
Illegitimate (non-married)	11.27	8.34	9.17
Total	7.78	2.61	3.3

Source: CHILD ABUSE IN NEW ZEALAND, A report on a nationwide survey of the physical ill-treatment of children in New Zealand

Suffice to say, New Zealand’s earliest analysis of child abuse cases identified particular family types or traits more likely to feature: single or unmarried parent(s), large families, and of Maori or Pacific ethnicity.

Anecdotal evidence about perpetrators is also recounted by Dalley:

“Wellington hospital reported that mothers formed the majority of abusers, and that abuse did not generally start until a baby was six months old. A 1965 Justice Department study also indicated that women played a predominant role, and that their abuse tended to be more ‘vicious’; this was perhaps a startled reaction to the usually non-violent pattern of female offending.”¹⁸

It is noted that as children spent more time in the care of their mothers than anyone else, this might explain the higher likelihood of maternal abuse.

As children spent more time in the care of their mothers than anyone else, this might explain the higher likelihood of maternal abuse.

“[K]ey figures” in the Child Welfare Division of the late 1960s, including Superintendent Lewis Anderson, “...saw a direct link between single motherhood and abuse and neglect.”¹⁹

At a time when marriage was almost universal among parents²⁰, mounting concern paralleled the increasing incidence of unmarried births. These children were widely considered to start from a position of disadvantage hence mandatory enquiries were made by child welfare officers into their

16 *Past Judgement: Social Policy in New Zealand History*, edited by Bronwyn Dalley and Margaret Tennant, Otago University Press, 2004, p182-4

17 *CHILD ABUSE IN NEW ZEALAND, A report on a nationwide survey of the physical ill-treatment of children in New Zealand*, David M. Fergusson, Joan Fleming, David P O'Neill, Government Printer, 1972, p149-153

18 *Family Matters: Child Welfare in Twentieth Century New Zealand*, Bronwyn Dalley, Auckland University Press, 1998, p253

19 *Past Judgement: Social Policy in New Zealand History*, edited by Bronwyn Dalley and Margaret Tennant, Otago University Press, 2004, p184

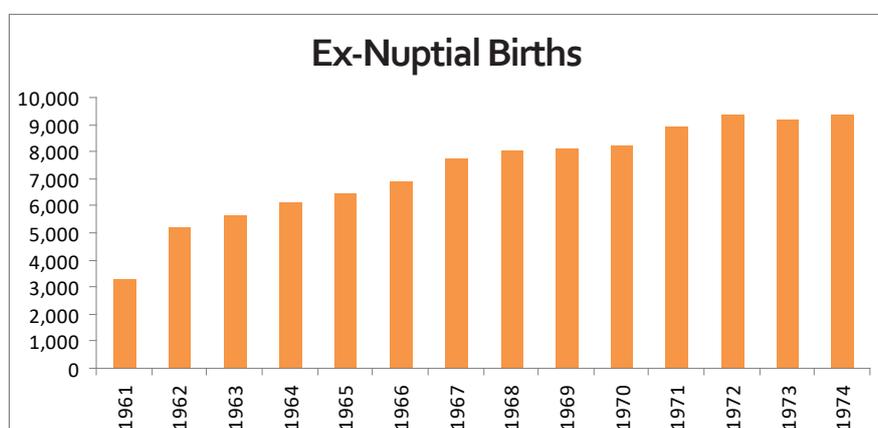
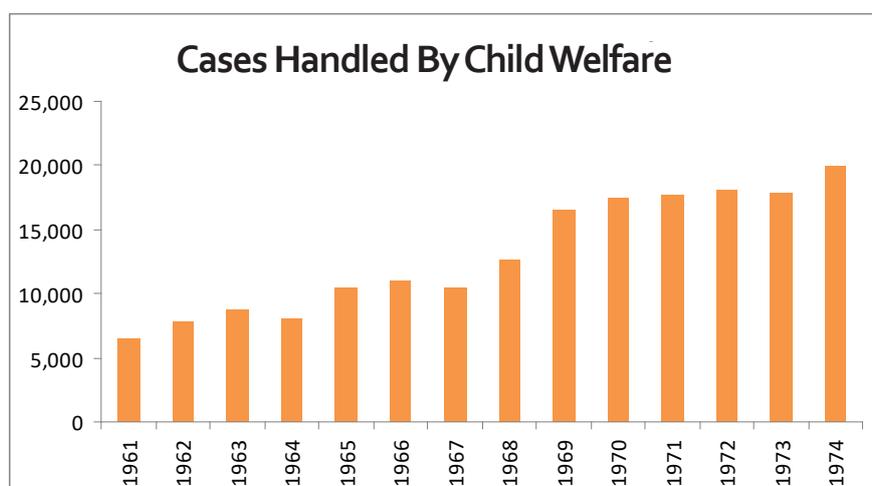
20 At both the 1961 and 1966 censuses over 95% of children lived in married couple families.

circumstances and environments. This practice continued until 1982.

The Plunket Society also worried about the trend towards sole parent families. Historian Linda Bryder describes their attitude as demonstrated by:

*"...the publication in its Newsletter in 1977 of a statement by fourteen Wanganui health professionals who described themselves as 'social scientists, nurses and doctors', and claimed first-hand experience and knowledge of published sources about unmarried parents and their children... They contended that the child of an unmarried parent was disadvantaged: 'The amount of handicap varies but it can be severe.'"*²¹

Between 1961 and 1974 – the first period over which consistent and comparable data was published – cases handled by the Education Department's Child Welfare Division (and from 1972, Social Welfare) more than tripled, while the growth in ex-nuptial births was almost three-fold.



Data sources: *New Zealand Yearbooks 1961-1976*, *Statistics New Zealand Infoshare*

Naturally, 'cases handled' will rise if ex-nuptial enquiries are included. The noticeable jump in ex-nuptial births in 1962 was due to inclusion of previously excluded Maori statistics. By the end of the decade, 90% of Maori mothers under 20 who had ex-nuptial births did not opt for legal adoption whereas a small majority (53%) of European mothers continued to do so.²² While conclusions about levels of child abuse cannot be drawn from this set of statistics, the trends are still noteworthy.

Unfortunately, from 1975 to 1991, statistics relating to 'cases handled' were no longer published. Department of Social Welfare annual reports contain some

Between 1961 and 1974, cases more than tripled, while the growth in ex-nuptial births was almost three-fold.

*"Assessing the level of child abuse in the community is always difficult, given that so much of it remains hidden from the public view."*²⁵

21 *A Voice for Mothers: The Plunket Society and Infant Welfare, 1907-2000*, Linda Bryder, Auckland university Press, 2003, p267-8

22 *MAINTAINING SOLE PARENT FAMILIES IN NEW ZEALAND: AN HISTORICAL REVIEW*, Kay Goodger, Social Policy Agency, 1998

data but these were criticised for lack of specificity.²³

A draft discussion document from the Public Health Commission remarked:

“The child protection intake statistics that have been published by the DSW [Department of Social Welfare] in their six-month and annual reports pose problems as far as measuring child abuse is concerned.”²⁴

In a similar vein, Bronwyn Dalley writes:

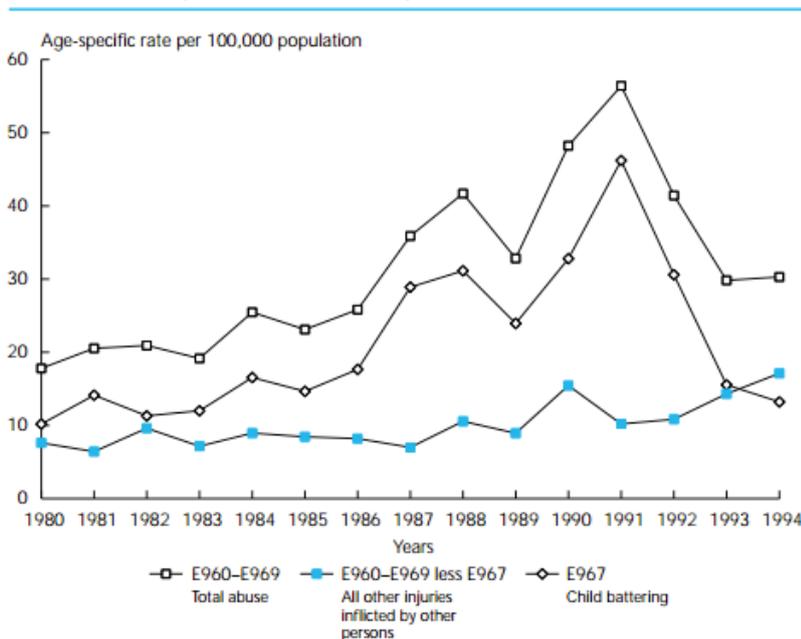
“Assessing the level of child abuse in the community is always difficult, given that so much of it remains hidden from the public view. The Department itself frequently combined figures for child abuse with other care and protection statistics, or buried them under the heading of ‘miscellaneous’ cases, the number of which increased dramatically during the 1970s.”

Despite this ambiguity, she was able to report:

“The number of child abuse and neglect investigations soared in the late 1980s, rising from 2,131 in 1987/8 to more than 6,500 the following year; in 1992, almost 11,000 notifications of abuse and neglect were recorded.”²⁵

These statistics are mirrored in child hospitalisations during the same period:

FIGURE 1: Hospitalisations of children ages 0–14 years due to child battering and other maltreatment (E967), all other injuries purposely inflicted by other persons (E960–E969 excluding E967), and total abuse (E960–E969 inclusive), 1980–1994



Source: New Zealand Health Information Service

Source: Child Abuse Prevention: The Health Sector's Contribution to the Strengthening Families Initiative, 1996

“The number of child abuse and neglect investigations soared in the late 1980s.”²⁵

The 1980s gave rise to the ‘street kid’ crisis – a corollary, perhaps, of child abuse.

23 Appendices to the Journals of House of Representatives contain these reports but the criticism is valid - they do not provide particularly conclusive data.

24 *The Health Sector's Role in the Prevention of Child Abuse*, Draft Discussion Document, Rangapa Hauora Tūmūtānui, Public Health Commission, 1996

25 *Family Matters: Child Welfare in Twentieth Century New Zealand*, Bronwyn Dalley, Auckland University Press, 1998, p342

(The steep decline in admissions resulting from 'child battering' after 1991 is explained as follows:

*"Interpretation of these data after 1991 is difficult because hospital admission procedures changed. Apparently, hospitals tightened up on admissions, with a higher proportion of people being sent home after attendance at Accident and Emergency clinics rather than being formally admitted."*²⁶⁾

Along with a lack of statistical data, information about the families of abused children is not available from these years although the theme of ethnicity recurs amongst problems relating to young people.

For instance, the 1980s gave rise to the 'street kid' crisis – a corollary, perhaps, of child abuse. In 1988, it was reported:

*"In the Auckland area alone recent information gives cause for serious concern. The following estimates are from Auckland Police and schools: 300-400 unsupervised young people on the streets (about 90% Maori); 200-300 chronic solvent abusers; 1%-5% of children, on a daily basis, who should attend school not doing so. (1% is 4,250 children; 5% is 21,250)."*²⁷

From the early 1990s, in part due to increasing public pressure on CYF (known then as NZCYPS²⁸) to perform, more detailed care and protection data was published annually.

Tim Garlick, who wrote about the history of the Ministry of Social Development (MSD), describes this period:

*"Public awareness of child abuse in New Zealand rose significantly in the 1990s, partly because of media reports of extreme instances of abuse, such as those resulting in the deaths of two-year-old Delcelia Witika (1991) and eleven-year-old Craig Manakau (1992). The media also scrutinised NZCYPS' actions for any suggestion of culpability."*²⁹

In 1995, the New Zealand Official Yearbook stated:

*"Care and protection notifications continue to show the steady upward growth evident over the last decade. Although the rate of growth between 1993 and 1994 has slowed to 6.25 percent the more serious categories continue to show a significant increase. Notifications for child abuse and neglect increased by 9.4 percent, while notifications alleging that a child or young person in (sic) a detrimental environment increased by 11.98 percent. This suggests that notifications to the service may be of a more serious nature."*³⁰

By this time, greater analysis of *notifications* (but not *findings*) was available, although physical and sexual abuse were still recorded together.

*"Public awareness of child abuse in New Zealand rose significantly in the 1990s."*²⁹

*"This suggests that notifications to the service may be of a more serious nature."*³⁰

26 *Child Abuse Prevention: The Health Sector's Contribution to the Strengthening Families Initiative*, The Public Health Issues, 1995–1996, Ministry of Health, p20-21

27 PUAO-TE-ATA-TU, *THE REPORT OF THE MINISTERIAL ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON A MAORI PERSPECTIVE FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WELFARE*, 1988

28 The New Zealand Children and Young Persons Service was created in 1992. The name changed to Children, Young Persons and their Families Service in May 1996. The agency became Child, Youth and Family (CYF) in 1999.

29 *Social Developments: an organisational history of the Ministry of Social Development and its predecessors, 1860-2011*, Tim Garlick, Steele Roberts Aotearoa, 2012, p176

30 New Zealand Official Yearbook 1995

Table 7.8. NOTIFICATIONS RECEIVED*

	<i>Year ended 30 June 1995</i>
Physical/sexual abuse (in family)	6,740
Physical/sexual abuse (non family)	2,024
Care concerns/emotional abuse	11,195
Child/young person with problem behaviour	4,331
Total number of general care and protection notifications	24,290
Arrest of children and young persons	1,018
Number held in police custody	531
Number held more than 24 hours†	89
* Notification categories changed between 1994 and 1995.	
† The consent of the Director-General is required for arrested children and young people to be held in police custody longer than 24 hours.	
Source: Children and Young Persons Service.	

Source: *New Zealand Official Yearbook 1996*

In 1996, the health sector identified the following “child abuse risk factors”:

- unsatisfactory and unstable housing
- low socioeconomic status
- low maternal age
- large family
- single parent family

The Office for the Commissioner of Children identified an additional risk factor:

- Having a step-parent or parent having a de facto partner³¹

In respect of family type, almost thirty years on, this list is a repetition of the earliest identification (1967) of risk factors.

The current categories of abuse – physical, sexual, emotional and neglect – were reported from 1997. More importantly, actual findings were documented. While notifications sky-rocketed from 23,246 in 1997 to 150,905 in 2015, growth in substantiations was less dramatic. (Soaring notifications may represent a combination of change in reporting procedures, heightened public awareness, and false allegations.³²)



Source: *Social Developments: an organisational history of the Ministry of Social Development and its predecessors, 1860-2011* (First published in the *Waikato Times*, 2001)

Almost thirty years on, this list is a repetition of the earliest identification (1967) of risk factors.

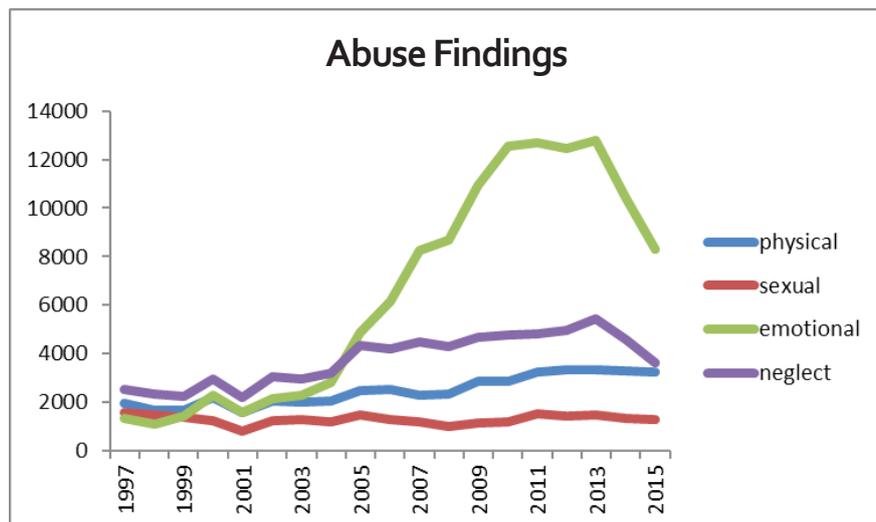
All forms of substantiated abuse excluding sexual grew until 2013, emotional abuse in particular.

31 *Child Abuse Prevention: The Health Sector's Contribution to the Strengthening Families Initiative*, The Public Health Issues, 1995–1996, Ministry of Health

32 The 2003 *Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect (CIS-2003)* analysed unsubstantiated cases and found 27% were 'Non-malicious Reports'; 5% were 'Malicious' and a further 7% were 'Malicious Intent Unknown'.

Nevertheless, all forms of substantiated abuse excluding sexual grew until 2013, emotional abuse in particular. Over the same period the demographic aged 17 and under grew by a mere 5%.³³

Hospital admissions from child assault, neglect or maltreatment since 2000 are showing a gradual decline.



Data sources: Various New Zealand Yearbooks/MSD Statistical Report 2011/CYF Key Statistics

The odd variability of the green line is explained by MSD:

“An important contributor ... was a change in Police procedures which resulted in a notification to care and protection services being made in respect of all children present at family violence incidents attended by the Police.

“This, together with recognition of exposure to family violence as a form of psychological abuse under the Domestic Violence Act (1995), was associated with a rise in the number and proportion of children with substantiated findings of emotional abuse....

“A further change in procedures for handling Police family violence referrals was introduced in July 2010. From that date, Police family violence referrals that require no further action do not result in care and protection notifications, but instead are recorded as “contact records”.

“This appears to have been associated with a levelling off of numbers of findings of emotional abuse (2012).”³⁴

Since then, a new strategy which “... sees doctors or police directly refer to a group that specialises in preventing domestic violence, rather than refer to Child, Youth and Family (CYF)...” has accounted for a further fall.³⁵

Painting a slightly different picture, hospital admissions from child assault, neglect or maltreatment since 2000 are showing a gradual decline.

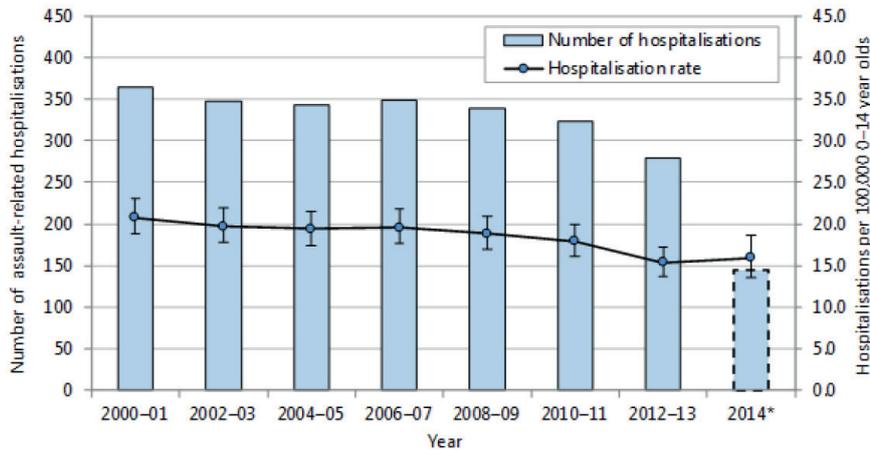
33 Population Estimates – DPE, Table: Estimated Resident Population by Age and Sex (1991+) (Annual-Dec), Statistics New Zealand, Infoshare

34 *The feasibility of using predictive risk modelling to identify new-born children who are high priority for preventive services*, MSD, February 2014, p15

35 *Child abuse statistics and policy change*, New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse, January 2015

(Hospitalisations are for two-year periods except for 2014):

Figure 29. Hospitalisations due to injuries arising from the assault, neglect, or maltreatment of 0–14 year olds, New Zealand, 2000–2014



Source: Child Poverty Monitor: Technical Report

The rates of hospitalisations for injuries arising from the assault, neglect, or maltreatment of 0–14 year olds per 100,000 were: Maori 28, Pacific 24, Asian / Indian 5 and NZ European / Other 12.³⁶

Again the ethnic disproportionality is marked and importantly here, unlike notifications for abuse, cannot be discounted by claims of bias in the system - for example, Maori and Pacific families being subject to greater levels of public, police and CYF scrutiny.

With regard to family type, retrospective research using the 1993 birth cohort found a large overlap between children known to CYF and children in the benefit system. This is consistent with the over-representation of Maori (but not Pacific) single parents on income support.

A later examination of the 2010 birth cohort produced more specific findings about the rates of substantiated child maltreatment among single parent families, Maori and those receiving a benefit. A detailed discussion of that data appears shortly.

Circumstances Of Children Who Die From Maltreatment

Child deaths from maltreatment are mercifully quite rare and, as such, are not necessarily indicative of underlying abuse levels.³⁷

In 1967, the first ever survey into child abuse recorded seven deaths from inflicted injury. This is not so different to the numbers recorded today. The over-representation of Maori and Pacific ethnicity and the ages of the children are also similar.

What differs is the deaths did not receive massive media coverage. Neither are we privy to the names of these children, nor the consequences for the perpetrators of their injuries.

The ethnic disproportionality is marked and cannot be discounted by claims of bias in the system.

The 1993 birth cohort found a large overlap between children known to CYF and children in the benefit system.

36 Child Poverty Monitor: Technical Report

37 See *Children at increased risk of death from maltreatment and strategies for prevention*, CYF, 2006, p6 for a range of international estimates for indicated underlying abuse incidence.

1. INJURIES RESULTING IN DEATH (N = 7)

Race, Sex, Age	Type of Injury	Explanation	Outcome
Pacific Islander Male 3 yrs	Brain haemorrhage, extensive bruising to face, arms, legs and buttocks. Healing fractures of collar bone and elbow.	Parents claimed the child fell out of a window.	Child died
Maori Female 11 mths	Head injury and brain haemorrhage. Small bruises to head, back and legs. Three fractures in left arm and fractured left leg.	Foster mother claimed the child fell off a bed.	Child died
Maori Female 3 yrs	Extensive bruising to body and subdural haemorrhage.	Mother admitted ill-treatment.	Child died
Pacific Islander Female 4 yrs	Bruising to left eye and back of the head, allegedly caused by a fall. Bruising to arms, legs and buttocks, healing fractures of two ribs and healing blister on left heel.	Father admitted punishing the child but denied that he was overly severe or that he caused her death.	Child died
Part Maori Female 9 mths	Extensive bruising all over body, large bruise on abdomen in the shape of an adult hand, pin pricks on buttocks, scalds and scabies.	Parents offered no explanation.	Child died
European Male 11 mths	Subdural haemorrhage and bruising on cheek and above eye.	Mother hit the child's head on the floor because he would not eat.	Child died
European Female 3 yrs	Fractured skull, fractured jaw, broken ribs, bruising to stomach, buttocks, left arm and face.	Father admitted losing control and beating the child severely.	Child died

Source: CHILD ABUSE IN NEW ZEALAND, A report on a nationwide survey of the physical ill-treatment of children in New Zealand

About this period, Bronwyn Dalley wrote:

"[Child welfare] Officers ...commented on the 'distressing' number of cases of ill-treatment of young Maori children who subsequently died by mothers who were 'girls' or state wards from homes in which they had experienced little stability or security".³⁸

If this anecdotal evidence has any factual basis these fatalities must have been buried in the broader (and high) child mortality statistics of those times. The Maori infant mortality rate was 49.68 in 1961 – more than double the whole population rate at 22.79 per 1,000 live births.³⁹

Moving forward, for the period between 1981 and 1992:

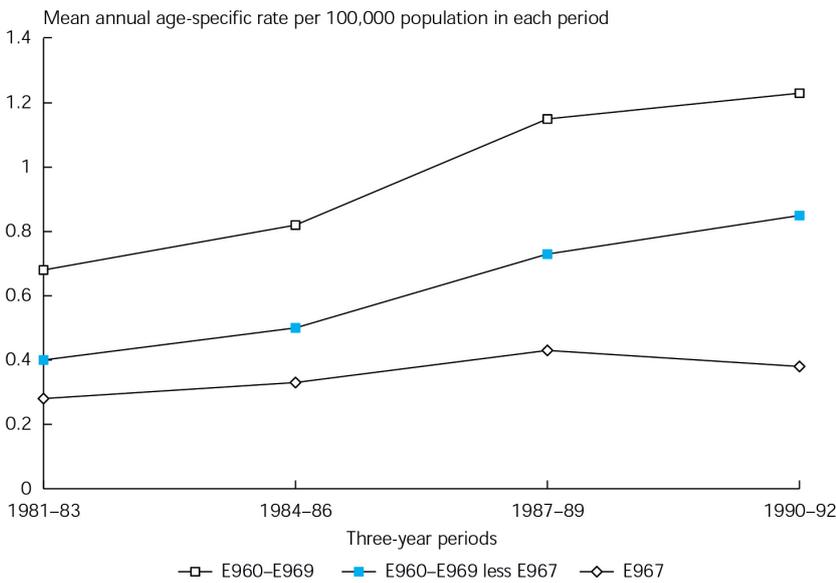
"Information collected by the New Zealand Health Information Service shows that in the 12 years from 1981 to 1992, 93 children aged 0 to 14 years died from child battering and injuries inflicted by others. Of these deaths, 34 alone were classified as resulting from child battering and other maltreatment. Because the number of deaths each year is small (averaging 7.75 per annum between 1981 and 1992), an increment or decrement of one or two above a previous year's total results in wide fluctuations in the annual age-specific mortality rates per 100,000 children aged 0 to 14 years. For instance, the age-specific mortality rate in 1989 for code E967 was 0.51 per 100,000, but in the following year it was 0.12, returning to 0.50 in both 1991 and 1992. Because of the 'volatility' of the annual rates (i.e. small numbers and large fluctuations) it is more appropriate to calculate the mean rates for different sets of years."

The Maori infant mortality rate was more than double the whole population rate in 1961.

38 Family Matters: Child Welfare in Twentieth Century New Zealand, Bronwyn Dalley, Auckland University Press, 1998, p252-3

39 Death Rates – DMM, Table: Infant mortality rate (Maori and total population) (Annual-Dec), Statistics New Zealand, Infoshare

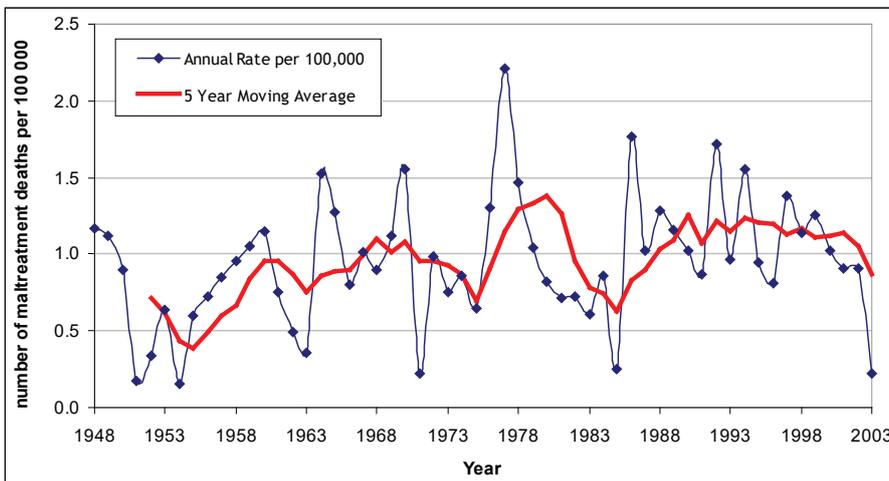
FIGURE 4: Deaths of children ages 0–14 years from child battering and other maltreatment (E967), all other injuries purposely inflicted by others (E960–E969 excluding E967), and total abuse (E960–E969 inclusive), 1981–1992



The rate alone is too low to draw conclusions about correlation to family structure change.

Source: *Child Abuse Prevention: The Health Sector's Contribution to the Strengthening Families Initiative, 1996*

The Ministry of Health has recorded child maltreatment deaths for many decades. Expressed as deaths per 100,000 and shown as a five-year moving average, the rate alone is too low to draw conclusions about correlation to family structure change. Since 1961 the rate has fluctuated between around 0.7 and 1.4 deaths per 100,000 children:

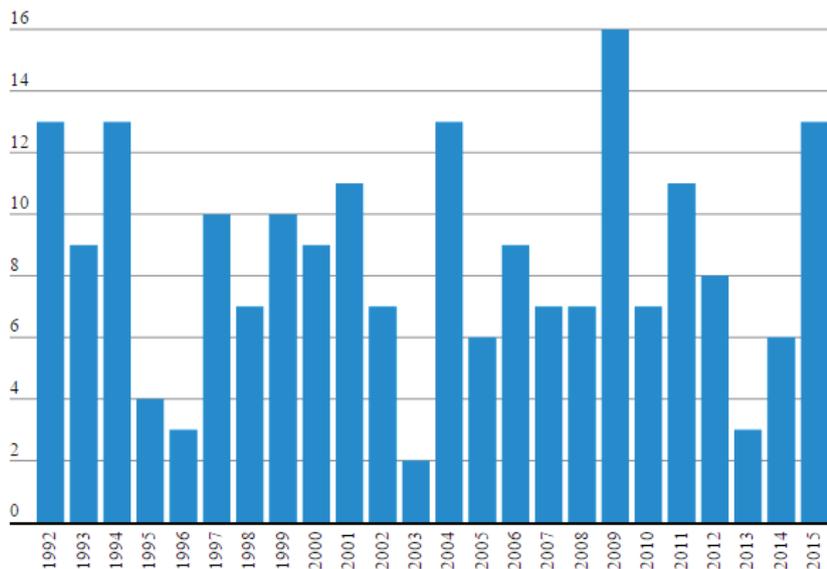


Source: *Child Death from Maltreatment, A review of incidence in New Zealand, July 2006*

This data set has not yet been publicly updated. However, the *Dominion Post* recently investigated child homicide⁴⁰ and produced the following set of statistics:

40 According to Mike Doolan, former Chief Social Worker, child death by homicide can be variously described as infanticide, filicide, death from maltreatment, manslaughter and murder.

Child homicides per year in New Zealand



Source: Child homicide in New Zealand: How do the numbers compare internationally? Stuff, November 2015

The graph is a good match for the child maltreatment deaths in the overlapping years of 1992 to 2003. Since 2003, numbers have not abated. On average there were eight child homicides annually between 2003 and 2015.

To summarise, while the incidence of deaths from maltreatment fluctuates, the *known* incidence of child abuse was officially described as “...not a problem of major importance” in the 1960s. It went largely uncharted during the 1970s and 1980s (though notifications soared in the late eighties). From first recorded substantiations in 1996, the incidence was quite flat until an upward trend began in 2001. It has very recently started to reduce (though whether the reduction is apparent or real is disputed).

In contrast to the 1960s, by 2004 the official Ministry of Social Development position had reversed:

“Child abuse and neglect are major social problems. They cause physical and psychological harm which is often long-lasting.”⁴¹

Child abuse has been repeatedly linked with single or absent parents, large numbers of siblings, young mothers and Maori or Pacific ethnicity.

So how have families that pose increased risk of child abuse changed since 1961?

Change In At-Risk Families

Ex-Nuptial Births

In 1961 and 1966⁴² just over 95% of children were born within marriages.

The marriage rate steadily declined from 1971. Naturally enough, so did the percentage of births to married parents:

On average there were eight child homicides annually between 2003 and 2015.

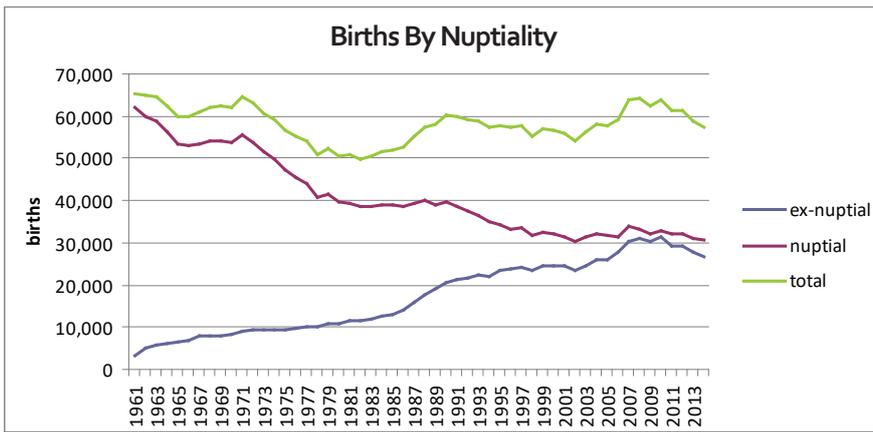
“Child abuse and neglect are major social problems. They cause physical and psychological harm which is often long-lasting.”

Ministry of Social Development, 2004

So how have families that pose increased risk of child abuse changed since 1961?

41 The Social Report, 2003, MSD

42 Census data, New Zealand Official Yearbooks 1965, 1973

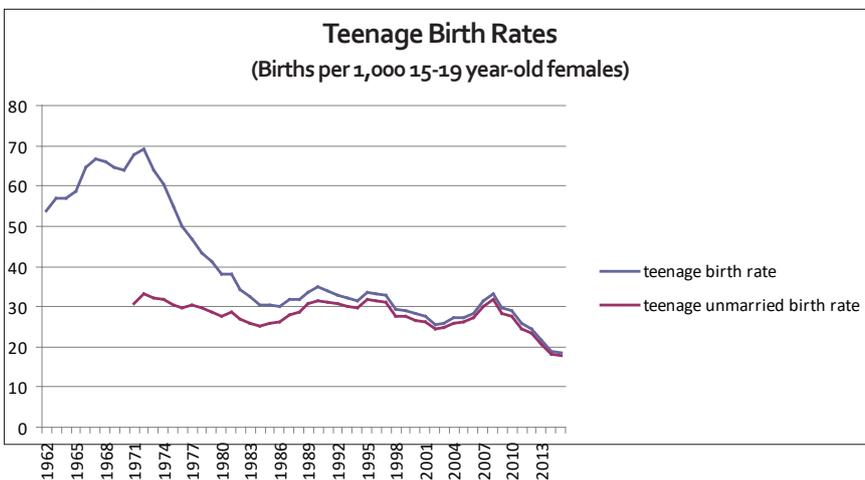


Data source: Statistics NZ Infoshare

It will be recalled that the 1967 survey of child abuse found "...children born out of wedlock were more than three times as likely as legitimate children to suffer abuse."⁴³ In fact, for 0-5 year olds, it was nearer to four times (see page 12).

"Children born out of wedlock were more than three times as likely as legitimate children to suffer abuse." (1967)⁴³

Teenage Births



Data source: Statistics New Zealand Infoshare

While the teenage birth rate was high in the 1960s, around half of the births occurred within marriage. It peaked in 1972. Thereafter, more young couples began living together without marrying while, simultaneously, more teenage mothers began raising their children alone.

Most teenage mothers are sole parents who rely on income support.

"The smaller proportion of children being offered for adoption is thought to reflect the beginnings of a changing pattern in society, with an increase both in de facto liaisons and in the proportion of mothers wanting to undertake the sole care of a child."⁴⁴

The Domestic Purposes Benefit (DPB) which enabled this was introduced in 1974. Today, while there are fewer of them, most teenage mothers are sole parents who rely on income support.⁴⁵

Young parenting poses higher risks for children.

⁴³ *Family Matters: Child Welfare in Twentieth Century New Zealand*, Bronwyn Dalley, Auckland university Press, 1998, p284

⁴⁴ New Zealand Official Yearbook 1976

⁴⁵ *Teen parents and benefit receipt - paper to Welfare Working Group*, Barbara Collins, MSD, 8 June 2010

Teenage births present two problems. Firstly, young parenting poses higher risks for children.

In *Social Developments*, Tim Garlick discussed recent initiatives to reduce New Zealand's "particularly high rate of child deaths resulting from maltreatment":

*"Another way to reduce the maltreatment of children was to address New Zealand's high rate of teenage pregnancy, which was linked to social problems such as abuse, educational under-achievement, crime, and mental health issues."*⁴⁶

In 2006, MSD conducted a review of research into child maltreatment and looked at the age of mothers:

"Young mothers, particularly those who are unsupported or in violent relationships, are more likely to carry out, or fail to intervene to stop severe abuse of children than older mothers."

*"However, it is the factors associated with young parenthood rather than the age of the mother per se that raise the risk of maltreatment of children: unplanned pregnancy, stress from low income, depression, high dependency, inadequate support and lack of parenting knowledge and skill."*⁴⁷

Furthermore, the younger the teenage mother is, the higher the risk of serious abuse becomes.

A Ministry of Justice paper noted:

*"Overseas research indicates that children with mothers aged under 15 years, or aged under 17 years with two or more children, are significantly more likely to be fatally abused or experience serious injury as a result than children with mothers aged 25 years or over."*⁴⁸

Secondly, teenage births are often the beginnings of long-term sole parent families, also linked by child welfare authorities to higher abuse levels from earliest analysis.

Single Mothers

Returning again to the 1967 survey of child abuse, it found, *"The abused children tended to come from larger families, were ex-nuptial births, and lived in homes from which one or both parents were absent."*⁴⁹

These early findings were published in 1972. Throughout the period that followed, the rate of ex-nuptial births and number of sole mothers climbed. (At any given time a majority would rely on welfare, the significance of which will become apparent).

"Young mothers, particularly those who are unsupported or in violent relationships, are more likely to carry out, or fail to intervene to stop severe abuse of children than older mothers."

Ministry of Social Development, 2008

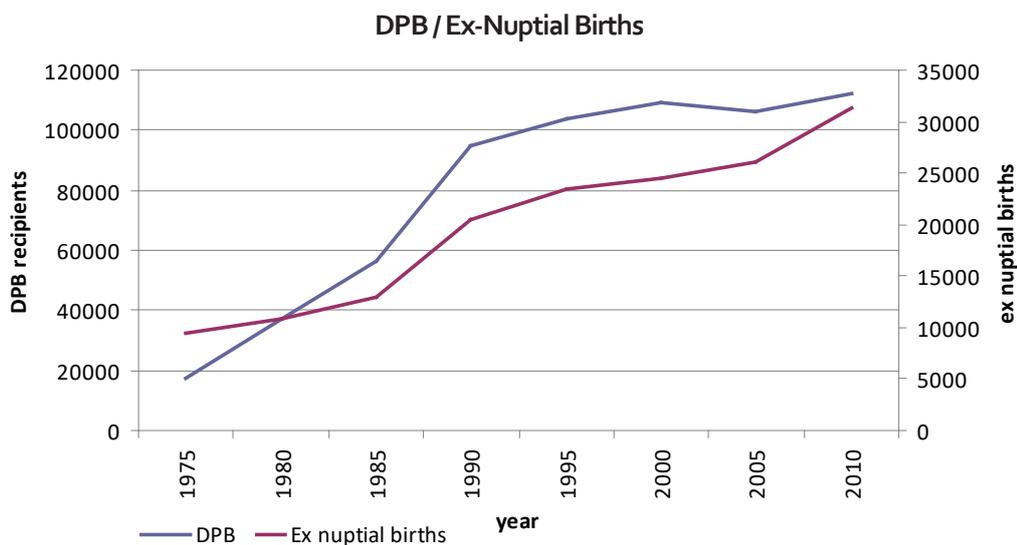
Teenage births are often the beginnings of long-term sole parent families.

46 *Social Developments: an organisational history of the Ministry of Social Development and its predecessors, 1860-2011*, Tim Garlick, Steele Roberts Aotearoa, 2012, p285

47 *Preventing Physical and Psychological Maltreatment of Children in Families Review of Research for Campaign FOR Action on Family Violence*, Summary of findings, Centre for Social Research and Evaluation, Te Pokapu Rangahau Arotaki Hapori, March 2008

48 *Who is vulnerable or hard-to-reach in the provision of maternity, Well Child and early parenting support services?* Ministry of Justice, 30 June, 2010

49 *Past Judgement: Social Policy in New Zealand History*, edited by Bronwyn Dalley and Margaret Tennant, Otago University Press, 2004, p182-4



Data sources: MSD, The Statistical Report 2012/Statistics NZ, Infoshare

According to Bronwyn Dalley, “The number of child abuse and neglect investigations soared in the late 1980s.”⁵⁰ That is consistent with the especially steep rise in ex-nuptial births and DPB numbers evident between 1985 and 1990.

(It also coincides with a rapid climb in the unemployment rate to reach over 11% in 1991.⁵¹ The first report in this series showed however that when unemployment declined, the rate of single parenthood did not. Neither have abuse statistics.)

By 2001, single parents accounted for 28% of all families with dependent children. The level has stayed thereabouts since. Single parents do not constitute a static group however:

“It is important to note that while at any one time just over one-in-four families with dependent children contain only one resident parent, the chances of ever living in a sole parent family are higher, with an estimated third of children having lived in a sole mother family by age 17.”⁵²

By international standards, New Zealand’s rate of sole parenthood is high.

When unemployment declined, the rate of single parenthood did not. Neither have abuse statistics.

Step / Blended Families

Being a single parent is a transitional stage for many. But not a great deal is known about movements in and out of sole-parenthood. This is summarised in a briefing for the Families Commission in 2004:

“There are...some surprising gaps in our knowledge of family forms (such as the lack of census data on blended families, stepfamilies and joint-custody families)... A significant minority will be sole parents, a more common family form among Māori and Pacific than European families. Many families will be stepfamilies or blended families, with children living with one adult who is not their biological parent, and some children will be being brought up by their grandparents, or other family members... The Christchurch Health and Development Study showed ... 16 percent of those born into a two-parent family had experienced family breakdown by five years, but over 70 percent re-entered a two-parent family within five

By international standards, New Zealand’s rate of sole parenthood is high.

50 Family Matters: Child Welfare in Twentieth Century New Zealand, Bronwyn Dalley, Auckland university Press, 1998, p342

51 Trading Economics: New Zealand employment rate 1985-2016

52 New Zealand Families Today, Factsheet 01, July 2013, SuperU

years. Around 70 percent of those born to a single (unpartnered) parent entered a two-parent family by the age of five. Just over half (55 percent) of remarriages ended in breakdown within four years, and almost a fifth of the CHDS sample had lived in a stepfamily for some period between birth and 16 years... In the 1995 Survey of New Zealand Women: Family, Education and Employment, about 40 percent of children living with a sole mother saw her repartner within five years of separation from a partnership, whether from a cohabiting union or a marriage. For children, the probabilities of being in a stepfamily or blended family were higher for Māori, and higher for more recent birth cohorts than for earlier ones.”⁵³

“There are some surprising gaps in our knowledge of family forms.”

Families Commission, 2004

Much evidence points to families becoming more unstable over time. The percentage of children born into single-parent families seems to have stabilised but the cohabitations (which will probably ensue) are becoming less enduring.

In 2009 the Australian Institute of Family Studies found:

“Despite its increasing prevalence, cohabitation is a relatively unstable living arrangement as evidenced by the fact that the vast majority of couples either marry or separate within the first few years of the union. Indeed, the probability of cohabitation ending in separation rather than marriage has increased.”⁵⁴

“Cohabitation is a relatively unstable living arrangement.”

Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2009

Additionally the Office for National Statistics in Britain reported, “...over time, progressively fewer of those who live together ultimately marry, and a larger proportion separate.”⁵⁵

In 2013, SuperU (formerly Families Commission) said no estimates were available for how many children live in stepfamilies:

“However the rates are likely to be at least as great as in Australia (7 percent) and England (9.5 percent). One estimate is that as many as 20 percent of children in New Zealand will have the experience of living with a step-parent before they turn 17 years.”⁵⁶

All of the above forms or features of family formation raise the risk of child abuse.

Current Evidence About Child Abuse

Have the original 1967 findings held true? Yes. Most abused children today come from a single parent family, nearly always from one receiving a benefit. Maori, and to a lesser degree Pacific families remain over-represented. ‘High parenting demands’ imposed by the presence of young children clustered together and multiple births increases risk; so does young maternal age.⁵⁷

The over-representation of single-parent families is underscored by a recent project led by Rhema Vaithianathan, an economics professor from Auckland University, who explored the possibility of developing a risk prediction model for child maltreatment.

The associated feasibility study showed that 26.6% of the 2010 birth cohort⁵⁸ were born to a single parent. Of these children, 7.9% had a substantiated finding

No estimates were available for how many children live in stepfamilies.

⁵³ *New Zealand Families today*, A Briefing for the Families Commission, July 2004

⁵⁴ Fact check: Are de facto relationships more unstable than marriages? Fact Check, ABC News, 30 October, 2013

⁵⁵ *Cohabitation and marriage in Britain since the 1970s*, Office for National Statistics 46 Population Trends nr 145 Autumn

⁵⁶ *New Zealand Families Today*, Fact Sheet 01, July 2013, SuperU, p7

⁵⁷ *The feasibility of using predictive risk modelling to identify new-born children who are high priority for preventive services* - companion technical report, MSD, February 2014

⁵⁸ Identified through birth or benefit data by three months of age.

of maltreatment by age two. For those children not born to a single parent (or whose parental partnership status was unknown) only 0.9% had a finding. The incidence of abuse in the single parent situation is almost nine times greater.⁵⁹

The incidence of abuse in the single parent situation is almost nine times greater.

The data is presented in the table below followed by the strongly-associated findings by the caregiver’s time on a benefit. The report noted:

“...in most cases a child included in benefit appears with a single parent or caregiver...”⁶⁰

Profile and cumulative incidence of substantiated findings of maltreatment by age 2, children in the study population born in 2010 (N=63,176)

	All	% in population	Incidence of finding %
Single parent	Single parent	22.1	8.2
	Single parent and no father listed in birth registration	4.5	6.5
	Not single parent or partnership status unknown	73.4	0.9
Time on benefit in last 5 years	More than 80%	10.7	11.3
	20<-80%	17.1	6.6
	Up to 20%	13.5	2.1
	No time	58.7	0.3

Data source: The feasibility of using predictive risk modelling to identify new-born children who are high priority for preventive services - companion technical report, MSD

For those children whose caregiver had spent ‘more than 80%’ of their time on a benefit in the last five years, 11.3% would have a finding of abuse. Those who had ‘no time’ on benefit had an abuse finding of just 0.3%. The likelihood of abuse for the first group was almost 38 times greater than for those with no benefit history.

The likelihood of abuse for the first group was almost 38 times greater than for those with no benefit history.

Based on the study data, single-parent families accounted for 76% of substantiated maltreatment findings by age two for the 2010 birth cohort. Of 16,805 single parent families (26.6% of 63,176), 7.91% had a finding (1,330). This represents 76% of the total 1,750 findings.⁶¹

The likelihood of maltreatment increasing with greater time spent on a benefit also surfaced in a MSD study *Children’s contact with MSD services*⁶² which

59 *The feasibility of using predictive risk modelling to identify new-born children who are high priority for preventive services - companion technical report, MSD, February 2014, p7*

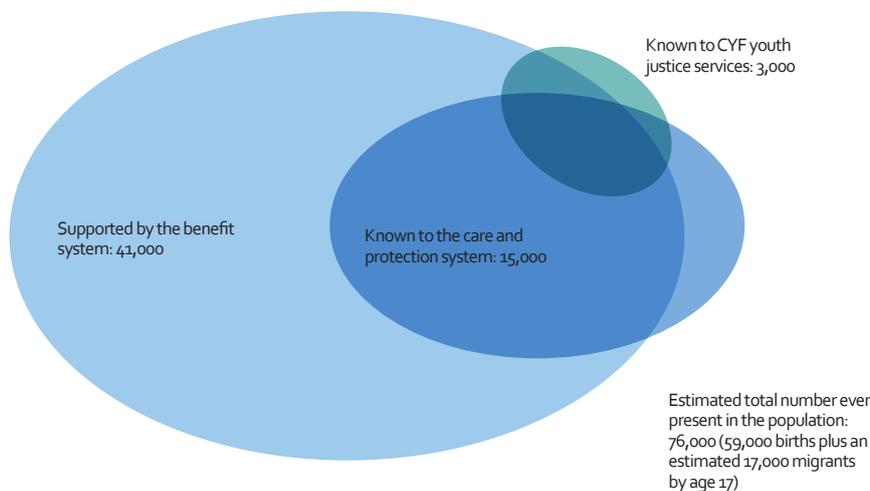
60 *The feasibility of using predictive risk modelling to identify new-born children who are high priority for preventive services, MSD, February 2014, p14*

61 *The feasibility of using predictive risk modelling to identify new-born children who are high priority for preventive services - companion technical report, MSD, February 2014, p9*

62 *Children’s contact with MSD services, MSD, 2012*

analysed the overlap between children's contact with the benefit system, care and protection, and youth justice services. From a 1993 birth cohort of 59,000 (plus 17,000 migrants by age 17), 41,000 had been on a benefit, 15,000 had experienced contact with the care and protection services and 3,000 were known to youth justice services.

Figure 1 Contact with MSD services before age 17, 1993 birth cohort



Source: Children's contact with MSD services, MSD, 2012

The data revealed significant risk differences between the non-benefit and benefit cohorts, especially for children whose caregiver had long periods on welfare. The calculated and published risks were however minimised by comparing the *benefit cohort* to the *total birth cohort*. ('Why' is addressed later.)

Further evidence of the disproportional rate of child abuse in single parent families was provided by a 'real life' experiment. In 2000, *Early Start*, a trial home visitation programme, was set-up in Christchurch. One aim was the "...reduction of child abuse" including, "...reduced agency contact for child abuse and neglect" and "...reduced use of physical punishment by parents".⁶³ Plunket nurses identified the most at-risk families who were then recruited and divided between the visitation programme and a control group to compare outcomes over time. At the point of recruitment, over 60% were single-parent families. Furthermore, "...the majority (over 80%) of families were single-parent families at some time during the 36-month study period." 90% were reliant on welfare.

Child Abuse Perpetrators

Despite most abuse occurring in single-parent settings it is not implicit that the mother (usually the primary caregiver in single-parent families) is the perpetrator. An unknown number of single mothers have 'partners', live with other family members or unrelated adults. It is also likely, based on the data showing lower incidence in those families with no father recorded in birth registration, and US evidence (see page 30/31), that single mothers without partners pose fewer risks than single mothers with partners.

According to the Families Commission:

"In 2006, people who sexually abused children and young people were mostly men. Males who physically and emotionally abused children and young people also outnumbered females. Females who neglected their children or young people outnumbered males more than two to one, and

Single-parent families accounted for 76% of substantiated maltreatment findings by age two for the 2010 birth cohort.

It is not implicit that the mother is the perpetrator.

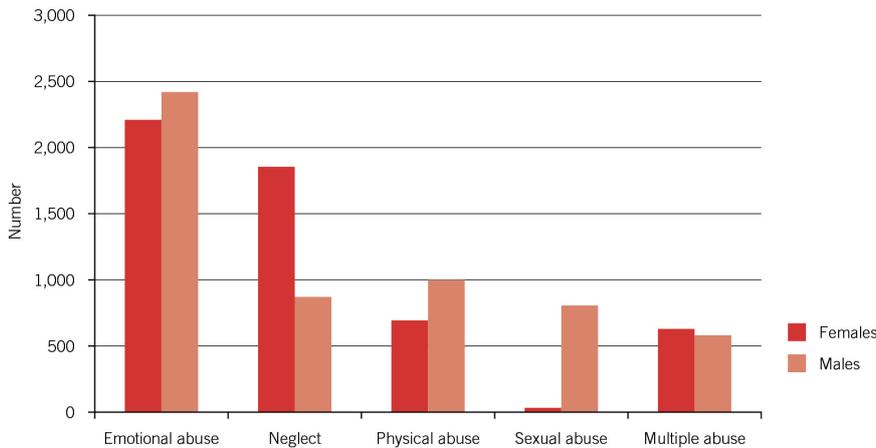
It is also likely that single mothers without partners pose fewer risks than single mothers with partners.

63 *Early Start Evaluation Report*, November 2005, David Fergusson, John Horwood, Elizabeth Ridder, Hildegard Grant, Christchurch Health and Development Study, Department of Psychological Medicine, Christchurch School of Medicine and Health Sciences, Christchurch, New Zealand

were slightly more likely to inflict multiple types of abuse on children and young people.... 76 percent of persons convicted of assaulting a child were men and 24 percent were women.”⁶⁴

The likelihood of abuse increases for children born onto a benefit.

FIGURE 7: NUMBER OF FEMALE AND MALE ABUSERS OF SPECIFIC TYPES OF ABUSE AND NEGLECT, 2006



Source: Family Violence Statistics Report, Families Commission, 2009

In summary, based on the 2010 birth data, over three quarters of children with a substantiated finding of abuse by age two were born to a single parent. The likelihood of abuse increases for children born onto a benefit, and incrementally, with increasing time spent dependent. The abuse is not necessarily committed by the primary caregiver.

Current Evidence About Children Who Die From Maltreatment

As mentioned earlier, child deaths are rare events and cannot be taken as a reliable indicator of the underlying incidence of child abuse, especially when a significant number are the results of perhaps more spontaneous events such as filicide / parental suicide and neonaticide. Data does exist, however, about perpetrators of Child Abuse and Neglect (CAN) deaths.⁶⁵ In the period 2009 – 2012, ‘stepfathers’ were hugely over-represented in the infliction of fatal injuries:

Table 12: Associations between death type and relationship of offender to deceased in CAN deaths, New Zealand, 2009–12

DEATH TYPE	Number of CAN death events n=34	Number of CAN child deaths associated with death events n=37	Offender role n=34				
			Mother n=13	Father n=7	Step-father n=9	Female caregiver n=3	Unknown n=2
Fatal inflicted injury	19	19	1	4	9	3	2
Filicide and parental suicide*	8	11	5	3			
Neonaticide	4	4	4				
Fatal neglectful supervision	3	3	3				

In the period 2009 – 2012, ‘stepfathers’ were hugely over-represented in the infliction of fatal injuries.

Source: Family Violence Death Review Committee, Fourth Annual Report

64 Family Violence Statistics Report, Families Commission, August 2009, p18, p87

65 The Fifth Annual Report from the Family Violence Death Review Committee states: “The Committee has not included updated quantitative data on all New Zealand family violence deaths in this report. This is because insufficient time has passed since our last report for a complete set of information on deaths that occurred in 2013 and 2014 to be finalised for reporting purposes. A data report, which sets out general trends across all family violence deaths, including family violence deaths occurring in 2013 and 2014, will be published by the Committee in mid-2016.”

Of the nineteen children who died from inflicted injuries in the period 2009-12, fourteen were Maori (74%), three were Pacific (16%) and two were other ethnicities. Five of the eight cases of filicide and parental suicide were NZ European biological parents. Three cases were fathers and five were mothers.⁶⁶

A 2006 CYF report found:

*“Māori children are more exposed to the risk of **fatal** child maltreatment associated with having a stepparent, as Māori children are twice as likely as New Zealand European and other children to be raised in a blended family.”⁶⁷ (added emphasis)*

“Māori children are more exposed to the risk of fatal child maltreatment associated with having a stepparent.”

CYF report, 2006

Child Abuse And International Evidence

An American professor commissioned by MSD to review and present international evidence into family resilience made the following pertinent observation:

“While the lack of New Zealand data limits our understanding about how resilience might manifest itself among New Zealand families, [these] high-level findings are likely to have considerable relevance to New Zealand.”⁶⁸

Overseas analysis provides a great deal of useful information about the family circumstances of maltreated children.

This section – with the exception of the UK – features only government data about care and protection cases. It briefly covers family structure and perpetrators.

Some apparent anomalies between jurisdictions are explained by different recording methods.

For instance, Australia classifies ‘one biological parent and one non-biologically-related parent’ as step / blended families whereas the United States records the same as a single parent with a partner.

The Canadian data includes a fifth abuse category – ‘exposure to domestic violence’.

Australia

In 2012, the Australian Institute for Families Studies⁶⁹ explored “...whether some family structures expose children to a higher risk of child maltreatment than others”.⁷⁰

Children in a sole mother family were 4.5 times more likely to suffer abuse than those in an intact two-parent family.

⁶⁶ Family Violence Death Review Committee, Fourth Annual Report, January 2013 to December 2013, p53

⁶⁷ Children at increased risk of death from maltreatment and strategies for prevention, CYF, 2006, p5

⁶⁸ Ariel Kalil, Assistant Professor, Harris School of Public Policy Studies University of Chicago, commissioned by MSD, 2003 to write *Family Resilience and Good Child Outcomes: A Review of the Literature*

⁶⁹ Australian Government’s key research body in the area of family wellbeing

⁷⁰ *Family structure and child maltreatment: Do some family types place children at greater risk?* Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2012

Using child protection data, it produced the following table:

Table 1: Comparison of Australian demographic data and child protection data

Family structure	Population representation, by family structure (ABS, 2011)	Maltreatment substantiations, by family structure (AIHW, 2012)
Intact two-parent	73%	32.4%
Sole-mother	17%	33.7%
Step/Blended	7%	14.9%
Sole-father	3%	4.5%
Other relative/kin	<1%	3.6%
Foster care	<1%	1%
Other	<1%	9.9%

Source: Family structure and child maltreatment: Do some family types place children at greater risk? Australian Institute of Family Studies

Despite 'sole-mothers' accounting for just 17% of all families, they were responsible for the largest share of child maltreatment substantiations. Children in a sole-mother family were 4.5 times more likely to suffer abuse than those in an intact two-parent family. Children in step / blended families were 4.8 times more likely to be maltreated than those in intact two-parent families.

In 2014, the same agency made the following statement about perpetrators of child abuse:

*"It is clear that with the exception of child sexual abuse, most abuse and neglect is perpetrated by parents and/or caregivers. This is relatively predictable given that children spend most of their time with parents and are reliant on them for care, nurture, and protection. However, research on perpetrators of child abuse and neglect is limited in Australia."*⁷¹

United States

The United States Child Protection Service publishes highly detailed data periodically.

While the Australian data makes no differentiation between married or cohabiting intact families, the US data does. The most recent *National Incidence Survey* showed:

*"...variations in family structure and living arrangement classified children into six categories: (1) living with two married biological parents, (2) living with other married parents (not both biological but both having a legal parental relationship to the child), (3) living with two unmarried parents (biological or other), (4) living with one parent who had an unmarried partner (not the child's parent) in the household, (5) living with one parent who had no partner in the household, and (6) living with no parent.... The groups differed in rates of every maltreatment category and across both definitional standards. Children living with their married biological parents universally had the lowest rate, whereas those living with a single parent who had a cohabiting partner in the household had the highest rate in all maltreatment categories. Compared to children living with married biological parents, those whose single parent had a live-in partner had more than 8 times the rate of maltreatment overall, over 10 times the rate of abuse, and nearly 8 times the rate of neglect."*⁷²

Children in step / blended families were 4.8 times more likely to be maltreated than those in intact two-parent families.

*"Children living with their married biological parents universally had the lowest rate."*⁷²

71 Who abuses children? Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2014

72 Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS-4) Report to Congress, 2010

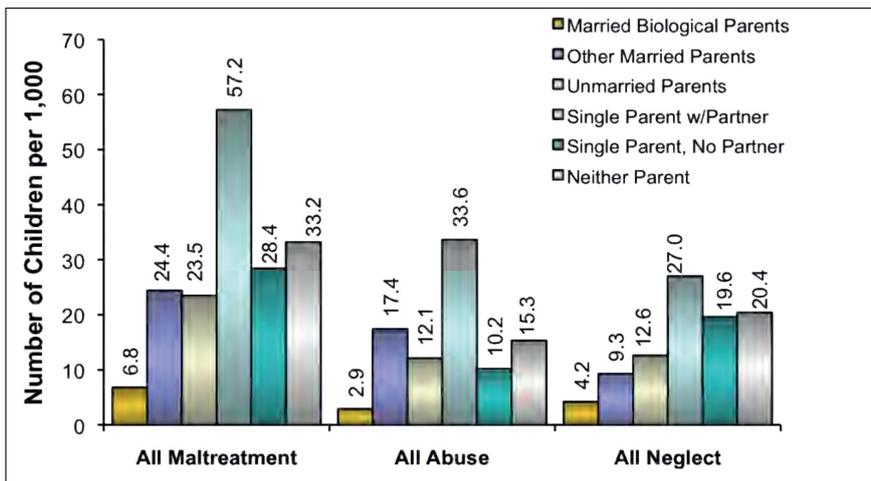


Figure 5–1. Incidence of Harm Standard Maltreatment by Family Structure and Living Arrangement.

Source: Fourth National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect (NIS–4)⁷³

A further 2013 analysis by the United States Human and Health Services Department examined gender of perpetrators and found:

“Perpetrator data were examined by sex for selected maltreatment types. Of the perpetrators who medically neglected their victims, 76.0 percent were women. Of the perpetrators who sexually abused their victims, 87.8 percent were men. Perpetrators who physically abused their victims were split evenly between the sexes with 49.6 percent men and 48.2 percent women.”⁷⁴

United Kingdom

The care and protection authorities (which operate independently in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland) publish a variety of statistics relating to age, gender and ethnicity of children but none about family backgrounds.⁷⁵

However, the Australian Institute of Family Studies referenced a longitudinal study conducted by the University of Bristol which found:

“Children from sole-mother families had a higher risk of registration on the child protection register than those living in “two-parent” families. The authors reported that the effects of sole mother status were modified by parental background characteristics such as young parental age, low educational achievement, adverse childhood experiences, and past psychiatric history, as well as socio-economic factors. Poverty was found to be the highest risk factor for both investigation and registration for all children on the register, but again this was moderated by other factors. The extra stresses commonly experienced by sole-mother families created a higher risk environment for these children. Finally, although the relative risk was higher for sole-mother families than for “two-parent” families, the vast majority of sole-mother families (96.5%) had no record of child maltreatment registration.”⁷⁶

“Those whose single parent had a live-in partner had more than 8 times the rate of maltreatment overall.”⁷²

“The extra stresses commonly experienced by sole-mother families created a higher risk environment for these children.”

Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2012

73 By way of explanation, “The Harm Standard ... is relatively stringent in that it generally requires that an act or omission result in demonstrable harm in order to be classified as abuse or neglect.”

74 *Child Maltreatment 2013*, Children’s Bureau (Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Administration for Children and Families) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, p65

75 *Characteristics of children in need: 2014 to 2015*, Department of Education, England, October 2015

76 *Family structure and child maltreatment: Do some family types place children at greater risk?* Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2012

Data relating to perpetrators of abuse comes from the 2015/16 Crime Survey which asked, for the first time, questions about the experience of childhood abuse.

Biological mothers appear to be the most common abuser, with biological fathers not far behind.

The Office of National Statistics published the following findings:

“Perpetrators were most likely to be a parent for those that had suffered psychological abuse (father, 35% and mother, 40%) or physical abuse (father, 39% and mother, 29%).

“In contrast, survivors of sexual assault by rape or penetration reported that the perpetrator was most likely to be a friend or acquaintance (30%) or other family member (26%).”⁷⁷

Canada

Like the United States, Canada also routinely reports on the national incidence of child abuse and neglect.

Their 2003 edition⁷⁸ contained the following table:

TABLE 7-1 Household Structure, by Primary Category of Substantiated Child Maltreatment in Canada, Excluding Quebec, in 2003

	Primary Category of Substantiated Maltreatment										Total	
	Physical Abuse		Sexual Abuse		Neglect		Emotional Maltreatment		Exposure to Domestic Violence			
Two Parent-Biological	35%	8,770	34%	1,010	28%	8,484	26%	3,983	36%	10,710	32%	32,957
Two Parent-Blended/Step	20%	4,965	13%	376	14%	4,301	15%	2,307	15%	4,296	16%	16,245
Biological Parent and Other	3%	874	2%	–	5%	1,533	4%	583	2%	461	4%	3,493
Lone Mother	30%	7,597	40%	1,175	42%	12,724	42%	6,540	43%	12,716	39%	40,752
Lone Father	4%	1,118	4%	122	5%	1,524	6%	878	3%	776	4%	4,418
Other	8%	1,931	7%	211	6%	1,801	7%	1,079	1%	411	5%	5,433
Total Child Investigations*	100%	25,255	100%	2,936	100%	30,367	100%	15,370	100%	29,370	100%	103,298

Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect – 2003

* Based on a sample of 5,660 substantiated child maltreatment investigations with information about household structure. Rows and columns may not add up to total because low frequency estimates are not reported but are included in total. Columns may add up to 99% or 101% because of rounding.

Source: CANADIAN INCIDENCE STUDY OF REPORTED CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT – 2003: MAJOR FINDINGS

Again, lone-mother households account for the largest share of substantiated child maltreatment. It should be noted though that this table includes a new category – “exposure to domestic violence”.

If this category is removed (for international comparability) the adjusted percentages show lone-mother families responsible for 38% of the total maltreatment, followed by two-biological-parent families responsible for 30%.

As with the Australian and US data, step / blended families are also over-represented.

⁷⁷ Abuse during childhood: Findings from the Crime Survey for England and Wales, year ending March 2016, Office for National Statistics

⁷⁸ CANADIAN INCIDENCE STUDY OF REPORTED CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT – 2003: MAJOR FINDINGS, Centre for Research on Children and Families McGill University, 2003

TABLE 4-4(a) Identified Perpetrator (Relatives), by Primary Category of Substantiated Child Maltreatment, in Canada, Excluding Quebec, in 2003

	Primary Category of Substantiated Maltreatment										Total	
	Physical Abuse		Sexual Abuse		Neglect		Emotional Maltreatment		Exposure to Domestic Violence			
Relatives												
Biological Mother	50%	12,524	5%	147	83%	25,313	63%	9,713	27%	7,904	54%	55,601
Biological Father	38%	9,581	9%	260	36%	11,051	45%	6,985	73%	21,474	48%	49,351
Stepfather/Common Law Partner	12%	3,142	13%	385	9%	2,633	11%	1,681	15%	4,440	12%	12,281
Stepmother/Common Law Partner	3%	747	0%	–	1%	401	3%	456	1%	374	2%	1,978
Foster Family/Adoptive Parents	2%	541	0%	–	1%	281	2%	254	1%	154	1%	1,230
Other Relative	8%	2,016	35%	1,012	5%	1,417	11%	1,627	1%	360	6%	6,432
Child Investigations With At Least One Relative Perpetrator												
	97%	24,453	60%	1,769	98%	29,755	98%	15,112	94%	27,544	95%	98,633
Child Investigations With At Least One Non-Relative Perpetrator												
	2%	486	38%	1,110	2%	597	1%	212	4%	1,069	3%	3,474
Total Child Investigations*	100%	25,257	100%	2,935	100%	30,366	100%	15,369	100%	29,369	100%	103,298

Canadian Incidence Study of Reported Child Abuse and Neglect – 2003

* Based on a sample of 5,660 substantiated child maltreatment investigations with information about alleged perpetrators. Columns are not additive as maltreatment may have involved more than one perpetrator. Rows and columns may not add up to total because low frequency estimates are not reported but are included in total. Columns may add up to 99% or 101% because of rounding.

Source: CANADIAN INCIDENCE STUDY OF REPORTED CHILD ABUSE AND NEGLECT – 2003: MAJOR FINDINGS

Biological mothers appear to be the most common abuser, with biological fathers not far behind. Again though, after removing the “exposure to domestic violence” data, biological fathers are responsible for 38% of total maltreatment; biological mothers are responsible for 65%.

Neither of the above tables provides the family type representation in the total population so risk factors cannot be calculated.

Family structure was not included in the later 2008 incidence report. But a follow-up study using the 2008 data looked specifically at family structure for cases of neglect. It formed a sample “...constituted by randomly selecting one child per family among the 2077 children whose situations of neglect were substantiated”, and found:

“Child neglect is generally associated with single-parent families headed by mothers who are grappling with major psychological and social problems of their own. Our study qualifies this finding somewhat by showing that men are present in a not insignificant proportion of neglectful families. These men face fewer personal problems than the women in these families, and although parents with partners are likewise grappling with serious problems, their situation is not as bad as that of single parents.”⁷⁹

“Child neglect is generally associated with single-parent families headed by mothers who are grappling with major psychological and social problems of their own.”⁷⁹

The contemporary complexity of relationships is illustrated in the following diagram which highlights the multiplicity of family types:

⁷⁹ Who are these parents involved in child neglect? A differential analysis by parent gender and family structure S. Dufour et al. / Children and Youth Services Review 30 (2008) 141–156

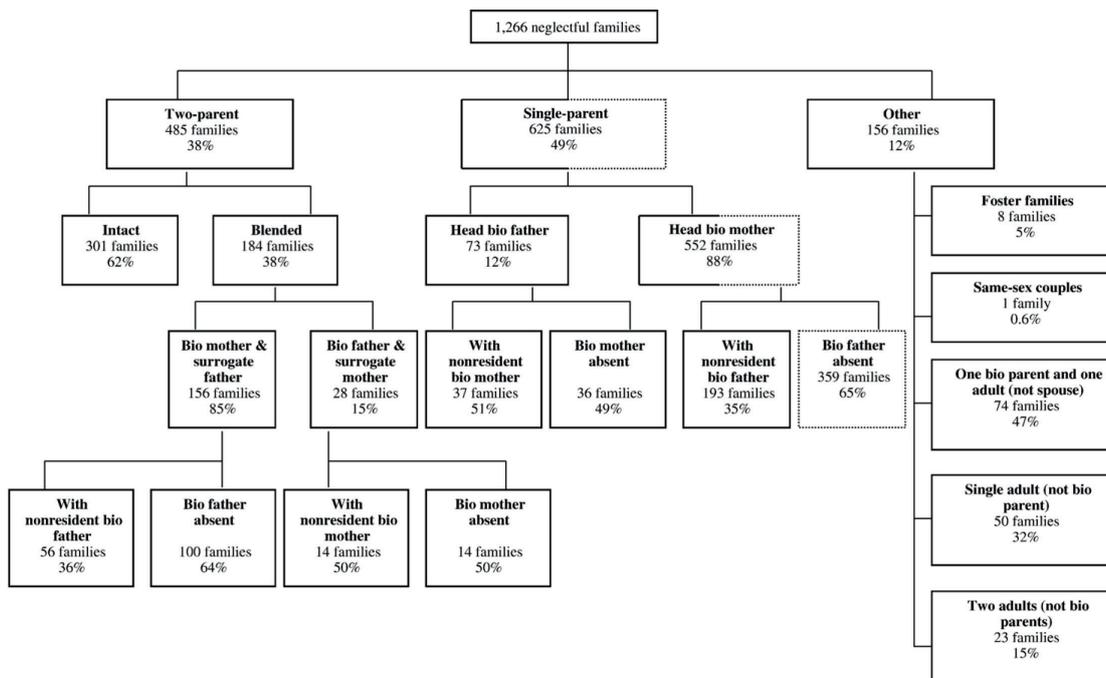


Fig. 1. Different types of family structures in which neglect is substantiated.

Source: *Who are these parents involved in child neglect? A differential analysis by parent gender and family structure*

Finally, according to the World Health Organisation:

*"In both developing and industrialized countries, poor, young, single mothers are among those at greatest risk for using violence towards their children."*⁸⁰

"Poor, young, single mothers are among those at greatest risk for using violence towards their children."

Child Deaths From Maltreatment – International Evidence

World Health Organisation

A Missouri analysis of child deaths from inflicted injury between January 1, 1992 and December 31, 1999 showed that the biological father was the perpetrator in 34.9% of cases. However, "boyfriend of mother" accounted for 24.2% of deaths. The study concluded, "Children residing in households with unrelated adults were nearly 50 times as likely to die of inflicted injuries than children residing with 2 biological parents."⁸¹

*"Children residing in households with unrelated adults were nearly 50 times as likely to die of inflicted injuries than children residing with 2 biological parents."*⁸¹

TABLE 3

Gender of Perpetrator and Relationship to Decedent Child

Relationship	n/%	Relationship	n/%	Relationship	n/%
Males	94 (71.2)	Females	34 (25.8)	Gender Unknown	4 (3.0)
Biological father	46 (34.9)	Biological mother	26 (19.7)	Babysitter	3 (2.3)
Boyfriend of mother	32 (24.2)	Female babysitter	4 (3.0)	Nonrelative	1 (0.8)
Other male relative	6 (4.5)	Other female relative	2 (1.5)		
Male nonrelative	4 (3.0)	Girlfriend of father	1 (0.8)		
Stepfather	3 (2.3)	Female, nonrelative	1 (0.8)		
Male babysitter	2 (1.5)				
Foster father	1 (0.8)				

Source: *Child Deaths Resulting From Inflicted Injuries: Household Risk Factors and Perpetrator Characteristics, Pediatrics, November 2005, VOLUME 116*

80 *World report on violence and health*, Chapter 3, Child abuse and neglect by parents and other caregivers, World Health Organisation

81 *Child Deaths Resulting From Inflicted Injuries: Household Risk Factors and Perpetrator Characteristics, Pediatrics, November 2005, VOLUME 116 / ISSUE 5*, <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/116/5/e687>

Canadian researchers Martin Daly and Margo Wilson have specialised in assessment of step families and the risks of child death:

"... in several countries, stepparents beat very young children to death at per capita rates that are more than 100 times higher than the corresponding rates for genetic parents. The most thorough analyses are for Canada, where data in a national archive of all homicides known to police indicate that children under 5 years of age were beaten to death by their putative genetic fathers at a rate of 2.6 deaths per million child-years at risk (residing with their fathers) in 1974-1990, while the corresponding rate for stepfathers was over 120 times greater at 321.6 deaths per million child-years at risk. Note that because few small children have stepfathers, this rate differential does not, in itself, convey anything about the absolute numbers of victims; what these rates represent are 74 fatal batterings by genetic fathers in 28.3 million child-years at risk, and 55 by stepfathers in 0.17 million child-years at risk. Estimates of this sort have not been made for other countries, but it is clear that this immense excess risk to stepchildren is not peculiar to Canada. In England & Wales in 1977-1990, for example, 117 children under five years of age were beaten to death by putative genetic fathers and 103 by stepfathers. As in Canada, the available population-at-large survey data indicate that fewer than 1% of British children of the same age as the victims dwelt with stepfathers, while over 90% dwelt with putative genetic fathers, and so, as in Canada, the difference in per capita rates of such fatal assaults is well over 100-fold."

A further notable finding is:

"Both registered-marriage stepfathers and de facto stepfathers (aka. commonlaw stepfathers, mothers' boyfriends, cohabitantes, and, in older literature, "paramours") are overrepresented as perpetrators of abuse in many [of the] studies..."⁸²

The international statistics are not dissimilar to New Zealand's with respect to stepfather over-representation. In this country, during the period 2009 to 2012, 19 children died from assault. Nine were killed by stepfathers. Biological fathers were responsible for four deaths and a biological mother for one. Three deaths were at the hands of related / non-related female caregivers and a further two had unknown perpetrators. Around half of the male offenders were known to police for partner abuse and three of the stepfathers had abused three or more previous partners.⁸³

The Politics Surrounding Child Abuse

For some reason the seven maltreatment deaths in New Zealand of 1967 were not acknowledged in later writings about the child abuse survey. 'Why' is left to speculation.

But historian Bronwyn Dalley refers to Ministerial concern about the report findings at the time, especially those related to ethnic disproportion, and the public dissemination of them:

"There was some disquiet in political circles when these figures were first noted. Duncan McIntyre, the Minister of Maori Affairs, believed that there could be problems with the release of these figures, and emphasised

"In several countries, stepparents beat very young children to death at per capita rates that are more than 100 times higher than the corresponding rates for genetic parents."⁸²

"It is clear that this immense excess risk to stepchildren is not peculiar to Canada."⁸²

"Both registered-marriage stepfathers and de facto stepfathers are overrepresented."⁸²

⁸² *The "Cinderella effect": Elevated mistreatment of stepchildren in comparison to those living with genetic parents*, Martin Daley and Margo Wilson, Department of Psychology, Neuroscience & Behaviour McMaster University Hamilton, Ontario, Canada, 1985

⁸³ *Family Violence Death Review Committee, Fourth Annual Report*, January 2013 to December 2013

that the report should stress that abuse was not an issue of major social importance. Minister of Social Welfare Lance Adams-Schneider concurred, noting that the differences in the Maori, Pacific Islands and Pakeha levels may be more apparent than real, and were perhaps due to the different economic levels of the three groups.”⁸⁴

This is an early example of political obfuscation. (Coincidentally, Lance Adams-Schneider was the National MP who agitated most strongly for the passage of the DPB legislation in 1973.)

Much later, in 2000, Judge Mick Brown was tasked with reviewing CYF after a series of child abuse deaths:

“We know too, that the shape of families has changed greatly. With the increasing incidence of single parent families, blended families, joint custody etc, all of these factors are confusing both to parents and children. But one reassuring point stands out from the mountain of research on these phenomena and that is that internal family dynamics are considerably more important than family structure and affecting delinquency.”⁸⁵

He presented his findings to then-Social Development Minister Steve Maharey who had similar inclinations about family – that structure was unimportant. He famously stated in 2003, *“I know of no social science that says a nuclear family is more successful than other kinds. It is whether you have loving, nurturing family.”⁸⁶*

Yet, separating *“family dynamics”* from *“family structure”* is untenable. Disrupted and degenerating family dynamics push family members apart while positive and supportive dynamics hold them together. Intact families are testament to good family dynamics. Parental commitment and stability – as expressed by marriage⁸⁷ – create the safest environment for children. That doesn’t mean that married biological parents guarantee child safety 100% of the time or that other settings can’t protect children well, but the chances start reducing as families move away from the married model. Some influential thinkers would deny this and, perhaps as a consequence, have failed to seek out evidence that may contradict those beliefs. Their proliferation in the public service, academia and parliament has left New Zealand too often obliged to rely on international evidence. Literature reviews have had to suffice.

Remaining in the year 2000, one such review of research into the circumstances and characteristics of familial child abusers was conducted by MSD and stated:

“The research does confirm a likely link between child maltreatment and family fertility patterns and family structure.”

A resistance to the finding quickly followed:

“But that association is extremely complex and may be mediated by a number of situational and environmental variables.”

And:

“A large body of evidence suggests that the incidence of reported child maltreatment is over-represented among single parent families and blended families. Much of that research, however, is based on relatively

Social Development Minister Steve Maharey famously stated in 2003, “I know of no social science that says a nuclear family is more successful than other kinds.”

Separating “family dynamics” from “family structure” is untenable.

Intact families are testament to good family dynamics.

⁸⁴ *Past Judgement: Social Policy in New Zealand History*, edited by Bronwyn Dalley and Margaret Tennant, Otago University Press, 2004, p182

⁸⁵ *Care and protection is about adult behaviour*, The Ministerial Review of the

Department of Child, Youth and Family Services, Michael J A Brown, December 2000

⁸⁶ *Two-parent families still the best*, Garth George, New Zealand Herald, November 27, 2003

⁸⁷ *Child Poverty and Family Structure: What is the evidence telling us?* Family First, 2016, summarised New Zealand and international evidence showing the risk of parental separation for cohabiting parents by the time a child is aged five is 4-6 times greater than for married parents.

simple comparisons of the proportion of such families in the general population compared to their representation among families reported in maltreatment statistics. That type of analysis must be treated with considerable caution.”

The objection becomes more specific:

“Some of these groups, particularly single parent families who are female-headed and receiving welfare, may be under significantly higher levels of surveillance by public welfare agencies (and, indeed, neighbours) than other parents. That surveillance may contribute to higher reported rates of child maltreatment among those groups. In addition, the impacts of familial socioeconomic position need to be teased out from the impact of families’ structural and demographic characteristics. This is particularly problematic because disadvantage, in itself, tends to be correlated with particular family features such as single parenthood and female-headed households.”⁸⁸

The review illustrates a prevailing dogma which may explain why New Zealand has been slow to conduct analysis into child abuse and family circumstances using its own CYF data. Findings might discomfort advocates of single parenting and state support. That reticence would also shed light on why, when MSD researchers eventually examined the correlation between children on benefit and those known to CYF, they failed to make meaningful cohort comparisons, thereby minimising risk incidence.

The major published finding was:

*“While most supported by the benefit system in childhood had no contact with care and protection services, as a population group their likelihood of contact was 1.5 times that for the **cohort overall**.”⁸⁹ (added emphasis)*

Using the non-benefit cohort, ex-Government Minister Rodney Hide re-analysed the data and found:

“...benefit-supported children are six times more likely to be abused or neglected. They are 14 times more likely to be known to Youth Justice. And the longer the time on a benefit, the worse it gets.”⁹⁰

Later, in 2006, an MSD report about identifying children at risk of fatal abuse said:

“It would be inappropriate, for example, to suggest the risk of fatal child maltreatment is higher on the basis of being a child of a sole parent or a child having a low birth weight.”⁹¹

Yet ‘stepfathers’ disproportionately inflict fatal injuries on children. What is more important – appropriateness or accuracy?

It follows that it might also be “inappropriate” to suggest the risk of non-fatal maltreatment is higher “on the basis of being a child of a sole parent”. To say otherwise however would seem to defy any point in researching risk.

After National became government in 2008, the acquisition of robust data became central to social policy. The actuarial / investment approach required historical knowledge of welfare dependence, use of government social services, progression from childhood reliance into adult reliance and other measurable indicators of social disadvantage over a lifetime.

Findings might discomfort advocates of single parenting and state support.

“Benefit-supported children are six times more likely to be abused or neglected.”⁹⁰

What is more important – appropriateness or accuracy?

88 FAMILIAL CAREGIVERS’ PHYSICAL ABUSE AND NEGLECT OF CHILDREN: A LITERATURE REVIEW, MSD, 2000

89 Children’s contact with MSD services, MSD, 2012

90 Why welfare needs health warning, Rodney Hide, NBR, September 21, 2013

91 Children at increased risk of death from maltreatment and strategies for prevention, CYF, 2006, pvii

Unfortunately, parliamentary opposition, aided by the media, still seeks to disrupt progress. In 2015 the plug was pulled on the promising *Predictive Risk Modelling* work referenced earlier. Despite a proven very high 'capture' rate produced by the overlap between early and extended benefit receipt, single parenthood and CYF involvement, the Minister of Social Development decided to proceed no further. New to the job, Anne Tolley might have misunderstood the intent behind the next stages of the project.

Tim Dare, associate professor of philosophy at the University of Auckland, who had provided an ethical analysis of the PRM tool, responded to the decision in an opinion piece:

"A minister sees a briefing paper with a proposal to test a computer model designed to identify children at risk of maltreatment. She reacts strongly. "Not on my watch!" she writes in the margin, "these children are not lab-rats". The study is shelved.

The media obtain the briefing paper, complete with the marginalia, and publicise it. The Opposition seize on the lab-rats cry and use it in the House against the Minister of Social Development and the ministry.

Should we feel relieved? Have we averted another unfortunate experiment? No. The minister's reaction, and the media and Opposition response to it should make us feel uneasy.

The problem is not the shelving of the study – though that was a mistake too – rather it is the chilling effect of the knee-jerk and political response to an attempt to produce evidence for important social policy. Science collided with politics, and politics won."⁹²

MSD officially commented:

"This study, had it proceeded, would not have displaced standard response. Agencies such as Child Youth and Family and the Police would have, at all times, continued to act on notifications in relation to vulnerable children, as they do now. All children would have received the full range of support available from agencies.

However, as noted, the study is not proceeding."⁹³

A further aspect of child abuse politicisation is the habit of putting up causative factors that suit broader, vaguer agendas. For instance, those who believe that, in general, the state should tax and redistribute more, primarily blame the maltreatment and neglect of children on poverty.

Poverty

Of all the conditions put up as precursors of child abuse, poverty is the most common.

More than once, quoted material in this paper alludes to poverty being the strongest marker for child abuse.

To aid understanding of the relationship between poverty and child abuse, an approximate Venn diagram can be constructed from known statistics.

In 2015 the plug was pulled on the promising Predictive Risk Modelling work referenced earlier.

"The minister's reaction, and the media and Opposition response to it should make us feel uneasy."⁹²

"Science collided with politics, and politics won."⁹²

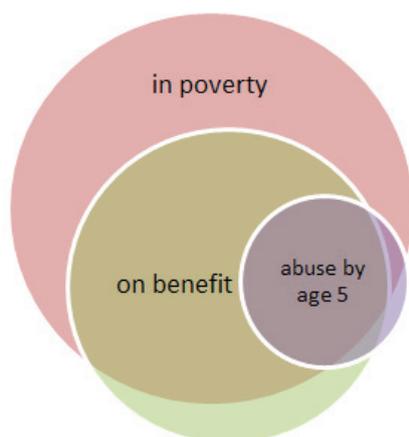
⁹² Anne Tolley's 'lab rats' call inflammatory political rhetoric, Tim Dare, Dominion Post, August 4, 2015

⁹³ Predictive Modelling, MSD

According to Auckland University:

“Using data on care and protection outcomes for all children in the birth cohort, we estimate that 5.4% of all children in New Zealand are maltreated by age 5. We also estimate that the average rate of maltreatment amongst children who were never on a benefit is 1.4%”⁹⁴

The current 0-5 year old demographic is approximately 370,000. On average⁹⁵ 27% – 99,900 – of these children are in poverty.⁹⁶ Typically, 20% – 74,000 – would receive a benefit.⁹⁷ If 5.4% of all children are maltreated by age five, that equates to 19,980 children. Based on the Auckland University study cohort, 86% (17,183) would appear in the benefit system by age five:



This representation of the relationships shows that the chance of being poor and abused is significantly smaller than the chance of being on a benefit and abused. (This non-scientific Venn diagram is similar in type to the one created by MSD and reproduced on page 27).

Philip Gillingham from the University of Queensland has been a strong critic of predictive risk modelling. He wrote:

“...the ‘primary covariate’, or strongest predictor identified by the PRM is poverty, identified as the length of time spent by the main caregiver on public welfare benefits. In order of strength, the other main predictors are the relationship status of the main caregiver as ‘single parent’ and the caregiver’s care and protection history as a child and the care and protection history of other children in the family.”⁹⁸

Time spent on a benefit is not, however, a satisfactory identifier for poverty. Not all caregivers on a benefit are below the poverty threshold and around half of all families in poverty have a full or part-time worker(s).⁹⁹ The only accurate marker for poverty is low family income but the feasibility study did not record incomes.

Those who believe that, in general, the state should tax and redistribute more, primarily blame the maltreatment and neglect of children on poverty.

“It is the presence or absence of adult support that makes the greatest difference in determining whether child abuse is likely to be present or absent within poor families.”¹⁰⁰

94 *Vulnerable children: Can administrative data be used to identify children at risk of adverse outcomes?*, Centre for Applied Research in Economics (CARE) Department of Economics, University of Auckland, September 2012

95 Averaged over the 6 years 2009-2014.

96 *Household Incomes in New Zealand: Trends in indicators of inequality and hardship 1982-2014*, p103, 60% contemp median

97 *Child Poverty Monitor: Technical Report*, Figure 44. Proportion of all children aged 0–17 years who were reliant on a benefit recipient by age and benefit type, New Zealand as at end of June 2015

98 *Re-imagining Social Work in Aotearoa New Zealand* blog, October 8, 2015

99 *Household incomes in New Zealand: Trends in indicators of inequality and hardship 1982-2014*, Bryan Perry, MSD, August 2015, p129

From *The Child Abuse Crisis: The Disintegration of Marriage, Family, and the American Community* by Patrick F. Fagan, Ph.D:

“Traditionally, the variable used to explain a rise in the incidence of child abuse has been poverty. The most recent National Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect illustrates this pro-poverty bias. However, Richard Gelles of the University Of Rhode Island Department Of Sociology, a recognized expert on abuse, has shown that it is the presence or absence of adult support that makes the greatest difference in determining whether child abuse is likely to be present or absent within poor families.”

¹⁰⁰

Back in New Zealand, another spanner in the works for the poverty protagonists is the very low incidence of child abuse amongst the Asian / Indian populations. The rate for child hospitalisations for Asian / Indian children is only 5 per 100,000.¹⁰¹ For Maori it is 28 per 100,000. Yet the *New Zealand Income Survey* (averaged over 2010-14 as per the hospital data) shows average weekly Maori income was \$582 whereas average weekly Asian income was lower at \$565.¹⁰² If poverty is the main driver of child abuse, why is it failing to impact on Asian / Indian children?

A 1996 discussion paper from the Australian Institute for Family Studies commented:

*“...despite the intuitive strength of poverty as a causal factor in child maltreatment, the reality is that not all impoverished parents maltreat their children. As with all single factor explanations of child maltreatment, it does not seem useful to focus solely on poverty to the exclusion of other environmental or intra-familial factors, such as family structure, class or homelessness.”*¹⁰³

And in a later paper:

*“The fact that most disadvantaged families do not experience child maltreatment suggests that, as with other risk factors, there is no straightforward causal relationship between poverty and maltreatment.”*¹⁰⁴

“Correlation Does Not Equal Causation”

Just as the previous quote acknowledges – “...there is no straightforward causal relationship between poverty and maltreatment” – the same can be said about any causal relationship between family structure and maltreatment.

However, the *correlations* between both family structure and abuse, and benefit dependence and abuse, are stronger than the correlation between poverty and abuse. Put another way, the incidence rate for substantiated abuse is higher among single-parent families and benefit-dependent families than it is amongst families below the poverty threshold.

If poverty is the main driver of child abuse, why is it failing to impact on Asian / Indian children?

“There is no straightforward causal relationship between poverty and maltreatment.”

Australian Institute of Family Studies, 1996

The incidence rate for substantiated abuse is higher among single parent families and benefit-dependent families than it is amongst families below the poverty threshold.

¹⁰⁰ *The Child Abuse Crisis: The Disintegration of Marriage, Family, and the American Community*, Patrick F. Fagan, Ph.D., Heritage Foundation, May, 1997

¹⁰¹ Child Poverty Monitor: Technical Report

¹⁰² New Zealand Income Survey: June 2014 quarter, Statistics New Zealand

¹⁰³ *Child maltreatment and family structure*, Adam M. Tomison, Australian Institute of Family Studies, 1996

¹⁰⁴ *Family structure and child maltreatment: Do some family types place children at greater risk?* Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2012

This may be explained by studies showing that the source of income matters. For example, when comparing families in poverty, “... the findings show that poor children reliant on government transfers, when compared with poor children reliant on market incomes, have lower living standards and a number of compounding shortfalls that can be expected to place them at greater risk of negative outcomes.”¹⁰⁵

Additionally, “...the families of poor children reliant on market income were more likely than the above group to be two-parent families...”

The direct causes of child abuse and neglect are factors that impel these behaviours from parents and caregivers – for example, stress, alcohol and substance abuse, and mental ill-health. In turn, all of these have the potential to prevent or disrupt family formation. Causes and correlates are intertwined.

But when over three quarters of substantiated abuse findings by age two are from single-parent, benefit-dependent families the correlation is too large to dismiss.

Maori Families

The following statement is typical in discussions about child abuse:

“Against a historical back drop of colonisation, rapid urbanisation and concentration in industries most affected by job loss, Māori are disproportionately represented in deprived communities, and bear a disproportionate share of a range of social harms that are risk factors for child abuse and neglect.”¹⁰⁶

Yet when Maori unemployment fell (for example, between the late 1990s and 2008) there was no corresponding drop in their child abuse statistics.

Additionally, the abuse of Maori children was substantially higher than for non-Maori in 1967 when the first data was recorded. Yet the Maori unemployment rate was between just 2.3% and 3.5% at that time.¹⁰⁷ The 1960s was a period of growing economic security for Maori. According to think-tank Motu:

“Not all of the ‘unskilled’ jobs taken up by Māori were poorly paid. For males at least, jobs in areas such as construction and meat processing offered relatively good wages. Government income support, delivered through policies such as the Family Benefit, also helped improve the absolute and relative incomes of Māori during the postwar decades. Census income statistics indicate that in 1961, the average annual income of Māori men was 90 percent of that of non-Māori men. For women, the ratio was similar. In all likelihood this was a massive improvement on the situation 30 years earlier.”¹⁰⁸

So, in retrospect, neither poverty nor unemployment appears to stack up as a reason for disproportionate child abuse amongst Maori in the 1960s.

Poor children reliant on government transfers, when compared with poor children reliant on market incomes, have lower living standards.

When Maori unemployment fell, there was no corresponding drop in their child abuse statistics.

“Māori have not always been over-represented in child neglect and maltreatment statistics.”

Child Poverty Action Group, 2013

¹⁰⁵ *Children in poor families: does the source of family income change the picture?* Social Policy Journal of New Zealand, Issue 18, June 2002

¹⁰⁶ *The feasibility of using predictive risk modelling to identify new-born children who are high priority for preventive services*, MSD, February 2014, p31

¹⁰⁷ Respective unemployment rates at the 1961 and 1971 censuses

¹⁰⁸ *Māori economic development – Glimpses from statistical sources*, Andrew Coleman, Sylvia Dixon, and David C Maré Motu Working Paper 05–13 Motu Economic and Public Policy Research September 2005

In 2013, the Child Poverty Action Group claimed:

“Māori have not always been over-represented in child neglect and maltreatment statistics. In the period 1978-1987, prior to the economic restructuring during which many Māori lost their jobs, child homicide rates for Māori and Pakeha were similar.”¹⁰⁹

This is factually incorrect. The 1967 data showed, of the seven children who died from maltreatment, two were Maori and one was part-Maori. These numbers do not equate to similar child homicide rates for Maori and Pakeha. Additionally, in the same year, Maori children were six times more likely to suffer from physical abuse than Pakeha.

The facts do not fit the argument advanced.

So what about colonisation? Colonisation and disconnection from iwi and cultural identity are frequently cited as reasons for the over-representation of Maori children in abuse statistics. For example, according to Waikato University Associate Professor Leonie Pihama:

“Colonisation impacts on our children through the removal of every part of our cultural framework that enabled us to keep our children safe. And I think that model of the nuclear family, the domestic unit, is actually an unhealthy model for a culture of people who are used to having a collective relationship...Historical trauma caused by colonisation is the root cause of intergenerational issues, particularly child abuse within Maori families....Loss of culture and language left Maori looking for an escape, she said.”¹¹⁰

Professor David Fergusson *et al* used the *Christchurch Development Study* to investigate whether having caregivers identifying as ‘sole Maori’ with stronger links to cultural activities, Maori language activities and marae reduced the risk of child abuse and concluded:

“These findings [however] are not consistent with the assumptions underpinning influential theories, social policies and a number of intervention guidelines ...which claim that strengthening Māori identity and links with traditional Māori cultural practices will lead to reduced rates of child abuse among Māori. To the contrary, while the findings of this study suggest that this approach may lead to reduced risks of childhood sexual abuse, it may also be associated with increased risks of childhood physical abuse and exposure to inter-parental violence. These findings do pose a challenge to current policies aimed at reducing the over-representation of Māori children in rates of child maltreatment, which emphasise “identity interventions” that are not evidence-based and are largely ideologically driven. Even though such policies are no doubt well intentioned and observe statutory requirements unique to the New Zealand context, following the view expounded by UNICEF (2003, 2007), they must be exposed to ongoing critical scrutiny and empirical evaluation.”¹¹¹

An alternative explanation for Maori over-representation in child maltreatment statistics is the lack of two-parent, protective families.

Of Maori children born in 2010, 47.8% had a single parent. Of these children, 10.2% had a substantiated finding of maltreatment by age two. For those Maori children not recorded with a single-parent (or with partnership status unknown), the findings drop to just 2.5%.

“These findings do pose a challenge to...“identity interventions” that are not evidence-based and are largely ideologically driven.”¹¹¹

An alternative explanation for Maori over-representation in child maltreatment statistics is the lack of two-parent, protective families.

109 *Child abuse: what role does poverty play?* June 2013, Child Poverty Action Group, p22

110 “Faces of Innocents: High rates of child abuse among Maori can be traced back to colonisation, academic says”, Stuff, July 30, 2016

111 *Ethnic Identity and Exposure to Maltreatment in Childhood: Evidence from a New Zealand Birth Cohort*, Dannette Marie, Department of Psychology, University of Otago, Dunedin School of Psychology, University of Aberdeen, UK, David M Fergusson, Joseph M. Boden, Department of Psychological Medicine, University of Otago, Christchurch School of Medicine and Health Sciences, August 2009

Even more striking is the massive risk differential for children with caregivers who rely on a benefit. For those children whose caregiver had spent 80% or more of their past five years on a benefit, the abuse finding was 13.2%. For those whose caregiver had no time on a benefit, the incidence dropped to 0.7%.

The risk of abuse was 19 times higher than for those whose caregiver had no time on a benefit.

For Maori children whose caregiver was on a benefit for 80% or more of the past five years, the risk of abuse was 19 times higher than for those whose caregiver had no time on a benefit.

Profile and cumulative incidence of substantiated findings of maltreatment by age 2, Maori children in the study population born in 2010 (N=17,346)

	Maori	% in population	Incidence of finding %
Single parent	Single parent	39.2	10.7
	Single parent and no father listed in birth registration	8.6	7.9
	Not single parent or partnership status unknown	52.2	2.5
Time on benefit in last 5 years	More than 80%	21.6	13.2
	20<-80%	29.9	8.5
	Up to 20%	16.9	3.3
	No time	31.6	0.7

Source: *The feasibility of using predictive risk modelling to identify new-born children who are high priority for preventive services - companion technical report, MSD*

The evidence is telling us that Maori children with single parents who depend long-term on benefits are far more likely to be abused than Maori children with two parents and jobs. The same holds for non-Maori.

Yet we have become accustomed to abuse statistics that habitually compare Maori to non-Maori, rather than Maori to other Maori. For instance:

“Maori children are more likely than non-Maori children to be assessed as abused or neglected. In 2003, the rate per 1,000 was 11.9 for Maori and 5.9 for non-Maori.”¹¹²

And from the Corrections Department:

“Māori children are disproportionately represented in national statistics for maltreatment and injury. The rate of hospital admissions for intentional injury for Māori children aged under five between 1994 and 2004 was consistently about twice the rate than that of children of other ethnic groups. Death from intentional injury also occurs at a significantly higher rate among Māori than non-Māori;

We have become accustomed to abuse statistics that habitually compare Maori to non-Maori, rather than Maori to other Maori.

Child, Youth and Family rates of substantiated notifications of child abuse or neglect are considerably higher for Māori than non-Māori;

Māori children are more exposed to the risk of fatal child maltreatment associated with having a step-parent, as Māori children are twice as likely as New Zealand European to be raised in a family situation where unrelated persons – such as a new partner to the mother – are resident. In the five years from 1999 to 2003, Māori children died from maltreatment at an average annual rate of 1.5 per 100,000 children, more than twice the rate for children of other ethnicities.”¹¹³

The final paragraph captures the crux of the problem – the single-parent family environment where children are exposed to substitute parents. Of the Maori babies born in 2010, 47.8% were to a single parent. For the non-Maori cohort, the percentage dropped to 18.5%.

Exploring disproportionate Maori child maltreatment, David Fergusson *et al* identified:

“...loose or unstable family structure, often involving teen parenting, sole parenting or serial changes of adults responsible for performing a care-giving role to children in a family.”¹¹⁴

A further aspect of family and fertility which pertains particularly to Maori – early parenting – can be added to heightened risk factors.

Violence between partners has a strong bearing on child abuse incidence which may arise from a child being a witness (and classified as emotionally abused), or being physically caught up between antagonists. Corrections New Zealand research found international estimations that *“... 30% to 60% of child abuse occurs in households where IPV [inter personal violence] is co-occurring.”¹¹⁵*

The Dunedin Multidisciplinary Study (as reported by the US National Institute of Justice) found that:

“Women who had children by age 21 were twice as likely to be victims of domestic violence as women who were not mothers. Men who had fathered children by age 21 were more than three times as likely to be perpetrators of abuse as men who were not fathers.”

Furthermore,

“....the most violent relationships are found among young parents of small children...”¹¹⁶

Couple this with research from the Christchurch Health and Development Study:

“... respondents having a sole Māori cultural identity had odds of early pregnancy and parenthood that were over seven times higher than those of non-Māori, while those of Māori/other cultural identity had odds of

“Māori children are more exposed to the risk of fatal child maltreatment associated with having a step-parent.”

**Corrections
Department, 2008**

Early parenting can be added to heightened risk factors.

“The most violent relationships occurred among young parents.”¹¹⁷

113 *Over-representation of Maori in the Criminal Justice System, Family Characteristics, Corrections Department, 13 May, 2008*

114 *Ethnic Identity and Exposure to Maltreatment in Childhood: Evidence from a New Zealand Birth Cohort, Dannette Marie, Department of Psychology, University of Otago, Dunedin School of Psychology, University of Aberdeen, UK, David M Fergusson, Joseph M. Boden, Department of Psychological Medicine, University of Otago, Christchurch School of Medicine and Health Sciences, Social Policy Journal, August 2009*

115 *Family violence perpetrators: Existing evidence and new directions, Dr Bronwyn Morrison, Principal Research Adviser, Department of Corrections, John Davenne, Senior Adviser, Service Development, Department of Corrections, Practice: The New Zealand Corrections Journal, 15 August 2016*

116 *Findings About Partner Violence From the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study by Terrie E. Moffitt and Avshalom Caspi, National Institute of Justice, July 1999*

early pregnancy and parenthood that were over three times higher than non-Māori. These results were evident for both males and females.”¹¹⁷
(added emphasis)

The combination of these two findings provides further explanation for the over-representation of Maori children in abuse statistics. The incidence of child maltreatment by age two for the 2010 birth cohort for Maori children with a parent/caregiver under 20 was 9.6% – the highest of all age groups. For non-Maori under 20 the incidence dropped to 6.8% – still a relatively high level.

Before leaving this subject, Pihama’s objection to the nuclear family model should also be addressed:

“...that model of the nuclear family, the domestic unit, is actually an unhealthy model for a culture of people who are used to having a collective relationship...”

In 1967 the abuse rate for Maori children of married parents was 6.46 per 10,000 0-5 year-olds. For children of an unmarried parent(s) the rate rose to 11.27 per 10,000. Even for Maori, marriage was providing a protective factor for children.

At that time, 72% of Maori births were to married parents. By 2015 only 21% of Maori babies were born to married parents.¹¹⁸

Pacific Families

In comparison to NZ European children, the first child abuse study found an over-representation of Pacific children by a factor of nine. The Pacific population in New Zealand at that time was very small however (around 17,000) which may have somewhat distorted the findings. Since then, the Pacific population has grown substantially to around 300,000. At the last census it accounted for just over 7% of the total population.

More recent data relating to Pacific families is mixed and sometimes conflicting.

According to the *Family Violence Death Review Committee*, Pacific children were 4.8 times more likely to die from CAN (child abuse and neglect) than children of other ethnicities.¹¹⁹ However, of the nineteen children who died from inflicted injuries in the period 2009-12, fourteen were Maori (74%), three were Pacific (16%) and two were other ethnicities.¹²⁰ This suggests that neglectful supervision was a more likely cause of death for Pacific children during that period. An accidental drowning carries distinct connotations to one caused by intentionally inflicted injury.

According to the Families Commission (now SuperU):

“[In 2006], 29 percent of men convicted of assault on a child offences were New Zealand European, 47 percent were Maori, 19 percent were Pacific and one percent were of other ethnicity.”¹²¹

*Even for Maori,
marriage was providing
a protective factor for
children.*

*Neglectful supervision
was a more likely cause of
death for Pacific children
during that period.*

117 *Cultural identity and pregnancy/parenthood by age 20: evidence from a New Zealand birth cohort*, Dannette Marie, Department of Psychology, University of Otago, Dunedin and School of Psychology, University of Aberdeen, UK, David M. Fergusson, Joseph M. Boden, Department of Psychological Medicine, University of Otago, Christchurch School of Medicine and Health Sciences, June, 2011

118 Births – VSB, Table: Live births by nuptiality (Maori and total population) (Annual-Dec), Statistics New Zealand, Infoshare

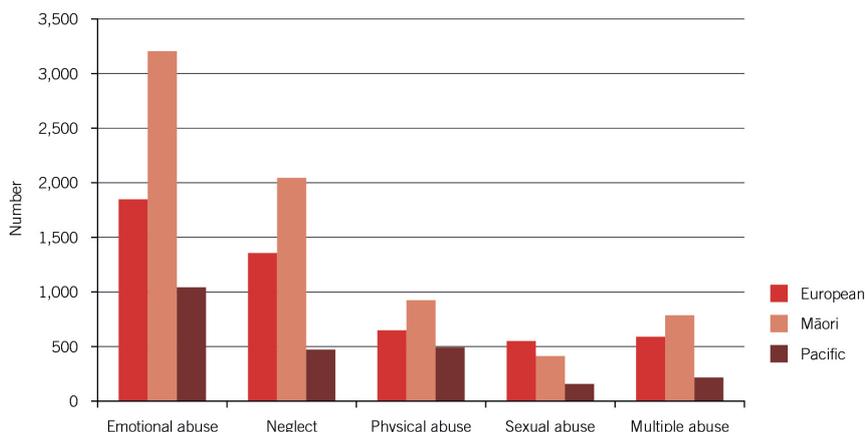
119 *Family Violence Death Review Committee*, Fourth Annual Report, January 2013 to December 2013, p33

120 *Family Violence Death Review Committee*, Fourth Annual Report, January 2013 to December 2013, p53

121 *Family Violence Statistics Report*, Families Commission, August 2009, p87

That pattern resembles child abuse statistics categorised by type of abuse and ethnicity:

FIGURE 4: NUMBER OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE FOUND TO HAVE EXPERIENCED ABUSE OR NEGLECT, BY ETHNICITY, 2006



From CYF Appendix Table 4.

Note that children and young people found to have experienced more than one type of abuse are shown in the 'multiple abuse' category as well as in the individual abuse types.

Source: Family Violence Statistics Report

Pacific children also experience a high rate of child hospitalisation due to assault, neglect or maltreatment of 0–14 year olds. (see page 18)

However, other data sources show Pacific rates of child abuse closer to their population rate.

For instance, between 2003 and 2006, on average, 23% of children referred by Plunket because of care and protection concerns were Pacific.¹²² 15% of babies born in 2006 were Pacific (or Pacific and other ethnicity).

According to the MSD's 2004 Social Report:

*"... Pacific children... are not over-represented among children assessed as abused, accounting for 11 percent of such children in 2003, about the same representation as they have in the child population."*¹²³

An investigation of a small sample from infant notifications to CYF in 2005/06 found:

*"New Zealand Māori made up 49% of babies in the sample, 33% were New Zealand European, and Pacific Island groups constituted 14%."*¹²⁴

The association between domestic violence and child abuse has already been touched on. Pacific females do not report experiencing partner violence disproportionately:

*"The New Zealand National Survey of Crime Victims also found [that] almost half of Māori women surveyed reported that they had experienced partner violence, a rate very much higher than that for New Zealand European/European women and for Pacific women."*¹²⁵

This seems to conflict however with other data which finds Pacific adults have a fatal IPV (Intimate Partner Violence) rate of 0.62 per 100,000 of the population compared to 0.68 for Maori and 0.27 for other ethnicities.¹²⁶ As previously noted though, deaths cannot be taken as a reliable indication of underlying rates of abuse for either children or adults.

Other data sources show Pacific rates of child abuse closer to their population rate.

Pacific females do not report experiencing partner violence disproportionately.

122 Family Violence Statistics Report, Families Commission, August 2009, p268

123 The Social report 2004, MSD, p109

124 Working with vulnerable infants, Marie Connolly, Philippa Wells and Jo Field, Social Work Now, December 2007

125 Children at increased risk of death from maltreatment and strategies for prevention, CYF, 2006

126 Family Violence Death Review Committee, Fourth Annual Report, January 2013 to December 2013, p49

At March 2016, of the 5,204 children in state care only 7% were Pacific whereas 61% were Maori.¹²⁷ In 2014 only 6% of children in *Home for Life* placements were Pacific.¹²⁸

Like Maori, historically, Pacific people have also experienced a “...concentration in industries most affected by job loss” but this is not routinely evoked to explain the incidence of child abuse.

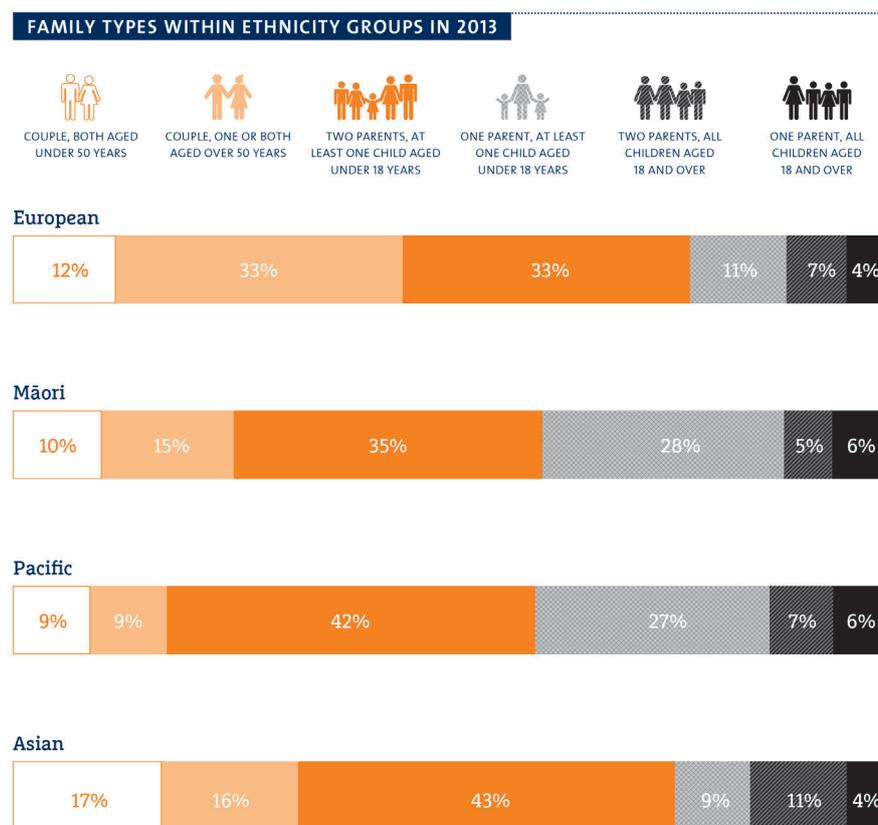
Like Maori, single-parent rates are relatively high among Pacific people. At the 2013 census, 27% of Pacific families were ‘one parent with at least one child aged under 18’.¹²⁹ For Maori the percentage was 28%. But at the same time only 10% of Domestic Purposes beneficiaries were Pacific whereas 43% were Maori. This relatively low dependence on welfare benefits would indicate extended families that are functioning economically to support each other and their children, regardless of structure. If they are functioning better economically they may well be functioning better in other capacities, for instance, caregiving.

The differences developing between Maori and Pacific incidences of child abuse points away from poverty and towards welfare dependence. Not enough is documented about marriage rates, the presence or absence of biological fathers, and family stability among Pacific people to draw safe conclusions about the role of family structure, but the extended Pacific family may be operating more effectively than the extended Maori family.

This relatively low dependence on welfare benefits would indicate wider families that are functioning economically to support each other and their children, regardless of structure.

Asian Families

Family groupings were classified by SuperU using the 2013 census data. One-parent families with at least one child under 18 had the lowest proportion among Asian families:



The extended Pacific family may be operating more effectively than the extended Maori family.

What is known about Asian families should predict low incidence.

Source: Demographic overview of families in New Zealand, June 2015

127 CYF, Key Statistics, Kids in care

128 OIA response to Ms Paora Moyle from MSD, 2 April, 2015

129 Demographic overview of families in New Zealand, June 2015, SuperU, p6

Benefit data for Asians is not published, but it is reasonable to assume low dependence. For example, at June 2016, of all Sole Parent Support beneficiaries, a total of 10% were “Other Europeans, Asian people and Middle Eastern/Latin American/African peoples.” For context, 47% and 11% were respectively Maori and Pacific.¹³⁰ At the 2013 census those identifying as Asian accounted for almost 12% of the population.

Asian children accounted for 11.3% of all children born in 2007 but only 4.2% of children with maltreatment findings.

Based on the consistent findings about family type and child abuse incidence, what is known about Asian families should predict low incidence.

This appears in the feasibility study for predicting maltreatment risk. Asian children accounted for 11.3% of all children born in 2007 but only 4.2% of children with maltreatment findings by age two:

Table 7. Ethnic composition of children overall, children with findings of maltreatment by age two, and the 3,000 children with the highest PRM scores
2010 models applied to children born in 2007 with birth registration or on benefit by 3 months of age⁽¹⁾

Ethnic group(s) (total response) ⁽²⁾	% of all children	% of children with findings by age 2	% of the 3,000 children with the highest PRM scores
Composition of children in group with non-missing ethnicity:			
Māori	28.4	60.9	69.2
Non-Māori	71.6	39.1	30.8
NZ European	71.4	53.2	49.9
Pacific	14.7	21.7	18.9
Asian	11.3	4.2	2.0
Other	1.8	0.8	1.0
% of all children in group with missing ethnicity data ⁽³⁾	2.4	2.8	10.5

Notes:

(1) Based on conservatively linked data. This is known to understate the proportions with CYF contact and findings of maltreatment.

(2) Ethnic groups are as recorded on the birth registration for the child.

(3) Ethnicity data are missing for children for whom there is no linked birth registration data, considering all birth registrations made by June 2012. Possible reasons for the apparent absence of a birth registration (and as a result missing ethnicity data) include (i) being not born in New Zealand (ii) being born in New Zealand and remaining without a birth registration at June 2012, and (iii) being born in New Zealand and with a registered birth but there being differences in identity information in the births and benefit data which meant that the records could not be linked with the data linkage algorithms applied.

Source: *The feasibility of using predictive risk modelling to identify new-born children who are high priority for preventive services.* (Note multiple ethnicities can be recorded on birth registrations so % columns do not sum to 100.)

Additionally, the lowest hospital admission rates due to assault, neglect, or maltreatment are for Asian / Indian children at just 5 per 100,000.¹³¹

Caution Regarding Ethnicity

This report acknowledges a high degree of intermixing between New Zealand ethnicities, particular Maori and Pakeha, and subsequent identification difficulties.¹³² It is common practice for government agencies to prioritise ethnicities where more than one is recorded. This is the case, for example, with the *Family Violence Death Review* which prioritises in the following order: Maori, Pacific, Asian, all other and NZ European.

The lowest hospital admission rates due to assault, neglect, or maltreatment are for Asian / Indian children.

130 Benefit fact sheets, Sole Parent Support - June 2016 quarter

131 Child Poverty Monitor: Technical Report

132 See *Child Poverty and Family Structure: What is the evidence telling us?* Family First, 2016, for data relating to the rates of intermixing between New Zealand ethnicities.

Is It Marriage Or Biological Fathers That Protect Children?

It is the presence of the biological father that generally, though not always, protects children. It is marriage that significantly raises the chances that he will remain on the scene.

The United States has led research into the protective role of biological fathers. The US Department of Health and Human Services goes so far as to produce a manual for child protection workers about the importance of fathers which notes:

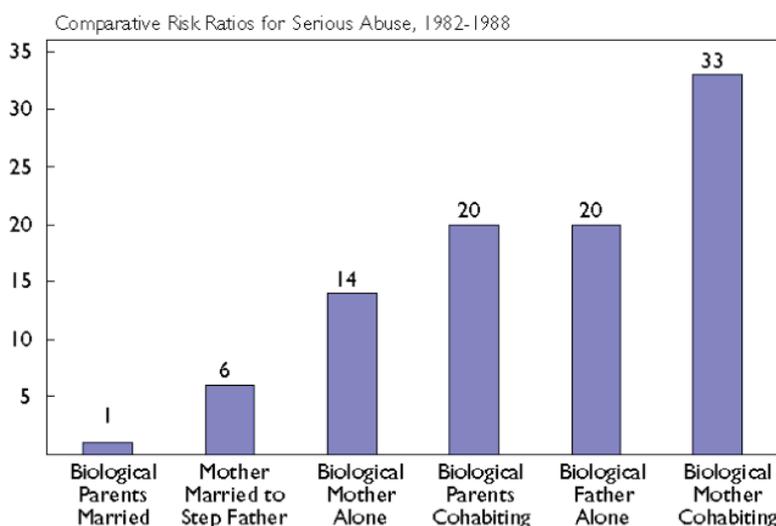
“Caring, involved fathers exist outside of marriage. They are more likely, however, to be found in the context of marriage. There are numerous reasons for this, not the least of which being the legal and social norms associated with marriage that connect a father to the family unit. That may also explain, in part, why research consistently shows that the married mother-and-father family is a better environment for raising children than the cohabitating (living together) mother-and-father family.”¹³³

Analysis of US care and protection data shows:

“All other family types had a higher likelihood of CPS involvement than those in which the biological father of all children resided in the household.”¹³⁴

Patrick F. Fagan, from the Heritage Foundation, produced the following graph using Robert Whelan’s court data collected in Britain between 1982 and 1988:¹³⁵

In Britain, a Child Whose Biological Mother Cohabits Was 33 Times More Likely to Suffer Serious Abuse Than a Child With Married Parents



Source: *The Child Abuse Crisis: The Disintegration of Marriage, Family, and the American Community*

It is the presence of the biological father that generally, though not always, protects children.

It is marriage that significantly raises the chances that he will remain on the scene.

“Caring, involved fathers exist outside of marriage. They are more likely, however, to be found in the context of marriage.”

US Department of Health and Human Services

¹³³ *The Importance of Fathers in the Healthy Development of Children*, Jeffrey Rosenberg and W. Bradford Wilcox 2006 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families Administration on Children, Youth and Families Children’s Bureau Office on Child Abuse and Neglect

¹³⁴ *Mothers, Men, and Child Protective Services Involvement*, Lawrence M. Berger, Christina Paxson, and Jane Waldfogel, August, 2009

¹³⁵ *The Child Abuse Crisis: The Disintegration of Marriage, Family, and the American Community*, Patrick Fagan, Ph.D, May 15, 1997

Daly and Wilson's work into child mistreatment in stepfamilies finds:

*"Children in stepparent families are disproportionately often injured in industrial nations too. The specific kinds of injuries involved suggest that such children are not at risk merely by virtue of decreased parental vigilance and supervision, but are also more often assaulted. When injuries are attributed to 'child abuse', the difference between stepparent and genetic parent homes is large and is independent of risk attributable to low socioeconomic status, maternal youth, family size, or personality characteristics of the abusers."*¹³⁶

In New Zealand, neither marriage nor the presence of a biological father is officially acknowledged as a protective factor against child abuse yet "extended family and/or whānau support" are. They are mentioned in the PRM feasibility study (along with other examples) in the context of "known protective factors":

*"Coverage of known protective factors is particularly weak, reflecting the limitations of the available data. It is not possible, for example, to include markers that relate to extended family or whānau support. With further data linkage, incorporation of information on the availability and use of services that have the potential to be protective (early childhood education or kōhanga reo, teen parent education units, parenting programmes and home visitation services for example) could be explored, but was not feasible in the current study."*¹³⁷

It is disquieting that the traditional New Zealand European family structure is not considered as a protective factor yet traditional Maori family structure is (though this may be a misreading of the writer's intent).

In 2013, the Child Poverty Action Group produced a report about child abuse and the role of poverty which featured a section on potential protective factors:

*"The greatest protective factors for children are good parenting, strong bonds between children and parents, and a stable family unit. The crucial years include early childhood and adolescence, with secure infant attachment to an adult family member, especially the non-abusive family member (assuming there is one), and high levels of paternal care being important for young children."*¹³⁸

Oddly, though, nowhere in the paper do the terms 'father', 'marriage' or 'two biological parents' appear. Yet "high levels of paternal care" and "stable families" do not occur in a vacuum. (The paper also acknowledges the over-representation of sole mothers in child abuse statistics but claims this relates to their high poverty rate. The risks posed by children's exposure to unrelated males are not discussed at all.)¹³⁹

A New Zealand literature review of international evidence into child neglect featured an interesting finding:

*"Single-parenthood and non-married status were significantly associated with neglect. Father figure or father involvement resulted in less neglect when the duration of the relationship was longer, when involvement in household tasks and childcare was less (although this is counter-intuitive) and when they had a greater sense of parental efficacy."*¹⁴⁰

In New Zealand, neither marriage nor the presence of a biological father is officially acknowledged as a protective factor against child abuse.

The traditional New Zealand European family structure is not considered as a protective factor yet traditional Maori family structure is.

Nowhere in the paper do the terms 'father', 'marriage' or 'two biological parents' appear. Yet "high levels of paternal care" and "stable families" do not occur in a vacuum.

136 *Evolutionary Social Psychology and Family Homicide*, Martin Daly and Margo Wilson, Science, 28 October 1988, Volume 242, pp. 519-524

137 *The feasibility of using predictive risk modelling to identify new-born children who are high priority for preventive services*, MSD, February 2014, p17

138 *Child abuse: what role does poverty play?* June 2013, Child Poverty Action Group, p18

139 *Child abuse: what role does poverty play?* June 2013, Child Poverty Action Group, p15

140 *Recognising and responding to child neglect in New Zealand*, December 2010, MSD, p27

From a sample of CYF-notified infants studied in 2005/06, researchers found:

“The involvement of fathers appeared higher than we first thought with all the 171 babies. Particularly for babies for whom there was no further action required, there was a high level of paternal involvement ... It may be speculated that there was some interaction between the higher level of paternal involvement, less violent relationships between parents, positive family support and the assignment of a no further action status to the case.”¹⁴¹

A further observation recorded is especially noteworthy:

“Although connecting with hard-to-reach fathers takes time and energy, it nevertheless provides important access to the extended paternal family whose engagement may provide significant protective support options for the child.”

When fathers are excluded from their children’s lives, too often, so are the paternal grandparents and other family members.

Discussion

The following statement from the Australian Institute of Family Studies provides the perfect basis for a wrap-up discussion. It has as much relevance in New Zealand as Australia:

“Although family structure is a tangible and easily identifiable risk factor for child maltreatment, its influence can easily be—and is often—exaggerated. Researchers, commentators and practitioners must consider the role that factors such as poverty, domestic violence and substance use play in the association between family structure and child maltreatment. If they fail to do so, they may promulgate misinformed ideas, encourage inaccurate debate and promote judgemental discrimination of certain types of families. Australia is a liberal democracy, where people generally have the freedom to choose ways of life that suit them within the rule of law. It seems very unlikely that we will return to a time when couples are compelled to endure loveless and abusive marriages, or where children born to unmarried parents are the subjects of systematic discrimination and destructive interventions. It is crucial that policy-makers and practitioners who work with families look beyond family structure to identify substantive risk factors that are appropriate and realistic targets for intervention.”¹⁴²

Granted, family structure is just one factor associated with child abuse, but consider its bearing on the other factors mentioned. The poverty rate for single parents is the highest poverty rate in New Zealand. De facto couples also have lower incomes than married couples, and a much greater likelihood of becoming single parents.

Family structure also has a significant bearing on the incidence of domestic violence which is more strongly associated with non-marital partnerships. According to the Families Commission, *“Risks of partner violence were considerably higher for people in sole-parent households.”¹⁴³* In 2006, only 18% of women using Women’s Refuge services were known to be married.¹⁴⁴ Legally married males had the lowest victim rate for partner offence (4 per 100 compared to 15 per 100 for de facto males) in 2005; for female victims the respective rates were 4 and 12. Single females had the highest victim prevalence rate at 17 per 100.¹⁴⁵

“Risks of partner violence were considerably higher for people in sole-parent households.”

Families Commission, 2009

Legally married males had the lowest victim rate for partner offence.

141 *Working with vulnerable infants*, Marie Connolly, Philippa Wells and Jo Field, Social Work Now, December 2007

142 *Family structure and child maltreatment: Do some family types place children at greater risk?* Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2012

143 *Family Violence Statistics Report*, Families Commission, August 2009, p19

144 *Family Violence Statistics Report*, Families Commission, August 2009, p23

145 *Family Violence Statistics Report*, Families Commission, August 2009, p199-200

A child born into a single parent family in 2010 was almost nine times more likely to suffer abuse by age two than a child born into a non-single parent family. Cohabiting mothers are 4-5 times more likely to become single mothers by the time their child is aged five than married mothers.

To this extent it is not possible to exaggerate the importance of married, biological parent families for the protection of children.

The depiction of the past as a time when couples were “...compelled to endure loveless and abusive marriages” also begs scrutiny. It implies today’s alternative parental relationships are, by contrast, loving and non-abusive. Manifestly that is not the case. Family violence is now described by some as at “epidemic levels”.¹⁴⁶ Moreover, many women still report an inability to leave abusive relationships.

Describing the past as a time when children born to unmarried parents were “...the subjects of systematic discrimination and destructive interventions” is also problematic, though the writer is on sound footing with regard to systematic discrimination. However, the discriminatory and disempowering statutory status of ‘illegitimacy’ was dispensed with (at least in New Zealand) in 1969.¹⁴⁷

Whether the interventions relating to the children of unmarried mothers were “destructive” is, in retrospect, arguable. Discreet enquiries by social workers into the wellbeing of babies born to unmarried mothers were intended to be constructive – not destructive.

Today, calls abound for greater early intervention into the lives of children known to be at risk of abuse or neglect: more funding of services like Plunket and certainly better resourcing of CYF – the ultimate interventionist. The new Children’s Commissioner and ex-principal Youth Court Judge, Andrew Beecroft, recently spoke about the cycle of child abuse and subsequent youth criminality:

“Generally my assessment is that we need to intervene less often, but earlier.”¹⁴⁸

Perhaps “destructive interventions” is code for adoption, yet there are now groups promoting a return to this practice (albeit with a much greater degree of voluntarism and transparency involved). The government’s *Home for Life* programme aims to provide children born into high risk environments with stability and security from the outset.¹⁴⁹ The concept of ‘permanency’ is gaining currency here and internationally.

The conclusion of the Australian Institute of Family Studies advises:

“It is crucial that policy-makers and practitioners who work with families look beyond family structure to identify substantive risk factors that are appropriate and realistic targets for intervention.”

Until very recently, it would appear that looking “...beyond family structure to identify [other] risk factors” is all that policymakers have done. Ample evidence of that approach has been provided here.

Lip-service has been paid to a ‘strengthening of families’ philosophy yet families are loosely defined. New Zealand research into the importance of two biological-parent families is virtually non-existent.

This resistance is perplexing until considered in the current ideological climate – first, cause no offence. This sentiment was conspicuous in protests against the re-naming of CYF the “Ministry for Vulnerable Children” as ‘stigmatising’.

Cohabiting mothers are 4-5 times more likely to become single mothers by the time their child is aged five than married mothers.

Discreet enquiries by social workers into the wellbeing of babies born to unmarried mothers were intended to be constructive – not destructive.

“Generally my assessment is that we need to intervene less often, but earlier.”

**Children’s Commissioner
Andrew Beecroft**

146 New family violence measures won’t address ‘epidemic’ - Women’s Refuge, TVNZ, July 2, 2014

147 PROCEEDINGS OF SOCIAL POLICY FORUM 2002 *THE CHILD AND THE FAMILY COURT: SEEKING THE BEST INTERESTS OF THE CHILD* ISSUES PAPER NO. 13 Edited by STUART BIRKS

148 *A kid with support stays out of court*, The Dominion Post, July 23, 2016

149 CYF, A home for life

Objectors wanted the new agency named the “Ministry for Children”. But there is no escaping that it exists to protect *vulnerable* children.

With the stakes so high – the continuing mental and physical suffering inflicted on thousands of children – some advocates are telling us that avoidance of offence or stigmatisation should take precedence.

Similarly, they resist the reality that certain family structures make children more vulnerable and argue that saying as much should also be avoided. Suspension of fact is, though, an abrogation of our collective responsibility to children and won’t serve to improve the situation.

Closing Comment

The New Zealand data shows clearly that the factors associated with child abuse have remained constant since first recorded analysis of substantiated findings. While there is no guarantee that a child in a married two biological parent family will never experience some form of maltreatment, the risk begins to increase for a child in any other family setting.

It is possible to end on an optimistic note, though the optimism is tentative. In 2014 child abuse statistics decreased for the first time in ten years. The trend continued in 2015.

The government credited the drop with the implementation of the *Children’s Action Plan* which involves “...legislative changes, information sharing, tracking vulnerable children, tougher penalties and monitoring of child abusers, screening those who work with children, a free child protect phone line, public awareness campaigns, local children’s teams and shared responsibilities for all New Zealanders.”¹⁵⁰

The Children’s Commissioner, however, then cautioned against reading too much into the decrease since it coincided with a change in police procedures resulting in fewer referrals to CYF.¹⁵¹

There are also positive trends in those fertility factors that are adversely associated with child abuse. The teenage birth rate is falling quite rapidly. Subsequently, the number of teenage parents on benefits dropped 49% between 2008 and 2016.¹⁵² The percentage of births that are ex-nuptial peaked at 48.8 in 2010 and has fallen very slightly in each subsequent year. In the year to June 2016, 46.4% of all births were ex-nuptial.¹⁵³ The divorce rate has been falling since 2002¹⁵⁴ though the declining marriage rate has not yet reversed.¹⁵⁵

It remains to be seen what effect these trends will have on the future incidence of child abuse and neglect but if they lead to parents who are stronger in their commitment to each other and their children, nobody should be surprised.

The family model in which children are raised by their two biological parents did not evolve without reason, and the evidence suggests it is still fit for purpose.

New Zealand research into the importance of two biological–parent families is virtually non-existent.

Some advocates are telling us that avoidance of offence or stigmatisation should take precedence.

Suspension of fact is an abrogation of our collective responsibility to children.

The family model in which children are raised by their two biological parents did not evolve without reason.

150 *Children’s Action Plan* progress report 2015

151 *Child abuse statistics and policy change*, New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse, January 2015

152 Parliamentary Question 7849, 2016

153 Births – VSB, Table: Live births by nuptiality (Maori and total population) (Annual-Jun), Statistics New Zealand, Infoshare

154 Marriage and Divorce Rates – DMR, Table: Divorce rate (total population) (Annual-Dec), Statistics New Zealand, Infoshare

155 Marriage and Divorce Rates – DMR, Table: General marriage rate, December years (total population) (Annual-Dec), Statistics New Zealand, Infoshare

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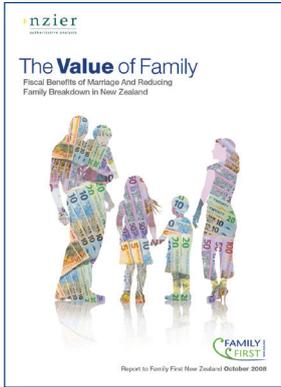
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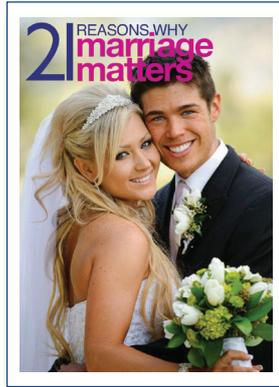
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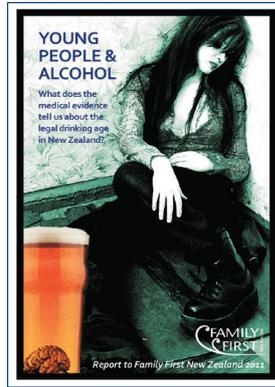
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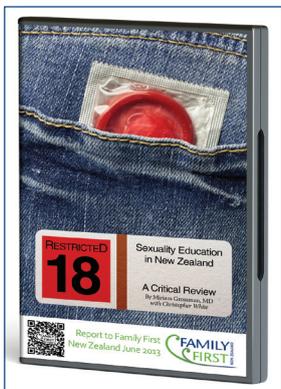
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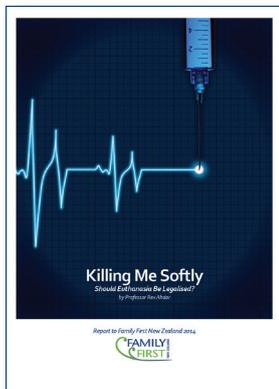
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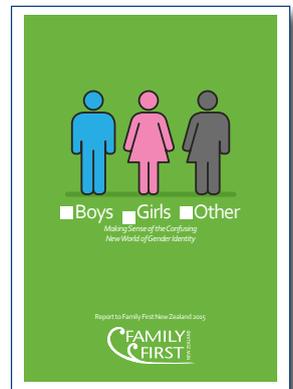
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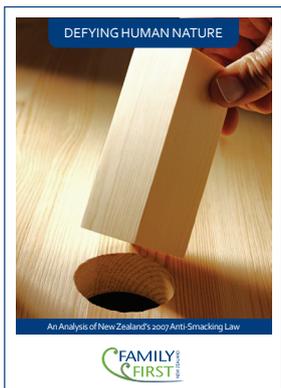
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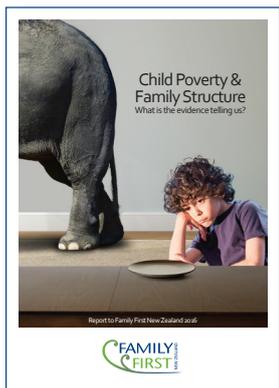
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