Framing Family Group Conferences: A Framing analysis of New Zealand Herald reports between 1999 and 2025

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Abstract

This study explores how the New Zealand Herald framed Family Group Conferences (FGCs) between 1999 and 2025. FGC is a type of restorative justice that allows families, victims, and accused individuals to discuss the offence and develop a solution. Using a qualitative methodology and framing analysis, this research identifies three dominant media narratives surrounding FGC: the youth-control frame, the victim frame, and the authority frame. It examines how these narratives changed over time, contributing to understanding how New Zealand Herald news reporting makes FGC publicly meaningful. Moreover, it shows that earlier reporting focused strongly on controlling difficult or dangerous young people, while later reporting provided greater attention to rehabilitation, victim harm, social context, and institutional responsibility.

Keywords: Restorative Justice, Family Group Conference, News Media, Media Portrayals

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Family Group Conference is an important part of the youth and restorative justice system in Aotearoa New Zealand. It was first introduced in New Zealand with the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act 1989, also known as the Oranga Tamariki Act 1989. It involves families of the accused and victims in the decision-making process, reflecting family empowerment (Connolly, 1994). The participants discuss the offence, its effects, the responsibilities arising from it, and the actions that should follow (Levine, 2000; Maxwell & Morris, 2006). Its purpose is to facilitate collaboration and to make appropriate decisions regarding the young person concerned (Kingi et al., 2016).

FGC is associated with restorative justice because it engages those who are impacted by the offence in determining how the harm should be handled. According to restorative justice, an offence is not just a violation of the law but also a harm done to individuals and relationships. As a result, it emphasises involvement, admitting wrongdoing, taking active responsibility, and making an effort to recover from the effects of an offence (Zehr, 2014). These values can be demonstrated in an FGC by an apology, compensation, community service, treatment, education, limitations, family support, or other agreed-upon measures. Additionally, the approach might give the young person a chance to comprehend the consequences of their actions and take part in future planning (Maxwell & Morris, 2006).

However, FGC should not always be understood as effective every time because a conference has taken place. The system has achieved several important goals, including diversion from formal court processes and the promotion of accountability, but it has not achieved every restorative aim in every case (Maxwell & Morris, 2006). The practical value of a conference depends on how the process is conducted and whether the resulting plan is implemented. A formally completed conference may still produce limited outcomes when participants are not meaningfully involved, victims do not feel recognised, agreed actions are not completed, or appropriate services and follow-up are unavailable. Therefore, restorative justice should not be idealised as a process that automatically creates remorse, reconciliation, victim satisfaction, or behavioural change (Daly, 2002).

FGC also has cultural and political significance in New Zealand. The development of the 1989 legislation reflected a movement away from decision-making controlled entirely by

professionals and towards greater family and whānau participation (Connolly, 1994). This development was connected to wider concerns about the exclusion of Māori families and approaches from state decisions affecting Māori children and young people. Although the process may involve family participation, collective discussion, cultural practices, and Māori values, it continues to operate within a state-designed and state-administered justice system (Moyle & Tauri, 2016).

Family participation, cultural inclusion, and Māori authority are related but are not the same. An FGC may involve whānau members, incorporate tikanga, or take place in a culturally significant setting without transferring control of the justice process to Māori communities. Cultural inclusion may strengthen whānau involvement, relationships, identity, and engagement, but these practices can still operate within a state-controlled system in which Māori authority remains limited (Moyle & Tauri, 2016; Nygård & Saus, 2019; Roguski, 2020; Tauri, 1999). Cultural practices may also be interpreted by state institutions mainly through goals such as improving compliance, rehabilitation, or reducing reoffending, rather than as expressions of Māori self-determination (Moyle & Tauri, 2016). The public meaning given to these practices depends partly on how news reports select, emphasise, and explain cultural participation within FGC (Entman, 1993; Vaandering & Reimer, 2019).

News media are an important source through which the public can encounter information about FGC. News reports do not simply reproduce every part of an event or justice process. Journalists must choose which details to include, whose voice to quote, which explanations to prioritise, and which outcomes to make visible. Framing theory explains that these choices can make particular aspects of an issue more noticeable than others. A frame can define the main problem, identify its apparent causes, make a moral judgment, and promote a particular response (Entman, 1993). Framing may be created through headlines, repeated expressions, labels, quotations, metaphors, descriptions, source selection, sequencing, and omission (Entman, 1993; Scheufele, 1999).

These framing choices are important when FGC appears within news stories about youth offending. Crime reporting commonly gives strong attention to violence, danger, conflict, victims, police, courts, and other features that make an event appear serious and newsworthy (Jewkes, 2015). Such reporting may give readers detailed information about an offence while providing only a short statement that an FGC was ordered, delayed, completed, or unsuccessful. As a result, the public image of FGC may differ from its legal and restorative purposes, which include participation, accountability, recognition of harm, repair, and future support (Maxwell

& Morris, 2006; Zehr, 2014). Framing analysis is therefore useful for examining which features of FGC are made most visible, which voices are treated as authoritative, and which interpretations of the process are made available to readers (Entman, 1993).

This does not mean that media reports directly determine what all readers believe. Readers interpret news through their existing knowledge, experiences, values, and political views. However, repeated frames can make certain definitions of a problem and certain responses more available within public discussion (Chong & Druckman, 2007). Media coverage can influence whether FGC is publicly discussed as meaningful accountability, rehabilitation, cultural restoration, bureaucratic delay, institutional failure, or an overly lenient response to youth offending.

The limited literature examining media representations of restorative justice supports the need to study these public meanings. Restorative justice may be publicly judged through victim visibility, fairness, offender accountability, and institutional credibility rather than through only its formal principles. Giving attention to victims may improve recognition of the harm caused by offending, but it may also simplify the variety of victims' experiences or encourage restorative justice to be judged only through victim satisfaction (De Mesmaecker, 2010). Public interpretations of restorative justice may also differ from those of practitioners, researchers, and advocates who possess more detailed knowledge of restorative processes (Vaandering & Reimer, 2019).

Despite the importance of news media representation, limited research has examined how New Zealand news reporting has framed FGC over an extended period. Existing FGC scholarship explains the process's statutory development, restorative purposes, participant experiences, implementation difficulties, and contested relationship with Māori authority. Crime-media scholarship explains how news reporting can construct danger, blame, victimhood, institutional failure, and appropriate punishment. Research on news media representations of FGC remains comparatively small and has generally concentrated on public communication, particular cases, or public reactions rather than longitudinal mainstream news coverage (De Mesmaecker, 2010; Vaandering & Reimer, 2019).

As a result, a gap remains in understanding how New Zealand news coverage has made FGC publicly meaningful over time. Further attention is needed to determine how news reports represent young people, victims, families, whānau, professionals, and justice institutions; whose voices are treated as authoritative; which causes of offending are made visible; and

which outcomes are used to judge the legitimacy of FGC. It is also necessary to examine whether these representations remain consistent or change as public discussions of youth offending, victimisation, rehabilitation, cultural participation, and institutional responsibility develop.

This study addresses that gap through a qualitative framing analysis of selected New Zealand Herald reports published between 1999 and 2025. The New Zealand Herald is used as a case study of mainstream news reporting in Aotearoa New Zealand. The study does not claim that the selected articles represent every New Zealand media organisation, nor does it attempt to measure their direct effect on individual readers. Instead, it examines the interpretations made available within the New Zealand Herald articles through language, quotations, metaphors, descriptions, sequencing, source selection, and omission.

1.2 Research Aim

The aim of this study is to examine how the New Zealand Herald framed Family Group Conferences between 1999 and 2025 and to identify how this framing changed across the selected publication periods. The study investigates how the reports defined the main problems connected with FGC, attributed responsibility, made moral judgments, promoted particular responses, and distributed voice among young people, victims, families, whānau, professionals, and government agencies.

The study seeks to identify the recurring narratives through which FGC was made publicly understandable. It examines whether FGC was presented primarily as a mechanism for controlling youth offending, a process for recognising and repairing victim harm, a means of supporting rehabilitation, a form of family and whānau participation, a culturally meaningful response, or a procedural delay.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

This chapter surveys the bodies of scholarship necessary to situate the present study within wider debates about restorative justice, youth justice, media representations of criminal justice matters, and public attitudes towards them.

This chapter is divided into seven parts.

The first part reviews the broader literature on restorative justice, tracing its conceptual development and synthesising evidence on victim experiences, offender accountability, reoffending, power, voluntariness, case suitability, institutionalisation, and structural limitations.

The second part reviews research on Family Group Conferences (FGCs) in New Zealand, including their statutory development, process, implementation, participant experiences, and reported outcomes.

The third part examines Māori perspectives on restorative justice and FGCs. It reviews the contested relationship between Māori legal traditions, collective decision-making, state incorporation, indigenisation, and Māori authority.

The fourth part reviews research on crime reporting, public attitudes, and moral panic, focusing on recurring frames and the conditions under which they may support punitive responses.

The fifth part reviews the small body of scholarship that directly examines media and public representations of restorative justice and identifies what this research can and cannot establish.

The sixth part brings these bodies of scholarship together to examine news media framing of Family Group Conferences in New Zealand and specifies the research gap addressed by this study.

The last part states the two research questions that will be answered in this study.

2.1. Restorative Justice: Development, Evidence, and Debate

2.1.1. Emergence and Conceptual Foundations

The literature of restorative justice agrees that offending should be understood as harm to people and relationships, and that those affected should have a meaningful role in determining how that harm is addressed. The label 'restorative justice' is commonly traced to Eglash's 1977 account of creative restitution, while Christie's (1977) argument that professionals had appropriated conflicts from those directly involved became a foundational rationale for victim, offender, and community participation (Christie, 1977; Eglash, 1977; Wood et al., 2022).

From the late 1970s onwards, the field developed as a critique of conventional criminal justice and as a diverse set of practices, including victim-offender meetings, family group conferencing, youth justice conferencing, and sentencing circles (Braithwaite, 1999; Daly, 2002; Wood et al., 2022). Across these models, the literature repeatedly identifies three aims: meeting victims' needs for participation and redress, requiring people who have caused harm to accept responsibility, and involving families or communities in repairing harm and supporting reintegration (Braithwaite, 1999; Wood & Suzuki, 2016; Wood et al., 2022).

This conceptual agreement should not be overstated. Daly (2002) shows that 'restorative justice' is used to describe both normative ideals and institutionally varied practices, while Wood and Suzuki (2016) identify continuing disagreement about the field's boundaries, aims, and relationship to punishment. Therefore, the literature does not describe one uniform intervention; it examines programmes that differ in referral pathway, participant eligibility, facilitator practice, legal authority, and intended outcome (Daly, 2002; Wood & Suzuki, 2016; Wood et al., 2022).

2.1.2. Evidence on Victim Experiences

The empirical literature compares victim experiences in restorative processes with those in conventional court proceedings. Meta-analyses and systematic reviews find that victims who complete restorative processes report equal or higher satisfaction and strong perceptions of procedural fairness, especially when they are able to ask questions, describe harm, participate in agreement-making, and receive an apology (Fulham et al., 2025; Latimer et al., 2005; Strang

et al., 2013; Wood et al., 2022). This is one of the more consistent areas of agreement in the outcome literature.

The evidence for emotional recovery is more qualified in this case. Some studies report reductions in anger, fear, or trauma-related symptoms, but a systematic review of seven quantitative studies found only moderate support for reductions in post-traumatic stress and mixed findings across different symptom groups (Lloyd & Borrill, 2020; Wood et al., 2022). The available evidence is also focused on victims of property and personal offences; comparative research remains limited for family violence, sexual violence, corporate crime, and hate crime (Wood et al., 2022).

Methodological limitations restrict the power of these conclusions. Victims are usually assigned to cases involving restorative or conventional processes rather than being independently randomised. Therefore, the two groups may not be directly comparable. Studies also use different instruments and follow-up periods, and many examine only participants who completed the restorative process (Strang et al., 2013; Wood et al., 2022). These designs can exclude people who declined, withdrew, or had cases considered unsuitable, which may inflate estimates of satisfaction and limit generalisability.

Qualitative research records outcomes that aggregate satisfaction scores can conceal. Victims may feel marginalised when offender rehabilitation dominates decision-making, pressured to accept an unwanted outcome, or dissatisfied with apologies perceived as strategic or insincere (Choi et al., 2013; Daly, 2002; Suzuki & Wood, 2018). The literature supports a conclusion that restorative processes often improve participation and procedural justice, but positive outcomes depend on preparation, voluntariness, facilitation, and the distribution of power within the meeting.

2.1.3. Offender Accountability and Reoffending

The literature focused on offending differentiates accountability and reoffending. Studies find that restorative participants perceive opportunities to make amends, and victims are more likely to regard offenders as having been held accountable than in conventional proceedings (Fulham et al., 2025; Wood et al., 2022). However, studies of youth conferences show that taking responsibility is demanding; young people may struggle to narrate events, communicate

remorse, or produce an apology that a victim experiences as sincere (Daly, 2002; Suzuki & Wood, 2018).

Findings on reoffending are less conclusive than the early literature suggested. Recent meta-analysis associates restorative programmes with a reduction in recidivism but finds no significant reduction in violent recidivism, such as when type of programme, study quality, and sample characteristics moderate the results (Fulham et al., 2025). Moreover, earlier reviews report no difference or small-to-moderate reductions, while differences in the definition of reoffending, follow-up length, programme design, and selection into restorative processes limit comparison across studies (Piggott & Wood, 2018; Strang et al., 2013; Wood et al., 2022).

Wood's (2015) critique is particularly important because it separates reoffending from system-level claims. Even if some participants reoffend less, this does not demonstrate that restorative justice will reduce incarceration. Wood argues that most programmes operate at the edges of criminal justice, remain dependent on state referral, and do not alter the political and economic arrangements that sustain imprisonment (Wood, 2015). The literature therefore contains a disagreement between evidence of individual-level effects and claims that restorative justice can transform the penal system.

2.1.4. Power, Voluntariness, and Case Suitability

Imbalance in power is an important theme in the critical literature. There can be participant compromises when an offender joins to secure diversion or a sentencing benefit, when a victim feels expected to forgive, or when professionals control the agenda and available outcomes (Choi et al., 2013; Daly, 2002; Hoyle et al., 2002). Inequalities related to age, gender, ethnicity, disability, communication, and socioeconomic position can therefore enter the restorative process rather than disappear within it (Daly, 2002; Suzuki & Wood, 2018; Wood et al., 2022).

The literature is divided on gendered and serious violence. Restorative responses to sexual violence cannot be evaluated through a simple binary, whereas coercive control and unequal bargaining power may endanger victims if safeguards are inadequate. This work does not establish that restorative justice is universally safe or unsafe; it identifies the need for screening, preparation, victim choice, and protection from coercion (Coker, 2006; Daly, 2006; Wood et al., 2022).

2.1.5. Institutionalisation and Structural Limits

A further body of scholarship examines what happens when restorative justice is incorporated into state systems. Institutionalisation can extend access and provide procedural safeguards, but it can also narrow restorative aims to administrative efficiency, offender management, or post-adjudicative programming (Braithwaite, 1999; Wood & Suzuki, 2016; Wood et al., 2022). In this account, the state retains authority to define harm, eligibility, and acceptable outcomes, while communities and participants exercise only delegated power.

Critical and Indigenous scholarship extends this argument by asking whether a process can be transformative while the social structures producing harm remain unchanged. Wood (2015) questions the claim that restorative justice can reduce imprisonment without confronting the political economy of punishment. Moyle and Tauri (2016) similarly argue that state-centred programmes may use Indigenous concepts while leaving colonial authority intact. The unresolved issue in this literature is therefore not whether restorative practices can benefit some participants, but whether those local benefits can be translated into structural change (Moyle & Tauri, 2016; Wood, 2015; Wood et al., 2022).

Overall, restorative justice research is strongest in demonstrating improved participation and procedural fairness for many participants, more cautious about effects on trauma and reoffending, and sceptical about claims that restorative justice can transform criminal justice systems without wider structural change (Fulham et al., 2025; Lloyd & Borrill, 2020; Wood, 2015; Wood et al., 2022). These disagreements are central to this study because news reporting may select one part of this contested evidence base-success, failure, leniency, accountability, or structural limitation- and present it as the meaning of restorative justice.

2.2. Family Group Conferences in New Zealand

2.2.1. Statutory Development and Process

The New Zealand FGC literature locates the model within the reforms that produced the Children, Young Persons, and Their Families Act 1989. Historical and legal studies connect the Act to criticism of institutional racism, centralised professional decision-making, and the exclusion of whānau from decisions concerning Māori children and young people (Connolly, 1994; Levine, 2000; Moyle & Tauri, 2016). Under the Act, FGCs became mandatory decision-

making mechanisms in youth justice and central mechanisms in care and protection; their prominence therefore followed from statutory design, not simply from demonstrated programme effectiveness (Connolly, 1994; Levine, 2000).

The descriptive literature identifies participation and family decision-making as the model's distinguishing features. Youth justice FGCs bring together the young person, family or whānau, the victim, police, a coordinator, and other relevant people to discuss the offence and formulate a plan (Levine, 2000; Maxwell & Morris, 2006). Private family time is intended to reduce professional control by allowing family members to deliberate independently. However, the final process remains governed by legislation and by professional decisions about referral, information, safety, and plan approval (Levine, 2000; Moyle & Tauri, 2016).

2.2.2. Evidence on Participation and Outcomes

Evaluative studies generally report that the New Zealand model widened family participation and diverted many young people from formal court processing (Maxwell & Morris, 2006; Morris & Maxwell, 1998). However, the same literature does not present uniformly restorative outcomes. Maxwell and Morris (2006) show that conference quality and later outcomes vary with participant engagement, the young person's remorse, the treatment of victims, and the quality and completion of plans. These findings direct attention away from whether an FGC occurred and towards how it was conducted and implemented.

The New Zealand evidence base also has limits. Much of the foundational research was conducted during the early implementation period, often using administrative records, interviews, or observational data rather than experimental designs (Maxwell & Morris, 2006; Morris & Maxwell, 1998). This work is valuable for understanding process and participant experience, but it cannot by itself establish that FGCs caused later changes in offending. International meta-analyses of restorative conferencing cannot resolve this New Zealand-specific question because they combine programmes operating under different laws, referral systems, and institutional conditions (Fulham et al., 2025; Wood et al., 2022).

2.3. Māori Perspectives, Indigenisation, and Authority

A major disagreement concerns how the relationship between FGCs and Māori legal traditions should be interpreted. One strand of literature describes the 1989 reforms as a shift towards

whānau participation, collective responsibility, and less professionally dominated decision-making (Connolly, 1994; Morris & Maxwell, 1998). A critical Indigenous strand argues that this description can romanticise the model and mistake cultural inclusion for the transfer of authority (Moyle & Tauri, 2016; Tauri, 1998, 1999).

Tauri's early analyses characterise FGC as an indigenisation of an existing state system rather than an autonomous Māori justice process: Māori concepts and participation were incorporated, but the state retained control over law, resources, and institutional boundaries (Tauri, 1998, 1999). Moyle and Tauri (2016) later describe the global portrayal of FGC as an Indigenous restorative success as a 'mystification' that can obscure Māori experiences of standardisation and Eurocentric professional control. These critiques directly challenge accounts that treat the model's Māori inspiration as settled fact.

More recent work shows that institutional form matters. Roguski's (2020) case study of iwi-led family group conferences examines the reclamation of whānau decision-making outside a solely state-centred model, while Nygård and Saus (2018) find that cultural adequacy depends on local ownership and adaptation rather than mechanical transfer of the New Zealand format. The literature therefore distinguishes among family participation, cultural symbolism, and Indigenous authority; these are related but not interchangeable outcomes.

Research on FGCs in New Zealand has consequently developed around statutory design, participant experience, implementation, reoffending, family empowerment, and Indigenous critique (Connolly, 1994; Maxwell & Morris, 2006; Morris & Maxwell, 1998; Moyle & Tauri, 2016; Tauri, 1998, 1999). What remains under-explored is how these competing scholarly interpretations are translated into public discourse. The FGC literature explains the model's legal and practical operation, but it does not establish how New Zealand news media make FGC intelligible to readers or which voices and outcomes become most visible.

2.4. Crime Reporting, and Moral Panic

A body of research examines racialised framing. Harding’s (2006) analysis of historical Canadian news discourse found that Aboriginal peoples were repeatedly associated with crime and social disorder and were denied equal authority as sources. Although this study is not about New Zealand, it demonstrates a mechanism relevant to the present research: Indigenous people can be framed as objects of intervention while colonial history and Indigenous interpretations

remain marginal. The transferability of that finding to Māori and FGC reporting must be tested rather than assumed. However, Harding's work is useful because it shows how crime reporting can racialise disorder by deciding whose voices are treated as authoritative and whose social context is left unexplained (Harding, 2006). This connects with wider crime-media scholarship, which argues that news reporting does not only describe crime events but also shapes public understandings of danger, blame, control, and punishment. Moreover, studies of crime news show that media narratives often privilege conflict, individual responsibility, official sources, institutional failure, and exceptional violence, which can make punitive or controlling responses appear more reasonable to the public (Dowler, 2003; Greer & McLaughlin, 2012; Milićević & Drndarević, 2023).

This is directly relevant to the media portrayal of FGC because New Zealand FGC has been described in the literature as a participatory youth justice process that brings together young people, victims, families, whānau, and professionals to make decisions about accountability and future action (Maxwell & Morris, 2006; Lynch, 2016). Its restorative purpose also connects with wider restorative justice principles of addressing harm, recognising obligations, and supporting repair (Zehr, 2014). Nonetheless, crime reporting may pull FGC into a different narrative logic, such as one centred less on participation, repair, and culturally grounded decision-making, and more on youth risk, victim harm, public anxiety, institutional failure, and demands for visible accountability or stronger control. This concern is supported by crime-media literature which is showing that news coverage can foreground fear of crime, danger, blame, outrage at institutional failure, and punitive common sense (Dowler, 2003; Greer & McLaughlin, 2012; Pratt, 2007), while wider research on media portrayals of justice institutions shows how complex justice processes may be simplified in ways that reinforce punitive understandings (Milićević & Drndarević, 2023). The literature therefore suggests a tension between the restorative and participatory ideals of FGC and the dominant tendencies of crime reporting. This creates a gap in the existing scholarship: while crime-media research explains how news can produce punitive meanings, and FGC scholarship explains the restorative purpose of the process, less attention has been given to how New Zealand media portray FGC when it appears inside youth crime reporting.

2.4.1. Public Attitudes

Research on media effects generally associates frequent exposure to sensational crime reporting with exaggerated perceptions of risk, fear of crime, and support for punitive

responses, although effects vary with audience characteristics and prior beliefs (Aleem et al., 2021; Chong & Druckman, 2007; Dowler, 2003). These findings do not establish that media messages determine public opinion directly; they show that repeated frames can make some problem definitions and policy responses more cognitively available than others.

This literature connects framing to moral panic. Cohen's account of moral panic concerns the amplification of perceived threats and the construction of symbolic offenders (Cohen, 2002). Media and political actors can reinforce one another by circulating crisis narratives and remedies (Greer & McLaughlin, 2012).

2.5. Media Representations of Restorative Justice

Only a small part of restorative justice literature directly examines media representation of the system. This work can be synthesised around one central theme: media communication shapes how restorative justice becomes publicly meaningful. Across this literature, restorative justice is not simply explained to the public as a neutral process of dialogue, repair, and relationship-building. It is interpreted through questions of victim visibility, institutional trust, fairness, power, and legitimacy (De Mesmaecker, 2010; Vaandering & Reimer, 2019; Leonard, 2024). One concern is that public support for restorative justice may be built by foregrounding victims, but this can also simplify diverse victim experiences and turn them into a communication strategy instead of fully recognising their complexity (De Mesmaecker, 2010). A second concern is that audiences may interpret restorative justice differently from its advocates, especially when they see it as coercive, institutionally self-protective, or as public relations rather than justice (Vaandering & Reimer, 2019). Together, these studies show that media representation matters because restorative justice can be reframed through public expectations of accountability, victim recognition, and institutional credibility. However, the evidence base remains limited because existing studies focus on communication strategies, social-media perceptions, or single cases rather than longitudinal mainstream news coverage of statutory restorative justice processes (De Mesmaecker, 2010; Vaandering & Reimer, 2019; Leonard, 2024). Therefore, while the literature shows that media can shape public understandings of restorative justice, it does not yet explain how recurring news frames develop over time or how FGC is represented in New Zealand media. This leaves an important gap for the present study, which examines how New Zealand news media have framed FGC across different periods.

The gap is specific rather than a general claim that media and FGC have never been studied. Existing framing research explains how crime news constructs problems and remedies; FGC research explains the model's statutory development, outcomes, and contested Indigenous foundations; and a small number of studies examine public or media understandings of restorative justice (De Mesmaecker, 2010; Vaandering & Reimer, 2019). What is missing is a longitudinal study of how New Zealand news media frame FGCs, including whose voices are authorised, which harms and outcomes are emphasised, and whether the process is represented as accountability, leniency, cultural restoration, or institutional failure. This study addresses that gap through a qualitative framing analysis of New Zealand Herald reports published between 1999 and 2025.

2.6. News Media Framing of Family Group Conferences in New Zealand

Family Group Conferences have a distinctive position within Aotearoa New Zealand youth justice. FGC is not simply a general restorative justice practice imported into the justice system; it is a statutory process that developed in New Zealand through debates about state dominance, family and whānau participation, Māori overrepresentation, and the need for culturally responsive decision-making in youth justice (Connolly, 1994; Morris & Maxwell, 1998; Maxwell & Morris, 2006; Lynch, 2016). On one hand, FGC reflects restorative justice principles because it aims to bring together young people, victims, families, whānau, and professionals to discuss harm, responsibility, repair, and future support (Maxwell & Morris, 2006; Zehr, 2014; Lynch, 2016). On the other hand, Māori and Indigenous justice scholars caution that FGC should not be treated only as an expression of Māori justice, because it remains located within a state-designed and state-administered youth justice system (Moyle & Tauri, 2016; Kingi, 2016; Nygård & Saus, 2018). This New Zealand context is important for media framing because news coverage may not only shape public views of restorative justice but also how the public understands a process closely connected to youth justice, whānau participation, Māori representation, state authority, and cultural legitimacy in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Restorative justice literature shows why media representation matters. Restorative justice should not be reduced to a soft alternative to punishment. Rather, it requires active accountability, careful preparation, meaningful participation, and attention to the needs of victims, offenders, families, and communities (Daly, 2002; Zehr, 2014; Latimer et al., 2005). FGC literature similarly presents the conference as a process that brings together young people,

victims, families, whānau, professionals, and sometimes community members to discuss harm and agree on practical next steps (Maxwell & Morris, 2006; Lynch, 2016). However, this process may be difficult to communicate in short crime reports. If the media only mentions that an FGC was ordered, delayed, completed, or failed, the public may not see the relational and deliberative work that the process is supposed to involve. This is where the literature points to a possible gap between restorative justice as a practice and restorative justice as a media image.

Family and whānau participation is another key theme in FGC scholarship. FGC has often been described as a model that aims to shift decision-making away from professional dominance and toward greater family, whānau, and community involvement (Connolly, 1994; Morris & Maxwell, 1998; Maxwell & Morris, 2006). This participatory aim is central to the identity of FGC in Aotearoa New Zealand. However, the literature also recognises that participation alone does not guarantee fairness or effectiveness. Restorative processes may reproduce power imbalances if participants feel pressured, if professional voices dominate, if victims do not feel safe, or if families lack the resources needed to support a plan (Daly, 2002; Green et al., 2013; Wood & Suzuki, 2016). These concerns are relevant to media framing because news coverage may focus on family responsibility, agency failure, or youth risk without fully explaining the structural pressures that shape family and whānau participation.

Indigenous and Māori justice scholarship adds a layer to this issue. FGC developed partly in response to criticism of state dominance, institutional racism, and the exclusion of Māori whānau from decisions affecting children and young people (Connolly, 1994; Moyle & Tauri, 2016; Nygård & Saus, 2018). However, Indigenous scholars also caution against treating FGC as a simple return to traditional Māori justice, because the model remains embedded within a state designed and administered youth justice system (Moyle & Tauri, 2016; Kingi, 2016). This matters for media representation. If news coverage presents cultural participation only as a tool for compliance or reoffending reduction, it may acknowledge Māori concepts while still framing them through a state-centred logic of risk management. The literature therefore suggests the need to examine whether media portrayals give meaningful attention to whānau authority, cultural context, and Māori perspectives, or whether these are reduced to supporting roles within official justice narratives.

Overall, the literature review shows that media framing is highly relevant to public understandings of FGC, but it also reveals a clear gap. Restorative justice and FGC scholarship explain the principles, aims, cultural significance, and implementation challenges of the process in Aotearoa New Zealand. Crime-media scholarship explains how news can construct

crime through fear, blame, victimhood, institutional failure, and punishment. However, relatively little research brings this literature together to examine how New Zealand news media frame FGC as a youth justice process over time. This study will discuss this gap. It is important because FGC is not only a legal or restorative process; in New Zealand, it is also connected to public debates about youth offending, Māori and whānau participation, victim recognition, cultural authority, state intervention, and confidence in the youth justice system. Therefore, understanding how news media frame FGC can help explain the conditions under which the process appears legitimate, weak, hopeful, culturally meaningful, or politically contested in Aotearoa New Zealand.

2.7 Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. How did the New Zealand Herald frame Family Group Conferences between 1999 and 2025?
2. How did the framing of Family Group Conferences change across the three selected time periods?

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter explains the methodology of the framing analysis applied in this study. 3.1 Research Design

The study used a qualitative research design based on the framing analysis of news media articles. This design was appropriate because the research focused on meaning rather than numerical measurement. The purpose was to understand how language, quotations, descriptions, silences, metaphors, omissions, and repeated narratives in news articles constructed the public meaning or perceptions of FGC between 1999 and 2025, and how it changed over time.

3.2 News Article Selection

The primary data consisted of New Zealand Herald news articles published between 1 January 1999 and 31 December 2025. The search terms “family group conference” and “FGC” were used to locate relevant articles. The preliminary search produced approximately 300 results.

The initial results were screened before the final sample was selected. Duplicate and repeated articles were removed because they repeated material already contained in the dataset. Articles containing fewer than 200 words were also removed. At first, 10 articles were selected per period, but upon closer reading, the number decreased as some of the articles were related to FGC for childcare, not for criminal behaviour. Therefore, the childcare articles were subsequently excluded.

After the screening process, the dataset was reduced to 19 articles. This number was appropriate for a qualitative study because it allowed each article to be read closely while still providing enough material to identify repeated patterns. The purpose was to develop a detailed interpretation of a focused sample.

The sample was selected through purposive chronological sampling. The final 19 articles consisted of:

1. the first 5 relevant articles published after 1 January 1999;
2. the first 7 relevant articles published after 1 January 2012; and
3. the last 7 relevant articles published before 31 December 2025.

The articles were selected in this way because the study aimed to compare framing across time. The first group provided an early point of comparison, the second group provided a midpoint, and the third group represented the most recent reporting within the study period. This sampling method made it possible to examine whether the same frames remained present and how their meanings were modified over time.

3.3 Method

This study used framing analysis to investigate how the New Zealand Herald framed FGCs over time. It was mainly informed by Framing Theory. Entman (1993) explains that framing involves selecting aspects of reality and making them more noticeable within a text. Frames commonly perform four functions: they define a problem, identify its causes, make a moral evaluation, and recommend a response. This theory was appropriate for this study because it provided a way to examine how FGCs, youth offending, victims, families, and justice agencies were presented within the selected articles.

Framing can be produced through headlines, repeated words, labels, quotations, metaphors, descriptions, images, source selection, and the order in which information is presented. It can also operate through omission, where some facts, explanations, or perspectives are made less visible than others (Chong & Druckman, 2007; Entman, 1993; Scheufele, 1999). These framing choices make interpretations noticeable and easier for readers to accept, while alternative interpretations may receive less attention (Entman, 1993).

For example, FGC can be framed in several different ways. When an article focuses on unpaid reparation or an apology described as insincere, FGC may appear to possess formal authority but limited practical force. This reflects wider restorative justice research showing that accountability depends not only on reaching an agreement but also on whether apologies are experienced as genuine and whether agreed plans are meaningfully implemented (Daly, 2002; Maxwell & Morris, 2006; Suzuki & Wood, 2018).

This theory helped the study examine how FGC was publicly constructed. It guided the identification of the main narratives, including how problems, causes, moral judgements, voices, and solutions were organised within the articles.

The articles were then coded using four guiding questions. Each article was read four times, every time with one of the four following coding questions in mind.

1. What is the main problem?

To identify how an article constructs the main problem, I moved from surface features to deeper interpretive elements. I began with a holistic read-through to establish the general thrust of the argument and to form an initial sense of what the text implicitly treats as problematic. I then examined the headline, subheadings, and opening paragraphs, recognising that these components are deliberately crafted to foreground particular issues and signal to readers what should be understood as most urgent or newsworthy. From there, I identified explicit problem statement sentences where the author directly names a concern, describes a failure, or highlights a condition requiring attention. I also traced recurring keywords, evaluative adjectives, and emotionally charged phrases that appeared throughout the article, noting how repetition and tone work together to frame certain situations or behaviours as harmful, pressing, or in need of intervention. This close attention to language allowed me to see not only what the article labels as the problem, but how it rhetorically constructs that problem as serious, consequential, and deserving of public concern.

2. Who is being blamed?

From there, I analysed the causal explanations offered, noting how the article attributed responsibility and what mechanisms it claimed produced the problem. I also considered whom the article positioned as affected and how their experiences were described, since these representations help justify why the problem matters. The question examined who or what was presented as responsible for the main problem. Then, I analysed whether blame was individualised through the behaviour, choices, attitude, or character of the young person or more broadly distributed with factors such as trauma, neglect, family violence, poverty, fragmented services, inadequate information, or delayed intervention.

3. What solutions are being promoted?

To identify what solutions are being promoted, I examined how each article suggested what should be done. I began by looking for explicit solution statements, such as calls for court action, detention, residential supervision, harsher sentences, stronger monitoring, reparation, apologies, community work, family support, cultural reconnection, early intervention, or FGC itself. I then looked beyond direct statements to identify implied solutions, paying attention to the actions, institutions, or responses that the article presented as necessary, reasonable, or inadequate. This included tracing verbs and phrases such as “must,” “should,” “need to,” “ordered,” “monitored,” or “supervised,” because these words show how the article directs readers toward particular responses. I also examined who was positioned as responsible for

solving the problem: the Youth Court, police, Oranga Tamariki, families, whānau, victims, communities, or the young person themselves. This helped me determine whether the article framed the solution mainly through punishment and control, through restorative repair and support, or through a mixture of both.

4. Whose voices are heard?

To identify whose voices are heard, I examined how each article distributed speech, authority, and silence. I began by identifying who was quoted directly, because direct quotation gives a speaker visibility, emotional presence, and interpretive authority within the article. Then, I examined who was paraphrased, summarised, or spoken about by others, as this often placed some actors in a less powerful position within the text. The analysis considered the voices of judges, police officers, lawyers, politicians, government agencies, social workers, victims, parents, whānau, young people, and FGC practitioners. I paid close attention to whether official voices were used to explain the seriousness of an offence, the legal process, or the need for intervention. I also examined how victims and family members were given space to describe harm, fear, trauma, financial loss, anger, or dissatisfaction with an FGC outcome.

The 10 articles within each publication period were then read and analysed together. This allowed the analysis to move beyond individual articles and consider the broader understanding a reader might form if those reports were their main source of information about FGC.

Finally, the three publication periods were compared. The comparison focused on continuity and change within the three frames.

Chapter 4. Findings and Analysis

This chapter explains the three publication periods separately to identify the main news media frames about FGC between 1999 and 2025 and then compares them to identify how the frames changed over time. There are three publication timetables-

Table 1: First publication period

Published Date	Author	Headlines	Newspaper	Link
1999, February 27	Tony Wall	Girl on drugs charges out of control: Family.	New Zealand Herald.	Webpage
1999, August 21	Jan Corbett	The boy who didn't hit back.	New Zealand Herald.	Webpage
2001, Mar 10	Carroll du Chateau	The tough business of keeping young offenders out of jail.	New Zealand Herald	Webpage
2001, Mar 10	No Author	No easy answers for at-risk families	New Zealand Herald	Newztext
2000, May 30	Scott Inglis	Boy steals classic craft for jaunts around gulf.	New Zealand Herald	Webpage

Table 2: Second Publication Period

Date	Author	Headlines	Newspaper	Links
2012, January 13	Laurilee McMichael	Turangi attack: Teen's plea to God	New Zealand Herald	Webpage
2012, April 14	Abigail Hartevelt	Rotorua Youth Court cases to be heard on marae.	New Zealand Herald	Webpage
2012, September 5	Katie Holland	Teen sent to military camp after armed robbery	New Zealand Herald	Webpage
2012, September 12	Jared Savage	Teens take paramedic hostage.	New Zealand Herald.	Webpage
2012, October 31	Katie Holland	Gang fight driver, 15, in court.	New Zealand Herald	Newztext

2012, November 14	Peter Calder	Ray of hope in youth crime gloom.	New Zealand Herald	Webpage
2012, December 18	Conchie, S.	Teen gunman admits guilt.	New Zealand Herald	Webpage

Table 3: Third Publication Period

Date	Author	Headlines	Newspaper	Link
2024, November 13	Hannah Bartlett	Tauranga teen given supervision for knife attack on girl at Bayfair mall	New Zealand Herald	Webpage
2024, October 5	Shayne Currie	Honey Hireme-Smiler - how Kiwi Ferns and Black Ferns sports star and top Sky TV commentator turned her life around from a town bully in trouble with police.	New Zealand Herald	Webpage
(2024, December 16).	Anna Leask	NZ youth offenders report reveals insight into Kiwi kids' 'crimewave'	New Zealand Herald	Webpage
(2025, May 3).	Kelly Makiha	Rotorua tyre-slashing spree: Two 12-year-old girls referred to police Youth Aid	New Zealand Herald	Webpage
(2025, January 28).	Russell Wills	We can reduce NZ youth offending. Here's how.	New Zealand Herald	Webpage
(2025, February 28).	Megan Wilson	Oranga Tamariki strike: Social workers won't work on weekends for seven weeks	New Zealand Herald	Webpage
(2025, July 19).	Audrey Young	Who can claim credit for the dramatic reduction in ram raids?	New Zealand Herald.	Webpage

4.1 Media framing of Family Group Conferences in 1999

This section analyses how the first 10 New Zealand Herald articles selected, starting from 1999, construct public meaning around Family Group Conferences (FGCs). In adherence to the media frame analysis method, the articles are read together to unearth overall ideas that may influence reader opinions about FGC if these articles were their only source of knowledge. Three connected frames organise the coverage. First, FGC is framed as a last resort for young people who are represented as uncontrollable yet still redeemable. Second, FGC is structurally fragile because it depends on family, agency, and support. Third, FGC is framed as morally vulnerable when it fails to meet the needs or expectations of the innocent victim. Voice, omission, sequencing, and metaphor modify these three frames rather than creating additional frames.

4.1.1. FGC as a last resort for uncontrollable but redeemable youth

The first frame constructs young people as risky, disorderly, disobedient, and difficult to govern. The language of control turns particular incidents into evidence of youth deviance and positions FGC as an intervention used when ordinary family, school, welfare, and police authority appear insufficient.

This is clearest in Wall's news article, where the frame is first created by labelling the offending girl as "out of control" in the headline, which does more than just describe the girl's behaviour; it gives readers an interpretive shortcut to judge her actions. Before the reader learns much about her circumstances, the headline already showcase as she is mentally sick and positions her as someone who operates outside socially acceptable boundaries. Later, the article states that her family had "no control over her", which reiterates the original idea and thereby reinforces it. The repetition of the word "control" makes the problem appear less about one drug-related school incident and more about a young person who cannot be governed by ordinary family or school disciplinary measures (Wall, 1999).

The reference to the girl's foster-care history strengthens the image of failed containment. Her movement through foster homes functions as evidence that successive adults and systems have been unable to manage her. The narrative therefore locates the problem in her ungovernability and leaves the possible failures of care, support, and stability outside the main explanation.

The same frame appears in Inglis' news article about Robert stealing boats. Robert is described as a teenage boy who took an $85,000 classic launch on a "fishing joyride" and has "struck again," and the article says he "taunted police" over the boat radio (Inglis, 2000). These words

imply that Robert is bold, reckless, and out of control. “Struck again” makes the act sound like a deliberate attack or challenge, as if his family and social welfare could not stop him from repeating it. “Taunted police” adds another layer, implying that Robert is not only breaking rules but also has no respect for authority and openly challenges them. It also tells readers that even police are insufficient to contain him. Together, the words frame him as a child out of control and beyond ordinary supervision. This turns the young person into someone who is actively testing the boundaries of the justice system. The reader is therefore encouraged to see him not simply as a child who has done something wrong, but as a young person who is enjoying the challenge of escaping adult control and has no fear of the justice system.

Du Chateau’s description of Shane’s “standard youth offenders’ uniform” provides a visual symbol for the same frame: a hooded sweatshirt, battered Nikes, and oversized jeans become signs of membership in a recognisable group of deviant youth (du Chateau, 2001). The phrase “standard youth offenders’ uniform” suggests that Shane looks like what readers might expect of a young offender. The word “uniform” is especially powerful because it makes his clothing seem like a symbol of group identity, as if he belongs to a known category of difficult or troublesome young people who are tough to control. This is significant because framing operates through the selection and highlighting of particular features, including keywords and stereotyped images, which can make some interpretations more immediately available to readers (Entman, 1993). This visual description encourages readers to judge Shane before hearing his full background, emotions, or reasons for his behaviour. He is presented less as an individual young person and more as a recognisable soldier who is enlisted in the army of youth deviants. This metaphor positions Shane as a representative of an oppositional group and makes FGC appear as an authority-driven response to youth who are presumed to resist social rules (du Chateau, 2001).

The same article also describes Shane as *“recalcitrant,” “virtually mute,”* and *“aggro”* (du Chateau, 2001). These words carry moral judgment and are not neutral because they do not simply describe behaviour. They interpret it negatively. *“Recalcitrant”* suggests stubborn resistance to authority. *“Aggro”* suggests aggression and hostility. *“Virtually mute”* presents silence as refusal or non-cooperation, rather than as possible nervousness, shame, fear, trauma, or discomfort in court. These descriptions make him appear unwilling to listen, difficult to communicate with, and resistant to adult control. The effect on the reader is that Shane is framed less as a vulnerable young person who may need understanding and more as an out-of-control youth who requires discipline, supervision, and intervention.

However, the same articles simultaneously construct the young 'uncontrolled' offenders as redeemable. Robert is described as *"not a bad child"* and as someone who needs *"guidance"* (Inglis, 2000). This does not remove the earlier out-of-control framing, but it changes its meaning by turning individual deviance into a symptom of inadequate support and intervention. Robert is framed as a child who may already have moved beyond social control but is not yet morally lost and therefore is redeemable and can be brought back under control.

FGC gains meaning through this contradiction. It is presented as a last-resort mechanism for bringing a young person back within accepted social boundaries before the behaviour becomes more serious or a lifelong trajectory. The imagined opposite is the unredeemable youth who can no longer be redirected. That hidden worst-case image gives adult intervention a moral urgency and positions FGC as a channel through which institutions guide, discipline, and redeem.

This frame is solidified by the silencing of young people across these articles. The absence of their voices from the narrative makes them appear unreachable or defiant. Readers encounter them only through the voices of authority figures such as police, courts, parents, or professionals, rather than through the young people's own accounts of their experiences, which may explain their harmful behaviour. This selective amplification of adult voices not only reinforces the idea that youth are objects of control rather than participants in decision-making but also naturalises the assumption that they lack the maturity to speak for themselves. Hence, their silence becomes part of the 'uncontrollable but redeemable' frame. It is not merely a product of journalistic choices or structural power imbalances. Their silence becomes evidence of their deviance and distance from societal norms. By erasing their perspectives, the articles make it easier to portray them as subjects who must be acted upon, managed, and redeemed by adults within the FGC mechanism, thereby strengthening the hierarchical, authority-driven logic that underpins the 'uncontrollable but redeemable' frame. Other possible aspects of the young person's experience, such as trauma, poverty, care histories, family instability, or social exclusion, are either only briefly mentioned, fully omitted, or instrumentalised to underscore that youth have become 'uncontrollable'.

Overall, the first frame invites readers to understand FGC as a form of social control applied when young people are seen as difficult to govern but still capable of being redirected. Its legitimacy comes from the possibility of redemption, while its urgency comes from the fear that the opportunity for control may be disappearing.

4.1.2. FGC is structurally fragile because it depends on family, agency, and support

A second frame presents FGC as structurally fragile because its success depends on the families, agencies, and support systems that the articles often describe as weak, overwhelmed, or unable to provide consistent guidance. This frame is closely connected to the previous "uncontrollable but redeemable" frame, but it shifts attention from the young person's behaviour to the social environment around them. In this framing, FGC is not judged only by what happens inside the conference. It is judged by whether the people and institutions surrounding the young person can provide the support, supervision, and follow-through needed after the conference.

This is visible in Wall's article, where the family is described as having "no control over her" (Wall, 1999). The phrase suggests more than individual disobedience. It also presents the family as unable to provide the authority, care, or stability expected of them. The family is not given much space to explain what support they had, what difficulties they faced, or how the girl's foster-care history shaped the situation. Instead, their role in the story is reduced to confirming that ordinary family guidance has failed. This makes FGC appear as a response used when family control and support have already broken down.

A similar pattern appears in Inglis' article about Robert. Robert is described as "not a bad child" but as someone who needs "guidance" (Inglis, 2000). This is important because it frames his offending as something that may be redirected if the right adults and agencies intervene. At the same time, the article also shows that the systems around him have already struggled to contain or support him. He has been placed in social welfare care, runs away, returns to the marina, takes his father's dinghy, and steals another boat. The sequence creates the impression that several layers of support have failed: social welfare care does not hold him, family space does not prevent further offending, and police only become involved after risk and damage have already occurred. FGC therefore appears as a late intervention that depends on the same fragile network of family and agency support that has already been shown as unreliable.

The article "No easy answers for at-risk families" develops this frame more directly. It states that the Youth Court and FGC system may work for young people like Shane, but that the "tough 3 or 4 per cent" of youth offending is rooted in "crime-riddled, violent families" (No easy answers for at-risk families, 2001). Ross Lienert also says he has never encountered a repeat youth offender without a "shambolic background" (No easy answers for at-risk families, 2001). These phrases place some young people close to the line between redeemable and

difficult to redirect. They suggest that FGC may still have potential, but only when it is supported by stronger family capacity, professional guidance, and long-term practical help.

This frame creates a contradiction in the media representation of FGC. FGC is based on the idea that families, whānau, victims, and communities can participate in decision-making and support accountability. However, the articles often describe those same families as unstable, violent, absent, overwhelmed, or lacking the skills needed to support young people. This makes FGC appear vulnerable from the beginning. The process asks families to help repair harm and guide young people, but the families most visible in these articles are often framed as least able to provide that guidance.

The effect on the reader is that FGC appears only as strong as the support system around it. If families are overwhelmed, if agencies intervene too late, if guidance is inconsistent, or if follow-up is weak, then FGC appears fragile even when its principles seem reasonable. The frame therefore does not simply present FGC as soft or useless. It presents FGC as dependent. Its success depends on whether families, agencies, and professionals can turn the conference plan into everyday structure, supervision, and support. In this way, the media framing narrows confidence in FGC by suggesting that the process may work for some young people, but only when the wider social system around them is strong enough to sustain change.

4.1.3. FGC is morally vulnerable when it fails to meet victims' needs or expectations

The innocent victim frame appears strongly across the articles, as is typical in crime reporting (Christie, 1986; Christie & Fattah, 2016). Victims are represented as morally innocent, vulnerable, loved, and deserving of repair. This matters because this frame creates the vantage point from which readers are encouraged to judge FGC. That means the reader is likely to take the victim's position on whether the process recognised the harm, produced a meaningful apology, secured reparation, and made the victim feel that justice had been done. When FGC appears unable to deliver these outcomes, it becomes morally suspect.

Moral superiority is particularly evident in the portrayal of Stuart, who "resisted fighting back" despite being a black belt in taekwondo. This is amplified through the voice of his mother, who is quoted as saying that he "didn't retaliate" and "kept his wits about him" (Corbett, 1999). The repetition of Stuart's restraint is significant because it constructs him as more than someone who was simply assaulted; it presents him as a person who possessed the ability to use violence but deliberately chose not to. This creates a sharp moral contrast with the young people who

attacked him. Unlike the "uncontrollable" offender figure developed elsewhere in the period, Stuart is presented as someone who remains disciplined under pressure.

Moreover, the article evokes the biblical moral image of *"turning the other cheek,"* which, in Western culture, is associated with Jesus, who is said to have exercised patience, dignity, self-control, and moral strength even when others acted violently or unjustly toward him. This encourages the reader to see Stuart as morally superior to the young people who attacked him and as fundamentally good. The implied reference to Jesus Christ makes him appear almost godlike, elevated to a moral level beyond reproach. By emphasising what Stuart did not do- he did not fight back, did not lose control, and did not escalate the conflict- the article creates a sharp moral contrast between the innocent victim and the offenders.

This frame is strengthened again through silence; in this case, the silence about the background of the confrontation. It remains vague. The accusations made against Stuart are dismissed as *"rubbish,"* but the substance of the accusations is never explained, and the offenders are not given an opportunity to speak. As a result, potentially complicating information is excluded, allowing Stuart's innocence to remain largely unchallenged. The article therefore guides the audience to see the harm he experienced as entirely unjust and strengthens his position as a sympathetic and morally deserving victim. This journalistic construction reflects Christie's concept of the ideal victim, which explains that some victims are more readily recognised as legitimate and deserving of sympathy because they are portrayed as innocent, respectable, and blameless (Christie, 1986; Christie & Fattah, 2016). While Stuart does not fully fit the ideal victim type because he is physically capable, the article still frames him as such by repeating his restraint and self-control, as he is represented as respectable, restrained, and undeserving of harm, even though he is physically capable of defending himself.

Victim satisfaction becomes the practical moral test of FGC. Stuart's mother describes the apology as "insincere" and says the family has "never seen the money" ordered as compensation (Corbett, 1999). The formal record may show an apology and a reparation order, but the victim's experience gives those outcomes their meaning. A hollow apology and unpaid compensation frame the process as unable to deliver genuine repair.

Voice determines whose interpretation becomes authoritative. Because the young offender is not heard, the victim's assessment of the apology becomes the dominant public meaning. Hayes (2006) notes that young people may express shame, guilt, or regret in ways adults struggle to recognise, but the media narrative gives readers no competing account of the apology. The victim's dissatisfaction therefore functions as evidence of weakness in FGC.

FGC is framed as morally vulnerable when it fails to meet victims' needs or expectations. The frame directs readers to compare restorative promise with the victim's experience. Restorative justice emphasises participation, recognition, accountability, and repair (Maxwell & Morris, 1993; Zehr, 2015). The victim's experience determines whether apology, reparation, and accountability carry moral meaning. FGC becomes legitimate when it visibly honours the innocent victim and responds to the harm the victim has experienced.

4.1.4 Overall finding for the first publication period

At the first point in the timeline, the three frames combine to produce a sceptical but conditional view of FGC. Young people are presented as difficult to control but still redeemable; FGC has formal status but depends on fragile family, agency, and participant support; and victims provide the moral standard by which outcomes are judged.

Therefore, the overall judgment a New Zealand Herald reader was likely to form in 1999 is specific rather than simply negative. FGC appears as a last-resort intervention whose value depends on strong adult guidance, attendance, follow-up, and meaningful repair. The process gains credibility when a young person remains reachable, the surrounding adults sustain the plan, and the victim experiences accountability as real. This establishes the baseline against which the later modifications of the three frames can be assessed.

4.2 Media framing of Family Group Conferences in 2012

The second publication period is marked by an aggravation or specification of the 1999 frames. The uncontrollable young person is aggravated into a dangerous offender associated with serious and frightening harm, while direct speech, remorse, and visible change specify how redemption becomes believable. The innocent-victim frame is intensified through fear, vulnerability, and the need for protection. The structurally fragile authority frame is specified through a contrast between procedural delay and monitored control: FGC appears weak when it merely pauses court action and gains credibility when plans shape everyday behaviour.

4.2.1 FGC as a last resort for dangerous but redeemable youth

The first frame intensifies the earlier language of ungovernability into a language of danger, seriousness, and public threat. Terms such as "brutal attack," "aggravated robbery," "drug-addled teenagers," "threatened to kill," "masked armed gunmen," "gang fight," and "reckless disregard" make the capacity for serious harm unmistakable (McMichael, 2012; Holland, 2012,

2012; Savage, 2012; Conchie, 2012). Weapons, balaclavas, threats, and frightened workers become visual and verbal symbols of dangerous youth.

However, the articles do not always leave them inside this identity. Some later introduce remorse, vulnerability, family support, rehabilitation, discipline, or personal change, producing a frame in which a dangerous young person can still be redeemable.

The word choices in these articles often make the young person appear threatening before the reader learns about their circumstances or personality. The phrase "drug-addled teenagers" does more than report that drugs were involved; "addled" suggests damaged judgment and loss of rational control (Savage, 2012). Similarly, the armed robbery article describes the young people as *"dressed in black and wearing balaclavas,"* while one boy points a weapon at the attendant and says, *"Give us the money, or I will shoot"* (Holland, 2012). These visual and verbal details create a recognisable image of dangerous youth. Clothing, weapons, and threatening language become symbolic markers of deviance. The reader is encouraged to recognise danger before attempting to understand the young person.

The articles then reframe some young people through appearance, voice, remorse, and action. A 16-year-old charged with a "brutal attack" is later described as neatly dressed in a tie and blue shirt, standing quietly with his head bowed (McMichael, 2012). Orderly clothing and posture introduce respectability, humility, shame, or remorse and make him visible as more than the offence.

The teenager's karakia strengthens this movement toward possible redemption by giving the reader access to an imagined inner struggle. He asks God to *"make me a man, without hate, anger and stress"* (McMichael, 2012). This is a powerful statement because it does not deny the seriousness of the situation or ask to escape consequences. Instead, it imagines change. The phrase "make me a man" presents moral adulthood as unfinished, while the desire to live without "hate, anger and stress" implies that these emotions are recognised as part of the problem. Hayes (2006) argues that remorse in youth justice can be difficult for young people to express and difficult for adults to interpret. In this article, however, the prayer gives the audience an unusually direct expression of self-reflection and makes the young person appear emotionally reachable rather than permanently defiant.

The Oscar article develops the same transformation more fully by presenting change as a process rather than a single emotional moment. The headline describes him as "getting sorted," while the article contrasts the person he is becoming with the earlier "sullen, alienated boy"

who first came before the court (Calder, 2012). The words “sullen” and “alienated” initially construct distance and disconnection, but the article does not leave Oscar there. He has stopped associating with the gang involved in his offending, nearly completed 100 hours of community service, and “scrupulously observed” his curfew (Calder, 2012). The young person can therefore move between identities. He can be alienated and later cooperative; he can offend and later demonstrate discipline.

The sequencing of these stories is crucial because rehabilitation is usually introduced only after danger has been firmly established. The reader first encounters serious offending and then later encounters prayer, family support, community service, compliance, treatment, or cultural involvement. This structure means the articles do not ask the audience to ignore harm in order to sympathise with the young person. Instead, they ask whether serious wrongdoing must permanently define them. Daly (2017) argues that restorative justice should not be understood merely as the opposite of punishment, since accountability and reintegration can coexist. The articles reflect this tension: the young person is first made responsible and only then made redeemable.

Who is allowed to speak also affects whether the young person appears reachable. In several short court reports, the young offender remains silent and is represented through charges, lawyers, judges, and police. However, the strongest rehabilitation stories give young people direct speech. The teenager’s karakia asks for freedom from “hate, anger and stress,” while Oscar says, *“Thank you God for this meeting and stuff. I wish I can get this sorted”* (McMichael, 2012; Calder, 2012). Direct speech reframes the offender as emotionally reachable and capable of participating in the meaning of the story.

The overall effect of this frame is to present some young people as dangerous but not permanently lost. The articles still require the reader to recognise the seriousness of the offending, but they increasingly ask whether dangerousness can be temporary. Respectable appearance, prayer, family support, compliance, rehabilitation, treatment, community work, and cultural involvement become signs that a young person may still be reachable. In this context, FGC gains legitimacy because it becomes one of the places where the justice system can decide whether a young person is capable of moving toward a different future.

4.2.2. FGC judged through the innocent-victim frame

The innocent-victim frame appears prominently throughout the second time period. Victims are constructed as blameless, vulnerable, respectable, and morally deserving of protection. This

frame matters for the portrayal of FGC because it places a high moral burden on any youth justice response. FGC is not judged only by whether it gives the young person a plan; it is judged by whether the victim's fear, loss, and dignity are recognised.

In the armed robbery article, the service-station worker is described as the *"frightened attendant"* who fills a bag with cash after a weapon is pointed at him (Holland, 2012). The adjective *"frightened"* places the victim's experience at the centre of the story. By contrast, the young offender is associated with black clothing, a balaclava, a weapon, and the threat*, "Give us the money, or I will shoot"* (Holland, 2012). The victim is associated with fear and forced compliance. The contrast produces an immediate hierarchy of innocence and danger.

The paramedic article produces a similar effect. After being threatened with death and forced into a hostage situation, the paramedic is still *"forced to take"* another teenager to hospital "despite the ordeal" (Savage, 2012). This sequence makes her victimisation continue beyond the immediate threat. She is not only frightened; she is also required to continue providing care after being harmed. The contrast between the teenagers' threat and the paramedic's professional duty strengthens her moral position as an innocent victim.

Voice is central to this frame. Some victims do not speak directly, yet their silence is framed differently from offender silence. When young offenders remain silent, the reader may interpret that silence as defiance, emotional distance, or refusal to engage. When victims are silent, documents, family members, workers, or professional accounts speak for them, and the silence tends to strengthen their vulnerability. This contrast matters for FGC because the process is meant to bring affected people into dialogue, yet media reports often give readers a clearer sense of the victim's suffering than of the offender's explanation or the conference's internal reasoning.

The overall effect of the innocent-victim frame is to make FGC credible only if rehabilitation does not displace victim recognition. Some articles humanise young people and portray them as capable of change, but the victim frame reminds readers that change cannot be presented as successful if the harm itself is made secondary. A restorative process must therefore create space for rehabilitation while still making the victim's fear, loss, and need for repair visible.

4.2.3. FGC as formal authority modified through procedural delay and monitored control

The third frame refines the earlier image of formal authority with weak practical force. The 2012 articles distinguish between authority that merely interrupts the court process and

authority that becomes visible through monitoring, conditions, support, and compliance after the meeting.

The procedural power of FGC is highly visible, as several articles show that the legal process cannot proceed until the conference has taken place. In the rape case, the guilty plea cannot be entered because an FGC "would need to be held first" (McMichael, 2012). In the gang-fight case, the boy *"would have to attend a family group conference"* before making a formal plea (Holland, 2012b). In the armed-gunman case, the judge "directed" that an FGC be arranged and called for an *"*FGC report" (Conchie, 2012). These statements place FGC at an important point between the alleged offence and the final legal outcome. The process is not presented as optional. Courts must wait for it, reports must be produced, and important decisions about jurisdiction or outcome may depend on it. This gives FGC considerable formal status.

The same language also frames FGC as procedural delay. Passive and obligation-based constructions emphasise what the conference must do for the court while making the people, dialogue, and decision-making inside it less visible. In serious cases, the pause can appear to postpone the justice response. The authority is real, but it is first experienced as a required step rather than as restorative action.

The frame becomes more positive when the articles move beyond the fact that an FGC occurred and show the consequences that follow from the plan. The armed robbery case describes the agreement as a "robust plan" and a "no soft option" (Holland, 2012). The plan includes residential supervision, a military-style camp, further supervision, and reparation. The word "robust" suggests something strong, demanding, and capable of producing an effect. Similarly, "no soft option" directly addresses the possibility that readers might see FGC as too lenient for serious offences. These words pre-empt criticism of the FGC by presenting the outcome as restrictive and demanding. The article provides readers with clear evidence that the young person is still facing substantial restrictions and responsibilities. FGC therefore appears credible because its plan produces consequences that look difficult and practical rather than symbolic.

The ambulance case similarly strengthens the practical power of FGC by describing the young person as being placed in drug rehabilitation under "strict conditions" (Savage, 2012). The adjective "strict" is important because the incident itself has already been framed as extremely serious, involving aggression and a threat to kill. Without the word "strict," rehabilitation might be interpreted by some readers as a weak response or an escape from punishment. The wording

reassures the audience that treatment does not mean complete freedom or an absence of responsibility. Instead, the young person is being placed inside a controlled intervention. FGC is therefore framed as a gateway into a different type of accountability: one based on addressing the drug problem while still limiting behaviour through conditions. This makes rehabilitation appear disciplined rather than permissive.

Oscar's case provides the clearest example of formal FGC power being converted into practical monitoring over time. He has nearly completed 100 hours of community service, followed a 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. curfew, and stopped associating with the gang connected to his earlier offending (Calder, 2012). These details matter because they show that the plan has become part of his everyday life. It affects where he goes, what he does, whom he spends time with, and how he uses his time. The youth aid officer then makes a conditional promise: if Oscar completes the six-month plan, *"I'll withdraw the charges"* (Calder, 2012). This "if–then" structure makes responsibility very clear. The positive legal outcome is neither immediate nor guaranteed; it depends on Oscar continuing to meet the agreed requirements. FGC power therefore becomes measurable because progress can be observed, and conditional because the benefit must be earned through continued behaviour.

The journalist's access to the FGC itself makes this positive framing possible because readers are shown what the process actually looks like. Instead of simply reporting that a conference "will be held," the article describes a psychologist, a social worker, a youth aid officer, a lawyer, and Oscar's mother discussing where he will live, what he will do after school, and what education or skills he might pursue (Calder, 2012). These are practical questions about everyday life rather than abstract statements about justice. The article therefore turns FGC from a legal term into a human meeting. Readers can see people trying to build a plan around the young person's actual needs, interests, and future. The visibility of the process helps make rehabilitation appear more believable because the reader can see the work involved.

Oscar's case also shows that monitored control can be framed as hope when it is connected to everyday routines, supportive adults, and visible personal change. The headline *"Ray of hope in youth crime gloom"* establishes this positive frame before the article itself begins (Calder, 2012). The phrase "ray of hope" is a metaphor of light entering darkness, while "gloom" represents the fear and pessimism surrounding public discussion of youth crime. The headline does not claim that youth crime has been solved or that every FGC succeeds. Instead, it prepares the reader to interpret Oscar's story as evidence that change is possible, even within a wider public conversation dominated by negative stories.

The article also frames adults as people who can either lose or hold onto a young person. The youth advocate says, *"unless you coordinate everybody, you can lose your client"* (Calder, 2012). The word "losing" suggests that a young person may gradually drift away from school, family, support, or lawful behaviour when adults fail to work together. It also implies that responsibility does not belong only to the young person. Professionals and family members must remain connected and organised for the plan to work. The solution is therefore not simply to control Oscar more strongly. It is also to ensure that supportive adults do not disappear, work against each other, or leave gaps through which he can become disconnected again.

The phrase "straight and narrow" reinforces the rehabilitation frame by framing offending as a departure from a socially accepted path. The FGC plan is "hammered out" to keep Oscar on the "straight and narrow" (Calder, 2012). The path metaphor suggests direction: the young person may have moved away from an expected route but return remains possible. The word "hammered" adds another layer by suggesting that the plan requires effort, negotiation, and repeated work. The future is not simply discovered; it is constructed. Together, the two metaphors present rehabilitation as both direction and labour. Monitoring keeps this hopeful frame believable because opportunity remains conditional upon continued responsibility. The system gives the young person a meaningful opportunity, but he must respond to it.

The Rangatahi Court article reinforces and expands the same monitoring or control frame by explicitly monitoring FGC plans after the conference has ended. Young people can have their plans monitored by the Rangatahi Court, and Judge Bidois suggests that the marae setting may lead to greater family input and *"more compliance with the family group conference plan"* (Hartevelt, 2012). The word "compliance" is significant because it shifts attention from making a plan to following it. A plan on paper has limited value if the young person, family, or agencies do not carry it out. Monitoring therefore becomes the bridge between formal decision and practical outcome. The article suggests that the involvement of the court, family, and community may help maintain pressure and support after the original meeting. Power is no longer located solely within the FGC itself; it extends through observation, relationships, and ongoing accountability.

The Rangatahi Court article also expands the positive frame from individual rehabilitation to cultural reconnection. The Ministry of Justice says the process aims to *"reconnect young offenders with their culture and reduce re-offending,"* while Judge Bidois predicts greater family input and stronger compliance with FGC plans (Hartevelt, 2012). The verb "reconnect" is especially important because it suggests that something valuable already existed but has been

weakened or lost. The young person is not imagined as needing to become an entirely different person. Instead, they may need to restore relationships with culture, family, community, and identity. Offending is therefore framed partly as a form of disconnection, while the response involves rebuilding a sense of belonging.

The involvement of kaumātua, kuia, whānau, and Te Arawa protocol gives the FGC plan a broader social environment. The young person is not monitored only by a judge or a professional institution but is also placed within relationships that carry cultural meaning and expectations. This may make accountability feel more personal because the young person is answerable not only to an abstract justice system but also to people and traditions connected to identity and community. Lynch (2016) explains the distinctive role of FGC within New Zealand youth justice, and the Rangatahi Court coverage suggests that plans may gain practical strength when legal responsibility is connected to cultural belonging. The article therefore presents culture not as decoration around the justice process but as a possible source of engagement and compliance.

The positive frame still retains legal seriousness because cultural reconnection is not presented as a replacement for consequences. Sentences on the marae remain the same as those available in the Youth Court and may include reparation, community work, electronic monitoring, judicial oversight, and residential supervision (Hartevelt, 2012). This information is important because it prevents the cultural setting from being framed as an easier or more lenient form of justice. Accountability remains present, but it occurs within a different social environment. The article therefore suggests that legal consequences and cultural reconnection can work together. Responsibility may become more meaningful when the young person understands both what they must do and the relationships to which they are being reconnected.

The second-period authority frame therefore extends power beyond the conference room. FGC appears weak when it functions only as a procedural pause and stronger when plans continue through restrictions, treatment, practical support, cultural belonging, court monitoring, and measurable compliance. The frame shifts from uncertain follow-through to conditional authority that is visible in everyday life.

4.2.4 Overall finding for the second publication period

The 2012 coverage intensifies and further specifies the three earlier frames rather than replacing them. Uncontrollable youth are increasingly presented as dangerous and capable of serious harm, yet they are also more fully voiced and more clearly shown as redeemable. Their

direct speech, expressions of remorse, compliance with plans, and participation in rehabilitation allow readers to see them as complex young people rather than only as threats requiring control. Victims remain the moral centre of the coverage and are portrayed through heightened fear, vulnerability, and continuing harm. This ensures that the growing emphasis on youth rehabilitation does not minimise the seriousness of the offence or the victim's need for recognition and repair. Formal authority is divided between procedural delay and monitored control. FGC appears weak when it is described only as a compulsory step before court proceedings can continue, but it gains credibility when plans are shown to be strict, practical, culturally grounded, and actively monitored after the meeting. Whānau involvement, professional coordination, cultural reconnection, curfews, treatment, and community service make the process appear more capable of producing visible and sustained change.

A New Zealand Herald reader in this period would therefore be encouraged to judge FGC conditionally rather than viewing it as either entirely effective or ineffective. The process appears credible when serious harm remains visible, victims are recognised, young people demonstrate change, and formal decisions are converted into structured responsibilities. Its legitimacy depends not simply on holding a conference, but on whether the plan continues to shape the young person's behaviour and everyday life. Support from whānau, professionals, culture, and continuing judicial oversight makes accountability appear shared rather than located only within the young person. Through these modifications, FGC begins to appear less as a final attempt to control dangerous youth and more as a coordinated process that combines accountability, rehabilitation, cultural belonging, and community responsibility.

4.3 Media framing of Family Group Conferences in 2025

The third publication period retains the same three frames and modifies each through wider context, more varied voices, and a broader understanding of responsibility. Dangerous youth are increasingly represented as morally changeable and as shaped by trauma, unmet needs, inequality, and earlier service contact; official statistics also complicate the image of a youth-crime epidemic. The victim frame expands from immediate innocence and satisfaction to enduring individual and family harm, while repair is assessed through practical and relational obligations. The authority frame expands from monitored control to the human capacity, coordination, and speed required to sustain FGC in practice. These modifications shift attention from the conference alone to the people, relationships, services, and actions that give the process practical meaning.

4.3.1. FGC as a response to dangerous but contextualised and morally changeable youth

The third period constructs young people through a tension between danger and the possibility of change. Serious offending is not softened: the stabbing is described through planning, a weapon, repeated violence, and concerns about empathy; ram raids are linked with stolen cars, machetes, and repeat offending; and the tyre-slashing article shows two 12-year-old girls approaching vehicles, one appearing to carry a large knife (Bartlett, 2024; Leask, 2024; Makiha, 2025; Young, 2025). However, these young people are not always left inside a fixed identity of dangerousness. Across the articles, language such as *"turned a corner," "turn their lives around," "make good what they had done," and "Circuit-Breaker"* repeatedly suggests movement away from harmful behaviour (Bartlett, 2024; Leask, 2024; Makiha, 2025; Young, 2025). The frame, therefore, does not deny serious harm, but asks whether dangerous behaviour must permanently define the young person. Redemption is possible, but the media expects it to become visible through action.

Dangerousness is first established through language that emphasises agency, intention, and the seriousness of the harm. In the stabbing case, Judge Cook tells the teenager, *"You planned it, you thought about it, you brought a weapon"* (Bartlett, 2024). The repeated "you" directly assigns responsibility, while the three short clauses build a sequence of conscious decisions. Similar images of danger appear in reporting about youth offending more broadly, where headlines and examples focus on stolen cars, machetes, ram raids, masked young people, and repeated offending (Leask, 2024). Even the article about the two 12-year-old girls includes CCTV images of one child appearing to carry a *"large knife"* while approaching vehicles (Makiha, 2025). These details make danger highly visible. The young person is not initially presented as harmless or simply misunderstood. The media first establishes that the behaviour can frighten, injure, and seriously affect others, which means later claims of rehabilitation must answer to a strong image of responsibility.

At the same time, the period repeatedly uses movement metaphors to suggest that the young person's present direction need not become their permanent future. The stabbing teenager is said to have *"turned a corner"*; the Ministry of Justice describes youth justice as helping young people *"turn their lives around"*; and the *"Circuit-Breaker"* programme is described as an intervention intended to interrupt repeat offending (Bartlett, 2024; Leask, 2024; Young, 2025). These expressions all imagine offending as movement along a path or cycle rather than as an unchangeable personal essence. A person who turns a corner is still connected to the road behind them, but they are moving in another direction. A life that can be *"turned around"* has

not reached a fixed ending. A *"circuit"* can be broken before the same pattern repeats again. Together, these metaphors create a shared message: the past matters, but it does not have to dictate everything that comes next.

The possibility of change becomes most believable when remorse is connected with practical action rather than words alone. In the stabbing case, the teenager attends an FGC with flowers and a letter of apology, but the wider plan also includes curfews, therapies, educational programmes, restrictions on movement, community work, and continued supervision (Bartlett, 2024). Honey Hireme-Smiler's account similarly combines shame with practical responsibility because she was required to attend an FGC and pay the dentistry bills of the woman whose teeth she had knocked out (Currie, 2024). The article about the two 12-year-old girls explains the same principle through the phrase *"make good what they had done,"* with possible responses including koha, reparation, activities, or agreed work (Makiha, 2025). Across these articles, the media does not treat an apology as sufficient on its own. Change becomes more credible when the young person must do something: repair damage, complete work, follow conditions, attend programmes, or remain accountable over time. This reflects Zehr's (2014) argument that restorative justice is concerned not only with wrongdoing but also with the obligations created by harm.

The articles also show that signs of remorse remain open to interpretation rather than functioning as automatic proof of moral change. The stabbing teenager's flowers and apology letter are presented by the defence as evidence that she has changed, yet the article does not tell the reader how the victim understood those gestures (Bartlett, 2024). This omission matters because an apology can carry different meanings for the person offering it and the person receiving it. Hayes (2006) argues that remorse in youth justice can be difficult to express and difficult to interpret. By contrast, Honey Hireme-Smiler speaks directly about her own past and says, *"I didn't want to be her; I was tired of being the bully"* (Currie, 2024). Her admission feels more convincing partly because the reader can compare those words with the life she later built. The period, therefore, suggests that change is most readily accepted by the media when words, actions, and time begin to support one another.

Family and wider social support are also framed as central to the question of whether change is possible. The stabbing teenager's whānau provides a place to live, and the judge tells her she is "lucky to have that support" (Bartlett, 2024). The Circuit-Breaker programme similarly works by bringing together Education, Health, Oranga Tamariki, and Justice, while providing practical support to the whole family, including mental health assistance, food, and school

uniforms (Young, 2025). Wills (2025) also argues that many young people who offend have experienced trauma, abuse, neglect, school exclusion, mental-health difficulties, or unmet developmental needs. These articles, therefore, move beyond the idea that change depends solely on the young person deciding to behave better. Rehabilitation is presented as relational. A young person may need supervision, treatment, education, stable accommodation, culturally safe services, and adults who remain involved. The media frame still expects personal responsibility, but it also recognises that change is much harder when the surrounding conditions remain unchanged.

The frame becomes particularly humanised when the media allows young people or former young offenders to speak about who they were and whom they are trying to become. Honey Hireme-Smiler describes herself as a "lost, angry, headstrong young Māori girl," someone who might have been dismissed as a "no-hoper," but she later says she became tired of being the bully and now sees herself as "a pretty decent, good person" (Currie, 2024). Her language is powerful because it acknowledges harm without accepting that the earlier identity was permanent. The Ministry of Justice's phrase "turn their lives around" reflects the same future-oriented possibility at a broader level (Leask, 2024).

The period also suggests that moral change is easier to believe when the media can show a longer story rather than one isolated moment. Honey Hireme-Smiler's transformation is persuasive because readers can see the distance between the "town bully" and the successful athlete, commentator, partner, mother, and hospice worker she later became (Currie, 2024). The stabbing teenager's future, by contrast, remains uncertain. The article offers smaller signs, a changed attitude, flowers, apology, family support, and a structured plan, but the reader does not yet know whether these changes will continue (Bartlett, 2024). The two 12-year-old girls are also positioned at the beginning of a possible restorative process, in which completing a plan may allow the matter to be resolved (Makiha, 2025). The media, therefore, judges change differently depending on the time. Long-term transformation can be demonstrated over an entire life, whereas immediate rehabilitation must be assessed using incomplete and uncertain signs.

The frame also becomes more complex when the articles connect offending with earlier vulnerability. Wills (2025) argues that young people who offend often have histories of trauma, abuse, neglect, school exclusion, mental-health problems, neurodiversity, and unmet needs, while Ministry of Justice reporting shows that many young people referred to youth justice FGCs had previous reports of concern (Leask, 2024). The ram-raid article similarly describes

some repeat offenders as coming from homes where they were regularly exposed to family violence and had already come to the attention of Oranga Tamariki (Young, 2025). These details do not excuse offending, but they make the young person's identity more layered: the young person is represented as someone who has caused harm and, in many cases, someone whose own needs were visible before the offending occurred.

The phrase "needs go unmet" is particularly important because it suggests that some offending may develop in the context of a history of missed intervention (Wills, 2025). The young person is not presented simply as naturally dangerous. Their behaviour is placed inside a sequence of earlier warning signs, service contact, school difficulties, family pressure, and delayed support. This makes change appear more possible because it suggests that the conditions surrounding offending can also change. The Circuit-Breaker programme reflects the same logic by responding quickly to the family environment rather than waiting only to punish each new offence (Young, 2025). Rehabilitation therefore becomes not only a moral question about whether the young person is sorry, but also a practical question about whether the system can change the circumstances that keep harmful behaviour going.

The media also resists the idea that all young people involved in offending belong to a permanently dangerous group. Leask (2024) begins by acknowledging the public image of a youth-crime "epidemic," fuelled by dramatic incidents involving machetes, stolen cars, and ram raids, but then presents long-term declines in youth offending and some measures of reoffending. This matters for the morally changeable youth frame because a constant crisis narrative can make young people appear collectively beyond repair. The statistical counter-frame suggests that patterns do change and that many young people do not continue offending indefinitely. The Ministry's commitment to helping young people "turn their lives around" therefore sits within a wider story that change can occur not only in individual biographies but across the youth justice population.

Across the period, the strongest evidence of change appears when accountability, support, and future possibility are connected rather than treated as opposites. The stabbing teenager faces restrictions, supervision, community work, and therapy while remaining close to whānau support (Bartlett, 2024). Honey Hireme-Smiler is required to contribute to the victim's dental costs while also moving toward a different identity (Currie, 2024). The 12-year-olds may be required to "make good" the damage through a plan developed with families, professionals, and possibly victims (Makiha, 2025). Circuit-Breaker combines rapid intervention with practical family assistance (Young, 2025). These examples suggest that the media finds

rehabilitation most believable when the young person is neither simply punished nor simply excused. Change is constructed through a combination of responsibility and support.

Daly's (2017) argument that restorative and punitive elements often overlap is useful for understanding this frame. The third-period articles do not present redemption as the absence of consequences. Curfews, reparation, community work, restrictions, treatment, and monitoring remain visible. At the same time, the young person is not reduced to punishment alone. Opportunities for education, family support, therapy, practical assistance, and long-term reintegration remain part of the response. The media therefore presents change as something built through both accountability and continued inclusion.

The overall effect of the dangerous-but-morally-changeable youth frame is to resist both total condemnation and easy forgiveness. Serious harm remains visible: a teenager plans and carries out a stabbing, ram raids frighten communities and businesses, tyres are deliberately damaged, and Honey Hireme-Smiler openly admits that she was once a bully. However, the same period also presents flowers, apology letters, practical reparation, whānau support, structured plans, changing attitudes, intensive family assistance, and long-term personal growth. The central media judgment is that a young person should be held responsible for what they have done, but their worst action should not automatically become their permanent identity. FGC gains legitimacy within this frame when it helps connect responsibility with a believable pathway toward doing something differently.

4.3.2. FGC judged through enduring victim harm and relational repair

The later articles show that victimisation continues over time and affects not only the victim but also their family, relationships, routines, and sense of safety. Victimisation is presented as continuing through physical pain, fear, flashbacks, sleep difficulties, changed routines, family trauma, and the loss of ordinary experiences. The victim is therefore constructed not only through what occurred during the offence but also through what the offence continues to do afterwards. An apology, plan, or rehabilitative pathway is consequently judged against the victim's continuing life with the consequences of the offence. This makes the passage of time important because the justice process may move forward while the victim and family remain emotionally and physically connected to the event.

In the stabbing article, the contrast between "small disagreements" and the "extreme" use of a knife constructs the victim as undeserving of the violence (Bartlett, 2024). Her memory of the attacker "laughing and running away" adds moral injury because laughter suggests

indifference, pleasure, or an absence of empathy after serious harm. The victim's question about "what kind of person" could act in this way places the offender's empathy and character under examination before rehabilitation is considered. It shifts the narrative beyond the immediate act and raises a wider moral question about what the behaviour appears to reveal about the offender. Consequently, later claims that the young person has developed insight, empathy, or a changed attitude must respond to the moral doubt already created by the victim's question.

The article follows the harm into daily life. Flashbacks, medication for sleep, discomfort when alone, avoidance of the shopping centre, and permanent scars show that the victim cannot leave the event behind (Bartlett, 2024). These details make trauma visible through ordinary routines, demonstrating that the offence continues to influence where the victim goes, how she sleeps, and whether she feels safe without another person present. The mother's description of uncertainty as "torture" and her "unapologetically angry" response make fear and anger legitimate parts of victimisation. Her experience also extends the category of victim beyond the person physically attacked because she experiences helplessness, uncertainty, and the fear that her daughter may die. The grandmother's statement that the attacker's smile will "haunt me forever" extends the harm across another generation. The word "haunt" presents the memory as something that repeatedly returns, transforming the violence into a family memory rather than only an individual injury.

Ordinary life becomes a symbol of what was taken. The grandmother says her granddaughter should be talking about school, friends, and a sports game rather than recounting the stabbing (Bartlett, 2024). The phrase "should be" creates an alternative adolescence and frames the offence as the loss of safety, ordinary conversation, and expected teenage experience. The contrast between everyday topics and the "horrific details" of the attack shows that victimisation involves more than physical injury. It interrupts the freedom to experience adolescence without trauma and replaces ordinary family conversations with repeated accounts of violence.

The sequencing preserves this moral centre. The article develops the attack, injuries, PTSD symptoms, family fear, and anger before introducing the offender's apology, flowers, family support, and rehabilitation. Readers reach the possibility of change only after the continuing harm has been made visible. Rehabilitation is therefore considered under the moral weight of the victim's experience rather than being presented as a separate success story. This ordering

does not prevent the offender from being understood as capable of change, but it ensures that her future is considered in relation to the life she has altered.

Direct quotation gives victims and family members greater authority than in the earlier periods. The victim questions the attacker's conduct, the mother names fear as torture and claims her anger, and the grandmother describes being haunted. Their own language defines the meaning of the harm rather than leaving that interpretation to police, judges, lawyers, or journalists. The quotations also communicate emotions that formal legal descriptions such as injury, supervision, or sentencing cannot fully express. Victims and family members therefore become interpreters of the offence, not merely people whose experiences are summarised by institutional speakers.

The tyre-slashing article shows the same frame at a lower level of severity. English tourists lose a planned day and must arrange repairs to a rental car (Makiha, 2025). Their disrupted plans, financial consequences, and effort to maintain a positive view of Rotorua construct them as reasonable people dealing with harm they did not invite. Although the offence does not produce the physical and psychological trauma described in the stabbing article, it still interferes with the victims' use of time, money, mobility, and enjoyment. The comparison shows that victim harm can be recognised across different levels of offending rather than only in cases involving serious bodily injury.

The moral criterion also shifts from victim satisfaction alone toward practical and relational repair. *"Make good what they had done*" gives restorative accountability an accessible meaning: the young person must do something in response to the harm (Makiha, 2025). The phrase presents accountability as an obligation arising from the consequences of the offence rather than as an abstract punishment imposed by the state. Payment of dentistry bills, koha, reparation, agreed work, community service, treatment, and restrictions linked to the place of the offence connect responsibility with the specific consequences created (Currie, 2024; Makiha, 2025; Bartlett, 2024). Remorse becomes more credible when it is translated into action, and the matter is not treated as complete merely because the young person attended an FGC. Closure remains conditional upon the agreed plan being carried out.

The Bayfair restriction illustrates relational recognition. Banning the stabbing offender from the place where the victim was followed and attacked acknowledges that the location has become part of the victim's trauma (Bartlett, 2024). The restriction makes accountability physically and geographically visible because the young person's freedom of movement

remains shaped by the harm she caused. The plan therefore addresses safety and emotional experience as well as the young person's future. It communicates that rehabilitation does not provide an immediate return to ordinary freedom and that the victim's relationship with the location must also be recognised.

The absence of the victim's response keeps practical repair open-ended. Dentistry payments, flowers, an apology letter, community work, or movement restrictions can represent responsibility, while trauma, fear, anger, and lost trust may continue. The stabbing article leaves the victim's response to the flowers and letter unknown, and Honey Hireme-Smiler's story leaves the injured woman's view of the dentistry payment outside the narrative (Bartlett, 2024; Currie, 2024). These omissions matter because an action can appear successful from the perspectives of the court, offender, or journalist without establishing that the victim experienced it as meaningful. The frame therefore treats repair as an ongoing relationship between harm, obligation, safety, and recognition rather than as a completed transaction. Practical action can strengthen accountability, but it cannot be assumed to prove healing, forgiveness, or satisfaction.

This change gives greater importance to the victim's experience while requiring FGC to be judged by whether it addresses continuing harm, safety, family impact, and practical repair, not only whether an apology or reparation is provided. The 1999 concern with a sincere apology and paid reparation remains, but the 2024-2025 coverage asks whether accountability responds to long-term individual and family harm, protects the victim's everyday life, and connects the young person's obligations to the specific damage caused. FGC is therefore judged not only by what is agreed inside the conference but also by whether responsibility becomes visible, sustained, and relevant to the victim's continuing experience. The modified frame encourages readers to recognise that practical repair and rehabilitation may be valuable while still remaining incomplete from the victim's perspective.

4.3.3. FGC as credible authority when support, monitoring, and timing are sustained

The authority frame expands beyond the legal status of FGC and the monitoring of individual plans. The third-period articles judge authority through the capacity of the wider youth justice and support system to prepare conferences, share information, build trust, respond quickly, and remain involved after a decision. Authority is therefore no longer located only in the conference or the legal plan it produces. It also depends on whether the surrounding system has enough people, time, information, resources, and willingness to turn that plan into practice. This

changes the central question from whether FGC formally has authority to whether the conditions needed to exercise that authority are actually present.

Wills' argument that *"sometimes plans don't make the difference they should"* separates formal planning from implementation (Wills, 2025). A plan cannot visit a home, notice a change in risk, coordinate services, maintain a relationship, or recognise when a family is beginning to disengage. Those actions depend on people who have the time and professional capacity to respond. The statement therefore suggests that the weakness may not lie in the content of the plan itself, but in the system's ability to carry it out. FGC is consequently framed as an institutional process whose practical authority is created through continuing human involvement rather than formal procedure alone.

Wilson's reporting on Oranga Tamariki workers makes that human capacity visible. Social workers, FGC workers, youth justice residence staff, supervisors, and administrative support are presented as the people who organise and prepare conferences, coordinate participants, engage whānau, share information, and follow plans after decisions are made (Wilson, 2025). Their inclusion reminds readers that conferences do not organise themselves and that legal requirements depend on largely unseen professional labour. Heavy workloads, after-hours demands, burnout, and worker unavailability place the continuity and quality of FGC at risk. When workers are overstretched or unavailable, early support may arrive late, important information may not be shared, and relationships with young people and families may be disrupted.

Practical obligations continue to matter within this expanded authority frame. Curfews, therapeutic and educational programmes, movement restrictions, community work, reparation, koha, and completion requirements make authority observable in the young person's everyday life (Bartlett, 2024; Currie, 2024; Makiha, 2025). These requirements show that accountability is not completed by attending an FGC or expressing remorse. "Appropriate oversight and interventions" indicate that someone must continue checking progress and responding to the needs associated with the offending. Similarly, the rule that a matter ends only after *"everything in the plan was carried out"* frames accountability as conditional, supervised, and sustained. Plans become credible when responsibilities can be followed, measured, and completed rather than remaining promises on paper.

Family and whānau support become part of that authority rather than a separate source of sympathy. A whānau member provides accommodation and helps control the stabbing

teenager's movements, while Circuit-Breaker supplies mental-health support, food, school uniforms, and coordinated agency involvement (Bartlett, 2024; Young, 2025). These forms of assistance create the conditions in which the young person can follow restrictions and complete agreed responsibilities. Housing, transport, supervision, food, treatment, and emotional stability therefore become the practical infrastructure through which a plan can operate. Authority is distributed across the young person, whānau, professionals, and services because no single participant can sustain the plan alone. The articles consequently frame support not as an alternative to accountability, but as part of what makes accountability achievable.

Timing modifies the frame further. The Circuit-Breaker programme responds within *"24-48 hours,"* while an FGC may take around three weeks in the repeat-offending context described by Young (2025). The contrast between two days and several weeks creates a clear temporal judgment: intervention must arrive while the incident remains immediate, the family remains engaged, and there is still an opportunity to interrupt the pattern before another offence occurs. Timing is therefore not presented as a minor administrative concern. A well-designed intervention can become ineffective when the delay allows risk to change, offending to continue, or a family to withdraw from services. This does not reject FGC principles, but it suggests that a scheduled conference may need to be supported by more immediate action when risk is moving quickly.

"Circuit-Breaker" becomes a new symbol of authority. The electrical metaphor imagines repeat offending as a current or flow that can gain momentum and cause further damage unless it is interrupted. Its meaning differs from punishment imposed after each separate event because it emphasises stopping the pattern before the next incident occurs. The metaphor gives authority an active and preventative meaning: the system must intervene in the present rather than merely record or condemn harm after it has happened. It also connects that interruption with practical support, suggesting that breaking the cycle may require stabilising the family environment as well as controlling the young person.

Wills broadens the timing problem from days and weeks to waits of months or years for specialist assessment (Wills, 2025). The reported waits of 15 months for an initial appointment and four years for a full team assessment make the language of *"early intervention"* appear difficult to achieve in practice. By the time support arrives, families may have disengaged and behavioural or developmental difficulties may have become more serious. Wilson's question, *"Who's going to be there to respond if something happens?",* connects speed to worker availability (Wilson, 2025). The question shows that rapid response is not produced by policy

language alone; it depends on workers being present, supported, and able to act, including after normal working hours. Authority is therefore measured by presence: a system can respond only when people, current information, and appropriate services are available at the time of need.

Political language makes speed a sign of competence and control. Claims that a government acted *"way too slow"* and the *"arsonist"* metaphor turn timing into a contest over blame, toughness, and credit for falling ram-raid numbers (Young, 2025). The metaphor is strongly accusatory because it suggests that the government was not merely late but had contributed to the crisis it later claimed to address. Acting quickly is therefore framed as evidence of seriousness, effectiveness, and political control, while slower responses risk being represented as weak or disconnected from public concern.

The same reporting frames rapid intervention as practical support as well as control because it includes food, uniforms, mental-health assistance, and coordinated services. These ordinary needs become part of crime prevention because they help stabilise the environment surrounding the young person. Fast action is therefore represented as effective not simply because it is harsh, but because it reaches families while their difficulties remain immediate and before they become more difficult to address. Statistical evidence of declining youth offending also places urgency within a measured account of risk (Leask, 2024). Dramatic incidents may create public pressure for immediate action, but the wider evidence prevents urgency from becoming a justification for panic alone. Effective authority is therefore represented as responsive, supportive, and evidence-based: the system should act quickly when needed, but it should not act blindly.

The third-period authority frame therefore presents FGC as one point in a longer chain of community and institutional responsibility. Formal decisions gain force when workers have sufficient capacity, agencies coordinate and share current information, whānau can support the plan, obligations are monitored, and action begins early enough to prevent further harm. A conference may create a plan, but the plan becomes meaningful only when people and services continue working after the meeting. The most important change is therefore from asking simply whether FGC has authority to asking what practical conditions are required for that authority to produce change. The conference becomes credible through the relationships, resources, monitoring, and continuing work that surround it.

4.3.4. Overall finding for the third publication period

By 2024-2025, the three frames have become broader and more relational. Dangerous youth remain accountable but are contextualised through voice, biography, unmet needs, inequality, and statistical evidence. Victims remain the moral centre, but harm is represented as enduring across individual and family life, while repair is understood through continuing obligations and recognition. FGC authority is assessed through monitoring, workforce capacity, coordination, whānau support, and timely action.

A New Zealand Herald reader in this period would therefore be encouraged to understand FGC as part of a sustained youth-justice response rather than as an isolated meeting. Its legitimacy depends on holding harm and change together: victims remain visible, young people remain accountable and capable of development, and communities and institutions remain responsible for creating the conditions in which plans can work.

Chapter 5. Discussion

This discussion examines how the New Zealand Herald framed Family Group Conferences between 1999 and 2025 and how its three dominant frames were modified across the three publication periods. Entman's (1993) framing theory draws attention to how media texts select and emphasise aspects of an issue while giving less attention to others. This includes examining which actors are allowed to speak, which details are made most visible, how information is sequenced, what explanations are omitted, which metaphors are used, and what moral judgments are encouraged. When the articles are read longitudinally rather than as separate reports, they repeatedly modify three enduring narratives: the youth-control frame, the innocent-victim frame, and the authority frame. The discussion therefore traces changes within these three frames instead of treating every new emphasis as a completely separate frame.

5.1. The youth-control frame: from uncontrollable to contextualised and morally changeable

Across the three periods, New Zealand Herald coverage gradually changes the concept of the young offender presented to readers. In 1999-2001, expressions such as *"out of control," "struck again," "recalcitrant,"* and the *"standard youth offenders' uniform"* make uncontrollability the most noticeable feature of the young person (Wall, 1999; Inglis, 2000; du Chateau, 2001). This pattern reflects Entman's (1993) argument that framing works by selecting and emphasising particular aspects of an issue in ways that define the problem, attribute causes, make moral evaluations, and suggest appropriate responses. By foregrounding defiance, appearance, and offending while giving limited explanatory attention to trauma, poverty, foster-care experiences, or institutional failure, the articles encourage readers to locate the central problem primarily within the young person rather than within the circumstances surrounding them.

The restricted distribution of voice reinforces this interpretation. Parents, police officers, judges, lawyers, and other professionals are generally given authority to explain the young person, while young people rarely speak directly. Harding's (2006) study of Indigenous representation shows how media discourse can privilege official and dominant voices while marginalising the perspectives of the people being represented. Although Harding did not examine New Zealand youth justice, this insight is relevant to the present analysis because the dominance of adult voices limits the explanations available to readers. Young people are

consequently encountered mainly as objects of concern, assessment, and control rather than as participants capable of explaining their experiences. Moreover, FGC is presented as a final mechanism through which adults may restore discipline after family and institutional authority appears to have failed. Although Robert is described as *"not a bad child,"* the article presents his possibility of change as dependent mainly on adult guidance and supervision (Inglis, 2000).

This representation narrows the public meaning of FGC. The New Zealand youth justice model is designed to bring together the young person, victim, family or whānau, police, a coordinator, and other relevant participants to discuss the offence and provide a plan (Maxwell & Morris, 2006). Research also identifies family participation and a reduction in exclusively professional decision-making as important features of the process (Morris & Maxwell, 1998). However, when reporting concentrates mainly on controlling the young person, readers may understand FGC as an offender-management mechanism rather than as a participatory process involving accountability, dialogue, family decision-making, and repair. Maxwell and Morris (2006) show that the significance of an FGC depends not simply on whether it occurs but also on participant engagement, the young person's remorse, the treatment of victims, and the quality and completion of the resulting plan. Daly's (2002) caution against idealising restorative justice also supports the need to distinguish between restorative principles and the uneven outcomes that may occur in practice.

By 2012, the frame intensifies from uncontrollability to dangerousness. References to weapons, balaclavas, drugs, gangs, violent attacks, and death threats make the young person's capacity to cause serious harm highly visible (McMichael, 2012; Calder, 2012). Crime reporting privileges violence, conflict, danger, individual blame, police authority, and punishment, commonly because these elements correspond with established news values (Jewkes, 2015). Therefore, readers may initially understand serious young offenders primarily as threats from whom the community requires protection.

The 2012 articles complicate this judgment by including direct speech, karakia, remorse, cultural participation, curfew compliance, community work, and withdrawal from gang associations (McMichael, 2012; Calder, 2012). These details present the young person as an actor within the narrative rather than only as someone described by authorities. Oscar's wish to *"get this sorted,"* for example, provides evidence of aspiration and self-reflection. Rehabilitation is therefore represented through observable routines, responsibilities, and relationships rather than through a simple declaration of change. Hayes (2006) shows that apologies, remorse, reconciliation, and repair in youth justice conferences are complex and that

an apology does not automatically produce a restorative outcome. The inclusion of young people's own words consequently gives readers access to an interpretation that might be supplied entirely otherwise by adults, although direct speech should not by itself be treated as proof that rehabilitation has been achieved.

The 2024-2025 coverage broadens the explanation further by including trauma, abuse, neglect, school exclusion, mental distress, neurodiversity, poverty, racism, family violence, service history, and unmet needs (Leask, 2024; Young, 2025; Wills, 2025). This moves the reporting away from a mainly episodic focus on what an individual young person did and towards a more thematic explanation of the conditions surrounding the offending (Iyengar, 1991). Readers are encouraged to ask not only why the young person offended but also whether families, schools, welfare agencies, health services, and justice institutions had earlier opportunities to respond. Responsibility is not removed from the young person. Instead, the explanation is widened to include individual decisions, adult actions, institutional responses, and social conditions.

Metaphors such as *"turned a corner," "turn their lives around,"* and *"Circuit-Breaker"* strengthen this rehabilitative interpretation by presenting offending as a direction or recurring pattern that may be changed or interrupted (Leask, 2024; Young, 2025; Wills, 2025). Unlike earlier descriptions that place young people within relatively fixed categories of deviance, these metaphors make an alternative future imaginable. This interpretation is consistent with research showing that FGC outcomes depend on meaningful participation, engagement, remorse, victim treatment, and the quality and completion of plans rather than on the conference's formal occurrence alone (Maxwell & Morris, 2006). It is also consistent with Daly's (2002) warning that restorative justice should not be idealised, because visible evidence of implementation and repair remains necessary when evaluating whether restorative aims have been realised.

Vaandering and Reimer (2019) further show that public interpretations of restorative justice presented in media reports and reader comments may differ from the understandings held by restorative-justice practitioners. They support the conclusion that media representation influences whether restorative justice is understood as meaningful justice, coercion, public relations, or an inadequate substitute for punishment. In the New Zealand Herald articles, descriptions of completed obligations, supervision, cultural connection, supportive relationships, and behavioural change may make rehabilitation appear more credible to readers than abstract references to an FGC alone.

The use of statistical context further challenges the construction of young people as a collective public threat. Although the metaphor of a youth-crime *"epidemic"* produces urgency and fear, evidence of longer-term declines in youth offending and evidence that the large majority of Māori young people have no police proceedings prevent serious individual cases from automatically representing all young people (Leask, 2024).

Therefore, the main outcome for the New Zealand Herald readers is a movement from an individualised youth-control frame towards a more contextualised and rehabilitative understanding. In the early period, the coverage encourages readers to see the young person as out of control and in need of adult discipline. By 2012, the young person is represented as capable of serious harm but also capable of demonstrating remorse, responsibility, and behavioural change. By 2025, personal accountability remains important, but offending is increasingly explained through biography, social conditions, institutional responses, and access to effective support. The later coverage does not remove responsibility from the young person; rather, it expands the field of responsibility to include whānau, victims, professionals, services, institutions, and the wider social environment.

5.2. The victim frame: from satisfaction as the moral test to enduring harm and relational repair

Across the three periods, the New Zealand Herald encourages readers to judge Family Group Conferences primarily through the experiences of victims. The selection of victim characteristics, the distribution of voice, the order in which information is presented, and the visibility of practical outcomes are responsible for this effect. Entman (1993) explains that framing works by selecting certain aspects of an event and making them more prominent, thereby shaping how readers define the problem, assign responsibility, make moral judgments, and evaluate possible responses. In these articles, the harm experienced by victims becomes the main moral standard against which FGC is assessed.

In the 1999-2001 coverage, Stuart is presented as restrained, respectable, and undeserving of the assault because he refuses to retaliate even though he is capable of defending himself (Corbett, 1999). Repeated attention to his self-control strengthens his moral position. This resembles Christie's (1986) concept of the "ideal victim," which describes how some victims are more readily recognised as legitimate and deserving of sympathy when they are represented as innocent, respectable, blameless, and undeserving of harm. Stuart does not fully fit Christie's

ideal type because he is not physically weak, but the article moves him towards that position by repeatedly emphasising that he could have fought back but chose not to.

This construction affects how the reader evaluates the FGC. Stuart's mother describes the apology as "insincere," and the ordered compensation is reported as unpaid (Corbett, 1999). Although an apology and reparation order may formally indicate that the process responded to the offence, the article presents them as inadequate because the victim's family did not experience them as genuine or complete. Therefore, the reader is encouraged to treat victim satisfaction as the test of whether FGC has delivered justice. This interpretation is consistent with restorative justice research showing that victims may value participation, explanation, accountability, reparation, fairness, and emotional recognition rather than punishment alone (Strang, 2002; Latimer et al., 2005).

In the 2012 coverage, the victim frame becomes more strongly connected to vulnerability and protection. The service station attendant confronted with a weapon and the paramedic threatened while carrying out emergency work are presented as ordinary people performing legitimate or socially valuable roles when danger is imposed upon them (Holland, 2012a; Savage, 2012). Their fear and forced compliance make their lack of responsibility for the incident particularly visible. This again resembles Christie's (1986) argument that victims become more easily recognised as legitimate when they are represented as innocent and undeserving of what happened to them.

This representation places a stronger moral burden on FGC. The process cannot be judged only by whether it gives the young person an opportunity to change. It must also be judged by whether it recognises the victim's harm, dignity, fear, need for safety, and right to participate. Restorative justice conceptualises crime as harm to people and relationships rather than only as a breach of law. Therefore, it emphasises victim involvement, offender responsibility, dialogue, and repair (Zehr, 2014). As a result, it encourages accepting that offender rehabilitation may be important, but it cannot be considered successful if the victim's experience is ignored or treated as secondary.

By 2025, victimisation is represented as an enduring condition rather than a single event. The victim who was stabbed describes scars, flashbacks, fear, disrupted sleep, changed routines, and the loss of ordinary teenage experiences, while her mother and grandmother describe their own fear, anger, helplessness, and haunting memories (Bartlett, 2024). These details extend the meaning of harm beyond physical violence. The offence continues through the victim's body,

emotions, movement, relationships, and sense of safety, and its effects also spread through the family. This interpretation is consistent with restorative justice literature recognising that crime may produce emotional, psychological, social, physical, and economic harm for victims and those around them (Latimer et al., 2005; Zehr, 2014).

The later articles broaden repair from words to practical action. Requirements such as making amends, paying for dental costs, providing koha, doing community work, getting treatment, following movement restrictions, or staying away from the place of an attack link accountability to the specific consequences of the offence (Currie, 2024; Makiha, 2025; Bartlett, 2024). Restorative justice processes can involve apology, restitution, community service, or other agreed-upon actions intended to repair harm and demonstrate responsibility (Braithwaite, 2002; Wood & Suzuki, 2016). This approach encourages readers to judge accountability by what the young person does after the offence, not just by what they say. The restriction preventing the stabbing offender from entering Bayfair adds a relational dimension to repair. Bayfair is not treated simply as a geographical location because it is where the victim was followed and attacked. Restricting the offender's access responds to risk, but it also recognises that the offence has changed the victim's relationship with that place. The response therefore acknowledges emotional safety as well as physical protection. The reader is encouraged to see repair as involving the restoration of the victim's ability to use ordinary spaces without encountering the person who caused the harm.

These obligations cannot be treated as proof that healing or reconciliation has taken place. The articles do not always report whether victims found flowers, apology letters, compensation, community work, treatment, or movement restrictions as meaningful. Hayes (2006) cautions against assuming that apology can create reconciliation, while Daly (2002) warns against idealising restorative justice or treating its intended outcomes as guaranteed. A payment may address financial loss without reducing fear, an apology may acknowledge wrongdoing without restoring trust, and a restriction may increase safety without removing trauma. Therefore, formal compliance and emotional repair are related but not identical.

The later victim frame consequently creates a more demanding standard for judging FGC. In the early period, readers are encouraged to ask whether the victim experienced the apology and compensation as genuine. By 2012, the standard includes protection, dignity, fear, and safety. By 2025, the standard expands to include the long-term physical, emotional, relational, and practical effects of the offence. This development is consistent with research indicating that

victims may value meaningful participation, explanation, recognition, accountability, reparation, and emotional recovery (Strang, 2002; Latimer et al., 2005).

The overall concept presented to the reader is that FGC becomes legitimate only when it can recognise the continuing reality of victimisation while creating meaningful opportunities for the young person to accept responsibility and change. Rehabilitation is not rejected, but it is made conditional. It becomes morally credible when practical obligations, future behaviour, and support for the offender remain connected to the specific people, relationships, losses, and safety concerns affected by the offence.

5.3. The authority frame: from fragile social control to monitored community responsibility

Across the three periods, authority gradually moves from fragile social control towards monitored and collectively supported responsibility. The main concept presented to the New Zealand Herald reader is that the authority of Family Group Conferences is conditional rather than automatic. FGC may have formal legal authority to bring people together and develop a plan, but the articles encourage readers to distinguish between making a decision and ensuring that the decision produces change.

The early coverage in 1999-2001 creates the impression that FGC has formal authority but limited practical power. It can organise a meeting and record an agreement without guaranteeing that participants will comply due to references to failed conferences, non-attendance, unpaid reparation, weak follow-up, disputed apologies, and overwhelmed families (Corbett, 1999; Wall, 1999; du Chateau, 2001). Therefore, the reader is encouraged to see a gap between authority on paper and authority in everyday life.

The literature supports this distinction because the quality and outcomes of FGCs depend on participant engagement, the treatment of victims, the young person's response, and the quality and completion of the plan (Maxwell & Morris, 2006). The fact that a conference occurred is therefore not enough to demonstrate success. Restorative justice should not be idealised by assuming that its principles automatically produce meaningful accountability or repair (Daly, 2002). The early articles consequently encourage readers to judge FGC through implementation rather than through its formal existence.

The early coverage also creates a contradiction around family authority. FGC is intended to increase family and whānau participation and reduce decision-making controlled exclusively

by professionals (Connolly, 1994; Morris & Maxwell, 1998). However, the families shown in the articles are frequently represented as overwhelmed, unstable, divided, or unable to supervise the young person (Wall, 1999; du Chateau, 2001). The resulting concept is that family authority requires support. The success or failure of FGC depends on the circumstances surrounding implementation, including preparation, relationships, professional involvement, and participants' capacity (Bredewold & Tonkens, 2021). Therefore, Readers are encouraged to believe that FGC depends on families to carry out its plans, yet the articles often portray those same families as lacking the stability or capacity needed to do so.

The 2012 coverage suggests that monitoring converts formal authority into credible accountability. The reader sees that the conference has enough legal status to delay a plea or court decision but receives little information about what it achieves. In this form, FGC can appear to interrupt decisive court action rather than contribute to change.

The meaning changes when the articles describe “robust” plans, “strict” conditions, followed curfews, completed community work, attended treatment, and consequences linked to several months of compliance (Holland, 2012a; Savage, 2012; Calder, 2012). These details make authority visible because they show how the plan affects the young person’s movements, time, associations, responsibilities, and daily conduct. For the reader, FGC becomes more credible when its decisions are measurable and supervised rather than merely recorded.

Monitoring therefore becomes the connection between the conference and its practical outcomes. Plan quality and completion are important influences on the effectiveness of FGC outcomes (Maxwell & Morris, 2006). Restorative accountability also involves recognising harm, accepting responsibility, and participating in practical reparative activity rather than simply receiving a formal sanction (Braithwaite, 2002; Zehr, 2014). Authority is consequently represented as something demonstrated through continuing conduct.

The Rangatahi Court reporting suggests that responsibility may become stronger when legal monitoring is connected to whānau, community, culture, and belonging. Marae-based monitoring, guidance from kaumātua and kuia, stronger whānau involvement, and cultural reconnection help surround the young person with relationships that feel personally and socially meaningful (Hartevelt, 2012). So, the articles suggest to the reader that accountability may become meaningful when the young person is answerable not only to a court but also to respected people and communities connected to their identity.

In 2024-2025, the articles suggest that the authority expands from the conference plan to the capacity of the entire support system. Even a well-designed plan may fail when no one has sufficient time or resources to implement it, as shown by reports about delayed services, high workloads, unavailable workers, weak coordination, and families disengaging before assistance arrives (Wills, 2025; Wilson, 2025). FGC may produce suitable goals and obligations, but those decisions have little practical authority when workers are overloaded, information is unavailable, agencies do not communicate, or services have long waiting lists. Restorative and FGC processes depend on preparation, skilled facilitation, reliable information, participant engagement, and follow-up (Daly, 2002; Bredewold & Tonkens, 2021). Therefore, the reader is encouraged to recognise that a plan cannot contact a family, transport a young person, arrange treatment, build trust, notice changing risk, or respond to a crisis. People and organisations must perform those tasks.

Then, the "Circuit-Breaker" metaphor adds speed and prevention to the concept of authority. By contrasting intervention within 24-48 hours with waiting several weeks, the article suggests that a response is more credible when it begins before repeat offending develops further momentum (Young, 2025). Therefore, the reader is told that authority is no longer measured only by the eventual strength of the plan. It is also measured by whether the system responds while the young person and family remain engaged and before another harmful event occurs.

Importantly, rapid intervention is not represented only as punishment or stronger control. Circuit-Breaker includes mental-health assistance, food, school uniforms, family support, and multi-agency coordination (Young, 2025). These details show that authority may operate through practical support as well as restriction. Support does not remove the young person's responsibility. Instead, it creates conditions in which responsibilities can be completed. Treatment may assist behavioural change, accommodation may make a curfew possible, and family assistance may help maintain supervision.

The overall outcome is that the reader is moved away from understanding authority as one institution controlling one difficult young person. Responsibilities are distributed across the young person, victims, whānau, courts, professionals, schools, health services, welfare agencies, and community organisations. The young person remains responsible for the offence, but the wider system also becomes responsible for providing accurate information, timely intervention, supervision, practical assistance, and continuing engagement. FGC is presented as a form of conditional community responsibility. The main message for readers is that FGC cannot create meaningful authority on its own. Its decisions become effective only when

families, professionals, and services provide the relationships, monitoring, information, resources, and ongoing effort needed to turn a written plan into real accountability.

5.4. Overall discussion: implications for New Zealand Herald readers, 1999-2025

Since 1999, the New Zealand Herald has described Family Group Conferences using three main ideas: controlling youth offending, recognising victims' experiences, and judging whether FGC has real authority. The coverage often frames FGC as a way for young people who have caused harm to take responsibility. At the same time, the process is measured by whether victims feel heard and protected, and whether they see real repair. FGC is seen as credible when decisions are followed, monitored, and supported after the meeting. So, a conference is not seen as successful just because it happens. It is considered legitimate when young people take part, accept responsibility, complete what they agreed to, and show changes in behaviour, while victims get recognition and practical help for the harm they experienced. This matches research showing that FGC outcomes depend on how engaged participants are, how victims are treated, whether there is remorse, the quality of the plan, and whether agreed actions are completed, not just on holding a conference (Maxwell & Morris, 2006). It also supports the idea that restorative justice should not be idealised, since its values do not always guarantee accountability, victim satisfaction, or real repair in practice (Daly, 2002).

The way FGC was described changed a lot between 1999 and 2025. In the 1999-2001 articles, young people were often shown as "out of control," defiant, and hard for families or institutions to manage. Their actions were usually blamed on their own traits, with less attention to their backgrounds or social situations. Families were shown as overwhelmed or unable to maintain control; victims were unhappy with apologies or unpaid reparation; and FGC was seen as having legal authority but not always delivering reliable results. This made readers see FGC mostly as an uncertain way to restore adult control.

By 2012, the coverage became more detailed. Young people were still seen as capable of serious violence and as possible threats to public safety, but the articles also showed signs of remorse, direct involvement, following curfews, getting treatment, doing community work, and reconnecting with their culture. FGC seemed more credible when its plans were described as strict, strong, and closely watched. The focus started to move from just holding a conference to whether the young person followed the plan and showed real change in their behaviour.

By 2025, the way FGC was described became broader and more focused on the bigger system around it. Youth offending was more often linked to trauma, abuse, poverty, being excluded from school, mental health needs, racism, family violence, and earlier failures by institutions. This did not take away personal responsibility from young people, but it made readers think about what happened before the offence and whether earlier help could have stopped more harm. Victimisation was shown as having long-lasting physical, emotional, relationship, and practical effects, not just ending when the offence or court case was over. At the same time, FGC's authority was tied to having enough workers, services, information, resources, monitoring, and quick action. A written plan was seen as not very useful if families did not get support, workers were too busy, services were delayed, or agencies did not communicate. Overall, the coverage moved away from blaming individuals, unhappy victims, and weak social control, towards a more complete understanding of youth offending, a stronger focus on lasting harm to victims, and seeing accountability as something shared by young people, families, victims, professionals, courts, and community services.

Chapter 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This section concludes the study, covers its limitations, and presents recommendations for the New Zealand news media when reporting on Family Group Conferences.

6.1 Conclusion

In conclusion, the three dominant frames: the youth-control frame, the victim frame, and the authority frame, show how the New Zealand Herald's representation of Family Group Conferences changed between 1999 and 2025.

The earliest reporting mainly presented young people as difficult to control and FGC as a last-resort intervention with uncertain practical power. By 2012, the coverage placed greater emphasis on serious offending and public danger, but also included remorse, rehabilitation, cultural reconnection, monitoring, and behavioural change. In 2025, the reporting became more contextual by connecting offending with trauma, poverty, mental-health needs, family violence, racism, and institutional failure. Responsibility was therefore represented more broadly across young people, families, professionals, services, and justice agencies.

The findings show that FGC was not framed as simply effective or ineffective. Its legitimacy depended on whether victims were recognised, young people accepted responsibility, plans were completed, and families and services provided continuing support. The reporting could be improved by including more voices from young people, whānau, Māori communities, victims, and FGC practitioners, and by explaining the conference process beyond brief procedural references.

As a longitudinal framing analysis of New Zealand Herald reporting, this study contributes to understanding how one major New Zealand newspaper has publicly represented FGC over time. It demonstrates a gradual movement from individual blame and control towards a more contextual and shared understanding of responsibility, accountability, and restorative justice.

6.2 Limitations

This study has several limitations. It examined a focused purposive sample from one newspaper, so its findings cannot be generalised to all New Zealand news media. The use of three selected publication periods allowed detailed comparison over time but did not provide continuous coverage of every year between 1999 and 2025.

The study used qualitative framing analysis, meaning that the findings depended on interpretation of language, source selection, sequencing, metaphor, emphasis, and omission. Moreover, systematic coding questions were used; therefore, another researcher might interpret some passages differently.

6.3 Recommendations

First, news organisations should provide clearer explanations of what an FGC involves rather than mentioning it only as a procedural step. Reporting should explain the purpose of the conference, the participants involved, the obligations contained in the plan, and the support and monitoring required after the meeting. This would allow readers to judge FGC through its actual restorative and practical work rather than assuming that it is either a “soft option” or an automatic solution.

Second, reporting should include voices and contexts of all involved people. Victims, young people and whānau should have opportunities to explain the harm they have experienced. Reporters should be more cautious about descriptions based on clothing, appearance, silence, ethnicity, or gang association, as these may encourage stereotypical judgments without explaining the person’s circumstances.

Future research should compare the New Zealand Herald with other newspapers. Research could also examine how different audiences interpret FGC coverage and whether journalists, victims, young people, whānau, and practitioners understand the same reports differently. This would help establish whether the frames identified in this study are present across the wider New Zealand media environment.

Chapter 7. References

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