

The Pathways to Resilience Research Project (New Zealand):
Whāia to huanui kia toa

**Review and Analysis
of Case File Summaries:**

Introduction to file reviews

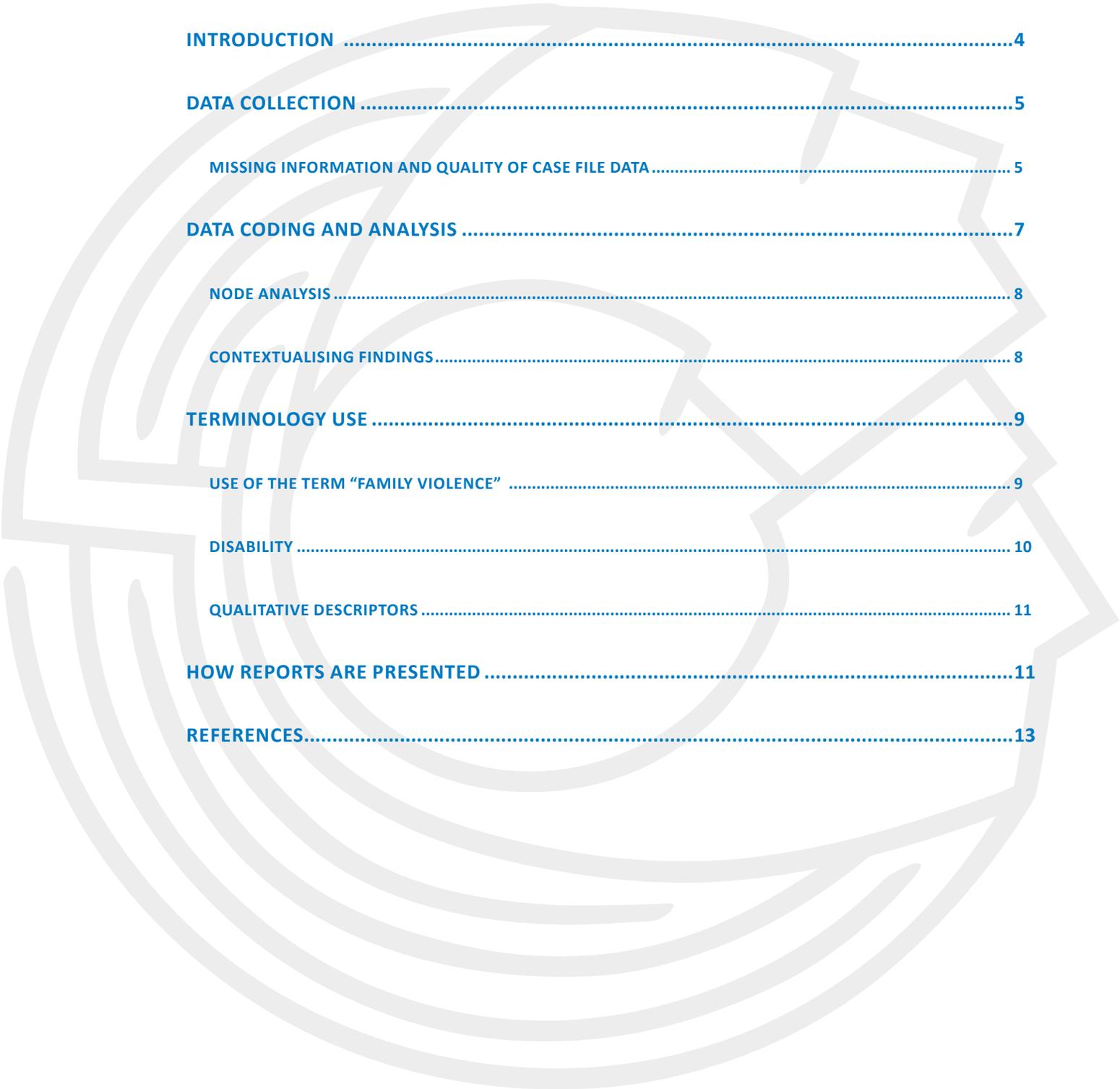
Technical Report 15

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Introduction

Case file reviews were conducted as one component of the Pathways to Resilience (PtRP) research programme. Ethical approval for the research was provided by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (MUHEC approval 08/33) and also from each of the organisations who provided access to their case files. Peer review was also provided of all complete case file technical reports in this series by senior members of staff in these organisations.

Case files are a rich source of information about the interactions between young people, their families, and services. The files provided a valuable opportunity to learn more about young people's entry into and pathways through services, about decision-making in service delivery, and about the interactions between services and their respective roles. The full methodology used in the PtRP study is described elsewhere (Sanders et al., 2013). Young people who were selected for inclusion in the qualitative sub-sample of the study¹ ($n=109$) gave permission for case file reviews to be completed for up to four of the services they had received. These services included: education, child welfare, mental health and youth justice. The file reviews generated an understanding of young people's experiences across service domains. In all, 291 case files from 79 young people were accessed and reviewed.

This report provides an overview of the file review process, outlining how file reviews were conducted including the production of case file summaries and how these summaries were analysed. It discusses missing information and other issues relating to data quality. This report provides an explanation of the specific terminology used in data collection and analysis. It outlines the range of reports emerging from the file review process and that accompany this report.

1 See Sanders et al. (2013).

Data collection

Case file data was collected using a template devised by the research team and included: dates, the nature of the file item (referral, investigation, case record, supervision, court record) and narrative that summarised the content of that item. Case file summaries were created capturing the following:

- the reasons why the service became involved,
- processes of assessment and investigation that informed decisions,
- interventions with the young person including referral to and involvement in other services and support systems, and
- the rationale for case closure.

Key issues in the case files were also identified; these included, for instance, identification of particular issues that might have required assessment, referrals to other services that were or were not accepted, as well as any overarching contextual factors that characterised the time the young person was involved with the services.

The files reviewed for this component of the study started in 1994 and included information up to 2013 in some instances.

Missing information and quality of case file data

Information contained within files provided only a snapshot of young people's lives, and the completeness of information on files varied. Some of the individual files contained little information about the young person or their family/whānau background. This was particularly the case where there had been minimal involvement with the young person, or where one agency (or part of) was not aware of

another agency's involvement. In some cases there were references to further information held on paper files, on files held by other agencies, on legal files, or on sibling's files. In cases where services had been more extensively involved with families, histories were often documented and in many cases summarised, for example, within family group conference and court reports.

Organisations used differing combinations of electronic and paper records. In this analysis, the format that captured the greatest detail on a particular young person was used as the data source. This was done for practical reasons to manage the volume of information in a timely fashion. Where it was clear that a critical part of a young person's engagement with a service was missing, this was sourced from the other records held by the agency. In some cases, aspects of the young person's file was contained in other family/whānau members' files and if this information could be accessed independently of that family/whānau member's data also being included, it was extracted and summarised. If reviewers needed to access the full file data from the other family/whānau member, this information was not collected because the young person had only given permission for their file to be reviewed.

Concerns for missing information and data quality have previously been noted with regard to the use of administrative data, including case files, for research purposes (Dixon, 2002). Other concerns regarding the quality of administrative data include under-recording, changes in recording practices and misrepresented information (Dixon, 2002; Jones, Gross & Becker, 2002; Staudt, 1999). In the PtRP study case file information is one component of data collection which also includes qualitative and quantitative data (Sanders et al., 2013). Despite data quality challenges, case files provide useful service perspectives on the histories and experiences of young people with complex needs.

Data coding and analysis

Case file summaries were coded in NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software package that allows multiple users to create and amend coding over the course of analysis. These summaries were coded against themes developed by four research team members who had extracted most of the file data, based on preliminary analysis of the file summaries and analysis of qualitative interviews. This preliminary analysis took a ground-up approach but also utilised an ecological framework to ensure the broad range of factors impacting young people's lives were considered. For example, themes relating to family/whānau, education, community and the impacts of structural factors and circumstances, (e.g. financial hardship), and the interaction of these factors were considered. A set of eleven 'parent' codes (referred to as nodes in NVivo) and twenty-two 'child' nodes were created. In order to test these nodes, ten file summaries were analysed by two research team members. Some of the initial nodes were merged and others added, and the programme team leaders reviewed changes. The new nodes and their 'definitions' were written up as a set of coding guidelines, and new analysts were trained in use of the nodes. A team of five trained analysts coded two file summaries each; these were reviewed for quality by the two team-members who had developed the coding guidelines. Feedback was provided to analysts who were then allocated the remaining file summaries for coding.

Weekly team meetings were held to explore coding consistency, to challenge interpretations and possible biases, and to discuss any nodes that may be missing or underutilised. A number of nodes were added and others merged, and by the fourth meeting no further changes were required. This process was undertaken by the coders, and peer-reviewed by the research leaders who had extensive involvement in the project but were not directly involved in the

coding (Sanders et al., 2013). The final coding framework comprised twelve parent nodes, described later in this document. Once case file summaries had been coded, twenty per cent were allocated to other analysts for review, to enhance coding consistency. Meetings were held to discuss any inconsistencies and coding was amended as required.

Node Analysis

Each of the parent nodes was analysed individually using a range of approaches. Initial coding used endogenous themes generated from the research questions and the case file summary coding guidelines, exploring occurrences and the detail around these. In conducting this form of analysis, additional themes emerged from the data, which were created as query nodes or documented manually. NVivo tools were also used to display word frequencies and patterns and thus generate themes. The data in each parent node was reviewed a second time to achieve more detail around these emerging themes and concepts.

Contextualising Findings

Skehill, Satka and Hoikkala (2013) discuss the importance of contextualising case file information within the “macro discourses of child welfare” of the time, encouraging researchers to consider the influences of policy and legislative discourses on practice and vice versa; and promoting use of a case-based analysis. In addition, practices and policies within services and agencies evolve over time. As such, the findings of the case file summaries reported here should be considered within the context of the agency policies and practices of the time as well as other macro influences. Many of these are outlined in the background policy documents² which are companion

2 See Resilience Research Centre <http://www.massey.ac.nz/massey/learning/>

documents to this study. These documents provide detailed information on policy and service delivery in New Zealand as well as insights into the dominant discourses within services for children and young people at the time of the PtRP study.

Terminology use

The following section outlines the terms used in the analysis of the data.

Use of the Term “Family Violence”

Family violence is defined by the Te Rito: New Zealand Family Violence Prevention Strategy (Ministry of Social Development, 2002, p.8) as:

“...a broad range of controlling behaviours commonly of a physical, sexual and/or psychological nature which typically involve fear, intimidation, and emotional deprivation. It occurs within close interpersonal relationships”.

The Te Rito definition of family violence includes:

- Partner or spouse abuse (abuse or violence by one partner against the other, in same sex and different sex relationships, including dating relationships)
- Child abuse or neglect
- Elder abuse or neglect
- Parental abuse (abuse or violence by a child or young person against a parent) and
- Sibling abuse (abuse or violence by a child or young person against a sister or brother) (Ministry of Social Development,

[departments/centres-research/resilience-research/publications/publications_home.cfm](#)

2002, p. 8).

Family violence was prevalent in many of the files we examined. Because of its pervasive nature, a decision was made to distinguish between particular forms of family violence in our analysis. Our analysis makes distinctions between the following:

- Abuse of the young person whose file we reviewed (coded as Abuse and Wellbeing Concerns);
- Repeated incidents of family violence within a nuclear family setting (coded as Abuse and Wellbeing Concerns – Family Violence);
- Patterns of family violence reported across the wider/extended family/whānau or where a parent became involved with successive abusive partners (coded as Patterns of Family Violence);

Disability

The term disability is used in a number of different ways across different settings and it is useful here to outline how this term has been used as part of coding and analysis.

The Office for Disability Issues (n.d., para. 2) in reference to the New Zealand Disability Strategy (2001) states:

Disability is not something individuals have. What individuals have are impairments. They may be physical, sensory, neurological, psychiatric, intellectual or other impairments. Disability is the process which happens when one group of people create barriers by designing a world only for their way of living, taking no account of the impairments other people have.

Based on World Health Organisation standards, Statistics New Zealand utilises a functional concept of disability: “any long-term limitation in activity resulting from a condition or health problem” (Statistics New Zealand, n.d., unpaginated). Accepted categories of disability according to such definitions include: sensory (hearing and visual); physical; intellectual; psychiatric / psychological and other (for example conditions affecting memory or speech).

For the purposes of the reports on the case file summaries we have used a functionally based definition of disability and made a distinction between mental health concerns (psychiatric and/or psychological disabilities) and other disabilities.

Qualitative descriptors

Throughout the series of reports which accompany this overview, qualitative terms are used to describe particular trends or phenomena. These terms are used consistently and are broadly defined in quantitative terms as outlined in the table below.

Table 1. Quantification of qualitative descriptors

Descriptor	Amount based on sample of young people whose files were reviewed (n=79)
Few/small amount	3-8
Several	8-15
Some/reasonable amount	12-30
Often/common	20 plus
Many	26 plus
Most / majority	40 plus

How reports are presented

The case file reports present the findings from the twelve parent nodes included in the final case file summary analysis framework as

discussed earlier. These nodes are listed below:

- Change of circumstances
- Engagement with education
- Family/whānau patterns
- Social service practice
- Wellbeing concerns
- Young person's behaviour
- Young person's voice

Because of the sensitive nature of the research and the way in which case file data was collected, the reports present summaries of experiences rather than use direct excerpts or quotes from case files.

A fuller description of the information collected within each node is presented in their respective reports. There are seven node reports in total that accompany this report.

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