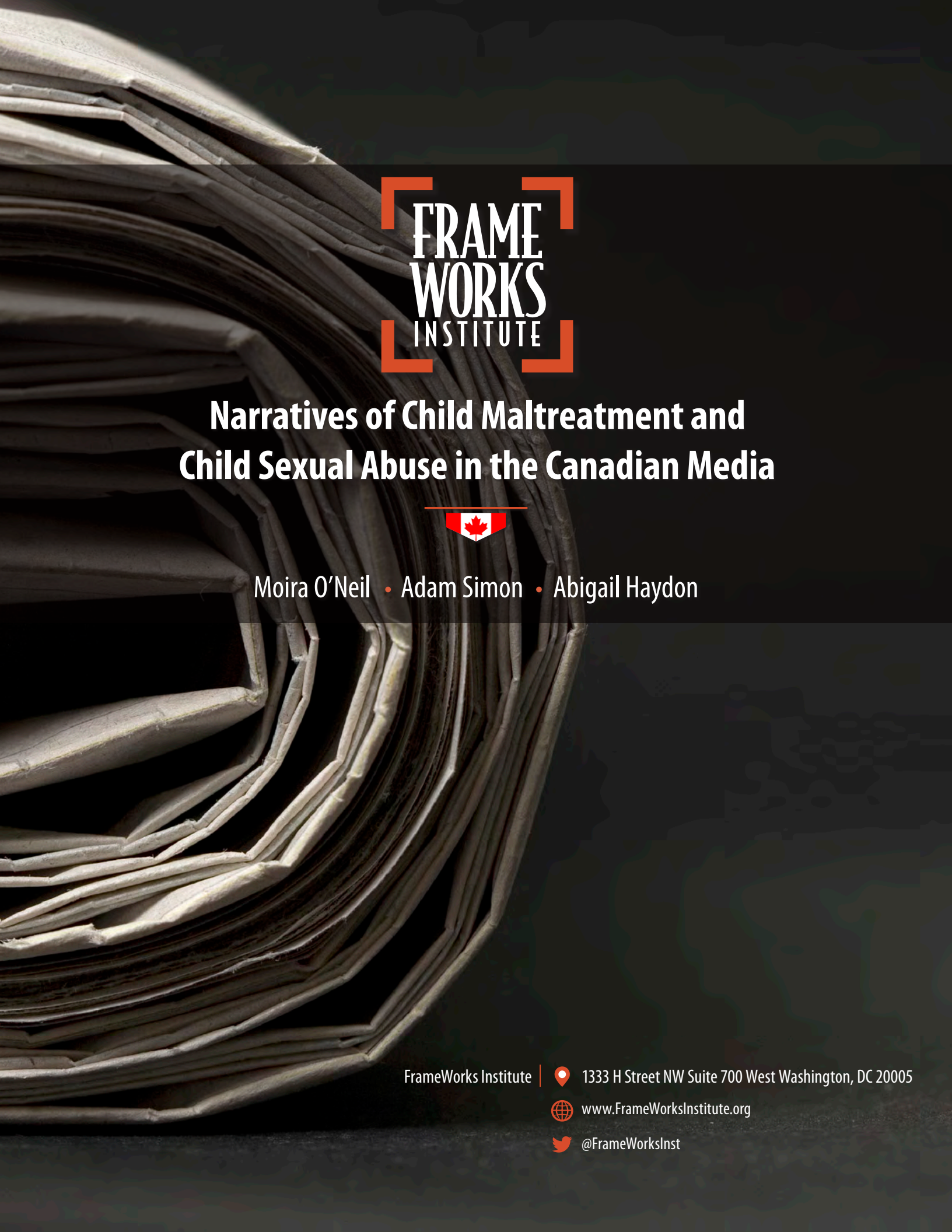

FRAME WORKS INSTITUTE

Narratives of Child Maltreatment and Child Sexual Abuse in the Canadian Media

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I. INTRODUCTION

The sources of information about child maltreatment available to the Canadian public range from the intensely personal to the publicly visible.[1] In 2014, the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* reported that roughly one third of all Canadians were abused as children. Higher rates of abuse were observed in the Western provinces, including Alberta.[2] The striking prevalence of maltreatment suggests that Albertans' opinions about maltreatment are certainly influenced by direct experience. At the same time, however, the mass media also inform public perceptions of child maltreatment, and have been shown to substantially shift how the public responds to this issue.[3] For example, media coverage of high-profile cases of child maltreatment is associated with increases in reporting. Furthermore, when the media implicate major organizations such as schools or religious institutions in abuse, it is often accompanied by large-scale demands for institutional change.[4] In short, *understanding what the media are saying about child maltreatment — and how they are saying it — is a critical step in attempts to change the direction of public discourse and action on this issue.*

The purpose of the research presented here, conducted by the FrameWorks Institute for the Alberta Family Wellness Initiative with support from the Norlien Foundation, is to analyze media coverage of child maltreatment, and of child sexual abuse in particular. This research is part of a larger effort to design and test communications strategies with the ability to increase public support for policies and programs aimed at preventing child maltreatment and better addressing its effects on individuals and society. In this phase of the research project, we identify the dominant narratives that structure the media discourse on child maltreatment in Canada. We examine the likely impacts of these media narratives on the public's understanding of child maltreatment.[5] In so doing, we begin to identify reframing strategies that will expand public understanding of child maltreatment, create a more productive public conversation about this issue, and increase support for the programs advocated by child maltreatment experts.

The mechanisms by which media influence public engagement with social issues are complex. Media studies scholars describe this process as a "drip, drip, drip" effect.[6] Through the consistent telling of certain kinds of stories, and the persistent exclusion of other kinds of stories, media discourse creates and reinforces public understandings over time. The power of media discourse to influence and shape cultural beliefs about social issues derives not just from its *content*, but from the way that content is organized into a specific story — what is referred to as *narrative structure*. Thus, the analysis that follows examines both the

content of media coverage of maltreatment *as well as* the ways in which this content is consistently organized into, and presented as, narratives. This analysis provides insight into how communicators can strategically expand and improve existing media narratives, with the ultimate goal of creating new ways of talking and thinking about child maltreatment, and specifically child sexual abuse, in Alberta.

II. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Based on a mixed-method analysis of Canadian media, this report identifies the dominant narratives concerning child maltreatment. It also examines the implications of these narratives for public understanding of this issue, and public support for interventions to both prevent and more effectively address child maltreatment in Alberta.

Findings

Canadian media disseminate four distinct narratives related to child maltreatment. These include *Punish The Perpetrator*, *Institutional Accountability*, *Violence Against First Nations Teenagers* and *Prevalence Of Maltreatment* narratives. These narrative clusters are distinct, meaning that their content does not overlap. For example, media stories that address issues of child sexual abuse are not likely to discuss other forms of maltreatment.

All narratives are missing critical narrative components. The public will "fill in" these gaps with dominant understandings of child maltreatment. None of the media narratives of child maltreatment is a complete story. For example, the *Punish The Perpetrator* narrative fails to discuss why child sexual abuse occurs or what the long-term consequences are for victims and society. Similarly, the *Violence Against First Nations Teenagers* narrative omits any discussion of solutions, or actions that can be taken to address child maltreatment in aboriginal communities. These are not innocuous absences — they will be "filled in" by dominant public understandings of child maltreatment, many of which run counter to the types of understandings that experts and advocates seek to communicate in order to better address this important social issue.

The media present a limited range of solutions to child maltreatment, regularly excluding any discussion of preventative approaches. The absence of prevention-oriented solutions was particularly pernicious in the *Punish The Perpetrator* narrative, which focused on child sexual abuse in the context of the criminal justice system. The lack of robust solution discussions in the media is likely to feed into, and reinforce, fatalistic attitudes among members of this public about child maltreatment in general, and about the possibility of addressing child sexual abuse in particular. This is particularly problematic for child sexual abuse, as other FrameWorks research shows that members of the public struggle greatly to think about potential solutions to this issue.

Recommendations

Use all opportunities to expand existing media narratives. All of the media narratives described in this report present a very narrow story about maltreatment, and are missing critical narrative elements. In public-facing communications, experts and advocates should try to explain why maltreatment, and particularly child sexual abuse, occurs, detail the long-term and societal-level impacts of maltreatment, and provide preventative and treatment-based strategies to address child maltreatment that are outside of the criminal justice system.

Tell a coherent story about non-sexual child maltreatment. Currently, maltreatment that involves physical and emotional abuse or neglect does not constitute a coherent narrative in the Canadian media. Communicators should view this absence as an opportunity to explain the causes of non-sexual child maltreatment, detail the kinds of social supports that will reduce its occurrence, and highlight both individual- and societal-level impacts using values and the Core Story of Early Childhood Development.

Use values to establish the collective impacts of child maltreatment. Members of the Albertan public will undoubtedly find data about the rates of child maltreatment and child sexual abuse extremely troubling. However, without clear communications cues, their concern will focus on individuals who are directly affected and they will have difficulty understanding the societal impacts of child maltreatment. This difficulty will impede public support for systemic solutions designed to address the root causes of child maltreatment. Values such as *Interdependence* and *Ingenuity* can shift the media's focus on individuals, and help create public conversations about the *societal*-level consequences of child maltreatment.

Use the Core Story of Early Childhood Development to communicate the long-term effects of child maltreatment. Members of the public understand that child maltreatment has negative effects on victims, but they often do not understand the scope of those effects or the mechanisms by which ongoing maltreatment impacts developmental outcomes. The Core Story explains early brain development, demonstrating how maltreatment can disrupt that development, leading to life-long problems in health, learning and overall well-being. When members of the public have a deeper sense of the mechanisms by which maltreatment leads to negative outcomes, they too can become advocates for social programs and supports that prevent child maltreatment and improve outcomes for children who have been affected by this issue.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

The analysis presented here was guided by the following three research questions:

> *What are the media narratives of child maltreatment in Canada?*
>
> *To what extent do certain narratives dominate this discourse and shape public understandings of child maltreatment?*
>
> *What are the likely impacts of these narratives on public thinking about maltreatment?*

In order to address these questions, we draw on the following analysis:

Media Analysis

The sample includes stories taken from national and Alberta-based newspapers, and national television broadcasts. We used LexisNexis to generate a sample of news stories from the following sources: *The Globe and Mail*, *Calgary Herald*, *Edmonton Journal*, *Red Deer Express*, *National Post*, *Carstairs Courier* and broadcasts from CTV Television.

We used a wide variety of search terms[7] to capture stories from the sources listed above that dealt with issues of child maltreatment. The search was performed from July 24, 2013, through July 24, 2014. This search resulted in the identification of 681 stories. We then eliminated stories that did not deal substantively with child maltreatment issues. Duplicate articles (i.e., the same article published in multiple news outlets) were also removed from the sample. This process resulted in a final sample of 416 media stories.

The coding structure was designed to track all the narrative components (e.g., topic, values, solutions) present in the 416 documents in the sample. The resulting codes were analyzed using hierarchal clustering, or cluster analysis, to identify patterns of narrative components that co-occur within the data.[8] This approach examines the content and structure of narratives in the media (for example, whether they include logically aligned value statements and solutions). A more detailed explanation of these methods can be found in the Appendix.

IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS

The cluster analysis identified four narratives in the media's coverage of child maltreatment. The *Punish The Perpetrator* narrative of child sexual abuse was by far the most prevalent (see Figure 1). This narrative constituted over 64 percent of the coverage regarding child maltreatment. It is notable not only for its frequency, but also for its separation from the other narrative clusters identified in the analysis. The narrative components that appear in the *Punish The Perpetrator* narrative are highly unlikely to appear in the other narratives discussed below. In short, the *Punish The Perpetrator* narrative is a distinct and highly predictable media story.

Figure 2 shows the positioning of each of the four narratives using a multidimensional scaling (MDS) plot. The distance between the points on the MDS plot represents the degree to which they co-occur in the media coverage. For example, solutions to maltreatment that are associated with the criminal justice system and the identification of the perpetrator as an adult man are highly likely to co-occur in the same article. Conversely, solutions that focus on the criminal justice system and discussions of the rates of maltreatment are unlikely to appear in the same article. In short, clusters of points on the plot represent narrative elements that are highly likely to occur together in the same media stories, while distance between points indicates narrative elements that are likely discussed in different stories.

The horizontal axis indicates the degree to which a particular narrative component does or does not refer to child sexual abuse. Narrative components positioned toward the right side of the plot deal squarely with child sexual abuse while components positioned toward the left side do not refer to child sexual abuse. The vertical axis represents the extent to which a narrative cluster is presented in episodic or thematic terms. Elements closer to the top of the plot are more *thematic*, meaning that they focus on institutions and systems in which child maltreatment occurs, and feature systems-level causes and solutions. Elements closer to the bottom of the plot are presented *episodically*, meaning that they feature individual stories about isolated incidences of abuse.

Because the *Punish The Perpetrator* narrative dominates media coverage of child maltreatment, it is difficult to observe all four narratives on the same graph. Figure 3, therefore, removes articles associated with the *Punish The Perpetrator* narrative and highlights the other three maltreatment narratives. Below, we describe each narrative and examine its component features.

Figure 1: Share of Maltreatment Coverage by Narrative Cluster

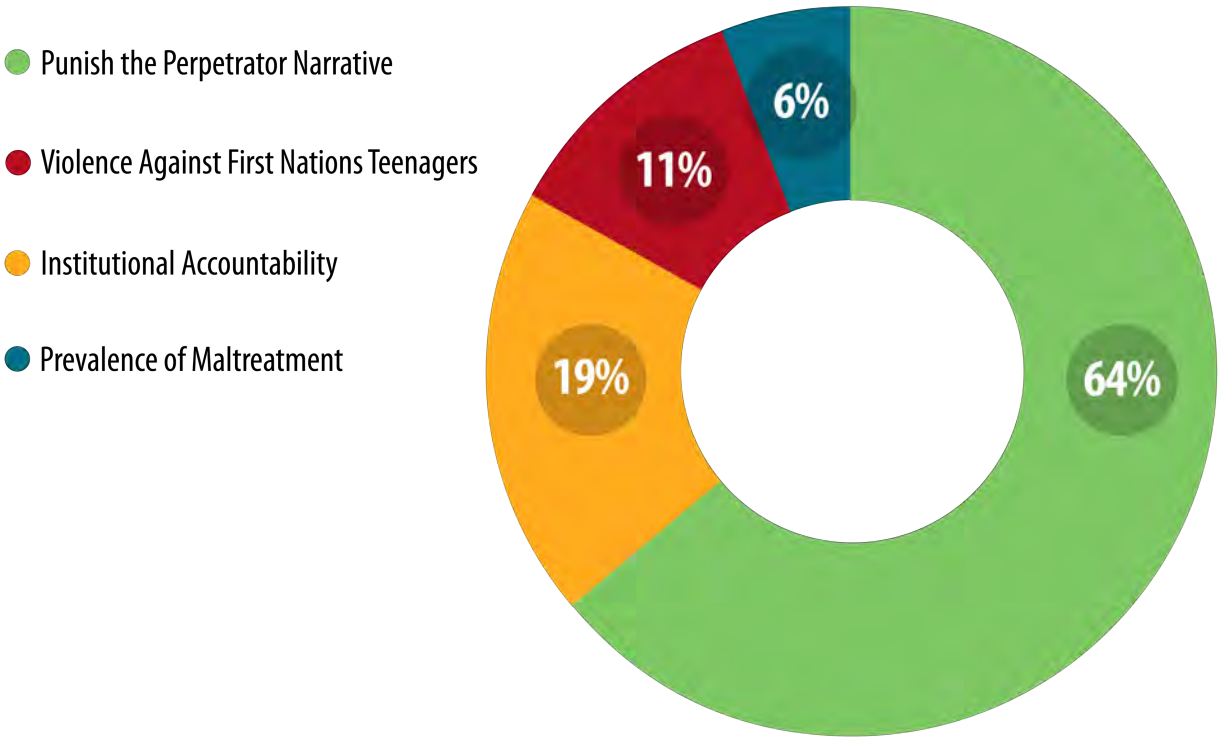


Figure 2: Dominant Narrative Cluster: Full Sample

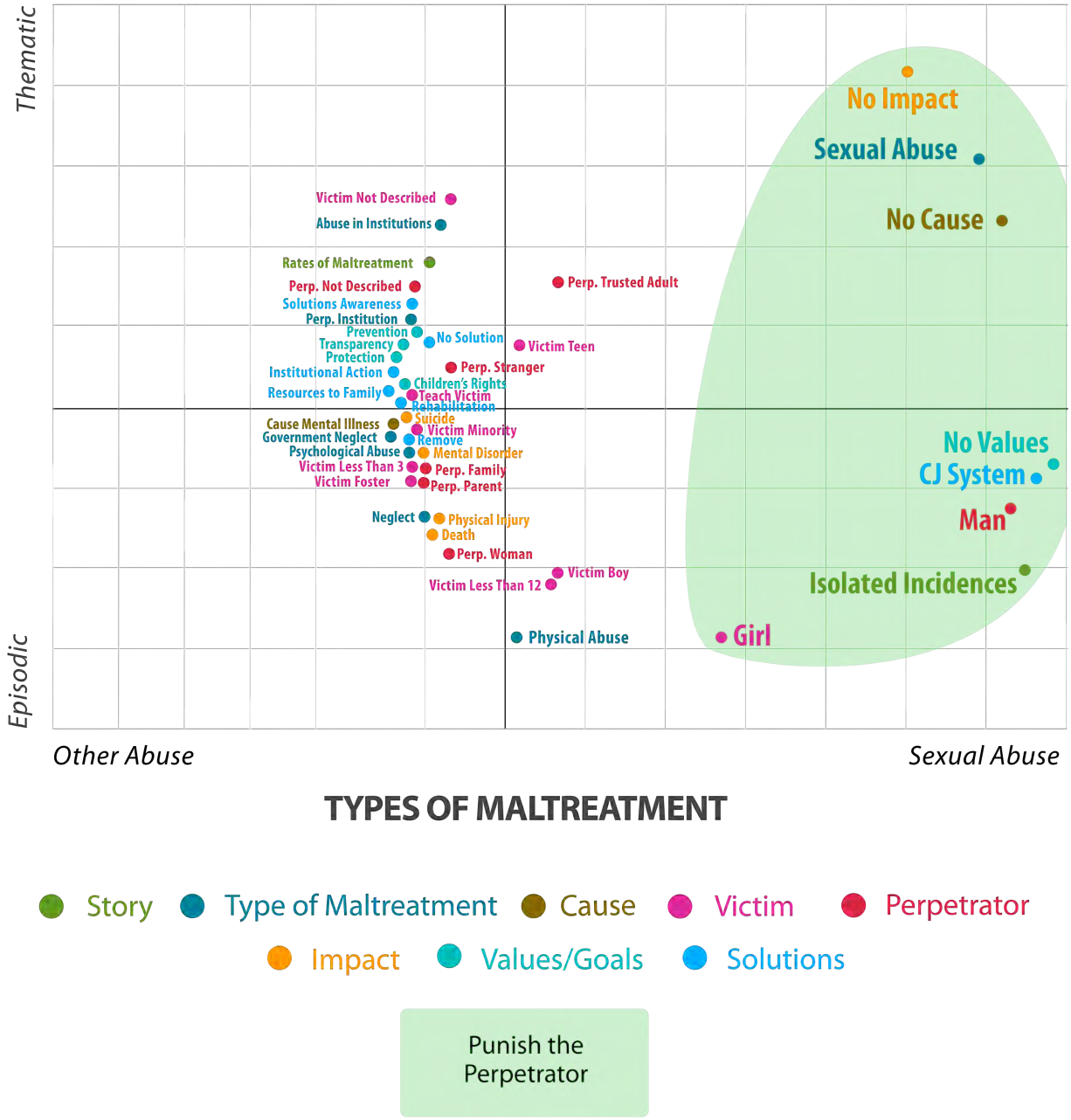
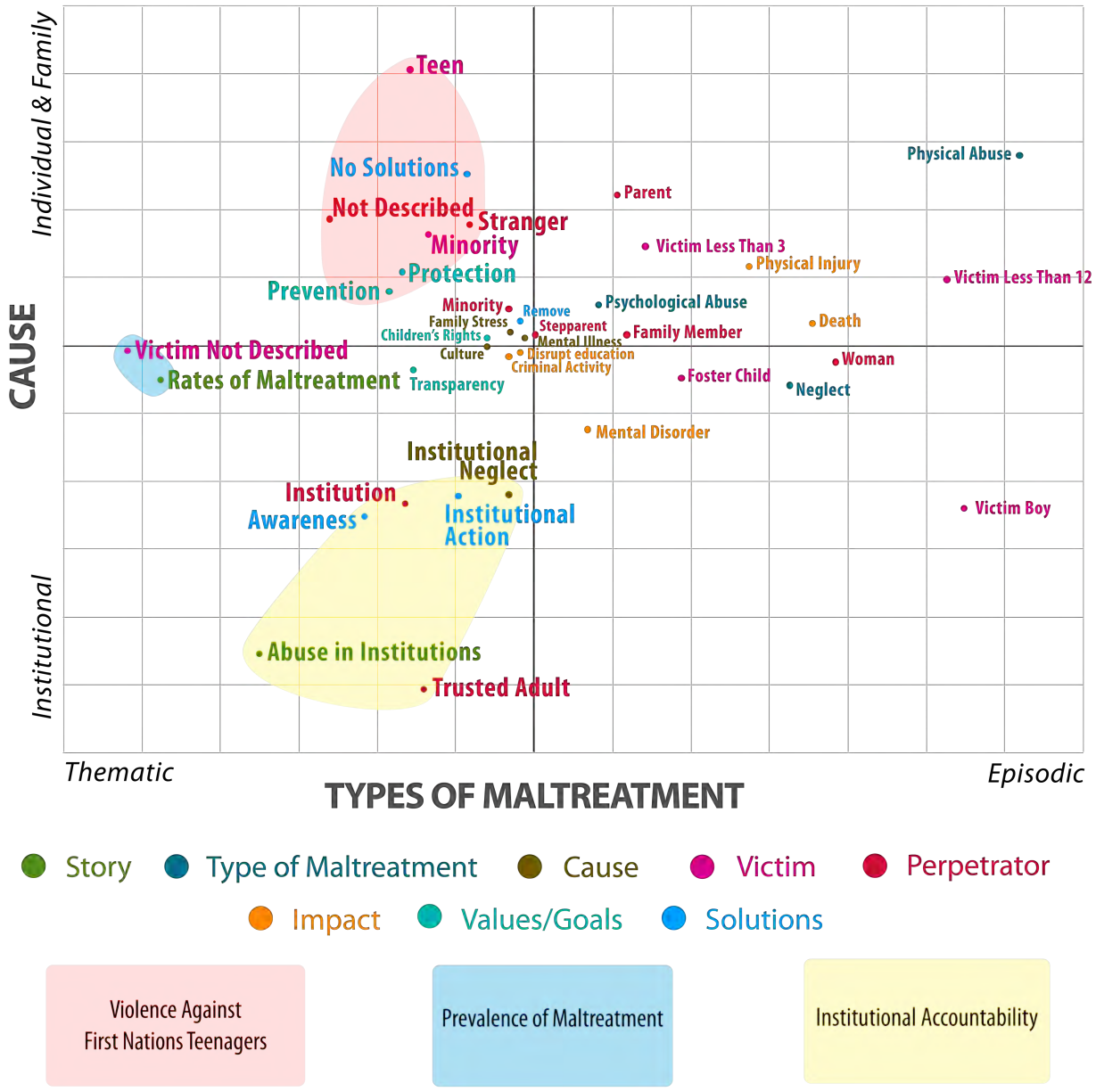


Figure 3: Recessive Narrative Clusters



The *Punish The Perpetrator* Narrative of Child Sexual Abuse

The *Punish The Perpetrator* narrative consists of stories reporting a single, episodic incident of sexual violence against a child. These stories feature the criminal justice system prominently, and recount details of the arrest and prosecution of offenders. In these stories, perpetrators are consistently described as men and victims as young girls. The involvement of the criminal justice system is the primary solution offered to address the problem of child sexual abuse in these stories.

The *Punish The Perpetrator* narrative is most notable for the consistent *absence* of other narrative elements. The articles that include this narrative rarely contain causal explanations, meaning that there is little to no discussion of why sexual abuse occurs. They also rarely include value statements or declarations about "what is at stake" and why the issue is important. Finally, media pieces associated with this cluster tend to avoid mention of the individual or societal effects or consequences of child sexual abuse. The following excerpts illustrate the tendency towards episodic coverage, and the exclusion of key narrative components, that typifies this narrative cluster:

> *Eight Alberta men have been arrested in a national child pornography investigation which saw 150 total arrests, the Alberta Law Enforcement Response Team announced Thursday. The investigation, known as Operation Snapshot III, resulted in five children across the country removed from harm, as well as two million images and videos seized. The operation was coordinated by the RCMP's National Child Exploitation Co-ordination Centre and included assistance from 40 police agencies Canada wide.*[9]

> *A Strathcona County man is facing multiple charges after allegedly luring a 13-year-old Edmonton girl he met on a social media website and sexually assaulting her. Sean Palylyk, 39, is facing seven charges: two counts each of sexual assault, sexual interference and luring, and one count of possession of child pornography. He was arrested earlier this week in Edmonton and has since been released from custody. He has a court appearance set for next month.*[10]

In short, the dominant *Punish The Perpetrator* narrative simply documents the arrests and prosecution of offenders. This narrative provides little to no information about cause, importance or solutions.

The *Institutional Accountability* Narrative

The Canadian media also focus on maltreatment that occurs in institutional settings, such as schools or religious organizations. The *Institutional Accountability* narrative assigns the institution itself the role of "perpetrator." In the rare instances where an individual perpetrator is identified, he or she is typically characterized as a trusted adult who is unrelated to the victim. Responsibility for the occurrence of maltreatment is attributed to failure on the part of the institution to protect children's safety — for example, the failure to remove a priest or teacher from his or her work with young children. The excerpts below are examples of how the media position institutions as perpetrators and responsible actors in these stories.

> *The lawsuits state that the Catholic archdiocese is responsible for the sexual assaults because it failed to ensure the safety of the students both on and off archdiocese property. "The Diocese knew or ought to have known that sexual abuse was occurring at St. Bernard, and off-site, but failed to take reasonable steps to prevent such abuses from occurring," the lawsuits state.*[11]

> *In 2004, the claim states, Child and Family Services hid the siblings' history from a central Alberta family who wanted to adopt them. That family was "assured that (the girl) and her brothers were relatively normal with no significant developmental or behavioral difficulties. The (adoptive family) were not informed about the possible history of sexual assault, or about the history of inappropriate sexual contact between the siblings." The adoptive family was told that the girl's diagnosis of Dissociative Identity Disorder was false and she needed no "additional therapy or assistance." The family adopted all three siblings. The suit states that Child and Family Services knew the adoptive family did not want to take in children with mental or emotional problems because they already had a child with "significant physical and developmental concerns." The lack of disclosure to the adoptive family robbed them of the chance to decide if the adoption was right for them, the lawsuit states. Also, the family did not provide the supports the girl needed because they were unaware of her past. She suffered without such support.*[12]

Media stories associated with the *Institutional Accountability* narrative consistently call for increased public awareness of maltreatment in institutional settings, or addressing institutional practices that allow for continued perpetration of abuse (for example, increasing coordination among various parts of institutions to improve identification and immediate action in response to instances of abuse). The example below illustrates how

solutions offered in this narrative cluster are focused on the institutional setting in which abused has occurred:

> *Documents supplied by the Alberta Teachers Association show the complaint against Mastel is one of 37 accusations of an inappropriate or sexual relationship with a student filed against Alberta teachers in the past five years. Of the 22 cases where sufficient evidence was found to warrant a hearing, 16 resulted in the teacher being banished from the classroom. "You cross that line with students," said Alberta Teachers Association executive secretary Gordon Thomas, "and we're generally not giving out second chances."*[13]

Media stories that employ the *Institutional Accountability* narrative maintain several individualizing elements of an episodic story, for example, focusing frequently on individual perpetrators and victims. However, this narrative also places child maltreatment and sexual abuse in a broader institutional and social context — more so than any of the other narratives identified in this analysis. In particular, this narrative focuses on how organizations can encourage or discourage isolated contact with young children among their staff, and how increased coordination among institutions that address these issues can prevent incidents from occurring in the first place.

The *Violence Against First Nations Teenagers* Narrative

The *Violence Against First Nations Teenagers* narrative is a distinct narrative cluster, but is not present in the media as frequently as the *Punish The Perpetrator* narrative (see Figure 1, above). This narrative primarily concentrates on violence committed against teenagers in First Nations communities. In these stories, perpetrators (if identified at all) are typically described as persons unfamiliar to the victim. While media documents that cover child maltreatment in First Nations communities very rarely propose clear solutions to address this problem, journalists and other commentators regularly include value statements in this narrative. More specifically, they argue that Canadians have a duty to *protect* young teens of aboriginal descent and to *prevent* violence in First Nations communities from occurring in the first place.

The *Violence Against First Nations Teenagers* narrative only constitutes a little over 10 percent of media coverage about child maltreatment (see Figure 1). However, it is notable that the narratives the media employ to talk about First Nations children are separate from narratives used to talk about maltreatment as it impacts other groups of children. This separation implicitly represents child maltreatment in Aboriginal communities as qualitatively different from child maltreatment in the general Canadian population.

The *Prevalence of Child Maltreatment* Narrative

While this analysis shows clearly that media coverage overwhelmingly focuses on isolated incidences of maltreatment, there is an identifiable narrative cluster in the media that deals with *trends* in child maltreatment. Stories employing this narrative report statistics (most frequently prevalence data) or findings from recent research studies. The following excerpt illustrates the features of this narrative:

> *Children are most likely to be sexually abused by a family member or someone they know, according to Statistics Canada's latest report, released Wednesday. The National Post's Sammy Hudes looks at the report's findings.*
>
> *Numbers of abused*
>
> *About 14,000 children and youth under the age of 18 were victims of sexual abuse reported to police in 2012, or 205 for every 100,000 children and youth. According to Statistics Canada, 6.9 million Canadians are under the age of 18.*[14]

On its face, the *Prevalence of Child Maltreatment* narrative seems to be well positioned to provide deeper explanation and a more contextual picture about child maltreatment. However, media articles employing this narrative do not provide characteristics of victims or perpetrators, do not include causal accounts, do not feature specific solutions, and contain no discussion of individual or societal impacts or effects. What is notable about this narrative is, in fact, the dearth of information offered and the lack of explanation of the problem.

Unassociated Narrative Elements

In addition to the narratives discussed above, the analysis showed that there were several narrative elements that did not consistently co-occur with other narrative elements to construct a coherent narrative. Most importantly, there is no consistent narrative in the media that covers child maltreatment that is not sexual in nature, including neglect, physical abuse and emotional abuse. The presence of these relatively isolated points of content is significant, and is addressed in detail below.

V. COGNITIVE IMPLICATIONS

Based on FrameWorks' analysis of the implicit patterns of understanding, or "cultural models,"[15] that the Albertan public employs to reason about child maltreatment, we conclude that exposure to the media narratives described above is likely to activate the following ways of thinking about this issue.

Missing narrative elements in media stories reinforce dominant cultural models. Previous FrameWorks research, as well as research conducted by other social and cognitive scientists,[16] shows that, when people are confronted with an incomplete story, they fall back on their dominant understandings of how the issue works in order to fill in missing elements. In short, if elements are missing, people fill them in with their most familiar ways of thinking. This finding is significant in the current analysis because all of the narratives identified are missing key elements. Members of the public will fill in these gaps in predictable ways, which will have the following effects on how people think about child maltreatment.

- The *Punish The Perpetrator* narrative lacks information about the *causes* and *impacts* of sexual abuse. Furthermore, this narrative contains little discussion about "what is at stake," and why the issue of child sexual abuse must be addressed. This is largely a result of the media's focus on reporting arrests and prosecution of offenders. FrameWorks' cultural models research indicates that Albertans have tremendous difficulty in understanding the causes, consequences and solutions to child sexual abuse; in short, they cannot wrap their minds around how such heinous acts could occur. This cognitive hole, in turn, leads to a sense that child sexual abuse is a horrific, but ultimately unavoidable, occurrence. The current media discourse will likely support the fatalism that characterizes Albertans' understanding of this issue, and contribute to their inability to deeply engage with this problem.

- The *Violence Against First Nations Teenagers* narrative represents an important part of the media discourse about child maltreatment. Its presence echoes findings from cultural models interviews that suggest that incidents of child maltreatment in First Nations communities serve as salient examples of this particular social problem. FrameWorks' research suggests that Albertans tend to link rates of child maltreatment in First Nations communities to poverty, alcoholism and substance abuse. Despite its salience, however, there does not appear to be a strong sense of how to address maltreatment in First Nations communities among members of the Albertan public.[17]

Clear proposals about how to effectively address maltreatment in First Nations communities are similarly absent from the media. The danger of a media narrative that focuses exclusively on the incidence of child maltreatment in aboriginal communities, and that lacks clear solutions, is that members of the non-aboriginal public may think about maltreatment in these communities as another intractable social problem that exists "over there." Not only will this reinforce stereotypes about Aboriginal communities, but it impede people's sense that maltreatment in any community impacts all Albertans. This will become a major obstacle for efforts to build public support for policy and programmatic measures designed to address maltreatment issues.

- The *Prevalence of Child Maltreatment* narrative provides the public with some information about the scope of maltreatment, but provides little context or explanation to help the public understand how and why this problem persists. Again, these absences fail to give Albertans the tools they need to think and talk about this issue in a way that more closely aligns with expert understanding, and, instead, allow them to fall back on default assumptions, including vague notions of the effects of all types maltreatment, and ideas that the causes of child sexual abuse in particular are "unknowable," all of which contribute to a sense of fatalism about addressing this issue.

- The media's limited discussion of solutions will further the public's inability to think about how child maltreatment, and child sexual abuse in particular, can be prevented. The dominant solution associated with the *Punish The Perpetrator* narrative is arresting and prosecuting offenders, and there is very little attention to other forms of prevention and remediation of this issue outside of the criminal justice system. FrameWorks' cultural models interviews suggest that the public does not bring a strong "law and order" perspective to child sexual abuse. At the same time, Albertans are not able to think productively about preventative strategies or treatment for offenders. This omission in the media coverage leaves the public with few resources to reason about effective solutions. The media narrative about child sexual abuse will reinforce the sentiment that child sexual abuse is horrific, but there is not much that can be done to address it.

- The lack of a coherent narrative that focuses on maltreatment that is not sexual in nature will also do little to dislodge dominant and unproductive models of understanding these issues. More specifically, it will likely substantiate public

pessimism about the feasibility of reducing child maltreatment in Alberta. This lack of a coherent narrative is perhaps most pernicious on the topic of neglect, where the public struggles to understand its long-term impacts.[18]

The Institutional Accountability narrative may help broaden public thinking about responsible actors and effective solutions. This narrative is notable in that it is the only media narrative that shifts the focus from *individuals* to the *institutional structures and systems* that make abuse more or less likely to occur. Placing people's attention on the ways in which institutions and structures shape outcomes is a productive foil to the heavily episodic stories that account for the majority of coverage on maltreatment issues. The presence of a more systemic perspective on this social issue should cue a perspective from which policy-level solutions make sense, and are seen as necessary and effective means of addressing maltreatment in the province.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The media narratives documented in this analysis depart from the expert story of child maltreatment and child sexual abuse in several ways, each of which has implications for advocates who communicate with non-expert audiences on this issue.

1. Causes of Maltreatment. There is very little attention paid, in any of the media narratives, to the causes of child maltreatment. However, the expert account focuses heavily on explanations of the factors that precipitate various forms of child maltreatment — with robust causal explanations of physical and emotional abuse and neglect, and a growing understanding of the factors that cause sexual abuse.

2. Effects of Maltreatment. Experts also have a robust understanding of the life-long physical and psychological impacts of child maltreatment, and appreciate that these impacts affect every domain of a person's life — including health, educational and occupational outcomes, and relationships. In contrast, the dominant media stories of child maltreatment focus on only the most immediate consequences of maltreatment (typically the immediate physical injury or harm), or, alternatively, on the *rates* at which maltreatment occurs without discussion of negative outcomes or explanations of how maltreatment leads to these outcomes.

3. Solutions. The solutions discussed in the media are also extremely limited, and largely confined to the criminal justice system. Experts, on the other hand, are clear about the defining features of effective interventions for both victims and offenders. They demonstrate that, with the right programmatic interventions, rates of maltreatment can be significantly reduced and outcomes for those who have suffered from maltreatment can be markedly improved.

Improving the public's access to expert and scientific information on child maltreatment will require expanded and improved media narratives. As an initial step in the direction of developing this strategy, FrameWorks offers the following recommendations:

Expand the *Punish The Perpetrator* narrative of child sexual abuse beyond the criminal justice system. In order to better engage with the issue of child sexual abuse, the public first needs an expanded media story that moves beyond the criminal justice system. This narrative needs to address the root causes of child sexual abuse, so that people can begin to reason about how it can be prevented from occurring in the first place. This prevention-based story will help move people away from the idea that they "cannot wrap

their head" around child sexual abuse, to a sense that there are concrete strategies that reduce and prevent its occurrence. When the media focus on instances of abuse that have already occurred, communicators should attempt to include a deeper discussion of the long-term individual and societal-level impacts.

Draw on strategies employed in the *Institutional Accountability* narrative. The *Institutional Accountability* media narrative is not without framing hazards. However, it consistently shifts focus from individual offenders to the institutional contexts that make child maltreatment more or less likely to occur. From here, these articles are often able to suggest institutional-level reforms that are designed to protect children. This focus on context aligns well with Albertans' less practiced way of understanding how offering greater social and community supports for families can help to prevent child maltreatment. In addition, when members of the public can move beyond demonizing individual perpetrators, they are better able to engage productively with systems-level solutions.

Focus on context in the *Violence Against First Nations Teenagers* narrative. The media narrative about maltreatment in First Nations communities needs deeper explanation of its causes and long-term effects. Many experts connect the history of colonization to child maltreatment — both the abuses that occurred as a result of national policies (such as residential schools), and the social and economic impacts of colonization that create environments in which child maltreatment is more likely to occur.[19] This level of explanation should become part of the media narrative about this issue. An expanded narrative will also need clear and concrete solutions to address maltreatment as it occurs in, and impacts, First Nations communities. Finally, values will be necessary to help establish that what happens in specific communities impacts all Albertans — thereby inoculating against disengagement from this issue by non-aboriginal communities.

Frame the facts in the *Prevalence of Child Maltreatment* narrative. The dominance of episodic stories in the media will leave Albertans with an inaccurate sense of how many people are impacted by child maltreatment in the province. However, there is a small part of the media that is focused on reporting on rates of maltreatment in the province, and in Canada more generally. The provision of facts and statistics are not, in and of themselves, an effective strategy for translating the expert story of child maltreatment. The *Prevalence of Child Maltreatment* narrative lacks contextual information about the systems, structures and environments in which maltreatment occurs. Communicators need to tell a story. Doing so requires building a frame around the facts that clearly explains the causes of maltreatment, as well as recommending effective solutions.

Explain the long-term impacts of maltreatment using elements from the Core Story of Early Childhood Development in all media narratives. There is a strong public assumption that "what does not kill you makes you stronger." [20] This default understanding is so powerful that it extends to instances of child maltreatment, and leads people to reason that maltreatment may, in fact, increase the chances that a child will develop the necessary skills to persevere through subsequent adverse experiences. There is also a countervailing understanding amongst members of the Albertan public that children are irreparably damaged and destined to life-long negative outcomes when they experience early adversity. These conflicting, but co-occurring, public understandings place child maltreatment advocates between a rock and hard place. They must strike a subtle balance between emphasizing the seriousness of early adversity, and explaining plasticity and the potential impact of effective interventions and treatments for victims of child maltreatment. The Core Store of Early Childhood Development is a powerful tool for navigating these two dominant cultural models. The Core Story of Early Childhood Development explains the processes by which child maltreatment impacts the developing brain, and can infuse media coverage with a deeper and more sophisticated discussion of the long-term physiological and biological effects of maltreatment. At the same time, it demonstrates the efficacy of policies and programs not only to prevent early adverse experiences such as maltreatment, but also to help victims recover from these experiences.

Include values in all media narratives to highlight the necessity of societal-level solutions and to clarify the collective benefits of addressing child maltreatment. The lack of values in the media discourse about child maltreatment may reflect the assumption that the gravity of this issue "speaks for itself." This strategy relies on a faulty assumption. Across a range of issues, FrameWorks has found that values are a central component of reframing efforts. For example, on the issue of addiction in Alberta, FrameWorks found that the values *Interdependence* and *Ingenuity* lift public support for relevant policies and programs. While addiction and child maltreatment are very different issues, they share at least two common features: (1) intense stigmatization of the addict/offender, and (2) the perception that these are horrific, but private, issues that only impact the people involved (and perhaps their immediate family members). Effective value statements will help establish the shared social *impacts* of child maltreatment, as well as the collective benefits of addressing this issue. In so doing, value statements lay a foundation for discussions of prevention of child maltreatment and treatment of victims outside of the criminal justice system.

Expanding media narratives to more effectively communicate expert messages is a critical step for communicators and other advocates who are trying to end child maltreatment in

Alberta. Part of a successful strategy to address this issue will require creating a new kind of "drip, drip, drip" effect on public understanding — one that helps the public see that, with the right public polices and programs, child maltreatment is preventable, and that the whole province benefits when effective steps are taken to address this issue.

APPENDIX

Table 1: Variables Included in Cluster Analysis

Narrative Component	Description	Examples of codes
Story Type	Is the media using episodic or thematic stories?	• Story(ies) of isolated incidences of abuse • Ongoing abuse in a single institution • Rates of maltreatment
Topic or Plotline	What type of abuse is covered in the article?	• Sexual abuse • Physical abuse • Emotional/psychological abuse • Neglect
Causal Story	Why did the abuse occur?	• Family stressors • Perpetrator depravity • Perpetrator's history of abuse • No causal story provided
Value	Why should Albertans be concerned about child maltreatment?	• Protection of children • Prevention • Children's rights
Solution	How should child maltreatment be addressed?	• Use of the criminal justice system • Teach victims to protect themselves • Rehabilitate/provide treatment for offenders
Characteristics of Victims	How are victims described?	• Boy • Girl • Member of under-represented community
Characteristics of Perpetrators	How are perpetrators described?	• Man • Woman • Family member • Unfamiliar person
Impacts of Abuse	What happened to the victim as a result of the abuse?	• Mental health issues • Death • Injury

Cluster Analysis / Multi-Dimensional Scaling

The statistical technique known as multi-dimensional scaling (a form of cluster analysis) was applied to the coded articles.[21] This method uses an algorithm to group codes based on their concurrence in the data. Codes that appear together in the body of texts appear closer to each other on the draft, while codes that do not overlap in the same coverage are farther apart. Further, the algorithm also arrays codes along the two orthogonal (right angle) dimensions, according to the amount of variance in the distances. Here, the codes are the instantiation of the narrative elements that appear in media articles. The goal of cluster analysis is to identify code groupings, which, when coherent and separate from other groupings, form a distinct narrative, and where shorter distances can be interpreted as more narrative coherence.

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