

# Investigation of the care and treatment of “socially maladjusted teenage girls”, Sub-Committee of the Tasmanian Branch of the Australian Institute of Welfare Officers

c. 1975 – c. 1975

## Details

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The investigation of the care and treatment of “socially maladjusted teenage girls” was carried out in about 1975 by a sub-committee of the Tasmanian Branch of the Australian Institute of Welfare Officers. The language is as-used by the Institute. Its report recommended offering “support to the girl, her family and the community” rather than state intervention. Even so, it also recommended new state run institutions for teenage girls.

“Socially maladjusted” was a term applied to teenage girls during the 1970s if they committed a criminal offence or came under the notice of the Social Welfare Department for being in moral danger, that is likely to breach conventional sexual morality, because their parents could not control them. “Socially maladjusted” partially replaced the term “uncontrollable” which was commonly used to describe children and young people before the 1970s.

An increase in the number of criminal offences usually associated with boys but committed by girls prompted the Investigation of the care and treatment of “socially maladjusted teenage girls”. There had also been more girls coming under formal notice of the Department of Social Welfare for being “in moral danger” because their parents could not control them, according to the meaning of the *Child Welfare Act* 1960.

The sub-committee that prepared the report included the Hobart District Child Welfare Officer, a former School Guidance Officer, a former lecturer in psychology at the University of Tasmania, a child psychiatrist, two social workers, a general practitioner, a gynaecologist, a magistrate, a child health nurse, the former Directress of the Magdalen Home, and a psychologist. The presence of doctors and a nurse on the committee suggests that medical intervention into social issues, which began in the early twentieth century, was well established by the 1970s.

The report began by attempting to assess the numbers of teenage girls who were “socially maladjusted”. It concluded that this was difficult because no research about them had been carried out. The report expressed concerns about girls who were potential drug takers and alcoholics, likely to commit suicide or suffering from ‘paranoia’ or ‘personality maladjustment’ but not known about because they concealed their problems.

The report found that services in Tasmania were over stretched. It estimated that because of the lack of basic facilities, support programs, and vacancies, 43% of 93 teenage girls were in the wrong placement. Many of the approved children’s homes that previously received them had ceased to do so. In addition, the closure of the Magdalen Home in 1974 had ‘dramatically changed the complexion of facilities in Tasmania’. Government

institutions were also inadequate. In particular, Weeroona Girls' Training Centre had numerous problems, including a lack of well trained staff, social isolation, and inadequate educational facilities. The Royal Derwent Hospital was used for teenagers with psychiatric disorders or severe intellectual disabilities. Occasionally girls in an 'acute social crisis' went there because there was no alternative. However, this was not an appropriate place for them. Some girls spent a brief time at the Royal Hobart Hospital Psychiatric Unit. Receiving homes could work well but only offered temporary care. Most foster homes could not cope with 'socially maladjusted' teenage girls.

Counselling services offered by the Social Welfare and Education Departments were inadequate because the big caseloads carried by staff left them without enough time to do it well. Most of Tasmania's psychiatric services were for adults but the Combined Children's Centre in Hobart and Launceston, which employed psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers, offered family centred counselling on an outpatient basis.

The report recommended increasing field staff, the establishment of a youth psychiatric unit at the public hospitals and of a new institution to replace the Magdalen Home, upgrading of the staff at Weeroona, short term crisis accommodation, a hostel for working girls, and a halfway house for girls coming out of Weeroona, the Royal Derwent Hospital, and the Royal Hobart Hospital Psychiatric Unit.

## More info

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### Related Entries

#### Related Glossary Terms

- [In Moral Danger \(c. 1939 - c. 1980\)](#)

#### Related Organisations

- [Social Welfare Department, State of Tasmania \(1961 - 1983\)](#)
- [Weeroona Girls' Training Centre \(1959 - 1979\)](#)  
The report discusses conditions at Weeroona Girls' Training Centre.
- [Magdalen Home \(1893 - 1974\)](#)  
The report mentions the Magdalen Home.
- [Royal Derwent Hospital \(1968 - 2000\)](#)  
The report mentions the Royal Derwent Hospital.
- [Annie Kenney Young Women's Refuge \(1978 - 2009\)](#)  
This report shows that the Social Welfare Department saw troubled teenage girls as 'maladjusted' and in need of rehabilitation, a view that workers at Annie Kenney opposed.
- [Combined Children's Centre \(1968 - current\)](#)
- [Children's Psychiatric Service Launceston \(1971 - 1990?\)](#)

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