



Public institution  
**VAIKO NAMAS**

*Child Abuse. The evaluation of the situation  
in child care institutions*

Research review

**Vilnius, 2003**

## **Children in Institutions**

### **I. The situation in the Central and Eastern Europe.**

#### **Different world**

**Reality: during the last few years the number of children in various child care institutions is increasing.**

The progress in economy of Central and Eastern European countries is obvious. At the same time, more attention is being paid to the children and the condition of their lives and this is noticed to be connected to the increasing number of the children who live in childcare institutions. About 1 million children in Baltic state region, Central and Eastern Europe are deprived of parental care. At the same time only small part of them are orphans, most of the children have at least one parent. A great number of those children live in large institutions.

The number of infants (0 to 3 years of age) who are deprived of their biological parents care and live with the guardians has considerably increased in 10 out of 14 states in the region (we have data only from some countries). The number of such children rose 45% since 1989 in Romania, Russia and Latvia. In Estonia this number is even bigger – 75%. These numbers contradict the general policy intentions of those countries. At the same time, the figures reflect another problem – the stress of social living and the inability to manage the difficulties of life.

#### **The heritage of the past**

The regions inherited the institutional point of view of the state and the society toward the care of its members. The old regimen conducted the solid family support schema which included social insurance, free of charge education and health protection as well as the complete employment. The only way out for children whose families had problems was putting them to the state care institutions. There were no effective structures to take actions to prevent children institutionalization. The social work was undeveloped in the whole region. Besides most of the parents believed the putting their children to the state care institutions was the best for the latter.

The situation and the living conditions in the Romanian child care institutions before the changeover movement shocked the world, yet the similar were the whole region child care institutions conditions. The children in those institutions were the poor left without the consideration and deprived of any connection with their families. The everyday routine was strictly regulated; the children had no help resources in the case of abuse.

**Who are the children in institutions?**

The most children in care institutions are not orphans.

The most of children are “social orphans” taken from their families, because their parents deprive them of care.

For example, 95% of children in Russian child care institutions have parents.

**Today...**

The statistics tells us about the increasing number of children in institutions in the region. Since the 1980 the number of children in state care institutions rose to 50 000.

**II. The situation in Lithuania**Children in care institutions

2597 children, 35% of them were under 7 years of age, lost parental guardianship in 2000 according to the department of Statistics.

Only to every fourth of institutionalized children this was inevitable. Only one out of ten deprived of parental care children is an orphan. 1265 children were directed to the child care institutions in 2000. To compare with, in 1995 there were 1571 those children, in 1996 – 1965, 1997 – 1883, 1998 – 1898 children. 66 children lost parental guardianship because of parental abuse in 2000.

In total 3887 children lived in child care homes, 310 – in temporary care homes, 894 – in care institutions for disabled children in 2000.

In total 3613 (71%) orphans and deprived of care children lived in institutions, 2954 (76%) of them lived in child care homes, 112 (36%) – in temporary care homes, 547 (61%) - in care institutions for disabled children.

The state and the municipalities set 1097 lt. /month for child in district’s child care home in 2000 (to compare, in 1998 – 1129 lt./month, 1999 – 1164 lt./ month). For the children in municipal care homes it was set 891 lt. /month for each (1998 – 1016 lt. /month, 1999 – 988lt/month). Child care homes for the disabled children got 2090 lt. /month per child in 2000 (1998 – 2193 lt. /month; 1999 – 1934 lt. /month).

### Child care institutions

According to the information of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour there are 228 child care institutions in Lithuania:

<b>The name of institution</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>1999</b>
Care homes for the disturbed infants	5	5 (479)	6 (425)
District child care homes	33	31 (2772)	30 (2738)
Non governmental child care homes	21	14 (361)	14 (355)
Temporary care child care homes	15	17 (310)	17 (287)
State boarding schools	11	7 (421)	8 (599)
Special training schools for the children with misconduct problems or those who committed non – criminal delinquency	4	4 (218)	4 (273)
Child care homes for the disabled children (pensions)	5	6 (894)	6 (886)
Municipal child care homes	45	20 (754)	20 (821)
Parish child care homes	4		
Specialized boarding schools	42	55 (876)	55 (893)
Fostering families	43	49 (391)	51 (427)

The number of children is shown in brackets.

According to: Children of Lithuania. Department of Statistics, 2001;

Ministry of Social Affairs and Labour of Lithuanian Republic ([www.socmin.lt](http://www.socmin.lt)).

### **III. The research in child care institutions conducted by the public institution „Child house“.**

The review of the problem:

- 13 trips to the secondary schools in the farthest regions of Lithuania were made by the “Child house” workers in November and December of 2001. The goal was to provide knowledge and information to pupils and teachers about child sexual abuse and sexual – commercial exploitation. 525 pupils and 135 pedagogues were polled about the topic. The results had showed the lack of knowledge how to provide help to sexual abused child. The main problem is the ignorance of pedagogues of ways and sources to help the abused child. The majority of polled children stated they would keep secret and blame themselves if sexually abused. 5% of polled children were abused sexually. According to the research of Vilmantė Pakalniškienė (2000) there are about 11% of sexually abused children in Lithuania and Latvia. During those trips we visited 2 child care institutions where we found quite a large number of abused children. Our Latvian colleagues suggest children in institutions are especially vulnerable to sexual abuse and sexual commercial exploitation (Sandra Sebre, 2001). Our own notice suggests the number of abused children is high in those institutions with shortage of child protection information.
- According to the media reports there are children from institutions amongst the victims of sexual abuse.

- Western researchers suggest conditions similar to those in the family should be created to the institutionalized child. In Lithuania child care homes are overcrowded so it is impossible to follow the conditions stated in the UN Convention for the rights of the Child.
- Children in care institutions are often socially isolated. This has its effects on their further life. Because of the lack of the necessary skills it would be next to impossible for the child to protect himself or herself from the harmful activities, such as prostitution and the like.
- One of the common forms of sexual abuse in child care institutions is sexual terror amongst children. This is a very rapidly spreading form of abuse since the children have no self protection knowledge and skills.

Considering these problems we determined to survey the Lithuanian child care institutions. We did not intend to make thorough analysis. By the current research we intended to mark certain trends which could be useful in creating child abuse prevention and backing programmes in future.

477 workers and 487 children from 27 child care institutions took part in the survey<sup>1</sup> (269 children with special needs were not polled). All the questionnaires were anonymous. The participants were questioned twice – before and after the seminar on child sexual abuse topic. The aim of questioning the children before the seminar was to find out their rules of personal security, that is we wanted to know what they do to avoid dangerous situations, who are the persons they trust and apply to in difficult situation, what they know about child sexual abuse. The results made us understand more clearly about children knowledge and self security as well as searching help skills and who the persons they trust are. Sexual abuse comprehension data let us to make conclusions about children’s understanding of the phenomena. We hope those data will help to make more effective prevention programmes.

This questioning was significant because it let us to find out the self defence skills and safe behaviour knowledge of the children in the *care institutions*.

The questionnaire consists of 11 items: 5 of them are demographical – age, presence of parents and siblings etc. The others are aimed to find out what children’s do to avoid dangerous situations, who are the persons they apply, if at all, when difficulties arise. There also were questions to find out if a child would apply for a help in case of abuse and threats. There was a question to check the comprehension of the sexual abuse concept. The after seminar questioning was targeted to learn about the children’s experience. We sought to discover if a child have been abused (emotional, physical, and sexual). In questionnaire we gave examples of each kind of the abuse. For example, “Martha feels bad about the school. She has no friends. She feels nobody likes her, everyone wants to estrange her”; “John is often beaten by his farther, so he has many bruises and scratches over his body”; “An adult person was touching X intimate body parts and forced X to do likewise”. After having read such situations the children were to answer some questions: “How many children do you think encounter similar situations (most, somebody, just few)?”; “Do you know anybody who encountered similar

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<sup>1</sup> The acknowledgments to the Organization in Poland “Nobody’s Children Foundation” for using their built questionnaires (or parts of it). The Authors: Monika Sajkowska and Jadwiga Siemaszko (From the Book “How to Organize Local System of Assistance for Abused Children”, TORET, 2001.)

situation?”, “Have you yourself encountered similar situation?” If a question considered sexual abuse we asked more details such as “who was the abuser (was that a stranger, an acquaintance, a friend, family member)” We also put the questions about sexual commercial child exploitation. We considered this meaningful since the Lithuanian mass media reports of many cases when children (girls especially) are exported and forced to render sexual services.

The purpose of questioning the personnel before the seminar was:

- To gather information about the personnel who works in child care homes as well as about the children who live there;
- To find out the attitude of the personnel towards the physical punishment of the children and child sexual abuse;
- To find out the attitude toward the existing child care system and competence of various specialists (medics, police officers, pedagogues, social workers) who work with the abused children.

Here are some examples of the questions: “What could be the circumstances in your opinion which justify the using of physical punishment of a child? When in your opinion a child deserves to be physically punished: if lies, is late to be back at home, the academic achievements are poor, runs away from home, disrespects the mentor, damages the goods, disobeys, smokes, uses alcohol, wrongs smaller children?”, “Do you think the police only records the abuse case but does nothing furthermore, the interviewing of the abused children is of low competence, there is no possibility to separate the victim from the abuser, there is no possibility to provide psychological assistance for the offender, the punishment for the child abuse is too easy, the prosecutors and the judges don’t believe the children testimony and trust the adults, the interference of the journalists in the child sexual abuse cases causes more pain and harm to the children?”, “Do you think a stranger can (or have to) intervene in when a parent/guardian slaps a child in his face, beats a child with a belt or other thing, when a child is always hungry, is deprived of a care, spends all his/her time outside, is talked to vulgarly, a child is forced to look after younger brothers or sisters, a child is deprived of communication with his/her peers, is being sexually abused in the family?”, “What is your opinion about the specialists who are to help the child – police officers, medics, social workers, psychologists, mentors, teachers, the chief of the child care home, NGOs?” The options of answer to this question were: “they never help because have no opportunity”, “they never help though there are opportunities”, “they are trying to help but very seldom have a chance to”, “They do help”, “I have difficulties answering this question”.

The goal of the second questioning (after the seminar) was to find out if the personnel of the child care homes encounter with child abuse cases both emotional and physical and sexual. How many are there abused children, what are the actions the personnel took in such situations. “How many do you think are there in your child care home children who were emotionally, physically or sexually abused by their parents/guardians/peers?”; “Have you personally encountered the child sexual and physical abuse, threatening, alienation in the child families/foster families and in the child houses?” “Have you encountered the girls who were pressed to go abroad?” The answer options were “Yes” and “No”, if the answer positive, the number of cases was asked to be written. The question about assumed measures was such: “Did you take any actions when faced the

mentioned problems?" The possible answers were: "Yes, every time I encountered the problem", "Sometimes", "Never". If the answer is positive the actions were asked to be named, such as: conversation with parents, conversation with child, the consultations with the colleagues, and the report to the police, the report to the child protection service, the report to the social worker, the report to the psychologist, the report to the nurse. If the answer was negative, the reasons for that were asked to mention, such as: "I considered other services are to take actions", "Didn't know what to do", "I had neither time nor opportunities for that", "I did not believe my intervention can be effective", "I was afraid of doing greater harm to the child", "Cannot answer".

### **The reactions of the personnel and the children toward the questioning.**

Both children and the personnel were very cautious about the questioning, especially the first one. Talking about the reactions of the personnel the reasons for their defensiveness could be few. First to mention is the very topic of child sexual abuse which has been a taboo for many decades. The negative attitudes are very obvious especially in the province. Since the goal of the first questionnaire was to find out the attitudes of the personnel toward the phenomena, the respondents might have taken the questions very personally. The second reason is the suspiciousness toward the strangers from the capital city. To the executive of child care home in the province the visit from the capital links with the check up or even with troubles. The third reason can be named as fear of being identified by the headmaster or directress of the child home. The question if somebody else is to read these questionnaires besides the researchers was very common. We ensured the anonymity of the questioning. Still it was very difficult to break the defensiveness of the personnel.

Though less cautious than the personnel the children were also scared of being identified in abuse cases. So we explained the purpose of the questioning to the children quite explicitly and ensured the anonymity. We promised nobody, not even the headmaster of their child care home, except the specialists from "Child house" could have an access to the questionnaires.

At the end of the seminar the participants, both personnel and children, were less cautious. We think this was due to the atmosphere of the trust we tried to create during the three hours of the seminar. The greater confidence in us confirms the disclosure of the sexual abuse cases.

### **The results of the personnel survey**

477 (10% men and 90% women) members of personnel of various child care homes took part in the current research. The age variance was such: 32% of respondents were 46 to 55 years of age, 30% - 36-45; 22% - 25-35, 13% were older than 55 years of age; 4% - under age of 25. Most of the participant were married (73%), 11% were divorced, 8% single, 5% lived with the parents, there was 1% of widows. 86% of participants had children.

The most of the subjects (55%) had university education, 7% had unfinished university education, 28% had higher education, 10% had secondary education. The most of the participants were mentors (56%) who work in child care home. There also were

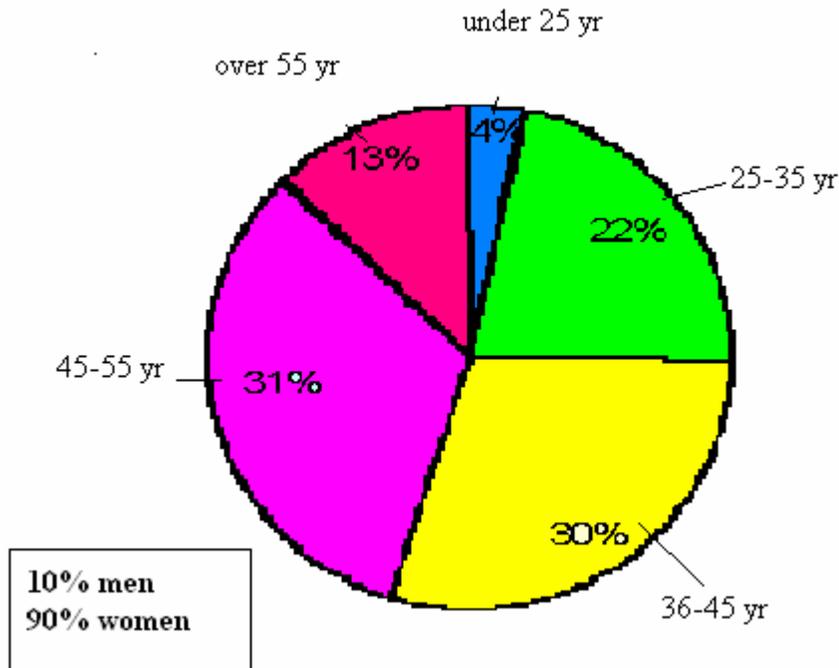
teachers – 15%, administrative personnel – 6%, medics – 4%, social workers – 3%, social pedagogues – 2% and other personnel. The biggest part of participants has worked in the child care home from 1 to 5 years. 25% of respondents have been working more than 20 years, 22% - 11 to 20 years, 19% - 6 to 10 years and 4% have been working less than 1 year.

55,5% of child care homes personnel stated to have encountered the cases when children had been physically abused by their parents or guardians; 40% reported to have encountered the children had been emotionally abused by the parents or guardians, 36% – the children have been physically abused in child care home. 25,4% of respondents reported of child sexual abuse in parents' or guardians' families. 21% of respondents reported emotional abuse in child care institution, 16% – child sexual abuse in child care home. 12,7% of personnel reported to have encountered the girls being impressed to go abroad to work.

25% of child care homes personnel took no actions encountered child abuse. 85% took some actions: 67% of respondents talked to the child, 62% consulted with the colleagues, and 30% talked to the parents, the rest informed social worker, psychologist, child care service workers or the police officer. Those who did not move on in child abuse cases have explained their behaviour by thinking others services have to do with the child abuse cases, or by having no conditions or qualifications or knowledge to help the child. Some of the participants thought their interference would only harm the child.

## The results

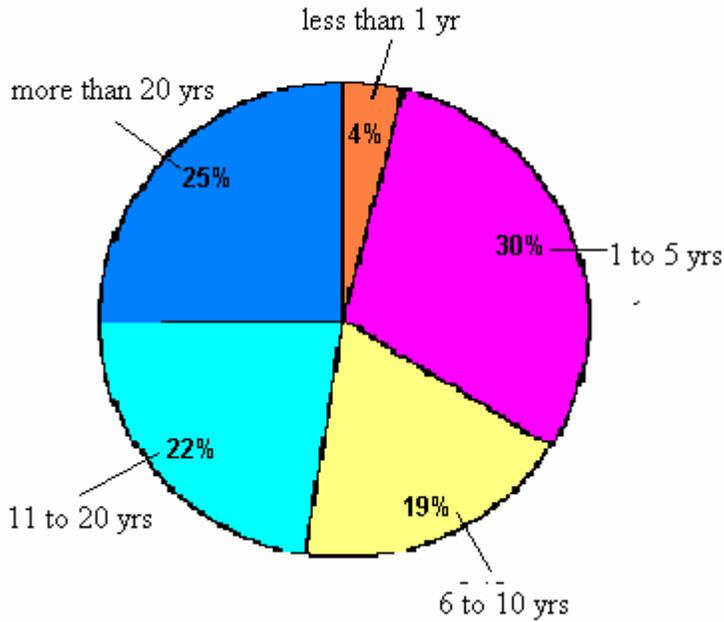
### The age of respondents



Two noticeable trends might be distinguished here. The child care personnel are of older age. The resettlement of younger specialists is very slow. This may be due to several reasons. First of all, the job in child care institutions is not a prestigious one. On the other hand, the older personnel are not eager to welcome newcomers to the community which already exists.

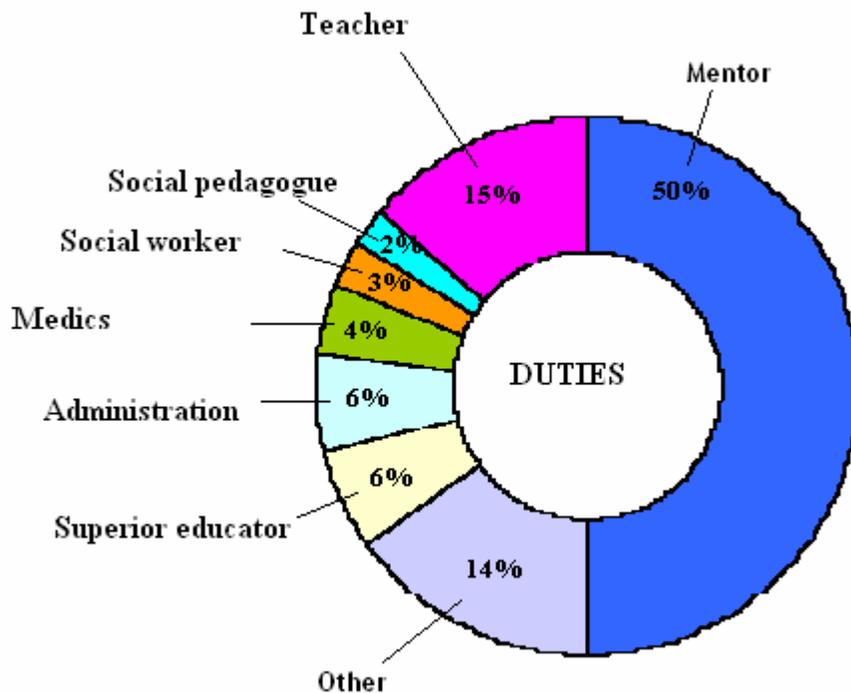
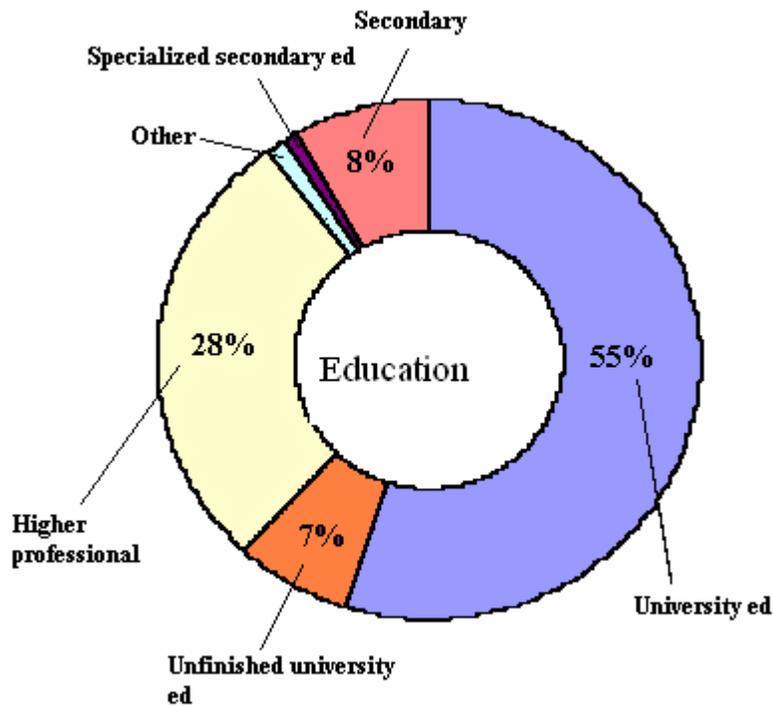
The other thing is that the most of the child care home personnel are women. It is universally acknowledged that educating and fostering jobs are attributed to women. For many years child care homes substitutes “state family” for the children and the most of the surrounding people are women. This may cause the one sided understanding of social relationships and the lack of various experience.

### Working experience in the institution



For the most of the personnel the job in child care homes is an occupation of many years. Every fourth have been working there for more than 20 years. They have risen few generations of children.

Most of the seminar participants were mentors. According to the profession, most of them were pedagogues – teachers, special pedagogues, social pedagogues and the like. Considering only part of the personnel participated in seminars we suspect less than half of all who work with children have a university education. That means a great part of the personnel use their own life experience rather than specialized knowledge which is necessary in communicating with the children of risk group.



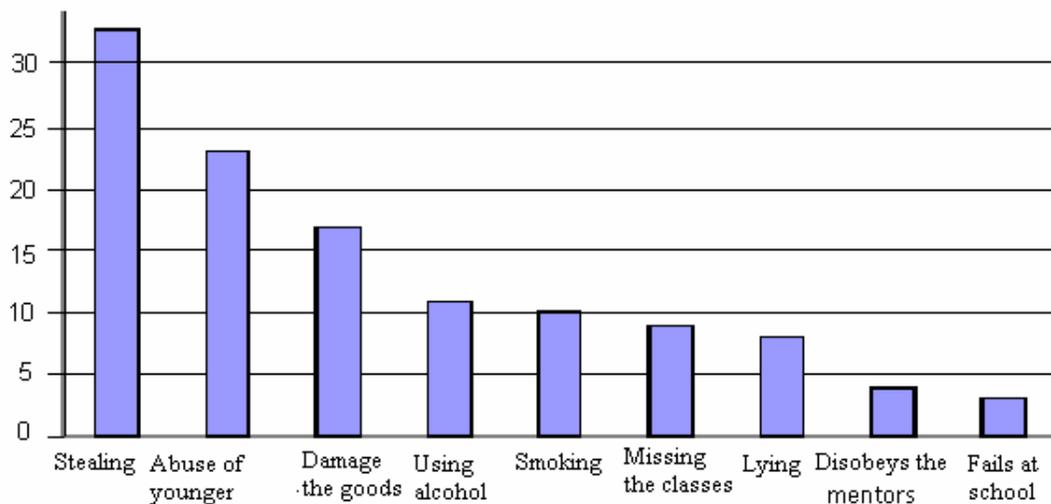
Most of the child care home personnel are mentors; their duties are to make a daily routine for the children. Those people see the children the most; they watch their nurslings and communicate with them. Those workers have shown the most interest in our seminars. Amongst the educators there are 51,5% with university education, 7% with

unfinished university education, 33% with higher professional education and 7 % with secondary education.

These figures mean the biggest part of those, who look after and educate children have no specialized knowledge and skills which are important for the work with the children from risk groups. This may hinder the implementation of the specialized programmes to provide the children’s further social and psychological development.

The next picture shows the personnel is prone to the ineffective education methods. One of the most harmful attitudes working with children is the consideration of physical punishment for certain behaviour.

**Reasons to punish the child physically**

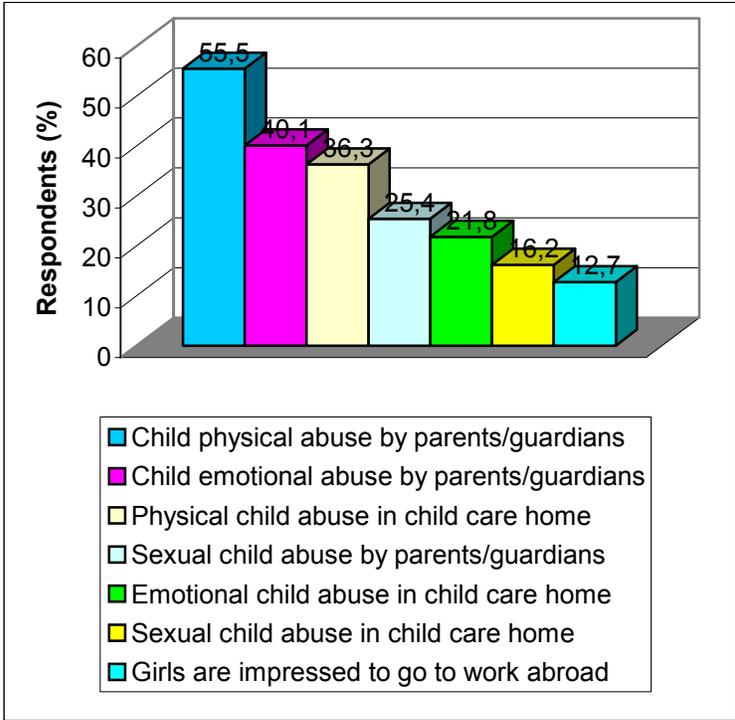


The results show the positive attitude to use a physical punishment in case of any child misbehaviour. It is difficult to explain the using of physical punishment for failure at school. 10% of respondents think physical punishment should be used in case of smoking and alcohol usage.

One in three child care home worker would apply physical punishment in case of stealing. That means the cause of material damage should be punished physically.

There is another discovery of the current research. 59% of polled children said half of the children are being beaten by their parents and guardians to cause bruises and the scars. 33% of children say more than half of the children are physically abused by the teachers. From the next table we can see the child abuse decreases less than by half comparing the situation at families and child care homes. 55% of children are abused in the families, and 36% in the child care institutions.

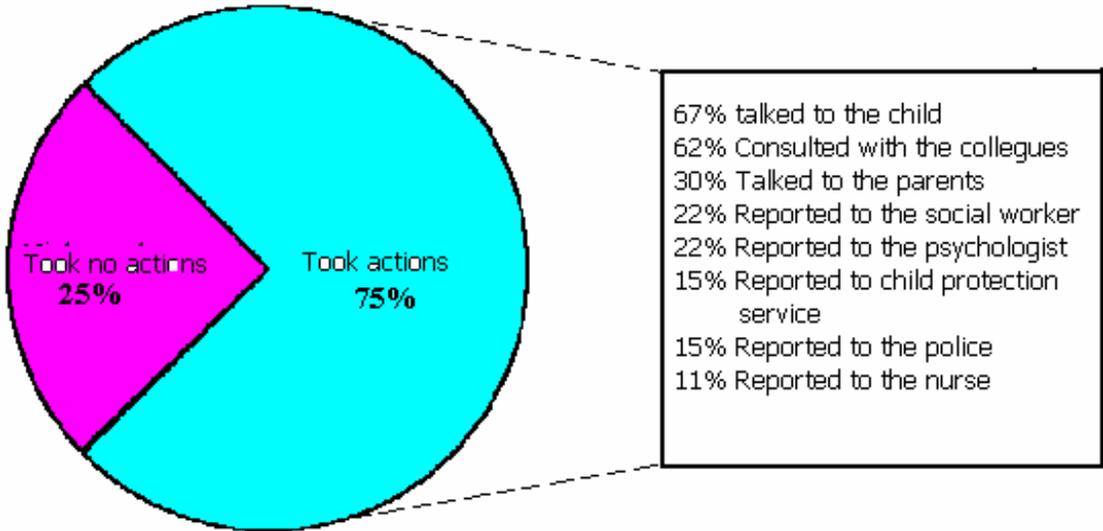
Emotional abuse is the second common form of abuse in the child care home, while in the families it is sexual abuse.



This table shows the percentage of personnel who encountered various forms of child abuse in their institutions, not the percentage of abused children.

The next picture shows us the actions which were taken encountered the abuse.

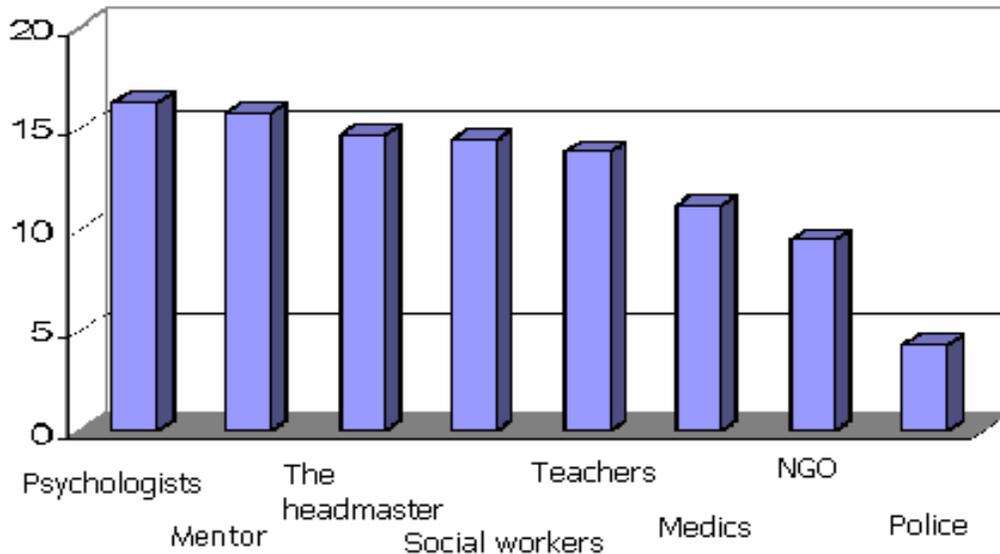
**THE ACTIONS TAKEN ENCOUNTERED CHILD ABUSE**



The taken actions were minimal. The specialists of the field were not employed. The most common way of help is talking to the child or the colleagues. Though in the cases of abuse the participation of the legal officers is a must they are involved very seldom. This might be due to the different evaluation of the effectiveness of help of various specialists.

**THE OPINION OF THE RESPONDENTS ABOUT THE ASSISTANCE EFFECTIVENESS OF VARIOUS SPECIALISTS**

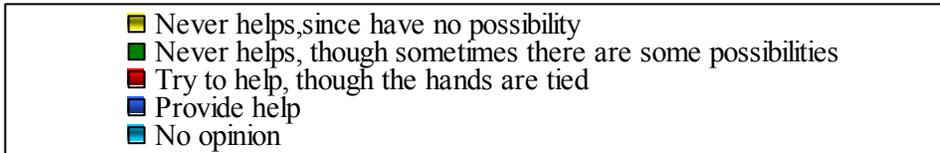
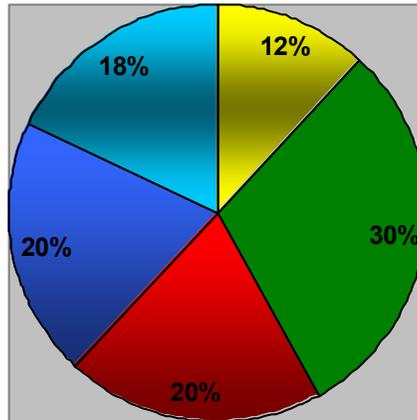
Respondents (%)



The psychologists are thought to be the most helpful for the abused child. So are the educators. The possible use of NGO’s is rated rather low, the reason for that may be they are unfamiliar yet or provide no concrete help to the victims of abuse.

The term “police” is not correct since it covers only part of legal officers. We dare suggest the lowest ratings of the police officers reflect the general opinion about the effectiveness of the legal system. The next table shows some reasons for that.

## RESPONDENTS' OPINION ABOUT THE POLICE EFFECTIVENESS

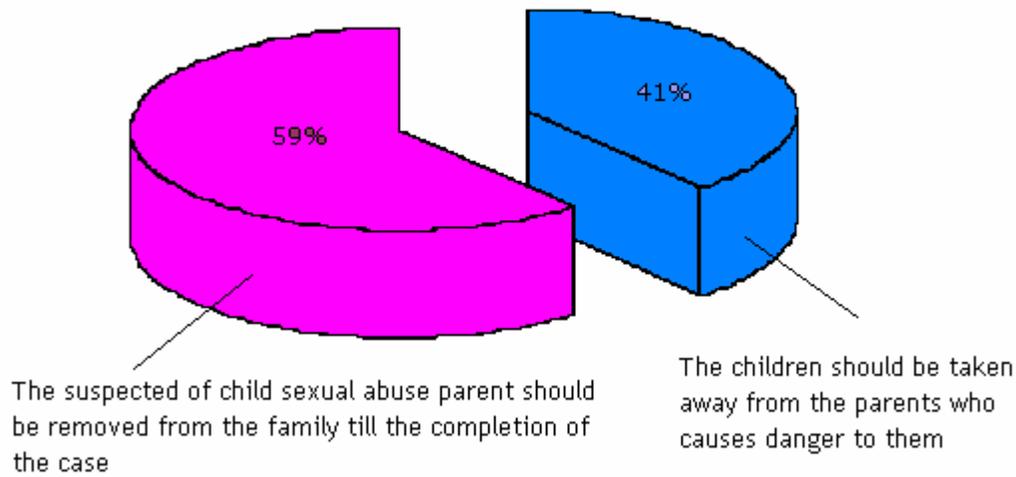


So the police officers are valued diversely. Their ratings as ineffective may rise from the lack of the effective ways of help. That means during their service officers are forced to use ineffective ways of assistance to the abused children. On the other hand most of the respondents declared the effective help to the abuse victim is not the police business.

Attitudes toward sexual abuse.

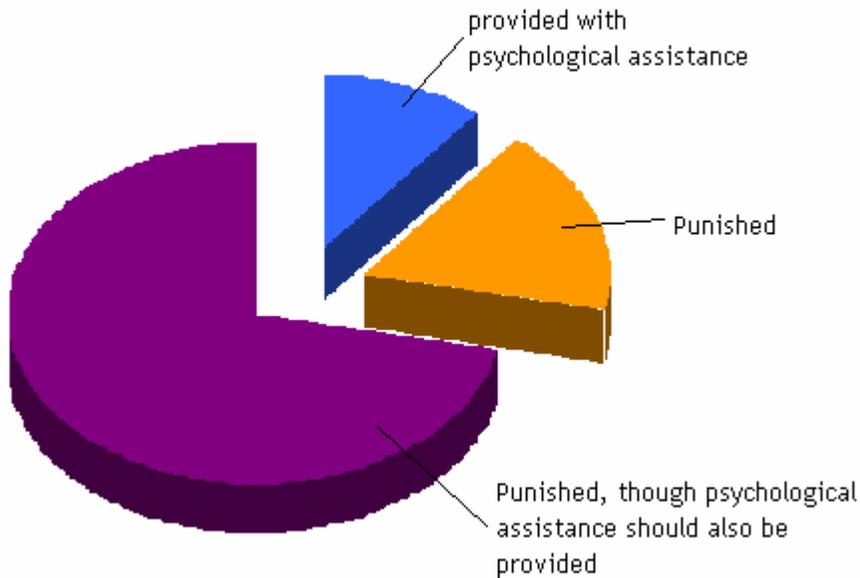
In Lithuania a sexually abused child is taken from the family and put to the child care institution till the completion of the case. However the opinion of the child care home personnel is different from the current state policy. More than half of respondents think the abuser should be taken away from the family rather than the child should be “saved” by such means.

### The Opinion of Respondents



The very point of view toward the sexual abuser is not only as to the criminal. Most of the respondents acknowledged the person who sexually abused the child needs psychological assistance.

The child sexual abuser should be:



Almost every fourth of the respondents think the abuser deserves nothing but punishment. This attitude reflects the current situation: no assistance is being provided to the legally punished persons.

## **The results of the children poll**

45% of boys and 55% of girls aged 7 to 20 (those above 18 were from specialized child care institutions) participated in the survey. There were 11% of children aged 7 to 10, 39% - 11 to 14 years, 48% - 15 to 18 years, 2% were above 18 years old. The average of age was 14. 75% of children informed of having parents, 11% have guardians, and 92% have brothers and/or sisters.

We inquired about the school. 49,5% reported to have satisfactory results, 33,3% are good at school and 10,5% are very good there. 6,7% of children said having problems at school and missing the classes.

We inquired what they do to avoid dangerous situations. Most of the children (40%) reported to follow child care home inner rules, 33% declared knowing how to behave in various dangerous situations. 13% ask for a grownup person's help in the case of trouble. 12% said they take no actions.

15% of polled children refer for the help of an adult person quite often, 68% apply only when it becomes difficult. 17% stated never ask for a help, 10% said they manage by themselves. Those who seek help most often apply to the educators, friends and siblings.

The children were asked if they would seek for help even being abused by an adult person or in a case of threatening by an adult. 88% of children declared they would. 24% of those would apply to the parents, 20% would search assistance from the friends, 18% would report to the educators, 15% - to the siblings, 8% - to the administrative personnel or others.

We asked to comment on how children feel at school and at home. 37,6% think children feel bad at school – have no friends, are disliked and outcast by the classmates. 7,9% of children think this is the way only some of their peers feel. 52,6% said to have known one or very few such children, 8% said they have known many of children who are disliked.

33% of polled children think teachers are finding faults, demands more than from the others and beat half of their peers. 25% confirmed to have known one or few such children, 7% said to have known many children who were abused by the teachers.

Almost 50% of polled children in child care homes think half of children are beaten by their classmates. Only 15% thinks this happens to very few children. 9% said to have known many children who were being abused by the classmates, 50% said to have known one or few.

59% of polled children said half of the children are beaten by their parents and guardians to cause bruises and the scars. 11% said to have known many such children, 46% said to have known one or few children who are beaten by their parents and/or guardians to cause bruises.

48% of children said of being beaten themselves by their parents or guardians, 29% are disliked or beaten by the teachers, 30% are being physically abused by the classmates. 46% of children reported they felt bad at school, have no friends, feel disliked and outcast.

33% of children in child care home think more than half of their peers are forced to watch pornographic magazines and movies by the adults. 11% of children reported to had been forced by an adult, whether familiar or not, at least once to watch pornographic

magazines and movies. 27% said to have known children who were forced to watch pornographic magazines and movies by the adults.

13% of polled children reported an adult cuddle them, touched their intimate body parts. 22% said to have known boys and girls who were sexually harassed by an adult. 17% of children think grownups do such things to many of children.

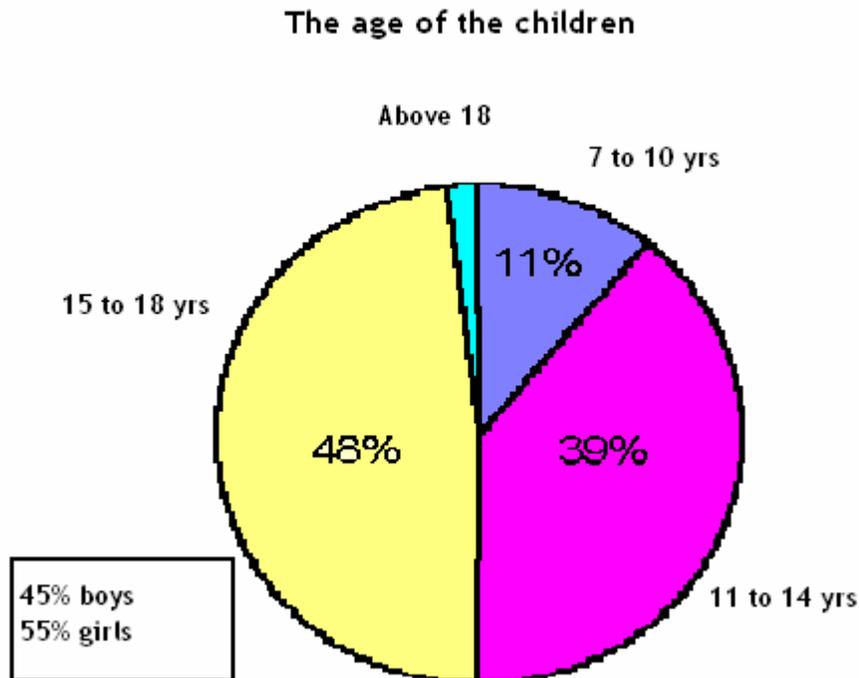
51% of children had heard about the women trafficking, 4% of girls reported of had been offered to work abroad.

### **Certain trends of the results**

Analysing the results we should mention the limitation of the current research. The survey does not fit all the requirements of the scientific paper. The idea was to review the certain trend. We agree the thorough research plan is needed to make firm conclusions about the cause – effect link. We sought to find out the child abuse experience and attitudes toward it.

Further we shall mention the results which in our opinion are worth to pay attention to.

First of all we should mention the age of the children participated in the survey. Primarily the prevention programme was created for the children of 11 to 16 years of age. The table shows us the older children were our main audience.



The picture shows children younger than 10 years of age were accepted to the seminars though we have not plan while that preparing the programme.

The survey of demographical data suggests the Lithuanian children who are deprived of parental care are very much like those in the Central and Eastern Europe. Most of the children in the child care institutions have at least of the parents.

### **The biological family of a child**

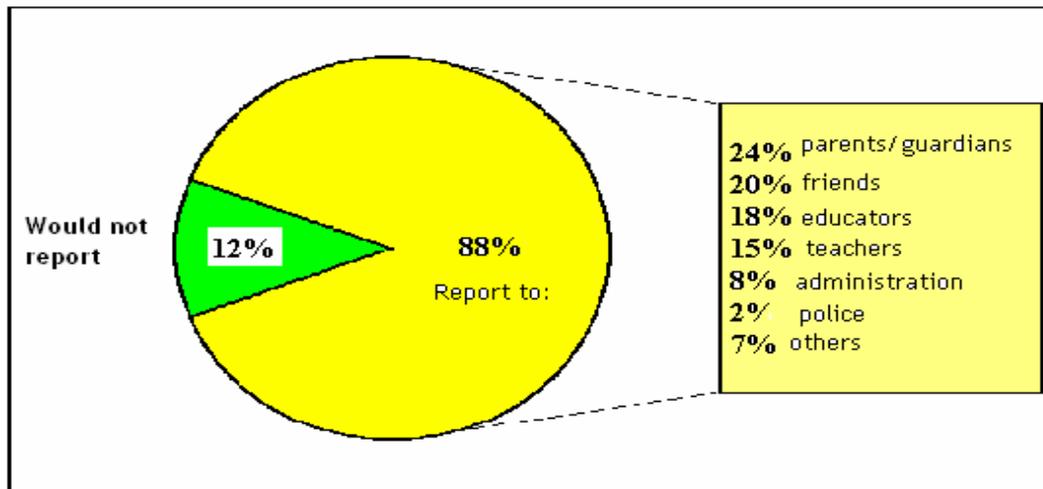
75 % have parents
11 % have guardians
92 % have siblings

Unfortunately even with alive parents many children are moved to the child care homes together with their brothers and sisters.

The next picture discloses interesting information. Even though most of the children get to the child care institutions because of their parents' inability to take care of them, most of the children would ask their parents for the help when difficulties occurs. The second source for the assistance is the friend. The alarming information is that the personnel of child care institutions are the third choice, which means the children do not expect much assistance from them.

The answer to the question:

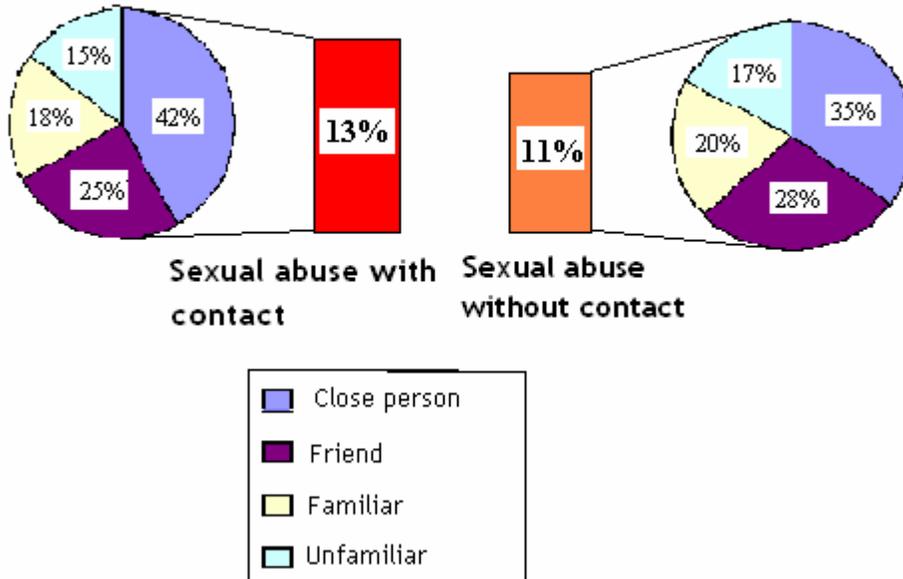
“If someone abused or threatened you, would you report about that?”



We rated the experience of sexual abuse indirectly. The children were given the examples and then asked if they have encountered similar situations.

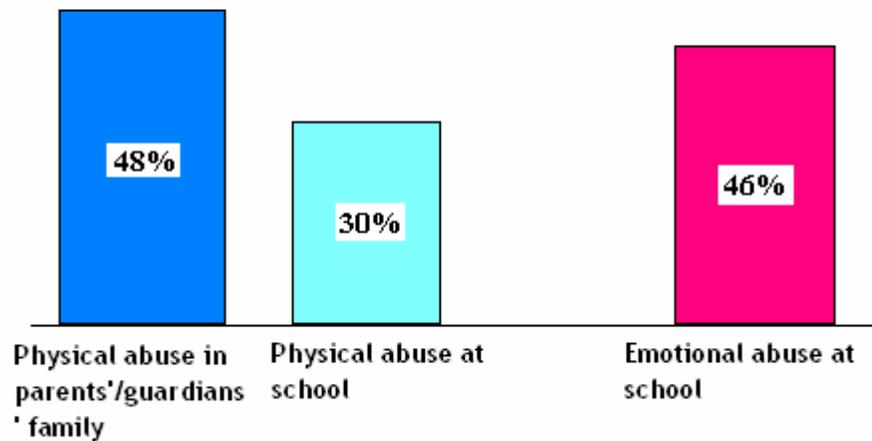
The next picture shows the child experience of sexual abuse data. The children were asked about the two forms of the abuse – the force to watch pornographic information and the touching of the child under his/her protest.

### SEXUALLY ABUSED CHILDREN



Alarming information is that children are sexually abused by the close person most frequently. Every fourth had been abused by the friend, most probably by the other child in the child care home. Among the sexual abusers the unfamiliar persons are least frequent.

## CHILD EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL ABUSE



30% of children confirmed to be abused at school by peers and other pupils. Almost half of children say they feel emotionally outcast. Most of the children who live in child care homes go to the general secondary schools which do not belong to the child care institutions.

Almost half of the polled children confirmed to had been beaten by the parents or guardians so bruises remain.

### Conclusions

- The current research does not allow to state children at child care institutions have greater risk to be abused. Still the results show children in the institutions are being abused very often. They encounter various forms of abuse at school and in their families, as well as in the child care homes.
- The greater attention should be paid to the psychological wellbeing of the children for they do not rely on the child care home personnel assistance when abused.
- The children are abused in their family. They later share their experience communicating with other children. Child care institutions should use specific means to prevent the spreading of the abuse in the institution.
- The specialists of various fields should be involved managing child abuse case for it is not enough simply to talk to the child or to consult with the colleague.
- The fact that 25% of the child care home personnel take no actions encountered child abuse deserves consideration.
- More specialized seminars are needed for the personnel to lessen the positive attitude toward physical punishment.