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CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE : AN EXAMINATION OF THE CASE HISTORIES OF A SAMPLE OF CHILDREN IN CARE, WITH PARTICULAR EMPHASIS ON PLACEMENTS OF CHILDREN IN FOSTER HOMES

R.A. MACKAY
(SENIOR RESEARCH OFFICER)

RESEARCH SECTION

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WELFARE

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Although only one name appears as author on the title page of this paper, the project from which the paper derives, the Foster Care Study, is the product of the combined work of many people.

The project was initiated in 1976, and early development and design work was carried out under the immediate supervision of David O'Neill, a former Senior Research Officer with the research section. Staff members who contributed to the development and design of the study were Dianne Hawkins and Rosemary Sutton.

The administration of the project through the data collection phase was overseen by Francis Luketina, assisted by Esther Zander, who supervised the coding operation. Mr Luketina was also responsible for the creation and editing of the data file, and some of the early analysis.

This paper was substantially written by Ross Mackay, but major contribution to the analysis have been made by Christine Coshan, Peter Mounsey, Dianne Hawkins, Rosemarie Webb and Tay Koay. A further contribution was made to the draft of the report by Susan Taylor.

The whole of the project has been conducted under the direction of John Jensen, Director of Research.

The views expressed in this paper remain those of the author, and do not necessarily represent the official view of the Department of Social Welfare.

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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH

Each year in New Zealand approximately 1,000 children and young persons are removed from the care of their families by the courts, and placed in the care of the Department of Social Welfare. Children remain in care for varying lengths of time, but the total number of children in care at any one time has been increasing over recent years, and is currently about 7,000.

In providing for children in its care, the Department has a number of options, including placement in a foster home, in a family home, or in an institution, a range of which are operated by the Department. At present there are just under 3,000 children living in foster homes, which amounts to about 40% of the children in the care of the Department. Foster care is the most frequently used form of care.

While foster care has been the subject of extensive study in many overseas countries, it has until recently received comparatively little attention in New Zealand, and the service operated by the Department has never been subjected to systematic research on a major scale. In the absence of basic descriptive data about the system, the Department has over recent years become increasingly concerned about reports of the rapid turnover in foster placements experienced by some children and young persons in care. One or two recent small scale studies carried out by individuals using departmental records have tended to confirm these reports, but such studies have been very limited in scale, and consequently have not gone very far toward supplying the information necessary for a proper review of the system.

For this reason it was decided to conduct a full scale research study to provide basic descriptive data about the foster care service operated by the Department, and to enable an appraisal of the way in which the system provides for children in care.

CHAPTER 1: DEFINITION OF FOSTER CARE AND A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF ITS USE IN NEW ZEALAND HISTORICALLY

1.1 DEFINITION OF FOSTER CARE

The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines a foster child as one related to those caring for it "not by blood, but in virtue of nursing or bringing up". More generally, foster care is the practice whereby a family takes in a child not its own, on behalf of the legal guardians, and cares for the child as though he or she were an ordinary member of the family.

The study reported in this paper concerns foster home placements arranged by the Department of Social Welfare. Thus except when the contrary is indicated, the terms "foster home", "foster placement", "foster care" and so on, as used in this paper, will refer specifically to the Department of Social Welfare's foster care system. The research does not deal with informal fostering arrangements occurring within the community nor foster care arrangements made by church based and other non-statutory welfare agencies. Thus foster care, in the present study, will refer to the arrangement whereby a family takes into its home a child who has been placed in the care of the Department of Social Welfare, and cares for that child, as far as possible, as if he or she were an ordinary member of the family.

Foster care is quite distinct from adoption, with which it is sometimes confused in the popular imagination. In the first place, adoptive parents become the legal guardians of the child they adopt, and in law have the same powers and responsibilities as though the child were theirs by birth. By contrast, in the case of a child under the guardianship of the state who is placed in a foster home, guardianship remains with the state although the foster parents provide the day to day care. The state also provides for the child's keep in the form of a weekly board rate paid to the foster parents. This is intended only to recompense them for the additional costs they incur in caring for the child, and is not intended to include any significant monetary recognition for the service provided. The foster child is encouraged, where possible, to keep in touch with his or her own biological parents or previous parent figures, and it is usually intended that the child will be returned eventually to that family. This is perhaps the most important practical distinction between adoption and fostering : while adoption is always intended to be permanent, a fostering arrangement is often intended as a temporary measure, a means of providing care until, for example, the child can be successfully returned to his or her own family. Of course, in some cases there is no real possibility of this, so that a foster home will be sought where the child can be cared for on a long term basis and where the child may remain until he or she has reached an age of independence. In any case, formal obligations on the part of the foster family cease when the child leaves the home.

Although the state is legally responsible for the child, it is the foster family that must provide the day-to-day care and guidance of the child, furnish the necessary warmth and security, and endeavour to make the child's life as close as possible to normal. It is considered that a healthy, already constituted family, with parents who are willing to take

on this extra and demanding task, has the best chance of providing a normal environment and of giving the warm personal support every child needs. Fostering is made more difficult by the fact that foster children frequently have special emotional needs as a result of having experienced disruption in their own family backgrounds, and possibly varying degrees of neglect or ill-treatment.

The foster family is assisted in its task of caring for the child by a departmental social worker who visits the child and family, and is available to the family to provide assistance and support. While the child is living in the foster home, the social worker will normally also be working with the child's original family, in order to prepare them for the eventual return of their child, or to sustain continuity of contact with the family where desirable, even if return to them cannot be considered until the child is much older.

1.2 THE USE OF FOSTER CARE IN PROVIDING FOR CHILDREN IN CARE

There are a number of ways in which children can come into care of the Department of Social Welfare. The majority are placed under the guardianship of the Director-General of Social Welfare by order of the Children and Young Persons' Court, because the court considers either that the child is in need of care and protection, or that the child's behaviour is so difficult or disturbed that he or she cannot be effectively managed in his or her usual home. There are also a number of children in the care of the Department by agreement with the child's parents, under the provision of Section 11 of the Children and Young Persons' Act 1974. In addition, the Department also provides temporary care for children who are remanded in its custody by the courts, usually while their long term needs are assessed, pending a final decision by the courts. The present study is concerned only with children in the first category - those who have been the subjects of court guardianship orders.

Table 1.1 gives details of the situations in which the 7031 children in the care of the Department were living as at 30 November 1979. The table shows the full range of placements available to the Department, including institutions such as departmental girls' and boys' homes, departmental long term training centres, Education Department special schools, as well as community placements, such as foster homes, and family homes (a variant form of foster care, in which a house is provided by the Department to a family who are prepared to care for a number of children). Children may also be placed at home with their own families on a trial basis, or with relatives, while they are in the care of the Department.

It is the declared philosophy of the Department which has been laid down for many years, that foster placements are the preferred form of care for children : "if for some reason a child cannot live in his own home with his own parents, it is best for him to live in someone else's home, where as far as possible he is a member of the family" (Section J9, Social Workers' Manual). It is evident from the table that this philosophy carries over into practice, as the 41% of children in foster homes form by far the biggest group.

Table 1.1 Placement of Children under the Care and Control of the Department of Social Welfare as at 30 November 1979

	No.	%
In foster homes	2891	41.1%
Placed with parents for trial period	967	13.8%
Living with and supported by relatives	184	2.6%
In residential colleges	172	2.4%
In Social Welfare short stay homes	407	5.8%
In Social Welfare family homes	778	11.1%
In private institutions	427	6.1%
In Department of Education special schools	33	0.5%
In hospitals	22	0.3%
In psychiatric hospitals and psychopaedic hospitals	45	0.6%
In Social Welfare national institutions	348	4.9%
In borstal and detention centres	8	0.1%
In police custody	2	0.0%
Absent without Leave	16	0.2%
Information on living situation not available *	731	10.4%
TOTAL CHILDREN IN CARE	7031	100.0%

* The information presented here is taken from a table which appears in the departmental annual report. The table was based on the formal status of the children, as used by the department, rather than on their living situations, which is the focus here. For this reason, there were several categories in the source table (children in employment, children receiving tertiary education, and children on probation) for which we have no information about the living situations of the children.

1.3 A BRIEF HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE USE OF FOSTER CARE IN NEW ZEALAND

Table 1.1 shows that about 80% of children in care are living in the community (in foster homes, in family homes, with their own families or with relatives), while only about 20% are in institutions. Historically, New Zealand has a firm commitment to caring for children in the community in this way. The Child Welfare Act of 1925 stated that "children committed to the care of the Superintendent (of the then Child Welfare Division of the Department of Education) ... shall not .... save in exceptional circumstances be permanently maintained in an institution", thus making it a statutory obligation for the Department to find suitable foster homes, where possible.

The practice of fostering children, or placing children "at board" as it was then termed, goes back to the 1880's. There is some difficulty obtaining numbers of children living in foster homes up until the end of the second world war, because of changes in the way the information was reported. Nevertheless, since the war, the proportion of children in care placed in foster homes has been consistently over 40%. Indeed, between 1950 and 1955 the proportion climbed to over 50%, but this has since declined again to its present level of around 40%.

Table 1.2 gives, for the years between 1945 and 1979, the total numbers of children in care, and the numbers and percentages of these placed in foster homes.

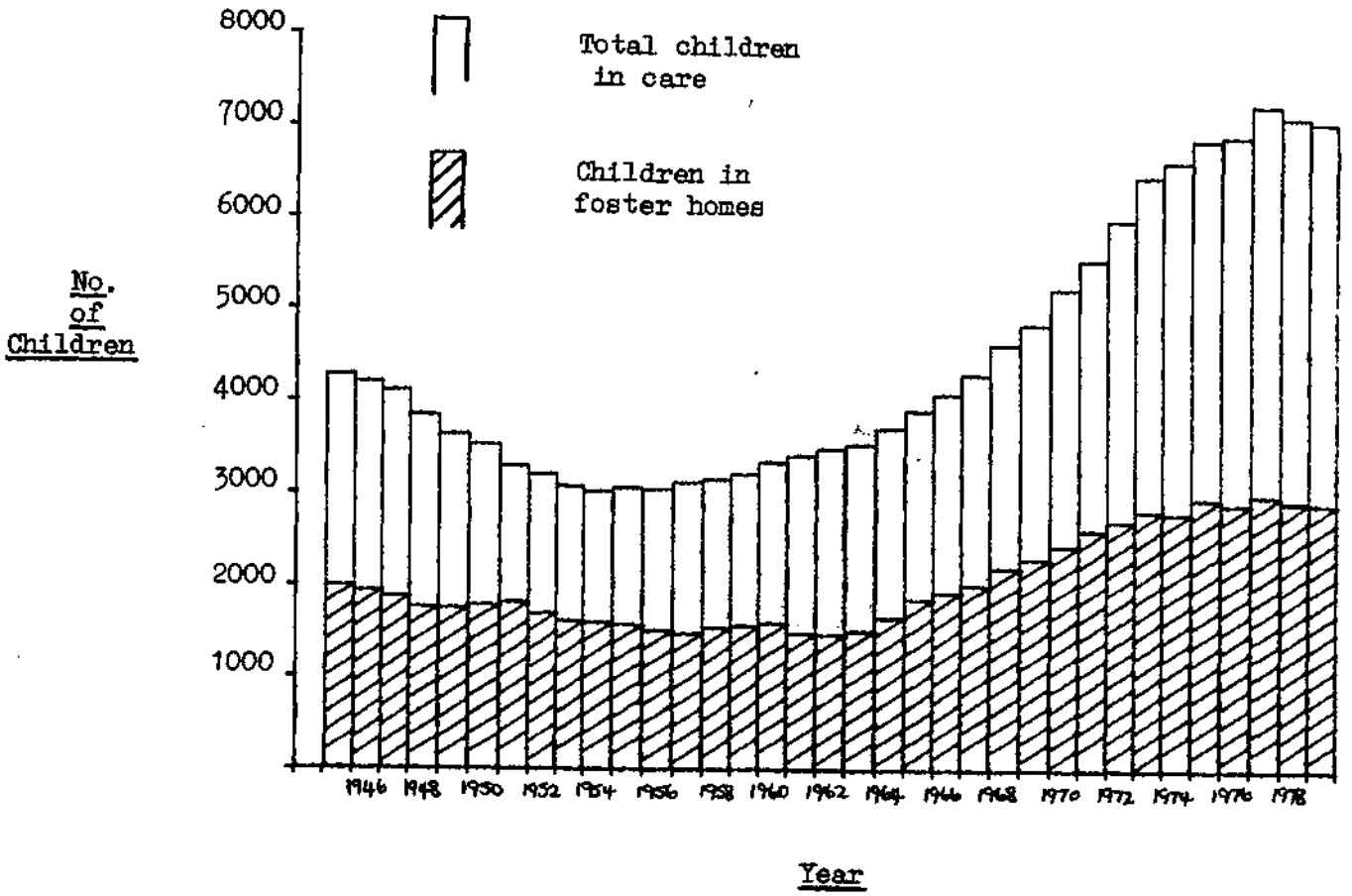
Table 1.2 Total Number of Children in Care and Number of Children in Foster Homes from 1945 to 1980

Year *	Number of Children in Care	Number of Children in foster homes	Percentage in foster homes
1945	4,258	1,976	46.4%
1946	4,184	1,924	46.0%
1947	4,096	1,858	45.4%
1948	3,824	1,747	45.7%
1949	3,616	1,737	48.0%
1950	3,502	1,771	50.6%
1951	3,270	1,796	54.9%
1952	3,177	1,681	52.9%
1953	3,050	1,599	52.4%
1954	2,995	1,579	52.7%
1955	3,033	1,553	51.2%
1956	3,018	1,489	49.3%
1957	3,092	1,461	47.3%
1958	3,122	1,520	48.7%
1959	3,180	1,539	48.4%
1960	3,314	1,574	47.5%
1961	3,387	1,467	43.3%
1962	3,457	1,451	42.0%
1963	3,506	1,494	42.6%
1964	3,684	1,642	44.6%
1965	3,881	1,841	47.4%
1966	4,056	1,917	47.3%
1967	4,269	1,999	46.8%
1968	4,602	2,189	47.6%
1969	4,814	2,290	47.6%
1970	5,202	2,430	46.7%
1971	5,515	2,599	47.1%
1972	5,950	2,693	45.3%
1973	6,428	2,808	43.7%
1974	6,588	2,783	42.2%
1975	6,838	2,938	43.0%
1976	6,871	2,877	41.9%
1977	7,214	2,968	41.1%
1978	7,081	2,908	41.1%
1979	7,031	2,891	41.1%

* Note : From 1950 to 1963, the figures given are as at 31 March, while from 1964 to 1979, the figures are as at 31 December. There is one exception to this : for the year 1979, the figures given are as at 30 November. It should also be noted that the figures do not include children placed in family homes.

Figure 1.1 represents the information in Table 1.1 graphically. A conspicuous feature is the trough in total numbers of children in care in the years immediately following the war, and the progressive increase beginning in the late 1950's, and continuing through to 1977, when it peaked. The numbers since 1977 have stabilised at around the 7,000 mark.

Figure 1.1 Total Number of Children in Care and Number of Children Placed in Foster Homes from 1945 to 1979



The numbers of children in foster homes began to rise in the early 1960's, although not as steeply as total children in care, so that the proportion of children in foster homes actually declined over the sixties and seventies. This is partly a result of the increasing numbers of children placed in family homes over that period. However, it was also a consequence of the difficulty of finding sufficient foster homes for the increasing numbers of children. An additional 1,000 foster homes were required between 1965 and 1975. Since 1975, the proportion of children in foster homes has been relatively stable at around 41%.

Over these years there was also a change in the way the system was perceived to be working, at least as this is reflected in official reports. Early accounts of the system given in the Annual Reports of the Child Welfare Division tended to be somewhat complacent in tone, given to bland assurances that the fostering system prepared children to become "decent and useful citizens". This rather self-congratulatory tone persists until at least after the second world war. A typical quote from the 1940's is as follows : "the Department's record of foster home placement is one from which it derives considerable satisfaction" and again "it is satisfactory to record that only in rare instances is it found necessary to remove a child from a foster home which has deteriorated or otherwise become unsuitable for the particular child placed therein".

A change in tone in the official reports is evident from about 1950 onwards. From this time, there was more frequent reference to the difficulties involved in fostering children, and the process of trial and error involved in making successful placements. In 1973, the Annual Report noted that "the task of foster parents is frequently difficult because the children placed with them are often very disturbed". It is not clear whether the change in tone in the reports actually reflects an increase in the degree of difficulties involved in fostering over these years, or is rather a result of increasing recognition of difficulties which had always existed. Certainly, the complacent tone of early reports suggests that the view taken was not a particularly self-searching one, and that shortcomings in the system may have been glossed over. Nevertheless, it is probably the case that there were elements of both these factors in the change of stance. It is likely both that the degree of difficulties was increasing as more children came into care, and that this increase of difficulty was forcing a more candid stance.

There appear to have been changes in attitude in foster care practice over these years too. In the early days of fostering, it was generally assumed that once a child had been removed from his or her home, the most appropriate course was to seek another home in which the child could receive substitute long term care. There was little thought given to restoring the child to his or her original family. One home was considered to be as good as another, as long as it fulfilled certain criteria. Over more recent years, foster care has come to be regarded more often as a temporary measure, as a means of providing care for a child while work is done with the family of the child with a view, eventually, to restoring the child to that family.

Thus, over the past two or three decades, both the practice of foster care within the Department, and the official face of the system, as given expression in annual reports, have undergone some change. It might also be noted here that it was in the 1950's that the first departmental family home was established, to cater for children who were considered difficult to foster, but for whom an institutional placement was regarded as undesirable. These facilities have also been used frequently to provide more temporary caring arrangements. Family homes have become increasingly important in the range of options for caring for children.

1.4 RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN FOSTER CARE

Partly as a result of increasing stresses on the foster care system, there have been a number of developments of particular interest over recent years. Firstly, the New Zealand Foster Care Federation was formed in 1976. The new Federation brought together a number of locally based Foster Care Associations, some of which had been in existence for a number of years. By providing a national umbrella, the Federation has since had a seeding effect, stimulating greater local community interest in foster care, and encouraging the formation of more local associations. Since its formation, the Federation has held annual conferences, and has been active in promoting mutual support among foster parents, and in helping to formulate policy in the area of the foster care services.

In 1980, an Intensive Foster Care Scheme was launched by the Department of Social Welfare in conjunction with the Foster Care Federation, and is currently being piloted in Auckland and Christchurch. The scheme is designed to make a well supported foster placement a viable option for children who, because of evident difficulties, appear to be unlikely to succeed in normal foster care. The scheme involves special recruitment and training of foster parents, a higher level of board rate, and more intensive social work back up.

A further sign of interest in foster care was the planning of this survey. The project was originally proposed in 1976, and the data collection was begun in 1977. A first report was produced in 1978, and presented to the annual conference of the Foster Care Federation in that year.

These developments show that there is at present a lively interest in foster care, and in finding ways in which the system can be improved. No longer is the fostering system comfortably taken for granted; no longer is it pronounced that fostering transforms children into "decent and useful citizens"; that the system is a source of great satisfaction to the Department, even that it is the best we can do. Rather, these assumptions are being increasingly questioned. The present study is part of this questioning process. It is the intention of this report to examine the way in which the Department has provided for a sample of children while they are in care, to allow judgments to be made as to how well the present system provides for children in the Department's care.

CHAPTER 2: PREVIOUS RESEARCH INTO FOSTER CARE

Foster care has been the subject of a considerable amount of research in Britain and the United States, while there have been only a handful of small scale studies conducted in New Zealand. Studies into foster care generally follow one of three distinct approaches, identified by George (1970). These are the "follow up" approach, in which the life adjustment of adults who were fostered as children is assessed; the "current" approach, in which children who are currently in foster homes are rated on various adjustment measures; and the "breakdown" approach, which generally involves examining the turnover of placements experienced by foster children, length of stay in a foster home often being used as an indication of the success of the placement.

The overseas literature is dominated by studies of the third type concerned with turnover and breakdown of placements, and most work done in New Zealand has also been of this nature. The present study was also conceived on the "breakdown" model. The children in the sample were not approached or observed directly : rather, information was gathered from their files, describing their placement histories over a period of five years following the care order. The brief review of the literature in this section will focus mainly on results from studies of the "breakdown" type.

The "breakdown" approach, with its emphasis on a need for more stable long term placements, seems to contradict what many regard as an important feature of foster care : that it is primarily a temporary arrangement until the child may be reunited with his or her own family. This points us towards a central problem in evaluating foster care programmes, which arises out of conflicting assumptions as to what the purpose of foster care is, and hence as to what constitutes "success" and "failure" in placements.

Kadushin (1967) wrote : "One of the most serious problems faced by the foster care programme is that it is failing, in a wide margin, to fulfil its purpose. The distinguishing aspect of foster care is that it is designed to be a temporary arrangement. The family is broken up only so that it can be put together again in a way that will be less problematic for the child. Currently, however, many children moving into foster care never return to their homes." The spectre of children "adrift" in foster care in this way has been raised by others, and the whole topic has been the subject of much debate (e.g. Sherman et. al., 1973). In some circumstances, long term placements, characterised by Dinnage and Kelmer Pringle (1967) as "semi adoptive", are seen as desirable on the grounds that "children who have already suffered separation from their parent should not be exposed to further unnecessary moves. There needs to be continuity both of environment and of important relationships. Studies make it clear, however, that many children do not have this continuity and this is harmful to their satisfactory development" (Adcock, 1980). The "breakdown" approach reflects the fact that although most agencies work on the assumption that foster children may be returned to their natural families in time, the stability of their foster home placements is seen as desirable.

This conflict over aims has had the effect that studies have approached the topic from widely varied stand points. Most studies have been concerned with stability of placement and many have used the simplistic notion of the length of time the child stays in the placement as the criterion of "success". Parker (1966) was among the first to use such an approach : he chose a five year period as his yard stick. According to this criterion, 52% of the 209 foster placements in his study in one county in England were successful - i.e. about half the children remained in their placements for at least five years. Of the failed placements, Parker found that 70% had ended within the first two years.

Other researchers, using this approach, have come up with success rates which have varied considerably, as have the periods over which they monitored the placements. Napier (1972) also used a five year period : he also introduced an additional dimension, by examining the reason for the termination of placements. In his study, the proportion of placements which lasted for five years was 30% (n = 167), while in the case of 17% of placements, children had to be removed from a home other than as planned : yielding a success rate of 30% and a breakdown rate of 17%. Gray and Parr (1957) found that 46% of the foster placements arranged for children in their large sample (n = 1776) had terminated within one year. Furthermore, when planned or unavoidable terminations were excluded, 25% of all placements were found to have broken down within the year. Gray and Parr also reported that in about a third of the placements which had ended, the child was "at fault", while in around 10% the foster parents were at fault. In general, these studies have tended to agree that the risk of placement breakdown is highest over the first year, but diminishes thereafter.

Although this approach which defines success purely in terms of length of stay seems rather simplistic today, yet this must be seen in the context of foster care practice at the time. As mentioned in Chapter 1, early fostering practice was largely directed towards establishing the child on a long term basis in a substitute family, often with little thought of return to his or her original family. The frequency with which such returns "home" were attempted was quite low, and the early researchers were probably justified in neglecting these cases. Such an approach is not a viable one in the climate of current practice, however. Where placements terminate, we must take cognisance of the reasons for the termination, as did Napier in his 1972 study.

Other researchers have concerned themselves with the numbers of placements experienced by children (i.e. placement turnover) rather than length of stay. Maas and Engler (1959), in their large American study, found that children had an average of between two and three placements during their time in care. Ambinder (1965) found a higher average among his sample of boys only : he found that the average 13 year old boy had had four to five placements. Gray and Parr also counted the number of placements experienced by the children in their sample. 40% of the children had been placed in a foster home once, 12% twice, and 5% three times or more. This was over a period of one year.

All of these studies were primarily concerned with the stability of the foster placements, and several of the researchers attempted to identify factors associated with positive or negative outcomes of placements. Parker tried to construct a prediction table for outcome of foster placements. Other researchers following Parker have made various attempts to validate this table, but without much agreement. Walton and Heywood, for example, transplanting Parker's study into a different county in England, found that many placements which, according to the table should have failed, were successful. George (1970) agreed with Parker on two items : that older children, and children displaying behavioural difficulties were more likely to experience failed placements, while Napier's findings supported Parker only on the association of the age of the child with placement failure. Nevertheless, a number of variables have been shown to be associated with the outcome of foster placements, as noted by Prosser: these include the age of the child at placement (older children being less likely to succeed in foster placements); the length of time a child had spent in residential care (the longer, the less likely was the child to succeed in foster care); and the child's experience of a previous foster placement (children who had had previous foster placements being less likely to succeed). However, as Prosser points out, there is no agreement about the importance of individual factors.

While most of the research effort has been directed at gauging the stability of placements, and possible factors affecting this, Fanshel (1971) took a different tack. His concern was the exit of children from foster care : i.e. how many children were eventually returning home. He found that 54% of his 624 children had exited from care at the end of the three and a half year period, while the remaining 46% were still in foster care. Of those children who had left care, most had left during the earlier phase of the placement. The greatest rate of exit was achieved for cases where the main reason the child had come into care was the illness of a parent figure : 55% of such children had returned home within one year. However, only 12% of children in care for reasons of their behaviour had returned home within a year, and only 18% of those who had been abandoned.

It appears that the fostering system studied in Fanshel's study had a somewhat different emphasis from that operating in this country - that it tended to be more frequently used for short term care arrangements than is the case in New Zealand. Indeed, one of the problems in comparing results in different studies, and hence in comparing overseas results with those achieved in New Zealand, is that they may relate to quite different regimes, taking different types of children, and offering different types of care, with different types of objectives. The range of approaches taken in evaluating different programmes is in part a reflection of the wide variety of different types of caring regimes operating in different contexts.

The remainder of this chapter will focus on the work done in New Zealand. Most of this has been simply concerned with length of stay, and turnover of placements experienced by foster children. Robertson (1951), for the School of Social Sciences at Victoria University, carried out a statistical check on the Child Welfare Division records of 1,863 children in care in October 1951. Using somewhat approximate methods, she gave the following estimates of placement turnover : approximately 30% of the children had a change of placement less frequently than once every four years, while at the other end of the scale, 30% of the children were being moved to new foster homes at least once every year. Gunn (1959), investigated the records of 59 children committed to the care of the Superintendent of Child Welfare under the age of two years, and followed them up for eight years. Thirty three of the children had been adopted, but of the remainder, only four had remained in one placement for the eight years, while the remainder had an average of between 2 and 3 placements each. Some children had more than ten placements over the period. Furthermore, Gunn considered that less than half the children who were not adopted were well adjusted. He concluded that the children had been subject to an excessive amount of movement, usually with detrimental effect.

In 1968 the Child Welfare Division Research Section carried out a retrospective file study of 99 children committed to care under the age of two, and followed their progress for seven and a half years. They were found to have an average of 3 to 4 placements each. 70% of the children had had three placements or less, but nearly 20% had had eight or more placements. In 1974 a group of Lower Hutt social workers, examining the records of 98 state wards found that 80% had had more than one placement, and that on average, the children were experiencing a change of foster home every eleven months.

Most of the fore-going studies were on a small scale, and used crude methods in their analyses of the records. More substantial projects were mounted by Stirling (1972) and Prasad (1975), although neither of these went much beyond measurement of placement turnover. Stirling studied the files of 67 children committed to care between 1960 and 1965. She found 66% of foster placements had ended within two years and that the majority of these had ended within the first year. Prasad found that 71% of placements for the 91 children in his Auckland sample lasted for two years, and 55% lasted for three years. He did not give figures for average length of stay.

Overall, the picture that emerges from these studies is one of considerable movement of children between foster homes. This gives rise to some concern, as overseas research has demonstrated that there is a clear link between foster placement breakdown and maladjustment. By way, of caveat, it should be noted, as Dinnage and Kelmer-Pringle observed, that "it would not be realistic to ask whether repeated placements are the cause or the result of emotional disturbance, since the two factors are so closely linked". With this association between breakdown and maladjustment in mind, it is the aim of the present paper to establish the real extent of breakdown in foster placements in this country, and to attempt to determine what factors are associated with such breakdown.

CHAPTER 3: THE PRESENT STUDY : AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 THE DESIGN OF THE STUDY

The present project was originally proposed in 1976, and was conceived as a three part examination of the foster care service operated by the Department. The three parts of the project were as follows : -

* a survey of a sample of 300 sets of foster parents, seeking details of their experience of the foster care service operated by the Department, and their attitudes towards various issues in fostering;

* a survey of all social workers employed by the Department of Social Welfare, seeking details of the extent of their work involvement in fostering, the length of their experience, and their attitudes towards various issues in fostering. A number of the questions asked of social workers were coincident with those asked of foster parents, in order to allow for comparison between social workers and foster parents;

* an examination of the case histories of a sample of 654 children in care, covering the family backgrounds of the children, the circumstances surrounding the care order, and the placements arranged for the children over a five year period following the care order.

A preliminary report on results from the first two parts of the study was produced in 1978. The present paper reports on results from the third part of the project, that relating to the sample of children in care, which is the largest and most central part of the whole study. This chapter decribes the aims and methodology of this part of the study.

3.2 THE AIMS OF THE STUDY

The aims of the study were to provide basic descriptive data about the types of children who come into the care of the Department of Social Welfare via a court order, about the ways in which children come to the notice of the courts, and about the reasons for decisions to take children into care; to provide descriptive data about the placements arranged for the children during the period spent in care (with particular emphasis on foster placements), and about the outcomes of those placements; and through this information to seek to identify factors associated with successful outcomes of foster placements, and those associated with failed placements.

3.3 THE SAMPLING PROCEDURE

The sample, comprising 654 children, was a national random sample (unstratified by district or by any other key variable) drawn from the total of 1175 children who were the subjects of guardianship orders made by the Children's Court in the year 1971. A more detailed account of the sampling procedure is given in Appendix 1.

3.4 THE DATA COLLECTION

A standard recording form, titled the Foster Child Recording Form, was used for the collection of information on each child included in the sample. The form was a 54 page booklet, which sought comprehensive details about the child's life history prior to the care order, and about all placements arranged for the child during the first five years following the care order.

The forms were filled in by district office social work staff, using the children's files as the information source. It was requested that, where possible, the form should be filled in by the social worker who had been responsible for the case supervision of the child. Regrettably, this was often not possible, owing to staff turnover among social work staff. Thus, in many cases, the form was filled in from case record files by a social worker who had no personal knowledge of the child.

The data collection was a major exercise for departmental social workers, owing to the amount of information sought about each child. The recording forms were sent out to districts in March 1977. As the forms were returned to Head Office, they were checked by research staff against Head Office files for completeness and accuracy. A substantial amount of amendation and augmentation of the recorded data was carried out at this point. Where possible, corrections were carried out from files held in Head Office, but frequently forms had to be returned to district offices to be rectified. The data collection phase of the project took more than a year, and forms were still being received from districts in April 1978.

3.5 THE DATA PREPARATION AND ANALYSIS

Once the forms had been checked for accuracy and completeness, they were coded in numeric form, using a detailed coding specification and a specially designed coding sheet. Again, the coding operation was a major exercise, involving 1,550 numeric characters per child, for the 654 children.. Coding was begun in 1977, and was concluded late in 1978.

The coded data was key punched onto Inforex tape, and a computer file was established for the purposes of analysis. Prior to analysis, an extensive editing exercise was carried out on the data, checking for invalid codes and logical inconsistencies. The editing procedure was again a time consuming exercise, and was not finally completed until November 1979.The editing did not succeed in entirely eliminating errors from the data, and further errors have been detected as analysis has proceeded. These have been corrected as they have come to light. The results reported here may be subject to further modification as processing continues. Such modifications, however, will certainly be minor, and will not change the pattern of the results.

Once the editing was completed, analysis began, using the SPSS package (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) available on the State Service IBM computer at the Cumberland installation.

3.6 CURRENT STATE OF ANALYSIS AND SCOPE OF THIS REPORT

The analysis carried out to date has largely been descriptive in nature, and the present report does not aim to go far beyond a descriptive approach. Thus the report will be concerned with the personal characterisitics of the children in the sample, their family backgrounds, the reasons they came into care, and will focus on the patterns of placement which they have experienced in the five year period following the care order.

Some exploratory analysis has been done with a view to identifying factors associated with success in foster placements. However, there is a need for further work before this question can be squarely addressed. In addition, there are a number of other topics of interest which have not yet been broached. Further analysis of these aspects is planned, and further reports will be produced as results come to hand.

CHAPTER 4: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES

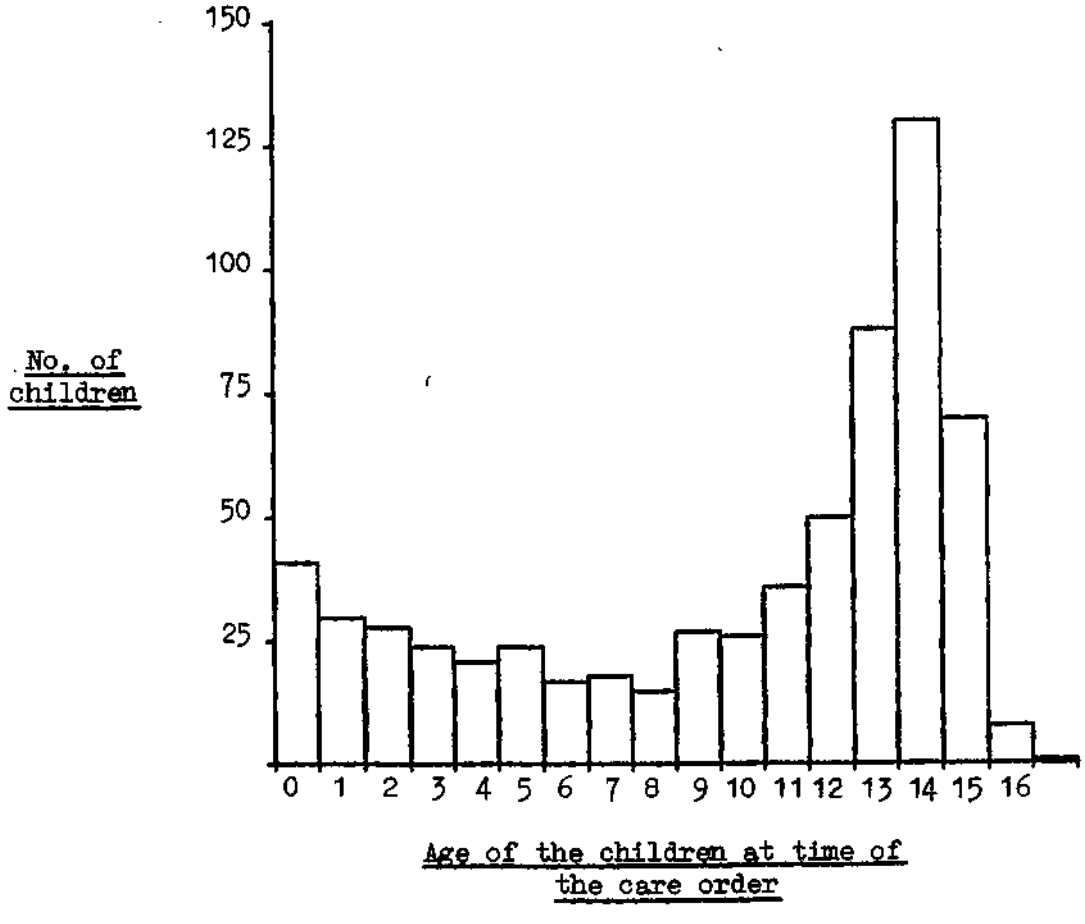
This chapter presents basic information on the children and their families. First, the demographic characteristics of the children and their biological parents will be examined. However, not all of the children were raised by their biological parents. Indeed, many of the children experienced a number of different living situations prior to the care order. For this reason, the family in which the child had spent most time prior to the care order was identified, and selected characteristics of this family will be reported. This family will be referred to as the "main family".

4.1 DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CHILD AND HIS OR HER BIOLOGICAL PARENTS

4.1.1 Age and sex of the child

The ages of the children at the time of the care order ranged from less than one to seventeen years the median age being 11. The distribution of ages of children coming into care has frequently been shown in other research to have a bi-modal tendency, with relatively high numbers at a young age (usually on the grounds of neglect or indigence), a trough in numbers roughly between the ages of four and nine, and higher numbers again over pre-adolescent and adolescent years (usually on the basis of misconduct or offending). The distribution for the children in the sample exhibits just such a bi-modal tendency, which is shown in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1 Ages of the Children at the Time of the Care Order



The graph shows that the bulk of the children came into care between the ages of 12 and 15, the 14 year olds being the single biggest age group. The numbers tailed off considerably above age 14.

There was a preponderance of males in the sample which, although not very large, was more than could be explained in terms of the sex distribution in the population at large. Table 4.1 gives the numbers and percentages of males and females in the sample, compared with percentages in the total population for the 0 to 17 age group.

Table 4.1 Sex Distribution of the Children in Sample, Compared With the Distribution for 0 - 17 year olds in 1971 Census Figures

	Children in the Sample		0 to 17 year olds in 1971 Census figures
Males	365	56%	51%
Females	289	44%	49%

NOTE: 1971 census figures were used because the sample comprised children who came into care in 1971.

When age and sex were considered in conjunction, it emerged that the preponderance of males occurred mainly in the older age groups. The mean age at the time of the care order was 10.3 for males, and 9.1 for females. Table 4.2 has details of the age of the children at the time of the care order, broken down by sex.

Table 4.2 Age of the Children at the Time of the Care Order by Sex

Age	Male		Female		Total	
less than 1 yr	22	6%	19	7%	41	6%
1	8	2%	22	8%	30	5%
2	12	3%	16	6%	28	4%
3	11	3%	13	4%	24	4%
4	10	3%	11	4%	21	3%
5	10	3%	14	5%	24	4%
6	10	3%	7	2%	17	3%
7	8	2%	10	3%	18	3%
8	8	2%	7	2%	14	2%
9	19	5%	8	3%	27	4%
10	16	4%	10	3%	26	4%
11	25	7%	11	4%	36	6%
12	34	10%	15	5%	50	8%
13	53	15%	35	12%	88	13%
14	77	21%	53	18%	130	20%
15	37	10%	33	11%	70	11%
16	3	1%	5	2%	8	1%
17	1	-	-	-	1	-
TOTAL	365	100%	289	100%	654	100%

The table shows that up to the age of eight, the number of females coming into care tended to be slightly greater than the number of males. However, for ages above eight, the number of males was considerably greater than the number of females. Table 4.3 collapses Table 4.2 into a two way breakdown, around the age of eight. The relationship between sex and age at the time of the care order was significant in statistical terms ($p < 0.01$ on the chi-squared test).

Table 4.3 Children Aged Eight or Less and Children Aged More Than Eight at the Time of the Care Order by Sex

		male		female		total	
Age	eight or less	99	27%	119	41%	218	33%
	more than eight	266	73%	170	59%	436	67%
	TOTAL	365	56%	289	44%	654	100%

Using 1971 Census figures, we can compute a crude rate of the number of children coming into care per 1000 children in the total population for each of the four age-sex groups in Table 4.3. These rates are given in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4 Rate of Children Coming Into Care per 1000 Children in the Total Population by Age and Sex

		Sex	
		male	female
Age	eight or less	2.80	3.48
	older than eight	10.08	6.55

These rates indicate that younger females tend to be more likely than younger males to be the subjects of care orders, while adolescent boys are much more likely to be taken into care than adolescent girls. It is probable that the higher likelihood of adolescent boys coming into care is a result of the higher incidence of offending among adolescent males. A fuller discussion of this question will be given in Chapter 5, which deals with the reasons for the care order.

4.1.2 Ethnic origin of the children

Ethnic origin is a somewhat problematic variable, for several reasons. In the first place, there is a problem of how to record the ethnic status of persons of mixed descent. The coding classification used was a fairly full one, based on that used in the Census. Nevertheless, it relied on approximations. For example, persons with more than half Maori parentage and the balance European were coded as Maori, while persons with some Maori parentage, but less than half, and the balance European were coded part Maori. A similar convention applied to other ethnic groups, while persons from a mixture of non-European ethnic groups were classified by the ethnic group which comprised the largest part of their ancestry.

From this it can be seen that some children will be coded as if they were from an ethnically homogeneous background, when they had, say, a grandparent who was a different ethnic origin. The results therefore are rather crude, and will underestimate the numbers of children of mixed ancestry.

It was not possible, however, to apply a more precise coding for persons of mixed origin, because the information recorded on the files was often woefully meagre. Persons may be recorded simply as Maori, for example, when the actual proportion of their Maori ancestry might be anything from full blooded to an eighth, or even less. Thus the distinction between Maoris and part Maoris, preserved in Table 4.5 below probably does not reflect the actual situation very accurately. For these reasons, the full coding of ethnic origin was not used in the analysis, but was generally collapsed into three categories as follows: Full European, Maori or part Maori, and other. At some points, an even simpler break-down into Full European and non-European was used. For the record, Table 4.5 gives the distribution of ethnic origin according to the full coding.

Table 4.5 Distribution of Ethnic Origin for the Survey Children

Ethnic Origin	Frequency	Percentage %
Full European	255	39.0
Part Maori	45	6.9
Maori	302	46.2
Maori/Pacific Islander	18	2.8
Maori/Other	2	0.3
Samoan	7	1.1
Cook Islander	12	1.8
Niuean	4	0.6
Other Pacific Islander	1	0.2
Fijian	1	0.2
Indian	1	0.2
Other Ethnic Group	2	0.3
Other mixed origin	3	0.5
Missing	1	0.2
TOTAL CHILDREN	654	100%

When the figures are compared with what would be expected on the basis of the ethnic composition of the total population, it can be seen that Maoris are considerably over-represented. Table 4.6 allows this comparison by presenting the ethnic distribution of the children in the sample in terms of four broad groups, European, Maori or part Maori, Pacific Island Polynesian and others, compared with the distribution for the total population aged 0 to 14, from 1971 Census figures.

Table 4.6 Distribution of Ethnic Origin for the Children in the Sample Compared with Distribution for the 0 to 14 Year Old Population in 1971 Census Figures

	Children in the Sample		0 to 14 year olds in 1971 Census
Full European	255	39.0%	80.9%
Maori or Part Maori	347	53.1%	12.3%
Pacific Island Polynesian	24	3.7%	2.4%
Other Ethnic Group	28	4.3%	3.4%
TOTAL CHILDREN	654	100%	

The classification of ethnic origin for this study was similar to, but not identical with, that used in the Census, so that this table should be used with some caution. Nevertheless, it is clear that Maoris are overwhelmingly over-represented in our sample, comprising more than half of the children. Children from other ethnic groups also appear to be slightly over-represented, but the effects are so slight that not too much weight should be placed on them, in view of the difficulties of obtaining reliable data.

There may be several factors operating to produce this effect. In the first place, part of it may be attributed to the effects of different socio-economic distributions among the Maori and European populations, since there is a higher overall incidence of guardianship orders for children from lower socio-economic groups. However, previous research on the area of offending by young persons, for example, has not been able to account completely for over-representation by Maoris, by reference to variables such as socio-economic status.

It may also be that European families are more likely to have access to other resources to assist them in dealing with problem children, which are not so readily available to families of different cultures and that these families consequently become much more visible to the authorities. However, this is merely speculation, and it must be stated that it is still not completely understood why Maori children are over-represented in the numbers of children coming into care.

A small sub-group of the children were from families where the biological parents were from different ethnic groups. This variable is of some interest, not because of any shibboleth about mixed blood, but because parents from different cultures have extra adjustments to make, and the difference of cultural backgrounds is an additional potential source of strain and conflict in the marriage.

Table 4.7 gives a breakdown of the children whose parents were recorded as having different ethnic backgrounds.

Table 4.7 Children with Parents of Different Ethnic Origin

Ethnic Origin	No.	% of children in total sample
Mixed Polynesian*	20	3.1%
European/Polynesian*	90	13.8%
Other, mixed origin	11	1.7%
TOTAL CHILDREN WITH PARENTS OF DIFFERENT ETHNIC ORIGINS	121	18.5%

* Including Maoris and Pacific Islanders

The proportion of children with parents of different ethnic origins (nearly 20%) is relatively high. In the absence of figures for the population at large, which are not easily available, we have no way of knowing just how high, although it would certainly appear to be higher than would be found for the total population. Most of the children with heterogeneous origins are from Polynesian/European unions. It could be that this pattern is merely a reflection of the over-representation of Maoris in the sample: as the sample tends towards "Maori-ness", this means that there is an over-representation of part Maoris in the sample as well. However, another interpretation of the figures is possible here: it may be that the pattern indicates that being of mixed ethnic origin is a social handicap in some way, so that children of mixed descent are more likely to be the subjects of care orders. However again in the absence of reliable population controls, it is not possible to explain fully the pattern of the distribution here.

The age distributions of children of different ethnic status were similar in shape, with European children being slightly younger on average than children of non-European ethnic origin.

Table 4.8 Age at Time of the Guardianship Order by Ethnic Origin

Age (years)	European		Maori or part Maori		Other		Total	
Less than 2	29	11%	37	11%	5	10%	71	11%
2 to 4	33	13%	37	11%	3	6%	73	11%
5 to 9	47	18%	44	13%	10	20%	101	15%
10 to 13	66	26%	123	35%	10	20%	199	30%
14 or more	80	31%	106	31%	23	45%	209	32%
TOTAL	255	100%	347	100%	51	100%	653	100%

More European children (18%) came into care between the ages of 5 and 9 than Maoris (13%), while there were more Maoris (35%) in the 10 to 13 year age group than Europeans (26%). It may be that this pattern is related to patterns of misconduct and offending displayed by the children. It will be seen in Chapter 5 that European children were more likely than others to come to attention for misbehaviour, while Maoris were more likely to come to attention for offending. The average age at which children come to attention for misbehaviour is generally somewhat lower on average than the age at which children first come to notice for offending. Be this as it may, the differences here are not large, nor are they statistically significant.

4.1.3 Children born outside New Zealand

Only 19 children were born outside New Zealand (less than 3% of the total sample). Eleven of these were from Pacific Island countries while eight were of European descent.

The proportion of children in the sample born outside New Zealand is no greater than that observed for the population at large (in 1971 Census figures, around 4% of children aged between 0 and 15 were born outside New Zealand). However, there appears to be a disproportionate representation of children from Pacific Island countries among them. The Pacific Islands accounted for only 14% of children aged 0 to 14 born outside New Zealand in 1971 Census figures, compared with over half of those in the sample. It would appear that among immigrant children, those of other than European ethnic origin have a higher risk of coming into care. However, the numbers here are very small: only 11 out of more than 5000 children in the total New Zealand population aged 0 to 15 who were born in the Pacific Islands.

4.1.4 Age of the biological parents of the child

The average age of the mother at the time of the birth of the survey child was 25.3, while the average age of the father was about four years older at 29.5. Table 4.9 gives the distribution of the ages of the biological parents at the time of birth of the children.

Table 4.9 Ages of the Biological Parents at the Time of Birth of the Children in the Sample

Age	Mother		Father	
Less than 16	6	1%	2	=
16 - 19	92	14%	18	3%
20 - 24	189	29%	110	17%
25 - 29	159	24%	157	24%
30 - 34	92	14%	116	18%
35 - 39	37	6%	64	10%
40 - 44	7	1%	25	4%
45 - 49	-	-	14	2%
50 or more	-	-	6	1%
missing	72	11%	142	22%
TOTAL	654	100%	654	100%

The birth years of the children in the sample ranged from 1953 to 1971, so that any exact comparison of the above information with national fertility patterns would need to take account of changes in these patterns over an 18 year period. This would be a major demographic exercise which is beyond the scope of this paper. However, we can provide some reference points. The average age of mothers for all live births in the year 1957 (which was the birth year for the biggest single age group of children in the sample - the 14 year olds) was 27.6, while by 1971 it had reduced to 25.1. As most of the births of children in the sample were towards the earlier end of the time period, it appears that the mothers of children in the sample were slightly younger than average at the time of birth of the survey child. However, the likely size of the difference (i.e. one or two years) seems too small to be of practical significance.

It is probably more useful to examine the age of the mother at the time of the birth of her first child. This is of some interest, as overseas research has shown that couples who begin families before they have had a chance to establish themselves (ie with respect to housing, finances etc) thereby place themselves in a position of relative deprivation, from which they may take some years to recover. Many lose ground which they never make up. This may in turn have some effect in placing the children at a higher risk of coming into care.

Table 4.10 addressed this question by giving the age of the biological mother at the time of birth of her first child. Unfortunately the information is rather inadequate, as the survey form was not designed to deliver full information about the family of the biological parents where they had not been responsible for raising the child. Thus there is a relatively high proportion of missing information. Nevertheless, for 323 cases, the information was available. The exercise was not repeated for the biological fathers, as there were additional complications with the father figure, and the loss of information was prohibitively high.

Table 4.10 Age of the Biological Mother at the Birth of her First Child

13	5	1%
14	-	-
15	5	1%
16	18	13%
17	25	4%
18	38	6%
19	48	7%
20 - 24	133	20%
25 - 29	38	6%
30 - 34	9	1%
35 - 39	3	*
40 or more	1	*
information not available	331	51%
TOTAL MOTHERS	654	100%

53 of the mothers (8%) had their first child at the age of 17 or younger, which is young by most standards. It should be noted that this will represent a considerable under-estimate of the proportion of very young mothers, for two reasons. Firstly, the information is available for less than half the cases, so that if the same rate occurred among the mothers for whom the information is not available, then the percentage would be twice as large. However, there is reason to suspect that there would be an even higher proportion of very young mothers among those for whom we have no information, since this group contains all the mothers who gave up their children, many of whom would have been very young.

To set this result in context, we can note that the proportion of mothers aged 17 or less, for all nuptial first births rose from 1.6% in 1953 to 5.5% in 1971, and did not exceed 6% for any year during this period. Unfortunately, figures are not available for total first births (including ex-nuptial births). Overall, it seems likely that the mothers of children in the sample had begun their families at a relatively early age. Just what part this plays in the process of children coming to care needs to be investigated further.

4.1.5 Legitimacy status of the child

A quarter of the children in the sample (168) were born ex-nuptially. Although this is not particularly high in comparison with current rates of ex-nuptial births (in 1978 and 1979 the proportion of ex-nuptial out of all live births was over 20%, and for the first three quarters of 1980, it was more than 21%), it nevertheless indicates that ex-nuptial children are considerably over-represented in the sample, since the rate of ex-nuptial births was much lower over the 1950's and 1960's when the survey children were born, rising from 4% in 1953 to 15% in 1971.

The figures for the sample can be put in a national context by breaking the sample down into same age cohorts and comparing these with national figures. Thus Table 4.11 gives the number and percentage of children in the sample born ex-nuptially, for each year from 1954 to 1971, and compares this with the rate of ex-nuptial births for the total population for each year.

Table 4.11 Number of Children Born Ex-nuptially for Each Year from 1954 to 1971 Compared with National Rates of Ex-nuptial Births

Year	No. of children in the sample born ex-nuptially	Total children in sample	Percentage born ex-nuptially	National ex-nuptial birth rate
1953	-	1	-	4%
1954	-	2	-	4%
1955	5	35	14%	5%
1956	14	112	13%	5%
1957	16	111	14%	5%
1958	7	58	12%	5%
1959	10	46	22%	5%
1960	3	30	10%	5%
1961	6	22	27%	6%
1962	4	25	16%	8%
1963	5	16	31%	9%
1964	4	20	20%	10%
1965	7	23	30%	11%
1966	10	23	43%	12%
1967	5	14	36%	13%
1968	11	30	37%	13%
1969	16	29	55%	13%
1970	30	39	77%	14%
1971	15	18	83%	15%

Clearly, the proportion of children in the sample born ex-nuptially is much higher than the corresponding proportion in the population at large. This over-representation is evident for every age cohort, excluding only the three children born in 1953 and 1954. Using the ex-nuptial birth rate for each year together with the number of children in the sample born in that year, we can compute the number of ex-nuptial children we would expect to find in the sample. This expected number is 46 (7%), which compares with 152 children (23%) in the sample who were actually born ex-nuptially.

The other fact which emerges from this table is that there is a strong relationship in the sample between age and being born ex-nuptially. Over half the children born in 1964 or later (i.e. those up to the age of seven) were ex-nuptial, while more than three-quarters of the children born in 1970 and 1971 (i.e. up to the age of two) were ex-nuptial. This pattern indicates first, that for children born out of wedlock, there is a higher risk of coming into care, and secondly, that this risk is highest in the earliest years of life, and diminishes as the age of the child increases.

There were slightly fewer males (23% of all males) among the ex-nuptial children than females (28% of all females), while there was a strong tendency for children of ethnic backgrounds other than European to be over-represented in the ex-nuptial group. The sex effect was not a significant one, while the over-representation of non-European children was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$ on the chi-squared test). Table 4.12 gives details.

Table 4.12 Legitimacy Status of the Child by Sex and Ethnic Origin

	European				Maori or part Maori				Other				Total	
	male		female		male		female		male		female			
nuptial	112	82%	91	77%	139	72%	95	62%	23	68%	12	71%	472	72%
ex-nuptial	25	18%	21	18%	49	25%	56	37%	11	32%	5	29%	168	26%
missing	-	-	6	5%	6	3%	2	1%	-	-	-	-	14	2%
TOTAL	137		118		194		153		34		17		654	

chi-squared = 30.07, $p < 0.001$

Of the 168 children who were born ex-nuptially, 36 were subsequently legitimised, 10 by the marriage of the parents, and the remainder through adoption. Table 4.13 gives details of the change of status for those children born ex-nuptially who were subsequently legitimised.

Table 4.13 Number of Children Born Ex-nuptially and Number Subsequently Legitimised

Parents married	10	6%
Adopted by one parent and spouse	4	2%
Adopted by relatives, friends or foster parents	6	4%
Adopted by strangers	11	7%
Adopted (not known by whom)	5	3%
Total children subsequently legitimised	36	21%
TOTAL CHILDREN BORN EX-NUPTIALLY	168	100%

4.1.6 Socio-economic status of the biological parents

An estimate of the socio-economic status of the biological parents of the children in the sample was computed using Elley and Irving's Revised Socio-Economic Index for New Zealand, 1976. This index represents an attempt by the authors to quantify the subjective concept of "socio-economic status", using objective data. The index was constructed from 1971 Census data about income levels and average level of education for a large number of occupational categories. The data were analysed, and a scale constructed which assigned the occupations to one of six categories, score 1 representing highest socio-economic status (ses) and score 6 representing lowest ses. Although it is not a perfect instrument, the scale has been validated by independent researchers.

A score was assigned to each of the biological families of children in the sample, on the basis of the reported occupation of the father, or, where the father was not working, that of the mother. Unfortunately, there remains a high proportion of cases (18%) for which the information about the occupations of the biological parents is not available. Nevertheless it is sufficiently clear from the information that is available, that the biological families of the survey children were overwhelmingly from the lower socio-economic groups. Table 4.14 gives details of the distribution of ses scores for the families of children in the sample, giving also for comparison purposes, the distribution of scores for the total male work force, accordingly to 1971 Census figures.

Table 4.14 Distribution of SES Scores for the Biological Families of Children in the Sample According to Elley and Irving's Scale

Ses score	Families of children in the sample		Percentage of total male work force in 1971 Census
	No.	%	
1	3	=*	5%
2	1	=*	9%
3	27	4%	24%
4	97	15%	29%
5	158	24%	18%
6	253	38%	12%
missing	115	18%	-
TOTAL	654	100%	100%

* Note: The convention of an = sign will be used throughout this paper to signify non-zero percentages which round down to zero.

Thus far, a certain amount of information has been presented on the biological parents of the child, However, a substantial proportion of the children in the sample were not raised by their biological parents (at least for most of their lives prior to the care order). Thus, further information on the family and home background of the child will not be presented for the biological family, but for the family with which the child spent most of his or her life prior to the care order. As explained previously, this family will be referred to as the "main family". The information on the main family is given in the following section.

From the data presented so far, a clear profile of children in care has begun to emerge : these are children almost exclusively from low socio-economic status families, likely to be Maori or part Maori, also likely to be ex-nuptial, and born to mothers who had begun their families at a very young age. Section 4.3 will go on to flesh out this picture with details of the home background of the children.

4.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MAIN FAMILY

This section of the report presents information on the family in which the child spent most of his or her life prior to the care order (the "main family").

4.2.1 Relationship of the main family parent figures to the child

In 406 cases (62%) the main family was in fact the biological family. The other 38% of the children were living in a variety of family situations, some with solo parents, some with one biological parent and a replacement spouse, some with adoptive parents, some with grandparents or other relatives. In over three quarters of the families, the main family mother figure was the biological mother, while two thirds of main family fathers were the biological fathers of the children.

Table 4.15 gives the relationship of each of the main family parent figures to the child. The table shows that where the mother was not the biological mother she was likely to be the grandmother, or some other female relative, while the father figure was more likely to be a step father or a de facto step father. This difference is due to the tendency for mothers of ex-nuptial children who keep their children to enter into permanent or semi-permanent relationships with replacement father figures.

Table 4.15 Relationship of the Main Family Parent Figures to the Child

Mother figure			Father figure		
biological mother	510	78%	biological father	445	68%
adoptive mother	16	2%	adoptive father	20	3%
step mother	8	1%	step father	34	5%
de facto step mother	13	2%	de facto step father	25	4%
grandmother	22	3%	grandfather	14	2%
other relative	29	4%	other relative	24	4%
other adult	20	3%	other adult	21	3%
no mother figure	36	6%	no father figure	71	11%
TOTAL	654	100%	TOTAL	654	100%

This table records that 6% of the children had no mother figure and 11% had no father figure. Most of these cases were solo parent families, but there was a small group of children who were recorded as having no main family parents. These were children who were taken into care at a very early age, and up until the time of the care order, had been living in a maternity hospital or a Karitane hospital, or a similar institution.

Table 4.16 reconstructs Table 4.15, by incorporating the relationship between the parent figures in the main family.

86% of the main families were two parent families, while 11% were single parent families. It is again difficult to set these figures in a national context, as there is no easily available information on the incidence of solo parent families in the total New Zealand population. Nevertheless, the observed incidence of solo parent families in the sample (11%) does not appear very high. By way of comparison, 6.7% of single family households in 1971 Census figures were families where one spouse was permanently absent. This, however, leaves out of the reckoning some 88,000 households (14% of all households) which contained more than one family. It is likely that among these multiple family households there would be a higher incidence of single parent family units. This suggests that 6.7% would be an under-estimate of the incidence of solo parent families in New Zealand in 1971.

Table 4.16 Relationship Between the Parent Figures in the Main Family

Two parent families		
Biological parents	406	62%
Biological mother and step father	33	5%
Biological mother and adoptive father	3	=
Biological mother and de facto father	24	4%
Biological father and step mother	7	1%
Biological father and de facto step mother	12	2%
Adoptive parents	16	2%
Grandparents	10	2%
Other relatives	32	5%
Other adults	21	3%
All two parent families	564	86%
Solo parent families		
Biological mother living alone	36	6%
Biological mother living with others (e.g. with grandparents, other relatives)	6	1%
Biological father living alone	18	3%
Biological father living with others (e.g. with grandparents, other relatives)	2	=
Adoptive father living alone	1	=
Grandmother living alone	6	1%
Other female relative living alone	1	=
Other female adult living alone	3	=
All solo parent families	73	11%
No main family parent figures	17	3%
TOTAL	654	100%

4.2.2 Age of the main family parent figures at the time of the guardianship order

The main family parent figures were on average older than the biological parents of the children. This is as would be expected, firstly since the main family parent figures included a number of grandparents, and secondly, since many of the biological mothers who had given up their children did so because they were too young to care properly for the child. Table 4.17 gives details of the age of the main family parent figures.

Table 4.17 Age of the Main Family Parent Figures at the Time of the Guardianship Order

Age	Mother Figure		Father Figure	
less than 20	10	2%	4	1%
20-29	92	14%	45	7%
30-39	243	37%	172	26%
40-49	164	25%	213	33%
50-59	33	5%	55	8%
60 or more	9	1%	21	3%
not known	67	10%	73	9%
no parent figure	36	5%	71	13%
TOTAL	654	100%	654	100%

When the parents were classified into ten year age groups, the biggest group of mothers were in their thirties, while the biggest group of fathers were in their forties. The mean age of the main family mothers at the time of the care order was 36.6, compared to 40.8 for the main family fathers.

4.2.3 Ethnic origin of the main family parent figures

The distribution of ethnic origin of the main family parent figures corresponded approximately with that of the children. There were some differences however. The chief of these was the fact that there were considerably fewer Maoris among the fathers than among the children : only 36% of the fathers were Maori, compared with 53% of the children. There were also slightly fewer Maoris among the mothers, although this difference was not as marked as it was for fathers. In view of the questionable reliability of the data on ethnic origin, it is probably wise not to dwell on these differences.

Table 4.18 gives details of the ethnic origin of the children of the main family parents. The table gives the ethnic origin of the children for comparison purposes.

Table 4.18 Ethnic Origin of the Main Family Parents

	Mother Figure		Father Figure		Children	
European	262	40%	277	42%	255	39%
Maori or part Maori	305	47%	237	36%	347	53%
Other	28	4%	39	6%	52	8%
Not known	23	4%	30	5%	-	-
No parent figure	36	6%	71	11%	-	-
TOTAL	654	100%	654	100%	654	100%

31 children (5%) were living in a main family where at least one of the parent figures was of a different ethnic origin from the child. Most of these (21) were Maori children with European parent figures.

4.2.4 Work status of the main family parents

Table 4.19 and 4.20 give the employment status of the main family parent figures. Information was not available on the employment status of the fathers of 67 of the children, and a further 71 of the children did not have a father figure. Of the remaining 516 cases, 451 children had father figures who were usually employed, 18 of the fathers were chronically unemployed, and the other 47 fathers were either retired, ill, disabled, or not employed for other reasons. Of the 618 mothers, the majority (382) were full-time housewives.

Table 4.19 Work Status of the Main Family Father Figure

usually employed	451	69%
retired	13	2%
chronically unemployed	18	3%
receiving sickness benefit invalid's benefit or war pension	18	3%
not employed for other reasons	16	2%
not known	67	10%
no father figure	71	11%
TOTAL	654	100%

Table 4.20 Work Status of the Main Family Mother Figure

usually employed	162	25%
full-time housewife	382	58%
not employed for other reasons	14	2%
missing	56	9%
no mother figure	36	6%
TOTAL	654	100%

4.2.5 Socio-economic status of the main family

Elley and Irving's scale was again used as a measure of the socio-economic status of the main family. The occupation of the father figure was used where it was available, and that of the mother was substituted where no information was available for the father. However, there remained close to 20% of cases for which there was no information on the occupation of either parent figure. Nevertheless, from the information which was available, it is clear that the main families, like the biological families, were firmly located in the lower socio-economic strata. Indeed, the distributions of ses of main family and biological family were almost identical, which is not unexpected since in many cases, the biological and main families were the same. Table 4.21 gives the distribution of ses for the main families, with the distribution of scores for the total male work force from 1971 Census data, for comparison purposes.

Table 4.21 Socio-economic Status of the Main Family

Ses score	Main families		Percentage of total male work force in 1971 Census
1	3	=	5%
2	2	=	9%
3	28	4%	24%
4	96	15%	29%
5	170	26%	18%
6	232	35%	12%
missing	123	19%	-
TOTAL	654	100%	100%

4.2.6 Size of the main family

The main families of the children were in general considerably larger than the average New Zealand family. The average number of children in the main family was 6.1. Half of the families had six or more children, and as many as 13% of the families had ten or more children.

Table 4.22 Number of Children in the Main Family

Number of children		
one	27	4%
two	52	8%
three	64	10%
four	85	13%
five	67	10%
six	64	10%
seven	69	11%
eight	52	8%
nine	54	8%
ten or more	86	13%
unknown	36	6%
TOTAL	654	100%

Some of the families were very large indeed. There were three cases of families with 20 children, and the largest family had 21 children. However, this count included all children who had lived in the home up until the time of the care order, and not all of these children were resident in the home at the time of the care order. In some of the larger families, many of the children had long since reached adulthood and left the home. Table 4.23 gives details of the number of children resident in the home at the time of the care order.

Table 4.23 Number of Children Living in the Home at the Time of the Care Order

Number of children		
one	92	14%
two	82	13%
three	105	16%
four	67	11%
five	59	9%
six	39	6%
seven	33	5%
eight	44	7%
not known	97	15%
no main family	36	6%
TOTAL	654	100%

The average number of children living in the home at the time of the care order was 3.7. Thus, although over a third of the children in the family, on average, were not living in the home at the time of the care order, nevertheless, the size of the household at that time was still in excess of the size of the average completed New Zealand family.

Part of the reason for the large family size observed in the sample is that the families were often not simple nuclear family units, but were frequently larger extended families. Furthermore, the structure of the families was often quite complex. This is sufficiently clear from Table 4.16, showing the variety in constellations of parent figures. It is not the intention of this paper to investigate at any further length the complexity of family structure - indeed the design of the data collection form does not permit a very elaborate investigation of this. However, to give another indication of the incidence of families more complex than simple nuclear groups, in 205 cases (31%), the children in the household were not all full sibling relatives.

4.2.7 Number of children in the main family who had come to the notice of the Department of Social Welfare prior to the care order of the survey of child

In about two thirds of the families, other children in the home had come to the notice of the Department of Social Welfare, prior to the proceedings resulting in the care order. Details are given in Table 4.24. In nearly 20% of the families, as many as five or more children had previously come to the notice of Social Welfare. Clearly, a good proportion of the families were quite well known to the authorities at the time of the care order.

This history of previous contact with the authorities often passed across the generations : for example, it was known that 47 of the biological mothers (7%), and 16 of the biological fathers (2%) had been state wards in their own childhood years. Assuredly, more would have been known to official agencies, without actually having been the subjects of a care order. The topic of previous notice of the child or family to official agencies generally (such as Police, Social Welfare, Maori Affairs etc) is dealt with in Chapter 5 of this report.

Table 4.24 Number of Children in the Main Family Who had Come to the Notice of Social Welfare Prior to the Care Order

none	200	31%
1	123	19%
2	80	12%
3	54	8%
4	53	8%
5	27	4%
6	31	5%
7	32	5%
8	40	6%
not known	14	2%
TOTAL	654	100%

4.2.8 Locality in which the child had lived prior to the care order

The children in the study were predominantly urban children. Only 10% had spent most of their lives prior to the care order in a rural area. Nearly half were from one of the four main urban areas, and another 20% were from provincial cities.

Table 4.25 gives a breakdown of the sample according to whether the children had lived in an urban or rural setting for most of their lives prior to the care order. The table also gives comparative figures for the total population aged from 0 to 15, according to 1971 Census figures.

Table 4.25 Whether the Child had Lived in an Urban or Rural Setting for Most of Life Prior to the Care Order

	Children in the sample		Total population aged 0 to 15
one of the four main urban areas	315	48%	41%
other cities	136	21%	19%
towns with pop'n over 1000	124	19%	15%
rural areas	71	11%	24%
not known	8	1%	-
TOTAL	654	100%	100%

4.2.9 Descriptive Characteristics of the main family

Information was collected on a disparate range of characteristics of the main families using a series of check lists, the items were endorsed whenever a particular characteristic was known to apply to the family. Table 4.26 reports the frequency with which selected items on this check list were endorsed.

Table 4.26 Reported Frequency of Selected Items from Check List of Characteristics of the Main Family

	No. of families for which this item was endorsed	
Finances		
Family has had financial problems	416	64%
Family income frequently only social welfare benefits	170	26%
Employment record		
Father has unstable work record	191	29%
Father unemployed for long periods	114	17%
Accommodation		
Family accommodation crowded	203	31%
Family accommodation dirty	229	35%
Frequent changes of accommodation	144	22%
Child-care		
Standard of child's nutrition inadequate	181	28%
Child frequently left without adequate supervision	260	40%
Child's truancy apparently condoned by parents	113	17%
No interest or affection from mother	178	27%
No interest or affection from father	189	29%
Physical abuse by father	89	14%
Physical abuse by mother	58	9%
Sexual abuse by father	13	2%
Illness		
History of long-term illness of mother	105	16%
History of long-term illness of father	115	18%
Alcohol		
Heavy drinking by father	256	39%
Heavy drinking by mother	148	23%
Psychiatric illness		
Mother admitted to psychiatric hospital for short periods	60	9%
Father admitted to psychiatric hospital for short periods	47	7%
Offending		
Mother has a history of offending	71	11%
Father has a history of offending	119	18%
Siblings have a history of offending	178	27%

Marital difficulties

History of rows, arguments etc causing disruption to family	297	45%
Parents separated while child was at home	183	28%
Parents divorced while child was at home	27	4%
De facto or step mother did not get on with child	19	3%
De facto or step father did not get on with child	22	3%
Extra-marital affairs by mother	83	13%
Extra-marital affairs by father	37	6%

The most common problems were financial problems and marital discord. Two thirds of the families were considered to have had financial difficulties. Other items not given in the table, showed that 17% of the families had had assistance from the state in the form of needy families grants, and 20% had received financial assistance from other quarters, such as churches, voluntary agencies, charitable organisations.

In close to half the families, there was evidence of marital discord. In more than a quarter, this had led to the separation of the parents while the child was at home. The cases where a replacement parent did not get on with the child need to be put in proper perspective as a percentage of families which actually included a replacement spouse. In 12 out of 21 families where there was a step mother or de facto step mother, (i.e. 57%) there was reported to be tension between the mother figure and the child. Furthermore, 7 of these mothers (33%) were reported to have physically abused the child. Similarly, 20 of the 59 replacement father figures (34%) were reported to be on bad terms with the child, and in 13 cases (22%) the father figure was reported to have physically abused the child. All these results except the last one were statistically significant ($p < 0.0005$ on the chi-squared test). While 22% of the (de facto) step fathers were reported to have abused the child, 15% of the natural or adoptive fathers were also noted to have abused their children, and the difference between the two groups was not statistically significant.

Other areas in which problems were reported relatively frequently were: accommodation - it appeared that about a third of the families were living in sub-standard accommodation; alcohol - a problem for 40% of the fathers and a quarter of the mothers, although only 5% of the fathers and 1% of the mothers were actually reported to be alcoholic; and care of the children - in 40% of the families, there was little supervision of the children, and in nearly 30% the parents showed a lack of interest in, or affection for, the child.

Offending was less frequently reported for main family parents, but more so for the siblings of the survey child. One mother in ten, and one father in five had a criminal record, while a quarter of the child's siblings had histories of offending.

Physical abuse of the children had occurred in 14% of the families, and was especially likely where there was a (de facto) step parent, as noted above. Sexual abuse was only rarely recorded. The items on the check list relating to sexually deviant behaviours were also only rarely

endorsed. There was also little evidence of drug abuse among these families. Nevertheless, despite these two omissions, the families appear to have compiled a sufficiently full chronicle of woe.

4.3 STABILITY OF THE CHILD'S LIFE HISTORY PRIOR TO THE CARE ORDER

The preceding section, detailing the characteristics of the main family of the survey children, takes cognisance of the fact that many children were not brought up by their biological parents. However, this convention of a "main family" does not provide full information about the family backgrounds of the children. Indeed it disguises the fact that many children were not settled in one particular family situation for most of their lives prior to the care order. The prior lives of a considerable number of the children had been characterised by continual shifts in living situation, and changes of parent figures.

This section attempts to gauge the extent of such disruption in the children's lives prior to the care order, and will present some statistics aimed at summarising the amount of change and disruption experienced by the children.

4.3.1 Numbers of living situation experienced by the children

Table 4.27 gives the number of different living situations experienced by the children prior to the care order. A change of living situation was defined to have occurred whenever:

- a child moved to a new setting (e.g. from living with biological parents to living with maternal grandparents);

or - one of the parents (or parent figures) left home while the child remained with the other parent figure;

or - an adult who acted as a parent figure joined the home.

Brief, or purely temporary, changes in situation, such as holidays, or brief hospitalisations, were not recorded as changes in living situations for the purposes of this table.

Table 4.27 Number of Living Situations Experienced by the Child Prior to the Care Order

1	120	18%
2	81	12%
3	101	15%
4	67	10%
5 - 9	217	33%
10 - 14	58	9%
15 - 19	6	1%
20 or more	4	1%
TOTAL	654	100%

The living situations counted here will not necessarily all be different from each other: a child may have been in the same situation on several different occasions. For example, a child may have moved several times between his or her biological parents and grandparents. (Because of the way the data was recorded, it is not possible to establish how many distinct care takers had been involved with the child prior to the care order.) The table indicates that many of the children were subject to a considerable amount of disruption and instability in their family backgrounds. The great majority (over 80%) had experienced more than one living situation, and just under half had experienced five or more changes in their situation. The maximum number of living situations was 25 - there were three children who experienced this many changes.

4.3.2 Age at the first change of living situation

The number of living situations experienced by the child is a gross measure only, and makes no allowance for the age at which the child came into care, which will have an obvious effect, in that children who came into care at a younger age had less opportunity to experience changes of situation.

An obvious refinement is to examine the duration of each living situation. However, the data is far from satisfactory in this area. In many cases the dates of the beginning and end of the living situations were unknown, and estimates were made using the year only. Generally, the data is more unsatisfactory for children with higher numbers of living situations.

We will restrict attention here to the duration of the first living situation. This will give us the age at which the child first experienced a change of situation. For children who had only one living situation prior to the guardianship order, the guardianship order itself will represent the first change in the child's situation. Thus age at the time of the order has been used in the table for these children.

Table 4.28 Age of the Child at the First Change of Living Situation

Age of child		
less than 1	88	14%
1	92	14%
2	53	8%
3	42	6%
4	32	5%
5 - 9	129	20%
10 - 17	204	31%
missing	14	2%
TOTAL CHILDREN	654	100%

Over a third of the children experienced the first change to their living situation before the age of three, while close to half the children had experienced a change before they turned five. The mean age of the children at the first change of living situatin was 7.3. Clearly, many of the children were experiencing changes in their family situation at a very young age.

It is of some interest to examine the number of changes in situation experienced by children during the early years of life. There is evidence in the literature that the period between the ages of 3 months and 3 years is a crucial one for the development of the child, and it is likely that frequent changes of situation over this period, and frequent changes of care takers, could severely traumatise the child, with ill consequences for later development. Table 4.29 reports the number of changes experienced by the children during the first three years of their lives, allowing some margin for imprecision in the data.

Table 4.29 Number of Changes of Living Situation During the First Three Years of the Child's Life

first living situation lasted more than three years	379	58%
one change	101	15%
two changes	67	10%
three changes	32	5%
four changes	17	3%
five changes	19	3%
six changes	20	3%
seven or more changes	20	3%
TOTAL CHILDREN	654	100%

Over 40% of the children experienced at least one change of situation during the first three years of life, and more than 10% of the children experienced four or more changes during these years. The maximum number of changes experienced by one child during this period was eleven, and there were also seven children who had ten changes.

4.3.3 Proportion of time child spent with biological parents prior to the care order

Another useful way to look at the children in this context is to examine the proportion of time they had spent with their biological parents prior to the care order. Although these parents are often highly inadequate, and surrogate parents may provide the child with a much more stable home, yet there are special bonds between the child and its biological parents which cannot lightly be disregarded, and which mean that, all other things being equal, children are probably best living with their own parents.

Table 4.30 gives the proportion of their lives prior to the care order spent by the children with both biological parents together, as well as the proportion with each parent.

Table 4.30 Proportion of Time Children Spent with their Biological Parents Prior to the Care Order

Proportion of life prior to the care order	With both biological parents		With biological mother		With biological father	
none	117	18%	57	9%	111	17%
some but less than half	90	14%	61	9%	73	11%
more than half but not all	189	29%	160	24%	181	28%
all	212	32%	330	50%	243	37%
not known	46	7%	46	7%	46	7%
TOTAL CHILDREN	654	100%	654	100%	654	100%

Less than 10% of the children had never lived with their biological mother, while 17% had not lived with their biological father. Half had spent some time away from their biological mother prior to the care order, and two thirds had been away from their biological father. Only a third had lived with both biological parents up to the time of the care order.

The overall picture which emerges from this section is of a group of children who have been subjected to a considerable amount of change and disruption in their family backgrounds, prior to the decision to remove them from their homes. Only a third had lived with both biological parents up to the time of the care order, and nearly half had experienced five or more changes in living situation prior to the guardianship order. The question which remains is whether the lives of the children have been more stable since the care order.

CHAPTER 5: OCCASIONS OF OFFICIAL NOTICE OF THE CHILD AND FAMILY PRIOR TO THE CARE ORDER AND CIRCUMSTANCES SURROUNDING THE CARE ORDER

5.1 OFFICIAL NOTICE OF THE CHILD OR FAMILY PRIOR TO THE CARE ORDER

5.1.1 Number of occasions of notice and length of time the family had been known to official agencies

94% of the children or their families had come to the notice of the police or other official agencies (such as the Department of Social Welfare, or the Department of Maori Affairs) prior to the occasion which had led to the care order. It is clear that many of the families were well known to the official agencies : over half had come to attention on four or more separate occasions, while a small core of families (around 10%) had had a long history of more than ten occasions of previous notice. The highest frequency of contact was displayed by three families who had come to official notice on 22 separate occasions. Even with the high level of previous contact recorded for the families, there is still a suspicion that the data here was under-reported. Table 5.1 gives details of the number of occasions on which the child or other members of his or her family had come to official attention, prior to the occasion which led to the guardianship order.

Table 5.1 Number of Occasions of Notice of the Child or Family to Police or Social Welfare Prior to the Care Order

	N	%
no occasions of prior notice	40	6%
one occasion of notice	82	13%
two occasions	88	14%
three occasions	87	13%
four occasions	69	11%
five to nine occasions	198	30%
10 to 14 occasions	60	9%
15 to 19 occasions	20	3%
20 or more	10	2%
TOTAL CHILDREN	654	100%

Over half the families had first come to notice in the five years immediately preceding the care order. However, for 16% of the families, the first official notice of the family had been ten years or more before the care order. Table 5.2 has details of the length of time between the first notice of the family and the date of the guardianship order.

Table 5.2 Length of Time Between First Official Notice of the Child or Family and the Guardianship Order

no notice prior to to the care order	40	6%
less than a year	52	7%
1 year	108	16%
2 years	73	11%
3 years	53	8%
4 years	50	7%
5 to 9 years	158	24%
10 years or more	108	16%
TOTAL	654	100%

5.1.2 Age of the child at the time of first official notice

The families of 13% of the children had first come to the notice of official agencies before the birth of the survey child. For remainder, the average age of the children at the time of the first notice of the family was 6.7 years. Nearly half the children or their families had come to notice before the child had turned five. Table 5.3 gives the age of the child at the time of the first notice.

Table 5.3 Age of the Child at the Time of the First Official Notice of the Child or Family

Age of child		
family had come to notice before the child was born	85	13%
0 to 4	210	32%
5 to 9	135	21%
10 or older	182	28%
child not known to police or social welfare prior to circumstances of the care order	40	6%
TOTAL CHILDREN	654	100%

5.1.3 Official notice of the child for offending

267 of the children (41%) had come to official attention for offending prior to the care order, while in a further 70 families at least one of the child's siblings had been involved in offending. Thus in over half the families, at least one of the children had been involved in offending. Furthermore, 160 of the children (24%) had come to notice for offending on more than one occasion. Table 5.4 gives the number of occasions on which children in the sample had come to notice for offending.

Table 5.4 Number of Times Children had come to Notice for Offending Prior to the Circumstances Surrounding the Care Order

none	387	59%
one	105	16%
two	77	12%
three	44	7%
four	26	4%
five	5	1%
six	5	1%
seven	3	1%
eight	2	-
TOTAL CHILDREN	654	100%

The incidence of offending differed between the sexes and between different ethnic groups. Females were less likely to have offended (25%) compared with males (54%), while non-Europeans were more likely to have offended (47%) than Europeans (32%). Thus male non-Europeans were the group most likely to have offended (60%) while European females were least likely to have offended (19%). "Maleness" had a stronger effect in determining whether a child was likely to have offended than "non-European-ness". Table 5.5 has details. It is clear from the order of the chi-squared score, that these patterns are highly significant in statistical terms.

Table 5.5 Had the Child come to Notice Prior to the Care Order for Offending by Sex and Ethnic Origin

	European				Non-European				Total	
	male		female		male		female			
yes	59	43%	22	19%	137	69%	49	29%	267	41%
no	78	57%	96	81%	91	40%	122	71%	387	59%
TOTAL	137	100%	118	100%	228	100%	171	100%	654	100%

chi-squared = 69.82, $p < 0.001$

Males also tended to begin offending earlier than females, but there was no real difference between the European and non-European children, in the age at first notice for offending. The average age at first notice for offending for males was 11.5, compared with 12.6 for females. The average age at first offence for European children was 11.7, compared with 11.8 for non-European.

Table 5.6 Age of the Child at First Notice for Offending by Sex and Ethnic Origin

	European				Non-European				Total	
	male		female		male		female			
less than 10	13	2%	1	5%	26	19%	2	4%	42	16%
10	6	10%	4	18%	11	8%	4	8%	25	9%
11	6	10%	2	9%	24	18%	8	16%	40	15%
12	13	22%	-	-	21	15%	4	8%	38	14%
13	8	14%	9	41%	25	18%	10	20%	42	19%
14	9	15%	1	5%	24	18%	15	31%	49	18%
15	2	3%	3	14%	6	4%	5	10%	16	6%
16	2	3%	2	9%	-	-	1	2%	4	1%
not known	-	-	1	5%	-	-	-	-	1	=
TOTAL CHILDREN WHO OFFENDED	59	100%	22	100%	137	100%	49	100%	267	100%

The most common type of offences were property offences. 39% of the children had come to notice for the commission of property offences, and over 20% had come to notice for such offences on more than one occasion. No more than 2% of the children had come to notice for any other type of offence. Table 5.7 gives details.

Table 5.7 Children Who Had Come to Notice for Offending by Type of Offence

Type of offence	No. of children who had come to notice for each type of offence	
Property offences	256	39%
Offences against the person	16	2%
Sex offences	8	1%
Offences against good order or against decency	9	1%
Serious traffic offences	-	-
Licensing offences	3	-
Other offences	14	2%

5.1.4 Notice of the child for misbehaviour

In addition to offences, 245 children (38%) had come to notice for misbehaviour, 134 of these (21%) on more than one occasion. The main forms of misbehaviour were truancy and absconding. Table 5.8 gives details.

Table 5.8 Children Who Had Come to Notice for Misbehaviour by Type of Misbehaviour

Type of misbehaviour	No. of children who had come to notice for each type of offence	
Truancy	122	19%
Absconding (running away from home)	99	15%
Uncontrollable in the home	44	7%
Generally disturbed behaviour	36	6%
Sexual promiscuity	5	1%

There were no real differences between the sexes here, but European children were more likely than non-European children to have come to notice for misbehaviour. The differences were consistent for both sex groups. 43% of Europeans had come to notice for misbehaviour, compared with 34% of non-Europeans.

Table 5.9 Children Who Had Come to Notice for Misbehaviour by Sex and Ethnic Origin

Had child come to notice for misbehaviour prior to the care order?	European				Non-European				Total	
	male		female		male		female			
yes	60	44%	50	42%	79	35%	56	33%	245	37%
no	77	56%	68	58%	149	65%	115	67%	409	63%
TOTAL	137	100%	118	100%	228	100%	171	100%	654	100%

The chi-squared test for this two by four table did not yield a significant score, but when the test was repeated on the two by two table (collapsing the sex categories, and considering the effect of ethnic origin alone) the difference was found to be significant at level $p < 0.025$.

European children who did come to notice for misbehaviour also tended to come to notice at an earlier age than children of non-European ethnic origin. On average, European children coming to notice for misbehaviour did so at age 10.3, compared with age 11.7 for non-Europeans. Females tended to be slightly older than males at first notice for misbehaviour but the difference was negligible.

In all, 368 of the children (56%) had come to notice at least once prior to the occasion leading to the guardianship order, for either offending or misbehaviour.

Of the various types of unsatisfactory home conditions which caused families to come to notice, the most common was inadequate parenting or neglect: this was recorded for 57% of the families. Table 5.10 gives the number of families who had come to attention for different reasons relating to conditions in the home.

Table 5.10 Number of Families Who Had Come to Notice for Inadequate Home Conditions by Reasons for the Notice

	No. of families who came to attention for this reason	
physical or sexual abuse	51	7%
physical neglect	130	19%
marital problems	91	13%
financial, accommodation problems	104	15%
inadequate parenting	254	38%
other reasons	183	27%

European children were more likely than non-European children to have come to notice for inadequate home conditions. The difference was significant, in statistical terms. Table 5.11 gives details.

Table 5.11 Families Who Had Come to Notice Prior to the Care Order for Inadequate Home Conditions by Sex and Ethnic Origin

Whether the family had come to notice for inadequate home conditions prior to the care order?	European				Non-European				Total	
	male		female		male		female			
yes	104	76%	85	72%	139	61%	119	70%	447	68%
no	33	24%	33	28%	89	39%	52	30%	207	32%
TOTAL	137	100%	118	100%	228	100%	171	100%	654	100%

chi-squared = 10.2, $p < 0.025$

The majority of the children had prior histories of offending or misbehaviour. Such behaviour had resulted in 282 of the children (43%) making appearances in the Children's Court prior to the occasion which had led to the guardianship order, while 196 children (30%) had been dealt with by the Youth Aid Section of the Police.

263 of the children (40%) had been placed on probation or legal supervision on at least one occasion prior to the care order, 176 had been placed on preventive supervision (27%), and 54 had been fined or admonished by the Court (8%).

5.1.5 Notice of the family for conditions in the home

Apart from notice for offending or misbehaviour of the child, about three quarters of the families came to notice by reason of conditions in the home. Table 5.12 gives details of the number of times families had come to notice on account of their home conditions.

Table 5.12 Number of Occasions Family had Come to Notice for Home Conditions Prior to the Care Order

no notice for home conditions	173	26%
one	100	15%
two	84	13%
three	59	9%
four	45	7%
five to nine	153	23%
10 to 14	40	6%
TOTAL	654	100%

Of the 368 children who had come to official attention for offending or other forms of misbehaviour, 242 (65%) came from families which had also been the subject of official attention, by reasons of the conditions in the home. In other words, for two thirds of the children who had come to attention because of anti-social behaviour, the family background of the child had also come to the attention of official agencies. Inadequate home backgrounds are a very common feature in the histories of these children.

5.2 REASONS FOR THE DECISION TO TAKE THE CHILD INTO CARE

This section presents information on the reasons for the guardianship order. Firstly, the legal basis of the court appearance will be examined, and then the reasons why the court decided that a guardianship order was the most appropriate action.

5.2.1 Legislative basis for care proceedings in 1971

The legislative basis for care proceedings in effect in 1971 (when the children in the study were taken into care) was contained in the 1925 Child Welfare Act. Since then, the legislation has been completely rewritten in the Children and Young Persons Act 1974. For this reason, it will be necessary to preface the results with a brief review of the way in which care proceedings operated at that time.

A child could be brought before the Childrens Court either by being charged with offences, or on the basis of a complaint laid against the parent(s) or other person(s) having custody of the child. Section 13(1) of the Child Welfare Act listed five separate grounds for complaint : a complaint could be laid in respect of any child who was "a neglected, indigent, or delinquent child, or (who was) not under proper control, or (who was) living in an environment detrimental to its physical or moral well-being".

These terms were not further defined by the Act. However, we can get some idea of how they were used in practice from a set of guidelines laid down in the Social Workers' Manual. The relevant sections are I.1.13 to I.1.17.

"I.1.13 Indigence does not necessarily imply a state of destitution; an indigent person may have some means, even though scanty. The essential point is that a child is left in a position where there is no person accepting the responsibility of maintaining him.

"I.1.14 Neglected. This complaint may require a comparatively high standard of proof since there is usually implied an element of censure of the parents, which they may well deny. In borderline cases it may be that a complaint, that a child is "not under proper control" or is "living in an environment detrimental to its physical well-being", will fit the case more precisely.

"I.1.15 Living in an environment detrimental to physical or moral well-being

Normally only one of the alternatives applies, and it should be specified. Sometimes both are applicable. Complaints of this nature might apply to home circumstances where a child is exposed to such things as ill-treatment, malnutrition, violent conflict between parents, and obvious sexual immorality. It should not be used in respect of a girl who is willingly cohabitating with an undesirable male.

"I.1.16 Not under proper control. There are two main types of case which may satisfactorily be dealt with under this complaint:

". A child who is guilty of repeated misconduct which, while serious in its implication for his happiness and welfare, is not necessarily against the law, e.g., running away from home, sleeping out, keeping undesirable company, repeated truancy, persistent misbehaviour and sexual misconduct or promiscuity. In such cases the determining factor is not so much the parents' failure to make all reasonable efforts to control their child, but rather the child's own conduct - however caused - that brings about the court action. It is preferable when the child's conduct is 'naughty' - although serious - rather than wilful or malicious, to use this complaint (of NUPC) rather than 'delinquent' in order to lessen any future stigma the latter term might leave.

". A child who is left to run wild, or left to his own devices to an unreasonable extent, or whose parents make little or no effort to control or train him. The child may not be guilty of any misconduct at all. Indeed, the parent may not be culpable either, as he or she may be prevented from exercising proper control because of illness or for some other good reason. This type of NUPC case is distinguished from a 'neglect' case by a lack of supervision, guidance and acceptable example, rather than by failure to provide the child with his material needs.

"I.1.17 Delinquent. This complaint should be used where there is an established pattern of offences; an isolated offence does not substantiate a complaint of delinquency. To make complaints of delinquency whenever a child is being charged with an offence would therefore be wrong. However, a child may be appearing before the court on a minor charge (e.g. theft of money from milk bottles) where ordinarily a recommendation of admonish and discharge would seem appropriate. If in the past there have been other offences about which an officer is aware and in relation to which he can produce evidence if necessary, a complaint of delinquency would be justified. In many cases a complaint of NUPC will meet the situation more adequately where the child's serious misconduct is not the subject of police charges. The Child Welfare Amendment Act 1954 extended the meaning of the expression 'delinquent child' to include acts of unlawful sexual intercourse and indecency."

Children could also be brought before the Children's Court on a complaint for breach of supervision conditions, or breach of probation, or on the application of the manager of a Children's Home.

5.2.2 Children who appeared before the court on the basis of complaint action

475 children (73%) appeared before the courts on the basis of complaint action. The most frequently used grounds for complaint was not under proper control: 62% of all complaints specified this as the ground for complaint, and 48% of all the children in the sample appeared before the court of the basis of not under proper control complaint action. It is clear from the Social Workers' Manual that this ground was ambiguous : it could be used both for cases involving misconduct by the child, and cases where there was no element of misconduct. There is no way of knowing from the figures how many of these children had been involved in misconduct, which is all the more unfortunate as it is by far the most frequently used ground for complaint. However, in this study, as additional information was sought about the circumstances of the care order, including detailed reasons for the care order, we will be able to investigate this: in fact, about half of the not under proper control complaints involved some misconduct by the child, and half did not. The next most frequently used ground was indigence, which accounted for 22% of all complaints, and 17% of all the children in the sample. Apart from these two, other grounds for complaint were used comparatively infrequently. Table 5.13 gives the numbers of children who were brought before the courts on the basis of complaint action, by the grounds for the complaint.

Table 5.13 Number of Children Appearing Before the Court on the Basis of Complaint Action by the Grounds for Complaint

	No. of complaints	% of all complaints	% of all children in the study
not under proper control	315	62%	48%
indigent	111	22%	17%
living in a detrimental environment	47	9%	7%
neglect	27	5%	4%
delinquent	7	1%	1%
breach of supervision or probation	3	1%	=
TOTAL	510	100%	

There were 35 children for whom two separate complaints were laid : this explains why Table 5.13 reports a total of 510 complaints, where only 475 children had been the subjects of complaint action. Table 5.14 has details of these 35 cases.

Table 5.14 Children who were the Subjects of Two Separate Complaints by the Grounds for Complaint

not under proper control/indigent	13
not under proper control/living in a detrimental environment	14
not under proper control/neglect	4
not under proper control/delinquent	3
indigent/neglect	1
TOTAL CHILDREN WHO WERE THE SUBJECT OF TWO SEPARATE COMPLAINTS	35

5.2.3 Children appearing before the court charged with offences

228 children (35%) were charged with offences. This number included 49 children who were appearing before the court on the basis of a complaint. The pattern of offence type was familiar : 90% of all charged offences were property offences, while other types of offence were comparatively infrequent. Moreover, 215 children were charged with property offences, which amounts to 94% of all children charged with offences. Table 5.15 gives the number of children charged with offences, by type of offence.

Table 5.15 Number of Children Charged with Offences by Type of Offence

	No. of children charged with this offence	
Property Offences		
Theft	120	18%
Burglary	122	19%
Receiving stolen property	9	1%
Conversion of motor vehicle	61	9%
Conversion of bicycle	14	2%
Other conversions	2	=
Fraud, forgery, or false pretences	7	1%
Arson	2	=
Wilful damage	15	2%
Breaking or leaving glass in public place	1	=
Offences against the person		
Assault	13	2%
Other offences against the person	1	=
Sex offences		
Indecent assault	3	=
Offences against good order		
Disorderly behaviour	2	=
Idle and disorderly	5	1%
Other offences against good order	1	=
Serious traffic offences	1	=
Offences against licensing laws		
Drinking in a public place	1	=
Other offences		
Escaping lawful custody	7	1%
Other offences against the administration of justice	1	=
Firearms offences	1	=
Other offences	1	=

The children faced varying numbers of charges. About a third faced only one charge, while 20 children faced ten or more charges each.

Table 5.16 Numbers of Charges Faced by Children at the Court Hearing Related to the Care Proceedings

No. of charges		
none	424	65%
1	73	11%
2	42	6%
3	29	4%
4	20	3%
5	12	2%
6 - 10	40	6%
11 - 15	9	1%
16 - 20	5	1%
TOTAL CHILDREN	654	100%

It was stated earlier that 49 children appearing on the basis of a complaint were also charged with offences. For 44 of these children the ground for the complaint was not under proper control, for three the ground was delinquency, one child was in breach of a supervision or probation, and the remaining child was indigent.

5.2.4 Reasons for the care order

The reasons for the decision to take the child into care, as far as these could be determined from the children's files, were recorded in two ways as follows. Firstly, a judgment was made by the coder, on the basis of what was recorded on the form, as to the general area of concern underlying the care order, in terms of the following three options:

- offending by the child;
- misbehaviour by the child;
- inadequate conditions in the child's home.

Half of the children were judged to have been taken into care because of inadequate home conditions; 30% because of their offending; and the remaining 20% because of misbehaviour. Table 5.17 gives full details of the general reason for the decision to take the child into care, as it was recorded by the coders.

Table 5.17 General Reason for the Decision to Take the Child into Care

offending by the child	203	31%
misbehaviour by the child	126	19%
inadequate conditions in the home	325	50%
TOTAL CHILDREN	654	100%

A second, more detailed method of coding information about the reason for the care order made use of an extensive coding list, and allowed up to five reasons to be recorded. The list of reasons used is given in Table 5.18 below. The table presents details of the main reason reported for the decision to take the child into care, as well as the number of children for whom each reason was mentioned as a factor in the decision.

Table 5.18 Detailed Reasons for the Decision to Take the Child into Care

	main reason for the care order		number of children for whom each reason was mentioned	
Serious offending	9	1%	9	1%
Persistent offending	152	23%	164	25%
Other reasons to do with offending	45	7%	52	8%
Misbehaviour at home	67	10%	178	27%
Misbehaviour at school	8	1%	111	17%
Unable to be controlled	28	4%	188	29%
Disturbed behaviour	7	1%	48	7%
Sexual misbehaviour	5	1%	38	6%
No response to supervision	8	1%	141	22%
Other reasons to do with misbehaviour of the child	-	-	2	*
Child available for adoption	19	3%	20	3%
Child had no real family	29	4%	51	8%
Child deserted by parents	61	9%	87	13%
Child physically or sexually abused	23	4%	54	8%
Child neglected	35	5%	106	16%
Child emotionally rejected by parents	19	3%	85	13%
Marital breakdown	31	5%	130	20%
Marital problems	19	3%	95	15%
Frequent changes of parent figures	1	*	15	2%
Psychiatric problems of parents	26	4%	70	11%
Ill health of parents	10	2%	67	10%
Imprisonment of parents	3	1%	45	7%
Ineffective parenting	20	3%	178	27%
Irresponsible parenting	26	4%	200	31%
Other reasons to do with conditions in the home	3	*	74	11%
TOTAL CHILDREN	654	100%		

In all, reasons associated with offending were mentioned for 222 of the children (34%), reasons associated with misbehaviour were mentioned for 345 children (53%) and reasons associated with conditions in the home were mentioned for 552 children (84%).

A quarter of the children were regarded as persistant offenders, and just under 30% were unable to be controlled by their parents. Marital breakdown had contributed to the need for the care order in 20% of cases, and around 30% of the parents were considered to be ineffective and irresponsible. Furthermore, 16% of the children had been subject to neglect, 13% had been emotionally rejected by their parents, 13% had been deserted and 8% had been abused.

It is of some interest to examine the general reason given for the care order in the light of the legal basis for the court proceedings. Children appearing before the court on complaints on the grounds that they were not under proper control are of particular interest, since this category could be used for two quite distinct types of cases : those involving misconduct by the child, and those where there may have been no element of misconduct. Table 5.19 gives the overall reason for the care order for children appearing on each type of complaint, and for the remainder of children who were charged with offences.

Table 5.19 Overall Reason for the Care Order by Type of Complaint or Whether the Child was Charged

		Overall reason for the care order							
		Offending		Misbehaviour		Home conditions		Total	
Type of Complaint	neglect	-	-	-	-	27	100%	27	100%
	indigent	-	-	1	1%	109	99%	110	100%
	living in detrimental environment	-	-	-	-	42	42%	42	100%
	not under proper control	29	10%	113	39%	147	51%	289	100%
	delinquent	1	25%	3	75%	-	-	4	100%
	breach of supervision or probation	-	-	3	100%	-	-	3	100%
	Children charged with offences	173	96%	6	3%	-	-	179	100%
	TOTAL	203	31%	126	19%	325	50%	654	100%

The interesting feature of this table is that the complaint of not under proper control appears to have been used equally frequently for cases where there was misconduct, and for cases where there was no element of misconduct by the child. This, of course, is now largely an historical curiosity, since the grounds for complaint have been rewritten in the 1974 Children and Young Persons Act.

5.2.5 Variations in the reason for the care order by basic demographic variables

Males were much more likely than females to be taken into care because of offending behaviour, while the females were much more likely to come into care because of inadequate home backgrounds.

Table 5.20 Overall Reason for the Care Order by Sex

		Overall reason for the care order							
		Offending		Misbehaviour		Home conditions		Total	
Age	Male	166	45%	44	12%	155	42%	365	100%
	Female	37	13%	82	28%	170	59%	289	100%
	TOTAL	203	31%	126	19%	325	50%	654	100%

The relationship in this table was highly significant in statistical terms ($p < 0.001$ on the chi-squared test).

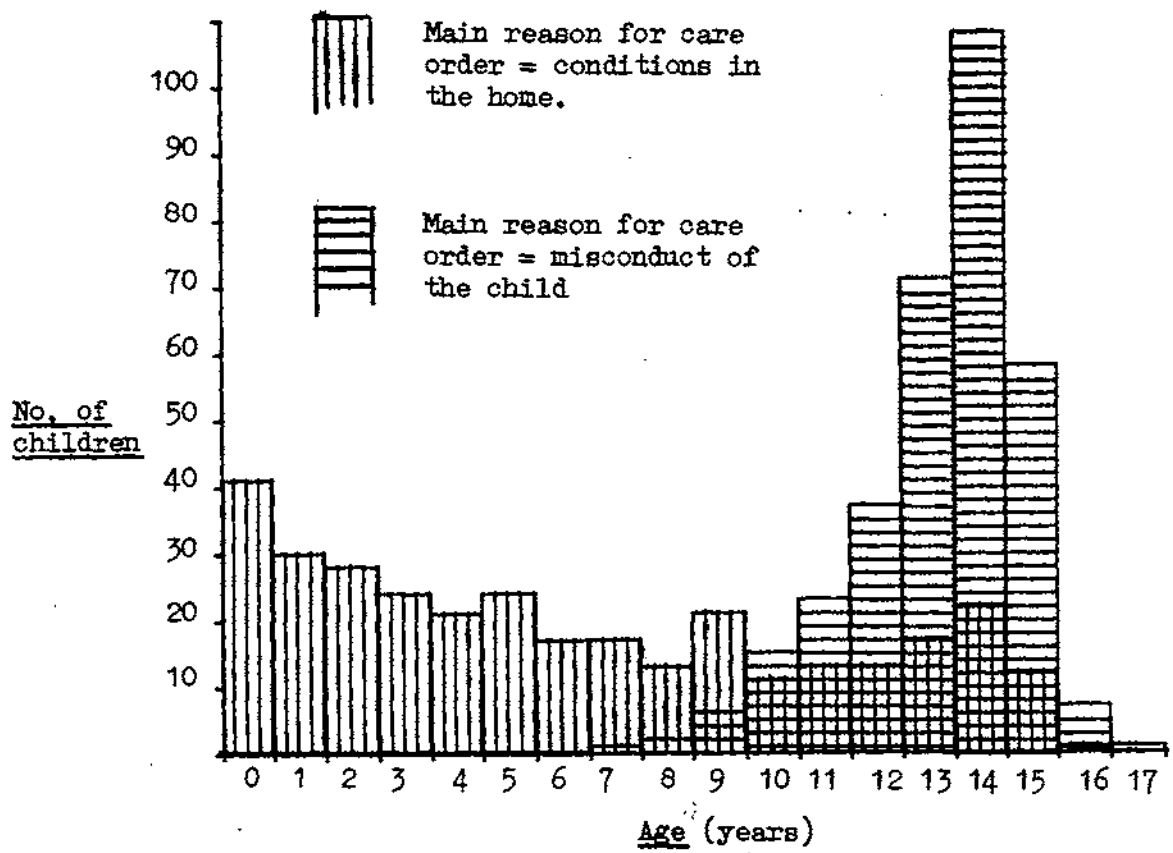
Age was also strongly related to the reason for the care order, younger children being less likely to come into care for offending, as would be expected.

Table 5.21 Overall Reason for the Care Order by Age

		Overall reason for the care order							
		Offending		Misbehaviour		Home conditions		Total	
Age	less than 2	-	-	-	-	71	100%	71	100%
	2 to 4	-	-	-	-	73	100%	73	100%
	5 to 9	-	-	9	9%	92	91%	101	100%
	10 to 13	92	46%	54	27%	54	27%	200	100%
	14 or more	111	53%	63	30%	35	17%	209	100%
	TOTAL	203	31%	126	19%	325	50%	654	100%

Again the effect was highly significant statistically ($p < 0.001$ on the chi-squared test). Figure 5.1 represents this effect graphically. In the graph the offending and misbehaviour cases have been amalgamated, so that the reasons for the care order have been divided into those involving misconduct by the child, and those where there was no misconduct. The graph shows very clearly the tendency for younger children to be taken into care by reasons of inadequate conditions in their home backgrounds, where older children are more likely to have been involved in offending or other forms of misbehaviour.

Figure 5.1 Reason for the care order by single years of age



Children of non-European ethnic origin were also more likely than European children to be taken into care on account of offending behaviour. This is in keeping with the higher levels of offending among non-European children observed prior to the care order. Yet again the result was highly significant ($p < 0.001$ on the chi-squared test).

Table 5.22 Overall Reason for the Care Order by Ethnic Origin

		Overall reason for the care order							
		Offending		Misbehaviour		Home conditions		Total	
Ethnic origin	European	53	21%	55	22%	147	58%	255	100%
	Maori or part Maori	128	37%	63	18%	156	45%	347	100%
	Other	22	43%	8	16%	21	41%	51	100%
TOTAL		203	31%	126	19%	324	50%	653	100%

The results reported in the fore-going section merely serve to document patterns which are expected and familiar from previous research. It would be completely expected that older children would be more likely to come into care for offending, while it is well-documented that the incidence of offending is higher both among males, and among non-European ethnic groups, so that these effects would also be expected to show up in reasons for care proceedings.

CHAPTER 6: PLACEMENT HISTORY OF THE CHILD DURING THE FIRST FIVE YEARS FOLLOWING THE CARE ORDER

This chapter presents information on the placements arranged by the Department for the children in the sample over a five year period following the guardianship order. The focus of the chapter will be on the outcomes of the placements : the duration for which children remained in placements, and the reasons why placements came to an end. Particular attention will be paid to foster placements.

6.1 DEFINITION OF A PLACEMENT

Before proceeding any further with the discussion, it will be necessary to state precisely what is meant by a placement. This term was defined at some length in the data collection booklet used in the survey, so that the social workers compiling the information would have a precise specification to which situations were to be recorded in the form and which should be left out. The definition was as follows:

> A placement is any living situation of two weeks or longer (or which was intended to last two weeks or longer) which was not a purely temporary break within a continuing living situation.

Generally, living situations of less than two weeks were not counted as placements, for example, short holidays, visits to relations, brief stays in a boys' or girls' home or a family home while in transit, brief abscondings, weekend visits home etc.

In some special circumstances, living situations of less than two weeks were counted. These were situations where the placement was not a purely temporary break within a continuing living situation.

For example, admissions to psychiatric hospitals, to departmental facilities on remand or adjournment, admissions to department facilities because a foster placement or home placement had broken down, were all counted as placements even if they lasted less than two weeks.

Further, any living situation which at time of commencement was intended to last more than two weeks was considered to be a placement even if it did not in fact last two weeks. For example, a family home placement, or foster placement which suddenly broke down was classified as a placement.

Generally, living situations which lasted two weeks or more were counted as placements. The only exceptions were purely temporary situations lasting two weeks or longer where it was intended that the child return to the original placement, for example, longer holidays, stays in hospital, stays with family home foster parents while the child's mother or foster mother has a baby etc.

6.2 NUMBER OF PLACEMENTS EXPERIENCED BY THE CHILDREN

According to this definition, a total of 4220 placements were arranged for the children in the study over the five year period, an average of 6.5 placements each per child. Table 6.1 gives the number of placements experienced by the children over the five year period.

Table 6.1 Number of Placements Experienced by the Children

No. of placements	No. of children	%	No. of placements	No. of children	%
1	53	8%	16	9	1%
2	84	13%	17	4	1%
3	71	11%	18	4	1%
4	62	9%	19	1	=
5	62	9%	20	3	=
6	55	8%	21	4	1%
7	45	7%	22	1	=
8	59	9%	23	-	-
9	34	5%	24	3	=
10	18	3%	25	-	-
11	28	4%	26	1	=
12	18	3%	27	1	=
13	11	2%	28	-	-
14	9	1%	29*	2	=
15	12	2%	TOTAL CHILDREN	654	100%

The information in this table is more easily digested in condensed form. This is given in Table 6.2. The table shows at a glance that about 40% of the children had less than five placements; a similar number had between five and nine placements; and 20% had ten or more placements. Of the children who had more than ten placements, some experienced very high numbers of placements. 12 had more than 20 and two children had as many as 29 separate placements.

Table 6.2 Number of Placements Experienced by the Children

No. of placements	No. of children	%
1 to 4	270	41%
5 to 9	255	39%
10 to 14	84	13%
15 to 19	30	5%
20 or more	15	2%
TOTAL CHILDREN	654	100%

* Note: One of the children who had 29 placements had absconded a total of seven times during the period. The other had absconded three times, and had had three spells in police custody during the period. All of these were counted as placements, according to the definition of placement used in the study. Other children who experienced high numbers of placements also had their "placement count" boosted by periods of absconding in this way.

6.3 INTENDED DURATION OF THE PLACEMENTS

It is important to appreciate that not all of the placements were intended to be long-term arrangements. The definition allowed for the inclusion of placements which were made for short term purposes - e.g. to provide an opportunity to assess the needs of children as they came into care, to allow time to make more permanent arrangements for the care of the child, or to provide the child with a settling down period, following the trauma of family break-up, or following the breakdown of another placement. Table 6.3 classifies the placements arranged for children according to the intended duration of the placement. It was not always possible to make this distinction on the basis of what was recorded on the child's file, so that the information is not given for over a quarter of the placements.

Table 6.3 Intended Duration of the Placement

purely temporary (i.e. less than two weeks)	504	12%
short term (i.e. 2 weeks up to 3 months)	838	20%
long term (i.e. 3 months or more)	1728	41%
intended duration not able to be determined	1150	27%
TOTAL PLACEMENTS	4220	100%

The large proportion of cases for which the judgment is not able to be given clouds the picture somewhat. However, it was clear from information recorded in the files that a third of the placements were made for purely short term goals, while over 40% were intended to be long term arrangements.

A total of 1728 long term placements were arranged for the children, an average of 2.6 placements each. Table 6.4 gives the number of long term placements which were made for the children.

Table 6.4 Number of Long Term Placements Arranged for the Children

No. of long term placements		
none	25	4%
1	150	23%
2	184	28%
3	123	19%
4	90	14%
5	43	7%
6	21	3%
7	10	2%
8	-	-
9	8	1%
TOTAL CHILDREN	654	100%

This table makes more palatable reading. More than half the children were placed in at most two situations which were intended to be long term arrangements. Nevertheless, a substantial number of children still experienced a relatively high turnover of long term placements : more than a quarter had four or more such placements over the period. These children would have experienced new "long term" care arrangements pretty nearly every year.

In connection with Table 6.4, it should be noted that the table includes only placements which it is known from the files were intended to be long term. Thus, the 1150 placements (27%) for which it was not possible to determine the intended duration from the files (see Table 6.3) were excluded from consideration here. This will have the effect that the figures in Table 6.4 will under-estimate the real situation, since there will be an additional unknown number of placements which were meant to be long term among this omitted group.

The focus of this section will largely be on the placements, which were intended to be long-term, paying particular attention to the duration and turnover of these placements. This is because the effect of high turnover of placements is most disturbing for the children when the placements were intended to be long term caring arrangements. However, the relatively high numbers of short term placements cannot be lightly dismissed as of little account. The total number of placements, as a gross measure of change, indicates that the lives of some of these children have been characterised by at least as much change and disruption since the guardianship order, as there were preceding it.

6.4 TYPES OF PLACEMENTS EXPERIENCED BY THE CHILDREN

The settings in which children were placed covered a wide range of situations. Table 6.5 classifies the placements by type of setting, and reports the numbers of children who experienced placements of each type. The table also reports the number of children who experienced placements of each type which were intended to be long term.

The table shows that 60% of the children were placed at home with their natural parents at some time during the five year period, while attempts were made to place over 40% of the children at home on a long term or permanent basis.

Apart from home placements, the most frequently used types of placements were foster homes (55% of the children experienced a foster home placement, and 43% of these were placed in a foster home on a long term basis); family homes (40% had family home placements, although only 13% had long term family home placements); and departmental girls' and boys' homes (50% of the children were placed in an institution of this type, although only a negligible 3% were placed there on a long term basis). Foster homes were used mainly for long term placements, while family homes were used much more frequently for shorter duration placements - for assessing the needs of the children, or for settling the children down prior to making more permanent arrangements. Girls' and boys' homes were used almost exclusively for short term placements. Indeed, these institutions are usually referred to within the Department as short stay homes.

Table 6.5 Types of Placements Experienced by the Children

Type of Placement	No. of children who had a placement of this type		No. of children who had a long term placement of this type	
With natural parents	383	60%	266	41%
With adoptive parents	10	2%	8	1%
With grandparents	31	5%	13	2%
With siblings	64	10%	31	5%
With other relatives	84	13%	41	6%
With other adults	27	4%	2	=
Foster home	360	55%	282	43%
Foster home (with relatives)	65	10%	53	8%
Family home	261	40%	83	13%
Private board	101	15%	49	7%
DSW girls/boys home	324	50%	19	3%
DSW reception centre	40	6%	1	=
DSW long term training centre	155	24%	155	24%
Private childrens institution	59	9%	42	6%
Boarding school	14	2%	14	2%
Ed Dept special school	42	6%	41	6%
Psychiatric hospital	36	6%	7	1%
General hospital	37	6%	1	=
Justice Dept institution	70	11%	52	8%
Flatting	66	10%	21	3%
Hostel	61	9%	37	6%
Live-in employment	89	14%	58	9%
De facto relationship	16	2%	3	*
Police custody	80	12%	-	-
Child missing	141	22%	-	-
Other placements	19	3%	2	=
Type of placement not known	23	4%	-	-

The table also shows that around a quarter of the children pass through the long term training centres operated by the department. These facilities are usually reserved for children who are more difficult to manage in the community. 12% of the children were in Police custody at some time during the study period, and the Justice Department had long term plans for 8% of the children. Furthermore, a total of 141 children (over 22%) absented themselves from a placement once during the period, and 64 children (10%) did so on more than one occasion.

6.5 PATTERNS OF PLACEMENT OF CHILDREN ON FIRST COMING INTO CARE

It is instructive to look at the patterns of placement of children as they first come into care, and the first long term caring arrangements made for them. Table 6.6 gives the first situation in which the child was placed following the care order, and the first situation which was intended to be a long term arrangement. As there are quite distinct patterns for different age groups, the table is broken down by age.

Table 6.6 First Placements Arranged for the Children Following the Care Order and First Long Term Placement

	First placement				First long-term placement			
	Age				Age			
	0-3	4-9	10-17	total	0-3	4-9	10-17	total
natural parents main family	1 1%	1 1%	1 =	3 =	7 6%	8 7%	27 7%	42 6%
other relatives	- -	2 2%	6 1%	8 1%	1 1%	- -	11 3%	12 2%
foster home	97 79%	69 57%	62 15%	228 35%	105 85%	87 71%	104 25%	296 45%
family home	8 7%	24 20%	60 15%	92 14%	- -	- -	41 10%	47 7%
private board	- -	- -	6 1%	6 1%	- -	- -	15 4%	15 2%
DSW short term institution	5 4%	14 11%	258 63%	277 42%	- -	- -	17 4%	17 3%
DSW long term institution	- -	- -	1 =	1 =	- -	- -	108 26%	108 17%
other institutions	7 6%	11 9%	9 2%	27 4%	2 2%	13 11%	51 12%	66 10%
independent situations	- -	- -	2 =	2 =	- -	- -	26 6%	26 4%
other situations	5 4%	1 1%	4 1%	10 2%	8 7%	8 7%	9 2%	25 4%
no placement	- -	- -	- -	- -	8 7%	8 7%	9 2%	25 4%
TOTAL	123 100%	122 100%	409 100%	654 100%	123 100%	122 100%	409 100%	654 100%

For the majority of the children (469 out of 654 or 72%), the first placement was not intended to be long term. Three quarters of the children, then, were placed in a temporary situation on first coming into care while more permanent arrangements were made. Young children were likely to be placed straight into a foster home (79% of those aged 3 or less, and 57% of those aged between 4 and 9), while older children were more likely to be placed in a short term departmental facility, such as a girls' or boys' home, or a receiving home (63% of the children aged 10 or more).

The first long term placements arranged for the children showed a similar differentiation by age. The overwhelming majority of young children were placed in a foster home as their first long term placements (85% of children aged 3 or less, and 71% of those aged between 4 and 9). Only a quarter of those aged 10 or more were placed in a foster home as their first long term arrangement. Children of this age were equally likely to be placed in a departmental institution, such as Kohitere or Kingslea training centres, while 10% were placed on a long term basis in a family home, and 12% in other institutions.

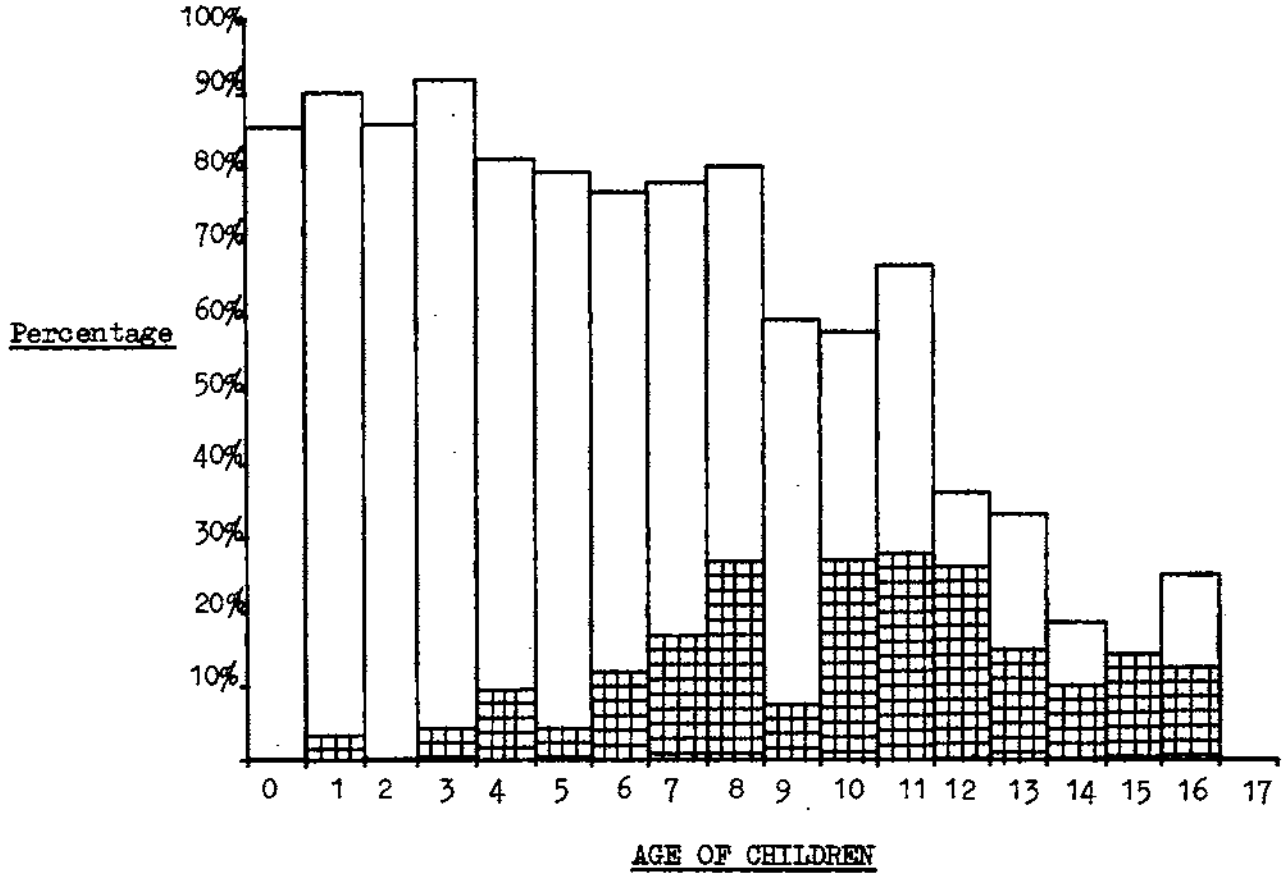
These patterns hold not only for first placements, but for all placements made for children. Young children were as a rule placed in foster homes, while departmental institutional facilities, both short term and long term were reserved mainly for older children. There is an interesting contrast here between the use of foster homes and family homes. Table 6.7 gives the proportion of children of different age groups who had long term placements in each of these situations.

Table 6.7 Numbers of Children who had Long Term Placements in Foster Homes and Family Homes by Age

	Age	No. placed in foster home		No. placed in family home		Total children
	0 - 3	108	88%	2	2%	123
	4 - 9	91	75%	14	11%	122
Age	10 - 13	86	43%	43	21%	200
	14 - 17	36	17%	24	11%	209
	TOTAL	321	49%	83	13%	654

Figure 6.1 represents this information graphically, using a fuller breakdown by single years of age. The bars in the graph do not represent absolute numbers but percentages of each single year age group, who had a long term placement of each type. The shape of the curves indicate that children up to the age of eleven are usually placed in foster homes on a long term basis, at least on one occasion, with older children being less likely to be placed in a foster home, while children aged between eight and twelve are the most likely candidates for a long term family home placement. The relative size of the curves indicates that family homes are used much less frequently than foster homes for long term placements.

Figure 6.1 Percentages of Children placed in foster and family homes - long-term intention



This leads us into a closer examination of the foster placements experienced by the children in the study.

6.6 FOSTER PLACEMENTS

6.6.1 No. of foster placements experienced by the children

Table 6.5 showed that 55% of the children had experienced at least one foster placement, and that 10% had been in foster homes where the foster parents were relatives. Many of these children experienced more than one foster placement, and the maximum number of foster placements experienced by a child over the period was as high as eleven. Table 6.8 gives details of the number of foster placements experienced by the children, and the number of these which were intended to be long term placements. The table no longer preserves the distinction between placements where the foster parents were relatives of the child and other placements.

Table 6.8 Number of Foster Placements Experienced by the Children

No. of foster placements	No. of children who had this no. of foster placements		No. of children who had this no. of long-term foster placements	
none	258	39%	333	51%
1	184	28%	182	28%
2	101	15%	81	12%
3	43	7%	30	5%
4	36	6%	16	2%
5	13	2%	5	1%
6	5	1%	5	1%
7	6	1%	-	-
8	4	1%	2	*
9	1	*	-	-
10	2	*	-	-
11	1	*	-	-
TOTAL CHILDREN	654	100%	654	100%

For the children who had at least one foster placement, the average number of foster placements was 2.2, while the average number of long-term foster placements was 1.4. 111 children (17%) had more than two foster placements, while there were 58 children (9%) who had more than two foster placements which were intended to be long term.

6.6.2 Duration of foster placements

A total of 868 foster placements were made for children during the five year period covered by the study. Of these, 727 had ended during the study period, while 141 children were living in foster homes at the end of the five years.

For the 727 placements which had ended during the study period, the average duration of the placement was 290 days, about 9 1/2 months. Over 40% of the placements which had ended did so within the first three months, and only 12% had lasted two years or more. Table 6.9 gives details of the length of stay of the child in the foster home for the 727 placements which ended during the course of the five year period.

Table 6.9 Length of Time the Child had Stayed in the Foster Home for All Placements which Ended During the Study Period

Length of placement	No. of placements	%
less than 3 months	306	42%
3 months to 6 months	108	15%
6 months to 1 year	125	17%
1 year to 2 years	100	14%
2 years or more	87	12%
not known	1	*
TOTAL PLACEMENTS WHICH ENDED DURING THE PERIOD	727	100%

The pattern suggests that placements are most likely to terminate during the early days of the placement, and that the likelihood decreases as the length of stay increases. This is in line with findings from previous studies conducted overseas.

Of the placements which were still continuing at the end of the five year period, a high proportion (77%) had lasted for more than 2 years. The average length of time that the child had been in the placement was 1302 days, which is about 3 1/2 years. Table 6.10 gives details of the length of time the children had been in placements, for all placements which were still in force at the end of the period.

Table 6.10 Length of Time Child had been Living in the Foster Home for All Placements Continuing at the End of the Study Period

Length of placement	No. of placements	%
less than 3 months	7	5%
3 months to 6 months	2	1%
6 months to 1 year	7	5%
1 year to 2 years	16	11%
2 years or more	109	77%
not known	1	-
TOTAL PLACEMENTS WHICH ENDED DURING THE PERIOD	141	100%

The 141 children living in foster homes at the end of the five year period amounts to 22% of all the children in the sample. 40 of these children had been in the foster home for the full five years, 6% of the children in the study. Using the crude notion of 2 years continuous residence in a foster home as a criterion for a stable long term placement, 17% of the children were in stable long term placements at the end of the five year period. Combining this figure with that from Table 6.8, appears that 23% of all placements made during the five year study period lasted for two years of more.

6.6.3 Duration of foster placements intended to be long term

The above figures need to be adjusted somewhat, since they include placements which were intended to be for short periods only, as well as those which were intended to be long term arrangements. Table 6.11 gives the length of stay of children in placements which were intended to be long term arrangements (i.e. three months or more) for all the placements which ended during the five year period. The mean length of stay of a child in a long term foster placement for placements which had ended, was 389 days, or about 13 months.

Table 6.11 Duration of Foster Placements Intended to Last Three Months or Longer which Ended During the Period

Length of Placements	No. of placements	%
less than 3 months	108	24%
3 months to 6 months	74	16%
6 months to 1 year	106	24%
1 year to 2 years	86	19%
2 years or more	75	17%
not known	1	-
TOTAL PLACEMENTS WHICH ENDED DURING THE PERIOD	450	100%

Of all the foster placements which had been intended to last three months or longer, a quarter of those that ended during the period failed to last for three months. Furthermore, another 40% ended inside a year, making nearly two thirds that failed to last a year. Only 17% lasted for two years or more.

However, over three quarters of the long term placements which were continuing at the end of the period had lasted for two years or more. The average length of time children had been in long term placements which were still continuing at the end of the period as 1309 days, about 3 1/2 years. Table 6.12 has details of the length of stay of children in continuing long term placements.

Table 6.12 Length of Time Children had been Living in Foster Placements which were Intended to be Long Term and which were Still in Force at the End of the Five Year Period

less than 3 months	3	3%
3 months to 6 months	2	2%
6 months to 1 year	7	6%
1 year to 2 years	16	13%
2 years or more	91	76
TOTAL	119	100%

The duration of placement was related to the number of prior foster placements experienced by the children. The higher the number of prior foster placements experienced by the child, the shorter the placement was likely to last. Table 6.13 gives the mean length of stay of the child in a foster placement for first, second and third foster placements and for all subsequent foster placements. Only those placements which were intended to be long term were included in the calculation of the means. The table shows that the mean length of stay decreases as the number of prior foster placements increases.

Table 6.13 Mean Length of Stay in Foster Placements which were Intended to be Long Term and which Ended During the Period by Number of Prior Placements

Placement number	Mean length of stay
first long term foster placements	425 days = 14 months (n=257)
second long term foster placements	401 days = 13 months (n=114)
third long term foster placements	287 days = 91/2 months (n=42)
all subsequent long term foster placements	204 days = 7 months (n=36)

6.6.4 Reasons for the end of foster placements

Each time a placement ended, information was collected on the reasons for the end of the placement. A detailed coding system was devised to classify the reasons for the end of the placements into three main categories : those which ended according to a plan; those which ended because of unavoidable accidental factors; and those which could be considered to have broken down.

Table 6.14 gives the reasons for the end of the 727 foster placements which ended during the period, and also for the 450 placements which were intended to be long-term.

Table 6.14 Reasons for the End of Foster Placements

PLACEMENTS CONSIDERED TO HAVE BROKEN DOWN	All foster placements which ended		Long term foster placements which ended	
Reasons Primarily Associated With the Child				
child offended	17	2%	14	3%
child absconded	45	6%	34	8%
child's misbehaviour in the home	70	10%	46	10%
child's misbehaviour at school	3	=	3	1%
child's disturbed behaviour	15	2%	11	2%
other reasons primarily associated with the child	9	1%	6	1%
Total Reasons Primarily Associated with the Child	159	22%	114	25%

PLACEMENTS CONSIDERED TO HAVE BROKEN DOWN	All foster placements which ended		Long term foster placements which ended	
Breakdown in Relationships				
unsatisfactory relationship between child and foster parents	53	7%	40	9%
unsatisfactory relationship between child and other children in foster home	26	4%	21	5%
unsatisfactory relationship between foster parents and child's natural family	4	1%	4	1%
unhappiness of child in placement	6	1%	5	1%
Total Breakdown in Relationships	89	12%	70	16%
Reasons Primarily Associated with the Foster Parents				
foster parents neglecting child	1	=	1	=
foster parents abusing child	2	=	2	=
foster parents rejecting child	7	1%	5	1%
foster parents could not cope with child	25	3%	19	4%
foster parents not providing adequate supervision	1	=	1	=
marital problem of foster parents	16	2%	9	2%
financial, accommodation problems of foster parents	16	1%	4	1%
foster parents lack of commitment to child	17	2%	15	3%
other reasons primarily associated with foster parents	17	2%	14	3%
Total Reasons Associated with the Foster Parents	92	13%	70	16%
Other Breakdowns Associated with the Social Worker				
inappropriate placement by social worker	3	=	2	=
lack of support by social worker	3	=	-	-
Total breakdowns associated with the social worker	6	1%	2	=
TOTAL PLACEMENTS CONSIDERED TO HAVE BROKEN DOWN	346	48%	256	57%

	All foster placements which ended		Long term foster placements which ended	
PLACEMENTS TERMINATED BECAUSE OF UNAVOIDABLE ACCIDENTAL FACTORS (Not Breakdown)				
child ill or hospitalised	9	1%	4	1%
change in child's employment situation	3	1%	2	=
change in child's schooling situation	1	=	1	=
other accidental factors relating to the child	2	=	2	=
parent figure died	4	1%	4	1%
parent figure ill or hospitalised	43	6%	36	8%
foster mother pregnant	11	2%	9	2%
another member of foster family died	1	=	1	=
foster parents moved from locality	27	4%	20	4%
other accidental factors relating to foster parents	15	2%	9	2%
TOTAL PLACEMENTS TERMINATED BECAUSE OF UNAVOIDABLE ACCIDENTAL FACTORS	116	16%	88	20%
PLANNED TERMINATIONS				
child adopted or placed with a view to adoption	29	4%	21	5%
child discharged	7	1%	6	1%
child returned to natural family or relatives	69	9%	45	10%
end of period of assessment	1	=	-	-
end of holiday	16	2%	-	-
end of emergency placement	20	3%	-	-
end of temporary "holding" placement while permanent placement sought	70	10%	-	-
other end of temporary placement	7	1%	-	-
child moved placement to facilitate employment	13	2%	11	2%
child moved placement to facilitate schooling	5	1%	4	1%
other planned terminations	15	2%	11	2%
TOTAL PLANNED TERMINATIONS	252	35%	98	22%
reason for termination unknown	13	2%	8	2%
TOTAL PLACEMENTS WHICH ENDED DURING THE PERIOD	727	100%	450	100%

Nearly half of all placements which ended (48%) were considered to have broken down. Of these 22% broke down because of the behaviour of the child, while for 13%, the placement broke down because of factors associated with foster parents. The remaining 12% of placements which broke down did so because relationships had deteriorated so that the placement was no longer suitable, although no one party could be held blameworthy for the breakdown.

Of the placements which did not break down, about a third (35%) ended in accordance with a plan, and 16% ended because of unavoidable accidental factors.

Among the long term placements, there was a higher rate of breakdown (57%). This is because many of the short term placements which ended in accordance with a plan, are now excluded from the count. (For example, temporary placements to care for the child while a more permanent placement was sought, and other transitional foster placements.) In 25% of cases, the placement broke down for reasons associated with the foster child; in 16% the placement broke down for reasons associated with the foster parents; and in the remaining 16% of cases there was a breakdown in relationships in the placement, where no one party could be considered solely responsible for the breakdown.

Of these 396 children who experienced a foster placement, 208 (53%) experienced at least one "breakdown" according to the above classification of reasons for placements ending and 86 (22%) experienced more than one such breakdown. Thus 32% of all the children experienced a foster placement which broke down and 13% experienced more than one such breakdown.

6.6 REASONS FOR THE END OF OTHER TYPES OF PLACEMENTS

It is useful to make a comparison of the reasons why foster placements ended in comparison with the reasons given for the end of other types of placements. Table 6.12 gives all reasons recorded whenever various selected types of placements ended. The figures given for foster placements are different from those used in previous tables, in that all reasons recorded on the form have been included in the table. Earlier tables have been concerned only with the main reason given for the end of each placement. It should also be noted that the table includes all placements of each type listed, those which were intended to be for short terms only, and those which were intended to be long term arrangements.

The table shows that nearly 60% of the reasons given for the end of foster placements are reasons indicating "break-down" of the placement. This is much higher than for family home placements (only a third of the reasons for the end of family home placements indicated a "break-down"), and is also higher than for placements of the children at home, with their own families (just over half indicated a "break-down"). Institution placements rarely broke down. This is as would be expected : serious misbehaviour of a child in an institutional placement would not normally be a reason for removing the child from the placement, as it might be in, for example, a foster placement.

Table 6.12 Reasons for the End of Different Types of Placements

	Natural/ parents main family		Foster placement		Family home placement		DSW short stay institutions		DSW long stay institutions	
Placement broke down through behaviour of the child	217	27%	291	23%	138	27%	70	9%	30	9%
Placement broke down through deteriorating relationships	82	10%	187	15%	18	3%	2	=	-	-
Placement broke down through fault of parent figures	110	14%	258	21%	14	3%	-	-	-	-
Child adopted/discharged	139	17%	47	4%	2	=	1	=	2	1%
Child returned to parents/ other family	10	1%	90	7%	49	9%	64	8%	113	35%
Other planned end	199	25%	176	14%	248	48%	575	76%	167	51%
Placement ended through unavoidable accidental factors	27	3%	163	13%	28	5%	6	1%	3	1%
Other reasons for end of placement	20	2%	39	3%	21	4%	38	5%	11	3%
TOTAL REASONS GIVEN	804	100%	1251	100%	518	100%	756	100%	326	100%

Only about a quarter of the reasons given for the end of foster placements are concerned with planned endings, compared with over half of those for family homes, and over 80% of those given for institutional placements. The difference between foster homes and family homes is no doubt due in part to the fact that family homes tend to be more frequently used for short term purposes. Nevertheless, the pattern indicates the difficulty experienced in planning for children, when the outcomes of foster placements are only infrequently in consonance with plans for the child's future.

CHAPTER 7: SITUATION OF THE CHILDREN FIVE YEARS AFTER THE CARE ORDER

7.1 CHILDREN DISCHARGED FROM CARE WITHIN FIVE YEARS OF THE CARE ORDER

Over half of the children were no longer in the care of the department five years from the date of the care order. This number included one child who had died* during the five year period, and one child whose guardianship order had been revoked shortly after it had been made. The remainder of the children no longer in care had been discharged. Table 7.1 gives details of the number of children still in care and the number no longer in care at the end of the five year period.

Table 7.1 Status of the Child Five Years After the Care Order

still in the care of the department	304	46%
no longer in the care of the department	350	54%
TOTAL CHILDREN	654	100%

There were no significant differences in likelihood of discharge between the sexes or across ethnic groups. However, age was strongly related to the likelihood of discharge. This is expected, since children aged 12 or more at the time of the care order would be aged 17 or more five years on, which is the age at which children are often discharged from care. Table 7.2 gives the rates of discharge for different age groups of children.

Table 7.2 Status of Children Five Years After the Care Order by Age at the Time of the Care Order

	Child still in care		Child no longer in care		Total
less than 2	51	72%	20	28%	71
2 to 4	64	88%	9	12%	73
5 to 9	91	90%	10	10%	101
10 to 13	90	45%	110	55%	200
14 to 17	8	4%	201	96%	209
TOTAL CHILDREN	304	46%	350	54%	654

* This child was a very frail baby girl who suffered from bronchitis. Because of her state of health, she was hospitalised twice before she was six months old, and died aged eight months.

Just over a quarter of the children who came into care very young (i.e. aged less than 2) were no longer in care after five years. However, children who came into care between the ages of 2 and 9 were 90% likely to remain in care for at least five years. Older children were more likely to be discharged for age related reasons.

Table 7.3 gives the age of the child at the time of discharge, for those children who were discharged.

Table 7.3 Age of the Child at the Time of Discharge

Age (years)	No.	% of children discharged
0 - 4	21	6%
5 - 9	11	3%
10 - 14	15	4%
15	48	14%
16	135	39%
17	92	26%
18	21	6%
19	5	1%
TOTAL CHILDREN DISCHARGED	348	100%

Close to 86% of the children who were discharged during the period were aged 15 or older at the time of discharge.

For those children who were discharged during the period, Table 7.3 gives the primary reason for the discharge. The table confirms that most children were discharged for age related reasons.

Table 7.4 Reason for the Discharge of the Children

Reason for discharge	No.	% of children discharged	% of children in sample
Child adopted	26	8%	4%
Child returned to parents or other guardians	42	12%	6%
Child discharged for age related reasons	150	43%	23%
Child in custody or under supervision of Justice Department	130	37%	20%
TOTAL CHILDREN DISCHARGED	348*	100%	53%

* Note: This total excludes the child who died, and the child whose guardianship order was revoked.

It should be noted that the 42 children who were recorded as "returned to parents or other guardians" were not the only children who were returned home, but were those for whom the return home was the primary reason for the discharge. 53 of the children discharged primarily for age related reasons were also living with their parents at the time of discharge. These children were described as independent and self-supporting. The table also shows that there was also a large group of children, amounting to 20% of the children in the sample, who ended up in the hands of the Justice Department. 62 of these children (9%) were actually in the custody of the Justice Department, while the remainder were under Justice Department supervision or on probation.

For those children who had been discharged, Table 7.5 gives the length of time the children had been in the care of the Department.

Table 7.5 Length of Time Children Remained in the Care of the Department

less than 1 year	8	1%
1 year to 2 years	61	9%
2 years to 3 years	112	17%
3 years to 4 years	98	15%
4 years to 5 years	71	11%
still in care after 5 years	304	47%
TOTAL CHILDREN	654	100%

7.2 CHILDREN DISCHARGED TO PARENTS OR OTHER GUARDIANS

There were 42 children (6%) who were discharged within five years primarily because they had been successfully returned to their parents or other guardians. Most of these children were fifteen or older at the time of discharge and only 8 were discharged on return to their families aged younger than 10.

Table 7.6 Age of Children at Discharge on Return to their Families

Age (years)	No.	%	% of all children in the sample
0 - 4	1	2%	=
5 - 9	7	17%	1%
10 - 14	7	17%	1%
15 - 19	27	64%	4%
TOTAL CHILDREN DISCHARGED ON RETURN TO FAMILY	42	100%	6%

Overall there were few cases of successful return of the child to his or her family (6%). It appears that age is an important factor in many such returns. Very few children aged less than 15 were returned home and discharged from care.

7.3 CHILDREN DISCHARGED ON ADOPTION

Adoption is also a comparatively infrequent outcome of a guardianship order. A total of 26 children (4%) were discharged on adoption. Most of these children were aged less than 5, but there were 2 children (twins) who were aged 17 at the time of adoption.

Table 7.7 Age at Adoption of Child

Age (years)	No.	%	% of all children in the sample
0 - 4	20	77%	3%
5 - 9	4	15%	1%
10 - 14	-	-	-
15 and over	2	8%	=
TOTAL CHILDREN ADOPTED	26	100%	4%

7.4 CHILDREN DISCHARGED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

A large group of children (130 or 20% of all the children in the sample) were discharged to the care of the Department of Justice. 62 of these children (9%) were in Justice Department institutions, and the remainder were under Justice Department supervision. Table 7.8 gives the age of these children at the time of their discharge. It should be noted that children may not be placed under Justice Department supervision under the age of 14.

Table 7.8 Age at Discharge to the Justice Department

Age (years)	No.	%	% of all children in the sample
14	7	5%	1%
15	33	25%	5%
16	58	45%	9%
17	27	21%	4%
18	5	4%	1%
TOTAL CHILDREN DISCHARGED TO JUSTICE DEPARTMENT	130	100%	20%

Boys were much more likely than girls to pass into the hands of the Justice Department. Table 7.9 shows the relationship between sex and discharge to the Justice Department. The relationship was highly significant ($p < 0.0001$ on the chi-squared test). The tables includes only children who were aged ten or more at the time of the care order, since children younger than this would have been too young to have come under Justice Department supervision.

Table 7.8 Whether Discharged to the Department of Justice by Sex

	male		female		total	
not discharged to Justice Dept	148	60%	131	81%	279	68%
discharged to Justice Dept	99	40%	31	19%	130	32%
TOTAL	247	100%	162	100%	409	100%

These are sobering figures. A third of all children who came into care aged ten or more, and 60% of all boys of this age, passed eventually into the hands of the Justice Department. There was, however, no apparent difference across ethnic groups in the likelihood of coming into the care of the Justice Department.

Children who had come into care primarily on account of their offending were much more likely than other children to end up in the hands of the Justice Department, while children who had come into care primarily by reason of conditions in their home backgrounds, were least likely to do so, which is an expected result. The relationship, given in Table 7.10, is again highly significant ($p < 0.0001$ on the chi-squared test).

Table 7.10 Whether the Child was Discharged to the Justice Department by Overall Reason for the Care Order

	Overall reason for the care order							
	Offending		Misbehaviour		Home conditions		Totals	
not discharged to Justice Dept	117	58%	82	70%	80	80%	279	68%
discharged to Justice Dept	86	43%	35	30%	9	10%	130	32%
TOTAL	203	100%	117	100%	89	100%	409	100%

7.5 TYPE OF PLACEMENT CHILDREN WERE LIVING IN AT THE TIME OF DISCHARGE

45% of the children were living with their families or with relatives at the time of discharge, while 8% were in foster homes or in family homes. 18% were in the custody of the police or the Justice Department. Most of the remainder were in independent situations.

Table 7.11 Type of Placement Children were Living in at the Time of Discharge

Type of placement		
With natural parents	129	37%
With main family	4	1%
With other relatives	20	6%
With adoptive parents	4	1%
Foster home	25	7%
Foster home (with relatives)	1	=
Family home	1	=
Private board	20	6%
Justice Department institution	62	18%
Police custody	1	=
Flatting	27	8%
Hostel	9	3%
Live-in employment	14	4%
De facto relationship	12	3%
Psychiatric hospital	1	=
Other placements	4	1%
Not known	14	4%
TOTAL CHILDREN DISCHARGED	348	100%

7.6 CHILDREN STILL IN CARE FIVE YEARS AFTER THE CARE ORDER

304 children (46%) were still in care five years from the date of the care order. The biggest group of these children (133 or 44% of the children) still in care were in foster homes, and another 6% were in family homes. Nearly 30% were living with their families or with relatives, about 9% were in institutions, and about 8% were in independent situations. Table 7.12 gives details of the type of placements these children were living in five years after the care order.

Table 7.12 Type of Placement Children Still in Care were Living in Five Years After the Care Order

Type of placement		
With natural parents	67	22%
With main family	4	1%
With other relatives	16	5%
With adoptive family	1	=
Foster home	117	38%
Foster home (with relatives)	16	5%
Family home	19	6%
Private childrens' home	11	4%
Education Department special school	7	2%
DSW long stay institutions	2	1%
Psychiatric hospital	3	1%
Private board	3	1%
Boarding school	5	2%
Flatting	7	2%
Hostel	8	3%
Live-in employment	6	2%
De facto relationship	3	1%
Police custody	3	1%
Other placement	1	=
Child missing	5	2%
TOTAL CHILDREN STILL IN CARE	304	100%

BRIEF SUMMARY AND CONCLUDING NOTE

This paper has presented information on the characteristics and family backgrounds of children who come into the care of the Department of Social Welfare. We can sketch out a quick profile of such children : they are generally from large families in the lower socio-economic strata; likely to have been born to mothers who began their families at a comparatively young age; likely to be Maori; while a substantial number (over a quarter) were also ex-nuptial. Though this represents the general pattern it must be stressed that there are many exceptions.

A common denominator amongst the majority of these children is instability in their home backgrounds. The parent figures commonly have marital problems, and most of the children have experienced disruption in their living situations as a result of this. Many of the children have experienced shifts from one set of care-takers to another - for example, from parents to grandparents - and such shifts may have occurred a number of times.

In other cases, the children have experienced changes of parent figures within the home, as the parents separate and take new partners. A substantial proportion of the children have been subject to parental neglect, and in a smaller minority of cases, have been physically abused. Such abuse is particularly likely when there is a replacement parent figure in the home. In addition to such dysfunction in family dynamics, the families have frequently experienced financial difficulties, and are often poorly housed.

For half of the children, the primary reason for the care order was the conditions within their homes, although the majority of children have offended or engaged in other kinds of misconduct prior to the care order.

The paper has also presented information on the patterns of placement of children during their period in the care of the Department. The children experienced relatively high numbers of placements during the five year period covered by the study. The high rate of turnover was particularly evident in relation to foster placements. Foster placements which began and ended within the study period lasted on average for just over nine months each. While this average figure includes placements which were intended to be short term, yet the average length of placements which were intended to be long term arrangements, and which ended within the study period, was not greatly longer, at about 13 months.

Only about a quarter of the foster placements made during the period ended as planned, while over half broke down (either because the child proved unmanageable in the home, or because the foster parents were no longer willing to continue looking after the child, or no longer able to provide a suitable standard of care for the child). The remainder had ended because of unavoidable accidental factors. That such a low proportion of foster placements actually end in consonance with the plans for the child emphasises the difficulty in planning for children.

A number of questions arise from the results reported here. Of particular concern is the reason why so many foster placements ended other than as planned. It is intended to carry out further work to attempt to identify factors which might have been associated with breakdown of these foster placements and those which might have been associated with successful placements. The thrust of this further work will be to see whether well-defined patterns of placement breakdown can be identified. Such findings would be of assistance in guiding future practice in planning placements for children in care.

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APPENDIX I: THE SAMPLING PROCEDURE

The sample comprises 654 children who were the subject of care orders made by the Children's Court in the year 1971. A total of 1,175 children were taken into care in that year by means of court orders. It was decided that a sample size of 650 children was desirable. A national random sample of this size was generated from the total pool of children by the following procedure. The sampling fraction of 650/1175 = .5532 was computed. Beginning at a random starting point in a table of random numbers, consecutive random numbers of four digits were assigned, one to each of the 1,175 children. Where the number was less than 5,532, the child was included in the sample, and where the number was greater, the child was excluded. This procedure generated a sample of 659 children. It was later found that in the case of five of these children, the date of the guardianship order was actually outside the limits of the year 1971. These five children were then excluded from the sample. In this way, the final sample comprised 654 children.

APPENDIX II: LIST OF TABLES

DEPT. OF SOCIAL WELFARE
016587
No.
CLASS 362.
7330
9931
MAC

016587
362.
7330
9931
MAC
Mackay, R. A
Children in
foster care
7 MAY 1982 R 11 JAN 1985
16 SEP 1982 R 25 FEB 1985
WTR
NOV 1985
8 OCT 1982
27 AUG
30 OCT 1982
13 NOV 1982
27 FEB 1983
10 SEP 1983
27 OCT
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