

Dear Commissioners,

I wish to make a submission regarding the draft report.

I am a business owner in Melbourne and a father of 2 children currently aged 33 and 26. I hope one day, possibly soon, to become a grandfather.

I am extremely concerned regarding proposed legislation concerning the mental screening of infant children from 0 to 3 years old for “social and emotional well-being”.

Per the draft report 'a definition of infant mental health is still a matter of debate'. I couldn't agree more with this statement. If an infant is manifesting some kind of emotional upset I consider an adequate assessment could well be made by an infant welfare nurse or other infant carer. In my experience as a father of 2 children such manifestations as crying, temper tantrums, waking during the night etc. can be well remedied by a loving and caring parent with the support of an infant welfare nurse if required.

In my experience many of an infant's upsets are due to a nutritional issue or some other physical discomfort or pain. Parents would do well to have comprehensive data made available to them to help detect such problems. I really don't believe one can accurately diagnose an “emotional situation” for such a young person as they obviously can't verbalise their concerns making it frustrating for them as well as their parents.

As an example I have seen in my children and others the success of 'controlled crying' to help a child settle into a sleep pattern . The sleep problem was not an emotional disorder but a need in those children for a predictable routine . The symptoms of erratic sleep which can include crying, difficulty sleeping and whinging, were easily resolved with a physical handling. This was most definitely the case with my son when young. Apparent “odd behaviour” disappeared when an experienced physician at the Children's Hospital found the correct treatment for a bowel problem . It was not a “ behavioural or emotional” problem as had been suggested by other Doctors, but he needed a physical remedy.

I really can't agree with the approach of making diagnostic evaluations and proposing early intervention on such young people. This could well result in inappropriate treatment being administered.

To take the right and responsibility away from the infant's parents I would consider an encroachment on my basic rights as a parent to rear my children and future grand children. I believe there is no substitute for a loving and caring family unit and a gross violation to take this duty away because a young one is going through a troubled time. In fact I think such intervention could well be counter productive.

I sincerely urge you to take my opinion and experiences into account when making final decisions and delay recommending screening on our very young for their sake and for societies sake in the future.

Yours sincerely,

Bernard Lowenstein.