

Using systems thinking to address intimate partner violence and child abuse in New Zealand

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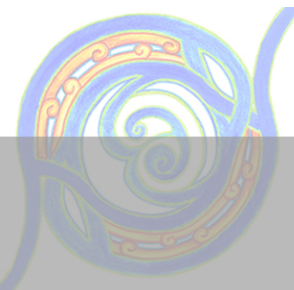
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Key Messages

- Systems thinking is recommended to address intimate partner violence (IPV) and child abuse and neglect (CAN) in New Zealand.
- Systems thinking is an umbrella term that encompasses a range of ideas, methods and tools that focus on understanding system behaviour, emphasising the contextual nature of the problems we try to solve. It aims to affect transformational systemic change that is both sympathetic to existing needs and disruptive in terms of making changes aimed at positive outcomes.
 - Systems analysis helps build a collective understanding of the parts, and relationships between the parts, which leads to a view of the whole.
 - System designers often talk of bringing the whole system “into one room” since the capacity to understand and explore the issue are spread across the system.
 - The experiences of people directly impacted by a system play a critical part in understanding the system and in the design, implementation and review of any change process.
 - Systems tend to pivot around leverage points: places in the system that have a significant impact on system behaviours. These leverage points need to become the focus of interventions, targeting scarce resources where they will have the most effect in reducing the incidence and improving the response to IPV and CAN. Systems analysis also informs theories of change and helps identify measures and indicators.
- Using systems thinking to address IPV and CAN requires transformational change and an enabling framework. This includes:
 - Government leadership and a strategic intent
 - Early and sustained collaboration across the system and integrated government *and* community level efforts
 - Infrastructure and processes to link and enable the various parts of the prevention and response system to work together
 - Effective stewardship including oversight, monitoring of outcomes and acting on shared learnings
 - A framework for measurement, monitoring and evaluation for the purpose of learning.



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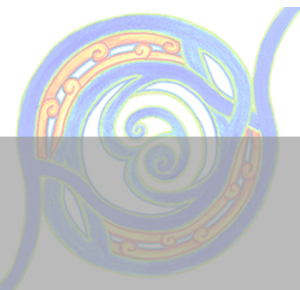
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1. Introduction

This paper makes the case that using systems thinking (ST) is essential if we are to make significant progress in reducing intimate partner violence (IPV) and child abuse and neglect (CAN) in Aotearoa New Zealand. The paper outlines some key concepts and tools of ST and how these can contribute to the design, development and implementation of effective approaches to prevent and respond to IPV and CAN. Ultimately, it argues that an ST approach is essential as previous efforts have failed to achieve the scale and lasting change required. The Family Violence Death Review Committee has emphasised that “transformational change” is required.¹

The paper is based on a review of New Zealand and international literature. As literature on the application of systems thinking to IPV and CAN is limited, we have also drawn on literature applying systems thinking to other social and environmental issues. Findings from the literature were supplemented by conversations with some key people working on IPV and CAN in New Zealand to help relate the themes from the literature to the policy and practice context.

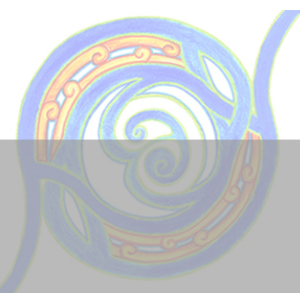
2. What is systems thinking?

What do we mean by a system?

Leading systems thinker Donella Meadows defines a system as a “set of things – people, cells, molecules, or whatever – interconnected in such a way that they produce their own pattern of behavior over time.” (p.2)² A system consists of elements, interconnections, and a function or purpose. However, she emphasises that purposes are deduced from *behaviour*, rather than from rhetoric or stated goals. What a system is achieving is not something any one actor can compel and may not be the purpose we say we want (e.g. reducing IPV and CAN). Stroh³ notes that systems are perfectly designed, consciously or not, to achieve what they currently do.

Meadows also notes that fundamentally there are no separate systems as “the world is a continuum” (p.97).² Accordingly, where to draw a boundary around a system depends on the purpose of the discussion. The (fragmented)^{1,4} collection of services, agencies and programmes responding to IPV and CAN are sometimes referred to as the ‘family violence system.’ However, a system in the ST sense is bigger than this: it includes the wider set of forces that impact on the prevention, occurrence and response to IPV and CAN. These include, for example, socio-cultural drivers of violence such as gender inequality, rigid gender norms and the structural inequalities that are typically targeted as part of prevention efforts. Forces can also include, for example, ways of thinking, policies and people.

ST is a way of seeing the world that provides a language to communicate and investigate complex issues. While ST includes a number of theoretical and practical approaches, they share a common focus on understanding the factors affecting an issue and how they are connected to each other in a system: a set of things working together as a complex whole.



Key concepts in systems thinking

ST recognises that a system is made up of interrelated components and that the relationships between the components are just as important in understanding the behaviour of the system as the components themselves.

“You think that because you understand ‘one’ that you must therefore understand ‘two’ because one and one make two. But you forget that you must also understand ‘and.’” (p.12)

~ Sufi teaching story cited in Donella H. Meadows, *Thinking in Systems: A Primer*, Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing; 2008.

While much has been learnt from understanding the component parts of a system, systems thinkers believe that additional insight is gained by looking at the system as a whole compared to only examining each part in isolation. This is especially the case when the system involves multiple interacting components that evolve over time.⁵ While describing ST in detail is beyond the scope of this paper, some key concepts and terms are outlined briefly below.

TOOLS OF A SYSTEM THINKER

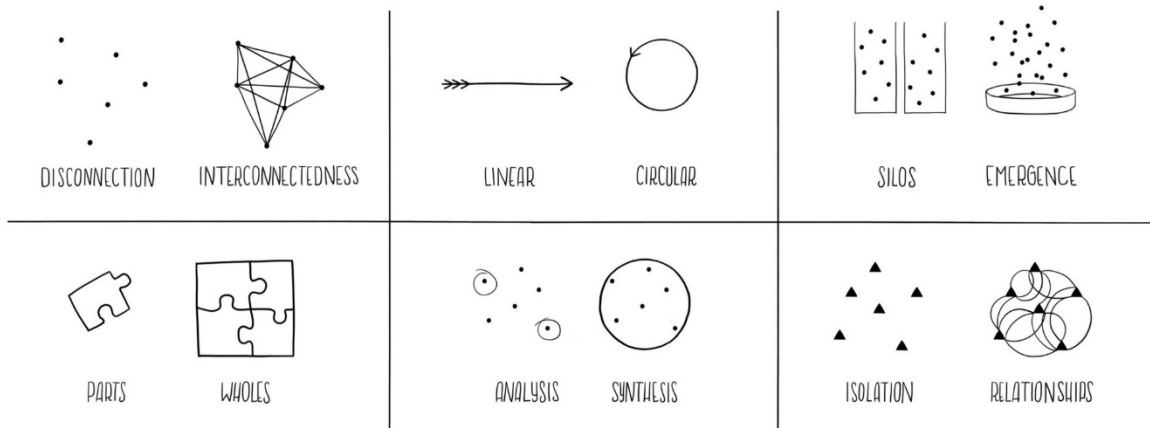
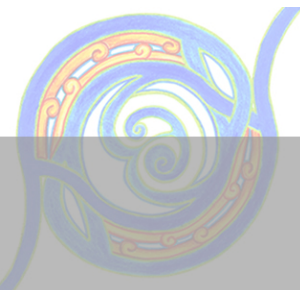


Figure 1: Tools of a systems thinker

From *Tools for Systems Thinkers: The 6 Fundamental Concepts of Systems Thinking* by Leyla Acaroglu, 2017⁶



Interconnectedness

All systems are composed of inter-connected parts. This connectedness means that a change to any part or connection in the system affects other parts of the system. System thinking embraces complexity, recognising that everything is connected.

Self-organising

Systems thinkers understand that systems (from planetary systems to social systems) are self-organising and adapt to change. How a system organises itself is dependent on interactions between its interconnected parts. A policy or law change for example, may be ineffective in achieving its goal because people find ways to work around it, adapting their behaviour to new circumstances – in effect re-organising the system.⁷ Well-intentioned actions that result in unintended consequences can be a result of the dynamic and self-organising nature of systems.⁸

Synthesis

*“Synthesis is about understanding the whole and the parts at the same time, along with the relationships and the connections that make up the dynamics of the whole.”*⁶ In ST the focus is on synthesis, the ability to see interconnectedness, as opposed to analysing systems purely by breaking them down into parts. Systems thinking focuses on the connections between the parts of the system as this determines how the system works together to produce outcomes.

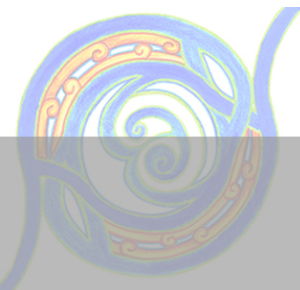
Emergence

Emergence is the natural result of things coming together – the outcome of the synergies of the parts. Systems thinkers understand that you cannot predict the outcome of the system solely by examining its parts. ‘Emergent’ behaviour is produced through interactions in the system. If analysis is done using only reductionist methods (breaking the system down into parts) it can miss behaviour that emerges from the parts interacting with each other.

Feedback loops

Since everything is interconnected, there are constant feedback loops between parts of the system. Feedback loops help us understand how components of a system work together and evolve over time. There are two types of feedback loops:

- a) Positive loops which reinforce a behaviour or outcome
- b) Balancing loops which dampen or buffer changes, making the system stable.



Feedback loops help explain the behaviour of the system, shedding light on why well-intentioned practices and policy can have detrimental, unforeseen consequences. Feedback loops are the main reason a system's behaviour is emergent. Feedback loops are described further in the next section.*

Causality

Causality in ST is being able to understand the way things influence each other in a system.

Understanding feedback loops allows insight into cause and effect, or how one thing results in another thing. Understanding causality can help in a number of ways, including targeting and planning change. Time is an important consideration when thinking about systems. Frequently there is a time delay between cause and effect.

Complex social systems can exhibit counter-intuitive behaviour

Complex social systems involve multiple, non-linear feedback loops. As Forrester⁹ stated, the human mind is not well adapted to interpreting how complex social systems behave, partly because a cause “may lie far back in time and arise from an entirely different part of the system from when and where the symptoms occur.” A change that results in an improvement in the short term can result in negative effects in the long term.

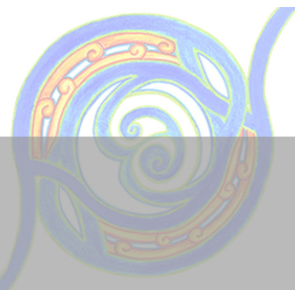
Leverage points

Leverage points are places in the system where a small shift in one thing can result in big changes throughout the system.² Research has shown that people are not very good at identifying effective intervention points in social systems,⁷ instead generally focusing on visible symptoms of the issue of concern and not the real causes, which are often spread more widely in both space and time.

The bathtub analogy

An ST approach to IPV and CAN would use systems techniques to understand the connections between *prevention* and *response* to generate coherent and complimentary approaches. An ST approach to prevention involves mapping out drivers, influencers and dynamics that are implicated in IPV and CAN and informs possible prevention efforts. The approach to response involves understanding and responding to the aftermath of violence with the aim of trauma response, healing, and safety.

The ‘bathtub’ analogy from systems thinking^{3,10} (figure 2 below) can be used to illustrate these two levels of analysis. The incidence rates of both IPV and CAN are the ‘inflow’ of people experiencing abuse into the ‘bathtub.’ The ‘outflow is represented by ‘safe and effective responses to at all points of the service system.’ However, primary prevention and early intervention efforts to stop water flowing into the ‘bathtub’, represented by the hand turning the tap, are severely neglected. Just 1.5% of government spend on family and sexual violence goes to primary prevention and just 1.5% to



activities that identify violence or intervene early on the basis of risk.¹¹ The consequence is that while interventions may assist those who have been victims of IPV and CAN, the inflow continues so that the 'water' in the bathtub continues to rise. Unless the inflow is slowed considerably, interventions to assist people experiencing IPV and CAN, while important, will do nothing to reduce the prevalence. That will only occur when the rate of the inflow is slowed so that it becomes less than the rate of the outflow. The lesson from ST is clear: if you wish to change the prevalence of any condition, be it those experiencing IPV, CAN or any other social issue, the only way to do it is to ensure that the inflows are *less* than the outflows. If that is not the case the prevalence will not decline.

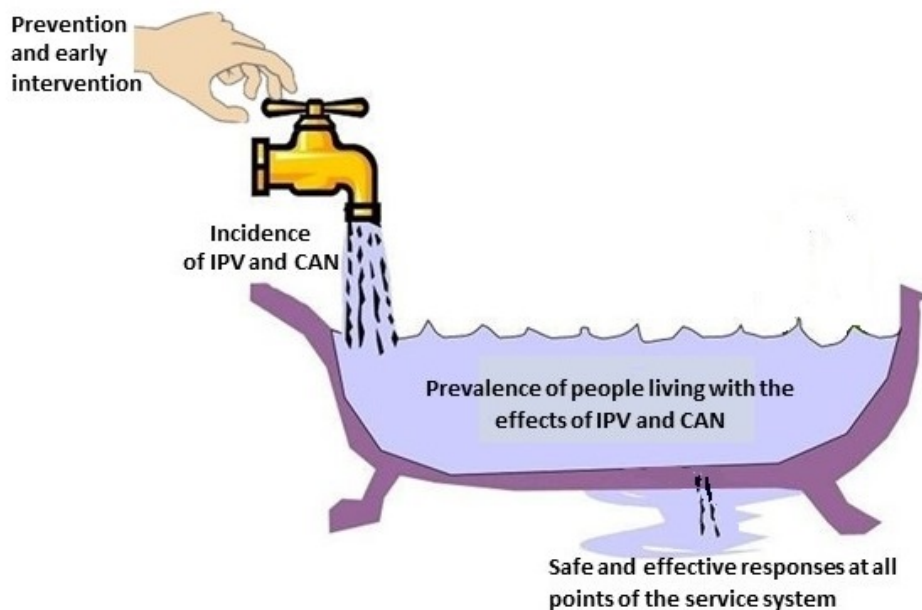
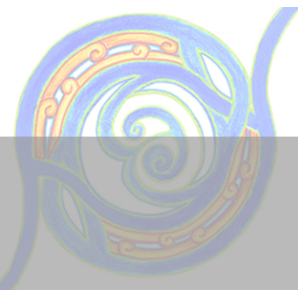


Figure 2: The Bathtub analogy

3. Why use systems thinking for IPV and CAN?

“... international thinking is that 'the system matters' when it comes to eliminating and preventing family violence because the causes are deeply rooted at every level of the social ecological system.” (p.3)

Murphy, C., & Fanslow, J. (2012). *Building collaborations to eliminate family violence: facilitators, barriers and good practice*. Auckland, New Zealand: New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse, The University of Auckland.



Systems thinking is key to addressing ‘wicked’ problems

The term ‘wicked problem’ was coined by Rittel and Webber¹² to describe the challenges of planning and social policy problems. Wicked problems are complex, multifaceted and enduring. They have multiple drivers, are hard to describe and don’t have one right answer. Many stakeholders are involved with different viewpoints, norms and priorities. Additionally, the effectiveness of specific interventions are hard to evaluate because of downstream effects and the inherent complexity of the issue, making it difficult to identify direct links of cause and effect.¹²⁻¹⁴ Each of these characteristics on its own would be challenging but taken together wicked problems can appear unsolvable. The term is being used more and more to describe a multitude of problems. Indeed, as understanding of the blurred boundaries between issues increases, it may no longer be possible to treat any problem as discrete.¹³ As Kaplan (2017)¹⁵ points out this is challenging as many professionals work in silos and don’t have either the language or the tools to ‘pull the pieces together.’

International momentum to use Systems Thinking to address wicked problems

Increasingly ST is being utilised by those who deal with ‘wicked’ problems such as climate change, international conflicts, poverty, human rights and health care.

The World Health Organisation has published a report on ST¹⁶ and state “the responses of many health systems so far have been generally considered inadequate and naïve. ... a system’s failure requires a system’s solution – not a temporary remedy.”¹⁷

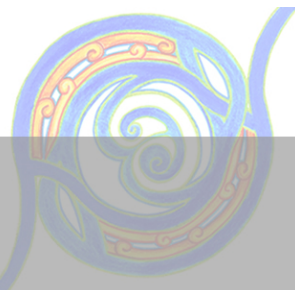
In 2018, the Governance Directorship of the OECD declared “the time for piecemeal solutions in the public sector is over” and recommended the use of systems thinking to instigate innovative solutions to cross-cutting and complex issues.¹⁸

The United Nations Leadership Framework¹⁹ advances ST as one of the four behaviours that international leaders need to adopt in their leadership practice, as it seeks to deal with global issues such as climate change, poverty and human rights, including gender-based violence.

The International Council for Science (ICSU), which reports to the UN, has released a position paper recommending a major shift towards systems thinking methodologies to achieve its Sustainable Development Goals.²⁰

Understanding IPV and CAN as wicked problems

Increasingly IPV and CAN are seen as wicked problems. Like other wicked problems there is a “complexity gap” where existing structures and processes are unable to address these issues successfully.¹³ This complexity can be seen in the interconnections between IPV, CAN and other forms of violence, in the far-reaching impacts of IPV and CAN, and in their interconnectedness with other social issues.



Interconnections between forms of violence

There are interrelationships between different types of violence.²¹ IPV and CAN often co-occur in families and are “entangled” forms of violence.²² Experiencing or being exposed to violence at home as a child increases the risk of someone using or experiencing intimate partner violence as an adult.²³ People who have been violent in one context (e.g. toward peers) are likely to be violent in another context (e.g., toward intimate partners). Victims of one form of violence are likely to experience other forms of violence²⁴ and revictimisation rates are high.²⁵ Suicidal behaviour is also linked to experiences of violence.^{26,27}

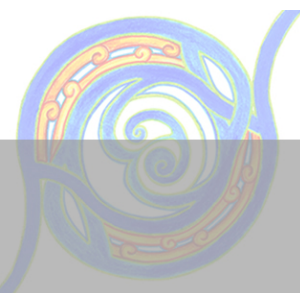
Additionally different types of violence share common risk and protective factors.²⁴ For example, masculinity norms associated with aggression and domination are associated with men’s violence against women, assaults by men against other men and against people from LGBTTIQ+ communities.²⁸ This has led to the Centers of Disease Control developing a strategic vision to “connect the dots” and prevent multiple forms of violence.²⁹

Hamby and Grych (2013)³⁰ also set out the evidence on the co-occurrence of different forms of violence, including multiple perpetration and multiple victimisation. They argue for integrated responses including: recognising co-occurrence as the norm not the exception; developing a common prevention framework; and avoiding retraumatising one or more family members who have been victimised (for example, child protection interventions such as removing children from non-abusive parents for “failing to protect” them from the perpetrator’s abuse can retraumatise parents who have been victimised by IPV, as can removing children from non-abusive parents except as a last resort).

Violence can also be seen through a life-course lens where experiences of violence or issues associated with violence influence life trajectory. For example, childhood exposure to IPV or CAN can affect brain development and cognitive, behavioural, social and emotional functioning³¹ leading to a host of negative life impacts including increasing the risk of future experience or perpetration of violence.

Violence can profoundly affect parenting capacity,³² which can be compounded by associated factors such as mental health issues, substance abuse and poverty. For some families, violence, police involvement, alcohol and substance use and severe stress is common, which can be accompanied by high distrust and disengagement with helping organisations and agencies and exclusion and disempowerment.³³ Beyond individual life-courses, families, whānau and communities can also experience intergenerational trauma.

Colonisation and Māori and systems thinking are discussed further below.



IPV and CAN interconnect with multiple other social issues

Examples of evidence showing the interconnections of IPV and CAN and other social, health and justice issues are briefly outlined below:

Homelessness

Adult, youth and child homelessness can result from experiencing violence in the home, including through financial abuse, loss of tenancy due to property damage or transience to evade police. Intimate partner violence is a key driver of homelessness for women.³⁴⁻³⁶

Mental health issues

Experience of violence can lead to a trauma response, in turn resulting in the misuse of drugs and alcohol and mental health issues such as PTSD, anxiety, depression and sleep and eating disorders.^{37,38} For instance, children who witness intimate partner violence against a parent/caregiver are at higher risk of being diagnosed with anxiety or depressive disorders by the age of 21.³⁹

Lack of academic achievement

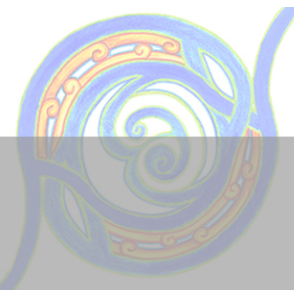
Dysfunctional family processes (e.g. conflict, substance abuse, child abuse, negative modelling, disturbed parent-child relationships, deprivation of stimulation and affection) can affect children's performance and behaviour at school.⁴⁰⁻⁴² New Zealand evidence suggests that about two-thirds of 13-15 year olds in alternative education have experienced violence.⁴³

Bullying

There is evidence for an association between children and young people being exposed to or experiencing violence at home and being a victim or perpetrator of bullying, and between bullying and later intimate partner violence perpetration.⁴⁴⁻⁴⁶

Crime

Child abuse and exposure to domestic violence are considered to contribute to later criminal offending.^{47,48} In New Zealand, 60-80% of youth offenders have been either exposed to or involved with family violence in their home.^{49,50} Most (87%) young offenders aged 14 to 16 years old in 2016/17 had had prior reports of care and protection concerns made to Oranga Tamariki – Ministry for Children.⁵⁰ One study of a prison population found that three quarters of the women and nearly half of the men had experienced family^a and/or sexual violence. Nearly two thirds of the women had experienced physical intimate partner violence. For many the abuse started when they were young and was part of a sustained period of violence.⁵¹



Poverty

IPV occurs across all sections of society: victims and perpetrators are found in every income bracket. 1 in 4 NZ women with a household income over \$100,000 per year, and 1 in 4 women with a university degree or higher, have experienced physical or sexual violence from an intimate partner (this compares to 1 in 3 women overall).⁵² However, the relationship between poverty and IPV and CAN can be a reinforcing loop.⁵³ Women who are experiencing poverty and have less access to education and work opportunities are more likely to experience IPV. Economic hardship can also make it harder to leave abusive relationships. Additionally, women who experience IPV also experience more mental health challenges, and have more unplanned pregnancies, which can also contribute to economic hardship.⁵³⁻⁵⁶

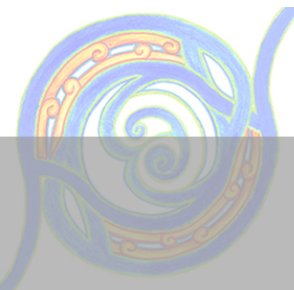
Poor health outcomes

Injuries such as traumatic brain injury and health conditions such as functional gastrointestinal disorders are associated with violence.^{57,58} Sexual violence is estimated to lead to 13% to 43% greater total health care costs (increased emergency department visits, greater number of hospitalisations, more generalist, subspecialty, and psychiatric evaluations)⁵⁷ and persistent trauma-related internalising disorders (depression, generalized anxiety disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder) can lead to age-related disease and premature mortality.⁵⁹ Exposure to toxic stress due to factors such as chronic neglect, abuse or exposure to violence during pregnancy and early childhood can modify the expression of genes and can result in long-lasting effects on mental and physical health, learning, and behaviour. These changes can be transferred across generations.⁶⁰

Other impacts

The effects of violence can manifest in a host of problems including stress, inability to cope, anger and relationship difficulties.²⁴

^a The study included three types of violence grouped as family violence: “being badly beaten up by parents or the people who raised you; witnessing serious physical fights at home; or being badly beaten up by a spouse or romantic partner.” Data was not collected on childhood neglect, or psychological, economic or emotional coercion and control exerted in a relationship. Sexual violence (by any perpetrator) was considered separately.



Calls to use systems thinking to address IPV and CAN in New Zealand

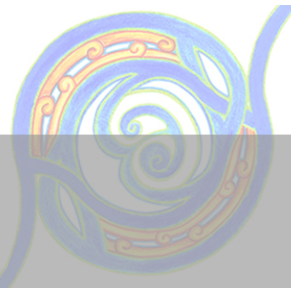
Calls to take a systems approach to IPV and CAN in New Zealand have come from several published sources including the Family Violence Death Review Committee,¹ the Glenn Inquiry,⁶¹ the Impact Collective⁴ and the New Zealand Productivity Commission,⁶² who make the following points:

- The current family violence service ‘system’ is a system by default and not a system by design. It was not developed to account for the intersection of IPV and CAN and concurrent social issues that may exist (e.g. trauma, mental health issues, addiction, poverty)
- Many services and service delivery models have been unchanged for years without being evaluated. Likewise, agencies generally have little information about which interventions and services work well and for whom, and which do not work well and why
- Without clarity about interconnections across the system, attempting to fix one part of a complex system in isolation can reveal or create unexpected further problems downstream and/or be unsafe
- There is little ability or incentive for providers to experiment and share or adopt innovations. (This is partly related to low levels of funding of non-government organisations and highly prescribed contracting by agencies.)
- Services can be disempowering for clients allowing them little participation in decisions. There is often poor coordination between services, and clients often find government processes confusing, overly directive and/or harmful (exposing victim/survivors to further violence) as well as wasteful and disconnected
- Responses can be inappropriately confined to one-off single-issue interventions. Opportunities for early intervention with potential to avoid further escalation or harm are frequently missed. The current system means that both human and fiscal costs escalate as people repeatedly re-enter the system at more costly intervention points, such as prisons or emergency units.

The above list does not adequately capture the all too common ways the current system is failing people who are victims of violence. Frequently, not only is help hard to find, but contact with agencies can make the situation worse, for example, if staff are uninformed or judgmental or if the perpetrator is allowed to control the situation. This can lead to increased stress and distrust of helping organisations and discourage future help-seeking.^{61,63}

“Leaving meant my life went from being a living hell to a horror story. I constantly lived in fear of what would happen to me and my children. I couldn’t sleep and, when I did, I had nightmares. I always felt that when I asked for help, I was being judged and treated in a callous way. I just needed gentleness and help to get through this living hell to a place of safety.” (p.8)

~ ‘Janice’ cited in Wilson D, Webber, M. (2014). *The People’s Blueprint: Transforming the way we deal with child abuse and domestic violence in New Zealand*. Auckland: The Glenn Inquiry.



Over the past few decades, a number of attempts have been made to overcome siloed ways of working. However “what such initiatives can achieve within the existing structures of government appears to have a natural limit.”⁶² Structures that have been tried to date in New Zealand are listed in Appendix 1, with the most recent ones described below.

In 2014, the National-led Government established a cross-government work programme which aimed to achieve an integrated system for preventing and responding to family and sexual violence. In practice, however, while there was connection through the high-level cross-government group, it appears that each agency worked independently on their area of action with limited connection to how their work would impact on other areas and without a mechanism for reporting system impact. The lack of a shared platform meant duplication of work at times as each agency sought understanding of the issue in order to carry out their work.

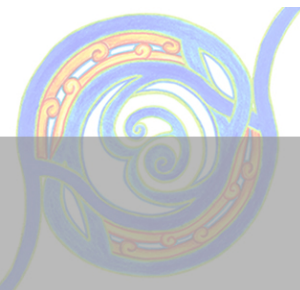
In 2018, the Coalition Government announced a new “joint venture” approach to “lead, integrate, and provide support for everyone to ensure an effective whole-of-government response to family violence and sexual violence.” Early actions include the development of a national strategy and action plan, and the preparation of a single, whole-of-government package for Budget 2019 to align and prioritise resources. The joint venture will also lead the preparation of a collective annual report across all agencies with a view to creating a collective account of performance towards shared outcomes and a single point of accountability to Parliament and the public.

Under the Coalition Government, a number of other initiatives have also commenced to address a range of health and social issues including housing plans, a child poverty action plan, the Treasury’s work on wellbeing,⁶⁴ Mental Health Inquiry, criminal justice reform, welfare system review and ongoing work to establish Oranga Tamariki – Ministry for Children. It is argued that a systems approach will be essential to have a meaningful impact these issues, including their interconnections with IPV and CAN.

Service integration versus systems thinking

System thinking is not the same as service integration. There can be confusion or conflation of these concepts despite the important differences between them. With respect to the service ‘system’ responding to IPV and CAN, there is much talk about integration of services, including terms such as: integrated system, integrated programme, integrated response model, integrated service response, integrated practice and integrated community practice. Likewise, most of the literature relating to service systems and IPV and CAN refers to service integration and does not actually include systems thinking, methods, or tools.

A meta-evaluation conducted by Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety (ANROWS) examined published literature on Australian and international partnerships, collaborations and integrated interventions regarding domestic and family violence and sexual assault services and provided recommendations for future evaluations and key considerations for integrated responses in



terms of core elements, contexts and circumstances.^{65,66} The final report⁵⁵ found that the evidence for effectiveness of integration was limited, however, anecdotal and empirically derived potential benefits of integration still appeared to outweigh the alternatives. Benefits included:

- A broader range of services that are offered beyond the initial crisis period
- Improvement of the professional knowledge base and relationships between service providers
- Facilitation of responsive and prompt decision-making
- Increased cross-programme or agency collaboration on case management
- Provision of multiple entry points for clients to access support.

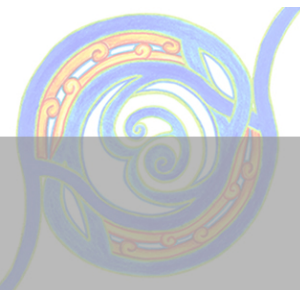
However, the report also noted that there were clear limits to the problems service integration can solve. Barriers included power imbalances between agencies; lack of common ground between perspectives and disciplines; privacy concerns for clients; and unsustainability due to resource limitations. Additionally, “perverse and unanticipated outcomes may result from improved collaboration and identification of service needs, if there are insufficient services or inadequate resourcing available to meet increased demand.” (p.29) The authors note the meta-evaluation was difficult to carry out due to the term ‘integration’ often being applied loosely to describe a variety of networks or partnerships. Additionally, evaluation of initiatives was commonly focused on the success or otherwise of one or more of its programme components rather than on the effectiveness of integration itself, most did not include indicator analysis and many had no theories of change.

As integrated service systems have occupied much of the investment and focus in NZ, one of these is briefly discussed below. This illustrates that changes in activity can create positive change but can also have unintended consequences.

Integrated Safety Response (ISR)

An example of an integrated approach in New Zealand is the Integrated Safety Response (ISR) which is a multi-agency initiative led by NZ Police that aims to increase the safety of adult and child victims and to work with perpetrators to prevent further violence.⁶⁷ The ISR model brings together NZ Police, Oranga Tamariki – Ministry for Children, Corrections, Health, local District Health Boards (DHBs), Justice, Education, Social Development, ACC, specialist family violence NGOs, and kaupapa Māori services.

An evaluation published in 2017⁶⁸ documented early findings and concluded that the model has allowed better information sharing, enhanced working relationships and collaboration which has in turn resulted in improved risk assessment, safety planning and more effective responses to family violence reported to Police.



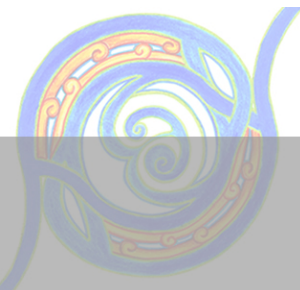
The evaluation also highlighted areas for improvement, which included the need for:

- Better clarity of service provider and agency roles and improved understanding of how ISR fits into wider family violence responses (noting that only an estimated 24% of family violence episodes are reported to Police, which is the gateway to the programme)
- Increased coordination between agencies
- Better consultation with and input from Māori stakeholders and NGOs
- More work to understand and address the needs of children and deliver a family or whānau-centred approach
- Addressing the strain on NGO services within the sector due to the intensive resourcing necessary to meet the high demand of ISR.

From the perspective of Aviva Family Violence Services, a specialist agency initially involved in the Christchurch ISR, ISR also had a number of significant unintended consequences for the wider family violence response system. Nicola Woodward, CEO of Aviva,⁶⁹ has described these as follows:

- The rapid redeployment of current practice staff into ISR significantly reduced workforce capacity to respond to client demand on other parts of the system, including self-referrals. This included the prioritisation of ISR referrals above non-ISR referrals, irrespective of risk
- An apparent lack of consideration of the time lag between new staff recruitment, induction and clinical readiness to respond to non-ISR referrals, which as a consequence, restricted agency capacity to meet non-ISR contract volumes
- The shift from a family-centred ‘pull’ system, to a demand-driven ‘push’ process in which agency capacity rather than capability determined ISR referrals decisions
- Because intervention was largely concentrated in the Police referral pathway – which for many is a crisis point – ISR diverted agency resources from opportunities for earlier intervention
- The expectation that ISR clients would be referred on to other non-ISR contracted services after three months, without prior consideration of the of workforce capacity requirements to achieve this, relative to other system demands.

Work has continued to improve the ISR, including through partnerships, capability building, workforce development and quality assurance and improvement processes.



4. Barriers to using Systems Thinking to address IPV and CAN

ST provides a set of core ideas, methods and tools that can be used to harness knowledge and bring about transformational change. Used effectively, it has the potential to avoid simply shifting consequences, blame, and costs from one part of the system to another, or addressing symptoms while ignoring causes.¹³ However there can be considerable resistance to a ST approach as decision-makers may see it as too complex, time consuming and costly. As a counter to these barriers, system thinkers offer the following:^{3,4,13}

- Complex problems are likely to require complex solutions. The job of system thinkers is to provide the tools and expertise to articulate complexity, making it visible and understandable.
- System change does take time. However it does so through a process of continued improvement starting from the status quo and gradually moving towards positive and sustainable outcomes.
- Transformative change is always costly to implement. However the current approach is already costly on an on-going basis.

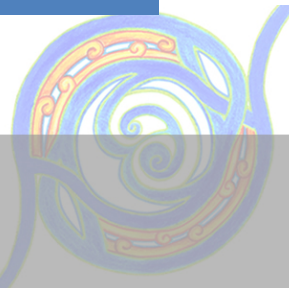
Some barriers to using systems thinking

The ways we have always done things – the status quo. There can be considerable inertia when we try and move something that has been there for a while. In terms of how we provide services the current system is cemented in legislation, regulation and policies, workforce practices, funding and procurement models. Responsibility for different needs and issues are delegated across different government agencies, NGOs and providers - this siloed approach is resistant to change.

The uncertainty of the new and low appetite for risk. While there may be dissatisfaction with the status quo, it is familiar. Doing things differently involves risk – and where there is public accountability it reduces the appetite for risk. Deloitte NZ found that accountability for spending was prioritised over the achievement of outcomes and there remain few incentives to try untested approaches.⁷⁰ Risk aversion in government agencies is evident when there is top-down control, overly prescriptive contracts, short funding rounds, capital constraints and 'bare-bones' funding. These circumstances can then contribute to low levels of innovation and low levels of trust, coordination and collaboration between agencies and providers and which in turn limit the ability of services to offer flexible services which might better meet the needs of clients.⁶²

Costs of change. There are considerable costs involved in transformational change. This includes financial investment, discomfort of learning new skills, having to act interdependently instead of independently, a possible shift in mission and work and having to wait for success.³

Getting on the same page. Not only do agencies struggle working together cohesively but it can be hard for 'coal face' stakeholders to work with government agencies due to previous less than successful attempts at collaboration. Some of the practical issues involved in true collaboration are the resources, including time, that it takes to build trusted relationships and shared understanding. For example, it can be difficult for service user voices to be actively heard or gathered if a willingness from agencies is not present. Getting service user input can also seem risky and may unearth more than the agencies feel they can respond to.

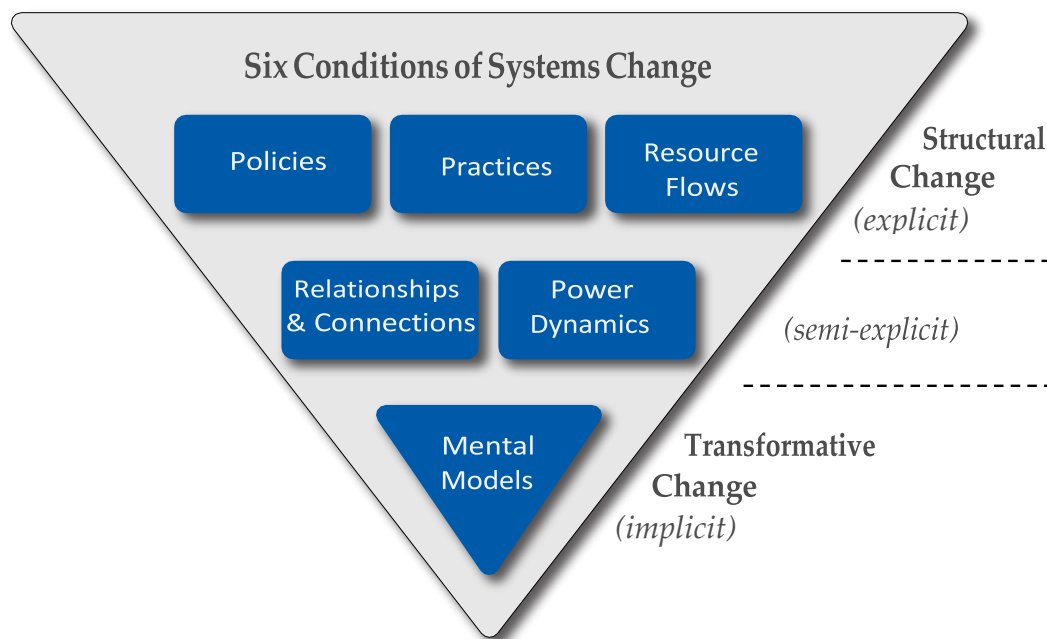


5. Enabling systems change

Kania, Kramer and Senge (2018)⁷¹ have drawn on the work of key systems academics and practitioners to develop an actionable model for achieving systems change. In figure 3 below, they set out six interdependent conditions that typically significantly impede or enable social change.

Figure 3: Shifting the conditions that hold the problem in place

From John Kania, Mark Kramer & Peter Senge (2018), *The Water Of Systems Change*, FSG.



Systems change conditions — Definitions

Policies: Government, institutional and organizational rules, regulations, and priorities that guide the entity's own and others' actions.

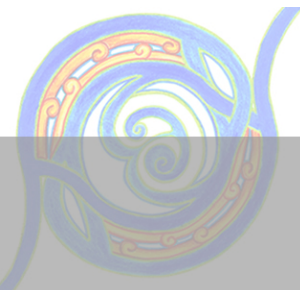
Practices: Espoused activities of institutions, coalitions, networks, and other entities targeted to improving social and environmental progress. Also, within the entity, the procedures, guidelines, or informal shared habits that comprise their work.

Resource Flows: How money, people, knowledge, information, and other assets such as infrastructure are allocated and distributed.

Relationships & Connections: Quality of connections and communication occurring among actors in the system, especially among those with differing histories and viewpoints.

Power Dynamics: The distribution of decision-making power, authority, and both formal and informal influence among individuals and organizations.

Mental Models: Habits of thought—deeply held beliefs and assumptions and taken-for-granted ways of operating that influence how we think, what we do, and how we talk.



Mental models

“... people who have managed to intervene in systems at the level of paradigm have hit a leverage point that totally transforms systems.” (p.163)

~ Donella H. Meadows, *Thinking in Systems: A Primer*. Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing; 2008.

Systems thinker Meadows¹⁰ points out that the dominant underlying assumptions and “*deepest set of beliefs about how the world works*” in a society determines what a system looks like. While frequently unstated, this mindset nevertheless determines the goals, structure and rules of a system.

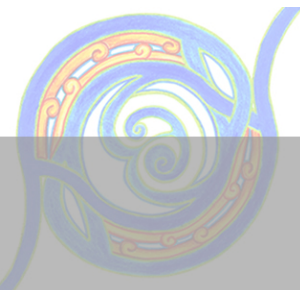
Kania, Kramer and Senge⁷¹ identify mental models as the least visible and most transformative conditions involved in social change. They state that they are not necessarily “more causative” than other conditions, but that other conditions (for example, policy) are much less likely to shift without shifting frames of reference at the mental models level. ^b Accordingly, “changemakers must ensure that they pay sufficient attention to the relationships, power dynamics, and especially the underlying mental models (such as racism and gender biases) embedded in the systems in which they work.” (p.5)

Marianne Hester’s⁷² ‘three planet’ model describes the tensions and contradictions between different mental models in three areas of practice: domestic violence work, child protection work and child contact work. She explores systemic contradictions between these three areas of work, arguing that they are “especially difficult to bring together into a cohesive and co-ordinated approach because they are effectively on separate ‘planets’ – with their own separate histories, culture, laws and populations (sets of professionals).”

In another UK example, Caffrey (2015)⁷³ also highlights how perceived organisational goals can impact on practice. The ST tools of ‘local rationalities’ and ‘goal conflicts’ were used to explore how problematic practices in supported child contact centres made sense to staff and volunteers working in the centres. This was due to a conflict between the goal of ensuring child safety and the perceived organisational goal of providing a ‘non-judgmental’, ‘welcoming’ and ‘neutral’ service for non-resident parents. This saw volunteers and staff discount the domestic abuse histories of non-resident parents and therefore discount the need for measures such as close supervision and monitoring to provide safety for children during and beyond contact.

In New Zealand, perpetrators and adult and child victims of IPV and CAN may come into contact with multiple agencies such as Police, Justice, Oranga Tamariki – Ministry for Children, Education, Work

^b The authors also point out that the only reliable way to know that shifts in mental models are in fact occurring is to see shifts in the other conditions, i.e. seeing the consequences of such shifts on things that are more visible like policies, practices, and resource flows.



and Income and Health, as well as non-government organisations. Each may have own set of values, goals and priorities. Herbert and Mackenzie⁴ note that myths and misconceptions about IPV and CAN are widely held by both the public and people working in the services victims and perpetrators come into contact with. They list some commonly held misconceptions including that: abuse in relationships is usually caused by both people, victims allow it to happen, and therefore, both must change for the abuse to stop; children need fathers, even violent ones; and abuse is caused by drinking or stress.⁷⁴

Kania, Kramer and Senge⁷¹ note that changing mental models often means challenging power structures that have “defined, influenced, and shaped” those models historically and in the present. This may be particularly salient in the context of IPV and CAN which are fundamentally about power and control.

“Ultimately, perhaps the biggest paradigm shift we need to achieve to address IPV and CAN is to recognise that they are preventable problems, and that we could design and build systems that support and nurture healthy and respectful relationships.”

6. Systems thinking and Māori

Māori have emphasised the need for work to prevent and address IPV, CAN and other forms of violence within whānau Māori to recognise and address the context of colonisation,^{75,76} racism,^{77,78} historical and intergenerational trauma,^{78,79} the dispossession of land, cultural disconnection and loss of language, and disruption of protective pre-colonial social structures and gender roles.⁸⁰ Violence within whānau has been described as the “manifestation of the powerlessness and dispossession of colonisation.”⁷⁵ (p.31)

The ongoing impacts of colonisation can be understood as forms of structural violence,^{81,82} where social structures or social institutions harm, exploit, disempower, degrade and isolate people or groups by preventing them from meeting their basic needs. Structural violence is often hidden as it is built into the configuration of a society. The ongoing impacts of colonisation can be understood as key components of the system that leads to the disproportionate impact of IPV and CAN on Māori. Systems Thinking has an underlying theory of change that argues for structural change, that is that change will occur when the structure – pattern of relationships – in the system changes.⁸³

As a British settler colonial state, New Zealand’s system of government, services and dominant ways of thinking reflect Western cultural heritage. Services tend to be delivered to individuals in response to a discrete issue. For Māori, like many indigenous peoples, the focus is not on individuals or discrete issues; mātauranga Māori sees individuals as intrinsically entwined within a web of connections, referred to as whakapapa. Ultimately, it is these connections that enable wellbeing to emerge. For Māori it is therefore critical to understand these connections and the outcomes that



result from them. When the web of connections is strong, it nourishes individuals. When the web is weak, or torn apart, the individual suffers. It has been argued that this feature of Māori knowledge, linking all things together, underpinned by a holistic, relational and temporal worldview, has commonalities or overlap with contemporary ST,⁸³ with its emphasis on emergence within complex webs of interaction.⁸⁴ Opportunities for prevention and healing reside in kaupapa Māori practices.⁸⁵

7. Applying systems thinking to IPV and CAN

This section outlines key steps in applying ST to IPV and CAN.

Step 1: Understanding the system

Albert Einstein is reported to have said “*given one hour to save the world, I would spend 55 minutes defining the problem and 5 minutes finding the solution.*”⁸⁶ Despite knowing that today’s problems are complex and can’t always be broken down into specific components, we rarely invest sufficient time and resources into understanding the issue prior to trying to solve the problem. Understandably there is pressure to respond to the issues of IPV and CAN, however in a rush towards solutions there can be missed opportunities, wasted resources and a real possibility that efforts will not result in the overall goal, reducing violence in our society.

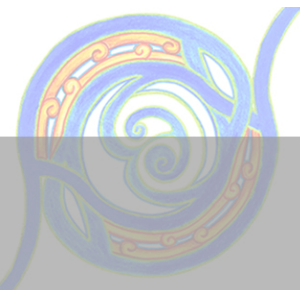
There are many tools in the ST toolbox to help understand and manage the seemingly unsurmountable complexity and connectedness that are part of wicked problems. ST has methods and tools for understanding, designing and managing change in complex systems over time. Tools and methods that can be applied in ST include systems mapping and simulation modelling to understand systems, and identifying root causes to assist in designing high leverage interventions for success.

Systems mapping

The process of systems mapping identifies and maps the components within a system in order to understand how they interconnect, relate and act. The mapping process is not trying to solve the problem, but rather build a collective understanding of the parts and relationships between the parts leading to a view of the whole. The insights from mapping are used to plan and develop interventions that will change the system in the most effective way. Since systems maps aim to reflect reality they also enable transformational design that is both sympathetic to existing needs and disruptive in terms of making changes aimed at positive outcomes.¹³

A collective process

In traditional thinking, decisions to act should be based on robust evidence, although it is unclear how much this is practiced in reality.^{87,88} ST also aims to utilise robust evidence but recognises that



evidence to inform real-world problems is often incomplete. For a system thinker, data is not just numbers in a spreadsheet but also research evidence, relevant documents and input from people within the system, particularly people with lived experience. All of these inputs comprise the ‘data’ used to inform a systemic intervention. As Forrester states, “if you leave a variable out of your thinking or your models because precise data is not available, you are in fact giving that variable a very precise value, namely zero.”⁹

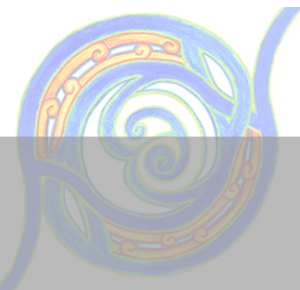
The role of lived experience

International best practice recommends early and ongoing involvement of people with lived experience in any change process. This has particular relevance in the area of IPV and CAN where disempowerment, re-victimisation and myths associated with violence are prevalent. Ultimately system map needs to represent the lived reality of people who are affected by the system.

A NZ government guide, *Incorporating The Voice of Experience – Service User Involvement Guide*⁸⁹ provides an overview including benefits and issues to consider when working with specific populations such as survivors, perpetrators, children and youth, Māori, Pacific and migrant/refugee populations, disabled people, older people, and the lesbian, gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) communities.

System designers often talk of bringing the whole system ‘into one room’ since the capacity to understand and explore the issue are spread across the system. Often stakeholders share common aspirations but have different perspectives and priorities. The idea is not only to gain and share knowledge from different perspectives, but to obtain insights into stakeholders’ roles and relationships within the system. Collaboration utilising systems mapping can enable stakeholders to share knowledge and to see how their domain fits within a wider reality and how their actions both affect and are affected by the wider system.

Stroh notes that ST maps can also prompt stakeholders to reflect on the difference between what they say they want and what they are actually (contributing to) producing. This can make explicit the choice between the outcomes people say they want to achieve and the benefits of the status quo, even if this does not support their highest aspirations. He uses the following example of a homelessness coalition:³



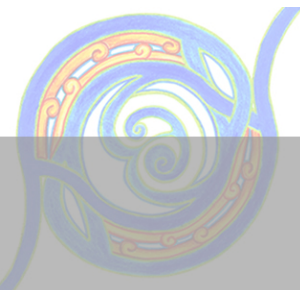
Role	Espoused Purpose	Hidden Priorities
Elected Official	Permanent housing with support services and jobs are important.	This takes a long time and is expensive; the community has other more immediate issues; I need to be reelected shortly.
Business Leader	It's important for everyone to have shelter.	Our primary concern is homeless people downtown who hurt business.
Homeless Shelter Director	Giving people shelter is humane.	The more beds we fill, the more money we get.
Director of Health Care for Homeless	Homeless people need basic health services outside the ER.	We have to compete with other providers for limited funding.
Affordable Housing Advocate	All people need permanent housing first.	We need to attract people who can afford to pay for housing and have less complex needs.
Funder	We are committed to helping homeless people.	Our board wants to show results <i>now</i> .
Concerned Citizen	No one should be homeless, and shelters provide a humanitarian solution.	I don't want homeless people living near me; taxes should go to more pressing problems.
Homeless Person	Permanent housing gives me ongoing security.	My community is other homeless people; I don't know if I can make it in mainstream world.

Source: Bridgeway Partners and Give US Your Poor

Consideration does need to be given to the most effective *processes* for gathering the perspectives and knowledge from different stakeholders. Large one-off summits and other one-off 'expert consultations' have been popular in recent years however these are not necessarily conducive to working through complex issues in enough detail and depth to see meaningful progress. Practical techniques used by system mappers help facilitate stakeholders *iteratively* providing input and *engaging* with each other to identify and implement possible solutions.⁹⁰

"We can't impose our will on a system. We can listen to what the system tells us, and discover how its properties and our values can work together to bring forth something much better than could ever be produced by our will alone."

~ Donella H. Meadows (2001) *Dancing with Systems*, Whole Earth, 106: 58-63.



Framework for Change:⁹¹ Application of ST to reduce children and young people's experience of violence

The injury prevention arm of ACC commissioned Synergia to produce a systems view of violence to support ACC in achieving their goal of supporting children and young people to experience safe, healthy and respectful relationships. The Framework has allowed ACC to move beyond single programme funding to whole initiative funding as it provides an evidence-based rationale for investment decisions. It is also being used as part of building theories of change and monitoring and evaluation frameworks.

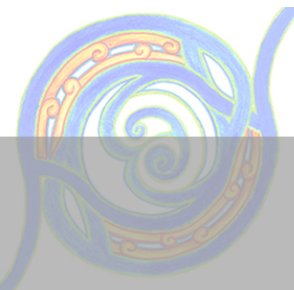
For example, ACC has funded the Le Va national Pasifika Spearhead Initiative to focus on the primary prevention of young people's experience of family violence, sexual violence and suicidal behavior. The Pasifika Spearhead Initiative (Atu-Mai) aims to provide Pasifika young people and their families with the knowledge, skills and attitude to prevent violence by providing evidence-informed and relevant education, training, resources and tools, tailored to the meet the needs of Pasifika communities.

As part of the Framework project, ACC contracted Synergia to:

- Use the learnings from the ST approach to guide design and implementation of the Pasifika Spearhead Initiative
- Test the Framework within a Pasifika cultural context
- Test the Framework at the community level
- Support the continuous improvement and development of the Framework at both a conceptual and practical level
- Guide the detailed design and the overall monitoring and evaluation framework.

Synergia writes:

“The proposition underlying systemic approaches to social change is that significant changes come from developing coherence and alignment across the different and complex interactions that form the ‘system of violence’. A programmatic approach on the other hand, no matter how significant and effective any specific programme is, will eventually butt up against other components of the system, limiting their reach and effectiveness (Supovitz, 2005). This is not to say that a programme focusing on, for example, sexual violence is inappropriate, or too narrow in its focus. What a systems approach is saying, however, is that ACC and other agencies cannot afford to focus on discrete programmes alone.”



Step 2: Planning, modelling and implementing change

Information from Step 1 of the process is used to plan change. System mapping helps identify leverage points which need to become the focus of interventions aimed at generating change, and targeting resources to where they will have the most effect. Leverage points can then also become areas of common focus across stakeholders – all working together in areas that will have mutual benefits and shift outcomes towards the desired direction.

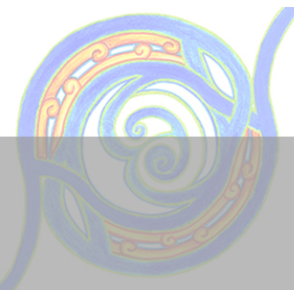
The components or variables surrounding the leverage points within a systems map directly inform a theory of change. (A Theory of Change describes what is expected to happen as the result of an action.) These variables can also be captured by measures and indicators informing evaluation and monitoring activities which provide feedback on what actually happened, including documenting any unforeseen consequences (see further below).

Information from system maps can also be used to build simulation models, where ST software is used to explore and test the effect of potential interventions on the system over time, allowing a view of both short and long-term consequences. Inputs include quantitative data such as the number of people entering into a service or programme, as well as the resources available to the programme. They can also help predict effect sizes and inform the timing of different phases of implementation. Forrester states, *“we do not know enough to design the most effective social policies directly without first going through a model-building experimental phase. Substantial supporting evidence is accumulating that proper use of models of social systems can lead to far better systems, laws, and programs.”*⁹

Step 3: Continuous system improvement

As stated earlier, reducing the rates IPV and CAN will take time and sustained commitment. This is necessary to shift the system towards better outcomes. Systems approaches place a great deal of emphasis on utilising the best available data, quantitative and qualitative. Such data allows system refinement and learning, informs progress over different time horizons, looks for intended and unintended consequences, tracks performance against theories of change and gathers information on outcomes achieved.^{3,13} This requires comprehensive and sophisticated mechanisms for identifying measures both quantitative and qualitative, and data collection from sources throughout the system as well as a mechanism for sharing this information and acting on it.

Herbert and Mackenzie argue that establishing a ‘backbone agency’ (at arms lengths from central government) is critical to an effective integrated approach to family and sexual violence. They propose the agency would facilitate collaborative leadership, innovation, learning and continuous improvement. A key function would be to collate information from a range of sources including iwi co-production partners, service users, frontline personnel, quality management activities, complaints, death reviews, Coroners’ findings and research. The information would be analysed by key stakeholders and experts in order to improve and identify opportunities for strengths-based learning across the system.



8. Key components to enable a systems thinking approach to address IPV and CAN

This section outlines some recommended actions and considerations to support the implementation of a successful ST approach.

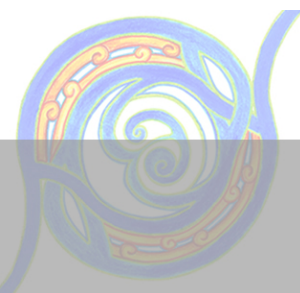
What strategy means in a systems context

Not only do many strategies fail or quickly become outdated but from a systems point of view there is a danger in using traditional strategies which start at setting a goal, identifying the steps to reach the goal and charging decision makers with implementing the strategy in a top-down approach. When goals are ambitious and the effective steps required to achieve those goals are less clear, a strategic intent may be more suitable. A strategic intent sets a clear goal for what it wants to achieve and in what timeframe. It is less clear about the 'how', allowing for flexibility, innovation and realising that progress will rarely follow a pre-determined course. Instead, principles and enabling actions guide the process, along with shared platforms where diverse stakeholders can come together.^{3,13} Having a strategic intent is considered appropriate for wicked problems where the focus is on nudging the system towards better outcomes rather than imposing preconceived solutions and providing a prescriptive work programme.¹

Infrastructure

Herbert and Mackenzie (2014)⁴ note that a core part of an integrated prevention and response system needs to be the *infrastructure* and the *processes* to link and support all the parts to work together. They argue we “cannot continue to try and fix individual parts of the existing system in the absence of a strong infrastructure to hold everything together.” (p.81)

As stated above, Herbert and Mackenzie (2018)⁹² have recently made a more detailed case for a backbone organisation as an essential part of this infrastructure. They propose this organisation would carry out functions including coordination, generating and transferring knowledge around the system to ensure the system is constantly learning, disseminating knowledge and providing opportunities for ongoing professional development. The primary purpose of the collaborative backbone agency be to provide the “glue” to hold the integrated system together, to “enable all key stakeholder groups to have collective ownership, accountability and responsibility for ensuring the system continually learns and improves over time.” (p.4) They envisage the voices of victim/survivors would become a central part of this agency to ensure that lived experience is central to planning, implementing and continually improving the approach.



Additional infrastructure will also be required to achieve the strategic intent of systems change. For example specific agencies and structures to carry out prevention work will need to be developed.^c There will also need to be significant investment in workforce development.

Governance and stewardship

Effective stewardship is a fundamental factor in the success of a ST approach. The Helsinki Design Lab described stewardship of systems change as *“the art of getting things done amidst a complex and dynamic context. Stewardship is a core ability for agents of change when many minds are involved in conceiving a course of action, and many hands in accomplishing it.”*⁹³ Effective stewardship requires leaders to lift their heads above the concerns and priorities of their own organisation to take on a shared responsibility for the bigger issues that cannot be solved by any single organisation.

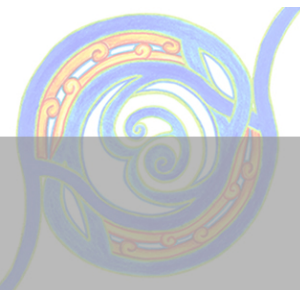
The Productivity Commission’s report on social services⁶² recommended that the government takes responsibility for system stewardship which includes:

- Conscious oversight of the system as a whole
- Clearly defining desired outcomes
- Monitoring overall system performance
- Prompting change when the system under-performs
- Identifying barriers to and opportunities for beneficial change, and leading the wider conversations required to achieve that change
- Setting standards and regulations
- Ensuring that data is collected, shared and used in ways that enhance system performance
- Improving capability
- Promoting an effective learning system
- Active management of the system architecture and enabling environment.

Literature on ST identifies activities that are part of the governance of system change. They include:

- Providing agile leadership, making decisions throughout the process and having the ability to change direction if necessary
- The ability to continuously calibrate between evolving contextual realities and desired outcomes
- Managing the collaboration process and insuring it is continuous
- Managing and targeting resources
- Managing unpredictability.

^c See for example: Our Watch (Australia) was established to drive nationwide change in the culture, behaviours and power imbalances that lead to violence against women and their children, <https://www.ourwatch.org.au/> Respect Victoria (Victoria) has been established to focus on the prevention of all forms of family violence, <https://www.respectvictoria.vic.gov.au/>



Beyond stewardship, leadership and empowerment from Ministers and senior officials will be necessary to start to shift the risk-averse public sector to allow innovation, collaboration and a focus on shared outcomes.⁷⁰ Part of the task of the 'joint venture' established in 2018 is to "lead much needed coordination of public-sector and NGO effort to address domestic and sexual violence."⁹⁴

Designing and committing to a long-term plan

Perhaps the biggest challenge to adopting an ST approach to violence on a large scale is the addiction to a short-term focus and 'quick wins', which often undermines the achievement of longer-term bigger goals. Governments come and go and have different priorities and methods of addressing them. A systems approach to reduce experiences of IPV and CAN in New Zealand is a long-term project and cross-party support over time would be a challenge to achieve and maintain but will be a necessary part of forward progress.

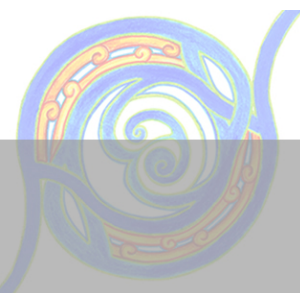
One way of meeting this challenge is to try and embed new ways of working that are resistant to political cycles. This may include legislation and policy both at government and agency level, to allow processes such as: interagency collaboration and cooperation, appropriate sharing of information, and development of shared priorities and measures; and funding, commissioning and procurement procedures, and service delivery models to enable ST approaches to be implemented. Support from strong and independent community stakeholders, people with lived experience and advocates across the system would also help sustain momentum in the face of changing political cycles. Since using ST to bring about transformational change is a different way of doing things, setting realistic time frames will be important as will communication of both short and longer-term outcomes.

Government and community partnerships

Initiation of a transformative ST approach to IPV and CAN needs to be endorsed and practically supported at the governmental level. An overarching national system view of IPV and CAN would incorporate national indicators and measures that capture system performance.

At the same time, every community has features that are different – be it the characteristics of its members, context, culture or environment. While informed by a national understanding of the system, a regional or community systems map also needs to fit the environment it operates in. Therefore, while a community or regional systems map would likely contain a number of national level measures and indicators, a local system map would be designed by the community and reflect their reality. This shared ownership drives change and levers off community resources – so again ST incorporates both.

A successful systems response to the issues of IPV and CAN in our society involves integration of government *and* community level efforts. Community services responding to violence (including specialist services focused on violence) must be well supported and sustainably resourced as they are a critical part of the 'system' response. Warning against seeing integration as a way to downsize and cut costs, Hamby and Grych emphasise "*The best hope for increasing our success at reducing*



*violence is not fewer services but better services with a more coherent organization and delivery system.*⁹⁵ (p.100)

In addition, efforts to address violence also need to significantly upskill and mobilise communities to prevent and respond to violence. This includes not only geographical communities but also other communities of belonging such as hapū, iwi, ethnic minority communities, LGBTTIQA+ and disability communities. As Hann and Trewartha⁹⁶ state *“Communities are the places where people’s identities, roles and attitudes are shaped. In communities, we learn what it means to be a parent or partner, and we learn to tolerate or reject violence. Engaging communities is also important because the majority of victims and perpetrators of family violence do not reach services. Most seek help from friends and family members.*^{97,98} *This means that the majority of family violence incidents are currently being dealt with by friends, families and communities who may or may not have the skills and knowledge to respond in helpful ways.*⁹⁷ *To enable these informal systems to work well, it is critical to increase community members’ understanding of the issue.*^{99-102”} Currently, there are few resources directed at increasing communities’ ability to recognise and respond effectively to disclosures of violence and people using violence.

Role of evaluation, monitoring and data collection in Systems Thinking

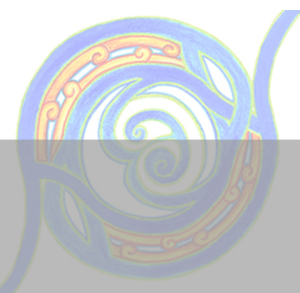
Data collection

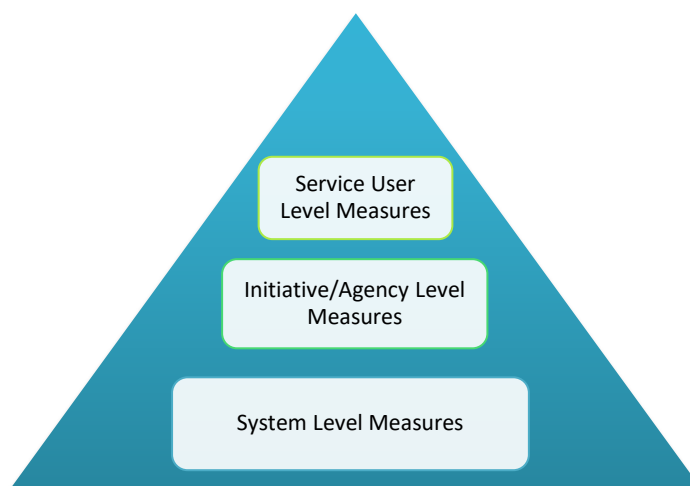
Systems change is heavily reliant on sustained and ongoing collection of data, both quantitative and qualitative, not only to evaluate and monitor changes but to aid continuous learning. Currently information regarding IPV and CAN relies on irregular data collection, supplemented by reviews and limited service evaluations.

A framework for measurement, monitoring and evaluation

A measurement framework needs to account for the depth of the system, from local programmes to whole system overview, and provide line of sight. Line of sight is provided when local or programme measures contribute directly to whole of system measures. For example, a service or programme would have its own evaluative criteria, informed by service providers, which would include measures relating to system performance. This should be operationalised through a theory of change, or logic model. For instance, a school-based violence prevention programme would not only capture measures relevant for the programme, such as attitude change relating to gender norms, but also collect data relating to system level outcomes of interest such as changes in the number of reported incidents of violence and educational success. This data would be aggregated both at a community and a national level.

Costs can be managed through monitoring and evaluation frameworks with associated shared resources and capability building. As Herbert and Mackenzie state, *“... New Zealand will have to spend in order to save, but like any investment it will only produce good returns if we invest wisely in a high quality system that continually collects evidence and makes improvements, that becomes more and more effective over time.”*⁴





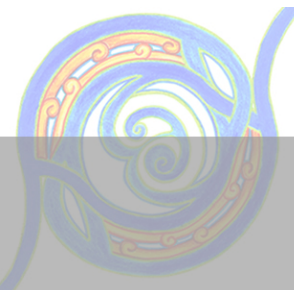
ST stresses that information from evaluation and monitoring activities needs to be used as part of continuous learning and improvement. A measurement framework provides:

- Transparent goals across the sector
- A line of sight from activity to system outcomes
- Key indicators that are easy to measure
- A focus on outcomes
- A mechanism to collect, share data and inform learning
- A basis for accountability.

Ongoing evaluation and monitoring need to be a planned and resourced part of delivering an ST approach. Responsibility for the measurement framework is part of the system stewardship role.

Traditional, top-down, reductionist approaches assume linear causality – A causes B – and therefore tend to expect rigid accountability, with monitoring and evaluation systems set up for this purpose. Uncertainty is managed through control – more guidelines, more rules, greater consequences for poor practice. Other reviews using systems thinking have noted that undue focus on performance indicators, targets and so on can negatively influence practice.¹⁰³ This focus can also inhibit learning and reflective practice. ST assumes non-linear causality and accepts that other factors, apart from the particular service, will influence both the process and outcome.

Safe practice in the area of IPV and CAN of course needs to be paramount, however realistic approaches to performance measures and accountability are prescribed by ST, which include capturing possible downstream unexpected and unwanted consequences of performance measures. Work needs to be done to collect data that encourages reflective practice and learning, avoids undue blame, empowers service providers and users but also allows transparency and accountability.



A need to measure for impact

Measures and indicators are needed to track progress at the population level over time. There are known challenges in collecting accurate data due to underreporting, however without any regular violence prevalence data we are unable to monitor trends over time. If we are successful in violence prevention, for instance, we would expect an increase in reporting before rates started to fall so other measures are necessary to track short- and medium-term progress. This is illustrated in figure 4 below. (The crucial role of prevention infrastructure such as an expert workforce and coordination mechanisms is also shown, represented by the grey line.)^d

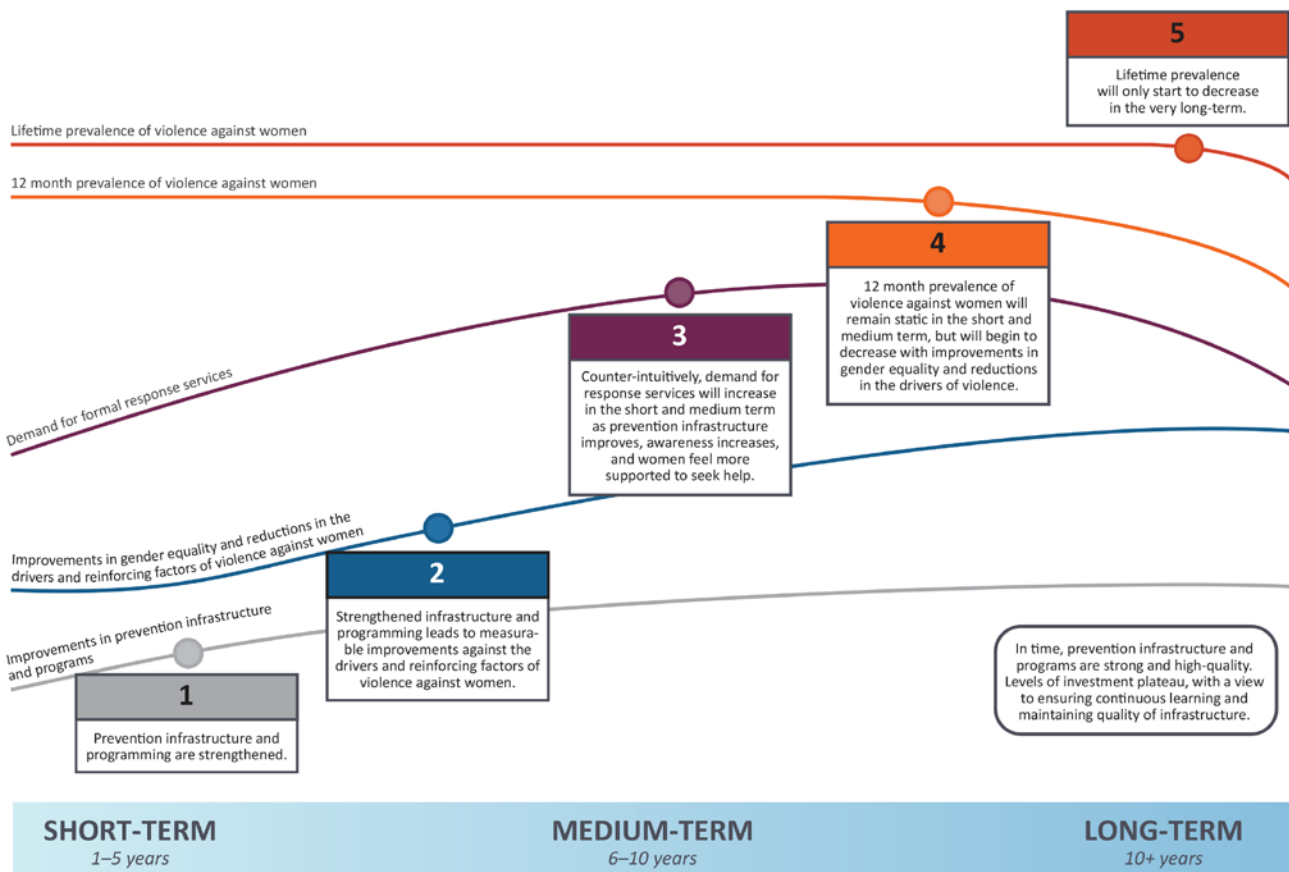
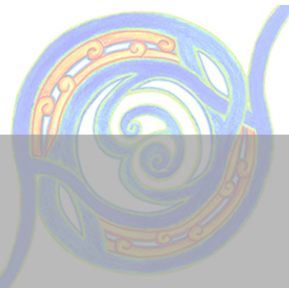


Figure 4: Expected process of change

From *Counting on change: A guide to prevention monitoring*, Melbourne, Australia: Our Watch; 2017

^d For more information on the collection of measurement data and development of indicators relating to IPV and CAN, see: Gulliver P, Fanslow, J. *Measurement of family violence at a population level: What might be needed to develop reliable and valid family violence indicators?* Issue Paper 2, Auckland: New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse; 2012,

Counting on change: A guide to prevention monitoring, Melbourne, Australia: Our Watch; 2017, and State of Victoria. *The Family Violence Rolling Action Plan 2017-2020*. Melbourne: Victorian Government; 2017.



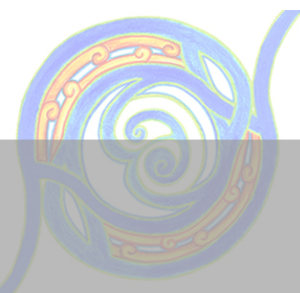
9. Conclusion

Addressing family and sexual violence is a priority for the current Government which acknowledges things need to be done differently:

“We have to stop splitting this issue up into half a dozen unconnected silos. Family and sexual violence are complicated, affect every part of our community and demand a coordinated, committed response.”¹⁰⁴

ST has the potential to provide a truly transformational approach, and is being recognised by bodies such as the United Nations as essential to meet the challenge of ‘wicked’ problems. However it is not enough to talk about system integration and change. Multiple areas of deep knowledge are needed to both inform and operationalise the ST approach. Lived experience together with sector, practice-based, ‘grassroots’ / flaxroots experience^{13,105} and knowledge from a variety of academic disciplines including ST, intersectional feminist theory, mātauranga Māori, Pacific, Asian and disability studies, queer theory, sociology, public health, clinical, epidemiology, multidisciplinary psychology, education, economics, data science and research and more would be required. Building workforce capacity is also required, as a sound understanding of IPV and CAN are essential across agencies, disciplines and roles.

ST has the potential to avoid the duplication inherent in the current siloed approach and, if implemented effectively, a systems analysis can identify leverage points that enable targeting of interventions (and funding) for maximum benefits while providing measures and indicators to evaluate change. It can do this in a way that is both sympathetic to current needs and transformational in terms of bringing about long term change. Imagining and bringing a world without IPV and CAN into being will require us to shift to believing that these are preventable problems. Backing up that belief with investment and commitment to long-term, iterative system change is already overdue.



Appendix 1: Government bodies established to address IPV and CAN

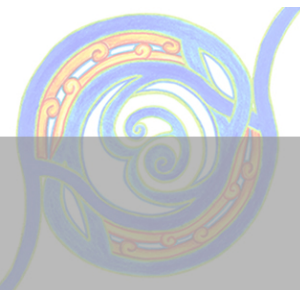
This table has been compiled from the following sources:

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Herbert, R. (2008). Learning our way forward: Implementation of New Zealand's family violence strategies. A dissertation submitted to the Victoria University of Wellington in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Master of Public Policy.

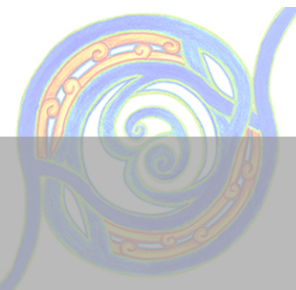
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Body	Year established
Joint Venture, Family Violence and Sexual Violence (including Joint Venture Business Unit)	2018
Multi Agency Team (MAT)	2017
Ministerial Group on Family and Sexual Violence	2014
Taskforce for Action on Sexual Violence	2007
Taskforce for Action on Violence within Families	2005
Family Violence Ministerial Group	2005
Te Rito Advisory Group	2002
Family Violence Focus Group	1999
Family Violence Unit	1996 (disbanded 1999, new Family Violence Unit established 2011)
Family Violence Advisory Committee	1994
Crime Prevention Unit	1993
Crime Prevention Action Group	1992
Victims Task Force	1987
Family Violence Prevention Coordinating Committee	1985
National Advisory Committee on the Prevention of Child Abuse	1981
New Zealand Committee for Children	1979
Inter-departmental committee on child abuse	1976

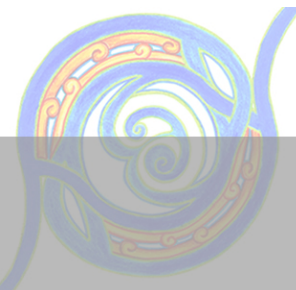


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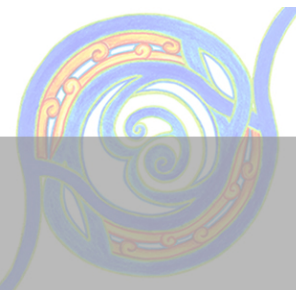
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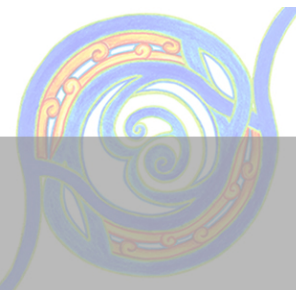
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