

# Newman Weekly

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The New Zealand Centre for Political Debate

## Maori Child Abuse Crisis

The violent murder of three-month old babies Chris and Cru Kahui is a stark reminder of an ugly sickness that exists in New Zealand society. Once heralded as one of the safest places in the world to bring up a family, New Zealand has fallen to third worst in the OECD for child deaths, from sixth worst in 1994.

According to police figures, 103 children were killed in the 12 years to 2001. The overall rate of deaths per 100,000 children was 12.2, but Maori had double the overall rate at 24.4, while Asians had 11.8, Europeans 8.6, and Pacific Islanders 5.7.

Figures from the Ministry of Social Development show that in the first four months of this year, the number of substantiated cases of child abuse is already approaching 6,000. While over 40 percent of these cases involve Maori children, these are only the tip of the iceberg. A large proportion of cases of abuse against Maori children do not get reported as their whanau invokes their 'pact of silence'.

An Auckland teacher describes her experiences in this way:

*"Sarah, a 6 year-old Maori child, came to school, with a small blanket wrapped around her waist, and blood trickling down her legs. She collapsed in front of me. I called the health nurse. "This is common with Maori children, and if you interfere, you are called racist", she said. I went to the Principal, who said the same, as did CYFs: "we have too many of these cases to deal with, and haven't the staff". This happened regularly. I discussed the child with others. It was her older brother. We contacted the mother, who totally ignored what we said.*

*"A similar thing happened with a five year old at a school in Otara. CYFS said: 'we have only 4 child abuse officers for the whole of Otara, therefore we can only deal with children under five'. Too much happens in Otara and no-one knows how to cope. So people close their eyes, including the Police and Social Workers, everyone.*

*"I taught at a school in Auckland South. The Maori students were gathered together. They were taught to obey and respect the elders. They had lessons on Maori Culture. Then they were taken to the local Marae. They arrived back at school. The girls were weeping. They had been raped - by the elders. Not one or two, nearly all, if not all of them. They were taught to obey the elders, and they did. The headmaster was crying; the parents were also. A Pastor's daughter was raped. But the big issue came from the School: keep it in the Iwi; don't let others know. We were warned that not one child would give evidence if we took it outside the Iwi. This happens so frequently in the Maori Culture: 'We must keep it in the family, and deal with it ourselves'. They did. And it happened again and again".*

*Some blame 'colonisation' for the high rates of Maori child abuse. But this victim-hood mentality is just a cop out.*

Five years ago it was the family of Lillybing who closed ranks to protect a child killer. Now it is the family of the tiny Kahui twins. Nothing has changed.

On being elected in 1999, the Labour-led Government vowed to reduce child abuse. Yet, after seven years, not only have their law changes made the situation worse, but they are so afraid of jeopardising political support amongst Maori that they haven't got the guts to tackle the real issue: the abuse of Maori children by Maori. By pretending that yet another restructuring of the Department of Child, Youth and Family will make all the difference, Labour is perpetrating the sacrificing of Maori children - Lillybing, James Whakaruru, Anaru Rogers, Delcelia Whittaker, this national roll call of shame gets longer and longer.

Some blame 'colonisation' for the high rates of Maori child abuse. But this victim-hood mentality is just a cop out.

At the heart of the child abuse problem is a dependency culture that Maori have embraced. It excuses and rewards irresponsible and depraved behaviour and treats children as a revenue stream - the more babies you have, the more money you receive, and the bigger the house you get to live in.

A former nurse who worked for Plunket for 10 years from 1975 explains that the corrosive effects of welfarism were 'blindingly obvious and predictable' even then:

*“Poor Pakeha as well as poor Maori women were living on the dole as single mums and continued to give birth to fatherless children. The dole was their meal ticket. These women were no advertisement for their respective races, and, happily, neither did they represent the majority. Single Pakeha women could not claim colonialism for their plight, but what they did have in common with Maori single mums was an unshakeable feeling of entitlement to taxpayer funded support and make no mistake about it: they insisted on being given larger flats or statehouses for their growing FATHERLESS families”.*

It was during that decade that the Kirk Labour Government's welfare reforms had begun to take effect. The well-established social contract that had ensured only those who were good citizens and met community standards were eligible for a state benefit were removed with the result that the welfare system began to reward destructive behaviours and irresponsible lifestyles. Not only that, but by raising benefit levels, the financial incentive to get a job was virtually eliminated.

Further, the newly established Domestic Purposes Benefit signalled to young women who were outside of a stable relationship and lacking in career prospects, that having babies could effectively guarantee them a secure income for life. (See [www.nzcpd.com](http://www.nzcpd.com) to view an article that I wrote in 2001

following the death of baby Lillybing, which explores the effects of these benefit changes and the resulting emergence of New Zealand's 'underclass'.)

Since the seventies the growth in single parent families has sky rocketed, with the Domestic Purposes Benefit becoming a major meal ticket for young women without education and skills. As a result, New Zealand now has the third highest teenage pregnancy rate in the OECD. But a closer inspection of the statistics reveal that while teenage birth rates amongst non-Maori are similar to the rates in Europe, the rate for Maori is nearly five times higher.

According to Dr Sue Bagshaw, a Christchurch based expert on adolescent development, a key part of the reason for this disparity is that Maori culture promotes and encourages childbirth regardless of how the pregnancy came about. New Zealand's overall teenage pregnancy record will not improve until Maori culture says it is not a good thing for unmarried Maori teenagers to have babies. If they continue to have babies supported by welfare, Maori child abuse statistics will continue to soar. Maori leadership needs to promote the virtues of stable relationships and good jobs as pre-requisites for starting a family.

The sooner these elders take ownership of the problem and turn their attention away from the financial rewards associated with treaty settlements and the imposition of their culture through statute, the sooner we can confine New Zealand's disgraceful child abuse statistics to the dustbin of history.

*The poll this week asks: Do you think Labour has had any success in reducing child abuse since they have been in power?*

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