

Editorial

Protection of children from physical and emotional abuse whether as a result of actions of individuals or institutions or by default through government policies is now promoted as a major concern of Australian States. What is not clear is just how this concern is expressed through policies and programs. Because child welfare is seen primarily as a State concern it is recognised that there will be different approaches to protecting children and dealing with interventions when child abuse is suspected.

Peter Boss has chosen a management model as a framework for analyzing "essential legislative and administrative features of each States system" with respect to child protection. His study provides important information which previously has not been available, with respect to the similarities and differences of the States' approaches to management of the problem.

The protection of children from abuse calls upon recognition not only of the causes of the problem but acknowledgement of what are the appropriate systems and technology which will provide adequate protection to children and support for their families. It is disturbing that despite the professed Government and community concern for vulnerable children there is relatively little money available for research into effective programs for protecting children. Such a situation gives credence to Kadushin's statement that community concern for children is a myth. The truth is that society wants to protect the status quo and does so by protection of children not for the child's sake as much as for society's sake.

Reports of child abuse when published rightly cause an outcry throughout the community. The focus of the response has usually revolved around concern for the child and anger towards the abuser. Increasingly the anger is also being directed

towards any professional workers involved with the situation with respect to the apparent lack of protection provided the abused child. However there is rarely an analysis of the system in which all concerned operate at some level. Given the complexity of the issue it is difficult to determine if any failure to protect a child in a particular situation has been influenced by problems in the management system or is related to the actual practice carried out or other factors. The value of this study is that by providing an analysis of the management approach to child protection in each State and comparing the approaches it provides a more solid starting point for an evaluation of child protection programs.

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