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Day 1:

General remarks:

- Caution should be exercised when publishing prevalence figures. In general, it can be said that the prevalence of sexual abuse of children in residential care (RC) is three times higher than that of children who have not been placed in a youth institution in the United Kingdom.
- A study carried out in the UK found that 40% of girls in RC had been sexually abused prior to placement.

Presentation by Frédérique Six: 'Governance'

Mandatory reporting

Mandatory reporting may be advantageous regarding the reporting of sexual abuse. A disadvantage of mandatory reporting is that it heightens concerns about the so-called 'nanny state'. There is no mandatory reporting in the UK.

Residential care versus foster care

Residential care (RC): risk that besides group leaders, peers may be perpetrators of sexual abuse.

Foster Care (FC): risk that foster parents may be perpetrators of sexual abuse.

Differences between RC and FC: in RC, several group leaders and children are present. Thus in a case of unacceptable behaviour, the child can confide in another child or the group leader (i.e. there is a larger network around children in RC as compared to children in FC).

Children in RC are a priori at greater risk. In the case of sexual abuse in FC, the child has fewer chances to break free from the abuse due to the absence of a network around the child.

Recommendations:

- Strengthen the child's network (including attention to peers). Peers can be perpetrators, but they can also be helpful as receivers of signals. In the case that peers are receiving signals, one disadvantage can be that the child is seen by the group as an 'undercover leader.'
- Strengthen the empowerment of the child.
- Private telephone for the child.
- Complaints procedure that meets the needs of children.

Cost-benefit analysis

A system that is too heavy undermines itself: too many protocols and obstacles can be a reason for group leaders not to take action immediately in case of a suspicious of sexual abuse. So a too heavy system makes it more difficult to tackle the problem of child abuse.

In the last few years, there have been financial cuts in RC, with the result that children are not receiving the treatment that they need. The wisdom of this is questionable, because investing in the right treatment for children can save a lot of money in the future. This is because fewer children then end up in the judicial system, which is extremely costly.

In economic terms, FC is cheaper than RC. In the UK, children aged under three years are not permitted to enter RC.

Sexual abuse and the reporting of sexual abuse by the child (empowerment of the child)

- Encouraging children to talk about what has happened to them puts too heavy a burden on them, and gives them too much responsibility. It is recommended that rather than training a child to speak out, staff and people in the child's environment should be trained to recognize the signs of sexual abuse. Yet, it is seen as a problem that children do not talk about what has happened to them. In cases of sexual abuse, only 10% of children speak to staff about what has happened. It would seem

best to encourage children to talk about what has happened to them by training them. The training of the child should not only be aimed at encouraging them to talk, but it should also be aimed at educating the child. Being properly informed is a form of protection for children.

It is also recommended that two people should always be present in a group, 24 hours a day. This obviously has financial implications.

- In Germany, group leaders involve children and talk to children so they feel that they are being listened to. For example, children are asked what they need to feel safe. All the points that they bring up are ranked and then discussed in the group.

- All children should be trained to understand what constitutes normal and abnormal behaviour. As part of the training, sexual abuse should be discussed in a broad context (what is a good/bad secret, what is a nice/unpleasant way to be touched, what is a good/bad relationship, etc.).

- Staff should be more sensitive and groups should be smaller. There should be more staff so that they can pay more attention to the children, not because they should monitor their colleagues.

Open dialogue and climate

The discussion about creating an open climate in institutions and the importance of dialogue has been going on for many years. RC is by definition a riskier place for children than FC (note that in the UK this is not true for high-quality residential care). RC employees are often inadequately trained and there is a high turnover of staff. A solid and committed team is needed to create an open climate. There should be more attention to the proper handling of false accusations.

In the UK, there are a lot of multi-agency approaches and there is also multi-agency training. During multi-agency training, different care workers get to know each other and how they work.

Presentation by Jan Hendriks: 'Perpetrators' characteristics'

- The relatively high age of the perpetrators is remarkable. In this presentation, Jan Hendriks was concerned with the characteristics of convicted offenders. Most offenders have a history of sexual abuse, but have not been convicted for these violations.

- It is indicated that 50% of perpetrators were themselves victims of sexual abuse. The question is whether this figure is correct, or whether perpetrators state that they were sexually abused in the hope of receiving a reduced penalty. Having a history of domestic violence is strongly linked to becoming a perpetrator.

- On basis of the data, it is difficult to give an overall picture/profile of the perpetrators. A small number of perpetrators were examined in this study; it is an atypical study. Only a few studies have been conducted in this area, and few cases of sexual abuse are forwarded to the Public Prosecutor (and even fewer result in convictions). The question is whether these perpetrators are very different from other offenders.

- Modus operandi: the modus operandi is usually very effective. A perpetrator will often invest in building a good relationship with a child. This relationship is often better than the relationships that the child has with other people. Being manipulative and controlling are key characteristics of professional perpetrators. They also control other staff and other children, and sometimes let older children groom the younger ones. The aim is to socially and emotionally isolate the child. In this sense, it is logical to have less contact with the child's family.

- Munro's study on the demoralization of staff in institutions was mentioned. Demoralization is still an issue in everyday practice.

- Research is often carried out after a scandal. This kind of research looks for answers and asks who was involved. Research that is not scandal-driven will focus more on what went wrong and what can be learned from this. One recommendation is that data should be collected systematically. In addition, the committee should report on what has been done with respect to all of the opinions and recommendations made by committees in recent years (probably very little!).

- In the Netherlands, central government pays for the treatment of children in RC or FC. This means that there is no incentive for local government to invest in preventive or early treatment for children.

Day 2

Presentation by Wim Slot: overview of civil and penal placements in the Netherlands

- In the UK, the so-called 'family climate scale' instrument is used to measure the interaction between family members.
- A study in the UK has shown that children in care are placed, on average, in eight different settings by the time they are 14.
- In the UK, there is specialist FC. Specialists are paid a fee in addition to their basic salary for their area of expertise/specialism.
- In the UK, there is a limit on the number of children per family that can be placed in FC. The limit is three children per family, but sometimes this limit is exceeded.
- In the UK, there are no more than 200 children in Youth psychiatric care; the rest are placed in RC.

Presentation by Catrien Bijlefeld: qualitative research (sub-studies 3 and 5)

Most international literature studies give a global definition of abuse. Sexual abuse is one of many forms of abuse, and in many studies, it is not investigated separately.

Interviewing children

Of all the children who filled in the questionnaire, 36 wrote that they would like to be interviewed. One problem relating to interviewing the children is that confidentiality has been promised, which makes it hard to get in touch with the children to make appointments for interviews.

Some children wrote on the form that they had been abused, but during the interviews, they said that nothing had happened. One explanation for such 'crumbling' in the interviews might be an error in the electronic questionnaire. Some children probably mistakes when filling out the questionnaire.

This might also explain the discrepancies between the first and second surveys conducted by the Deetman Committee. People often fail to read the question properly, or they do not understand the question.

Behaviour of children in test situations:

- difficulty understanding the question
- blackout
- may cross boxes at random instead of taking the time to read and answer the questions correctly

Children are terribly inconsistent, and this is something that also applies to abused children. When making such statements, children do not define themselves as 'abused', once and for all. When they understand the enormity of the situation, they might say that they made a mistake.

- False denials are much more common than false allegations. When such statements come from a child (even a child under ten), they are much more likely to be true.

- The context in which the child is interviewed is crucial. In the UK, children are only interviewed in a domestic environment. A multidisciplinary team is involved: police, medical staff, youth care staff, etc. All professionals wear normal clothes and are specially trained in interviewing children.
- Kevin Browne makes use of projective drawing techniques. They can be used to back up the story and drawing can also be used to break the ice.
- The use of professional judgement and skills when interviewing children is very important.

Inspectorate

- In the UK, there is one main inspectorate that covers the places where children can stay: schools, RC, FC, adoption, local agencies, etc. Local authorities carry out surprise inspections every year.
- When a family home opens in the UK, the inspectorate always visits the home. The Inspectorate also counts the beds.
- In the Netherlands, the inspectorate collects data that is then analysed by researchers.
- This raises the question, why does the inspectorate not analyse the data itself?
- In the UK, it is standard procedure to ask for references, to make checks on care workers' personal and employment histories and to check for any gaps in their CVs.

The broader scope of sexuality, relationships and power

- We should not just talk about abuse, but also about the broad spectrum of relationships and sexuality. There is no education on relationships and sexuality in schools. Professionals feel embarrassed about talking openly about sex (*handelingsverlegenheid*). Introducing protocols on this does not work; we have to build an open culture.
- Who talks with youngsters when it comes to prevention, intervention and after-care? There should be more direct supervision of the child. Create an environment in which children feel safe and not morally condemned.
- Even if you have a system of checks and increasing supervision, abuse will still occur. Talking about boundaries and sexuality should be 'all the time procedures'. This should not occur in the framework of a supervisory system that states what is and is not allowed, and which procedures should be followed if something goes wrong.
- We do not listen enough to the biological parents, because we see them as unable to raise their own children.
- There is an ongoing discussion about risk between the child and the workers. Children write down what they consider to be a risk, which things are more risky than others, and then discuss this. Consciousness-raising discussions. In the Netherlands, there is a programme on safety for children in RC called '*Samen veilig wonen*' [living together safely]. This covers children's emotional, social and physical health.
- We should not forget that a sex offence is not always about a sexual interest; a large part has to do with power. Finkelhor has written on power relationships, and how there are big differences between adult-child and peer-to-peer abuse in terms of power. There is also a big difference between a stranger and a familiar person: compared to abuse by a stranger, abuse by someone who is familiar is much more traumatic in the long term. Abuse by a professional perpetrator can be seen as abuse of trust, an act of betrayal.
- Do not put too much emphasis on sexual abuse. Take the example of drug abuse; the last thing you should do is talk about drugs.
- Most children do not see the taking of pornographic photographs as abuse. 'That happens all the time.'
- Gay men are seen as a risk. There are a lot of misunderstandings relating to gender and abuse. Boys who are abused by men tend not to want to talk about it. Some institutions have homophobic atmospheres. Children are afraid of being beaten up by their peers.

What to do with victim and perpetrator in the case of peer-to-peer abuse? If one of them has been in the institution or foster family for five years, it will have become their family. This child cannot be moved easily. The outcome depends on the purpose of the placement. Temporary placement > move. But if the aim is to find a permanent place for the child, then the decision is harder to make. There are no rules; the outcome is dependent on the situation. In the case of a power relationship, the victim and the abuser should always be separated. Sometimes there is a tension between long-term wellbeing and short-term safety.

Presentation by Catrien Bijlefeld: Nature and prevalence 1945 – 2008 (sub-study 4)

- The survey only covers confirmed cases, although we specifically asked that suspicions be covered as well.
- Professional perpetrators are often highly respected individuals in society.
- A common modus operandi in FC is to systematically isolate the victim.
- Pindown made children more vulnerable. Acceptance of therapeutic methods that are actually abusive creates an atmosphere in which sexual abuse is also accepted.

Presentation by Catrien Bijlefeld: Prevalence 2008 – 2010 (sub-study 3a)

Prevalence rate

- This is not a prevalence study but an incident study, because the research covers a short time period.
- How to interpret the big difference in numbers between the self-reporting and the informant study? This tells us something about the situation in the institution. The staff members are not in the least aware of what is going on. Similar results in the UK; Kevin will send the report.
- If the children in the survey still live in the institutions when filling in the questionnaire, they are probably underreporting.
- We need statistics for political purposes. The numbers you get depend on the question you ask and how you interpret it. Who is asking for the data and what do you want to do with it?
- Children under 12 were not questioned. Finkelhor wrote on interviewing children from the age of eight. Strauss even wrote on interviewing children from the age of six.
- Gender effects are very important in prevalence: young boys in RC and (teenage) girls in FC.
- It might be useful to look at research focused on people who have left institutions, as these people are more likely to disclose information.

The abuse is ingrained in the system: children with traumatic backgrounds and serious behavioural problems are put together in the same groups, while they are supervised and cared for by unqualified personnel. Qualified workers and experts (psychiatrists, educationalists) are present from 9 am to 5 pm, but it is after this that the abuse takes place. When sexual abuse occurs, in the evening and at night, the personnel with the least training are present. Besides, the majority of the staff members 'on the work floor' are not informed about earlier abuse of the children.

Perpetrators

- We should make a distinction between perpetrators who are intrinsically motivated to abuse children and perhaps even choose to work with them for that very reason, and perpetrators who cross boundaries as a consequence of certain dynamics in foster families and institutions.
- The selection process and screening are focused on catching those applicants who have the wrong intentions. For the other group, we need to invest in training to ensure that any sexual behaviour on the part of the child is handled in a very careful way. It is no excuse to say, 'She seduced me.'
- Some perpetrators in temporary FC try to stay in touch with the child after the child has gone back home.

Children with disabilities, including mental disabilities

- In Germany, the health system (including that for children with low IQs) is much more closed than the youth system. At the moment, attempts are being made to open up the 'black box'. In the Netherlands, it is the other way around. The government has more influence on the health care system, and the inspectorate has more influence on the sector.
- A large study was conducted in the UK on children with disabilities (including day care). Disabled children are three times more likely to be victims of abuse than children with normal IQs. Children suffering from behavioural problems are seven times more likely to become victims of abuse.
- UK manual on working with children with behavioural problems in RC. Checklist for all kinds of groups. (www.aimproject.org.uk/index.php)

Presentation by Sietske Dijkstra: 'Round-tables'

To clarify her presentation, Sietske said that the round-tables take place in relation to cases that really occurred, whereby all the professionals who had to deal with the case come together to examine what happened. The purpose is to find out what went wrong and what can be improved. Discovering the patterns enables the professionals to learn from past cases and handle similar cases differently in the future.

Professionals

- It looks like as if we are at the beginning of the professionalization. How can we train professionals to handle cases differently?
- Children feel powerless and that feeling of powerlessness must be discussed. Professionals also have that feeling of powerlessness.
- It is not about working with the child, it is about the group leaders themselves. There is no information 'from above' on daily operations. Professionals often have no training on how to recognize sexual abuse. Therefore, they feel powerless. It is necessary to improve supervision.
- We forget how important supervision is. There is supervision, but in the Netherlands, it is only focused on rules and achieving targets. That must change.

Children/privacy

- Guardians and caregivers cannot have the same boundaries as biological parents. Children are forced to show their 'naked bodies' in a large group. Institutions are not really 'homey' and there is little privacy for a child. Children don't learn how to live with each other.
- In the Netherlands, institutions are more homelike than in the UK. All children have private bedrooms and separate showers.
- However, it is still difficult for children to have privacy.

Round-tables

- Marion complimented the committee for organizing the round-tables. She said that the round-table is a good tool for professionals to learn from cases. She also referred to the SKY Centre of Excellence & Outcomes and the CAF (Common Assessment Framework). It is often the case that professionals do not want to share information.
- Under what conditions is it 'safe' for the people involved to talk about their experiences openly? The round-tables must be organized by an independent person or organization.
- In the UK, round-tables are regularly organized to evaluate cases. Sheila Fish (SCR) can be contacted on this. However, during the evaluation, allegations (directed at professionals) should be avoided.
- There are many complaints at the round-tables about the things that are wrong with the system. Sometimes these complaints mean that the round-table is no longer about the children themselves.

Summary debate

The child

Children are not responsible for their own safety. 'False accusations' should be given another name. Children deny sexual abuse rather than falsely accusing someone. To make sexual abuse discussable, we have to create an environment in which children and professionals can speak openly. They should not only be able to talk about sex, but also about how people in relationships should treat each other. In addition, children have a different relationship with the perpetrator, in which the abuse of power plays a major role.

The professionals

Supervision of group leaders is important, but we should also encourage supervision of foster parents. During supervision, the discussion should not only cover work, but also the professionals' experiences and the effect these have had on them. In addition, there must be better cooperation between supervisors and group leaders/FC staff. Training should also be provided for foster parents, in which they can learn how to deal with the problems encountered by children in out-of-home placements, including children who were sexually abused by their biological parents.

The system

The fact that the FC system is booming and that it continues to be affected by many problems makes the system very dangerous, especially for the children involved. It should be ensured that children do not have to be in so many institutions and foster homes.

The abuse in foster/adoptive families is not very different from the abuse that occurs in families with biological parents. Sexual abuse takes place in many more settings than in biological families, foster families and adoptive families.

Focus on outcomes: how do you know what is successful? Make a plan for each child that covers every step of the process, from the beginning to the end. This could include a type of client tracking system for all children who come into the system, so it is possible to see what they go through.

Recommendations and best practices

Research

Use a minimum dataset. The figures do not appear to be complete. In order to monitor, we need to know how many children there are, the kind of care they are in, and for how long. Characteristics such as age, gender, legal status and voluntary placement should be included in the dataset. Don't make it too complicated. It is the government's duty to know the figures. They are the ones who are responsible for the children. In addition, undertake evidence-based research.

With older offenders, the issue at hand is often power, not the sex itself. It is therefore counterproductive to only look at the sexual aspect of sexual abuse. We should also make a distinction between offenders who have a clear motive to abuse children and offenders who 'just' want to abuse someone.

System

When monitoring, it is good to make unannounced home visits. During such visits, the observations have to be made by professionals. Health workers are needed for this, instead of social workers. There is no more effective way of signalling sexual abuse than through observing the housing situation during a home visit. In the long term, this is useful and financially achievable. This can be done with both foster parents and biological parents.

More strategies are needed to change the system. It is important to develop risk analysis tools. In addition, having a say about what happens in an institution is important. Create a complaints system for children so that they can participate. Sexual abuse is part of a larger phenomenon. It is not the only thing that we have to supervise; for example, we should also focus on other aspects of the

climate, such as bullying.

All legislation regarding children should fall under one responsible institution. It is also important for FC and institutions to be under the responsibility of the government. The most dangerous system is one in which what happens to a child is not recorded.

The Child

Children need an independent trustee. Children do not trust anyone within the system and therefore need someone who is independent. Peers may also help in identifying signals. In addition, there should be therapy for children in institutions and foster homes who have been sexually abused. An example from the UK is the 'Safe in your own house' project.

Professionals

Schools are an important place for the reporting of sexual abuse, especially among foster children. Professionals must be trained to recognize sexual abuse, and should be taught to pick up the signals. In addition, ensure that professionals know how to communicate with children and mentally disabled children. Also make sure that research is translated into practice and that it is used during the training and evaluation of professionals.

Biological parents

Children's biological parents should be more involved. The involvement of the biological parents will not only help the children to speak out for themselves, but also increases the chance that children can be quickly returned to their biological parents.

Cost

If you present something new, something else has to go. In the Netherlands, there is a hotline for children who are abused (*de kindertelefoon*). It allows a child to tell his or her story to someone they can trust. New initiatives always cost money.

Remaining issues

- In the UK, more children are removed from their biological parents than anywhere else in the world. This partly has to do with the fact that parents tend to have another child if one child has been taken by the state.
- Society is only interested in scandals and wants quick solutions and figures.
- Rudi referred to the exit project in Flanders. The project is designed for people who are afraid that they might abuse children and ask for help.
- The discussion has not addressed the socio-economic aspects in much depth. Tackling poverty, including relative poverty, is the best means of prevention.
- Rudi noted that we did not talk about children aged under 12 (perpetrators and victims).