

Introduction

The issue of child abuse is currently receiving considerable attention in New South Wales. The *Children (Care and Protection) Act 1987* is undergoing an extensive review, and there has been intensive media coverage of child protection issues in recent months. For example, on 29 August 1995 *The Sydney Morning Herald* featured a front-page article entitled "Our child abuse shame: 19 dead", referring to the fact that 19 children known to the Department of Community Services (DCS) had died over the past two and a half years. A month later a special series of articles appeared on child protection by *Herald* journalist Adele Horin, entitled "The Lost Children" (September 25 to 27). These articles were critical of the child protection system and the system of reviewing deaths. This culminated in the announcement by the Premier, Mr Carr, that New South Wales will have legislation passed to establish a new committee to review cases of child death (*The Sydney Morning Herald*, 26 September 1995). The establishment of such a committee was the major recommendation of a recent report by the New South Wales Child Protection Council.¹ Experience in many of the American States has demonstrated that this is the only effective way to review cases of child death.

It is therefore particularly appropriate that this issue of *Current Issues in Criminal Justice* focuses on child abuse. The articles cover a wide variety of topics and are written by a diverse range of authors, including those working in policy, academia and practice. Although the issue deals primarily with Australian material, there are also articles drawing on data from overseas jurisdictions.

Robert Ludbrook's paper reminds us that children have a right to bodily integrity, and reviews several recent cases in which this issue is raised.

There has been significant interest in the reliability of the evidence of children who claim they have been abused (for example, there has been considerable publicity about the "False Memory Syndrome"), and several papers touch on this issue. The papers by Kay Bussey and Pamela Budai discuss the use of children's evidence in court, and the importance of ensuring this evidence is perceived as credible and reliable. Kate Sinclair's paper addresses the issue from a broader standpoint, and describes how the "backlash" movement in the United States has sought to undermine the child protection movement and discredit the majority of abuse claims. This paper holds important lessons for those working in child protection in Australia.

Another controversial topic in the child abuse field is the long-term effects of being abused as a child. In their paper Lyndy and Hugh Potter provide results from a valuable empirical study examining the long-term psychological impact of childhood abuse. The "abused becomes abuser" theme is also explored in Marie Wilkinson's review of Freda Briggs' recent book.

The *Children (Care and Protection) Act* is discussed in two papers. Chris McRobert provides a perspective on the workings of the legislation and the Children's Court, drawing on his experience as a Children's Court magistrate. Patrick Parkinson, who is heading

1 Wilczynski, A, in consultation with the Child Death Review Committee, *Preventing Child Homicide* (1995) NSW Child Protection Council, Sydney.

the team currently reviewing the legislation, also provides a brief outline of the review process.

In my paper, I outline the risk factors for child homicide by parents, drawing on research carried out in England. Two English homicide cases are also the subject of Gitta Sereny's book reviewed by Marcus Niski, although in both of these cases the perpetrators as well as the victims were children. Insights from the British child protection scene are provided in Terry Carney's review of a recent book edited by Loraine Waterhouse.

Two papers outline recent programs in the child protection field. Karen McCarthy outlines the preliminary findings from the evaluation of the Joint Investigation Team (JIT) project being conducted by DCS and the New South Wales Police Service. Judith Edwards describes the Benevolent Society of New South Wales' Early Intervention Programme, a secondary prevention project.

Finally, Kate Russell's paper looks at a group of children whose needs often remain invisible: children of prison inmates with alcohol and other drug problems.

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Guest Editor, Special Issue

Correction: *Current Issues in Criminal Justice* Volume 7 Number 1, page 65: footnote number 45 should read, "For example, see *Sixty Minutes*, March 1995, program on Fred Many release and rape victim interview" rather than "For example, see *Sixty Minutes*, March 1995, program on Raymond Denning release and rape victim interview". The publishers and author apologize for the error.