A Modern History of Child Protection in Australia: Queensland 1965-1980

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Abstract

This paper examines child protection policy and practice in Queensland in the 1960s and 1970s, which was a period of major social change effecting relations between children, families, and the state. Using government annual reports from the period, the paper traces developments in policy and service delivery. It discusses changes in two interlinked areas: the use of preventative family support approaches; and the expansion of the professional knowledge base. Understanding the history of a policy field can facilitate critical reflection on current debates. The child protection field continues to revisit long-standing tensions about the best ways to safeguard children from abuse and neglect in their families, albeit in different ways.

Keywords: child protection, family support, history, social work.

Implications

- It is important to recognise and value the social work profession's strong contribution to building the child protection knowledge base.
- Many current debates in child protection are not new: since the child protection field developed in the 1960s it has continually revisited tensions about how best to intervene to address the individual and social causes of child abuse and neglect.
- Documenting the history of a social policy field can facilitate critical reflection on current developments.

The origins of modern child protection systems are generally traced back to the 1960s, when there was international attention to research about the "battered child syndrome" (Tomison, 2001). The physical abuse of children by parents was exposed as a widespread problem, putting pressure on governments to intervene. Prior to this, the main concern of child welfare departments was orphaned, abandoned, and delinquent children (Tomison, 2001), whereas the treatment of children within the family was regarded as a private matter. By the end of the 1970s, most jurisdictions in Australia, the USA, and the UK had distinct, professionally staffed child protection services located within larger government welfare departments (Tomison, 2001). The 1960s and 1970s was also a time when attitudes were changing about child-rearing, the role of women, and the family. The feminist movement led to dismantling of multiple social and employment barriers to equality and more women remained in the workforce after having children. Aboriginal rights came to the fore with the 1967 referendum approving Constitutional amendments to remove discrimination against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The 1972 election of the Whitlam Labor government led to other social reforms such as no-fault divorce laws, the single parents' benefit, multiculturalism, child care, and direct funding for local, non-religious community services including family support services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies. These social and political changes all had an impact on the field of child welfare.

While the exact timing and detail of developments in child protection varied between jurisdictions, the overall directions were similar. This study examines changes to child protection policy and practice in one Australian state, Queensland, between 1965 and 1980. During this time, there was stability at the state government level. The conservative Country (later National) Party held government the entire time, mostly with the same Premier (Bjelke-Peterson, 1968-1987). The aim of the study is to place today's policy and practice in an historical context: tracing when and why practices were introduced; exploring processes of change; and exposing possible relationships between the past and the present (Gale, 2001).

Method

Theoretically the study was informed by a critical perspective on policy, recognising the role of context and interpretation in policy analysis (Forester, 1993). An interpretive stance facilitates going beyond an account of events and when they happened, to consider how the documents organise attention to certain issues and prioritise them as policy problems, and the values and attitudes they signify (in this case, about the care and protection of children). The annual reports of the Queensland Department of Children's Services from 1965/66 to 1979/80 were the primary source of data. Annual reports are provided each year by heads of government departments to their Minister, who presents them to Parliament. They are intended to account for public expenditure on the portfolio and inform Parliament about major initiatives (Althaus, Bridgman, and Davis, 2013). The reports contained standardised content about the Department's activities and services, funding allocations, future directions, and statistics about the number of children and families who received different types of services.

While using official documents is a valid and often-used method of historical analysis, a limitation of this data source is that annual reports are a narrative of the department filtered by the Director. There are many ways to write history, such as drawing from government documents, an oral history of people involved at the time, or using documentary sources such as media reports or court records. In annual reports, difficulties may be named, but they generally portray the department in a positive light. To provide a fuller perspective, annual reports were supplemented with information from research and public inquiry reports (e.g., Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions, 1999). Quotations from Department of Children's Services Annual Reports are referenced using the acronym "CS-AR".

The analysis involved firstly generating a detailed timeline about child protection developments. Secondly, the following questions formed a framework for analysis and discussion:

- what child protection policy issues dominated?
- how were these issues addressed and what were they called?
- what was the social context and the conditions that allowed certain "problems" to be named?

- what was not stated and why were some topics more visible on the agenda than others?
- where are these issues now and how have they changed?

The 1965-1980 timeframe was chosen because it was when child protection services (as a subset of child welfare services) were established. New legislation – the *Children's Services Act 1965* - was passed, and fifteen years later in 1980, a review of that Act commenced. The child protection field was defined as encompassing legislation, policies, programs, and professional practices that aim to protect children at risk of abuse and neglect within the family. (At the same time there were major changes in related child welfare fields of youth justice and adoption. These have been explored elsewhere, for example, O'Connor, 1994; Quartly, Swain, & Cuthbert, 2013.)

Findings

The child protection policy issues that dominated annual reports were grouped as follows:

- Legislation, policies, and services aiming to prevent family breakdown and keep children living with their parents. This incorporated changes in out-of-home care placement options to optimise keeping children connected to family.
- Expansion of the professional knowledge base, which was linked to broadening understandings of child abuse and neglect and the increased employment of professionals, mainly social workers, to provide services to families.

Legislation

New legislation set a new direction. The *Children's Services Act 1965* (*CSA*) was the first major Act dealing with children since the beginning of the century. It directed "the policies and attitudes that are to be adopted towards children and families, particularly those who need care, protection, help and guidance" (CS-AR, 1966, p.1) and aimed to "remove the stigma and other handicaps that are attached to socially deprived children and their families" (CS-AR, 1966, p.1). Terms such as "State child" and "ward of the State" were replaced by the term "child in care", with

the purpose being "to remove any impression that these children were mendicant, or that they were different to other children" (CS-AR, 1967, p.1).

The *CSA* established the Department of Children's Services and introduced two orders to remove parental guardianship: care and control and care and protection. A child could be considered in need of care and protection (s.46) when having no parent to exercise proper care leading to neglect; exposed to moral danger; falling in with bad associates; or being likely to fall into a life of vice or crime or addiction to drugs. A child could be admitted to care and control (s.60) when falling into a life of vice or crime or addiction to drugs; exposed to moral danger; or being uncontrollable. The Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions (known as the Forde Inquiry) noted the overlap, finding essentially that care and protection was used for children with an "unfit guardian", whereas care and control related to the behaviour of the child, usually an adolescent (Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions, 1999, p.39). Both orders applied until 18 years, or until revoked by the Children's Court upon application of either the Department or parents. These two orders shaped practice for almost 30 years, until repealed by the *Youth Justice Act 1992* and the *Child Protection Act 1999*.

Until 1965, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families were subject to child welfare laws plus specific laws that, among other powers, enabled the separation of Indigenous children from their parents and removal to institutional care (such as dormitories on reserves and missions) or domestic labour (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997). In 1965 the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Act* replaced the 1939 *Aboriginals Preservation and Protection Act*. The Director of Aboriginal and Island Affairs, replacing the Director of Native Affairs (as then named), was no longer automatically the legal guardian of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Preventative turn – services to keep families together

At the time the new Act came into force, the bulk of the Department's work was conducted by administrative officers who processed relief payments to needy families. Payments enabled

families or deserted wives or husbands to keep their children, rather than send them to orphanages. "This is aimed at avoiding children coming into the care of the Department through neglect, abandonment or delinquency arising from family breakdown caused by financial stress" (CS-AR, 1968, p.2). Payments supported the Act's principle that it was best for children to be raised in their own family (CS-AR, 1968, p.2), as well as avoiding the cost impost on government and churches caused by family disruption (e.g., CS-AR, 1967). Increases to Commonwealth social security benefits had a profound impact on operations. "Increased benefits have been instrumental in reducing the incidence of children coming into care by reason of the mother being unable to care for them" (CS-AR, 1969 p.2). Nevertheless, extending the Supporting Mothers Benefit to unmarried mothers in 1973 led the Director to comment: "Whether these changes [improved financial aid] are in the interests of children, only the future will tell" (CS-AR, 1973, p.1).

Children for whom only monetary aid was granted ceased to be considered children in care and consequently, guardianship remained with parents: "It is most satisfying that a mother does not have to sign away guardianship of her children in order to receive financial help" (CS-AR, 1967, p.2). This reflected a principle in the Act, that every effort be made by the Department to prevent the separation of children from their families. Alongside this family support approach, the balance shifted from administrative to professional. By the late 1960s, "hopes were high for a revitalised, modern Department that would introduce the high level of professional services for government care of neglected children that had been lacking in the previous century" (Commission of Inquiry into Abuse of Children in Queensland Institutions, 1999, p.39).

Every annual report during the period stated that it was best for a child to be raised in their own family: "Children need the love and care of a family and the feeling of belonging to a family" (CS-AR, 1968, p.3). Families were encouraged to seek help earlier in instances of desertion, divorce, and parental failure: "Social agencies are endeavouring to prevent family breakdown, but it is unfortunate the people concerned do not seek help before it is too late. This is understandable, because most people resent intrusion into their domestic affairs, and their right to privacy must be

respected" (CS-AR, 1967, p.1). By the 1970s, prevention was the main approach to combatting child abuse and neglect. "Staff are working more towards being able to identify danger signals and high-risk families prior to the onset of abuse and neglect, as well as providing supportive follow-up services after crises" (CS-AR, 1974, p.16). Workload pressures received frequent comment: "The demands being made on Child Welfare Officers have given them extremely heavy caseloads and it has not been possible to devote the time to individual cases which these Officers would like to have given" (CS-AR, 1970, p.1).

In 1977, the Director stated there was a comprehensive and coordinated program of child and family welfare services to ensure children's wellbeing and protection (CS-AR, 1977). The work of field staff included "family counselling and casework with individual family members" (CS-AR, 1977, p.3). This was expected in most cases to "halt continuing deterioration of family situations and prevent the necessity for the Department to invoke its statutory powers" (CS-AR, 1977, p.3). The 1978 report reiterated the Department's aim to keep families together despite having no statutory responsibility in the area of prevention, justifying the need for remedial services because of the social and economic costs of family breakdown and institutionalisation of children (CS-AR, 1978, p.3). Preventative services received increased funding when the Queensland government accepted Commonwealth funds under the Family Support Services Programme (CS-AR, 1978, p.28).

It was evidently not straight-forward to change expectations of other government agencies when the direction shifted from removal to prevention. Under s.49 of the *CSA*, both departmental officers and police officers could apply to the Children's Court for care orders. In 1976, the legal status of departmental officers to investigate complaints of abuse and neglect was questioned (CS-AR, 1976, p.21), highlighting tensions between the responsibilities of police (investigating criminal matters) and the Department (investigating child abuse and neglect). To clarify the department's role an inter-agency coordination committee was formed. The establishment of Suspected Child Abuse and Neglect (SCAN) teams across the state in 1980 sought to embed inter-agency cooperation and liaison across health, police, and Children's Services (CS-AR, 1980, p.13). Doctors were mandated

to report suspected abuse or neglect. The SCAN system required police to consult with the Department on child protection matters; unilateral action could no longer be taken. This was a major change, as the Department sought to prevent unnecessary applications for care by assisting families. This was reflected in statistical data. In 1967, when the number of children subject to care and protection orders was first reported, there were 2510 children in care. The number increased each year until 1979, when there were 5008 children in care, with a marked decrease to 2982 children in 1980.

A feature of practice during this time was voluntary admissions to care and protection, which were made with consent, or by request of, parents. Voluntary admissions had the advantage of avoiding adversarial court proceedings, but still involved removal of parental guardianship to 18 years at a time when legal aid and legal representation for parents was not available, so children entered care with cursory judicial oversight. Annual reports provide data about voluntary admissions disaggregated by the reason for admission (e.g., ex-nuptial, mother unable to care for, father or mother deserted). There were 573 voluntary admissions in 1972 increasing to 599 in 1974 and then decreasing each year after 1975. In 1980, only 225 voluntary admissions were reported. Reasons given for the decreases in both voluntary and court admissions to care and protection included the availability of financial support and "increased counselling and guidance which Child Care Officers have been able to give to parents, because of the increase in the number of these officers now in the employ of the Department" (CS-AR, 1974, p.1). When entry to care was necessary, the practice was to emphasise "temporary foster placement and family counselling with a view to reuniting parents and children" (CS-AR, 1976, p.5).

Out-of-home care

Problems about the mistreatment of children in institutional care were known about since the turn of the century, leading to the use of foster care or "boarding out" in preference to large institutions (Tomison, 2001). This trend picked up pace after 1965 as the Department sought to increase foster care placements to provide different options depending upon the child's needs. The

preference was to place infants in foster care (CS-AR, 1966) and reserve institutions for children who were "mentally disturbed" or could not tolerate a family situation (CS-AR, 1971). The Department sought to place siblings together (e.g., CS-AR, 1976) and find local placements to facilitate children's community connections and proximity for contact with their natural family (e.g., CS-AR, 1978). However, as early as 1968, a shortage of suitable placements was noted and many reports referred to the challenge of recruiting carers who were prepared to accept the foster child's return to their natural family (e.g., CS-AR, 1972; 1975) or be part of a team with the Department and natural parents to aid family reunification (e.g., CS-AR, 1968; 1974; 1979).

In residential care, from 1966, visiting departmental workers aimed to build friendly relationships with children in homes so that children referred to them by name and not as the "State Lady" (CS-AR, 1966, p.4). Institutions encouraged children's engagement in the local community (e.g., attending kindy, school, sport, church, excursions) (CS-AR, 1966, 1968). Welfare Officers visited institutions "to help and advise those in charge on the manifold problems which continually arise" (CS-AR, 1968, p.4) and sought to find foster parents for children, some with "handicaps" (CS-AR, 1966). Fewer admissions to institutions were asserted as consistent with modern child care practice (CS-AR, 1974, p.7), but many children still lived in large institutions into the 1970s, when there was a move to cottage homes staffed by married house parents (Department of Children's Services, 1979, p.11). Annual reports noted the good relationships with denominational providers and consistently stated how well looked after the children were (e.g., CS-AR, 1975, 1977), a claim that was contradicted in later inquiries (e.g., 1999 Forde Inquiry).

Expansion of professional knowledge base

Concomitant with the new Act, there was a desire to increase the professional workforce of the Department. Social work (then called social studies) training had started at the University of Queensland in 1956 and the main strategy to professionalise the workforce was cooperation with the university to provide students with practical training in child welfare (CS-AR, 1966). Student research projects accessed case and other materials (CS-AR, 1974). Reports asserted the value of

research “in developing preventive services as well as overall planning” (CS-AR, 1966, p.1) and to ascertain the effectiveness of new approaches (CS-AR, 1976).

Because there were insufficient social work graduates (“males in particular”) for the Department and other welfare agencies, cadetships in social studies were introduced (CS-AR, 1970; 1974). It was noted that “with the increasing degree of specialization, the field of child welfare has become a professional one” (CS-AR 1971, p.13). The Child Welfare Officer (CWO) title was changed to Child Care Officer (CCO) in 1971, with the first induction program run in 1972 (CS-AR, 1972). Gradually, new specialist positions were instigated: two dedicated CCOs working with hospital social work departments to investigate suspected “battered child” cases (CS-AR, 1971, p.12); a research officer (CS-AR, 1972); residential care, intake, child abuse, and court services CCOs; and a Principal CCO (CS-AR, 1972). By 1974, most CCOs were social workers (CS-AR, 1974). The professional knowledge base was bolstered through staff attending conferences, for example, the first Australian conference on the battered child in 1976 (CS-AR, 1976).

There were two Directors of the Department between 1965 and 1980: Charles Clark (1960 to 1974) and Robert Plummer (1975 to 1981). Plummer was a psychologist who had previously worked in child guidance and worked on drafting the *CSA.* He was committed to professionalisation and ushered in a new atmosphere. From his commencement, he advocated for evidence-informed practice: “There is a fairly substantive body of knowledge in relation to the causative factors of child abuse and neglect… the Department wants to develop a treatment approach that is based on sound criteria and theory” (CS-AR, 1975, p.24).

Understanding of child abuse and neglect

Over the period, understandings about child abuse and neglect changed. There were community expectations that government should act: “The work of the Christian Church over the centuries in the field of child welfare is traditional, and it is only of comparatively recent times, because of social pressures, that the State has entered so largely into this sphere of activity” (CS-AR, 1968, p.4). Church residentials were concerned about children’s moral development; the new Act

turned attention to their families. The first ever procedures manual for departmental and denominational home staff was produced in 1974 (CS-AR, 1974, p.18). The contents covered general family welfare work, payment of financial assistance, foster care payments, seeking maintenance payments from parents whose children were in care, and adoptions (Department of Children's Services, 1976). There were only two pages about child abuse and neglect, setting out the role of the newly established specialist Child Protection Unit "formed to deal with all aspects of child abuse" (CS-AR, 1976, p.21). The unit comprised of CCOs who were attached to local areas. The updated 1976 *Child Care Officers' Manual* (section 7.1) defined child abuse and neglect as: "a child suffering a physical injury or at risk of suffering a physical injury; the injury is non-accidental e.g., fractures, bruising, burns, cuts, retinol haemorrhage; or failure to thrive". There were no guidelines for home visits, what to assess, or how to assess.

In 1978 it was reported that "the problem of sexual abuse of children is becoming more apparent. This is not necessarily suggesting that the phenomenon is on the increase, merely that it is no longer so taboo as to discourage discussion or the seeking of assistance" (CS-AR, 1978, p.6). Previously sexual abuse was known about, but any action taken was with criminal sanctions rather than social work intervention. In 1968, for example, it was recorded that 15 parents or guardians were prosecuted for sex offences (CS-AR, 1968, p.11). In 1979, the definition of child abuse expanded to explicitly name sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, and emotional abuse (CS-AR 1979, p.5). Enhancing responses to child sexual abuse and emotional abuse was noted as an area for future service improvement (CS-AR, 1979, p.6). By 1980, the Child Protection Unit's remit had widened from mainly physical abuse to more involvement with sexually and emotionally abused children and to "the provision of a direct casework service to children and families" (CS-AR, 1980, p.12).

The first mention of the "battered child syndrome" was in 1968 when the Department reported it had informed the university Faculty of Medicine about child protection work and the intersection with the role of doctors (CS-AR, 1968, p.12). In 1970, the Department was working with hospitals on suspected cases of battering: "… mindful of its responsibilities under the Act to protect

children, particularly with respect to the battered child (CS-AR, 1970, p.10). Formal liaison with children's hospitals about cruelty and ill treatment commenced in 1970. Departmental staff worked with Brisbane hospital social workers to investigate suspected child battering or serious neglect (CS-AR, 1972, p.12). Distinctions between physical abuse and neglect (seen to be caused or exacerbated by poverty or ignorance about children's needs) influenced the Department's approach (CS-AR, 1974, p.16). It was reported the Department has to help parents who "abuse their children because of feelings of loneliness, inadequacy, or general frustration. Child rearing practices that the parents themselves were subjected to do play an important part in deciding whether they abuse their own children" (CS-AR, 1975, p.24). The annual reports repeatedly mentioned difficulty obtaining enough evidence to present to court. For example, "All complaints are investigated and, although there is a high proportion in which there is no substance, there are many others where varying degrees of suspicion exist but which cannot be proven" (CS-AR, 1971, p.12). Concern was expressed that the visible evidence of child abuse was only a small part of the picture for a child, with probable under-reporting of ill-treatment "through people not wishing to become involved" (CS-AR, 1971, p.12). Allegations found not to have foundation were attributed to "differences in values towards child rearing, neighbourhood or personal disputes, and/or acute reactions by well-meaning people to publicity on abuse and neglect" (CS-AR, 1974, p.16).

The changes brought in by the new Act were controversial. Reports noted problematic media reporting of the Department's work and difficulties in relationships with other government agencies. "The field of child and family welfare has altered dramatically in recent years as part of an on-going evolutionary process…various agencies misunderstanding the Department's purposes and goals…attempt was made to convey to members of the public, organisations and agencies which came into contact with the Department, understanding and empathy for their particular problems" (CS-AR, 1978, p.1). It seems that while the media and other agencies (presumably police and health) wanted the department to take particular action, the department wanted to project its role in helping families. There was concern about "ill-informed criticism" directed at the Department and the

consequent toll on staff morale (CS-AR, 1979, p.1). The Director argued for family-focused practice: "Serious abuse cases are not simply a matter of helping the child but of helping the parents as well" (AS-AR, 1975, p.24). He was concerned that the Department has "a closed or even sinister image" in the community as a "child snaring agency" whereas the aim was to change the image to "family caring" (CS-AR, 1977, p.2). This was to be achieved by making services locally available through decentralisation and building a "sympathetic, compassionate service… flexible and attuned to needs of its clients" (CS-AR, 1977, p.2).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

While the *CSA* applied to all children, the Department of Aboriginal and Island Affairs (DAIA) retained oversight of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy and there were few mentions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the annual reports. There were statements about the need for cooperation to address the needs of Aboriginal children in the care of DAIA who were being raised in dormitories on communities (e.g., CS-AR, 1966, 1967, and 1968, p.13). "Many coloured children are 'children in care' or assisted children and the close relationship with the Director of Aboriginal and Island Affairs and his officers is helpful and in the interests of these coloured children and their families" (CS-AR, 1967, p.15). Dormitories became licensed residentials under the *CSA* but children's services staff required DAIA permission to enter reserves and missions, so in practice, their role was constrained.

Discussion

The 1960s and 1970s in Queensland, as in other jurisdictions, was a period when the field of child protection was demarked from the broader child welfare field. There was recognition that child abuse and neglect within the family was a problem that required government intervention. Child protection was reoriented from a moral issue dealt with by the church to a social issue to be dealt with by the state, although moral concerns about "family breakdown" persisted. State regulation of the family expanded beyond policing to social agencies. The helping professions grew as interventions extended beyond punishment to rehabilitation (Carter, 1983). Consideration of the

social and emotional needs of children and families altered power relations between police and departmental officers. Social workers started to take over from police in care and protection applications to children's courts (Carter, 1983). Professionalisation and the new direction of supporting families meant that punitive provisions, such as charging parents with cruelty and collecting maintenance from them to contribute to the costs of their children in care, lapsed into disuse. Such practices interfered with the helping relationship the Department was seeking to establish with parents. But it also provided Child Care Officers with wide discretion to intervene in family life in the name of "care and protection" or "care and control" to remedy the perceived failings of parents or children (O'Connor, 1993).

Child protection is a multidisciplinary field, but social work has always been a pivotal profession. Social work has a dual focus on the individual and social causes of problems - the "inner and outer worlds" of clients - and by the 1970s social workers had been established as helpers for people in difficult circumstances due to poverty and disadvantage, rather than as therapists (Thoburn, 2020). The child welfare field evolved alongside the social work profession with its social casework approach and social work was influential in building its knowledge base: Timms' 1962 *Casework in the Child Care Service* and Rowe and Lambert's 1974 *Children Who Wait* were both influential texts in shaping practice (cited in Thoburn, 2020). Social work aimed to shift child protection away from moral judgements towards professional assessments of child and family needs. However, the family support ethos of the 1965 legislation remains on the margins of child protection. Ideas of prevention and early intervention continue to be promulgated in "public health" approaches (Jenkins, 2021), but there are still insufficient services to meet family needs. Most expenditure is allocated to investigation and out-of-home care, family support is largely outsourced to community agencies, and child maltreatment is portrayed in public and professional discourse as being about problematic and irresponsible parents, with less attention to social inequality (Tilbury, 2016). Media criticism about the efforts of statutory child protection agencies to keep families together instead of removing children persists (e.g., *Courier Mail* Editorial 3 Feb 2021).

The limitations of "child saving" via removing children from home were recognised, as research revealed the feelings of insecurity and abandonment many children in care experienced (Tomison, 2001). Foster care placements are still preferred over residential care, but there have always been concerns about its quality and availability. Shortages of foster homes to meet the needs of some cohorts of children (children with disabilities, older children, and sibling groups) were noted even in the 1960s. The foster care model, being based on single-income families with father at work and mother at home, has been outmoded since it started, as women's workforce participation increased in the 1970s. Despite knowledge that it was better for children if out-of-home care was short-term and contact with families was maintained to facilitate family reunification, the time children spend in out-of-home care has lengthened since the 1990s (Tilbury, 2016).

Cruelty and ill-treatment towards children in residential care had been revealed in multiple inquiries dating back to the 1850s (Daly, 2014) continuing to the 1999 Forde Inquiry and the 2013 Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. In the 1960s there was a shift from large total institutions managing all aspects of daily life towards smaller, more family-like homes supporting children's participation in school and community activities. Nevertheless, the quality of residential care remains problematic today, characterised by under-resourcing of therapeutic models, under-qualified staff, and a lack of effective regulation, overlaid by children's feelings of being unsafe, vulnerable, and powerless (Ainsworth and Hansen, 2015; Moore, McArthur, Death, Tilbury, and Roche, 2018). The concept of child rights and ideas about children's autonomy were evident in ideas that children needed family and community connections and they should be encouraged to talk about their feelings, but research shows that challenges in participatory child protection practice remain (Woodman, Roche, McArthur, & Moore, 2018).

Child sexual abuse came to the Department's attention in the 1970s, but it received relatively few mentions. Sexual abuse in the family was certainly known about, because it had been a criminal offence since the 1800s. Featherstone and Kaladefos (2014) found that by the 1950s conviction rates in Australia for "carnal knowledge" and "indecent assaults" of children by paternal fathers and

stepfathers were high, but the legal system persistently minimised the harm caused to children, with themes of victim blaming and the wickedness of children in sentencing decisions. Many "delinquent" or "runaway" girls, including those subject to care and control in Queensland in the 1970s, are likely to have been victims of sexual abuse in the home, but they were labelled as "acting out" and often held in custody for "treatment" (Besemeres, 1966; Featherstone, 2018). Even by the 1980s when there was ever-increasing knowledge about sexual abuse, doctors frequently did not report, and mothers who became aware of it were ashamed or fearful and did not understand the terrible impact on children (Featherstone, 2018). There was race and class bias about the morals of certain families, there was a failure to believe children, or it was suggested they were not really children and not innocent (Smart, 2000).

While there was concern expressed in annual reports about the number of Indigenous children in care, the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children was not explicitly named. Over-representation became a policy issue in the 1970s when Aboriginal child care agencies funded by the Commonwealth sought to prevent children entering care and losing ties with family and culture (Tilbury, 1998). Contrary to the assertion and recognition of the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people evident in Australia at the time, Queensland's conservative government resisted change. The DAIA, which was paternalistic and strongly opposed Indigenous rights, maintained control of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy and directions did not change until Labor won government in 1989. In the 1970s and up until 1985, the State government insisted "that collection and dissemination of data on the extent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons in care and in detention not occur" (O'Connor, 1993, p.18). The disparity between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous children has increased markedly since then, when they represented around 20% of children in care: in 2020 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children represented 43% of all children in out-of-home care in Queensland, while only 8% of the child population (AIHW, 2020). This deleterious trend shows the failings of the forensic approach and

government's inability to work in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to provide the types of services that families need.

There are many similarities between the topical child protection issues of the 1960s and 1970s and contemporary issues – the expanding definition of child abuse and neglect, staffing and workloads, the quality of care for children, lack of placement options, and the inadequacy of family support services are all current policy problems. But the period can also be seen as a transition between a family welfare approach and a narrower risk-driven approach, with new developments in the 1980s accelerating changes. Mandatory reporting laws requiring professionals to report child abuse and neglect commenced, based on the rationale that child abuse was too often unreported. Yet after barely a decade, child protection services were overwhelmed by reports, with the result that more families come to the attention of authorities, but few reach the threshold to get help (Tomison, 2001). This "forensic turn" from the late 1980s concentrated child protection on risk assessment to ration services, responding to only the most serious cases, creating an adversarial stance with parents and a blame culture (Parton, 2017). As successive public inquiries have found, many child protection systems have never recovered from the burden of the forensic turn and remain unable to cope with large numbers of reports and investigations and declining capacity to effectively assist families in trouble (Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry, 2013). Permanency planning was also introduced in the 1980s, prompted by research about children drifting in care. This version of permanency planning emphasised family reunification and active case planning. It is markedly different to notions of permanency planning since the 2000s, which emphasise removal and involve timeframes for working with families and transfer of guardianship from the state to an adoptive parent or foster or kinship carer (Queensland Child Protection Commission of Inquiry, 2013).

Many of the strains evident in Queensland child protection during the 60s and 70s remain in play today and are not unique. Commenting on the USA, McGowan and Meezan (1983) identified "child saving versus preventative family support" and the "micro family focus versus macro community and poverty focus" as two of the perennial tensions that can be traced consistently

through the history of child welfare policy. They are evident in the "Supporting Families Changing Futures" current reform program in Queensland. Its stated priorities are familiar: support families earlier; reduce the number of children and young people in the child protection system; work better with families whose children are in care; enhance foster and kinship care; improve post-care support; and reduce over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs, 2019).

Conclusion

Child protection is a contested social policy field, in which controversies are never fully resolved, because they reflect differing underlying values. Accordingly, child protection has not advanced progressively over time but continues to revisit old problems, albeit in different ways. Society has slowly come to recognize that the abuse of children inflicts lasting trauma, even as it seems to accept the diminished lives of many children. Media stories about anomalous and heinous bad parents fail to acknowledge either the common-place occurrence of family violence, conflict and abuse, or the consequences for children of entrenched poverty and disadvantage. Why does it matter to have this history? It is to avoid loss of collective memory, to provide new insights, to increase understanding about the longstanding nature of problems faced by child protection services, and to inform possible solutions.

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