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Recent Research Abstracts

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CHILD PROTECTION

Ainsworth, F & Hansen, P. (2006). Five tumultuous years in Australian child protection: little progress. *Child & Family Social Work*, 11 (1), 33-41.

In an article published in 2002, one of the authors of this paper offered an analysis of the Australian child protection data from 1999 to 2000 and raised questions about the effectiveness of mandatory reporting. Recently, child protection data for 2003-2004 has been released. This provides an opportunity to re-examine some child protection issues and the effectiveness of mandatory reporting five years on. Each state and territory has held major inquiries into this area of practice and, as a result, significant organizational changes have taken place and new resources are being made available. Nevertheless, questions about the effectiveness of child protection services remain. There is continuing doubt about the value of comprehensive reporting systems.

Dumbrill, G. (2006). Parental experience of child protection intervention: a qualitative study. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 30 (1), 27-37.

This study sought to explore how parents experience and negotiate child protection intervention. In-depth qualitative interviews were used to explore the experiences of 18 parents who had received child protection services. How parents perceive workers using power was shown to influence parents' views of intervention and their reactions to it. Two perceptions of power emerged: power being used over them as a form of control or power with them as a form of support. Three ways of responding to intervention emerged: parents fought workers by openly opposing them, "played the game" by feigning co-operation, or worked with them in collaborative relationships. Parents experiencing power being used over them tended to fight or play the game while parents experiencing power being used with them tended to work with intervention. No evidence was found linking case type (non-voluntary or voluntary cases) to whether parents perceived power being used by workers over them or with them.

Sheehan, R. (2006). Emotional harm and neglect: the legal response. *Child Abuse Review*, 15 (1), 38-54.

This study examined records of 208 court-ordered pre-trial conferences at the Melbourne Children's Court heard between February and July 2002 to determine the extent to which they were based on emotional/psychological abuse and neglect and what factors were produced as evidence. Although cases involving emotional abuse have increased in terms of child protection applications, they remain cases that are difficult to decide. While in 1998-99 emotional harm was a ground in 25.7% of child protection matters completed in the Family Division of the Children's Court of Victoria, legal decision-makers are reluctant to make a finding of child abuse in these cases because determinations of child abuse are less accurate and there are fewer legal principles available for guidance.