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Strategies of Violence Prevention in the
Familial Context in Germany

Child Welfare and Child Endangerment

Centre for the Prevention of Youth Crime (ed.)



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Arbeitsstelle Kinder- und
Jugendkriminalitätsprävention

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1 Introduction

All people – and that includes children and young people – share the right to the free development of the individual, to life and to physical integrity as is enshrined in our constitution (see art. 2 of the *Grundgesetz* [German Basic Law]). Many needs and rights of children are also described in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) of 1989. In ratifying this treaty in April 1992 the Federal Republic of Germany pledged to uphold it according to international law. Article 19 of the international convention stipulates that the child should be protected “from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse”.

The degree to which the needs and rights of children are being observed and implemented differs around the world from country to country depending on specific cultural, social and political contexts. In what follows the varying forms of violence against children within the family are firstly described and the consequences for child development are sketched. The legal framework for child protection is then outlined in respect of Germany. In the main section strategies for the prevention of violence are introduced and the need for the further development and expansion of child protection is discussed.

2 Neglect, psychological and physical child maltreatment and sexual abuse

The forms of violence against children described below primarily delineate the varying endangerment situations in terms of content and are not particularly to be seen as providing general definitions.

Neglect is »the persistent or repeated omission of protective behaviour on the part of those persons responsible for the care of children (parents or others authorised by them as carers), necessary for the ensuring of the physical and psychological care of the child. This omission may be active or passive (unconscious) due to insufficient understanding or insufficient knowledge. The chronic lack of care of the child due to neglect caused by the lack of consideration, disregard or withholding of its requirements for life inhibits, impairs or causes injury to its physical, intellectual and mental development and can lead to serious enduring damage or even to the death of the child « (see Schone et al. 1997: 21). A distinction has been made between emotional, cognitive, physical and medical neglect and insufficient supervision (cf. Deegener/Körner 2005b).

Psychological (emotional, mental) child abuse is present, when those people responsible for the care of a child persistently or repeatedly

- terrorise it (threats, intimidation, excessive demands, etc.),
- reject it (constant criticism, belittling, humiliation, etc.),
- isolate it (imprisonment, frequent refusal of contact, etc.),
- bring it up deliberately inconsistently and in a conflicting manner,
- corrupt it (foster anti-social behaviour, etc.)
- and thereby endanger the healthy psychological and/or physical development of the child (cf. Amelang/Krüger 1995, Engfer 1986).

Physical (bodily) child abuse is understood to include all acts by parents or other key carers carried out by use of physical force or violence which any reasonable third party would foresee as likely to cause considerable physical or psychological damage to the child and its development, or as carrying a high risk of such consequences occurring (cf. Kindler 2006a)¹.

In order to reach a definition of sexual abuse, various aspects have to be merged. On the one hand, there is the societal normalisation of the rights of children²; on the other, the damaging effects of sexual acts on, or in front of, children and young people. These aspects are accounted for in differing ways in the definitions used by various occupational fields and fields of action.

One may differentiate between »narrow« and »broad« definitions of sexual abuse. Narrow definitions include only acts with direct bodily contact, unambiguously identifiable as sexual, between victims and perpetrators (that is, direct contact of the skin, in a way that serves the satisfaction of the sexual needs of the adult, with the breast or the genitals of the child through to vaginal, anal or oral rape) (see Wipplinger/Amann 1998). Broad definitions of sexual abuse also include sexual acts with indirect bodily contact (e.g. through clothing) and those without physical contact, such as, for instance, exhibitionism. In this way their damaging effects are also taken into consideration. Demarcations are being sought in these diverse definitions in order to facilitate assessments in individual cases. The drawing of these demarcation lines is often very difficult, since none of the available definitions does justice to all borderline cases (cf. Unterstaller 2006a).

1 The debate about the definition of child abuse makes particular reference to the following issues: to what degree is physical abuse only mentioned when damage has already occurred or has already been threatened? Are physical injuries alone taken into account, or are psychological ones also considered? Must a deliberate act have taken place or is the negligent use of violence deemed child abuse? To what degree do religious or cultural practices constitute an exception (e.g. male circumcision)? On this debate, see Kindler 2006a.

2 On this, see, for example, § 34 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and chapter 2.

This means that classifying an act as sexual abuse can be difficult. Different criteria assist in facilitating assessments as to whether an act should be seen as sexual abuse or not. Here, for instance, the imbalance of power between perpetrators and victims should be mentioned. This criterion does not assist in differentiating any further in cases involving adults and children, but in cases of sexual acts between minors, for instance, between siblings, it assists decision-making. A further criterion, which should be mentioned, is the intention of the perpetrator. This aspect in particular is, however, often difficult for third parties, who have to decide on the situation being reported, to deduce.

Beyond this, the following criteria are to be found in the specialist literature: “(...) the difference in age between victims and perpetrators, the victim’s sense of having been abused, the consequences of the abuse, the use of force and violence by the perpetrator, the build-up of pressure to keep things secret, the lack of empathy of the perpetrator, as well as cultural contexts “ (see Unterstaller 2006a: 6-3).

Bange and Deegener (1996: 105) have formulated a further definition, which comprises the following criteria: ”Any sexual act is sexual abuse if it is carried out either on, or in front of a child against its will, or where a child cannot knowingly agree to it due to physical, psychological, cognitive or linguistic inferiority. The perpetrator uses his position of power and authority to satisfy his own needs at the cost of the child”.

2.1 Extent

Up till now it has not been possible to make reliable statements on the extent of child neglect and psychological child abuse in Germany. There is a lack of representative study findings, although they are urgently needed in respect of prevention and the planning of support provision. The current findings, which rely only on estimations and a few non-representative data (cf. Mnder et al. 2000³, overview in Deegener 2005), however, allow one to assume, that child neglect is by far the most frequent form of endangerment in cases of child endangerment known to the child and youth welfare services. The general drift of this assertion is underpinned by the fact that the situation in other western industrial countries is similar.

3 A study by Mnder et al. (2000) shows that in applications to the court, in almost two thirds (65.1%) of all cases, the professional staff of the youth welfare services cited child neglect as a marker of endangerment. In every second case (50%) it was seen as the key endangerment indicator. Over a third (35.2%) of affected children are less than three years old. Other endangerment indicators were given primacy at the following rates of frequency: mental abuse 12.6%, physical abuse 6.6%, sexual abuse 7.9%, conflicts of autonomy 5.7%, parental conflicts 4.1%, other 7.9%, no data 5.3%.

Better documented is the extent of physical parental violence, although there is also a lack of representative findings in this regard. Published studies (cf. overview in Deegener 2005) support the assertion, that the majority of parents employ at least minor forms of physical violence, such as, for instance, slaps to the face or a smack. With the inclusion of infrequent and minor physical violence, Pfeiffer and Wetzels (1997) assume that around 70% to 80% of all children experience physical parental violence. That also corresponds with the results of the most recently published study by Bussmann (2002, 2003, 2005).⁴ Nonetheless, for over 90% of parents asked in 2005 their ideal upbringing was non-violent (see Bussmann 2005). In his summary of study findings Engfer (2005) drew the conclusion, that 10% to 15% of parents used serious and frequent physical punishment.

It is possible to make some assertions about the extent of sexual abuse, although barely any representative studies have been published either on this subject for Germany.⁵ The findings of Wetzels (1997)⁶, for instance, prove that approx. 7% of men and 18% of women in Germany were affected by sexual violence in childhood. Dependent on which definitions were taken as a basis, the figures on the extent of sexual abuse in other studies carried out in western industrial nations fluctuated between 7% and 36% in affected women and between 3% and 19% in affected men (cf. Finkelhor 1998).

On the basis of a comparison between national and international representative and non-representative surveys Bange and Deegener (1996) assume, that every fourth or fifth girl and every twelfth boy in Germany is affected by sexual violence. The ratio of female to male victims in international studies demonstrates on average a 1.5 to 3 times higher rate for women than for men (cf. Finkelhor 1998).

The findings of investigations indicated that the majority of vulnerable children are not exposed to only one form of violence (see Deegener 2005 et al.). Moreover, children, who have already been victims of violence, demonstrated that they were at high risk of becoming victimised again (see Jonson-Reid et al. 2003). According to a longitudinal study by Wu et al. (2004) on the commencement of neglect or occurrence of maltreatment, over 50% of all endangerment incidents reported took place in the first three years of life in families with three or more risk factors.

4 In 2001/2002 and 2005 Bussmann carried out investigations on the effects of the change in the law (§ 1631 paragraph 2 BGB) and compared the findings with those of studies from 1992 to 1996. In 2002 almost 70% of adolescents reported minor slaps around the face (in 1992 over 81% did).

5 Wetzels 1997, non-representative studies by Richter-Appelt 1995, Raupp 1993, Bange/ Deegener 1996 et al.

6 Wetzels (1997) based his retrospective survey on differing (narrow and broad) definitions. The figures mentioned include all forms of sexual violence against children.

2.2 Risk constellations

Risk factors alone do not increase the likelihood of neglect and abuse but rather do so when brought together or in interplay.⁷ In a longitudinal study by Brown et al. (1998) the risk of abuse and neglect increased at a threshold of three or more risk factors from under 10% to just less than 25%.

Among the most important risk factors for maltreatment in particular are relationship violence, earlier abuse of the child, the affirmation of harsh punishments and the rejection of the child (cf. Kindler 2006b). Further risk of violence against children lies in the abuse or neglect experiences of one parent, high impulsiveness, a marked sense of stress and in child-related deficiencies, e.g. a lack of the capacity for empathy as to the needs of the child, a negatively distorted perception and unrealistic expectations of the child in relation to its autonomy and its behaviour. Within the context of psychological problems, depressive disorders, parental addictions and a number of less common dysfunctions⁸ are considered risks. Features of family life, such as poverty⁹, single parent status, families with lots of children or young mothers, are weak predictive risk factors in themselves, but in combination with risk factors with higher predictive power and particularly cumulatively, are of importance (cf. research overviews on risk factors for abuse and neglect in Connell-Carrick 2003, Righthand et al. 2003, Black et al. 2001a, Schumacher et al. 2001).

It is barely possible to name any separate risk factors in respect of sexual abuse. In two longitudinal studies what emerged above all was little care for the child's welfare (cf. Fergusson et al. 1996) and little emotional support from the mother (cf. Pianta et al. 1989, Kindler 2003).

7 Within the frame of an assessment as to whether a child is currently exposed to a high risk of endangerment or is threatened by it, several procedural and criteria-oriented aspects should be considered. The following issues need to be addressed: to which risks is a child exposed, but also which resources are available to it? To what degree are the child's needs being fulfilled? To what degree do the parents or third parties embrace their parental role? Which symptoms and undesirable developments are the results of the neglect or maltreatment?

8 Proof is offered, for instance, for the link between an anti-social personality disorder and the risk of abuse (Walsh et al. 2002 and others).

9 Most children known to be vulnerable grow up in financial poverty, (Münder et al. 2000,) and the larger proportion of small children suffering from neglect come from families with a low socio-economic status (von Hofacker 2000). One cannot, however, draw the reverse conclusion. The number of affected families living in relative poverty is very large and most of the affected families of course do not neglect or abuse their children. Marked economic deprivation does, however, increase the risk of neglect. It is not disputed that it is not only absolute poverty, but relative poverty as well, that has a negative effect on child development. It should also be mentioned that neglect of children from wealthy backgrounds, such as emotional neglect, is barely known to child and youth services.

If a child has already been the victim of sexual abuse, the probability of revictimisation and the endangerment of sibling children should be taken into account (cf. overview of research by Wilson 2004a). On an individual basis, varying indicators allow to assess the increased or reduced risk of revictimisation or of a repeat of the crime after a proven or very probable case of sexual abuse. Research on recidivism in sex offenders, which largely sees a repeat conviction as a relapse, lists as examples alcohol problems and paedophilia as factors, which increase risk. Factors, such as a fraught mother-child relationship, the presence of maltreatment in the family, or the absence of the (social) father in early childhood, also increase the risk of the repeat abuse of affected minors. What can have the effect of reducing the risk of revictimisation is if the abuser undertakes therapy corresponding with the current state of research and practice.¹⁰

2.3 Consequential problems

The maltreatment and neglect of children can have a considerable negative effect on their emotional and cognitive development and cause physical damage or, indeed, result in death. The extent of consequential problems has less to do with the form of violence against children than with the duration and severity of the occurrences of neglect or maltreatment¹¹, the overlapping of forms of endangerment¹² and other stress factors. The causal effects of neglect, maltreatment and abuse can worsen significantly in interplay with the cumulation of additional pressures.

The consequences take varying forms dependent on the kind and extent of child endangerment within the context of its wider life circumstances.¹³ There are proven links between neglect or maltreatment, on the one hand, and problematic attachment relationships, dysfunctions of the interest and cognitive

10 See Kindler 2006b, overview of the state of research in Wilson 2004b and Coulburne Fuller 1993.

11 A series of studies on all forms of violence reveal an exposure-response effect. In relation to neglect, see, for instance, Kinard 2004, on physical abuse, see Thornberry et al. 2001, on psychological abuse, see Bifulco et al. 2002, Edwards et al. 2003, on sexual abuse, see the overview of research by Kendall-Tackett et al. 1998.

12 Marked negative effects are to be found in the interaction between varying forms of endangerment or multiple endangering situations, e.g. in Bifulco/Moran 1998, Bagley/Mallick 2000, Dance et al. 2002, Edwards et al. 2003.

13 Proof of this has been found for varying stressors. The following interconnections have been described in an exemplary way: children, who as a result of their physical development appeared to be particularly vulnerable, e. g. premature babies, exhibited particularly negative responses to neglect (Mackner et al. 1997, Strathearn et al. 2001 among others). After sexual abuse children on average develop serious symptoms where there is little emotional support in the family, and where parents, for instance, react in the form of denial, rejection or even punishment (Unterstaller 2006b).

development (problems with school performance), low self-esteem, psychological disorders (aggressive, anti-social behavioural abnormalities, depression, post-traumatic stress disorders, addiction, etc.) and health issues (e.g. disabilities caused especially by the shaken baby syndrome), on the other hand.¹⁴

The long-term consequences for the suffering of the affected individual depends on the interaction of the individual stressors and resources¹⁵, which can alleviate certain problems when taken together and may foster positive development.¹⁶

3 Legislative framework

The legislature has also recognised the significance of early prevention of violence against children and has taken it into account in the *Gesetz zur Ächtung der Gewalt in der Erziehung und zur Änderung des Kindesunterhaltsrechts* (Act Outlawing Violence in the Upbringing of Children and Amending the Law on Child Maintenance) of 2 November 2000.¹⁷ The newly formulated § 1631 paragraph 2 of the *Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch* (German Civil Code; *BGB*) states unambiguously that children have a right to a violence-free upbringing and that physical punishment, mental damage and other degrading actions are illegal.

The demand thus expressed in § 1631 para. 2 German Civil Code for a violence-free upbringing appeals to the understanding and responsibility of those people who are concerned in the supervision of the child. The provision in the Civil Code, however, does not indicate any direct consequences – for instance,

14 Overviews of the state of research on the consequences of physical child abuse may be found, for instance, in Kolko 2002, Kaplan et al. 1999. In comparison with physical abuse there are considerably fewer findings available on the effects of child neglect; in comparison with psychological abuse, however, there are substantially more. An overview of the research is published in, among others, Hildyard/Wolfe 2002.

15 Resilience research demonstrates that varying resources in combination can increase the psychological resilience of the child towards biological, psychological and psychosocial developmental risks, such as maltreatment and neglect. Such personal resources include, among others, a stable attachment figure who fosters trust and autonomy in the child, problem-solving skills, good social competence, belief in self-efficacy, and positive interests. Social resources within the familial and extra-familial environment include, for instance, appropriate parenting behaviour, stability and constructive communication within the family, a supportive social network and resources at a local level (supervisory and support provision for children, etc.).

16 Resources can support children and young people in overcoming burdensome developmental conditions, even though the damaging effects of experiencing serious violence generally cannot be averted (Lillig 2006).

17 *Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch* (German Civil Code), BGBI. I p. 1479, the so-called „Act to Outlaw Violence“.

a criminal penalty - for its transgression. Flouting of the law is, however, understood as the expression of a lack of competence in child rearing¹⁸ and should be taken into consideration accordingly within the frame of proceedings in the family courts concerning parental care¹⁹.

The accompanying research commissioned by the Federal Ministry for the Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth and the Federal Ministry of Justice on the effects of the Act to Outlaw Violence is based among other things on a survey carried out in 2001 and 2002 and again in 2005 on young people and parents; its overall finding is that there is a trend towards less violence in the upbringing of children (cf. Bussmann 2002, 2003, 2005). In families fraught with violence, however, the use of physical violence has not decreased, but remains at a relatively high level, and the number of families fraught with violence has barely changed (cf. Bussmann 2005).

The legal basis for the punishment of violence against children is the provision outlined in § 225 of the Criminal Code on “the maltreatment of wards”, which names maltreatment and neglect as statutory offences, but which can as penal provision not be seen as a preventative measure. Nonetheless, police criminal statistics (cf. police criminal statistics 2005, www.bka.de/pks) for the last years report an increasing growth in reported cases of child abuse. An explanation for this could be an increased sensibility towards violence against children within society, which in the longer-term might be accorded a more primary preventative significance. §§ 176, 176a and 176b *Strafgesetzbuch* (penal code) regulate the legal provision on the »sexual abuse of children«. Since 2003 the number of reported cases has decreased and in 2005 was at its lowest level since 1993 (cf. police criminal statistics 2005, www.bka.de/pks).

In the run-up to endangerment of child welfare, as well as in the case of impending or existing endangerment, the welfare programme of the Social Code Book VIII offers protection for children and young people (cf. chap. 4).

Public youth welfare offers parents, in as far as their perception of parental responsibility is based on child welfare, programmes to support child development, if they wish, in accordance with supported rearing of children in line with §§ 11 to 26 Social Code Book VIII. The child should thereby be protected from dangers to its welfare (cf. Schmid/ Meysen 2006).

If “an upbringing is not guaranteeing the welfare of a child or of a young person” (see § 27 para. 1 Social Code Book VIII), but the boundaries of endan-

18 On the detailed determination, see Dettenborn/Walter 2002.

19 One might think here, for instance, of the provisions governing parental care after parental separation according to §§ 1671f. German Civil Code (*BGB*) or the legal measures in cases of the endangerment of a child's welfare in line with §§ 1666, 1666a German Civil Code.

germent of child welfare have not been overstepped, the parents and carers are entitled to assistance with child upbringing in line with §§ 27 to 35 Social Code Book VIII. Such assistance should put a halt to the entrenchment of upbringing practices, which do not foster child welfare.

The new regulation, § 8a Social Code Book VIII (“Protective Mandate in Cases of Child Endangerment”) which came into force on 1 October 2005 in the Act for the Development of child and youth services, on the contrary, concerns itself with the design of the procedure for the prevention of directly threatened child endangerment, for which “solid principles” (see § 8a para. 1 Social Code Book VIII) already exist, thus no longer making reference to early recognition of risk factors and endangerment. The focus is now on the collaboration between professionals, particularly independent providers and the child and youth office towards improved action in respect of child protection. It must aim to formulate unified standards for quality in the design of the protective mandate.²⁰

The appeal to the courts is also formulated within this provision, should the child and youth office consider recourse to this to be necessary or »should the legal guardians or those responsible for the care of the child be unwilling or unable to collaborate in the assessment of the risk of endangerment« (see § 8a para. 3 Social Code Book VIII). The basis and standard for actions of the family courts are the provisions of § 1666 *BGB* (German Civil Code), which, in the case of an existing endangerment to the child’s welfare – “in the abusive exercising of parental care, in the neglect of the child, in the innocent break-down of parental care or in the behaviour of a third party” – determines, that “the Family Court, if the parents are not minded, or able, to prevent the danger, should take steps to prevent it” (see § 1666 para. 1 *BGB* [German Civil Code]). These measures, however, are of a decidedly interventionist nature.

The prevention act should, on the other hand, be seen in connection with primary prevention, the design of which²¹ is being debated again by the legislature. It is also mentioned in the Coalition Agreement as a goal towards which the governmental parties should work. The design makes reference primarily to the promotion of health, which also has significance in respect of the prevention of violence against children. The very important interweaving of the differing preventative fields is also taken into consideration in the current emphasis in family policy, the »early support for vulnerable children« (cf. ch. 5).

20 See, for instance, the » recommendations of the German Child Protection League for the professional handling of the Protective Mandate in cases of Child Endangerment according to the provisions of SGB VIII, particularly of § 8a SGB VIII (Employment Aid)«.

21 German Parliament (2005), Gesetzentwurf der Fraktionen SPD und Bündnis 90/Die Grünen. Entwurf eines Gesetzes zur Stärkung der gesundheitlichen Prävention vom 15 Feb.2005, BT-Drucksache 15/4833.

The legal framework, such as the use of the *Polizeiengesetz* (German States Police Act for the Guidance or Removal of the Violent Person), the *Gewaltschutzgesetz* (Act for the Protection against Violence), the right to a violence-free upbringing (see § 1631 *BGB* [German Civil Code]), the *Kinderrechteverbesserungsgesetz* (Children's Rights Improvement Act) (see § 1666 *BGB* [German Civil Code]) and the Protective Mandate in cases of Child Endangerment (see § 8a Social Code Book VIII) extend the possibilities for protection and send signals in respect of changing societal norms. This can also be expected from legal changes aimed at dealing with stalking and forced marriage.

4 Professional practice-based strategies for the prevention of child endangerment

4.1 Programmes offered by the Child and Youth Services

Measures to prevent violence within the family – in particular due to the substantiation of child protection in § 8a para. 1 Social Code Book VIII, which provides for the granting of aid for the prevention of endangerment – primarily include assistance for parents and children. These are based on the voluntary acceptance of assistance by affected parents and thus take the form of an offer. Assistance with Upbringing is generally aimed at instructing parents in an appropriate manner and to support them in overcoming their child rearing tasks in a positive manner. This can, for example, take place within the frame of child rearing and family counselling or socio-educational family assistance. Within the context of child rearing and family counselling conflictual situations are discussed with the parents or the whole family and constructive solutions are worked out together. Socio-educational family assistance is carried out on an outreach basis in the home environment of the family. In this way the family is supported, aside from questions of upbringing, to overcome everyday problems.

Child-related assistance, such as, for example, individual, group or special educational assistance and therapeutic programmes are focused on the individual support or treatment needs of a child or young person and are intended to balance out developmental damage and strengthen psychosocial and cognitive skills. It is best to select and implement the assistance in collaboration with the parents and children and should be designed to match their resources and living environment.

If parents are not prepared or in a position to assist with the assessment of the endangerment risk, prevent the dangers to the child's welfare, accept the help offered to them or change their upbringing or relational behaviours, professionals from the child and youth services take steps through the family courts to ensure measures are taken, to guarantee the safety and welfare of the child (see § 8a para. 3 clause 1 Social Code Book VIII). The services offered in line with the Social Code Book VIII are performed by public and independent providers of youth assistance – such as, for example, associations or initiatives – in cities or rural districts. The legislature wishes for there to be a multiplicity of providers with varying focuses and a plurality of content, methods and ways of working (see § 3 para. 1 and 2 Social Code Book VIII).

One should note in criticism, however, that the effectiveness of assistance implemented where there is suspicion of violence or where interfamilial violence has taken place against children in the German welfare system has not yet been systematically evaluated. The evaluation of the effectiveness of available instruments of assistance would be of great importance for the design of specific and resource-sensitive assistance both for the affected children and their families, for professionals, and not least the economic management of the child and youth services (cf. ch. 6).

4.2 Specific strategies for early recognition and for preventative assistance

In many local authorities and on a regional level, distinct activities towards a renewed early and preventative provision of assistance are evident.

Most of these approaches are arranged selectively, that is, the provision of aid proceeds from a process, which attempts to recognise the target group of families who have a raised risk of maltreatment and neglect. Schemes and concepts, which are not aimed at one particular target group, but instead, for instance, offer support for all families with new born children, are on the contrary directed in universally.

The target areas of these projects are varied (cf. Overview 1). They are often rather heterogeneous and multidimensional in their fostering of the cognitive development or physical care of the child, even if certain individual programmes concentrate on particular aspects, such as, for example improved child-rearing skills, positive parent-child-interaction or the specific prevention of abuse, maltreatment or neglect. Nonetheless, these programmes also generally focus on broader aims (cf. Sweet /Appelbaum 2004).

Overview 1: Target Areas

- Physical care of the child
- Cognitive support of the child
- Positive parent-child-interaction
(Establishing of protective mechanisms, e.g. fostering of attachment)
- Child rearing skills
- Specific prevention (in particular in the area of sexual abuse)
- Multi-dimensional target areas

Early warning systems, which focus on a target group with particular risk factors, presuppose a systematic recognition of relevant risk factors on the basis of the most comprehensive access to the population. The aim is to recognise signs of endangerment as early as possible and to estimate their severity in order to be able to offer adequate assistance. In order to be able to test the acceptance and suitability of the assistance provided, one needs to distinguish between two strategies: a guaranteed institutional supervision, on the one hand, and, on the other, personal contact. The institutional monitoring of risk is rather based on the continuous assistance and support of the families by an institution especially established for this purpose, while a personal approach allocates the task of family assistance and support to particular carers assigned to a family in order to ensure the acceptance of the assistance offered. In respect of the assistance, one also needs to distinguish whether the programmes are working with lay people, (semi-) professional carers or professionals.

Early warning systems in the true sense are distinguished by the fact that they are made up of various co-ordinated components, and are thus differentiated on a structural level from assistance and programmes, which form the core around which the system orients itself.

Early assistance as such includes a very wide spectrum of support measures – from programmes aimed exclusively at parents and the strengthening of their parenting skills (simple parent schooling/parent trainings) right through to interaction and child-oriented approaches, which actively involve the children.

Further aspects of such approaches (cf. Overview 2) are described below. Programmes with a so-called »open door structure« require the family to visit a particular place as a rule (“centre-based”), in order to take part in the assistance on offer. Other provision can also be implemented in the form of outreach work (“home-visiting”) and makes use of a so-called “go-structure” [going to the family]. Nonetheless the take-up of these programmes is dependent as a rule on the advertising of the assistance on offer. Systematic access to the potential target group can occur within the context of an early-warning system, for example, via the neonatal and child clinics in a specific region.

In respect of their methodological orientation one should single out programmes, which primarily convey parent-centred information and instruct parents educationally. In comparison concepts, which are based on a interactive observation, are intended to change parental behaviour by means of direct feedback. These are generally based on attachment theoretical approaches, which seek to improve parental sensitivity. Finally one should mention child-centred approaches, which in practice are seldom to be found in isolation but instead as a complement to parent or interaction-centred approaches. Overview 2 outlines the differing structural aspects of these strategies for prevention.

Overview 2: Aspects of Approaches to Prevention

- Primary / secondary prevention
- Universal / selective / very selective
- Open-door / home-visit initiatives
- Parent-centred / child-centred / interaction-centred
- Focused on the social environment, focused on the living conditions
- Reflective approach to sexual relations
- Modular / multi-modular
- One-dimensional / multi-dimensional methodological character, etc.

5 Overlapping political strategies

With a view to current political programmes and campaigns, the *Nationaler Aktionsplan "Für ein kindergerechtes Deutschland 2005-2010"* (National Action Plan "Towards a Germany appropriate for children 2005–2010"), which was passed by the Federal Government in 2005 within the framework of the UN-Convention on the Rights of the Child, is being implemented on a federal level at present. The theme "Growing up without Violence" forms a focus of the Action Plan. Many of the measures described have preventative goals, such as the comprehensive introduction of family education programmes to foster violence-free child rearing, the support and evaluation of early preventative assistance, the development of assistance specific to target groups (e.g. for multiply-stressed families and immigrants, the training of professionals on the themes of early recognition and prevention, the development of educational modules for pupils on the theme of care and rearing of babies and small children and the development of training programmes for parents-to-be). The explicit anchoring of the theme of child neglect is to be welcomed in respect, for instance, of the formulating of the need for research. In that, the action plan takes an important step in the direction of neglect, itself neglected (cf. Deegen/Körner 2005b) to bring to appropriate attention the extent and the often

serious consequences of neglect. Even if the measures formulated may be considered very positively, the Action Plan must not be allowed to hide the fact that many areas of child protection are currently obliged to live with severe financial losses.

In the Coalition Agreement of November 2005 the coalition parties took up the theme of the early support of vulnerable children. Within the frame of the focus on “Early Help for Parents and Children and Social Early Warning Systems”, it is planned to develop early warning systems and the provision of early assistance by dovetailing health-related services, the services of the child and youth services and the involvement of civil society. By means of so-called »home-visiting initiatives« access to particularly stressed families and their children is actively being sought. In this way, a focus is being placed on the period of pregnancy and the phase around the birth, since young women in this phase of their lives generally make use of medical services and are especially accessible via social advice provision. The goal is to strengthen the protective mandate of civil society and parental responsibility for child rearing. The federal state has made available up to ten million euros for the implementation of this programme until 2010. Nationwide it will initiate, support, supervise and evaluate different model programmes and establish a service office meant both to supervise the activities of regional and local authorities and to safeguard the transfer of experiences made.²²

6 The need for further development and conclusions related to child protection

Within the context of what has been described here it is possible to outline the general requirements relating to German child protection, in order to more effectively fight violence against children in all population groups. In order to reach particular target groups on a long-term basis, additional specific preconditions are necessary. They will be discussed in what follows. In conclusion we will point to the need for a research culture around German child protection issues and specific research tasks will be outlined.

²² Coalition Agreement between the CDU, CSU and SPD dated 11.11.2005, section VI: family-friendly society, 1: Better Infrastructure for Families, lines 4789 to 4817 and press release from the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth dated 26.4. 2006: Better protection of children by means of early recognition and early assistance.

6.1 Practice – general requirements

The fields of actions, described in the Coalition Agreement of November 2005 and the National Action Plan »Towards a Germany appropriate for children 2005 – 2010«, with the focus on »Growing up without Violence«, in respect of the protection and support of vulnerable children, are aimed at certain important requirements: the early recognition of risk and endangerment situations, the development and extension of early assistance, the systematic interweaving of the health care system and child and youth services, the training of professionals, etc. (cf. ch. 5).

The responsible and well-founded behaviour of professionals depends on their specialist and personal qualifications. One basis for this is appropriate specialist knowledge on the varying forms of child endangerment, on the well-founded assessment of risk and endangerment, and on the efficacy of assistance. Against the background of the revision of Social Code Book VIII, in particular the specifications of the protective mandate in cases of child endangerment (see § 8a), there is now an increasing awareness of the need for appropriate expertise, and therefore opportunities grow for training, continuous professional development and further education. That should not cloud the fact that the knowledge base in certain institutions is still parlous, that the dissemination of knowledge is not always done in a professional manner and that in many places »half truths« are disseminated, which in isolated cases can be damaging. For instance, unqualified methods can decrease access to a family during an early evaluation of endangerment and thus hinder rather than support the implementing of appropriate assistance. Thus there is a need for proper, suitable training of professionals in all appropriate professional fields of (socio-)educational, psychological, therapeutic, medical, and in the arenas of the law and police provision (see *Ulmer Aufruf zum Kinderschutz 2006*²³).

Specialist and personal training and the implementation of reliable, practical²⁴ evaluation procedures go hand in hand. Deegener and Körner (2005b) et al. point to the necessity for standardised instruments for the evaluation of endangerment. The (further) development and dissemination of evaluation procedures, appropriate to the respective professional groups and fields of work are required.

The evaluation of situations of endangerment or the early recognition of risk constellations for neglect and maltreatment, in order to prevent violence against children at an early stage, is only of use, if numerous other aspects are

23 Available at www.uni-ulm.de/klinik/kjp/UlmerAufrufzumKinderschutz.pdf

24 Procedures which are too time-consuming, lasting many hours, are not appropriate in respect of the time resources of many professionals.

taken into consideration at the same time: qualified professionals, who have won trusted access to the families affected and who manage to sensitise them to the value of professional support; appropriate forms of assistance; interdisciplinary co-operation and agreements between facilities and institutions, etc.

In Germany there is an increase in early warning systems, which aim to identify risk-affected families and to support them. These should include a systematic interweaving of modules in the following areas: early recognition, measures for assistance, continuous supervision and procedural monitoring.

A systematic interweaving of modules should be the basis of all processes relating to assistance and would require binding mono and multi-professional guidelines for co-operation (see Fürniss 2005), unambiguously regulated information pathways and responsibilities (see *Ulmer Aufruf zum Kinderschutz 2006*) as well as systematic networking structures in practice and in the policies adopted by the child and youth services, and the health and educational systems.

With respect to the question as to which forms of assistance should be implemented, there is a need on the part of professionals, who make decisions in collaboration with families as regards the type of assistance to be employed, not only for appropriate knowledge about the efficacy of assistance, but also for suitable available provision. If they are lacking or if inappropriate measures are taken for financial reasons or because of a lack of knowledge, then an ensuing chain of ineffective assistance is a potential consequence (see below). The negative effects burden the families and also the financial resources of local authorities. Massive financial cut backs in the arena of regulatory assistance in line with Social Code Book VIII could prove costly in the long term and cannot be balanced out by the support given to one or two (model) projects.

6.2 Practice – particular requirements in the collaborative work with families who have high levels of psychosocially stress and neglect or violence problems

Particular requirements for the prevention are needed where children are growing up in families with high levels of psychosocial stress²⁵ (cf. research overview by Snell-Johns et al. 2004) and structures of violence and neglect stretch

25 Families, who are exposed to numerous stressors, including chronic relationship problems, psychiatrically abnormal family members, rejecting inconsistent relational patterns, marked feelings of stress, financial problems and unfavourable housing situations, etc.

back through many generations of the family. Conflict-laden patterns of interaction, unstable relationships and frequent break-downs of relationships keep repeating themselves (cf. Fonagy et al. 1991, 1995, 2003). These experiences can re-inscribe themselves into the system of assistance as well and become entrenched, if there is a lack of suitable forms of intervention, inadequate forms of assistance fail and staff are insufficiently trained. The implementing of assistance becomes difficult when parents do not show sufficient perceptual and reflective ability in relation to the precarious situation of their child, do not recognise the need for assistance or deny it (cf. Zenz 2002). Moreover their ambivalent feelings towards social institutions can make access more difficult, if, on the one hand, they are again and again or permanently dependent on social support and dependency exists, and, on the other hand, lack trust in any contact from this quarter and fear scrutiny (cf. Schone 2002). On the part of the system of assistance, the overloading of national and private institutions, unclear responsibilities and a lack of communication and co-operation may result in the thwarting of on-going accessibility (cf. Kinderschutz-Zentrum Berlin 2000). The effects of less obvious forms of violence against children, such as the emotional and cognitive neglect, are often also underestimated. Intervention only occurs when children come to notice as a result of secondary problems.

6.3 Preconditions for sustainable accessibility

The Kinderschutz-Zentren (child protection centres) (2006) justifiably criticise the fact, that public debate does not sufficiently take into account, the degree to which families, where child welfare is endangered, are burdened.²⁶ Short term, sporadic assistance is insufficient. Families with a high level of psychosocial stress require longer term, continuous supervision, which fosters and stabilises positive developmental processes while taking into account the respective current situation relating to their requirements and resources (cf. Crittenden 2004, 2005). Thus supervision based only on crisis management is not sufficient due to the limited capabilities of parents to evaluate crises as well as their extent. Particularly in the case of newborns and small children life-threatening situations may occur which are not recognised as such in time by the parents. Long-term beneficial effects of assistance are then lacking (cf. Crittenden 2004, 2005). Since children are often neglected and maltreated from birth, it is important to extend the area of early recognition and early assistance, which orients itself to the special needs of the target group. Outreach work, forms of assistance that relate to the social environment are thus suitable for the colla-

²⁶ Statement of the child protection centres, »Fachleute melden sich zu Wort« on the occasion of the specialist conference, »Hilfeprozess im Konflikt / Handlungskompetenz der Jugendhilfe bei Kindeswohlgefährdung«, press release of 22.02.2006.

boration with families with high levels of psychosocial stress (cf. Schefold 2004), especially where they are components of a multi-dimensional, fitting, flexible and well-co-ordinated arrangement for assistance (support for positive parent-child-interaction and parental care and child rearing abilities as the central components [research report in Spangler 2003], practical support every day, etc. [cf. Henggeler et al. 1996; for a research overview, see Snell-Johns et al. 2004]).

First conceptual designs in the field of early warning systems link systematic modules concerning the early recognition of risks and endangerment, assistance and continual, long-term supervision. Thus they also take into account the needs of families with high levels of psychosocial stress. A glance at the situation as a whole in Germany demonstrates, however, that to date there are barely any specific, comprehensive approaches available which would address the needs of this target group.

Moreover, account is often not taken in practice – due to a lack of knowledge and appropriate provision and financial resources – of the fact that sustainable accessibility of families with risk constellations requires considerable specialist knowledge (cf. Daro et al. 2005, Geeraert et al. 2004, Layzer et al. 2001). Professionals must have methods which are well-founded and they must be well-qualified themselves. Further they should be very well-versed with the special living circumstances and relational dynamics of families (cf. Zenz 2002). Long-term collaboration with parents depends on whether they are successful at building up a sustainable, trustful relationship with the family, despite all the set-backs and ruptures (cf. Henseler 2002).

Furthermore one should be mindful of the fact that a long-term intensive supervision of a family requires corresponding resources of personal involvement, time and thus finance.

6.4 Practice – particular requirements for the collaboration with families from an immigrant background

Several approaches target violence prevention in families with an immigrant background. The main requirement exists in the expansion and (further) development of programmes, such as culture-specific courses for parents or provision in the field of early support. In the area of training and continued professional development and further education (socio-)educational, psychological, therapeutic, medical and legal professional groups should increasingly include the themes of immigration and its attendant challenges for collaborative work with immigrants in their curricula. Aside from linguistic skills profession-

als require specific knowledge and a basis for understanding of cultural and religious differences, and knowledge of the characteristics of professionally skilled collaboration with families, as well as special capabilities to act (cf. Wendler 2005). Moreover the increased employment of professionals from corresponding ethnic backgrounds is to be desired.

6.5 Research

The *Ulmer Aufruf zum Kinderschutz* (2006) criticises the lack of a research culture beyond the individual initiatives and model projects taking place within the frame of German Youth Protection. Thus the requirement for research is correspondingly broad and will be formulated in the form of examples and in bullet point form below:

- (Basic) research, particularly longitudinal and interdisciplinary studies on all forms of violence against children, particularly on child neglect (National Action Plan “Towards a Germany appropriate for children 2005–2010”) and psychological maltreatment.
- The development and evaluation of standardised instruments for the evaluation of endangerment for various fields of work.
- Investigations by means of which cases of endangerment can reliably be identified, further neglect and maltreatment can be prevented and positive development can be fostered in affected children.
- Comparative statistics on cases of child protection and systematic case-study based analyses of institutional failings in respect of child protection.
- Research on the benefits of the state-organised child protection system and the efficacy of measures taken by child and youth services.
- Investigations on the accessibility of families with high levels of psychosocial stress.

7 Summary

It should be said at the outset that the varied world of practice often carries out highly skilled and valuable work in specific cases. There is, however, a requirement for the further development and expansion of child protection in the regulation of suitable training for professionals and in the standardisation of procedures, such as the interweaving of varying modules on the evaluation of endangerment, assistance measures, and continuous supervision and procedural monitoring. This should be based on mono and multi-professional guidelines for co-operation. There is a lack of not only systematised continuous supervision of families with high levels of psychosocial stress, but within the

frame of supervision procedures there is also barely any adequate (early) assistance available. If unsuitable assistance fails, the negative consequences burden the families and thus the financial resources of local authorities. In this respect the development of a research culture is urgently needed in order to be able to implement limited resources effectively, but above all, to be able effectively to support families.

8 Literature

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Notes

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