



Australian Government

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Where's the child?

Child-aware lessons from past policy and practice

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Wisdom of hindsight

- Past practices for which we as a society have apologised or recognised as wrong and in need of reparations:
 - ◆ Forced adoption
 - ◆ Stolen Generations
 - ◆ Forgotten Australians and Former Child Migrants
 - ◆ Institutionalisation

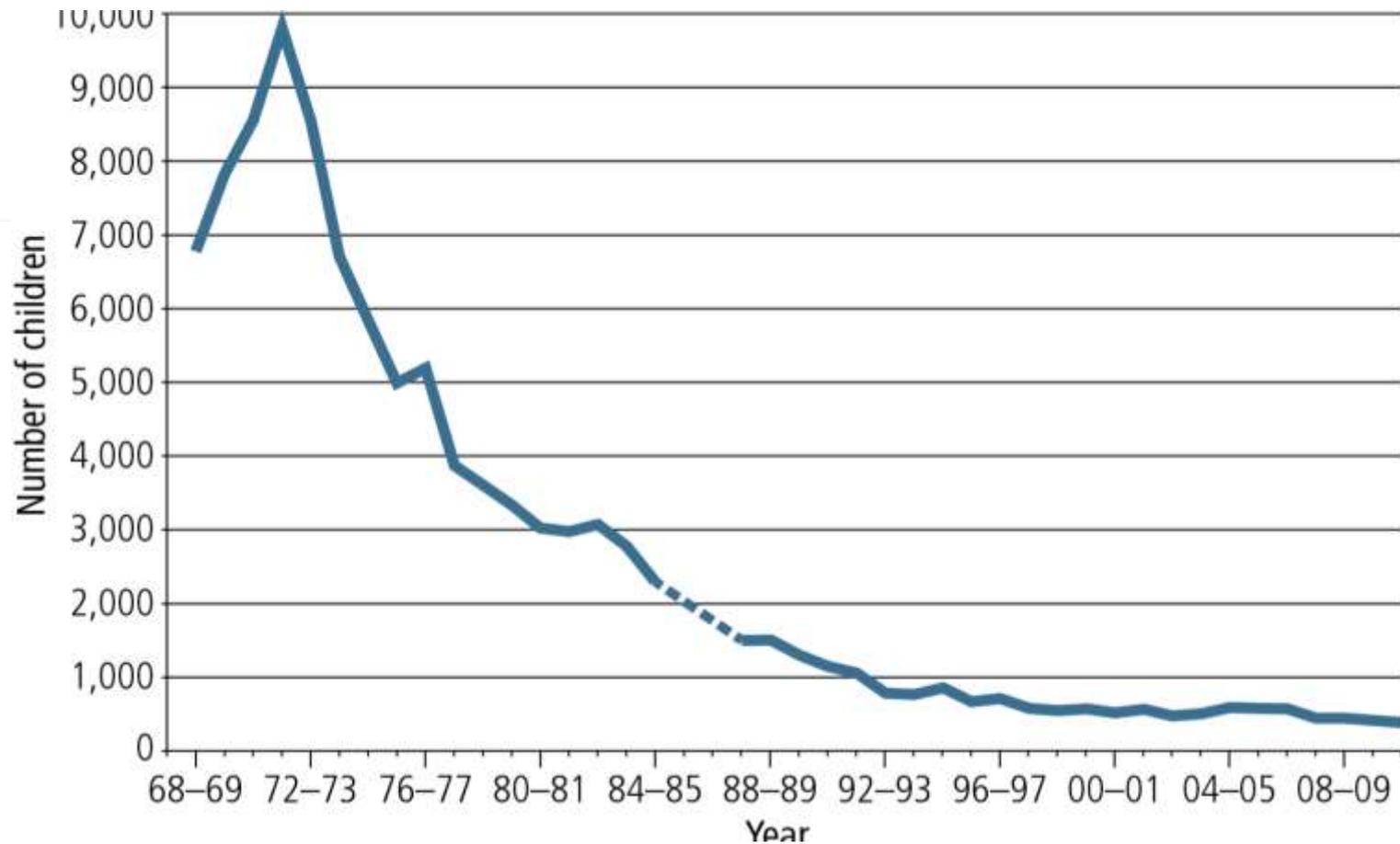


Past Adoption Practices

- Closed adoptions
 - ◆ In Australia, since the late 1920s, between 210,000 and 250,000 adoptions took place
 - ◆ Rapid decline in adoptions since 1971-72



Number of adoptions in Australia 1968-69 to 2010-11



History of closed adoption

- 1920s – "clean break" from the birth parents
- adopted child's original birth certificate is sealed forever
- amended birth certificate issued that establishes the child's new identity and relationship with their adoptive family
- 1960s – secrecy provisions tightened
- "forced adoption" – mothers subjected to unauthorised separation from their child
- 1970s – legislative reforms overturned the blanket of secrecy
- 1980s & 1990s – information on birth parents was not made available to adopted children/adults.
- Beginning with NSW in 1976, registers were established for both birth parents and adopted children who wished to make contact
- Reunion services now part of the ways in which governments and agencies are trying to address the negative impacts of separation



Effects of forced adoption: Results of National Study of over 1500 people

- Trauma, grief & loss, attachment disruption
- Trauma of experience is still current e.g., mothers talked about:
 - ◆ The birth process
 - ◆ Differential treatment from married mothers
 - ◆ Experiences of abuse and neglect
 - ◆ Administration of drugs that impaired capacity
 - ◆ Lack of ability to provide or revoke consent
 - ◆ Systematic approach to removal of babies from undeserving couples (unwed) for deserving couples



Stolen Generation

- ◆ As many as 100,000 Aboriginal children forcibly removed from their natural families from the late 1800s into the 1960s (WA Aboriginal Child Health Survey 2005)
- ◆ As much as 53% of the Aboriginal population is, or is directly related to a member of the stolen generation (NATSISS 2002)



Stolen Generation

- Sexual abuse
 - ◆ 7.7% of males and 17% of females – reported incidents of sexual abuse (Bringing them Home report 1997)
 - Figures are for ‘reported only’ incidents and can be assumed that there were more incidents that went unreported



Stolen Generation

- Follow-on effects of forced removal
 - ◆ Carers who had been forcibly removed were:
 - 1.95 times more likely to have been arrested,
 - 1.61 times more likely to report alcohol problems,
 - 2.10 times more likely to report gambling problems,
- (WA Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey 2005)



Stolen Generation

- Intergenerational effects of forced removal
 - ◆ Children of carers who were forcibly removed:
 - 34.6% at risk of clinically significant emotional/behavioural difficulties
 - 15.2% drunk alcohol or gotten drunk in the past 6 months
 - 10.5% used drugs in the past 6 months
 - ◆ Statistically higher than children from families of no forced removal (WA Aboriginal Child Health Survey 2005)



Forgotten Australians

- The 2004 Inquiry of the Senate Community Affairs References Committee estimated that more than 500,000 children have experienced life in an orphanage, Home or other form of out-of-home care during the last century in Australia.
- *Forgotten Australians: a report on Australians who experienced institutional or out-of-home care as children* – documented the types of abuse experienced and the lifelong impacts of care



Former Child Migrants

- from 1947 to 1967, between 7000 and 10,000 children were sent to Australia
- ‘children were placed in large, often isolated, institutions and were often subjected to harsh, sometimes intentionally brutal, regimes of work and discipline, unmodified by any real nurturing or encouragement. The institutions were inadequately supervised, monitored and inspected’



39,000 children in Out of Home Care in Australia (June 30, 2012)

	Number of children		Rates per 1,000 children	
	Indigenous	Non Indigenous	Indigenous	Non Indigenous
NSW	5,991	11,177	83.4	7.1
VIC	1,028	5,106	66.4	4.2
QLD	3,041	4,919	42.2	4.9
WA	1,614	1,760	51.6	3.4
SA	706	1,828	55.0	5.4
TAS	212	789	25.1	7.4
ACT	134	421	68.0	5.3
NT	573	127	20.7	3.7
Australia	13,299	26,127	55.1	5.4



Outcomes for children currently in care

	Children in Care	Victorian Children
Long term health condition	57.9%	37.0%
Illicit drug use* (15-17 yrs)	8.3%	4.7%
Alcohol use (15-17 yrs)	63.6%	52.3%
Emotional and behavioural difficulties	75.0%	13.3%
Father contact - % young people who never have contact with their father	39.2%	26.0%
Do not attend kindergarten/preschool	17.6%	4.9%

Wise, S. (2013). Children in Care Report Card. Produced for Anglicare Victoria: Melbourne.

* Not including cannabis



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The hope of foresight

- How do we avoid repeating the mistakes of the past?
- In order to benefit from hindsight, we need to reflect on issues below the surface, so we can see parallels with current day issues.
- What are the common features from past policy failures? Where do similar features appear in current issues?



Common features

- Widespread removal of children from parents and/or extended family community
- Use of force/coercion or power imbalance
- Systematic – often based on race/class/marital status or other ‘vulnerability’ factor
- Actions explained as being “in children’s best interest”
- Disconnection from biological family
- Disruption to formation of identity



Current policies and practices with similar features

- Young people in the child protection and out-of-home care systems (as of 30 June 2012, there were 39,621 Australian children living in out-of-home care; 1 in 3 are Indigenous)
 - ◆ Removal of children vs. family preservation and support services
 - ◆ Stability and permanency in care
 - ◆ Adoption from care
- Overseas adoption & domestic unrelated adoption
- Surrogacy (commercial; 'altruistic')
- Donor insemination
- Family law – and post-separation parenting arrangements



References

Dow, C., & Phillips, J. (2011). *Forgotten Australians' and 'Lost Innocents': child migrants and children in institutional care in Australia*. Background note: Parliamentary library, Parliament of Australia.

Kenny, P., Higgins, D., Soloff, C., & Sweid, R. (2012). *Past adoption experiences: National Research Study on the Service Response to Past Adoption Practices* (Research Report No. 21). Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

<<http://www.aifs.gov.au/institute/pubs/resreport21/index.html>>

Alliance for Forgotten Australians: <http://www.forgottenaustralians.org.au/>

Find and Connect: www.findandconnect.gov.au/

Bringing them home: *Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*

www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/bringing-them-home-report-1997



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