

Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry

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Address by Professor Michael Lamb

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Good morning. My name is Michael Lamb, and I am honoured to be the third member of this Panel.

I was born and raised in Zambia and I am currently Professor of Psychology at the University of Cambridge. I moved to the United States as a young man in order to complete my studies and spent 30 years there as an academic, as a researcher, and as a father before I moved to Cambridge with my two youngest children.

My career has focused on two issues - understanding the factors that shape psychological adjustment and exploring how to achieve justice for victims of abuse by making it easier for them to describe their experiences. Some studies have thus focused on examining variations in children's early experiences - in the nature of their relationships with parents, their cultural context, their exposure to carers outside the family, family configuration and breakdown, and experiences of abuse - and their impact on later adjustment. The other line of research has involved trying to understand the developmental and motivational factors that affect the willingness and ability of children and adults to disclose their experiences, and the ways in which interviewers (including police officers and social workers) can make it easier or harder for children to describe those experiences. For the last two decades, I have focused on improving the ways in which abuse victims are interviewed, and changing the ways in which the criminal justice system might better achieve justice for them and for those who abuse them.

When I began my career in the 1970s, abuse was considered vanishingly rare. We have since learned that it is far more common, and that children are abused, often repeatedly, in families, foster families, and institutions. I agreed to serve on this Panel alongside Susan O'Brien and Glenn Houston because it seemed important to establish not only how commonly abuse had occurred in the distant and recent past, but also whether the conditions that made it possible still exist, whether any failures to protect children have now been properly addressed, and whether we, as a society, can and should do more to minimise the effects on those who have been affected and to ensure that abuse cannot happen unrecognised or unstopped in the future. This exercise is long overdue, and will be my major focus in the next few years. I am pleased that the Inquiry staff have already begun interviewing people whose lives have been scarred by their experiences, and I hope that their testimonies, and those provided at the public hearings we will soon convene, will cast light on dreadful events, help ensure that victims are given the support they need, promote justice, and guide the development of practices that make similar events and scarring impossible in the future.

Professor Michael Lamb
23 March 2016