An Investigation into how Family Support provided by Ireland's Child and Family Agency is Represented in Ireland's Print Media

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy In Political Science and Sociology National University of Ireland, Galway.

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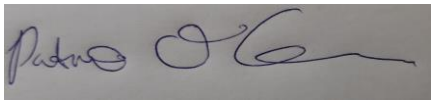
Declaration

I, the candidate certify that this thesis is all my own work and that I have not obtained a degree in this University or elsewhere on the basis of any of this work.



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PATRICIA O'CONNOR

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to critically analyse how the media portray family support provided by the Child and Family Agency (Tusla) in Ireland. In phase one, a newspaper content analysis was conducted on a broad range of national and regional Irish Newspapers over four years which described communication about family support services provided by Ireland's Child and Family Agency. This is a relatively unknown area of study since the establishment of Ireland's new Agency. Results showed that although child protection was not used as a specific search term, news items on the Agency and family support were usually directed more towards child protection and children in care. This is important because how the media communicate and frame family support as part of the overall child welfare system is one of the main influences on public understanding and awareness of preventative family support and child welfare services. In phase two, findings from qualitative interviews with journalists and Agency workers found empathy for each other's roles signifying there may be potential for collaboration to better understand each other's responsibilities. More positive reporting on good practice in Governmental inspection and review reports is recommended to ensure families in need of support could see that positive procedures and structures are embedded within the Agency. Such reports are often used as sources by journalists who could in turn highlight more positive aspects of the child welfare system. The study also shows the Agency could benefit from proactively promoting their own good news stories consistently in order to change negative perceptions of the Agency. The research shows the importance of better understanding of family support and child protection so that families can access services in a timely way, seek help when they need it and get interventions early that are preventative as well as protective and legal as required.

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Social science and journalism are both mediums for gathering information and both try to portray the world truthfully and accurately. The way in which family support services are portrayed in the media can have an impact on how the public understand, view and engage with integrated public child welfare and child protection systems. Child protection and family support have often been viewed as two separate entities but countries around the world, including Ireland, are now trying to integrate both services in order to shift from reactive, child welfare models to more supportive service models within a children's rights framework. To date, little is known about print media publication trends surrounding Ireland's Child and Family Agency family support work and child welfare. This study aims to examine those trends and how they are portrayed to the public in addition to examining the relationships that exist between family support and child welfare and how this is presented to the general public.

In this thesis, I have chosen to analyse how Tusla's family support work is portrayed in the Irish print media using Framing and Communication theories. Communication, how we communicate and how we receive messages communicated to us can define how we think about those messages (Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 2014). One of the ways the media communicate to the general public is by setting the agenda and deciding what to communicate. Framing Theory is the original agenda-setting thought and can help to explain the medias' influence on society. How an issue is presented (framed) in the media, influences how people think about that issue (Tetteh & King, 2011). The way in which the news is brought (the frame in which the news is presented) is also a choice made by journalists. A frame refers to the way media and media gatekeepers organize then present the events and issues they cover and the way audiences interpret what they are provided with (Gupta, 2006). Frames also organize social meaning and influence the perception of news on the audience.

In order to analyse issues pertaining to Tusla's family support work and child welfare published in Irish newspapers, this study will conduct a newspaper content analysis. However, studying media content in isolation is not sufficient to fully understand the individuals who produce that content, nor the extent of its effects (Baran & Davis, 1981). In order to address this, the following three steps were followed to obtain a more accurate view of the information. The messages communicated to the audience were analysed (newspaper data). This was followed by an examination of the process through which those messages were published (journalist interviews) and, child welfare practitioners perspectives on how issues surrounding family support and child welfare were published and portrayed in the print media (interviews with child welfare practitioners) were considered.

1.2 Background to the study

Ireland's Child and Family Agency (Tusla) was established on the 1st January 2014 and, as part of its National Service Delivery Framework the Programme for Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS) was implemented in 2015. The PPFS programme was established to develop alongside the child protection and welfare system and sought to transform child and family services in Ireland by rooting prevention and early intervention services into the culture and operation of the organisation. While Irish statutory child welfare, support and protection systems have always included preventative, supportive and protective features (see Devaney & McGregor, 2017; McGregor & Devaney, 2020a, 2020b), child protection has persistently dominated as the main aspect of the statutory service while family support services tended to be more associated with commissioned/funded third sector, non-governmental organisations (Devaney, 2017). As the Irish legislation (*The Child Care Act 1991*) makes statutory provision for prevention as well as protection, it has not been until the establishment of Tusla that a comprehensive approach to prevention was developed and an explicit attempt to re-orient the system has emerged. A greater emphasis has been placed on

expanding the PPFS services of the state agency alongside ongoing development of the child protection system. With this in mind, the Agency developed a Continuum of Need/Care to incorporate this relationship between child protection and child welfare (Tusla, 2018a). The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre (UCFRC) at National University of Ireland Galway (NUIG) provided research, evaluation and support to Tusla focusing on the implementation of and outcomes from the PPFS programme. The PPFS Programme was implemented through five main work streams, one of which was called Public Awareness. This thesis stemmed from the Public Awareness work package.

The purpose of the Public Awareness work package was to establish levels of awareness of prevention, partnership and family support within the general public so as to inform future public awareness work within the Child and Family Agency. In order to achieve this, a number of research activities took place including an analysis of how the media report on PPFS. Findings from the Public Awareness work package Baseline Survey (McGregor & NicGabhainn, 2016) and the Follow-Up Survey (McGregor & NicGabhainn, 2018) together with other research activities within the package led to the wider development of this dissertation. The final report of the Public Awareness work package collated the overall findings including the message that public understanding of family support differed from professional thinking revealing a dissension between how family support is constructed theoretically and how the public understand it (McGregor, Canavan & O'Connor, 2018; McGregor, Canavan & NicGabhainn, 2020; O'Connor, McGregor & Devaney, 2018). Further, and crucial to this study, the inter relationship between family support and child protection was found to be unclear in that most of the public were found not to differentiate between family support and child protection. Indeed, as detailed more later, when asked about family support, most respondents associated it with child protection and children in care. The report concluded that more focused clarification needed to be communicated to the public, to the media and to other groups. This PhD thesis specifically explores the media portrayal of

family support and analyses how the relationship between family support and child protection were framed in the print media.

1.3 Research Question and Objectives of the study

This section states the research question and the objectives of the study in addition to detailing the layout of the overall thesis.

1.3.1 Overall Research Question

How is Tusla's family support work portrayed in the Irish print media?

1.3.2 Objectives

1. To examine how Tusla's family support work is portrayed in the print media.
2. To compare and contrast trends and content in print media reports on Tusla's family support work.
3. To consider the underlying processes associated with print media production and publication.
4. To explore the responses of child protection and welfare practitioners to the portrayal of Tusla's family support work in the print media.

1.4 Layout of the thesis

This introductory chapter briefly introduced the concept of Communication and Framing theory and gave a short account of the background to this study. The study's research question and the objectives of the research have been stated. The remainder of the thesis is divided into six chapters.

Contextual information for the study is provided in Chapter Two which gives a brief history of Ireland's child protection and welfare system. In addition, the formation of Tusla and its foundations are set out together with the challenges which the Agency has had to face. Ireland child protection system and influential policy documents are considered with a final look at the main practice models of family support and child protection which are used in Ireland, namely, Meitheal and Signs of Safety.

Chapter Three provides a review of the literature across four principal areas. The first includes family support and where it fits in a global context. The second area pertains to orientations of child welfare systems. Next the interface between child protection and family support are detailed in addition to the impact of the media on such systems. Finally, the literature looks at the theoretical underpinnings of the media and how they communicate by detailing Communication and Framing theories.

The methodology for the study is outlined in Chapter Four which describes and elaborates on the research methodology designed and implemented in order to answer the research question and the objectives. The methodology included content analysis and qualitative semi-structured interviews. The research design and theoretical perspectives are outlined including ethical issues, sampling processes, data collection and methods of analysis used. The limitations of the study are also outlined.

Chapter Five presents the core findings of the study. A brief profile of the sample characteristics of the respondents in the study are presented. Core research findings for the objectives are then presented. Chapter Six discusses the research findings which are elaborated on in relation to the study's objectives with key points highlighted. The final chapter, Chapter Seven, concludes by re-stating the purpose of the study and offering overall recommendations.

1.5 Chapter Summary

This chapter has set the scene for the entire study, including the objectives and background to the research. The structure of the thesis was also presented. The next chapter, Chapter Two, will provide context to the study.

Chapter 2 Context

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents contextual information for this study by firstly giving a brief history of Ireland's child protection and welfare system up to and including the current system. A number of high-profile child abuse inquiries in Ireland have influenced the way the current system was formed and these are also detailed. The establishment of Tusla - Child and Family Agency in 2014 is set out together with a description of its organisational and policy context in addition to challenges which the agency faces including its image. The main international influences of child protection and family support are also set out with the two examples of family support and child protection programmes currently in use in Ireland. Finally, the formation of this thesis, based on the literature review, is delineated.

2.2 A Brief History of Ireland's Child Protection and Welfare System

Ireland historically took a mostly passive role in relation to child protection and most of the care was provided by religious and voluntary organisations up to 1970. In 1970, *The Health Act 1970* established eight regional health boards across Ireland with the remit to provide health and social services. From 1970 to 1991, the focus was mainly on developing a child protection system with some attention to support and prevention (see Task Force on Child Care Services 1980) but with limited investment in either. The Task Force on Child Care Services Report (1980) noted the general public's and government's indifference regarding child care in Ireland through the use of residential institutions to divert society's responsibilities for deprived children. The findings began a series of legislative developments to replace *The Child Act* of 1908. This eventually led to *The Child Care Act 1991* which was a pivotal moment of change in the child welfare and protection system in Ireland (McGregor, 2014). It was the first time in legislation in Ireland that specific legal responsibility for prevention as part of an overall child welfare programme was set out. The Act represented a shift in the nature of child protection from a reactive child protection system to a more proactive,

preventative approach which aimed to involve parents, children and carers in addition to facilitating inter-agency collaboration (Buckley, Skehill & O'Sullivan, 1997).

In 2005 the Health Service Executive (HSE) replaced the health boards, however, following many public inquiries on child abuse of children in the home and historical abuse of children in the care of the state, the HSE was deemed not entirely suitable to continue delivering child protection and welfare services. The need for a separate agency, rather than a child welfare service within an integrated health and social service structure, was identified and the template for the agency was expressed in the Report of the Task Force on the Child and Family Support Agency in 2012 (Department of Children & Youth Affairs, 2012). The Task Force Report detailed the main principles for the new Agency including greater emphasis on family support, prevention, early intervention and integration of unified services (McGregor, 2014). While some developments did occur in relation to family support up to 2014, the emphasis still remained mostly on a reactive child protection system consistently hindered by resource limitations, concerns raised in inquiries and lack of political leadership (for example, as part of the wider health system) until Tusla - Child and Family Agency was established (Burns & McGregor, 2019). The Agency was legislated for by *The Child and Family Agency Act 2013*. Notably, the word 'support' was removed from the title of the Agency. Its duties are carried out by social workers who work primarily in child protection teams and by social care workers who work mostly in family support services (Devaney & McGregor, 2017). (See Appendix I: Key points in Irish History of Child Protection and Welfare).

2.3 Child Abuse Inquiries in Ireland

One of the main ways child welfare features in the media is when inquiries into abuse and/or neglect is reported. As in other jurisdictions, growing public awareness of child abuse helped to shape the major changes which occurred in child welfare services in Ireland including abuse of children by their families, the clergy and others in positions of trust (Devaney & McGregor, 2017; Burns & McGregor, 2019). Some of the key child abuse

enquiries in Ireland that have been highly publicised and have had a major impact on Ireland's child protection and welfare system include The Committee of Inquiry into Industrial & Reformatory Schools (The Kennedy Report, 1970), The Kilkenny Incest Investigation in 1993, the Interim Report of the Joint Committee on the Family (1996), the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (the Ryan Report, 2009), and the Roscommon Child Care Inquiry (Roscommon Child Care Case, 2010).

The Kennedy Report (1970) which was published on Industrial Schools and Reformatories led to the replacement of the terms 'industrial and reformatory schools' with 'group homes' and 'special homes'. Up to the 1950's the numbers of children in institutional care was extremely high. This gradually declined in the early 1950's and from the 1970's onwards, the trend towards greater use of foster care was evidenced. The Kennedy Report (1970) was influential in moving the child welfare system in this direction towards a more community-based service and in line with developments in the UK and elsewhere (Devaney & Dolan, 2014). Now, the vast majority of children in care are in foster care (5,446 at the end of 2019 (Tusla, 2018b)). The Kilkenny Incest Investigation in 1993 was the first major child abuse inquiry in Ireland and received much media attention. The victim publicly criticised the social worker involved in the case and it was highlighted that social services had over one hundred contacts with the family over 13 years while the abuse continued. The Inquiry identified many deficiencies in the child protection system and activities of professionals involved, including poor inter-agency cooperation and weak management (McGuinness, 1993). The investigation stressed the need for child care services to improve and placed child abuse in the public and political arena for the first time in Ireland. This inquiry was the beginning of a series of inquiries into child abuse and neglect and brought to the attention of the public the role of the Catholic Church in its provision of child care services and its concealment of abusers over long periods of time (Buckley, Skehill & O'Sullivan, 1997). It led to the implementation of *The Child Care Act 1991* and a series of recommendations and reforms including a call for Constitutional change to Articles 41 and 42 on the family to rebalance the emphasis on parental rights over children's

rights (Kilkelly, 2008; Lynch & Burns, 2012). Three of the recommendations from the Kilkenny report were not implemented at the time: constitutional reform; mandatory reporting; and the creation of child abuse registers. However, attempts were made to address these issues such as referring the call for Constitutional reform to the Constitutional Review Group which kept the issue on the political agenda (Buckley & O'Nolan, 2013). In addition, the issue in respect of mandatory reporting was examined by Government in 1996 (Department of Health, 1996) and again in 1997 (Department of Health, 1997). However, no decision was made in respect thereof and mandatory reporting did not come into effect until 2017 under *The Children First Act 2015* and associated guidelines *Children First 2017.*

The Interim Report of the Joint Committee on the Family (1996) was published following the death of a 15 year old teenager, Kelly Fitzgerald, who died in a London hospital on the 4th February 1993. Kelly died from septicaemia having suffered physical abuse and neglect by her parents. Her mother and father were charged with wilful neglect and were sentenced in November 1994 to 18 months imprisonment. The Inquiry team (Joint Committee on the Family, 1996) made 44 recommendations including that Articles 41 and 42 of the Irish Constitution be amended to include a statement of the constitutional rights of children, which echoed the Kilkenny Incest Investigation's recommendations. Another of its recommendations that mirrored the Kilkenny report recommendations pertained to reporting legislation and called for a child protection register for use by hospital staff and other organisations (Buckley & O'Nolan, 2013).

Even though industrial schools had ceased to be provided as a form of care for children for many years, they became a matter for great public concern from the 1990's onwards as various disclosures of abuse of children within the schools and associated institutions were discovered and reported in the media (O'Sullivan, 2009; Raftery & O'Sullivan, 2001). In 2009, the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (known as the Ryan Report) was published which investigated the abuse of children in schools run by Catholic

Religious authorities. The report examined abuse of children in Irish religious run institutions over a 60-year period. It highlighted all forms of abuse which existed within the institutions including physical, sexual, emotional and neglect. In addition, lack of inspections and supervision of those institutions by the state was found to have contributed to the abuse suffered by child victims. Crucially, complaints made by children and or their parents were ignored and not investigated by the state (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2009: vol. 4, chp. 6, p.453). It was widely known and documented that abuse was occurring in those institutions but despite awareness of such child protection concerns, adequate responses did not occur. The Government's response to the Ryan Report published in the 'Implementation Plan' (Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, 2009) addressed the report's recommendations and proposed actions to address the failures in service provision. In particular it addressed the recommendation to place the *Children First* guidelines (Department of Health and Children, 1999) on a statutory level.

One year on, more focus on the current functioning of the child protection and welfare system came to light due to another major child abuse inquiry. The Roscommon Child Care Case (2010) Report of the Inquiry Team to the Health Service Executive investigated the states failure to intervene in the lives of six children who suffered severe abuse and neglect by their parents. Similar to the Kilkenny Incest Investigation, the children were known to authorities including the HSE and Court system. However, the children were left in the care of their parents for several years due to the belief by the state that they were indeed helping the family and making improvements in their lives. In 2004, some 15 years following the families first referral in 1989, the children essentially "rescued themselves when they could no longer be silenced" and were removed from their parents care (Gibbons et al., 2010, p.5). During the sentencing of the mother in 2009 and father in 2010, the case was widely reported in the media and caused the public great concern about the children and the length of time they had spent being abused in the home while under the care of the child welfare services. A notable feature of the Inquiry was the failure to hear the voices of the six children and a key

recommendation stressed the need to comply with the UNCRC requirement for children to be heard in all matters that concern them. The report also expressed concerns that the extensive media coverage could detrimentally affect the well-being of the six children given the considerable information placed into the public domain through Victim Impact Statements and interviews with witnesses involved in the case. The Inquiry Team stressed that the media were not adequately informed of their responsibility to adequately protect the identities of the children and their rights to privacy under the Child Care Act 1991 (Gibbons et al., 2010, p.81). These types of inquiries, especially in the past 20 years, have impacted on public perceptions of Ireland's child and family welfare services and the work they undertake with children and families in their care (Buckley & O'Nolan, 2013).

2.4 Child Protection and Welfare in Ireland today

This study took place within the context of a significant system change in the child welfare and protection system in Ireland. As outlined in the history above, prior to the establishment of the Child and Family Agency, Tusla, child protection and welfare services were delivered as part of a wider integrated health and social services system. In this section, a more detailed review of some of the developments is provided in order to contextualise the current child protection and welfare system now delivered by the independent child and family agency.

2.4.1 Tusla - Child and Family Agency

The Child and Family Act 2013 requires Tusla - Child and Family Agency to support and promote the development, protection and welfare of children and effective family functioning by offering protection and care for children living in situations where their parents are unable to provide necessary care. To do this, the Agency must provide services and supports for children and families; ensure all children attend school or receive an education; provide educational welfare support services; monitor children's attendance and participation in education; ensure the best interests of children guide all

decisions which affect them; consult with children and families to assist in shaping the Agency's policies and services; strengthen interagency cooperation; undertake research; provide information and advice to the Minister; and commission services which relate to the provision of child and family services. The range of services provided by the Child and Family Agency include many universal as well as targeted services to include: child protection and welfare services; educational welfare services; psychological services; alternative care; family and local community supports; early years services; domestic, sexual and gender-based violence services.

Tusla incorporated the former Health Service Executive (HSE) Children and Family Services, the Family Support Agency (FSA), the National Educational Welfare board (NEWB) and Domestic and Gender Based Violence services. Notably, it did not include the Public Health Nursing system although this was recommended by the Task Force to ensure multi-disciplinary integration. When transitioning from the HSE Child and Family Service, the Agency brought a wide range of family support services which are provided directly by the Agency or through grant aids ranging from early years services, adolescent services, universal supports for all children and families to access, targeted services for children with specific needs and support to children in state care and their families.

The Child and Family Agency's framework entitled 'Clear Response Pathways Along the Continuum of Help/Support' in its Corporate Plan 2018-2020 (Tusla, 2018a) identifies where family support, alternative care and child protection are provided. Family support is provided through Family Resource Centres (FRC's), designated Family Support projects, PPFS, and Early Years services. Alternative care takes place at a higher level where children are at risk of harm while child protection and welfare together with the Signs of Safety (SoS) model come into force at the medium preventative level. When children are at risk of harm at the high level of this continuum, alternative care strategies are employed. The principles of participation and partnership in the delivery of these services as per Meitheal and Signs of Safety models are entrenched across all levels of the continuum (Tusla, 2017).

In this continuum, the relationship between the support and protection services are articulated. For example, in relation to Meitheal, there is a process for 'step up' and 'step down' from child protection services (Rodriguez, Cassidy & Devaney, 2018; Malone & Canavan, 2018)

2.4.2 Irelands child protection system and policies

The child protection system in Ireland has been heavily influenced by international trends, as well as its own social system, in addition to high-profile cases of child abuse over the last few decades. Child abuse scandals and tragedies that gained media attention in the United Kingdom, such as, the Maria Colwell Inquiry, began to influence awareness of the problem in Ireland (Buckley, Skehill & O'Sullivan, 1997). As a result of this growing public and professional awareness, in 1975, the Department of Health formed a committee to discuss the issue of non-accidental injury to children. The committee, comprised mainly of medical professionals, agreed the problem was significant. Their Report was published in 1976 (Department of Health, 1976) and represented the basis for subsequent guidelines issued by the Department of Health. However, the Irish Association of Social Workers were critical of the reports' emphasis on detecting physical signs of child maltreatment while neglecting emotional, psychological and social aspects of the problem. The report was further criticised for its lack of recommendations regarding prevention and intervention plans (Buckley, Skehill & O'Sullivan, 1997).

By the mid-1980's the number of cases of child sexual abuse dramatically increased which received much media attention. Child sexual abuse was specifically mentioned for the first time in Irish guidance in 1983. In 1984 the Irish Council for Civil Liberties (ICCL) set up a Working Party on Child Sexual Abuse with a view to gathering data on existing policies, laws and services regarding child sexual abuse (Cooney & Torode, 1989). They found there was poor coordination and training for groups working with victims, lack of knowledge, and over-reliance on international research findings which

did not apply to the realities and demographics of Irish children at risk of sexual abuse. In 1990, the Law Reform Commission Report on Child Sexual Abuse introduced the condition that Gardaí should be involved in the early stages of investigations in order for prosecutions to be enforced. In addition, the commission recommended empowering Health Boards to seek barring orders for removal of abusers from the home. This came into effect in T*he Domestic Violence Act 1996*.

As previously stated, the introduction of *The Child Care Act 1991* provided a legislative framework to deal with abused children or children at risk of abuse in Ireland and clarified the duties and roles of Health Boards. The introduction of the act shifted the nature of child protection from a reactive child protection system to a more proactive, preventative approach (McGregor, 2014; Gilligan, 1995; Ferguson & Kenny, 1995; Ferguson, 1996; Ferguson, 1997). Under this Act, Ireland's child and family agency, Tusla, has a statutory responsibility to promote the protection and welfare of children and take action to promote children's welfare. Similar to the United Kingdom as expressed in the Children Act 1989, social workers were expected to maximise child protection with minimum intervention from the state into private family life. Increased demands were placed on social workers and professionals working with children's welfare. Assessment, treatment, and family support services were developed to proactively deal with child abuse and its prevention. However, as a consequence of a number of inquiries into child abuse in the family home and in other care settings, more time was spent focussing on child protection systems.

A series of policy documents have influenced the child protection and welfare system in Ireland such as guidelines, governmental departments and law reform. The following commentary provides a synthesis of some of the main developments pertinent to the context of this study.

Children First: National Guidelines for the Protection and Welfare of Children was first published in 1999 and was revised in 2011. It offers

guidance for social workers, professionals, organisations, and others to keep children safe from harm. Its intention is to help the public and professionals to identify and report child abuse and neglect and details responsibilities for mandated persons and organisations under *The Children First Act 2015* to respond to reports made about children. Children First is based on a legal framework provided by *The Child Care Act 1991* and subsequently Section 6 of *The Children First Act 2015*. Children First guidelines have been reviewed and updated a number of times, most recently in 2017. *The Children First Act 2015* operates side by side with Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2017) both of which were operationalised in December 2017 and introduced mandatory reporting for the first time. In Ireland, the Child and Family Agency and An Garda Siochana (Irish police force) are the two state authorities who deal with child protection concerns. The Child and Family Agency assess reports regarding a child's safety and welfare, while the Gardaí investigate alleged offences. Under *The Child Care Act 1991* the Gardai have a duty to protect children which includes the power to remove them to safety without a warrant (Section 12). *The Children First Act of 2015* requires mandated persons, including all members of the Gardai, to report child abuse to Tusla. Under the Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2017) a Joint Working Protocol was published setting out the joint efforts of the Child and Family Agency and An Garda Siochana to ensure the protection and welfare of children. Joint working, it states, forms a crucial element of the child protection and welfare services (Tusla, 2017).

The Department of Children & Youth Affairs was established in 2011 and brought together policy and children's services through which child protection and welfare facilities are delivered. HIQA (Health Information and Quality Authority) developed National Standards for the Protection and Welfare of Children (HIQA, 2012). This provided a more coherent framework for the development of services to protect and promote children in Ireland. These standards also describe the steps Tusla should take to ensure children's rights and welfare are protected (Burns & McGregor, 2019).

The National Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020 'Better Outcomes Brighter Futures' (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014) together with the High Level Policy Statement on Supporting Children and Families (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2015) offers a national policy platform for Ireland's Child and Family Agency to embed prevention and early intervention in the delivery of its services and thereby bolster child and family support services. Better Outcomes Brighter Futures was the first policy framework to incorporate whole governmental thinking to improve outcomes for children and young people (up to aged 24 years). Within it, the Irish government committed to making Ireland a 'good place to be a child' and 'the best small country in the world in which to grow up and raise a family' where all voices of young people are heard and their rights are respected and protected, and are able to reach their full potential (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014, p. 2). Other commitments in the document include: developing shared outcomes to enable government and statutory agencies, community and the voluntary sector to work together towards a clear response when providing for the needs of children and their families as well as embedding unified and evidence-informed approaches to service delivery (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014). The document also conceptualises prevention and early intervention and offers context and the means through which policy objectives can be carried out by the Child and Family Agency.

2.4.3. Tusla's family support work

Tusla's family support work emphasises prevention and early intervention and focuses on family strengths. Children and young people are placed at the centre of all decisions and interventions. Family support is delivered by a range of practitioners who work with families and uses a partnership approach (Cassidy et al., 2016). The Child and Family Agency's family support services are provided to families in their own homes and communities generally by trained staff including family support workers, social workers

and youth workers. Such supports are delivered locally in family resource centres and can help families through difficult periods to ensure children live in a stable and secure environment while simultaneously supporting their parents.

Tusla's Family and Community Services Resource Centre Programme provides support to local communities (currently 109) through 121 centres across Ireland and two outreach Centres. The family support programme delivers universal services to families in an effort to combat disadvantage and improve family functioning. The family resource centres work with families, communities, statutory and non-statutory agencies and emphasise involving each community in tackling the problems being faced. Family support services include education and training courses, counselling, practical assistance such as information technology access, and how to create needs-led community groups (Tusla, 2021).

Tusla's overall expenditure in 2015 was €650 million, €234 million of which was used towards pay costs and €416 million in non-pay. Care costs (children in care, including residential services) represented 53% of total expenditure. Family Support represented 15% of total expenditure while Child Protection reflected 12% of overall expenditure. Over time, from 2015 to 2017, these relatives did not change significantly. However, there has been an increase in Tusla's budget to €713 million in 2017 (Shaw & Canavan, 2018).

Other organisations and sectors across Ireland also provide prevention, early intervention and family support services in areas such as health, community development, youth work, youth justice and other fields (e.g. the Doodle Den Literacy Programme (Biggart et al., 2012); Speech and Language Therapy Service of the Childhood Development Initiative (Hayes, Keegan & Goulding, 2012); Lifestart Growing Child Parenting Programme (McClenaghan, 2012); Incredible Years BASIC Preschool Early School Years Parent Training (McGilloway et al., 2009) and Preparing for Life (PFL Evaluation Team, 2015). A major investment programme by Ireland and the Atlantic Philanthropies, Ireland was carried out between 2006 and 2014

including the Programme for Early Intervention and Prevention (PEIP) which implemented and evaluated children's services together with the Area-Based Childhood (ABC) programme which built on learning from the PEIP programme.

There are many approaches to family support (Devaney et al., 2013) but currently in Ireland, the principal family support model of practice is Meitheal. As mentioned earlier, it is a model of practice that represents a 'step down' from child protection and welfare or a preventative approach to avoid referral to child protection in the first instance. Set aside this, the Signs of Safety child protection model has been implemented by Tusla as the main child protection and welfare practice model. The following section discusses these two complimentary models (see Malone et al., 2018).

2.4.4 Ireland's main practice models of Family Support and Child Protection

Meitheal is a national practice model to ensure that the needs and strengths of children and their families are effectively identified and understood and responded to in a timely way so that children and families get the help and support needed to improve children's outcomes and realise their rights. One of its central objectives is to ensure families receive prevention and early intervention services at a local level. It is a voluntary process which requires parental/carer's written consent to participate thereby working in partnership with parents/caregivers. Meitheal is an outcome-focused practice model which aims to ensure the strengths and needs of children and families are identified, understood and responded to in a timely manner so children and families can get the help and support they need (Devaney et al., 2013). It is an inclusive, voluntary, strengths-based model which works in partnership with families usually led by a key worker or Lead Practitioner. If a child protection concern arises during the course of the process, the Meitheal is closed or suspended (Cassidy, Devaney & McGregor 2016; Rodriguez, Cassidy & Devaney, 2018). Findings from a recent nationwide study that evaluated the experiences of parents and/or guardians and their children who

participated in Meitheal highlighted a number of themes including participants experiences, the impact on families' outcomes, changes to the system of providing help and the challenges faced. Results showed that Meitheal improved family outcomes particularly from mothers' perspectives. Parents and families valued being listened to while practitioners felt the process could facilitate change in family outcomes.

Signs of Safety originated in the late 1980's when an Australian child protection worker who practised in a remote area was concerned with the impact of child protection intervention on families with child abuse and neglect concerns. His aim was to find a better way to work with families when conducting investigations, particularly those from the Aboriginal community. The approach focuses on the question of how practitioners can build partnership with families in situations where child abuse is suspected or substantiated and deal with the maltreatment issues effectively? As well as investigating risk, it establishes strengths that can be built upon to solidify the family unit by assessing danger, strengths and safety (Turnell & Edwards, 1999; Turnell, 2012). Tusla adopted Signs of Safety as Ireland's national framework for child protection assessment and practice in 2017 as part of its new national approach to child protection practice to ensure all staff engage with families and children under one consistent approach (Gimpel, 2017). The principles and disciplines underpinning Signs of Safety guide the work being done and include working relationships, partnership and collaboration, while the tools used include Three Columns and Safety Networks (Salveron et al., 2015). Some central elements and principles of this model are that it explores harm and danger, strengths and safety simultaneously and with equal rigour. In addition, the model advocates that equal importance be afforded to professional knowledge and family knowledge while undertaking risk assessment involving all participants both professional and family in a holistic manner (Turnell & Murphy, 2017).

A direct comparison of both practice models was carried out by Malone, et al (2018) who suggested Ireland's Child and Family Agency *Clear Response*

Pathways along the Continuum of Need framework (Tusla, 2018c) offers a clear description and context through which both models operate. In the framework, services are delivered on a low, medium or high prevention basis with the aim of ensuring children and families receive unified services as early as possible across all levels of need. Meitheal is depicted at the low-medium prevention level of needs while Signs of Safety is illustrated at the medium prevention level of needs. Across all three levels, both models practice principles of participation, partnership and collaboration in service delivery. However, this relationship between models differing between low, medium and high levels of need is not always straightforward and further research is needed to better understand the relationships between both practice models of family support and child protection (McGregor & Devaney, 2020a).

It seems Ireland is in the process of significant systems change. It's terminology, ethos and orientation has been revised substantially while at the same time it is still heavily influenced, for a number of complex reasons, by its historical orientation towards reactive child protection services within persistently under-resourced conditions.

2.4.5 Challenges in the Child and Family Agency

Tusla had many organisational infrastructural challenges to deal with including staffing, human resources (HR), legal, communications and information technology (IT) issues while simultaneously meeting the needs of children and families on a daily basis. In addition, the Agency have had to respond to legislative changes including *The Children First Act, 2015* which, as stated, introduced mandatory reporting of abuse and new child protection guidelines which came into effect in 2017. The Agency were also responsible for implementing reforms following the Constitutional referendum in 2012 regarding Children's Rights under Article 42A which strengthened young people's rights in the Irish Constitution and placed greater emphasis on the voice of the child in addition to creating changes to adoption policy and the

expansion of the use of adoption for children in long-term care (McCaughren & McGregor, 2018). This required the Agency to invest heavily in planning and responding to the 2015 Act and its guidelines while also preparing for future referrals to the organisation. In addition to those issues, the Agency received considerable criticism towards its shortcomings in child protection, children in residential care and adoption which were highlighted by media reports, HIQA (Health Information and Quality Authority) reports and Ombudsman reports.

The McCabe case was brought to the attention of the public on the 9th February 2017 when a television programme (*Prime Time*, 2017) was broadcast on RTE (Radio Telefis Eireann) which revealed that the Child and Family Agency sent a notification to An Garda Siochana (Irish police force) containing a false allegation of child sexual abuse against a Garda whistle-blower, Sergeant Maurice McCabe. The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs believed the handling of information by the Agency indicated a serious risk to the health and welfare of children referred to them regarding sexual abuse issues. On the 2nd March 2017 the Minister instructed HIQA to carry out a statutory investigation under the Health Act 2007 into the safety and standards of Tusla services in respect of allegations of child sexual abuse (HIQA, 2018). A large amount of media attention was given to the report published by HIQA and the manner in which the information in the case was treated by the Agency. This led to concern around the capacity of the Agency to address child welfare (HIQA, 2018). While the HIQA (2018) report acknowledged there were examples of good practice by the Agency in the management of allegations of child sexual abuse and retrospective abuse, it also found there were significant delays in the Agency's practices around assessing risk, screening and assessment of allegations.

Another case which received much media attention concerned, Grace, a non-verbal adult with severe intellectual and physical disabilities who was removed by the HSE from a foster family placement in July 2009 having living there since 1989. Serious concerns were raised by whistleblowers about Grace alleging she suffered significant physical and sexual abuse at the

hands of her foster carers in the residential home which were highlighted in 1992 and again in 1995. These concerns were raised by a number of media outlets including the television programme RTE Investigates *Lost in Care* (aired 1st February 2018). Two enquiries into the case were commissioned by the HSE, one in 2012 (the Devine Report) and another in 2015 (Resilience Ireland Report) neither of which were published. A review into those reports was commissioned by the Minister for Social Affairs which was published in 2016 (The Dignam Report) following which a Commission of Investigation (the Farrelly Commission) commenced in May 2017 relating to the care of individuals who resided with the foster family in addition to the protected disclosures made against them. The Dignam Report (2016) found that the procedures followed by the HSE when commissioning the 2012 and 2015 Reports were inadequate and that many vulnerable children and young people placed in the foster home had delayed reviews of their cases. He further criticised the HSE for the manner in which it handled the whistleblower allegations and the length of time Grace had been left in the foster home despite intentions to remove her. The first phase of the Farrelly Commission of Investigation relates to the role of public authorities in the care and protection of Grace while a resident at the foster care facility. The second phase, in relation to 46 other vulnerable people placed in the home, will not commence until the first stage has been completed. Due to the scale of work involved, the commission has been granted numerous extensions and has not yet published its findings in relation to Grace (Fegan, 2020).

One of the consequences of the criticisms of the Agency, exemplified in the McCabe case and the Grace case, is that it continues to be crisis-driven. The negative press and highlighting of the Agency's shortcomings raised questions of its ability to transform services as it intended to do. The Minister for Children and Families referred to the new Agency as 'a revolution in child protection and family services' that would 'bring a dedicated focus to child protection and family support for the first time in the history of the State'. She went on to say 'we must do better for children and families. It will take time for us to create this new reality out of the rubble of a system that has been crumbling for decades' (cited in McGregor, 2014, p.771). The high

profile cases called into question the capacity of Tusla to achieve this change and this also impacted on their image, as discussed in the next section.

Image and identity can influence how the general public perceives an organisation by creating and forming a brand that represents core values which an organisation represents. Image can potentially influence the general public, staff and stakeholder perceptions of performance and services offered most particularly when considering negative media coverage impact (Christensen & Askegaard, 2001). It is clear from Tusla's website that there has been a very real and significant attempt to rebalance its image away from a purely child protection service to a more balanced picture of alternative care, family support, early years inspectorate, education and welfare, domestic, sexual and gender-based violence as well as child protection and welfare support services. (https://www.tusla.ie/). In addition, Tusla has have created a child/youth-friendly website called Changing Futures (https://www.changingfutures.ie) which was created and developed by young people. Its aim is to help young people better understand the work carried out by Tusla. This range of services clearly advocates that prevention and early intervention are core to the Agency's image and identity. The website brands the Agency as encompassing an all-inclusive approach to child welfare and protection and its delivery of services along a continuum of support and protection *(Changing Futures).*

2.4.6 The Child and Family Agency and Wider Socio-Economic Issues

On a wider level, policy challenges and service delivery difficulties outside of the Agency in the fields of income, poverty, housing, education, health and disability shape how policy can effectively achieve intended outcomes in meeting the needs of children and families (Kennedy, 2019). Ireland's latest election in February 2020 highlighted homelessness, health and income inequality as key features of the resulting general public's voting choices. The Child and Family Agency is one segment of the policies and services pertaining to children and families and can only succeed if other public agencies share their commitment to providing quality services to children and

families (Dukelow & Considine, 2017). For example, most recent figures published by the Central Statistics Office show there are 760,000 people currently living below the relative income poverty line in Ireland (Social Justice Ireland, 2019). However, the Covid-19 pandemic recent unemployment surge has led to concerns regarding poverty levels, most especially among children which have been expected to increase by at least one-sixth and at most one-third (Regan & Maitre, 2020). Homelessness and lack of access to affordable housing has also worsened annually with 10,448 adults and 3,752 children living in emergency accommodation as at November 2019 (Social Justice Ireland, 2020)

Regarding health, mental health issues have also been to the fore of the minds of the general public with approximately one in four people experiencing mental health issues and problems at some stage during their lifetimes (Mental Health Ireland, 2020). This implicates social services in all countries and in Ireland thousands have experienced depression in their families. In addition, recent figures from the HSE showed that at the end of 2019 there were 2,327 young people waiting for an appointment with the Child and Mental Health Services (CAMHS) while a further 4,100 children were waiting for an Assessment of Need in relation to a disability (Walshe, 2020; Sherlock, 2020).). Furthermore, cuts to social welfare payments, medical card eligibility changes, prescription charge increases, decreases in supports such as respite allowance and home carers support hours have made it very difficult for people to thrive in their communities (Watson et al., 2017). As a result of these cuts and low public investment in the areas of public services to address these issues an organisational discrepancy has emerged creating persistent, ongoing deficits for Ireland's vulnerable, disadvantaged as well as many working-class individuals living pay check-to-pay check. There are issues of inequality, racism and limited services such as Direct Provision (DP) where children and adults are accommodated in asylum seeker centres across Ireland and given a small living allowance (Moran et al., 2019). The weekly allowance of €19.10 for an adult and €15.60 for a child renders families at severe risk of poverty and deprivation who may stay in the system for upwards of 3 years (Fanning & Veale, 2004). Individuals living in DP

experience frequent attacks of racism and are susceptible to mental illness including depression (Arnold, 2012). Social Justice Ireland (2018) have predicted that Ireland's level of public spending will not be sufficient to address social service shortages which highlights the inability of social services to respond to these abundant social issues in our society.

In 2008 Ireland experienced the worst economic recession since the 1930s during which time many families became significantly poorer and at enhanced risk of poverty (Flynn, 2018). Ireland was hit particularly hard by the economic crisis due to the combined factors of the global recession, the banking crisis and the domestic property crash which resulted in Ireland having to accept a bail out from the European Central Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the European Union (Whelan, Russel & Maitre, 2016). During this time, long-term unemployment rose steadily while those in employment experienced wage cuts and tax increases (Callan et al., 2013). Respite Care Grants were cut in 2013; special needs assistants were capped; disability service budgets were reduced; there were long waiting lists for children awaiting Occupational and Speech Therapy; and home help assistance decreased (Flynn, 2018). Whelan, Russel & Maitre (2016) highlight the governmental response to the crisis as being 'deeply flawed, involving not only a failure to protect the vulnerable but the imposition of major sacrifices on those on low and middle incomes' (p.506). The aforementioned challenges faced by the Child and Family Agency including negative media coverage of high profile inquiries, staff recruitment, and dealing with negative HIQA reporting have raised concerns about the Agency's capacity to effectively manage the child and family support services which has meant the Agency is spending much of its time responding to crises and managing risk.

2.5 Formation of PhD Research

As outlined in the background section, this thesis initially formed part of the Public Awareness package with the specific aim of exploring in more depth how family support is understood from different perspectives. This study

chose to focus specifically on the print media for illustration. The first phase, was to analyse a wide range of newspaper articles and news items from a number of local and regional Irish newspapers. The overall aim of the newspaper content analysis was to describe communication about PPFS over four years: 2014 to 2017 to explore any change in frequency and reporting of PPFS; examine changes in the nature of reporting; establish any evidence of greater awareness of the Tusla's services; and ascertain what newspapers and regions were reporting most often. The findings of the media analysis are discussed later in this thesis and were also published in a 2018 report (O'Connor, McGregor & Devaney, 2018). The findings of the content analysis led to phase two of the study. Just as the public awareness study had found, the media reporting of family support showed a strong orientation towards child protection. This was significant as the search terms used in the content analysis pertained *only* to family support. And yet, a dominant theme found was that there was a focus, in 'family support' reporting, on child protection and children in care. This led to a focus in the next phase of interviews to explore in more depth with Journalists and social workers about how both family support and child protection is reported in the media and to understand in more depth what factors influenced that reporting and how practitioners responded to it. An emphasis was placed in this phase about exploring in more depth how the relationship between family support and child protection was constructed through framing in the print media.

2.6 Chapter Summary

As this chapter has shown, the Irish child welfare system is in a juxtaposition at present. On the one hand, it has an agency newly established since 2014 that is proactively attempting to reorient its services and broaden its response to incorporate a more early intervention and prevention approach. On the other hand, due to both historical and present failures, as mentioned above, the Irish child welfare system has had a lot more negative media and public attention than positive. The agency faces a major challenge in seeking to promote a more positive reputation and to communicate to the public and the media that they are an agency concerned with support as well as protection

and that these two elements are in fact complimentary. This chapter shows the complexity inherent in the development of the family support and child protection system in Ireland and many of the dilemmas posed are reflective of wider international trends as discussed in the next chapter which presents the literature review.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

Child protection and family support have often been viewed as two separate entities but many countries across the world, including Ireland, are now attempting to integrate both services in order to effectively shift from reactive, risk-responsive child and family welfare models to more developmental, supportive service models. This chapter begins with an overview of family support and child protection and welfare. The author acknowledges that both family support and child protection are large and complex fields with a wide range of relevant discourses associated with them. For the purpose of this literature review, the focus is mainly on family support as delivered within a state child welfare context and child protection with regard to its orientation. The relationship between both of these fields is considered followed by examples of research carried out to examine that relationship. The nature and impact of media coverage on child protection systems is then discussed. Finally, the theoretical media underpinnings of Communication and Framing theories are reviewed.

3.2 Family Support

Family support is a widely used term describing interventions which enable families to function as a cohesive unit and for family members to achieve healthy functioning in times of difficulty. It has been referred to as 'positive social work, responding to all levels of need, not just crises, so having the potential to ease the stigma felt by families seeking help' (Thoburn, Wilding & Watson, 2000). Gardner (2003) defines family support as an equal balance of prevention of damage and promotion of strengths by working with families' strengths in their immediate environment.

In this literature review, in line with the thesis focus on family support within statutory child welfare, family support is defined by Tusla as 'a style of work and a wide range of activities that strengthen positive informal social networks through community-based programmes and services'. Its focus is

on early intervention and it aims to protect and promote well-being, health and rights of children and families with an emphasis on vulnerable or at risk individuals. Family support can manifest through informal support systems and more formal supports. Informal supports include support of family, extended family and friends. Formal supports are more planned and are delivered by professionals under three categories, according to Gilligan (1995): developmental; compensatory; and protective.

Chaskin (2006) in seeking to define family support that can guide practice, inform policy and establish evaluation frameworks, draws on core principles, guidelines and characteristics as detailed in the literature surrounding family support (e.g. Dunst, 1995; Gilligan, 2000; Pinkerton & Katz, 2003; Pinkerton, Dolan & Canavan, 2004). Some of those principles take a strengths-based approach; some are used as a general guide to practice such as the need to promote social inclusion; and some involve concrete practice involving families in the planning of such service provision.

In some parts of the world, family support, government-led initiatives are rare, such as in Central and Western Africa. In other parts, family support is developing strongly including in Europe, Latin America, some parts of Southern and Eastern Africa, and Asia. In these areas it takes two main forms: through services (social care and psychological care) and, secondly, economic support offered to families (cash payments). Most often, family support in different countries, takes the form of services offered to families who may be at risk of social exclusion, are marginalised, have children with special needs; children who are at risk of violence, neglect or abandonment and children in need of kinship care. These services have a tendency to be problem-oriented rather than preventive although there are increasing attempts to shift this toward a more preventive approach. Problems vary according to regions. For example, in Eastern and Southern Africa and South East Asia, violence and abuse of children is dominant in service interventions. In central and Eastern Europe the risks are similar but the focus is on reducing and preventing institutional care and keeping children within their own family environment (Daly et al., 2015).

While family support and child protection are often presented and organised differently, family support has always had a child protection focus which, as highlighted by others, requires integration (Buckley, 2003; Featherstone, 2004; Connolly, 2004; Devaney, 2011). Tensions exist however, as Devaney (2011) evidences through relations between voluntary, community and statutory sectors in child welfare provision. Contributory factors to this tension include the perception that the work of statutory agencies is of greater importance than the work carried out by voluntary service providers which creates a two-tier system. However, as evidenced in Connolly (2004), the Roscommon Report (2010) and Devaney (2011), collaboration between agencies is necessary for the provision of coordinated services. A multi-disciplinary team is needed with a number of agencies working together in order to achieve effective support for children and families.

3.3 Theoretical basis for Family Support

Dolan, Canavan & Pinkerton (2006) suggest that family support, prevention and early intervention are founded in theoretical approaches of social support, resilience and strengths-based work, social ecology and social capital in order to produce services and practice that incorporate the following: children's rights; prevention of problems arising; intervening in problems early; focus on social support networks; strengths of children and parents as solutions; sources of existing support; relationship-building; and reflective practice towards ongoing improvement. Devaney (2017) emphasises the place of attachment theory in how Family Support is conceptualised and delivered with an important focus placed on the parent-child relationship and the need to promote this. As stated by Malone & Canavan (2018, p.2) 'prevention, early intervention, and family support are ideas that resonate for all parts of a Child Protection and Welfare service offering'. Good practice in cases of child protection must involve attention to family support and be preventative and intervene early in order to reduce negative effects on children's development (Devaney, 2011). Social support refers to assistance available from other people which is mainly accessed through informal networks of

immediate and extended family and friends (Canavan & Dolan, 2003). Four main types of social support have been identified by Cutrona (2000): concrete (practical assistance e.g. childminding); emotional (empathy, listening and generally being there); advice (often sought from families); and esteem (how individuals rate and inform one another in terms of self-worth). When referring to resilience, it is assumed that a person's ability 'to adapt successfully to disturbances that threaten system function, viability, or development', implying that individuals change in order to accommodate risk (Masten, 2014, p.10). Rutter (2006) defines resilience as interactive, combining risk experiences and a positive psychological outcome despite those risk experiences. He states that some individuals have good outcomes despite having experienced serious adversities while other individuals may not experience good outcomes when suffering the same adversities. Some resilience theorists have identified protective factors at three levels: the child, the family and the community. These protective factors include; mental health, the parent-child relationship, social relationships, family stability, maternal warmth, secure attachment, effective schooling, self-efficacy, expressiveness, having positive role models and cultural identity (Rutter, 2006; Masten, 2001; Luthar, 1991; Ungar, 2005).

Social ecology implies an interdependence between individuals and their environment. People shape and influence each other through interaction between themselves and their wider environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Jack, 1997). Families' social ecology must therefore be considered when providing support to children and their families. Urie Bronfenbrenner's *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design* (1979) was influential in theorising child development and created a powerful image of the child set within four interlocking systems: micro (home, school, neighbourhood); meso (overlapping links between family, school neighbourhood); exo (links between two or more settings such as parents workplaces and local political institutions); and macro (society as a whole).

Finally, social capital has been described as a contested and developing concept (Canavan, Pinkerton & Dolan, 2016). Three of its major theorists

include Robert Putnam, James Coleman and Pierre Bordieu. Putnam (1993) approaches social capital from a volunteering and civic action approach and defines social capital as the 'trust, norms and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions' (Putnam, 1993, p.167). This essentially means that an individuals' social capital is found within their own networks and the relationships within those networks. Coleman (1988) defined social capital as the 'structure of relations between actors and among actors' (p. 98). He believed that social capital could be found in the ties between people, in their networks and is not held privately. Bordieu focused on understanding inequality and the social hierarchy existing in society. He believed that an individual's ability to utilise existing resources within relationships with friends, acquaintances, school etc. enables people to transform such social capital into resources that can lead to achieving personal and social goals (Bourdieu, 1980).

Devaney (2011) conceptualised this theoretical basis for family support highlighting that for the majority of children, the primary relationships which they form within their families provide the platform from which they grow, develop and explore the world. Children can reach their fullest potential through the assurance provided to them in permanent and stable family units and connection with family members. This informal social support is provided throughout the child's life cycle by family members, from adult to adult and, more importantly, from adult to child. This support can vary in type and intensity, as required, depending on a child's age and stage of life. In many cases, children (and adults) will turn to their family members for all types of support and assistance from 'a listening ear' to a financial 'dig out'. The security and supports provided by families act as protective factors which can build a child's resilience to adapt to and cope with life challenges. Families and family life do not exist in isolation. Extended family, neighbours, communities and other social institutions (school, work, religious groups, clubs, etc) play a connected influential role in family functioning. This social ecology within which children and families live together with the social capital accumulated by close ties which family members develop as

part of community-based relationships, are used as a resource when times are good and bad (Devaney, 2011, p. 43)

3.4 Child Protection and Welfare Orientations

The field of child protection and welfare is immense and has been intensively researched (as demonstrated in works such as Frost & Dolan 2017; Parton, 2015a; Parton, 2015b; Parton, 2015c; Parton, 2020). This literature has focussed mostly on orientations in child protection as discussed below.

Frost & Dolan (2017) combined the experiences and expertise of leading international commentators' contributions in the field of child welfare in their Handbook of Global Child Welfare. The chapters form six sections including historical perspectives of child welfare, family support, parenting, crime and violence, as well as positive practices. Tensions and challenges that have arisen have been highlighted by many of the contributory authors including Frost (2017) who discusses difficulties surrounding maintaining the privacy of the family when professionals are assessing appropriateness of interventions. Different states react differently and have differing approaches: some are authoritarian and heavily interventionist while other societies are less so. He is of the view that in order to support children and families, universal services are needed for all families together with more targeted support services for those with specific problems. Others, such as Munford & Sanders (2017) consider the tensions among politicians, policy makers and practitioners who have different perspectives on how to respond to the needs of families who are facing multiple challenges. They believe that child welfare provision must also be addressed alongside issues of poverty, housing, health and education as they impact on the nature of child welfare services, supports and interventions. Parton (2017) offers a comparison of child protection systems internationally from the publication of the first comparison by Cooper et al's (1995) comparison of England and France to Gilbert's (1997) analysis of nine countries' systems and subsequent comparison of 10 countries (Gilbert, Parton & Skiveness, 2011). The interest

in the focus of comparing systems, he states, was driven mainly by the growing crisis in child protection such that researchers and policy makers looked to other countries to see if their system might help their own. However, the comparisons, while extremely relevant and beneficial, have led to child protection orientations developed by high-income western societies which preclude poor or developing countries with very different histories, culture and constitution. One of the challenges stated by Parton (2017) is to develop the comparative work to include additional non-Western countries.

Featherstone, White & Morris (2014) offered a critical review of contemporary child protection and raised a number of questions that challenged a child protection culture they described as becoming more and more authoritarian. The eight chapters have been compiled by authors who bring experience, scholarship and practice and who contribute with themes such as: inequalities in society; understanding how to use evidence effectively; developing a just culture for the work of social workers; the lived experience of poverty; and parenting. They called for a more family-minded practice of child protection where children should be understood as individuals and parents should be treated more sensitively paying attention to the adversities they are faced with including the role of poverty and deprivation. The child protection system, they state, is focused on rescuing children from their demonising parents and call for a more humane practice. Four years later, Featherstone et al (2018), amid continued austerity and the disproportionate impact it was having on deprived families as well as local authorities, decided to develop their 2014 work and move the discussion forward. The State, they say, can no longer guarantee its citizens decent work, affordable housing or adequate nourishment, as it is both intrusive and neglectful towards its citizens, especially those who are poor. This, they state, has created a lack of trust and widespread alienation. They describe a child protection system that focuses on assessing risk and parenting capacity with interventions focused on trying to change family functioning. However, they also point out that evidence is growing to show that families engaged by social services are poor and that such poverty is invisible in practice. This has led to a disconnect which allows governments to believe they are

improving child protection while simultaneously implementing policies that increase the numbers of children who live in poverty by reducing support services available to them. The authors introduce the 'social model' (p.8) to: tackle and understand root causes; rethink the role of the state; develop relationship based practice and a human rights approach in policy and practice. The book comprises 8 chapters including research projects to explore service responses experienced by families; domestic abuse and; Framing Theory.

According to the World Health Organisation (2020a), almost 3 in 4 children aged 2-4 years suffer physical punishment and/or psychological violence regularly from their parents or caregivers with an estimated 40,150 homicidal deaths in children and young people under the age of 18 years, some of which include deaths as a result of child maltreatment. Child maltreatment can occur through physical, sexual, emotional abuse and/or neglect and can cause adversarial health, educational, emotional and behavioural consequences on a young person right throughout the lifespan (Norman et al., 2012; Chen et al., 2010; Maguire et al., 2015; Hughes et al., 2017).

UNICEF (2011) refers to the term child protection as a preventative response to violence, abuse, exploitation of children in any context including vulnerable children such as those living outside of the family, children who are homeless and children in conflict or natural disaster situations. A recent report published on preventing violence against children charted 155 countries progress for preventing and responding to such violence. Half of the children in the world (approximately one billion children) are affected by sexual, physical or psychological violence, injuries, disabilities and death as a result of countries failure to adequately protect them (World Health Organisation, 2020b). The report found that the majority of countries (88%) had laws in place to protect children against violence but less than half of those laws (47%) were being enforced. Between 32% and 37% stated that victims could access supports with 26% providing programmes on parent/caregiver support. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting

school closures, violence has been rising including online hate and bullying. The school closures and stay-at-home measures have resulted in a limiting of usual supports for families such as friends, family and professionals, while an increase in calls to helplines for child abuse have been seen (World Health Organisation, 2020b).

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child has been ratified by all Countries with the exception of the United States. This internationally binding agreement clearly sets out the rights of children in relation to survival, protection, development and participation and was ratified by Ireland in 1992. Article 19 of the agreement states that all parties should take measures (legislative, administrative, social and educational) to protect children from physical, sexual and mental abuse, injury, neglect, maltreatment or exploitation when in the care of parents, guardians or other carers. In addition, these protective measures should include social support programmes for children and their families/carers as well as reporting, identification, referral, investigation and follow-up of child maltreatment for judicial review (UNCRC, 1989). Child protection service models differ across the globe depending on each country's culture, society, political climate and history (Gilbert, 1997; Gilbert, Parton & Skiveness, 2011; Lonne et al., 2019; Stafford, Parton & Vincent, 2010; Parton, 2017). Services can be administered by state governments, local governments (such as Councils), non-governmental organisations, health organisation or community groups (Cooper et al., 1995; Hetherington et al., 1997; Gilbert, 2012).

It is well established that countries respond differently when attempting to meet the needs of children and families depending on a number of factors including their cultural and political climates. Gilbert (1997; Gilbert, Parton & Skiveness, 2011) identified three main orientations of child welfare systems: family support; child protection; and children's rights/development. They studied child welfare arrangements in 9 countries in 1997 and identified mainly child protection orientations in the USA, Canada and England while family service orientations were the main focus in Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Belgium, Netherlands and Germany. However, by 2010, Gilbert

(2012, p.533) states 'it was no longer possible to sharply differentiate among the countries' leaning towards either family service or child protection orientations as they all included a mix of protective, developmental and service orientations (Parton, 2014; Frost, Abbott & Race, 2015). Parton (2014) describes the way systems negotiate between support and regulation through the legal system on one level and family support interventions on the other. The constant push-pull relationship between early intervention and prevention and the legal risk management responsibilities of child welfare systems majorly influence countries' overall orientations. According to Devaney & McGregor (2017) and Merkel-Holguin, Fluke & Krugman (2019) these child welfare systems are not separate and contain combined features of family support, child protection and child-centred approaches. Shannon (2009) also argues that Ireland combines both a child protection system and a family support system focussing either on child protection and welfare, children in care, or, family support.

In order to build on Gilbert, Parton & Skiveness' (2011) international child protection orientations, and include lower-income countries with differing challenges in their child protection systems, Connolly & Katz (2019) detail the continuum of child protection development across countries by way of four separate orientations: individual-formal; individual-informal; community-formal; and community-informal. Although the authors state "there is no perfect system", they hold that "a well-functioning child protection system is one which best fits the cultural, social and economic context of the jurisdiction within which it operates" (p.386). The first orientation, individual-formal, emphasises identifying and assessing children suspected of being at risk of abuse or neglect. The system has a well-developed professionalised system where children may be removed from harmful family situations. Early interventions target families who have been risk-assessed and, while resources are offered, sanctions apply for non-compliance. England, Australia, the USA and the Maldives are offered as examples of countries with this particular child protection orientation. The second orientation, individual-informal, reflects countries with regulated response systems but prefer to provide family support than intervening using

statutory powers. Universal services are often found in countries oriented towards this typology and create a preventive focus such as Sweden, Finland and Japan. The community-formal orientation emphasise family and community-oriented solutions rather than individualised foci. The example of the Family Group Conference is given as a model of practice which seeks to involve extended family and community into these child protection systems. Aotearoa New Zealand, Canada and the USA are referred to as colonised countries with an overrepresentation of indigenous children in their child welfare statistics and operate under this community-formal typology. Finally, the community-informal orientations emphasise the role of communities in improving childrens welfare through informal response methods such as community development and public health approaches. Nepal and Bhutan in South Asia are both examples of countries that rely on community-based service provision where families and the communities come together to provide for children's needs.

Since the 1970's high profile child deaths, media campaigns, concern of the general public and political debate created a strong move towards a child protection system primarily based on risk assessment and authoritarian interventions. This has varied across the world but is most apparent in England (Frost, Abbott & Race, 2015). This focus on risk assessment in Britain led to a decrease in efforts promoting family support and prevention (Parton, 2014; Parton, 1997). It is clear from the literature that a major assumption is that in order to protect children and prevent child maltreatment, families should be fully supported with necessary interventions occurring at an early stage for those who find themselves in need of more specialised support services. However, the literature also shows that there is much debate about this relationship and balance between child protection and welfare and family support (Featherstone, White & Morris, 2014; Frost & Parton, 2009; Parton, 1997; Devaney & McGregor, 2017; McGregor & Devaney 2020a, 2020b). For example, Frost Abbott & Race (2015) state that due to the aforementioned high profile child deaths and media attention given thereto, that a trend of risk assessed based work in chid protection systems

have contributed to a marginalisation of prevention and family support making child protection more dominant.

One of the most commonly used frameworks used to differentiate support and protection has been the Hardiker model. Policy and practice development can use this model to identify thresholds of intervention and plan for service delivery of family support (Hardiker, Exton & Barker, 1991). Three levels were first used: primary, secondary and tertiary while a fourth level, quaternary, was added later. The primary level pertains to universal services such as housing, health, income and education which are necessary to meet family needs and which should be accessible by all. The secondary level relates to more targeted service provision where needs are highlighted, often by a referral, and often provides use of an outside sector such as home visiting. This secondary level involves case work where records and files are kept as part of the process which can be viewed as the beginning of stigmatic and invasive procedures (Frost, Abbott & Race, 2015). The tertiary level involves more complex work involving some child protection or child safeguarding for children whose needs are greater. At this level, vulnerability and risk are high and more intensive interventions are required (Hardiker, Exton & Barker,1991). The quaternary level involves the rehabilitation of the child or young person such as returning home from state care, reversing any negative damage as a result of a care placement. The Hardiker Model is now known as the threshold of needs model and frames the service delivery model in Ireland.

As Devaney & McGregor (2019) argued recently, while these levels guide the thresholds, the distinction between support and protection is not that straightforward. They argue that child protection concerns can arise at any of the levels and that family support practice occurs not just at Level 1 and Level 2, but also in child protection interventions. Moreover, many families coming into child welfare are what they call 'in the middle'. They state that investment is required at all of the levels and that levels 4 and 1 have to be differentiated more clearly to take account of legal forensic criminal concerns on the one hand (level 4b) and the importance of informal and community

supports alongside traditional universal services. They suggest more focus can be placed on Hardiker's level 1 universal services, such as schools and the health service, together with the role of families themselves and their informal supports. They argue that the challenge lies with families in the middle (level 2 to level 4a) regarding how to balance support and protection while taking into account their varying needs. In order to achieve this, the authors suggest that those working in the family support arena need to be able to identify and manage risk levels when working with families, while those employed in the child protection sector need skill and awareness of family support while also promoting children's rights in their working practices (Devaney & McGregor, 2020a, 2020b).

An example of how the orientation between protection and support developed over time in the UK, for example, was the death of Maria Colwell in 1973 which gave rise to the public and political view that social workers were failing to keep children safe (Jeffrey, 2003; Parton, 1991). Prior to that incident, Corby (2006, 1998) described a period of focus on family support and prevention in social work with high staff morale, societal support, shared visions and welfare ideology (Hendrick, 2003). Parton (1991) discusses this in terms of a shift from medico-social to socio-legal practice and later (Parton, 2014) to socio-risk practices. The Colwell inquiry was influential in shaping childcare policy in the decades that followed whereby procedures such as case conferences, area review committees and the establishment of a child abuse register for those at risk were introduced. The focus of social work in child welfare thereafter shifted with a preoccupation on how to recognise signs of child abuse and investigating and assessing child abuse at the cost of more family-based approaches. This continued following other child deaths and ensuing childcare policy shifts including Jasmine Beckford, Kimberly Carlisle, Tyra Henry, Victoria Climbe and Peter Connolly (Frost & Parton, 2009). This impact of child deaths on child protection systems and lack of family support practices were described by Ferguson (2004) as a paradox which fixates on child deaths when the child protection system has never been more effective. These cases are extremely rare but the attention given to them

leads to fewer resources and less time being invested in preventative family support practices (Frost, Abbott & Race, 2015; Parton, 1991; Parton, 2014).

A refocusing of child protection practice away from over-emphasis on risk and towards support emerged more strongly from the 1990's (see Parton, 1997) but it was the Munro Review of Child Protection (Munro, 2011a, 2011b) that led to widespread attention of the urgent need to rebalance objective procedural practice and relationship based practice that many authors have been emphasising in relation to jurisdictions including the UK (Parton, 2015a, 2015b, 2015c), the US (e.g. Daro and Donnelly, 2002) and Australia (Connolly, 2004).

As reflected in debates about child welfare systems, there is a constant tension between how much to invest in 'high end' protection and risk management and how much to invest in early intervention and prevention (Connolly & Katz, 2019; Merkel-Holguin, Fluke & Krugman, 2019; Gilbert, Parton & Skiveness, 2011). Indeed in Merkel-Holguin, Fluke & Krugman's (2019) examination of ten countries child protection systems, this debate was highlighted. For example, Oates (2019) described the cost of child protection in Australia to be a major economic burden which was increasing annually. Greater governmental awareness of the long-term costs of abuse including mental illness, poor health and substance abuse, she states, would increase investment in preventative services and make then a priority. In addition, Trocmé et al. (2019) state that the amount of funding available for enhanced prevention focused services in Canada has not kept up with the needs of communities, a situation, they state, remains unresolved. In England, Biehal (2019) refers to the significant reductions in funding for voluntary agencies providing support to children and families as well as universal and secondary preventive services that could support families while problems are at an early state. The demand for child protection and welfare services have been simultaneously increasing. Furthermore, Gottfried & Ben-Arrieh (2019) highlight the acute shortage of community-based solutions for at-risk children in Israel whose child protection and welfare services need ongoing investment and resources to strengthen and develop community-based services so that

families and children can engage with them. Lee (2019) stresses the complete lack of an early intervention system in North Korea which he states needs to be fully developed. The country's focus on retribution emphasises judicial intervention rather than investment in support services. Because of the nature of the work, it is more often the case that most investment goes into Levels 3 and 4. In sum, there is a need going forward for child welfare systems to rethink the relationship between support and protection as interfacing to being more integrative (McGregor & Devaney, 2020a). The next section looks in more detail at specific studies that addressed the balance between family support and protection in different ways. This is a selective consideration to highlight further themes pertinent to this study and which is developed further in the Discussion chapter.

3.5 Main International Influences of Child Protection and Family Support

In order to prevent problems, intervening early, rather than responding later to ingrained problems, is an approach that most would agree with (Deacon, 2011). Prevention means to intervene early in not just the problem but also early in the child's life (Munro, 2011). There is a multitude of research studies, reports and documents that argue for prevention of child maltreatment through early intervention within child welfare policy (Frost, Abbott & Race, 2015; Allen & Smith, 2008; Field, 2010; Allen, 2011; Tickell, 2011).

In the UK, the Munro Report (2011), which was commissioned by the government to review the child protection system in England, identified three principal arguments for helping early in the problem and early in the child's life: morally, to minimise suffering; to prevent damage rather than reversing it; and, for cost effectiveness. Munro (2011) discusses recognising different levels of need through the use of the Hardiker model and the benefits of a primary and secondary preventative service. She stated that 'intervening early can save costly interventions' (p. 22). This report has had a major impact on child protection and welfare in England, and more widely, and led to a

reflection on the impact of increased proceduralisation and bureaucratisation in child protection and brought more emphasis back to relationship-based social work which aligns very closely with a family support ethos. Little (1999) delineated a broad distinction between prevention (intervening before problems arise) and early intervention (reacting to problems in their early stages). Frost, Abbott & Race (2015) opine this lack of clarity has led to a wide range of preventative services being carried out by statutory, voluntary and community sectors. But, as articulated by many authors (see for e.g. Parton, 1996, 1997), getting this 'rebalance' right is far from straightforward.

Munro (2011) also mentioned and defined effective communication practices between social workers and children in order to place the child at the centre of all work undertaken with them including being listened to and understood from their perspectives. Ruch et al (2017) in their research on effective communication between social workers and children found that employers of social workers and social work organisations were unable to recognise what their practitioners needed in their daily encounters with children. In addition, the organisational culture lacked creativity when thinking about practice which the authors described as 'impoverished mindsets' (p. 1021). Provision of safe spaces for effective communication with children was also noted as a challenge exacerbated by bureaucracy-driven organisations and policies and the researchers found that practitioners were considerably impacted by organisational contexts on what could or could not be achieved by them. Responding to emergencies, preoccupation with risk management and caseload demands resulted in social workers being unable to effectively attend to the inter-personal connections in their encounters with children. This financially-driven 'short-term-ism' at the core of welfare policies and practices is a huge challenge if children's best interests are to be promoted and meaningful connections are to be made (p.1022).

Another important development has been greater emphasis on the social factors impacting on child protection issues (Featherstone et al., 2018; Bywaters et al., 2018; Morris et al. (2018). Indeed, Bywaters et al. (2018) hypothesised that supply (factors affecting service provision such as

legal/policy frameworks; local priorities; service provision; resource allocation; skills of staff) and demand (social determinants such as socio-economic circumstances; domestic violence; mental/physical ill-health; substance use) factors interact with each other producing intervention rates. The study aimed to quantify inequality rates and identify factors influencing those inequalities. Findings supported the importance of deprivation as a key factor in both demand and supply of children's services and the inequalities in intervention rates. The authors recommend children's services create equally good services for all children and minimise inequalities in demand for services as well as focusing on the impact of poverty and financial insecurity on family life. Morris et al (2018) examined how social workers described, discussed and were influenced by the economic and social circumstances of families when deciding on interventions due to child protection concerns. Social workers could articulate the relationship between poverty and harm but their practice took little account of such analysis. The authors found that social workers disengaged with poverty and justified this stance with explanations of practicing equitably and in a non-stigmatising way. The notion of social work regulation of the underclass permeated the data findings and the extent to which this discourse was found amongst social workers about the families and communities they worked in. Practitioners, it was found, could recognise the consequences of poverty and deprivation for families while at the same time could not merge this notion with their practice stating they had to focus on the central focus of risk assessments detached from socio-economic conditions. The authors described this detachment from poverty as 'an uneasy understanding of the relationship between poverty and child abuse and neglect' reinforced by organisational systems and cultures that focus on risk rather than holistic engagement with families and communities (p.372).

3.6 Examples of Research on the Relationship between Child Protection & Family Support

As aforementioned, this section reviews specific studies that examined the relationship between family support and child protection from different

perspectives. Sandau-Beckler et al (2002) reviewed family-centred practice approaches (including family-centred values) in order to demonstrate a best practice approach to child welfare investigation with an emphasis on the protection and safety of all family members. They concluded that child protection systems have yet to fully address the needs of families who abuse their children due to the fact that the overall philosophy has not integrated child safety with family safety which they believe is critical to both child protection and family wellbeing. The authors aimed to reframe child protection practice into an approach which protects the child while also supporting and protecting families. They state the entire system needs to be rethought or the system needs to implement new strategies that balance child protection with family protection as many problems lie in the conceptual framework of how child protection systems are being implemented. Dolan, Shannon & Smyth (2018) state this attempt to redirect interventions had been 'all but lost to the belief that child and family social work is really now only about safeguarding children in Ireland and the UK' (p. 737). However, this issue is constantly being rebutted and attempts to change the functions of social work practice towards a family support orientation which includes child protection practice as a component and not a sole function, has again emerged (Featherstone, Broadhurst & Holt, 2012).

Devaney & Smith (2010) represent one of the first attempts in Ireland to consider family support specifically in relation to child protection practice. They presented family support as an approach to seven social workers who then applied the approach to existing child protection cases. Practitioners were enthusiastic about the use of the family support approach in their child protection work and the family support principles positively impacted their work encouraging meaningful collaboration with families. The family support approach is characterised by partnership and client-led orientation where child welfare is viewed in the context of social and psychological difficulties which families experience. This is in contrast to the child protection approach which focuses on assessment of risk and harm to a child and involves investigating incidents of abuse and harm.

Spratt (2003) conversely looked at child protection and sought evidence of a family support orientation. He examined the perspectives of staff and service users in five client focused family centres in the North of Ireland pertaining to how child protection issues were understood and dealt with. He found that staff reframed child protection work as family support practice by negotiating with clients and those who referred them to the centres. This then led to the development of partnership and good relationships between staff and clients based on their mutual high regard for each other. According to Gardner (2003) with some assistance, families can recover from factors that contribute to child abuse, including domestic violence, poverty, ill health and isolation. In her examination of the NSPCC's family support services over a two-year period, the author found that parents mostly sought help regarding their school-going age children's behaviour and most families required practical support such as day-care and advice. Regarding three levels of networks of support: informal; semi-informal; and formal, parents received most support from friends and family (informal support). The greater their informal support network was, the less degree of difficulty was perceived by parents in the areas of stress, ill health and their children's behavioural difficulties. Outside of such informal supports, the NSPCC support project was the greatest support source sought by parents. The project instilled confidence in parents and actively supported them including providing professional help where necessary and when wanted. Prinz et al (2009) in their US study of the Triple P system population trial conclude that it is possible to implement a large parenting and family support intervention using a population based approach to prevent child maltreatment. In order to successfully do this, existing service providers would need to be trained in intervention rather than hiring additional service providers who specialise in the field. Blending prevention of child maltreatment and promoting child and family well-being in a public health strategy (through the use of the Triple P model for example) could have an impact on major problems such as child maltreatment.

While Signs of Safety is a specifically child protection model, its ethos, as discussed in the Context Chapter, is very much underpinned by family support principles. Salveron et al (2015) examined a six-year implementation

of the Signs of Safety (SoS) practice framework in Western Australia as part of the state's child protection system reform including consultations with 27 key personnel from the Department of Child Protection and Family Support. In its sixth year, the widespread uptake of the SoS framework was described by respondents as coherent and unifying in defining child protection practice and the Department's deliberate and thorough organisational-led implementation was crucial to affecting better outcomes for children and families. The framework appealed to practitioners who moved from crisis point to deciding that a different approach was necessary. Verhallen, Hall & Slembrouck (2019) studied two families in an in-depth ethnographic study over a period of 3 years in the Netherlands in order to capture how family support and child protection interventions were conducted. Both studies consisted of single mothers who were raised in poor neighbourhoods and voluntarily sought assistance from social services with regard to housing, childcare and employment and practical support. Following inspections and investigations both mothers came into the spotlight of child protection services. While their situations were quite similar, their family support and child protection interventions developed in different directions dependant on the social worker involved and their perception of each families situation and whether the worker focused on problems and risks or family strengths. These differing perceptions resulted in different goals, with different interventions and led to each families outcomes: one mother's child was placed permanently into the care of the state; while the other mother's children remained in the home with adequate supports to do so. The authors conclude that the system in the Netherlands is more oriented towards control and risk management where the interest of the child is placed in opposition to the parents' interest departing from a model founded on joint interest of children and parents.

The issue however seems not just about the orientation of the system or thresholds of intervention, but about public understanding of this also. As already discussed, research in Ireland found that the general populations' conceptualisation of family support (citing McGregor & NicGabhainn, 2016, 2018) as being different from professionals and academics. Family support

has been understood as coming from individuals own networks or from universal services such as their GP and the general public often combined protection and support as overlapping and not distinct. This implies a greater emphasis on a public health approach to child protection (see Lonne et al, 2019; Canavan et al., 2019). Similarly, the media analysis carried out as part of this dissertation also showed a lack of separation of how the media understood and reported on child protection and family support (O'Connor, McGregor & Devaney, 2018; McGregor, Canavan & NicGabhainn, 2020).

3.7 The Impact of the Media on Child Protection and Welfare Systems

It is widely acknowledged that the media has a great impact on how the public view child welfare services. It is of note that the vast majority of media reporting on child welfare is about child protection with very little focus on family support. Media coverage can also impact on the amount of cases being reported to child protection agencies globally. In this section, literature relating to the impact of media coverage on child welfare systems in Canada, Britain and New Zealand are detailed. Saint Jacques et al (2012) looked at the impact media coverage of children in need of protection had, on the number of cases reported to child protection agencies in Canada. They found a statistically significant relationship between coverage and cases reported. They also stated that the child abuse and neglect cases reported were often sensational and involved tragic outcomes for children, which paints a distorted image of child welfare agencies to the public. Lonne & Parton (2014) focused on how the Australian and English media portrayed child abuse scandals and the impact such coverage had on policy and practice. They state that the media play an important two-way role in the coverage of child maltreatment. On a positive note, the media contribute to raising public awareness, reform and increased resources for child protection agencies. Negatively, they argued that the media tended to focus too much on criminal matters such as sexual and physical abuse and less on neglect and emotional maltreatment, which distorts public understanding. The researchers found that there is a lack of children's and parent's voices in media reporting. Ayre

(2001) examined three decades of what he described as sensationalist coverage of child abuse scandals in England and Wales. He found that the media contributed to the creation of public fear, blame, and mistrust of the child protection system. Stanfield and Beddoe (2013) stated that negative and inaccurate news reports undermine public confidence in protection services, challenge social workers' professionalism, and therefore increase risk to those most vulnerable.

Briar-Lawson et al (2011) highlight the need to educate the media about the complex work undertaken by child welfare workers. Ayre (2001) states that social care services could learn much about media management from the UK police force, who have developed a competent understanding of the media's needs. Strategies employed by the police when interacting with the media include anticipation of a controversial story breaking, quick response, and availability for interview. Similarly, Munro (2011) refers to the UK's police services' adoption of an integrated approach to communication as a central part of its organisational structure, including media training for its staff at all levels. This approach was developed out of a realisation that effective communication is essential for good policing. One of Munro's recommendations was that social workers be provided with a similar set of principles as the police force to effectively handle communication with the media following high profile incidents. Stanfield and Beddoe (2013) introduce the notion of inter-professional collaboration among social workers and journalists, whereby both professions work together to promote public awareness of social issues relating to child welfare.

It is well evidenced that the media have played an important role in child protection systems around the world. For example, in the 1990's in Canada, a number of high-profile media stories about children's deaths became known to authorities most notably in British Columbia: The Gove Commission Report 1995. Judge Gove emphasised the safety of children over family support and recommended more comprehensive risk assessments together with training of child protection practices (Gove, 1995, Vol I-94). Media coverage often targeted protection workers resulting in high levels of stress

for staff and high turnover of workers in protection services. However, Armitage (1998) warns that such negative media coverage of poor parenting, inadequate social worker care and professional cover ups, lead to the media missing the complex picture of a non-supported mother with limited abilities trying to cope with modest support. He stresses that judicial inquiries and the press coverage of such inquiries 'provide a poor forum for policy-making' (p.105). By 2002, 8 out of Canada's 13 provinces had adopted some type of risk assessment tool (Gilbert, Parton & Skiveness, 2011).

A further example of the impact the media can have on the public and on child protection systems was evidenced following the death of Peter Connelly ('Baby P'). A national newspaper ran a campaign for justice in 2008 and delivered a petition to the Prime Minister with 1.5m signatures to exert pressure on the Government to act appropriately. The Government, in response, ordered reviews to be carried out in the relevant local authority and to review child protection procedures in England. Further, a Social Work Task Force was established to identify any barriers faced by social workers in carrying out their duties. In 2005, four employees connected to the Baby P case were dismissed which resulted in severe difficulties in recruitment and retention of staff working in children's social care services (Munro, 2011).

Another example is where Sweden's media coverage caused public outcry against local authorities who it described as being too lenient and unwilling to intervene immediately in child welfare and protection cases. The early 1980's saw the Press campaigning against a welfare state that removed children from their parents (Gilbert, Parton & Skiveness, 2011). One of Finland's major developments in tackling child abuse and maltreatment included a focus on social exclusion. A 2007 policy program introduced the new approach of investing in children and focussing on children's positive developments for the sake of all society. The media influenced welfare practices by discussion surrounding moral influences in the approach to childhood and families which saw increased early intervention programmes and new discourses around discussion of childhood problems (Vanhanen, 2008). In Denmark, child welfare scandals which were highlighted in the

media included identification of gaps in local authority's service provision when families moved area such as in the Tonder case (Skovmond & Schmidt Astrup, 2015). Despite Denmark's scandals, they never reached the importance of setting policy issues (Gilbert, Parton & Skiveness, 2011).

In the 1970's, Germany experienced extensive media coverage of fatal child abuse cases which brought many errors and systemic failures to the attention of the public. Social workers were criticised for neglecting their duties and were held responsible by the Press for the harm and death of children. The events resulted in a child protection panic in the public, political and professional arenas which led to a refocus of supports services for children and families which emphasised early risk assessment, crisis intervention and swift out of home placements. The Government were under immense pressure from the media and in 2006 convened a Conference of all Prime Ministers of the Laender in 2007 (the Child Protection Summit) in order to try and cope with the child protection crisis. The Conference concluded laws that should be implemented and recommended a new framework for cooperation in child protection and identify gaps to enhance networking among professionals. Belgium's 1996 Dutroux case involved the deaths of four girls whose deaths caused public outrage when the media highlighted continuous errors made by police and professionals. The White March saw 300,000 people walking the streets of Brussels seeking change in child protection and welfare systems. In response to public outrage, the Government established a group of experts to recommend legislation to prevent sexual exploitation of children in Belgium. Despite the negativity surrounding the Dutroux case, following its occurrence, parents were more inclined to accept calls from youth care services to discuss concerns regarding their children's welfare. The White March led to positive change favouring the protection of wellbeing of Belgian children (Leurs, 2009).

As outlined earlier, media coverage of high-profile child deaths and various child abuse inquiries in Ireland contributes to a primarily risk-assessed child protection system as opposed to a family supportive, preventative interventionist approach. Ireland has seen the media highlighting issues of

clerical child abuse which put pressure on the Irish Government to act in response thereto. RTE (an Irish broadcasting television channel) broadcast a documentary entitled *States of Fear* in 1999 which highlighted the issue of institutional abuse in industrial and reformatory schools. Following the programme, the Irish Governments came under pressure to respond. They issued a public apology to the victims and established the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse. This led to the publication of the Commission's findings in the Ryan Report in 2009 discussed in Chapter 2. Donnelly & Inglis (2010) state: 'the government was predominantly motivated to investigate the inadequacies of Church and State facilities for children in response to media pressure' (p. 15).

The Ferns Report (Murphy, Buckley & Joyce, 2005) acknowledged the role of the BBC documentary *Suing the Pope* (broadcast in 2002) which reported child sexual abuse allegations against an Irish Priest and the mishandling of the case by the Bishop of Ferns. Following the broadcast, the Bishop resigned and a preliminary investigation into the abuse allegations led to the Ferns Inquiry (Powell & Scanlon, 2014). Another RTE broadcast, *Cardinal Secrets* in 2002, included sexual abuse allegations in the Dublin archdiocese and offered damaging commentary on the Diocese's handling of the abuse. A major police investigation ensued into clerical child sexual abuse complaints and the Dublin Archdiocese Commission of Investigation was set up.

As stated in Chapter 2, a further inquiry into child abuse which received much media attention and public interest was the Roscommon Child Care Case Report (2010) which examined the failure of social services to effectively intervene in the lives of six children who suffered abuse and neglect by their parents (Gibbons, et al., 2010). Amongst its many recommendations, the report also stated that 'the Inquiry Team is concerned that the coverage of the case had a further detrimental effect on the well-being of the six children and young people who were victims in this case' (p.81). Due to the considerable information about the six victims being published and placed into the public domain by the media through their victim impact statements and from interviews with other individuals involved in the matter, the children were

concerned they could be identified. The report goes on to state that appropriate legal warnings or admonishments were not adequately given to the press and raised the question as to whether there was a need to clarify the position regarding the protection and privacy of children on the one hand and the provision of victim impact statements on the other (Gibbons et al., 2010).

In many countries, child welfare and protection stories covered by the media who frame stories of human suffering and fatal child abuse cases, have played a key role in portraying child welfare professionals' incompetence's and holding politicians to account. In the Netherlands, two family tragedies, the Maas girl, a 12-year-old murdered by her father, found dismembered in the River Maas and the Nulde girl, a 4-year-old murdered by her mother and step-father, found beheaded in Lake Nulde, resulted in an official inquiry into legal proceedings against a child welfare supervisor (Knijn & van Nijnatten, 2011). Germany's fatal cases of abuse received widespread public attention which led to changes in child protection workers responsibilities in the late 1990's. Canada saw homicide charges brought against a child welfare worker due to negligence. In Belgium the Dutroux case incited a 300,000-person march in the streets who expressed their outrage. This led to a National Commission Report containing 63 recommendations for child protection and welfare systems change. Sweden's case of a teenage suicide the day prior to giving evidence in her sexual abuse case caused public outrage against welfare authorities who were accused of being too lenient and hesitant to intervene in child abuse cases. As mentioned earlier, the death of Baby Peter in England put immense pressure on the British Government to initiate change. While the media have been instrumental in highlighting shortcomings to the public, it can do so in certain ways by focussing on scandals and tragedies which deflect attention from the core issues such as causes and characteristics which contribute to neglect and abuse (Lonne & Parton, 2014).

The literature reviewed in this section shows the media tend to highlight failures and crises of child welfare systems which affects the wider system and the individual practices of the workers involved. The impact of this type of reporting upholds and reinforces a risk oriented and defensive response and

diminishes public confidence as well as media confidence in the abilities of professionals and welfare systems to adequately respond to children and families in need. There is a significant lack of emphasis on family support reporting and a major focus on what went wrong. The issues discussed show how media framing of child welfare has a profound impact not only on what people think about the services but also on how services are developed. To explore this in further detail, the following section introduces Framing and Communication theory.

3.8 Communication and Framing Theory

Communication science, according to Riffe, Lacy & Fico (2014), is at the centre of all social sciences because 'communication increasingly defines what we do, how we do it, and even who we are individually, socially and culturally' (p. 13). In order to develop communication science pertaining to media communication, communication content must be logically assessed, where the objective is to predict and explain phenomena. Quantitative content analysis can provide reliable and valid communication content whereby communication patterns emerge and, in turn, causes or potential effects begin to develop. A framework to achieve this involves use of theory on processes that affect content, together with the effects of that content. Shoemaker & Reese (1996) outlined three dominant approaches to communication theory: mass communication theories and research; mass media processes and effects; and communication theories origins, methods and uses in the mass media. Mass communication theory originated in the early 20th century when political scientists investigated the effects of propaganda and persuasive messages. It can be defined as the process through which messages are received and understood by an audience and the effects those messages have on an audience (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996).

During the World Wars, propaganda through the use of radio, film, and print media highlighted concerns over mass media messages broadcast to the general public which had the capacity to captivate, mesmerise, capture people's attention, and instigate panic. The rise of advertising agencies that

broadcast persuasive campaigns through messages attempted to persuade people to do what the communicators wanted. These powerful effects in the media aligned with behaviourist traditions, and early theories of communication were formed. The powerful effects perspective was later challenged as being simplistic and was replaced by factors that contribute to or mitigate effects (Severin & Tankard, 2000), called the limited effects outlook. Experimental researchers found that in some cases mass media messages could actually change an audience's knowledge but not their attitudes or behaviours (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Audience members used media messages for their own purposes; they chose what parts, if any, of the messages to accept, and rejected messages not applicable to their existing beliefs, values and attitudes. In the latter half of the 21st century, communication theorists suggested that the above effects of mass media, whether powerful or limited, were dependent on various conditions. This was called the contingency effects perspective; it allowed theorists to speculate that effects of communication messages were not the result of any particular message but relied on a variety of conditions. Harold Lasswell (1948) designed a framework to describe the communication process as: who (the communicator), says what (media content), through which channel (medium), to whom (audience), with what effect. Berelson (1949) also developed a cause-and-effect framework: some kinds of communication, on some kinds of issues, brought to the attention of some kinds of people, under some kinds of conditions, have some kind of effects.

McCombs & Shaw (1993) later theorised that the media not only told people what to think about but also how to think about items and what to think. They called this Agenda Setting Theory, whereby the media set the 'agenda'. McCombs, Shaw & Weaver (2014) state: "many regard agenda setting as the transfer of issue salience from the news media to the public agenda" which has now expanded to cover many more channels of communication including social media, which they call the social media conversation occurring on platforms such as Twitter, Facebook and blogs (p. 787/8). Framing theory, whereby the media draw public attention to certain topics, was the original agenda-setting thought (Gupta, 2006). A frame represents how the media and

media gatekeepers organise and present issues and how audiences interpret them. These frames are abstract notions that structure social meaning and influence the perception of news by the audience. This type of agenda-setting perspective tells us not only what to think about but also how to think about it, while also expanding beyond the issues or messages and focusing on the ethos of the issues. Framing theory is based on the premise that the media focus on certain events and place them in a field of meaning.

Goffman (1974) first theorised framing in his essay on Frame Analysis, stating that people interpret their world through their primary framework. He offered two distinct primary frameworks, natural (unguided, purely physical events, e.g. 'the brushing of a branch against the door by the wind') and social (a guided event e.g. 'a knock at the door'), which help people categorise information and understand it in a wider social context (p.303). Effects of frames on news audiences, as discussed by Baran & Davis (2012), suggest that exposure to news coverage can result in learning consistent with frames structuring that coverage. If news coverage is dominated by a person's frame, learning will be guided by that frame. News coverage strongly influences the way audiences understand news, and this is especially true of news involving highly publicised events. More recently Schonfelder & Holmgaard (2019) in their investigation of child welfare interventions in Norway, Denmark and Germany, state that how the media report on public interventions in cases of child abuse and neglect can be framed very differently depending on the media's focus. Some frame the abuse as a result of the child's guardian's neglect, while others frame the abuse as a result of ineffective services. Such reporting can have an influence on the welfare services reputation as well as public confidence in statutory services. Blomberg (2017) focused on how journalists framed their reporting of Swedish social services and social workers and highlighted the important role the media play in their framing of such services. The author believes that the media should report more on improvements being made and on positive events happening in social services in order to provide a more balanced image of social services and social workers.

The challenge highlighted by Ho & Chan (2018) is to refocus the news media from reporting sensationalised, individual events to portraying the broader issues from other perspectives such as social and health services, children and family development services and social responsibility. The media could be a valuable tool used to widen the discussion on child welfare, create greater awareness of child protection in communities and educate the public about such issues.

3.9 The Nature of Journalism

The word 'journalism' originates from the early 1830's, borrowed from what the French used to describe newspaper reporting, 'journalisme' (King & Plunkett, 2005, p.293). A journalist can be defined as a person who writes particular text, such as news, for a medium, a newspaper, and who requires a specific set of skills, newsgathering and writing, not shared by other professional writers (Ornebring, 2010). Philo (2010) is of the view that the media are key in constructing public understanding of issues.

The press originally gathered and disseminated news, which was not yet distinct from printing, whereby the printer was the individual responsible for collecting, presenting and distributing all information. However, during the 19th century, the printer began to employ others to produce text or, alternatively, those who produced and disseminated texts, employed a printer, a process which, over time, distinguished writing from printing (Ornebring, 2010). Different types of texts were produced by those media professionals at that time including poetry, fiction, commentaries and criticisms. Such writing became more specialised as the media landscape changed and different audiences were catered for by different publications. Newspaper press writing became one of those new specialist writing formats (King & Plunkett, 2005) as well as other specialisms including political reporting, crime reporting, sports journalism, labour journalism and entertainment journalism.

Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch (2009) outline four phases of journalism research history: normative; empirical; sociological; and global-comparative. Normative theories of mid-19th century German social theorists were concerned with what journalism ought to be from a social communication and political discussion standpoint. Empirical theories, which originated in the United States in the early 1900's, were concerned with the processes and structures of producing news. Early communication research began in the 1950's involving disciplines of sociology, political science and psychology which were headed by individuals such as Paul Lazarsfeld, Kurt Lewin and Harold Lasswell. Much of the research conducted in this era were concerned with media and audience effects followed by professional news people's values, routines and editing structures. Theories included Gatekeeping; Professionalisation; and Agenda-Setting. The sociological phase began in the 1970's and 1980's whereby the influence of sociology was stronger on journalistic research. This period focused on journalisms routines, occupation, culture, and concepts such as framing, narrative and storytelling which related to news texts were discussed. The final phase, global-comparative, emerged in the 1990's due to global political changes and new technologies in communication giving rise to global international and comparative research.

Of paramount importance for journalists is said to be autonomy, the freedom to write their own work without being controlled by external or internal forces. Journalism autonomy from other societal interests is also essential if journalists are to succeed in their watchdog function (Ornebring, 2010). Journalists have become more actively engaged in interpreting the news and setting the agenda (Benson, 2008). However, there has been criticism in how news is selected and what stories are covered by those believing journalists to be controlled by management who seek to maximise audience figures and increase profits (Hallin, 2000). Hallin & Mancini (2004) highlight the criteria of professional journalists: autonomy, distinct professional norms and public service orientation. In their comparison of media systems, they found that journalists were successful in achieving autonomy within organisations where a number of outside influences could affect the production process.

Dueze (2006) states that due to interactive communication technological advances, journalism is "dead" and likens it to a "zombie institution" (p.2). Conversely, Weber (2007, cited in Wahl-Jorgensen & Hanitzsch, 2009) believes journalism to be, not dead, but in a process of reinvention. As stated by Zelizer (2009), new challenges from blogs and online websites have meant that journalism provides a smaller part of people's information source than before.

3.9.1. Ethics in Journalism

Ward (2009) describes journalism ethics as "the analysis, evaluation and promotion of what constitutes correct conduct and virtuous character in light of the best available principles" (p.295). Jacquette (2010) discusses the importance of journalistic ethical responsibilities including telling the truth to the reader/audience who depend on accurate reporting of news and events in order to make everyday decisions. The underlying principle of truth-telling, he states, is in the interest of the public and for the good of the public and serves as a foundation for journalistic ethics. Ward (2009) divides the history of journalism ethics into 5 stages. Firstly, in the 16th and 17th centuries, editors assured their audiences that the facts they were reading were based on the truth. Secondly, the public ethic stage during the 18th century, viewed journalists as people's rights champions and protectors of liberty against government. The third stage during the 19th century refers to the liberal theory of the press and stressed that a free and independent press was required in order to protect public liberties and promote liberal reform. The 20th century, during the fourth stage, simultaneously developed and criticised the liberal phase. Those who developed this stage were journalists and ethicists who created professional journalistic ethics based on social responsibility, the production of facts and the restraining of an increasingly sensational press which was dominated by business interests (Hocking, 1947). Critics were comprised of journalists who focused more on interpretations of journalism including investigative reporters. The final phase, the mixed media phase, occurred from the late 1900's onwards when non-professional journalists and

bloggers engaged in journalism using interactive multi-media platforms which challenged ideas of verification and sources (Ward, 2009).

Ward (2009) goes on to state that the mixed media fifth stage is influenced by four theories: liberal theory; objectivity and social responsibility theory; interpretive and activist theory; and, communitarian and care ethics. Liberal theory refers to journalists as independent, that informs the public and acts as a watchdog on government and abuse of power. Objectivity and social responsibility pertain to a social contract that allows journalists to report freely if public issues coverage is responsible. The third theory, interpretive journalism, explains the significance of events and actively attempts to reform society. Many journalists view themselves as a combination of interpreter, advocate and informer. Finally, communitarian ethics and feminist ethics of care emphasise minimisation of harm and accountability and the impact of journalism on community values and caring relationships.

Journalists have an ethical responsibility when reporting on sensitive social issues such as child protection or social services. According to Brindle (1999) when deciding what to report on, he looks for 'anything which offers robust evidence, quantitative or qualitative, of the functioning of both society and the controls upon it' (p.46). Aldridge (1999) states that an event involving social services or child protection issues does not determine whether or how news media will cover a story but the economics and politics of the newspapers themselves do. Sloane (1997) states that social issues such as child abuse have to be hard-hitting in order to compete for news space. While recognising all media need to be mindful of reporting more on preventative issues of child abuse, she also states a journalist who wants to effect change must get politicians to react which is achieved by reporting a scandal.

3.9.2. Journalists' Sources

Sources can be defined as individuals and, or, organisations external to news groups (Franklin, 1997) who are unpaid for their information and are not subject to any managerial authority. They are, however, crucial to the

production of news and on whom journalists rely for their information (Franklin, Lewis & Williams, 2010). The interaction between journalists and their sources, as stated by Berkowitz (2009) "represents a long-term, yet dynamic influence on society" and has the potential to shape people's assumptions about the world. In an Irish study, social media was found to be a common source for journalists with two-thirds of participants using it as their daily primary tool when identifying leads. Over half of the journalists surveyed used social media to source their content, however, they did not rely on it to verify facts a finding which suggests it is now embedded into journalistic norms (Heravi & Harrower, 2016). According to Brody (2012) the role of print media is complicated whereby the press have a moral obligation to provide the public with accurate news while at the same time maintaining a viable profitable business. This, she states, leads to the ongoing dilemma of whether to print content that sells or whether printed content will serve the public interest.

3.9.3. The Role of Journalists

Merritt & McCombs (2003) state that journalists must make difficult decisions about what stories they should write about given the large amount of topics competing for their attention, more than any news organisation could possibly cover. The general public acquire facts about public and social affairs from the news media while simultaneously learning how much importance to attach to those topics based on their emphasis in the news. Journalists act as our "watchdog before the high and the mighty, asking sharp questions and demanding straight answers; they expose wrongdoing and the abuse of public trust" (p.51). Hanitzsch (2018) states that journalists generally view their work as meaningful both to themselves and to others which is enacted through four distinct roles: normative (what they ought to do); cognitive (what they want to do); practised (what they really do in practice); and narrated (what they think they do). Some socially desirable normative roles, e.g. the watchdog, derives from a journalists contribution to democracy and citizenship by holding the government to account. McNair (2018) calls this watchdog role of journalism the information function which

is necessary for the general public in order to make meaningful choices about societal decisions available to them. This information is gathered by investigative journalists through, for example, interviews with governmental authorities. Such critical scrutiny often exposes authorities' flaws and failures which the public access every day through television, radio and the press. This is closely related to the journalists interrogation function by interrogating powerful authorities and subjecting them to scrutiny on behalf of the public and holding them to account in clear view of the people. Merritt & McCombs (2003) opine that such negative reporting of social and public affairs occurs too often and loses site of the bigger picture and context of the issues being reported on. They explain this happens for a number of reasons including the fact that conflict is interesting to people, it is exciting for journalists to write about and is often very accessible. This can, however, lead to public cynicism.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter has examined in detail literature pertaining to child protection and family support and the relationship between both of these child welfare systems. As this is an immense field, the focus of this study has been specifically on the question of how welfare systems are oriented towards child protection or family support. The literature on child protection and family support focused on the impact that the media has had on child welfare systems which highlights the resulting messages being portrayed to the general public about statutory support and protection services. How these messages are communicated and framed to an audience have been examined through the theoretical underpinnings of communication and framing theories. The literature tells us that the media have the potential to exert change and influence opinion in addition to acting as a vessel through which its audience is informed of issues being written about and published. The next chapter (Chapter 4) outlines the methodology utilised in this study in order to address the aims and objectives of the study.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This section begins by detailing the researchers epistemological and ontological research positions. The following positions are discussed: positivism; post-positivism; interpretivism; objectivism; constructionism; and, the position taken in this study, pragmatism. Thereafter, quantitative and qualitative research methodologies are set out together with designs pertinent to each stance. Mixed methods procedures are also described which is the method used in this research dissertation. The first phase of the research is then set out consisting of the pilot content analysis study, the newspaper content analysis 2014-2017, the databases used and some limitations of the content analysis. Phase 2 consists of qualitative interviews with journalists from regional and national newspapers in Ireland together with interviews with Tusla staff members.

4.2 Research Question and Objectives.

4.2.1 Research Question

How is Tusla's family support work portrayed in the Irish print media?

4.2.2 Objectives

1. To examine how Tusla's family support work is portrayed in the Irish print media.
2. To compare and contrast trends and content in print media reports on Tusla's family support work.
3. To consider the underlying processes associated with print media production and publication.
4. To explore the responses of Child Protection and Welfare practitioners to the portrayal of Tusla's family support work in the print media.

Finding from Phase 1 that influenced Phase 2.

When family support is discussed it is most often associated with child protection. Family support is portrayed more positively in local areas print media while child protection is portrayed more negatively nationally.

Definition of Terms

For clarification purposes, the term 'print media' refers to all newspaper and news items found in two databases used in this study: The Irish Newspaper Archive and Nexis. The term 'news items' pertains to information printed in newspapers and online news media in relation to Tusla including events (opening an agency; new service being offered; publication of a booklet/brochure; visiting consultant; funding; staffing), feature material (feature stories) and public services (advertisements; promotions; public service announcements; press releases).

4.3. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate how Tusla's family support work is portrayed in the media. Based on the findings of phase one, the investigation was extended to explore how family support and child protection are portrayed in Ireland's print media. This is an important area of study in order to understand Tusla - Child and Family Agency's media profile by evaluating issues pertaining to Child Protection and Family Support in order to rate print coverage and recommend action and response. To date, little is known about publication trends and key messages being published in Irelands print media of Tusla, family support and child protection themes.

In order to determine the above, firstly, a print media content analysis was conducted using search terms pertaining to Tusla together with terms including 'family support', 'prevention' and 'early intervention'. Following this analysis, phase two aimed to look in more depth at the portrayal of family support and the inter-relationships with child protection. Phase two involved, interviews with journalists/authors of selected articles in order to understand

the process behind the headlines and how an article reaches publication in addition to gaining their views of Ireland's Child and Family Agency and the services they provide. Also, interviews were conducted with Tusla staff members from national and regional areas to gain their understanding and perception of how Tusla is portrayed to the general public.

4.4 Research Design

4.4.1. Theoretical basis for the research design

Philosophical worldviews, or epistemological and ontological positions, are a researcher's philosophical orientation about the world and the nature of research the researcher brings to a study. The types of beliefs held by a researcher are based on a researcher's discipline, their mentors' inclinations and past research experiences which lead to their approach to their research being qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods. Four worldviews are discussed by Creswell (2014): post-positivism; constructivism; transformative; and pragmatism.

A paradigm represents the choice of methods used by a researcher to conduct research based on their ontological and epistemological assumptions. It can be described as a way of looking at the world comprised of philosophical assumptions that guide the researchers actions and thought (Mertens, 2005). A paradigm can provide a framework for theory and research to include basic assumptions, issues and ways of seeking answers (Neuman, 2006). Denzin & Lincoln (2008) state that a paradigm holds a researchers epistemological, ontological and methodological beliefs. Creswell (1994, p.176) refers to the 'paradigm wars' of the 1970's and 80's whereby purists believed that paradigms and methods should not be mixed while situationalists believed different methods could be used in certain situations. More simply, the positivist paradigm and use of quantitative research methodologies were criticised by those who believed in the use of qualitative research and the constructionist paradigm (Reichardt & Rallis, 1994). As a result of this, mixed methods researchers struggled to find a rationale for combining qualitative and quantitative data in the face of the incompatible paradigms

traditionally underpinning them (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Pragmatists directly oppose the purist thought and believe in the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods to conduct research to enable the integration of research findings without the conflict of the paradigm wars (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003).

Epistemological considerations concern what is or what should be acceptable knowledge within a discipline (Bryman, 2016). *Epistme* is the Greek word for knowledge and *logos* means to study. Epistemology is the theory or study of knowledge and how things are known which presents a view and a justification for what can be known and what criteria makes it knowledge rather than belief (Blaikie, 1993). For social researchers, epistemology refers to what is regarded as knowledge about a social occurrence and what sort of knowledge should be used to help study that social occurrence (Matthews & Ross, 2010). Bryman (2016) mentions three epistemological positions: positivism, interpretivism and realism and each impact on the researchers choice of research topics and research questions.

4.4.2. Positivism

The epistemological position associated with the natural science is known as positivism which can be descriptive, describing a philosophical position, or it can be a negative term to describe often crude data collection practices (Bryman, 2016). Distinctive features of a positivist approach include: knowledge is what can be observed; knowledge of social occurrences is based on what can be observed and recorded; data gathered usually tests a hypothesis generated from theory; and the researcher has no impact on the data, the research is objective. Quantitative data are collected in the positivist approach, the social world and social occurrences are measured, causal relationships are sought and large data sets and statistical analysis are used (Matthews & Ross, 2010). Critiques of this positivist approach have been detailed, such as, rejection of the notion that science becomes credible because every scientist is seeing the same thing when looking at the same piece of reality. However, it has been demonstrated often that an observers

characteristics and perspectives affect what they see therefore what they see is not determined only by the characteristics of the thing being observed (Robson & McCartan, 2016).

4.4.3. Postpositivisim

The postpositivist worldview uses more quantitative research methods than qualitative. It is sometimes called the scientific method or positivist research, empirical science or postpositivism which represent the thinking after positivism and challenges the notion of the absolute truth or knowledge by recognising that researchers cannot be positive about their claims of knowledge when studying human behaviour and actions. This postpositivist worldview originates in the 19th century from writers such as Comte, Mill, Durkheim, Newton & Lock (Smith, 1983) and more recent writers such as Phillips & Burbules (2000). Postpositivists believe causes determine effects or outcomes so that problems studied by them need to identify and assess causes that influence outcomes such as those found in an experiment. It is also reductionist by reducing ideas into small discrete sets for testing, such as variables comprised of hypotheses and research questions. Knowledge is gathered by observation and measurement of the objective reality that exists in the world. Developing numeric measures of observation and studying individual behaviour is crucial for a postpositivist. In this scientific method, the researcher begins with a theory, collects data to support or refute the theory, then makes necessary revisions and carries out additional tests (Creswell, 2014).

4.4.4. Interpretivism

Interpretivism directly contrasts with positivism and prioritises people's interpretations and understandings of social occurrences and their own actions. Many social researchers believe social research must be understood and explained by events which are not necessarily observable but can be interpreted by the researcher. Knowledge that is gathered from the interpretivist approach include individuals interpretations and understandings with a focus on how they interpret the world which offers differing

perspectives that can be explored. In essence, the researcher is interpreting individuals interpretations and is studying the social occurrences through the eyes of the people being researched. Theory is generated by the researcher working with the data. Qualitative data is collected through interviews and observation which allows for the collection of multiple perspectives. Work uncovers subjective meanings, interpretation of meanings and understanding of individuals personal situations (Matthews & Ross, 2010; Robson & McCartan, 2016).

'Ontology is the science of what is, of the kinds and structures of objects, properties, events, processes and relations in every area of reality' (Smith, 2003, p.155). *Ontos* is the Greek word for being. Ontology refers to the way the social world and social situations occurring within it are viewed which can include social groups such as family, gender, ethnic groups, institutions and organisations as well as social behaviour and events (Matthews & Ross, 2010). Researchers ask whether social objects should be considered neutral with a reality outside of social actors, known as objectivism, or whether they should be considered social constructions built from perceptions and actions of social actors, called constructivism (Bryman, 2016).

4.4.5. Objectivism

Objectivism takes the ontological position that social situations making up the social world exist on their own, apart from and independent of social actors. It is an approach often taken by natural scientists studying the natural world of science which values the independence and objectivity of the researcher and identifies the social worlds characteristics as predictable, ordered and can be recorded without affecting them (Matthews & Ross, 2010). Bryman (2016) uses organisation and culture to illustrate objectivism. An organisation, he states, is an object with rules and regulations and standard procedures for getting things done. Individuals have different jobs, there is a hierarchy and a division of labour. These features vary from organisation to organisation but each has a reality external to the individuals within it. Matthews & Ross (2010) illustrate objectivism in terms of the family which

is a family unit made up of people related to each other or groups of people unrelated but live as if they were related and consider themselves to be a family. Relationship may be defined by law or by custom including responsibilities for finances, for example, or for children's behaviour. Changes are marked by various life events such as marriage, birth, or divorce. The family as a social unit has a reality independent of the individuals within it. The family represents a set of relationships and behaviours which individuals conform to in varying degrees.

4.4.6. Constructionism

An alternative ontological position is called constructionism, also known as constructivism, whereby social situations are only real in the sense that they are constructed ideas which are reviewed and reworked continually by the social actors involved in them through social interaction and reflection (Matthews & Ross, 2010). Meaning does not exist on its own but is constructed by individuals as they interact and engage in interpretation (Robson & McCartan, 2016). More recently, the term has also included the view that researchers own views of the social world are constructions whereby the researcher presents a specific view of social reality rather than a definitive one (Bryman, 2016). The constructionist ontological position challenges the notion that organisation and culture are pre-given and thereby confronts individuals to be external realities with no influential role.

The constructivist world view usually lends itself to qualitative research. This constructivism originates in ideas from Berger & Luckmann's (1967) The Social Construction of Reality and Lincoln & Guba's (1985) Naturalistic Inquiry. Social constructivists believe that people seek to understand the world in which they live and work. Individuals develop meanings of their experiences, towards objects or things. These meanings are many and varied which leads the researcher to seek the complexity of those views and not try to narrow meanings into a small number of categories or ideas. This research relies on the participants views of the situation. Questions are broad and general so that the participant can construct meaning of a situation through

discussions or interactions with other people. Open-ended questions are better to allow the researcher to listen carefully to what respondents say or do in their daily lives. Constructivist researchers often address the interactions among individuals and tend to focus on the specific contexts where people live and work so that they can gain an understanding of the historical and cultural settings of the participants. Furthermore, researchers recognise that their own backgrounds shape their interpretations so they position themselves in the research by acknowledging how their interpretation stems from their own personal, cultural and historical experiences. The constructivist researcher makes sense of and interprets the meanings others have about the world and generate or inductively develop a theory rather than starting with a theory.

4.4.7. Pragmatic Worldview

Pragmatism originates from the works of James, Mead, Peirce, and Dewey (Cherryholmes, 1992). Pragmatism arises out of actions, situations and consequences. It focuses on applications, what works, and solutions to problems (Patton, 1990). Pragmatic researchers focus on the research problem and how to use multiple approaches to understand the problem and gain knowledge about it. Seven key features of pragmatism include: firstly, that is it not tied to one research method but draws from both quantitative and qualitative assumptions. Secondly, pragmatic researchers have the freedom to choose the methods, techniques and research procedures to best meet their needs. Thirdly, pragmatists do not see the world in one view therefore pragmatic research uses mixed methods to collect and analyse data. Fourthly, pragmatism yields that truth is what works best at a given time therefore mixed methods research using both quantitative and qualitative data give a better understanding of a research problem. Next, pragmatic researchers seek what and how to carry out research based on the consequences of where they want to go with it. Mixed methods researchers establish a purpose for mixing their research methods and rationalise why quantitative and qualitative data are mixed. Pragmatics believe that research occurs in social, political and historical contexts. Mixed methods can include a postmodern element which

reflects social justice and political aims. Finally, pragmatist research includes multiple methods, different worldviews and assumptions and different data collection methods and analysis techniques.

Teddlie & Tashakkori (2010) offer six paradigmatic stances taken when using mixed methods research:

(a) A-paradigmatic stance (paradigms are often unimportant in many studies)
(b) Substantive theory stance (theories relevant to the research are more important than philosophical stances)
(c) Complementary strengths stance (the strength of each paradigm used is only successful if the different methods used are kept as separate as possible).
(d) Multiple paradigms (in some studies a single paradigm is not applicable)
(e) Dialetic stance (all paradigms have something to offer and using multiple paradigms in one study creates better understanding).
(f) Single paradigm stance (an alternative paradigm stance to include pragmatism, critical realism and transformative paradigms).

A common stance used in mixed methods research is pragmatism which is a single paradigm stance. It offers a practical approach to solving problems and provides a bridge between paradigm and methodology (Greene & Caraceli, 2003). Tashakkori & Teddlie (2010) state there are two methodological principles to mixed methods research that distinguish it from other research approaches: rejecting the either/or during the research process; and subscribing to the cyclical approach to research. These principles, they state, represent a pragmatic approach being the bridge between philosophy and methodology.

The author of this study aligns very closely with the paradigmatic stance and the core belief that while there are different worldviews and assumptions that are all relevant when conducting research, in order to find out what works best at a given time to answer a research question, pragmatism is a very

effective stance. The research question in this study was far-reaching and in order to effectively answer the question together with its associated objectives, a mixed methods approach was chosen to achieve this.

4.5. A Methodological Basis for the Research Design

4.5.1. Quantitative and Qualitative Research

For a number of years, social researchers had to make a basic choice when conducting a piece of research between qualitative and quantitative research methodologies. These different approaches are linked with the different views on how individuals see and understand the world. The quantitative route investigates sciences such as physics, chemistry and biology while the qualitative approach focuses on researching human beings in social situations (Robson & McCartan, 2016). The decision to use a qualitative or quantitative approach depends on the research question and the data needed to analyse and address it (Matthews & Ross, 2010). However, there is growing recognition that combining both quantitative and qualitative research styles is valuable.

4.5.2. Quantitative

A central feature of quantitative social research is its ability to be accurately and precisely measured and quantified by transforming the information or data into numbers. The focus is on individuals behaviour and what they say or do. The principles are the same as those which apply to the natural sciences. Deductive logic, where pre-existing theoretical ideas or concepts are tested is used in quantitative social research methods. The research design is specified at a very early stage of the research process. Furthermore, it is reliable across time and can be used with various types of research as well as being valid by measuring what is intended to be measured. The study can be easily replicated by using the detailed procedural specifications provided. Quantitative research also involves statistical analysis of the data. The findings are generalizable by using a sample of participations representative of a wider population. Distance is maintained between the researcher and the participants and objectivity is sought (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Creswell (2014) states that quantitative research tests theories by examining the relationships among variables. The variables can be measured on instruments

that can be numbered so the data can be analysed using statistical procedures. There is a set structure to reporting data. Quantitative researchers test theories deductively, control for alternate explanations, protect against bias and generalise and replicate the findings. The quantitative model has been closely linked to positivism (Berg, 2001).

4.5.3. Quantitative Designs:

There are many quantitative designs available to the researcher. Survey research numerically describes trends, opinions or attitudes of a population by taking a cross-section of the population. Cross-sectional and longitudinal studies that use questionnaires or structured interviews are used for collecting data and the intent is to generalise from a sample to a population (Fowler, 2008). Experimental research on the other hand seeks to establish whether a specific treatment influenced an outcome. The researcher provides specific treatment to one group and withholds it from another and then deduces how both groups score on an outcome. True experiments randomly assigned subjects treatment are used in addition to quasi-experiments that use non-random assignments (Creswell, 2014). Content analysis is another quantitative approach and was used during Phase 1 of this research study which began with a newspaper content analysis as discussed below in more detail.

4.5.4. Qualitative

The focus in qualitative research is on meanings and contexts and the need to understand individuals and phenomena in their social settings. Individuals are described from the individuals perspectives. Findings are presented verbally or in a non-numerical format. Inductive logic is used beginning with data collection from which theoretical ideas emerge. The research design emerges as the research is carried out. The importance of the researchers values and the values of others involved is accepted. Objectivity is not of value as it is seen as distancing the researcher from the participants. Generalizability of findings is also not a concern. Qualitative research takes place in natural settings where both the personal commitment and self-

awareness of the researcher are valued. It is most likely to involve small numbers of people or situations (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Data collection methods include observations and interviews. Case studies are found in many fields of study, most especially in evaluation studies whereby the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case or program, event or activity, process or of one or more individuals. The researcher collects detailed information using various data collection procedures over a sustained period of time. In this study, the qualitative approach used was interviews.

4.5.5. Qualitative interviews

Interviewing has been widely viewed as one of the most widely used research methods and can be used to find out what cannot be answered simply (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The qualitative research interview aims to describe meaning of themes in the subjects' worlds and to understand the meaning of what they say. It covers both a factual and a meaning level (Kvale, 1996). Qualitative interviews are very useful for obtaining the story behind a participant's experiences and allows the interviewer to pursue in-depth information around topics. They are also useful for following-up on certain responses given and provide an opportunity for further investigation of those responses (McNamara, 1999).

Various types of interviews can be used when conducting qualitative research which can be differentiated by the degree of structure employed on their format ranging from standardised or structured interviews to unstructured interviews. Major types of interviews include: structured/standardised; semi-structured; unstructured; in-depth interviews; focus groups; and life history/biographical interviews. Structured interviewers have the same working and order of questions for each interview. Often there are a fixed set of answers on offer for the respondent. The questions are closed, pre-coded or fixed and the interview schedule is strictly adhered to. The schedule is usually completed by ticking boxes. When using semi-structured interviews, the researcher has a series of questions in an interview schedule which can be varied in sequence. The researcher also has latitude to ask further questions

if they deem them relevant based on responses received. In an unstructured interview, the research has a list of topics, issues, or questions in an interview guide where the style of questioning is informal and vary from interview to interview. In-depth interviews often refer to both semi-structured and unstructured interviewing and is the most common data collection method used in qualitative research. The researcher of this dissertation chose to use semi-structured interviews and deemed this most suitable for exploration of the quantitative findings as there were specific avenues based on the findings of the content analysis that she wanted to explore in more depth. But at the same time, the semi-structured approach allowed room for generation of new and unexpected data to inform the research question.

4.5.6. Qualitative Data recording procedures

An interview schedule was prepared based on the findings of the quantitative phase of the research which asked certain questions around certain themes which had emerged in order to explore the topics further and obtain the views and opinions of the research subjects to further explain and elaborate on the findings. The approach to data recording was planned in advance by creating an interview protocol for asking questions and recording answers during the interviews. Handwritten notes were taken in addition to the audio-recording which Cresswell (2014) recommends even when interviews are taped. Each interview protocol contained instructions for the interviewer to follow so that standard procedures were used from one interview to the next. The questions were set out in sections together with probes for use when following up or asking individuals to explain their ideas in more detail or elaborate on certain points. The data analysis proceeded while interviews were ongoing.

4.5.7. Qualitative Data Analysis

In qualitative research, as in this qualitative research phase, data analysis proceeded hand-in-hand with other parts of the data collection and write up of findings. While interviews were proceeding, the researcher also analysed earlier interviews. When all interviews were transcribed, data was read in order to gain a general sense of the information collected; to reflect on the

overall meaning and general ideas emerging; to obtain the tone of the ideas; and to make notes and general thoughts. Next, all data was coded and organised by bracketing chunks of text. A word was written to represent each category on the margins (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). These pieces of text were then segmented into sentences and paragraphs and formed into categories which were then labels with a term (the term was often based on the actual language of the participant, in vivo term). Tesch (1990) provides 8 steps in this qualitative coding process:

1. Get a sense of the whole – read all transcripts and write down ideas while reading.
2. Pick a random interview and ask: what is it about? Try and focus on the underlying meaning, write thoughts in the margins and repeat this for all interviews.
3. Make a list of all topics recorded, cluster them together with similar topics and transfer them into columns.
4. Go back to the data with this list of topics, abbreviate the topics as codes; write the codes next to the appropriate sections; and see if new categories emerge.
5. Find the most descriptive wording for each topic/category and look for ways of reducing the total list by grouping topics relating to each other. Show the interrelationships.
6. Finally decide on the abbreviation of each category then alphabetise those codes.
7. Gather all data in each category to one place and preliminary analyse it.
8. Recode existing data if necessary.

There are broadly three types of coding categories: codes on topics that researchers would expect to find based on literature and common sense; codes that are surprising and unanticipated; and codes that are unusual and of interest conceptually to researchers.

4.5.8. Mixed Methods

While quantitative research emphasises quantification in data collection methods and analysis and qualitative research emphasises words rather than quantification in data analysis and collection, Bryman (2001) states 'it is necessary to be careful about hammering a wedge between them too deeply' (p. 21) and 'the two can be combined within an overall research project' (p.22). He uses the term multi-strategy research to stand for research that integrates qualitative and quantitative research strategies to include triangulation. Triangulation involves cross-checking the results of an investigation using one research strategy with the results of another research strategy. This was important in this study as part of the purpose of the interviews was to explore in more depth themes arising from the content analysis. In particular, the findings about the relationship between child protection and family support, even though not specifically sought, strongly influenced the questions that were developed for the interview schedule. Cresswell (2014) states that mixed methods research involves the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data that may use philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks. The assumption behind mixed methods research is that combining quantitative and qualitative approaches will provide a better understanding of the research problem than either approach can achieve alone.

The mixed methods design used in this research study has been described as explanatory sequential mixed methods research whereby quantitative research is first conducted (newspaper analysis), following which the results are built on to explain them in more detail through the use of qualitative research (interviews with journalists, Tusla staff, general public). The mixed method is described as explanatory due to the initial quantitative data results which are explained further with qualitative data. It is sequential due to the initial quantitative phase being followed by the qualitative phase (Cresswell, 2014). The data collection types used in the qualitative phase of this research study were interviews carried out face-to-face, by telephone and through the use of focus groups. These types of data collection tools have been described as advantageous because of the depth of information participants can provide

while also allowing the researcher to have a level of control over the questions posed. Some limitations include the fact that indirect information can be filtered through from the views of the interviewee; the presence of the researcher could bias responses; and not all people are able to articulate and perceive information equally. The qualitative phase of interviewing used a semi-structured interview technique which was audio-taped and transcribed.

4.6. Implementing the Study

Phase 1

4.6.1. Content Analysis

Content analysis is a technique used in research to objectively, systematically and quantitatively describe content of communication (Berelson, 1952). Through the analysis of documents and texts, printed or visual, content analysis seeks to quantify contents in predetermined categories in a systematic and replicable manner which can be applied to varying forms of media (Bryman, 2001). Media content analysis can be a useful source of information about current affairs, public opinions and attitudes, and how society reacts to the media. In addition, by analysing texts and examining communication via texts and transcripts, media content analysis can provide historical insights across time (Macnamara, 2005). It can be used to study books, essays, news articles, and other written material. It can be considered more of a data-reduction technique than an analytical one, because it breaks down long pieces of text into manageable data units (Macnamara, 2005; Neuendorf, 2002).

According to Trueman (2015), media content analysis is the deconstruction of text using either quantitative or qualitative research methods. Quantitative research methods involve a structured form of gathering information from media clips, while qualitative methods interpret the text to identify themes

and possible effects of the message. Harold Lasswell introduced media content analysis in 1927 in order to study propaganda (Macnamara, 2005). Berger & Luckmann (1967) in their work *The Social Construction of Reality* state that media content texts are open to varying interpretations, and such analyses therefore cannot be objective. Like most methods, content analysis is open to criticism of bias, with particular concerns about subjectivity. As set out below, the level of subjectivity will vary depending on the specific approach to content analysis adopted. Additionally, as Neuendorf (2002) points out, clear prior decisions made regarding variables, measurement and coding reduce risks of bias and invalidity.

According to Pawson (1995) there are four approaches to content analysis: formal content analysis; thematic analysis; textual analysis; and audience analysis. Formal content analysis systematically classifies texts to identify different features, which are then counted with an emphasis on objectivity and reliability which was the approach taken in the newspaper content analysis in Phase 1 of this study. Thematic analysis is a coding process with a focus on the intentions behind the document. A specific area of the report is chosen then analysed in detail to uncover the underlying purpose and intentions of the authors. A weakness of thematic analysis is that researchers can choose themes that suit themselves, and this can create a lack of understanding of the reasons such themes were chosen. Textual analysis is an analysis of the use of words and phrases and how they may be used to influence readers. Finally, audience analysis looks at the audience responses, whether they accept or reject the content, and what it means to them. Appendix II details each of Pawson's (1995) four approaches. In content analysis, which Busch et al (1994-2012) also refer to as conceptual analysis, a concept is chosen and is analysed by quantifying and tallying its occurrence. According to the authors, there are six steps involved when conducting content analysis: state the research questions; select text sample and categorise it; read, review and examine; identify themes; code material; and interpret and report the findings. This six step process was the approach adopted in the newspaper content analysis.

When research questions and a sample have been identified, the text can then be coded into categories. Krippendorf (2004) and Shapiro and Markoff (1997) state that coding involves selectively reducing large pieces of text into more manageable content. This means that the research can then focus on and code for specific words or patterns aligned to the research question objectives. Appendix III details an example of a coding frame for this study by setting out different codes for basic information, such as the county the article appeared in, the name of the newspaper, and the date it appeared. The size of the article, its focus and the main themes are coded. Michaelson and Griffin (2005) delineate nine traditional approaches which they state are widely used in content analysis practice. The approaches range from simply counting clips to measures that aim to reach conclusions on the quality of an article's coverage. Included in these approaches are human coding, machine coding, and web-based coding and analysis methods. The methods are often combined when content analysis is being undertaken. Appendix IV details each method.

Michaelson and Griffin (2005) are of the view that a better approach when conducting content analysis is to determine the presence of four factors: Is the information correct? Is the information incorrect? Is the information misleading? Is information omitted? Having correct information is a fundamental, central aspect to any communication vessel. Fundamental facts include definitions and, or, descriptions of the service; statements; opinions; and points of view that are supported and documented. Misstatements can include errors or incorrect information in an article. They can occur due to incorrect data provision or due to false, unsubstantiated opinions of a reporter. Incomplete information can include a statement or opinion that includes some information but excludes other relevant information. This creates a misleading impression or deception of a service. Omission occurs when key information is not included in an article when it should be. In order to fully understand an omission, the article context has to be understood. The focus of the article will be incomplete unless the omission or basic fact has been included. Following these four approaches, the authors state that human coders should have an in-depth knowledge of the issues being analysed in

order to achieve reliable and consistent analyses. To ensure reliability and validity for this study, a pilot study was first carried out as described below.

4.6.1.1 Pilot study

Conducting a pilot study can ensure a researcher is thoroughly familiar with and understands the research process and the research objectives by reading a subset of relevant content, thereby producing a valid and reliable media content analysis (Neuendorf, 2002). 30 national and regional newspapers were searched using the search terms set out in Table 1 for the pilot study, which yielded the amount of resulting articles set out in the second column. The first three search terms were reported on for the pilot study: Tusla and Family Support; Tusla and Parenting; Tusla and Prevention. Results from other search terms are also shown most notably the results from Tusla and PPFS, and Tusla and Parenting, Prevention and Family Support, both of which yielded zero resulting articles. Appendix V sets out the number of articles found per year for each of the search terms. The pilot search was carried out for the period 1 January 2014 to 8 April 2017 and used the NUIG Newspaper Archive database. The pilot sample identified eight themes (Support Services & Programmes; Childcare Services & Creches; Schooling & Homeschooling; Foster Carers; Funding; Child Protection; Tusla Policies & Procedures; and Young People's Mental Health). Five further themes were identified following analysis of further news items (Advertisement for Foster Carers & Staff; Children & Young People in Care; Adoption and Mother and Baby Homes; Tusla's Legal Spend; and Retrospective Abuse). It is important to be reminded that the themes emerged from a search for PPFS & Tusla content. This study was not about all of Tusla, and it was not about child protection. It is aimed at very specific objectives for the study and search terms. However, what emerged reflected some of the general issues surrounding Tusla. If the search terms were different, the results would in turn have been different.

Table 1 **Piloted Tusla Newspaper Analysis Search Terms and Results**

SEARCH: **From 1 January 2014 .to. 8 April 2017.**

Search Term	Results
Tusla and Family Support	651 Results
Tusla and Parenting	542 Results
Tusla and Prevention	262 Results
Tusla and PPFS	0 Results
Tusla and Parenting, Prevention & Family Support	0 Results
Tusla and Child Support	602 results
Tusla and Children	911 results
Tusla and Adolescents	52 results
Tusla and Teenagers	247 results
Tusla and Parenting Support	410 results

The 30 newspapers of the pilot sample were examined using the first three search terms in Table 1: 'Tusla and Family Support'; 'Tusla and Parenting'; and 'Tusla and Prevention'. The first ten articles from each search term are listed in Appendix VI with the exception of articles that overlapped between categories and search results that did not include both search terms. The name of each newspaper is given, together with the date and day of the week of each article. The headline of each article and a brief summary of its contents are then set out. Appendix VII gives the 30 piloted news items detailed by topic, rating and geographical area. Appendix VIII summarises the three search term results, the total number of articles, and whether they were positive, negative, or both, by geographical area of each article. News items were rated positive when Tusla was mentioned positively; negative when Tusla was referred to negatively; and 'both' when the article reported both positively and negatively of Tusla. To avoid bias and doubt, even if a newspaper item referred to Tusla negatively more often than positively, this was placed into the 'both' category (see Appendix XXII for examples). Appendix IX shows the total number of positive/negative/both articles and whether they were cited in regional or national newspapers. Appendix X shows the number of articles per year from 2014 to 8th April 2017 and whether they were positive, negative, or both. Conducting the pilot study was useful in that it highlighted a number of Irish newspaper titles, both regional and national, which were not included in the NUIG Newspaper Archive database. This led to the decision to include a further database Nexis when conducting the full newspaper content analysis. In addition, the pilot study enabled the

researcher to gain knowledge of the time-scale needed to analyse the articles and news items. Further, it was clear following the pilot study that there would be an overlap of articles per search term and this enabled the researcher to make the decision early on to cross-reference each item on a spreadsheet to avoid duplication of articles. Following the pilot study, the full content analysis was carried out, as outlined below.

4.6.1.2 Newspaper content analysis 2014–2017

Table 2 below sets out the full list of search terms utilised when the newspaper content analysis was conducted between June and September 2017 for the period 1 January 2014 to 31 December 2016. Of the nine search terms used, 2,041 articles were analysed. The largest number of articles resulted from the search term 'Tusla and Family Support'. The process for conducting the analyses is explained in the database analysis section. A further search was carried out in January and February 2018 for the period 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2017. The results of this analysis were published as part of the PPFS study programme (O'Connor et al., 2018[1]). Table 3 shows the same search terms as delineated above, totalling 999 articles for analysis.

Table 2 **Tusla Newspaper Analysis 2014-2016**

SEARCH: **From 1 January 2014 to 31 December 2016**

Search Term	**Results**
Tusla and Family Support	577
Tusla and Parenting	485
Tusla and Prevention	230
Tusla and PPFS	1 Result
Tusla and Parenting, Prevention & Family Support	0 Results
Tusla and Parenting Support	373
Tusla and Early Intervention	101
Tusla and Adolescents	46
Tusla and Teenagers	228
Total Number of Articles	2,041

[1] See Appendix XXI for Statement regarding authorship and permission to use this report.

Table 3 **Tusla Newspaper Analysis 2017**

SEARCH: **From 1 January 2017 to 31 December 2017**

Search Term	**Results**
Tusla and Family Support	315
Tusla and Parenting	238
Tusla and Prevention	119
Tusla and PPFS	2 Results
Tusla and Parenting, Prevention & Family Support	0 Results
Tusla and Parenting Support	143
Tusla and Early Intervention	38
Tusla and Adolescents	42
Tusla and Teenagers	102
Total Number of Articles	999

4.6.1.3. Database Analysis

Two databases were used in the newspaper analysis: *The Irish Newspaper Arch*ive and *Nexis*, both of which were accessed through the NIUG website. Table 4 lists the newspapers covered by both databases. Newspapers shown in italics are common to both databases.

Table 4 **Newspapers per Database**

Irish Newspaper Archive – Newspaper Sources	**Nexis – Newspaper Sources**
Anglo Celt	Corkman
City Tribune	*Drogheda Independent*
Connacht Sentinel	Irish Daily Mail
Connacht Tribune	*Irish Examiner*
Connaught Telegraph	Irish Independent
Donegal Democrat	Irish Times
Donegal News	*Kerryman*
Drogheda Independent	*Sligo Champion*
Dundalk Democrat	Sunday Business Post
Fermanagh Herald	*Sunday Independent*
Gaelic Life	Wexford People
Irish Examiner	**Nexis – other sources**
Irish Independent	Belfast Telegraph Online
Kerryman	Breaking News.ie
Kildare Nationalist	Irish News
Kilkenny People	PA Newswire Ireland

Laois Nationalist	RTE.ie/news
Leinster Express	
Leitrim Observer	
Limerick Leader	
Longford Leader	
Meath Chronicle	
Munster Express	
Nationalist & Leinster Times	
Nenagh Guardian	
Sligo Champion	
Southern Star	
Strabane Chronicle	
Sunday Independent	
Tuam Herald	
Tyrone Herald	
Ulster Herald	
Western People	
Westmeath Examiner	

Each newspaper article was examined and categorized into one of the search terms set out in Table 2. As can be seen in Tables 2 and 3, the total number of articles sourced as per the nine search terms amounted to 3,040. Some articles were common to more than one search term. Therefore, to ensure that no article was repeated and where overlapping occurred, the predominant theme of the article was chosen and categorized accordingly. The search terms chosen in Tables 2 and 3 are not mutually exclusive but are broadly related to Parenting, Prevention and Family Support, which yielded a broad overview of public awareness in the results.

T*he Irish Newspaper Archive* database was found to be unreliable and inconsistent in its results. For example, while the total number of articles sourced under the Tusla and family Support search term as per Table 2 was reported as 577, the database did not display 577 articles. Instead, 201 articles were displayed across the 3-year time period specified. The archive staff were contacted by e-mail on a number of occasions but they were unable to rectify the issue. In order to proceed and successfully report on the 577 results generated by the database, the customised dates searched were separated and reduced. Articles were searched per year, for example from the 1 January 2014 to 31 December 2014, and per half-year, for example 1 January 2014 to

30 June 2014. Having done this, a total of 580 articles were reported on. This method had to be repeated for three further search terms (Parenting, Parenting Support, Prevention). All other search terms were displayed in *The Irish Newspaper Archive* database search results.

A further issue experienced when using this database occurred when articles displayed did not contain both search terms in the content. When using the search term Tusla and Family Support, some articles contained only Tusla and not family support. This was a consistent issue throughout all search terms. However, the author reported on all results, and all news items which mentioned Tusla as part of the search for PPFS were categorised. In addition, some results did not lead to the exact page in the newspaper where the search term occurred, which resulted in manual searching of each page of the newspaper on the database. During the 2017 search, this database had improved, and all search results were displayed. But again, not all articles contained both search terms.

The *Nexis* database was consistent, clear and accurate with its results. While the number of articles found was considerably less than from *The Irish Newspaper Archive*, all articles contained the search terms. This means that all articles contained the words Tusla and the corresponding search term, e.g. Family Support. Articles were summarised and entered into a Word document template. The information was then transferred to an Excel Spreadsheet per search term, for individual analysis, and were also combined for overall article analysis. At a later date, the results were also input to SPSS.

The name of each regional and national newspaper was recorded, and the area in which each item was published is set out below, in order to compare coverage across regions. The regions are categorised according to Tusla's Area Management Structures (Table 5).

National Newspapers:

Irish Independent; Independent.ie; Sunday Independent; Irish Examiner; Irish Examiner.com; Evening Herald; Herald.ie; Breaking News.ie; Irish Daily Mail; Irish Times; RTE News; Sunday Business Post; Press Association.

Table 5 **Regional Newspapers according to Area/County**

Area	**Newspaper**
Dublin Mid-Leinster (DML) including Midlands	
Dublin South Central	*Metro Herald*
Dublin South West	-
Co. Kildare	*Leinster Leader*
Co. Wicklow	-
Co. Longford	*Longford Leader*
Co. Westmeath	*Westmeath Examiner*
Co. Offaly	-
Co Laois	*Leinster Express* *Laois Nationalist*
Dublin North East (DNE)	
Co. Meath	*Meath Chronicle*
Co. Louth	*Drogheda Independent* *Dundalk Democrat*
Co. Cavan (N/S/E)	*Anglo Celt*
Co. Monaghan	-
Dublin North/North City	-
South	
Co. Cork	*Cork Examiner* *Southern Star* *The Corkman*
Co. Kerry	*Kerryman*
Co. Waterford	*Waterford News & Star*
Co. Wexford	*Wexford People*
Co. Kilkenny	*Kilkenny People*
Co. Carlow	*Nationalist & Leinster Times*
South Tipperary	
West	
Co. Galway	*City Tribune; Connacht Sentinel; Connaught Tribune; Connaught Telegraph; Tuam Herald; Western People*
Co. Donegal	*Donegal Democrat* *Donegal News*
Co. Leitrim	*Leitrim Observer*
Co. Mayo	*Mayo News*
Co. Sligo	*Sligo Champion*
Co. Cavan (West)	*Anglo Celt*

Area	Newspaper
Co. Roscommon	-
Co. Clare	-
Co. Limerick	*Limerick Leader*
North Tipperary	*Nenagh Guardian*
Northern Ireland	
Co. Tyrone	*Tyrone Herald*
Co. Fermanagh	*Fermanagh Herald*
Co. Antrim	*Belfast Telegraph & Online*
Co. Down	-
Co. Armagh	-
Co. Derry	-

4.6.1.4. Limitations

This media content analysis was an exploratory study. As stated above, the databases used did not always produce exact search results, and results were sometimes difficult to distinguish. However, the search terms were very specific and related closely to PPFS and not more widely to Tusla and its services. This study categorised all results and all articles and news items mentioning Tusla and an aspect of PPFS. Due to limitations in the search functions of one of the databases used, at times only Tusla or only PPFS were found, but these were still included if the content of the articles was relevant. Notwithstanding these limitations, there are some key findings that are relevant and point to the need for further investigation.

Phase 2

The second phase of this study pertains to qualitative interviews with a sample of Irish journalists and a sample of child protection and welfare practitioners. Phase two was aimed at further understanding Objectives 1 and 2 and specific understanding of Objectives 3 and 4. This section first discusses the sampling process used when selecting journalists followed by the sampling of Tusla staff.

4.6.2. Sampling Process - Journalists

The purpose of conducting qualitative in-depth interviews with journalists was to trace the process behind the headlines. A sample of newspaper titles were chosen and contacted. The purposive sampling technique was based on pre-selected criteria: journalists from both regional and national newspapers. 67% of news items from the content analysis were published in national newspapers while the remaining 33% of items were published in regional newspapers. The aim was to interview 2 journalists from four of the national newspapers set out below and two journalists from each of the four regional areas set out below (total expected sample 16). The newspapers approached were selected as follows (see Table 6):

Table 6 **Sampling of Newspapers**

National newspapers (67% of items analysed in the CA)		
Most published National newspaper (top 4)	**Percentage of news items published nationally per newspaper**	**Proposed number of interviews**
1. Irish Examiner	52%	Interview 2 journalists
2. Irish Independent	11.1%	Interview 2 journalists
3. Irish Times	10.5%	Interview 2 journalists
4. Irish Daily Mail	6.4%	Interview 2 journalists
Regional Newspapers (33% of items analysed in the CA)		
Most published Regional newspapers per region	**Percentage of news items published regionally per newspaper**	**Proposed number of interviews**
1. Dublin Mid Leinster		Interview 2 journalists
Westmeath Examiner	40%	

Kildare Nationalist	19%	
Longford Leader	17%	
2. Dublin North East		Interview 2 journalists
Meath Chronicle	24%	
3. South		Interview 2 journalists
Munster Express	28%	
4. West		Interview 2 journalists
Donegal News	16%	
Total Interviews		**16 Journalists**

The journalists were contacted by e-mail inviting them to participate in a face-to-face or telephone interview. An Information Sheet outlining the details of the study was attached to each e-mail (see Appendix XI). Following 2 weeks, a reminder e-mail was sent and following 2 weeks from the reminder e-mail a final e-mail was forwarded. If no response was forthcoming, the next journalist in the sample was contacted. When a journalist agreed to be interviewed, an Interview Schedule and Consent Form were forwarded for perusal and completion (see Appendix XII and Appendix XV). Invitation e-mails were first sent in August 2019. Many journalists replied expressing their interest in participating in the research but due to their own time constraints and pressures at work were unable to give an exact date for conducting the interview. This led to delays in moving through the sampling frame as their interest was not deemed a refusal. In addition, follow-up e-mails reminding those interested in participating were met with sincere intentions to participate, however, actually setting up a concrete date was difficult. The sampling frame was very useful in moving systematically through the journalists and newspapers. Most of the journalists contacted expressed their limited time available for conducting the interview due to pressures at work. Up until March 2020, the researcher continued to e-mail and contact journalists in the sample in an attempt to secure the required sample of 16. Difficulties surrounding the Christmas break and the General Election 2020 meant that many journalists postponed participation. When the Covid-19 restrictions came into force on the 12th March 2020, it was clear that interviews would be suspended indefinitely. A total of six journalists were successfully interviewed: five telephone interviews and one (unrequested) e-mailed response to the interview schedule. Five of the

journalists were from national newspapers and one regional journalist was interviewed (see Table 7).

Table 7 **Newspaper Titles of Interviews Conducted**

Name of Newspaper	**Number of Journalists Interviewed**
Irish Independent	1
Irish Daily Mail	1
Irish Examiner	1
Irish Times	2
Anglo Celt (Dublin North East Region)	1
Total journalists interviewed	**6**

4.6.3 Interviews with Journalists

Each telephone interview conducted ranged from 30 minutes to 90 minutes. As stated previously, a semi-structured interview schedule was developed in advance of this phase of data collection. The schedule emerged from findings from the newspaper content analysis and questions were grouped into three sections: (1) attitudes and perceptions of family support and child protection; (2) framing questions; and (3) communication questions (see Appendix XII for full journalist interview schedule).

4.6.4 Sampling Process – Child Protection & Welfare Practitioners

Sampling of Child Protection and Welfare practitioners was carried out on a geographical basis. It was initially the intention to interview 4 staff members who work in the area of family support and/or child protection (social care and social work practitioners) from each of the four Child and Family Agency Regions (West; South; DNE; and DML) giving a total of 16 interviews. This geographical approach complemented the sampling approach taken for the newspaper analysis and the journalists interviews. However, due to poor uptake, the total number of achieved interviews with practitioners was five.

4.6.5 Data analysis

Each interview was audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim. The framework approach to analysing qualitative data was used to analyse interviews with the journalists and Tusla staff members. This approach allowed for the creation of an organised structure to manage the data and analyse themes. It was first developed in the 1980s at the United Kingdom's National Centre for Social Research (Ritchie & Spencer, 1994). It is comprised of five stages that are interconnected and provide guidance on analysing data from collection stage through to developing explanations and themes (Hackett & Strickland, 2018). These interconnected stages enable the researcher to move back and forth across the entire dataset until themes are defined, refined and a clear conceptual framework is developed (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The five step framework analysis process (adapted from Ritchie & Spencer, 1994) is detailed in Table 8. [This five step process was conducted at two different time periods: firstly for the interview transcripts from the journalists and secondly for the interview transcripts from the child protection and welfare participants.]

Table 8 **Framework Analysis Five Step Process**

Step 1: Familiarisation	• Gain overview • First cycle coding • Note key ideas & recurrent themes • In vivo coding • Descriptive coding
Step 2: Identifying a thematic framework	• Recognise emerging themes • Note emerging issues, concepts & themes • Second cycle coding – more focused coding
Step 3: Indexing	• Sections of information corresponding to themes are identified and applied to all text • Use of numerical/text term system to index references • Apply index to all interview transcripts
Step 4: Charting	• Indexed data is arranged in charts of themes

	• Data taken from original transcript/index and placed in charts
Step 5: Mapping and interpretation	• Analysis of key characteristics in charts • Diagram of study's data to guide researchers interpretation of the data set. • Concepts created reflective of participants data • True reflection of attitudes, beliefs and values of participants

Step 1: Familiarisation

Having read and re-read the interview transcripts and listened back to the audio-recordings, the interviews were transferred to an excel spreadsheet. A worksheet was created for each participant and each sentence was given an individual line. Initial codes/themes were recorded in the adjacent columns to each line of text which created a large number of initial codes/themes. This process of familiarisation enabled the researcher to pinpoint each participants quote to a corresponding theme/code or idea (first cycle coding). Any additional ideas or queries were noted in the next column. The use of spreadsheets replaced sheets of paper used when framework analysis was first developed and are now considered appropriate for developing thematic charts (Ritchie, Spencer & O'Connor, 2010).

Step 2: Identifying a thematic framework

Having constructed a large number of themes/codes, recurring themes and ideas were grouped together (second cycle coding). These refined themes were colour coded and each line of text was coloured according to the overall theme to enable each line of text to correspond to its coloured theme. This enabled the researcher to easily find each participants quote according to the developed theme. These became the initial thematic framework, also called a coding index, of themes and sub-themes (Ritchie, Spencer & O'Connor, 2010).

Step 3: Indexing

Once the recurring themes and the thematic framework had been drawn up, a conceptual framework or index was devised. The colour coded transcripts

were reread and labels were applied to each theme. Each theme was grouped into overall themes. Each overall theme was numbered and transferred onto a separate document. Each theme identified in the transcripts was numbered in the next column according to the overall theme. This thematic map consisted of the overall numbered themes grouped together. The numerical thematic system made it relatively easy to refer back to each line of corresponding interview transcript. All extracts of data had now been coded into a theme or subtheme.

Step 4: Charting

The purpose of charting is to organise the data into a more manageable format in order to facilitate analysis for the next stage. The indexed data was arranged into charts of themes and original transcript data were placed underneath each theme. Indexing and charting took place simultaneously given the unexpectedly lower number of participants than expected. A mixture of in-vivo themes and text themes created a full document of each participants pertaining quotation. Having each individuals quotes underneath each theme kept the research close to the participants own language used and prevented the researcher from imposing her own discourse into the text.

Step 5: Mapping and Interpretation

In order to analyse key characteristics in the charts, a number of diagrams were drafted in order to guide the researchers interpretation of the data set. Themes that had been generated from the data set through revising charts and making connections within and between categories were arranged and rearranged until a final set of themes were agreed on which reflected the data accurately giving a true reflection of all participants' perceptions of their experiences.

As stated previously, this step-by-step procedure was used for the data collected from the child welfare employee participants. The overall analysis of both sets of data resulted in the themes as detailed in Chapter 5 and discussed in Chapter 6 of this study.

4.7. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the overall project was provided by NUI Galway research ethics committee. In addition, approval was obtained from the Tusla Ethics Committee in relation to conducting interviews with Tusla staff. The main ethical considerations for the overall project as set out in the NUI Galway Ethics application pertained to issues surrounding informed consent; confidentiality of participants; protection from harm; and risk assessment. The Committee required clarification on the location and length of time data would be stored in addition to requiring all participant Consent Forms include such information.

The Tusla application pertained to the interviewing of Tusla staff. It proved to be more challenging than was expected and took nine months in total to process. The application was initially submitted on the 15th March 2019, however, full approval was not granted until December 2019. The main ethical considerations set out by the Tusla Ethics Committee were similar to the NUI Galway Ethics committee with the addition of a face-to-face meeting with a member of the Committee as well as separate approval from The Chief Operations Officer prior to final grant of approval (see Appendix XX).

4.8 The research process

Following approval from the Tusla Research Ethics Review Committee and permission received from the CEO, the four Service Directors were contacted by e-mail (West, Aisling Gillen; South, Dermot Halpin; Dublin North East, Linda Creamer; Dublin Mid Leinster, Patricia Finlay) and were forwarded an Information Sheet for Gatekeepers (see Appendix XIX and Appendix XVIII). The Service Directors were asked to disseminate the information sheet (see Appendix XIII) to staff who met the inclusion criteria together with a Distressed Persons Protocol (see Appendix XVII). Anyone interested in participating in the study was asked to contact the researcher by e-mail. Consent Forms (see Appendix XV) were forwarded to interested participants

and they were given two weeks to consider and consent to participating. Suitable dates and times for the telephone interviews were agreed on.

While a sample of 16 was anticipated, a final total of five participants agreed to be interviewed. They were all from the Dublin North East region. All interviews were carried out by telephone which lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. A semi-structured interview schedule was developed in advance of this phase of data collection (see Appendix XIV) which emerged from findings from the newspaper content analysis and sought to gain information about participants roles, their perceptions of the print media and any effects they may have experienced as a result of coverage.

4.9 Limitations

As stated, out of a proposed sample of 16 journalists from national and regional newspapers, a final sample of 6 were successfully interviewed. Although this figure was well below the sample desired, the information garnered provided rich insight into the topics under discussion. A further proposed sample of 16 child protection and welfare practitioners was not met and a final sample of 5 were interviewed. Again, while well below the desired sample, the information garnered provided valuable information to the research study. It had been the intention of the researcher to have a third phase to the study with input from adult members of the public and a youth group, however, the timeframe did not allow this. It is an area that warrants further research.

4.10 Advice of Graduate Research Committee (April 2020)

A number of areas were discussed with the Graduate Research Committee (GRC) on the 28th April 2020, regarding progression of this PhD. Firstly, the effects of the Covid-19 restrictions and implications for this research were queried by the Committee. They were informed that attempts to conduct further qualitative interviews with journalists and with Tusla staff members had ceased and would be unlikely to resume in the near future (five Tusla staff members and six journalists had been interviewed prior to the restrictions out of a target of 32: 16 journalists and 16 Tusla staff members).

Members of the Committee queried whether there was enough in the interviews conducted to date to meaningfully contribute to the research and enable completion by late Autumn 2020. Both the Supervisors and the researcher were confident that the information garnered to that date would be more than sufficient to enable completion while providing rich analysis of the qualitative data gathered. The committee was also informed that the Tusla staff members were now busier than ever and a senior Tusla Research staff member had made it known that no further research or research obligations would be carried out by Tusla staff prior to November 2020 at the earliest.

The researcher put forward a suggestion to return to the newspaper analysis and review a further two years of newspapers to add to that data set. However, the Committee and Supervisors were unsure whether this would be necessary and whether it would add undue pressure and workload to the already sufficient dataset. The committee suggested revisiting the research questions, aims and objectives and see what has been achieved to date, what could be achieved with what has been done, and whether any of the research questions may need to be altered to sufficiently answer the questions. It was decided by the Supervisors, the Committee and the researcher to proceed with the data already gathered and submit in September 2020. While the scope of the project was thus limited, the findings have nonetheless provided a rich set of data that has addressed the research question and contributed to each of the four objectives of the study.

4.11 Chapter Summary

This chapter has describe the methodology designed and implemented in order to answer the research questions and associated objectives for this study. The sampling frames used for data collection of the print media, journalists and child protection and welfare practitioners have been set out in detail. The implementation of each phase has been clearly outlined together with details on the data analysis approach, framework analysis. Finally, some limitations were highlighted together with recommendations from the Graduate Research Committee at NUIG in view of the Covid-19 pandemic

and its implications for the research. The next chapter, Chapter 5, presents the findings of this study.

Chapter 5 Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the findings of this research study. The chapter is divided into two main sections. The first section provides the results pertaining to the Print Media Analysis carried out during Phase 1 of this study. The second section sets out the findings in relation to Phase 2 of this study, consisting of qualitative interviews with Tusla staff members and journalists. It also provides a brief description of the characteristics of the participants in the study. The main findings under each objective are presented sequentially with a summary of each finding set out in the final section of this chapter. Table 9 shows the sequence of each research objective by matching it with its findings and location in the chapter. It should be noted that while the main sources are connected with the objectives, as shown in the findings, the interviews also provided useful complimentary data to inform objectives 1 and 2.

Table 9 **Location of Results in this Chapter according to Objectives**

Objective	**Location in Chapter**	**Main Source of Data**
1. To examine how Tusla's family support work is portrayed in the Irish print media	Section One	Newspaper content analysis
2. To compare and contrast trends and content in print media reports on Tusla's family support work	Section One	Newspaper content analysis
3. To consider the underlying processes associated with print media production & publication	Section Two	Qualitative interviews with Journalists
4. To explore the responses of child protection and welfare practitioners to the portrayal of child protection and Tusla's family support work in the print media	Section Two	Qualitative interviews with Child Protection and Welfare Practitioners

5.2 Section 1: Media Analysis Findings (Phase 1)

5.2.1 Introduction

This section details the results of the newspaper content analysis which was carried out on 1,497 news items and articles across four years (2014-2017). This analysis pertains to objectives 1 and 2 and examines how family support is portrayed in the print media in addition to comparing and contrasting trends and content in a selection of Irish print media. The nature of reporting on PPFS and any changes that occurred over time is also explored. It is important to refer back to the methodology and search terms used when interpreting this data. Search terms related to PPFS and did not include terms relating to child protection, children in care, or Tusla in general. All results and articles which mentioned Tusla and an aspect of PPFS were categorised. Due to limitations in the database, at times only Tusla or only PPFS results emerged but were still included if they contained relevant articles. This section details the number of news items found per year and whether the items were positive, negative, or both. The themes identified are categorised per year and are rated accordingly. Finally the items are detailed per region and per newspaper title, ending with a summary of all results. Full details of the newspaper content analysis can be found in O'Connor et al. (2018).

5.2.2 Results

A total of 3,040 news items were recorded across the four years 2014-2017. After repeated articles were removed, a final total of 1,497 newspaper items were analysed. Table 10 sets out the search terms utilised and final number of items. The largest number of articles appeared in the search term 'Tusla and Family Support' (n = 934), while 'Tusla and Parenting, Prevention and Family Support' yielded no results. As stated, full details of the search process and methods used can be found in O'Connor et al. (2018).

Table 10 **Search Results 2014-2017**

Search Term	**Results following removal of repeat articles**
Tusla and Family Support	934

Tusla and Parenting	85
Tusla and Prevention	39
Tusla and PPFS	1 Result
Tusla and Parenting, Prevention & Family Support	0 Results
Tusla and Parenting Support	192
Tusla and Early Intervention	37
Tusla and Adolescents	65
Tusla and Teenagers	144
Total Number of Articles	1497

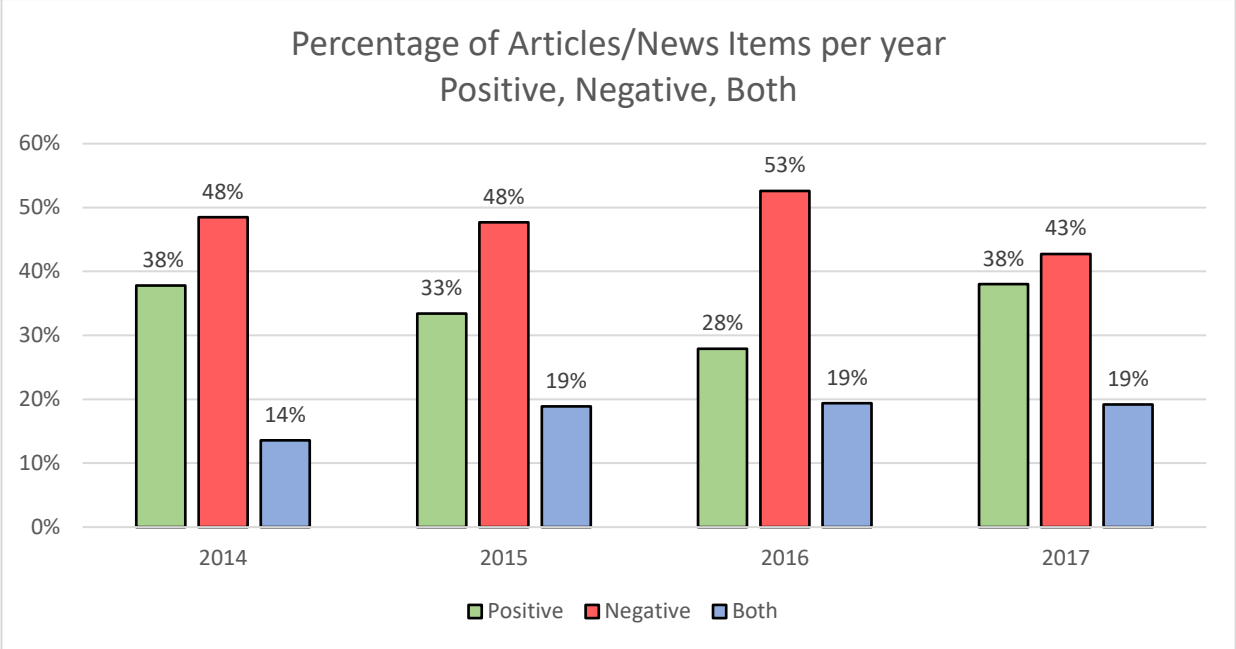

Figure 1: **Percentage of Articles per year: Positive, Negative, Both**

Figure 1 details the percentage of news items which were found to be positive, negative, or both. Across all years, the highest percentage of articles were negative, followed by positive, and lastly a mixture of both. Since Tusla was established on the 1 January 2014, the number of negative articles in the newspapers searched for the first three years (2014 to 2016) have been increasing while the number of positive articles has been consistently decreasing. There has been an increase in the number of articles which fall into the 'both' category from the establishment of Tusla. In 2017 the highest number of articles were negative (43%). However, the number of positive

articles increased by over 10% from the previous year (38%): 2017 is the first year since Tusla's establishment that the number of positive articles has increased. To ascertain whether a difference was present in each items rating (positive/negative/both) over time (2014, 2015, 2016, 2017), a Pearson chi square was conducted. The result was statistically significant [χ^2 (6),N=1497)=16.784, p=.010]. The effect size for this finding, Cramer's V, was low/weak, 0.07.

573 items were collected in 2017 the majority of which were negative (43%). Coverage pertaining to the whistle-blower scandal involving McCabe and Harrisson)[2] gained much coverage in 2017, totalling 19% of all articles; 90% of these were negative, 3% positive, and 7% both positive and negative. However, when those whistle-blower articles were removed from the sample, there were more positive (46%) than negative (32%) articles for the first time since Tusla's establishment in 2014.

Table 11 **Articles & News Items by Theme & Rating (overall %)**

Theme	**Number of Articles**	**Positive**	**Negative**	**Both**
Support Services & Programmes	377 (25.2%)	256 (17.2%)	65 (4.3%)	56 (3.7%)
Child Protection	219 (14.6%)	41 (2.7%)	109 (7.3%)	69 (4.6%)
Children & Young People in Care	216 (14.4%)	19 (1.3%)	156 (10.4%)	41 (2.7%)
Funding	185 (12.4%)	58 (3.9%)	104 (6.9%)	23 (1.6%)
Tusla Policies & staffing issues	159 (10.6%)	6(0.4%)	139 (9.3%)	14 (0.9%)
Whistleblowers	*108 (7.2%)*	*3 (0.2%)*	*97 (6.5%)*	*8 (0.5%)*
Childcare, Services & Crèches	125 (8.4%)	33 (2.2%)	54 (3.6%)	38 (2.6%)
Schooling & Homeschooling	61 (4.1%)	24 (1.6%)	22 (1.5%)	15 (1.0%)

[2]Sergeant Maurice McCabe and Garda Keith Harrison, members of An Garda Siochana (Ireland's Police Force), became widely known to the general public as Garda whistle-blowers following allegations they made of malpractice and corruption in An Garda Siochana practices. An investigation was undertaken into whether files in certain State agencies, including Tusla, were created and distributed by senior members of An Garda Siochana in inventing false allegations of sexual abuse against Sergeant McCabe. Concerns in relation to Garda Keith Harrison and his family in similar circumstances were also investigated. This investigation received extensive media coverage.

Advert for Foster Carers/Carers/Staff	51 (3.4%)	50 (3.3%)	0	1 (0.1%)
Adoption & Mother & Baby Homes	47 (3.1%)	9 (0.6%)	28 (1.8%)	10 (0.7%)
Foster Carers	28 (1.9%)	13 (0.9%)	10 (0.7%)	5 (0.3%)
Tusla Legal Spend	16 (1.0%)	0	11 (0.7%)	5 (0.3%)
Young Peoples Mental Health	7 (0.5%)	0	6 (0.4%)	1 (0.1%)
Retrospective Abuse	6 (0.4%)	2 (0.1%)	4 (0.3%)	0
Total	**1497 (100%)**	**511 (34.2%)**	**708 (47.2%)**	**278 (18.6%)**

Table 11 sets out the 13 themes identified across each search term and whether the article or news item was positive, negative or both.

The highest number of items related to Support Services and Programmes (25.2%), followed by Child Protection (14.6%), then Children and Young People in Care (14.4%). Funding was also in the top four articles identified, at 12.4%. Support Services and Programmes scored highest for positive articles at 17.2% of the 1,497 newspaper items, while articles regarding Children and Young People in Care scored the highest negatively of all articles, at 10.4%. The majority of Child Protection items also scored negatively, at 7.3% of the overall number of articles. With the exception of Support Services and Programmes, most themes scored higher negatively than positively, not taking into account advertisements for foster carers, carers and staff, which were predominantly placed into the 'positive' category. In addition, Schooling and Home-schooling scored marginally higher positively (1.6%) than negatively (1.5%) together with Foster Carers who scored positively at 0.9% and negatively at 0.7%.

Across the four years, the largest number of items appeared in the theme Support Services & Programmes in 2016 (n=8.0%). The number of items under Child Protection increased steadily from 2014 to 2017. Children and Young People in Care news items increased from 2014 to 2016, but coverage almost halved from 2016 (6.5%) to 2017 (3.4%). News items regarding funding appeared similarly in 2014 and 2016 but were covered more in 2015 and 2017. Under the theme Tusla Policies & Staffing issues, most items pertained to the Whistleblower scandals. When these were removed, coverage

of Tusla's policies and staffing issues rose sharply in 2017. Childcare services were covered most often in 2016 (3.1%) and 2017 (2.7%) compared to the first two years. Advertising for foster carers and staff remained steady across each year. Coverage of items pertaining to Adoption and Mother and Baby Homes increased sharply in 2017 (1.5%) compared with 2014 (0.3%). Foster Carers items also increased sharply in 2017 (1.5%). Retrospective Abuse news items did not appear in 2017. Very little coverage was given to Young People's Mental Health (0.5%) and Retrospective Abuse (0.5%).

The highest percentage of positive items relating to Support Services & Programmes were published in 2017 (82%). Negative items in this area have decreased from 2014 (25%) to 2017 (8%). Regarding Child Protection, the percentage of negative items decreased from 62% in 2014 to 38% in 2017. The highest number of items published on Children and Young People in Care appeared in 2016 (n = 97) and remained predominantly negative. However, the percentage of articles rated 'both' increased from 5% in 2014 to 35% in 2017. Positive coverage of Funding items increased from 26% in 2014 to 60% in 2017. Negative coverage rose steadily across 2014 (67%), 2015 (72%), and 2016 (84%) but dropped in 2017 to 20%. Positive coverage of Childcare Services & Crèches rose from 16% in 2014 to 49% in 2017. Negative coverage fell from 42% in 2014 to 17% in 2017. Further, Schooling & Home schooling positive coverage rose from 11% in 2014 to 61% in 2017. Adoption and Mother & Baby Home coverage appeared most often in 2017 (n = 21) and was largely negative (67%). Foster Carers coverage appeared most often in 2017 and was mostly positive (55%). Young People's Mental Health items were not published in 2014 or in 2017.

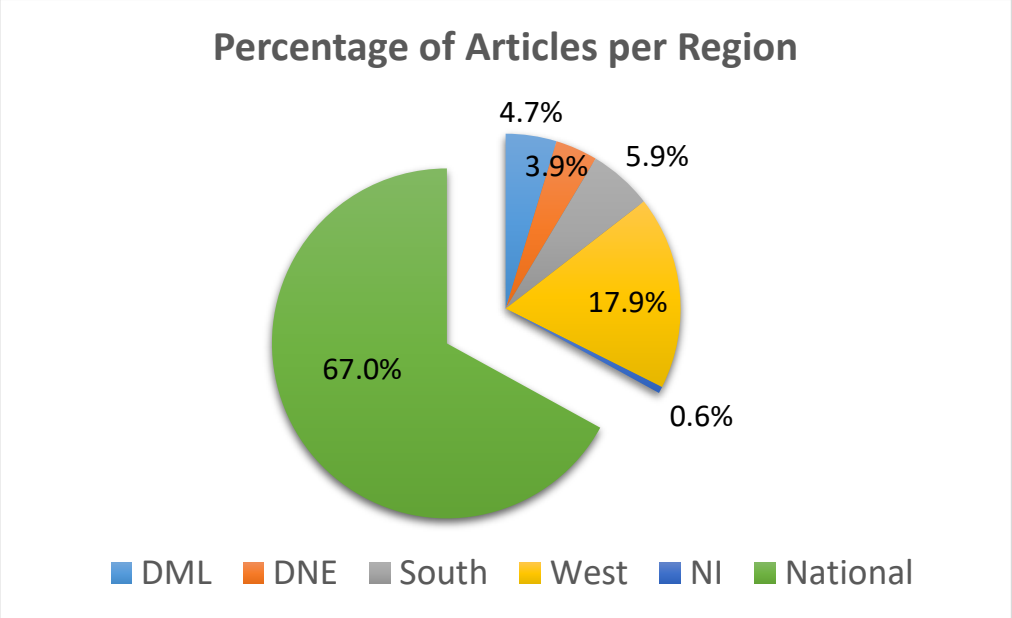

Figure 2 **Percentage of Articles per Region (National, DML, DNE, South, West, NI)**

Regional and National Differences

Figure 2 shows the percentage of newspaper items published in each region of Ireland. Two-thirds of the articles were published in a national newspaper which is not surprising given that most national papers analysed were daily papers and the regional papers were published weekly. The highest number of regional articles were found in the West (17.9%), while the lowest were found in Northern Ireland (0.6%). A Pearson chi-square test of independence was calculated comparing the region of publication of items (national/local) and the items rating (positive/negative/both). A significant interaction was found [χ^2 (2)=377.28, $p < .001$]. A moderate measure of this association was calculated using Lambda (λ=0.284). Using knowledge of the region each item was published in (national/regional) would allow a 28.4% reduction in predicting its rating (positive/negative/both).

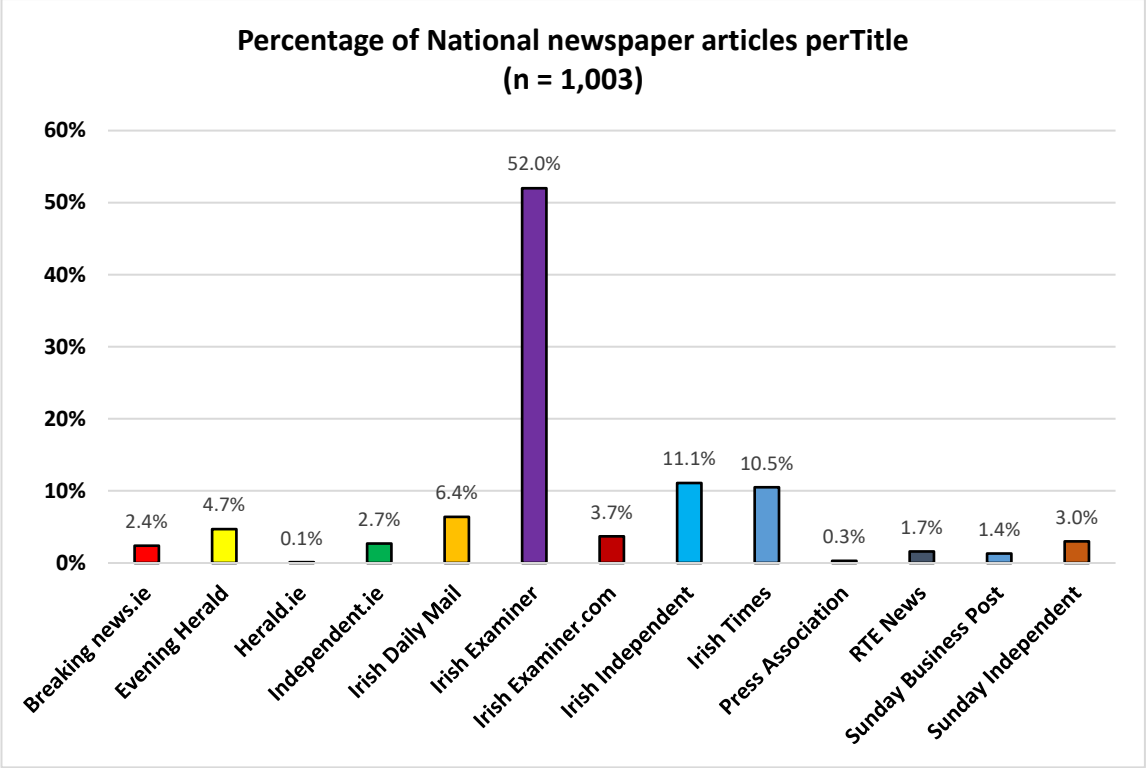

Figure 3 **Percentage of National Newspaper Articles per Newspaper Title**

Figure 3 shows the percentage of national articles per newspaper title. The highest number of national articles appeared in the *Irish Examiner* (52%) followed by the *Irish Independent* (11.1%), the *Irish Times* (10.5%), and the *Irish Daily Mail* (6.4%). The *Sunday Business Post* published the fewest items (1.3%) with the exception of Herald.ie (0.1%) and the Press Association (0.3%). The *Irish Examiner* has been publishing articles extensively on Tusla since the organisation's establishment in 2014. All national newspapers had a higher percentage of negative articles than positive articles or than articles with elements of both positive and negative. The *Irish Examiner* published the highest number of negative articles (32.8%) followed by the *Irish Independent* (5.6%), the *Irish Times* (4.9%), and the *Irish Daily Mail* (4.4%). The highest number of positive articles also appeared in the *Irish Examiner* (8.3%) (although this was four times less than the number of negative articles), as did the highest number of positive and negative articles (10.7%).

5.2.3 Summary of Results of Media Analysis Findings (Phase 1)

5.2.3.1 Overall News Items

Of the 1,497 news items analysed, most items were negative across all four years. 2017 had the lowest percentage of negative items and was the first year since the establishment of Tusla that the percentage of positive items increased. Following the removal of all whistleblower items in 2017, the publications were more positive than negative.

5.2.3.2 Themes

Of the 13 themes identified in this study, the highest percentage of items were found under the Support Services & Programmes theme, followed by Child Protection, Children & Young People in Care; Funding and Tusla's Policies, Procedures & Staffing Issues. Support Services & Programmes contained more positive than negative news items with the exception of Schooling & Home schooling, Advertisements, and Foster Carers. All other themes contained more negative than positive news coverage. Child Protection coverage increased each year. Tusla Policies & Procedures coverage rose in 2017 (excluding Whistleblower articles). There was little coverage of Young People's Mental Health and Retrospective Abuse. In 2017, the highest percentage of positive news items pertained to the theme Support Services & Programmes (82%). Negative news coverage of Support Services & Programmes decreased from 25% in 2014 to 8% in 2017. Negative coverage of Child Protection decreased from 62% in 2014 to 38% in 2017. Positive news coverage of Funding increased from 26% in 2014 to 60% in 2017. Positive coverage of Schooling & Homeschooling increased from 11% in 2014 to 61% in 2017. Young People's Mental Health coverage was predominantly negative and no items were published in 2014 or in 2017.

5.2.3.3 Breakdown by Region

67% of all news items appeared in National Newspapers. 4% of items were published in both the Dublin Mid Leinster (DML) region and in the Dublin

North East (DNE) region. 6% of items were published in the South region, 18% in the West region and just 1% in Northern Ireland.

5.2.3.4 National Newspapers

The *Irish Examiner* (print and online) published the highest percentage of items (55.7%) followed by the *Irish Independent* (print and online) at 13.8%. The lowest percentage of items were published in the *Sunday Business Post* (1.3%). All National newspapers published more negative news items than positive. 32.8% of the overall articles were negative and were found in the *Irish Examiner*.

5.2.3.4 Regional Newspapers

The majority of regional newspapers published more positive than negative news items ranging from 59% in the Dublin Mid-Leinster and Dublin North East regions up to 71% in the West.

5.2.3.6 'Tusla' in the Headlines

10% of all articles mentioned "Tusla" in the Headlines, 57% of those were negative; 19% were positive. 16% of those Headlines appeared on the front page, and 68% of those were negative.

5.2.3.7. Phase 1 Summary

The results give an insight into how PPFS is reported in Ireland's print media both nationally and locally. They show there is not just one narrative about PPFS and Tusla: positive and negative reports are published. As discussed in the final Public Awareness Report (McGregor, Canavan & O'Connor, 2018) and print media analysis (O'Connor, McGregor & Devaney, 2018), the print media hold a similar perception of PPFS and child protection as the general public, in that they do not always seem to differentiate them. Further, the print media tend to view family support work more in terms of child protection and

children in care in terms of family support approaches or specific programmes.

The results also show increasing awareness of Tusla and PPFS and a tendency to be more positive than negative when reporting on PPFS: Support Services more positive than negative in 2014 (65%), up to 82% in 2017; Child Protection more negative than positive in 2014 (62%), down to 38% in 2017; Children and Young People in Care more negative than positive in 2014 (85%), down to 53% in 2017. The themes that emerged from this analysis are significant to inform how the media report on and understand PPFS and how they interpret this in the context of Tusla's services. The finding related to child protection and family support was especially significant and was influential in informing the focus of the qualitative study in phase 2.

The next section, Section 2 presents the findings from Phase 2 of this study comprised of qualitative interviews with child protection and welfare practitioners and journalists.

5.3 Section 2: Findings from Qualitative Interviews with Journalists and Child Protection & Welfare Practitioners (Phase 2)

Section 2 is divided into two parts. Firstly, the profile and findings from interviews conducted with six Journalists are detailed, and secondly, the profile and findings from interviews conducted with five Child Protection and Welfare Practitioners are presented.

5.3.1 Part One: Interviews with Journalists

Table 12 **Profile of Journalists**

Newspaper Title	Area	Gender
J1. Irish Examiner	National	Male
J2. Irish Times	National	Female
J3. Anglo Celt	Regional	Male
J4. Irish Independent	National	Female
J5. Irish Times	National	Female

J6. Irish Mail	National	Female

A total of six journalists were interviewed for this study, two male and four females (see Table 12). Five of the journalists wrote for national newspapers while one wrote for a regional paper. All but one of the interviews were carried out by telephone. The remaining journalist chose to submit answers to the interview schedule by e-mail.

5.3.2 Objective 3: To consider the underlying processes associated with print media production and publication from journalists perspectives.

This section presents the findings for objective three of this research study, to consider the underlying processes associated with print media production and publication from journalists perspectives. While many interesting points were made by the journalists, five overarching findings were compiled to adequately explain this objective. These five factors are presented in Table 13 and are then discussed individually.

Table 13 **Five Key Factors to consider Print Media Production & Publication**

Key factors to consider print media production/publication
1. Child Protection and Family Support Differentiation
2. Irelands Child & Family Agency (a) Fragmented (b) Resources
3. Communication with Ireland's Child & Family Agency (a) Restrictions
4. Framing (a) The way the media works (b) Power of the media (c) Sources
5. Impact of Reporting (a) Impact on public (b) Impact on Agency workers

5.3.2.1 Factor 1: Child Protection and Family Support Differentiation

All of the journalists appeared to understand the concepts family support and child protection. This is important given they are the individuals reporting on

these issues in the print media which is read by members of the general population. Two of the journalists seemed to have a basic understanding of the term family support when asked what their perceptions were stating: *"it would be a sense of support structures around families"* (J1) including parenting supports, supports on how to listen and play with children, practical supports such as family budgeting and how to address issues in the home. Two others perceived family support to be mostly targeting families at risk or children who were vulnerable and services ranged from family budgeting supports to domestic violence cases. However, two journalists were not as clear when describing their understanding of family support and associated family support with child protection concerns: *"The kind of, ahhhh, services that they put around families when there are child protection concerns"* (J5) and also mentioned supports such as after-school help with homework and parenting support. Another participant stated: *"So you mean, you're talking about the families who have children removed or the children on their radar, that perspective?"* (J6). The term family support resurfaced at other stages during the interview and was described as a service to try and prevent a crisis within a family which was consistently working in the background, often very successfully. There was recognition that the term was misunderstood as a service for families where something had gone wrong and that this should not be the case: *It should be for families who want to use it, need it"* (J2). In addition, it was described as being *"a bit tainted"* (J2) with some taboo surrounding it and the perception that parents seeking support have *"a major problem"* (J2).

Child Protection as discussed in previous chapters as the process of protecting individual children identified as either suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm as a result of abuse or neglect. The term 'child protection concern' is used when there are reasonable grounds for believing that a child may have been, is being, or is at risk of being physically, sexually or emotionally abused or neglected. The state was recognised by journalists as being in charge of child protection: *"Child protection I would see as the sharper end of things from the perspective of state agencies, including Tusla, where there are*

sufficient concerns about a child or family…..up to and including the child being placed in care" (J1). It was stated to be "*reactive rather than protective, rather than preventative. It's reacting to circumstances"* (J2). Two journalists were unclear in their differentiation between child protection and family support services, such as parenting support and thought that the state usually enter the homes of families with parenting concerns to set up programmes for parents and enter into a signed agreement with social workers. *"That sort of arrangement would be put in place in advance of any Care Order and that"* (J5). If such an agreement was not kept the next step would be for social workers to apply for an Emergency Protection order or else go to court to seek an Order from the Judge to take the child into care.

5.3.2.2 Factor 2: Ireland's Child and Family Agency

On the 1st January 2014, Ireland's Child and Family Agency (Tusla) was established as an independent agency. Prior to this, the child protection and welfare services were delivered as part of a wider integrated health and social services system (Burns & McGregor, 2019). The newly established Child and Family Agency placed a greater emphasis on expanding the PPFS services of the state agency alongside ongoing development of the child protection system. This expansion of the PPFS services is enabling the delivery of a more integrated and holistic frame of practice placing help on a continuum from low to high level of need and risk. Journalists gave their views on the agency and many of the difficulties faced by the agency. Some felt that the supports that Tusla offer should be consolidated with other services such as mental health services.

(a) Fragmented Services

One journalist stated *"It seems to me that fragmentation of services potentially makes life more difficult"* (J1) and stated there was a lack of coordination across support services in place around children. The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and justice services for young people should have been placed under the remit of Tusla according to some participants. CAMHS is a specialist service for people under the age of 18 who experience mental health difficulties and is under the remit of Ireland's

Health Service Executive (HSE) while the Irish Youth Justice Service (IYJS) is comprised of two divisions run by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), responsible for legislation and policy in respect of detention schools and the Department of Justice and Equality (DJE) which deals with crime policy and Garda youth diversion projects. One journalist stated that a case could start off as a family support case and because of this fragmentation of services could develop into a child protection or welfare issue. This was also described as an *"overlap"* of services and *"a big failure when they created Tusla"* (J5).

(b) Resources

The issue of the Child and Family Agency being under-resourced and over-worked was highlighted by journalists. There appeared to be unanimous recognition that the agency needed more resources in order to adequately support children and families. J1 stated: *"I think there are a lot more things it would like to do and more things it could do better if it had more money"* and this lack of resources meant the agency could not fully execute its brief. The difficulty surrounding hiring of social workers was stated to be the reason for critical HIQA reports being published due to child referrals not being assessed in a timely fashion. One participant stated that the agency was under-supported, under-funded and *"it's probably fire-fighting all the time"* (J5). Social workers were described as *"working hard and doing their best to give the service but often they are vastly overworked"* (J5). There was recognition that they had too many cases to look after and this leads to a lack of adequate services being provided for children despite social workers best intentions. Another participant had knowledge of social workers who *"left the job, 'cause it's just so appalling"* (J6). The lack of resources was mentioned by one journalist as the reason for negative coverage of child protection issues being highlighted by the media.

5.3.2.3 Factor 3: Communication with Ireland's Child and Family Agency

All of the journalists mentioned their experiences when communicating with the Child and Family Agency. The issue of no comment being given by Tusla

when a right of reply was sought was a common issue which impeded journalists reporting fully on issues pertaining to support and protection. One journalist described the Agency as *"just another statutory strand that has to be dealt with…….very hard to understand……..a difficult organisation to try and pin down"* (J3) and when seeking comment from them had experienced no transparency and therefore found it very hard to present a story. Another participant stated the whole country would like to hear the Agency's version of themselves and always seeks a right of reply: *"Their response is no response"* (J6). Another journalist stated the lack of response is referenced in the article and if a response arrives a follow-up article is written with that response. Another participant stated the Agency do not explain when things have gone wrong or wait too long to give an explanation why things have gone wrong which results in the issue becoming *"a lot bigger than if they had just explained initially and the story wouldn't have become such a big story"* (J5).

Some journalists received daily press releases from the Agency and were in regular telephone contact with the media department who were described as *really helpful and courteous"* (J1). Another participant spoke about Tusla roadshows pertaining to recruitment of foster carers when Tusla helped journalists to engage with foster carers who could tell their stories. Another participant stated the Agency *"will always give you a comment of some sort about the specific situation you're addressing"* (J5) which enabled the journalist to come to a greater understanding of the issues *"and the story becomes more of a nuanced story than it would have been if they don't give you anything at all"* (J5). Other participants stated the contact with the agency can vary depending on whether or not a controversial case or critical report is published. The example of a HIQA report being published in relation to deficits in foster care services was given when Tusla usually provide a press release with its response on the day of publication of the report. The fact that Tusla do not hold press conferences was also mentioned and the statement that senior executives in the agency do not appear in front of the media unless they are addressing a seminar or conference. Another participant stated that communication with the agency depended on the type of article being written.

An informative piece surrounding support services and the way they work would be perceived by Tusla as beneficial and would then *"put someone forward who would chat to me"* (J5). An article being written about foster carers would also result in Tusla putting the journalist in touch with social workers who would talk about the need for foster carers in addition to providing contact details for foster carers themselves. However, if the article is a critical article, *"they won't get you to talk to somebody"* (J4) and usually a written response is issued stating they will not comment on individual cases.

(a) Restrictions to Reporting

Many of the journalists spoke of the restrictions in place to prevent them from accurately reporting on child protection and welfare issues. The issue of the in-camera rule was mentioned which was stated to make it *"very, very difficult for a journalist to highlight what's really going on under the surface"* (J6). The in-camera rule pertains to family law cases which are heard in private (*in camera*) in order to protect the privacy of the family. Part 2 (sections 3 to 12) of the Courts and Civil Law (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act, 2013 allows *bona fide* representatives of the Press to attend family law cases, subject to the right of the Judge to exclude any such representatives, under the strict condition that no names, addresses or any other details which might identify the parties can be used (DJE, 2020). One participant felt that this rule was being abused by the child protection system and that journalists were *"robustly restrained in reporting what's actually going on in the system. You're silenced"* (J6). The journalist spoke of being very careful when reporting on child protection cases and that articles had to be approved by a Solicitor and the Editor who might decide not to report on the issue at all given the legal issues surrounding the in-camera rule. Another participant spent many years reporting in the Courts and had previous experience of Tusla applying to have her removed from the Court which meant *"I couldn't cover quite a lot of cases"* (J5). The reason for the agency applying to have reporters removed from the Court could include their fear that a child might be exposed if the case was reported in a certain way. However, journalists were aware of the rules of reporting such cases and would never write anything to lead to the identification of a child: *"These stories tend to be*

always anonymous because the child cannot be identified" (J4). In addition, when a Judge decides a journalist can report on a case, he/she can impose a condition stating not to do so until the end of the case which means the newspaper may not have the resources to send a reporter to Court for a long period of time for one article at the end: *"Newspapers don't have the resources to have a reporter go every day to a court for 3 weeks and then produce one piece of copy at the end of it" (J5)*.

5.3.2.4 Factor 4: Framing

Under this factor, framing, three sub-themes are noted: (a) the way the media works, (b) the power of the media, and (c) sources.

(a) The way the media works

How the media construct and report on issues was discussed. Some journalists appeared to recognise that print media coverage in matters relating to child protection and family support were predominantly negative and that positive coverage was not as common and probably did not get the attention it deserved in the print media. One participant stated that, depending on the newspaper, children and family issues were presented as crisis issues when problems arise with very little positivity. Another participant spoke about writing stories regarding foster care services in order to highlight difficulties within the system. The journalist also stated *"But I would be the first to say that the system overwhelmingly works brilliantly for loads of children…..but maybe I, along with a lot of reporters, could be accused of focussing excessively on what doesn't work rather than what does"* (J1).

Being objective and free from bias was an important point raised by journalists who held the view that their personal feelings did not infringe on their reporting of issues. Journalists mentioned their responsibility to write honestly and correctly by presenting the facts stating it would be unethical to allow personal prejudice to influence their writing. It was recognised that having an agenda to write in a certain way would not be doing themselves, the newspaper or the readers justice: *"If I start excluding certain information*

then obviously there's a problem in how the story is going to be shaped" (J3). When writing about children, stories are written from an anonymous perspective in order to protect the child: *"we don't write things to upset people"* (J3).

The reporting of details from large reports was mentioned as being a skill held by journalists to report all of the pertinent facts accurately and succinctly. In addition, the way journalists compile stories was explained in terms of structuring an article and the importance of quickly capturing the attention of the reader at the headline firstly, then the first line of the article. It was explained that if a reader is not interested in the article within the first five lines that they will not read the story at all. Therefore the journalist has to write an article that is informative and accurate or consist of at least two of the three pillars of journalism: *"inform, educate and entertain"* (J3). The culture of newspapers reporting bad news stories was mentioned by journalists as being a selling factor. Participants stated that writing a story about a child doing really well in foster care was very difficult to present: *"we can't do that story"* (J3) and writing about a child protection case when things work out well *"don't make good news stories"* (J5). However, if a child had run away and became a missing person: *"obviously every newspaper is gonna jump on that. I suppose it's a culture as well of newspapers where bad news sells"* (J3). Another participant stated that tragic stories had the most impact on readers and were read more often than positive ones: *"that's just the nature of the news"* (J5). Another explanation for bad news stories being published most often in the print media was the general populations *"morbid curiosity"* (J6). One participant stated that it was difficult to write positive stories in the same way that negative stories are written because the newspaper did not want to identify or isolate a particular child or family and that bad news stories did not always identify the people involved. Another stated the media had an obligation to highlight certain issues to the public and the responsibility was on the journalist to write the story as balanced as possible while emphasising improvements that may be underway.

(b) The power of the media

Journalists at times mentioned the importance of print media publications and their ability to reach and impact audiences compared to other media sources such as the internet or the radio. The newspaper was said to be tangible with a captive audience for a set period of time. One participant stated many people in the area were unaware of a domestic violence issue until the newspaper published a report on it. In addition, the newspaper reports were written in the hope that *"you might wake the people up with a bit of power on the decision makers"* (J3) stating that often publicity could act as a stimulus towards change. Others were of the view that the media played an important part in highlighting deficits in children's support services and mentioned that in the past the number of children who died in social services were not known but are now published by the HSE due to media coverage. Another stated the media should highlight tragic cases so that lessons can be learned and *"journalists need to continue to hold these services to account"* (J4) otherwise bad practice, if unchallenged, can adversely affect vulnerable children. In addition, the focus on tragic cases was not thought to be a bad thing and that if there was a scandal or failure, it needed to be highlighted: *"it's why schools and crèches are inspected. It's why HIQA runs the rule over facilities and institutions"* (J6). This was described as the job a journalist has to do in the hope that things can change: *"journalists have exposed some of the greatest corruptions in this country and all across the world"* (J6). Newspaper coverage of child protection cases were thought by some participants to impact the number of cases reported to child protection services by making people aware of the issues: *"it opens people's eyes"* (J2). By highlighting forms of abuse of children that people may have ignored, they may realise the behaviour is not acceptable and consider reporting. *"I do believe that by highlighting things you can encourage more people to come forward"* (J6). Journalists were said to be in a position to alert people to important issues.

(c) Sources

Journalists spoke of how they sourced their articles and topics to report on. The publication of governmental reports on issues was a common source of reporting and triggered newspaper coverage as well as responding to a tragedy. HIQA inspections of foster care services and their published reports were also mentioned as common sources: *"the release of a particular report will trigger coverage such as a HIQA inspection of foster care services in a particular area"* (J4). A family member may contact a newspaper in distress about an issue that may have occurred. At times, young adults over the age of 18 years who had been in care contacted journalists in order to tell their story. In addition, Tusla internal reports covering cases pertaining to child protection provided by whistleblowers could trigger newspaper coverage. At times journalists decided themselves what to report on. Others reported on topics from a Press Release: *"it would just give me the idea and then I would follow it up"* (J2). Some newspapers publish a Press Release on their website and wait for feedback from the public. If there is interest in it, a follow-up will be written in the newspaper. Other journalists spoke of social workers being the source of articles published who might be willing to talk about the services. However, it was stated that while social workers might be "*willing to talk"* they were also "*frightened to talk*". Members of the public sometimes made contact with journalists in response to previously published articles which could lead to a bigger story on the same topic: *"quite often people do engage with the papers….and are willing to talk to us"* (J3).

5.3.2.5 Factor 5: Impact of Reporting

When asked whether journalists thought their reporting of issues impacted on the general public, some felt that they did impact on public views about certain matters. Two sub-themes were noted: (a) impact on general public and (b) impact on agency workers.

(a) Impact on general public

One participant stated the newspaper coverage of social workers in the UK over the years had greatly impacted the general public's views of social services and child protection. Newspapers were stated to be a *"safe and trusted format with checks and balances and editors"* (J1) which meant that more people believe the content published. Another participant stated *"our job isn't to influence really. It's to take facts or hold opinions up to scrutiny"* (J1) and ask whether or not the system is working or if it could be better but admitted that this may have an impact on how people think. Another stated they did not think that any pieces written would have any impact on the general public view but that *"obviously you would hope it would impact some people when they're reading it"* (J2). In addition, J2 stated that reading about people in adversity could make others feel better about their own lives and *"actually realise they've a lot to be grateful for"*. Tusla was described by one participant as a *"brand"* and if there is constant negative coverage *"that brand is being devalued"* and people will look negatively at that brand, Tusla (J3). Another described newspapers as the way most people get their information about services they have no personal experience of and are therefore influenced by the content published. When journalists were first allowed into child welfare cases, the information printed by newspapers was the first time those stories had been heard by the public *"so writing about it would obviously impact people for the first time in particular"* (J5). One participant stated that anonymity in child protection cases and articles did not have the same impact as individuals who were named.

(b) Impact on Agency workers

It was recognised that consistent, repeated negative stories about shortcomings and system failures in the Child and Family Agency was not conducive to a good working environment amongst social workers. However, it was also stated that if these stories were not written, then journalists would not be doing their jobs: *"If we don't do those stories, we are not doing our job" (J1)*. In addition, the negative tragic stories were stated to have the effect of positive changes being made within the agency: *"It doesn't mean that the*

tragic stories are negative for the agency" (J2). However, it was pointed out that social workers particularly had spoken about the negative impact the media has had on them and how it influenced them to change profession.

5.3.2.6 Summary of Key Findings from Journalists Interviews

Table 14 sets out the key findings and responses from the interviews held with the journalists.

Table 14 **Summary of Key Findings from Journalists' Interviews**

Key factors	
1. Child Protection and Family Support Differentiation	1. Four Journalists had good understanding of family support; two journalists associated family support with child protection; taboo surrounding the term; State recognised as agency in charge of child protection; child protection services is reactive not preventative.
2. Irelands Child & Family Agency (a) Fragmented	2. (a) Tusla should be consolidated with other services e.g. mental health; overlap of services; a big failure when Tusla was created
(b) Resources	(b) Agency is under-resourced and over-worked; difficulty hiring social workers; critical HIQA reports; fire-fighting; social workers working hard, doing their best, too many cases leading to lack of services; lack of resources leads to negative coverage
3. Communication with Ireland's Child & Family Agency	3. No comment given by Tusla impedes journalists reporting fully; difficult organisation; no transparency; hard to present a story; Agency wait too long to explain when things have gone wrong; if explained initially the story would not become such a story; some journalists had good relationships with the Agency: helpful and courteous; will always give some comment; contact varies depending on issues; senior executives do not appear to media; Agency provide information regarding foster care recruitment.
(a) Restrictions	(a) In-camera rule; very difficult to highlight what's going on; journalists restrained in reporting; silenced
4. Framing (a) The way the media works	(a) Recognition that coverage was more negative and positive coverage did not get attention it deserved; crisis issues covered; journalists are objective and free from bias; write honestly and accurately presenting the facts; skill in covering details in large reports; journalists write informative pieces; bad news sells;

	morbid curiosity of the public; obligation of the media to highlight issues
(b) Power of the media	(b) Journalists have responsibility to make people aware of issues e.g. domestic violence; publicity can act as a stimulus towards change; highlighting deficits can lead to improvements; need to hold services to account; unchallenged bad practice can adversely affect children; journalists can alert people to important issues.
(c) Sources	(c) Governmental reports; responding to a tragedy; HIQA inspections; family members; internal agency whistleblowers; journalists themselves; Press Releases; feedback from public; social workers.
5. Impact of Reporting	5.
(a) Impact on public	(a) Newspapers are safe and trusted and people believe the content published; journalists are not there to influence, just to hold opinions up to scrutiny; newspapers the way most people get information about services they have no experience of; general public are influenced by newspaper; coverage of social workers impacted public view of social services and child protection.
(b) Impact on Agency workers	(b) Negative stories not conducive to good working environment for agency staff; journalists just doing their jobs; negative stories lead to positive changes in the agency; negative coverage of social workers leads to change in profession.

The next section, Part Two, details the findings from interviews conducted with five child protection and welfare practitioners.

5.4.1 Part Two: To explore responses of child welfare practitioners to the portrayal of family support in the print media (objective 4).

A total of five Child and Family Agency workers were interviewed for this study, three females and two males (see Table 15). All of the participants who participated in the study were social workers despite the invitation to all Tusla staff working in the area of child protection and family support (social care and social work practitioners) to take part. All participants who contacted the researcher were from the Dublin North East region and each interview was conducted by telephone.

Table 15 **Profile of Child Protection and Welfare Practitioners**

Role	Area	Gender
P1. Principal Social Worker	Dublin North East	Female
P.2 Social Worker – Children in Care	Dublin North East	Female
P.3 Social Work Team Leader for child protection and welfare	Dublin North East	Female
P.4 Social Worker – Children in Care	Dublin North East	Male
P.5 Social Work Team Leader	Dublin North East	Male

5.4.2 Introduction

This section presents the findings for objective four, to explore responses of child welfare practitioners to the portrayal of family support in the print media. While a number of very interesting points were made by respondents, four overarching findings were raised as contributing factors in addressing this objective. These factors are presented in Table 16 and are then discussed individually. The key findings reflect the thematic framework analysis approach undertaken in this study.

Table 16 **Four Key Findings to explore Practitioners responses to print media publications**

Key findings to explore practitioners responses to print media publications
1. Ireland's Child and Family Agency (Tusla) (a) Agency Role (b) Agency Culture (c) Agency Systems
2. Print Media Coverage (a) Focus on negativity (b) The way the media work (c) Disconnect
3. Communication (a) Agency communication with print media (b) Agency communication with staff (c) Print media communication to public
4. Impact of Print Media publications (a) Impact on staff (b) Impact on families needing support

5.4.3 Factor One: Ireland's Child and Family Agency (Tusla) – role, culture & systems

(a) Agency Role

Ireland's Child and Family Agency is responsible for the improvement of Irish children's wellbeing and outcomes through the provision of support services pertaining to the protection of children, family support and early intervention. The Agency's role, its culture and the systems in place within the agency were discussed by all participants. When speaking about the responsibility the Agency has towards children and families and the importance of such work, one participant felt that focusing on how the agency was viewed from a public relations point of view was not as important as protecting children.

"I think the state has more important things to focus on than public relations. It's not important at the baseline. The main focus of Tusla should not be promoting itself in the media. The main focus of Tusla should be to protect children." (P2)

The participants spoke of their own roles, the role of social workers and what the real work of social work entailed. All of the respondents worked with children and families at risk and spoke of the amount of work involved in supporting them. The practitioners all held positions of high responsibility where children and families' welfare and wellbeing were part of their daily workload. Supports could be in place for long periods of time with little recognition of the amount of work involved in supporting and protecting children and families. The goal of practitioners was "*to try to keep children with their families wherever possible"* (P3). Supervision and daily case reviews were mentioned as being part of the role of the agency's work with families with the need for the ability to recognise any changes that occur in order to protect individuals. When speaking of the agency's role regarding successful cases, one participant felt that the agency's success stories resulted in normal life for children who had been through the child protection and welfare system: *"the success stories are run of the mill, kind of normal family life in many respects and the failures are very significant"* (P4). These '*success stories'* were considered good news stories by participants who described them as "*fantastic", "spectacular", and "just normal".* Due to the

hard work of the agency, children could experience normal family life, they could attend college and attain improved outcomes even though their families had experienced hardship or the children themselves had experienced neglect or other adversities. Practitioners spoke of the achievement felt by all who worked with those families including the parents, foster parents, children themselves, schools and other services in place around a child. There was an acceptance and understanding that these stories were not adequately portrayed by the media: *"I suppose in many ways, I understand why the media doesn't support those"* (P4).

(b) Agency Culture

Participants highlighted that HIQA (Ireland's Health Information & Quality Authority) have a tendency to focus on the agency's negative aspects when writing reports and that the positive aspects are not identified. HIQA began monitoring child protection and welfare services in 2012 to ensure compliance with the National Standards for the Protection and Welfare of Children. To do this, they inspect and visit social care services, speak with children, their families and other people in their lives including carers, staff, social workers or guardians ad litem. Inspectors examine children's files to see what is going well and if there are things that could be going better. Complaints about a service are also looked at. Children in residential care, special care, detention and foster care are visited. Child protection services are also inspected to make sure families in need of extra support are getting the assistance they need. HIQA's findings are then published on their website. The participants in this study spoke of the negative reporting of HIQA inspections and stated this can create a level of despondency amongst practitioners, whereas if positive aspects of the Agency's work were also highlighted in HIQA reports, this could help others in the Child and Family Agency to learn and improve.

"….when you have a HIQA report, they focus on the negative. Even, we've asked I think, Tusla have asked HIQA to try and be fairer in their identification of positive as well as negative instances they've carried out, their investigations or audits." (P1)

There was recognition amongst all practitioners of the fact that there will always be areas in need of improvement but that the negative highlighting by HIQA of things that are going wrong give an overall negative impression of the child protection services and implies they are not working correctly. A further point mentioned was that the lack of social workers employed by the Child and Family Agency has a consistent negative impact on HIQA reporting: *"There's a lot of issues around shortage of social workers yet I think that impacts on the report you get from HIQA"* (P1).

Following a HIQA inspection, three of the participants spoke of the reaction by the Agency to published reports. A number of recommendations, tasks and actions are circulated amongst staff which are required to be dealt with going forward. This '*ticking off mentality'* (P5) was said to be embedded in the Child and Family Agency's culture with no actual change being made to remedy the practice of producing reports around the same things. Further, one participant stated that the agency's internal practices and how things are done internally reflect on how the agency is judged externally. The agency needs to be very clear about why they operate the way they do, what works best and what the intentions are internally.

"I think there's an element that is of significance of what you're doing, about how we do things internally, because I think that's how we often get judged externally then as well" (P5).

This internal successful operation is crucial to how the agency is viewed from the outside. Internal practices such as consistent feedback from staff that offer insight and valuable information on the daily practices of the agency and how services are operating could be of great benefit to the Agency. Involving staff and introducing feedback into the culture of the agency could contribute to the idea of transparency, improvement and external success. There was also recognition amongst all participants that the Child and Family Agency need to be held to very high standards given the work that it is entrusted with in Ireland. Participants did not feel that negative occurrences should be ignored, rather they should be recognised and the Agency should

be held to account: *"I think it's very important that it is held to account when it makes mistakes"* (P4).

(c) Agency systems

A number of issues emerged surrounding the Agency's practice and ways of dealing with matters. One participant was very interested in systems and research activities around trying to improve the Agency's practices. While many people within the Agency had access to statistics and reports, there was little interest in seriously analysing such data. P5 described this as *"more data movement back around the place I'd say without any real clear analysis of it, from my point of view, or indeed nationally within Tusla as well".* Other systems in place around practice were more positive. An area manager in one region made regular use of a Compliments and Complaints Register which was updated regularly, reviewed at strategic management meetings and circulated to all staff: "*the Compliments Register was three times longer than the Complaints Register. But I suppose those pieces are never put out there."* (P2). Again, there was recognition that these positive aspects of the systems in place within the Agency were not highlighted.

P2 spoke of the Agency's Human Resources (HR) and Public Relations (PR) systems. These systems were referred to as *"very convoluted"* and *"they don't work and they don't address what we need them to and they don't stop the manner of the work that you're doing*". These systems and policies were said to be separate to actual practice: *"It's hard to distinguish between the aspirational and the actual*" (P5). Systems, policies and procedures put in place within the Agency involved the aspirations of individuals in HR and PR committees which were then distributed to all areas and staff members. However, trying to achieve such aims and objectives in daily practice was said to be quite different. One of the challenges highlighted by P5 was to look at frontline staff and their working practices and to try and ensure that what is being said is actually happening and that managers across the organisation are modelling what they are talking about. The agency was said to have a culture of responding poorly at times and taking on a *"bigshot role"* (P5) in the child protection system. There was a culture of not focussing on

building relationships with others which can cause dissatisfaction and poor relationships.

One participant discussed court cases and her experience when working in the court system, mentioning in particular the Child Care Law Reporting Project (CCLRP) which attends courts where child care cases are heard. Data is collected and analysed from the court proceedings and the CCLRP then publishes reports on the outcomes of such proceedings. P1 stated the CCLRP reported very fairly on child care cases and highlighted difficulties experienced by social workers in court. Social workers are usually called to give evidence pertaining to any Orders being sought by the Child and Family Agency where there are concerns about the safety and welfare of children. P1 spoke of being referred to as *"nasties"* by the Judge in the area. Following evidence heard by all relevant witnesses and solicitors, Judges can decide whether or not to grant an Order sought. P1 stated the Judge had the power to impact on other cases if their decisions were judicially reviewed. Solicitors in the past had advised Tusla not to judicially review the Judges decisions due to the impact it could have on other cases being heard by the Judge. *"And there's some judges still around that you could get at different times that would be very kind of difficult…The whole court system isn't a good way to operate"*.

The issue of the McCabe tribunal was mentioned by some staff members and the way the process was handled by the Agency. Sergeant Maurice McCabe and Garda Keith Harrison, members of An Garda Síochána (Ireland's police force), became widely known to the general public as Garda whistleblowers following allegations they made of malpractice and corruption in An Garda Síochána practices. An investigation was undertaken into whether files in certain State agencies, including Ireland's Child and Family Agency (Tusla), were created and distributed by senior members of An Garda Síochána in inventing false allegations of sexual abuse against Sergeant McCabe. Concerns in relation to Garda Keith Harrison and his family in similar circumstances were also investigated. This investigation received extensive media coverage. P5 was of the view the Agency did not know how to deal

with the publicity surrounding the events and did not fully inform their staff how they should deal with the matter: *"You could see in that context the system was really slow and unresponsive and actually didn't have the capacity to see what was happening and at any stage to then say stop"*. There was recognition that the Agency had made serious mistakes in relation to the matter and a feeling of anger and dismay about the entire sequence of events: *"I was quite angry about how the whole thing happened and I would have been very dismayed"* (P5).

5.4.4 Factor Two: Print Media Coverage

The next finding discussed by staff members was their view of print media coverage, the way they perceived the media to operate and the disconnect they noticed between print media reporting and the actual reality of situations on the ground.

(a) Focus on negativity

Participants were asked about their views on how child protection was portrayed in the print media. All of the respondents stated the media published more negative news items surrounding child protection than positive ones. Good news stories in the print media were considered *"rare"* and *"basically non-existent" (P4).* The success stories were described as fading into the background while mistakes made generally appeared in the print media. One participant referred to the media as *"dramatists"* (P1) while another stated that a lot of media coverage was also misleading and deliberately left out the numerous instances where individuals work very hard to keep children safe and at home.

"Like that's not really out there, you know what I mean? People wouldn't know that. They would either think it's the worst case scenario where you've done nothing and something has happened a child, or, that you're trying to be intrusive in families and take kids away. So I don't think that's very accurate out there at all of what we're actually trying to do." (P3).

All participants reported that the media were very slow to report a good story, even though the Agency has tried to highlight positive stories with them: *"they focus on the negative"* (P1). In addition, four of the participants stated

that stories were published quickly, led by a crisis and without having all of the facts: *"an awful lot of that is kind of negative and crisis-driven"* (P3). Such negative reporting and highlighting of poor practice was found to be unhelpful, one-sided and unbalanced.

(b) The way the media work

The participants spoke of how they thought the print media work generally when publishing items. In order to sell papers, negative stories were stated more likely to be published. There was also recognition that journalists had to publish stories based on facts and would not publish a story that was not true. Their job is to report the facts and not to target the Agency: *"I'd have respect for them and how they go about their jobs*" (P5). One participant was of the view the media did not look deeply enough behind the stories being written in an effort to understand the Agency's system and how it operates. Others were of the view that journalists were *"looking for a juicy story, that's what they're looking for*" (P4). In addition, the success stories of the Agency were stated as not interesting: "*child finished school is not an interesting headline*" (P4). It made sense to P4 that the general public would not want to read about children in care making it to college and that the way the media works is to publish bad news stories. Journalists were said to be *"very selective in what they publish"* (P2) and that they know publishing a bad news story against the state will sell papers. One participant stated the media should, but do not, have respect for the Child and Family Agency's main focus which is to protect children. In addition, journalists were stated as choosing not to see things from the perspective of social workers, their experiences and the pressures they face: *"It's not difficult for them to put pieces like that into their articles, but they choose not to"* (P2). P2 also spoke of the work of social workers when a child needs to be protected and applications for Care Orders have to be made to the Court in order to do so by the agency. These processes are not evidenced in the media: *"it's always just going to be the end case scenario"* (P2). Another participant spoke of the positive print media coverage of the nursing profession who are portrayed as *"the backbone of the health services as far as everyone is concerned. You*

know social workers are the backbone of child protection but that doesn't come out" (P1).

One participant spoke of a personal experience with a journalist during a fostering campaign. A journalist approached the participant following the publicity piece seeking information on a nine year old child accused of abusing other children. The journalist stated it would be *"helping her out, that's how she put it"* if any information could be provided about the facts of the case which the participant described as *"totally inappropriate*". Participants also believed that the print media had a tendency to target social workers and print negatively regarding them:

"There's the whole thing about child protection and removing children, all the jokes about social workers. But you know, we don't remove children for the hell of it. We have to do it for good reasons and it's difficult to do." (P1)

Three of the participants stated the print media did not print any informative pieces around what child protection social workers actually do and what their jobs entail. All of the participants spoke of the perception the media had created of social workers as *"child snatchers, we're lying, we make up stories, that we take other people's children"* (P3) and that informative pieces could help to dispel these false perceptions, by highlighting the support services that are available.

In addition to targeting social workers, three of the participants felt that the print media also had a tendency to print negatively about any public services but that the health services and child protection services were most often the focus. This negative reporting around public services was said to create more interest than reporting good news stories. In addition, one participant stated that if the media were targeting anyone other than the state, it would be slander and the articles would not be published. The state was described as *"always a fair target"* but that it was *"not fair, particularly on children who are reliant on that"* (P2). P5 stated that there was an overall perception of governmental services being poor and being viewed negatively and that journalists were not solely responsible for creating a negative image of the Child and Family Agency. In addition, P4 stated there was always a huge amount of work being done in the background of whatever is printed in the

media and this was the case not just for the Child and Family Agency but also for any other governmental service. For this reason, the participant was of the view that: *"whatever is printed in the media should be taken with a pinch of salt"* (P4).

(c) Disconnect

All of the participants felt there was a strong disconnection between what was being printed by journalists and what was actually happening on the ground. They were of the view that the media should hold some moral responsibility in publishing more accurately when reporting on issues pertaining to children and families in need of support in Ireland.

"It's just not good enough. They hold a moral responsibility to children in this country in terms of what they're putting out to the public. And they're failing massively in my opinion." (P2)

Another participant stated the media should be held to account for negative reporting and the impact such negativity could have on others in need of support services. P2 was of the view that the media probably did not feel in any way responsible or accountable. However, P5 did not feel that the media were responsible for any negative perceptions of the Child and Family Agency and these negative perceptions were more likely to occur locally by people's experiences of the services:

"I think the perception of the organisation is another thing as to how it is portrayed in the media. And I don't think that's been down to the media about how people think about Tusla. I think it happens in more of a local way in a sense of how the services are run and their experiences of the services" (P5).

Three of the participants spoke about regional newspapers publishing more positively than national newspapers and stated that sending stories to local newspapers were more likely to be published than national newspapers: *"once you send it in to local papers, they'll publish it…they're always looking for stories"* (P1). There was recognition that family support coverage could feature more heavily on a community based level and that children and young people's services would be more often reported at local level. Two of the participants also spoke of journalists who were balanced in their reporting on issues, most often when reporting on issues of foster care recruitment when

longer stories and good news stories are published. Another participants spoke of positive and balanced reporting of journalists at certain times, for example, "t*oken good pieces like on Christmas Eve, the 6:1 news."* (P2). Three participants stated that some journalists were really good at their work and made an effort to be *"more fair"* and *"more measured*" (P1) and when reporting on child care cases in court were *"probably balanced…..just reporting facts*" (P4).

One participant also spoke of the disconnection that existed between the perception of work carried out by child protection services and work carried out by family support services whereby family support workers were viewed by families as *"great"* and *"such a help"* and *"such a support"* (P3). Social workers also work extremely hard but were not necessarily associated with family support or PPFS when they actually work closely and do much of the same things with children and families: *"I'd know that the social worker could be breaking her back to do bits and pieces. But they don't necessarily see that the PPFS is aligned with ourselves or that we're actually in the same office and we're doing the same kind of thing".* (P3).

5.4.5 Factor 3: Communication

A third factor contributing to the participants' responses to print media was the way the agency communicate with journalists and with their own staff. A further issue raised was the way agency staff perceived media communication to the general public.

(a) Agency communication with print media

All of the participants described how the Child and Family Agency communicate with the print media with one stating there was *"a kind of fear….of just being more straightforward and balanced in how we address things"* (P5) and that the Agency have a responsibility in how they function and how they are then portrayed in the media. The agency were stated to be *"less open with journalists"* and not wanting to put context on the work being done which resulted in journalists just reporting on the facts available to them: *"I think all journalists are doing is reporting on facts"* (P5).

A number of perspectives were offered regarding the mechanisms through which the agency communicated with the media including through a central Communications Department in Dublin with senior people and Head Office; through a public relations department; and through a spokesperson giving statements to the press. Two participants did not know how the agency communicated with the media. One participant spoke of being offered training in the past on how to communicate with the media but it had been some years since that had happened and could not remember much about it. Another participant stated if a report was being released an e-mail would be circulated internally *"warning us, instructing not to speak to them"*. The understanding was that staff members were not contractually allowed to speak to journalists due to issues surrounding confidentiality and ethical boundaries but could not recall reading any such policy. Similarly, another participant stated that staff members do not speak to the media or try and redirect them elsewhere: *"our understanding is that if anything ever comes up, you don't speak to the media, or you try and redirect them, that you don't engage with it"* (P3). The issue is then highlighted with the Line Manager. P3 also stated the previous CEO of Tusla, Fred McBride, was very open and honest when communicating with the media and could openly admit to failures and apologise for them in a genuine way. In addition, he highlighted the fact that social workers are not always responsible for errors and other people have certain responsibilities that also need to be looked at. This was found to be very helpful and his understanding and consideration was appreciated:
"I would have found that he was good at responding to the media and actually telling people that, actually, this happened…….and it kind of helps as well, that the CEO of the company can see what you're doing" (P3).

All of the participants mentioned the Agency making no comment to the media. The organisation cannot comment on individual cases in line with confidentiality issues and the protection of the children and families involved. When negative stories are printed in the media, the Agency is usually unable to comment and participants mentioned this also means the Agency is therefore unable to adequately defend themselves or offer their side to the

story: *"there's no rebuttal and there's no opportunity for rebuttal*" (P2). This then results in a very unbalanced view of the Agency. The inability of the agency to comment on individual cases was considered a very important one amongst participants and the seriousness surrounding this limitation. Many stories written by journalists in the print media who seek a response from Tusla state the agency were contacted and could not comment. The reasons why the Agency could not comment were not elaborated on or explained to the public: *"There's huge ramifications depending on the situation if you share certain information….so Tusla can't just reply"* (P4).

Two of the participants also spoke of the Agency having missed an opportunity when it was established as an independent organisation on the 1st January 2014. Prior to this, the child protection and welfare services were delivered as part of a wider health and social service system under the auspices of the HSE (Health Service Executive). One participant recognised the importance of this time of change and felt that the launch of the new Child and Family Agency could have been handled more effectively by running a national advertising campaign to introduce the new agency, explain what social workers do, what family support does, what children in care teams do and what child protection workers do: *"I think there was a missed opportunity of Here is Tusla. This is what we do. This is what we can do"* (P3). Another participant highlighted the confusion surrounding the naming of the new organisation and how it was highlighted at its inception and how it is misunderstood now: *"This bigger picture of how things are branded is kind of confusing to the public"* (P5). When negative stories were brought to light in the newspapers, some participants spoke of people asking questions such as *"where were the services and who was at fault and what could have been done?"* (P5). These are questions asked by many people who read negative stories and seek responses when child protection and welfare tragedies occur. However, there appeared to be a disconnection between how Tusla operate as an agency whose focus is to protect children and how it responded to questions raised in response to such tragedies: *"I think we started off on a positive enough note, but as time has gone on, there has been kind of tragic*

cases and they're the ones that come into the media and they're the ones with the Tusla label attached to it".

(b) Agency communication with Staff

When speaking about the whistleblower newspaper coverage, one participant spoke of the lack of communication between the Agency and its staff stating that internally no one working in the region would have any real knowledge of what was going on in the case as there was no communication documentation or guidance issued throughout the agency: *"Internally you wouldn't have had a clue what was going on"* (P5). The only information received by one participant was through the media. P5 stated the Agency should have communicated with its staff members to let them know how the events occurred and how the Agency was going to respond to the issues but the lack of internal communication on the matter was not helpful. In addition, the communication processes in place within the Agency were described as being *"very kind of hierarchical and doesn't welcome feedback from staff"* (P5). A suggestion going forward was for better internal communication within the agency itself: *if we're alert to how we communicate ourselves, like a communication policy and strategy about how we're communicating with staff"*. Due to the lack of clear communication with staff about its policies and processes, P5 found that when new staff were brought into the agency, there was no sufficient guidance in place within the agency to adequately induct them: *"So if a new member of staff comes on induction, I can't say, look, here's the structure under which we're working. Here's the strategic management. Here's what it does."* Communication within the organisation and its staff was again highlighted by P5 when speaking about processes in place regarding Gardai communication and in-house communication structures. The child protection dedicated point of contact can change quite often and that point of contact is the individual dealing with the Gardai. There was no one central point where all staff contact details and telephone numbers of everyone in the organisation could be found. This, P5 states, is not seen as important within the agency but is *"a basic requirement of any organisation*".

(c) Media communication to Public

The issue surrounding Tusla's lack of comment to the media was again highlighted by staff members who spoke of the media's response thereto. The issue of not expanding on why the Agency could not comment on individual cases due to a child's right to anonymity was again raised:

"….they simply choose to write that there's no comment. They never seem to elaborate on the fact that a child has a right to anonymity. The child's story is not a story piece……..the agency cannot comment and elaborate on a child's story. They never include that. They simply write that the agency says no comment." (P2)

Three of the participants spoke of the fact that problems were already in existence in families of issues surrounding child protection and welfare prior to the Child and Family Agency becoming involved. The agency make many efforts to assist children and their families and these efforts are often not highlighted by the media. If a child cannot be placed with a family further questions need to be raised such as why that is: *"that's not specifically an agency problem. There's a homeless crisis. It's a much broader scope than within Tusla"* (P2). Many children have undergone years of trauma prior to the Child and Family Agency becoming involved and then work very hard to try and undo the damage. However, in some cases, the trauma has been going on for too long and the efforts of the agency are not successful despite everyone trying their best: "*But your best may never be good enough before you even start with the lack of resources or the lack of anything else"* (P2). There is another issue that is often not highlighted by the media: "*There's families that are actively sometimes harming their children and we won't have a crystal ball to know which families did that"* (P2). The media direct all of their anger towards the Agency and social workers without looking at societal factors pertaining to some cases of abuse such as why people abuse their children. *"When an adult breaks a child's arm, well how could we have predicted that?"* (P2). P2 stated this is a *"disconnect"* whereby the media are quick to *"point the finger*" rather than considering who actually caused the harm.

One participant stated that due to negative print media coverage, support services on offer for families may not be known by members of the public. Another participant stated the general public "*have absolutely no idea what it is like to work as a frontline social worker"* (P3). Print media coverage portrays "*a very skewed view"* that social workers "*do nothing*" and are there just to take children away from their parents. P3 stated this was a very inaccurate view of what social workers do on the ground on a daily basis but that there is no media coverage to try and inform people any differently.

5.4.6 Factor 4: Impact of Print Media Publications

The impact that print media coverage had on participants on a professional and personal level was discussed. Two sub-themes were noted: (a) impact on staff and (b) impact on families needing support.

(a) Impact on Staff

One participant was involved in a public scandal in the past in relation to her work and was *"targeted by the media"* which *"had a major impact on myself and my colleagues and is still having it"* (P1). This participant stated the media impact was not going to go away quickly and was still ongoing. Colleagues at work involved in the scandal together with other colleagues not involved and the participant herself had undergone negative experiences from not only the public but from other colleagues in the region. This particular participant had found a way to carry on and try to remain positive despite her negative experiences. She was determined not to let the experience cloud her career of positives things she had accomplished and the clients she had helped. However, she was conscious that the impact could *"cloud all that"*. Negative print media coverage could also result in less people entering the social work profession by highlighting difficulties and shortages which could *"put people off going into social work"* (P1).

When discussing the impact of negative print media coverage, P2 stated that personally this lack of disregard could make people very angry and irritated especially due to the one-sided coverage. Professionally, the negative coverage could impact how other people see the agency and this in turn can

impact how people engage with social workers which was described as having "*a very detrimental effect"* (P2). Other participants stated they felt *"fed-up"* and *"is there anything that you can do right?"* (P3). The negative coverage means people do not get an accurate view of the agency's work which is portrayed as "*crisis-driven*". P3 felt it was not healthy to take on all of the negativity and tended not to fully read such negative articles any more in an effort to block out some of the content. Furthermore, participants spoke of other people, friends, family, associates, asking why a particular tragedy happened when it was published in the media. This resulted in participants trying to defend a situation they may not fully understand in an effort to answer questions such as: *"why did that happen, or why did that social worker not do that? How could they leave a child in that situation?"* This was considered to be difficult on a personal level and on a professional level when staff members are trying to do the best job they can and then end up having to try and explain what social workers do or don't do leaving them feeling ashamed and embarrassed of their work: *"That can be kind of hard on a personal level….. you're having justify or explain what you're doing….I do think that's actually quite unfair"* (P3). Another participant stated he/she was not impacted at all by print media coverage and was very sure the stories printed were inaccurate with the full story not being reflected in the media: *"I'm always aware that quarter of the story is being reflected in the media so it wouldn't upset me or anything like that"* (P4).

(b) Impact on families needing support

Participants were also asked about the impact print media coverage had on families who may need support services. Negative coverage could lead to a lack of confidence in the services: *"How are they meant to have any confidence in it if they're not seeing that printed, ever?"* (P2). P2 gave the example of somebody in need of help who was considering phoning Tusla. If that individual carried out an internet search to find the local phone number, a number of very derogatory media articles would appear which would not make that individual feel confident. A further example given was a child who had been placed into the care of his grandmother who was in need of a hip replacement. The grandmother became *"unimaginably upset"* any time the

idea of supports were mentioned to her because *"she was so terrified that we were going to take him"*. This incident happened directly following a negative newspaper article published about a grandchild being taken from his/her grandparent and the grandmother in need of her hip replacement *"could see in the paper that this child had been taken"* (P2). The article had not mentioned the reasons the child had been taken into care and the risks involved in the story which was one-sided and had a major knock-on effect on the grandmother in need of support: *"there was only one side, one element of that story put forward"* (P2). Similarly, P3 stated that families who read negative media reports made it very difficult for them to trust their social workers and think they are trying to take their children from them when they are not. *"It doesn't leave it easy for them and it doesn't leave it easy for us"*. Participants could understand that parents would feel frightened in such a situation and might not know what was going to happen. It was suggested that if the media were more informative and printed accurate information it could help to alleviate fears for many parents and assist social workers in such situations because parents would not feel so afraid. They might be more informed as to their right to have a say and to respond and to potentially get help but they are not aware of this.

Participants were asked if they thought that coverage of the Agency in the print media had an impact on the general public's perception of the agency. All participants responded that it did, for instance, some service users had refused to participate in a Meitheal or family support service because they did not want Tusla involved. Three respondents stated that negative print media articles and scandals published in newspapers highlighting incompetence within the Agency could make it hard for the general public to trust in them or care for children. Another participant stated that a service provider refused to move into the same building as Tusla because *"they don't like the perception the public had of us"* (P1) and did not want their organisation to be in any way aligned with Tusla. However, while acknowledging the impact on the public's perception of the Agency, one participant simultaneously did not think the general public spent a lot of time thinking about negative articles

even when they did not portray the Agency positively: *"I don't think people spend a lot of time thinking about stuff like that"* (P5).

5.4.7 Summary of Key Findings from Child Protection & Welfare Practitioners

Table 17 reiterates the four key findings from interviews with child protection and welfare practitioners and summarises the main points highlighted by respondents.

Table 17 **Summary of Key Findings from Practitioners**

Key findings to explore practitioners responses to print media publications	
1. Ireland's Child and Family Agency (Tusla) (a) Agency Role	(a) To protect children/keep children with families; success is normal life. This is not adequately reported.
(b) Agency Culture	(b) Ticking off mentality; internal practices can lead to how agency is viewed externally; HIQA focus on negative which is printed in media giving overall negative view of child protection services.
(c) Agency Systems	(c) No clear analysis of research activities; positive aspects of agency not highlighted; convoluted PR/HR departments; Agency unable to deal with whistleblower coverage;
2. Print Media Coverage (a) Focus on negativity	(a) All agree media focus on negative stories; positive stories are rare
(b) The way the media work	(b) Media are dramatists; bad news sells; court reporting is fact based; respect for journalists; looking for a juicy story; success stories are not interesting; no informative pieces published;
(c) Disconnect	(c) On the ground work disconnected from what is published; media have a moral

	responsibility to children and families; family support is positively reported locally; negative impression not the media's fault, it is people's own experiences of services
3. Communication	
(a) Agency communication with print media	(a) Disconnect between how Agency operate and how they respond to questions raised; Agency responsible for how they are viewed; journalists just report the facts; staff unsure of communication systems; Agency cannot comment therefore only one side publicised; Agency missed an opportunity when launching in 2014 to better explain its role/services.
(b) Agency communication with staff	(b) Lack of communication with staff; McCabe scandal poorly communicated; does not welcome staff feedback.
(c) Print media communication to public	(c) No comment from Tusla is not explained by media – huge ramifications for children and families; problems already exist before the Agency become involved with families; supports unknown to public; the real life of social workers is unknown
4. Impact of Print Media publications	
(a) Impact on staff	(a) Less social workers entering profession; anger, dismay, frustration; have to explain situations and defend the Agency family and friends.
(b) Impact on families needing support	(b) Lack of confidence/trust in social workers; lack of use of services.

Both sets of data findings from the interviews with journalists and the interviews with child protection and welfare practitioners were analysed using the Framework analysis approach which will inform the Discussion chapter, chapter 6.

Summary of Findings Chapter

This chapter provided the core research findings under the four objectives of the study. The first section set out the findings from the media content analysis carried out during Phase 1 of this research. A brief description of the sample characteristics of both sets of respondents, journalists and child protection and welfare workers, was provided in the second section, Phase 2. The core research findings from each cohort were presented. The next chapter, Chapter Six, will set out each of the four objectives and will form the basis for the overall discussion and consider the findings from the content analysis and interviews with reference to the literature in the area.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of the research set out in chapter 5 in order to address each of the objectives of the study which are:

1. To examine how Tusla's family support work is portrayed in the Irish print media.
2. To compare and contrast trends and content in in print media reports on Tusla's family support work.
3. To consider the underlying processes associated with print media production and publication.
4. To explore the responses of child protection and welfare practitioners to the portrayal of Tusla's family support work in the Irish print media.

This chapter will now discuss the key research findings as per the study's objectives and the literature reviewed in chapter 3. This discussion will highlight the knowledge learned from this study and answer the overall research question. In concluding this discussion, the implications of the knowledge gained in this study are considered.

To begin, Table 18 summarises the findings discussed in this chapter as per each of the four objectives with reference to the findings from Phase one and two.

Table 18 **Summary of Findings from Phase One and Two**

Objective	Tusla Staff	Journalists	Media Analysis
1. To examine how Tusla's family support work is portrayed in the Irish print media	**Child Protection** All participants stated child protection focus is negative and that success stories are rare Some participants highlighted McCabe coverage being mostly negative. There is a disconnect between social workers portrayed negatively and family support workers portrayed positively (P3) Negative coverage results in less social workers being recruited (P1) **Family Support** Not covered by the media so supports largely unknown to the public (4 participants)	**Child Protection** More negative coverage, positive coverage does not get the attention it deserves The state are responsible for child protection (J1) Ireland's child protection system is reactive not preventative (J2) Crisis issues are covered most often (5 participants) **Family Support** Four journalists had good understanding. Two journalists combined family support with child protection. There is a taboo surrounding the term Family Support (J2) **Tusla** Services are fragmented and they overlap with other services (e.g. mental health). This was a big failure when Tusla was established (3 participants)	Support services & programmes are covered more positively than negatively. There is not just one narrative – there are positive and negative reports Media tend to view Family Support more in terms of Child Protection and children in care. There is increasing awareness of Tusla & PPFS. Support Services more positive in 2014 (65%) up to 82% in 2017. Child Protection more negative in 2014 (62%) down to 38% in 2017 Children & Young People in Care more negative in 2014 (85%) down to 53% in 2017

Objective	Tusla Staff	Journalists	Media Analysis
		Tusla are under-resourced and There is difficulty hiring social workers (5 participants). HIQA reports are critical (3 participants). Tusla are constantly fire-fighting without proper resources which leads to negative coverage (all participants)	
2. To compare and contrast trends and content in reporting of Tusla's family support work in Ireland's print media	Local papers will publish more positively (3 participants) Foster care recruitment gets positive coverage (2 participants).	Journalists have more contact with the Agency if there is a report published or a crisis is happening (3 participants) Bad news sells (all participants)	67% of items were in National newspapers 4% in DML & DNE 6% South 18% West 1% North **National** Irish Examiner 55.7% More negative than positive items nationally **Regional** More Positive than negative items: 59% DML & DNE 71% West **Tusla in Headlines** 10% in Headlines 57% negative 19% positive
3. To consider the underlying processes associated with print media production and publication from journalists perspectives	Success in child protection is just normal life which is not interesting to the media (2 participants)	No comment by Tusla impedes journalists (all participants) The Agency wait too long to explain (P5)	

Objective	Tusla Staff	Journalists	Media Analysis
	Positive aspects of agency/work not covered (all participants) Bad news sells (all participants) Journalists publish facts and are respected (2 participants) Journalists are selective (P2) in what they publish. They are crisis-driven (4 participants), dramatists (P1) and do not respect the Agency (P1). Journalists target social workers and regard them as stereotypical child snatcher (4 participants). Journalists do not publish informative pieces to dispel false perceptions (3 participants) Court reporting is more balanced (2 participants) The fact that Tusla cannot comment is not explained by journalists (all participants)	The Agency can be helpful & courteous and some good relationships can be found (2 participants) Some stated there is a good response from Tusla to Journalists when the topic pertains to foster care recruitment The in-camera rule impedes journalists reporting (2 participants) Journalists are restrained from reporting (all participants) Journalists are objective and free from bias when writing (all participants) Journalists are honest & accurate and present the facts (all participants) Journalists have a skill when covering large reports and reporting them to the public (all participants) Journalists write informative pieces (all participants)	

Objective	Tusla Staff	Journalists	Media Analysis
		Bad news sells (all participants) and the general public have a morbid curiosity (J6) The Media are obligated to highlight issues (all participants) Journalists have a responsibility to make people aware (all participants) Published articles can act as a stimulus for change (some participants) Published articles can lead to positive changes and/or improvements being made (some) Journalists need to hold services to account (all) If journalists do not challenge and highlight bad practice, that can adversely affect children (all) Journalists sources include: reports; a tragedy; a HIQA inspection; family members; whistleblowers; other journalists; press releases; feedback from the public; social workers.	

Objective	Tusla Staff	Journalists	Media Analysis
		Newspapers are safe and trusted. People believe the content being published (2 participants) Journalists are not there to influence, just to hold opinions up to scrutiny (J1). People get their information from newspapers and are influenced by newspapers (4 participants) Journalists are just doing their jobs (all participants)	
4. To explore the responses of child welfare practitioners to the portrayal of Tusla's family support work in the print media	**Child Protection** HIQA reports are negative and the journalists publish findings negatively which gives a negative impression of the child protection services (all participants) Journalists have a moral responsibility to publish more accurately (all participants) Journalists do not state that problems already existed prior to Tusla's involvement (3 participants) Negative coverage impacts on service users who then have no confidence in services (3 participants)	Social workers are overworked; they are doing their best; they have too many cases (5 participants) Negative stories are not conducive to a good working environment for agency staff (3 participants) Negative stories lead to positive changes (5 participants) Negative coverage of social workers leads to social workers changing their profession (2 participants)	

Objective	Tusla Staff	Journalists	Media Analysis
	Social workers have to justify and explain to family/friends about stories published in the newspaper (2 participants) **Family Support** Not covered (4 participants) **<u>Tusla:</u>** The primary role of Tusla is to protect children and is not to focus on public relations. Tusla has a tick-box culture (3 participants) If the Agency is successfully internally amongst its own staff then it will be viewed as such externally. The Agency is responsible for their own communication with the media and how they are then portrayed (P5) The fact that Tusla cannot comment is not explained to the public (all participants) There was a missed opportunity when Tusla was established in 2014 (2 participants)		

Objective	Tusla Staff	Journalists	Media Analysis
	Tusla has poor communication with its staff (2 participants)		

6.2 Objectives 1 & 2: To examine how Tusla's family support work is portrayed in the Irish print media; and to compare and contrast trends and content in reporting of family support in Ireland's print media.

As seen in the literature review, framing theory was the original agenda-setting theory whereby a frame represents, in this instance, how the media organize and present issues and how audiences interpret them. It is based on the premise that the media focus on specific events and place them within a field of meaning. Overall, the findings from Phase One's newspaper content analysis give insight into how family support is reported and framed in the media, both nationally and locally. The 13 themes that emerged from the media analysis tell us what the media are focusing on when they talk about family support, and what their understanding of it is, in the wider context of the Child and Family Agency's services. While no specific search for child protection reporting was made, a number of themes emerged pertaining to this dimension of the Agency's work. Again, it should be noted that the content analysis was not about all of Tusla and its services: it was driven from very specific objectives for the study and the family support search terms utilized. This finding is important because it demonstrates that while professionally, child protection and family support are often differentiated theoretically, the media are less likely to do this (see McGregor, Canavan & NicGabhainn, 2020; McGregor, Cavanan & O'Connor, 2018; Lonne & Parton, 2014). Instead, the reports about family support have been more often framed within the context of child protection.

From the findings from interviews, all of the journalists and agency workers agreed that child protection coverage did not only appear more often than family support or positive news stories but was almost always reported on negatively. This is not unique to Ireland as Schonfelder & Holmgaard (2019) argue in their comparison of Norwegian, Danish & German newspaper coverage of child welfare services wherein critical portrayals of such services were more common than positive ones. The findings from this study revealed that all of journalists are aware of this fact and they offer a number of

explanations and justifications for doing so. These include their views that bad news sells and that the public have a morbid curiosity for negative stories. Another explanation given by journalists was their belief that the Child and Family Agency are under-resourced and have difficulty hiring social workers. Furthermore, some of the journalists stated that the Child and Family Agency are reported on negatively by HIQA which leads to negative reporting as HIQA are one of the major sources for journalists when writing about the Child and Family Agency. The aforementioned reasons were stated to be major contributors to negative coverage by all of the journalists interviewed. Agency workers were in agreement with some of these issues including the overly negative focus by HIQA on the Agency in their reports and the lack of social workers entering the profession due to the negative image being portrayed to the general public. All of the agency participants stated it would be helpful for HIQA reporting to also highlight positive aspects of the agency's work and deter from overly-focusing on negative occurrences which appear to negatively impact the agency's image but also the agency workers and in turn people who are in need of agency services. Indeed the tick-box culture of the agency which was highlighted by one of the agency participants was stated to be partly due to negative HIQA reporting and the high volume of paperwork involved following publication of such reports. This reflects the general concern with child welfare in recent decades about an emphasis on risk and risk society and the consequent impact of practice on this (Parton 1991, 1997, 1998). These bureaucratic demands have increased across time and can result in less direct contact with families and young people as highlighted in reflections on child protection systems across many jurisdictions (Hall et al, 2010; Wastell et al, 2010; Munro, 2011b; Buckley, 2012). This appears to be in contrast with the child protection system which aims to place children, their voices and experiences at the centre of its policy and practice as the Munro Review of Child Protection and others have highlighted (Munro, 2011a, Munro, 2019; Ruch et al., 2020).

The newspaper content analysis also shows that both positive and negative reporting is published, which shows there is more than one narrative that frames media and public understanding of the child and family agency and

family support. At times when reading literature on this theme, it may seem there is just one, often negative, narrative when in fact, as shown in the findings, it is important to realise there are different narratives to note. Findings relating to both public perception and media perception suggest there is less differentiation between family support and child protection than is theoretically assumed (McGregor & NicGabhainn, 2018; Devaney & McGregor, 2017). Findings from phase two of this study show diversity in journalist's understanding, two of the journalists interviewed for this study were mixed in their understanding of the term family support and while four out of the six journalists appeared to have a good understanding initially, there were two who merged their understanding with issues pertaining to child protection. This appears to align with the findings from phase one and shows that the media may often be unclear when reporting on issues surrounding support and protection and about the differentiation between them. This could be partially because of lack of awareness or public education about the services on offer from Ireland's Child & Family Agency but it also reflects literature relating to media understanding of child welfare elsewhere (e.g. Ayre, 2001, Hove et al, 2013) which shows the need for greater education and awareness within the media of the complexities involved in child welfare practice and its various dimensions. One response to this is the argument that the inter-relationship between family support and child protection needs to be more explicit within service provision (McGregor & Devaney, 2020a, 2020b). It may also imply that reporting on issues pertaining to child protection are better understood than family support practices due to, perhaps, the historical association and negative reporting of child protection such as the Ryan Report (The Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse, 2009) and other inquiries in Ireland (McGuinness, 1993; Holohan, 2011; Shannon & Gibbons, 2012). The dual support and protection role of the Child and Family Agency and its predecessor may not be fully understood by journalists.

As discussed, the way child protection and family support are conceptualized in Ireland has been influenced by various factors including the traditional tendency to separate support and protection services. Prior to the establishment of Ireland's Child and Family Agency, child protection and

welfare were delivered as part of the wider health and social services programme which included medical care. Little attention was given to family support which was delivered more within the voluntary and community sectors while the majority of state resources were allocated to child protection activities (Skehill, 2004). However, on an international level, as discussed in the literature review, many countries are currently trying to work out the relationship between them both (Gilbert, Parton & Skiveness, 2011; Merkel-Holguin et al., 2019) in addition to placing them within an overall children's rights framework (Gilbert, Parton & Skiveness, 2011; Parton, 2019). In Ireland, as discussed in the literature, many developments in family support and child protection in recent years have been about re-orientation of the system which has led to a shift from a reactive service towards a more developmental and supportive model with increased Governmental investment (McGregor, Canavan & NicGabhainn, 2020; Shaw & Canavan, 2018). The findings in this study's content analysis reflect how the media have started to report more positively about the Child & Family Agency's supportive activities which is more evident in local news reporting. In addition, journalists themselves have admitted that positive reporting on the agency's supportive work is not covered enough by the media and that it should be. This aligns with Sloane's (1997) recognition that the media need to be mindful of reporting more positively and constructively as well as Merritt & McCombs (2003) opinion that negative reporting of social issues occurs too often and loses sight of the bigger picture. Foster care recruitment was mentioned by both journalists and agency workers as a time for positive news coverage of Ireland's Child and Family Agency and the work that it carries out. Journalists stated the agency were much more likely to communicate with them and arrange for social workers and foster carers to meet with them in order to distribute the positive stories of foster carers and the children in their care. Likewise, agency workers mentioned that journalists tended to write positively about issues pertaining to foster care recruitment and any instances where the agency set up a recruitment week or other such event to highlight the need for foster carers. This finding is notable in that it would seem that the agency are well-equipped to interact with

journalists and provide credible sources for them to include in their articles in order to create more public awareness of the issues they want to circulate.

Overall, the findings point to changing levels of awareness of issues surrounding child welfare. The media content analysis shows that the media are changing how they report on issues surrounding family support, child protection, prevention and early intervention. There are signs of increased positive reporting on issues surrounding support services as well as a decrease in negative reporting around child protection and children in care across time, 2014 to 2017. Communication patterns are emerging, and potential causes and effects are beginning to develop. More positive than negative reporting trends are starting to be seen. The newspaper media are one source of public awareness and understanding about child protection and family support and they play an important role in how these issues are reported in national and local newspapers. Most family support happens within families, extended families and the local community (McGregor & NicGabhainn, 2018). However, when additional supports are needed, Daro (2019) suggests creating a new platform which recognizes families universal need for support through enhancing parental capacity. Given the importance of informal sources of support (typically available in neighbourhoods) (McGregor & NicGabhainn, 2018; Daro 2016, 2019) and community based networks as sources of support (McGregor & Devaney, 2020b) further research is warranted to explore these issues in more depth. The increased positive reporting trends may also show recognition that good child protection can happen through family support services being provided by Ireland's Child and Family Agency.

The findings show that it is important to pay attention to print media reporting of family support and child welfare locally and nationally. The newspaper content analysis in phase one shows mixed results in knowledge about PPFS and some indication that there is a move towards greater understanding of family support. In addition, the Child & Family Agency's family support activities are reported more positively, especially in local news reporting. Further, it appears the media are changing their level of awareness and

reporting on family support issues, child protection, prevention, and early intervention. As discussed in the literature around framing theory, the way the media present or frame child protection and family support is based on their interpretation and understanding of the topics. The effects of those frames and how they are delivered can influence audience perceptions and how they make sense of the news, especially when highly publicized events are covered, and how such events are framed to the general public (Baran & Davis, 2012; Schonfelder & Holmgaard, 2019; Blomberg, 2017). The divergences between the national and regional findings indicate the power of the print media to influence the way in which support services are perceived and understood.

6.4 Objective 3: To consider the underlying processes associated with print media production and publication from journalists perspectives.

Interview data from agency workers and journalists are most relevant for answering objective 3 and objective 4 from Phase 2 of this study. Analyses of these interviews show that one major finding is journalists feel somewhat restrained in reporting and social workers feel restrained in talking. The relationship between the media and social work have been covered substantially by others as discussed in the literature review (see Ayre, 2001; Stanfield & Beddoe, 2013; Lonne & Parton, 2014; Parton, 2012, 2014). The way the media frame issues surrounding family support and good news stories and the way more crisis-led, negative stories are published more often, have far reaching implications for how the public view Ireland's Child and Family Agency as discussed above. It was interesting to note in phase two of this study that journalists felt they were restricted from reporting accurately on topics surrounding child protection and welfare due to constraints in place, such as the agency not being able to comment on individual cases and the in-camera rule. Agency workers also felt restrained from speaking with the media due to policies and structures in place within the agency restricting them from communicating with journalists (Tusla, 2017). Agency employees must abide by the Standards of Integrity and Codes of Conduct which include

not disclosing any information garnered during or following termination of their employment (part 3.3). In addition, all records pertaining to children and families must be kept strictly confidential (part 3.4). Agency workers felt that the media did nothing to explain why the agency is unable to comment and the huge implications involved regarding children and families' rights. Journalists on the other hand felt that the agency often waited too long to comment on matters, if at all, and by the time any response was received, the story was already published. This was mainly due to a working environment where news items must be published within strict deadlines at an ever-increasing fast pace (Deuze, 2005; Wilkins, 2013).

In keeping with literature reviewed, all of the journalists in this study spoke of their roles as informers, duty bound to make people aware of services that need to be held to account. This, they state, is their responsibility and can have the effect of creating positive changes and improvements within the child protection and welfare services. As reviewed in the literature, Merritt & McCombs (2003) call this the 'watchdog' function of journalists who can expose wrongdoing and abuse of public trust. Similarly, Hanitzsch (2018) refers to the watchdog role of journalists who contribute to democracy by holding the government to account while McNair (2018) opines the watchdog role of journalism is necessary in order for the general public to make meaningful choices about societal decisions. Journalists in this country adhere to the Press Council of Ireland's Code of Practice for Newspaper and Magazines (2014) which gives them the freedom to publish and the right to inform people 'what it considers to be news, without fear or favour and the right to comment on it' (p.6). The Code of Practice was written by Journalists and editors and is overseen by the Press Council of Ireland which is comprised of members from national and regional newspapers. Any decisions regarding complaints under this Code are made by an independent Press Ombudsman. There are 10 principles contained in the 2014 Code including fairness, honesty, truth and accuracy, as well as privacy. Two of the journalists in this study stated that newspapers are safe and trusted formats of news and information which people believe in and can be influenced by, especially on issues that they may not be fully aware of. Simultaneously, three journalists

were aware that consistent negative reporting can adversely affect social workers and their working environment. Even though the main literature on the media, child protection and welfare does not focus on journalists' perspectives per se, this study suggests the importance of understanding this perspective (O'Ceallaigh & Horgan, 2014; Frost, 2017; Merritt & McCombs, 2003; Hanitzsch, 2018; McNair, 2018; Sloane, 1997).

Journalists are tasked with writing articles which tell a story or give an accurate account of events or newsworthy occurrences. The importance of telling the truth to readers was discussed by Jacquette (2010) who stated that audiences depend on accurate news reporting which is a foundation of journalistic ethics. Journalists set out to inform their audience by producing accurate, robust and balanced reports (Silverstone, 2007; Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2001; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, Merrill, 1974; Mencher, 1999; Brooks et al., 2001; Jacquette, 2010; Ward, 2009; Philo, 2010). While doing so, as in this study, they attempt to gain input from various actors to whom the story relates, such as seeking comment from the Child and Family Agency. If they are met with no comment from the agency, they state this fact in the article. The article is published and is read by members of the public. Two of the Agency workers in this study stated that family members and friends often refer to published articles and seek explanation as to why events unfolded as printed. The agency workers feel that they then are responsible for explaining the processes and structures in place around the agency and giving more context to the article as published. They are in effect setting the record straight. This disconnect between a journalists strive to obtain input from the agency and the agency's response being no response results in agency staff feeling obligated to inform and explain more accurately to their circle of family and friends the systems in place and why things occurred as written. Perhaps similar explanations could be offered by the agency itself to journalists in an effort to accurately inform and generate a more balanced version of proceedings and of itself in the print media. In Northern Ireland, Dooley & Holland (2012) produced a guidance document for media reporting on child abuse and neglect which they described as an accompaniment to the National Union of Journalists (NUJ's) Code of

Conduct for ethical journalism. The document was written by journalists and child care professionals and advocates for 'the clear need for improved communication between professionals and the public so children's wellbeing can be better supported' (p.1). One of its goals is to provide information for journalists on child welfare as well as encouraging both professions to work together in order for better public understanding of child protection, abuse and neglect. It specifically mentions a journalist's role regarding accuracy when reporting on child welfare which should be fully backed up with evidence. The document advises social care services to provide official comments to journalists in order for them to write evidence-informed pieces even if the agencies are worried about possible adverse publicity or criticism. Other key issues mentioned in the guidelines state: agencies should identify key media personnel to manage all requests for information; share information with the media proactively rather than reacting to requests for comment; clearly state the limits of confidentiality when commenting on individual cases while ensuring some comment is given about the issue in general; avoid the statement of 'no comment'; use all requests for information from media as an opportunity to inform and educate the wider public. The importance of promoting media engagement by public welfare agencies forms a major part of the guidance document and clearly sets out the importance of journalists and welfare professionals working together to better inform the public about very important child protection and welfare issues.

6.5 Objective 4: To explore responses of child welfare practitioners to the portrayal of Tusla's family support work in the print media.

Agency workers in this study highlighted the fact that media reporting often sought to blame social workers and child welfare practitioners for tragedies that occurred. The fact that children were already being abused prior to the agency's involvement was not apparent in media reporting. This has been seen elsewhere as discussed in the literature reviewed whereby the media frame issues surrounding child abuse and neglect differently depending on their particular focus: some focus on the parent or guardian while others focus

on ineffective services (Schonfelder & Holmgaard, 2019). This concept of blame also resonates with literature from the UK such as the coverage of the death of Baby P (Parton & Berridge, 2011; Parton, 2012; Munro, 2011). In the Irish context, the various high-profile inquiries into child abuse outlined earlier also attempted to blame the social services involved (The Kennedy Report, 1970; Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse 2009; Gibbons, 2010). The publicity, findings and recommendations that emerged from such inquiries may have prompted change in service provision, also mentioned in the literature by Sloane (1997). However, such changes were focused more on a narrow child protection system rather than a preventative, supportive approach (Skehill, 2003; Devaney & McGregor, 2017). This study finds that the issue of the media allocating blame to agency workers is ongoing according to the staff interviewed.

The findings from practitioner interviews suggest that the focus on reporting of bad news stories needs to be addressed. For example, one of the agency workers interviewed stated that the media make a conscious decision not to cover positive stories or success stories of Ireland's Child and Family Agency. The literature shows that media framing on social services should be more focused on improvements being made and on positive events in order to provide a more balanced image of social workers and supports available (Blomberg, 2017; Merritt & McCombs, 2003). Studies in the US have shown that American media have reported more favourably on social work which is presented in a mainly positive light (Reid & Misener, 2001). The findings in this study show that agency workers are of the view that positive stories are not reported. Gaughan & Garrett (2011) offered a reason by stating social workers believe journalists to be unsympathetic and lack sufficient knowledge of social services to adequately report their work. McNulty (2008) urged social services to be more proactive in their public relations techniques in order to proffer a more positive image in the public. Another issue highlighted by agency workers was success stories that are achieved by the Agency in the lives of countless young people and the lack of coverage thereof by the print media. Success stories were described as children successfully finishing school or perhaps going on to college having

experienced extreme difficulties and hardship. These success stories were referred to as 'normal life' stories. The huge achievements of children who experienced adversities in their lives were not stated to be interesting to journalists nor the general public (Gaughan & Garrett, 2011; Merritt & McCombs, 2003). This is a challenge for the child and family agency to try and highlight that good practice in child protection does happen in the form of preventative and family support services (Daro, 2016; Devaney, 2017).

Another major finding that both journalists and agency workers deemed important related to the establishment and launch of Ireland's new Child and Family Agency in 2014. Agency workers felt that the Child and Family Agency had missed an opportunity when establishing itself in January 2014 and could have done more to highlight its services and supports available for children and families prior to its launch. One agency staff member referred to public awareness activities undertaken in the United Kingdom including television advertising and informative campaigns about social workers and support services and the work they perform on a daily basis with children and families (Department for Children Schools & Families, 2009). Public awareness campaigns can have many purposes including to reframe a negative or difficult topic or to publicise new developments to a targeted audience (Vineburgh, 2004). They can also be used by governments to impact public attitudes, values and behaviours and to influence agenda setting and raise awareness in society (Campbell & Manganello, 2006; Hoefnagels & Mudde, 2000). Furthermore, such campaigns can reduce incidents of child abuse (Jones, Finkelhor & Kopiec, 2001; Ayre, 2001) and increase referral rates (Maughan, Iervolino & Collinshaw, 2005). As stated earlier, it had been the intention of the Child and Family Agency to conduct a publicity campaign at the outset but it was decided that awareness building amongst staff and stakeholders needed to happen in the first instance (McGregor et al., 2018). The agency have also developed annual public awareness days in addition to a new child-friendly website, *Changing Futures* (no date).

The findings showed an empathy and understanding among journalists of the challenges faced by the agency including its lack of resources and difficulty

hiring social workers. Two journalists specifically expressed respect for social workers and the jobs they carry out while two agency workers also expressed respect for journalists and their work. There is a lack of literature on the topic of social workers feelings of empathy with journalists and vice versa. Stanfield & Beddoe (2013), however, in their examination of interprofessional joint teaching programmes for social work students and media students state that while social workers could benefit from the expertise of media professionals, little is written from a media perspective about what social workers could offer journalists. As seen in the literature, journalists draw on communication theories where the objective is to assess content in order to explain phenomena (Riffe, Lacy & Fico, 2014). In addition, McCombs & Shaw (1993) and Benson (2008), theorized that the media tell people what to think about by setting the agenda (Agenda Setting Theory) and journalists have become more actively engaged in doing so. With this in mind, agency workers are best placed to re-set the agenda for journalists by establishing better communication channels with the media and more focused direction from the agency's Communications team.

Chapter Summary

In relation to the first and second objectives, to examine how family support is portrayed in the Irish print media; and to compare and contrast trends and content in report of family support, six key points were discussed. The first key point related to framing theory, the original agenda-setting communication theory, whereby the media focus on certain events and present the issue within a frame of meaning. The newspaper analysis gave insight into how family support is being presented and framed in the Irish print media and what the media focus on when they talk about family support, and their understanding of it. The analysis showed that while no specific search term for child protection was used, the theme emerged strongly which demonstrates that reporting on family support is more often being framed within the context of child protection. Secondly, journalists and agency workers agreed that child protection coverage appeared more often than family support and was most always reported negatively which is not unique

to the Irish context. Other countries have experienced this too (Schonfelder & Holmgaard, 2019). One of the reasons offered by journalists for this negative reporting was the negative HIQA reporting which was a major source for journalists. This is in line with general child welfare system concerns with a risk society emphasis and its consequential impact on practice (Beck, 1992; Parton, 1991, 1997, 1998).

The third key point discussed pertained to the newspaper content analysis which showed there is both positive and negative reporting being published in Ireland indicating there is more than one narrative framing media and public understanding of the child and family agency. Fourthly, media reporting was found to be more positive in local reporting reflecting how the media have started to report more positively about the activities of the Child and Family Agency's supportive work in local news reports. Prior to the establishment of the Child and Family Agency, child protection and welfare formed part of the wider health and social services with little attention given to family support activities. Internationally, many countries, including Ireland, are trying to work out the relationship between them (Gilbert et al., 2011; Merkel-Holguin et al, 2019). In recent years in Ireland, developments in family support and child protection have been about shifting from a reactive service towards a more developmental, supportive model (McGregor, Canavan & NicGabhainn, 2020). Next, levels of awareness surrounding issues of child welfare appear from the findings of this study to be changing with signs of increased positive reporting on support services and a decrease in negative reporting across the four years. This increased positive reporting suggests that with greater awareness of family support practice and its strong connection to child protection, future 'framing' of the issues in the media may become more balanced. Finally, it is important to pay attention to print media reporting locally and nationally. The way the media frame an issue is based on their understanding of that topic and the difference in national and local reporting signifies the power the media have to influence the way support services are perceived and understood by the public. This also highlights the importance of awareness, increased communication and

promotion of shared understanding between the media as a stakeholder and the child welfare system.

Under objective 3, to consider the underlying processes associated with print media production and publication from journalists perspective, three points were discussed. The first related to the interviews with journalists who stated they were restrained from reporting due to issues surrounding rules and procedures and lack of comment by the agency. Agency workers also felt restrained from speaking with the media due to constrains within their own working environment. A second discussion point was journalists perception of their roles as informers and their duty to hold public services to account which can lead to positive changes being made to improve practice. It is important to understand the journalists perspectives and recognise their contribution to portraying positive images of the work of the Child and Family Agency. The final discussion point under this objective related to a clear need for improved communication and collaboration between professionals and social welfare practitioners to work together to better inform the public about child protection and welfare issues.

The final items discussed were made under objective 4, to explore responses of child welfare practitioners to the portrayal of family support in the print media, with four key points. Firstly, agency staff interviewed felt the media have a tendency to blame social welfare practitioners for tragedies that have occurred. This has also been seen in the UK and elsewhere as well as in Ireland as a result of various tragedies and enquiries into child abuse (Munro, 2011; Parton & Berridge, 2011; Parton, 2012; (The Kennedy Report, 1970; Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse 2009; Gibbons, 2010). Findings have indicated that the issuing of blaming social welfare services is ongoing. The second point discussed was the media's focus on bad news stories instead of highlighting the good work that is being done by the Child and Family Agency. Studies in the US have found more positive reporting by their media of child protection and welfare services (Reid & Misener, 2001). It was highlighted by McNulty (2008) that social services need to be more proactive in their public relations activities in order to present themselves in a more

positive light. The third discussion point pertained to the establishment of the Child and Family Agency in 2014 and the agency workers and journalists perspectives that the agency had missed an opportunity to promote itself more positively through publicity and public awareness activities. The agency have made efforts to do so through annual public awareness days and the creation of a new child friendly website. The final point discussed was around the empathy and understanding among journalists of the challenges faced by agency workers while practitioners interviewed also expressed respect for the work being done by journalists. Interprofessional teaching programmes among social work studies and media students can be beneficial in order to reset the agenda for journalists by establishing better communication pathways with the Child and Family Agency on the work being done and the recognition by the agency of the benefits of working with and understanding the value of collaboration with the media. The next and final chapter will conclude with a set of overall implications from the research with a focus on media portrayal and how child protection and family support services can be understood more clearly by the public going forward.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

This study has produced novel and interesting findings about how family support is written about in the media. It has provided insights from a selection of journalists and practitioners about the nature of this reporting which contributes to our understanding of how information pertaining to family support and child welfare services are distributed to the public and the impact reporting can have on those who work in the Child and Family Agency. The limitations of the study centred around timing, especially where the original aim to also include perspectives from the public, including young people, was not possible to achieve. As discussed in more detail below, the importance of further research, especially with children and young people, is fully acknowledged in this work. This chapter reiterates the research question and objectives of the study. The implications of the research are set out together with some recommendations for service provision and media outlets.

7.2 Research Question

How is family support portrayed in the Irish print media?

7.2.1 Objectives

1. To examine how Tusla's family support work is portrayed in the print media.
2. To compare and contrast trends and content in print media reports on Tusla's family support work.
3. To consider the underlying processes associated with print media production and publication.
4. To explore the responses of child protection and welfare practitioners to the portrayal of Tusla's family support work in the print media.

This research shows the importance of a better understanding of family support and child protection by the print media so that parents, children and young people can access services in a more timely way and seek help when they need it. The most important reason for attention to this issue is to ensure

better outcomes for children and families. One of these would be that, with better awareness and understanding, families and children are more likely to know what services are available to access and how to access these services and get interventions early that are preventative as well as protective and legal as required. Children have the right to be supported and protected and we, the public, all of us, in whatever position we are in, have a duty to ensure the best possible support and protection for children and young people. This study shows that one obstacle to potentially more help-seeking and engagement is about perception and expectation of the agency reflected in the print media that is often at odds with the agency's intentions and scope of services.

7.3 Implications from the Research

As the findings have shown, while print news items regarding Tusla and PPFS are sometimes skewed towards child protection and children in care, there is not just one but a number of strands of news related to the work of the Child and Family Agency. Communication theory and framing theory highlight the need to consider how Tusla services are communicated and how messages are framed to the public. A focus on media coverage can enhance understanding and influence public awareness, which creates the need for a differentiated strategy towards engagement with the media at national and local levels.

It is increasingly recognised that family support and child protection are not linear, separate paths, even though discursively they have historically developed this way (see Devaney & McGregor, 2017; Devaney, 2011; Skehill, 2004). The duality of support and protection in working with children and families has been long established (see e.g. Parton, 1991; Donzelot, 1979). One may argue that somehow, while not using the theoretical language involved, the public understand family support and child protection in this way also as interconnected and overlapping. But public understanding is persistently weighted towards a lens of child protection, and this is reflected

also in the way family support, prevention and the Child and Family Agency are reported in the newspaper media. This points to the need to explain more clearly this persistent and symbiotic relationship between support and protection with children and families to the public. This explanation needs to capture the dual role of the Agency as a child protection, welfare and family support organisation which promotes and supports families and well-being while also regulating and managing risk in the interests of protecting children from harm.

In Ireland, family support continues to be associated with child protection by members of the public despite the range of targeted family support programmes available (McGregor & NicGabhainn, 2016, 2018). While academics and researchers strive to differentiate and analyse the relationship between both support and protection (Devaney & McGregor, 2017; McGregor & Devaney, 2020a, 2020b), the general public do not do so. McGregor, Canavan & NicGabhainn (2020) suggest there is a need to find a new frame of reference to accommodate both family support and child protection and for public awareness activities to do more than educate or inform the public about services which have been constructed from expert domains. Perhaps we need to reconsider re-framing issues pertaining to child protection and family support from the professionals perspective in view of how the media and the public themselves frame family support and child protection so differently.

The media play a key role in influencing public knowledge and understanding. Both the media and the general public need to be better informed about what family support is and how it relates to child protection in the context of Tusla services. It is recommended that greater partnership work with the media, through local and national events, be established as part of the ongoing public awareness work of the Agency. It is recognised that the Child and Family Agency have established its own Communications Groups and are now conducting an annual public awareness week in addition to the launch of its new child friendly website (www.changingfutures.ie).

These are positive steps which can be built on and to continuously communicate the positive work being done by the agency.

This thesis looked at literature from the areas of child protection and child welfare and not from journalists' perspectives. It is clear from the findings of this study that more attention could be given to the media and child welfare literature from the perspective of journalists. Not enough attention appears to have been paid to how the media distribute information. Further research is required into journalists and social welfare systems and the interrelationship between them. As stated, this study pertains to print media publication only and another important area of study is the role of social and online media.

A national awareness campaign could create greater awareness of Ireland's Child and Family Agency and the services they provide in addition to distributing a more accurate and informative picture of social workers and family support workers to the general public. Ireland's child protection and welfare policy and practices have in many ways developed from highly negative and critical responses of the media to professional failures over a number of years. As set out in the context chapter of this study, the impact of public inquiries and reports on social welfare practice has been well documented (Skehill, 2003). Improving the public image of the child and family agency and the work it carries out with children and families is key to improving child protection and family support services. Public awareness campaigns can increase awareness as well as education about what needs to be done and what needs to be known. There is a need for the public to know what services are available, what family support is and the difference between support and protection to help them to see the duality of protective and preventive aspects of the child and welfare system. McGregor & NicGabhainn (2016) suggested learning from other public awareness campaigns such as those raising awareness of domestic violence and mental health which could offer examples of how to conduct such awareness raising activities and the methods used to effectively do so.

As discussed in the literature review, the way child protection and welfare are reported in the media impacts on public opinion and understanding, often in a negative way. There is much less attention to reporting of family support. Child protection and family support services need to be clearly understood and known by both the public and the media so that there is more than one story to tell (the narrow story of child protection). In reality there are multiple stories to tell as reflected in the findings from the newspaper analysis of this study and knowing and understanding this could improve individual's ability to seek help while also recognizing the need for ongoing quality improvement.

This study has found that journalists have better communication with the Child and Family Agency when issues pertaining to foster care awareness arise. The agency provide spokespersons to speak with the media and are proactive in highlighting foster care awareness. Perhaps similar communication methods could be used when journalists seek information on other topics pertaining to the agency so that a more systematic, structured and informative approach towards journalists and the articles they write could be distributed.

This study intended to include opinions of young people and members of the public through focus groups, however, due to time constraints and difficulties accessing participants, this aspect of the research did not happen. It is important that future research gain these opinions in order to try to establish the effects of media frames on members of the public including young people. Aligned to Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and under the National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making (DCYA, 2015), the involvement of children and young people by participating in decisions that affect their lives is fundamental to a child-centred, rights-based approach. The Child and Family Agency's underpinning legislation, the Child and Family Agency Act (2013, Section 5.1), requires Tusla to ascertain the views of children and young people when planning and reviewing the provision of services. In a recent report which

aimed to assess the extent of participation of children and young people in the Agency's operations, it was found there is strong evidence of such participation being embedded across the Child and Family Agency's practices (Tierney et al, 2018).

Findings from this study indicate that journalists and social workers have empathy for each other's roles which signifies that there may there may be potential for a forum for collaboration in order to better understand the importance of each other's roles. This study suggests that training child welfare practitioners on the role of the media could improve their ability to cooperate with the media while not encroaching ethical standards. Collaboration between practitioners and journalists could allow the media to integrate more perspectives into reporting. Journalists need to be seen as powerful stakeholders by the Child and Family Agency which is in the public interest so that greater understanding of these important issues can be circulated. This study suggests inter-agency training between social work students and journalism students be carried out between schools in order to begin the collaborative process.

As discussed, HIQA reports are a key source used by journalists who are writing about the Child and Family Agency. If these reports continually highlight poor practice and negative aspects of the agencies work, then the media are likely to report that negative content. More positive reporting on good practice and highlighting things that have gone well in the agency on a consistent basis in HIQA reports is recommended. This could ensure that families who need extra supports could see that even in serious child protection or welfare issues, positive procedures and supports are in place and are embedded within the Agency. In addition, Agency workers could benefit from reading positive procedural practice and gain greater understanding of complex child welfare cases and the positive work being done with families and young people even if the final outcome was one of children being placed outside of the family. It has been seen throughout this study that negative media reporting can have a very powerful effect on the general public, on

practice, policy and procedures being undertaken by the Child and Family Agency. Information is a powerful tool and can be used in positive as well as negative ways. The negative impact is widespread and long-lasting. Positive information could genuinely lead to more positive changes occurring in policy and practice and give the general public a more balanced view of the work that the agency carries out with Ireland's children and families. This would not just benefit those working in the field, although it would be welcomed, but would begin to contribute to narrating a more balanced public understanding of the continuum of help and support and protection now delivered under Tusla which is markedly different and more comprehensive than any time in the past in Irish child welfare.

This study has shown that the Child and Family Agency could benefit from taking proactive steps to present and promote their own good news stories on a consistent basis and highlight good practice being carried out on a daily basis by the agency staff. These good news stories need to be promoted at every opportunity in order to change negative perceptions of the agency. It is recognised that the Communication office have carried out excellent work by establishing an annual public awareness day, in addition to creating a new website for children. In addition, it is acknowledged that Tusla are committed to practitioner's research in their strategy documents and could perhaps encourage all practitioners become more proactive in writing about their work to provide positive information which is accessible and available for journalists to write about. Clarity on the scope and potential for this requires guidance, procedure and supervisory support to get the balance right between protecting the highly confidential and sensitive nature of their work and finding ways to communicate in more detail the nature of this work to the public and the media.

7.4 Personal reflection

Most families require support whether from within their own network of extended family and friends or more formal supports. My own experience in childhood of parental mental illness continued into adulthood together with all of the challenges and lifelong effects which accompany such an illness.

We as a family experienced stigma and fear from external family and friends and learned to cope without seeking outside help. I developed a fiercely protective empathy towards more vulnerable members of society. I worked in a legal office as a general secretary for over 20 years and became thoroughly familiar with various aspects of the law and policy documentation. More importantly, I was privy to the daily struggles of ordinary people dealing with their own families, the law, separation, divorce and bereavement. This PhD journey has been carried out with a genuine hope that the findings will actually help some families who need extra support.

7.5. Chapter Summary

This chapter has reminded the reader of the research question and objectives of the study. The key messages arising from this research have been set out in addition to the implications from the research. Reflecting overall on this study, it is hoped that the knowledge produced will assist child welfare practitioners, communications employees and all agency staff to understand the important role the media play in highlighting the positive aspects of Ireland's Child and Family Agency and the crucial work being undertaken on a daily basis with children and families.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Key points in Irish History of Child Protection and Welfare

Year	Statutory Child Care Providers for Children in Need	Legislation	Focus	Media Focus
From 1820's	Orphanages & Workhouses			
1838	Orphanages & Workhouses	Poor Relief (Ireland) Act 1838	Concern over conditions for children in care – a system of fostering/boarding out children was put in place	
1840's	Catholic & Protestant Religious Orders – Reformatory Schools & orphanages		Training & education of children on the streets	
1858	Religious Orders and Voluntary Agencies	Reformatory School (Ireland) Act 1958		
1868	Conversion of Orphanages into Industrial Schools & new schools run mostly by Religious Orders	Industrial Schools Act 1868		
1870	Reformatory Schools – majority		Training & education	

Year	Statutory Child Care Providers for Children in Need	Legislation	Focus	Media Focus
	run by Catholic Orders			
1908		Children Act 1908		
1922 (Foundation of State)	Religious Institutions (mostly Catholic Church)	Children Act 1908	Residential Care	
1937 (Constitution)	Religious Institutions (mostly Catholic Church)	Children Act 1908		
1966 (Tuairim Report) 1966 (Investment in Education) 1970 Committee of Inquiry into Industrial & Reformatory Schools (Kennedy Report)	Religious Institutions (mostly Catholic Church)	Children Act 1908	These three reports highlighted the inadequacy of the 1908 Act in meeting needs of children	State & Religious Institutions
1970	State began to play a key role in provision of child care services	Children Act 1908 Health Act 1970	Decentralisation of services to 8 regional Health Boards	
The Task Force Report 1980	Children's services	Children Act 1908	Examined all aspects of children's services	

Year	Statutory Child Care Providers for Children in Need	Legislation	Focus	Media Focus
(established in 1974)				
1991		Child Care Act 1991	Promote welfare of children including family support Statutory framework for taking children into care	
1992 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child ratified		Child Care Act 1991		
1993 Kilkenny Incest Investigation		Child Care Act 1991 UNCRC Rights of the Child (1989 – ratified in Ireland in 1992)	Catalyst for overhaul of child protection services	HSE (Child Protection Services)
1999		Children First Guidelines adopted as national policy		
2000 Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse established		Child Care Act 1991 Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse Act 2000	To investigate abuse of children in state institutions	Religious Institutions Child Protection Services Dept. of Education

Year	Statutory Child Care Providers for Children in Need	Legislation	Focus	Media Focus
2005 The Ferns Inquiry	Investigated child sexual abuse by members of Clergy in Ferns diocese 1962-2005	Child Care Act 1991 Criminal Justice Act 2006	Recommended nationwide publicity campaign on child sexual abuse; increase public confidence in reporting & investigation; specialist child protection units be developed within Gardai	
2007 (establishment of HIQA)		Child Care Act 1991 Health Act 2007	HIQA responsible for quality standards for child protection and welfare services	
2009 Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (Ryan Report)	Children who had been abused in industrial & reformatory institutions from 1914 to 2000	Child Care Act 1991 Children First Guidelines	Recommended childcare policy be child-centred & needs of child be paramount.	
2009 The Dublin Report (Commission of Investigation)	Investigated child sexual abuse in Dublin Archdiocese 1975 to 2004	Child Care Act 1991	Recommended HSE be given power to intervene in child protection issues	
2010 Roscommon		Child Care Act 1991	Commitment by Government to hold	HSE (Child Protectio

Year	Statutory Child Care Providers for Children in Need	Legislation	Focus	Media Focus
Child Care Inquiry		UNCRC Rights of the Child	referendum on children's rights	n Services)
2010 The Cloyne Report	Investigated child sexual abuse in Cloyne diocese Cork		Expressed reservations that State's laws & guildelines sufficiently clear for child protection	
2011 (establishment of Department of Children & Youth Affairs)			Guidance document about protection & welfare of children published	
2011 Children First Guidelines published				
2014 (establishment of Ireland Child & Family Agency)				
2014			Better Outcomes Brighter Futures: National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020	
2015 Children First Act		Children First Act 2015 (operationalised in 2017)	Mandatory Reporting Child Safeguarding arrangements Cooperation	

Appendix II: Four approaches to content analysis

FORMAL CONTENT ANALYSIS	THEMATIC ANALYSIS	TEXTUAL ANALYSIS	AUDIENCE ANALYSIS
• Systematic sample of texts • Classification system • Identify different features of text • Count them • Emphasis on objectivity & reliability	• Coding • Intentions behind the document • Pick an area • Detailed analysis • Uncover underlying purpose & intentions of authors • WEAKNESS: researcher chooses themes – lack of understanding as to why specific themes were chosen	• Analysis of use of words & phrases • How words & phrases influence the reader	• Looks at responses of the audience • Do they accept or reject the content? • What does it mean to them?

Appendix III: Example of a Coding Frame

1. Basic Information		
101	County	(1=Galway, 2=Roscommon etc.)
102	Item No.	ID no. of article
103	Newspaper Name	
104	Month	(1-12)
105	Day	(1-31)
106	Year	(2 digits)
2. News		
107	Size of article	(1=small, 2=medium, 3=large)
108 etc.)	News format	(1-article, 2=investigation, 3=interview
109	Author	
110	Focus	(1=Tusla focus, 2=Tusla reference)
3. The Story		
111	Main actor	
112	Sector	(1=public, 2=private, etc.)
113	Main themes	

OR

Add standard variable fields into coding list

Media categorization media	-	highly circulated – higher score than smaller
Prominence	-	Page no.
Positioning	-	Headline/first paragraph/passing mentions
Size of article	-	Size
Sources quoted cited	-	Balance of opposing & supportive sources
Credibility of source expert/unqualified source	-	Government official/known

Appendix IV: Nine approaches to content analysis (Michaelson & Griffin, 2005)

1. **Clip counting** – List the publications; sort by date; total article count; no insight, discussion, interpretation is carried out when clip counting. Large amounts of data are often generated.

2. **Circulation and Readership Analysis** – Adds information on each article through secondary sources – Companies who provide number of readers; number of copies distributed; total number of actual readers (circulation multiplied by average number of readers for each copy), demographic profiles of readership (age, gender, income, education etc.)

3. **Advertising Value Equivalence (AVE)** – estimate of cost of purchase of advertising equivalent to the size and location of a given publication on a specific day.

4. **Simple Content Analysis** – classifies what is written into categories that can be statistically analysed. Codes are developed by analysing a sample of articles and the remaining articles are analysed based on the presence of those codes. Each article is read for presence of information according to the codes. Information from those codes is then entered into a database to determine the frequency of those codes or information classifications. This method produces analyses based on information that is actually written, not what is intended or interpreted.

5. **Message Analysis** – Analysis is centred on presence of intended messages in the articles. These key messages are created based on communication objectives which are then translated into codes to form the basis of analysis. Articles are coded by presence of those key messages in articles. Those codes are then entered into a database for statistical analysis.

6. **Tonality Analysis** – Uses subjective assessment to determine if article content is favourable or unfavourable to the person/company/organisation/product which it is discussing. (Positive, neutral, negative); (zero to 100).
   (a) Assess overall tone of article
   (b) Assess tone of a specific code
   (c) Assess tone of a specific message
   (d) Finding aggregated to present an overall assessment of the tone of the articles.

7. **Prominence Analysis** – takes 6 factors into account:
   (i) The publication
   (ii) Where the article appears
   (iii) Date of appearance
   (iv) Overall size of article
   (v) Where in publication it appears
   (vi) Presence of photography/artwork
   (vii) Size of headlines.

   Each article is given a weight which creates an overall score for each one which then determines the prominence of the article. Some publications are rated as having higher prominence than others (e.g. Irish Times). Usually this is based on the size and perceived quality of the readership. Date of appearance can be a factor as readership can be higher on certain days (e.g. Sunday). Articles with higher prominence scores are given more emphasis in the analysis as it is assumed that the high readership or prominence of the publication, the size and placement, or a combination of all of these, leads to higher communication effectiveness.

8. **Quality of Coverage** – Combines factors such as tonality; prominence; inclusion of specific messages; overall volume of articles. Each factor generates a score for each article in the analysis which generates a quality of coverage score.

9. **Competitive Analysis** – Compares the performance of companies, brands, topics/events on the media coverage. Comparisons of the total number of clips .to. overall prominence one company receives over another. Can be used to assess relative performance in the media.

Appendix V: Pilot search results per search term

Figure a. Tusla .and. Family Support

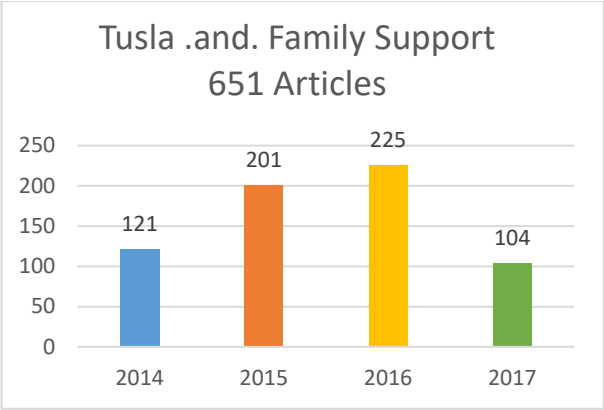


Figure b. Tusla .and. Parenting

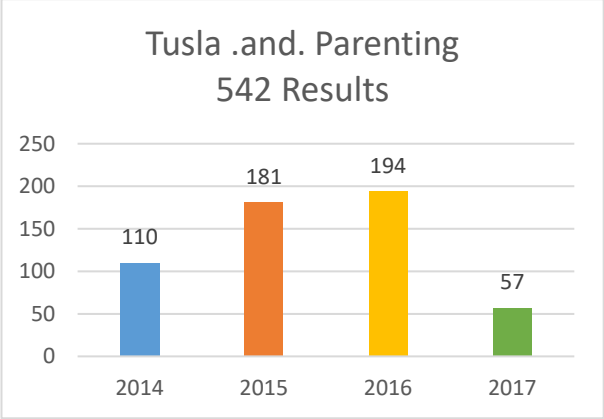


Figure c. Tusla .and. Prevention

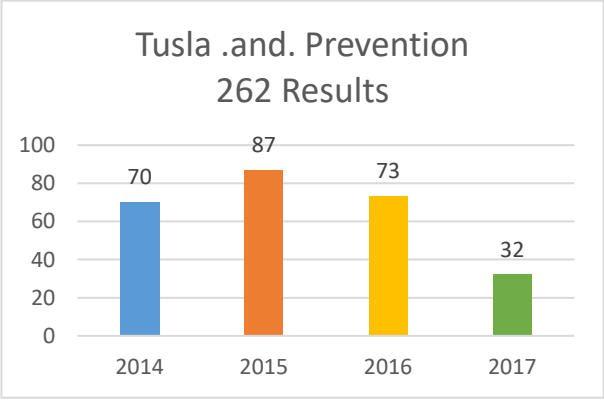


Figure d. Tusla .and. Child Protection

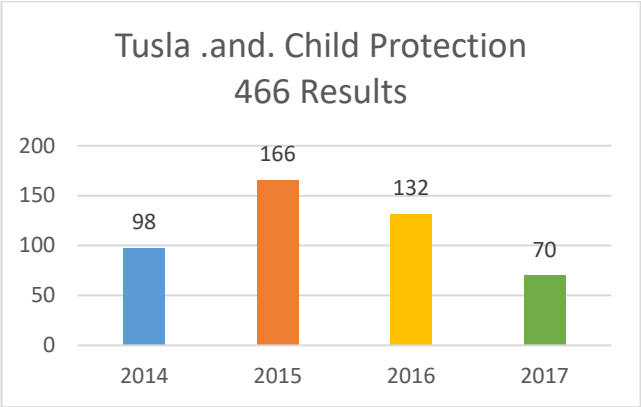


Figure e. Tusla .and. Child Support

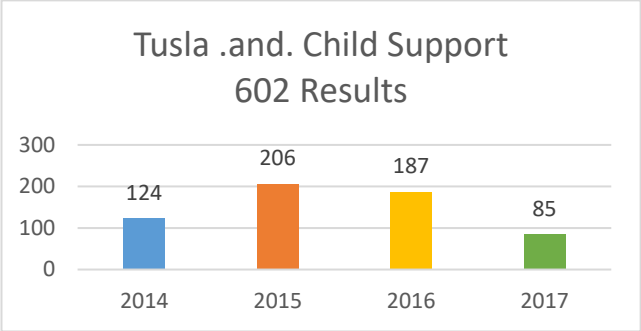


Figure f. Tusla .and. Children

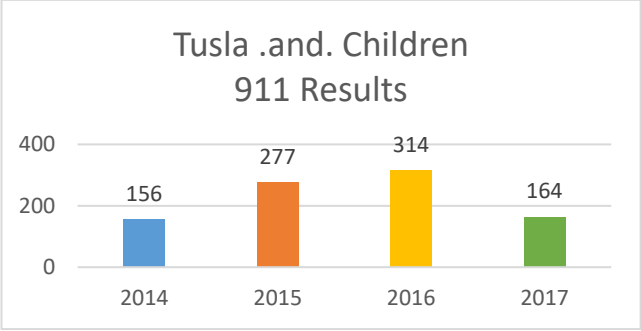


Figure g. Tusla .and. Adolescents

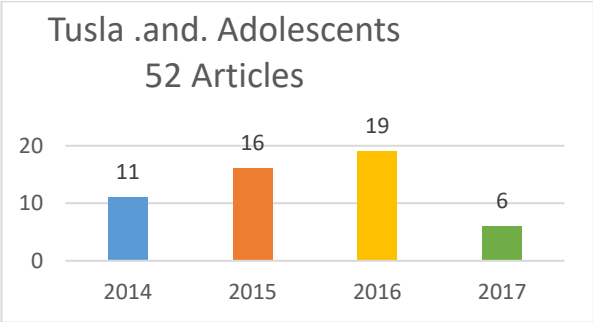


Figure h. Tusla .and. Teenagers

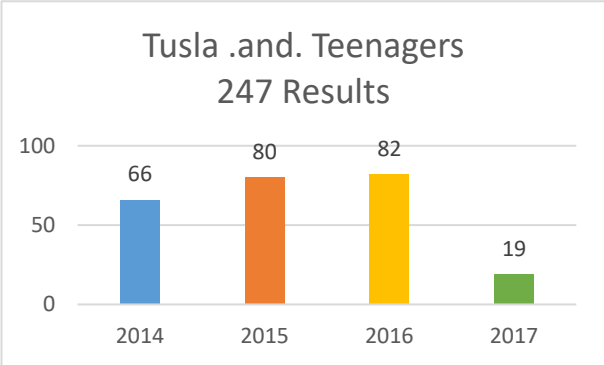
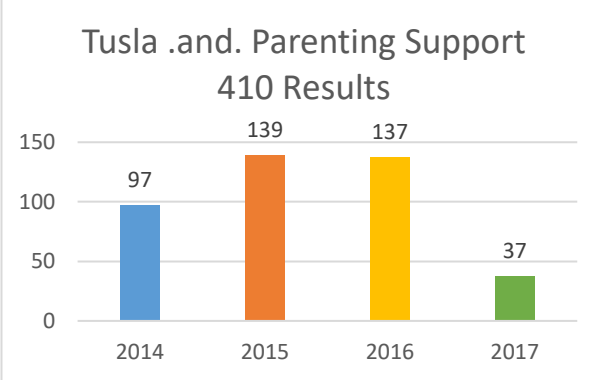


Figure i. Tusla .and. Parenting Support



Appendix VI: Sample: Pilot Tusla Search Results: 30 articles

	Tusla and Family Support **651 results** **Pilot – 10 results**	**Tusla and Parenting** **542 results** **Pilot – 10 results**	**Tusla and Prevention** **262 Results** **Pilot – 10 results**
1.	**Nenagh Guardian** 04/02/2017 (Sat.) '*Successful Family Support Event'* Tusla event for staff working with children and families in North Tipperary. Presentation by Pat Dolan. Tusla's Ger Brophy, Area Manager in attendance. (Photo)	**Nenagh Guardian** **22/02/2014 (Sat)** '*Incredible Years Parenting Programme Launches in Tipperary'.* First roll out of Incredible Years Parenting Programme in North Tipperary. Free of charge. Open to all parents. Consortium made up of Barnardos, North Tipp. Community Service, Leader and Tusla (photo)	**Irish Independent** **16/06/2015 (Tues)** '*Cutting Lifeline to Vulnerable Victims of Rape is a callous move by the state'.* Tusla stripped Rape Crisis Network Ireland (RCNI) of all of its funding €184,000. RCNI will not be able to withstand its decision. Tusla stated it was due to 'funding pressures' in 2015 Budget. RCNI collect data and carry out research – which informs policy & prevents sexual violence.
2.	Meath Chronicle 03/05/2014 (Sat) '*New Website "signpost" for Family Support Services is Launched'* Launch of new website to support children & families in Meath by Meath Children's Services Committee in Beaufort College, Navan. Attended by Leonard Callaghan, Tusla (Photo)	Westmeath Examiner 30/07/2016 (Sat) '*HIQA Report Small Number of Abuse Allegation Files Yet to be Dealt with – Tusla says it is addressing 230deficiencies'* Child Protection & Welfare Service deficiencies in the Midlands were identified in a HIQA Report and are being addressed Tusla stated. Jim Gibson (Chief Operations Officer, Tusla) stated Tusla were committed to improving child protection and welfare services. 228 files were reviewed 12 children were met with 8 parents.	Donegal News 17/07/2015 *'Tackling Suicide in Donegal'* (photo) Plan (Connecting for Life) involved widespread consultations. Action plan sets out 5 year strategy to reduce suicide levels. Key objectives of the Connecting for Life plan include improving understanding of mental health and well-being and provide communities capacity to prevent suicidal behaviour. Led by the HSE and developed in partnership with Education Sector Representatives, Gardaí and Tusla. Reps from all

	Tusla and Family Support **651 results** **Pilot – 10 results**	**Tusla and Parenting** **542 results** **Pilot – 10 results**	**Tusla and Prevention** **262 Results** **Pilot – 10 results**
			agencies attended the launch.
3.	Irish Independent 21/11/2014 (Fri) *'Charges Against Crèche in RTE Probe Struck Out'* Tusla are reviewing Judge Hugh O'Donnell's decision to strike out alleged breaches of childcare regulations by a crèche in Co. Dublin featured in RTE's Primetime programme in 2013. Judge O'Donnell ruled TUSLA did not have retrospective powers. Chief Executive of Tusla Gordon Jeyes asked Tusla legal office to review decision urgently.	Nenagh Guardian 25/07/2016 (Sat) *'Group Complete Innovative Parenting Programme'* Completion of first ever Nenagh Incredible Years Parenting Programme. 13 sessions 2.5 hours each Joint initiative between North Tipperary Community Service and Tusla. (photo)	Anglo Celt 15/01/2015 (Thurs) *'Doing Nothing is Not an Option – Humphrey's Programme Tackling Childhood Obesity in Cavan/Monaghan launched'* Launch of programme tackling childhood obesity attended by programme coordinators, Barnardos Rep; Minister Heather Humphreys TD, Early Intervention Manager Tusla; Cllr. Madeline Argue & Bernie Brady, Tusla. 2 Free programmes aimed at promoting and maintaining healthier lifestyles: Prevention and Management. (photo)
4.	Kildare Nationalist 21/06/2016 (Tues) *'Teach Dara Community & family Resource Centre, Kildare: First Public Launch for its Annual report'* Report outlines activities undertaken over the year with a 33.8% increase in footfall. Attendees: Teach Dara Board Members, Manager, Chairperson and Noreen Gill, Tusla. (Photo x 2)	Irish Independent 05/09/2014 (Fri) *'Why we should remember the Nazis were the first to ban home-schooling'* Germany – prohibition on home-schooling. Some families come to Ireland to home-school. Irish couple had to register with Tusla to do so. Couple felt their constitutional rights were being violated. Tusla has a duty to ensure children who are home-schooled receive a certain minimum educational standard.	Irish Examiner 09/06/2015 (Tues) *'State has job to do and Tusla is not the answer'* In 2014 the Government addressed many failings on sexual violence by founding Tusla. Its capacity and remit addresses gaps and failings in the states response to the crime of sexual violence. Tusla alone does not fulfil state's responsibility on sexual violence. Government cannot just hand over all its responsibility to Tusla

	Tusla and Family Support **651 results** **Pilot – 10 results**	**Tusla and Parenting** **542 results** **Pilot – 10 results**	**Tusla and Prevention** **262 Results** **Pilot – 10 results**
			as they have insufficient capacity and fragmented approaches to the prevention of sexual violence.
5.	Donegal News 30/01/2017 (Mon) *'Foster Carers needed in Donegal: Children now being fostered in Derry'* Tusla stated there are occasions when the best available placement for a child in foster care is in a neighbouring county to their own. Donegal – lack of foster carers. Tusla's Fostering Team in Donegal – planning a major recruitment campaign for foster carers in early 2017.	Irish Independent 03/12/2014 '*A lost generation? In a rush for votes, politicians strive to look after the middle classes and elderly first'.* Fine Gale/Labour Government of 2011 forgot the very children who will be doing the electing in the future. GUI study states Irish children and families are becoming more economically vulnerable. Government took some steps to safeguard children with the creation of Tusla.	Irish Examiner 14/04/2015 (Tues) '*Philanthropy fund gives €8m to national child support plan'* The Child and Family Agency (Tusla) has announced a major programme of early intervention measures for children after it received over €8m in one-off Atlantic Philanthropies funding. This means 'a stronger focus on prevention and early intervention rather than crisis management' (Minister James Reilly). The Prevention Partnership and Family Support Programme will begin this year and will run into 2018.
6.	Connacht Tribune 13/01/2017 (Fri) *'Family Resource Centres Grant'* Loughrea Family & Community Resource Centre awarded funding of €80,000 from Tusla towards purchase of new premises.	Irish Examiner 11/02/2017 (Sat) '*McCabe plans to sue state over sex abuse allegations'* Solicitor for Mr. McCabe, Sean Costello, plans to sue the state – rumours of sex abuse largely based on a file in Tusla created in 2013. Mr. McCabe, as any parent, relative, whoever, sees these things written about in this sense, that Mr. McCabe being posed a potential risk is devastating.	Irish Examiner 18/04/2016 *'Wasn't Tusla supposed to make sure we didn't return to the past?' (photo)* We may not be good at assessing risk but we agree that reducing it is a good move. Or we did until along came a man named Fred McBride the new head of Tusla. In foster homes if you want to prevent children from being harmed from another family member you remove either the children or the accused. According to Mr. McBride, media expectations of what

	Tusla and Family Support **651 results** **Pilot – 10 results**	**Tusla and Parenting** **542 results** **Pilot – 10 results**	**Tusla and Prevention** **262 Results** **Pilot – 10 results**
			child protection workers could or should achieve are "utterly absurd". He went on to state that responsibility should be knocked into parents rather than taking the kids into care.
7.	Westmeath Examiner 08/10/2016 '*Tusla host event to promote child welfare service in the area'.* Information briefing session held by Tusla in Mullingar attended by 55 HSE Reps. An Garda Siochana, voluntary agencies, Tusla's education and welfare service in North Westmeath to promote Tusla within the area and highlight its services, emphasise important of all agencies working together. (Photo x2)	Irish Examiner 23/02/2017 (Thurs) *'ISPCC warns of cyber threat to children'.* Children are spending up to 5 hours a day online engaging in dangerous activity (including sexting) with their parents unaware of the dangers. ISPCC state there is a need for Office of Digital Safety Commissioner and a National Cyber Safety Strategy for Children. Need for policy change and roles for Tusla, education and other departments and creation of new offences reflecting the online world.	Munster Express 12/05/2015 (Tues) *'Foróige Youth Project Launches New Premises in Tramore' (photo x5)* After almost 20 years working in the community, the Tramore Youth & Family Project, operated by Foróige, hosted the official launch of their new Summerhill premises. Tusla manager, Jim Gibson, spoke about the importance of having a service like this: Foróige is a strategic partner with Tusla. They are very much involved with us in providing prevention and family support services.
8.	Connacht Sentinel 15/07/2014 (Tues) *'Not exactly a tús maith for Tusla agency'* Tusla's savage cuts to budget of therapeutic learning centre in Ballinasloe – 50% cuts rob over 60 Toddlers of early intervention therapy throughout Galway. (Photo)	Irish Examiner 29/09/2016 *'Ombudsman faced delays on Tusla Criticisms'* Office of the Ombudsman experienced 'significant delays' when handling complaints relating to Tusla in 2015. Delays relating to Tusla are frustrating for children and families. Niall Muldoon (Ombudsman). Nuala Ward (Director of Investigations for the Ombudsman) stated that	Mayo News 23/06/2015 *'Rape Crisis Network Ireland cuts demeaning to survivors'.* *(photo)* State terminating core funding to RCNI, the body that collects and collates evidence of sexual violence. Tusla has terminated 100% of RCNI's core funding, essentially closing it down. Tusla says it will take over responsibility but data protection laws mean existing data cannot be transferred and Tusla has no

	Tusla and Family Support **651 results** **Pilot – 10 results**	**Tusla and Parenting** **542 results** **Pilot – 10 results**	**Tusla and Prevention** **262 Results** **Pilot – 10 results**
		Tusla " should dedicate time to ensure it has a good complaint handling service'. In 2015 1,639 complaints were made, an 8% increase on 2014. Majority of complaints made by parents (75%).	alternative in place. Tusla states maximum resources will go directly to frontline support services. Prevention is better than cure. Preventative strategies are long overdue. The RSA receives millions in state funding to prevent road deaths. Why can we not adopt a similar approach to preventing sexual violence. "Tusla have defunded the collection of evidence in an area where there is not a lot of evidence and an awful lot of silence" RCNI Acting Director, Dr. Cleona Saidléar.
9.	Meath Chronicle 03/05/2014 (Sat) *'Navan Centre to run IFPA Speakeasy Programme'* Tusla's CFA Family Resource Centre in Navan will run the first Irish Family Planning Association (IFPA) in Meath during May. A 6-8 week course for parents/carers of children and teens. A needs led service – which listened to people who attended the family resource centre.	Irish Independent 17/02/2015 *'Government in race to pass new child law ahead of marriage vote'* The Children and Family Relationships Bill 2015 – Government decision expected today. The new Bill will take into account new & diverse families; guard children's rights when cared for by married parents; unmarried parents; parent & partner; grandparents or other relatives acting as parents; expert panel to be appointed; Disabled parents can become guardians by informing Tusla; grandparents access; civil partners	Irish Examiner 27/12/2016 (Tues) *'Striving for a proactive approach to children'* Niall Muldoon, Ombudsman for Children, states huge strides have been made in recent years pointing to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the separation in 2014 of Tusla from the HSE. Tusla should "invest in children before they find themselves in trouble at school or with the Gardaí". Social Workers, he states, could prevent so much if they could give families a helping hand in the early days. Early intervention would prevent the torrent of child abuse complaints that can overwhelm child and family services. (photo)
10.	Munster Express 05/08/2014 (Tues)	Galway City Tribune 11/11/2016 (Fri)	Irish Examiner 27/10/2015

	Tusla and Family Support **651 results** **Pilot – 10 results**	**Tusla and Parenting** **542 results** **Pilot – 10 results**	**Tusla and Prevention** **262 Results** **Pilot – 10 results**
	‘*St. Brigid’s Family and Community Centre Family Fun Day in Wyse Park’.* Successful family fun day including storytelling; puppet show; music; dancing; games. St Brigid’s thanked all supporters including Tusla.	*‘Guidelines for Youth Events: Party Organisers are urged to make safety paramount’.* New set of Guidelines to help people hosting youth events (discos; party nights0 was launched at the Ardilaun Hotel. Guidelines drawn up through multi-agency discussions with young people, parents, Gardaí, Drug & Alcohol Task force; Tusla and HSE. Guidelines offer advice to organisers on all relevant aspects of planning and running a safe event. Paul Tannian (Tusla) was one of the individuals involved in developing the guidelines. (photo x2)	*‘Therapy seen as key to prevent re-offending’ (photo)* The need for sex offenders to have access to appropriate treatment services is recognized by Children First the national guideline for the protection and welfare of children. One of these programmes is Buddy Better Lives (BBL) sex offender programme. “All the men attending have sexually abused children and all are aware that both Tusla and the Gardaí are made aware of the identities of those who attend” Maeve Lewis, Executive Director.

Appendix VII: Summary of 30 Pilot articles:

	Tusla and family Support			**Tusla and Parenting**			**Tusla and Prevention**		
	Topic/Theme	***+ / -***	***Area***	***Topic/Theme***	***+ / -***	***Area***	***Topic/Theme***	***+ / -***	***Area***
1.	Tusla family support Event (Support)	+	Nenagh	Parenting Programme Launch (Support Prog)	+	Tipp.	Cuts to RCNI (Funding)	-	National
2.	Launch of new website re: support services (Support)	+	Meath	HIQA – Tusla deficiencies	-	Wst.Meath	Suicide Action Plan (mental health)	+	Donegal
3.	Tusla review of Crèche Charges struck out (Childcare)	-	Dublin	Parenting Programme (support)	+	Nenagh	Programme Launch re: Child Obesity (Child Prot)	+	Cav/Mon
4.	CFRC Annual Report Launch (Support)	+	Kildare	Home-schooling	Both	National	Tusla not equipped re: sexual violence (Ch. Prot)	-	National
5.	Lack of Foster Carers (Foster Carers)	Both	Donegal	Child & Family Poverty rise (Ch. Prot)	Both	National	PPFS Funding awarded	+	National
6.	Fam. Res. Centre Grant awarded	+	Galway	McCabe to sue state (Tusla Policies & Procedures)	-	National	Foster Care	-	National
7.	Tusla event to promote ch. Welfare serv. (Support)	+	West. Meath	Cyber Threat to children (Child Prot.)	-	National	Foróige launch new premises (Support)	+	Tramore
8.	Cuts to Therapeutic Centre (Funding)	-	B.sloe	Ombudsman – delays dealing with complaint	-	National	RCNI Cuts (Funding)	-	National

				s (Ch. Prot)					
9.	Parenting Course Launch (Support)	+	Meath	Ch. & Fam. Relationships Bill 2015 (Support)	+	National	Ombudsman wants prevention & early intervention (Support)	-	National
10.	Family Fun Day (Support)	+	Munster	Guidelines for Youth Events Launch (Ch. Prot)	+	National	Sex Offender Programme (Ch. Prot)	+	National

Appendix VIII: Summary of Search Terms, positive/negative/both and regional/national newspapers

Tusla and family Support			**Tusla and Parenting**			**Tusla and Prevention**		
Pos.	**Neg.**	**Both**	**Pos.**	**Neg.**	**Both**	**Pos.**	**Neg.**	**Both**
7 (regional)	2 (regional)	1 (regional	4 (2=reg. 2 = nat)	4 (3=nat 1=reg)	2 (national)	5 (3=reg 2=nat)	5 national	0

Appendix IX: Total number of positive/negative/both articles and regional/national newspapers

Total Positive Articles	Total Negative Articles	Total Both
16 12 = regional 4 = national	11 3 = regional 8 = national	3 1 = regional 2 = national

Appendix X: Total Number of Articles by year, positive/negative/both

2014	**2015**	**2016**	**2017 (to April)**
8 Articles	**9 articles**	**8 articles**	**5 articles**
4 positive	6 positive	4 positive	2 positive
2 negative	3 negative	4 negative	2 negative
2 both			1 both

Appendix XI
Information Sheet for Journalists

Dear Sir/Madam,

This document will give you all the information you need to know about the conduct of this study.

This research study is being carried out as part of a PhD at NUI Galway. The title of the research study is: An investigation into awareness, process and understanding how child protection and family support are represented in Ireland's print media and how Ireland's Child and Family Agency (Tusla) is portrayed to the public.

Who is the researcher?

The researcher is Patricia O'Connor ,MSc who can be contacted at: p.oconnor14@nuigalway.ie or (087) 9306498. Ms. O'Connor's research is being supervised by Professor Caroline McGregor (e-mail address: caroline.mcgregor@nuigalway.ie) and Dr. Carmel Devaney (e-mail address: carmel.devaney@nuigalway.ie).

What will the study focus on?

[3]The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationships/differences in how child protection and family support are portrayed in Ireland's print media focusing on public awareness. This is an important area of study in order to understand Ireland's newly established Child and Family Agency's (Tusla's) media profile by evaluating issues pertaining to Child Protection and Family Support in order to rate print coverage and recommend action and response. To date, little is known about publication trends and key messages being published in Irelands print media of Tusla, child protection, and family support themes.

The main objectives of the study are:

1. To describe trends in communication content.
2. To disclose geographical differences in communication content.
3. To compare newspapers' levels of communication.
4. To understand the process behind the headlines (process) and trace the development of scholarship (authors of media content).
5. To determine the impact of print media on the public (understanding) and to describe responses to communication in print media (population sample) Berelson (1952).
6. To examine the relationship and differences in how child protection, child welfare and family support are portrayed in the print media in relation to family support with a focus on the level of media and public awareness (awareness).

Purpose/Role of the Interview:

The broad purpose of the interview is to understand the process behind the headlines and trace the development of scholarship. You, as a journalist, are best placed to provide insight into this process and to provide information that you think may be helpful to the researcher by offering your unique experiences and insights into the research.

What does the researcher plan to do?

The researcher would like to conduct a one to one interview with you, the Journalists, at a time and location most conveniently suited to you. Whether the interview will be conducted face to face or by telephone will be entirely dependent on what you deem most convenient.

What will happen to the information gathered?

[3] The objectives of the study were condensed into the four objectives listed throughout this study.

The information gathered will be published as part of PhD dissertation and may appear in research journals or other academic publications. All information collected will be kept strictly confidential and will not be shared with anyone else. The information collected in this research study will be stored in a way that protects all participants identities. The recordings will be transcribed for analysis. The original recordings will be stored securely for five years in accordance with NUI Galway's Data Retention Policy after which they will be destroyed.

What if you are unhappy with the conduct of the research or have received complaints about the researcher?

If you have or receive any complaints regarding the conduct of this research, or you have questions regarding the conduct of the research, you can contact the researcher directly: Patricia O'Connor at p.oconnor14@nuigalway.ie (087-9306498) or Professor Caroline McGregor at caroline.mcgregor@nuigalway.ie.

If you have any concerns regarding this study and wish to contact someone independently and in confidence, you may contact The Chairperson of the NUI Galway Research Ethics Committee, e/o Office of the Vice President for Research, NUI Galway, ethics@nuigalway.ie.

What happens next?

The researcher will be in contact with you shortly to make arrangements for conducting the interview. If you require further information in relation to this study please feel free to contact Patricia O'Connor.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to meeting with you soon.

Yours sincerely,

Patricia O'Connor
p.oconnor14@nuigalway

Appendix XII – Interview Schedule - Journalists

How do you decide what to report on? Who decides what topics you cover?

Do you generally try to obtain differing views from various sources to verify your reporting/stories?

Do you think your writing has an influence/impact on how the general public view the topic?

Would you welcome a press release from the agency you are reporting on regarding the topic of your story?

If you do not have the views of the agency you are writing about, does this influence the direction of your story?

What is your perception/understanding of family support (services)?

What is your perception/understanding of child protection (services)?

What is your perception/understanding of Ireland's child and family agency that offer both family support and are in charge of child protection?

Do your personal views of family support and child protection impact on your writing/stories? If so, in what way? If not, why not?

Do you think family support is portrayed more positively or negatively in the print media? Why do you think that is?

Do you think child protection is portrayed more positively or negatively in the print media? Why do you think that is?

Appendix XIII
Information Sheet for Tusla Participants

Dear Sir/Madam,
This document will give you all the information you need to know about the conduct of this study.
This research study is being carried out as part of a PhD at NUI Galway. The title of the research study is: An investigation into awareness, process and understanding how child protection and family support are represented in Ireland's print media and how Ireland's Child and Family Agency (Tusla) is portrayed to the public.

Who is the researcher?

The researcher is Patricia O'Connor ,MSc who can be contacted at: p.oconnor14@nuigalway.ie or (087) 9306498. Ms. O'Connor's research is being supervised by Professor Caroline McGregor (e-mail address: caroline.mcgregor@nuigalway.ie) and Dr. Carmel Devaney (e-mail address: carmel.devaney@nuigalway.ie).

What will the study focus on?

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationships/differences in how child protection and family support are portrayed in Ireland's print media focusing on public awareness. This is an important area of study in order to understand Ireland's newly established Child and Family Agency's (Tusla's) media profile by evaluating issues pertaining to Child Protection and Family Support in order to rate print coverage and recommend action and response. To date, little is known about publication trends and key messages being published in Irelands print media of Tusla, child protection, and family support themes.

[4]The main objectives of the study are:

1. To describe trends in communication content.
2. To disclose geographical differences in communication content.
3. To compare newspapers' levels of communication.
4. To understand the process behind the headlines (process) and trace the development of scholarship (authors of media content).
5. To determine the impact of print media on the public (understanding) and to describe responses to communication in print media (population sample) Berelson (1952).
6. To examine the relationship and differences in how child protection, child welfare and family support are portrayed in the print media in relation to family support with a focus on the level of media and public awareness (awareness).

Purpose/Role of the Interview:

The broad purpose of the interview is to examine the relationship and differences in how child protection, and family support are portrayed in the media and to determine the impact, if any, print media has on the public and to your work practices. You, as a staff member of Ireland's child and family agency, are best placed to provide insight into this process and to provide information that you think may be helpful to the researcher by offering your unique experiences and insights into the research.

What does the researcher plan to do?

The researcher would like to conduct a one to one interview with you at a time and location most conveniently suited to you. Whether the interview will be conducted

[4] The objectives of the study were condensed into the four objectives listed throughout this study.

face to face or by telephone will be entirely dependent on what you deem most convenient.

What will happen to the information gathered?

The information gathered will be published as part of PhD dissertation and may appear in research journals or other academic publications. All information collected will be kept strictly confidential and will not be shared with anyone else. The information collected in this research study will be stored in a way that protects all participants identities. The recordings will be transcribed for analysis. The original recordings will be stored securely for five years in accordance with NUI Galway's Data Retention Policy after which they will be destroyed.

What if you are unhappy with the conduct of the research or have received complaints about the researcher?

If you have or receive any complaints regarding the conduct of this research, or you have questions regarding the conduct of the research, you can contact the researcher directly: Patricia O'Connor at p.oconnor14@nuigalway.ie (087-9306498) or Professor Caroline McGregor at caroline.mcgregor@nuigalway.ie.

If you have any concerns regarding this study and wish to contact someone independently and in confidence, you may contact The Chairperson of the NUI Galway Research Ethics Committee, e/o Office of the Vice President for Research, NUI Galway, ethics@nuigalway.ie.

What happens next?

The researcher will be in contact with you shortly to make arrangements for conducting the interview. If you require further information in relation to this study please feel free to contact Patricia O'Connor.

Thank you for your time and I look forward to meeting with you soon.

Yours sincerely,

Patricia O'Connor
p.oconnor14@nuigalway

Appendix XIV: Interview Schedule: Tusla Participants

What is your role in Tusla?

What is your understanding/perception of how Tusla is portrayed/communicated to the general public in the print media (newspapers or online articles)?

What is your understanding/perception of how family support is portrayed in the print media (newspapers or online articles)?

What is your understanding/perception of how child protection is portrayed in the print media (newspapers or online articles)?

Do you know how Tusla communicate with journalists/media?/How do Tusla communicate with journalists?

Have you ever had any training on public awareness or how to communicate with the media? If so, how often and what did that entail?

Do the newspaper articles/online articles have an impact on you personally/professionally as an employee of Tusla?

Do you think the way Tusla is portrayed in the media has an impact on public understanding of Tusla's work/supports offered? In what way?

Do you think Tusla is represented fairly in the print media?

Appendix XV
Consent Form for Journalists
If you wish to take part in the youth advisory panel, please fill in this Consent Form and return it to the researcher via the stamped self-addressed envelope.

* I have read the information sheet and I know what the role of the interview is 

* I know that my participation is voluntary 

* I know that I can choose not to take part at any time. 

(*If you <u>agree</u> to take part, please tick the box below)*

* **<u>I agree</u>** to take part in the interview 

OR

(*If you <u>do not agree</u> to take part, please tick the box below)*

* **<u>I do not agree</u>** to take part in the interview 

Name: _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Appendix XVI
Consent Form for Tusla Participant
If you wish to take part in the interview, please fill in this Consent Form and return it to the researcher via the stamped self-addressed envelope.

* I have read the information sheet and I know what the role of the interview is ☐

* I know that my participation is voluntary ☐

* I know that I can choose not to take part at any time. ☐

(*If you <u>agree</u> to take part in the Interview, please tick the box below)*

* **<u>I agree</u>** to take part in the Interview ☐

OR

(*If you <u>do not agree</u> to take part, please tick the box below)*

* **<u>I do not agree</u>** to take part in the interview ☐

Name: _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Appendix XVII

Distressed Persons Protocol

Research that elicits stories of personal experience is by its very nature probing, particularly where emotive issues are discussed (e.g. parenting; child-rearing; division of responsibilities; immigration). The possible occurrence of feelings of distress or of a participant becoming uncomfortable with the topics depends on the person, their characteristics and personality, and their individual experience. Distress is therefore difficult to predict.

The methods of data collection for this study are focus groups and interviews. In the event of a participant indicating distress during interviews, the researcher will immediately follow the Distressed Persons Protocol. During focus group sessions, the participant will be removed to another room, away from fellow participants and will adhere to the Distressed Persons Protocol.

If a participant indicates that they are uncomfortable or experiencing emotional distress, or if they exhibit behaviours suggestive of such, the following course of action will be taken:

1. The participant will be immediately asked whether they want to continue the focus group

   Session or interview, discontinue at this time, or withdraw from the study.
2. If the participant decides to discontinue at this time, they will be asked if they would like to continue at another time using a different venue and different method to speak about the problems or issues they are facing (e.g. face to face, phone call).
3. The participant can withdraw if they choose to withdraw and the researcher will reassure them that existing data will not be used if they so wish.
4. Researcher/Supervisors and participant can decide if another person (practitioner or partner) should be informed of the situation to ensure participant safety and well-being.
5. The participant can decide to seek further help from their local general practitioner or any other service.
6. Time will be given to ensure that the participant's distress or upset has diminished sufficiently by asking the participant how they feel prior to concluding the meeting.
7. If the participant wishes to return to the focus group session, they are free to do so after distress has diminished sufficiently and they have been reassured that they can discontinue or withdraw from the study at any point if they so wish.

Appendix XVIII
Information Sheet for Gatekeepers

Dear Sir/Madam,

This document will give you all the information you need to know about the conduct of this study.

This research study is being carried out as part of a PhD at NUI Galway. The title of the research study is: A study of how child protection and family support are represented in Ireland's print media.

Who is the researcher?

The researcher is Patricia O'Connor ,MSc who can be contacted at: p.oconnor14@nuigalway.ie. Ms. O'Connor's research is being supervised by Professor Caroline McGregor (e-mail address: caroline.mcgregor@nuigalway.ie) and Dr. Carmel Devaney (e-mail address: carmel.devaney@nuigalway.ie).

What will the study focus on?

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationships/differences in how child protection and family support are portrayed in Ireland's print media. This is an important area of study in order to understand Ireland's newly established Child and Family Agency's (Tusla's) media profile by evaluating issues pertaining to Child Protection and Family Support in order to rate print coverage and recommend action and response. To date, little is known about publication trends and key messages being published in Irelands print media of child protection, and family support themes.

[5]The main objectives of the study are:

1. To describe trends in communication content – (completed)
2. To disclose geographical differences in communication content – (completed)
3. To compare newspapers' levels of communication – (completed)
4. To understand the process behind the headlines (process) and trace the development of scholarship (authors of media content) – (This aspect of the study pertains to interviews with Journalists).
5. (a) To determine the impact of print media publications surrounding issues of child protection and family support on the public (aged 18+ years) (understanding) and to describe responses to communication in print media (population sample) Berelson (1952) – (This aspect of the study pertains to focus groups with members of the public aged 18 years and over).

   5. (b) To determine the impact of print media publications surrounding issues of child protection and family support on a sample of young people (aged 13-18 years involved in a youth project) and to describe responses to communication in print media.

   5. (c) To determine the impact of print media publications surrounding issues of child protection and family support on Tusla Staff working in the areas of child protection and family support (social care and social work practitioners) and to describe responses to communication in print media.
6. To examine the relationship and differences in how child protection and family support are portrayed in the print media with a focus on the level of media and public awareness (awareness) – (Following all data collection and

[5] The objectives of the study were condensed into the four objectives listed throughout this study.

analysis, this objective will emerge in the Findings and Analysis section of the final study).

Purpose/Role of the Interview:
As can be seen from 5(c) above, the purpose of the interview with Tusla staff members working in the areas of child protection and family support (social care and social work practitioners) is to determine the impact of print media publications surrounding issues of child protection and family support on them and to describe their responses to such communication in the media. In addition, the research intends to examine the relationship and differences in how child protection, and family support are portrayed in the media and to determine the impact, if any, print media has on Tusla staff work practices. Staff members of Ireland's child and family agency, are best placed to provide insight into this process and to provide information that they think may be helpful to the researcher by offering their unique experiences and insights into the research.

What does the researcher plan to do?
In order to determine this objective and make contact with interested participants for telephone interview (lasting approximately 30-40 minutes), I would be obliged if you could forward the attached Information Sheet to all staff in your area working in family support and child protection services (social care and social work practitioners) and instruct anyone interested in participating to contact me directly at p.oconnor14@nuigalway.ie.

What will happen to the information gathered? / Confidentiality:
The information gathered will be published as part of PhD dissertation and may appear in research journals or other academic publications. All information collected will be kept strictly confidential and will not be shared with anyone else. The information collected in this research study will be stored in a way that protects all participants identities. With your permission the interview will be audio recorded (by Dictaphone) and transcribed for use in the research. Information provided will be anonymous and no individual will be identifiable in the report. The original recordings will be stored securely for five years in accordance with NUI Galway's Data Retention Policy after which they will be destroyed in accordance with NUIG's Data Protection Policy (https://www.nuigalway.ie/media/data-protection/QA400-NUI-Galway-Data-Protection-Policy-(1).pdf). Consent forms containing participants' identifiable information and hard copies of transcripts will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the Child & Family Research Centre for five years after the end of the study in accordance with NUI Galway's *Data Protection Policy*. Documents and data will be disposed of safely after this time.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to distribute the Tusla Staff Information Sheet to all staff in your area working in family support and child protection services (social care and social work practitioners) and invite anyone interested in participating to contact me directly at p.oconnor14@nuigalway.ie. If you

decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect your rights in any way.

What if you are unhappy with the conduct of the research or have received complaints about the researcher?

If you have or receive any complaints regarding the conduct of this research, or you have questions regarding the conduct of the research, you can contact the researcher directly: Patricia O'Connor at p.oconnor14@nuigalway.ie (087-9306498) or Professor Caroline McGregor at caroline.mcgregor@nuigalway.ie.

If you have any concerns regarding this study and wish to contact someone independently and in confidence, you may contact The Chairperson of the NUI Galway Research Ethics Committee, e/o Office of the Vice President for Research, NUI Galway, ethics@nuigalway.ie.

You can also make a complaint directly to Tusla in accordance with the document: A Guide On How To Give Feedback and make Complaints available at: https://www.tusla.ie/uploads/content/Tell_Us_-_Public_Guide_(2017).pdf. Complaints can be made about any action/lack of action by a service provided on behalf of Tulsa considered unfair, that negatively affects you or has negatively affected you in the past. Complaints can be made verbally, in person by phone, online, e-mail, in writing, text or WhatsApp.

Tusla Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)

Tusla's Employee Assistance Programme provides confidential counselling support and/or referral for all staff with personal or work related difficulties. If you require support from Tusla's EAP, you can contact Tusla on 086-1438390 or e-mail eap@tusla.ie. Further information on Tusla's EAP can be found at: https://www.tusla.ie/health-wellbeing-and-eap/employee-assistance-and-counselling-service/employee-assistance-programme-overview-and-access/

Risks and Benefits of the Study

It is not envisaged that there are any risks associated with taking part in this study. However, should any participant become upset or need to seek support a list of services will be provided (see attached list of support services).

Benefits to the study include the knowledge that taking part will ensure Tusla staff members opinions are heard and documented and will form part of the overall findings of the study which could benefit future public awareness activities in relation to family support and child protection.

What happens next?

If you are interested in participating, please contact the researcher directly at (p.oconnor14@nuigalway.ie).

Thank you for your time and I look forward to speaking with you soon.

Yours sincerely,

Patricia O'Connor
p.oconnor14@nuigalway

APPENDIX XIX
E-MAIL TO 4 SERVICE DIRECTORS

Dear (1) _____
Dear (2) _____
Dear (3) _____
Dear (4) _____

My name is Patricia O'Connor. I am conducting research as part of a PhD at NUI Galway's Child and Family Research Centre. The title of the research study is: A study of how child protection and family support are represented in Ireland's print media. My research is being supervised by Professor Caroline McGregor (caroline.mcgregor@nuigalway.ie) and Dr. Carmel Devaney (carmel.devaney@nuigalway.ie).

One of the objectives of my study is to determine the impact of print media publications surrounding issues of child protection and family support on Tusla staff working in the areas of child protection and family support (social care and social work practitioners) and to describe responses to communication in print media. In order to determine this objective and make contact with interested participants for telephone interview (lasting approximately 30-40 minutes), I would be obliged if you could forward the attached Information Sheet to all staff in your area working in family support and child protection services (social care and social work practitioners) and instruct anyone interested in participating to contact me directly at p.oconnor14@nuigalway.ie.

If you would like any further information or clarification of this study, please do not hesitate to contact me at p.oconnor14@nuigalway.ie or contact either of my Supervisors. I thank you most sincerely for your time and assistance. I am attaching a Gatekeeper Information Sheet for you in order to decide whether you wish to participate in the study.

Yours sincerely,

Patricia O'Connor.

APPENDIX XX
E-MAIL TO CHIEF OPERATIONS OFFICER

Dear _____

My name is Patricia O'Connor. I am conducting research as part of a PhD at NUI Galway's Child and Family Research Centre. The title of the research study is: A study of how child protection and family support are represented in Ireland's print media. My research is being supervised by Professor Caroline McGregor (caroline.mcgregor@nuigalway.ie) and Dr. Carmel Devaney (carmel.devaney@nuigalway.ie).

One of the objectives of my study is to determine the impact of print media publications surrounding issues of child protection and family support on Tusla staff working in the areas of child protection and family support (social care and social work practitioners) and to describe responses to communication in print media. In order to determine this objective and make contact with interested participants for interview, I would be obliged if you could provide me with your written approval to contact the following four service directors:

1. West Service Director
2. South Service Director
3. Dublin North East Service Director
4. Dublin Mid Leinster Service Director

If you would like any further information or clarification of this study, please do not hesitate to contact me at p.oconnor14@nuigalway.ie or contact either of my Supervisors. I thank you in advance for your time and valued assistance.

Yours sincerely,

Patricia O'Connor.

APPENDIX XXI

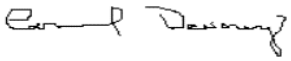
Statement of Authorship and Permission

Name of Report:	**Newspaper Content Analysis: Print Media Coverage of Ireland's Child and Family Agency (Tusla) 2014-2017.**
Authors:	**Patricia O'Connor** **Caroline McGregor** **Carmel Devaney**
Year:	**2018**
Publishers:	**UNESCO Child & Family Research Centre,** **NUI Galway.**

The above-named report was largely the work of Patricia O'Connor as part of her PhD and was overseen by her Supervisors, Caroline McGregor and Carmel Devaney. Both Caroline McGregor and Carmel Devaney give their full permission for the work undertaken to be used in this thesis.

Signed: _____

Caroline McGregor



Signed: _____

Carmel Devaney

Signed: _____

Patricia O'Connor

Dated this 12th day of April 2021.

Appendix XXII

Examples of Positive/Negative/Both ratings

Sat 11/10/2014 Nenagh Guardian (p. 25) – Summary of Article
'*Barnardos opens new child-focused service in Tipperary*'
Barnardos opened new space in Thurles. Donation from Tony Ryan Trust. Tusla were thanked for their funding and support. Programmes including parenting and children's development are offered to children and families.
(Positive)

Tues 23/12/2014 The Irish Times (pg 7) – Summary of Article
'Tusla gets care order for 2 children'
Judge granted a 6 month Care Order to Tusla in respect of 2 children whose parents tried to take their own lives. Tusla said aim of the agency is reunification of the children with their parents. Judge directed Tusla to help the two parents with parenting skills and provide medical assistance to the parents and liberal access during the 6 months.
(Positive)

29/9/2016 Irish Examiner (pg. 7) – Summary of Article
'Ombudsman faced delays on Tusla criticisms'
The Ombudsman for Children said it experienced considerable delays when handling complaints relating to Tusla when seeking information. A spokesperson for Tusla acknowledged the delays and said new procedures are in place. Majority of complaints received were from parents. 3% arose from children. 81% of complaints the Ombudsman was contacted by parent/sibling and/or extended family. Half of complaints – education. 25% family support care and protection services. 14% complaints about health services.
(Negative)

Fri 15/4/2016 Irish Times (pg 17) – Summary of Article
'*Too little; often too late: Child protection*'
Mother in Galway – 29 charges of child cruelty and neglect – children remained in her care for 5 years after coming to the attention of social services. Almost 30 inquiries into state's handling of child abuse cases over the past 2 decades. Same issues – lapses of communication between state agencies; lack of standardised approach; lack of prevention measures. Hopes that the establishment of Tusla would tackle these issues – not yet materialised. Separation of health and social services has not helped. Mental health and public health professionals integral to the prevention of child abuse. But there is no effective structure. Tusla – over reliance on agency social workers. High Staff turnover. Funding issues.
(**Negative**)

2/8/2014 Limerick Leader (pg. 8) – Summary of Article
'Foster carers fear over aftercare changes: new policy could drive more children to homelessness and addiction as Tusla promises consultation with carers'.

Tusla to standardise aftercare supports for young people leaving care system and will ensure equal access to country housing, social welfare, educational and other supports. Huge concern among Limerick foster carers (212) – foster care allowance to be cut to zero as soon as the child reaches 18 – fear this standardisation in aftercare supports could see social care teams encouraging children in care towards welfare and housing supports – encouraged to leave foster family – Tusla stated no decisions have been made regarding financial packages and no decision will be made without further consultation with foster carers.
(**Both – Tusla referred to both positively and negatively in article**)

Fri 2/12/2016 Irish Examiner (pg 5) – Summary of Article
'*Over 130 babies taken into care: 6,388 children in care as of August of this year: No figure on newborns taken from parents*'
On average over 130 babies under 1 taken into care annually. End 2015, 121 babies in care, 139 in 2014 and 136 in 2013. Katherine Zappone unable to provide figure for number of newborns taken into care. Tusla has confirmed that it does not collect a metric that collates the number of newborn children taken into care directly or soon after birth. Social workers engage with vulnerable mothers to assess their capacity to care for the newborns and if necessary will contact the local social work department in Tusla. Once referral from a maternity hospital is made, assessment is completed and if risk of harm or neglect identified, a Care Order is made to the Court. Mattie McGrath commended the work of protecting vulnerable babies but said more should be done to assist parents. He had concerns there is not enough support or focus for developing a parallel process whereby a parent can be fully supported in their efforts to get their lives back on track and recover custody when the ability to care has been proven. Tusla's latest data report – 6,388 children in care. 4,100 foster care. 1,832 relative foster care. 93% assigned to a social worker.
(Both).