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The impact of 'child removal' in nineteenth and early twentieth century Britain: A life course approach[1]

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Abstract

'Child removal' was practiced on a vast scale in Britain and its empire. It is defined here as the placing of children deemed to be 'in trouble' or 'at risk' into residential institutions run by state, civil and religious organisations. The precise number of children involved during the peak period of its use – the nineteenth and twentieth centuries - will never be fully known but is likely to have run into millions. This article begins to reframe familiar but segmented histories of child-saving, child protection and youth justice as part of a wider history of child removal. Using a life course approach, it outlines the complex factors that drove child removal as practiced by different agencies and then suggests how historians might begin to assess its impacts.

Introduction and context

'Child removal' – defined here as the placing of children deemed to be 'in trouble' or 'at risk' into residential institutions run by state, civil and religious organisations - was conducted on a large scale in Britain in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[2] It continues in various forms and on a smaller scale today through the child protection and youth justice systems. There is no formal measure of its precise historical scale over this period because it was conducted by many different charitable, religious and statutory organisations and recorded by them in many different ways. This article argues that historians – and public policy makers - have much to gain from beginning to reframe familiar but segmented histories of child-saving, child rescue, child emigration, child protection and youth justice as a wider history of child removal. It opens with an outline of the complex factors driving child removal as practiced by different agencies and then explores, in greater detail, how crime historians have begun to assess its impacts by applying a life course approach to reveal patterns within the lives of those who experienced it.

It may seem strange to suggest that we need a new history of child removal when so many

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(2) Child removal also included private or state-sponsored family adoption arrangements but these are not covered here. Child removal began prior to the nineteenth century and continues today, albeit on a smaller scale. These broader time frames are not covered here.

valuable histories of its component elements have already been produced. For example, there are many histories of child-saving and child emigration (see for example, Hendrick, 2003; Boucher, 2014). However, the challenge for historians here is to find ways to compound and synthesise these component elements in order to draw out broader learning from them. This article suggests how this might be done by, for example, connecting the history of one component of child removal – the development of child protection and youth justice institutions – to its wider practice.

The article draws on a wider project - the first of its kind to be completed in Britain - investigating the impact of the country's early state-sponsored youth justice and care systems across the life-course (Godfrey, Cox, Shore and Alker, 2017). These two systems were closely connected in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, forming part of what today would be termed as an attempt to create a 'joined-up response' to the interconnected challenges of youth crime, poverty and neglect. As part of this, two new state-certified training institutions were set up for children in the 1850s: industrial and reformatory schools. The wider study from which this article is drawn focuses on the experiences of 400 children sent to three of these institutions and one allied independent institution in northwest England from the 1850s to the 1920s. The four institutions are: Bradwall reformatory; Stockport industrial school; and two Liverpool-based training ships – the Akbar and the Indefatigable. They are introduced in more detail below.

Industrial and reformatory schools were just two among of a large range of what today would be termed 'providers' of institutional care to children. The most significant provision was channelled through the national Poor Law system (Crowther, 1983). From the 1830s onwards, all localities were required by the state to operate (or share access to) a local workhouse – a policy enacted in response to population growth, industrialization and rising levels of inequality and reflective of the rise of new forms of governmentality that sought to mobilise and maximise the nation's economic and imperial productivity. Children were typically admitted to a workhouse with one or more family members but housed in separate areas and sometimes in separate facilities altogether. Historians have argued that this separation of children from their parent(s) was undertaken to punish poor families for their apparent idleness or immorality. In other words, this form of orchestrated child removal was used as a deliberate tactic of governance to 'incentivise' the destitute to change their habits (Doolittle 2014; Ward, 1990, 2016). Children were often committed to the workhouse for much longer periods of time than their parent(s), especially those who were housed in special cottage homes or schools where they were offered basic education and employment training.

The other major provider of institutional child care was the nineteenth century voluntary sector. The vast majority of these providers were charities linked to different religious denominations, most of them Christian. Charities connected to Anglican (or the established state Church of England), Catholic non-conformist and Jewish groups all operated their own extensive local and national networks of children's homes, orphanages, rescue homes and

preventive homes as well as specialist homes for children with disabilities (for overview, see Sheldon, 2013; Godfrey, Cox, Shore and Alker, 2017, 18-42).

Recent studies have used institutional and voluntary organisation archives to investigate the reasons why children were placed in institutions and their experiences therein (see, for example, Cox, 2003; Murdoch, 2006; Ward, 1990; Soares, 2016; Skinner, 2017; Skinner and Thomas, 2017). However, aside from the wider study from which this article is drawn (Godfrey, Cox, Shore and Alker, 2017), the long term adult outcomes of the many thousands of British children who experienced these many different forms of child removal have not yet been researched. A further key exception here is the innovative research completed on the life course outcomes of children and adults transported to Australia as convicts in the early nineteenth century (Founders and Survivors, 2018). Notably, the ending of such convict transportation was one of the factors that forced reformers to consider alternative judicial disposals for children – two of which took the form of new industrial and reformatory schools.

These schools were set up by statute in the 1850s and modelled on existing child institutions run within the poor law and the voluntary sector as well as on previous juvenile prison experiments. French models were also important, as discussed briefly below. All were certified, inspected and part-funded by the state. However, the majority were managed, staffed and mostly funded by the faith-based voluntary sector. Industrial schools admitted those under the age of fourteen found guilty of committing an offence or judged to be in need of protection. Reformatories admitted offenders up to the age of sixteen. They offered basic education and training in a trade and most offered pre-lease supervised employment through their licence systems and post-release supervised employment for up to three years. The two institutions were amalgamated to form 'approved schools' in 1933. Thereafter, and notably with the expansion of the welfare state after 1945, they were much more firmly associated with the justice system rather than the care system which, in turn, then expanded its own institutional provision. Today that provision is offered through 'secure training centres', 'secure children's homes' and 'youth offender institutions'.[3]

Taken together, these historical practices helped to lay the normative foundations of child removal across British colonies and provided a core model for the later removal of very large numbers of indigenous and poor white children by settler populations in Australia and Canada – children frequently referred to as belonging to a series of 'stolen generations' (Cuthbert, Spark and Murphy, 2010; Jacobs, 2009; Swain and Hillel, 2010). Further, the British reformatory and industrial school model, and the family-related legislation underpinning it, was exported across the British empire (Ellis, 2014). It may also have been considered by Meiji reformers in Japan given their close interest in Western modes of governance (see Platt, 2005 on broader child

(3) Other historical accounts of industrial and reformatory schools have examined their early influences and formation (Stack, 1994; Shore, 1999; Gear, 1999), later reform (Carlebach, 1970; Bailey, 1987) and experiences of staff and young inmates (Cale, 1992, 1993; Cox, 2003; Sheldon, 2009, 2013). None, to date, have used life course methods or conducted a systematic assessment of adult outcomes.

policies in the Meiji period; and Goodman, 2002, 2005 on child protection and family policy in Japan today). The British model had itself been influenced by developments in France, notably the Mettray reformatory set up in 1840 (for overview see Cox and Shore, 2003; Ramsland, 2010). French models were also imposed or adapted in colonial French Indochina and, arguably, elements of their legacy continue to shape youth justice institutions today in parts of east Asia (Cox, 2012).

Historical life course methodology

In the past decade, life course research methods have become much more widely used across the social sciences – especially in criminology. The life course can be defined as 'a sequence of socially-embedded, age-graded events and roles that connect life phases' (Elder and Shanahan, 2006: 667). Life course criminology, then, is 'the study of life-course events, transitions and trajectories and their relation to stability and change in crime involvement' (McLaughlin and Muncie, 2013: 254). In particular, life course criminology allows us to ask what makes some children more likely to offend than others and what, in turn, makes some offenders more likely to stop or reduce their offending than others. These questions can be summarized as questions of 'onset', 'desistance' and 'persistence'.

Life course research design tends to be longitudinal, or based on the repeated observations of the same set of variables over time. In criminologically-oriented studies, these variables typically include measurable – or quantifiable - items such as whether, and to what extent, research participants were exposed to early family/parental risks and whether they gained certain qualifications, entered or left employment, became a known offender, joined the military, married or become a parent. Other items that can be measured include whether a person went on to become a known offender and, if so, what criminal justice sanctions – including child removal to a custodial institution – they may have received, and whether they persisted or desisted from crime. The focus of life course (criminological) studies on family history, family risk factors, family relationships and intergenerational effects mean that they have a great deal to contribute to family studies more generally. In Japan, key life course studies (in English) include work by Orpett (2010), Kato (2013) and others that have made use of large datasets such as the 2001 National Family Research of Japan Special Survey that collected data from 5000 Japanese women born between 1920 and 1969 on their life event experiences such as marriage, divorce, childbearing and childrearing, residence, home ownership, employment, elderly care, and migration.

Life course criminological studies fall into two groups: prospective and retrospective. Prospective studies follow a cohort of people, born in the same year, at intervals over their lives whereas retrospective studies collate past or historic data on a given cohort. The wider study from which this article is drawn is a retrospective study and has been made possible by the digitisation of historical sources and development of new historical life course methods developed by historians of crime (for overview see, Hitchcock, 2013; Godfrey 2016). The study's

methodology was further informed by the TransFive investigation that follows the lives and five generations of descendants of 198 boys sent to a single Dutch reform school in the 1910s (Bijleveld and Wijkman, 2009; van de Weijer, Bijleveld, Blokland, 2014).

Our approach was also inspired by the work of US criminologists Robert Sampson and John Laub on the factors that drive patterns of persistence and desistance. Their 2006 book, *Shared Beginnings, Divergent Lives: Delinquent Boys to Age 70* follows the adult lives of a group of 500 boys sent to a reformatory school in Boston in the 1940s. The boys had previously featured in classic 'criminal career' studies completed by Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck (1950, 1968) that would underpin what would become life course studies. Many Japanese studies of crime and desistance have also engaged with Sampson and Laub's wider work, notably their concept of 'cumulative disadvantage', including Harada (1994) and Shirai, Satomi and Kondo (2013). Sampson and Laub (1993) use the term 'cumulative disadvantage' to refer to the accumulation of deficits that decrease the probability of positive life chances.

Case study: Young Criminal Lives: Life Courses and Life Chances in England from 1850

This case study presents the core findings of a broader investigation into the life courses of 400[4] children – mostly boys – who were sent to one of four child institutions in northwest England between the 1850s and 1920s. The year 1855 was chosen as a start date in order to capture some of those sent to a state-certified reformatory during their first year of operation. The year 1927 was chosen as an end date to capture some of those sent to a state-certified reformatory or industrial school in the year that the Home Office recommended that these two institutions should be amalgamated – thus ending this first phase of their history. The core sample in the study is therefore drawn from across the first generations of children to pass through these new youth justice and care institutions.

The sample is predominantly male: 380 boys and twenty girls. This is broadly reflective of gender ratios within admissions to all industrial and reformatory schools across the period concerned and, indeed, of all court proceedings involving juveniles where gender is documented (Cox, 2003). By contrast, women made up a larger proportion of adults appearing in court and of those sent to prison. An earlier historical study of adult criminal life courses in the same geographical region was based on a sample comprising 82% men and 18% women (Godfrey et al, 2007).

Our study explores our sample's experiences of child removal within four institutions. The largest group (n=171) were sent to Stockport Industrial School, located within a textile town that is now part of Greater Manchester. This institution was initially established as Ragged School in the 1850s by a local Methodist non-conformist group and was only one in our study

(4) The full study (Godfrey, Cox, Alker and Shore, 2017) also includes a further control group of 100 children - 50 siblings of the main cohort and 50 children who appeared in local courts but given alternative disposals, such as fines, recognizances or corporeal punishment.

to admit both boys and girls. The next largest group (n=143) attended Bradwall Reformatory School located near Sandbach in Cheshire and founded by a local landowner and politician. The remaining boys were sent to two training ships, both moored on the River Mersey close to Liverpool. The Akbar (n=36) accepted reformatory cases from the 1850s and later operated as a land-based school nearby under the new name of Heswall Nautical School. The Indefatigable (n=50) was established as an independent training ship in the 1860s for destitute and orphan boys and was funded by voluntary subscription. Unlike the other three institutions in our study, the Indefatigable was never certified by the state as an industrial or reformatory school.

Framing the risk factors that lead to child removal

The children in our sample were removed from their families for a range of reasons. The most common reason was that they had been found guilty of an offence by a summary court and deemed by the magistrate of that court to be likely to benefit from industrial or reformatory training. This was the case for all of the boys sent to Bradwall Reformatory and the Akbar training ship, most of whom had committed some form of minor theft, minor criminal damage or minor assault. It is important to note, however, that children deemed unlikely to benefit were typically sent to prison to serve a short sentence or, if their offence was less serious, given a community punishment such as a fine or recognizances (the latter was an early form of probation). Unfortunately no admissions data survives from the Indefatigable training ship but organizational records confirm that it only accepted boys in need, with no criminal record and deemed likely to benefit from naval training. Overall, most children passing through the nineteenth and early twentieth summary courts and convicted of an offence were not committed to a reformatory or industrial school: the vast majority were not subject to child removal as a result of their exposure to the justice system. Judicial statistics spanning the 1850s to the 1920s indicate that the numbers of children sent to reformatories across this period remained remarkably stable at around 1,000 per year. Reformatories did not, therefore, play a major part in hands-on child removal in Britain (although they did, of course, play a significant symbolic role). By contrast, industrial schools drew in much greater numbers of children, peaking in the 1890s. That expansion was driven by emergent child protection practices. In the 1860s, their remit was broadened, allowing them to admit destitute orphans, destitute children of prisoners; those aged under 12 charged with an offence; children judged by (step)parents to be beyond control; and refractory (or badly behaved) child paupers under the control of the Poor Law authorities. In the 1880s, it was extended further to include children linked to the sex trade, notably the children of prostitutes and those living in homes used as brothels. As a result, the national numbers sent to industrial schools rose from 1,700 in the mid-1860s to 5,700 in the late 1860s to 17,000 in the early 1880s and to 20,000 by the mid-1880s: more than a ten-fold increase in two decades.

This national trend played out locally in Stockport. The Stockport Industrial School saw a dramatic increase in its admissions and expansion of its capacity over the period analysed here. When it was first certified by the state as an industrial school in 1866 it admitted thirty children

per year but in less than a decade it admitted three times as many and continued to expand into the 1890s (Tenth Inspectors Report, 1867: 71; Webster, 1973: 283).

Of the boys and girls sent to Stockport Industrial School, only a quarter (26%) had committed a criminal offence. The rest had been removed from their families because they were considered to be at risk of harm or at risk of offending. Their admissions were linked to the following factors: vagrancy (30%); inadequate parents (21%), with that description typically linked to some of form of parental criminal record, violence, perceived immorality or drunkenness; truancy or repeated failure to attend school (19%); being 'out of control' (10%); having 'bad associations' (3%). Significantly, a number of these 'at risk' children had been reported to the authorities, or cast out, by their own families rather than being removed from them. This is an important element in the compound history of child removal. It speaks to the fact that children were frequently rejected by their own immediate and extended families and were admitted to institutions as a result – and as a last resort. Step-children and those who had experienced the death of one or both parents seem to be over-represented within the Stockport sample (n=171), even allowing for the fact that these circumstances were common across the general population in this period. One third were from families where one parent had died: 31 had lost a father and 23 had lost a mother. A further 6 children had lost both parents. In several cases, a child was referred to the court as a result of conflict with a step-parent or grand-parent.

Behind these figures, of course, lie real life stories. Eleven year old Edward T. was sent to SIS for breaking into and stealing from a series of shops and was one of a quarter of SIS admissions to have committed a criminal offence in 1917. However, the remaining three quarters of these cases are more properly viewed as victims rather than offenders. Harriet W. was one of the earlier and youngest admissions, having been sent to SIS in 1875 at the age 6. She had been found destitute in Stockport and had been beaten and wounded by her mother. Her father had died four years previously. Two young brothers, Joseph and William N., aged 10 and 12, were admitted to SIS in 1879 having been found wandering in town after their parents had moved away and left them behind. The family had previously spent time in the local workhouse. Another 12 year old, John R. was admitted in 1890, having been charged in court with wandering and sleeping out. He had a record of truancy and his father had left the family when he was 3. Brothers Walter and Charles P. were admitted in 1917 at the ages of 14 and 13 after their parents had been imprisoned for child neglect (for more on these cases, see Godfrey et al, 2017: 65-66, 75).

These profiles are significant in that they reveal something of Victorian and Edwardian framings of childhood risk and their use of child removal as a means of mitigating that risk. In many ways, industrial and reformatory schools could be seen as examples of early 'social investments' on the part of the Victorian state that aimed to reduce or contain the wider social impacts of these individualised risks (see Cox, 2018 on the historical rise of the social investment state and its focus on children).

These profiles are also valuable because they open the door to a tentative attempt to conduct a form of historical predictive risk analysis. Life course criminologists helped to pioneer

this method, which involves identifying the factors present in a child's life that make their onset into criminality more or less likely. For example, in their early studies of young offenders sent to a reformatory in Massachusetts in the mid-twentieth century, Sheldon and Eleanor Glueck (1950) found that these young people were more likely than their non-delinquent peers to have been exposed to a particular set of risks, namely poverty, poor family cohesion, and inconsistent parental affection and supervision. These factors have proved to be fairly stable over time although, of course, they do not exist independently of the perceptions, values and prejudices of those in positions of authority who articulated, and then acted upon, them. Many of the children sent to SIS in our sample, for example, came from families already known to the police or education authorities. Thus, their previous exposure to official attention may also have functioned as an additional risk factor shaping the decision to remove them to an institution. Here, further historical research is needed to shed more light on the more precise ways in which children who faced, or who were perceived to be facing, these broader risk factors became subject to particular kinds of child removal (or not). For example, many of those admitted to SIS could equally have been admitted to a charitable children's home or to a statutory workhouse or could have remained living with their families in their own communities.

Risk factor research pioneered by the Gluecks and others has stimulated two powerful research questions within life course criminology and allied studies. The first, as outlined above, centres on the onset of criminality and the question of what makes some children more likely to become offenders than others. The second centres on desistance from, and persistence of, criminality and the question of what makes some young people more likely to desist from offending. These issues have been addressed by different studies in different ways but have all divided offenders into distinct categories. In her ground-breaking longitudinal study of the life patterns observed across 1,000 people born in the New Zealand town of Dunedin in 1972-3, Moffitt (1993) identifies two core groups: 'adolescent-limited offenders' (whose offending careers are very short) and 'life course persistent offenders' (whose offending careers persist across some or all of their adult lives). In the first group, potentially life-changing opportunities – for example, the acquisition, or offer of, new educational skills, jobs, homes or relationships – are more likely to trigger desistance. In the second group, they are much less likely to do so. These kinds of life-changing opportunities have been identified across a range of contemporary desistance studies (for overview, see Maruna, 2001).

Crime historians using life course methods have applied this thinking to their analysis of the factors shaping the criminal – and desistance - careers of adult offenders (Godfrey, Cox and Farrall, 2007, 2010). In this study, we seek to apply similar insights to our analysis of the life course outcomes of the 400 children subject to child removal in our sample. In particular, we seek to assess elements of the longer-term impact of their experience of institutionalisation by asking whether this had broadly 'protective' or broadly 'harmful' effects. These terms are used by contemporary child protection and juvenile justice practitioners to refer to the extent to which institutional care mitigates or exacerbates the potential impacts of children's exposure to

early life risk (Stein, 2005; Parton, 2014). Those who argue that it exacerbates the negative effects of these existing risks highlight the fact that institutionalisation – whether in a facility oriented towards child protection or to juvenile justice – contributes to 'cumulative disadvantage'. As previously outlined, 'cumulative disadvantage' is the concept developed by Sampson and Laub (1993) to denote the accumulation of deficits that can impede positive life chances over the life course. Recent US studies have argued that official interventions – from youth policing to youth custody – increase the likelihood of further offending because they can trigger exclusionary and stigmatizing processes that restrict economic and social opportunities (Bernburg and Krohn, 2003; Lopes et al, 2012). The next section of this article presents our data and findings on the life course outcomes of the 400 children in our sample.

Adult outcomes of child removal

Our wider study maps adult outcomes of care at the individual level through the creation of personal life grids populated with details including: residential address, employment, household composition, marital status, parental status and military service; any alleged offences, convictions and further engagement with police or welfare authorities; and any personal materials surviving in other sources. These details have been assembled through the systematic and cross-referenced search of available digitised and institutional records. Adult outcomes of care have then been analysed at the cohort level using multivariate analysis to identify key variables driving 'positive' and 'negative' adult outcomes (for full discussion, see Godfrey et al, 2017). These variables were derived from research designs developed within life course criminology, life course crime history and desistance studies (see Sampson and Laub, 2006; Van de Weijer, Bijleveld and Blokland, 2014; Godfrey et al, 2007 and 2010). Given the crime history focus of our study, our analysis of adult outcomes centred on the (re)offending rates of our sample group in adulthood and on the extent to which their institutional experience may have influenced these. Other studies of the adult outcomes of child removal – particularly ones in which the children concerned are still alive – have focused on other aspects, including the longer term effects of early trauma and intergenerational harm experienced by 'stolen generations' (see for example, Cuthbert, Spark and Murphy, 2010; Jacobs, 2009).

A major and remarkable finding in our study is that – as far as our sources are able to reveal - just 84 (21 per cent) of these 400 young people went on to (re)offend after their release from their particular institution. In the majority of cases, their offences were very minor and ceased in young adulthood. Of these 84 individuals, most were convicted of minor property and public order offences, and most involved young men released from the two reformatories in our study: 43 of the 143 sent to Bradwall Reformatory, and 14 of the 36 sent to the Akbar, committed at least one minor offence post-release. A further 15 individuals (4 per cent) went on to gain five or more convictions over their life course which means that very few in our sample went on to become 'life course persistent offenders' despite their shared exposure to early life risks.

Again, behind these numbers lie more personal narratives. One of the 21 per cent of re-offenders, Richard C. went on to commit a series of offences after his release from Heswall Nautical School (formerly the Akbar ship) including larceny, house-breaking and possession of a firearm. Similarly, one of the 4 per cent of persistent offenders, Henry C had a long if petty criminal career that included convictions for theft, public nuisance, debt and assault. He spent his adult life moving between casual labour, the workhouse and prison. However, both were in a minority among our 400 – at least as far as available data reveals.

In addition to (re)offending rates, we also examined the experiences that our 400 individuals had whilst on work-placement and whilst out on licence from their institution; whether they went on to marry and/or to have children as adults; whether they secured employment; whether they moved around the country or stayed in one place for most of their lives. The factors we identified as significant mirror those derived from other studies of contemporary care outcomes. In particular, these variables allow us to ask questions that are very pertinent to current debates within care provision, notably whether institutional care offers 'protective' or 'harmful effects' and whether it contributes to or reduces 'cumulative disadvantage'. Researchers are divided on this question. Some argue that 'good care' promotes resilience and thereby helps 'looked after children' to 'overcome the odds' created by their difficult early lives (see, for example, Stein, 2005). Others counter that even 'good care' tends to damage future life chances (see, for example, Centre for Social Justice, 2015).

In terms of wider life chances within these adult outcomes, combined analysis of data taken from our full sample's license records and census entries shows that most entered three broad types of employment: 'industrial', 'agricultural', 'seafaring'. Within these, boys took jobs as, for example, porters, agricultural labourers, wireless operators, hatters, printers, shoemakers, railway workers, soldiers and sailors, or were self-employed across a variety of trades. Girls typically worked in textile mills and related trades, in domestic service or retail. These jobs were part of the occupational fabric of everyday working class life in nineteenth and twentieth-century Britain and their ready availability played a crucial part in shaping 'successful' adult care outcomes.

Overall, our life course evidence indicates that child removal – or institutionalisation – within reformatory and industrial schools did not damage the material life chances of those passing through them. It suggests that, with a small number of exceptions, institutionalisation did not contribute to a marked 'cumulative disadvantage' or 'institutional bias', defined in terms of an increased likelihood of future arrest or incarceration.

This raises a crucial question. If child removal to these four institutions 'worked' to mitigate early life risks and create modest protective effects, why did it? What can a compound historical approach to child removal bring to this question?

The four institutions 'worked' because of the interaction of three specific mechanisms operating in a particular social and economic context (Pawson and Tilley, 1994, 1997; Godfrey et al, 2017). First, most care leavers were placed in what are today described as 'through the gate'

jobs – meaning that, on release from their institution they entered into supervised employment within a buoyant local labour market. Second, that supervision involved an important affective emotional dimension. All four of the institutions investigated here operated an after-care system in which staff maintained contact with young people after they left – through letters and personal visits. In many cases, this contact was not obligatory and continued for decades. These ongoing relationships are likely to have contributed to these broadly positive outcomes, particularly for those sent to Stockport Industrial School and the Indefatigable, where post-release supervision was especially robust. While they can never be measured in the same way as a documented marriage or job, these relationships are very likely to have played a key part for many. Third, those leaving their institution and working locally were often able to find affordable housing relatively close to their workplaces and often within, or close to, familiar communities that are likely to have offered a further affective relational network. Similarly, those who were placed, or found work, in large organisations – notably the military, merchant navy or trans-Atlantic shipping companies – were afforded accommodation and personal networks.

We are also very mindful, however, of more negative factors that cannot be easily measured – or even documented or articulated. Child removal may have offered some clear protective effects, as indicated above. However, it is also very likely to have generated harmful effects that were not limited to measurable cumulative disadvantage. A further mechanism central to the fact that these institutions 'worked' – in terms of preventing offending and giving young people time to acquire marketable skills – was the long 'sentence' served by the children sent to them. This meant that they were effectively cut off from their families for up to several years – with untold effects. It is very possible that those care leavers who went on to lead 'regular' working class lives also went on to carry significant personal trauma as well as to have transmitted this in some respect to their own children. Unfortunately, the surviving sources available to us do not allow us to investigate these crucial aspects of child removal.

Conclusion

Of the 400 children in our study who experienced child removal through their admission to four institutions in northwest England from the 1850s to the 1920s, the majority went on to lead what can be described as 'regular' working class lives: they found regular if generally low paid work; they married and formed families and/or lived with their extended families; they lived in households and communities; they earned enough to share rented accommodation in local neighbourhoods; they avoided major involvement with the police or welfare authorities. In stark contrast to care leavers today, few experienced long-term unemployment, homelessness or significant later involvement with criminal justice or welfare systems (Centre for Social Justice, 2015).

The practice of child removal was established as a new norm in nineteenth century social policy but this did not mean that its effects were normalised among those directly experiencing it. Child separation could be an emotionally brutal business, the 'success' of which was exacted

at a high emotional price, even where it was carried out in a humane way (Bingham et al, 2015). Child removal in the examples analysed here offered protective effects – in terms of skills training, work placements and post-release support – but it was also likely to have carried harmful effects involving the undocumented abuse of children.

Child removal may have worked in the past but in circumstances that are not replicable today. Understanding the dynamics of its compound history is vital if we are to understand its protective and harmful effects and to understand its continuing use in Britain and many other states today.

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