GOOD PRACTICES

IN

THE AREA OF CHILD ABUSE INTERVENTION AND PREVENTION AT RESIDENTIAL CARE INSTITUTIONS IN BULGARIA

2010
**Exploration of practices for prevention and rehabilitation of children victims of violence**

The **purpose of this study** is to identify best practices for prevention, intervention and rehabilitation relative to child abuse in the past ten years in Bulgaria. The **research method** is content analysis of reports and publications.

In the context of this analysis “practice” means an activity or activities or services related to prevention of child abuse and intervention, rehabilitation and integration of children victims of violence and their families.

When analysing the best practices one must bear in mind that, given the relatively short history of operation of the protection system and provision of programs and services related to violence against children, there is no commonly agreed and adopted standard of good practice.

For analytical purposes it is accepted that the criteria for good practice are associated with an activity and/or service which:

- meet current needs of the target group;
- have broad access to the target group/clients for whom it is intended;
- are sustainable (have an implemented or planned continuation);
- include networking with other organizations, other structures, etc.
- have an impact on national policies, development of practices, etc.

It must be borne in mind in the analysis that assessment of best practices is only relative, because of the impossibility for the activities and services to meet quality criteria relating to standards of good practice. Services and programs for children-victims of violence have been developing for only several years now, meaning that just a few practices may be regarded as complying with the best practice criteria. The early stage of their development in the reference period implies approbation and diversification of practices rather than their quality improvement.

**Group A – Practices for prevention of violence against children**

In the reference period prevention of violence against children is represented by campaigns and training initiatives. In terms of campaigns, the most widespread in Bulgaria is the approach through **informing**. It is aimed primarily at identifying the types of violence and recognizing their symptoms. The information campaigns are targeted to various groups such as:

- children;
- professional communities;
- the society in general.

Such campaigns over the reference period are the “**Health is my wealth**” and “**We can prevent sexual abuse**”, implemented through **brochures** published by the “Gender” Foundation, with the support of the “Global Fund for Children”, within the scope of a training project for prevention of trafficking and sexual abuse against children.

Another practice aimed at increasing the children’s sensitivity to reporting instances of violence is the national helpline for children “Chat with a friend” (0800 19 100). The SACP and UNICEF jointly created and implemented a pilot project “National helpline for children”, which lasted from December 2007 to 31.12.2008. The line is an easily memorable number
with national coverage. It is free-of-charge, operates round the clock, and is available for the kids who would like to use it.

**Campaigns aimed at adults** are conducted by the Social Activities and Practices Institute (SAPI). With the support of UNICEF, the State Agency for Child Protection and “Nadia” Centre in 2008 was launched the campaign “Look, Listen, Tell – Parents who beat their children, try to hide it”. The campaign aims to increase the sensitivity of society towards the problem of physical child abuse and spread information about the ways of effectively helping the children-victims. The campaign will continue until the end of 2010 and envisages *distribution of communication materials* in retail chains, centres for social services, hospitals, schools and others.

The **trainings of professionals** who work directly with children and adolescents are another preventive strategy that has established itself in our country. As good practices one may list the following projects of non-profit organizations:

- **Pilot project for training of social workers from the Child Protection Departments at the Social Assistance Directorates – Sofia** in working with children and adolescents who are victims of violence. The project was carried out between January 2003 and March 2004 by the “Animus” Association with financing provided by the OAK Foundation and support by the MLSP and SACP.

- **Project of “Gavroche” Association implemented in the period 2003-2006** provided training to 140 students from the Medical College in Varna, Shumen University, Varna Free University, 108 teachers and pedagogical advisers in schools and kindergartens in Varna and the region, and 22 specialists from local structures of central organizations. Under the project was developed a *Handbook for prevention of sexual abuse against children*, which presents the experience of “Gavroche” Association in the practical activity of protecting children from violence. It is intended for professionals in the social and educational spheres.

- **Another project of “Animus” Association implemented in the period August 1, 2006 – May 31, 2007** provided training to enhance the skills of judges, jurors and prosecutors to work with minors and under-aged victims, witnesses or perpetrators of violence. The project was funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development under the USAID Program “Initiative to strengthen the judicial system in Bulgaria” (JSSI). The aim was for the magistrates to develop attitudes of sensitivity to the problems and psychological characteristics of minors and under-aged victims or witnesses of violence with the idea to facilitate the process of communicating with children in the courtroom, improve the quality and completeness of the information provided by children during the proceedings, and reduce the risk of re-traumatizing and re-victimizing the minors and under-aged during criminal proceedings. A collection of teaching materials was developed for jurors, judges and prosecutors, which contains theoretical materials on topics related to violence against children and the emotional and behavioural consequences on the victims, as well as practical aspects concerning the role and influence the judiciary.

- **Pilot model for training of adolescents in residential-care homes for children lacking parental care in “Empowerment and prevention of trafficking”** was implemented by “Animus” Association. The project was funded by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) GmbH in the period August 1, 2004 – April 30, 2005. The main objective of the project was to pilot a comprehensive model for effective and sustainable empowerment and prevention of trafficking of adolescent girls and boys aged from 15 to 20 in the residential-care homes for children lacking parental care in Sofia. This model contained four main components: training of adolescents, program for correspondence, individual counselling and work with professionals involved in care for institutionalized children.
The “Cooperation of the public and private sectors for prevention of trafficking and sexual exploitation of children in tourism” project was launched and carried out by “Animus” Association as a joint initiative with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the State Agency for Child Protection and the Austrian NGO “respect” – “Institute for Integrative Tourism and Development”. The aim was to introduce a new approach to combating child trafficking in Bulgaria through mobilization of the tourism industry. The main task of the project was the adoption and implementation of a Code of Ethics for prevention of sexual exploitation of children in tourism.

The Youth Club to a Consultative Centre of the “Pulse” Foundation in Pernik operates since 1999 and currently brings together 26 young people who meet once a week. The team of “Pulse” Foundation provides systematic training of the young people in mediation with people at risk or victims of violence and in recognition of different types of psychoactive substances. The young people distribute informational materials and conduct training in identifying violence for prevention of trafficking in the schools in the city.

“Peer education” – examined were two practices implemented in the reference period, which use the influence of peers for the purposes of training in prevention.

*Training based on the “peer education” method* was delivered to children living in social care homes in areas with high risk of trafficking for sexual exploitation. This project was implemented by the “Gender Education, Research and Technology” Foundation with financial support from “The Global Fund for Children”. The objectives of this project were to train trainers of peers who will later participate in conducting programs for prevention of sexual exploitation and trafficking of children, and to raise the awareness and capacity of children from specific vulnerable groups to protect themselves from violence, trafficking, sexual and other types of exploitation. The project had two target groups: children from social institutions and educators and psychologists from the same institutions.

In 2007/2008 UNICEF Bulgaria, in partnership with the State Agency for Child Protection launched a project for prevention of violence and bullying among children in school – “School without violence”. The main objective of the project was to contribute to the prevention of bullying among children in schools and creating a safe and supportive school environment. Specialists worked with teachers, children and school community, showing them new ways of communicating and dealing with problems without aggression. The project was implemented with the involvement of the entire school community – all stakeholders were actively involved in the measures to prevent and deal with acts of harassment. The project started in six schools on the territory of Sofia and covered children from 5th to 7th grade. In 2008 the “School without violence” was extended with additional schools in other towns, including children from 1st to 7th grade.

The “Prevention of sexual abuse and trafficking of children at risk” project, “Demetra”, Bourgas, had the following project tasks:

- to inform potential victims about the risks of sexual exploitation and trafficking;
- to develop skills of professionals working on the problem and increase the effectiveness of the multidisciplinary approach;
- prevention of school dropouts with a focus on the Roma community.

Children and pupils from institutions are the specific target group of a training program entitled “Development of social skills of children at risk” – communication skills, conflict resolution, children’s rights, problem solving, applying the “peer education” method; organizing the leisure time of children through training and involvement in sports and dancing clubs – participation in festivals and concerts; conducting information campaigns in the
institutions “Trafficking in human beings exists”; organizing a discussion club “Me and my future” with young people from the Roma community; fieldwork with dropouts and young people at risk of dropping out of school, motivation for learning and vocational training in partnership with a Business Centre in Bourgas; counselling of victims of sexual abuse and trafficking in a crisis centre for children at risk. For parents of the Roma community was provided training and counselling to school dropouts in skills to be better parents and grow better the children.

**Group B – Practices for intervention and rehabilitation of children victims of violence**

Due to the numerous projects carried out by the “Animus” Association for preventing violence one may define as good practice the Centre for recovery of women, adolescents and children survivors of violence, which provides the following services and programs to children and adolescents survivors of violence:

- 24-hour Hotline;
- program for adolescents affected by violence aged between 14 and 21 years;
- program for psychological counselling of girls with problems related to violence;
- a program for social support;
- a program for support to the children of the female clients of the Centre.

Within the project “Hear the Child” implemented by SAPI in partnership with the “Union of Judges in Bulgaria” and the “No Man’s Children” Foundation – Poland, financed by the “OAK” Foundation were set up three specialized rooms for hearing of children victims or witnesses of crime. The aim is to introduce, if possible, a single hearing of the victims in the presence of a judge and within a friendly atmosphere.

Since the end of 2006 were set up the first Crisis centres in the towns of Burgas, Dragoman, Balvan, Alfatar and Montana. They are financed from the state budget. According to the SACP, today they are 15. In these centres are accommodated children who are victims of domestic violence or trafficking, with the aim to provide shelter and initial intervention.

According to the database of the SACP, 8 emergency admission centres were set up as part of the Community Support Centres. Through a service is sought an emergency removal of children from family or another environment that represents risk for their physical or mental health, aiming to ensure protection. The services are recognized by the authorized bodies and structures as places for quick and safe placement of children, but often expectations to the social services are that housed children will receive more support than the resources of the service permit.
**Findings and conclusions**

*Findings and conclusion as regards the practices applicable to children victims of violence*

- The study shows that practices related to violence against children are focusing on the prevention, intervention and rehabilitation.

- One of the study’s findings was that there are no practices for integration of children victims of violence (resident care and community-based services) to follow-up after the crisis intervention and rehabilitation services.

- Over the reference period are lacking also practices for working with perpetrators – in the family and other children/persons outside the family.

- A typical tendency in the development of practices during the reference period is the observed expansion of the target groups and the set of activities included. Perhaps this tendency is due to the accumulation of experience in organizations, allowing them to prepare and implement practices not limited to a single target group and activity.

- In terms of prevention, the approach most common for Bulgaria is through dissemination done through campaigns and training. These are aimed primarily at developing capabilities for identification of violence/abuse types and their symptoms. Campaigns and trainings are limited in terms of territorial scope, which is probably due to difficulties encountered by a non-profit organization in securing financially nation-wide campaigns and training initiatives.

- The practices for training of professionals have time-related restrictions (mainly within the duration of a project implemented by non-profit organizations) and are not integrated with the functioning of a support/training system, methodological guidance and supervision of professional communities.

- Relatively few practices include studies of the needs and effectiveness of the programme or service.

- There are practices of specialized services for children victims of violence, but these are one-off initiatives, pretty much insufficient, i.e. there is no guaranteed access to such services to every child who might need them.

- As far as the children in specialized institutions are concerned, the practices during the reference period are associated with project-based training of children and professionals for prevention of trafficking. The examined initiatives are pilot projects and the available information does not give clarity on how the obtained competencies of these groups are maintained and upgraded after the project’s completion and this definitely reduces strongly the sustainability of these practices.