

What has changed in decades of investment in child protection?  
– Have we made a difference?

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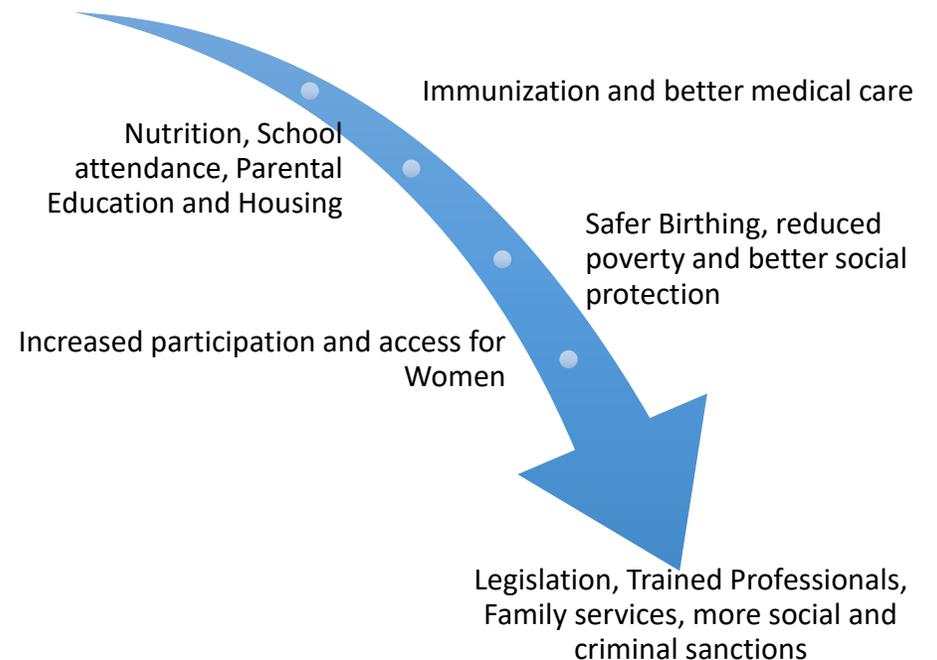


# The Bigger Picture in Long-Term Trends is Positive

- Mortality rate for children under 5 per 1000 live births 1960-2015

- Australia 1960 = 25 – 2015 = 4
- New Zealand 1960 = 28 – 2015 = 6
- United Kingdom 1960 = 27 – 2015 = 4
- Canada 1960 = 33 – 2015 = 5
- Malaysia 1960 = 93 – 2015 = 7
- South Korea 1960 = 113 – 2015 = 3
- Bangladesh 1960 = 264 – 2015 = 38
- Nepal 1960 = 327 – 2015 = 36
- Congo Republic 1960 = 184 – 2015 = 45

## Some of the Drivers of Change



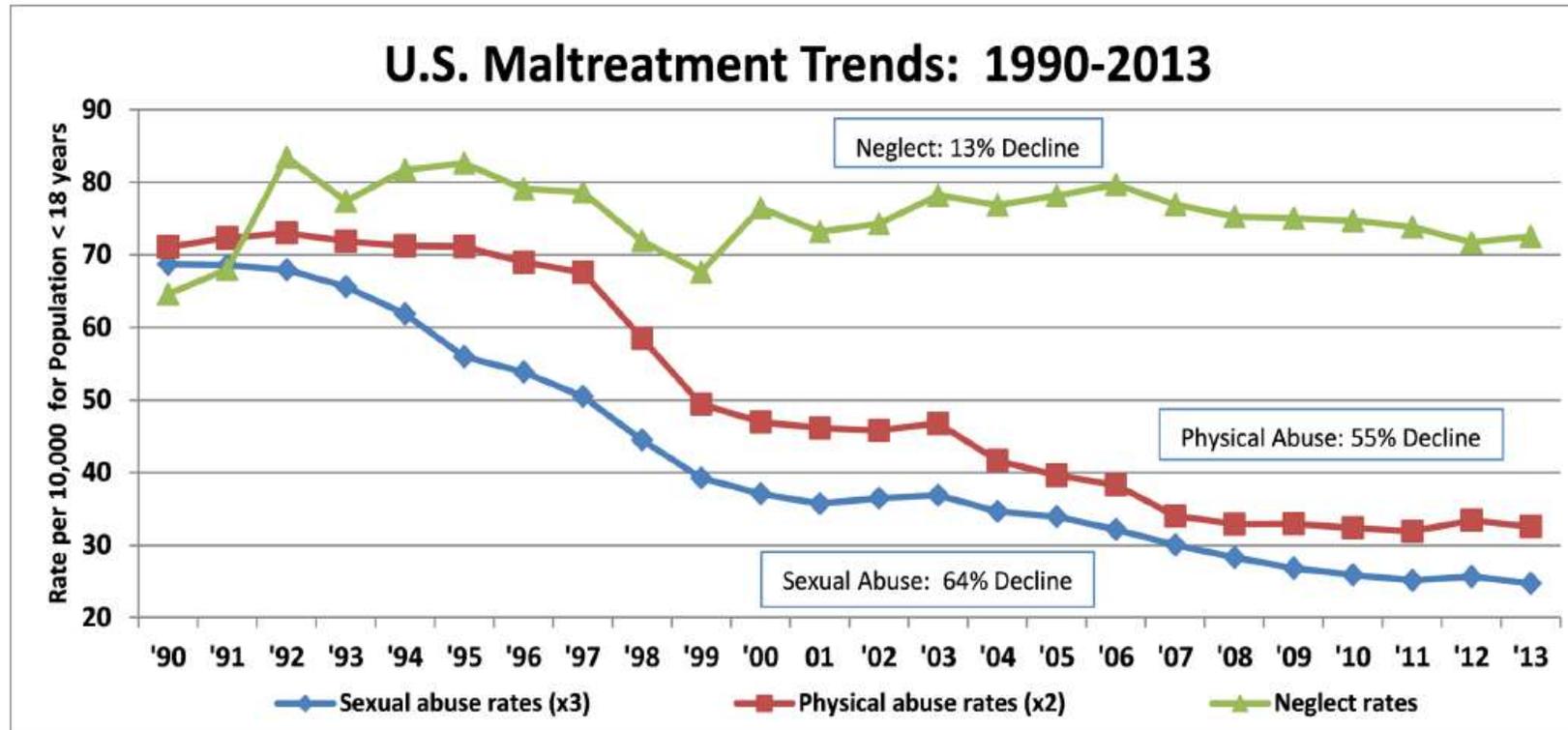
# The state of knowledge: Important Questions

- Over the last fifty or so years most high income countries such as United States, Australia, and European countries, have invested heavily in building child protection systems.
- This has prompted important yet highly complex questions as to whether this significant public investment resulted in a reduction in child maltreatment. Moreover what parts of the system can be attributed to any improvements?
- This has implications for countries such as Australia, but globally it influences low and middle income countries direction towards establishing and building child protection systems.

# Rates of child abuse, Reducing? – Mixed Results...

- Some challenges in understanding and differentiating reporting rates from prevalence rates
- In a study on six high income countries or states (United States, Sweden, Western Australia, Manitoba (Canada), England, & New Zealand) using data from child protection services, no consistent evidence was found of a increase or decrease in child maltreatment since 1970s when investments in child protection systems started. (Gilbert, et al, 2011).
- Rates of serious child physical injury or death for under 11 year olds did not vary substantially according to the number of contacts with protection services, however, increases in cases of young children being reported for maltreatment were attributed to more early intervention programs.
- Sweden had lower rates of poverty due to its social protection and universal parenting support measures which may have contributed to the lower indices of maltreatment compared to the United States (Gilbert, et al, 2011).

# Rates of child abuse, Reducing?: On the other hand

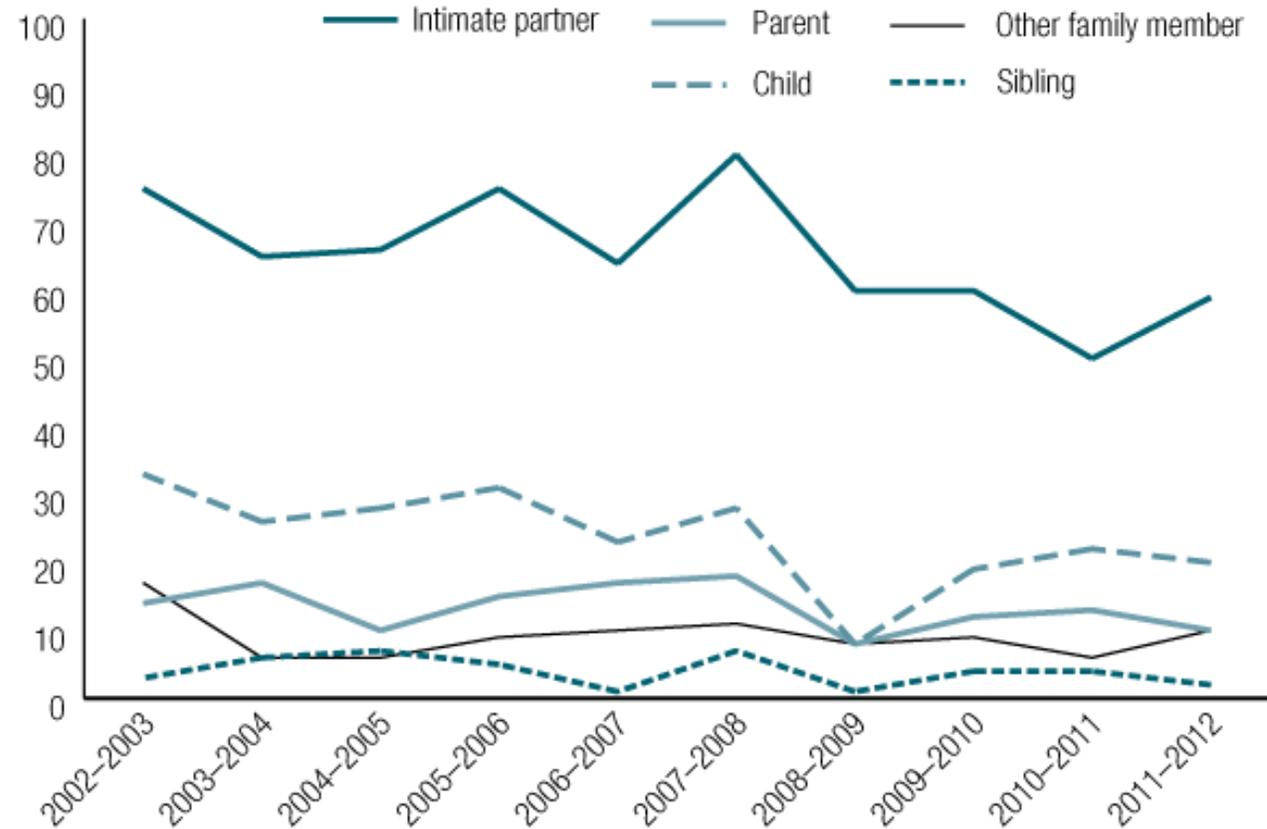


Note: Trend estimates represent total change from 1992 to 2011. Annual rates for physical abuse and sexual abuse have been multiplied by 2

# Rates of child abuse, Reducing?: On the other hand

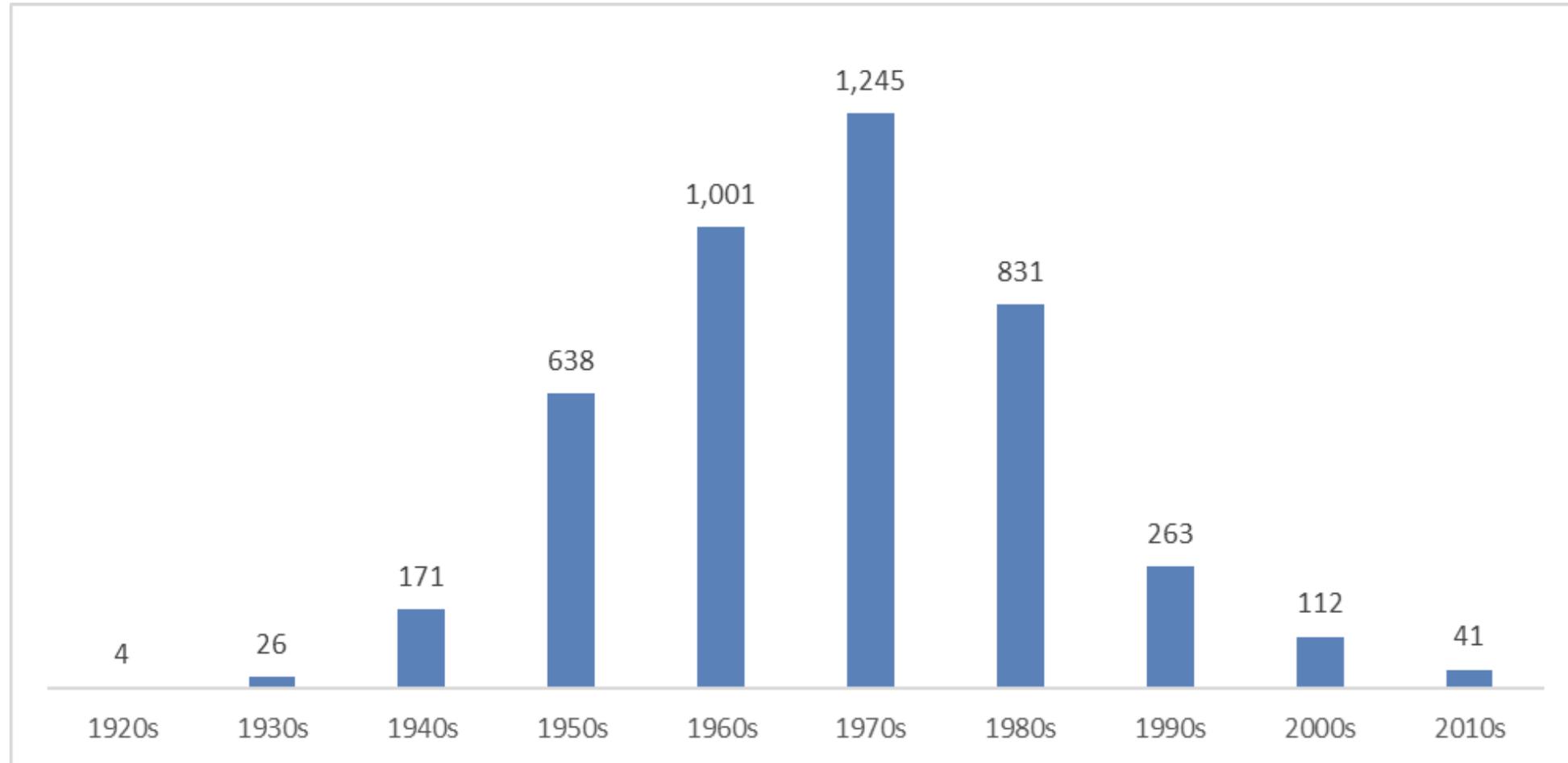
- A commentary paper of rates of child protection reports of different types of child maltreatment (Physical Abuse, Sexual Abuse and Neglect) in the United States between 1990 to 2013 showed large reductions in sexual abuse (64%) and physical abuse (55%), while results were less clear for neglect with a smaller reduction (13%) (Jud, Fegert & Finkelhor, 2016; Giardino, 2016).
- This review paper followed up on previous research by Finkelhor, Saito and Jones (2016 ) indicating lower rates of substantiated physical and sexual abuse since 1990, but more stagnate rates of substantiated neglect.
- Numerous reasons are provided for these results, not least of all is the corresponding reduction in violent crimes over the same period (Jones & Finkelhor, 2001). Giardino (2016) suggests results need to be interpreted with caution the trends indicate sizable decreases in sexual and physical abuse, but further work is needed especially in regard to addressing cases of neglect.
- The reduction in sexual and physical abuse but a less consistent decline in neglect in the United States is also highlighted by Finkelhor, Saito and Jones (2016). The seemingly lower level of long term success in reducing cases of neglect is one issue of further inquiry and may be indicative of wider socio-economic trends. Of course substantiated rates of abuse are different from prevalence rates, but are likely to be somewhat indicative of general community trends.
- Long term trends in criminology data suggests that reductions in serious forms of child maltreatment have corresponded with high income countries development of more sophisticated and holistic child protection systems.
  - Evidence from prevalence studies in United States and Australia show mostly that over the last forty years there has been increases in reporting of issues such as child sexual abuse but overall reductions in prevalence (Finkelhor, Saito & Jones, 2016). Indeed child death rates from abuse and violence have shown a general reduction in over the last thirty years (Finkelhor Saito & Jones, 2016; Australian Criminology Institute 2013).
  - However, the contradictory findings from the studies mentioned above show that it is also hard to differentiate between factors that contributed to the reduction of violence prevalence rates (including the systems development) to those that can directly be attributed to stronger components of child protection systems.
  - Proportional analysis of % of children killed in family homicides has mixed results

# Victims of domestic/family homicide, 2002–03 to 2011–12 (Australia)



- 2001–02, the overall homicide rate was 1.8 per 100,000 population. Since then, the homicide rate has declined (1.1 per 100,000 in 2011–12)

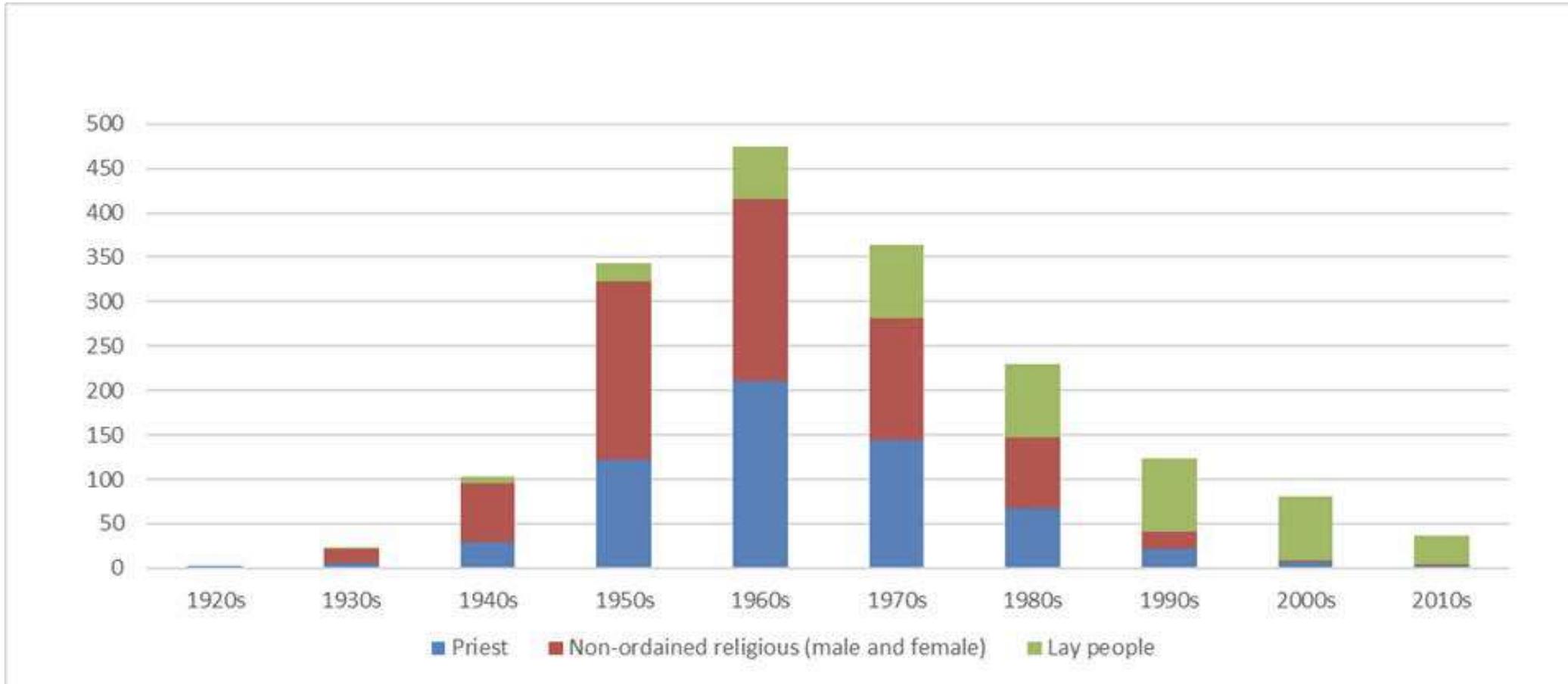
*Sexual Abuse Reports within the Australian Catholic Church may give some indication of how prevention has had an impact....* - Claims of child sexual abuse by decade of first alleged incident (where known)



- Eighty-six per cent of claims involved alleged child sexual abuse starting in the period from 1950 to 1989 inclusive.
- The largest proportion of first-alleged incidents of child sexual abuse fell in the 1970s

# Perpetrators of Child Sexual Abuse in The Australian Catholic Church

*(Number of alleged perpetrators by decade of alleged first incident of child sexual abuse for each religious status group)*



- The highest number of alleged perpetrators appear in the 1960s

# What can the Child and Family Services Sector and Child Abuse Neglect Movement Claim?

- Recently Finkelhor (2016) suggests we can make claims to:
  - Better and often comprehensive understanding of epidemiology and impact
  - Empowered victim/survivors and secondary victim/survivors
  - Reduced stigma and ignorance
- BUT There are still obstacles....
  - Lack of confidence that we know how to prevent child maltreatment at a reasonable cost and as part of an integrated system
  - What allies in the social policy environment do we need to join or strengthen?
  - Needing to move more and more to a Efficacy focus on impact of intervention

# Risks are not static

- Risks of harm to children remain dynamic with different types of risks emerging in 21st century.
- The changing nature of childhood influenced by factors such as families being fractured or on the move, poverty and inequality and digital technologies influence risks and developmental progression.

# Steps forward...

- We do have evidence that we have made a significant difference, but more can be done in linking the impact in research and policy agendas
- Conceptualising the boundaries of child protection system
- Addressing the reality that:
  - In practice child protection systems in many high income countries tend to invest more heavily in intervening with children who have already been victimisation in some way (Broomfield & Holzer, 2008).
- Focus on effectiveness of prevention for specific issues
  - For example, the inter-relationship between domestic violence and child protection.
  - Social protection and change on identified 'Drivers' linked to longitudinal research.