



SUMMARY

Research and advice bureau Breuer&Intraval has performed a research into interventions and resources that are used within the justice system for perpetrators and victims of child abuse. This pilot is commissioned by the Research and Documentation Centre (WODC) of the Dutch Ministry of Security and Justice. This research has three goals. The first goal is to gain insight into the interventions and resources that can be used within the justice system for perpetrators and victims of child abuse, the decision-making process concerning the use of these interventions, and the frequency with which the interventions are deployed. The second goal of this research is to determine whether the intervention palette is adequate for all types of perpetrators and victims, and whether suitable interventions and resources are available for all types of perpetrators and victims. The third goal is to examine to what extent the current intervention palette is in line with recent scientific developments in the investigation into child abuse.

Research Design

For this research we studied literature, conducted interviews with key informants, and conducted interviews with law-enforcement officials, employees from the Public Prosecution Service, the Dutch Child Protection Agency, Probation Services, certified institutions for youth protection and juvenile rehabilitation, and with employees from institutions outside the judicial system, including Veilig Thuis (Safe at Home), safety houses, addiction and (forensic) mental healthcare institutions, and various expertise centres. In addition, we have interviewed professionals involved in multidisciplinary teams (MDA++) and youth protection meetings. We particularly focused on the role of the judicial partners within the local collaborations aimed at preventing, identifying, and stopping child abuse and limiting the harmful consequences of child abuse. In total, we interviewed 35 people who were actually involved in interventions for perpetrators and victims of child abuse.

Characteristics of Victims and Perpetrators

Child abuse occurs in all population groups. There are, however, a number of characteristics that increase the risk of child abuse. Child abuse occurs more often in single-parent families or families with three or more children. In addition, a low level of education and - often related to this - a low income of the parents increases the risk of child abuse within the family. Children whose parents themselves have been abused also have a higher risk of being abused. Other factors such as nationality, unemployment, and social context may also play a role in the prevalence of child abuse.

As far as the perpetrators of child abuse are concerned, gender is the most important characteristic of the largest group of perpetrators of child abuse. In addition, the presence of aggression problems, unwanted sexual behaviour, a mild intellectual disability, psychological problems and substance use are predictors of child abuse.



Within the area of social neuroscience knowledge about the neurobiological characteristics of both victims and perpetrators of child abuse is increasing. The developments in this scientific field are moving rapidly and can be used to improve the behavioural interventions for perpetrators and victims of child abuse.

Existing Interventions

The existing interventions that can be used in child abuse are divided into four categories: criminal, administrative, civil and voluntary interventions. Criminal and civil-law interventions are judicial interventions. Administrative interventions (including house bans) are imposed by administrative bodies, for example by the mayor. The house ban is the most frequently applied administrative interventions, where the implementation (intervention) in practice is usually in the hands of the police. This intervention is mainly aimed at domestic violence, but children are often involved.

Criminal-law interventions include custodial sentences, behavioural measures and special conditions, but also the behavioural interventions applied within a forensic clinic or by probation to perpetrators of violence, including perpetrators of child abuse.

In the context of child protection, civil-law interventions are aimed at protecting victims of child abuse. This includes interventions such as an under supervision and a guardianship measure. Finally, voluntary interventions can be deployed. However, these interventions are outside the judicial framework and beyond the scope of this research.

Multidisciplinary Collaboration

Child abuse is a complex problem. It is a crime, but at the same time it is often also a parenting problem, a family problem, a development problem, a health problem and a social problem. Because of the complexity of child abuse, various disciplines are often involved in the approach of the problem. However, these professionals often focus on a sub-problem that, when this is insufficiently tackled in conjunction with the causes of violence, neglect or abuse of the child, has little result and cannot stop the child abuse.

To reduce child abuse, a joint vision and approach is needed aimed at stopping violence, guaranteeing safety, and preventing repetition. In recent years, local and regional collaborations have been established in a large number of regions in the country. Two of these new forms of cooperation, the multidisciplinary teams (MDA++) and youth protection meetings, have been described in more detail in the report, in which we mainly discuss the roles of the police and the judicial system.