

# Differences between biological and step fathers who kill their children



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## Background

- Between 2009-2016, fathers (biological and step) in New Zealand accounted for over two thirds of child homicide perpetrators <sup>(1)</sup>
- International studies have looked for patterns among fathers who kill their children <sup>(2, 3)</sup>
- Furthermore, some cases have found similar prevalence of child homicide perpetration among biological and step fathers, despite step fathers making up a minority of paternal caregivers <sup>(1, 4)</sup>

## Research Questions

- What patterns exist among fathers who commit child homicide?
- Are there any differences between biological fathers and step fathers?

## References

1. Family Violence Death Review Committee. (2017). *Fifth report data: January 2009 to December 2015*. Wellington: Family Violence Death Review Committee
2. Bourget, D., Grace, J., & Whitehurst, L. (2007). A review of maternal and paternal filicide. *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law Online*, 35, 74-82.
3. Marleau, J. D., Poulin, B., Webanck, T., Roy, R., & Laporte, L. (1999). Paternal filicide: A study of 10 men. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*, 44, 57-63. doi:10.1177/070674379904400107
4. Strang, H. (1996). *Children as victims of homicide* (Vol. 53): Australian Institute of Criminology.

*Biological fathers kill their children in different circumstances, for different reasons, and use different methods than step fathers*

## Conclusions/Future Research

International findings suggest that methods, behaviours and circumstances are different for step-fathers and biological fathers who kill their children. Interventions need to take these differences into consideration and separate interventions may be most effective in helping at risk families.

- Do fathers in New Zealand reflect the findings of international literature?
- Do current interventions in New Zealand appropriately focus on the differences between biological fathers and step-fathers?

## Results From International Literature

### *Common circumstances in cases perpetrated by biological fathers*

- Relationship breakdown or
- Recent threats of separation by mother
- Paranoid suspicions of partner infidelity
- Depression
- Familicide (killing of entire family)/Suicide

### *Homicide Type*

- Sudden outburst of rage
- Weapon use
- Intentional

### *Common circumstances in cases perpetrated by step-fathers*

- Domestic violence history (perpetrator)
- Previous neglect and maltreatment of victim
- Antipathy towards step- child
- Adverse life experiences in own childhood

### *Homicide Type*

- Fatal abuse/excessive discipline
- Chronic physical maltreatment
- Often accidental (intended to harm the child but not to kill)