

British Journal of Social Work: Book Review

DETAILS OF THE PUBLICATION

Errors and Mistakes in Child Protection. International Discourses, Approaches and Strategies.

Kay Biesel, Judith Masson, Nigel Parton and Tarja Pösö, Bristol, Policy Press, 2021, pp. XIV +273, ISBN 978 1 4473 5093 4 (pbk), £26.99

TEXT OF THE REVIEW

'Good intentions in child protection can go wrong. They do not necessarily have to. This is tragic and a hopeful story. We are of the opinion that professionals should not be held solely responsible for the origin of errors and mistakes in child protection. For this reason, it is important to know that in child protection different levels of legal responsibility exist that are often forgotten in discourses, debates and policies on errors and mistakes, in particular the responsibilities of local authorities, agencies, and states (Biesel et al., 2021, p. 31).'

Enriched by the perspective from Europe and the USA, Biesel and colleagues offer a unique collection of viewpoints derived from eleven different countries. A most helpful analysis of similarities and differences that link to current and future practice in child protection provides critical insight into the nature and impact of child protection miscalculations, starting from its "(re) discovery" in the 1960s (Biesel et al., p. 2). Fascinating historical outline of developments in child protection across the 'West' explains its roots and connection with the medical science yet offers such varied and changing construct of the phenomena. From denial and under-reporting of the 1960s, through parent blaming focus of 1970s, magnified reporting, and scandals of 1980s to the introduction of system-related errors and practitioners' fault of 1990s that reaches present times.

The book offers an insightful overview of 'triggers for action and reaction' (Biesel et al., 2021, p. 258) across discussed nations, very helpfully illustrated with the use of tables and diagrams. The significance of globalisation and neoliberal agenda are recognised as adding to the uncertainty and insecurity of current times, driving inequalities across families, communities, or life chances, with ever so visible differences in wealth and political influence. Interestingly, following Warner (2015, cited in Biesel et al., 2021, p.11), authors observe political responses that are 'increasingly moralistic and emotional', shaping in much inflamed by media fashion, whole countries policy developments.

Most importantly, however, the authors identify several common groups of errors that seem most prevalent across the eleven countries. *Dysfunctions* in effective decision-making, including child perspective errors closely linked to effective communication with children and parents, abusive institutional practices, policy implementation flaws, and failures to comply with legal requirements, seem most visible. Conducive and variable blueprints of different countries offer further wisdom to the reader. Attention is shifted to compelling and novel ways of supporting child protection practice, further noting the importance of a highly ethical competent and autonomous workforce that extends beyond social work. This informative read truly considers the complexities of

contemporary child protection, much recommended to anyone interested or involved in this area of practice.

REFERENCES:

Biesel, K. et al. (2021) *Errors and Mistakes in Child Protection. International Discourses, Approaches and Strategies*. Bristol, Policy Press

Warner, J. (2015) *The Emotional Politics of Social Work and Child Protection*. Bristol: Policy Press

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