Examining news media portrayals
of family harm in Aotearoa:
Is animal abuse part of the discourse?

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A dissertation submitted to
Auckland University of Technology
in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Criminology

2021

School of Social Sciences & Public Policy

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Abstract

In New Zealand, domestic violence is a severe problem. The role of media products in depicting incidents and information related to domestic abuse, as seen in newspapers, highlights significant discrepancies. While there are many forms of abuse, the media tends to focus on physical violence rather than psychological abuse. The possibility for abuse directed toward pet companions to cause psychological harm to victims has been investigated through research. This study aims to investigate which forms of harm are most reported in New Zealand newspapers and whether animal abuse is reported in the context of family violence. A media content analysis of 77 newspaper articles was undertaken from July 5th to October 5th, 2021. According to the findings, physical and sexual abuse is most commonly reported in the news media. Furthermore, financial, psychological, and animal cruelty are rarely reported forms of emotional abuse. According to the study's findings, emotional forms of abuse are rarely covered in New Zealand newspapers, especially animal abuse. Limited coverage means the public's ability to understand family violence is hindered if they are uninformed of emotional forms of harm.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Nirisha Singh   6/12/2021
Signature   Date

Acknowledgements

I want to express my gratitude to the following people, without whom I would not have been able to complete my research or complete my honours degree. I'd like to thank my supervisor, Antje Deckert, for her continuous support and advice. Her enthusiasm, knowledge, and strong attention to detail helped me stay on track with my work. I would also like to express my very great appreciation to Wairua Pukeiti and Davis Pham. Finally, I would like to thank my mother for her constant support and encouragement during my education.

1. Introduction

Domestic violence is a severe phenomenon affecting New Zealand society (Ministry of Justice, 2021). It is a complex social issue where victims often have no recourse but to tolerate, feel shameful of or remain in harmful situations which carry long-term psychological implications. Depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), suicidal ideation, eating disorders and social dysfunction are among some of the associated implications of abuse (Golding, 1999; Howard, Trevillion & Agnew-Davies, 2010). Furthermore, psychological trauma has a particularly negative impact on developing a child's personality and behaviour when exposed to violence in early childhood (Kahui & Snively, 2014; Trentham et al., 2018).

News outlets, media and platforms have a significant impact on public views of social issues such as domestic abuse and legislative responses to it (Taylor, 2009). Furthermore, media stories have the power to elicit and sustain a wide range of affective and emotional responses to issues (Taylor, 2009). Domestic violence suffers from under-reporting and unfair depictions in the media, which distort the reality of harm (Taylor, 2009). Domestic violence in the media frequently ignores contextual factors in favour of focusing on individual factors. For example, media reports on family violence at all levels, frequently shift responsibility for resolving the problem from society to the individual (Taylor, 2009). As overseas research shows, physical domestic violence is disproportionately portrayed in the media compared to other forms of abuse, with little regard for its psychological component (Sims, 2008). Emotional abuse has been characterised as part of domestic abuse, while economic abuse recently has gained recognition as a complex yet interrelated form of harm impacting victims (Domestic Violence Amendment Act 2018).

The idea that animals can be used to harm victims psychologically is of relevance in comprehending victim-abuser interactions when looking into this type of abuse (Jorgenson & Maloney, 1999; Newberry, 2017; Upadhya, 2014). That said, domestic violence is difficult to categorise as an offence. Under the Australian and New Zealand Standard Offence Classification (ANSZOC) domestic violence can be attributed to a variety of offences and is dependent on each particular case. As a result, this study focuses simply on the act of domestic violence rather than its offence classification (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011). Nevertheless, this research seeks to examine media portrayals of domestic violence to determine which forms of abuse dominate news media and

whether public discourse recognises animal abuse as a form of harm within a family harm context.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition and prevalence rates of family harm

Family harm encompasses various forms of abuse, including physical, sexual, psychological, and economic harm (New Zealand Police, 2021a). The New Zealand Police recognises the complexity of abuse victims' experience by using the phrase family harm (New Zealand Police, 2021a). Forms of abuse range from Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), child abuse and neglect to elder abuse (New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse, 2019). The recent recognition of financial or economic harm, defined as the threat, manipulation, restriction of access to personal finances, has prompted collaborative partnerships with agencies for victims to receive support (New Zealand Police, 2021a). Agencies include but are not limited to Women's Refuge, Work and Income New Zealand, Accident Compensation Corporation (ACC) and Oranga Tamariki (New Zealand Police, 2021a). Temporary accommodation and financial support are among the services agencies can provide other than Protection Orders and Police Safety Orders issued by the Police (New Zealand Police, 2021b).

Definitions of different forms of abuse are principally the same across various New Zealand institutions. Section 3(2) of the Domestic Violence Act 1995 defines domestic violence as harm against a person in or has been in a domestic relationship. Violence within a domestic violence context refers to physical abuse (slapping, kicking, punching), sexual abuse (non-consensual sexual contact, deliberate transmission of sexual infections) and psychological abuse (intimidation, threats) (Domestic Violence Act 1995). Section (2)(c)(iva) states that financial abuse is categorised as part of psychological abuse (denying, restricting access to finances, resources). Financial abuse was only added to the Domestic Violence Act in 2013 via an Amendment Act (Domestic Violence Amendment Act 2013). The Family Violence Act 2018 replaces the Domestic Violence Act 1995 with additional forms of abuse added to section 11(1) to define psychological abuse within a family violence context. Unlike the Domestic Violence Act 1995, the Family Violence Act 2018 recognises animal abuse as a form of psychological abuse. For example, section 11 (1)(d)(ii) states that psychological abuse includes the ill-treatment of household pets or other animals whose welfare affects significantly, or is likely to affect significantly, a person's wellbeing. Perpetration of harm is inflicted by a spouse, family member or someone sharing a household with the victim or anyone with a similarly close relationship (Domestic Violence Act 1995).

The NZ Police conduct 100,000 investigations into incidents related to family violence every year (Ministry of Justice, 2021). Victimisation rates show that approximately 35% of women experience physical or sexual assault due to IPV in their lifetime (Ministry of Justice, 2021). This statistic increases to 55% when the form of harm includes psychological abuse.

The assumption that women experience higher victimisation rates inhibits public understanding that males are also vulnerable to harm (Alejo, 2014; Peraica et al., 2021; Walby & Myhill, 2001). For example, 13% of males experience sexual violence or abuse in their lifetime (Ministry of Justice, 2021). The majority of male and female victims experience such abuse before the age of 16 (Ministry of Justice, 2021). Fanslow and Robinson (2010) found that many victims of physical or sexual abuse do not report incidents to the police regardless of the victim's gender. Fear of retaliation, limited ability to secure self-protection, privacy concerns and police leniency are only some of the underlying factors inhibiting victims from reporting incidents of abuse (Felson et al., 2002).

In relation to New Zealand child abuse statistics, a child dies as a result of family violence every five weeks (Child Matters, 2021). In 2020, Child Matters (2021) recorded 1,846 cases of offences against children under the age of 15, which involved severe assault and injury. Additionally, 1,488 cases of aggravated sexual assault were reported (Child Matters, 2021). In 2020, Oranga Tamariki received 78,900 reports of concern, and 41,300 assessments and investigations were conducted relating to child abuse (Child Matters, 2021). While there are no population-based studies on elder abuse, research estimates that two to five percent of elders are victims of family abuse (Fanslow, 2005). Age Concern New Zealand (2005) found that 56% of abuse and neglect cases involved psychological abuse, 46% of cases involved financial abuse, and 22% of cases of physical abuse was experienced by elderly victims (Age Concern New Zealand, 2005).

2.2 Understanding IPV discrepancies

Morris et al. (2003) found that IPV affects 49.3% of Māori women and 22.2% of New Zealand European women, suggesting an unequal distribution of vulnerability among social groups. Doone (2000) discovered that, despite accounting for 15% of the total population of New Zealand, Māori men account for 50% of male-on-female assaults, with Māori women and children accounting for 50% of women's shelter victims (New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse, 2007). However, more recent data on IPV among ethnic

groups is needed to fully comprehend these statistics and evaluate if outcomes for victims remain the same. Research on ethnic disparities concerning IPV suggests that socio-economic hardship and adversity contribute to perpetration rates (Bassuk & Dawson 2006; Feldman & Ridley 1995). Childhood exposure to violence (physical, sexual, and interparental violence) leads to intergenerational effects (Deckert, 2019; Fergusson 2003; Ministry of Social Development 2004; Ministry of Social Development 2007). Furthermore, theories related to colonisation emphasise additional aspects that affect cultural well-being (Jackson, 1987). Historically, Eurocentric attitudes and practices have oppressed Māori, leaving many feeling estranged and self-conscious (Balzer et al., 1997; Cram et al., 2002; Durie, 1995). Violence against women in Indigenous, ethnic, and migrant communities is widespread but underreported to police throughout all age, sexuality, and identity categories (Simon-Kumar, 2019). Compared to Māori, Pacific and European women, Asian women report the lowest lifetime prevalence of physical and sexual abuse (Fanslow & Robinson, 2010). While violence against Indigenous, ethnic, and non-ethnic women has certain parallels, violence in Indigenous and ethnic communities can take on different cultural forms, manifest in different ways, and be caused by a different set of risk factors (Simon-Kumar, 2019).

Although rates of domestic violence are consistently high, family harm reports further increased in Aotearoa during the Level 4 Covid-19 lockdown in 2020 (Franks, 2020). Calls regarding family harm incidents increased by 20%, with significant impacts on children due to a lack of external agency and community oversight through teachers and healthcare professionals (Franks, 2020). The number of family harm reports ranged from 345 to 645 per day, which increased from 271 to 478 per day the year before (Franks, 2020).

2.3   Economic costs of family harm

Family harm is a costly societal issue that strains government resources (Kahui & Snively, 2014). For example, in response to the increased demand for police services during the 2020 Covid-19 pandemic, a $200 million investment was granted for family harm services. Whāngaia Ngā Pā Harakeke (WNPH), a police response initiative that works explicitly with family harm issues, received part of this funding (Manaaki Tairāwhiti, 2021; Roy, 2020). Within these funds, $140 million was to support family violence victims, $25 million funded victims of elder abuse, $19 million was to compensate victims of non-fatal strangulation, and $16 million was for rehabilitation services for

perpetrators (Roy, 2020). The 2021 budget funds $131 million into the community and Iwi-led programmes to reduce family and sexual violence in New Zealand. The budget subsidises four-year prevention and intervention investment managed through related initiatives. Some of these initiatives include investments in Māori housing, kaupapa Māori violence prevention, increased benefit levels and training incentive allowances for women utilising services, all of which targets the multifaceted and complex issue of family harm (Ministry of Social Development, 2019).

Estimates suggest that child abuse and IPV cost $4 to $7 billion annually (Kahui & Snively, 2014). The Economic Cost of Child Abuse and IPV framework estimates the economic impact of abuse (Kahui & Snively, 2014). Costs within this framework include the cost of pain, suffering, premature mortality ($3.6 billion), direct health costs ($377.7 million), costs associated with courts, corrections, legal services, child protection, victim support and rehabilitation programmes for perpetrators ($837.7 million) and ACC compensation ($582.3 million) (Kahui & Snively, 2014).

2.4 Psychology, animals, and family harm

While research has established physical, sexual, psychological, and economic harm as forms of abuse, more recent research has focussed on animal abuse as a mechanism to inflict harm on victims (Ascione et al., 2007; Carlisle-Frank et al., 2004; Faver & Strand, 2003; Fitzgerald et al., 2019; Newberry, 2017; Onyskiw, 2007; Upadhya, 2014). Consistent with feminist theorising, research suggests that animal abuse in the context of family harm is a method to control and terrorise victims (Johnson, 2008). Control tactics are used against pets to intimidate, psychologically distress, and restrict victims (Adams, 1998; Faver & Strand, 2007). Perpetrators achieve intimidation by threatening (to harm or give away the pet), physically abusing (slapping, kicking, punching, actual killing) and ignoring the care and needs of the pet (depriving the pet of accessibility to food or veterinary care) (Ascione, 1998; Volant et al., 2008).

More importantly, not all male abusers harm pets; however, research into pet abuse used as a mechanism to inflict harm has noted differences between abusers who abuse both women and animals and abusers who harm humans only (Carlisle-Frank et al., 2004). Carlisle-Frank and colleagues (2004) emphasise the term 'selective battering', which best distinguishes the attitudes, perceptions and behaviours of abusers who target animals and people compared to those who abuse only people. Animal abusers or

selective batterers possess beliefs about their pets that differ from non-pet family violence abusers (Carlisle-Frank et al., 2004). Aside from abusing pets to psychologically harm human victims, selective batterers can harm pets because they perceive animals are property or deserve harm (Carlisle-Frank et al., 2004). Abusing pets as scapegoats for anxiety and stress is a common justification used by perpetrators (Agnew, 1998). Animal abusers frequently believe that by abusing their pets, they will be able to erase their pets' undesirable behaviours (Kellert & Felthous, 1985). As a result, selective battering is a type of abuse in which the perpetrator's abusive tendencies are linked to a process of rationalisation (Carlisle-Frank et al., 2004). Abusers who harm pets replace affection towards pets with threatening communication, harsh and unrealistic expectations (dogs should not bark) and negative perceptions of pets as property (Carlisle-Frank et al., 2004). Since animal abuse in the context of family harm is associated with the psychological paradigm of abuse, Flynn (2000a) suggests that abusers instil fear, guilt, and grief by attacking a vulnerable pet. As with research on emotional harm that victims experience, victim-blaming causes emotional distress (Adams, 1995, Faver & Strand, 2007; Flynn, 2000b).

2.5 Pet ownership and abuse statistics

Companion Animals New Zealand (2016) uses the phraseology 'companion animal' to represent animals who receive guardianship and welfare by humans (New Zealand Companion Animal Council Inc., 2016). Studies on the potential benefits of pet ownership suggest that pet companions promote health by creating opportunities to improve fitness, decrease anxiety and sympathetic nervous system arousal as they are a source of comfort and safety (Jennings, 1997). Pets that elicit tactile stimulation (activation of nerve signal through texture, temperature, touch sensations), e.g., petting cats, dogs, rabbits, are beneficial for achieving these positive effects (Jennings, 1997). As nurturing beings, pets decrease feelings of depression or loneliness, therefore, increasing social support and more successful coping strategies (Friedmann, 1990). For example, Newberry (2017) found that victims often talk about how pet companions do not judge them compared to their abusive partners. Therefore, victims develop gratitude towards pet companions as they possess characteristics that perpetrators lack (Newberry, 2017). Straede and Gates (1993) report that pet companions become moderators of psychological distress. Therefore, family functioning and familial pet attachment correlate positively with a family's ability to be cohesive and adaptable (Cox, 1993).

New Zealand has a high pet ownership rate, with more than 4.3 million companion animals residing in 64% of households (New Zealand Companion Animal Council Inc., 2016). In New Zealand, 44% of the pet companion population is cats, with 28% of the population being dogs, 10% fish, 7% birds and 3% rabbits (New Zealand Companion Animal Council Inc., 2016). Companionship is the predominant cause of getting these animals (New Zealand Companion Animal Council Inc., 2016). Variation in ownership rates is associated with ethnicity, as household demographics report 68% of pet owners are Māori, 67% are NZ European, 55% are Pasifika, and 48% are Asian (New Zealand Companion Animal Council Inc., 2016). Statistics comparing educational status to animal ownership rates report that those working full-time (71%) or earning $90,000 or above (72%) own a pet. Therefore, those earning less than $40,000 yearly (53%) who share homes with others are less likely to own pets due to reduced financial capacity (New Zealand Companion Animal Council Inc., 2016).

Although New Zealand has a large and diverse population of pet companions, the prevalence of animal abuse is relatively high (SPCA, 2020). Between 2019 and 2020, the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (SPCA) reported rehabilitating 40,000 animals due to abuse, neglect, and abandonment (SPCA, 2020). The SPCA annually releases a 'list of shame' which catalogues the nation's worst investigations and prosecutions of extreme neglect and senseless violence perpetrated towards animals (SPCA, 2020). In 2019, a list of 15 abuse cases disclosed the outcomes of investigations by the organisation (SPCA, 2019). The cases totalled approximately 60 animal victims (dogs, cats, birds, horses) of neglect, torture, physical and psychological trauma (SPCA, 2019). More recently, 2020's list details 12 cases of abuse and reveals 45 animals subjected to harm (SPCA, 2020). In cases where abuse results in severe trauma, aggression or irreversible debilitation, the animal is euthanised (SPCA, 2020).

SPCA New Zealand has created an online portal for practitioners, students, and scholars to access resources related to the co-existence of child abuse, family harm and cruelty to animals (New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse, 2019). The SPCA Targeted Intervention Portal consists of six areas. These areas include Family Violence and Animal Cruelty; Impact of Animal Cruelty on Children; Children's Cruelty to Animals; Adolescence and Animal Cruelty; and Professional Resources Community, where case studies, summaries of research and tools are available for assessment and planning of safety against harm (New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse, 2019).

2.6 Family harm and animal abuse

New Zealand's studies on the co-existence of familial violence and animal maltreatment are scarce (Roguski, 2012; Williams et al., 2008). Furthermore, previous research has primarily focused on animal maltreatment in conjunction with IPV rather than other victim groups such as children or elderly populations (Roguski, 2012; Williams et al., 2008). Williams and colleagues (2008) conducted surveys on veterinarians about their recognition of animal abuse in addition to their level of understanding of correlated human and animal harm. Survey data collected information from veterinarians, which included examinations of animals regarding the types of injuries animals experienced and the associated attitudes and perceptions (Williams et al., 2008). Vets saw deliberately abused animals, with two-thirds reporting having seen cases of abuse in the last five years (Williams et al., 2008). Nearly all respondents recognised a moral responsibility to intervene in cases of animal abuse (Williams et al., 2008). Sharpe and Wittum (1999) propose that veterinarians should utilise their advantage as pet care clinicians to recognise animal and human violence signs. However, inadequate training, limited resources, and a lack of knowledge of legal rights and responsibilities become a barrier. For example, 13% of respondents in Sharpe and Wittum's (1999) study had appropriate resources to offer to victims of family harm; however, perceptions surrounding dealing with human abuse reduced the likelihood of offering support. Therefore, despite a feeling of moral responsibility, actions are not always taken to assist with family harm and animal abuse situations as veterinarians often perceive these as exceeding a veterinarian's expertise (Green & Gullone, 2005).

In 2011, the RNZSPCA (Royal New Zealand Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals) collaborated with New Zealand Women's Refuge to research the co-existence of family harm and animal abuse within New Zealand (Roguski, 2012). Four Women's refuges were investigated for anecdotal evidence of torture and killing by male partners to psychologically harm women and children (Roguski, 2012). Notably, the research examined whether actual or threatened harm to pet companions created a barrier for women and children to remove themselves from abusive circumstances while protecting the safety of animals (Roguski, 2012). Interviews with Women's refuge clients and local SPCA managers were conducted to share experiences, involvements, and knowledge of the co-existence of animal abuse in family harm (Roguski, 2012). Animal cruelty was deemed a normalised demonstration of anger, among other forms of cruelty ranging from jealousy of a partner or child's connection to the pet companion, pets used as sexual

objects or collateral damage (Roguski, 2012). Pet abuse, in this sense, was recognised as a dimension of harm that reinforces silencing of victims by injuring animals as a secondary consequence of the abuser's behaviour and not the consequence of explicit abuse toward the animal (Roguski, 2012). Hurting animals to avoid police attention was common for those with prior family harm violations (Roguski, 2012). A total of 54.7% of women's refuge participants stated a family member or partner had threatened to kill their pet companion (including farm animals), whereas 79.1% reported receiving threats two years prior to the commencement of research (Roguski, 2012). Approximately 36.5% of respondents reported their pet being injured or killed, with 68.5% of respondents having reported harm occurred within the two years. While 90% of threats, actual injuries or deaths were perpetrated by a partner, 10% were by another family member (Roguski, 2012). Moreover, 32.7% reported witnessing threats to harm the pet, while 24.5% witnessed the actual killing or injury inflicted on a pet (Roguski, 2012).

Roguski (2012) found that 60% of women and children delay leaving or return to abusive relationships due to anxiety developed through communicated threats. Although a loss of confidence and overwhelming fear to leave may not be solely related to animal cruelty, abuse towards pet companions contributes to this factor (Roguski, 2012). In Roguski's (2012) research, 20% of victims experienced increased concerns over the welfare of the pet however were predominantly focussed on their survival due to escalating violence. The actual harming or killing of a pet after leaving the abusive relationship was also common (Roguski, 2012). Victims interpret abuse towards pet companions after leaving abusive relationships as associated with malicious punishment for leaving (Roguski, 2012). In many family harm situations, abusers use manipulation to isolate victims from external support systems such as friends and families (Bonomi & Martin, 2021). Roguski (2012) found that family and friend support systems also suffer as harm perpetrated toward pets of friends and family members occurs in retribution for helping victims leave.

Regardless of escaping abusive relationships, the pet's welfare rests on a victim's ability to secure temporary accommodation that permits animals on the premises. Without the adequate provision, 40% of respondents in Roguski's (2012) research reported the death of their beloved companion. The associated costs can be understood as a significant predictor of victims successfully securing animals' safety (Roguski, 2012). For example, Roguski (2012) sought estimated costs by surveying 17 SPCA offices, six of which provided temporary provisions for animals. The costs ranged from $31.50 to $63.00 per week (Roguski, 2012). Considering the financial factors associated with pet ownership

and income status determining ownership rates, this is a barrier to seeking assistance (Volant et al., 2008). Therefore, research on animal abuse and family harm suggests that the emotional bond between a pet companion and their owner determines the level of effectiveness of control tactics used by abusers (Flynn, 2000a). For example, Flynn (2000a) found that abused women whose pets experience abuse were more likely to perceive their pets as a source of emotional support than women whose pet companions do not get subjected to abuse. Therefore, the strength in emotional attachment to pets is useful for abusers to cause harm (Newberry, 2017).

Animal cruelty perpetrated throughout childhood has been proven to be considerably higher in studies involving criminal offenders. Compared to non-aggressive or less violent offenders, animal cruelty becomes a predictor of offenders committing violent crimes or acts of hostility. For example, Trentham and colleagues' (2018) replication of Tallichet and Hensley's (2004) study discovered that childhood animal maltreatment is a statistically significant predictor of adult interpersonal violence. Interpersonal violence and the presence of animal cruelty, which is one of the criteria for antisocial personality disorder in adults, necessitates more social recognition on the basis that, as social learning suggests, childhood behavioural imitation of aggression plays a pivotal role in aggression formation and links (Agnew, 1998; Bell & Naugle, 2008). According to researchers, animal abuse is a significant indication of family violence. Therefore, research is needed to understand the nature of harm better and improve identification, prevention, and intervention (Ascione et al., 1997; DeGue & DiLillo, 2009; Flynn, 2000b; Simmons & Lehmann, 2007).

Some scholars have disputed the supposition that animal abuse precedes violence towards humans. For example, Arluke and colleagues (1999) found that animal violence is linked to violent behaviour towards people. Arluke and colleagues (1999) compared the violence graduation hypothesis (abusers begin a pattern of harm with animals prior to progressing on to humans) to the deviance generalisation hypothesis (an individual who commits one type of offence is more likely to commit other types of offences regardless of time or order of offences committed), according to which animal abuse is just one of many forms of antisocial behaviours that emerge in childhood. According to Arluke and colleagues (1999), animal abusers are more likely to be interpersonally violent and more likely to commit property, drug, and public disorder offences. McPhedran (2009) also refutes the idea that animal abuse leads to interpersonal violence, claiming instead that problematic violent behaviours tend to cluster together.

Overall, according to Flynn (2000a), abuse or aggression towards animals is still not considered seriously by the public. Flynn (2000a) examined prosecuted animal cruelty cases and found that less than half of the cases resulted in a conviction. In addition, just one-third of those found guilty received a fine, only 10% received a prison sentence, and counselling or community service were required less frequently (Flynn, 2000a).

2.7   Family harm in news media

As a form of crime, family harm prominently features in the news media (Benjamin & LeGrand, 2012; Estes & Webber, 2021; Gillespie et al., 2013; Lamb & Keon, 1995; Rolle et al., 2014; Seely & Riffe, 2021; Taylor, 2009). The representation of family harm in the news media has been the topic of extensive research internationally (Benjamin & LeGrand, 2012; Estes & Webber, 2021; Gillespie et al., 2013; Lamb & Keon, 1995; Rolle et al., 2014; Seely & Riffe, 2021). While the international literature on news media representations of family harm is substantive, less is known about it in the NZ context (Dissanayake & Bracewell, 2021; Maydell, 2018; McGregor, 2017, Michelle & Weaver, 2003). However, research that does exist in NZ shows consistent findings with international literature. For example, Michelle and Weaver (2003) examined media representations of violence against women in documentaries. According to Michelle and Weaver (2003), the utilisation of case studies and personal testimony raises questions about the media's ability to tackle the issue of violence against women. Therefore the way violence against women is portrayed in the media is considered to confirm patriarchal hegemonic ideals since the discourse ignores the role of abusers and society in promoting male violence (McGregor, 2017; Michelle & Weaver, 2003).

Given that Michelle and Weaver's (2003) study focuses on documentaries, the findings are comparable to Dissanayake and Bracewell's (2021) analysis of media articles about family violence that resulted in death. Dissanayake and Bracewell (2021) did not look at the amount of coverage of family violence in the media. However, they did look at how language is used to describe victim groups. For example, the study discovered that articles with negative sentiments are more likely to be written about Māori or Asian victims of family violence than stories about European victims. The researchers acknowledged a novelty factor effect, in which male victims are overrepresented due to the novelty aspect of attracting audience attention. Furthermore, Dissanayake and Bracewell (2021) found that elderly victims of domestic violence are underrepresented in the media.

In a study of news articles on child sexual abuse, Maydell (2018) discovered that physical violence accounted for three quarters (74%) of the data set compared to sexual abuse (26%). Maydell (2018) discovered that news coverage of child abuse is mainly focused on crime reporting, which refers to sensationalist crime reporting approaches. McGregor (2017) also confirmed this as the majority of crime news examined in the NZ Herald in 2017 was related to police operations, police activities, and crime incidences.

2.8 Understanding family harm in news media

There are several theoretical explanations for the media's interaction with societal concerns like domestic violence. Social constructionism is a theory that explains crime by creating knowledge, interpretive meanings, and ideas that individuals hold in society (Andrews, 2012). Individuals who wish to share emerging knowledge with other members of society require interaction with institutions such as the media (Jewkes, 2015). However, the media's role in constructing the public's knowledge of crime often distort consumer views rather than reflecting reality (Chesney-Lind & Chagnon, 2017). As a primary source of information, media determines the construction of crime by producing newsworthy stories (Surette, 2007). Rather than reflecting political, racial, socio-economic, or sexual diversity, homogenised and mainstream representations of reality are portrayed to avoid controversy (Surette, 2007).

The media serves as a primary source of information about family harm and is influential in framing this social issue (Scheufele, 1999). With such power, the media can facilitate or inhibit public understanding of family harm in its various forms (Bullock & Cubert, 2002). Although newspaper reports on family harm can play a vital role in educating audiences, research suggests that news articles can and often do misinform the public about the empirical realities of family harm (Taylor, 2009). Journalistic texts can enhance information reported making certain aspects more noticeable, memorable, or meaningful through repetition or associated familiar symbols (Entman, 1993). However, ultimately, family harm is portrayed in the media to support the status quo (Taylor, 2009). As a critical source of influence, the media is based on public opinion or a measure of public support (Gamson, 1992; Ryan, 1991). The media's ability to gain political ground determines which topics are recognised and ignored (Gamson, 1992; Ryan, 1991).

While best practice guidelines for media reporting exist, news coverage on family harm relies on information sources such as law enforcement (McGregor, 2017). By

seeking information solely from law enforcement, however, the perspectives of public health experts are often overlooked (McGregor, 2017; Sutherland et al., 2016). Meyers (1997) explained that journalists perceive the police as a legitimate source due to the neutral nature they provide when reporting information related to family harm. However, the neutrality that is assumed is not always consistent. When reporting to the media, the police primarily focus on offenders, which leaves victims and audiences with an inadequate grasp of the complexities of family harm, including variables that contribute to abusive behaviours, and what values to take from stories for educational purposes (Chibnall, 1977; Meyers, 1997; Sherizen, 1978). However, Jones (1994) suggests that advocates for victims can report incidents from a different perspective than one of political and social dominance (Jones, 1994; Meyers, 1997). Research on the consistency of information reported by the media and data related to family harm incidents is limited (Richards et al., 2011; Vives-Cases et al., 2009). Police frames, according to Seely and Riffe (2021), are devoid of context since they are often fact-based, blame victims, and justify perpetrators crimes. The police frame contributes to the isolation of family harm reporting in the media in this sense (Carlyle et al., 2014). Therefore, the accuracy of media reports determines whether sympathetic responses are elicited from audiences, increasing support for prevention and intervention by the public (Carlyle et al., 2014). Gorelick (1989) claims that the police, as gatekeepers of information about criminal activity and events, limit the public's understanding of what constitutes crime. (Humphries, 1981; Gorelick, 1989). When police officers are not questioned, even when explanations or solutions to crimes are provided, competing perspectives can be marginalised (Carlyle et al., 2014). Marginalisation leaves other relevant sources, such as victim advocates or academic researchers, underutilised due to the associated fear of bias (Byerly, 1994).

2.9   The newsworthiness of family harm

The concept of newsworthy reporting is complex yet part of an interrelated pattern of dramatic storytelling. For example, Gilliam and Iyengar (2000) found that violent crime is over-represented in news media. In their sample, 83% of crime incidents were violent despite violent crime not being prevalent in Los Angeles at the time. Comparatively, news reports on petty, non-violent, and white-collar offences were less likely to be reported (Gilliam & Iyengar, 2000). Criminal events considered rare or unique are also considered newsworthy. For example, if a victim or offender is involved in an incident that shares

unordinary aspects, newspapers produce more information about the event to maintain audience attraction to the story (Gekoski et al., 2012; Gruenewald et al., 2013).

Within the paradigm of newsworthy reporting, coverage increases when incidents of family harm are of high-profile cases of abuse. For example, according to Berns (2004), increased publicity of the OJ Simpson trial led to increased domestic violence incidents. On the other hand, the expanded publicity did not contribute to greater public awareness and understanding of harm but rather to the appeal of sensationalism and violence (Berns, 2004). Furthermore, timing the publication of news reports with high-profile cases can reduce the severity of abuse recorded in other family harm incidents (Maxwell et al., 2000). More crucially, there are usually variations in reporting on family harm issues (Maxwell et al., 2000). Family violence is reported in a variety of ways by the media, through frames that include, but are not limited to, episodic and thematic framing (Dan & Raupp, 2018). The verbs, adjectives, and nouns utilised by the writers can be further broken down into these reporting techniques (Dan & Raupp, 2018). As a result of the subjectivity of reporting, domestic violence is therefore portrayed as isolated, socially focused, or critical of present legislation (Maxwell et al., 2000).

Suppose an event is associated with a victim perceived as an individual or group of individuals who do not deserve having harm inflicted upon them. In that case, news media assesses the perceived vulnerability of victims to gain public sympathy and attention (Lee & Wong, 2020). The victim's associated level of vulnerability or innocence concerning family harm is often associated with women, children, and the elderly (Jewkes, 2015; Lee & Wong, 2020). Populations are considered vulnerable on the basis that they require protection from harm (Gekoski et at., 2012). For example, violence against children is considered a crime committed towards the innocent, violating a human instinct to protect children (Jewkes, 2015). As a result, such news stimulates an emotional reaction by audiences. Perpetrators are vilified by the public when incidences of child abuse are reported to the media, which adds to the overall level of newsworthiness an incident can achieve (Gekoski et at., 2012). Similarly, just as children are newsworthy victims due to their perceived vulnerability, so are women (Carlyle et al., 2014). When news media reports violent crimes, male victims often receive less focus and significance in articles than their female counterparts (Boulahanis & Heltsley, 2004). Disproportionate reporting on female victims highlights the associated impact of a lack of recognition of male victimisation (Peraica et al., 2021).

Carlyle and colleagues (2014) suggest that age and gender are factors that contribute to newsworthiness depending on social constructions surrounding each factor.

Moreover, Carlyle et al. (2014) emphasised that while reports on female victims of violent crimes are significantly higher in news media, this may not be maintained when a female abuses drugs and alcohol or is homeless. Inadvertently the same issues of drug and alcohol abuse or homelessness provide excuses for the abuser's behaviours (Carrabine, 2008; Jewkes, 2015). Similarly, a white female who is middle-classed and young is perceived as more newsworthy than an older female who has a lower socio-economic status and belongs to an ethnic minority (Carlyle et al., 2014). In cases of IPV, female perpetrators who accuse male partners of cheating, seek self-defence against abusive partners, or experience mental suffering are given public justification to abuse partners in their relationships. Therefore, the emotionality associated with female offending characterises women as lacking a sense of control (Carlyle et al., 2014).

Elder abuse is also underreported in the media (Mastin et al., 2007). According to Mastin et al. (2007), an increase in reports of elder abuse may allow the media to portray this type of abuse as requiring public attention in the same way that male populations experiencing family harm do (Mastin et al., 2007). Since adequate media coverage can promote a greater understanding of the complexity of family harm, it can contribute to developing appropriate prevention and intervention methods for both victims and offenders (Mastin et al., 2007). Some researchers have also noted limited coverage of family harm when an incident involves same-sex parties (Estes & Webber, 2017). The lack of coverage of family harm relating to same-sex couples reflects a white, heterosexual, upper-class male framework that misrepresents populations dissimilar to such characteristics (Bullock & Cubert, 2002; Meyers, 1997). For example, research highlights how media reports of family harm on lesbian couple violence appear more exotic. As a result, the seriousness of harm is devalued and framed as unusual (Estes & Webber, 2017).

The narratives of news coverage on family harm often sensationalise victims and abusers, including framing incidents as isolated rather than as a complex social issue that contributes to ongoing harm in communities (Lloyd & Ramon, 2017; Savage et al., 2017; Scarduzio et al. 2017). News coverage of family harm promotes the idea that the nature of family harm is personal, which masks the actual pattern of harm victims experience (Lloyd & Ramon, 2017). By reporting family harm without addressing issues related to power and control, the subsequent impact of harm, regardless of socio-economic status, geographic location, gender, and sexual identity remain under-discussed (Easteal et al., 2019; Richards et al. 2011; Taylor & Sorenson 2002).

The amount of reporting is also related to how reports deal with domestic violence (Lamb, 1991). Appropriate terminology for describing different types of abuse can help readers understand what they are reading and emphasise the seriousness of family harm (Lamb, 1991). When journalists refer to family violence as a 'domestic disturbance' or 'domestic issue', they minimise the complexity and severity of the harm that victims face (Lamb & Keon, 1995). However, a consensus has yet to be achieved on whether terminology such as 'family harm' or 'domestic violence' used by officials is suitable for correctly expressing the type of harm. Lamb (1991) suggests that the term 'battering' is more appropriate since it is neutral, instead of terminologies like 'family violence' or 'marital abuse', which isolates family harm rather than recognising it as a social issue. Scholars indicate, however, that linguistic terms like 'domestic violence' or 'family harm' may garner more attention from policymakers (Lamb & Keon, 1995).

Frames, language, and false narratives in the news media are significant factors of news reporting. In their identification of audience reception research, Sutherland et al. (2016) found that these factors influence emotional responses and attribute blame to victims or offenders. Rather than challenging myths and misinformation, reporting often reflects society's confusion about forms of harm such as violence against women. Since the capacity to communicate via media sources is beyond the resource accessibility for individuals, institutionalised inequality reinforces in this way (Ryan et al., 2006).

2.10 Media, family violence and the weather

Research shows a link between crime rates and seasonal variations (Cohn, 1993; Farrell & Pease, 1994; Koutaniemi & Einiö, 2021), which can influence the amount of news coverage. Weather conditions can influence family violence rates. For example, Farrell and Pease (1994) found that domestic violence complaints rise throughout the summer months, as did Koutaniemi and Einiö (2021). According to the routine activities theory, temporal weather cycles predict crime rates because negative behaviours increase during the summer months due to increased stress and frustration from weathering and higher possibilities to engage in an outside activity (Cohn, 1993; Farrell & Pease, 1994; Koutaniemi, & Einiö, 2021). Research also suggests that hot weather can increase the presence of guardians, such as the police, increasing the possibility of being caught engaging in illegal activity (Horrocks & Menclova, 2011). Negative behaviours, such as participation in violent crimes during the summer and property crimes during winter, have been observed, however, violent crimes do not always increase over the summer months

(McDowall et al., 2012). Research argues that inclement weather, such as rain or storms, can lead to an increase in violent behaviour since it reduces the likelihood of having guardians such as police or witnesses present (Horrocks & Menclova, 2011). In relation to news coverage, Stevens (2020) discovered that the effects of temperature on behaviour extend to media platforms such as social media, where people engage in violent attacks online. As a result, increased family violence due to weather conditions can attract media attention because increased criminal activity leads to increased news coverage. However, because the media is known to exaggerate crime statistics, a rise in crime may not necessitate an increase in the news coverage (Ghanem, 1996).

2.11 Newsworthy reporting of animal abuse in the context of family violence

Research reveals that the media's newsworthiness of animal abuse incidents is confined to basic details such as animal species, alleged perpetrators, and a summary of the abuse case (Imbrock, 2003). Many articles lack detail, and as a result, they attract less attention than if they were more descriptive for readers (Grugan, 2019; Imbrock, 2003). According to existing studies on news coverage of animal cruelty, the suffering of animals provokes public emotion and reactions (Tiplady et al., 2013). For example, Tiplady et al. (2013) discovered that the instant reaction to animal mistreatment in the mainstream media is pity and sadness. According to research, women are more disturbed by crudeness in the media than males (Tiplady et al., 2013). Further investigation indicates that despite the majority of people discussing news coverage of animal cruelty with others afterwards, just about 10% contact politicians or write to news journalists (Tiplady et al., 2013). Overall, Tiplady et al. (2013) found that while media coverage of animal cruelty can affect the public, it does not result in significant behavioural changes to advocating for animals. Tiplady et al. (2015) found that reporting animal mistreatment often leads to sentiments of powerlessness (Tiplady et al., 2015).

Witnesses, police judges, and prosecutors depict offenders in the news media in unfavourable terms, according to Grugan (2019). Therefore, depictions add perspective to the piece (Grugan, 2019). Even when there is no judgement regarding animal abuse or perpetrators, the dramatic language used in storytelling might raise the danger of glorifying criminal behaviour in the media (Grugan, 2019). In some circumstances, sympathy for animal abusers can be directed towards the perpetrators, particularly if they have a psychological disorder or have experienced childhood trauma (Grugan, 2019). The

attribution of blame to external circumstances influencing abusers' behaviour leads to sympathy for perpetrators (Grugan, 2019). However, various methods, such as recording criminal charges or auditing other psychiatric and media records, are likely to underreport animal mistreatment and have lower sensitivity for discovering correlations and differences across groups (Patterson-Kane & Piper, 2009).

While there is no scientific research on family violence and animal abuse in the media, there is much research on family violence and animal abuse (Ascione et al., 1997; DeGue & DiLillo, 2009; Flynn, 2000b; Simmons & Lehmann, 2007). In general, however, animal abuse and family violence have been linked in news reports. For example, a newspaper editor in the United States wrote a viral piece about animal cruelty and domestic violence, eliciting a range of emotional responses from reports of child abuse, trafficking, rape, and murder involving family and pets. Another incident involving animal cruelty was mentioned in a news article where a police officer killed his girlfriend's dog and emailed her an image of the dog's death to mentally harm her (Anderson, 2014). Additional information on domestic violence and animal cruelty victims has been reported in news media, focusing on the need for animal care and how the public can help raise awareness about the issue (Forsyth, 2021).

New Zealand news media has covered, to some extent, animal abuse in the context of family harm. For example, in 2005, The Sunday Star-Times (Dave, 2005) reported on academic research that links pet cruelty to domestic violence. Similarly, in 2012, The Press discussed Roguski's (2012) 'Pets as Pawns' research describing an incident of a dog being decapitated by an abuser, using children as witnesses to evoke fear (Carville, 2012). The same study was explored by the Otago Daily Times, however, emphasising women who participated in the study expressing fears and concerns (Collins, 2012). These publishers' selective reporting emphasises the editorial power to focus on specific aspects of an issue (Lloyd & Ramon, 2017). Reports also covered the Women's Refuge and The New Zealand Veterinary Association supporting the submission of family violence legislation to the Ministry of Justice for animal protection and the elimination of animals being used to control women who remain in abusive relationships (see, for example, Lawrence, 2015).

To summarise, most academic literature on IPV focuses on physical and sexual abuse. On the other hand, animal cruelty receives very little attention as a type of IPV. The news media portrayal of animal maltreatment as a form of IPV in New Zealand has yet to be explored. Closing this gap in the literature is important because greater

public discourse on family violence is critical for improving knowledge about common kinds of family violence (Dragiewicz et al., 2018; Lindsay-Brisbin et al., 2014).

Research question

Seeking to start addressing the gap in the literature, this study asks the following research questions:

(1) Which forms of family harm (physical, sexual, psychological, financial) dominate news media reporting in NZ?

(2) Is animal abuse considered a mechanism to inflict family harm by the media?

(3) Is there a seasonal difference in the amount of family harm reported?

3. Research Design and Methodology

3.1 Methodology

This study employs a social constructionist worldview. Social constructionism looks at how people construct their view of reality (Andrews, 2012). Social constructionism emphasises people's daily interactions and how they use language to create reality (Galbin, 2014). According to the constructionist viewpoint, social concerns such as family violence are portrayed in ways that are not always reflective of reality. For example, while male-on-female violence is more frequently publicised in the media when it comes to the gendered nature of family violence, this does not rule out the reality of female-on-male violence (Brown & Fish, 1983; Frazer & Miller, 2009). Moreover, Frazer and Miller (2009) note that subtle variations in reporting techniques, such as active versus passive verbs, have an impact on how family violence is depicted. Both male and female readers are more likely to condone rape and battering of women when male sexual violence against women is recounted in the passive person. According to Frazer and Miller (2009), this is due to the perception that men are more active participants, and hence male descriptions are more active than female descriptions, which are perceived as passive recipients of the action.

Media content analysis was employed, which studies texts, ranging from transcripts of interviews to films, television shows, and newspapers (Macnamara, 2005). Media content analysis systematically records quantitative descriptions of communications to make interpretations (Macnamara, 2005). Media content analysis is an effective research tool to investigate social issues such as racism, misogyny, and violence because it can indicate socially acceptable attitudes and behaviours (Macnamara, 2005; Stemler, 2015). Content analysis techniques have the advantages of flexibility and generalisability and the capacity to detect communication biases, disparities in communication in different situations, and the repercussions of over-or underreporting (Macnamara, 2005). For the purposes of this study, the frequency of family harm phrases used in news articles was determined.

This study's core theoretical foundation is framing, which examines media material, specifically the frequency and differences in reporting the same subject to elicit varied emotions (Matthes, 2009). According to studies on framing effects, whether and how news articles cover family violence, as well as the frequency of coverage, can influence how readers perceive family violence and what should be done about it (Bullock, 2007;

Carlyle et al., 2008; Lindsay-Brisbin et al., 2014). Framing is also critical to comprehend political or social viewpoints on family violence (Matthes, 2009). While media coverage of family violence can raise awareness of support services for victims and perpetrators through psychological intervention, a focus on social intolerance of all types of abuse can educate the public on the nature and effects of harm (Aroustamian, 2020). Pre-set categories for types of harm were employed in a deductive coding approach (Matthes, 2009).

3.2 Data collection

For this study, news articles were used as discourse units. As a criterion for being retained for the content analysis, each article had to mention at least one form of abuse (physical, sexual, psychological, financial, animal abuse). According to Hudock (2005), readers of news items spend an average of 17 minutes each day reading the paper, which means they often only read the headlines. However, for the purposes of this research, news articles were read in their entirety to not risk losing information from the body of the piece (Hudock, 2005). Because the goal of the study was to see how often family harm is covered in the current news media, the selected news items had to be published in the chosen timeframe, even if they referred to an instance of family harm that occurred in an earlier time period. Seasonal variation was taken into account because the data was collected from July to October and included all articles published between January and October 2021. The nature of reporting was divided into two categories which were case-based reporting and generic reporting. Case-based articles are types of articles that discuss victims and the nature of the abuse as a single occurrence or pattern of incidents linked to a person committing or being a victim of harm. Generic articles contain general information on the prevalence of abuse, the financial expenses of rehabilitating or healing both victims and perpetrators, and statistical reporting on a victim or perpetrator demographics such as race, socio-economic status, and age.

Data was collected via Newztext, an electronic database that archives 19 New Zealand newspapers. Three influential newspapers were chosen for data analysis out of 19 publications: The New Zealand Herald, The Press, and The Dominion Post. The reason for choosing these newspapers was because of their national distribution and readership rates. Each newspaper produces articles in the three major cities of Aotearoa: Auckland, Wellington, and Christchurch. While there were no audits on the circulation and

readership rates of the NZ Herald this year, historical records reveal that the NZ Herald had the highest readership rates with 100,073 readers. The publishers The Press (37,002 readers) and the Dominion Post (36,652 readers) follow (The New Zealand Audit Bureau of Circulations Inc, 2021).

Articles were sampled over four months (July 5th to October 5th, 2021). Comparable New Zealand crime news studies cover a two-year period since this timeframe generates a sufficient and reasonable amount of data (Deckert, 2020; Easteal et al., 2019; Kelly & Payton, 2019). However, because the current study is an Honours dissertation with time constraints, a month-by-month data gathering procedure was used until a data amount equivalent to other news media studies, i.e., around 100 articles, was reached (Deckert, 2000). Seasonal impacts on media reporting can also be accounted for in four months (Sutherland et al., 2019).

Data sampled from the Newztext database were obtained through keyword combinations which included: Family harm <OR> family violence animal abuse <OR> domestic violence animal abuse <OR> domestic violence physical assault <OR> domestic violence sexual assault <OR> domestic violence financial abuse <OR> family harm animal abuse <OR> psychological abuse domestic violence <OR> domestic violence animal harm. The 'additional search phrases' section further reduced article searches. Physical assault <AND> sexual assault <OR> psychological assault <OR> financial abuse <OR> animal abuse <AND> psychological abuse were used as additional search phrases to filter the required articles. Newspaper editors create headlines to attract the public; thus, only the names of news articles were searched for these keywords (Tabbert, 2016). The filtering technique included removing duplicates (same items published by multiple publications) from the data collection. For analysis, the first duplicate published was chosen.

3.3   Data analysis

The item's title and publication date were noted first. Then it was determined if the piece was about a single case of domestic abuse (case-based article) or domestic violence as a societal issue (generic article). The form of family harm reported in each article was then determined. If an article was case-based or generic, it was marked as 1 or 0 in the coding categories. For example, if an item were case-based, it would be marked as 1 in the case-based category and 0 in the generic category. The following were the coding categories for each type of abuse based on the definitions of abuse: Physical (1), sexual (1),

psychological (1), financial (1), and animal abuse (1). If an article only discussed one type of abuse and not another, this was classified as a 0 for each type of abuse not mentioned. If an article addressed more than one type of harm, all forms of harm stated were coded as 1, while types of harm that were not mentioned were coded as 0. Once each item was coded in the Excel sheet, all entered data was thoroughly reviewed for spelling errors and potential duplicates to ensure accurate data processing.

3.4 Limitations

The current research has some limitations. The study's methodology suffers from a lack of reliability and validity due to the use of a combination of human and computerised coding techniques (Grimmer & Stewart, 2013; Lacy et al., 2015). Manual data entry raises the risk of human marker failures, such as incorrect items or data entry (Grimmer & Stewart, 2013; Lacy et al., 2015). When analysing the results, incorrect data entry was detected, which, while addressed, shows that there may be more anomalies in the data. Future researchers should use more sophisticated computerised coding analysis for their research designs.

The news media was the study's sample content. Although news media are a valuable source of information and can influence public opinions of family violence, other forms of media are also helpful for analysis (Bandura, 1986; Carlyle et al., 2008). Future researchers should analyse these mediums as part of their studies. Furthermore, research shows that media coverage of family harm is frequently skewed; hence, comparing news coverage to epidemiological data on family harm might aid in determining which types of harm are reported and which are not (Carlyle et al., 2008). While quantitative measures are useful for statistical reporting, qualitative analysis provides a better understanding of the complexities of family harm. It allows for more in-depth research of victim-offender interactions. Future research may examine how articles frame domestic violence as a social issue, and whether resources for victims and offenders are published in articles (Macnamara, 2005).

4.Findings

A total of 106 articles was gathered via the Newztext database. After removing duplicates, 77 articles were retained from July 5th to October 5th, 2021.

News publishers reporting family violence

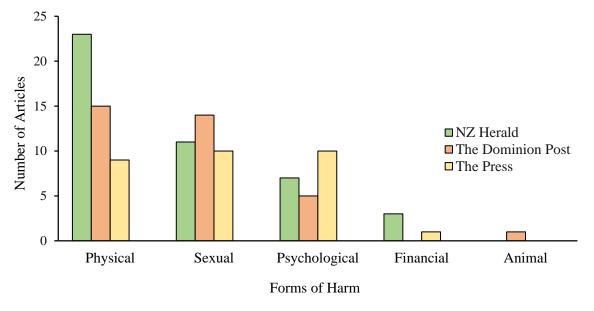The Dominion Post publishes the only animal cruelty article.

Figure 1. Comparison of publishers NZ Herald, The Press and The Dominion Post reporting different forms of abuse.

This graph displays a comparison of each news publisher (NZ Herald, The Dominion Post, The Press) reporting different forms of abuse (physical, sexual, psychological, financial, animal abuse) within a family harm context. Of the 77 articles published relating to family harm, only one (1%) was published on animal abuse as a form of harm reported by The Dominion Post. When analysing articles from the NZ Herald, Dominion Post and The Press, the NZ Herald reported physical abuse more frequently compared to all other forms of abuse, where 30% of articles reported physical abuse as a form of harm from this newspaper. In relation to sexual abuse, 18% of articles were published from the Dominion Post, higher than the NZ Herald (14%) and the Press (13%). Psychological abuse was reported more by the Press (13%) compared to The NZ Herald (9%) and the Dominion Post (6.5%), and no articles were published on financial abuse as a form of harm by the Dominion Post, as shown by the graph. However, financial abuse was reported by the NZ Herald (4%) and the Press (1%). Overall, The NZ Herald and the Dominion Post reported more articles on different forms of abuse than The Press.

Generic vs case-based articles

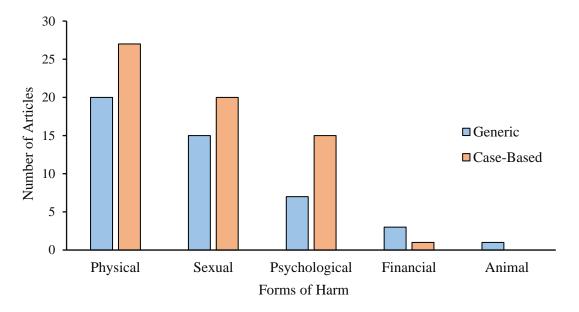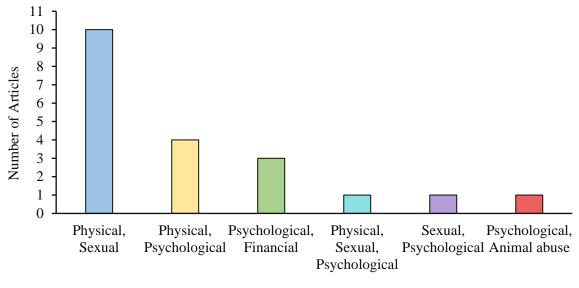News articles reported abuse as mainly case-based.

Figure 2. Comparisons of generic and case-based articles reporting forms of harm.

This graph displays comparisons for generic and case-based articles reporting all forms of abuse in relation to family harm. On average, most articles published were case-based (60%) compared to generic articles (40%). As shown, physical, sexual, and psychological abuse were reported more frequently than financial and animal abuse for both generic and case-based articles. However, there are notable differences in how many articles were published when comparing generic to case-based articles. Generic articles were reported consistently less in comparison. For example, 15 (19%) articles on psychological abuse were case-based compared to generic (9%). With only one article (1%) published on animal abuse, findings show that this article was generic. Furthermore, when examining financial abuse, this form of harm was reported more as generic (4%) than case-based (1%).

Generic articles reporting different forms of abuse

Physical and sexual abuse was reported more generically than any other combination of abuse reported.
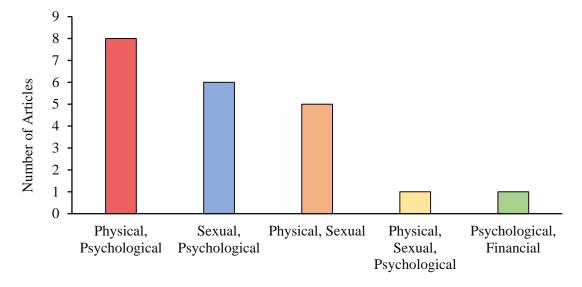

Count of Generic Terms Reporting Various Forms of Abuse

Figure 3 Generic articles that reported more than one form of abuse.

This graph displays generic articles reporting on more than one form of abuse. Findings show that 19 generic articles reported combinations of forms of abuse. As shown, ten generic articles reported on physical and sexual abuse. Therefore, reports on physical and sexual abuse were highest compared to other combinations of abuse reported in articles. Examination of generic articles showed a pattern of psychological abuse with financial abuse (3%). Similarly, psychological abuse was also associated with physical abuse in reports (4%). As shown, any other combination of abuse reported remained low in generic article reports (1%).

Case-based articles that reported different forms of abuse

Physical and psychological abuse are reported more frequently together.

Count of Case-Based Reporting Various Forms of Abuse

Figure 4. Case-based articles report more than one form of abuse.

This graph displays case-based articles reporting more than one form of abuse. Overall, 21% of case-based articles reported a combination of different forms of abuse. In case-based articles, physical and psychological abuse was reported highest (8%). However, when paired with sexual abuse, articles that reported psychological and sexual abuse together were relatively high also (6.5%). Similarly, articles reporting on physical and sexual abuse were common (5%). Other combinations of forms of abuse reported in case-based articles were not reported as often. As shown, only 1% of case-based articles reported physical, sexual, and psychological abuse together, and 1% of articles reported psychological and financial abuse.

Family violence reports from February to August 2021

Newspaper reporting of various forms of abuse is not evenly distributed. Seasonal changes in media reporting are accounted for by reporting on articles from February to August 2021.
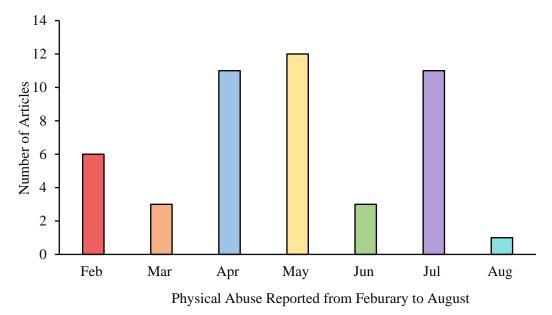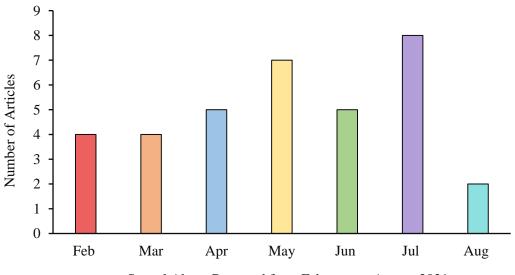

Figure 5. The number of physical abuse articles published from February to August 2021.

Figure 5 displays reports of physical abuse from February to August. On average, physical abuse was reported more frequently in May (16%). April and July also had relatively high rates of physical abuse reports (14%). Comparatively, reports of physical abuse were lowest in August (1%).

Figure 6. The number of sexual abuse articles published from February to August 2021.

Figure 6 displays seasonality patterns of sexual abuse reports. Sexual abuse was reported highest in July (10%) and May (9%). Findings show that sexual abuse was reported least in August (3%). As with February (5%) and March (5%), the months April and June shared the same rate of sexual abuse reports (6%).

Psychological Abuse Reported from Feburary to August 2021
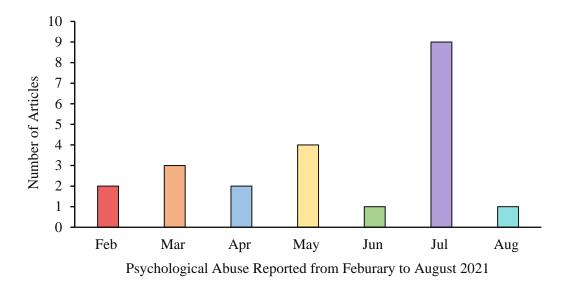
Figure 7. The number of psychological abuse articles published from February to August 2021.

Figure 7 displays the number of articles published on psychological abuse. Compared to any other month, psychological abuse was reported most in July (12%). In June and August, reports of psychological abuse were lowest (1%).

Financial Abuse Reported from Feburary to August 2021

Figure 8. The number of financial abuse articles published from February to August 2021.

Figure 8 shows the number of articles that reported financial abuse. As shown, the only months to report financial abuse were July (4%) and August (1%).

Number of Articles

1

0

Feb   Mar   Apr   May   Jun   Jul   Aug
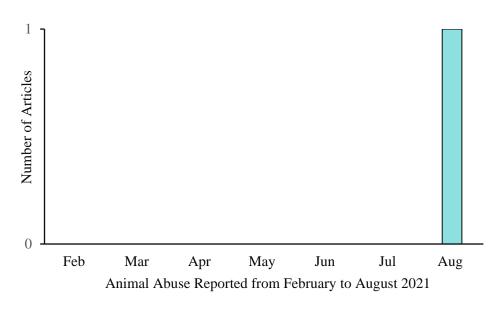
Animal Abuse Reported from February to August 2021

Figure 9. The number of animal abuse articles published from February to August 2021.

Figure 9 displays the total amount of articles published on animal abuse within a family harm context. Findings show that only one article was published on animal abuse (1%) in August of 2021.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, the media discourse in New Zealand on various forms of family harm was examined. Firstly, the research asked what forms of family harm (physical, sexual, psychological, and financial) dominate news media in New Zealand. The second question asked whether the news media view animal abuse as a method of inflicting family harm, and the third research question asked if any seasonal differences in reporting exist.

This section divides into three sections for each of the study's research questions and primary findings. The findings in the first section emphasise specific characteristics of media coverage of family violence linked to generic and case-based reporting. Comparisons to international literature, analysis of the reasons for excessive or underreported forms of harm, as well as the consequences of reporting, will be included. The analysis of pet abuse reports in the context of family harm will be discussed in the second section of this report, which will be linked to the scholarly literature on the topic. Lastly, the third research question of seasonal variations in family harm reporting will be discussed using comparisons to international literature.

5.1 Addressing research question 1

According to the findings, physical and sexual abuse are the most often reported forms of harm in New Zealand news media. Forms of abuse including financial, psychological, and animal abuse, are significantly underreported. Moreover, when looking at different types of abuse, physical and sexual abuse are more commonly reported simultaneously than other types of abuse. The outcomes of this study corroborate findings from the international literature on family violence coverage in the news. For example, Bullock and Cubert (2002) discovered that newspaper coverage of domestic violence is presented disproportionately in terms of physical harm. Psychological abuse is largely neglected in newspapers, with only 2.2% of the articles sampled in their study mentioning it. Sims (2008) also found that there is no explicit reference to emotional abuse in news articles. According to Sims (2008), family violence is limited to physical and sexual abuse, with financial abuse being underreported, meaning that both forms of psychological abuse are overlooked.

Regardless of the type of abuse stated, Mastin et al. (2007) revealed that factors such as victim populations could alter the level of news reporting. For example, in their

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analysis, although elder physical and sexual abuse was primarily mentioned in articles, press reports of elder abuse in the context of familial harm, in general, were still significantly low (Mastin et al., 2007). The findings suggest that typification processes, or newsworthy reporting approaches, might make particular types of abuse look more prominent in news stories, thereby highlighting or ignoring societal issues (Mastin et al., 2007).

A possible explanation for lack of reporting on psychological forms of abuse, according to Loring (1994), include the difficulty in reporting psychological abuse in violent relationships due to the inability to describe a shattered sense of self or damaged self-esteem in comparison to physical signs of abuse (Baldry, 2003; Sims, 2008). Therefore, media stories on journalistic psychological abuse are critical in increasing public awareness (Baldry, 2003; Sims, 2008). According to Vulić and Pavlović (2015), not only do physical forms of family violence dominate news media, educational, social, and ethical functions of journalism are neglected. However, researchers generally suggest that the press lacks the space for such reporting (Vulić & Pavlović, 2015).

The concept of sensationalism can also explain high or low media coverage on social issues (Skilbrei, 2013; Vulić & Pavlović, 2015; Wagunda et al., 2020; Weller, 2012). Sensationalist reporting styles are prominent when it comes to unusual types of violence. However, in the case of family violence, sensationalist reporting styles are influenced by how newsworthy the report is (Skilbrei, 2013; Vulić & Pavlović, 2015; Wagunda et al., 2020; Weller, 2012). Sensationalist reporting links to physical abuse in most studies, although it is more likely to be linked to abuse that results in death or attempted murder (Sims, 2008; Vulić & Pavlović, 2015; Weller, 2012). Bullock and Cubert (2002) suggest that to portray family violence more accurately, linking other family harm cases, quoting experts, or mentioning support agencies can help demonstrate the social issue of family harm. For example, a study of male perpetrated IPV published in Toronto newspapers found that while media reports of IPV have grown, they are still well behind police-reported violence (Fairbairn & Dawson, 2013).

Another argument is that, according to the agenda-setting theory, the news media plays a significant role in influencing audiences' perceptions of what is important in stories and how much coverage they should receive (Odenigbo, 2018). The ability of news media to transfer social issues from the media to the public, known as salience transfer, argues that social issues are inextricably related to news that the public thinks is significant (Odenigbo, 2018). This theory is relevant to this study because it emphasises the need for media to set an agenda that opposes family violence (McCombs, 2011).

Ultimately, audiences are more inclined to make an implicit relationship between domestic violence and physical manifestations of abuse if the NZ media depicts a dominant coupling of physical and sexual forms of family harm. The experiences of those who have suffered from emotional abuse are marginalised when there is no specific discussion of emotional abuse in publications, just as audiences cannot develop opinions and knowledge of psychological abuse when they do not appear in newspapers (Sims, 2008). Because the media is considered a valuable source of information on social issues, NZ audiences will be less aware of emotional forms of abuse, as researchers from other countries, such as Carlyle et al. (2008), have noted that the media has significant power over how audiences understand and develop an awareness of the nature of family harm. In this sense, there are fewer possibilities for NZ readers to learn about different types of abuse when there is less news coverage.

5.1.1 Understanding case-based and generic reporting

According to this study, articles reported more case-based than generically. Even a more detailed examination of the differences between generic and case-based reporting revealed that generic combinations (i.e., combinations of abuse that were generically reported) were relatively low compared to case-based reports. Overseas research also found that family harm is more case-based or episodically framed (Halim & Meyers, 2010; Sims, 2008; Sutherland et al., 2015). In general, isolated reporting methods relating to family violence are problematic (Bullock & Cubert, 2002; Gillespie et al., 2013; Hernández, 2018). News reports isolate incidents as discrete events rather than acknowledging the social context of family harm (Bullock & Cubert, 2002). The main issue with episodic framing of events is the resultant attributions of blame to individuals rather than society (Sutherland et al., 2015).

Bullock and Cubert (2002) found similar results to those found in this investigation. Bullock and Cubert (2002) found that news coverage of family violence is more isolated than generic. Based on the context of reporting, news coverage of family violence leading to attempted or actual homicide was examined (Bullock & Cubert, 2002). The results showed that domestic violence was more likely to be portrayed as isolated occurrences of abuse. In case-based publications, physical abuse was also covered in greater detail, indicating that physical forms of family violence receive more attention through isolated reporting styles (Bullock & Cubert, 2002). The Gillespie and colleagues (2013) study

results were marginally better than those of Bullock and Cubert (2002). They found that 12% of articles portrayed family violence as part of a more significant social issue.

Overall, case-based reporting portrays family violence as a private matter in NZ. As a result, victim-blaming attitudes and power inequalities between men and women in the context of IPV, for example, can increase the likelihood that NZ society will tolerate forms of family harm. Therefore, if NZ audiences read more case-based than generic articles, they will not determine that family violence is a social issue. They will also be unable to act as social change agents, pressuring public officials to change and restructure policies.

5.2   Addressing research question 2

This study found that there is a dearth of news media coverage on animal abuse as a form of harm. In a sample of 77 publications, the study found that only one referenced animal abuse in the context of family harm. While there are no studies on news media analysis of pet abuse in the context of IPV, Fitzgerald et al. (2020) discovered that violence against animal companions is a significant predictor of all forms of emotional and financial abuse. Fitzgerald et al. (2020) found that the link between threatened and enacted animal harm and IPV is stronger for emotional IPV than for other types of IPV. According to the study, those who report their partner threatening or harming their pet companion have a 39% higher chance of claiming they have been victims of emotional abuse (Fitzgerald et al., 2020).

Gray et al. (2019) found that concerning other media forums, companion animals are framed as property in domestic violence shelters. According to an analysis of websites, nearly half of the 155 Canadian domestic violence shelter websites that addressed companion animals did so in the context of discussions about goods, property, or belongings (Gray et al., 2019). Gray et al. (2019) highlighted that this might unintentionally belittle the relationship between IPV victims and their pet companions, obscuring the importance of fostering programmes for pets of human victims of abuse while they seek assistance. According to Gray et al. (2019), animal cruelty should be addressed in a way that shows pets as family members rather than property (Cain, 1985; Veevers, 1985).

Animal abuse can manifest itself in forms of abuse such as physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, much as family harm has evolved to recognise emotional, psychological, and financial abuse (Kelly & Johnson, 2008). According to this study,

animal mistreatment in NZ was generically reported. As previously stated, when reports of abuse are generic, they draw attention to social issues such as the link between animal mistreatment and family harm. If the same article is reported as case-based, blaming family harm as a social issue is difficult because the occurrence becomes isolated (Taylor, 2009; Wozniak & McCloskey, 2010). General reporting of animal abuse is beneficial for framing animal abuse within family violence as a societal issue. However, the lack of coverage means NZ audiences and victims, in particular, will be less likely to recognise animal abuse as a form of family harm even when it occurs in their lives since the NZ media rarely reports it.

5.3   Addressing research question 3

This study revealed that family harm reports peaked in July 2021, during the New Zealand winter season. Similar findings were found in research by Read (2013). In Alaska, Read (2013) noted that the rate of family harm links to alcohol consumption and the winter months. The study concluded that depression could develop due to the season's darkness and that difficulties with alcohol abuse can lead to other negative behaviours (Read, 2013). Other studies have revealed that violent crimes increase throughout the summer months (Carbone-Lopez & Lauritsen, 2013). For example, a study of homicide seasonal variation by Tiihonen et al. (1997) found that homicides generally surged in the summer.

   Academic study in the effects of environmental elements on human behaviour has led to identifying predictable seasonal patterns in family harm (Carbone-Lopez & Lauritsen, 2013; Posegate 2010; McCabe 2011). Changes in the weather affect stress levels, which increases the possibility of exhibiting behavioural changes due to physiological and psychological impacts (Cohn & Rotton, 1997; Moos, 1976). Violence is frequently associated with heatwaves in news stories; however, competing explanations suggest that seasonal fluctuations in crime rates link to differences in involvement in outdoor activities, holiday times, and lunar phases (Carbone-Lopez & Lauritsen, 2013; Cohn & Rotton, 1997). An explanation for family harm peaks in winter is that although inclement weather, such as cold, wet weather, is thought to reduce criminal activity since most people stay at home during these periods, family violence intensifies when victims remain at home with abusers (Henke & Hsu, 2020).

   Barchielli et al. (2021) found that increased family violence during the pandemic is linked to economic hardship, including financial uncertainty and limited access to resources. In 2020, the NZ Level 4 lockdown occurred in autumn, while in 2021, it

occurred in August, which is the winter season. Because family harm complaints increased dramatically during the lockdown period, the accompanying seasonal shift can be seen as playing a role in changes in family harm rates. As a result of the cold weather and the lockdown, family harm rates inevitably increased.

5.4 Conclusion

The content of this study examined the media coverage of family harm in Aotearoa to discover the most common types of harm reported. This study sought to determine if animal abuse is recognised as a form of harm in the news. According to the findings, news coverage contributes to widespread perceptions that family harm is primarily caused by physical and sexual abuse rather than other forms of suffering. The research also shows that psychological abuse, including emotional, financial, and animal abuse, is rarely depicted in publications of family harm. Furthermore, seasonality patterns of reporting are linked to the notion that, while summer seasons can contribute to higher rates of family harm, winter seasons can also see an increase.

While research has analysed media coverage of family violence in New Zealand and overseas, including seasonal impacts on media reporting, this is the first study to look at how animal abuse is presented in the media in the context of family harm in New Zealand. Future researchers should look at animal abuse in the media as it pertains to family violence and other types of media such as social media to acquire a better understanding of media portrayals. Researchers could look into thematic reporting techniques to understand how the media presents various forms of abuse. A possible suggestion is to extend the research period to cover all four seasons of the year to determine seasonal effects. Moreover, to determine public awareness, researchers should examine whether the visibility of animal abuse articles has risen over time. While the current study only found one generic article on animal abuse, a more in-depth review of terminology, phrases, and definitions presented in articles may reveal more about how different types of abuse are reported and what they provide to readers in terms of knowledge and understanding.

Overall, having a better understanding of different types of family harm is beneficial for victim intervention and assistance. Moreover, greater understanding can help develop public awareness of different types of abuse, such as animal abuse in the news media, as a co-existing component of family harm.

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