'crime families' in the news:
exploring media reports of young offenders and their families

DR FIONA BEALS WITH NIKOLIEN VAN WIJK

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Historically, youth crime has been a topic of great interest in New Zealand's print media, but there has been little research on the families of young offenders. This piece of research explores the ways in which the families of young offenders were represented in New Zealand print media between 2002 and 2007. It comprises a literature review of studies on the representation of families in news media, a content analysis of published newspaper articles and a qualitative exploration on the types of constructions used in newspaper articles.

Methodology

In the first phase of the research an extensive search for research reports, articles, book chapters and books was conducted through academic databases and Google Scholar. Whilst 128 sources were found, only 28 discussed the portrayal of families of young offenders in the media and institutional texts.

In the second phase of the research the Newztext database was used to locate a sample of New Zealand newspaper articles published between 2002 and 2007. In total, 208 articles were found. They consisted of commentaries, news articles and feature articles. Only 31 of these articles focused on the families of young offenders; the remainder mentioned the families of young offenders but focused on truancy and youth offending.

Literature review

The literature reviewed indicated that the sole-parent family (often led by a mother) and families that differ from a perceived nuclear norm are typically seen through the media as the greatest risk to social order. Researchers observed a clear scapegoating in the media of families that are struggling and needing assistance. The research showed that rather than looking at these factors, the media texts tend to blame the family.

Quantitative findings

The quantitative analysis indicated that the families of young offenders tend not to be examined and investigated in depth in newspaper media articles. Often the family is referred to in one or two sentences which use words such as 'solo mother', 'absent father', 'dysfunction', 'abuse' and 'poor parenting'. The families are seen as dysfunctional and in some cases families are labelled 'crime families' because of a generational pattern of crime.

Qualitative findings

The qualitative analysis looked at examples of articles where the family type or conditions were expanded and examined in more depth. Constructions of the families of young offenders tend to differ from mentions of the nuclear family in media reports on youth crime. When the nuclear family is mentioned it can, at times, be seen as the elixir to youth crime and society's problems. Absent fathers, bad mothers, sole-parent families and crime families, however, are stereotypes or categories used to develop a picture of the type of family surrounding young offenders. Often these families are talked about negatively. There are instances, however, where comments are made about the strain these families are under.

When it comes to family conditions, abuse and dysfunction are key constructions used in those media reports that provide further analysis of the families of young offenders. Whilst it was evident that these constructions help to give a negative picture of the family, there were some instances where media reports talked about family strain and context in depth.

Discussion

Looking at the types of constructions used in media reports between 2002 and 2007, there has been a tendency to draw upon understandings of developmental risk and the types of risk factors families present to the development of their child's adult character. This tends to construct families as dysfunctional without acknowledging the social factors that can lead to and influence disadvantage. At times, there are references to the pressures faced by families, but this is limited. What is needed is a balanced approach to discussing the families of young offenders that acknowledges these families' social context and the strain they are under, and the factors that need to be addressed.

Implications arising from this research are directed at policymakers and media practitioners. Media releases from policymakers on youth crime and the families

of young offenders could provide more information on factors affecting families and positive stories of families overcoming their circumstances. This research highlights the need for media practitioners to engage in dialogue on the effects of reporting on the families, and for space for reporting positive stories of families making a difference. Finally, during times when youth crime dominates reporting, editors should consider opening spaces for commentators to provide more depth and analysis in their articles.

1. INTRODUCTION

Central to the interplay between individuals' private troubles with crime and the social issue of crime are the mass media. The news media, in particular, provide an important forum in which private troubles are selectively gathered up, invested with a broader meaning, and made available for public consumption. (Sacco, 1995, p. 142)

As it is internationally, youth crime is a topic of interest for news media in New Zealand. Public consumers of news media can expect to see both the reporting of youth crime and debate on the ways in which it should be addressed throughout the media they consume. Often, these reports make reference to the families of young offenders and the familial factors that lead to youth offending, creating both a construction of the young offender and the family in which they live. New Zealand research on media reporting has also followed international trends by focusing on how young offenders are constructed in news media rather than the construction of young offender families. This study seeks to provide some information to fill this gap in the literature by looking at constructions of the families of young offenders in print media between 2002 and 2007, and to present discussion for further debate.

1.1 Print media in New Zealand

The bulk of print media in New Zealand is owned by two companies: Fairfax Media and APN Holdings. Fairfax Media publishes nine daily newspapers, including *The Dominion Post*, *The Press* and *Waikato Times*, two Sunday newspapers and more than 50 community newspapers. APN Holdings also publishes nine dailies, including *The New Zealand Herald*, one Sunday paper and over 30 community newspapers. A smaller company, Allied Press Limited, produces two dailies, including *Otago Daily Times*, alongside nine community newspapers.

1.2 The reporting of the families of youth offenders in New Zealand newspapers

Historically, youth crime has been a topic of great interest in New Zealand's print media. Roy Shuker, Roger Openshaw and Janet Soler (1990) found that youth crime reports can be found as far back as the 19th century, and that families at this time were seen as a factor contributing to rising youth crime problems. Shuker, et al also found that reports on youth crime tended to come in waves centring on events such as an extraordinary youth crime case. Reports and commentaries on youth crime can also spike during election campaigns or politically driven campaigns by interest groups. This means that constructions of both young offenders and their families may differ depending on the events stimulating media reports and the commentators contributing to these reports. The death of Michael Choy in 2001 (involving Bailey Kurariki Jr, the youngest person convicted of manslaughter in 2002), for example, alongside a national election in 2002, stimulated a myriad of media reports and commentaries about the causes of youth crime and the conditions in the families of these young offenders. Youth crime also featured in the 2005 election campaign, but rather than responding to a crime event, politicians and interest groups used the media to discuss interventions aimed at the types of families in which young offenders lived. So whilst youth crime and the families of young offenders featured in reports surrounding the 2002 and 2005 elections, the focus of these reports and commentaries changed to reflect the historical context.

To date, analysis of the construction of the families of young offenders in the media has not been a clear focus of research. An exception to this is an analysis of one article and one cartoon in *The Press* (Christchurch) by Susanne Gannon (2008). Gannon argued that statistics and facts were generalised and oversimplified in the article and cartoon. Using post-structural analysis, she found that the families of young offenders in Christchurch were constructed as sites of generational dysfunction and of Māori ethnicity. Given Shuker, et al (1990) observation that media reports are responses to events, Gannon's observations cannot be generalised across media reports in New Zealand; however, they do highlight a need for a broader analysis of media articles.

Research in Australia (Hil & McMahon, 2001) and Canada (Schissel, 1997) suggests that families of young offenders are often portrayed through the media as failing to discipline their children. These researchers have also commented that such families are seen as different from 'normal' families (particularly from the nuclear family). Beals (2008) found a similar

description of young offenders' families during the 2002 youth crime wave (a time when a number of young people were on trial for murder or homicide, including Bailey Kurariki Jr). None of these three studies, however, has specially focused on the news media construction of the crime family; instead, any commentary about the construction of families in news media has been a side observation by the researchers.

1.3 Study design

This study attempted to address the limitations of research to date by expanding the sample set (to include a variety of articles published throughout New Zealand) and focusing specifically on the construction of young offenders' families. The study was conducted in two phases and took a mixed qualitative and quantitative design. The Newztext database, which stores articles from *The New Zealand Herald* and nine Fairfax papers, was used to locate a sample of archived media texts on youth crime published between 2002 and 2007 inclusive. Articles were analysed quantitatively (to look at the extent and presence of various themes across the media reports) and qualitatively (to provide some deeper analysis into key constructions found throughout the media).

Aside from a generally negative tone to media reports, it was clear that key themes could not be generalised across the media. Not only were factors such as article type central to the types of constructions reported, but also the reality of events (such as the reported crime wave in 2001 and 2002, the election in 2002 and the election in 2005) and the differing groups and individuals engaging with the media and conveying a message (such as the Police, the Sensible Sentencing Trust and Senior Youth Court Judge Andrew Becroft) meant that each report reflected the context in which it was reported.

2. METHODS

This research was guided by three questions:

1. What does the international research say about the impact of media reporting on families of young offenders?

2. How are families of young offenders represented in the New Zealand press?

3. What conclusions can we draw about the ways in which the families of young offenders are represented in the New Zealand press?

The research was conducted in two discrete phases. The first was a literature review of current research, and the second was a direct analysis of a sample of newspaper articles. The literature review generated a thematic framework which guided the analysis of the newspaper articles.

2.1 Phase one: Literature review

After initial searching of academic databases, it was clear that there were very few academic studies focusing on constructions of young offenders' families in the news media. It was also clear, however, that some studies focusing on youth crime did make some comment on the portrayal of families in the news media. In order to locate articles and texts, a list of keywords was generated and used consistently across a number of databases available at Victoria University of Wellington. Keywords were truncated and combined to maximise results, and searches focused on the whole text (title, abstract and body). Keywords used included family (and its variations), youth crime, young offending, media, stigmatisation (and its variations), labelling and moral panic. In each search, between 100 and 200 articles were captured then skimmed over to determine whether the article could fit into the literature review stage (through an explicit mention of media reporting of young offender families). Book reviews were also considered (and full books sourced when necessary). Databases searched included Infotrac OneFile; Proquest; Sage Premier Journal Collection; Blackwell Synergy Online Journal Service; Index New Zealand; Te Puna; JSTOR Full Collection; MasterFILE Premier; PsychINFO; Scopus; and Sociological Abstracts. Google Scholar was also used to locate articles and texts. In all, 28 articles, chapters and books were located for review. We also found another 100 items useful for other aspects of the research, such as methodology, discussion and analysis.

2.2 Phase two: Media analysis

2.2.1 Sample and data collection

The Newztext database was used to locate New Zealand newspaper articles and commentaries published between 2002 and 2007 making reference to the families of young offenders. In all, 208 articles and commentaries were located. All of these articles were used in the thematic analysis of content. Sometimes an article (from a Fairfax paper) was published in more than one newspaper; when this happened only one instance of this article's appearance and paper would be recorded. Any repetition in article appearance was not included in the total number of articles analysed.

It should be noted that Newztext does not store every article published in Fairfax or APN papers. The articles stored tend to be in the commercially sold papers, which are metropolitan or provincial, but not all such articles are stored on the database. The 208 articles collected only formed a sample of those published in New Zealand papers between 2002 and 2007. An alternative to Newztext is LexisNexis, but this database tends to only store articles from metropolitan papers. On an initial trial of both databases it was found that Newztext tended to generate better search results.

As with the literature review, keyword combinations were used to find appropriate articles. Newztext searches are restricted because it searches for exact phrases and only allows the searcher to use one additional criterion. This meant we were restricted to using combinations of 'youth crime', 'youth offending', 'young offender', 'youth offender' (as well as the plural combinations) and 'crime families' in the first search with an additional criterion of 'family'. We searched for the exact phrases within the whole article and controlled our results by only looking at groups of articles in a single year in Fairfax papers and *The New Zealand Herald*. Searches involving different keyword combinations continued for each year until Newztext generated no new results.

Typically, 200 articles were generated in each search per year. To obtain relevant articles we opened each

one and read to see whether a reference was made to family. If a reference was made we cut and pasted the complete article into Microsoft Word and formatted for NVivo input and analysis. Articles were given a numeric file name and article information (article file name, author, title, newspaper, month, date, year, type of article, word length) was entered into an Excel spreadsheet in order to generate an NVivo 'casebook'.

2.2.2 Data analysis: Coding

The initial analysis of the articles was done through NVivo. In the first stage, attributes for the articles were taken from the imported casebook. Literature review findings were then used to generate initial themes (nodes) which could be explored and expanded. Articles were then read and applicable sections were coded to thematic nodes. Where appropriate, a single section of an article might be coded to several nodes at once.

Although many of these nodes came through the literature review, many were refined in the process of reading the data. For example, sole parents and sole mothers were clear themes arising through the literature review; when the data were read it appeared that the other variables such as 'absent fathers' were also present but could not be placed within a 'sole-mothers' category, so new sub-categories were made.

2.2.3 Data analysis: Quantitative analysis

The analysis occurred in two stages. In the first stage, the attributes of the collected articles were examined to find patterns across separate newspapers, years, types of article and article focus. Separate authors and commentators were not a point of focus in this analysis. Next, the key thematic categories (or nodes) were examined. Despite the possibility of several sections in one article being attributed to a single node, the focus was on the number of articles in each thematic category. This enabled a general idea of the extent to which particular themes occurred across the texts. Finally, queries (crosstabs) were conducted to look at attributes across thematic categories.

NVivo is a qualitative analysis program; however, it can be used alongside Excel to generate a quantifiable pool of data for quantitative analysis. Researchers such as Simon Lindgren (2008) have found that with the right coding and the use of attributes, an entire analysis can be performed through NVivo.

2.2.4 Data analysis: Qualitative analysis

In the second phase, the key themes arising from the quantitative analysis were explored further by looking at instances of the constructions within the texts. This involved looking at the words used and the stories told. Our analysis of constructions differed from discourse analysis as we did not look at implied meanings in texts (that is, we did not read 'between the lines' and draw conclusions). Instead, we used the key themes of the quantitative analysis and inferred from these that they were the dominant constructions used in print media. This meant that themes such as dysfunction, sole parents and crime families were evident and analysed in both the quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Although we were not performing, or intending to perform, a moral panic analysis, we found many of the techniques performed by moral panic researchers (see, for example, Cohen, 2002) useful as they attempt to tell a story about the data. We looked at the data for the stereotypes and analysis used in the news media to generate a picture of the typical family where a young offender might be raised. These stories helped us to develop an understanding of the quantitative construction. We could see whether the language used was positive or negative and evocative of metaphors (and stories). We could also see whether young offenders' families were constructed as abnormal and, if so, how they differed from normal families in society. This form of analysis was invaluable because it gave a picture to the figures that came through the quantitative statistics. It also gave a sense of what the public might take from an article to feed into their own understanding of the families of young offenders.

In order to do this, the data generated for each theme were read in full. This involved printing out reports of the nodes to enable a deep reading of and reflection on the stories constructed. The storytellers of particular perspectives were also examined. Whilst commentaries represent the perspectives of individuals and interest groups and are often written to stimulate discussion, reports of current events tend to be dominated with quotes from experts – all with their own opinion on a story. Through looking at the narratives of these storytellers, or experts, it is possible to see the types of stories that dominate the print media and the types of language used to stimulate public interest and debate.

Finally, we also used research on the psychology (particularly risk-factor analysis) and sociology of criminal deviance (particularly strain theory) to guide the qualitative analysis and later discussion. This enabled us to see the lenses the media use to tell a story and the aspects that are often ignored in media reports.

2.2.5 Ethical considerations

Often, if human subjects are not involved, it is easy to assume that ethics do not apply. However, implicit in this research is the notion that knowledge is something that is constructed, not discovered, to develop understanding of particular phenomena (Beals, 2008).

It is a construction of 'truth' which relies on tools that a particular group considers authentic (such as religion or science). The news media plays a role in constructing particular truths, and these truths tend to be imbued with ideological and political perspectives (Fowler, 1991). The knowledge that we produce through research also has ideological implications (Beals, 2008), and it is important that the researcher consciously considers the ethical implications of their research, both on the subjects of their research and those who will later read it. Ultimately, it is hoped that this research can be used to support and help our families rather than condemn them to a position of 'underclass'.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will provide an overview of the literature on how the families of young offenders have been constructed in public discourse. We will start with the construction of the dysfunctional family in contemporary society before moving onto research on the construction of the young offender's family in the media.

3.1 Philosophy and the dysfunctional family

In order to look at the ways in which media, and other institutions, construct the families of young offenders it is important to look at some of the theoretical literature on the construction of the dysfunctional family in contemporary society. Much of the theoretical literature (Day-Sclater & Piper, 2000; Donzelot, 1979; Goldson & Jamieson, 2002) argues that the dysfunctional family tends to be seen by dominant groups in society as the producer and constructor of social deviance. Theorists have noted that throughout the history of industrial and contemporary society the 'family' has been constructed as the key place for the reproduction and preservation of social values. It is the deviant family, the dysfunctional family, and the different family that is seen as a threat to society.

Shelly Day-Sclater and Christine Piper (2000), Jacques Donzelot (1979) and Barry Goldson and Janet Jamieson (2002) argue that the beginning of the notion of the dysfunctional family began in the early 1800s. During this time, the working-class family was constructed in institutional texts as a site of dysfunction and risk – a threat to the rising middle classes. Potential criminals and young criminals were seen as coming from these families and these families formed the target of intervention.

Aside from the working-class family, Donzelot (1979) found that since the early 1970s, Westernised countries have framed the sole-parent family as the greatest threat to society. Donzelot argues that this led to the state assuming the paternalistic function of the father. Day-Sclater and Piper go further to argue that since the Second World War and Bowlby's focus on maternal attachment, societal focus has shifted onto the psychological role of the father and the effects of his absence. In effect, they argue that this new focus continues to cement the nuclear family as normal

and all other forms of family as pathological. Such constructions reinforce a societal response for punitive control of any family that fits within the dysfunctional category (Goldson & Jamieson, 2002).

3.2 Constructions of the family in news media

There is little research that directly looks at how the print media constructs and discusses the families of young offenders. This does not indicate, however, that the media spends little, if any, time discussing the role, function and impact of the family on youth offending. Stanley Cohen (2002), the creator of moral panic theory, argues in the third edition of *Folk Devils and Moral Panics: The creation of the mods and rockers,* that the portrayal of young sole mothers in the media is a recent example of a moral panic. Without too much detail, Cohen argues that during the 1980s in the United Kingdom, there was increased and exaggerated reporting on young mothers whose only supposed reason for having babies was to get welfare benefits. Cohen describes how these young women were labelled in the media as the producers of tomorrow's criminals and as challengers to the stability of the nuclear family.

Angela McRobbie (1994) also found a negative focus on sole parents. Looking at the case of James Bulger (a toddler killed by two young boys in 1993), McRobbie argues that a deep anger was expressed in the media towards the 'lenient' actions of the youth justice system. As time went on this anger was transferred from the system onto the families of young offenders, and, in particular, sole-parent families and teenage mothers:

> From this point on it was the family and in particular the single-parent family which became the scapegoat. For a couple of weeks in July 1993 teenage mothers were caught in the full glare of publicity. Not only were their parenting skills cast in doubt, but their moral recklessness, in the form of their willingness to have children without the support of a father and breadwinner, was spotlighted. Most seriously it was their dependency on the state and on welfare ('Married to the State' as the newspapers put it) which confirmed their parasitical and deviant status. (McRobbie, 1994, p. 200)

Criminologist John Muncie (1999) argues that the Bulger case of the 1990s was a key extraordinary event that generated panic about both the deterioration of young people in British society and the deterioration of

the family. Sole mothers were blamed, with the media stimulating a community reaction. Muncie argued that this event signalled a change in moral panics as stories of youth crime were used to generate and sell news. In effect, rather than reporting crimes to inform readers of current events, news stories could be created (through headlines, language and images) and featured on the front page in order to make the paper attractive at news outlets.

Duncan, Edwards and Song (1999) specifically looked at the ways sole mothers were represented in both the media and politics in the United Kingdom in the 1990s. Their findings reflected those of McRobbie (1994) and Muncie (1999); they found that sole mothers were demonised and pathologised through the media as both a threat to society and a victim of circumstances. Duncan et al argued that right-wing academics were quoted in the media to support a construction of the dysfunctional family. They found two key constructions of the sole-mother family, the first being a construction of the 'underclass' where sole-parent families were seen as freeloaders taking from the state with no intention of giving back. The second concerned black sole-parent families. Duncan et al found that, whereas the public would react and challenge the media's constructions of Caucasian sole families, they accepted and took for granted that black sole mothers posed a risk, and threat, to society.

In the United States, Glassner (1999) looked at various fear-based panics during the 1980s and 1990s. One concerned the risk that young sole mothers posed to society. Glassner argues that during the 1990s the media exaggerated statistics about the extent of the 'problem' in the United States. In response, politicians (both liberal and conservative) heralded young sole parents as one of the biggest problems, if not the biggest problem, facing the country:

> In what may well qualify as the most sweeping, bipartisan, multimedia, multidisciplinary scapegoating operation of the late twentieth century, at various times over the past decade prominent liberals ... and conservatives ... all accused teen moms of destroying civilization. Journalists, joining the chorus, referred to adolescent motherhood as a 'cancer,' warned that they 'breed criminals faster than society can jail them,' and estimated their cost to taxpayers at $31 billion a year. (Glassner, 1999, p. 90)

Reflecting the youth crime literature, Glassner argues that the panic occurring through mass media and

political texts ignored the conditions that actually led to the children of young mothers becoming deviant. He further argues that it is not the age (that is, the young age of the sole mother) but the conditions in which one lives that lead to crime. Simply put, there is no difference between the children of a 35-year-old mother living in poverty and the children of a 16-year-old mother if these wider conditions are the same.

Finally, Glassner points out that this focus on the problem of young mothers has the effect of taking the focus away from the fathers of the children. He found that the opposite tended to happen when the media talked about sole fathers. Instead of seeing this family formation as a problem, the media tended to talk about sole fathers in a positive light.

Schissel (1997) came to the same conclusions over the portrayal of families in youth crime media in Canada, but found further stereotyping of the families of young offenders as poor and immigrant. Schissel argues that the stereotypes of the young offender and his or her family tend to be structured around race, gender and class:

> Typical depictions of youth criminals in the media readily reveal that categories for condemnation are poor families (living in poor communities), racially based gangs (either recent immigrants or aboriginal Canadians), and single mothers and mothers who work outside the home. In sociological analyses, race, class, and gender often arise as categories and are those upon which discrimination and maltreatment are thrust. (Schissel, 1997, p. 165)

In Australia, Richard Hil has written extensively about the scapegoating of families of young offenders in media, policy and academic research. Reflecting international research, Hil (1996, 1998; Hil & McMahon, 2001) argues that the sole mother is seen by the public and the state as a sign of the breakdown of the nuclear family – a key site of fear and risk. In observing media reports, Hil (1996; Hil & McMahon, 2001) found that in youth crime waves the family often becomes the focus of media attention. With this focus, youth crime is constructed as a response to the breakdown of a moral order, particularly bad parenting and the collapse of the nuclear family (Hil, 1996, 1998; Hil & McMahon, 2001).

Hil (1996, 1998) contends that the nuclear family is the standard that all other families are compared against. Other families are seen to be the direct binary opposite of the nuclear norm: stable/unstable, strong/weak,

functional/dysfunctional, intact/broken and complete/incomplete (Hil, 1998). The state's response to crime is led by the ideology of the nuclear family, and it becomes the state's role to reinforce and reproduce this family (Hil, 1996, 1998).

Hil and McMahon (2001) have also interviewed the families of young offenders to examine their own experiences in the youth justice system. They found that within a neo-liberal climate, families are given both the responsibility and blame for their children. However, both before and after the child offends, the family often does not get either the resources or support needed to deal with the issues they may face. The notion that some families might truly be trying to do something about their child's offending is often ignored completely by the state, media and general public (Hil, 1996; Hil & McMahon, 2001). Reflecting international research, Hil (1996; Hil & McMahon, 2001) found that often the effects of other social and economic conditions are downplayed and even ignored through focusing on the dysfunctional nature of the family.

3.3 Constructions of the family in New Zealand media

Shuker et al (1990) found that the New Zealand media were quick in perceived youth crime waves to attribute blame to the family. They note, for example, that in the moral panic about larrikinism in the later 19th century, the media ascribed blame for the misbehaviour of young people on the lack of parental discipline and the decline of the colonial family. Later, in the 1950s, the media were also quick to blame the rise of the 'milkbar cowboys' of that era on a decline in parental discipline and supervision.

Aside from the work of Shuker et al (1990), Beals (2008) also found that, with an institutional focus on youth crime, the families of young offenders are often mentioned, stereotyped and categorised. She observed that across media and academic and government texts published in 2002, there were two key constructions of families of young offenders: the pathological (dysfunctional) and the normal family. Pathological families tended to have race, class and gender dimensions (Māori, poor or sole parent). The children from these families were the at-risk youth, and institutional texts framed them as going on to live a life of crime. In contrast, young offenders from normal

families were seen as going through a passing phase which, because of the normality of their families, they would outgrow. Finally, echoing the ideas of Donzelot (1979), Beals also found that the state assumed the role of the parent in order to step in and counter the bad parenting styles of the dysfunctional family.

Recently Gannon (2008) explored a front page story and cartoon from a 2006 edition of *The Press*. The article, 'Crime families' (Martin, 2006), is included in our data (as 'Crime's family tree' (Newztext title)). Gannon applied a post-structural analysis to look at the ways in which words, images and diagrams constructed the families of young offenders as a key threat to the city of Christchurch and the Canterbury region. She found an ethnic dimension to the reporting which was both explicit and implied. Explicitly, the article quotes a police officer and his observation that the threatening crime families in Canterbury were Māori. Gannon notes, though, that the article and diagrams also evoked a sense of whakapapa (genealogy) by explicitly outlining the families of young offenders:

> The police and the media have taken up the particular cultural tropes [whakapapa and genealogy] available in the national context. The comment of Police Superintendent Manderson that 'we have shown some of them these family trees and some of them have corrected them for us' (Nisbet, 2006: D4: 1) makes another sort of sense in terms of the logic and centrality of lineage to Māori culture. (Gannon, 2008, pp. 414-415)

Gannon makes an interesting observation: that whether the family trees evoke ethnic metaphors or not, the family trees discussed in that particular edition of *The Press* only showed offending lines in the family lineage and did not show the missing faces (those members of the family who did not go on to offend).

3.4 Summary

The international literature indicates that the sole-parent family (often led by a mother) and families that differ from the perceived nuclear norm are typically seen through the media as the greatest risk to the social order. Researchers have indicated that there is a clear scapegoating in the media of families that are struggling and needing assistance. The research showed that, rather than looking at these factors, media texts tend to blame the family.

4. QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

In this chapter, we present the quantitative findings of our research. We start by providing some context to the data and then move onto exploring the types of families presented in media reports and the familial conditions of the families of young offenders.

4.1 The landscape of the data

To get some idea of how our thematic findings came through the data, various attributes were ascribed to the dataset. Four of them (newspaper, year, type of article and focus of article) were taken further in order to analyse the themes that came through the data. The articles found through the Newztext database came from 10 papers distributed throughout New Zealand. Figure 4.1 shows the papers and their locations.

FIGURE 1: Newspapers, locations and controlling companies
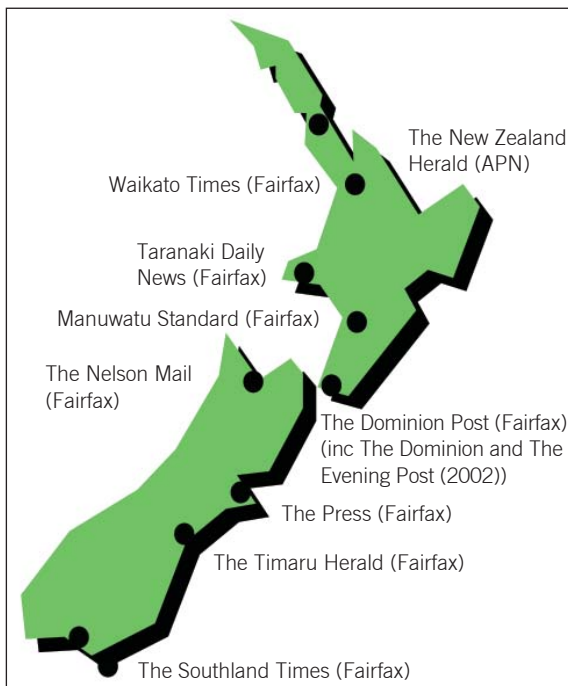
As Figure 4.1 indicates, the majority of our dataset came from Fairfax papers, with only one APN paper (*The New Zealand Herald*) contributing. Newztext also did not include newspapers from the West Coast of the South Island or the East Coast of the North Island. Although papers such as *The Press*, *The Dominion Post* and *The New Zealand Herald* are distributed in these

regions, the findings of our research should not be generalised to the media produced in these regions.

TABLE 1: Sample distribution across newspapers

Newspaper	No. of articles	% of sample (n=208)	National readership[1]
The Press	55	26.4	222,000
The New Zealand Herald	38	18.3	583,000
The Dominion Post	34	16.3	247,000
The Southland Times	16	7.7	67,000
Taranaki Daily News	15	7.2	60,000
Manawatu Standard	15	7.2	47,000
Waikato Times	11	5.3	105,000
The Timaru Herald	10	4.8	31,000
The Nelson Mail	9	4.3	39,000
Sunday Star-Times	5	2.4	564,000

Just over a quarter of the articles came from *The Press* (26.4 percent), whilst just under 20 percent of the obtained articles came from *The New Zealand Herald* (which has the largest daily readership). All the small daily newspapers, which not only have a smaller readership, but tend to have less content, all fell under the 10 percent mark. There were only five articles obtained from the *Sunday Star-Times* (Fairfax).

TABLE 2: Sample distribution across the types of articles

Type of article	No. of articles	% of sample (n=208)
News	116	55.3
Feature	42	20.2
Editorial	27	13.0
Opinion	17	8.2
Letter to the Editor	6	2.9
Television review	1	0.5

The majority of articles were general news articles (55.3 percent) or feature articles (20.2 percent). None of these articles were court reports. The remaining 24.6 percent were opinion-based articles written by editors, commentators, letter writers and reviewers. Newztext tends to ascribe labels to

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[1] Data from Neilson Media Research (2008)

commentaries, and as the physical paper was not obtained for this research, it was these names that were carried through to the research.

TABLE 3: Sample distribution across the types of articles

Newspaper	No. of articles	News or current affairs-based (proportion)	Opinion-based (proportion)
The Timaru Herald	10	.90	.10
The Dominion Post	34	.88	.12
The Press	55	.87	.13
Sunday Star-Times	5	.80	.20
The Southland Times	16	.63	.38
Manawatu Standard	15	.67	.33
Taranaki Daily News	15	.67	.33
Nelson Mail	9	.67	.33
The Waikato Times	11	.64	.36
The New Zealand Herald	38	.60	.40

Only four papers (*The Timaru Herald*, *The Press*, *The Dominion Post* and *Sunday Star-Times*) in the sample had at least three-quarters of their articles dedicated to news and feature articles. *The Press*, the paper with the most items in our dataset, had 48 of the 55 sampled articles dedicated to news or current affairs.

TABLE 4: Distribution of article focus across sample

Article focus	No. of articles	% of sample (n=208)
Youth crime	152	73.1
Families	31	15.4
Truancy	25	12

The majority of the articles sampled (73.1 percent) focused on reporting or discussing youth crime. These articles tended to make a short mention of the family of the young offender. Only 31 of the 208 articles focused directly on the families of young offenders; another 25 looked specifically at truancy and its link to youth crime whilst referring to families. Article focus was evenly distributed across the different types of articles sampled.

TABLE 5: Distribution of year published across sample

Year published	No. of articles	% of sample (n=208)
2002	50	24.0
2003	26	12.4
2004	26	12.4
2005	35	16.8
2006	35	16.8
2007	36	17.3

Almost a quarter of the sampled articles (24 percent) were published in 2002 when a number of high-profile youth crimes occurred. Across the years, there was a consistent pattern between news and opinion-based articles, with approximately one-fifth of articles published each year being opinion-based. A similar pattern occurred across article focus (youth crime, family or truancy) in 2002 and 2004 to 2007. In 2003, however, 10 of the 26 articles sampled focused on truancy and youth crime, as a result of a national focus on truancy interventions.

4.2 The types of 'crime families'

There were four types of families described in media reporting: the sole-parent family, crime family, extended family and nuclear family. As Table 6, shows, none of these family types dominated more than 21 percent of the full sample set. This was because of a number of factors, such as the current events being reported on, the range of motives and perspectives of experts and interest groups being referred to, and the limitations of newspaper reporting, where reporters are restricted in word length and article structures. Table 6 illustrates the range of family types across articles.

TABLE 6: The types of families to which the media referred

Family type	No. of articles	% of sample (n=208)
One-parent	43	20.7
Crime family	33	15.9
Nuclear family	9	4.3
Young parents	9	4.3
Extended family	7	3.4

4.2.1 Sole-parent families

When discussing sole parent families, 12 of the 43 articles explicitly mentioned sole mothers, while a further 14 articles referred to absent fathers. Another 16 articles made a general reference to sole parents without explicitly ascribing a gender to the parent. There were no positive constructions of sole-parent families in any of these articles.

Of all the newspapers, *The New Zealand Herald* had the highest proportion of articles focusing on sole parents – 12 of the 43 articles came from the *Herald* alone; another seven came from *The Press*. Nine of the 12 *Herald* articles on sole parents came from opinion-based articles.

4.2.2 Crime families

Explicit references to 'crime families' occurred in 33 articles. The crime family construction came about through direct use of the words 'crime family' or through reference to a cycle of generational crime within a family. The majority of these articles were published during 2006 and 2007 (20 articles), in news and current affairs articles (27 articles) and in articles with a focus on youth crime (25 articles). Twelve of these articles came from *The Press*. In many of these cases, the police were highlighting a number of families in the Canterbury region that had generational patterns of criminal behaviour. The police tended to explicitly label these families 'crime families'.

Reflecting the pattern in the reports of sole parents, only one of the 33 articles focusing on crime families talked about the desire of some crime families to move back into society constructively and meaningfully.

4.2.3 Teen parenting and the extended family

Nine articles discussed the condition of teen parenting and youth crime, and seven articles discussed extended families and young offending. Seven of the nine articles discussing teen parenting had a general youth crime focus (rather than a family or truancy focus). Five out of the nine articles came from *The New Zealand Herald*, of which three were opinion-based articles.

Six of the seven articles about extended families were feature articles. All these articles focused on how extended families encourage criminal behaviour, either directly or through abuse. There were no positive constructions of the extended family or the teen-parent

family. This pattern of negative reporting did not occur in references to the nuclear family.

4.2.4 The nuclear family

In nine articles, authors explicitly focused on nuclear families. Five of these articles were opinion articles, three of which came from *The New Zealand Herald*. Another three were news articles and tended to consist of quotes where interviewed experts talked about the essential role nuclear families played in society and the ways in which a nuclear family could protect, or divert, a young person from a life of crime. The remaining feature article looked at the role of marriage in society and drew upon the comments of the Maxim Institute, a right-wing policy and research centre.

4.3 The conditions of 'crime families'

Articles referred to various family conditions that could lead to young people offending. In particular, references were made to a general condition of dysfunction (23.1 percent), abuse within the family (23.1 percent), general poor parenting (22.6 percent) and lack of positive role models (20.2 percent). Table 7 illustrates the different family conditions referred to in the sampled articles.

TABLE 7: The family conditions to which reporters referred

Family conditions	No. of articles	% of sample (n=208)
General dysfunction	48	23.1
Family abuse	48	23.1
Poor parenting	47	22.6
Lack of positive role models	42	20.2
Lower socio-economic conditions	30	14.4
Societal strain	21	10.1
Divorce	18	8.7
Loving and caring parents	17	8.2
Working parents	11	5.3

4.3.1 General family dysfunction

In a number of articles (n=48, 23.1 percent), a general reference to family dysfunction was made without elaborating on the nature of the dysfunction. These references tended to occur in articles focused on youth crime (n=38) and in news or current affairs articles (33 of the 48 articles). A reference to both

family type and the condition of general dysfunction occurred in only 14 articles. Nine of these references were to crime families and another four referred to sole-parent families.

4.3.2 Family abuse

Abuse was referred to in 48 (23.1 percent) of the sampled articles. These discussions were mainly in news and current affairs articles (36 articles) and in articles focusing on youth crime (35). In 11 articles abuse was connected to crime families, whilst seven articles discussed abuse and referred to sole-parent families.

Five specific forms of abuse (domestic, physical, sexual, substance and violence) were discussed across the articles sampled; in some instances, references would be made to more than one type of abuse. There were also general references to abuse with no elaboration. Table 8 shows the number of articles which referred to different forms of abuse.

TABLE 8: The types of abuse to which authors referred

Type of abuse	No. of articles	Proportion of abuse-related articles (n=48)
Violent parents	32	.66
Violence in home	21	.44
Substance	16	.33
General reference	16	.33
Physical	11	.23
Domestic	9	.19
Sexual	5	.10

Across the sampled articles, abuse involving violence (violent parents, violence in the homes, physical abuse and domestic abuse) was seen as a key family condition leading to youth crime. The small number of articles referring to sexual abuse either looked at how abuse led to violent offending in young women or sexual offending in young men.

4.3.3 Poor parenting and the loving and caring family

Poor parenting was talked about in 47 articles (22.6 percent). Fifteen of these articles were published in 2006. There were only five instances where references were made to both family type and parenting (crime families (three instances) and sole parents (two)).

Seventeen articles (8.2 percent) referred to the loving and caring family (two of these also referred to the 'normal' nuclear type of family). In discussion of the loving and caring family, three key constructions emerged from the data: contradiction, need and experience. In the first instance, 11 out of the 17 articles looked at the reality that some young offenders come from loving and caring families. A further seven articles focused on the preventative aspect of the loving and caring family, and one article looked at the experiences of a young offender growing up in a loving and caring home.

4.3.4 Lower socio-economic conditions, societal strain and working parents

References to lower socio-economic conditions were made in 30 articles (14.4 percent), particularly articles on youth crime (27). These tended to occur in news and current-affairs articles (18), although eight commentaries referred to socio-economic conditions as a determinant of youth crime. When references were made to socio-economic conditions and family type, they tended to refer to the sole-parent family (seven).

References to social strain (the pressure and strain placed on the family as it struggled to meet basic needs) occurred in 21 articles (10.1 percent). These articles were mainly in *The New Zealand Herald* (five), *The Dominion Post* (five) and *The Press* (four), and in articles on youth crime (17). Authors most associated sole-parent families with societal strain (four out of six articles referring to family type and societal strain).

A small number of reporters also talked about working parents (11 articles; 5.2 percent) as an example of a family experiencing social strain. When discussing this family condition, reporters described how an increased need for parents to be working led to a lack of supervision and poor parenting. Reporters referred to a family type in only three of these articles, and in two of these instances, this family type was nuclear.

4.3.5 Positive role models, fathers and mothers

Across the sampled articles, references were also made to a lack of positive role models, particularly male role models (42 articles; 20.2 percent). Only 16 of these referred both to an absent role model and a sole-parent family. Reporters tended to refer to role models in news and current affairs articles (33 articles) and in articles published in 2003 (seven articles) and 2006 (11). A number of articles from 2003 referred

to a speech Judge Becroft made about the causes of youth offending, whilst in 2006 a variety of speakers and experts, including Judge Becroft, were referred to in media interviews.

In 33 articles (15.9 percent) an explicit statement was made about the mothers of young offenders. Only eight of these articles had some form of positive reference to the mothers of young offenders, and these tended to refer to the ways mothers supported their children through the justice system. In 11 articles, mothers were explicitly described with negative terminology. Another five articles discussed the relationship between foetal alcohol syndrome and youth offending. Three of these articles were in response to visiting experts who spoke about foetal alcohol syndrome at a youth justice conference.

4.3.6 The family, ethnicity and offending

Only 28 sampled articles (13.5 percent) directly referred to ethnicity. In most cases (16) this was a reference to the offender or the family being Māori. In six articles, authors directly noted the ethnicity of the family.

4.4 Summary

The quantitative analysis shows that families of young offenders were often referred to in one or two sentences which used terms such as 'solo mother', 'absent father', 'dysfunction', 'abuse' and 'poor parenting'. Key family types evident in media reports were sole-parent families and crime families. The families of young offenders were also described as sites of dysfunction and abuse.

5. QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

In this chapter, we will review the qualitative findings of our research. We start with outlining the data included in the analysis and then move into looking at how key family types (sole-parent and crime families) and family conditions (general dysfunction and abuse) were portrayed in media reports.

5.1 The landscape of the data

Whilst all the sampled articles were included in the initial qualitative reading and analysis, 22 articles were analysed further. These articles tended to dedicate some space to exploring a construction in depth. Looking at the attributes of the articles (as determined from the quantitative analysis), nine of these articles were general news articles, five were feature articles and the remaining eight were commentary articles. Ten of the articles focused specifically on the families of young offenders, 11 were youth crime focused and one focused on truancy. Articles were evenly spread over newspapers, with *The New Zealand Herald* (five articles), *The Press* (four) and *The Dominion Post* (six) supplying the bulk of articles and the remaining seven being spread across the small regional papers.

5.2 The normal family

One technique apparent in newspaper constructions of the young offender's family was the reference to the polar opposite – the nuclear family. This explicitly came through in conservative commentary-based articles. For example, in an opinion piece published in *The New Zealand Herald*, a perspective on the 'right' family is given – one that is formed through marriage. Marriage was seen as a solution for many societal problems and "good for the nation". Fathers were also explicitly referred to within the context of marriage. Although there is no source provided, "scientific research" was referred to as providing evidence:

> Marriage is good for a nation. Scientific research is unanimous that marriage increases the likelihood that fathers have good relationships with their children and lowers the risk of alcohol and substance abuse, domestic violence and child abuse. (McCoskrie, 2006)

There was acknowledgement in the opinion piece that contradictions do occur; but it was followed with reference to research again to enforce the idea that heterosexual families (which mix the mother's affection with the father's authority) reduce the chances of the child entering into "a life of crime":

> Are all children from solo parented homes criminals? No. Does marriage necessarily prevent crime – no again. Crime has always existed. But time after time, research shows that a mother's strong affectionate attachment to her child and the father's authority and involvement in raising his children are great buffers against a life of crime. (McCoskrie, 2006)

This argument also came through another commentary published in *The New Zealand Herald* in which the "breakdown of the family" was seen as the cause of social and economic problems (such as youth crime). The fault of all current crime problems was placed in the 1970s, the birth of feminism and various laws allowing for a diversity of families to arise. The solution given was to reinforce the traditional family:

> The breakdown of the family is the one simple reason for the almost insurmountable social problems we have today and many economic problems, too. Until that is addressed, nothing will change. The one answer to nearly all of our problems – social and economic – is to revive and bolster the traditional family. It is significant that the biggest jump in murder figures occurred between the 1970s and the 80s. It was in the 70s that much of the groundwork was laid which would lead to the weakening of the family although two contributors – the provision of divorce almost on demand and the arrival of the so-called new age – came earlier. The 1970s saw, for instance, the radicalisation of feminism, the birth of the DPB, the decriminalisation of abortion, artificial insemination, homosexual law reform, increasing tolerance of de facto relationships and single and solo parenthood and the beginnings of a liberalisation of our education system. (George, 2002)

5.3 The broken family: Types

Linking these offenders are familiar threads – poverty, broken homes, limited education, drugs and alcohol. Some learnt their criminal skills from their families. One was taken by his father on nights out stealing. He was just three years old when he started learning his dad's trade. (Courtney, 2004)

The metaphor of brokenness was not just limited to commentaries but also came through news articles and feature articles. It was used to refer to several family conditions (lack of positive role models and divorce) and family types (particularly the sole-parent family).

5.3.1 Where are the fathers?

Stories created around family breakdown talked about the 'adverse' effects of breakdown, particularly around the role of fathers. In one case, a statement from Judge Becroft was used to illustrate how young male offenders seek a male role model through gangs and truancy:

> Many of the young people who come through youth courts are 'like heat-seeking missiles' in their search for a male role model, he [Judge Becroft] says. If they don't find it in a teacher, or youth leader, or sports team captain, they're likely to find it in a gang leader or an older boy they meet while wagging school. (Chalmers, 2006)

5.3.2 What about the mothers?

Whilst fathers were seen as absent, and needed in order to provide a role model, there were clear instances of mothers being constructed negatively, even to the point of being seen as the cause of youth crime. Indeed, in one article, the words "role model" were explicitly used to describe the ways in which a mother led her daughter into drugs and alcohol:

> Client A was a classic example. Her drug and alcohol use was directly attributable to her mother's use, and her criminal offending flowed on from that. 'The mother was very responsive when it was put to her that she was actually a role model for her kids,' Mrs Wilson says. 'It made her think from a whole different perspective and the drug issue disappeared pretty quickly.' (Kay, 2004)

In another article, mothers were seen as the link in the 'family tree' who started producing young criminals by seeking 'like-minded' partners. These women engaged in 'sexual unions' producing more criminal children:

> It begins with a couple who don't appear to be criminals themselves, but three of their 10 children are. This trio starts what will become one of the district's top 10 offending families, clocking up 673 charges nationwide. The 53-year-old daughter, with 24 charges of assault and theft, forms one notable branch. She has a sexual union which produces four children, one of whom turns criminal and partners up with a 43-year-old thief with 129 charges. The woman's second union, with a 52-year-old thief, spawns a mini-crimewave. All five of their children become criminals. The eldest son, 26, has 99 charges for vehicle theft, burglary and serious traffic offences. The youngest son, a prolific burglar by 18, is headed down the same path at a faster pace, with 71 offences. Their only sister, a 25-year-old with eight charges, has met a burglar the same age and they now have three children of their own. So far, the family tree shows no sign that these offspring have turned to crime. (Martin, 2006)

5.3.3 Sole-parent families

Reflecting constructions of the mothers of young offenders, when mentioned, sole-parent families tended to be constructed negatively – both as the place to find young offenders and the space in which young offenders developed. A key construction centred on the idea that sole mothers lack the resources and abilities to effectively raise their children, and that absent fathers only exacerbate the problem. A news article that reflected this construction came from *The New Zealand Herald* and looked at 'Fathering Week', an initiative by the Waitakere City Council in response to an Auckland University of Technology (AUT) report. The reporter interviewed an AUT academic about the need for a focus on fathers. The argument given was that men were excluded through a "'feminised' culture" which saw them as "not necessary":

> 'Things like Plunket and Playcentre have been serving women for a long time. There is a lack of consciousness about how it might be for a man going along there,' he said. 'They say any man is welcome but don't notice what sort of magazines [they] have in the waiting room or the posters on the wall.' He says the feminist movement had to assert that men and women could do anything equally, but genetic science was now showing that the two genders were different. 'We have come from a culture where women, in claiming their independence, have tended to establish the notion that fathers are not necessary,' he said. (Collins, 2007)

There were instances across media reports where sole mothers were talked about but not condemned. These reports tended to acknowledge the factors that affected

the family as well as the mother herself. However, often the mothers were described as failing to have the resources to stop their children entering crime:

> In one known crime family, only the children are regularly in trouble with the law. The mother had an abusive partner, who has since left: she has tried and failed to prevent her children falling into a familiar cycle of drug abuse, alcohol abuse, thieving and domestic violence. Most of them are now in jail. (Boniface, 2004)

Across the media, sole families tended to be associated with brokenness and dysfunction. One commentator, however, used the news media to alert the reading public to the problems of predicting crime through looking at family type, and to point out that dysfunction is possible within in the nuclear norm:

> But the link is disputed by family experts who say family structure does not predict such outcomes. Psychologist Jan Pryor, director of the Roy McKenzie Centre for the Study of Families, at Victoria University, says the key factors affecting children include parental conflict, poor parenting, and economic adversity. 'If you look at lone-parent households, you find on average kids don't do as well, not because there is only one parent but because of things like parental conflict. The reality is there are thousands of kids living with married, two-parent families leading miserable lives.' (Gamble, 2003)

5.3.4 The crime family

> A hard core of young criminals from crime 'mini-dynasties' are committing increasingly serious offences in Nelson, and sometimes learning their lawlessness from parents or siblings, a lawyer says. (Phillips, 2007)

Another construction of the broken and dysfunctional family was the crime family, where the parents or relatives of children were actually involved in the criminal justice system themselves. Explicit constructions of this family often featured emotive and metaphoric language. References to crime families also tended to expand beyond a short sentence to a paragraph focus, and, in most cases, an article focus.

Two extreme constructions of these families occurred in *The Press* and *The Dominion Post*, where the police and community experts interviewed talked about intergenerational crime occurring in Māori and Pacific

families in their communities. In one *The Dominion Post* article, Māori 'crime families' in Rotorua were compared with mafia families. The article was full of references such as "underbelly", "underworld", "Soprano" and Mr and Mrs "Bigs". Whilst the article itself was an exploration into whether Rotorua has mafia families at all, there was a message that Rotorua has a number of 'crime families' and that these families ware Māori:

> Kevin Lee, programme coordinator of Mana Social Services, agrees with Mr Smith's estimate of perhaps 24 crime families. They're not as powerful as popular imagination might have it, but Mr Lee says their impact is significant. 'Even though they haven't got Mafia-style undertones, they do have a big effect on our community.' Mr Lee is not aware of a single crime family that has ever gone straight. There have, however, been victories with individual family members. (Boniface, 2004)

In *The Press* article, the 'crime family problem' in Christchurch was explored. The article used a narrative approach to take the reader onto the 13th floor of the central police station. The walls of the 13th floor were not decorated with "certificates, family photos and inspiring artworks" but rather painted with a series of family trees. Echoing *The Dominion Post* article on Rotorua, a number of metaphors, stereotypes and emotive words were used throughout the article: "pedigrees", "breed", "mugshots", "rampant recidivists", "prolific offenders", "genealogy" and "dynasties":

> Christchurch police are targeting the 10 families who are the region's most prolific offenders, writes YVONNE MARTIN. Most professionals line their office walls with framed academic certificates, family photos and inspiring artworks. But on the 13th floor of the Christchurch central police station, the Canterbury District Commander Superintendent, Sandra Manderson, has a feature wall containing the pedigrees of another breed altogether. The long charts running horizontally along the wall show neatly mapped-out, computer-generated family trees of some of the district's most prolific offenders. The names and mugshots of these rampant recidivists are known to every frontline police officer who has spent any time in Christchurch. And these criminals are getting plenty of unwanted police attention right now, besides being pin-ups on the police chief's wall. Police have been studying their genealogy for the simple reason that they have

pinpointed families who have a disproportionate number of criminal members committing a disproportionate number of the district's crimes. Ten criminal dynasties have been singled out for intensive monitoring and strategic sounding by multiple police branches in the latest bid to cut crime. (Martin, 2006)

5.4 The broken family: Conditions

Authors also talked about a variety of factors which made crime families 'broken', particularly dysfunction and abuse.

5.4.1 Spaces of abuse

Abuse was one family condition explored in depth in various articles. In talking about the families of young offenders, reporters also directly connected abuse to these homes. One construction of abuse was as an intergenerational condition where abused children become both criminals and abusing parents. For example, in a news article (written in editorial style) in *The Timaru Herald*, a picture was presented where "a mob of young men" experiencing abuse learn only how to hurt others through physical abuse:

> And that's my point: here was a mob of young men who would probably have been whacked all their lives, and who learned from that only to whack other people. A gang upbringing is not delicate. Gang members and their mates are not students of child psychology; they live by the efficiency of violence in their own lives. Violence begets violence, it's inter-generational, and jail is one inevitable result. (Rimutaka tantrum children deserved smack, 2007)

Another evident construction of abuse was that it occurred in Māori and Pacific families. In a commentary in *The New Zealand Herald* a medical expert linked abuse with "Māori and Pacific Island parents" who, in his or her opinion, are "prime users of excessive physical discipline":

> A doctor, arguing against Sue Bradford's bill, tells me that he's witnessed frequent and inappropriate use of physical discipline against children by Māori and Pacific Island parents, that they are 'the prime users of excessive physical discipline' and that 'this form of physical discipline is well known to result in impulsive violent acts later in life'. I wish I could disagree with that, but I've too often witnessed it myself. (Misa, 2007)

The general pattern in talking about abuse was to attribute it to youth crime. However, one commentary in *The New Zealand Herald* acknowledged the link between abuse and crime, but also discussed the impact of "market-driven social and economic policies" on the family. In effect, it noted that the strain and stress on families can exacerbate environments of dysfunction:

> All this while the number of younger and younger offenders has escalated, signalling a deep social and economic malaise. These youth have come, in the main, from home lives full of violence, deprivation and abandonment, against a background of the market-driven social and economic policies launched in the 1980s. (Robson, 2002)

There was a clear absence of the voices of the families themselves in media reports. Throughout the whole sample, only one article (a feature article) gave a story of survival and resilience. The story told was of a young woman resisting "following in the family footsteps":

> In one case, a girl wanted to focus on schoolwork rather than following in the family footsteps. At home, everyone was drunk or drugged up, and there was nowhere for her to study, so she was eventually found a flat. She hasn't been back in the court system since, which is as good an indicator of success as any. (Boniface, 2004)

5.4.2 Spaces of dysfunction

Alongside abuse, dysfunction was referred to as a key condition in families of young offenders. In some instances, the conditions of dysfunction would be analysed further and become a focus of a comment, paragraph or article. Two conditions of dysfunction referred to were poverty and lower socio-economic conditions. In one commentary, clusters of geographical poverty were linked to both dysfunction and to youth crime. Using metaphoric references, these areas were described as "breeding and training grounds" that provided a "marketplace" for drugs. They were also areas in which Māori reside:

> The overwhelming majority of New Zealanders, irrespective of their income or address, are honest. However, those in low socio-economic areas suffer the worst effects of crime because their neighbourhoods are the breeding and training grounds of young criminals and the most intensive

marketplace of illegal drugs. This means the victims of crime are mostly beneficiaries, single parents (usually women), Māori and young people generally – often uninsured and without discretionary income to repair their lives from the inevitable cost of being a victim of crime. (A reminder of a government's prime obligation, 2004)

In another article in the *Waikato Times*, an interviewed local expert explicitly spoke of "poverty" and "broken" families. These themes were drawn upon and developed through references to the strain and pressure put on young people in these areas. They had "unrealistic expectations", they "want material success not spiritual" and the material things are "dangled like a carrot":

> 'It all goes back to poverty. You've got situations where the family has broken down, single parents and absent fathers, there are not good role models. It's lack of food, lack of resources, lack of education and support systems,' says Rarere.

> 'There are unrealistic expectations. They say to me they want to be a rapper, to buy a car, to have money and the prettiest girl. They want material success not spiritual, and all the material things are dangled like a carrot.' (Monahan, 2006)

Another article explored the impact of cultural strain on crime, particularly for Pacific Island youth. This article looked at how the tension between home (traditional Pacific culture) and community (New Zealand culture), when combined with other factors, such as socio-economic pressure, could result in youth offending:

> She says the reasons for Pacific Islanders' over-representations in areas of violent crime are complex. Tension between New Zealand-born children and parents with traditional values is often

a factor, along with socio-economic and cultural stresses on families adjusting to life in a new country. (Todd, 2007)

Some references to strain were evident in articles when dysfunction was examined in depth. In one article, an interviewed police officer agreed with the possibility that families might be living in strain but disagreed that strain led to crime. That is, "disadvantaged" families were not necessarily dysfunctional families. Dysfunctional families were inherently "anti-social" and supported criminal behaviour:

> Though many families of children at risk are disadvantaged – mostly financially – a small percentage of hardcore offenders comes from anti-social families where crime is a way of life, he says. 'That is like a match to the petrol. Not only have you got the kids acting badly – it is being actively supported at home. The difference is that a disadvantaged family will not support that type of behaviour at all.' (Mirams, 2002)

5.5 Summary

Looking at the media reports where families of young offenders were talked about in depth, it is evident that there was a clear focus on family type and family conditions. These constructions differed from mentions of the nuclear family, which was often seen as the elixir to youth crime and society's problems. Absent fathers, bad mothers, sole-parent families and crime families were examples of constructions used through the media to develop a picture of the type of family surrounding young offenders. Often these families were talked about negatively, but there were instances where comments were made about the strain placed on these families.

6. DISCUSSION

In this chapter, we discuss the results in the light of the literature about youth offending. In particular, we look at the types of knowledge drawn upon in media reports, and draw some implications for consideration.

6.1 The media landscape

Media reporting and public interpretation of the news is not a simple relationship free from bias and mixed interpretations. To a certain degree the mediascape can be seen as a battleground where truths are made and contested. On the one hand, all the papers analysed in this report are commercially produced and sold. This means they have to be saleable. On the other hand, the mediascape is also a space where commentators and organisations try to influence the news to get a perspective across to the general public. This means that various interest groups see the media as a vehicle to get their information to the public.

Furthermore, the journalist has to interpret the information available as well as interview available experts (to a deadline) to write an accessible story for readers and consumers. Not only are they doing this in a context of competition, but they are also constrained through the brevity of news stories and the pressure on news media to be able to provide information on most, if not all, major stories (both national and international). All of this restricts the amount of context that can be given to the reading public in news stories. Whilst a feature article does provide more room for detail, it also requires more resources (time, editorial assistance, photographers, research).

Alongside reporters, commentators also play an important part in discussing and commenting on issues arising from current events. Commentators are unique in that their role is not to be objective; rather, it is to provide a perspective on an issue that represents a particular viewpoint (for example, a conservative or liberal opinion). Commentators write in a manner that generates a response from readers. Editors will intervene on matters of taste or legalities but very rarely edit the opinions expressed. As we found in this study, often a number of views are presented on an issue, allowing for fairness and balance.

Journalists and commentators must also make the news and issues understandable and accessible to the reading public. Typically this is done through the use of stereotypes (Fowler, 1990) or categorisations, where a word or phase is used from which the reader can then develop a general picture. For example, in popular culture, Bro' Town is a media programme focused on creating laughter through urban Pacific Island stereotypes. Stereotypes such as 'nuclear family', 'crime family', 'sole parent', 'abusive family' and 'dysfunctional family' were used throughout the print media between 2002 and 2007 to describe the families of young offenders. Stereotypes are not created by the media; they tend to arise through the writer's simplification of information and the reader's interpretation of the message presented. The stereotypes of the families of young offenders used throughout media reports between 2002 and 2007 tended to be associated with a developmental psychological understanding of risk factors.

6.2 Constructing the family through risk factors

Developmental-risk psychology focuses on the individual and their characteristics, as well as their family circumstances (Farrington, 1996, 1997). This psychological approach to deviance originated in the work of David Farrington. When it comes to familial risk factors, Farrington (1996) noted four key aspects of parenting styles that influence future offending: the ways in which parents supervise and monitor their children; the involvement of parents in children's activities; the inconsistent discipline practices of parents; and the type of relationship parents form with their children. In New Zealand, the Christchurch Health and Development study (Fergusson & Horwood, 1998) found that children with conduct problems were also associated with other familial factors, such as having a young mother, living in lower socio-economic circumstances, living in a sole-parent home and experiencing domestic violence at home.

Although research clearly shows that these are common factors in many offenders' backgrounds, it is important to recognise that most children who experience these risk factors do not commit crimes (Ministry of Justice & Ministry of Social Development, 2002). Equally, coming from a warm and loving, economically secure home is not a guarantee that someone will not commit a crime. The presence of multiple risk factors, therefore, is not, in itself, an accurate predictor of offending.

Furthermore, risk factors might equally be moderated by protective factors, such as strong and positive family relationships, or fear of detection or disapproval from family, peers or a partner (Farrington, 2007). Finally, risk-factor research has also been accused of marginalising societal groups through a focus on class, ethnicity and gender (Beals, 2008; France, 2008; France & Crow, 2005; Priday, 2006; White, 2002).

When we looked at media reports, the risk-factor paradigm dominated perspectives and reports. At times, there was even an assumption that factors such as parenting style, abuse and socio-economic status simply caused offending. The risk-factor paradigm allowed for commonsense explanations to be made. Although the problems of the risk-factor paradigm are very real, it is helpful for understanding the psychological factors associated with crime. There is a need, however, to put these factors into a broader social, political and ideological context.

6.3 Constructing the family through strain

Strain theories reject the idea that crimes are only, or simply, a result of the biological, psychological or psychiatric makeup of an individual person. They argue that wider social issues contribute to people committing crimes. Strain theory originated in the work of Durkheim (1999) and was developed further by Merton (1999). Merton argues that modern, Western societies have material, social and economic goals that people internalise and strive for. These are the markers of success. These goals can be met through legitimate or illegitimate means. Merton (1999) also argues that the means for achieving these goals are not equally accessible for everyone; this leads to strain and deviant acts (such as crime).

Social-strain theory also provides another lens to view the crime family. Rather than internalising the crime as a result of pathology and risk within the family, strain theory argues that the social and economic pressures placed on a family can push them into crime. It helps explain how crime rates climb in times of recession and in communities where there is a large division between the rich and the poor. In some cases the family might also internalise the strain (engage in what Merton, 1999, calls 'retreatism'), resulting in dysfunctional parenting, or even abuse, as the parents attempt to cope with the stress.

However, theories referring to social strain do not explain the developmental pathways of offending evident in some young offenders (Church, 2004; Farrington, 1997; Fergusson, Horwood, & Nagin, 2000; Moffitt, 1990).

Strain theories move to the other extreme of explanations – rather than focusing on the pathology of the family, it could be said that strain theories look at the 'pathology' of society. Furthermore, although strain theory is useful for looking at the types of factors that pressure families into crime and the effect that social inequalities have on families, it can provide an excuse for families' offending. There is a need for a balance, and to acknowledge risk factors alongside strain. We can find this type of theory in the work of Harms (2005).

6.4 Moving forward: Putting youth crime and the family into context

Harms' (2005) multi-dimensional approach considers the wide range of interacting influences and dimensions in a person's life. These dimensions include internal biological, psychological and spiritual factors, and broader social, economic and political influences. These influences can either be positive or negative; they feed into the ways in which a person builds resilience over time. Her framework also acknowledges that each of these factors is complex and multi-dimensional, and they influence each other in widely variable and complex ways.

In Harms' theory, families are located within the broader social, economic and political systems. Families influence, and are influenced by, the neighbourhoods in which they are located, and the workplaces and community-based organisations, such as schools, churches, clubs and sports groups, that their members are involved with. Public health and schooling systems, as well as local and national government activities, affect family life too. Families also have to negotiate the psychological, spiritual and biological factors brought to the unit by each member.

The acknowledgement of the structural and the social is an important aspect of Harms' theory. In effect, she argues that we can both acknowledge the impact of risk factors on a young person's life, and the place of these risk factors in a family. She also argues, however, that families are part of communities, societies and cultures. She acknowledges the role that communities can

have in supporting families, and the reality of social, cultural and economic strain in the lives of families. In effect, her theory combines the psychological and the sociological. She provides a tool that does not isolate the causes of crime within the family or within society, but acknowledges the interplay between the two. Harms' approach does not take responsibility from the family but it does give society a responsibility in the prevention of youth crime. Taking this approach to reporting would acknowledge the impact of risk factors and the social and societal context surrounding the family of the young offender. It could potentially enable the reading public to see the complex causes of youth crime.

6.5 Implications for policy and practice

The media is not a landscape crafted by the writing of reporters alone. It is a complex space in which the perspectives of speakers, interviewees, politicians, experts, social groups, social commentators and, at times, the general public are brought together by a reporter or commentator in a short article or report. Whilst constraints do surround news reporting (such as the brevity of articles and current stories of public interest), there are four key implications that arise from this research.

1. Policymakers and practitioners using the media as a vehicle to communicate a message to the general public should be encouraged to avoid focusing only on risk-factor constructions of the young offender's family. Rather, media releases and interviews should attempt to include information on the factors affecting families. There should also be an attempt to get positive stories of sole-parent families into the news as well as stories of disadvantaged families making a difference in their community.

2. Media practitioners should engage in dialogue on the ways in which reports of the families of young offenders are constructed, and the possible implications of these reports on disadvantaged groups in New Zealand (such as sole-parent families or families living in lower socio-economic conditions) who are not engaged in criminal acts.

3. This dialogue should also include consideration of reports of disadvantaged and sole-parent families

making a difference in their children's lives and the lives of others in their communities. Discussion should also be held about providing in-depth feature articles during times where youth crime and the families of young offenders feature heavily in news reports.

4. Discussion with commentators and editors should focus on continuing to provide the reading public with a balance of opinion. During times where youth crime features heavily in the news, editors should consider using commentary space to allow the issues to be discussed in depth by commentators who have some understanding of the social and societal conditions that affect families of young offenders.

6.6 Limitations of this research

The findings of this research should also be put into the context of the limitations behind the methodology. The limitations in this research have to do with the method of data collection and the type of media analysed. First, although Newztext is a database with a wide collection of articles, it does not collect every article. This means that what we researched in this report was a sample of articles published during that time. However, the balance of news, feature and commentary articles alongside the spread of articles across the years (with more in 2002, a year of extraordinary youth crime) suggests that the sample is representative of the papers surveyed.

A further limitation in the Newztext database is that it may not use the headlines of the actual article as published in the paper. For this reason, we did not analyse the headlines of articles. This dimension of the research would be interesting to look at, as some readers of news articles read the news headline-by-headline, not article-by-article. This could be amended through physical paper search at the Alexander Turnbull Newspaper Library housed at the National Library.

Finally, because our data were electronic, we did not analyse photos or other forms of media. Research on youth offending suggests that often the television media leaves a larger impression on the attitudes of consumers than text media (Gilens, 2004). This would be a further study in itself.

7. CONCLUSIONS

In this study, we set out to analyse the ways in which families of young offenders were represented in New Zealand newspapers. We found that a number of constructions came through the media, including sole-parent families, lack of male role models, crime families and abuse and dysfunction. These constructions were consistent with a psychological risk-factor paradigm understanding about the causes of youth offending. Whilst reporting through newspapers can and does have a number of constraints and limitations, through feature reports and commentaries a space could be created where stories of families overcoming disadvantage could be told and the social, economic and political strain on families of young offenders discussed in more detail.

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APPENDIX 1: Node structure

Thematic category	Sub-categories	Further sub-categories
Ethnicity	> Family ethnicity > Offender ethnicity > General reference to ethnicity	
Family conditions	> Overall dysfunction	> Physical abuse > Sexual abuse > Domestic abuse > Substance abuse > Violence in the home > General reference
	> Loving and caring family	> The need for … > The criminal from > The experience of …
	> Lower socio-economic conditions > Societal strain > Divorce > Poor parenting > Lack of positive role models > Working parents > Mothers	
	> General contradictions	> General positive > General negative > Foetal alcohol syndrome disorder > Mothers of criminals > Personal experiences
Role of family	> Support for family	> Lack of support > Support given or need for acknowledged > Family difficulty in getting support > The need to build trust
	> Family involvement	> Parenting skills > Involvement in intervention > Where intervention needs to start
	> Providing support	> General reference to families providing support > Extended family provide support
	> Accountability	

Family type	> One-parent	> Reference to sole mothers
		> Reference to sole fathers
		> Positive reference
		> General reference to sole-parent families
		> Reference to absent fathers
	> Nuclear norm	
	> Already parents	
	> Crime families	
Arising themes in texts	> National Party politics	
	> Choy death	
	> Children's Commissioner	
	> Andrew Becroft	
	> Academic references	
	> Early intervention	

APPENDIX 2: Full list of analysed articles

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