

REGISTRATION AND MONITORING OF CHILD MALTREATMENT CASES IN THE JUSTICE SYSTEM. A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF POLICY AND SYSTEMS ABROAD

ENGLISH SUMMARY

Child maltreatment is a serious and complex social problem that has a negative impact on the safety and physical and mental health of victims. Answering this problem requires, among other things, insightful, transparent knowledge-informed registration and monitoring of child maltreatment cases, with attention for the integration of data from different sectors (e.g. justice, social sector/welfare, health) and follow-up of cases over time. Good registration and monitoring allows policy makers to map the extent of the problem in the population on the basis of prevalence and incident studies and helps to develop, implement and evaluate interventions and preventive actions. For this reason, the World Health Organization (2016) has been promoting the establishment of so-called 'surveillance' systems for child maltreatment cases in recent years and is encouraging governments to make work of this. In the Netherlands, the registration and monitoring of child maltreatment cases is problematic. In particular in the justice system a recent study by ten Boom and Zebregs (2017) identified problems. Reports are not always substantiated and there is little insight in the number of cases reported, the follow-up of reports, the drop out of cases, and the trajectories of cases through the system over time. Furthermore, figures cannot always be interpreted unambiguously, partly because different counting units (e.g., case vs. perpetrator) are used, partly because it is not always clear whether a case is in line with the legal definitions of child maltreatment and domestic violence.

The aim of this project was to study registration and monitoring systems for child maltreatment cases abroad, in the first place within the justice system, but also within the social sector (child protection, welfare). The study was exploratory in nature and intended to answer the following questions:

1. What examples are there of registration and monitoring systems for child maltreatment cases abroad, in the justice system (police, public prosecution service, criminal law) and in the social sector (welfare)?
2. What are the global characteristics of these systems?
3. What is the underlying rationale of these systems and how up to date are they?
4. Which definitions and descriptions of child maltreatment are used in these systems? Do they also include domestic violence or is this separately registered and monitored in the justice system?
5. Are there figures on the number of cases of child maltreatment based on these systems?
6. How child-oriented are these systems?
7. How accessible and 'open' are these systems for researchers and to what extent have they been included in research?
8. Which systems could be an interesting example for the Netherlands and could therefore be included in a follow-up study?

We studied the systems of thirteen countries: Belgium (Flanders region), Canada, Denmark, Germany, England, Finland, France, Greece, Ireland, Norway, United States, Sweden and Switzerland. This was done on the basis of a literature study (published literature in scientific journals, grey literature, including policy documents, legal texts, etc.) and an online survey, plotted in our international network. The response to this survey was limited, however, and due to the short time allowed for the project, could not be further extended. We therefore based our results mainly on the literature study.

In the first part of the results section we give a general, comparative description of the policy regarding the approach of reports of child maltreatment in the various countries/regions in our sample, both in the judiciary and in the social sector. We found a number of similarities between countries/regions regarding principles and rationale of child protection systems, but also differences, among others with regard to the orientation of systems ('child protection' vs. 'family-centered' systems) and legal definitions of child maltreatment.

In the second part of the results section, we describe how the registration and monitoring of child maltreatment cases in the various countries/regions in our sample takes form. We note that both in the justice system and in the social sector systems have insufficient longitudinal perspective, few cases are followed up over time and there is little possibility of monitoring. In the social sector, registration systems are often not uniform and different systems are used in the same country/region. Furthermore, systems are not very integrative, either within a sector or across sectors. Canada, Ireland and the United States are exceptions. Ireland in particular seems to have a system that, at least in theory, offers the possibility to integrate child maltreatment records between the judiciary and the social sector. Next, we discuss in more detail a number of systems from the judicial (in particular police registers) and the social sector (here we focus on integrative systems within the sector). We indicate which variables are registered, what the follow-up looks like, and, where possible, what are the strengths and weaknesses of systems.

Finally, we present two interesting, recent and international initiatives for the development of registration and monitoring systems, in accordance with the principles of the World Health Organization on this subject: the *Working Group on National Child Maltreatment Data Collection* and the *Child Maltreatment & Neglect via Minimum Data Set*. These are initiatives in which researchers and policy makers work closely together to build up integrative registration and monitoring systems in their country.

We concluded from this exploratory study that in most countries the registration and monitoring of child maltreatment cases is rather fragmented, both in the judiciary and in the social sector. This prevents a good flow of information and makes it difficult to get an overview of the prevalence and incidence of child maltreatment and to trace cases of maltreatment. Some countries have developed promising systems on paper, but only in Ireland is there a system that explicitly aims to integrate registration data on child maltreatment cases by different partners within the same sector, as well as integrate registrations across sectors.

Literature

- Ten Boom, A. & Zebregs, S. (2017). *Registratie kindermishandelingszaken in de justitieketen*. Den Haag, Nederland: WODC.
- World Health Organization (2016). *Measuring and monitoring national prevalence of child maltreatment: A practical handbook*. Copenhagen: World Health Organization, Regional Office for Europe.