

FROM FREDA BRIGGS PHD AO

EMERITUS PROFESSOR IN CHILD DEVELOPMENT, UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

Having attended the Australia 2020 Summit in Canberra in April 2008, where there was an assumption that fixing poverty and the shortage of affordable housing would answer all our problems (and children were not even listed in the topics for discussion), it should have been no surprise that the National Child Protection Framework published recently is written from a welfare agency perspective and ignores child sexual abuse. If the Federal Government is assuming that fixing poverty (which is worsening daily) will reduce the appalling prevalence of child sexual abuse, it is mistaken. As one who has worked with victims and problems in elite schools Australia-wide, I can confirm that the problem crosses all socio-economic and religious boundaries, and child sex offenders gravitate to children ... wherever they are.

The new Framework does not mention the need for a national personal safety curriculum in schools, and yet we have known through published research (1991 onwards) that without such a program, all children are vulnerable to sexual abuse and abduction. Parents don't provide essential information because, reared only on 'stranger danger', they don't know how. While New Zealand has had an effective, national, comprehensive curriculum that has been independently evaluated with children and parents, only South Australia and NSW have a similar program. Although advised of its flaws, WA and Queensland Police persist in using the long-outdated 1970s American Protective Behaviours program, even in the Aboriginal intervention initiative. Desperate Catholic schools in WA and Queensland received permission to adapt the NZ model.

The new Framework fails to address the fact that child protection legislation and even reporting requirements vary from state to state. We have known since the Child Sex Abuse Task Forces of 1985/6 (NSW and SA) that the adversarial criminal justice system imposed on British colonies in the 19th century is not only inadequate in child sex abuse cases, but adds psychological harm to child victims. The conviction rate (around 1.8%) is a national disgrace with recidivism for untreated offenders at around 80%. US psychiatrist Dr Gene Abel and colleagues reported that 561 self-confessed offenders admitted to a staggering 291,737 crimes against 195,407 children by the time they were aged 31.5 years, i.e. an average of 520 offences and 374 victims per offender (Abel et al. 1987). It is hard to imagine that 561 men could abuse so many children that we would need two sports stadiums the size of Beijing's Olympic 'Bird's Nest' to accommodate them. Abel's figures are supported by other researchers.

In 1995, a multi-professional NAPCAN working party produced a report recommending that a different style of court be used for child sex abuse cases, i.e. an inquisitorial system staffed by child abuse experts who could examine all the evidence.

The abuse of child victims by Australian courts was further confirmed by the ABC Four Corners program *Double Jeopardy* and the work of Ballarat University's Dr. Caroline Taylor (2005). And as the Queensland judges remarked, 'reforms' have only chipped away at the edges, not providing the real changes that are required.

Abel and Harlow (2001) show that most child sex offenders begin offending in childhood/adolescence and that is where our focus should be, given that treatment is more likely to be effective at that stage. Younger and younger children are exhibiting inappropriate sexual behaviour in schools and early childhood centres, and yet, recently, I gave the only lecture on the topic (50 minutes) to early childhood student teachers about to graduate from a Queensland University. Last month, 150 health professionals working with Aboriginal child abuse victims and their parents in the Kimberly region reported that they received no training whatsoever for this work.

And while millions of dollars have been spent on TV advertising to protect women from domestic violence, there is no similar advertising to persuade child sex offenders to seek help. As the Australian Childhood Foundation discovered, most adults don't believe reports of child sex abuse, least of all know what to do when they receive them or where victims or offenders can find help. When I asked my GP what he would do if a child sex offender sought help, he grinned and said, 'I'd ring you'.

Sorry, Jenny Macklin; but while your interest in child protection is to be commended, you need to do much more. Australian governments have a long history of ignoring this horrendous problem despite awareness of its long-term economic, social and health costs. The new Framework provides no expectation that this will change.

REFERENCES

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