

The theoretical gaps are identified as including procedural implications arising from recent legislation. Also more research is required to evaluate particular types of residence and explore the needs of specific groups of children. A range of questions from previous decades are identified which the authors believe require a fresh approach. These include comparison of regimes and styles of care across childcare, education and health settings, and a much wider analysis of outcomes of the residential experience. Attention is also sought for a wider view of children's interests. The extent to which spiritual and expressive needs and connection to art, music and popular culture is recognised and developed. Always a central concern is what represents good practice and how people

and agencies involved in the child and young person's life relate to each other and act collaboratively in the child's interests. A strong argument is made for the need for the better use of theoretical dimensions and more research in residential care.

The latter part of the book is devoted to three charts and bibliographies. The first two cover studies pre- and post-1975, the third covers influential texts cited by the authors. The charts are divided into short and long stays in care and look at the overall structure of the placement, the influential factors during the placement and the effects and outcomes of the placement. Under each category, there is a number corresponding to a text in the following bibliography so that the reader

can quickly ascertain which texts dealt with which factors. The bibliography then has a description of the text and the main methods used and findings made for each text.

This publication will prove useful to students, workers and policy makers interested in the issues of residential care. The issues are outlined clearly and direction for further research is provided. The charts and detailed bibliography are especially useful for those wishing to further delve into this subject. ✪

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Prosecuting child abuse: an evaluation of the government's speedy progress policy

Plotnikoff, J. and Woolfson, R.

Blackstone Press Ltd. London

This is a slim volume with a very specific focus. It began as a research report, and it reads like one. As a book it has substantial limitations because it does not adequately consider or analyse many of the substantive issues with which it deals. As a research-based report though, it is likely to hold considerable interest for anyone concerned with the plethora of problems surrounding children's participation in court proceedings.

Prosecuting Child Abuse is concerned not so much with substantive issues in the prosecution of child abuse, but rather with the dilemmas of implementing safeguards for children who are caught up in the criminal justice system as witnesses to, or most often victims of, criminal acts.

The book provides an overview of how 'child abuse prosecutions' were dealt with in the United Kingdom prior to the implementation of the Criminal Justice Act. The researchers sought to evaluate the impact of this policy through the examination of disposition times and a description of how police, prosecutors and court staff handled a sample of cases. Two hundred prosecution case files were examined and interviews conducted with 85 criminal justice personnel during 1992-3.

The Government's policy responded to a widespread perception that children were particularly badly served by the criminal

justice system; there was a perceived delay in getting cases to court; the justice system was perceived as fragmented, characterised by a 'conveyor-belt' process where each professional participant was familiar only with their own bit; and a 'Duty Gap' was said to exist across and between agencies. Most importantly, the cases could take an inordinate amount of time to come to closure, and the courtroom experience of the children was likely to be harmful to them.

The problem of relating the time demands of various types of administrative action to the actual lives of children is well known to any practitioner in the child welfare system. The adult Weberian world of administration and law is not a place for children, and the problem is compounded in the court system where the requirements of legal process and probity are even more likely to ignore the critical points in the child's life. Children experience the passage of time differently to adults; there is a very real tension between time in terms of children's growth and development and as an issue in administrative action. Timelines developed around management imperatives are not likely to be related to a theoretically informed approach to practice in child welfare.

The 1991 Act aimed to improve the position of child witnesses mostly through

provisions aimed at reducing delay, and by facilitating the more extensive use of video evidence.

Evaluation of the policy was made difficult by the fact that, in the United Kingdom as in Australia, there is no criminal offence of child abuse as such, so it was not clear to whom the policy applied. Moreover, there was no good data on the victims of crime, on how long cases take to get to court, or on child witnesses in the legal system. The major achievement of this report is in its provision of a credible overview of what is actually happening.

Of the 200 or so cases studied, the ages of the children ranged from 1-16, with an average age of 10. Two-thirds of the victims were female, and 90% of the perpetrators male. These figures flow from the nature of the offences (indecent assault, rape, buggery, gross indecency, actual bodily harm, incest, attempted murder, robbery etc.). The gendered nature of the offences is only noted in passing and the opportunity to comment on the male culture of the courts, prosecution system and police, is not taken up.

The alarming finding of the study was that the number of days between summons and court appearance was over 170, both before and after the implementation of the Act. Moreover, the average time

from the reporting of the offence to the final court appearance was 260 days (which seems to mesh with anecdotal information about the position locally in Australia).

The report's recommendations are predictable. Firstly, it calls for clearer definitions and policy guidance, for systematic identification of cases, for co-ordinated case-management and for performance monitoring. Because the problem has been posed primarily in administrative terms, it is hardly surprising that the proposed solutions should also be administrative.

But beyond such administrative change (which, between the lines, the authors seem not to place much faith in) there is the recognition of the need for system and attitudinal change; of training for court staff and lawyers, of the need for judges to more tenaciously police the ground rules which might better protect child witnesses, for all concerned with the court process to see the need to deal with as many issues as possible before (and outside) the courtroom.

The report's major injunction is to bring children into the decision-making process, and the authors suggest this might be done through the appointment of a specific individual with a responsibility for the welfare of the child witness, both before and at court (akin to a *guardian ad litem* in care proceedings). Such a role had been recognised as important in discussion around the framing of the Act, but it was not independently established or funded (although the preamble to the Act states the hope that someone will take up the role).

In the research study it is clear that different people do take up parts of this role at different times. For instance, the authors detail the range of people who were present when children were initially interviewed, and it is not clear that all of them were appropriately skilled in child welfare, nor that they discerned a clear role of advocacy for the child. What is clear is that there was little continuity of people working across the different steps in the process.

In summary, this report gives a good descriptive overview of the functioning of the system, but, in my view, it skates over the substantive issues. There is no analytical discussion of child abuse, there is only cursory reference to substantive child welfare issues or to child welfare practice, there is little critical analysis of the inertia in the way the legal system is committed to operating or the fact that the legal system is hardly kind to the adult participants within it either.

And finally, the recommendations seem a little thin too. The authors seem to share the disillusionment with institutional solutions which is pervasive everywhere in the 1990's. Certainly it is hard to believe that the institutional machinery of the legal system can be markedly changed but the resort to a case-manager, as a type of system broker and advocate, is offered without sufficient analysis. While a commonly proposed solution in many social fields now, the broad case-management approach warrants critical analysis which it does not receive in this report.

Prosecuting Child Abuse is a good research monograph, but in every way, it lacks the weight of a book. ⚙

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