



National Child
Protection
Clearinghouse

CHILD ABUSE PREVENTION Newsletter

PUBLISHED BY THE AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF FAMILY STUDIES

VOL.11 NO.1 WINTER 2003



We need to protect the child from physical or psychological harm caused by being subjected or exposed to abuse, ill-treatment, violence or other behaviour.

Steps Forward for Families: Research, Practice and Policy

8th Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference

The 8th Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, *Steps Forward for Families: Research, Practice and Policy*, was held in Melbourne on 12–14 February 2003. The aim of the conference was to bring together research on a wide range of family issues, and many of the papers and conference sessions were at the intersection of research, policy and practice.

The conference was formally opened by the Minister for Family and Community Services, Senator Amanda Vanstone, via a video linkup. The Hon. Larry Anthony, Minister for Children and Youth, then gave a brief outline of government interest in family-related matters, emphasising the importance of early intervention and of children getting a good start in life.

In recent years, the Australian Institute of Family Studies has dedicated increased resources to research on the family as the natural environment for the growth and wellbeing of children, and on the role governments play in supporting parents by providing both material assistance and support programs. In keeping with this broad direction, a number of conference papers focused on the lives of children in their family and community contexts.

Addressing child abuse and other family violence

However, in addition to a range of papers focused on children, parenting and the provision of support to children and families, a number of sessions were developed to explore elements of child protection and child abuse prevention, domestic violence, sexual assault and associated issues. The increasing professional and societal interest in the various forms of ►

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The National Child Protection Clearinghouse serves as an interchange point for information, research and initiatives supporting work in the field of child abuse/neglect prevention.

The Clearinghouse is hosted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies and funded by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services.

Views expressed in Clearinghouse publications are those of individual authors and may not necessarily reflect Clearinghouse or Institute policy.

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Designed by Double Jay Graphic Design
Printed by XL Printing

ISSN 1447-0039 (Print)
ISSN 1447-0047 (Online)

Print Post Approved PP349181/00604

family violence is reflected in the expansion of Institute research in the area, particularly through the operation of the National Child Protection Clearinghouse.

Individual papers explored a range of specific forms of violence, such as adult sexual assault by intimate partners, family homicide, the abuse of children by women, and the abuse of animals. Some key issues likely to dominate family violence research, policy and practice issues over the next few years were also identified.

The first issue relates to a growing recognition that one form of family violence often does not occur in isolation. That is, there is a link between the different forms of family violence. This is perhaps clearest when looking at the association between the co-occurrence of different forms of child abuse and neglect and domestic violence (that is, the violence between intimate partners). A symposium of papers led by researchers from the University of Sydney explored this association, with Jude Irwin, Fran Waugh and Marie Wilkinson reporting on a recently completed study of the NSW Department of Community Services' response to domestic violence, and policy and practice issues related to the protection of children and young people who live with domestic violence.

The recent recognition of a relationship between the perpetration of various forms of family violence and the abuse of domestic pets was highlighted in a paper by Eleonora Gullone and colleagues from Monash University. Their study replicated US studies and brought home the horrendous nature of violence towards pets within a context of wider family violence.

The second issue concerned developments in research and practice. Presentations were given on current child protection practice, particularly as it relates to children living with domestic violence, and on the sexual assault of children. Robyn Sullivan, the Queensland Commissioner for Children, chaired a symposium on the roles and functions of the Queensland Commission for Children and Young People.

The Commission's use of evidence-based practice to inform government and the professional sector was highlighted. Presenters reflected on the Commission's work in engaging with children and young people – the importance of 'hearing children's voices' – particularly in the development of policy initiatives that inform the Commission's work.

A focus on resiliency

The shift from (purely) preventing risks or social ills towards the creation of family and community capacity or resilience is now a dominant trend in policy and practice. The impact of this transition on government policy, research and the changing nature of family support work was explored in a number of sessions at the Conference.

The current cornerstone of the Commonwealth's policies to support and strengthen Australian families and communities is the *Stronger Families and Communities Strategy*. Launched in April 2000, the Strategy takes a prevention and early intervention approach. It aims to help families and communities by building resilience and a capacity to manage problems before they become severe. Hence, the Strategy reflects the current shift towards a capacity building, rather than risk prevention, approach to family violence issues.

Libby Davies, Executive Director of the peak agency Family Services Australia, discussed some of the challenges for service

delivery in this changing policy environment. Anita Joinking and Marie Leech from Mission Australia described some of the trends in family demographics, workers' perceptions of the main issues in strengthening families, and some of the key family strengths that should be reinforced when attempting to develop families' resilience.

The Institute's role in conducting research allied to the Stronger Families and Community Strategy came to the fore via two sessions that highlighted the innovative work of the Stronger Families Learning Exchange (SFLEX). A major component of the Learning Exchange is the creation of a Training and Support Team of researchers who provide action research evaluation support to 40 community development projects. The Team is funded under the Stronger Families Fund, which is part of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy.

The Team assists projects to design and carry out an action research evaluation of their project, providing advice and support on issues such as: action research processes; research design and methods; the analysis and interpretation of data; and the production of project reports. In the longer term, the project will generate national data (via the Institute) on effective practice and early intervention strategies. The results will inform Government policy, community development and service delivery, and research practices.

A SFLEX symposium outlined how the Commonwealth's vision of research support for a range of community development projects located across the nation is in the process of being translated by the research team into broader learning outcomes that can inform policy. Leah Anderson, from

the Connecting Families project, Wagga Wagga NSW, presented a case study that demonstrated how the relationship between funders (FaCS), research support (SFLEX) and a funded project had developed, resulting in significant benefits at the local (project and community) level.

The specifics of providing action research support were further delineated by Kelley Johnson (SFLEX Team leader) and Lisa Natoli via the presentation of a workshop on action research processes. This session provided the audience with an opportunity to hear of the research team's experiences in working with a range of projects, at times within a government bureaucratic context, and to workshop issues of research practice.

Conference abstracts

A full list of papers presented at the conference can be either viewed or downloaded through the Institute's website at www.aifs.gov.au. The following is a selection of abstracts from the papers presented.

Institutional processes for dealing with allegations of child sexual abuse

Tom Altobelli

School of Law, University of Western Sydney

Institutional processes for dealing with allegations of child sexual abuse, such as the Catholic Church's Towards Healing statement, fail to recognise that the public has a legitimate interest in ensuring that the processes used to investigate complaints and offer assistance to victims are transparent, rigorous and accountable. These institutional processes

Results of the Clearinghouse Feedback Survey

Katie Kovacs

In the last edition of the Clearinghouse Newsletter, we sought feedback from readers about the content and format of our Newsletters and Issues Papers. We were delighted to receive 236 responses with some exceptionally helpful comments and suggestions. Many thanks to all who completed and returned the survey!

Results

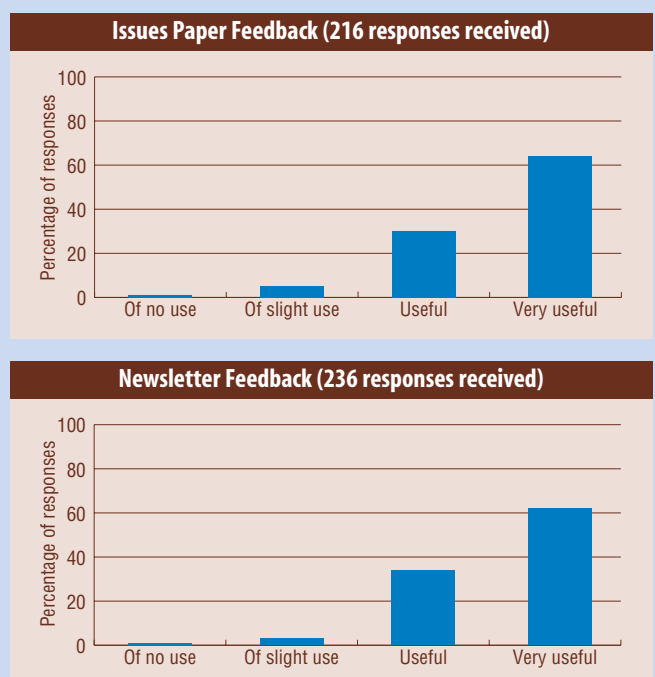
Readers were asked to rate the usefulness of both Clearinghouse Newsletters and Issues Papers according to a four-point scale ranging from 'of no use' to 'very useful'. The responses indicated that the majority of readers are finding our Newsletters and Issues papers either *useful* or *very useful*. The responses received can be seen in the charts below.

Feedback suggestions

Some extremely useful suggestions were offered about improving our publication formats. Such changes have been incorporated wherever possible in the current Newsletter.

Readers also suggested numerous interesting and relevant topics for coverage in future issues of our publications. The prevention of child abuse in Indigenous communities, is one such area that will be pursued later this year.

The Clearinghouse is grateful to all those who provided feedback to this recent survey, and we will endeavour to incorporate as many ideas as possible into future Newsletters and Issues Papers. Ongoing feedback in respect to either the content or format of our publications and services is always welcome and can be forwarded via email to ncpc@aifs.gov.au; or phone (03) 9214 7888; or fax (03) 9214 7839.



inadequately balance the public interest with the private interests belonging to the stakeholders in these claims.

The need for confidentiality that is invoked in seeking to protect private interests directly undermines public confidence in the process. Greater recognition needs to be given by institutions to the legitimacy of the public interest, and this legitimacy needs to be reflected in the processes used. The role of such processes in educating the public and thus having a preventative function needs also to be recognised. At the same time the public needs to recognise the legitimacy of claims by stakeholders to use confidential processes until clear findings have been made in relation to allegations. The paper will suggest a new model for dealing with claims within institutions arising out of allegations of sexual abuse that moves closer to finding that elusive balance between the public and private interests. (Full paper available)

Permanency planning beyond care: the attachment needs of young people leaving care

Judy Cashmore and Marina Paxman

Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales

Finding and maintaining a safe, secure and stable placement for children and young people in out-of-home care is recognised as a critical issue in out-of-home care because of the adverse outcomes associated with lack of stability and drift in care. Permanency planning includes a range of policy and practice approaches to try to maximise stability and continuity. This paper provides a review and critique of these approaches in Australia and elsewhere, and the implications from attachment theory. It also draws upon data from the five-year follow-up to the longitudinal study of Wards Leaving Care study in New South Wales, funded by the NSW Department of Community Services. The young people who have fared best are those who had some stability in care and the support of a carer, family member or community support worker after leaving care, but the young people's perceptions of their security during childhood and in care are better predictors of their 'resilience' than stability *per se*.

'Good enough parenting': when government is the parent?

Mike Clare

University of Western Australia

The paper reviews the introduction of the UK Looking After Children practice and management materials in

Australian States and Territories against the background of a comparative analysis of central government systems to prescribe standards of service and to monitor outcomes for children in care in the UK. The writer argues that the UK government commitment to a 'whole of government' interventionist set of activities is significantly more useful in driving child welfare initiatives than the more fragmented and secretive systems in Australian States. The measures include inspections of agencies, quality assurance processes and performance standards. Finally, the writer reviews some international LAC projects and reviews successful elements of implementation strategies. (Full paper available)


The violence of women: making sense of child abuse perpetrated by mothers

Lee FitzRoy

RMIT University

Women perpetrating violence against a beloved child, is a 'disgrace' hidden in the private realm of the home and/or publicly denounced as a crime of unnatural evil. Images of women hurting their children transfix and horrify the general community. These extreme social reactions emerge in part as a response to a construction of 'woman' as 'mother', the origin of life juxtaposed with the image of the 'bad' mother. The paper explores the contradictory constructions of 'woman' and 'mothering', combined with the often inconsistent social responses to, and theoretical analyses of, women who perpetrate violence. A critical examination of possible reasons why mothers perpetrate violence against their children is presented. The study primarily focuses on women's use of physical violence against their children; however, categories and definitions of 'violence' *per se* are not fixed or definitive. Therefore, the paper acknowledges that a focus on physical violence does not preclude a critical examination of other acts of emotional/psychological, sexual, social and/or financial violence perpetrated by women.

The broad aim of my research is to contribute to the current body of knowledge, which explores women's diverse and contradictory experiences as both victims/offenders. In undertaking the study, I believe that a detailed examination of women's use of violence may assist women themselves in their own choices and actions. In addition, it is hoped that such explorations may aid practitioners and the human service, child protection and criminal justice systems, which respond to women and their children. (Full paper available)



NATIONAL DISABILITY
ABUSE AND NEGLECT
HOTLINE
1800 880 052

**FRECALL
1800 880 052**

National Disability Services Abuse and Neglect Hotline

The National Disability Services Abuse and Neglect Hotline is a Australia-wide telephone service for reporting the abuse and neglect of people with disabilities who are clients of government-funded services.

The Hotline was launched by the Hon. Senator Amanda Vanstone in 2001 to help safeguard the rights of people with a disability who use Commonwealth, State or Territory funded services. The service is fully federally funded

through the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services.

Cases of abuse and neglect can include physical, sexual, psychological, legal and civil abuse, restraint and restrictive practices, or financial abuse. It can also include the withholding of care and support which exposes an individual to harm.

The Hotline is open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. seven days a week across

Australia. It is operated by an independent non-government organisation and staffed by people who are sensitive to the needs and issues of the disability sector.

Concerned people can call the Hotline to report cases of abuse or neglect, or to find out more about the service. Allegations are referred to the appropriate authority for investigation, and an interpreter service is available.

The co-occurrence of family violence and animal abuse: a comparison of violent and non-violent families

Eleonora Gullone, Anne Volant and Judy Johnson
Monash University

Over the last decade, professionals have become increasingly aware of a link between violence toward humans and animal cruelty. This link calls for a combined response by animal welfare organisations, law enforcement agencies and health care professionals. Such a response is increasingly being adopted in the US and the UK, but the need has only recently been recognised in Australia. Identification of animal cruelty may provide important information about family violence. The present investigation is the first of its kind in Australia. The aims of the study were primarily to determine the degree of co-occurrence of family violence and pet (companion animal) abuse in an Australian context. Secondly, co-occurrence rates between a randomly selected community sample and a representative Victorian sample recruited from family violence support organisations were compared. Participants included over 100 women who had in the past or were currently involved in a violent relationship, and a comparison group of women who had not in the past nor were currently involved in a violent family situation. The results of the study, which were very consistent with past research in other countries, were presented along with their implications.

Paying for care: the state of affairs in fostering

Marilyn McHugh

Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales

The trend in a number of Western countries is to pay foster carers a fee or retainer in addition to reimbursements for the costs of the child in their care. There are also a small but growing number of commercial foster care agencies who contract to governments to provide foster care services. The notion of 'paying for caring work' has received a good deal of attention in literature by feminist economists who distinguish between caring as a 'labour of love' and caring as unpaid work. The notion of paying foster carers for the work they do is quite contentious within the industry. Carers themselves are quite divided about the concept of being paid a salary or wage, with many arguing 'we don't do it for the money'.

In Australia and overseas the literature on current family foster care highlights the 'crisis' in foster care. Research indicates that the number of children requiring alternative care is on the increase in many countries, and of concern is the difficulty experienced by agencies in recruiting and retaining suitable carers and preventing placement breakdown. With the growing participation of women in paid work, particularly those with children (the 'typical' foster carer), the question arises 'who will do the caring' and, more cogently, 'how will the costs of caring be met'?

This paper overviews some of the current trends here and overseas in paying carers a fee or retainer in addition to reimbursements for costs. It discusses the merits of these programs and their applicability to Australia within the context of feminist economics.

Evaluating the Columbus Pilot in the Family Court of Western Australia

Paul Murphy and Lisbeth Pike

Family Court of Western Australia

The evaluation of the Columbus Pilot is being conducted by a collaborative team from The University of Western

NSW Early Childhood Intervention Infoline



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The Early Childhood Intervention Infoline is an initiative of the NSW Government through the Departments of Ageing, Disability and Home Care, Community Services, Education and Training, and Health. It was launched in September 1998 and is auspiced by Early Childhood Intervention Australia (NSW Chapter).

The Infoline provides information and advice on early childhood intervention services throughout New South Wales which assist both young children with developmental delay or disabilities and their families. Enquiries are welcome from anyone in the community, including family members, child care workers, teachers, therapists, doctors and other professionals. The Infoline is staffed from 9 a.m. to 2.30 p.m. weekdays, excluding Thursdays. Messages can be left on the answering service outside those hours, and all calls will be returned promptly.

Australia and Edith Cowan University. The evaluation is using a multi-method approach within the Stufflebeam CIPP (Context, Inputs, Process and Product) model of program evaluation. In addition to the qualitative data obtained during in-depth interviews with a range of key stakeholders, the project is 'mapping' cases within the Columbus Pilot and comparing these with a 'Control' sample, some long-term cases (a 'Comparison group'), and the 'ideal' Columbus process – the 'Design'. The mapping process also allows estimates of imputed 'case costs' to be established so that the cost of intensive early intervention can be assessed against the costs of lengthy litigation. This paper reports some of the preliminary findings and the impact this project is having on the culture of the Family Court of Western Australia. The paper also outlines the next two stages in the evaluation project. (*Full paper available*)

Childhood adversity and abuse and mental health in adult life

Bryan Rodgers, Kelly Blewitt, Patricia Jacomb and Stephen Rosenman

Centre for Mental Health Research

There is research evidence that early adversity and abuse have enduring consequences extending into adult life, in addition to their immediate effects on children. These consequences are particularly apparent for mental health problems. However, most studies in this field employ single measures of childhood adversity and outcome. Little is known about multiple risk.

The study aimed to (1) delineate associations between indices of childhood family adversity and depression, anxiety and substance use in adulthood; (2) assess the cumulative nature of risk; (3) identify types of adversity making unique contributions to outcomes.

Cross-sectional surveys of 7500 community participants aged 20–24, 40–44 and 60–64 years in the ACT Region were carried out. Data were collected by handheld computers, with retrospective reporting of childhood adversity. Types of childhood adversity varied in prevalence from less than 1% (parental sexual abuse) to over 20% (mother's depression). Multiple adversity occurred more often than expected by chance. In the 20–24 group, for example, 34.3% reported three or four types of adversity and 9.1% reported five or more types. Adult depression, particularly, showed a marked increase in prevalence with cumulative adversity – a sixfold increase in risk from zero to high adversity. A lesser twofold increase in risk was found for drinking. Some forms of adversity make unique contributions to predicting outcomes.

There is evidence that cumulative adversity is deleterious for adult mental health and that some individual types of adversity are especially linked to later risk. (*Full paper available*)



Left-right: Katie Kovacs, Janet Stanley and Steve Walker

Factors affecting families' access to child abuse prevention programs: an exploratory study

Janet Stanley and Katie Kovacs

National Child Protection Clearinghouse

There is little documented information about how families locate, gain access to, and use child abuse prevention programs. In order to address this knowledge gap, the National Child Protection Clearinghouse has undertaken exploratory research to gain further understanding about issues around how families with a child at risk of being maltreated avail themselves of programs designed to prevent this maltreatment.

Information was sought from a sample of 32 practitioners currently running home visiting and parent education programs in New South Wales and Victoria. Self-completed questionnaires and structured interviews were used to provide information on the nature of the projects, neighbourhood characteristics, recruitment processes and methods of program implementation that, it was hypothesised, could impact on how clients availed themselves, engaged with and used programs.

Results suggest that a number of well-planned programs exist which effectively link parents into a network of services and provide therapeutic support for the children. However, various barriers continue to restrict access by some families to these services.

The paper outlines practical outcomes which may assist service providers to further refine and develop programs that target, engage, and have the best possible impact on the group of 'high risk' families most in need of support, thus providing a more efficient and cost-effective service. The findings also have implications for future policy development in relation to prevention programs. (*Full paper available*)

Are we meeting family needs in Australia?

Adam Tomison

National Child Protection Clearinghouse

The increasing expansion and identification of social ills or issues (e.g. child abuse and parenting problems, youth suicide, bullying, domestic violence, substance abuse, relationship breakdown etc.), combined with a greater focus on the quality of family life and the health and wellbeing of family members, has produced significant demand by families and communities for support from governments and professional agencies. This has occurred as traditional forms of support provided by extended family and/or friends and neighbours have been decreasing.

The last decade has seen a reinvestment in a rapidly changing family support sector, and the growing recognition of the need to work strategically to ensure the best response for families and improved societal health and wellbeing. But are we – or, more specifically, the family support system – meeting family needs in Australia? Do our current approaches work and, if so, how do we know? And what is good practice in supporting families?

One of the substantial problems in determining if support is successful is that, in general, the service sector and policymakers lack good evidence of the interventions that can produce a significant change in family or community health and wellbeing. That is, we don't really know what interventions or programs work, or under what circumstances and for whom. This paper discusses the benefits of adopting an evidence-based practice approach to service provision, and provides a brief overview of some of the current trends that have been developed to meet identified needs. A number of promising areas that would benefit from further exploration are also noted. (*Full paper available*)

Safety planning – children and young people who live with domestic violence

Fran Waugh and Michelle Bonner

University of Sydney

A number of government and non-government agencies across NSW, including family support, community health, legal services, NSW Department of Community Services (DoCS) and housing services, are involved on a daily basis in working with the issues of domestic violence and child protection. For practitioners in this field, safety planning is a key element in their interventions with women and children experiencing domestic violence. However, practitioners have often addressed domestic violence and child protection as separate issues resulting in intervention focusing on the safety of the women while overlooking the safety of their children. This paper explores the issues of developing safety plans for children and young people in domestic violence situations as identified in focus groups and interviews conducted with practitioners in NSW in 2001. For some agencies these strategies ranged from making a report to DoCS about the domestic violence, to involving children and young people in developing their own safety plans. Other agencies, in comparison, had minimal or no direct intervention with children and young people and instead focused on the mothers' needs. The strategies that were developed were greatly influenced by legislation, the agency philosophy and policies, and practitioners' understanding of domestic violence and child protection. (*Full paper available*)