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Despite growing community awareness of child abuse and greater emphasis on programmes for prevention of child abuse, the incidence of abuse appears to be growing. Whether there is actually more abuse of children or whether the incidents are surfacing as community awareness grows in a moot point. What is clear is that some children are abused emotionally, physically and sexually. Programmes have been developed which do support parents and children and have a direct preventive effect on further incidents of child abuse. The success of these programmes whether they are Government, voluntary or self help, are an indication that particular forms of intervention can prevent child abuse or prevent future occurrences if abuse has already occurred.

Previous issues of this journal have in particular explored programmes and issues in child abuse. In this issue we pay particular attention to the law relating to child abuse, and the dilemmas in writing laws so they consequently can become supportive to families and not destructive.

The Australian Law Reform Commission Report, Child Welfare, was tabled in Parliament in November, 1981. John Seymour discusses the Commission's recommendations with respect to two aspects of the report, children who have been abused and children in need of care. Whilst there may be disagreement with the recommendations, the thoroughness of the discussion of complex matters allows the core issues to be seen clearly. Kate Warner explores a number of these issues with relation to child welfare law and practice in Tasmania. She gives her assessment of the validity of the proposals upon which legislative changes will be based.

In the practice area, Royna Cooper and Carol Deller discuss treatment for victims for sexual assault, and Jeanette Uren, a member of Parents Anonymous, discusses intervention with respect to child abuse from a self help viewpoint. One aspect of the process of intervention which is not highlighted in the articles is the aspect of teamwork, or cooperation between workers and coordination of programmes aimed at prevention and treatment of child abuse, and of the workers involved in service programmes.

Since the enquiry into the death of Maria Colwell, there has been more attention paid to coordination of services at a policy level. Sadly, perhaps partly due to scarcity of services and concomitant difficulties in planning services at a case level, communications between workers involved with a particular family can easily break down or at times be non existent. It appears that teamwork between professional workers and other significant people working with families involves a skill about which we still have a lot to learn.

Child abuse, as many writers have stressed, is a societal problem, and its eradication requires the input of concerned people from all disciplines and backgrounds. A combined approach to prevention of child abuse can address not only problems facing families at an individual level, but the incidence of institutional child abuse, an issue which was addressed by Jan Carter and others at the Second National Conference on Child Abuse in Brisbane, but which has yet to be acted upon to any significant degree.

Case Notes

In this issue we introduce an occasional feature of the journal, Case Notes. The section on Case Notes provides the opportunity for workers to write about particular case approaches they have taken in intervention in specific areas, and the effect of the approach. If this segment attracts adequate interest and submissions, it will provide a forum for exchange of views on practice approaches—hopefully at an interdisciplinary level.

Contributions are invited.

Margarita Frederico