

Generalised suspicion against male ECEC workers and sexual abuse in ECEC centres: an analysis of the current situation and modules for a protection concept

Michael Cremers/Jens Krabel

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The preconception you face when you are a man, the fact that ... that people are always keeping an eye on you, ... it was something I was very conscious of beforehand. Because the media always present men as predators when it comes to children. And I didn't know how that ... well, how that would affect me in my everyday work. (Male ECEC trainee, 23 years of age; Cremers/Krabel/Calmbach et al. 2010, p. 60)

In the beginning it was really difficult for me to let children be close to me. [...] There was something that made me consciously worried and afraid that someone might interpret it in the wrong way. (Male ECEC trainee, 21 years of age)¹

Introduction

ECEC centres and their providers have the responsibility and obligation to provide children with a safe place free of any kind of violence. And yet we hear again and again of cases of physical or psychological abuse of children. In recent years, awareness of the problem of sexual abuse in educational facilities has also increased, and this also applies to ECEC centres. The current debates in Germany, triggered, for example, by media reports of various cases of sexual abuse and by the establishment of the government "Sexual Abuse of Children" advisory council, have led both to a heightened level of awareness and to concrete measures in the facilities affected.

After a long series of struggles by those affected, it is increasingly being recognized that the well-being of the victim is more important than the reputation of a facility, or "that a facility protects its own reputation when it deals with the problem of sexual abuse in its own ranks with the required objectiveness and professionalism" (Enders 2003, p. 3).

However, sexual abuse and the public debate about it are, presumably, also the reason why it is practically impossible to talk about the issue of "men in ECEC centres" without being confronted by the generalised suspicion of men, which means all men are assumed to be potential child abusers. The area of early childhood education would appear to be a particular subject of such fears because of the physical aspect of the ECEC professional's work. It is therefore little wonder that this generalised suspicion can lead to a feeling of insecurity among (young) men when they are choosing a career, as well as among male students still in training, and among male staff in their practical work, as evidenced by the quotations cited above (see also Kimmerle 2012).

However, not only men, but also parents, female ECEC centre administrators and ECEC workers are in some way affected and to some extent unsettled. For example, some parents specifically do not want their children to be cared for by male ECEC workers, or management or team colleagues are unable to fully "let go" of their generalised suspicion and this vague feeling of insecurity leads them to stop male colleagues or interns from carrying out certain tasks that require close physical contact.

Some (few) ECEC centre administrators and ECEC workers also refuse to accept men into their teams in principle, because of this generalised suspicion. Thus, the prejudice against men working in ECEC centres that is expressed in this generalised suspicion cannot simply be ignored. Providers of ECEC centres and the facilities themselves who do, or want to, employ male staff must examine this generalised suspicion more closely, in our opinion, must also take a close look at the issue of sexual abuse itself and develop best practice approaches for dealing with it.

This is because, *on the one hand*, ECEC centres that present a concept for protection and prevention can also better protect their male staff from misplaced suspicions², as the following example from consultancy practice shows: In one ECEC centre, female ECEC workers realised that one group of four to five children had developed the habit of removing themselves from the group as a whole to play doctors and nurses, after a male intern had completed his internship at their facility. The ECEC workers found the children's interest in sexual matters went a little too far and they decided to speak to have a serious talk with the children about their sexual games and to explain to them that they should not play such games in the ECEC centre. During their talk with the children, two of the older ones said that they had always had fun playing such games, that the intern had played with them and that all of them found these games funny. The children also asked what was so bad about playing doctors and nurses games that they couldn't continue playing them. The ECEC

¹ From a group interview with trainees as part of a survey on male ECEC workers in ECEC centres.

² "Concept" as used here means a "written presentation of all content-related points that are relevant in an ECEC centre for the employees, parents, children and providers" (Dupuis 2001, p. 15). "A team uses this to formulate quality criteria for itself, defines what it understands as good quality education and develops ways to realise this" (ibid, p. 18)

workers and the ECEC centre management were unable to cope with the situation. They asked to what extent the intern might have sexually abused the children and whether they should inform the parents immediately.

They sought help from an advice unit specialising in sexual abuse against children. During their talks, it became apparent, among other things, that the ECEC centre did not have a concept for dealing with sexual issues and that the ECEC workers knew very little about child sexuality. The subject of children's sexuality had been more or less ignored, which led, among other things, to a situation where the female ECEC workers had not spoken either to the parents or to the intern about how children's sexual development could be supported in the ECEC centre or where the boundaries of their sex education work lay.

After the female ECEC workers had spoken once again to the children and also with the former intern, it turned out that the children had initiated the doctor game themselves and the intern had supported them in doing so in a somewhat naïve manner.³ A concept for protection and prevention which also includes definitions of sex education principles would possibly have meant in this ECEC centre that the team and the intern would have talked about how to deal with doctor games at an early stage thus preventing later suspicions from developing.

On the other hand, however, it is also clear that sexual abuse does happen outside of and inside childcare facilities and is mostly perpetrated by men. That is why such generalised suspicion and sexual abuse are to a certain extent two sides of the same coin, even if, on closer examination, it becomes apparent that both issues develop individually (and separately) in practice.

This article attempts to answer the following questions that arise in this respect:

How can these two issues in practical ECEC centre work, firstly be kept separate from one another analytically, and then brought together in the form of a concept? What strategies, measures and instruments are available to ECEC providers and ECEC centres both to protect their male ECEC workers against generalised suspicion and to protect the children from (sexual) abuse? Before presenting some initial practical considerations and strategies for action at the end of the article, the first two sections presents an independent analysis of each of these two issues and their different dimensions.

Generalised suspicion – an analysis of the current situation

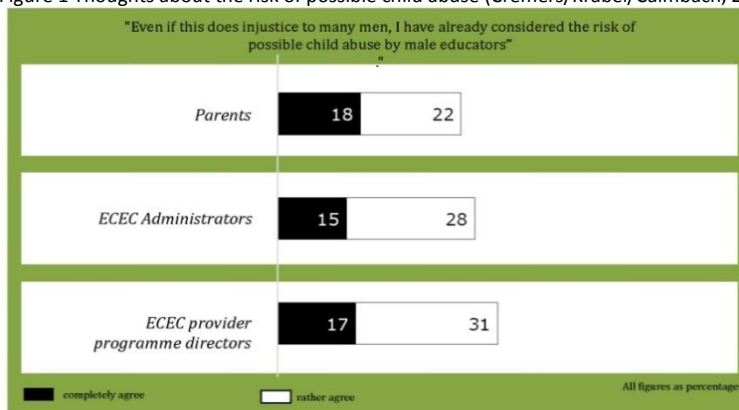
Generalised suspicion against men in ECEC centres

With the exception of a few reports in ECEC magazines, the subject of "Men in ECEC centres" was hardly present at all in the debate within the profession until recently. Only very few studies, in Germany and abroad, have dealt with males working in early childhood education. Although two comprehensive studies have now been published in Germany and Austria, as well as some smaller studies in other countries, it should still be noted that there is not a great deal of empirical information about men in ECEC centres. However, one outcome of the research work published to date both in Germany and abroad is that male trainees and ECEC workers are mentioned again and again in connection with the sexual abuse of children.

Thus, in our representative survey in Germany, 40% of parents, 43% of ECEC centre administrators and 48% of ECEC provider programme directors said they had thought – some more, some less intensively - about the danger of sexual abuse by male ECEC workers (see figure 1).

And the qualitative surveys carried out as part of a research project with male trainees and ECEC workers (male and female) show that male ECEC workers often worry about parents suspecting them of having latent paedophile tendencies.

Figure 1 Thoughts about the risk of possible child abuse (Cremers/Krabel/Calmbach, 2010, p.59)



³ This example was taken from an interview carried out by us in September 2011 with a female consultancy expert.

The Austrian research project “Elementary – Men Working in Child Education” (Aigner/Rohrmann 2012) arrived at similar results. Approx. 10% of the male trainees and ECEC workers in ECEC centres questioned said they had already been confronted explicitly with suspicion of having committed sexual abuse. The problem of such generalised suspicion becomes particularly clear, however, among the research group of 14 to 16 year old school students who were asked in a written questionnaire about their attitude to male ECEC workers, among other things. Of the boys questioned, 30% admitted that they saw men in ECEC centres as a “danger to children”. A fifth of the boys questioned even stated that they saw male ECEC workers as “perverts who abuse children” (ibid).

An episode that occurred in one of the ESF model projects “More men in ECEC Centres” is of relevance in this respect. As part of the project’s public relations activities, a top league football trainer was asked whether he would help the campaign to increase the percentage of male ECEC workers in ECEC centres. His initial reaction was to show some interest in the matter. The club’s press officer, however, advised him against demonstrating such support publicly, saying that the trainer might be accused of paving the way for paedophiles to enter ECEC centres.

In summary: the generalised suspicion of men working in ECEC centres is more or less established in the minds of many people and therefore certainly acts as one of the barriers that make it more difficult to increase the percentage of male ECEC workers in ECEC centres. What remains unclear, however, is how strong the barrier effect of this generalised suspicion actually is.

Possible effects of the generalised suspicion on practical work in ECEC centres

Remarkably, this generalised attitude of suspicion has little effect in Germany on the high level of public acceptance of male ECEC workers in ECEC centres. This is because, although 40-48% of the parents, ECEC administrators and ECEC provider programme directors questioned had already considered the possibility of sexual abuse by male ECEC workers, the majority of them in the survey spoke in favour of having (more) male ECEC workers in ECEC centres (Cremers/Krabel/Calmbach 2010, p 46ff.).⁴ This high proportion of people wanting to see more men in ECEC can also be found reflected in other German and international surveys (Aigner/Rohrmann 2012; Cameron et al. 1999; Rolfe 2005, Mahadevan 2011).⁵ One online survey carried out in Germany in 2011 by the pharmacy magazine “Baby und Familie” showed that nothing had changed in this level of acceptance, even following the public debate on sexual abuse in institutions (Baby und Familie 2011).

Despite the high level of acceptance, however, the scepticism towards men expressed in the German survey by those questioned should be borne in mind and should never be underestimated. This is because, *firstly*, while the group who expressed a great deal of scepticism towards men was relatively small (in Germany, for example, only 4% of parents, 2% of ECEC administrators and 3% of ECEC provider programme directors saw a risk in employing men as ECEC workers⁶), in some regions or ECEC centres, sceptics still may represent a larger percentage and may prevent men from being recruited as ECEC worker. What is more, it might be more than enough for one single female ECEC worker, one mother or one father to express suspicion of men in general or a certain man in particular to suddenly turn the subject of “sexual abuse” into a “hot potato” in an ECEC centre and thus unsettle the entire team.

Secondly, experience has shown that the positive general attitude in favour of male ECEC workers can also turn, resulting in all men be “tarred with the same brush” as soon as a male ECEC worker or intern is found guilty of child abuse and the media report extensively about it.

And *thirdly*, as the Austrian report on the subject more than any other shows that the generalised suspicion can make it more difficult for young males to decide to train as ECEC worker when they are exposed to the homophobic cliché among their peer group that male ECEC workers are gay and this is also linked with the homophobic prejudice that gay men are child abusers.

Fourthly, the generalised suspicion always has a real effect on the work of male ECEC workers. As a result, many male trainees and qualified ECEC workers develop individual strategies in ECEC centres for dealing with generalised suspicion and are very careful in their work, for example, not changing a nappy with the door closed, not sitting children on their laps, not comforting them for too long and not taking them to the toilet.

Significantly, in one workshop a male ECEC worker said that after many years of being physically reserved in his work with children, he asked himself whether such generalised suspicion actually did exist or only existed in his head. This illustrates the fact that educational staff – both men and women – certainly assume that male ECEC workers are generally suspected of being potential abusers although parents or colleagues have never expressed such suspicions and also do harbour them. Experience shows that ECEC centre administrators also

⁴ As these surveys took place before the aforementioned public debates about sexual abuse in ECEC centres, they cannot tell us whether such debates would have influenced the way in which parents, ECEC administrators and ECEC provider programme directors answered the questions put to them.

⁵ It must be said, however, that the surveys are very difficult to compare as they are very different in design.

⁶ Percentage of those questioned who completely agreed that “employing men as ECEC workers for children under three years of age constitutes a risk” (Cremers/Krabel/Calmbach 2010, p.59).

consider the question of what reservations parents might have towards male ECEC workers before employing a man.

ECEC centre administrators often do not know whether or how to broach the subject of possible suspicions. It is also sometimes the case that ECEC centre administrators and female ECEC workers do not allow male trainees and ECEC workers to carry out certain care tasks that require physical contact with children, without actually referring directly to (potential) abuse. One male ECEC worker reported, for example, that female colleagues told him during an internship that he shouldn't take the children onto his lap during the time when parents were arriving to pick up their children, without giving him any further explanation as to why.

Such instructions often confuse, upset or annoy male ECEC workers. Accordingly, many male ECEC workers would like to see more open discussion of the existing, or non-existing, generalised suspicion. They would also like support in dealing with underlying or openly expressed suspicions. However, the surveys and workshops dealing with this subject also show that some men reject open discussion of this issue because they have not (yet) experienced such generalised suspicion in their practical experience at work.

What is more, reports by people working in the field have shown that ECEC centre administrators and ECEC workers have also been confronted by parents who very clearly state their mistrust of men, for example, by asking that male ECEC workers do not change nappies or even do not work in ECEC centres at all. Such cases require clear instructions in ECEC centres concerning how administrators and ECEC workers, both male and female, can react professionally in cases where concrete suspicions are expressed.

While in Germany individual and non-transparent strategies for dealing with this generalised suspicion have tended to dominate, in countries like the USA or New Zealand, such suspicions have led to instructions being issued telling male ECEC workers and to some extent also female ECEC workers to have as little physical contact as possible with the children. This is described in professional circles as the "no-touch policy" (see in detail Aigner/Rohrman 2012, p. 92f.). In New Zealand, two cases of child abuse at the beginning of the 1990s even led to a considerable reduction in the percentage of men working in ECEC centres there. Farquhar maintains that this was because, after the cases of abuse became known, many men avoided working in ECEC centres out of fear that they would be accused of being paedophiles (Farquhar 2012, p.405-414).

Sexual abuse in ECEC centres – an analysis of the current situation

In the debate surrounding generalised suspicion of men, the question often arises of how common sexual abuse is in ECEC centres. This is not an easy question to answer. There is scarcely any empirical data available that might be able to provide evidence of the incidence and forms of sexual abuse in ECEC institutions in Germany.

It is only possible to gain an approximate idea of the extent of sexual abuse in the elementary education sector by looking at the results of the (few) studies that have examined the general occurrence of sexual abuse in Germany (e.g. Bange 2004; Wetzels 1997; Bienek et al. 2011), and in international studies (e.g. Andrews et al. 2001), as well as the few empirical studies on sexual abuse in German institutions that have been compiled to date (Helming et al. 2011). It also makes sense to include publications by advice centres and reports by those affected. In the most current and representative survey by the Criminological Research Institute of Lower Saxony (KFN), 7% of women and 1.4% of men questioned stated that they had been victims of physical sexual abuse (Bienek et al. 2011, p. 19).⁷

As the number of those questioned who stated they had been victims of physical sexual abuse was a little higher (women: 8.6%, men: 2.8%) in one methodically comparable study by the KFN in 1992 (Wetzels 1997), Bienek et al. (2011, p. 41) conclude that sexual abuse in Germany is on the decline. They explain this decline, among other things, by the fact that potential perpetrators (male and female) must expect to be discovered more easily nowadays because the willingness of victims to report such crimes has risen considerably and preventive measures against sexual abuse have been more effective in the last years.⁸

In addition to recording how often sexual abuse against children occurs, some German and international surveys have also provided detailed information about the age of children who are victims of sexual abuse. According to these surveys, the percentage of those who suffered sexual abuse at pre-school age was between 8% and 14% (see Engfer 2004, p. 14). If this data shows a true picture, then children are particularly at risk when they finish ECEC education and start school.

Abusers (male and female)

There is extensive agreement among professionals that children are mainly sexually abused by men. Engfer (2000, p. 34) puts the percentage of perpetrators who are male at 85-95%. In the KFN survey (Bienek et al.

⁷ Exhibitionist acts and abuse without direct physical contact were not included here.

⁸ Nevertheless, the survey has been criticised by experts from the consultancy sector, because the KFN did not take into consideration newer forms of sexual abuse, such as young children being confronted with pornography on the internet. In addition, acts of sexual violence were only included when an age difference of at least five years existed between victim and perpetrator.

2011, p. 30), the authors put the percentage of female abusers at 4.4% (“abuse with physical contact”) or 9.3% (in the category “other sexual acts”).

The authors of the academic research carried out for the coordinating office of the independent commissioner for child sex abuse (in the following simply referred to as “coordinating office”), which evaluated the telephone calls and letters received by the coordinating office, write that sexual abuse is committed in 87.6% of all cases by men and in 6.2% of cases by women and 6.2% by several male/female perpetrators (Fegert et al. 2011, p. 3). What is more, researchers into this matter came to the conclusion that the great majority of male and/or female perpetrators came from the children’s immediate social or family circle.

Where abuse takes place

According to the KFN survey, most acts of sexual abuse take place in the home of the victim or the perpetrator and outdoors. By comparison, religious organisations, schools and children’s homes are only rarely named as the place where such crimes are perpetrated (see Bienek 2011, p. 35). Results of the survey carried out by the German youth welfare organisation ‘*Deutsches Jugendinstitut*’, entitled “Sexual Abuse of Girls and Boys in Institutions” (Helming et al. 2011), and the accompanying research by the coordinating office nevertheless makes clear that cases of sexual abuse in religious and educational facilities, in particular, children’s homes, schools and boarding schools, are not merely isolated cases and the authors are of the opinion that there is a great need for action to prevent sexual abuse from taking place in such environments (Bundschuh 2011, p. 9).

What is noticeable is that ECEC centres are mentioned only rarely as the location of such abuse. The initial results of the KFN survey show that of the cases of sexual abuse considered, “only” 0.6% took place in ECEC centres (see Bienek et al. 2011, p. 35). The accompanying academic research by the coordinating office also showed that there were “only few” reports of abuse in ECEC centres (see Fegert et al. 2011, p. 3).

The fact that these findings show that sexual abuse in ECEC centres is comparatively low must not, however, lead us to be complacent about this issue.

Firstly, there has been scarcely any qualified research into the ECEC centre as an institution to date.⁹

Secondly, professional institutions which deal with sexual abuse point out that consultancy meetings on abuse or suspected abuse actually do take place in ECEC centres. Accordingly, sexual abuse in ECEC centres is a topic that must be taken seriously, especially considering the fact that, when abuse happens in such facilities, several children are often the victims.

Thirdly, the possibility cannot be ruled out that forms of sexual abuse take place in ECEC centres that have not yet been recorded by the previous surveys, such as young children being confronted with pornography on the internet. There are cases of abuse in ECEC centres that come under these new forms of abuse, as the example of one employee at an ECEC centre run by the Protestant Church shows: he was accused of possessing child pornography and of taking nude photos of children at his place of work (Bundschuh 2011, p. 22).

Fourthly, it is logical that while ECEC centres might not be the actual scene of sexual abuse, they do act as places of contact for abusers. ECEC workers, interns or voluntary workers could use ECEC centres to get to know children and their parents and thus also come into contact with children outside of a centre itself, for example, by offering private babysitting services for parents.

Fifthly, the type of institution is not decisive in whether sexual abuse is more or less likely to take place there. But institutional structures can make sexual abuse easier or more difficult for perpetrators.

International research and reports from everyday work concerning this issue make clear that sexual abuse is not something that happens “by chance”, but is carried out by perpetrators who act in a targeted and strategic way. They deliberately seek out institutions where they presume that their abusive acts will not be discovered. As such, they look closely at the management structures and the working style in such institutions and, when planning their crime, check precisely what risks they face of being discovered and confronted within an institution. That is why transparent management structures and clear instructions at work provide a relatively high degree of safety, although there is no such thing as a failsafe recipe for completely preventing sexual abuse from taking place.

What strategies, measures and instruments are available to ECEC providers and centres when developing both a concept for dealing with generalised suspicion as well as a practically feasible protection concept for implementation in the facilities they work in? We provide some initial ideas in the following.

Practical strategies, measures and instruments for implementing a protection concept

A protection concept in ECEC centres must include both a method for dealing with generalised suspicion of male ECEC workers, and a method for protecting children from sexual abuse in such centres. In the following

⁹ ECEC centres were also not included in the survey by the German youth welfare organisation “*Deutsches Jugendinstitut*” (Helming et al. 2011).

we first outline some building blocks for dealing with generalised suspicion and, after that, we introduce conceptual building blocks for protecting children from abuse.

Building blocks for a concept to deal with generalised suspicion of male ECEC workers

In our opinion, when implementing a concept for dealing with generalised suspicion of men, a total of five fields of activity must be included. These are described in more detail below:

1. A stock-taking of the generalised suspicion specific to the each ECEC centre;
2. Clarity in dealing with physical contact and physical closeness;
3. Breaking down gender stereotypes;
4. Procedures following the expression of a lack of trust and (general) suspicion;
5. PR work and working with parents;

Taking stock of the generalised suspicion specific to the each ECEC centre

Reports from everyday work show that generalised suspicion has different effects in each ECEC centre depending on the individual approaches to the issue by those involved. That is why it is important to carry out centre-specific and thus team-specific analyses of this generalised suspicion. The following questions can serve as a basis for individual and team discussions between ECEC centre administrators and male/female ECEC workers to carry out a centre-specific analysis:

- Do male and female ECEC workers approach the issue of physical contact with children differently? If so, why?
- Are there certain activities requiring physical contact that are only be carried out by female ECEC workers? If so, why?
- Have the ECEC workers (male and female) ever had the feeling that parents suspect them of molesting, overstepping boundaries with or acting violently towards a child? If so, how did they react to this?
- Have male ECEC workers ever experienced, either during their training or in their everyday work to date, that parents or female colleagues wanted to stop them or prohibited them from carrying out certain activities that required physical contact? If so, how did they react to this?

An initial stock-taking concerning generalised suspicion and discussions about experiences and methods of dealing with (presumed) suspicions generally lead to a situation where ECEC workers (male and female) cite examples of how they have dealt individually with generalised suspicion and/or the strategies they have found to be successful in this respect. One male ECEC workers, for example, said he thought it was helpful to talk openly about fears of possible suspicions as early as the job interview stage. Such best practice examples should be developed as part of a team analysis.

In order to take up discussion of the issue with parents, a parent's evening could be used to discuss 'gender-aware educational methods', for example, also including discussion of the generalised suspicion.

Clarity in dealing with physical contact and physical closeness

Taking a closer look at generalised suspicion shows that, in particular (but not only) male ECEC workers are unsure of how much physical contact and physical closeness is appropriate when working with children, particularly with very young children. That is why it is important to emphasise from the outset that physical contact is fundamental, essential and vital for everyday interaction between children and adults in ECEC centres.

This first of all affects physical care tasks such as changing nappies, washing children, changing their clothes and going to the toilet. However, it also includes expressing emotions or affection and reacting to the children's emotional needs, for example, by cuddling, calming, comforting the children or nursing them to sleep.

Children do not recognise a separation of bodily awareness, physical contact, emotions and relationships. That is why it is perfectly natural for children to seek and need physical contact from those responsible for their education and care. As young children only gradually develop the ability to express their feelings and needs verbally and to understand others, they rely on adults to react to their bodily signals, but also need ECEC workers who are capable themselves of direct bodily communication. This applies to almost all adults with whom they have a close personal relationship.

In everyday encounters with children, however, it is not always easy to know what intensity of physical contact is desired for all of those involved. There must be an awareness and consideration of the possibility of crossing boundaries – no matter the gender of those involved.

ECEC centre teams might reflect on the subjects of physicality and physical boundaries by developing guidelines for dealing with physicality and establishing boundaries for physical contact and physical closeness. This can also be done with parents at a parents' evening. The following questions provide an introduction to reflecting on the issue:

- What physical contact is appropriate between children and adults and what is not? Where are the grey areas?
- How can pleasant and unpleasant closeness be differentiated? How do children show that (physical) closeness is unpleasant for them?
- In what situations do children overstep other children's (physical) boundaries?
- In what situations have I or my colleague (male or female) overstepped (physical) boundaries with children and/or colleagues? How did the children and/or ECEC workers react?
- How do I deal personally with boundaries and the overstepping of these?

Breaking down gender stereotypes

Gender stereotypes are a substantial factor in generalised suspicion towards men. In their view of the world, qualified ECEC workers and parents with traditional notions of gender still have difficulty accepting men as caring ECEC workers and carers of (young) children. This lack of understanding can feed generalised suspicion, as if to say; why else would men be interested in working in the ECEC sector? Gender-awareness education is therefore fundamental for the work in ECEC centres in general and for preventing a generalised suspicion of men in particular.

Procedures when mistrust and (generalised) suspicions have been expressed

As already explained earlier in this paper, media reports about cases of sexual abuse as well as the launch of the advisory council on sexual abuse have led to greater awareness and concrete measures in affected institutions. ECEC providers and centres therefore now have at their disposal various guidelines and recommendations for action to help them develop tailored procedures for responding to (generalised) suspicions (see Hölling et al. 2010; Conference of German Bishops 2010).

Public relations and work with parents

In the area of public relations, ECEC providers and centres should clarify which of the measures they have implemented as part of the first four fields of action they wish to communicate internally and/or externally (for example to parents). Focus should be placed on the following questions:

- Should the provider or ECEC centre be perceived externally as an institution that implements modules to deal with generalised suspicion?
- Should guidelines for dealing with physicality and setting boundaries in the ECEC centre be made clearly visible, for example, on posters?
- To what extent does the ECEC provider or centre want the centre to be perceived as an institution that focuses on gender equality or gender-awareness education in its work?

Building blocks in a concept for protection against sexual abuse

ECEC providers and centres, as well as other child and youth welfare facilities, generally have more experience of implementing a protection concept than they have of implementing a concept for dealing with generalised suspicions.

We believe the following fields of action are important when implementing a protection concept:

1. Measures for organisational and personnel development;
2. Drafting a concept for sex education;
3. Developing forms of participation and involvement for children, ECEC workers and parents;
4. Developing procedures for dealing with suspicion and/or concrete cases of sexual abuse;
5. Public relations and working with parents;

Measures for organisational and personnel development:

In the past years, professionals dealing with sexual abuse, in particular, the "Zartbitter" advisory service, have developed structured concepts for how institutions can protect children from sexual abuse (Enders 2010, Zartbitter 2010). Below, we outline the main recommendations for action which institutions can use to establish preventive structures by means of organisational and personnel development measures:

- Secure transfer of knowledge and information: ECEC providers and centres should make sure that their ECEC workers receive relevant information about sexual abuse at regular intervals. This includes, for example, information about the frequency of sexual abuse, strategies used by perpetrators and preventive measures. Within their structures, ECEC providers and centres can also appoint a protection officer who is responsible for ensuring that this is put into effect.

- Develop recruitment standards: when recruiting staff, ECEC providers and centres should not only require an extended police certificate of good conduct from applicants, but should also make clear that the facility takes the matter of protection from sexual abuse and overstepping boundaries very seriously. This signals to potential perpetrators (both male and female) that their conduct will be under constant scrutiny. Furthermore, ECEC providers can also include additional clauses in contracts of employment specifying, for example, that ECEC workers are not allowed to carry out private babysitting services for parents who have children in the centre (for more examples of potential auxiliary agreements or work instructions, see Kroll et al. 2003, p. 196ff.; Enders 2010, p.6).
- Set up a complaint management system: parents and children should be given the opportunity to inform an (external) person of trust about possible sexual abuse or cases where they feel certain boundaries have been overstepped. If possible, this person should not work directly in the centre itself (Hölling et al. 2010, p. 13f.).
- Establish a clear, transparent working culture and transparent, non-authoritarian hierarchical structures (see Enders 2010): clear structures can be recognised, among other things, by the fact that “there is absolute clarity about competences/areas of responsibility at all levels of the hierarchy and that the respective duties of the staff and the respective limits on their competences are communicated transparently, both internally and externally, to children, teenagers and young adults” (ibid. p. 24f.).

Developing a concept for sex education:

Sex education in practice, when it works well, gives children a positive self-image and a sense of self-esteem (Wanzeck-Sielert 2008). Promoting physical skills and fundamental body awareness, as well as developing a positive body image, all play an important role here (ibid.). ECEC workers can help children develop positive ways for dealing with physicality and sexuality, for example, by:

- creating learning situations in which the children can gain experience of sensuous and physical aspects;
- talking to the children about sexual issues such as masturbation or sex play instead of suppressing such matters as if they were shameful. The “Zartbitter” advisory centre, for example, advises that sex play (doctors-and-nurses) among children not be banned, recommending instead that certain rules of play be developed (Zartbitter 2009).

Ultimately, ECEC centres need a firmly established sexual education concept as well as the corresponding practical competences among ECEC workers that are based on reflections about their own sexual development and own sexual morals, as well as professional knowledge about the sexual and social development of children (Wanzeck-Sielert 2008).

Developing forms of participation and involvement for children, ECEC workers and parents:

In the professional discourse about prevention concepts in educational facilities, great emphasis is always placed on the fact that children and young people have a participation right. This is vital if children are to represent their own (safety) interests as equal and self-determined actors and if they are to learn that they can exercise their right to self-determination – including the right of self-determination over their own bodies. Enders rightly states that the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and the German Child and Youth Services Act give children the (fundamental) right to have a say in, to influence and to determine their own lives (Enders 2010, p. 2). As such, ECEC centres are legally bound to,

- inform children of their rights (e.g. in the form of images that convey the individual children’s rights visually);
- provide children with concrete forms of participation and let them have their say (the documentary “*Die Kinderstube der Demokratie. Partizipation in Kindertagesstätten*” provides a great many ideas in this respect, see MSGFJS 2006);
- entrust children with areas of responsibility and work out rules together with the children;
- give children space to express criticism and complaints.

In addition to this, ECEC providers and centres are called upon to regard parents as partners in the children’s education and they should be involved in designing the educational work. Hansen (2008), who has developed concepts for and implemented several model projects for participation in ECEC centres has noted that the participation of children also requires the participation of parents. This is because parents must also be able to support the rules negotiated in ECEC centres as well as the children’s right to self-determination.

It is clear that ECEC workers will want to and be able to allow children to participate only when they themselves experience first-hand the personality-forming aspect of democratic participation in their work (for example, by playing an active role in defining their conditions at work), and if they have the necessary methodological and teaching knowledge about how children (and parents) can become involved in designing the everyday work at the ECEC centre.

Developing procedures for dealing with suspicion of and/or concrete cases of sexual abuse

As already described in “Procedures when mistrust and (generalised) suspicions have been expressed” above, ECEC providers and centres now have a variety of guidelines and recommendations for action at their disposal explaining how facilities should react in cases where there are signs that sexual abuse may have taken place. Concrete steps for action have been put forward, for example, by the German Conference of Bishops (2010) and the welfare association “Paritätischer Wohlfahrtsverband” (Hölling et al. 2010).

Public relations and working with parents

In the area of public relations, ECEC providers and centres should clarify which of the implemented measures from the fields of action numbered one to four above they wish to communicate both internally and externally (for example, to parents). This clarification should focus on such questions as these:

- Does the ECEC provider or centre itself aim to be perceived from the outside as an institution that implements the modules of a protection concept?
- How can ECEC providers or centres communicate their ideas on and educational approaches to the subject of child protection to parents and an interested public?
- Should children’s rights in the ECEC centre be made clearly visible, for example, on posters?
- Should competences, responsibilities and hierarchies be made transparent and visible in the ECEC centre and/or externally?
- How can institutions deal professionally in their public relations work with cases of abuse or suspicions that have come to light?

Conclusion and summary

The evidence presented shows that ECEC providers and ECEC teams are well advised to take a closer look at the subjects of generalised suspicion and sexual abuse so that they can develop professional methods for coping with these. Experience and research into generalised suspicion have shown on the one hand that male ECEC workers in early childhood centres are repeatedly confronted – whether explicitly said or not – with the notion that men are a risk factor in terms of the sexual abuse of children. This has a restrictive and long-lived effect not only on the work of male ECEC workers, but also on the work of ECEC centre administrators and female ECEC workers. ECEC providers and centres which employ male interns and ECEC workers (or want to do so) should support their personnel in dealing with generalised suspicion professionally and as a team.

On the other hand, information about the occurrence of sexual abuse shows that sexual abuse of children happens in ECEC centres, even if less so than in other educational facilities, and this is also not restricted to isolated events. Furthermore, ECEC workers, both male and female, must assume that a certain percentage of children in ECEC centres are or are potentially victims of sexual abuse outside the centres themselves. There is also a need for action in this respect in order to prevent and discover cases of sexual abuse in ECEC centres. ECEC providers and centres must train their ECEC workers to be aware of signs of sexual abuse of children by adults both inside and outside the centre so that they are in a position to take the necessary measures when there is actual suspicion.

ECEC centres which have a protection concept also protect their male employees from generalised suspicion at the same time, because the individual building blocks of a protection concept as introduced above, can be used by the team to establish professional educational practices, guidelines and procedures in their facility to work against such generalised suspicions. What is more, a protection concept provides ECEC centre administrators and ECEC workers, both male and female, with good arguments if parents should express general unfounded suspicions about a male colleague. In such cases, the ECEC centre management and the team can point out their protection concept and make clear that the ECEC provider and the centre itself have created an environment that prevents the sexual abuse of children in their facility to the greatest extent possible.

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