

# **Abuse Committed by Staff in Institutions**

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In the last few years, the awareness of sexual exploitation as a problem in educational circles has grown (e.g. Bange/Enders 1995; Engelfried 1997). For over ten years attention was focused on abuse by male professionals and volunteers. Since the end of the 1990s it has also increasingly turned to sexualised violence committed by women in institutions (Enders 2001a, 1995; Conen 1995). Research assumes that 10–25% of sexual offences (sexual assault) are committed by women (e.g. Wetzels 1997: 10%, Raupp/Eggers 1993: 25%). At least 50% of female offenders abuse children and young people driven by their own initiative (Matthews/Wolfers 1995, quoted in Kavemann 1999; Heyne 1996). Even though up to 50% of the women state they were forced to commit their crimes by men, this is only true to a limited extent. In very few cases, do women offenders commit acts of violence solely under duress (Sgroi/Sargent 1995).

Even if in the following sexual abuse cases, the crime is committed by men, the crime committed by women is not to be played down.

Practical experience shows that abuse in institutions is often carried out by groups of offenders, rather than by individuals. Individual victims are "passed on" from one offender to another. This paper does not deal with the institutional dynamic dealing with several offenders, which is beyond its scope. Nor is the institutional dynamic of sexual exploitation by child and adolescent offenders our topic here.

## **The offender's strategy**

### **Choice of occupation**

International research on offenders (e.g. Elliot/Browne/Kilcoyne 1995) as well as empirical reports (Enders/Simone/Bange 2001; Bange/Enders 1995) clearly show that sexual exploitation in institutions does not happen by coincidence. It is rather the result of a strategic approach. Perpetrators deliberately seek contact with their potential victims. Accordingly, "a classical offenders strategy" is to work full-time or as a volunteer in an educational, medical, pastoral or therapeutic setting. Offenders work as taxi-drivers in transportation of the disabled, chaplains, magicians at children's parties, doctors, nursery school staff, teachers, police officers, day-carers, child therapists, coaches, trainers, cooks in child-care centres or staff in projects for street children in the developing world (e.g. Enders 2001b; Bundschuh/Stein-Hilbers 1998; Zartbitter Köln 1998; Engelfried 1997; Elliot/Browne/Kilcoyne 1995, Wyre/Swift 1991). Some change their area of work during their careers in order to gain easier contact with girls and boys: e.g. sex offenders with a training as a craftsman, apply to become caretakers or workmen at primary schools.

### **Using institutional structures**

Offenders deliberately seek jobs in institutions where they assume that their abusive behaviour will not be easily detected. Institutions which want to be different or which are particularly concerned about their reputation are good targets for abusers.

*For example, the committee of a sports club would like to prevent its reputation being sullied by the discovery of sexual aggression committed by a trainer. This would detract from the glory of winning a championship.*

When choosing their jobs, many offenders take the management structure and working style of the institution into account. Institutions with transparent management structures and clear instructions for work, offer girls and boys, parents and colleagues, a relatively large degree of professional and personal safety from such offenders. It is less difficult for the institutions to be confronted with the suspicion of sexual aggression stemming from their own ranks. It is maybe easier for these types of institutions to react sooner than for institutions in which authoritarian management structures create strong personal dependencies. In authoritarian management

structures decisions are made more "from top to bottom". These decisions safeguard personal power, rather than being based on professional considerations. The professional and personal dependencies caused by strongly authoritarian structures are used by offenders to their own advantage (for example by "recruiting followers").

Similarly, offenders working in institutions with unclear structures and insufficient separation between professional and personal contacts, hardly run the risk of having their crimes discovered. They often change jobs as soon as institutions do not leave them sufficient space for personal intrigues, personal dependency networking and acts of sexual aggression.

*A mother expresses the suspicion of an abuse of her four-year-old daughter by a student intern who is on a year-long placement. Spontaneously the director sides with the young man. The director, tries to present the child's mother as mentally ill and questions the well-being of the girl in her mother's care.*

*On their first visit, the staff of a counselling centre are struck by the unattractiveness of the institution, and by the fact that working with the children does not seem to be "state of the arts": e.g. the muddy colours of the children's drawings on the walls indicate that paint-boxes are not regularly cleaned. Explaining their educational method the teachers stress the importance of skin contact with the children. One of them says that she often lays children on her bare stomach. The teachers do not seem to understand that such physical contact, more suited to a family setting, may certainly be felt by a child to be a violation of boundaries.*

*In a personal conversation, the student explains that he is frequently alone with individual children – which was not what the woman in charge said. He feels he can work very independently in this institution. It is his third placement in one year: he only "stood the first one for a fortnight". In this previous position, he was told what to do and had to discuss everything with the team. His second placement he also "chucked " after a few days because the director had always wanted to be informed about his activities. In this institution he can finally work according to his own educational ideas.*

### **Taking advantage of the lack of clear professional guidelines**

In practice, not only rigid, unclear management structures, but also certain professional approaches are to be viewed as a risk factor for sexual exploitation of girls and boys. Certain conceptual features make it "easier" for men (women) to sexually abuse children and adolescents

in institutions:

- Inadequate encouragement to support the autonomy of girls and boys.
- Orientation at traditional role models thus leads to gender-specific disadvantage for girls and boys.
- "Professional child neglect", (frequently portrayed as a laissez-faire educational style), disregards the necessity of providing orientation or individually furthering girls and boys (e.g. in their motoric abilities).
- Rigid sex education which sees sexuality as a taboo, generally forbids children to play doctor or masturbate. It also offers them inadequate support in developing a sexuality based on freedom of choice.
- Sex education which does not sufficiently respect the generation gap between adults, adolescents and children, child protection and the right of girls and boys to sexual integrity.

The educational styles outlined above can often be sensed on the very first visit. The arrangement of the rooms quickly indicates the educational approach and the books on sex education on the bookshelves "speak volumes" about the conceptional approach of the institution.

### **Blurring the perception of the world around**

Educational and psychosocial professionals are generally regarded as upright citizens and persons of authority and confidence, working for the good of the child. And so it comes as no surprise that some abusers deliberately work as youth group leaders, sports trainers, head altar boys, holiday group leaders or equipment officers in sports clubs (Bundschuh/Stein-Hilbers 1998; Wyre/Swift 1991).

The higher the degree of trust and the greater the authority, the easier it is for an adult to abuse a child. Clergy, doctors, therapists and lawyers enjoy an especially high degree of authority. They are considered to be righteous. Following their extensive research into sexual abuse by Catholic priests Elinor Burkett and Frank Bruni come to the conclusion that abusers are the "pied pipers" in their environment, respected by children and praised by parents for their generosity, patience and ability to get on with children (Burkett/Bruni 1995).

Some offenders, in turn, are regarded as "poor saps", "childish" or "forever young". They are not "taken seriously" by adults, but reportedly "get on well with children and young people".

Abusive staff weigh up very carefully the risk of their planned crime being caught and named within the institution. They prepare their sexual abuse systematically. As "manipulation artists" they have developed the ability to deceive (Eldridge 1999). They use this ability not just in contacts with victims, but also when dealing with colleagues, parents and the other young people. They use their power as professional carers by definition and their knowledge of institutional structures, in order to deliberately blur the perception of the people around.

### **Strategies in contacts with mothers and fathers**

- Expressing indignation in talks about sexual exploitation of girls and boys, and coming across as child protectors.
- Offering innocent mothers and fathers special care for children.
- Setting up personal dependencies and e.g. granting the parents of (potential) victims "special rights", such as offers of private babysitter services or special arrangements to consider parents' working hours.
- Redefining unusual behaviour of the child caused by the ongoing abuse as a consequence of family strain.
- Deliberately setting up friendships/sexual relations with mothers/fathers.

### **Strategies in contacts with colleagues**

- Expressing indignation in professional discussions about sexual exploitation of girls and boys and pretending to be a child protector.
- Showing particular commitment to the interests of the institution.
- Offering alternative "professionally founded" explanations for their own boundary violations. The offenders also offer explanations for the resulting conspicuous behaviour of the abused girls and boys.
- Manipulation of official records.
- Bullying critical colleagues, parents and other children.
- Establishing personal dependencies (e.g., covering up professional mistakes by colleagues and giving parents "special rights").
- Deliberately establishing friendships/sexual relations with colleagues.
- Trying to discover "kindred spirits" among colleagues and if possible even forming "crony" groups (also influencing new job appointments).

### **Deliberate search for vulnerable children**

After an initial contact with girls and boys offenders use their professional position to gather information about their potential victims. What social contacts does a child have? What are his/her likes, dislikes, habits, wishes and fears, family tensions, social position in the group and/or family? Conte, Wolf & Smith (1989) show the special ability of abusers to identify vulnerable children.

The following run a greater risk of becoming a victim of sexual exploitation:

- Girls and boys who have already been sexually exploited and whose resistance is particularly weakened due to the lack of support in getting over their experiences.
- Girls and boys suffering from a lack of a positive male contact person.
- Girls and boys living in poverty.
- Girls and boys with experience of physical violence.
- Girls and boys who have been neglected (also "orphans of affluent parents").
- Girls and boys with physical and / or mental disabilities.
- Girls and boys of pre-school age (see Enders 2001b).

### **Strategies in contacts with victims**

After gaining contact with potential victims abusers from institutions frequently practise hardly perceptible sexual boundary infringements. They test the resistance of potential victims. They deliberately seek out easily swayed girls and boys and try to blur their perception. Step by step, they embed sexual boundary infringements in daily activities (e.g. nursing care, assistance with sport). They label these infringements of the victims' personal integrity as being normal (desensitising children against sexual boundary infringements). Many resilient children break off contact with the offender after the first act of sexual aggression, e.g. giving up their music lessons or forgoing sporting success. Even if these girls and boys have frequently not undergone major aggression, they still suffer the consequences of the abusive situation: through abandoning their favourite sport due to the offender's behaviour.

Staff in institutions are very aware of the children's daily programme. They can easily select a place and time in order to abuse a child without being noticed. Often they disregard timetables and even alter local conditions, e.g. by changing locks, installing blinds etc. (Enders/Simone/

Bange 2001). They also create opportunities to be alone with children regularly, for example, offering to stay on duty alone even though it is against the rules - "You can get off early", or invite the girls and boys to go home with them.

Educational staff in institutions, trainers, and therapists etc. are trained to motivate children. Abusers use their professional skills either to gradually manipulate the perception of their victims and/or isolate a child by belittling or favouring him/her within the children's group. Likewise, they frequently try to spread bad rumours about their (potential) victims as well as their parents or the other members of the staff .

They try to guarantee the secrecy of abuse through threats of violence (against the victims, their parents and siblings), through massive use of aggression (e.g. cleaning the child's mouth with stinging nettles) and blackmail. Claudia Bundschuh and Marlene Stein-Hilbers (1998) report on a youth trainer who regularly placed large sums of money in the girls' changing rooms – in the hope that one of the girls would be tempted. He noticed which girls took the money and then threatened to make it public if they did not succumb to his sexual abuse.

Again and again child victims report that abusive staff of institutions force them to engage in sexual violence with each other. They then kept it to themselves – being afraid of punishment, ashamed of their "own" actions, or not wanting to "betray" themselves and their friends.

## **Institutional dynamics of abuse by a staff member**

The reaction of lay persons as well as professionals to the suspicion of sexual exploitation by staff of institutions is less determined by factual knowledge. It is more determined by the images people have of forms and extent of sexual abuse. The fact that offenders often appear to be committed, child-loving carers, in order to gain easier access to children, is something which has not really been recognised by the general public. Also, the sexual aggression committed by adolescent offenders in institutions is rarely taken seriously, and women are not thought capable of sexual exploitation.

### **The reputation of the institution**

Even in proven cases of sexual exploitation of girls and boys by a staff member, institutions have often felt more of an obligation to their own reputation than to the welfare of the victim.

Concerned with hushing things up, they tried to "solve the matter discreetly", e.g. through "heart to heart talks" between perpetrators and victims. At best, offenders were sent into early retirement "for health reasons" or transferred elsewhere – without consideration of the next potential victims. The institution's reputation was paramount. Only gradually has the recognition gained ground that an institution protects its good reputation by appropriately and professionally confronting sexual aggression in its own ranks.

### **Handling suspicions**

It is much more difficult to imagine sexual violence as taking place in one's own ranks than outside one's immediate sphere of life. Just as a parent is hardly able to perceive the abuse of her/his own partner, many professional carers dismiss the idea of sexual exploitation of a child in their own institution. In addition, many institutions have a "culture of boundary infringement" (e.g. through sexist comments and inappropriate physical contact), which aids and abets downplaying of abusive acts ("She shouldn't get so upset", "It wasn't meant that way"). Offenders usually act strategically, offering alternative explanations for situations of abuse, as well as the conspicuous behaviour of children concerned. For example, "he always wants to be the centre of attention." The carefully planned manipulation of the perception of children, parents and colleagues usually extends over a long period of time. In this way, institutions only have a very slight chance of noticing and uncovering a crime committed by a staff member, unless they seek professional support from outside.

Any suspicion of sexual exploitation within an institution usually causes a division between colleagues. Some take the suspicion seriously, and demand clarification of the matter, both in the interests of the possible victims and from the employer's responsibility, for the accused staff member. Others immediately rate the accusation as an attempt to ruin their reputation, and attempt to nip it in the bud. They frequently swear loyalty to the suspect ("I would give my right hand for him/her!") and experience the very idea of being suspected of abuse themselves as very worrying. Frequently the person uttering the suspicion is accused of trying to slander the offender. In many cases, this colleague, a parent or the boy/girl concerned are harassed or bullied to such a point that they leave the institution in self-defence. So it is not surprising that sexual exploitation by staff members within institutions is often discovered by people who are no longer, or not yet firmly integrated – e.g. through parents whose daughters/sons have only been going there recently or have already left it.

### **Coping with proven cases of abuse**

Through sexual exploitation by a staff member an institution no longer regards itself as being a basically safe, positive place. It sees itself rather as a dangerous and threatening place to be: It failed to protect its children and its own institutional identity has been undermined.

Just as with intra-family abuse the institutional experience is now mainly characterised by denial, lack of awareness and avoidance of encounter. Often institutions try to avoid recalling and dealing with the violent experiences. Certain situations, actions and topics relating to the abuse (e.g. camping holidays) are avoided. One consequence of this is a selective silence in the institution and the related danger of the traumatic experience not being integrated into the institutional identity. Normally memories of special events are recalled in the form of stories that change over time, no longer provoking intensive feelings and sensations. Traumatic experiences that have not been worked through can, however, be repeatedly experienced by individuals and also social institutions. These are relived with such intensity that it seems the events are happening again. Through institutional rituals, materials and meetings or other random triggers, such feelings and sensations are frequently reactivated in unbridled strength. Affected institutions frequently over-react to everyday situations – with excessive watchfulness and irritability. For example may staff suddenly forbid children to play doctors, which corresponds to a normal child development. Such over-reactions are even more reinforced if the institution has other skeletons in the cupboard besides the current traumatisation – i.e. other cases of trauma that have not yet been dealt with by the institution.

Institutions that become the scene of a crime, not only have to work through the feeling of having failed as an institution. They also have to deal with the dismay that the offenders have managed to strategically control all the institutional processes and internal communication – and continue to do so. Almost "everything" now rotates around working through the abuse. The offender is still "present", even after being suspended/sentenced; his/her actions committed continue to determine the relationships within the institution. Institutions that are burdened by a limited extent of sexual exploitation certainly suffer less from the "presence of the absent offender" than institutions whose entire everyday life is more or less determined by trying to cope with the abuse – e.g. if an offender abused several children in the institution or had a key role there (head master/mistress, top team-trainer etc.).

## **Team dynamics in cases of proven abuse**

Practical experience shows the effects of sexual exploitation within an institution on team dynamics. These are characterised by:

- A division within the staff team, since some members believe in the abuse, while others cannot imagine it happening.
- A limited readiness of some colleagues to take an active part in uncovering the situation. Since they themselves infringe boundaries and/or the offender has ensured their solidarity through strategic scheming. Often the latter group are concerned that their own wrongdoings will come to light during the process or that they will themselves lose privileges.
- Great distrust among colleagues resulting from the breach of trust by the offender.
- Some colleagues losing hope by recognising 'til now overlooked evidence of sexual exploitation. They , become ashamed of their own (professional) limitations, withdraw into themselves and their guilt feelings.
- Other colleagues trying to compensate for their own feelings of powerlessness through activism.
- "Isolationism" on the part of many colleagues not immediately affected, who do not want to be disturbed by the strong feelings of their traumatised colleagues, the parents and the children involved.
- The loss of trust in their own professional competence and the institution.
- A confrontation with institutional structures favouring abuse and their own behaviours.
- Silence among colleagues, although they have numerous telephone calls and conversations in small groups, the facts of the sexual exploitation are hardly mentioned, if at all. Details are only raised in the whole team in exceptional cases.
- An overtaxing of all colleagues, who not only have to cope with their own personal crisis, but also with demands from the children, parents, professional supervisors, the courts and the public (the media).
- An intensive search for arguments to excuse the offenders. Even when the abuse has been satisfactorily proven, many colleagues are still afraid to utter false suspicions.
- A search for explanations for the actions and motives of the offenders.
- Playing down the extent of sexual exploitation.
- Neglecting the necessary assistance for the abused girl or boy, the group of children, and the parents.

- The endeavour to "contain" the crisis as far as possible and to deal with it "internally", without outside help.

### **Individual staff dynamics**

The institutional crisis is reinforced through the personal crises of many staff members. The unexpected confrontation with the evil aspects the human nature is beyond the imagination of most colleagues. It profoundly shakes their image of themselves and the world. Others have seen a long-feared suspicion confirmed. Perhaps they had even expressed this suspicion to their superiors and/or colleagues, but were not taken seriously, or suffered harassment.

A profound feeling of disadvantage and uncertainty are experienced by many staff. The abuse made them realise that everyday life in the institution cannot be controlled completely. The institutional heads and immediate colleagues suffer from guilt feelings most, not knowing whom they can still trust. If colleagues had a positive – possibly private – relationship with the offender, they feel doubly "betrayed" – professionally and personally. Many doubt the meaning of their professional activity and suffer from a feeling of institutional worthlessness ("And I used to believe in/identify with this place!"). Some are ashamed to be members of this particular institution. They are afraid of others raising the issue, and fear the media coverage. In the first few months after the discovery of the sexual exploitation, all this strain leads to a high rate of absenteeism through illness and a high staff turnover.

Staff repressing the shock they had, and/or opting out of dialogue, easily lose a feeling for themselves and for others. This loss of empathy frequently leads to professional burnout.

The confrontation with sexual exploitation within an institution may mean that some staff members have to face their own experiences of mental, physical or sexual violence during their childhood, youth or adult life.

### **Team/child dynamics**

Due to the experience of counselling families in which the (step-)father abused the daughter/son, it is known that, after the discovery of sexual exploitation, some mothers level their anger not at the offender, but at the victim. They then even (sexually) abuse him or her. A comparable dynamic is visible with sexual exploitation in institutions. Often staff will accuse the child of

active participation and do not interpret her/his over-excitement and sexualised behaviour as a result of having experienced sexual violence ("She deliberately drives all the boys in the group crazy!" "We can't keep such a child offender in the group any more"). Staff have an interest in believing that the trauma is not really the reason for the victim's suffering and treat the girl/boy frequently with denigration, sometimes even punishment. The mere presence of the victim makes it difficult to repress the fact that one's own institution has become the scene of the crime. Accordingly, even in cases in which there is patent proof (e.g. photos) or a confession of the offender, the abused girls and boys are often represented as liars in general. Their credibility is repeatedly questioned. They are gradually excluded, and the negative assessment of the victim, previously systematically circulated by the perpetrator, continues to circulate unquestioned ("He has always been a liar!").

### **Dynamics of the parents' group**

The typical split caused by abuse dynamics is almost always reflected in the way parents react. While some mothers and fathers defend the offender ("He didn't really mean it, had such an unpleasant partner, deserves another chance..."), others call for the death penalty.

Since institutions only rarely inform the parents sufficiently, many mothers and fathers try in numerous telephone calls and personal contacts to "investigate" the facts of the case by themselves. Accordingly, in the context of criminal investigations imprecise testimonies are based on rumours and speculation. In the context of criminal investigations, the resulting imprecise testimonies, based on rumours, later often prove advantageous for the accused. Also repeated questioning of the victims by parents and other contact persons make it difficult for many courts to reach a clear appraisal of the testimony of the young victims. Their statements can in some cases no longer be used as clear evidence. In case of doubt, this leads to an acquittal of the offender.

Since most institutions rarely inform parents adequately about the steps taken, many parents frequently turn to the press in desperation, "something finally has to happen". A public scandal usually proves to be disadvantageous for the victim as well as the parents, who are often approached by people years later about the violent experience.

Often the dynamics of the parental group is determined by mutual accusations of guilt ("I always thought he was queer, but no one wanted to listen to me!"). Many mothers and fathers reproach

themselves, and suffer from guilt feelings for entrusting their children to the care of an abuser.

If several girls and boys in a group were abused by one or several offenders, very few parents will deny that abuse took place. But they are often "firmly" convinced that their own child is "not affected": "My daughter/son would have told me about it." They cannot imagine that many victims (especially boys) of sexual exploitation do not confide in their mothers and fathers. This is due to the specific threats from the offender, and at most the victims may talk about acts of violence they have observed regarding other children.

The confrontation with the suffering of their daughters and sons destroys the sense of basic trust of many mothers and fathers. For them, it is inconceivable that this person whom they liked and to whom they entrusted their child could be capable of doing them such harm. Many parents try to imagine what their child went through. Sometimes the police show them pornographic materials for them to identify their child. Their own fantasies and the study of these photos or videos are a heavy burden on parents. These images, their empathy for their daughter/son and the experience with the subsequent problems for the victim mean that mothers and fathers live through and "adopt" the feelings of the child. Even when they are "personally actually all right" they are sad, restless, irritated, angry or moody (secondary traumatisation).

This crisis situation often gives rise to conflicts in the husband and wife relationship. The parents' own repressed experiences of violence surface. These may be mental and physical maltreatment, sexual violence, experience of (sexual) violence against siblings, friends, or their mother. Due to their helplessness in this retraumatisation caused by their son's/daughter's experience of violence, quite a lot of parents – above all fathers – react with anger towards the child. Without being aware of it themselves, they often blame the boy/girl for making them have to face their own repressed suffering again. Frequently, a few weeks after discovering the child's sexual exploitation, they declare, "Now it should be OK again." They hope that their own feelings of helplessness can thereby be warded off.

Within the parents' group, gender-specific coping strategies can often be observed in the crisis situation. In the first few weeks, after discovering the sexual exploitation within an institution, fathers mostly take on the "management of the external situation". The mothers concern themselves more intensively with their children, and take the time to talk to their female friends

about their pain. When sexual abuse of children through staff of institutions occurs, it is typical for the fathers to engage in talks with the supervisory bodies and to take on the job of reorganising the institution. Asked about how they feel, they generally speak less about their own dismay than about their concern for their child and their wife, "who is very upset" and needs their support.

The typical gender-specific role distribution is here primarily functional, in that it gives fathers and mothers a sense of security. After a few weeks, the roles often switch. Mothers have gained ground again, the fathers allow themselves to feel their own pain more, particularly the grief lying behind their rage. Many men now notice that the sexual exploitation of their daughter/son has deeply shaken them too. Particularly, when the victim was their son, many fathers experience the suffering of the child as though they had undergone "it" themselves.

### **Dynamics of children's/youth group**

The discovery of an abuse by an institution staff member mostly also leads to a split in the children's group. Some children/young people just cannot take in the fact that a teacher or carer has committed sexual abusive acts. They are furious that this (beloved) person has been "taken away" from them. They target their fury at the girl/boy who made the abuse public. Massive accusations against the victim frequently reflect the group dynamics initiated by the perpetrator: "You were always his/her favourite, and you enjoyed it!" In many cases, a girl will publicly be called a "tart" and a boy "gay". Some children or adolescents will try to take over the vacant power position within the group hierarchy: With taunts like "Don't make such a fuss, you were having fun" –they try to label the victim as being "available" and commit even more acts of sexual violence against the girl/boy.

If several girls and boys were being sexually abused within an institution, the group dynamics initiated by the offender has the effect of perpetuating the wall of silence – even if he or she has long since left the institution. In the event of abuse by an educator at a child day-care centre, many parents try to keep the children's group together. They want their daughters or sons to "at least keep their friends". Many children are, by contrast, often relieved to be able to leave the institution which has become a place of threat to them. Many girls and boys can only turn to someone if they no longer have to return to the scene of crime; and/or have little contact, if any, with the other children involved. They should be allowed to choose only those contacts important

and helpful to them. Having to continue within the same group of children may be a great burden for many girls and boys, resulting in a constant reliving of their trauma. The surroundings, the toys and even the contact to other victims reminds them of their suffering and denies them the possibility of working through their own healing process. Coping at their own pace. Frequently, girls and boys willing to talk are silenced again by their despairing friends through massive (physical) violence: These children simply cannot bear being confronted with their own violent experience.

Victims of pre-school age are particularly prone to re-enact the abusive event in post-traumatic play. They keep replaying the scenes within their group, frequently even inflicting sexual violence on themselves and other children. Consequently, almost always adults will detect several alleged "child offenders". Children who are placed into other groups will often show no aggressive behaviour at all (e.g. when changing to another child-care centre).

Some children of the institution who were not directly affected by sexual exploitation are also traumatised: Their feelings of guilt because they are unharmed do not allow them to live normal lives. Sexual exploitation within an institution almost always leads to great strain for the children anyway, since the overtaxed carers can only offer limited support to their special needs

## **Coping capabilities**

Institutions that have to work through the experience of sexual exploitation in their own ranks are bound to change. They will never be the same again. The extent to which an institution succeeds in articulating its traumatic experience, feelings related to this experience, perceptions and possible explanations - determines whether there is a chance of redeveloping the ability to plan ahead or being permanently caught within the trauma. Only by overcoming silence, will an institution be able to make a distinction between past and present. This offers the opportunity to work towards a positive future.

Neither the severity of the sexual abuse nor the intensity of the shock may be seen as an indicator as to how the institution will be able to deal with the crisis. Institutions in which many children have been abused and/or the offender played a leading role can overcome their feelings of resignation and confusion by consciously facing what happened within their own ranks. By integrating these experiences into their institutional identity, they can provide themselves with a

basis for focused educational activity again. Thus gaining a new quality for their work.

### **Need for outside assistance**

Any institution dealing with sexual abuse stemming from its own ranks depends on outside assistance. This helps them to develop a new, positive identity, rediscover its vitality and face the future. Just as a mother (father) cannot act as therapist for her (his) daughter or son in the case of intra-family abuse, neither can an institution. It needs the support from independent counsellors situated outside the institutional hierarchy. It is crucial that girls and boys, mothers and fathers, staff and management obtain an individual offer of assistance as soon as possible. A considerable amount of healing can take place particularly during the first weeks after a traumatic experience (e.g. " We were not able to protect the children, but at least we reacted calmly and helped them to cope").

Often there is great resistance to external counselling. The professional accompaniment in crisis situations is first of all sought by a few committed parents. In most cases staff will have to be instructed by their supervisors in order to accept cooperation with external institutions. However, as time goes on, this cooperation is generally viewed to be helpful as well as supportive so that more and more members of the institution join in. Due to massive resistance against dealing with sexual abuse, it is often the case that given a choice between problem-specific information, or an extensive counselling programme – staff will usually opt for a purely factual, informative briefing. Consequently, the opportunity to really cope with all problems concerned and find a new point of view is lost.

### **Crisis intervention**

During the first phase after discovering sexual abuse in an institution, crisis management is required at all levels:

- The management needs problem-specific legal information and professional assistance in order to be able to survive the test of strength between its responsibility for the accused employee, the necessary support for staff, the justified demands of mothers and fathers for information and the safeguarding of the child's well-being.
- The staff do not only need initial orientation for their handling of the girls, boys and parents. They also need a sense of security as well as the space to be able to deal with their own shock reactions, and to allow their own ambivalence in assessing the abuse. Above all, however,

they need to be relieved immediately – also in the interest of the children – through mobilising additional staff resources. These should, if possible, be professionals who have had no contact with the offender.

- The parents need clear information above all else. By no means, should detailed information about the abusive actions or the names of the children involved be given. Yet parents have a right to learn how the sexual exploitation was discovered, and what steps have so far been taken, or planned, by the institution in order to safeguard the welfare of the child and support criminal investigations.

Straight after the announcement of the abuse an information session for parents of the group/institution should be offered in cooperation with a professional counselling centre. This is an opportunity to give a status report, and also to describe ways of dealing with sexual violence and providing assistance for children and parents.

- The girls and boys in the children's group concerned first need calm, and a "completely normal routine", since at the moment of discovery they are less crisis-stricken than the adults. Often professionally qualified temporary staff who do not know the offender are more suitable carers for girls and boys than familiar staff who cannot yet grasp the breach of confidence by the colleague and/or cannot visualise the abuse.

It is above all, important to ensure that the children are not continually "interrogated", what's more, by different people. By no means, should detailed descriptions of individual acts of abuse made by children to trusted persons (e.g. parents) be exchanged among adults. That would be another breach of confidence, which often makes the children finally fall silent.

### **Support in coping**

For future reference, careful monitoring of the coping process must be undertaken at all levels of the institution and in every individual case. Which areas prove to be difficult? Does the memory of the abuse overshadow all other experiences and thereby impinge on the vitality of the institution? Communication will be the basis for coping with the horror. Thus enabling people to seek out the internal and external place of horror while talking about it with others (Butollo/Krüsmann/Hagl 1998). Supervision and talks with the different groups of persons at the institution should come up with a rough outline of the sexual exploitation (by no means detailed descriptions of individual acts). It should also work out a possible description of the offender's strategies – as precisely as possible and also raise the awareness for institutional resources in

coping with the matter. This is an essential step in order to be able to help understand the (hidden) signs given by girls and boys. This is also a basic prerequisite for coping with institutional violence (e.g. reducing guilt feelings).

The feelings of loss, humiliation and hurt are appropriate to the situation of abuse in institutions. It is of no help to anyone if counsellors immediately take charge of everything in order to relieve those, whom they want to help, of their feelings. Rather, enough space has to be given to deal with the feelings, space that is already limited enough by the everyday problems which have to be dealt with. This is the only way to keep open all communication channels within the institution. Professional counselling is also responsible for supporting those members of the institution who are willing to speak about the (apparently) unspeakable.. This means young colleagues/new parents with whom the offender had no history of contact are particularly important: They can often describe very sensitively how heavily the effects of the sexual exploitation weigh on the staff of the institution/parents. They can also describe how much the staff or parents are struggling to cope with the consequences.

At the same time it is very important to realise that a staff of teachers, a team, an association board, the parents' group of an institution etc. is by no means a protected therapy group. Personal boundaries of the individuals are to be respected. This is not the place for working through the pretraumatic experiences of individual members of the institution, which are now activated by the current events. Often it proves to be very helpful to refer them to individual therapy. Dwelling too much on individual stories not only violates the personal integrity of those concerned. It also may cause an emotional flooding of everyday work, and may put at risk the ability of the institution to remain operational.

Adults need supportive counselling in various areas, starting with the absolute necessity of rearranging the rooms used by children. Further, they often feel uncertain about their relations with girls and boys affected directly and indirectly by sexual violence. Sexually abused children are not easy-care children (Enders 2001c). Both the staff of the institutions and their mothers and fathers need assistance to be able to stand by them. Besides team supervision and discussion evenings for the parents' group, opportunities for individual conversation available to both educators and parents have to be offered.

A basic step in developing new institutional identity is to reflect about the present internal and external perception of the institution. The amount of self-esteem lost by the sexual exploitation can only be regained if earlier strengths and abilities are recalled, perceived and recognised.

Available competencies/achievements and existing relations must be appreciated again, responded to, and also made visible to the outside world. A healthy distrust - and yet trust in one's own institutional resources offer scope for the development of new objectives.

## **Opportunities for prevention**

Girls and boys are only able to protect themselves to a limited extent against sexual exploitation by staff of institutions. Therefore, the empowerment of children can only be one building-block in the framework of preventing sexual violence in institutions. It is the job of us adults to stop current abuse and develop protective structures in order to hamper offenders in their intentions. Reports by offenders on their strategies for capturing their victims suggest many ways of developing preventative approaches. These are not just confined to informing and empowering girls and boys, but also involve adults in this responsibility. Evaluating his many years of working with offenders Ray Wyre calls upon institutions to create a "arena of safeness". Institutions must create a framework for children and adults in which they can act in safety. There has to be an atmosphere in which personal boundaries are respected, confronting boundary infringements is possible, and violence – particularly sexual violence – is outlawed. This presupposes prevention at all levels and the voluntary commitment of the institution. This means:

- The institution will adopt binding rules safeguarding the rights of children, young people and adults to sexual self-determination and explicitly naming the threats lurking in a particular area of work. Girls, boys, staff, mothers, fathers and institutional management will be involved in working out these rules.
- Girls and boys, mothers and fathers will be repeatedly informed about these rules when they register and at agreed, regular intervals.
- With new appointments applicants must sign a statement committing them to follow these rules. They will be informed orally and in writing about the labour law consequences of contravening this commitment.

- For all levels of the institution, information sessions or in-service training on ways to prevent sexual violence will be offered at regular intervals.
- The institution will put itself under the obligation of bringing in an external independent professional service should there be any suspicion of sexual exploitation in its own ranks.
- The institution will appoint an independent ethics commission, including external professionals, to whom girls and boys, and staff can turn if there is any suspicion of sexual exploitation within their institution.
- Staff with leadership responsibility must expect labour law consequences if they hear of sexual exploitation within their own institution and do not take steps necessary to safeguard the protection of the children.

Institutions operating active prevention at all levels will have a reduced risk of sexual exploitation in their own ranks, as offenders will tend to avoid them as workplaces. In these institutions the possibilities of professional and political influence by offenders will be limited. This also limits their opportunities to undermine institutional structures for the protection of girls and boys.

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