The Institutional Abuse of Children:
I have done nothing wrong and I have nothing to say

Chris Goddard

Rocked by broken romance, shaken by separation, engulfed in rumour, once again the role of the Royal Family and its ability to carry out its duties comes under unwelcome scrutiny.
As the Queen's disquiet spreads through the Palace, the tensions within have never been greater. Where once doors were kept open, they now remain firmly closed. Staff have started talking in whispers. Paranoia now pervades the most famous house in Britain.
(Benson, 1992)

It is extremely hard to escape from news of the Royal Family. Even apparently liberal (with a lower-case 'l') British newspapers like *The Guardian* subject readers to articles that suggest that Charles and Diana enjoy different breakfasts. I cannot remember who liked what, but I can remember being irritated with myself for reading the piece. It has been especially difficult to avoid the Royals in recent months.

Fergie, at this very moment, is on a tour of South-East Asia, together with her children, Beatrice and Eugenie. Fergie is reported to be considering a reconciliation with Andrew, but is accompanied by a rich American who happens to be a friend of the other rich American that Fergie saw rather a lot of in recent months. Andrew, meanwhile, has taken up golf, a cry for help if ever I heard one.

According to *The Daily Telegraph*, Fergie and Andrew were a high risk from the very start, although others probably argued otherwise:

> The roguish Andrew had found a girl who was his equal in energy and high spirits.
> (Garner, L. 1992)

The 'fiery Duchess' with an 'explosive nature' is described as a 'very confused and insecure' woman who once had her legs waxed at 6 a.m. (Seward, 1992). Andrew, on the other hand, in spite of appearances to the contrary, is seen as 'prissy' and a 'teetotaller' who was really in love with Koo Stark, the 'former soft-porn movie star' (Garner, V. 1992). There is a great deal of money to be made in this sort of 'journalism'. Seward is described as editor of Majesty magazine, and author of *Sarah, HRH The Duchess of York.* Garner (Garner, V. not Garner, L.) earns credit for being co-author of *Their Royal Highnesses, The Duke and Duchess of York.*

It is not clear whether 'Randy Andy' and Fergie will be reconciled, but the odds must be against it. Anne, however, has decided and has divorced Mark:

> It was the most unlikely match – a tough, headstrong Princess and a weak, unambitious Army officer. And it became the marriage she didn't want. Anne now has something to celebrate after spending the last two and a half years as a prisoner of protocol, neither a proper wife nor a free woman.
> (Walton, 1992a)

The quiet almost secretive divorce, according to Ashley Walton (1992b) 'Royal Correspondent', made a strong contrast with their wedding which was watched by 500 million people on television.

Walton (1992b) reports that their children, Peter and Zara, will live with Anne, while Mark who lives nearby, will have unlimited access. The children will spend a great deal of time sailing with their mother on her new $220,000 boat, launched recently by 'teetotal Anne' (Walton, 1992b).

Meanwhile, Fergie's father, 'the galloping Major, 59', has been 'linked' with 'polo girl Lesley':

> The Duchess of York's father Major Ron Ferguson shut himself away with his wife at the weekend amid claims that he has fallen in love with another woman... He refused to be drawn on allegations that he had pledged his undying love for beautiful polo girl Lesley Player, 33... Friends ... said Susan Ferguson, 45, the Major's second wife, was 'deeply upset'... She had stuck by him after he was caught coming out of a sleazy West End massage parlour two years ago.
> (McKerron, 1992)

According to some journalists, it only requires Charles and Diana to decide to enter the extra-marital stakes and the Royal family will be finished. The truth is that all it needs is the worst of the British press (much of it run by an ex-Australian) to discover such activity and 'the edifice of Monarchy becomes precarious':

> The marriage of ... the Prince of Wales is in difficulties. He rarely sees his wife.
> (Benson, 1992)

Melanie Phillips, writing in the *Guardian Weekly*, believes there is nothing new in all this:

> Royals have always led lives of hypocrisy and humbug on the basis that whatever the peccadilloes behind the palace walls, the pretence of serenity must be maintained to retain the mystique of the royal family.
> (Phillips, 1992)

This 'pretence of serenity' is becoming harder to maintain as the media subject each and every member to increasingly critical and intense scrutiny:...

> Princess Margaret is divorced. She went on to enjoy a relationship with Roddy Llewellyn, a young man 16 years her junior. Despite health warnings, she is rarely to be seen without a glass of whisky or a cigarette to hand. She spends as much time as she can at her million pound home on the Caribbean island of Mustique
> (Benson, 1992)

Failure to marry provides shelter from the media:

> Edward 'walked out' of the Marines and still has not got a 'proper job'
>
> (Benson, 1992).

It is suggested by some that Edward is a 'confirmed bachelor' whose only close relationships were with a footman and his nanny.

Writing about the Royals, you will have noticed, creates a severe outbreak of alliteration in many journalists. Other institutions under siege require a different writing style. The care of children in children's homes has received almost as much media coverage in Britain as the Royals have in recent months, and the journalists have once again reached for the 'scandal' and 'tragedy' buttons on their word processors. Unfortunately, the use of such words was necessary.

The early focus of concern was the provision of residential care for children in Staffordshire in England, and in particular a residential home for ten children at 245 Hartshill Road, Stoke-on-Trent. The story began with the complaints of a 15-year-old girl who described how she was:

> ... put in a room with a bed, a chair and a table, made to wear pyjamas the whole time, only allowed out of the room to go to the toilet after knocking on the door, had not gone to school, had nothing to read and had to be in bed at 7 p.m. She was also not allowed to communicate with other children. The following evening she had jumped out of the window of the room, a distance to the ground of about twenty feet, and had sprained her ankle. She had then gone in her pyjamas a considerable distance before she had been returned eventually by the police and spent a further two days in her room. She described her experience as being in 'Pindown'.
>
> (Levy and Kahan, 1991: 1)

The '"Pindown" Affair', as it has come to be known, was born out of this girl's story. Over the following months public and media concern built up about 'Pindown':

> Pindown was variously alleged to be solitary confinement, a behaviour control method, and humiliating and degrading treatment. In addition there was further concern about the activities of a senior member of the social services department ... regarding the running of a number of private companies providing many services to the department... He was also said to be the architect and leading exponent of Pindown.
>
> (Levy and Kahan, 1991: 1)

As is often the case, and as we have seen in Victoria, decisive action about the problem was only forthcoming after the media interest became overwhelming (Goddard, 1990). Pressure for an independent inquiry into 'Pindown' culminated in a documentary by the respected Granada Television World in Action series. The documentary, entitled 'Pindown', went to air throughout Britain on 25th June 1990. Levy and Kahan were appointed to conduct an independent inquiry on 29th June 1990.

In summary, Levy and Kahan (1991) found that:

- At least 132 children underwent the 'Pindown' regime;
- The longest continuous period was 84 days and the longest overall period was 129 days;
- The children were aged from nine to seventeen years;
- One child was placed in 'Pindown' on twelve separate occasions;
- The children placed in 'Pindown':

  > ... suffered in varying degrees the despair and potentially damaging effects of isolation, the humiliation of having to wear night clothes, knock on the door to 'impart information' as it was termed, and of having all their personal possessions removed; and the intense frustration and boredom from the lack of communication, companionship with others and recreation (1991: 167);
- The 'Pindown' regime was 'narrow, punitive and harshly restrictive' (1991: 167);
- 'Pindown' arose from an 'ill-digested' understanding of behavioural psychology;
- 'Pindown' was made up of everything that is repressive about institutional care:

  > ... baths on admission, special clothing, strict routine, segregation and isolation, humiliation, and inappropriate bedtimes (1991: 167);
- No psychiatric, psychological or educational advice was obtained even where the children were 'disturbed, depressed and in despair' (1991: 167);
- The management of social services was totally inadequate and:

  > ... seriously lacking in vision, leadership, commitment to quality services and recognition of the need for adequate knowledge, training and child care skills ... managers made decisions in isolation and were neither involved with staff nor with people who needed services
  >
  > (*Social Work Today*, 1991: 4).

Another extremely alarming aspect of the care of these children was how men with convictions for sexual offences had been allowed to visit the children in the homes.

Just in case 'Pindown' had not done enough damage to residential child care, the case of Frank Beck received massive media coverage in late 1991. Beck, in charge of three children's homes in Leicestershire, was found guilty of 17 charges, including five of buggery and one of rape, committed between 1973 and 1986. Beck, sentenced to five life sentences, had abused as many as 200 children. As many as five children, it was reported, had committed suicide as a result of the abuse they had suffered. The headlines in the popular media and the professional journals were surprisingly similar: 'Beck gets life for "pursuit of evil"' (*Community Care*, 5th December 1991), 'Child sex monster gets life 5 times' (*International Express*, 5th-11th December 1991), and 'The care nightmare' (*The Sunday Telegraph*, 1st December 1991).

The Beck case came to attention when a woman made a complaint to the police about an incident that had occurred some 15 years before (*Community Care*, 1991: 1). This prompted the police to follow up other children who were in Beck's care at this time. What is even more alarming than the offences themselves is the response of management:

> While Beck was beating or sexually abusing the most vulnerable children in Leicestershire the [social services] department was receiving complaints from parents, social workers, and sometimes, the children themselves. Yet little was done. Only four complaints were ever passed to the police...
>
> When Beck was actually charged with assaulting a boy in 1982 – he was later acquitted – he was not even suspended from duty.
>
> (Graves, 1991a)

As if this was not bad enough, he was then given, as a single man, approval to foster a teenage child even though the boy's father complained. Beck resigned in 1986 after further complaints by male staff of sexual harassment. In spite of this catalogue of disaster the police were not informed, and Beck was given two references by the Director of Social Services (Graves, 1991a). Armed with those references, Beck went on to work with two further social service departments.

A confidential report on the management of social services prepared for Leicestershire by Barry Newell:

> ... painted a grim picture of poor management, inadequate supervision, breaches of child care policy and disregard of staff disciplinary rules. [The report] concluded that 'overwhelming' evidence existed that would have enabled decisive action to be taken up to four years before his resignation. What [Newell] could not explain was the lack of action.
>
> (Graves, 1991a)

John Gilbert (1991), editor of *Social Work Today*, asked a similar question: 'Why did no-one listen?' In an editorial reminiscent of the Cleveland report, Gilbert complains that once again social workers ignored the children:

> As the years rolled by, repeated complaints from children and staff were ignored. Time and again the police returned runaways who asserted that they were being abused. Why did it take so long before someone decided to listen? Why did so many lives have to be blighted before Frank Beck was stopped?
>
> (Gilbert, 1991)

Gilbert argues that Beck was not operating in isolation, but had a large staff, line managers, and the homes in which he terrorised children were but a part of an integrated child care system. Gilbert wants to know where Beck's managers are now, 'responsible and accountable' as they are to varying degrees. Junior staff clearly were given no protection from Beck. Several of the young, inexperienced staff were themselves abused by Beck and were usually too frightened to complain (Graves, 1991b).

The stories of the adult survivors make distressing reading:

> A 31-year-old woman told the jury how she deliberately had her appendix removed as a teenager in an attempt to escape sexual abuse. She said she faked pains in her side after being repeatedly raped by Beck and sexually assaulted by other social workers when she was 15...
>
> 'I just did everything they wanted me to do. I was petrified of Frank Beck...'
>
> The woman also claimed she was raped and sexually assaulted by Beck after disturbing him and another resident ... aged 13 or 14, during homosexual activity ... She claimed she was subsequently sexually abused by Beck about 30 times.
>
> (Graves, 1991b)

It would be comforting to believe that such abuses only occur in Britain. Welfare workers know that, unfortunately, children in residential care are vulnerable everywhere. One encouraging aspect of recent developments in residential care has been the setting up in other countries of organisations along the lines of Britain's NAYPIC, the National Association of Young People in Care. Canada, USA, Sweden, and Finland are amongst those that have joined what is becoming an International Youth In Care Network (Morris, 1992). I look forward to hearing news that such an organisation, or network of organisations, has been formed in Australia.

In Victoria, Community Services Victoria under the direction of Dr John Paterson, the Director General, has been making valiant attempts to eradicate abuse and other offences in its institutions. In a letter to members of the State Public Service Federation of Victoria, Dr Paterson (1992) likens the SPSFV to a 'Ships Painters and Dockers style organisation'. The letter is in reply to a directive from the SPSFV that members not cooperate with any CSV disciplinary procedures, and that members should respond to each question asked of them with the phrase 'I have done nothing wrong, and I have nothing to say' (SPSFV, 1992). The SPSFV goes on to state that the right to remain silent:

> ... also applies to police inquiries, a number of which CSV have started and the union recommends that members act in the same manner.
>
> (SPSFV, 1992)

Dr Paterson's letter in reply is entitled 'SPSFV endorses rape, assault, theft, fraud and thuggery: do you?' He states:

> There is still at least one site where all women on staff go in fear of the sexual depredations of a small group of animals.
>
> (Paterson, 1992)

Such problems between management and unions in attacking residential abuse have been seen all over the world (Rindfleisch, 1988).

In the 'bad old days', Dr Paterson claims, CSV traded the non-prosecution of offenders for industrial peace (Paterson, 1992). He makes the distinction between the right to silence of a staff member subject to disciplinary action or police investigation and the duty of other members of staff to assist in an investigation. Children deserve more help and greater protection in Victoria's institutions (and elsewhere in Australia) than they have received in the past. I have, on occasion, been critical of CSV but Dr Paterson is to be applauded for his efforts to eradicate institutional abuse and prevent further harm.

The role of management is central to the provision of good quality residential care. Management has been severely criticised in almost every child abuse inquiry in Britain, whether the abuse has been intra-familial or institutional. A major problem has been that senior management has been slow to recognise that residential care is now almost exclusively a service for adolescents.

Sir William Utting, who was appointed by the Secretary of State in England following the 'Pindown' affair, conducted a review of residential child care. He examined the broader context of the management and control of children's homes (1991). Utting makes it clear that there will always be a need for residential care which should provide a home for children who:

- have decided that they do not wish to be fostered;
- have had bad experiences of foster care;
- have been so abused within the family that another family placement is inappropriate;
- are from the same family and cannot otherwise be kept together ...

(Utting, 1991: 8)

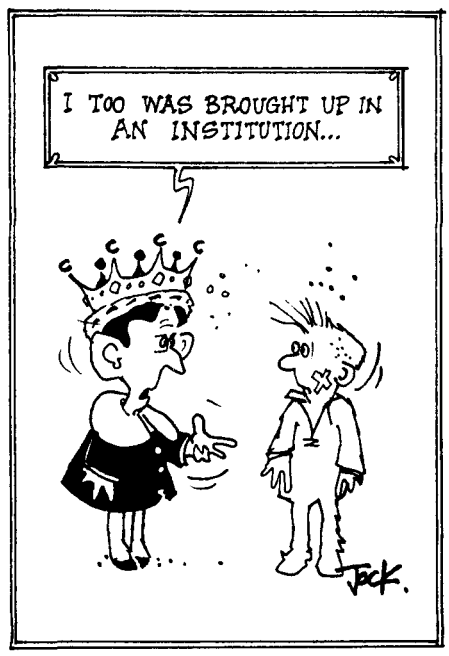
Residential care should provide:

> ... expert, multidisciplinary help with social and personal problems in a residential setting; containment and help in conditions of security. (Utting, 1991: 8)

Providing services for adolescents places carers in a complex and contradictory position. On the one hand, it must be recognised that the young people have rights, including the right to have a voice in decisions made. As Utting points out, if they are not given the opportunity to have their say they will 'vote with their feet' (1991: 32). On the other hand, older children will present staff with extremely 'challenging behaviour', to use that euphemism of welfare-speak. Young people who have suffered serious and relentless abuse and neglect have very often learned aggression and violence. Caring for (and controlling) such lonely and hurt young people is a difficult job.

The role of staff in institutional abuse is vital (Westcott, 1991). Unfortunately, not only has it taken a great deal of time to recognise that children might be abused in institutions, but the importance of the work of carers has also been ignored. In a recent study of residential child care workers in Australia, Murphy (1992) found that a significant number were dissatisfied with many aspects of their work, in particular the hours, wages and career opportunities. Most of the staff were 'undertrained' and had no access to training (Murphy, 1992).

The lives of little Willie, Harry, Beatrice, Eugenie, Zara, Peter et al. seem at first sight to be a long way away from the cruelties of 'Pindown' and the buggery and rape of Frank Beck. Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle are even geographically some distance from 'Pindown' and 245 Hartshill Road, Stoke-on-Trent, and The Poplars, The Beeches, and Ratcliffe Road where a perverted Beck abused and assaulted all and sundry.



Closer examination, however, reveals certain contiguities. The junior Royals spend very little time with their parents, are sent away to boarding schools, and appear to lead extremely unsettled lives. The children subject to 'Pindown' and to the gross abuse of Beck also spend considerable time away from their parents. Both groups of children, the Royals and those in care, have been subject to enormous media interest. In the case of the Royals, however, it is unlikely that the interest will wane, and it is hard to see how the attention benefits the children. For those children abused in the care of social services, it is to be hoped that the media spotlight will bring real and positive change, not only for the victims but also for children in the future.

Strangely enough, both the Royals and the children in care have been subject to what Coleridge, in his conversations with Wordsworth, called 'that willing suspension of disbelief' which gives rise to 'poetic faith' (1960: 169). In the case of the Royals, the British want (or have wanted) to believe in a 'pretence of serenity' (Phillips, 1992). As far as children in the care of social services are concerned, we want to believe that removing the victims from one form of abuse or neglect is all that is required to ease their pain and protect them from further harm.

The Royal Family may not be subsidised to the present extent or even exist in the next century. Indeed the lives the Royal children lead, and in particular the constant media surveillance, will be recognised as emotionally harmful, just as aspects of institutional care have been for other less-privileged children. Such an outcome will relieve the Royals of the need to wander around like SPSFV members saying 'I have done nothing wrong, and I have nothing to say'.

Overall, however, it is probably the differences that remain most striking. Britain, at present at least, appears to be prepared to continue to subsidise the Royal soap-opera. Phillips (1992) claims that the Royals serve as a symbol of 'The Family'. In that case, it appears entirely appropriate that divorce, separation and extra-marital activities (not necessarily in that order) fill their days. Phillips also points out that much of what they do is 'make-work', hence 'the existential angst' suffered by Charles as he tries to turn 'a symbolic role' into a real one (Phillips, 1992). Being spared the necessity of earning a pound allows more time for such 'angst', as well as for the delights of Mustique, and divorce, separation and other such affairs.

It is in this that the ironical quality of a comparison lies. The parents of the Royal children, replete with resources (as a British journalist might alliterate) are searching for work. Those staff working with children in care are paid poorly, trained rarely and, if at all, inadequately, and yet doing real work. In fact, our failure to ensure that children who are abused and neglected receive adequate resources in terms of treatment and care will eventually cost us far more than Britain pays for the Royals.♦

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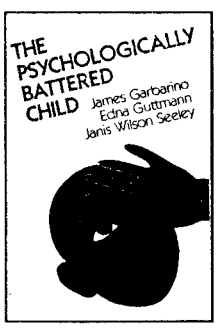

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