

# **Towards a National Child Protection Research Agenda**

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# Donald Schon, 1983

- “In the varied topography of professional practice, there is a high, hard ground, where practitioners can make effective use of research-based theory and techniques, and there is a swampy lowland where the situations are confusing ‘messes’ incapable of technical solution. The difficulty is that the problems of the high ground, however, great their technical interest, are often relatively unimportant to clients or the larger society while in the swamp are the problems of greatest human concern.”

# **Child Protection – a system in crisis**

- **Why is this so?**
- **What might reform look like?**
- **What might research have to offer?**

# Two historical forces

 The notion of the child as a holder of human rights

 The notion of the child as a psychological being

# National Trends (AIHW)

1. In 1992/93, 55,895 notifications and 25,630 substantiated (46%)
2. In 2003/03, 198,355 notifications and 40,416 substantiated (20%)

# Types of Cases (Victoria)

7,287 substantiated cases in 2002/03:

25% physical abuse

8% sexual abuse

44% emotional abuse

24% neglect

# Profile of Families (Vic)

75% of families investigated on low incomes, 45% sole parents

70% of substantiated cases parents had one or more of: psychiatric disability, alcohol/substance dependence, intellectual disability, domestic violence

# Children in State Care

There has been a 45% increase in the number of children in out of home care in Australia over the past 5 years:




13,979 on June 30, 1997

20,297 on June 30, 2003





# Placement Instability

65% of children in out of home care in Victoria on June 30, 2001 had experienced four or more previous placements



# A Public Health Model

-  Population based indicators of child abuse and neglect
-  Prevention strategies based on common risk and protective factors
-  Primary, secondary and tertiary prevention role of universal health and education services




# Key research priorities

-  Placement avoidance
-  Reduction of multiple placements
-  Effectiveness of reunification
-  Permanent substitute care outcomes

# Two meta-issues

-  Under what conditions is the translation of child protection research into policy and practice best facilitated?
-  Under what conditions is child protection policy transfer and diffusion of innovation best facilitated?

# Research Translation




-  Conceptual literature review
-  Retrospective study of child protection research to assess factors associated with impact
-  Prospective study of child protection research to test propositions derived from retrospective study

# Diffusion of Innovation




“Innovate-Evaluate-Disseminate and Replicate” process, in which Evaluation assesses:

- effectiveness
- efficiency
- transferability
- sustainability

# Diffusion of Innovation

-  Conceptual literature review
-  Retrospective study of models introduced 10-15 years ago to generate propositions
-  Prospective study of new models to test propositions derived from retrospective study

# National Child Protection Research Agenda

-  Makes best use of limited resources
-  Provides larger samples and greater generalisability
-  Reduces political risk of research for any one jurisdiction