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Prevention of sexual abuse against children and young people on the example of the Child Protection Centre in Kraków

Abstract

The aim of this article is to present the activities of the Child Protection Centre (COD) in the field of protection of children and adolescents from sexual abuse. COD is an inter-departmental unit operating at the Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow. The primary tasks of COD include training and educational activities in the psychological, pedagogical and spiritual fields on the subject of CSA, and the design and development of prevention programmes and models of good practice for various pastoral, formative and educational environments. The Child Protection Centre focuses on preparing and building structures for the effective implementation of the policies for the protection of children and young people, and on working to change the awareness not only of the clergy but also of people associated with the Church. The activities undertaken by the Child Protection Centre focus mainly on universal prevention, the basic aim of which is to stop potential perpetrators from harming children and to protect children – potential victims – from abuse.

Keywords

child sexual abuse, standards of prevention, universal prevention, prevention programmes, Child Protection Centre.

1. Introduction

The sexual abuse of children (CSA) has been a well-known phenomenon for centuries, even though in almost all types of societies, sexual contact between children and adults is perceived as inappropriate, both in legal terms and in terms of moral norms. It is only in recent decades, however, that CSA started to be considered a social problem. The increasing number of cases of abuse, shocking reports on the scale of abuse of children in church institutions in different countries, and the increased attention of the media on the subject, have led to CSA being viewed as a global problem.¹

Defining the CSA as a “global problem” makes it necessary for researchers to describe the phenomenon both in quantitative (the scale of abuse in different countries and social groups) and in qualitative terms (characteristics of perpetrators and victims, grooming strategies, the functioning of educational institutions). The analysis of CSA is complicated because it is a multi-faceted phenomenon. Difficulties can be seen due to factors such as the imprecise terminology, the low percentage of reported cases of abuse, the sensitivity of the problem, both for victims and perpetrators, the high dark figure of crimes committed, which may result in an incomplete understanding of the problem and inadequate interventions targeted at both victims and perpetrators.²

Sexual abuse causes serious physical, emotional and psychological harm to victims. The traumatic experience is further reinforced by the fact that most perpetrators are people/persons who are closely related to the child. According to David Finkelhor, around 90% of children who are victims of sexual abuse know their perpetrator, regardless of whether the abuse takes place within the family or in an educational, sporting or religious institution.³ The growing awareness of the risk of sexual abuse of children and young people outside the family home has led researchers to formulate a definition of “institutional

¹ M. Stoltenborgh, M.H. van Ijzendoorn, E.M. Euser, M.J. Bakermans-Kranenburg, *A Global Perspective on CSA: Meta-Analysis of Prevalence Around the World*, “Child Maltreatment” 2 (2011), p. 80.

² M. Sajkowska, *Co wiemy o wykorzystywaniu seksualnym dzieci? Ustalenia terminologiczne, skala zjawiska, oblicza problemu społecznego*, in: A. Żak, E. Kusz (ed.), *Seksualne wykorzystywanie małoletnich w Kościele. Problem – Odpowiedź Kościoła – Doświadczenia Polskie*, Kraków 2018: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Ignatianum w Krakowie, pp. 164–165.

³ D. Finkelhor, *Characteristics of crimes against juveniles*, Durham, NH 2012: Crimes against Children Research Center.

abuse”, which can take place in any setting where there are individuals who have power and trust over children. Gallagher defines institutional child abuse as: “The sexual, physical, or emotional abuse of a child (under 18 years of age) by an adult that works with him or her. The perpetrator may be employed in a paid or voluntary capacity; in the public, voluntary or private sector; in a residential or non-residential setting; and may work either directly with children or be in an ancillary role.”⁴

Sexual abuse is a phenomenon that cannot be ignored. In the past, the approach to this problem has not always been one of concern for children. Often the perpetrators were protected and it was difficult to admit that persons with social authority, such as teachers, educators or priests, are able to commit such crimes. S. Rossetti points out the mistakes made in the church environment, which resulted in the lack of proper response to the problem of sexual abuse by priests. He mentions, among others, the lack of listening properly/attentively to the victims and giving in to the manipulation of the perpetrators, the unfounded belief that the perpetrators can be cured and risk-free, insufficient human formation of priests, or missing the “Red Flag.”⁵ Given the high risk of CSA within the family and in educational institutions, there is a need to take a wide range of preventive measures, which can take different forms and target different groups. These include, inter alia, action targeted at perpetrators of child sexual abuse, action targeted at parents and professionals working with children, action targeted at children, and action targeted at society as a whole.⁶

The aim of this article is to present the activities undertaken in the field of the prevention of CSA carried out by the Child Protection Centre in Krakow (COD). In order to outline the full picture of the discussed issue, I will first present the scope of the definition of sexual abuse, and then I will present the mission of the COD, as well as the standards of prevention and programmes implemented within the broad scope of child and youth prevention.

⁴ B. Gallagher, *The extent and nature of known cases of institutional child sexual abuse*, “The British Journal of Social Work” 30/6 (2012), p. 797.

⁵ S. Rossetti, *Ucząc się na własnych błędach. Jak skutecznie reagować na seksualne wykorzystanie nieletnich*, in: *Ku uzdrowieniu i odnowie. Materiały z sympozjum dla biskupów i przełożonych zakonnych o seksualnym wykorzystaniu osób niepełnoletnich. Papieski Uniwersytet Gregoriański, 6–9 lutego 2012*, transl. Z. Kasprzyk, Kraków 2012: Wydawnictwo WAM, pp. 63–84.

⁶ D. Finkelhor, *Przeciwdziałanie wykorzystaniu seksualnemu dzieci*, “Dziecko Krzywdzone” 4/29 (2009), pp. 7–36.

2. Definitions of CSA

According to Maria Beisert and Agnieszka Izdebska, definitions of CSA can be divided into three groups: clinical, legal and social. Clinical definitions are the most comprehensive and refer to a specific type of relationship and interaction between individuals. They are created in order to best describe the phenomenon and make an accurate diagnosis. Legal definitions refer to the law in force in a given country. The definition of CSA set out in the provisions of the Penal Code describes the essence of the problem and contains three elements: an indication of the characteristics describing the victim, the perpetrator and the act, i.e. the type of sexual activity between the adult and the child. Finally, social definitions express society's beliefs about the phenomenon of CSA.⁷

As one can see, there is no single definition of child sexual abuse, which means that different researchers adopt different definitional scope and emphasize specific aspects of the phenomenon. Thus, E. Kusz assumes that sexual abuse is “drawing a child into the sphere of sexual activity, inadequate for its developmental stage, into the sphere of activities which the child does not understand and is not able to accept, and which at the same time violate legal and social norms.”⁸ A well known definition of CSA is the one presented by The World Health Organisation: “the involvement of a child in sexual activity that he or she does not fully comprehend, is unable to give informed consent to, or for which the child is not developmentally prepared and cannot give consent, or that violate the laws or social taboos of society. Child sexual abuse is evidenced by this activity between a child and an adult or another child who by age or development is in a relationship of responsibility, trust, or power, the activity being intended to gratify or satisfy the needs of the other person.”⁹

Recently, Ben Mathews and Delphine Collin-Vézina have attempted to build a Conceptual Model of CSA. In their opinion, to speak of CSA 4 factors must occur: 1) The person must be a child; 2) There must be a lack of true consent on the part of the child; 3) The activity must be sexually motivated; 4) The acts must be abusive. Furthermore, the authors state that abuse occurs within the

⁷ M. Beisert, A. Izdebska, *Wykorzystywanie seksualne dzieci*, “Dziecko krzywdzone” 39/2 (2012), pp. 48–66.

⁸ E. Kusz, *Wykorzystanie seksualne małoletnich przez osoby duchowne – analiza zjawiska*, “Dziecko Krzywdzone. Teoria, Badania, Praktyka” 14/1 (2015), p. 31.

⁹ World Health Organization, *Report of the Consultation on Child Abuse Prevention*, 1999, <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/65900> (20.12.2021).

relationship of power involving proximity or dependence between the perpetrator and the victim. A power relationship may arise, for example, from a family relationship (parent, sibling) or from an institutional relationship (teacher, coach, clergy person). Abuse also involves an unequal position. Inequality can exist in several senses: age; physical, cognitive, and psychological capacity; cultural inequality (e.g., caste); and gender inequality. Abuse involves exploitation of vulnerability, with the person taking advantage of the child's vulnerability and using his superior position to his benefit and to the child's detriment. Finally, abuse involves an absence of true consent, as it was discussed above.¹⁰ When talking about child sexual abuse I adopt the latter definition.

3. Child Protection Centre – mission and activities

The Child Protection Centre is an interdepartmental unit operating at the Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow founded in April 2014. As an academic centre, COD is not an agency of the Polish Bishops' Conference but serves the Church in Poland. The Centre undertakes a number of initiatives for the prevention of sexual abuse of children and young people. The primary tasks of COD include training and educational activities in the psychological, pedagogical and spiritual fields on the subject of CSA, and the design and development of prevention programmes and models of good practice for various pastoral, formative and educational environments to help them create safe environments for children and young people.¹¹

COD's activities have grown out of a collaboration with the Center for Child Protection embedded at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome (PUG). The first venture was an e-learning course on child protection prevention and intervention in pastoral settings. The course ran from September 2013 to December 2014 and was completed with a joint PUG and Ignatianum certificate by 40 participants. Since its inception, COD has been involved in building a systematic response of the Church in Poland to the CSA, resulting in the International Conference on: *How to understand and adequately respond to the sexual abuse of minors in the Church*. The conference took place at the Ignatianum

¹⁰ B. Mathews, D. Collin-Vézina, *Child Sexual Abuse: Toward a Conceptual Model and Definition*, "Trauma, Violence & Abuse" 20/2 (2019), p. 141–145.

¹¹ <https://cod.ignatianum.edu.pl/o-nas/misja-cod.html> (21.12.2021).

on 20–21 June 2014 and was attended by 180 participants from various Catholic communities from 26 dioceses, 20 male and 17 female orders and congregations. In June of the same year, the KEP adopted the Guidelines for initial canonical investigation and a document entitled *Prevention of sexual abuse against children and young people and persons with disabilities in the pastoral and educational work of the Church in Poland*. The COD's activities could therefore naturally focus on preparing and building structures for the effective implementation of the policies for the protection of children and young people contained in the enacted documents and on working to change the awareness not only of the clergy but also of people associated with the Church.

The building of structures to implement the protection policy was made possible by the appointment by all dioceses and by some religious provinces in the first half of 2015 of 80 delegates of diocesan and religious superiors and 69 pastoralists. This opened the way for 3 series of four-day professional trainings for delegates and 3 series of four-day trainings for pastoralists. The aim of the basic training courses for delegates and for pastoral workers was to prepare priests to work with persons abused by clergy by adopting the right attitude towards cases of sexual abuse, in order to contribute to the healing of trust and to restore the right climate for continuing pastoral work in the ecclesial community wounded by the crime.¹² On the other hand, the work on the change of awareness has been carried out through training addressed to diocesan and religious clergy, as well as to clerics preparing for priestly ministry, on how to live celibacy in a mature way. The training offer is also addressed to various types of educational institutions, religious organizations and communities, pastoral and formation institutions, professional groups and volunteers. The scope of lectures, sessions, trainings and workshops organised by COD, includes the following topics:

- the problem of terminology, scale, disclosure and research of the phenomenon of sexual abuse of minors in the Church and society,
- statements of recent Popes on the scandal of pedophilia among the clergy,
- principles of Polish law and procedures of canon law concerning the CSA,
- basic principles and practices of prevention to create safe environments for children and adolescents,

¹² <https://cod.ignatianum.edu.pl/component/content/article/11-komentarze/144-%C5%BCak-sj-6-lat-dzia%C5%82alno%C5%9Bci-cod.html?Itemid=109> (05.01.2022).

- the profile of the perpetrator of sexual abuse and its risk factors,
- risk factors of sexual abuse and protective factors in the family, the institution, and the victim,
- consequences of sexual abuse and victim support.¹³

In addition, the Child Protection Centre, in cooperation with the Faculty of Educational Sciences at the Jesuit University Ignatianum in Kraków, has organised and runs postgraduate studies in the prevention of sexual violence against children and young people. So far, there have been four courses completed by about 100 lay students, diocesan and religious priests, and nuns. These are people who are involved in various sectors of the Church's work with children and young people, sharing competences and skills acquired.¹⁴ The aim of this study is to acquire knowledge and skills in the prevention of sexual violence against children. In particular, they provide knowledge and skills in: 1) Recognizing symptoms of violence in children and adolescents; 2) Conducting interviews and providing crisis assistance to children who have experienced violence; 3) Knowing procedures for dealing with situations of violence against children and applying them skillfully; 4) Developing programmes to prevent violence in families, schools and care and re-socialisation facilities and in formal and informal groups of children and young people; 5) Preventing violence; 7) Responding to violence; 8) Developing programmes for early intervention with people affected by violence in the same places and environments.¹⁵

4. Prevention standards and programmes

CSA arouses widespread indignation and mobilises society to make efforts to protect minors through adequate education and awareness-raising not only for children, but also for adults. An important role is played by adequately constructed standards of prevention, which constitute guidelines for the construction and implementation of effective preventive programmes. Developing adequate child

¹³ <https://cod.ignatianum.edu.pl/edukacja-i-prewencja/warsztaty-i-szkolenia.html> (07.01.2022).

¹⁴ E. Kusz, *Profilaktyka wykorzystywania seksualnego w Kościele katolickim*, "Dziecko Krzywdzone. Teoria, badania, praktyka" 2/19 (2020), p. 252.

¹⁵ <https://cod.ignatianum.edu.pl/edukacja-i-prewencja/studia-podyplomowe.html> (07.01.2022).

protection standards is the responsibility of all organisations involved in raising children. According to Monica Applewhite current standards of care require organizations to address the following: 1) **Prevention policies**. Policies that address the guidelines of programmes and prohibit programme structures that place children at risk; 2) **Behavioral Guidelines**. Specific prohibitions and requirements regarding adult interactions with children that allow administrators to respond immediately when an adult behaves inappropriately with children, instead of waiting for an allegation of abuse; 3) **Reporting of abuse**. Policies and/or instruction that highlights statutory reporting requirements; 4) **Educational programmes**. Educational opportunities that raise awareness, encourage reporting and solidify commitment to child protection; 5) **Points of contact** to inform the organization of concerns and/or allegations of abuse. Specific information for individuals to reach out and talk about problems they may have encountered with members or leaders within the organization; 6) **Tracking of all reports**. Accountability for reports that are “screened out” and ability to resurrect past reports if new allegations arise; 7) **Victim assistance**. Responsive, consistent, and knowledgeable response to those who have experienced and been affected by abuse; 8) **Proactive investigations**. Actively pursuing information regarding allegations of misconduct by professionals with the knowledge and skills to fully investigate child sexual abuse and boundary violations; 9) **Decisive action regarding inappropriate behavior and allegations of abuse**. Upon confirmation of alleged abuse or misconduct, accountability and consequences for those involved; 10) **Objective review process**. Full disclosure of decisions that affect child safety to a review board or committee with knowledge of standards of care, expertise in the field, and highest levels of personal commitment and integrity.¹⁶

Building on the standards developed by Monica Applewhite outlined above, the board of the Child Protection Centre has adopted its own standards developed by psychologists, educators and theologians working with the Centre: 1) Creating and maintaining a safe environment in the Church; 2) Vetting, delegating, and educating those who work with children and youth; 3) Responding to accusations and inappropriate behavior; 4) Providing care and support for those who have been harmed; 5) Managing and working with those accused of sexual abuse; 6) Collaborating in the work of protecting children and youth;

¹⁶ M. Applewhite, *Historical and Current Standards of Care for Prevention and Response to Sexual Abuse*, retrieved from (15.12.2021): <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/historical-current-standards-care-prevention-response-applewhite>.

- 7) Training and ongoing support for those working in prevention in the Church;
- 8) Quality assurance in prevention and vetting.¹⁷

The adopted standards of CSA prevention cover all levels of prevention, i.e. universal, indicative and selective prevention. The activities undertaken by the Child Protection Centre, apart from the so-called intervention prophylaxis (reaction to reports of clergy abuse from the past), focus mainly on universal prevention, the basic aim of which is to stop potential perpetrators from harming children and to protect children – potential victims – from abuse. Such actions are targeted directly at potential abusers to prevent them from committing acts that fall under the broad definition of CSA, and at all child victims to help them identify risks and avoid threatening people and situations. As CSA occurs in specific situational contexts, a comprehensive universal prevention approach should also include interventions to address situations where children are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse. An important dimension of these interventions is raising public awareness. This means both knowledge of the problem of CSA and sensitivity and readiness to intervene in situations of risk.¹⁸

COD is currently implementing four programmes in the field of universal prevention. The first of these, entitled **Safe Holidays**, aims to communicate the principles of protection of children and young people to those responsible for holiday-related work with young people. The first stage of this programme was the training of moderators and animators (priests, pastoral workers, lay animators) of holiday activities in the Krakow archdiocese. The participants of the training gain knowledge about types of violence, recognition of symptoms and psychological consequences of the trauma of sexual abuse, principles of assistance and conversation with a minor and his/her parents about the abuse. They also get acquainted with the current legal regulations concerning the legal protection of child sexuality and the code of good practice and behaviour protecting human intimacy.

The second programme implemented by COD is the preparation of rules and standards for the protection of persons with disabilities. The beginning of the work on this project was the training of volunteers, staff and parents involved in “Jacob’s Ladder”, which is an institution dealing with people with disabilities.

¹⁷ E. Kusz, *Profilaktyka wykorzystywania seksualnego w Kościele katolickim*, “Dziecko Krzywdzone. Teoria, badania, praktyka” 19/2 (2020), p. 253.

¹⁸ M. Sajkowska, M. Skierkowska, *Zintegrowany model profilaktyki wykorzystywania seksualnego dzieci według Smallbone’a, Marshalla i Wortleya*, “Dziecko Krzywdzone. Teoria, badania, praktyka” 19/2 (2020), p. 13.

This training identified the need for a specific programme for people with physical and intellectual disabilities, as well as the need for parents and caretakers to participate in such training. Academics and people working with people with disabilities (including two postgraduates) are involved. The team is preparing an appropriate handbook for parents and educators as well as specific outlines for classroom and group activities.

The third programme entitled **Safe School** is aimed at the staff of almost 500 Catholic schools operating in Poland. The main objective is to prepare standards for the prevention of sexual abuse on school premises and to provide training for staff and pupils. An important element of the programme is the involvement of all Catholic schools in the protection of children and young people.

The fourth project aims to prepare e-learning courses for adult parish group leaders and in the longer term for youth ministry group leaders and participants. This project is currently being evaluated in terms of content by people who have experience working with group leaders and by academics. The technical part of this project is also being consulted.¹⁹

5. Conclusion

The activities of the Child Protection Centre for the prevention of CSA are still in the developmental phase. Adopted standards of prevention, study visits of COD employees to Western European countries and drawing on experiences developed by Church and secular institutions result in joining the pioneering work for the protection of children on behalf of the Church in Poland. A focus on universal prevention, a wide range of training workshops and postgraduate studies help to build a network of people who care about the welfare of the child and who are convinced that adequate training is essential to prevent sexual violence against children.

It also seems promising to involve COD in international research projects. One of them is the project “Measuring capability to create conditions of safety for children,” prepared by researchers from the Institute of Child Protection Studies of the Australian Catholic University. Research conducted within the Global Safeguarding Alliance aims to deploy and compare internationally results

¹⁹ E. Kusz, *Profilaktyka wykorzystywania seksualnego w Kościele katolickim*, “Dziecko Krzywdzone. Teoria, badania, praktyka” 19/2 (2020), p. 254.

from ACU's Safeguarding Capabilities in Preventing Child Sexual Abuse Survey. This survey measures the capabilities of clergy, leaders, staff and volunteers to prevent and respond to safeguarding concerns.

The Centre for Child Protection has become an important centre for prevention activities over the 6 years of its operation, aiming to change the way Poles think about CSA. Cooperation with the Episcopate, Empowering children Foundation or St. Joseph's Foundation, as well as presence in the media, contributes to greater recognition and wider reach of COD's activities for the protection of children.

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- sexual abuse? Terminological findings, scale of the phenomenon, and forms of the social problem], in: A. Źak, E. Kusz (ed.), [Sexual abuse of minors in the Church: The problem – the response of the Church – Polish experiences], Kraków 2018: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Ignatianum w Krakowie, pp. 164–207.
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