

Child abuse and child protection A guide for health, education and welfare workers

Dr Chris Goddard

Churchill Livingstone, Melbourne, 1996. 204 pp.

In the last decade, in common with much of the English-speaking world, Australia has seen its media come to take a major interest in the area of child abuse and child protection. In 1993, Victoria began the phased introduction of mandatory reporting for a range of health, education and welfare professionals, leaving Western Australia as the only state with no such provision.

Where Australia has failed to keep pace with, say, the UK or the USA is in developing a significant body of literature to inform professionals working in the field. Chris Goddard, one of Australia's foremost commentators on child abuse and child protection, acknowledges these factors as having been central to his decision to write this book.

For the most part, the interest of the media has been provoked by child deaths, which headline writers and editorial commentators perceive to have been the result of failures or deficiencies in the system and its personnel. *Ipsa facto*, the problem is resolved by the tightening of procedures and the dismissal of incompetent workers.

Health, education and welfare organisations up and down the country have shelves groaning under the weight of manuals and protocols dedicated to instructing staff how to respond to situations where they suspect child abuse. In the wake of the introduction of mandatory reporting in Victoria, in-service training workshops on child abuse for doctors, nurses, teachers, youth workers and so on proliferated.

This book is explicitly and purposefully targeted at those workers. However, it successfully avoids the trap of becoming just another 'how-to' manual by emphasising that effective practice in child abuse and child protection goes beyond the acquisition of an armoury of fixed competencies. Throughout, the reader is regularly reminded of the need to be aware of the 'historical, political and moral parameters' of the subject.

The relevance of this approach can be easily acknowledged when covering academic topics in chapter 2 such as the development of the concepts of childhood and the family, as well as the more contemporary construction of child abuse, children's health, children and poverty, and children's rights.

Chapters 3, 4 and 5, however, emphasise that the more prosaic dimensions of child abuse - definition, extent and causes and effects - should not be taken as agreed or straightforward. For example, in defining the problem,

workers are urged to consider institutional and societal child abuse as part of their domain as well as the more familiar child abuse in the family. In chapter 4, when considering the size of the problem, the reader is cautioned to beware the statisticians bearing facts since research and practice so rarely conjoin. Chapter 5 concludes with a warning to avoid the folly of embracing a single causation model of child abuse

Chapter 6 is co-written with Lydia Senyacia, a General Practitioner, and marks the beginning of that part of the book which deals with practice and intervention in child abuse. Dr Goddard uses the medium of case studies extensively in this chapter which includes sound, practical information on topics such as bruising and children's behaviour. Even here, however, he introduces some of the more unusual manifestations of child abuse such as Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy and female genital mutilation, as well as the contentious subject of corporal punishment.

The sequence of chapters 6, 7 and 8 follows that which would occur in a situation of possible child abuse - the formulation of suspicions on the part of a worker, the report and the response. The reluctance of workers to report suspected child abuse to the mandated agency is acknowledged as a significant impediment to the effective protection of children. This reluctance can be attributed to a number of factors: feeling responsible for the possible removal of a child from the family; the professional culture conflict inherent in multi-disciplinary work; disquiet over possible police and court involvement; failure of protective workers to provide feedback. He helps demystify the role of protective services by providing information about case conferences and possible court action.

Chapter 9 seeks to draw the threads of the preceding three chapters together, by presenting a model for effective practice. It begins by discussing some of the dilemmas inherent in professional application of authority, honesty and confidentiality. Moving from the ethical to the practical, the reader is invited to consider a comprehensive assessment framework borrowed from the British Department of Health. The framework is recommended for use by protective workers but health, education and welfare workers may be asked to make significant contributions. The chapter finishes by returning to the philosophical with discussions on the cultural

context of child abuse and predicting child abuse amongst others.

Chapter 10 is a timely reminder of the central role and importance of the child in child abuse and child protection with discussion on interviewing children who may have been abused, the child's participation in legal proceedings, and children with disabilities. Once again, the reader is invited to consider some of the controversies such as children who abuse and the Cleveland affair in England.

Chapter 11 is devoted to the circumstances surrounding the life and death of Daniel Valerio, who was killed by his stepfather, Paul Aiton, in Victoria in 1990. It was the media response to Aiton's trial which largely prompted the Government of the day to introduce mandatory reporting. The conclusions drawn by Dr Goddard from Daniel's death are that, even with the introduction of mandatory reporting, even when the community awareness of child abuse is raised, even when better training is provided to enhance the skills of workers in detecting and treating child abuse and even when community support services and resources are improved, children remain amongst the most vulnerable in our society because of their position of powerlessness. In the short, final chapter, he follows through on this theme by emphasising the crucial role played by health, education and welfare workers in the prevention of child abuse and the aftercare of children and families where abuse has occurred.

The style of the book is an interesting one. The text is liberally sprinkled with short discourses on topics, sometimes surprising, always contentious. So, for example, just as the reader is comfortably considering the discovery of child abuse in the 1960s, their attention is diverted to a short presentation on arguments for and against child care. The style reflects the very nature of child abuse and child protection. It is high-risk, multidimensional, complex and stressful. One day, a worker

might learn that many perpetrators of child sexual abuse have themselves been sexually abused as children. The next day they need to consider why then are the majority of perpetrators male and the majority of victims or survivors female? The following day, they must reflect on the possibility that there may be a high level of sexual abuse of boys which goes undetected and unreported. Then they must seek explanations or reasons for this apparent gender imbalance. And on it goes.

The book has much to commend it. It is a text with an Australian focus which targets a group, vital to the effective protection of children who have largely been poorly served by the literature. It is a comprehensive introduction to a complex subject which manages to combine the practical with the philosophical in a way which avoids oversimplification and encourages the reader to explore further. With this in mind, there are useful pointers to further reading at the end of each chapter.

Many social work and welfare graduates become child protection workers with little or no formal training in the field. *Child abuse and child protection* should be recommended reading for them, as well as for police officers, magistrates and politicians who are involved in the frontline of child protection. The book has highlighted a further gap in the literature. In Australia, as many as 50% of all reports of suspected child abuse may come from nonprofessional sources. How do we reach this target group?

Reviewed by:

John McClinton
Rural Health & Human Services Unit
La Trobe University, Albury/Wodonga

Who calls the tune?

A psychodramatic approach to child therapy

Bernadette Hoey

Routledge, London & New York, 1997

This beautifully written book will appeal to parents and professionals alike. It not only speaks to the head and the heart but to the soul as well. Bernadette Hoey, social worker, therapist and trainer, describes her use of psychodrama with vulnerable and troubled children through ten case studies in which the voice of the child can be seen in action more than heard in words. Drawing upon the psychodrama of Jacob Moreno as its foundation, the author integrates a broad range of theoretical insights such as Jung's and Milton Erickson's use of metaphor, and marries these with her practice wisdom and deep sensitivity. The text is enhanced by the superb photographs, some taken by the author herself, and the selection of poetry and prose which opens each chapter.

Knowing a little of Bernadette Hoey from a long time ago, I guessed that this book was going to have a special quality and so it was left for many months, waiting for a tranquil place and time in which I could savour it in peace rather than devour it in between the incessant demands of the Fax and phone. I am glad I waited. At that exquisite time of year when winter transforms into spring, bringing forth new life and hope, I read it as I sat in a courtyard at the Australian National University, with a glorious blue sky and the ethereal songs of magpies above.

Permeated with a profound respect for the uniqueness of each child and an empathic capacity to perceive the world as they might, Bernadette Hoey describes her use of puppets and story telling to enable the child to express the meaning of