



Title: *Working with Child Sexual Abuse:
A post Cleveland guide to effective principles and practice*

Author: Kieran O'Hagan

Publisher: Open University Press, Milton Keynes, 1989

Length: 168 pages

Kieran O'Hagan's book on child sexual abuse focuses primarily on the dilemmas in child protection work and the strategies needed by social workers who work in statutory child protection services to deal with children who have allegedly been sexually abused. His focus on child protection services and its relationship to the sexually abused child is the major strength of the book. He correctly points out that while a great deal has been written about child sexual abuse, very little of it is of any use to the frontline worker who is required to investigate reports of child sexual abuse. He also makes the valid point that most of the available literature describes practice in North America and that limits its usefulness for British social workers. The same limitation applies to this book. It focuses on social services practice in Great Britain and as such has only a limited relevance to the different state child protection systems operating in Australia. Notwithstanding this limitation the book raises several ethical and practice considerations that all experienced child protective workers would have grappled with. O'Hagan articulates philosophy and principles for dealing with these considerations and as such it is a worthwhile book to read.

Chapter One describes a fairly typical protective services intervention in responding to a referral of a young child who is alleged to have been sexually abused. The case highlights some of the problems and potential trauma to the child of unplanned intervention. O'Hagan states that like the alleged perpetrator, the protective workers "had perpetrated and sustained a conscious deceit upon the child, had caused her and her sister great misery in the process and had finally severed them from the parents they needed as much as they loved" and goes on to add "I'm sure the abuser too had deceived Sarah many times. I'm sure he had pretended to her that he was only doing many innocent and enjoyable things. But as to which deceit and which consequence had done the greatest harm, I most certainly wasn't sure." (p.7). O'Hagan uses this case as a basis for his discussion of the current child sexual abuse literature, research and treatment programmes and to propose a

social work categorization of child sexual abuse that enables protective workers to assess which sexual abuse cases they should legitimately be involved in.

Chapter Three provides a general overview of the child sexual abuse literature. O'Hagan concludes that in spite of the proliferation of such literature there is no cohesion or unanimity in theoretical perspectives, treatment programmes, policies or practices. He reviews the feminist perspective, the family therapy perspective and the humanist perspective on child sexual abuse. He concludes that the experiences of the feminist movement (particularly its reliance on victims' stories) give its perspective a "dimension and authority that have not as yet been recognized or appreciated." (p.33). He concludes that while the numerous treatment programmes reveal enormous diversity in philosophy and practice, these differences are reflected in the surrounding communities and that any attempt to provide alternative services must be based on an understanding of the varying political and legal contexts that the services will operate in.

Chapter Four looks at ethical considerations in dealing with child sexual abuse. O'Hagan argues that ethics have largely been ignored in child sexual abuse literature and practice as most professionals already operate within well-established professional ethical codes. He argues that there is a discrepancy between these codes and professionals' actual practice because ethical considerations have been reduced to platitudes such as "the protection of the child" and "rights of the parents versus the rights of the child" without looking at the complexities and challenges that such statements involve. He argues that the most significant principles of practice, that exist in most ethical codes, that would assist in all phases of a child sexual case, are the need for an accumulation of knowledge, multi-disciplinary co-operation and adequate agency resources.

Chapter Five reviews current research into child sexual abuse. O'Hagan concludes that the studies on prevalence rates are unreliable, due to the differing definitions, research methodologies and population

samples used. Research into the effects of child sexual abuse has failed to establish the precise impact of numerous variables and little attention has been given to the effect on the child of how social services, police and the judiciary respond to the abuse. He suggests that the retrospective nature of most research has meant that the potential risk of children with special needs has been overlooked.

Chapter Six proposes a social work categorization of child sexual abuse which provides a framework for protective workers to use in prioritizing child sexual abuse cases. He argues strongly and persuasively that social workers (and he is actually referring to those that have a legal responsibility to investigate child sexual abuse cases) should not respond to all cases of child sexual abuse. O'Hagan identifies the three essential components of a social work categorization of child sexual abuse as protection, the family and social context and resources and provides frameworks for assessing these three components. He concludes that protective services have to differentiate between "cases in which they have a statutory responsibility to intervene and those in which they have neither responsibility nor right." (p.90).

This argument is worth heeding as attempts are made to develop policies and practices for dealing with child sexual abuse in this country.

Chapter Seven deals with perpetrators of child sexual abuse. O'Hagan suggests that the sexual revolution of the sixties may have significantly increased the number of child sexual abuse perpetrators. He suggests that perpetrators are largely ignored by professionals because of ignorance of the enormous power they may wield over victim, family and agency interventions. He suggests that professionals tend to ignore male perpetrators of child sexual abuse and concentrate on developing relationships with the mother, treating her as if she does have the power and the authority to protect the child. He suggests that this misperception is based on the professionals' defence against using their real power and authority to exert control over the perpetrator. He argues that social workers need training in the task of isolating perpetrators and

minimizing their influence in families in order to protect the child. He suggests some strategies for this, and in Chapter Eight uses the case described in Chapter One to re-emphasize the use of a framework of response consisting of the referral phase, the investigation phase, the intervention phase and the case conference phase using his categorization components of protection, family and social context and resources.

Chapter Nine provides a general outline of a training package for foster parents of sexually abused children. This chapter would provide a good starting point for

anyone who was responsible for training foster parents to deal with child sexual abuse.

The value of this book lies in its child protection perspective and the framework it offers to child protection workers in categorizing and prioritizing child sexual abuse referrals. The book challenges the basis of many accepted "practice wisdoms" such as the importance of so-called disclosure interviews, the role of the mother in intrafamilial child sexual abuse cases and the social worker's relationship with the mother and perpetrator, and as such is worth reading.

The book is not difficult to read or comprehend. In fact I found that its easy, discursive style caused me to initially discount the significance of what O'Hagan was saying for statutory social work intervention in child sexual abuse cases. It was upon reflection that the value of what he was suggesting became apparent.

*Reviewer: Lesley Hewitt
Lesley Hewitt is currently on maternity leave from Community Services Victoria, where she is a senior policy advisor on child protection and sexual abuse.*



Title: *Sexual Attitudes and Behaviours: A Review of the Literature*

Author: Bruce Rollins

Publisher: Australian Institute of Family Studies, Bibliography Series, Melbourne 1989

Length: 88 pages

This review of the literature on sexual behaviours and attitudes to the sexual behaviour of various groups in the community was commissioned by the Commonwealth Department of Community Services and Health (National AIDS Program). The intention of the review was to contribute to an understanding of changes in attitudes to sexual behaviour and in community patterns of sexual behaviour. The knowledge gained from the review would assist in AIDS prevention, community education strategies and programs for the general community.

Bruce Rollins has produced an excellent discussion of over 400 publications which are included in the bibliography. The literature cited includes: commercial polls and sample surveys, work commissioned by governments and their agencies, and academic studies. There is a very comprehensive survey of Australian material and many significant overseas studies, in particular from the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

Most of the discussion focuses on material published after 1970. However, there is an excellent introductory chapter, "Patterns of Sexual Behaviour: From Kinsey to the 1970s". This chapter provides a very good summary of the Kinsey Reports on the sexual

behaviour of males (1948) and females (1953) in the United States, and compares the data with subsequent studies in the following decades, in the United States and other parts of the world, including Australia.

Both the patterns of sexual behaviour, and the attitudes to sexual behaviour of various community groups are discussed. These groups include adolescents, women, homosexual and bisexual men, and intravenous drug users. In line with the aims of the review, the text thoroughly discusses the implications of the various behaviours and attitudes for the spread of HIV in the Australian community.

The literature on male homosexuality, with particular reference to the spread of AIDS, is most comprehensive. There is an excellent review of recent studies carried out in Australia, and elsewhere, that have relevance to the prevention of AIDS. Changes in attitudes to homosexuality over the last two decades are summarised. The 1970's and 1980's literature is compared with Kinsey's (1948) study.

Much relevant information on adolescent sexuality is presented. The discussion draws on several studies that have surveyed teenagers on the diversity of their sexual behaviour, attitudes and sexual knowledge. Patterns of sexual activity, contraceptive use,

and attitudes to condoms have particular relevance in the planning of education programs for young people that are aimed at preventing the spread of AIDS.

The literature review covers a wide range of sexual behaviour, and makes comparisons between population studies in the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and Australia. The review documents some interesting changes in sexual behaviour, and attitudes to sexual behaviour, over the last four decades. This publication will definitely be most useful to those people involved in developing AIDS prevention strategies and education programs for the general community, and for specific sub-groups such as intravenous drug users, bisexual or homosexual men, and adolescents. The book will also be a valuable resource to a wide range of people interested in various aspects of human sexual behaviour. I found that the review contained much information that will be useful to me in my research on, and teaching of, human sexuality.

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