



Research article

The Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

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ABSTRACT

The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse is the largest royal commission in Australia's history and one of the largest public inquiries into institutional child abuse internationally. With an investment from the Australian government of half a billion dollars, it examined how institutions with a responsibility for children, both historically and in the present, have responded to allegations of child sexual abuse. Announced in the wake of previous Australian and international inquiries, public scandals and lobbying by survivor groups, its establishment reflected increasing recognition of the often lifelong and intergenerational damage caused by childhood sexual abuse and a strong political commitment to improving child safety and wellbeing in Australia. This article outlines the background, key features and innovations of this landmark public inquiry, focusing in particular on its extensive research program. It considers its international significance and also serves as an introduction to this special edition on the Australian Royal Commission, exploring its implications for better understanding institutional child sexual abuse and its impacts, and for making institutions safer places for children in the future.

1. Introduction

The Australian Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (the Royal Commission) is a public inquiry that warrants close attention from the international community. The largest royal commission in Australia's history, measured by financial investment, length of operation, volume of evidence taken, and number of commissioners, witnesses and submissions, it is one of the most important public inquiries into institutional child abuse globally, comparable in significance and impact to the Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse (the Ryan Commission) in Ireland, which reported in 2009. As with that inquiry, which revealed endemic abuse in once revered Irish church and state institutions (Commission to Inquire into Child Abuse, 2009; O'Shea, 2012), the Australian Royal Commission has laid bare the sobering reality of institutional child sexual abuse and its often profoundly negative impact on individuals, families, and communities.

The Royal Commission's *raison d'être* is to create a safer future for children and to provide justice for victims. It was established in 2013 with terms of reference that required it to examine how Australian institutions have responded to the sexual abuse of children. It was also charged with making recommendations for what institutions and governments should do to address and alleviate the impact of past and future child sexual abuse (Governor General of Australia, 2013). In developing its work, it drew on existing inquiry models and methods. It also pioneered new innovative approaches.

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Through public hearings, private sessions and an extensive program of research, the Royal Commission has undertaken an investigation of unprecedented scale and scope, one that is likely to have a significant impact and an enduring legacy in Australia and beyond. With a budget allocation of half a billion Australian dollars (AUD), it reflects a significant investment by the Australian government in child safety. The Royal Commission has identified systemic issues and will make recommendations aimed at ensuring that institutions adopt best practice approaches to protecting children, preventing abuse and providing a just response to victims ([Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2014](#)). Recommendations for redress and legislative reform have already been made and the final report will make further recommendations for changes in policies, practices and systems to prevent institutional child sexual abuse, and better respond when abuse does occur.

This article outlines the background and key features of the Royal Commission, focusing in particular on its innovative research program. Its role in increasing public awareness of child sexual abuse and fostering legislative, policy and practice reform in Australia, is also briefly noted. In examining the Royal Commission the article explores its implications for better understanding institutional child sexual abuse and its impacts, for making institutions safer places for children in the future, and for issues of justice. The article also serves as an introduction to this special edition of *Child Abuse & Neglect*. Each article addresses a distinct but related subject area. Collectively, they provide an insight into the range of issues addressed through the Royal Commission and the historic and international significance of this landmark public inquiry.

2. Background to the Royal Commission

The Royal Commission was announced in the wake of a series of inquiries into state institutions that is usually seen as beginning with the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families that reported in 1997 ([Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997](#)). In its focus, however, it also owes much to ‘The Paedophile Inquiry’ conducted as part of the Wood Royal Commission into the New South Wales (NSW) Police Service which reported in the same year ([Royal Commission into the New South Wales Police Service, 1997](#)). Three of the six volumes of the report of the Wood Royal Commission focused on child sexual abuse. By contrast, in the various inquiries into past welfare practices in Australia child sexual abuse was rarely mentioned in the terms of reference but rather emerged from testimony as one of the forms of abuse that were endemic in the system – physical, sexual and psychological abuse and emotional deprivation and depersonalization ([Australian Senate Community Affairs References Committee, 2001, 2004](#); [Forde, 1999](#); [Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997](#)). In none of these earlier reports was sexual abuse the primary focus, but rather it was positioned as one of a number of emotionally and physically abusive practices, labour exploitation and neglect for which people who experienced out-of-home residential ‘care’ as children (‘care leavers’) – demanded redress ([Australian Senate Community Affairs References Committee, 2001, 2004](#)).

However, when the state of South Australia established its own inquiry in 2004 sexual abuse was the core concern. Alongside deaths in care, it had become the primary focus for investigation ([Mullighan, 2008](#)). That inquiry determined that the sexual abuse of children had taken place in all types of ‘care’ since the 1930s, “challenging both those who wanted to position it as a relatively recent phenomenon and those who wanted to confine it safely to the past” ([Swain, 2015, p. 85](#); see also [Bevernage, 2010](#); [Musgrove, 2015](#)). Child sexual abuse was also the focus of a subsequent inquiry in the state of Victoria ([Victorian Parliament Family and Community Development Committee, 2013](#)). The Victorian inquiry into the handling of child abuse by religious and non-government organizations, moved the focus beyond children in the care of the state. It concluded that children had been the victims of sexual offending throughout history and across all types of organizations that gave perpetrators access to minors. This was important in providing the basis for the Royal Commission’s broad definition of ‘institutions’ in its terms of reference ([Victorian Parliament Family and Community Development Committee, 2013](#)).

It was the evidence presented to the Victorian inquiry, along with extensive media coverage of clergy abuse and the announcement of another state based inquiry into allegations of sexual abuse, this time in the Catholic Diocese in the Hunter region of NSW ([Cunneen, 2014](#)), which provoked the then Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, to establish the Royal Commission, a level of inquiry not granted to other groups who had sought redress for abuse in institutional ‘care’. Royal commissions in Australia, as in the United Kingdom and Canada, are independent ad hoc bodies appointed by government under legislation that confers considerable investigative powers, including the capacity to compel and cross-examine witnesses, subpoena documents, and protect people who give evidence ([Aroney, 2014](#)). They are the highest and most prestigious form of public inquiry within the Australian political system ([Prasser, 2006](#)).

Prior to its establishment, there had been considerable community level organization and activism and media campaigning for a Royal Commission ([Budiselik, Crawford, & Chung, 2014](#)). While momentum had been building, the tipping point was allegations made by a senior police detective on national television on 8 November 2012 of alleged corruption in the Catholic Church in relation to reporting incidents of child sexual abuse in the Hunter region of NSW ([Coorey & Tovey, 2012](#)). The NSW inquiry was announced the following day and the national Royal Commission several days later, on 12 November 2012 ([Cullen, 2012](#)). The Royal Commission was charged with confronting society’s unwillingness to accept the prevalence of child sexual abuse and challenging the structural arrangements that enabled it to remain hidden for so long ([Middleton et al., 2014](#)). Its establishment points to the now unquestioned representation of child sexual abuse as the worst form of child victimization in late modernity, the most fundamental violation of the innocence and vulnerability of children ([McAlinden, 2014](#)).

3. The work of the Royal Commission

The Royal Commission was formally established on 11 January 2013 with the release of the terms of reference and the

appointment of six Commissioners. The Chair, Justice Peter McClellan, brought considerable experience working on commissions of inquiry. The other Commissioners, all of whom remained for the duration of the Royal Commission, brought a broad range of relevant skills and expertise. They included a judge of the Family Court of Australia (Justice Jennifer Coate), a productivity commissioner with policy expertise (Mr Robert Fitzgerald), an Indigenous child and adolescent psychiatrist (Dr Helen Milroy), a former police commissioner (Mr Bob Atkinson), and a former politician who has advocated for care leavers (Mr Andrew Murray). The central tasks of the Royal Commission were to investigate how institutions, broadly defined, have responded to incidents and allegations of child sexual abuse, to uncover systemic failures, and to make recommendations for improvements to law, policy and practices, as well as consider justice for victims and redress measures (Governor General of Australia, 2013).

In setting the terms of reference the government established an inquiry that differed in two important respects from most previous Australian and international inquiries into institutional child abuse. It took a narrow focus on abuse type, considering sexual abuse only rather than the full spectrum of abuse and neglect, and it adopted a broad definition of institutions, to include not only residential care but also a range of state, faith-based, non-government and non-profit organizations, such as churches, schools, hospitals and sporting clubs.¹ Despite the focus on child sexual abuse only, the terms of reference established a wide-ranging inquiry, which examined institutional child sexual abuse and its causes, existing policy and legislation, future protocols for safeguarding children, and how the impact for victims could be alleviated. This ambitious agenda was met with wide public support.

The Royal Commission conducted its work through private sessions, public hearings, and a broad ranging research and policy program. After its establishment, it reported that its first priority was to hear directly from people who had been sexually abused as a child in an institutional setting. The *Royal Commissions Act 1902* was amended to allow for private sessions, based on a similar approach taken in Ireland's Ryan Commission, enabling people who had experienced abuse to share their story with one of the Commissioners (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2014). The information provided by victims and survivors was crucial to the development of the Royal Commission's understanding of institutional child sexual abuse and its impacts.

Public hearings took the form of case studies during which evidence was received about abuse within a particular institution, or a small number of related institutions, and findings were disseminated through interim reports. Hearings that had a broad policy focus, as distinct from the investigation of specific institutions, were also conducted. Between 2013 and 2016, 116 institutions were examined in public hearings. Many of these were faith based organizations, which by the end of 2016 were subject to 60 percent of the abuse reported in private sessions (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017c). While a wide range of institutions were subject to examination through public hearings, including the Scouts, Swimming Australia, the YMCA, health care and disability service providers, investigation of abuse in religious groups accounted for 34 of the 57 public hearings held across Australia during the more than 440 days the Commissioners sat in public (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017d, 2017b). The Catholic Church and related institutions were the focus of 15 hearings (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017c), a number higher than any other religious organization, and indicative of wider international concerns with clergy abuse.

Whereas private sessions were confidential, public hearings were livestreamed over the internet and widely covered by the media. The 'publicness' of the Royal Commission was crucial to its operation. It was intended to keep people apprised of its work, be informative, educative and transparent. Its public engagement strategies included the development of a comprehensive website and the publication of transcripts of public hearings, usually made available on the website within a day. With the exception of policy and review hearings, public hearings into particular institutions or groups of institutions typically began with the testimony of victims and survivors, reflecting the centrality of such testimony to the Royal Commission, as in other historical institutional child abuse inquiries internationally (Sköld & Swain, 2015; Swain, 2014). By the time the Australian government is furnished with the final report in December 2017, it is estimated that over 8000 people will have participated in a private session. In addition, many thousands of survivors of institutional child sexual abuse provided written submissions and 1200 witnesses gave evidence in public hearings (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017d).

An innovative approach taken by the Royal Commission was to conduct a final series of review hearings in which institutions that had been subject to earlier investigation were required to provide details of their current policies and practices, and an account of organizational change adopted since their initial appearance. In doing so, the Royal Commission sought to overcome a limitation of ad hoc inquiries, which do not have the capacity to follow up on their investigations and recommendations. In revisiting the Catholic Church in Case Study 50, the Royal Commission was also able to present damning research findings, which showed that between January 1980 and February 2015, 4444 people had made allegations of child sexual abuse against 92 of the 201 Catholic Church authorities in Australia that were surveyed. These statistics, along with the claim that 40.4 percent of St John of God Brothers were alleged perpetrators (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017a, 2017c), were widely reported in the Australian and international media.

The program set up by the Royal Commission was made possible by a substantial financial investment by the Australian government. With bipartisan political support, it was allocated funding of over \$500 million AUD and given five years to complete its work. Initially, it was established with a budget of \$281.13 million AUD and a timeframe of three years. The Commissioners soon recognised, however, that further time and funding would be required to complete the tasks set out in its terms of reference (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2014). Hence, in September 2014 the Royal Commission was granted

¹ The terms of reference did allow the Royal Commission to consider "other related matters". Physical and emotional abuse, therefore, could be considered but only if these forms of abuse occurred in the context of the sexual abuse.

a two-year extension and supplementary funding of \$125 million AUD ([Attorney-General for Australia, 2014](#)). The government justified the additional investment as enabling the Commission to “build a much fuller and more complete picture of the scourge of institutional child abuse, but, most importantly, it will give those who need to tell their stories the opportunity to do so” ([Commonwealth of Australia, Senate, 2014, p. 6178](#)). The media release announcing the extension noted that this would allow more private sessions and public hearings to be conducted, including the final review hearings.

The Royal Commission recognised that for survivors, sharing their story of abuse would often be extremely difficult. Information gathered by 2014 through private sessions suggested that on average it took people over twenty years to disclose their abuse ([Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2014](#)). To identify appropriate procedures for private sessions and for witnesses in public hearings, the Royal Commission sought advice from advocacy and support groups, mental health professionals and providers of sexual assault services. It developed a sensitive and respectful protocol for dealing with the public. Referrals for counselling were offered and assistance with taking allegations to police was provided if the individual wished to do so. By mid-2017, over 2200 matters had been referred to authorities, including the police ([Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017e](#)). The Chair of the Royal Commission noted that victims and survivors had many reasons for coming forward: “For some a chance to tell their story and have it accepted is all they seek. Others come wanting their matter referred to police. Many come in the hope their contribution will help to create a safer society for children” ([McClellan, 2016](#)).

4. The Royal Commission’s research and policy agenda

The breadth of its research program is a distinctive and unprecedented feature of the Royal Commission. While public inquiries typically undertake contextual research as part of their investigations and some also conduct or contract primary research, no previous public inquiry into child abuse in Australia or internationally is comparable in its emphasis on research (see [Wright, Swain, & Sköld, 2017](#)). More than 100 projects were undertaken by contracted researchers and internal research staff, covering the areas of prevention, reporting and responding to allegations of abuse. The Royal Commission describes its research and policy work as one of its ‘three pillars’, alongside the public hearings and private sessions ([Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2014](#)). Research was thus integral to the very structure of the inquiry itself.

Considerable resources were allocated to the research program to ensure that the studies undertaken, both commissioned and internal, were of high quality ([Anderson & Bromfield, 2017](#)). An internal research team was established and staff with expertise in qualitative and quantitative research and project management skills were recruited. The Royal Commission also appointed a Professorial Fellow to oversee the development of the research agenda, to manage the peer review process of research reports and to ensure the quality of research outputs. The internal research staff also supported the translation of research findings into the policy work undertaken by the Royal Commission ([Anderson & Bromfield, 2017](#)).

An ambitious and wide-ranging research agenda was developed to cover eight themes: causes, prevention, identification, institutional responses, government responses, treatment and support needs, institutions of interest, and ensuring a positive impact ([Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017g](#)). The focus of the research program was to develop new understandings of the extent, risk factors and dynamics of child sexual abuse, preventing abuse in institutions, identifying child sexual abuse, reporting, institutional and governmental responses, and ensuring a positive impact through redress and other measures. The types of research covered included descriptive and contextual research, internal analysis, primary research to fill evidence gaps, reviews of existing research evidence and future focused studies ([Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017g](#)).

Key questions addressed through the research program centred around why child sexual abuse occurs and how it can be prevented, as well as the responses of institutions, governments and other statutory authorities when abuse does occur. Some of the projects undertaken have been published as research reports and are publicly available, others were used primarily for internal purposes, providing contextual understandings of institutions of interest or other specific issues that were important to the investigative aspects of the inquiry. Research contracted by the Royal Commission drew on a range of disciplinary expertise, including criminology, history, law, psychology, social work and sociology.

In addition to generating a new body of research evidence through commissioned projects, the policy and research program drew extensively on information gathered in public hearings and private sessions. Staff in the research unit were responsible for analysing the large volume of material collected during the private sessions, each of which lasted around one to one and a half hours. The final report will include an analysis of this information ([Anderson & Bromfield, 2017](#)). The private sessions, therefore, not only provided opportunities for people’s voices to be heard, they also constitute the largest collection of individual narratives of institutional child sexual abuse that has been generated in Australia to date. Through its research program, the Royal Commission has made a major contribution to the knowledge base of child maltreatment.

A range of topics were also explored through issues papers, to which individuals and organizations responded with written submissions. These include redress schemes, civil litigation, crimes compensation schemes, experiences of police and prosecution responses, risk of child sexual abuse in schools, and advocacy, support and therapeutic treatment. Roundtables were also used to examine a variety of relevant matters, including pre-employment screening, criminal justice, out-of-home care, adult sex offender treatment programs, and responses from police and other agencies. Many experts, both from Australia and abroad, gave evidence in public hearings.

The Royal Commission’s policy agenda was informed by and closely related to the research program. Its policy work centred on the development of recommendations to improve child safety in institutional contexts and to advise governments on what they should do with regard to redress. Specific areas covered included: making institutions child safe; advocacy, support and treatment;

prevention; the needs of specific populations; redress; and, criminal justice. While the research component was intended to provide necessary background information, fill evidence gaps and explore what is known and what works, the purpose of the policy work of the Royal Commission was to develop positions and make recommendations, largely using evidence that would not normally be available to policy makers (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017f). Both in the research and policy areas, the statutory powers of the Royal Commission to compel documents from Australian institutions has meant that it has been able to generate a more accurate picture of institutional child sexual abuse than would have otherwise been possible. The figures provided above in relation to the Catholic Church, presented in Case Study 50 is an example of the generation of research evidence made possible through such powers (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017a).

Unusually, for a large public inquiry, important policy positions and final recommendations on some key issues were made through interim reports. Justice for victims and measures to alleviate the impact of abuse – through the provision of redress, improvements to mechanisms for referral for criminal investigation and prosecution, and the establishment of appropriate support services – were a core focus of the Royal Commission's work during its first years of operation and it submitted its final recommendations on redress and civil litigation in 2015. Commissioners noted their commitment to reporting as early as possible on these issues to provide certainty for governments and institutions and to address questions of civil justice for survivors as soon as possible (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2015a). In 2015, it also released its final report on pre-employment screening, called "Working with Children Checks" in Australia (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2015b). This approach of delivering conclusive recommendations on particular matters prior to handing down the final report is an important innovation, enabling the Royal Commission to make final recommendations during the course of its operation.

5. The Royal Commission's legacy and limitations

While it is too soon to assess its impact across institutional, societal and cultural life in Australia, it is clear that the Royal Commission will have a range of policy, legislative and social outcomes. In its interim report in 2014, it noted that its public hearings had already brought about significant change, with a number of institutions reviewing their management practices and responses to victims (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2014). Over its five years of operation, it played a vital educative role for both institutions and the broader community, raising public awareness, holding institutions publicly accountable, and helping shape public discourse around child sexual abuse and its effects. In doing so, it encouraged more open discussion of these issues, contributed to processes of destigmatization for victims of abuse and made a strong case for redress. Legislative reform has already been seen with a number of states, evident for example in the abolition, or commitments to abolish, limitation periods in child sexual abuse litigation. The Royal Commission is arguably one of Australia's most highly regarded and successful public inquiries, having developed a model for investigation of institutional abuse that has shaped the approach of other inquiries internationally. Yet it is not without its limitations.

The coercive powers of a Royal Commission may be wide ranging but they do not extend to the implementation of recommendations (Prasser, 2006). As an ad hoc entity, the Royal Commission ceases to exist once it completes its term. It has no power to compel governments to accept its recommendations; what is taken up and implemented and what is ignored is a matter for the federal government, and the states and territories. This is clearly illustrated in the problems emerging in relation to recommendations for a redress scheme. In November 2016, just over a year after the Royal Commission published its report on redress and civil litigation, the Australian government announced that would establish a national redress scheme for survivors of institutional child sexual abuse (Attorney-General for Australia, 2016). It was designed as an 'opt-in' arrangement, which institutions and state and territory governments could choose to join. Responses and commitments from state governments and institutions have varied. Lawyers and advocacy groups have expressed concern that the government's cap of \$150,000 for survivors is inadequate to compensate for pain and suffering and to meet the needs of many individuals. An additional concern is that participation in the redress may take away the common law rights of individuals to sue institutions or governments (Orti, 2016).

It is also evident that there has to date been mixed success with regard to the reform of institutions. The final series of review hearings saw evidence presented that the YMCA in NSW had invested considerable time and resources into becoming a child safe institution, including the establishment of a Child Protection Unit, the appointment of new Board members with expertise in child protection, and new senior staff to implement policy changes (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2016a). Scouts Australia similarly reported that it had undertaken a range of reforms, including new recruitment procedures, the development of a National Child Protection Policy and other key changes to facilitate a culture of child safety (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2016b). Representatives from the Salvation Army told Commissioners that their organization had implemented or planned to implement the Royal Commission's ten child safe elements, that it was reviewing its redress scheme and had re-investigated a number of allegations and incidents of child sexual abuse (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2016c). However, for a number of other faith based institutions, particularly the Catholic Church, there has been less evidence of significant reform and commitment to change (Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, 2017c).

Another issue that should be noted is that although the Royal Commission received widespread support from the Australian community, the terms of reference established by the Australian government, and the Royal Commission's interpretation of them, have been criticised by care leavers for being both too narrow and too broad (Golding, 2017). This has had a range of unintended consequences for care leavers, not least of which is people who experienced what is deemed non-sexual abuse in institutions will not be eligible for the national redress scheme. The focus exclusively on sexual abuse meant that the Royal Commission has been

understood by some as marginalizing the experiences of victims of other forms of maltreatment and cruelty, in effect creating hierarchies of abuse, with sexual abuse positioned as the most damaging. Without minimizing its often profoundly deleterious effects, the focus on sexual abuse left less room for consideration of the immense harm that occurred through the general brutality of institutional life.

On a more optimistic note, one area where it can be confidently stated that the Royal Commission has made a significant and positive impact is in its contribution to the knowledge base of institutional child sexual abuse. However, despite the important work that has been done, much will depend on the extent to which the research program of the Royal Commission is built upon in the future and the ways in which the issues investigated and the questions raised are taken forward. This special edition of *Child Abuse & Neglect* seeks to contribute to this task.

6. Articles in this volume

The genesis of this volume was an Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia (ASSA) workshop held at La Trobe University in April 2017, which brought together academic researchers, lawyers and advocates, and survivors and care leavers. Some of the articles in this special edition draw on papers presented at that workshop and many draw on research conducted for the Royal Commission. The articles and the research they report on illustrate the historic and international significance of the Royal Commission itself and its extensive research agenda. Topics covered include the importance of public inquiries for child safety, the impacts of institutional child sexual abuse on victims and survivors, the role of organizational culture in facilitating abuse, processes of reporting and prosecution, challenges to the implementation of regulatory change, and the importance of children's voices and perspectives in developing child safe policy and practice.

The first article following this introductory discussion places the Royal Commission in the wider international context of inquiries into institutional abuse and their role in preventing and responding to child maltreatment. As Wright (2017) shows, over the last two decades there have been many inquiries internationally charged with investigating historical institutional child abuse, both for the purposes of providing justice for victims and survivors and for improving child safety in the future. Yet inquiries also have wider social and political functions, which need to be considered when evaluating their social impact and outcomes. The educative role of the Royal Commission, for example, is clearly evident and few Australians would now doubt that institutional settings can be unsafe places for children.

However, the factors that give rise to problems of child safety have not been well understood. Palmer and Feldman (2017) throw new light on this issue through an examination of the ways in which organizational culture influences the perpetration, detection, and response to child sexual abuse. They provide a comprehensive analysis of youth-serving organizations through an integration of organizational sociology and management theory and by drawing on case studies from the Royal Commission. Their article both describes the problems faced by institutions and offers new insights for institutional policy and practice reform.

Another area which has not been well understood is the distinct impacts of child sexual abuse in institutional settings. While adverse outcomes for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse have now been well documented, the work of the Royal Commission suggests particular effects of institutional abuse. The article by Blakemore, Herbert, Arney, and Parkinson (2017) offers insights into the particularity of effects stemming from abuse in these settings. Through a synthesis of research findings on institutional child sexual abuse, they show that in addition to the impacts of child sexual abuse in other contexts, institutional abuse can have additional adverse effects, including on spiritual wellbeing and in the form of vicarious trauma for families and loved ones.

In the article that follows the focus on effects continues but turns to the subject of prosecution outcomes after delays in disclosing and reporting abuse. Cashmore, Taylor, and Parkinson (2017) investigated the characteristics of reports to the police of child sexual abuse and the likelihood of cases proceeding to prosecution after delays in reporting. They found that the longest delays were for cases involving persons in positions of authority and that male victims were more likely to delay reporting child sexual abuse to authorities. Their analysis reveals that historical matters were more likely to result in legal action and contrary to expectations, higher conviction rates than reports from children, possibly due to adults being able to articulate their evidence better than children.

This raises issues around how the taking of evidence from child complainants might be improved, a subject addressed by Earhart, Brubacher, Powell, Westera, and Goodman-Delahunt (2017). Drawing on the first study to examine the use of ground rules in such detail, their article explores judges' delivery of ground rules for child witnesses. It discusses jurisdictional differences and judges' verbosity as factors affecting the delivery of ground rules. Their study suggested that rules were rarely accompanied by practice examples, which has implications for rethinking approaches to better supporting children's court testimony. Overall, their article suggests that there is room for much reform, both in relation to the number of ground rules presented and in developing approaches to improving children's understandings of them.

The next two articles turn to wider issues of implementation and consider future directions for improving child safety in institutional settings. Moore (2017) offers a cautionary reminder that while the Royal Commission and its research program have made considerable advances, a number of concerns that young people have about their safety have not been sufficiently recognized. He suggests that in moving forward with systems reforms there is a risk that children's and young people's political, social and inter-personal powerlessness may be unwittingly reinforced through child-safe practices that restrict meaningful participation, ignore young people's agency and fail to respond to what they see as important. Drawing on the findings of three participatory studies with children and young people, his article highlights areas in need of further attention and stresses the importance of listening to young people and acting on the issues that concern them.

In the final substantive article in the volume, Mathews (2017) examines how the implementation of reforms to better prevent and respond to child sexual abuse in institutions can be optimized. While there has been much attention to the question of what measures

institutions should adopt, there has been limited attention to how to implement and regulate those measures. Mathews (2017) argues that failure to adopt strategies to overcome barriers to implementation jeopardizes systemic change. To address this problem, he draws on regulatory and public health theory to identify robust approaches and key elements for reform, indicating how those measures should be implemented to heighten prospects of success. Through an integration of these approaches, a theoretical basis for a model of implementation and regulation is presented, indicating the nature and functions of a regulatory body for this context.

The next section of the volume contains commentaries from international experts who reflect on the articles in this special edition and extend the discussion. In the first commentary, Smallbone (2017) considers the influence of the Royal Commission on child and youth-serving organizations. He identifies a number of opportunities and challenges and, importantly, calls for research to be disseminated in ways useful to organizations. This is followed by Doyle's (2017) examination of the Roman Catholic Church, a religious entity that has been subject to much scrutiny, both by the Royal Commission and more widely. He identifies the structural and cultural aspects most directly connected to sexual abuse and its cover-up, offering a salutary reminder of difficulties of institutional reform. In the commentary that follows, Hamilton (2017) turns to the U.S. context, where clergy abuse has also been a major issue. She considers the politics of religious liberty as a key barrier to a national inquiry into child sexual abuse in that country. In the final commentary, Morton (2017) draws on an evidence to action approach to show how easily evidence of child sexual abuse can be ignored and offers suggestions for ways to improve implementation efforts. These commentaries are suggestive of the wider influence of the Australian Royal Commission and how its work can be taken up in further research, policy and practice internationally. They also offer broader perspectives on the implications of this important national inquiry for institutional reform and child safety globally.

7. Concluding comments

Through both its investigative public inquiry and its innovative research program, the Royal Commission has made a significant contribution to child safety. In Australia, it has raised public awareness and promoted policy, practice and legislative reform. Internationally, it has influenced the direction taken by recent inquiries and generated significant new bodies of research. The studies undertaken by and for the Royal Commission provide improved understandings of institutional child sexual abuse in a range of domains. Yet these new studies and the new knowledge that has been generated has also given rise to new questions, which will, in turn, provide new directions for research (Bromfield & Anderson, 2017).

A key aim in compiling this special edition was to mark the significance of the Royal Commission and Australia's investment in child abuse prevention and response efforts. This volume is also a way of sharing some of the findings of important new research, made possible by the Royal Commission, with the international community. While the select number of articles herein reflect only a fraction of the projects undertaken for the inquiry, they underscore the importance of this work. It is our hope that this collection will encourage researchers, practitioners and the broader interested public to engage with the wide range of material produced by and for the Royal Commission. As Australia is a relatively small country, by population size if not geography, there is a risk that the international community might overlook the importance of the Royal Commission's work. It is our hope that this volume will aid in the dissemination of its findings and help move forward efforts to create safer futures for children across the globe.

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