

**Sex Education and Protection from Sexualized Violence: Approaches from Sexuality Education and Violence Prevention**  
*An Interview with Anja Henningsen and Ursula Schele*

**Trau dich! A National Initiative for the Prevention of Sexual Child Abuse**  
*Stefanie Amann*

**An Interpretation and Analysis of the Prevention of Sexualized Violence**  
*Brigitte Braun*

**Experiences of Sexualized Violence: Select Results of the 2015 Study on Youth Sexuality**  
*Angelika Heßling, Heidrun Bode*

**The Disclosure of Sexualized Violence in Childhood and Adolescence: Personal and Societal Reactions**  
*Sibylle Rothkegel*

**Protecting Persons with Disabilities from Sexual Abuse**  
*Katharina Urbann, Sara Scharmanski, Pia Bienstein*

**Children and Adolescents Have a Right to Protection and Self-Determination**  
*Christian Böhm, Beate Proll*

**Breaking Down Insecurities – Building up Competences: Protection Concepts Support Professionals in Dealing with Sexual Violence Against Children**  
*Johannes-Wilhelm Rörig*

# Sexualized Violence

Issue 2/2015 of FORUM is dedicated to the theme of preventing sexualized violence in childhood and adolescence. We chose to use the adjective “sexualized” instead of “sexual” in the title because we are of the opinion that these delicts have less to do with fulfilling sexual needs than with the exertion of power. How to best understand and use such termini is discussed by Anja Henningsen and Ursula Schele, who also address the professional approaches used in sex education and the prevention of violence. They look at some of the common elements, clear up some prejudices and stereotypes, and point jointly to the importance of encouraging open discussion and strengthening the personalities of children and adolescents in their prevention programs.

Education, information, training, and networking – those are the goals of the national initiative “Trau dich” [Dare to Do] of the German Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA). The goal of this initiative is to prevent sexual abuse. The initiative is also supported by local experts and cooperation partners at the municipal and state level. The results of an evaluation of the “Trau dich” program were also recently presented.

There then follow some very basic thoughts concerning prevention of sexualized violence as well as a partial analysis of an ongoing study of adolescent sexuality by the BZgA.

As part of a larger study, the psychologist and psychotherapist Sibylle Rothkegel addresses the questions of when and how persons affected by sexualized violence are willing to report on their experiences. She asks which type of reaction of others and which communicative circumstances are conducive and helpful in this regard and what can we learn from this.

How to protect persons with disabilities from sexual abuse is an important matter, as is the question of how to prevent sexualized violence in schools. Christian Böhm and Beate Proll sketch the necessary competences and define concrete steps that can be taken to develop such protection concepts.

In the last contribution, the Independent Commissioner for Matters Concerning the Sexual Abuse of Children, Johannes-Wilhelm Rörig, voices his call for a social consensus and a greater willingness to act in order to enable better prevention of sexualized violence toward children as one of the major tasks in the near future.

The Editor

---

# Sex Education and Protection from Sexualized Violence: Approaches from Sexuality Education and Violence Prevention

## An Interview with Anja Henningsen, Assistant Professor for Sexuality Education, Kiel, and Ursula Schele, Institute for the Prevention of Violence (“PETZE”), Kiel

**Ms. Henningsen, Ms. Schele, what term do you use and prefer – sexual or sexualized violence?**

*Henningsen:* I generally choose the best term depending on the context. Concepts such as “sexual assault or transgression,” “sexualized violence,” “sexual violence,” and “sexual abuse” clearly show that sexual interests and the desire to exert power can be expressed in various ways and to varying degrees. In my opinion the widely used general designation “sexualized violence” has the broadest scope.

*Schele:* In my prevention and training work I still quite often use – or perhaps I should say, I have returned to – the term “sexual abuse.” To me this designation is clear, legally circumscribed, and does not leave much room for interpretation. I think it is generally important to come to an understanding with participants on what we are talking about. Since in the past normally the perpetrators were the ones who made the definition, it is only proper and imperative that the law clearly state what sexual abuse means in connection with children and wards. The norms must be clear and the limits definitive. When we refer to “sexual abuse” or “sexualized violence” we are not, from my vantage point, talking about some sort of sexuality, but rather the exertion of power, the will to subject someone else, the intentional and conscious shaming or humiliation of another person by the perpetrators. Sexuality is here only a “means to an end”; it is instrumentalized to impose one’s own goals. Thus, the term “sexualized violence” is certainly helpful, but in the end not precise enough.

*Henningsen:* Sexual abuse on the part of adults is generally an expression of their craving for power. Some assaults occur

by negligence, some by the desire for a positive response: the sports coach who wants to be a buddy to the players and gives them a slap on their bottoms; the teacher who enjoys cuddling with the kids; the youth leader who flirts with an adolescent. In the gray area between well-intentioned (physical) closeness, erotic rapprochement, and forced intimacy there are many fuzzy borders.

*Schele:* I’m afraid I must vehemently protest at this juncture! There are no gray areas in sexual violence and especially sexual abuse. There we are dealing with the conscious and planned assertion of one person’s own need for power, dominance, and degradation to the detriment of generally weaker individuals. Sexual abuse has nothing to do with sexuality, but is in fact solely an instrument for exercising power. Preventing sexual abuse thus does not belong to the realm of sex education, but is a domain of its own that, if at all, belongs to the prevention of violence in general.

*Henningsen:* I also see less sexual motivation in sexual abuse, with perhaps the exception of pedophilia. What I am concerned with is when the sexual and emotional needs of adults come to the forefront, which contradicts professional practices; I am concerned with the lack of reflection about one’s own sexuality as a trigger for sexual assaults. Sexual transgressions, on the other hand, can only be effectively prevented once we have become aware of their causes and effects. Thus, for educational professionals it is important that we direct our attention toward the complex backgrounds and motivations that might explain why people attack others sexually and how best our own professional actions can be implemented. Sex education can make a major contribution to preventing sexualized violence by sensitizing everyone who

works in the field of education. Sex education also has the task of promoting sexual self-determination among children and adolescents – and it can contribute to increasing the protection provided to them.

**Ms. Henningsen, sex education that emphasizes the prevention of violence is something you are presently dedicated to as an Assistant Professor in Kiel. How would you describe your approach with respect to sexualized violence? Who is the target audience for your research?**

*Henningsen:* Our project is concerned with providing the theoretical background and an empirical analysis to show that sex education can make an important contribution to preventing sexualized violence. If we want to promote the self-determination of children and adolescents and to increase their ability to protect themselves, then we need to educate our professionals in the field to have a heightened sensibility of where limits lie and to instill in them the necessary knowledge about the relevant sexual-development processes. We look at how children and adolescents learn about sexuality and with how we can best structure support in matters of sex education. In addition, we want to contribute to minimizing all forms of sexualized violence in educational settings. We know, for example, that a lack of communication both with respect to sexuality in general and to sexualized violence specifically has led to, and still does lead to, assaults and abuse not being detected or disclosed. Thus, there is a need for both individual and collective candor about sexuality and about violence. This means working to eliminate taboos. We are presently preparing an empirical study on the structural background of dealing with sexuality and violence in schools, juvenile residential facilities, and childcare. The results of this study should lead to well-founded statements on the sexual culture in institutions and help us to identify violence-relevant aspects. They should also help us to formulate ways to initiate changes and reform processes.

In cooperation with specialized counseling services in Schleswig-Holstein and Hamburg, we are preparing a network to enable researchers to learn from practice and to transfer our research results to practice. We recently held a state-wide forum for Schleswig-Holstein/Hamburg entitled “Sexuality and Violence in Schools: Sex Education and the Prevention of Sexual Transgressions.” Further events and projects of this nature are planned.

**Ms. Schele, you have been the Head of PETZE in Kiel for some 22 years now – an institution that is explicitly dedicated to the prevention of violence toward girls and boys. Could you tell us something about your approach and your target audiences?**

*Schele:* PETZE arose from the work that began over 25 years ago at the Frauennotruf Kiel e.V. (Women’s Emergency Hotline), itself a product of the women’s liberation movement. When we began to professionalize the areas of counseling, therapy, witness accompaniment, and public relations, our primary goal was not to simply react to events. We wanted to become politically active and to make a contribution to prevention in order to improve the position of the victims of sexual violence (court retraumatization!) and to enable a sensitive and more professional approach by the public with the themes of sexual abuse and rape. Even though some things have indeed improved since that time,

today in many ways it still feels like we’re at the beginning. We also saw this in the demands made by the roundtable discussions held in Berlin. The prevention work done by PETZE developed from the experiences we had with the hotline, since we decided we wanted (and of course still want) to make a long-term contribution to the early detection, exposure, and termination of sexual abuse. At PETZE, we try to reach out to everyone who works with children, adolescents, and wards, whether as professionals or as volunteers, whether in schools, youth welfare, facilities for the disabled, childcare, or clubs. That is where girls and boys can directly be reached. Generally speaking, we assume that children are not in the position to defend themselves against sexual abuse all on their own; thus, we work closely with intermediaries, who in turn carry out our prevention projects directly in the respective institutions. Another important principle is that prevention must be a fun thing, that it broaden the scope for action, and that it strengthen the self-esteem of the girls and boys. They should above all understand that getting help is not “snitching,” and that their well-being is the most important thing – and that they have rights.

**Ms. Henningsen, how can sex education, how can sexuality education, contribute to the prevention of violence?**

*Henningsen:* Sexuality has always been an important component in the development of human identity – and it is today becoming even more important. Humans interact in very different ways with their bodies, their biological sex, their sexual orientation, and their relationships. There are now many ways available to express these feelings as well as many different forms of being discriminated against, manipulated, or exploited. The availability of sex education can contribute to strengthening a person’s personality, and it can help children and adolescents to defend themselves against discriminatory or violent incidents. The answers to the questions “Who am I?” and “What do I want?” provide the key to enjoying a sexually self-determined life.

More concretely, children and adolescents need to learn to deal with their own ideas, wishes, and limits. Learning about sexuality also means learning about social mores, since it furthers the ability to empathize and to respect individuality. Knowing about and applying one’s sexual rights can increase one’s motivation considerably to deflect transgressions of all sorts. The emphasis lies on speaking up for oneself – both on the part of the adolescents and of those supporting them. The ways in which we express sexual experiences are deeply entwined with our personalities, which makes it imperative that the development of our sexual identity become an individual constructive resource. Even the WHO has recognized this and thus defines sexual health as the “integration of the somatic, emotional, intellectual, and social aspects of sexual being, in ways that are positively enriching, and that enhance personality, communication, and love.”

In education, the themes of sexuality, physicality, and emotionality are still marginalized because of a lack of awareness as well as because of one-sided efforts at prevention. This happens through efforts to avoid talking about all things sexual, through ignoring the dangers involved, or by overemphasizing the latter. In my opinion, sex education can make a major contribution here and help to create a more easy-going approach to sexually charged matters and to reducing the extent of sexualized violence.

**Ms. Schele, you were originally involved in party-based feminist work with persons who had been victimized by sexualized, domestic, and structural violence. How have your experiences affected your position and your training work?**

Schele: In my training and prevention work the basic goal is to impart sound knowledge and a clear educational approach. I hope to encourage the participants in the training courses and to enable them to consciously – and with a clear bias – take up the cause for those who have been victimized. The feminist background is present inasmuch as sexual violence and sexual abuse always express the structural violence present in our society. Even when “patriarchal criticism” has receded into the background and boys today are seen as victims much as women are seen as perpetrators, the gender aspect in the context of sexualized violence still plays an important role in our understanding of the entire situation. My long experience in working with victims has clearly enabled me to impart to others how important it is not to go over the heads of those directly affected, but to see them as subjects in the further development of an intervention – to consciously and deliberately put them at the center of attention.

**Ms. Henningsen, Ms. Schele, how do you see your different approaches with respect to each other?**

Henningsen: I am of the opinion that the unifying element of sex-educational and violence-prevention approaches lies in the strengthening of the personalities of children and adolescents. Therein lie the interactions between the promotion of sexual self-determination and the promotion of resilience toward sexualized violence. For this reason, I see it as my job to emphasize that children and adolescents alike have the right to develop their own personality and to take possession of their sexuality – as well as having the right to protection from violence. I think both are equally important and must be ensured in professional educational work. Promoting all its various positive aspects of sexuality can provide identity and a fulfilled life – and should not be left out of or impeded in educational work. At the same time, however, responsible educational behavior also means being vigilant and open to discussion.

Schele: I quite agree with that. We always suggest to the schools that they first treat the fun and interesting sides of sexuality during sex education before turning to themes such as AIDS, contraception, pornography, and sexual violence. Many fear the early or excessive sexualization of girls and boys and leave them alone with their many questions and their need for orientation.

Henningsen: The most problematic prejudice, and the one most often expressed, is that sex education promotes a hedonistic pleasure principle, that it in fact increases sexualization. But offering conversations about sexual matters does not primarily mean talking about sexual practices. Rather, they are concerned more with the personal decisions adolescents face. “Sex education in all its diversity” means providing broad offerings that advocate recognition and tolerance toward sexual lifestyles. How do I imagine my own life? What types of partnerships do I envisage? How do I feel inside my own body?

Schele: I think sex education must also keep in mind that three to four children in every school class got their first sexual experiences through sexual abuse, transgressions, or massive violence. This should always be in the back of our minds when choosing texts. All games and exercises must foresee complete freedom of choice to participate. The school situation is already compulsive enough and is for many unsuitable for some things that may work fine in smaller, non-judgmental, voluntary groups with the right supervision.

Henningsen: I am committed to a sort of sex education that provides as much freedom of choice and self-determination as possible. All practices based on shaming should be avoided. Talking about very intensely personal matters, such as sexuality, demands that we educationists create a space in which children and adolescents feel safe and can pose any questions they may have. We must ensure them that they can withdraw if they want and can determine themselves how much information they receive. Professional sex education thus lies at the border between the individual concerns and limits of adolescents, while also respecting the characteristics of the target audiences and the institutional environment. This requires a high level of didactic and personal sensitivity. Talking about one’s own sexual experiences or even about one’s own expectations and wishes is not as such “transgressive” if done in accordance with accepted education-scientific findings; on the contrary, it supports the self-determined enjoyment of sexuality and the ability to set limits.

**Where does sexualized violence begin?**

Henningsen: Dependencies and power asymmetries are present in the educational context wherever custody or guardianship plays a role, where one party evaluates or grades another, and generally speaking wherever a generative asymmetry or responsibility is present. Sexuality is a major theme alone because of the sometimes very intensive confrontations that can occur with and among adolescents. Thus, the aura of power and sexuality is always going to be present in educational interactions; the balance between distance and closeness is fragile indeed. Both emotional and physical closeness may be considered oppressive in nature – as can intentional distancing.

Schele: Of course, there will always be some pupils who come to “idolize” their teachers, if nothing else for a lack of age-appropriate goals. I think it’s particularly problematic, however, to speak of “eroticism as an instrument in educational contexts.” The rules are clear in all situations of dependency about what is acceptable and what is unacceptable. I’m not against teachers comforting their pupils, taking them by the hand, or patting their shoulders in praise. I’m certainly not against their being in the same room with boys and girls. Only a trustful atmosphere can give a child the chance to develop trust to the teacher and get help.

Henningsen: The questions students are sometimes very intensely confronted with concern the balance between closeness and distance: What forms of physical contact can be applied in the educational context – or should such contact be used at all? How much of myself can I bring to the classroom? I think that boundaries are always in danger of being crossed in human interactions. Educational professionalism demands great sensitivity for the vulnerability of the other

person and is based on a professional stance of the highest respect. This means that, if educators purposefully cross the boundaries of adolescents by using their position to satisfy their own needs and if they reveal themselves to be indifferent to the concerns of children and adolescents, then we can indeed speak of the use of violence-like assertion of one's own sexual interests. Yet some transgressions are not done on purpose, but occur by accident. Sometimes it becomes apparent already during the situation that improper behavior has occurred. Here, professionalism is required to clear up the situation, to apologize appropriately, and to correct the behavior in question – not to insist on infallibility.

**Ms. Schele, you are presently working on a flyer for the German Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA) which is directed toward persons working in schools. What can you tell them so that they can be sensitized to addressing sexualized violence in the school setting?**

*Schele:* I would like to invite the teachers, the parents, and the school staff members to participate in a change in perspectives. When an affected child comes to them, they should not panic, doubt, or try to investigate the situation on their own, but rather above all view this trust as a gift. Something good has happened: A girl or a boy has had the courage to break through the silence, the fear, and the shame. If this is well accepted, there is a good chance that the abuse can be stopped. In prevention the goal is to impart well-founded knowledge, to strengthen competences, and to let the children know that they are not guilty or responsible for such a situation in any shape or form. Schools are ideal for doing this.

**Ms. Henningsen, you are working on developing a curriculum for a bachelor's and master's program in education with the focus on "Sexuality Education and the Prevention of Violence." Could you tell a little bit about the present status?**

*Henningsen:* The high demand for modules concerning sexuality education among students of education or student teachers shows that there is both the need and the willingness to deal with themes of sexuality, violence, and power in the educational context. Teaching sexuality education at the university level requires a very special didactic setting. To this end, we initiated a learning atmosphere directed both toward the pertinent material and the students themselves, in the sense of personal learning. Besides acquiring the usual contents in this discipline, the students have to work on their ability to self-reflect and didactically reflect. An evaluation of this program showed that students could indeed reduce their insecurities and viewed the approach as a positive step in their overall educational practice. Such professionalism, however, has been established at only a few universities in Germany. Together with the Assistant Professors from the research program "Sexualized Violence in Educational Contexts," which is sponsored by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, I am presently working on a unified basic curriculum.

**Ms. Henningsen, Ms. Schele, what has to happen to protect such institutions as schools and make them safe places?**

*Schele:* Any attempt to make our schools "safe places" would be absurd. We don't need more surveillance or a culture of

mistrust. What we need is a conscious, sensitive, and structurally well-planned and well-implemented approach to the subject of abuse in institutions. That includes a concept of how to protect our children, with clear procedures and responsibilities, an external ombudsperson, and systematic preventive programs that are participative and interlocking. Similar to the "School without Racism" project, there should be a program entitled "School without Sexism, Homophobia, and Violence."

*Henningsen:* I too prefer having the goal set at creating schools that are free of violence and sensitive toward sexuality. One meaningful strategy that could be adopted here is focusing equally on teachers, educational professionals, parents, and children. In order to encourage discussions and conflict-solving processes, we could, I think, make the following points part of a protection concept:

- Sensitization to the setting and observation of boundaries
- Gender aspects, sexism, discrimination, and homophobia
- The right to self-determination and the right to protection from violence
- Openness to discussions and the preservation of intimate boundaries
- Sexuality as a resource and sexuality as an instrument of power
- Closeness and distance – transparency and protection for intimacy
- Paths to voluntarism and methods of prevention in the "compulsory context" that schools represent.

This means working intensely on our culture of discussion, which is what ensures professional behavior by encouraging reflection about one's own position. But it can also be helpful for schools to become or remain open and to enter into cooperations with specialized counseling facilities that provide support for designing and reflecting on school culture. The social environment is closely related to the extent to which we can work to educate about sexuality and to prevent violence.

**Are children in the position to turn their knowledge into behavior? Is there evidence that prevention programs actually work?**

*Henningsen:* From prevention research we know that educational and preventive initiatives that are behavior-oriented are better able to motivate people to step up both for themselves and to prevent others from crossing borders. Becoming self-effective does not occur simply by learning something; children and adolescents need the space to gather experiences, where they are taught about their right to physical and mental integrity and can develop an awareness for transgressions, where experiences concerning their bodies and their relationships with others are discussed, and where existing means of getting help are available. Situational settings can be helpful in establishing and testing out behaviors, for example, for developing strategies to stop undesired flirts and advances or to verbalize one's own feelings.

*Schele:* For the past 15 years, our prevention exhibits "ECHT KLASSE, ECHT STARK, ECHT FAIR" and "ECHT KRASS" have had the experience that schools are indeed open to concrete prevention offers, and that networks, competences, and assistance offers can ensue from these programs. If we

properly inform and encourage children, they will accept the offers to get help, especially if they have learned, say, in grade school, that “getting help is not snitching.”

**How do you judge the present public debates going on in the media concerning sex education in all its diversity?**

*Schele:* Some very conservative, “concerned” circles of society are presently trying to discredit the themes of sex education, diversity education, and abuse, and to gain political territory in the very right spectrum by spreading uncertainty among parents. This sort of instrumentalization of diffuse fears among the general population can be met only with facts, clear concepts, progressive positions, and well-founded scientific expertise. For this reason, I am very happy that some Assistant Professors have taken up this matter and brought much clarity, reason, and objectivity to the discussion. Sexual abuse represents a major sort of endangerment within the family as well as in such “closed shops” as religious sects, free churches, and pseudo-elite groups. Education cannot allow the clock of enlightenment to run backwards, even though the pornographization spreading throughout the media and in fashion circles sometimes seems to call for it.

*Henningsen:* I agree completely. In addition to the ultra-conservative and politically motivated statements out there, I also welcome the more professional debates going on. On the one hand, it is emphasized that psychosexual development should not be neglected in the prevention of sexualized violence; on the other hand, some people have reservations about such professional efforts. What may or should offers of sex education include? In my own contacts with children and adolescents I have learned that a calm talk about things can deal with their curiosity, their need for information, and their insecurities. Adolescents want and need attention. I would greet more research that proves that this approach can be successful. Our own project wants to do its part in this respect.



*Anja Henningsen has a degree in education and has been Assistant Professor at the Institute of Education at the Christian Albrecht University in Kiel since 2013. She sits on the Board of the Gesellschaft für Sexualpädagogik (Society for Sexuality Education) and is a member of the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Erziehungswissenschaft (German Educational Research Association). Her research focus lies on the theory of sexuality education, the prevention of violence, professionalization theories, ethics and morals, media and pornography, and diversity studies. She was employed for many years on the staff of the sex education staff of the pro familia in Kiel and also worked at the AIDS Counseling Service in Flensburg.*

**Contact:**

[henningsen@paedagogik.uni-kiel.de](mailto:henningsen@paedagogik.uni-kiel.de)



*Ursula Schele is a teacher and, since 1979, counselor at the Frauennotruf (Women's Emergency Hotline) in Kiel. She has been Head of the Prevention Office PETZE and Director of the PETZE Institute for the Prevention of Violence since 1992. She was one of the Educational Consultants for the national educational offensive of the German Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth and the German Society for Prevention and Intervention in Child Abuse and Neglect. She is also on the board of the Bundesforum Familie (National Family Forum). Her focus lies on training courses, consulting professional councils and policy entities, as well as developing prevention materials and traveling exhibits for schools. She is also active in youth welfare and services for the disabled.*

**Contact:**

[ursula.schele@petze-kiel.de](mailto:ursula.schele@petze-kiel.de)

---

# Trau dich!

## A National Initiative for the Prevention of Sexual Child Abuse

*Stefanie Amann*

The German Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) and the German Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA) started the national initiative entitled “Trau dich” [Dare to Do] for the prevention of sexual child abuse on November 12, 2012. This program is part of the “Action Plan 2011” of the German government to protect children and adolescents from sexual violence and exploitation<sup>1</sup>. It serves as the implementation of the recommendations made by the roundtable “Sexual Child Abuse”<sup>2</sup> and the Office of the Independent Commissioner for Questions of Sexual Child Abuse<sup>3</sup>. This initiative represents one of the most important pillars in the overall concept of the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth “Together Against Sexual Violence” to strengthen the rights of children.

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child sets out the rights of children to protection from violence, abuse, and exploitation; it guarantees their physical integrity and dignity as well as their right to security, support, and assistance. This initiative is based on these child rights, the concept of health promotion/salutogenesis (WHO 1986), and a holistic and positive concept of sexuality education (WHO/BZgA 2010). Its various modules are directed toward school children, parents, and teachers. In particular, it is concerned with the rights of children to protection from violence and abuse as well as their right to education and assistance. The goal is to empower children to speak up and to provide them with strategies for dealing with transgressive situations. “Trau dich!” encourages boys and girls to get help and to find someone they can confide in, if need be. Effective prevention strategies, however, must be directed not just at the children and adolescents, but equally at the adults caring for them. As part of this initiative, parents are sensitized to the matter of sexual abuse, teachers are provided with professional training and encouraged to introduce this theme in their lessons and to follow up on it.

### Goals

The goals of “Trau dich!” lie primarily in educating and informing children while also enlisting their parents and caretakers in the effort. The available counseling and contact points should be propagated, and the existing support system networked with the local stakeholders. Offers of continuing education for teaching personnel and educational staff have the goal of providing impulses for the development of prevention concepts and strategies at the institutional level.

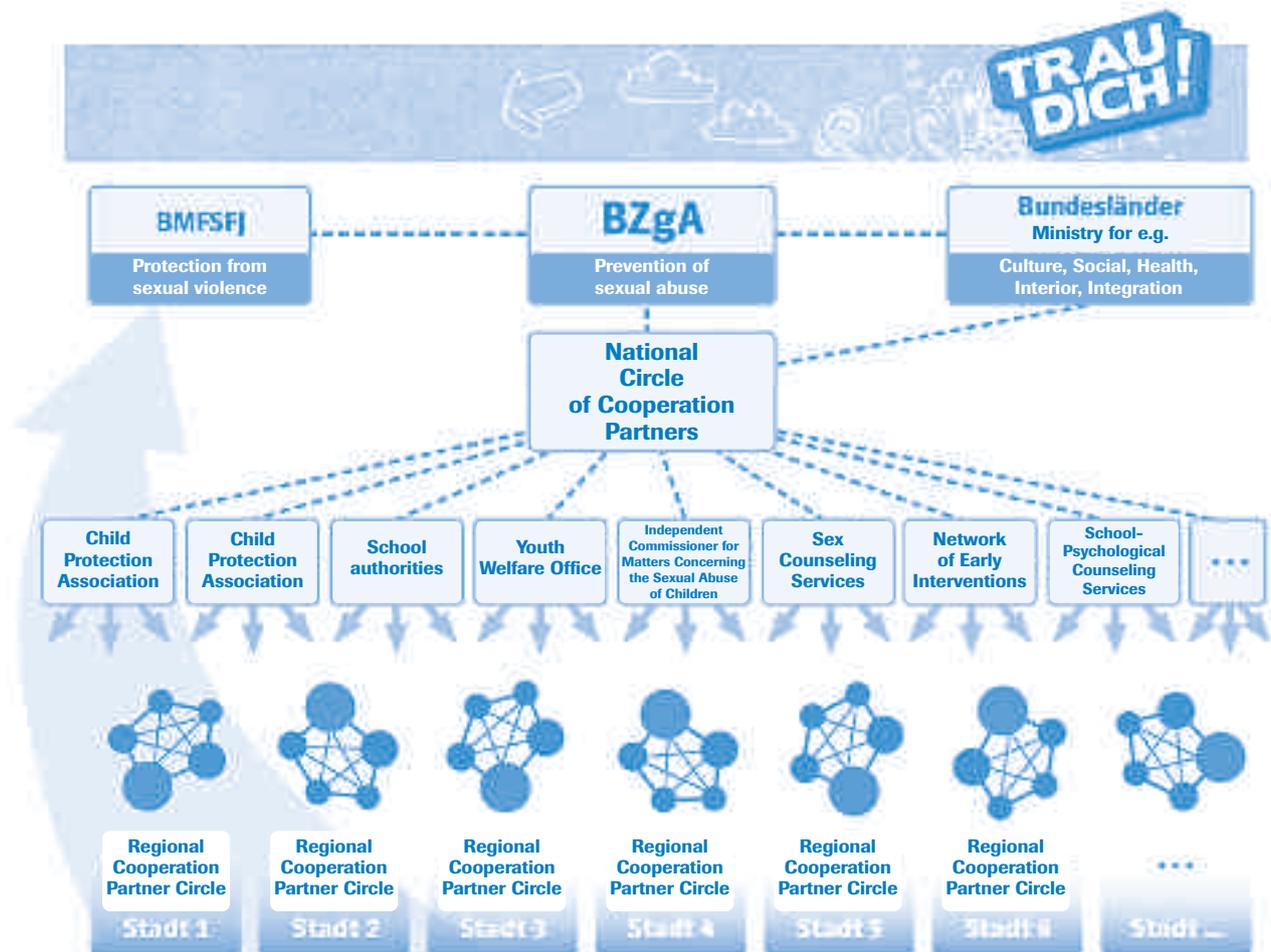
In addition, society in general should be sensitized to this subject matter. This contributes to maintaining a high level of relevance in the debate over sexual abuse.

### Target Groups

“Trau dich!” was conceived for children from grade-school age to the beginning of puberty (i.e., 8–12 years old). School-based programs can theoretically reach all children since the schools play a decisive role in disseminating information about themes such as sex education, health-related matters, and the prevention of violence. A study on the prevalence of sexual violence in institutions (HELMING/KINDLER/LANGMEYER 2011) documented as well that children tend to choose their teachers to disclose themselves to – which even more points up the necessity of including teachers in prevention programs.

In addition, the list of target groups includes all other specialists (people on teaching staff, school social workers, in youth welfare offices, at counseling centers, educational facilities, from local or regional initiatives) as well as parents and their organizations, the general public and cooperation partners at the local and state level.

1 BUNDESMINISTERIUM FÜR FAMILIE, SENIOREN, FRAUEN UND JUGEND 2011  
2 BUNDESMINISTERIUM DER JUSTIZ UND FÜR VERBRAUCHERSCHUTZ 2011  
3 GESCHÄFTSSTELLE DER UNABHÄNGIGEN BEAUFTRAGTEN ZUR AUFARBEITUNG DES SEXUELLEN KINDESMISSBRAUCHS 2011



## Strategy

The ongoing cooperation between the responsible state ministries, the various institutes concerned with teacher training, and organizations/associations dedicated to supporting such ventures guarantees the broad-based and long-term provision of assistance. Planning and implementing such initiatives is then carried out in close conjunction with the local stakeholders. At the municipal level, the initiative tries to ensure that a strong network exists between the school system, the municipal authorities, and the counseling services (see Figure 1). This network helps the children, their families, and the schools to become familiar with the local system of assistance as well as strengthening existing structures and establishing new ones. The goal is to make all offers known to all potential users and to improve the overall provision of counseling and help.

In order for children to receive the information and help they need quickly, anonymously, and discretely, the “Trau dich!” initiative cooperates with the national child and adolescent hotline “Nummer gegen Kummer.” The respective public relations campaign also helps to sensitize the public to the debate surrounding the theme of sexual abuse. A well-known news anchor from German public television, Caren Miosga, was recruited to be the ambassador for the initiative.

## Quality Assurance

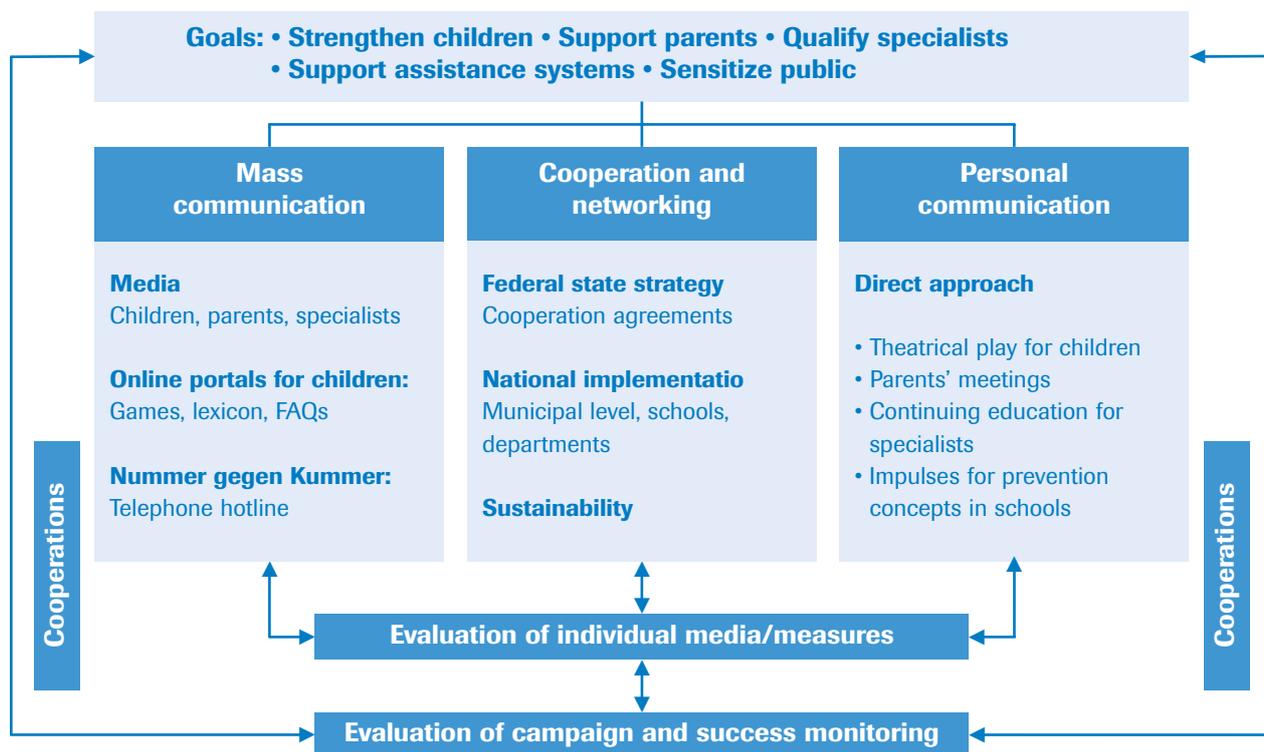
The BZgA is responsible for implementing high-quality measures and publishing media based on scientific evidence from research and practice. This includes continually developing the scientific background and the evaluation of

such measures directed at specific target groups. “Trau dich!” was accompanied by such a scientific evaluation of the process, the results, and the media involved. The scientific evaluation looked at the goals that had been set at all levels and was thus, over the course of the initiative, in the position to optimize the individual components. This ensured the acceptance, effectivity, and sustainability of the measures.

In addition, an expert committee advises and reports to the BZgA on implementing and further developing the initiative. In order to better link the activities that take place at the national level to ensure the protection of children and adolescents against sexual violence and exploitation, the BZgA works together with the Independent Commissioner for Matters of Sexual Child Abuse, Johannes-Wilhelm Rörig ([www.beauftragter-missbrauch.de](http://www.beauftragter-missbrauch.de)). The objective is to link the two initiatives “Kein Raum für Missbrauch” (No Place for Abuse, [www.kein-raum-fuer-missbrauch.de](http://www.kein-raum-fuer-missbrauch.de)) and “Trau dich!” ([www.trau-dich.de](http://www.trau-dich.de)) so as to provide support for the prevention measures of the federal states directed toward schools. To this end, there is a regular exchange of information with the Assistant Professors and the research projects being done according to the guidelines of the German Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ) “Sexuelle Gewalt in pädagogischen Kontexten” [Sexual Violence in Educational Contexts] as well as the representatives of the state Ministries for Cultural Affairs and the Institutes for Teacher Qualification and School Development of the federal states.

The concept of “Trau dich!” is based on the newest results of prevention research on the effectivity of programs addressed at preventing sexual child abuse. In summary, school-based prevention approaches have proved to be successful strategies against sexual child abuse when they

# A National Initiative for the Prevention of Sexual Child Abuse



are directed toward both the children and their parents and caretakers. Specific approaches such as theater-based interventions would appear to be well suited for reaching children emotionally and for imparting prevention-relevant knowledge (KINDLER/SCHMIDT-NDASI 2011; ANDRESEN/GADE/GRÜNEWALT 2015; Heck 2011; BOWI/KRUSE 2007; KINDLER 2011).

## The Messages of Prevention

In practice, “Trau dich!” uses some of the well-known and proven guidelines from the prevention of sexual abuse. The goal is to inform children about their rights, to strengthen their competences, and to promote their self-esteem. The basic statement included in the plays, the brochures, the online portals, or the colorful armbands prepared specially for children are as follows:

- My body belongs to me!
- I am what I am!
- I trust my feelings!
- I dare to do!
- I know what I want!
- I know what I can do!
- I decide!
- No means no!
- Respect me!
- I can tell the difference between pleasant and unpleasant touching!
- I can tell the difference between good and bad secrets!
- I am allowed to tell bad secrets!
- I am not to blame!
- I have a right to help!
- I can get help!

## Components

In order to reach the target groups, means of both personalized and mass media must be applied (Figure 2). The components of the initiative were designed and coordinated so as to be effective and applicable to all target groups: (1) “Trau dich! Ein starkes Stück über Gefühle, Grenzen und Vertrauen” (Dare to Do! A Powerful Piece about Feelings, Limits, and Trust), (2) training courses for teachers and parent meetings, (3) brochures for children, their parents, and their caretakers, (4) online portals for children with hotline support and counseling, (5) cooperation with the child and adolescent hotline “Nummer gegen Kummer” [Call when Hurt].

### “Trau dich!”

Together with the training courses offered for both the teaching staff and for parent meetings, the interactive theatrical play “Trau dich! Ein starkes Stück über Gefühle, Grenzen und Vertrauen” [Dare to Do! A Powerful Piece about Feelings, Limits, and Trust] forms the core element of the initiative. “Trau dich!” invites girls and boys to come along on a playful expedition. It recounts four complete (but not linear) stories and includes, besides film sequences of children commenting on and discussing matters, considerable use of music. Various interactive elements draw the children into what is happening on stage. The theatrical information that accompanies this project helps teachers to integrate the theme into their classwork following the performance.

The theater group “Kompanie Kopfstand”, which developed this play on behalf of the BZgA, closely researched the theme of sexual abuse and children’s rights. In order to ensure a clear connection to the life of children, they first organized project days and action programs at schools.

Using writing and painting workshops, quiz shows, and role-play, they talked with children about feelings, limits, friendship, trust, good and bad secrets, and much more. A number of public previews in front of audiences of both children and adults ensured that they had addressed the theme adequately and used the proper language. The play is now put on daily for 250 to 350 children in well-known theaters. The regional counseling centers have booths set up in the theater lobby so that after the show the children can become acquainted with the local offers, especially the hotline “Nummer gegen Kummer.” Cards are also passed out with the number of the hotline and information on its internet page ([www.trau-dich.de](http://www.trau-dich.de)).

#### **Training Courses for Teachers and Parent Meetings**

The prevention of sexual child abuse in schools can be successful only if the school staff is sensitized to the issue and qualified in prevention and intervention. This means that the staff members have to address the theme both personally and professionally. For this reason, the staff members receive free training specifically concerning sexualized violence before the play performances, provided by regional counseling services. The training seminars give background information, impart methods for dealing with these themes, and encourage introducing the play material in the classroom both before and after the performance. Parents have the opportunity to visit informational meetings sponsored by the local schools and the counseling services, where mothers and fathers can learn more about the initiative and receive support for discussing the pertinent themes with their children.

#### **Brochures for Children, Their Parents, and Their Caretakers**

Various brochures for the 8–12-year-old boys and girls (“Trau dich! Du kannst darüber reden,” “Trau dich! Du bist stark”) serve to inform about the rights of children, sexual violence, and offers of assistance. They encourage children to turn to a person they can trust and get help if necessary. All brochures also contain the telephone number of the “Nummer gegen Kummer” hotline.

After the play performance the children receive a sticker as well as doorbell label with various messages which they can color or write on themselves. Parents receive information materials with practical tips on protecting their children and helping them to stand up to attacks. A methodological pamphlet for the school professionals provides ideas and suggestions as well as games and exercises for dealing with the theme of the play in the school setting. Excerpts from the play and videoclips are also available to a select audience.

#### **Online Portals for Children with Hotline Support and Counseling**

[www.trau-dich.de](http://www.trau-dich.de) provides girls and boys age-adapted information concerning the general rights of children and their specific right to self-determination as well as answers to the most frequently asked questions. The internet portal is home to a database of counseling services, a lexicon, FAQs, a game, and other interactive elements for children. They can thus search for a local counseling service and other helpful addresses in their neighborhood. A direct link to the telephone number for “Nummer gegen Kummer” means they can directly get help in cases of sexual violence or sexual abuse.

#### **Cooperation with the Child and Adolescent Hotline**

“Nummer gegen Kummer e.V.” is the name of the parent organization of the largest free telephone hotline service for children, adolescents, and parents in Germany. The “Nummer gegen Kummer” (0-800-111-0333) offers low-threshold and anonymous counseling to parents and to children and adolescents as well as email counseling if preferred. This guarantees a high accessibility on 5 days (parents’ hotline) and 6 days (children’s and adolescents’ hotline) of the week. The anonymous hotline telephones are often the first contact points for children, adolescents, and their parents. The empathetic and confidential counseling offered significantly lowers the inhibition threshold to seek out other counseling possibilities. Presently approximately 4,000 volunteer counselors are responsible for answering the needs and concerns of the callers.

#### **Raising the Counseling Competence on the Theme of Sexual Abuse**

The volunteer counselors receive instruction based on a multilevel training curriculum. Often they represent the first contact point for those seeking advice or information. They learn how to advise persons who have been victims of sexual abuse, where they can find specialized care, and who is responsible for them. Since March 2013 all old and new volunteer counselors for the telephone hotline and the email counseling service are trained according to this curriculum. The organization behind “Nummer gegen Kummer” oversees a total of 83 sites where these training and continued training courses are given, thus guaranteeing national availability.

#### **The Theme of Sexual Abuse and Sexual Violence on the Children and Adolescent Hotline**

The latest statistics from 2014 show that children and adolescents are well acquainted with and use the available counseling offers. A total of 149,330 children and adolescents called the hotline during that year. Broken down by age range, from the target group of the “Trau dich!” initiative – those between 6 and 12 years of age – 33,688 children made up 22.5% of the callers: 20,011 girls (26.3% of all callers) and 13,261 boys (18.4% of all callers). In 416 cases no data were available on their sex.

The theme of sexual abuse is recorded under “violence and abuse.” In 2014, a total of 11,130 conversations were carried out (7.5% of all counseling contacts). Thereof, 2,277 calls (20.5%) concerned “sexual harassment,” 3,906 calls (35.1%) “abuse/rape,” and 1,231 calls (11%) the themes “sexual harassment on the internet” and “other violence/abuse.” Following the enormous increase in calls from the year 2012 to 2013 (2,541 calls in 2012 to 3,823 in 2013), the number of counselings on the theme of sexual abuse in 2014 was at a similar level as in 2013 (+2%).

The email counseling service of “Nummer gegen Kummer” regularly gets inquiries about this matter. Thus, in 2014 there were a total of 508 inquiries on the themes of “sexual harassment” and “sexual abuse” (2013: 510, 2012: 338).

The parent telephone hotline carried out 9,326 counselings in 2014, thereof 2,178 (23.4% of all calls) on individual themes from the area of “violence and abuse.” 196 calls (9%) of them were with regard to “sexual abuse,” and 197 (9%)

concerned “sexual harassment.” Since 2013 over 1,600 cases of children and adolescents were referred to special counseling services on sexual abuse. This statistic shows that empathetic and confidential initial counseling can effectively lower the threshold for turning to more specialized counseling facilities.

In the age group of 6–12-year-olds, a total of 2,463 conversations were held in 2014 on the subject of “violence and abuse” (22.1% of all calls on this subject matter). 482 calls (19.6%) concerned sexual harassment, 472 (19.2%) abuse/rape (cf. Sachbericht KJT und Statistik 2014).

### Scientific Accompaniment

The initiative was evaluated via a process evaluation by the Institut für Entwicklungsplanung und Strukturforchung (ies); in addition, some components were evaluated in the form of an outcome evaluation by the Institut für Sozialforschung und Kommunikation (SOKO). These two institutes looked at whether the initiative had been successful in reaching the various target groups and whether it had achieved sustainable results on the structural level. Were the respective networks and cooperations established or strengthened? Did “Trau dich!” provide impulses for the further development of prevention measures or concepts? Were the offers of continuing education taken up by the educators? In addition, forsa, a media company, did a media evaluation on how the children, parents, and teachers received and evaluated the media produced by the initiative.

#### “Now I know the face”:

##### Results from Practice and the Evaluation

By the end of 2015, “Trau dich!” will have trained a total of about 26,000 children and adolescents as well as some 1,700 parents and 800 teachers. About 400 different partners will have cooperated with the initiative by that time. Approximately 450 grade and secondary schools will have sent their pupils to the play and discussed its contents subsequently, in addition to training their staff and planning further measures.<sup>4</sup>

The BZgA is in constant contact with the federal states in Germany that were involved in implementing this program (Schleswig-Holstein, Saxony, Baden-Wuerttemberg, Hesse), the goal being to reinforce this initiative of preventing sexual abuse over the long term. Presently, the “Trau dich!” initiative is cooperating with the Agencies for Schools and Vocational Training, for Work, Social Affairs, Family and Integration as well as with the specialized counseling services to have the program implemented in Hamburg as well. In 2016 the initiative will work together with the Bavarian State Ministry for Work and Social Affairs, Family and Integration and with the Bavarian State Ministry for Education and Cultural Affairs, Science and Art to introduce the program throughout Bavaria. In Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania the initiative should start up in early 2016 and run through the summer of 2017. Here, too, the BZgA is cooperating with the Ministry for Education, Science and Cultural Affairs, the Institute for Quality Development and the Ministry for Work, Gender Equality and Social Affairs.

The state of Thuringia is also interested in cooperating with the national initiative to support its activities and measures to prevent sexual violence in that state.

The strategy laid out in the various cooperations with the individual states, municipalities, and support systems to

train educators parallel to offering the schools this program has proved to be effective and sustainable. The process evaluation shows that this approach strengthens existing structures and establishes new networks. Getting to know the program personally and developing new contacts are seen as positive impulses for a long-term cooperation. The initiative offers counseling services better ways of reaching out to the schools. “Trau dich!” is adapted to the ongoing action plans, prevention programs, and continuing education measures of the individual states and complements existing prevention projects. It has even produced an overall increase in the demand for such services. For the partners involved, the important thing is that they are dealing with a national program, and that their respective federal state is engaged. The brochures, the training seminars, and the parent meetings have all been positively received, and the reactions to the play are excellent both on the part of the counseling services as well as on the part of the schools. The media have praised the initiative without exception, and professional experts consider “Trau dich!” an effective instrument of prevention. The local counseling services are now also carrying out parent meetings and further education seminars for educators which are being financed by the Ministries of Social and Cultural Affairs. On the other hand, the short planning lead time as well as the insufficient equipment in the specialist centers to carry out the tasks at hand were judged to be negative aspects (see the Process Evaluation, Unpublished Report of the ies, December 2014).

The play has had a long-lasting and sustained effect. Even up to 6 months after having seen the performance, the children still remember the central prevention statements and can properly assess those situations in which transgressions or abuse take place. The subjective assessments of the children concerning the following competences increased significantly with respect to the baseline values (ascertained directly before their seeing the play): They can differentiate between good and bad secrets and between good and bad feelings. They report their passing along secrets if they do not feel good about them. And their motivation to get help increased: They mention an increasing number of contact persons they can turn to, such as family, friends, and institutions. But the largest increase was found with the “Nummer gegen Kummer” and the local support facilities (Outcome Evaluation, SOKO, May 2014).

No negative effects, in the sense of insecurities or uncertainties, were generated among the children. Some prevention messages tended to be forgotten over time, despite significant long-term effects. This shows just how necessary it is to subsequently discuss the themes treated in the play within the school setting – which also means permanently establishing the prevention programs among the school administrators, teachers, and other educational staff in the school systems.

Those educators who took part in the “Trau dich!” seminars reported having improved their knowledge of the legal background, of the perpetrators of sexual abuse and their strategies, of the risk factors, and of the dangers children are exposed to. They also noticed an increase in their own willingness to discuss such matters, to be sensitive to them, and to act if necessary (Outcome Evaluation, Unpublished

4 As of August 2015. These estimates were made on the basis of previous statistics and experience.

Report, SOKO, December 2014). The teachers evaluated the initiative and the accompanying media and materials as helpful and well-appreciated support. The play allowed not just the children, but also the teachers to gain an emotional and anxiety-free access to the themes in question. The teachers also declared their need for further qualification measures, for support through the school administration, and welcomed the structural anchoring of the initiative in the school system.

Those parents who had attended the parent meetings confirmed that their knowledge and ability to reflect on these matters had increased. The reported having received helpful suggestions about how to strengthen and protect their child. They confirmed that, after attending the play, their children had been more open to discussing the content and had used the give-aways (stickers and doorbell labels). The fact that 75 % of the parents would recommend the play to others reflects the basic high level of acceptance among the parents. However, the information provided to the parents as well as their involvement in the initiative could be improved. The results that emerged from the evaluation as well as the feedback provided by the experts produced the first suggestions for better addressing mothers and fathers, for example, by including parent representatives from the school setting early on in the planning. The worry that "Trau dich!" might lead to a sharp increase in the number of visits to counseling services and thus overwhelm the system has not been confirmed to date.

In those federal states in which "Trau dich!" has been implemented, the project has garnered considerable impulses for a long-term presence and sustainable place in the prevention of sexual violence. Examples are overarching workgroups between various ministries, interest in the long-term inclusion of the play in other child and adolescent theaters, the integration of the project in existing departments, the continuing education of educational personnel and school administrators, and the development of own prevention and protection concepts.



*Stefanie Amann has a degree in education and has headed the Department for the Prevention of Sexual Abuse at the German Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA) since 2012.*

**Contact:**

*Stefanie.amann@bzga.de,  
www.trau-dich.de,  
www.multiplikatoren.trau-dich.de*

#### References

AMANN, S./WINKELMANN C. (2011): Kann Sexualaufklärung einen Beitrag zur Prävention von sexuellem Missbrauch leisten? Das Beispiel der "Standards für die Sexualaufklärung in Europa." *Sexuologie*, 18, 3-4: 111-118

ANDRESEN, S./GADE, J. D./GRÜNEWALT, K. (2015): Prävention sexueller Gewalt in der Grundschule. Erfahrungen, Überzeugungen und Wirkungen aus Sicht von Kindern, Eltern, Lehr- und Fachkräften. Beltz Juventa

BOWL, U./KRUSE, J. (2007): Evaluation der Präventionsmaßnahme "Mein Körper gehört mir" zur Vorbeugung des sexuellen Missbrauchs an Grundschulen der Landeshauptstadt Düsseldorf

BUNDESMINISTERIUM FÜR FAMILIE, SENIOREN, FRAUEN UND JUGEND (2011): Aktionsplan 2011 der Bundesregierung zum Schutz von Kindern und Jugendlichen vor sexueller Gewalt und Ausbeutung. Berlin

BUNDESMINISTERIUM DER JUSTIZ UND FÜR VERBRAUCHERSCHUTZ (Ed.) (2011): Abschlussbericht Runder Tisch Sexueller Kindesmissbrauch in Abhängigkeits- und Machtverhältnissen in privaten und öffentlichen Einrichtungen und im familiären Bereich. Berlin

GESCHÄFTSSTELLE DER UNABHÄNGIGEN BEAUFTRAGTEN ZUR AUFARBEITUNG DES SEXUELLEN KINDESMISSBRAUCHS (Ed.) (2011): Abschlussbericht der Unab-

hängigen Beauftragten zur Aufarbeitung des sexuellen Kindesmissbrauchs, Dr. Christine Bergmann

HECK, H. (2011): "Mein Körper gehört mir!" A replication effect study about a German child sexual abuse prevention program. Rijksuniversiteit Groningen

HELMING, E./KINDLER, H./LANGMEYER, A. (2011): Sexuelle Gewalt gegen Mädchen und Jungen in Institutionen. Abschlussbericht des Deutschen Jugendinstitut (DJI)-Projektes im Auftrag der Unabhängigen Beauftragten zur Aufarbeitung des sexuellen Kindesmissbrauchs, Dr. Christine Bergmann. München

KINDLER, H. (2011): Eltern und die Prävention von sexueller Gewalt. *IzKK-Nachrichten*, 2012, 1: 5-10

WHO-REGIONAL BÜRO EUROPA/BZGA (2010): Standards für die Sexualaufklärung in Europa. Köln: BZgA (PDF-Version: [www.bzga-whocc.de](http://www.bzga-whocc.de))

KINDLER, H./SCHMIDT-NDASI, D. (2011): Wirksamkeit von Maßnahmen zur Prävention und Intervention im Fall sexueller Gewalt gegen Kinder. Expertise im Rahmen des Projekts "Sexuelle Gewalt gegen Mädchen und Jungen in Institutionen", Amyra e.V. (Ed.). München: DJI

---

# An Interpretation and Analysis of the Prevention of Sexualized Violence

*Brigitte Braun*

**How can we more precisely define the term “prevention” in the context of sexualized violence? What are the basic tasks facing prevention? How can – and should – educational practice create a culture of respect and mindfulness? These and other themes are addressed by Brigitte Braun in her contribution.**

Prevention is a very broad term that is constantly increasing in complexity, while at the same time in danger of forfeiting its clarity and precision. This may be seen especially in the practice of prevention, when the breadth of what is considered to be the prevention of sexualized violence against boys and girls is pitted against the sometimes rather fuzzy goals and methods applied to achieve this.

The following article is concerned with differentiating the terms in questions, the goal being a clearer connotation and definition of the prevention of sexualized violence. It is not a matter of understanding prevention primarily as a method but as an approach. Thus, the content is dictated by the form. This is clearly described in the suggestions and impulses given for institutional concepts of prevention.

The author relies on her years-long experience in the field of intervention, that is, the care and accompaniment of persons affected, and in the field of prevention, in the training of professional caretakers, the consultation of institutions in the development of prevention concepts, and in the intensive work done together with organizations and networks.

The core mission of prevention is and remains having adults deal with their attitude toward violence and their understanding of sexuality; with their willingness to accept responsibility and to have the courage to take up positions and facilitate them in their behavior.

## A Question of Definition

The classical definition stems from CAPLAN (1964), who differentiated between three different forms: primary (prevention), secondary (early recognition), and tertiary (reduce consequential damage). Thus, it also includes successful

means of intervention that reduce the danger of a renewed traumatization to a minimum.

Whether we are talking about a counseling service situated within a school or whether we are dealing with a Youth Welfare Office that takes someone in their charge – in both cases we are concerned with prevention.

Neither CAPLAN nor GORDON (1983), with his very person-oriented concept, nor DAHLBERG and KRUG (2002), in their so-called levels model, discriminated between intervention and prevention.

Caplan's definition was adopted in 1994 by the WHO in its own definition of health prevention. Interventions, regardless of when they occur, as well as various forms of therapy and the reduction of the sequelae of illness are all included and refer to the conventional medical system, from early screening to rehabilitation. A strict differentiation between prevention (primary prevention) and early recognition (secondary prevention) is often not possible or unclear. Such a state of affairs may not pose a problem in the field of medicine.

With respect to preventing sexualized violence, however, prevention and intervention differ according to the time the measure is executed and the type of action taken, whether an action or a reaction, whether prophylactic prevention or aftercare. Both areas demand very different competences and thus diverge in their intentions, their goals, and their target groups.

Generally speaking, when we talk about sexualized violence, we are referring to and more urgently concerned with intervention, from recognizing sexualized violence to the need for clear and unambiguous guidelines for action, which also usually have a legal background. Prevention projects, on the other hand, rarely create a feeling of urgency

and often occur after the fact. Since the classical definition of prevention also includes intervention, the latter generally becomes the focus of the concepts, often in the form of action guidelines. Separating the two areas would require a paradigm shift by putting the two on the same level and accepting the necessity for establishing both interventional plans and prevention concepts.

Establishing a differentiated and practice-oriented definition of prevention would, in my opinion, comprise using every possible means available of preventing sexualized violence against boys and girls – preemptively. That is the definition that I use when I speak of prevention.

An intervention, on the other hand, takes place when someone has already become a victim of sexualized violence. Intervention competence includes, among other things, having an expertise about trauma/traumatization, knowing the effects of violence and routes of action as well as possessing some legal knowledge. Prevention competence, on the other hand, also presumes the presence of knowledge on setting limits and the effects of setting limits, on the impact of organizational structures, a willingness to address conflicts, and management skills.

Because prevention may also turn into disclosure, it demands intervention competence as well as a sort of background potential. Prevention becomes intervention when the goal is to enable adults to successfully intervene. Providing adults with the capability to intervene is part of any prevention program. Concretely putting an end to sexualized violence is intervention.

### A Matter of Attitude

Prevention has the expressed goal of preventing or impeding sexualized violence against girls and boys. It calls on all caregiving adults, whether in their private or professional function, to look at their own stance and support any and all attempts to reach this goal, without ignoring their own presumptions and prejudices. Themes such as violence or sexuality are deeply embedded in our images and values, and can sometimes affect our behavior more radically than cognitively acquired knowledge.

Prevention is found in the conscious exemplification of independence, self-will, self-effectiveness, and dependability. It may also be found in our equally conscious dealings with the structures found in institutions and families; it always strives to establish partnership. The persons involved assume responsibility, face impending conflicts, and are respectful toward one another, regardless of their age or sex.

Whether a specific attitude in fact serves prevention may be seen in the following:

- How adults treat their own body and that of others.
- How they sense borders, set limits, and respect those of others.
- How they deal with secrets and how they make themselves available and reliable.
- How they talk about and cope with feelings.
- Whether they believe victims and want to help them.
- How they protect victims.

Of particular importance is the model function adults have with respect to gender roles: Do they allow girls and boys in their presence to develop openly and diversely – or do they attempt to restrict them?

Most victims are females, and most perpetrators are males. Power and hierarchy play decisive roles in exercising violence. As a rule, violence is perpetrated by persons in more powerful position on persons in less powerful positions. If this is not recognized and accepted, then the immanent solutions cannot be realized. That may mean conceding lived components of the female role such as courage, power, independence, and aggression, while assigning to the male role such attributes such as social welfare, comfort, mindfulness, and restraint.

Such a position demands much self-determinedness and self-will, and is reflected in a view of humankind characterized mainly by mindfulness and respect for others.

This attitude may also be seen in how much patience is shown when waiting for victims to come forward, how much adults are willing to improve their ability to listen and understand what someone else is saying. This is precipitated in one's attitude toward competence and responsibility. The linguistic competence of children is useless if adults do not know, do not hear, and do not see what is there. Adults can be empowered to want to know, to endure this knowledge, and to reflect on their own thinking and actions.

Such an understanding of prevention necessarily leads us back to our own behavior, which is both helpful and difficult at the same time: Helpful, because we alone are in the position to expand and change our attitudes; difficult, because we must take it upon us to own up to our responsibility. Children are not responsible for ensuring that we no longer have to worry.

Such basic ideas do not bring the protection of girls and boys down to the individual level; they do not pinpoint the individual mothers and fathers – and especially not the respective child – as being responsible. Rather, prevention is and remains a social/societal task. In this sense, prevention has a political dimension to it: It strives to change both individual behavior as well as social conditions and structures. Yet it does not attempt just to change behavior, but also to change relationships: between the generations, between the sexes, between those who have power and influence and those who do not.

Preventing sexualized violence is the foremost and basic goal of all educational efforts and thus represents a cross-sectional mission in every educational setting – regardless of whether math is being taught or a classroom is being painted.

The premises for all this lie in honest self-assessment and knowledge of one's own limits, knowledge of the basics of sexualized violence toward girls and boys, and experience in intervention and educational prevention. Thus, prevention is at once a political and a public act that cannot work without questioning social suppressive and marginalization structures. It demands taking a stance.

### Jurisdictions and Responsibilities

Prevention measures are primarily directed toward adults as potential caretakers, toward institutions with their structures and concepts, and at the girls and boys in question. Adults are challenged in the following areas:

- To acquire knowledge about sexualized violence and to deal with this knowledge.
- To reflect on their own body awareness and body posture.
- To develop a feeling for limits, to set limits, and to respect limits.

- To provide clarity and reliability, to stand up for their own positions.
- To rise to the challenge of receiving feedback and critical reactions from children and adolescents.
- To deal with their fear of such themes and to discern ways to overcome that fear and try out new ways.
- To display solidarity and support for victims.
- To withdraw their loyalty from those who spread sexualized violence in the form of derogatory or sexist behavior.
- To come to terms with gender roles, in light of the fact that, the more equal men and women are in a family or facility, the less violence is used.

Prevention directed toward children serves to strengthen them, to further their independence, to expand their mobility, and to increase their freedom. This includes the following themes:

- Body awareness and dealing with physical contact.
- Setting limits and observing limits.
- Being aware of feelings and intuitions.
- Getting help from one's best friend or from adults.
- Learning to resist transgressions and experiencing one's own authority.
- Differentiating between good and bad secrets.
- Participation and codetermination.
- Age-adapted sex education.
- Gender roles and their diversity.

The initiative "Trau dich!"<sup>1</sup> (along with the play of the same name) is directed toward girls and boys and is accompanied by training courses for caretakers and informational meetings for parents, with a number of additional subsequent offers made by state agencies or other institutions.

### A Question of the Concept

The following describes how to best promote nontransgressive behavior toward persons in one's charge in facilities. It also looks at the ongoing discussion concerning concepts for protecting children and adolescents.

The idea of protection concepts – or more broadly prevention concepts – is based on the finding that having the proper structures and concepts in place in facilities can impede, reduce, and sometimes even eliminate sexualized violence. Such concepts go beyond the individual capabilities of the staff and include the entire institution in the process as means of reducing and/or dealing with sexualized violence.

The men<sup>2</sup> who carry out such acts quite purposefully seek out facilities, clubs, etc., where they think the probability of their act of sexualized violence being discovered is small. On the one hand, it is thus imperative to raise the level of knowledge of the staff members as well as, on the other hand, to create transparent and positive structures in such facilities. It is important that these structures act to strengthen nontransgressive behavior in the staff members and to encourage intervention and prevention on their part. This also serves to prevent perpetrators from carrying out their strategy or at the very least making it more difficult.

Institutions, institutional structures, and the personnel working in these institutions sometimes jointly enable the possible misuse of power. Looking away or remaining loyal at the wrong time only encourages the use of violence. Instead,

institutions must see themselves as responsible collectives that can have many ways to work preventively.

Girls and boys in institutions such as nursery schools, kindergarten, schools, residential homes, etc., must be structurally protected, as must the conscientious staff members who devote themselves to these themes and become available to both victimized and nonvictimized boys and girls as reliable partners.

The following approaches have proved to be effective for making it difficult for adult perpetrators to proceed with their plans:

#### *Structures and conditions*

- Teamwork and cohesion are of utmost importance. Important keywords are mutual respect, sensitivity, dissatisfaction, irritations.
- Professional supervision should be employed in order to get an outside view. Continuing education is imperative.
- The management structures and roles of the individual staff members should be completely clear and transparent to all. Avoid creating diffuse roles and make sure all instructions regulate the problem of closeness/distance. These matters can also be anchored in employment contracts.
- The institution should be networked with other institutions and exchange pertinent information.
- If staff members fail to react to sexual assaults among the children, they should be held accountable and disciplined.
- The lived (and not just the theoretical) goal of the facility should be a culture of mutual respect and esteem.
- A "competence team" should be established to cooperate with external institutions and to regulate internal efforts at intervention and prevention.
- Clarification of incidents should take place externally. This makes taking action easier on the individual staff members.
- The special conditions that are valid for unpaid and volunteer work should be respected. But here, too, job and role descriptions are necessary and should broach the issue of crossing borders.

#### *Self-reflection and conflict skills*

- It is important to have both male and female positive role models. The more fluid the roles of men and women and of girls and boys, the more equal and equivalent the sexes become – and the less likely sexualized violence will occur.
- The goal of the institution should be to establish openness, courage, and critical faculties among the staff members. Dissatisfaction, critique, complaints, or suggestions for improvements should be addressed using structured procedures. Conflict skills should be trained and appreciated.<sup>3</sup>
- All rumors should be addressed directly and discussed openly.

1 See the article by S. Amann in this issue.

2 Generally, nonsexist language is preferred. However, since some 80–90% of all perpetrators are male, it would be improper to do so here.

3 I consider conflict skills – especially in the area of prevention – to be extremely important, indeed indispensable. Whereas girls and boys are admonished to participate in programs to strengthen this ability and to address matter of setting limits directly, adults often find it problematic to give direct feedback, especially negative feedback. But this very ability is what is needed when dealing with how to ensure nontransgressive behavior in institutions – when the discussion centers around how to ensure a balance of closeness and distance in facilities and when considering how best to notice and react to transgressions on the part of staff members.

- The best way to avoid improper behavior is to openly discuss one's own insecurities.

*Knowledge skills and behavioral security*

- Sexual abuse is a theme that should always remain on the conscious level and treated like all other acts against children and decisive events in their lives. Everyone should be encouraged to voice any concerns immediately. Protection of the victim has the highest priority.
- The competence of staff members, particularly in the area of sexualized violence, should be strengthened and expanded. Intuition is respected, reviewed, and considered important.
- The methods and strategies of perpetrators of sexualized violence are well known, as are the factors that support their actions.
- Group-dynamic processes must be kept in mind, especially with respect toward power imbalances and dependencies.
- Parents and other important persons are informed by the institution about matters of sexualized violence and prevention.
- The facility should develop its own position toward sex education and its own concept of sex education.
- Prevention should be formalized as a quality standard and contain concrete and verifiable criteria. This should include the perspectives of those persons who are affected.
- Should sexual assaults occur among the children, the reaction should be one of clear and decisive advocacy, with subsequent attention to the affected child's well-being. The protection of an institution's clients is part of the overall service quality.
- Staff members and/or management are obliged to call in or consult and cooperate with an external professional service should suspicions arise. Basic internal procedural guidelines should be developed (if possible, before the need arises), made public, and practiced.

*Respect for limits and participation*

- Remarks by children should be taken seriously.
- The institution develops an atmosphere of respect for limits.
- The staff members should be generally biased toward the girls and boys and trust their statements.
- In residential groups, all rooms should be considered safe quarters. Knocking before entering and entering only upon receiving a response represent one way to support acceptance of personal spaces as places of retreat.
- Solidarity and mutual support among girls and boys should be supported and actively applied.
- The girls and boys should participate in the establishment of rules and structures for the protection of their own sexual self-determination (and not only after something has already happened). These rules and structures are binding, transparent, and must be heeded. New staff members commit themselves upon being hired in writing to comply with these rules.
- "Snitching" on the part of children and adolescents is not considered betrayal, but a request for help.
- The strengthening of resilience and resistance of girls and boys should become part of the daily routine.
- How to best deal with the matter of closeness/distance is discussed openly.
- Following an incident of sexual assault among the children, the child affected should receive comfort and support. The

perpetrator child should be shown his/her limits, but receive support as well as shown clear positions and measures.

## A Matter of Action

The most important thing institutions need to do is to act educationally. Even today some sexual assaults are not legally indictable – yet whether or not an act is legally relevant cannot guide our educational actions. In this sense, much is still to be done. What we need are the many little everyday steps that eventually lead to a culture of respect and mindfulness.

The approaches described above and the various impulses that already exist offer many different ways to approach and to act on this matter from a multitude of perspectives. They serve the goal of making the practice-oriented term "prevention" differentiated at the beginning of this contribution come to life and illustrate the extent of available prevention measures in addition to well-conceived intervention guidelines and principles.

Furthermore, besides the many chances, it explicitly points up the diversity of the competences necessary to establishing autonomous prevention programs for combatting sexual violence toward girls and boys. The subordination of prevention to intervention often encountered in practice is reversed, creating a culture that is advantageous to all stakeholders.

Prevention programs do not propose to be perfect; rather, they want above all to be transparent and clearly reveal the existing strengths and limits, both on the individual and the institutional level.

That's the stuff of prevention.



---

*Brigitte Braun is a certified supervisor, holds a degree in social education, teaches continuing education as well as WenDo, and heads the Division for the Prevention of Sexual Child Abuse at the German Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA).*

**Contact:**

*brigitte.braun@bzga.de*

References

Unveröffentlichtes Seminar material aus der Aus- und Fortbildung  
Veröffentlichungen in diversen Broschüren und der regelmäßig erschienenen  
Zeitung des Bundesvereins für Prävention

BRAUN, BRIGITTE (2007): Jule und Marie, Köln: mebes und noack

---

# Experiences of Sexualized Violence: Select Results of the 2015 Study on Youth Sexuality

*Angelika Heßling, Heidrun Bode*

**For the past 35 years, the German Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA) has analyzed the attitudes and behaviors of adolescents with respect to sex education, sexuality, and contraception. The most recent study is the eighth representative survey of its kind. Questions concerning the theme of sexualized violence have been included in the survey since 2001.<sup>1</sup>**

In the 2015 survey, besides the 14–17-year-olds, for the first time young adults between 18 and 25 years were interviewed.<sup>2</sup> Increasing the age spectrum to 25 years provided broader results as well as improving the international comparability of the data. It yielded valuable knowledge about the theme of sexual violence which likely would have gone untapped since it can take many years before persons affected actually report on their “experiences”.<sup>3</sup>

The present study also contains two new questions – one concerning the timepoint of disclosure and the other on the circle of persons who were privy to what had happened.<sup>4</sup> The possible answers concerning the possible perpetrators expanded to include the option “Someone from my family, relatives.”

A total of 5,750 persons were interviewed: 2,500 adolescents (age group 14–17 years) of German origin and 1,000 adolescents with an immigration background; in the age group 18–25 years, a total of 1,500 young adults of German

origin and 750 young adults with an immigration background. The survey was carried out in the Spring and Summer of 2014 and is scheduled to appear in full in November 2015.<sup>5</sup>

## **Experiences of Sexual Violence Are Not Marginal Events**

For girls and young women between the ages of 14 and 25 the following is true: Experiences of sexual violence are not rare events. In fact, there is an alarming number of such events – about one in every five young women – that have to be dealt with in the course of a lifetime, in some cases multiple times. A smaller number of male adolescents is also affected: about 4 % report having been forced into sexual acts or affections against their will. Among homosexually (or bisexually) oriented boys and young men, however, it is a different story: They are affected almost as much as young women are, with about one-fifth (21 %) reporting sexual assaults.

Apparently the group of young people who are not (clearly) heterosexually oriented are overproportionately endangered, since girls and young women with homosexual or bisexual inclinations also experienced a higher rate (32 %) of sexual violence than the average rate found among girls/young women (20 %).

Whereas this plays only a minor role for boys/young men, the risk of sexual assault for girls/young women apparently begins as soon as they become sexually active. At least twice as many of those girls/young women who had had sexual experiences, as opposed to those who were sexually inactive, reported having been forced to have sexual activities at least

1 This study was carried out on behalf of the BZgA together with the TMS Emnid Sozialforschung Bielefeld. In conjunction with this special theme issue, the BZgA is publishing an advance excerpt of the results. When this theme was first introduced into the survey, the term “sexual violence” was chosen and is thus still in use.

2 Oral interview with written section to be filled out by the respondent.

3 On the terminology, see the article by S. Rothkegel in this issue.

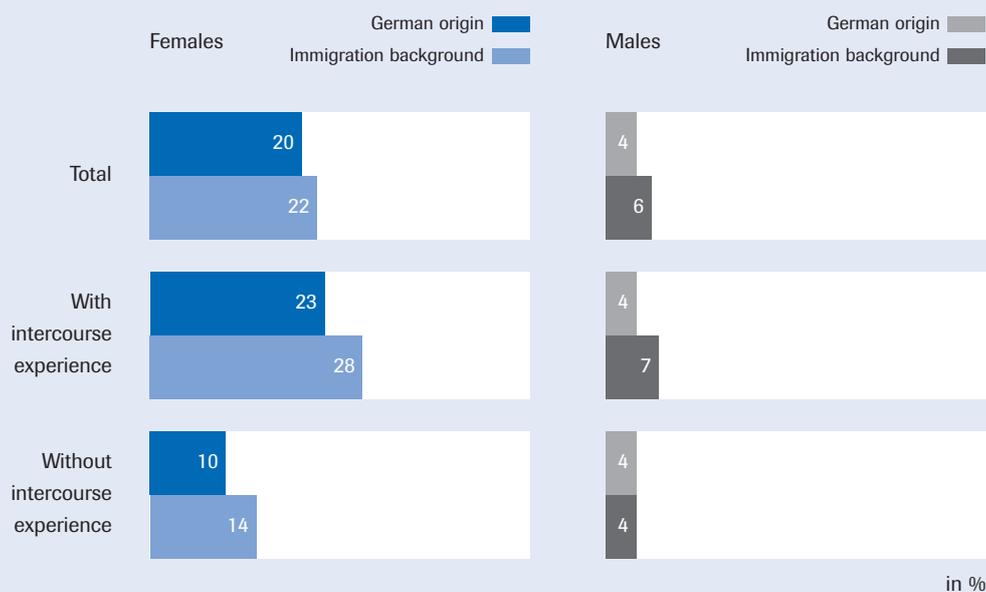
4 “Did you tell anyone about your experience?” Possible answers: Yes, right away. – Yes, but only after a few days. – Yes, but only after a few weeks/months. – Yes, but only years later. – No, no one.  
“Who did you tell about your experience?” Possible answers: Mother or father. – Another adult. – My (then) partner. – A friend of mine. – Someone else.

5 GERMAN FEDERAL CENTRE FOR HEALTH EDUCATION (BZgA) (Ed.) (2015): *Studie Jugendsexualität [Survey of Adolescent Sexuality]*. Cologne.

Fig. 1

**Experiences of sexual violence**

according to origin



Question: Has a boy or man at any time tried to make you have sex or exchange affections with him against your will by putting you under pressure?  
Basis: 14–25-year-olds

Source: TNS Emnid

once.<sup>6</sup> Girls/young women from immigrant families were even more strongly affected than girls/young women from German families. Yet even girls with no intercourse experiences were not immune: At least 10 % of these girls/young women also reported having been pressured at least once to have sex or exchange affections. The older these girls/young women are, the more often they report negative experiences of this nature (in correlation to their increasing number of sexual contacts).

This statistic was first collected in 1998 for girls of German nationality (2014: German origin) and showed slightly lower rates over time: 1998 – 16 %, 2001 – 15 %, 2005 – 13 %, 2009 – 13 %, 2014 – 11 %.

### Factors that Affect the Probability of Having Experiences of Sexual Violence

Among girls/young women we must differentiate even further. The small group of girls/young women who report not having (or hardly) known their partner at first sexual intercourse also report more often having experienced sexual pressure: Among those of German origin 42 %, among those from immigrant families 53 %. This group also exhibits more cases of repeated assaults.

Not quite as often, but still quite high, were the percentages of girls/young women who were 14 years and younger (32%/40 %) at first sexual intercourse. Their early start in sexual life also means they overall had more sexual contacts, which increases their risk of being exposed to sexual repressions.

On the other hand, educational background plays no role in this matter: Girls/young women with higher educational

status are generally equally affected by sexual violence as are girls/young women from a lower educational background.

### Offenders and Types of Assault

Among those girls and young women who were victimized, two main types of offenders are found: First, a new acquaintance and, second, their (ex) boyfriend (each 7 %). Smaller, but still large proportions are found for close friends and classmates (4 %) as well as complete strangers (3 %). Whether of German origin or with an immigrant background is of no consequence – the answers were similar here.

In about 50 % of the cases, the girls/young women who experienced overt pressure were able to fend off the attack, i.e., no sexual acts took place.

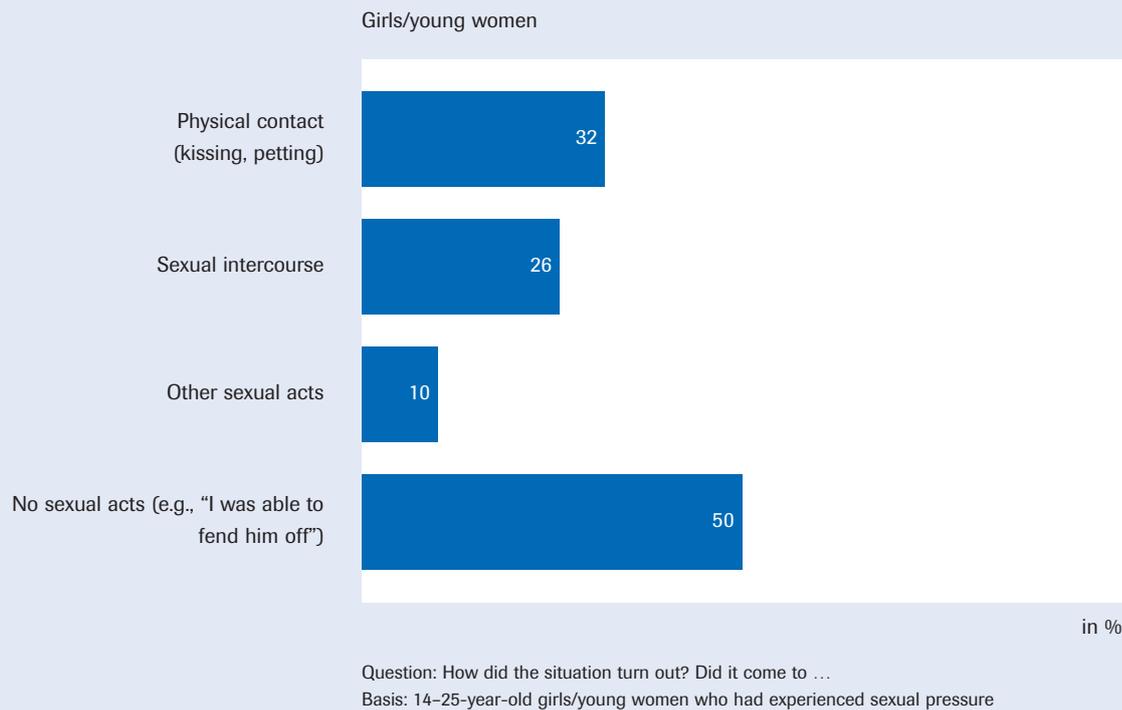
A third of those interviewed reported being forced to participate in kissing/petting (32 %), a fourth of them in sexual intercourse (26 %). “Other sexual acts” occurred more rarely (10 %).<sup>7</sup>

The rather small group of homosexually (and/or bisexually) oriented boys/young men who were exposed to sexual violence (n = 21 total cases) were largely unable to avert the

6 This statement cannot be deduced directly from the data since sexual activities were queried for the present, whereas undesired approaches could have taken place in the near or distant past, i.e., even before the first incident of sexual intercourse. The data, however, support this hypothesis.

7 This category refers mainly to oral or anal sex, although these terms were consciously not explicitly mentioned on the questionnaire. Thus, the designation “other sexual acts” was open some measure of interpretation.

Fig. 2

**Type of sexual violence act experienced**

Source: TNS Emnid

attacks. The majority of them were forced against their will to participate in kissing and petting. About one-fifth of them also reported that the encounter led to sexual intercourse or other sexual acts.

Girls/young women who hardly knew or did not know their first sexual partner reported more than average being the victim of sexualized violence. 39 % said that the situation ended with undesired sexual intercourse; "other sexual acts" also occurred at a much higher rate. However, these incidents need not necessarily have been their first experiences of sexual intercourse when the sexual violence described took place. Yet there is much evidence that at least a portion of this group experienced their first sexual intercourse against their will.

### Trends from 2001 to 2014 – German Girls<sup>8</sup>

If we look at the way girls were effected and dealt with sexualized violence, we can observe a negative tendency especially in the last two surveys: Undesired activities, including sexual intercourse, occurred more often than in the earlier surveys. Of those girls who already had had sexual intercourse and then became victims of sexual violence, 26 % reported that the incident led to sexual intercourse (2009: 24 %, 2001/2005: 14 % each).

However, 58 % of the 14–17-year-olds reported having been able to avert the attack so that the undesired sexual acts did not take place. In 2009 that was the case with only 49 % of this age group (2005: 62 %, 2001: 65 %).

### Communication Behavior Following Experiences of Sexual Violence

Being forced to take part in sexual activities against your expressed will is an experience that many do not want to talk about, at least not immediately. Only about a third of the girls/young women who were victimized confided in someone immediately thereafter. Another third confided in someone after a few days (17 %) or a few weeks or months (14 %).

Every seventh girl/young woman, however, revealed speaking about the incident only after many years (14 %). And about one-fourth of the girls/young women has not spoken to anyone to this day.

How quickly a girl/young woman confides in someone (if at all) depends largely on how the situation ended. It is easiest for those girls/young women to confide in others when they were able to escape the situation by resistance. About half of the girls/young women who successfully resisted recounted their experience afterwards, whereas only 17 % decided to remain silent. Only 13 % of the girls/young women who, on the other hand, had been forced into sexual intercourse against their will immediately confided in someone, whereas one-fourth of them took years to make this step – and more than one-third never told anyone (35 %). The situation among boys/young men affected by such experiences was similar.

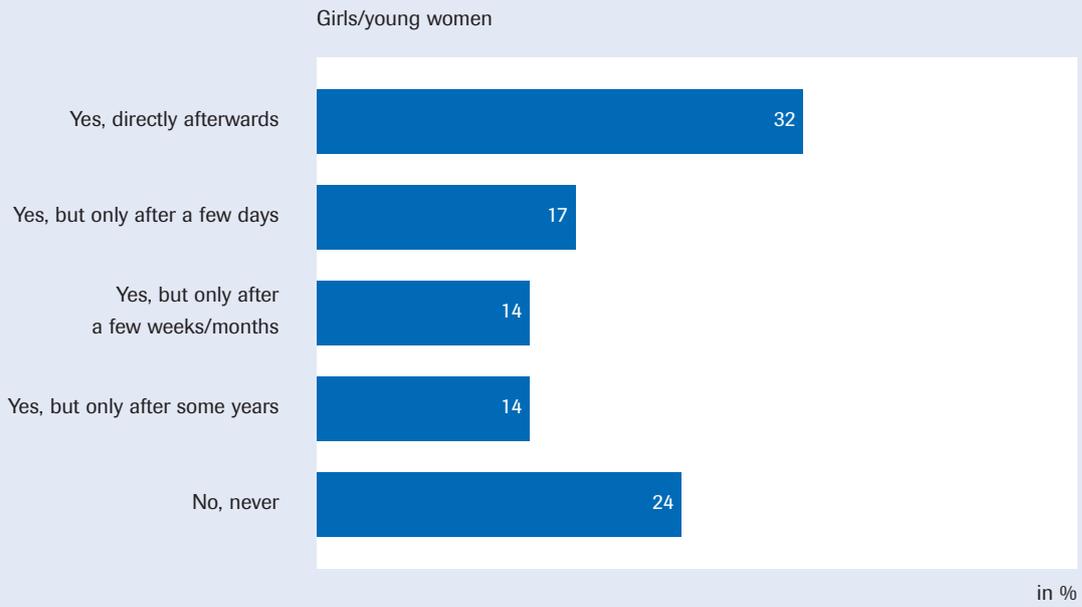
Girls/young women from immigrant families generally did not differ in their communication patterns from those of German origin. The few girls/young women of Turkish origin more often than average tended to confide in no one.

When the girls/young women did confide in someone, that person tended to be someone from their peer group. Three-fourths of them chose the answer "Someone from my

<sup>8</sup> For 1980 to 2009: German citizens, from 2014 on; of German origin.

Fig. 3

**Communication about the experience of sexual violence**

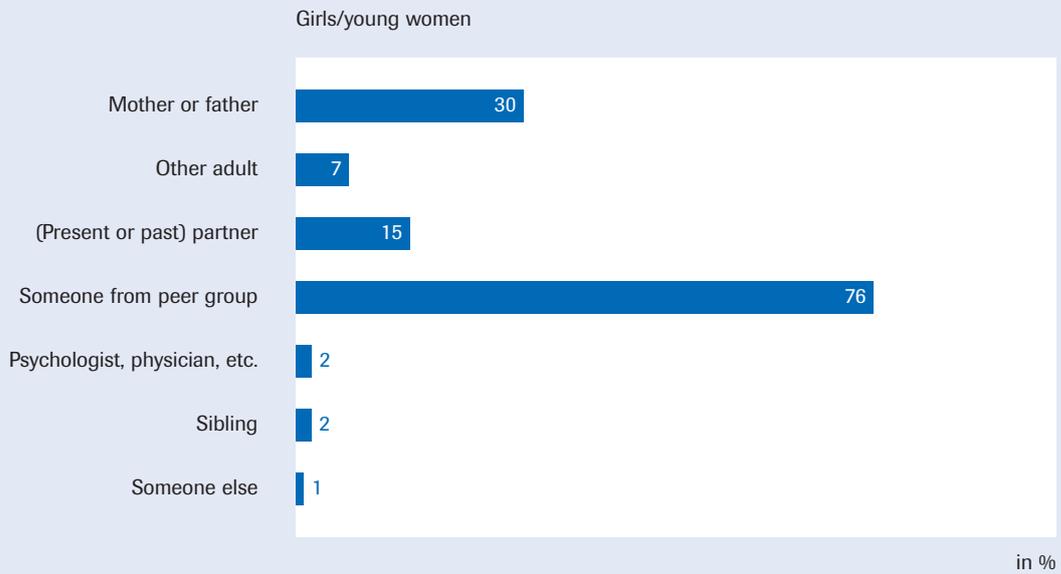


Question: Have you ever told anyone about this experience?  
 Basis: 14–25-year-old girls/young women who had experienced sexual pressure

Source: TNS Emnid

Fig. 4

**Communication about the experience of sexual violence – persons consulted in**



Question: Who did you inform about your experience?  
 Basis: 14–25-year-old girls/young women who had experienced sexual pressure and spoke with someone subsequently

Source: TNS Emnid

circle of friends.” A smaller percentage (30%) said they had (also) spoken with their father or mother about the incident; often both parents and peers were informed. 15% spoke with their (then or now) partner. The group of “Other adults” (7%) were confided in especially when parents were not considered persons of trust.

Although there was no category for having spoken with experts, some of those affected (2%) did report having spoken to a physician, psychologist, or other expert about the incident.

The communication behavior of the girls/young women with and without an immigration background did not differ: Both groups generally sought out similar persons to confide in. For both girls/young women of German origin and non-German origin the most important thing was an open and accepting atmosphere toward sexual themes in their homes. If that was the case, then they tended to inform their mother or father (35%/36%); if that atmosphere was missing at home, then fewer than half took this route. The absence of openness at home is in part compensated for by their turning to peers (plus 10%, respectively, compared to the other group). Some of those girls/young women from less open homes, however, decided to work through their experience on their own, without putting trust in anyone.

Girls/young women from educationally deprived backgrounds were overall less communicative, speaking with fewer persons and especially with fewer persons from their peer group.

The data on the number of boys/young men affected by sexualized violence are limited because of the smaller number of cases. The tendency, however, was clear that those over the age of 18 were less likely to confide in their parents than the respective group of girls/young women. Boys/young men of non-German origin generally tended to speak more with other adults, and their partner played a greater role.



*Angelika Heßling is a social scientist and has worked since 1992 at the German Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA). She is the Head of the section on National and International Cooperation, Advanced Training, and Research in the Department of Sexuality Education, Contraception, and Family Planning.*

**Contact:**

[angelika.hessling@bzga.de](mailto:angelika.hessling@bzga.de)



*Heidrun Bode has been employed for a number of years at the TNS Emnid in Bielefeld, working in the area of social research. Her field of activity comprises a broad spectrum of empirical projects, with one focus being on studies concerning adolescents and sexuality.*

**Contact:**

[heidrun.bode@tns-emnid.com](mailto:heidrun.bode@tns-emnid.com),

[www.tns-emnid.com](http://www.tns-emnid.com)

---

# The Disclosure of Sexualized Violence in Childhood and Adolescence: Personal and Societal Reactions

*Sibylle Rothkegel*

**“The moment of disclosure is a highly sensitive and complex situation for persons who have been victimized; the adequate reaction represents a major challenge for the person confided in.” A study of the Social Scientific Institute for Women’s and Gender Studies in Freiburg carried out between 2012 and 2014 provides insights into the situations in which the victims of sexualized violence confide in others, their subsequent experiences, and ways of supporting them.**

## Introduction

In the course of the 20th century, there were a number of phases in Germany in which the sexual abuse of children and adolescents came to the attention of the broad public (BANGE 2002).<sup>1</sup> At the same time, however, some claimed that the numbers being discussed were inflated, that the reports of the children and adolescents were not reliable, and that the “offenders were just perverse misfits” (ibid., p. 141). These at times rather heated discussions were initially carried in the public forum, though after a while the intensity of the debate died down and the public’s interest declined.

Since 2010, however, the subject of the sexual abuse of wards is once again in the news because of the publication of the many assaults carried out within religious and educational institutions. “This a systemic problem of power abuse and cover-ups that in part stretched over many years and generations of affected persons in these institutions” (KAVEMANN et al. 2015). Persons who had been victimized spoke of the high thresholds that prevented them from disclosing what they had experienced, how long they had had to wait, and how little appropriate the reactions were with respect to their disclosures. To this day the public attention has been present, but the reports in the media and in scientific forums sometimes read as if the authors had just discovered the phenomenon of sexualized violence toward children and adolescents (cf. HEITMEYER 2012). The sad truth is of course that these incidents should have been well known: The sexual abuse of children and adolescents is happening every day in all levels of society in all parts of the world.

In March 2010, the position of Independent Commissioner for Matters Concerning the Sexual Abuse of Children<sup>2</sup>,

with the express intent to establish, among other things, a “roundtable on sexual abuse” as well as an advisory board to develop measures to prevent sexual abuse and to explore the legal matters. These entities have the purpose of winning the trust of the victims in the protective function of the state authorities derived from the monopoly the state has on the use of force: Victims should be aware of their guarantee to the right to justice. A number of important signals were sent out, including widespread acknowledgment of the suffering the victims of sexual abuse had gone through and the demand for erecting means to assist them. Churches, other institutions, as well as later a political party<sup>3</sup> announced that they would be doing historical appraisals of the acts of sexual assaults and abuse perpetrated within their respective contexts. Victims were represented within the advisory board from the very beginning, but only after interventions on the part of their own interest groups were they invited to participate in the roundtable discussions.

1 For example, through the women’s liberation movement in the 1970s or at the end of the 1980s in the many discussions concerning the sexual revolution.

2 <http://beauftragter-missbrauch.de>. Dr. Christine Bergmann held this position from 2010 to 2011. Her successor since 1 December 2011 is Johannes-Wilhelm Rörig.

3 The Green Party (Bündnis90/Die Grünen) commissioned an independent study in 2013 after reports surfaced that some of the original members of the party (“Die Grünen” and in Berlin “Alternative Liste”) had endorsed legalizing pedophilia during the 1980s. Feminists, including those within the Green Party itself, had criticized this at the time.

## Study on the Willingness of Victims of Sexualized Violence during Childhood and Adolescence to Confide in Others

The study concerning the willingness of victims of sexualized violence during childhood and adolescence to confide in others was carried out at the Social Scientific Institute for Women's and Gender Studies in Freiburg from 2012 to 2014 and published in January 2015. The goal was to systematically gather statements from those affected by sexualized violence and to discover what factors were behind their willingness to confide in others, in whom they confided when they did disclose the incidents, and what their experiences were in that regard.

In this study disclosure is considered an interactive process "in which the victims themselves as well as various other persons and in part authorities, all with their own specific interests, are involved. It is a collective process that marginalizes the victims because of their experiences of violence or rather defines a normality that includes integrating and acknowledging experiences of violence" (KAVEMANN/ROTHKEGEL 2014).

When the study was launched, little was known about which factors in which constellations would promote or hinder the willingness of children and adolescents to disclose their experiences. Among the experts, however, it was assumed that the strategies of the perpetrators, namely, sealing a "pact to secrecy" and projecting shame and guilt onto the victims, would equally play a role along with the fears of the victims of being violated once again by the stigmatizing reactions in their immediate surroundings.<sup>4</sup> We also assumed that this willingness would be highly affected by whether or not the violence the victims had experienced was publicly discussed<sup>5</sup> and whether offers of support and assistance were in place.<sup>6</sup>

From March 2012 to March 2013, we carried out qualitative, in part narrative interviews with 44 women and 14 men between the ages of 21 and 66 years throughout Germany.

4 For an overview, see ZIMMERMANN (2011) for the private and BUNDSCHUH (2010) for the institutional context.

5 West German literature on this subject had been published since 1983; in East Germany, on the other hand, this was not a matter of public discussion. The two "waves" of public interest that subsequently occurred radically changed the environment for both disclosing sexualized violence and for supporting and empathizing with the victims of sexualized violence.

6 Within a relatively short period of time from 1983 onward, specialized counseling services were initiated in West Germany. In East Germany, this process slowly began to start up after 1989. Today, there are over 250 such institutions in the whole of Germany (cf. KAVEMANN/ROTHKEGEL 2012).

7 The discussion concerning ethical standards in research on interpersonal violence has since made much progress (cf. HELFFERICH et al. in print). One of the most important results was the "Bonn Declaration" of March 2015, which provided researchers in this field with their first code of ethics: <http://www.bmbf.de/press/3763.php>

8 The results of this study will be published in book form in the Fall of 2015 as KAVEMANN et al. (2015): *Schweigen und Sprechen nach sexuellem Missbrauch in Kindheit und Jugend*. Springer VS Verlag.

9 We chose this term following J.P. REEMTSMA, who describes his own kidnapping and captivity as an "event of extreme discontinuity" that he felt could not be properly described using the trivializing word "experience," since that term presumes continuity (REEMTSMA 1997, p. 45).

10 The results of research into the effects of sexual abuse on the development of women may be found in a long-term cross-generational study stretching over 23 years (TRICKEIT et al. 2011).

We encountered a broad spectrum of life histories. Some of those interviewed had started vocational training (sometimes several times) but were unable to complete it for health reasons and were disabled; others had been employed their entire adult lives, a number of them with great success. We spoke with persons who were single, married, with men and women in both heterosexual and homosexual relationships, who had children or not. Immigration background played a role in three life stories, and four persons suffered from physical disabilities or sensory handicaps (cf. KAVEMANN et al. 2015).

All of those interviewed had been informed in advance that the goal was not to have them recount the details of their experiences of violence, but rather that the emphasis of our survey was to discover something about the motives of whether they had or had not disclosed their experiences to others as well as the subjective strategies they applied to cope with their situations. We also asked which sort of support and assumed social assistance (if any) they had received. The interviews were recorded and then anonymously transcribed. For evaluation purposes, an assessment script was developed that was modified and adapted as necessary during the assessment phase.<sup>7</sup>

Our interview partners thus retrospectively reported on the incidents of sexualized violence they had experienced in various contexts as well as speaking with us as well about their motives for their (in part very long) silence. They also explained what they had intended with this behavior and what they had wanted to end, inhibit, or reach by then disclosing their experiences.

During the interviews the stories recounted were not questioned, and we used the substantial material we had gathered directly in the subsequent assessment. The depictions correspond to that of "subjective truth"; tracing the origin thereof was considered to be part of the interpretation of the interview (cf. Helfferich 2005, pp. 83ff.). In our evaluation we were confronted with a number of very different memory processes as well as with the ambivalence involved with (fragmentary) recollection, suppression, silence, and assertion. We also had to deal extensively with the question of the relevance of the individual and social resonance that followed their disclosures.<sup>8</sup> Only excerpts of the results of the study are provided here in summary form.

## Results

### Traumatic Events<sup>9</sup>

The sexual violence suffered by our interviewees was very heterogeneous in nature: Some recounted the misdeeds of family members, of fathers, stepfathers, grandfathers, brothers, uncles, mothers, and aunts from very different milieus. Offenders from outside the family included neighbors, acquaintances, and peers; in the institutional context there were teachers, caretakers, educators, persons from public social work, public schools, boarding schools, church facilities, healthcare facilities, and institutions for the handicapped.

The timespan involved with the violence was also very diverse, but largely over several years. Some reported being assaulted by several persons from their family context and social environment. Others had experienced multiple traumatic events in successive phases of their lives. Abuse stretching across generations<sup>10</sup> in der family was reported

relatively often by a total of 22 interview partners. In addition, five also reported that their mothers stemmed from “very difficult family situations” or suspected that they had also been violated. Most learned of their mothers’ fate only after disclosing their own violent traumas. In the majority of cases, these were very closed family systems that cultivated a family culture of remaining silent (vgl. DANIELI 1998).

### The Effects of Sexualized Violence Toward Children

The traumatization of children often turns out to be multiple or chronic abuse or abuse in a family context. The effects thereof are not necessarily specific to the trauma, but rather reveal themselves in developmental or age-specific contexts (cf. SCHMID et al. 2010). A “developmental trauma” is present when, among other things, disorders of the personality or binding behavior occur as well as conditions with a chronic course. Victimized children have the task of overcoming the traumatic experiences in addition to normal age-related developmental problems. Especially detrimental is the fact that a trusted person with the role of protecting the child and wielding emotional power over the child has become the perpetrator of such wrongs. The trust children so desperately need in order to develop their own self-esteem is then deeply shattered (KAVEMANN et al. 2015).

Children who have been affected are then confronted with feelings of powerlessness and helplessness, the result of the very basic disregard for their will, their needs and wishes, and their physical integrity. Their sexual feelings and views are distorted in such a way that their relationships with others become dysfunctional. A traumatic sexualization has occurred (cf. WEISS 2008, quoted in STERMOJAHN/FEGERT 2015).

As to the physical effects, research has shown that sexual abuse may lead to a number of health problems that may not be recognized as going back to the experiences of violence.<sup>11</sup> Especially important are reports of changes in the brain function resulting from such traumata. These changes “among sexually traumatized persons are found above all in those parts of the brain in which processes of emotional regulation, memory consolidation, and memory integration as well as the control over attention and behavior are presumed to take place” (GOLDBECK 2015, p. 148). Sexual abuse during childhood may cause girls and boys to display behavioral problems leading to risky behavior, which in turn may precipitate their falling victim to further sexualized violence (MANIGLIO 2014).

The extent and nature of these effects of such traumatic events depend on the type, conditions, and intensity of the incident – and especially on the developmental stage the victim was in at the time. These circumstances include the presence of any protective factors before, during, and after the traumatic event. Also, whether or not a child had in any way been mentally prepared and how the child’s environment reacted to the disclosure thereof were of great importance (HENRY 1997). KHAN (1963), using the concept of the cumulative traumatization, and KEILSON (1979), using the idea of the sequential traumatization, pointed to the multiplicity of the effects of traumatic events. In his long-term study over a course of 20 years, KEILSON analyzed the development of Jewish orphans in The Netherlands following World War II. He felt it was his task to “come to understand the sequences and consequences of the persecution suffered with respect to both the individual and the social-psychological aspects, to order the material, and to determine the effects of trauma-

tization and social rehabilitation” (ibid., p. 424). He was able to prove that not just the length of the directly experienced traumatic events were of importance, but also the immediate subsequent period of time<sup>12</sup> “was decisive for adequately understanding and assessing the traumatic developmental process.” It was not just a matter of working through past suffering, but rather of “determining the continued relevance of the social environment, even many years later” (BECKER 2001, quoted acc. to KÜHNER 2002, p. 27).

### The Reactions of the Victims

We also asked our interview partners whether they, upon looking back, had exhibited any conspicuous behavior or sent out any “unusual nonverbal signals” during their childhood that could have alarmed adults in their family or other persons from their social surroundings. It is worthwhile repeating some of their answers verbatim.

Psychologically, almost all of those interviewed reported feelings of powerlessness, in addition to constant fear and severe nightmares: “I wet the bed for a long time,” “I couldn’t stand being alone,” “Suffered from melancholy,” “I was depressive, had suicidal thoughts early on and extreme mood swings.”

Somatically, they reported chronic illnesses that often led to long stays in the hospital. One woman said: “My body was crying out from numerous symptoms”; another said: “I was always in pain. I couldn’t walk. I was just exhausted.” Others noted their eating disorders: “I was thin as a rail” or “I shoved everything I could find in my mouth, could only eat elsewhere since I couldn’t get anything down at home.” Some spoke of frequent vomiting without reason, of auto-aggressive behavior, of risky behavior with many accidents, of broken bones, of extreme alcohol or drug use as an adolescent.

As far as social behavior is concerned, many mentioned feelings of embarrassment, shame, and guilt. “Although I was otherwise a very well-adapted child, I was openly disrespectful to my uncle (the perpetrator) whenever he came to visit us.” Some report publicly sexualized behavior, others a sudden drop in (school) performance or unusual behavior at school. One woman said, “One day I was so desperate that I just started a fire on the school playground.” Other mentioned problems dealing with other children: “I was an outsider. I withdrew completely” or “I was always getting into fights.” Others said they continually acted awkwardly. Other emphasized how “inconspicuous” they were, “always well-behaved” (cf. KAVEMANN/ROTHKEGEL 2014).

In the sample we studied such “signals” were hardly ever registered. In only three cases did a teacher ask the child whether something was wrong, but then equally quickly resigned in light of the child’s silence.

### Remembering and Forgetting

Victims are not always continually reminded of their experiences of sexual abuse. Some report that they forgot about them, whether for a shorter or longer period – or completely. A sort of amnesia surrounding events of abuse is a widespread phenomenon. In our analysis of the qualitative data

<sup>11</sup> An overview may be found in GOLDBECK 2015, p. 147.

<sup>12</sup> The third traumatic sequence in his study is the timespan devoted to social rehabilitation.

at our disposal, we found several basic memory patterns: continual remembrance, reproduction of sometimes non-accessible memories, fragmentary memories, memories in the context of a dissociative disorder. In some cases, the long period of silence on the part of the victims goes back to the phases of forgetting (KAVEMANN et al. 2015). Some interview partners report experiencing spontaneous, obtrusive memories and flashbacks or that fragments of memories are suddenly triggered. One woman was “flooded” by images from memory of years-long sexual assaults she had suffered at the hand of her own father upon hearing about sexualized violence toward her own daughter in the familial environment, which precipitated a severe mental crisis in her. If such intrusions (i.e., recalling or reexperiencing psychotraumatic events) occurred in unprotected spaces, the victims often felt revictimized and retraumatized.<sup>13</sup>

The symptoms that occur as a result of having experienced a traumatic event may be seen as a loss of control or the partial loss of power over one’s self, for example, when memories are thrust upon one, when flashbacks occur, or when overexcitation arises in the form of overwhelming, uncontrollable physical symptoms. Here, the memories exert a “power” that involuntarily revitalizes past suffering. The memories break through carefully erected protection barriers (“forgetting”) that had the function of keeping something at a distance that was considered too painful to look at. This form of “transgression” is then experienced as a new trauma (KAVEMANN et al. 2015).

#### Does Talking About Things Really Help?

“Talking about things helps” was the motto of a campaign that the Independent Commissioner for Matters Concerning the Sexual Abuse of Children started in September 2010. Victims were encouraged to talk about what had been perpetrated upon them and to “break the power of the offenders.”<sup>14</sup> “The only effective means against unwanted intimacy is disclosure,” was how PHILIPP REEMTSMA (1997, p. 17) commented on the motivation he had to publicly take a position toward his own violent kidnapping and captivity.

However, the experiences gathered in counseling centers, which can offer some orientation for victims of sexual abuse, as well as the direct reports by victims themselves show that many children as well as adults often go for a long time before confiding in someone; the hurdles are just too high to disclosing what they have experienced or to bringing charges against someone (e.g., FEGERT et al. 2011). These are the reasons provided by our interview partners for their long silence: (1) the wish to maintain the family unit (“The worst-case scenario for me was that my family would break up”); (2) they wanted to protect themselves and others, for example, from threatened or feared retaliations, from foreseen or unforeseen emotional burdens; (3) sometimes they felt they didn’t have the resources necessary to talk about the events or to properly order the events and find a way to talk about them: “It was not the case that I was afraid of telling my parents about it. Rather, I didn’t even realize that you could talk to parents about such things.”

At what point in time the interview partners did in fact decide to reveal something about the violence they had experienced was very widespread, from immediately afterwards to many years later. The disclosure sometimes took place spontaneously – regardless of the point in time – or it was a planned and well thought-out act.

Sometimes disclosure turned out to be a relief, sometimes with very detrimental aftereffects. In the sample at our disposal, generally a number of people in the victim’s surroundings were informed over time. When the victims confided in family members, they generally did so to other females – their mother, grandmother, or aunt, some other female family members of the same level such as sisters or cousins. Many also confided in peers, friends, partners, or professionals in healthcare, social, or educational settings as well as in other victims.

#### Individual Reactions

The reactions to disclosures and the effects thereof on the victims were also widely scattered. However, two basic and opposite poles may be recognized: On the one hand, we found rejection, degradation, refusal; on the other hand, acceptance, respect, esteem for the person doing the disclosing. Our interview partners report being shocked at the reactions to their reports – the denying, ignoring, playing down, aggressive pushback, sometimes even punishment. They also were forced to experience that the main concern their relatives had was that the abuse would become public, more so than any concern others had about their well-being as victims of sexual abuse.

One woman who had grown up in a large family in the country said the following: “I thought that if I come forward, then everything will be better. But that was only the beginning of the pain.” At the age of 5 years she had gone into the kitchen to tell her mother, grandmother, and an aunt who had gathered there that her uncle had been touching her and had hurt her. The three women did not react, almost as though they hadn’t even heard her. “Nothing happened, not a word, not a gesture, nothing. They just didn’t talk about it at all.” She was very confused, felt exposed, unprotected, so for many years after that she remained silent about the still ongoing abuse. As an adult she spontaneously talked to her sister about the matter, later also to her own husband, her mother, and friends. With nearly all these people she had the feeling that they were at first “completely overwhelmed” and unable to “cope with the matter.” She described very poignantly how she felt like she was “losing her footing.” Her family wanted nothing more than to dissuade her from acting against her uncle; they were afraid of “what people might say.”

Two other examples to illustrate the breadth of the reactions. One interview partner (a woman) had entrusted herself to her teacher who reacted rather helplessly and played everything down: “He didn’t know exactly how to react to things, so at some point he said: ‘Well, there are a lot of women who’ve had that happen to them.’ That was his comment. He was completely helpless and didn’t know how to deal with me. The conversation didn’t really go anywhere.”

In contrast, the reaction to another woman’s revelations revealed much empathy, trust, and interest in her fate: “She (the teacher she had confided in) was very understanding, loving, protective, very protective. She believed me and listened to my story. She also asked me questions, was very interested, very interested in me.”

<sup>13</sup> A retraumatization has the effect of “updating” and effectively deepening the trauma.

<sup>14</sup> Further information on this campaign may be found under <http://beauftragter-missbrauch.de>

### Social Reactions

Being confronted with the offenders and the details of the offence of sexual abuse is something most victims want to avoid. They are afraid of not being able to withstand the burden of direct interaction. Yet, whenever victims demand their rights and want the person prosecuted, the process of criminally charging and trying someone for such a misdeed makes such confrontations unavoidable. Part of the interview contained questions concerning how the police were notified and what the experiences in that situation were, including any subsequent court sessions. Three of the overall 14 men interviewed and 9 of the 44 women interviewed took the perpetrators to court – all of them men, by the way. Some of the assaults had taken place so long in the past that they could no longer be prosecuted according to the statutes. In some cases, the case was dismissed for other reasons, for example, because of a lack of evidence. In only three cases was the offender actually convicted.

The answers of our interview partners reveal a number of reasons why some of them decided not to press charges: A fear of the (still) violent offender or a fear of having to confront him and the aftermath of the event led to their waiting until the offender had died before acting, only to then realize that the acts perpetrated no longer fell within the statutes of limitations. But some also noted their previous poor experiences with their own family or in a clinic where they had admitted to having been abused and were not believed.

Others listed health reasons or said that even today, many years after the events, they were unable to endure a court process. “Right now I can’t imagine, even if there were no statutes of limitations, standing in front of a court. That would be just too much for me to take and in the end wouldn’t help me. And, as I mentioned, I would be very afraid that no one would believe me.”

The demands that the court process makes on credibility and evidence usually run contrary to the possibilities and needs of the victims, who are interested in being believed and having wrongs righted. This is a further dilemma to the victims. With the exception of three cases, the confrontation with the traumatic events during the examinations by the police and during the court trial (sometimes directly with the offender) proved to be an overwhelming burden (KAVEMANN et al. 2015). Yet a look at the various experiences of the victims which took place at very different times showed that recent changes in the social structures were beginning to also change the outlook on the rights of victims.<sup>15</sup>

With a few exceptions, all of those interviewed who did decide to press charges said they felt the hour-long examination on the part of the police had been extremely stressful. It was difficult for them to be asked for exact details and caused them to relive the traumatic events all over again.

Being interrogated means being confronted once again with all the details of the act. Whether someone considered this bearable or “awful” depended as well on how the person doing the interrogating had proceeded. In addition to the room in which the interrogation and the examination take place, the way policemen and policewomen act can be very important to the atmosphere. Here are two examples:

Example 1: “There was a man there who didn’t know what he was doing – you could really tell that he found it very unpleasant to be sitting with me there. The whole interrogation took about, oh, four hours, without a single break, not a one (...) but what really got me the most was the fact that

this guy then said I should speak up to protect others. That was something I (...) really didn’t want to hear at that moment. Once, just once, I wanted to be listened to.”

Example 2: “The woman who took down my statement, she was specially trained for that. She helped to quiet me down, the whole conversation. She was very careful and gave me all the time I needed. We had a lot of time – there was absolute quiet with a few breaks here and now. Whenever I needed one, we took a break and then continued, piece for piece.”

The victims thought it was especially helpful and relaxing when the policemen and policewomen proved to be competent and did not react to the descriptions by the victims “hectically and excited, but remained cool and collected” as well as asking questions sensitively and mindfully – when they were able to create a good atmosphere during the interrogation. Especially positive was the fact that some took the time to counsel the victims, for example, by telling them how to react if they were ever threatened again by the offender and where they could get professional counseling<sup>16</sup> during the course of the legal proceedings.

Nearly all of the victims who eventually went to court thought the extremely long proceedings were very burdensome and stressful to them, especially when the accused appealed the sentence. To them this meant that the perpetrator was not being conscious of or owning up to the injustice and suffering he had caused someone else; by appealing to the next level he was effectively rejecting all the statements made in the initial proceedings. Any cross-examination that served to clear up the circumstances of the event and test the credibility of the witness at the time was also considered to be favoring the position of the defendant and implicitly accusing the victim. Sometimes these events were understood for what they were only much later.

“From the very beginning I had the feeling that they (the court) were on the side of the defendant. (...) The questions the lawyers posed seemed to me to be accusations directed at me. (...) And then they asked me: ‘So why didn’t you go and get your sister?’ (...) But that would have been useless. So they’re saying I should have made a commotion and got people’s attention? Well, OK: I did! I cried out, sure, but what could my sister have done? Nothing! (...) At that moment it seemed to me they were blaming me. Later, however, when I thought about it I realized: Yeah, OK, he just wanted to clarify what happened. (...) It was hard enough to talk about it all, to find the right words to express ...”

If the injustice done was not acknowledged within the family and by a court of law, that served only to increase the victim’s trauma, especially if the defendant(s) were not convicted or the sentences were not seen as befitting the crime and the suffering of the victims. Some reported that they wished they had been better prepared by their own lawyers or a counseling service for what they subsequently experienced in the courtroom. But the statements of the victims also clearly show that they were concerned less with

15 Since the mid-1990s the rights of victims are coming to be seen more and more as basic human rights, in both German and European jurisprudence. Extensive efforts have been undertaken to create the legal conditions for this. For example, since 2001 the police in German employ specially trained liaisons to provide victim protection.

16 A victim’s right to professional psychosocial process counseling is scheduled to be legally anchored in 2017 according to accepted quality standards.

the offender getting a serious sanction than that everyone would believe their account of the wrong they had suffered, and that the offender express his remorse in a public courtroom and, in light of the consequences the act had had, apologize to the victim (KAVEMANN et al. 2015). All of those interviewed mentioned the following factors as helping and protecting them in these situations: being accompanied and supported by friends and partners and receiving professional support throughout the long court procedures.

### Refusal of Social Recognition

The interviews also reveal that social recognition for the wrongs suffered was of great importance to the victims, so that by implication the failure to recognize their suffering carried with it a great potential for further traumatization, for example, when the level of suffering of the victims was doubted in public discussions concerning sexualized childhood and adolescence.

One way of expressing social recognition is to acknowledge their right to rehabilitation and recompense. Today, the application for victim compensation in accordance with the respective German law (OEG, Opferentschädigungsgesetz) may be made even without having made an official police report. This change in the law respects the consequences that traumata victims suffer, for example, delayed flashbacks and symptoms. According to the present German law, punishment of these crimes is often time-barred (i.e., subject to the statute of limitations)<sup>17</sup>, whereas the application for victim compensation has no time limits. On the other hand, the information provided must make clear that the sequelae were indeed caused by the traumatization and cannot be linked to later events in the person's life. The responsible authorities (the respective State Health Ministries) verify the statements, contact the witnesses, therapists, clinics, government offices, etc., to obtain the information and expert opinions necessary or to commission such opinions.

These conditions may still present themselves to many victims as insurmountable tasks. Many such negative experiences were reported. Only seven of the interview partners made an application for victim compensation; at the time of the interviews two of those seven applications had not yet been decided on. Only one male had made an application, only to later withdraw it because the defendant had offered financial restitution during the court proceedings. Many others had resigned beforehand and felt unable to present the necessary proofs: Many of the procedures had lasted many years and were then rejected because of "lack of convincing evidence." In the end, only very few applications were successful. The victims interpreted these events as once again the failure to believe them or as rejecting their versions, which in turn renewed the feeling of having suffered an

injustice or even a retraumatization. Only one interview partner reported that her OEG application had been granted and resulted in "complete cost coverage" (after only four months' time). This woman also emphasized that she had been contacted by telephone shortly after handing in her application and was kept up to date by authorities throughout the entire procedure.<sup>18</sup>

### Possibilities of Support – The Healthcare System

In response to our questions concerning their experiences with the healthcare system, many of those interviewed said that the number of psychotherapists approved by the statutory health insurance companies for treating persons with complex traumatization was insufficient. Further, when applying for extensions to their psychotherapeutic care, again and again they had to justify the need, only to have their applications rejected. They also lamented the poor knowledge many physicians had of the long-term and difficult courses such traumatizations could take following sexualized violence. The contact was often characterized by insensitivity.

With a few exceptions, all of the interview partners sought out professional support at some time following their experiences, either in the form of psychotherapy, in part as inpatients, or in self-help groups or from counseling services. The men among the victims had a more difficult time finding adequate support than did the women.

A particularly important role is played by the protected communication offered within a special counseling service or a psychotherapeutic setting as well as a trustful relationship among victims themselves. Their ability to listen and to provide understanding and empathy was often decisive in whether or not the disclosure changed the situation and whether a violent relationship was terminated (KAVEMANN et al. 2015). Teachers, caretakers, and physicians also played key roles in the process.

The disclosure situation is one of great import to the victims, and the proper reaction is a great challenge to the person chosen to be a confidant. In our sample, the following elements proved to be very important to the victims: (1) that the person chosen as confidant believes the victim's story; (2) that sexualized violence is considered a crime; (3) that the person doing the disclosing is accepted by the confidant (i.e., that the rights of the victim, such as that to self-determination, are respected); (4) that the victim receives appreciation for having stepped up and for the effort it has taken to continue on with life; (5) that the confidant express empathy and sympathy for what has happened to the victim and how the victim continues to suffer. Both short- and long-term support, for example, in situations in which the victim is confronted with the past experiences, is very highly valued (KAVEMANN et al. 2015).

<sup>17</sup> The present Justice Minister, Heiko Maas, initiated reform legislation in 2014 which could be an important step toward improving the legal protection of children. The research results of Prof. Tatjana Hörnle have confirmed that there is a need for reforming the statutes concerning the punishment of child abuse and statutes of limitations that apply to it. Expert opinions on this matter as well as other information on the hearing concerning "Criminal Law" may be downloaded at [www.beauftragter-missbrauch.de](http://www.beauftragter-missbrauch.de).

<sup>18</sup> During the reform process of the victim compensation act (OEG), those modifications that had been anchored in the coalition agreement made between the two political parties involved in the present German government (2014) became clear in the changes made to protect victims' right.



Sibylle Rothkegel is a certified psychologist, a psychotherapist, and a supervisor. Her focus lies on trauma in intercultural contexts. She has her own practice as well as working at the International Academy Berlin for Innovative Pedagogy, Psychology, and Economics gGmbH (INA). She also does extensive advanced training in Germany and elsewhere.

**Contact:**

rothkegel@ina-fu.org

References

- BANGE, DIRK (2002): Definitionen und Begriffe. In: BANGE, D./KÖRNER, W. (Eds.): Handwörterbuch Sexueller Missbrauch. Göttingen: Hogrefe, pp. 47–52
- BUNDSCHUH, CLAUDIA (2010): Sexualisierte Gewalt gegen Kinder in Institutionen. Nationaler und internationaler Forschungsstand. Expertise (Reihe: Wissenschaftliche Texte). München: DJI. Online verfügbar: [http://beauftragter-missbrauch.de/file.php/95/Expertise\\_Bundschuh.pdf](http://beauftragter-missbrauch.de/file.php/95/Expertise_Bundschuh.pdf)
- DANIELI, Y. (Ed.) (1998): International Handbook of Multigenerational Legacies of Trauma. New York: Springer
- FASTIE, FRIESA (Ed.) (2008): Opferschutz im Strafverfahren (2nd completely revised edition). Opladen: Budrich
- FEGERT, JÖRG M. (2012): Endbericht der wissenschaftlichen Begleitforschung zur Anlaufstelle der Unabhängigen Beauftragten zur Aufarbeitung des sexuellen Kindesmissbrauchs, Ulm. <http://beauftragtermisbrauch.de/course/view.php?id=28>
- GOLDBECK, LUTZ (2015): Auffälligkeiten und Hinweise bei sexuellem Missbrauch. In: FEGERT, JÖRG M./HOFFMANN, ULRIKE/KÖNIG, ELISA/NIEHUES, JOHANNA/LIEBHARDT, HUBERT (Eds.): Sexueller Missbrauch von Kindern und Jugendlichen. Ein Handbuch zur Prävention und Intervention für Fachkräfte im medizinischen, psychotherapeutischen und pädagogischen Bereich. Heidelberg: Springer
- HEITMEYER, WILHELM (2012): Sozialer Tod. Sexuelle Gewalt in Institutionen: Mechanismen und Systeme. In: Andresen, Sabine/Heitmeyer, Wilhelm (Eds.): Zerstörerische Vorgänge. Missachtung und sexuelle Gewalt gegen Kinder und Jugendliche in Institutionen. Weinheim: Beltz Juventa, pp. 22–35
- HELFFERICH, CORNELIA (2011): Die Qualität qualitativer Daten. Manual für die Durchführung qualitativer Interviews (4th ed.). Wiesbaden, VS Verlag
- HELFFERICH, CORNELIA/KAVEMANN, BARBARA/KINDLER, HEINZ (in press): Forschungsmanual Gewalt. Wiesbaden: VS Springer
- HENRY, J. (1997): System intervention trauma to child sexual abuse following disclosure. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 12, 499–512
- KAVEMANN, BARBARA (2015): Erinnerbarkeit, Angst, Scham und Schuld als Grenzen der Forschung zu Gewalt. In: HELFFERICH, CORNELIA/KAVEMANN, BARBARA/KINDLER, HEINZ (Eds.): Forschungsmanual Gewalt. München: Springer
- KAVEMANN, BARBARA/GRAF-VAN KESTEREN, ANNEMARIE/ROTHKEGEL, SIBYLLE/NAGEL, BIANCA (2015): Schweigen und Sprechen nach sexuellem Missbrauch in Kindheit und Jugend. Wiesbaden: Springer VS
- KAVEMANN, BARBARA/ROTHKEGEL, SIBYLLE (2014): Trauma: sexualisierte Gewalt in Kindheit und Jugend, Vergessen und Erinnern – Sprechen und Schweigen. In: Trauma & Gewalt 8, 202–214
- KAVEMANN, BARBARA/ROTHKEGEL, SIBYLLE (2012): Bestandsaufnahme und Finanzierungspraxis spezialisierter Beratungsangebote bzw. spezialisierter Beratungsstellen für Menschen, die von sexualisierter Gewalt in Kindheit und Jugend betroffen sind. Berlin: UBSKM
- KEILSON, H. (1979): Sequentielle Traumatisierung bei Kindern. Stuttgart: Enke
- KHAN, M./MASUD, R. (1963): The concept of cumulative trauma.
- In: KHAN, M./MASUD, R. (1974): The Privacy of the Self. London: Hogarth Press, pp. 42–58
- KÜHNER, A. (2002): Kollektive Traumata. Eine Bestandsaufnahme – Annahmen, Argumente, Konzepte nach dem 11. September, Berghof Report Nr. 9, Berghof Forschungszentrum für konstruktive Konfliktbearbeitung, Berlin
- MAGNILIO, ROBERTO (2014): Significance, Nature, and Direction of the Association Between Child Sexual Abuse and Conduct Disorder: A Systematic Review. *Trauma: Violence, & Abuse* pp. 1–17
- OERTER, R./HAGEN, C. VON/RÖPER, G./NOAM, G. (Eds.) (1999): Klinische Entwicklungspsychologie. Weinheim: Beltz – Psychologie Verlags Union
- Reemtsma, Jan Phillip (1997): Im Keller. Hamburger Edition, Hamburg
- RÖPER, G./NOAM, G. (1999): Entwicklungsdiagnostik in klinisch-psychologischer Therapie und Forschung. In: OERTER, R./HAGEN, C. VON/RÖPER, G./NOAM, G. (Eds.): Klinische Entwicklungspsychologie. Weinheim: Beltz – Psychologie Verlags Union, pp. 218–239
- SCHMID, MARC/FEGERT, JÖRG M./PETERMANN, FRANZ (2010): Traumata-Entwicklungsstörung: Pro und Contra. *Kindheit und Entwicklung* 19(1), 47–63
- STERMOJAN, CHRISTINE/FEGERT, JÖRG M. (2015): Unterstützung für von sexuellem Missbrauch betroffene Kinder und Jugendliche. In: FEGERT, JÖRG M./HOFFMANN, ULRIKE/KÖNIG, ELISA/NIEHUES, JOHANNA/LIEBHARDT, HUBERT (Eds.): Sexueller Missbrauch von Kindern und Jugendlichen. Ein Handbuch zur Prävention und Intervention für Fachkräfte im medizinischen, psychotherapeutischen und pädagogischen Bereich. Heidelberg: Springer
- TRICKETT, P. K./NOLL, J./PUTNAM, F. W. (2011): The impact of sexual abuse on female development: Lessons from a multigenerational, longitudinal research study. *Development and Psychopathology* 23, 453–476. Doi 10.1017/S0954579411000174
- WHO (World Health Organization) (2003): Ethical and safety recommendations for interviewing trafficked women. [http://www.who.int/gender/documents/women\\_and\\_girls/9789242595499/en/](http://www.who.int/gender/documents/women_and_girls/9789242595499/en/) Accessed on 17 April 2015
- ZIMMERMANN, PETER (2011): Sexuelle Gewalt gegen Kinder in Familien. Expertise, erstellt im Auftrag von Dr. Christine Bergmann, der Unabhängigen Beauftragten zur Aufarbeitung des sexuellen Kindesmissbrauchs. München: DJI. [http://www.dji.de/index.php?id=43264&no\\_cache=1&tx\\_solr\[q\]=13757&f=2](http://www.dji.de/index.php?id=43264&no_cache=1&tx_solr[q]=13757&f=2)  
[http://www.dji.de/index.php?id=43264&no\\_cache=1&tx\\_solr\[q\]=13757&f=2](http://www.dji.de/index.php?id=43264&no_cache=1&tx_solr[q]=13757&f=2)

# Protecting Persons with Disabilities from Sexual Abuse

Katharina Urbann, Sara Scharmanski, Pia Bienstein

In this article the authors reflect on the role of preventive measures in institutions and report on the research project “Vorbeugen und Handeln – Sexueller Missbrauch an Kindern und Jugendlichen mit Behinderung” (SeMB) [Prevention and Taking Action – The Sexual Abuse of Children and Adolescents with Disabilities]. This study focuses on children and adolescents with hearing impairments, mental or physical disabilities as well as looking at their educational environment.

## Background

Research results point to the fact that people with disabilities have a higher risk of encountering sexual abuse over the course of their lifetime (cf. among others CROSSE et al. 1992; SULLIVAN/KNUTSON 2000; MARTIN et al. 2006; HUGHES et al. 2012; SCHRÖTTLE et al. 2012; WISSINK et al. 2014).

Sexual abuse would appear to occur especially often in spaces that are presumed to be safe ones, such as in residential homes or schools. Here, assaults are perpetrated by staff members of the facilities, by other residents, or by other pupils (cf. ZEMP/PIRCHER 1996; ZEMP/PIRCHER/SCHOIBL 1997).

The latest research concerns the question of which factors facilitate sexual abuse in the institutional setting. A number of different risk factors occurring on various levels were identified (cf. BANGE 2015; BUNDSCHUH 2010; HELMIG 2011; SCHRÖTTLE et al. 2012):

1. The level of the children and adolescents themselves (e.g., because of the absence of satisfactory sex education and sexuality education; cf. CHODAN/REIS/HÄSSLER 2015; FUREY 2000; SCHMID/NOACK 1994; ZEMP 2002).
2. The level of the facility’s staff (e.g., because of the absence of knowledge concerning sex education and sexual abuse or the absence of open-mindedness toward these themes; cf. ZEMP 2002).
3. The structural level of the institution (e.g., because of the absence of established ways of dealing with grievances; cf. BANGE 2015; BUNDSCHUH 2010).

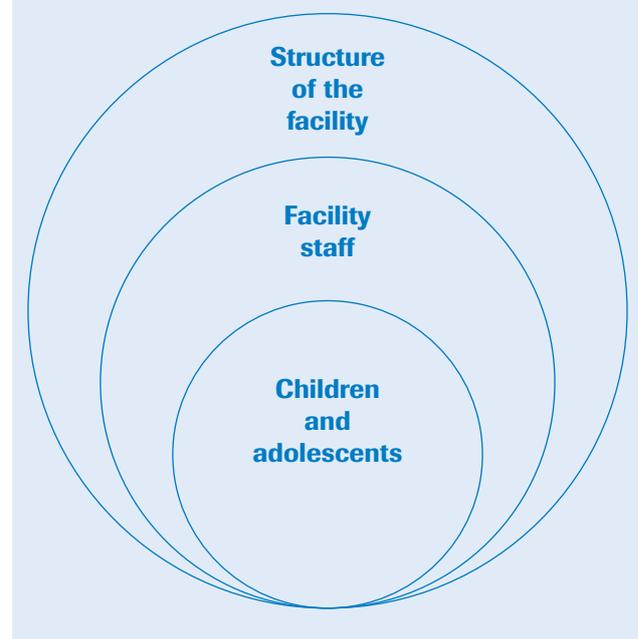
It is important to note that the assessment of the respective risk present in any specific facility must include all three levels. In particular, a cluster of risk factors increases the

imbalance of power and dependency that ensues between the caretakers and their charges (cf. CHODAN/REIS/HÄSSLER 2015; DARMANN 2000; ZEMP 2002).

The existence of such power and dependency relationships as well as the increased level of heteronomy in facilities devoted to the care of the disabled (esp. in residential

Fig. 1

**The levels of institutional prevention**  
(acc. to Bange 2015 and Bundschuh 2010)



Tab. 1

**Institutional protection concepts for persons with disabilities<sup>1</sup>**

At what level ...	... can something be done?
<b>Structural level (institution)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Anonymous complaint management for children and adolescents, staff, and parents as well as further persons who have contact with the institution</li> <li>– Continued education events for parents on the theme of “sexual abuse of children and adolescents with disabilities”</li> <li>– Cooperation with the police, youth welfare offices, specialized counseling services</li> <li>– Guidelines for dealing with suspected cases (e.g., obligation to document) and proven cases as well as how to provide “optimal care”</li> <li>– Establishing a protection concept that is binding for all staff members</li> <li>– Continued education for special staff members concerned with child protection</li> <li>– Establishing internal workgroup for child protection</li> <li>– Establishing standards for physical contact between the children and adolescents and their caretakers</li> <li>– Binding rules for all concerned regarding transgressive behavior</li> <li>– ...</li> </ul>
<b>Level of facility staff</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Designating certain persons (ombudspersons) to whom the children/adolescents can turn</li> <li>– Binding and regular continuing education courses on the theme of “sex education/sexuality education” and “sexual abuse of children and adolescents with disabilities”</li> <li>– Supervision</li> <li>– Intersession/case counseling among staff members</li> <li>– ...</li> </ul>
<b>Level of children/adolescents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Designating certain persons (ombudspersons) to whom the children/adolescents can turn</li> <li>– Information about the rights of children (Federal Child Protection Laws, UN Convention on Rights of the Disabled)</li> <li>– Regular sex-education courses</li> <li>– Prevention offers on the subject of sexual abuse</li> <li>– Clear guidelines on transgressive behavior and about what to do when this occurs</li> <li>– ...</li> </ul>

facilities) make them particularly inviting for perpetrators of sexual abuse (ZEMP 2002).

In order to decrease the level of dependency between the caretakers and their charges, and in order to protect children and adolescents from sexual abuse, factors that impart protection can be derived from the risk factors present. Example may be seen in the lists provided in Table 1.

Implementing protective factors is one element of a comprehensive quality management within such facilities (cf. GERMAN FEDERAL JUSTICE MINISTRY/GERMAN FEDERAL MINISTRY OF FAMILY AFFAIRS, SENIOR CITIZENS, WOMEN AND YOUTH 2011; UBSKM 2013). It is also necessary to continually review the quality of such measures and their implementation in order to further develop them. Communicative processes must also be considered here. The goal is to promote structures and processes that guarantee an effective top-down communication (e.g., discussing these matters in staff meetings, developing and propagating standards that are valid for and transparent to all staff members). This is the best way to establish good prevention procedures, and this is the only effective way to protect children and adolescents from sexual abuse (BIENSTEIN/VERLINDEN/PASCHKE in preparation).

### The SeMB Project<sup>2</sup>

In cooperation with the Bodelschwingh Foundation ([www.bethel-regional.de](http://www.bethel-regional.de)), the University of Cologne has carried out the research project entitled “Vorbeugen und Handeln – Sexueller Missbrauch an Kindern und Jugendlichen mit Behinderung” (SeMB) [Prevention and Taking Action – The Sexual Abuse of Children and Adolescents with Disabilities] since 2013. This project focuses on children and adolescents with hearing impairments, mental or physical disabilities as well as looking at their educational environment.

The SeMB project has four major priorities:

1. Gathering and measuring behavioral problems in connection with sexual abuse among children and adolescents with disabilities.

<sup>1</sup> This table is based on the recommended minimum standards proposed by the roundtable “Sexual Child Abuse” (cf. GERMAN FEDERAL JUSTICE MINISTRY/GERMAN FEDERAL MINISTRY OF FAMILY AFFAIRS, SENIOR CITIZENS, WOMEN AND YOUTH 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Further information on the SeMB Project may be found at <http://www.semb.eu>

2. Developing and evaluating a concept for the education/ continuing education of (beginning) teachers for special schools for children with disabilities as well as other educational staff in residential facilities.<sup>3</sup>
3. Developing and evaluating a prevention training program for children and adolescents with various forms of disability.
4. Preparing a national online survey of staff and management personnel of special schools for children with disabilities (in particular those concentrating on children with hearing impairments and mental or physical developmental problems).

The latter research area – the SeMB Online Survey – has the goal of gathering information about verified and presumed cases of sexual abuse in special schools for children with disabilities as well as implementing protection concepts (cf. Table 1). Below we look more closely at this survey.

### The SeMB Online Survey

The following research questions are being followed up on in the national online survey of the staff and management of special schools for children with disabilities:

- How often have verified and presumed cases of sexual abuse occurred within the past 12 months? What is the average rate of such cases per school? Is the respective incidence connected to any other characteristics peculiar to that institution (e.g., extent of prevention measures implemented, overall number of pupils)?
- Which preventive measures already exist in the schools, which are in planning, and which are missing altogether (cf. Table 1)?
- Are there any specific characteristics on the part of the pupils affected (e.g., level of disability, behavioral problems, age, sex) that correlate with verified cases of sexual abuse?
- Are there any specific characteristics on the part of the offenders or their misdeeds (e.g., place and type of assault, relationship between offender and victim)?

Registering the degree to which the protection concepts have been implemented is done by using the three above-mentioned levels of (1) children and adolescents, (2) staff, (3) institution. The participating persons report to what extent these structures are already present in their school or whether or not they are being planned. The survey was completed in April of 2014, and thereupon followed the assessment and evaluation phases.

This survey is intended as a contribution to intensifying prevalence-based studies. Further, it should reveal for the first time the level of implementation of the necessary protection concepts in special schools for children with disabilities. The minimum standards published by the roundtable “Sexual Child Abuse” were reviewed for the first time in 2013 in a report by the Independent Commissioner for

Matters Concerning the Sexual Abuse of Children (UBSKM), who queried institutions concerning their implementation of the minimum standards. Special schools for children with disabilities were included in that survey, though in the end there was no differentiation of the various types of school (cf. UBSKM 2013). However, because of the apparently high prevalence of sexual abuse among children with disabilities, it would seem to be essential to make such differentiations when registering the level of implementation of the protection concepts in the environment of children and adolescents with disabilities. The SeMB online survey serves just this purpose.

### Discussion and Outlook

Good prevention work means more than teaching children to “just say no” and to engage them in conversations about their body. Although the sex-educational work with children and adolescents with disabilities and the need to talk about transgressive behavior are essential parts of preventive efforts, providing good preventive measures means working on different levels.

The image shown in Figure 2 shows the basics of prevention: “Attitude – Inspection – Taking Action” (cf. URBANN/ VERLINDEN 2014). It is necessary to be on the lookout for what’s happening as well as to communicate it and then to take action. Only in this way is it possible to establish a preventive attitude toward sexual abuse free of taboos.

These three necessities – attitude, inspection, and taking action – mutually affect each other and provide the basic tenets for all preventive work at the institutional level:

#### Attitude

One of the basic necessities for preventive work in the area of sexual abuse is being able to talk about sexuality, especially the positive aspects of human sexuality, before sexual abuse actually occurs. Sexuality education always starts with the self-reflection of the experts, who must ponder their own

Fig. 2



<sup>3</sup> Basic background knowledge and behavioral guidelines are necessary prerequisites for recognizing structural and personal risk factors as well as warning signals pointing to sexual abuse and for taking up action in such cases. Initial study results may be found in the publication of BIENSTEIN, VERLINDEN, and SCHARMANSKI (2014).

sexual identity, their limits, their morals, and their ideals. This enables a calm and open access to the themes of sexuality and sexual abuse.

**Inspection**

The task at hand is to circumspectly look at what is happening in one’s surroundings – together with one’s colleagues, of course: Where are the risk factors that might facilitate sexual abuse? Which of the possible protective factors have already been implemented? Which remain to be implemented? (see Table 1)

**Taking Action**

This step represents the concrete effects of one’s attitude and what one has observed: Within the caretaking team, sometimes with external assistance (e.g., special counseling services), ways are discussed of how to close the gaps (risk factors) in the various levels. Only when prevention work has been firmly established on several levels can children and adolescents with disabilities be strengthened and protected from sexual abuse.

Taking small steps means being able to go the long route to ensure that the minimum standards recommended by the roundtable “Sexual Child Abuse” are sustainably implemented on a broad scale.



*Katharina Urbann is a teacher for special education and presently works as a scientific assistant with the SeMB Project. She wrote her doctoral dissertation on the subject of “Sexual Abuse of Children with Hearing Disabilities.”*

**Contact:**  
katharina.urbann@uni-koeln.de



*Sara Scharmanski is a certified psychologist and is presently training to be a child and adolescent psychotherapist. She works as a scientific assistant with the SeMB Project. She wrote her doctoral dissertation on the subject of “Behavioral Problems among Children and Adolescents with Impairments.”*

**Contact:**  
sara.scharmanski@uni-koeln.de



*Pia Bienstein is an Assistant Professor and Head of the SeMB Project as well as the Center for Diagnostics and Remedial Studies (ZeDiF) in the Faculty of Human Sciences of the University of Cologne. She is also a certified teacher of children with special needs and a certified child and adolescent psychotherapist.*

**Contact:**  
pia.bienstein@uni-koeln.de

## References

- BANGE, DIRK (2015): Gefährdungslagen und Schutzfaktoren im familiären und institutionellen Umfeld in Bezug auf sexuellen Kindesmissbrauch. In: FEGERT, JÖRG M. et al. (Eds.): Sexueller Missbrauch an Kindern und Jugendlichen: Ein Handbuch zur Prävention und Intervention für Fachkräfte im medizinischen, psychotherapeutischen und pädagogischen Bereich. Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer, 137–144
- BIENSTEIN, PIA/VERLINDEN, KARLA/SCHARMANSKI, SARA (2014): Prävention von sexuellem Missbrauch an Kindern und Jugendlichen mit Behinderung – Erste Evaluationsergebnisse der SeMB-Studierendenfortbildung. *Kindesmiss-handlung und -vernachlässigung*, 17(2), 180–193
- BIENSTEIN, PIA/VERLINDEN, KARLA/PASCHKE, STEFANIE (in preparation): Fortbildung für Fach- und Lehrkräfte zur Prävention sexuellen Missbrauchs an Kindern und Jugendlichen mit Behinderung. Göttingen: Hogrefe
- BUNDESMINISTERIUM DER JUSTIZ/BUNDESMINISTERIUM FÜR FAMILIE, SENIOREN, FRAUEN UND JUGEND/BUNDESMINISTERIUM FÜR BILDUNG UND FORSCHUNG (2011): Abschlussbericht Runder Tisch Sexueller Kindesmissbrauch in Abhängigkeits- und Machtverhältnissen in privaten und öffentlichen Einrichtungen und im familiären Bereich. Berlin
- BUNDSCHUH, CLAUDIA (2010): Sexualisierte Gewalt gegen Kinder in Institutionen. Nationaler und internationaler Forschungsstand. München: Deutsches Jugendinstitut e.V.
- CHODAN, WENCKE/REIS, OLAF/HÄSSLER, FRANK (2015): Sexueller Missbrauch von Kindern und Jugendlichen mit Behinderung. In: FEGERT, JÖRG M., et al. (Eds.): Sexueller Missbrauch an Kindern und Jugendlichen: Ein Handbuch zur Prävention und Intervention für Fachkräfte im medizinischen, psychotherapeutischen und pädagogischen Bereich. Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer, 407–420
- CROSSE, SCOTT B./KAYE, ELYSE/RATNOFSKY, ALEXANDER C. (1992): A Report on the Maltreatment of Children with Disabilities. Washington, DC: National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect
- DARMANN, INGRID (2000): Anforderungen der Pflegeberufswirklichkeit an die kommunikative Kompetenz von Pflegekräften. *Pflege*, 13(4), 219
- FUREY, EILEEN/KEHRHAHN, MARIJKE (2000): What Supervisors, Managers, and Executives Know about the Abuse of People with Mental Retardation. *Developmental Disabilities Bulletin*, 28(2), 40–59
- HELMING, ELISABETH/KINDLER, HEINZ/LANGMEYER, ALEXANDRA/MAYER, MARINA/MOSSER, PETER/ENTLEITNER, CHRISTINE/SCHUTTER, SABINA/WOLFF, MECHTHILD (2011): Sexualisierte Gewalt gegen Mädchen und Jungen in Institutionen. Abschlussbericht. München: Deutsches Jugendinstitut e.V.
- HUGHES, KAREN/BELLIS, MARK A./JONES, LISA/WOOD, SARA/BATES, GEOFF/ECKLEY, LINDSAY/McCOY, ELLIE/MIKTON, CHRISTOPHER/SHAKESPEARE, TOM/OFFICER, ALANA (2012): Prevalence and risk of violence against adults with disabilities: A systematic review and meta-analysis of observational studies. *The Lancet*, 379(9826), 1621–1629
- MARTIN, SANDRA L./RAY, NEENA/SOTRES-ALVAREZ, DANIELA/KUPPER, LAWRENCE L./MORACCO, KATHRYN E./DICKENS, PAMELA A./SCANDLIN, DONNA/GIZLICE, ZIYA (2006): Physical and sexual assault of women with disabilities. *Violence Against Women*, 12(9), 823–837
- SCHRÖTTLE, MONIKA/GLAMMEIER, SANDRA/SELLACH, BRIGITTE/HORNBERG, CLAUDIA/KAVEMANN, BARBARA/PUHE, HENRY/ZINSMEISTER, JULIA (2012): Lebenssituation und Belastungen von Frauen mit Beeinträchtigungen und Behinderungen in Deutschland. Berlin: Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (Retrieved on 27 May 2013 from <http://www.bmfsfj.de/RedaktionBMFSFJ/Broschuerenstelle/Pdf-Anlagen/Lebenssituation-und-Belastungen-von-Frauen-mit-Behinderungen-Kurzfassung.property=pdf,bereich=bmfsfj,sprache=de,rwb=true.pdf>)
- SCHMID, HANNA J./NOACK, CORNELIA (1994): Sexuelle Gewalt gegen Menschen mit geistiger Behinderung. Eine verleugnete Realität. Ergebnisse und Fakten einer bundesweiten Befragung. Stuttgart: Verband evangelischer Einrichtungen für Menschen mit geistiger und seelischer Behinderung e.V.
- SULLIVAN, PATRICIA M./KNUTSON, JOHN F. (2000): Maltreatment and disabilities: A population-based epidemiological study. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 24(10), 1257–1273
- UBSKM (2013): Handbuch Schutzkonzepte sexueller Missbrauch. Befragungen zum Umsetzungsstand der Empfehlungen des Runden Tisches »Sexueller Kindesmissbrauch«. Bericht mit Praxisbeispielen zum Monitoring 2012–2013 Berlin (Retrieved on 7 April 2014 from <http://www.kein-raum-fuer-missbrauch.de/aktuelles/missbrauchsbeauftragter-veroeffentlicht-handbuch-schutzkonzepte-sexueller-missbrauch/download/172>)
- URBANN, KATHARINA/VERLINDEN, KARLA (2014): »Die könnten denken, ich sei schwul ...«. Warum sich Jungen, die sexuelle Gewalt erlebt(ten), seltener offenbaren. Zeitschrift der Arbeitsgemeinschaft Kinder- und Jugendschutz AJS-Forum, 38(2), 4–5
- WISSINK, INGE B./VAN VUGT, EVELINE/MOONEN, XAVIER/STAMS, GEERT-JAN M./HENDRIKS, JAN (2014): Sexual abuse involving children with an intellectual disability (ID): A narrative review. *Research in Developmental Disabilities*, 36, 20–35
- Zemp, Aiha (2002): Sexualisierte Gewalt gegen Menschen mit Behinderung in Institutionen. Praxis der Kinderpsychologie und Kinderpsychiatrie, 51, 610–625
- ZEMP, AIHA/PIRCHER, ERIKA (1996): »Weil das alles weh tut mit Gewalt«. Sexuelle Ausbeutung von Mädchen und Frauen mit Behinderung. Wien: Schriftenreihe der Frauenministerin, Band 10
- ZEMP, AIHA/PIRCHER, ERIKA/SCHOIBL, HEINZ (1997): Sexualisierte Gewalt im behinderten Alltag. Jungen und Männer mit Behinderung als Opfer und Täter. Projektbericht. Wien: Frauenministerium

---

# Children and Adolescents Have a Right to Protection and Self-Determination

*Christian Böhm, Beate Proll*

**In this article the authors discuss approaches to preventing sexualized violence in the Hamburg school system. They look at learning objectives, ways to involve parents, and the necessary competences of the teaching staff to achieve this goal.**

## The School as a Place of Learning and Protection

As part of their mandate to educate and nurture children and adolescents, all of the schools in Hamburg have the obligation to enable children to grow up in a violence-free atmosphere. Part of that mandate is that pupils from grade school on be supported in the development of their personality and informed of their rights, among others, their right to physical self-determination.<sup>1</sup> The school setting is an important one for such learning opportunities: The role teachers have as supervisors includes their responsibility to prevent or stop assaults of all types directed toward their pupils. The prevention of sexualized violence should not be case-oriented, i.e., in the form of follow-up attention to concrete past situations, but rather comprehensively and permanently made part of everyday school life. The “Recommendations of the Culture Ministers’ Conference on the Prevention and Processing of Cases of Sexual Abuse and Violence in Schools and School-Related Facilities” point, among other things, to the role of family and sex education as well as programs designed to strengthen children’s personalities and prevent violence in the schools.<sup>2</sup> When implementing these programs, it is important not to position these programs as parallel approaches, but to combine and link them without sacrificing their unique characteristics.

## Sex Education Is Obligatory

The social upheavals that occurred in Germany in the 1970s changed its understanding of physicality and sexuality. Sex education in the schools was instituted in all German federal states in cooperation with church institutions based on the recommendations of the Culture Ministers’ Conference (KMK). That parents and the schools were jointly made responsible for the sex education of children and adolescents and must thus cooperate to this end was a major step. In Hamburg, sex education in the schools was implemented as an obligatory subject in combination with a number of fields. Parents do not have the right to exempt their children from sex-education classes; a number of court decisions have supported this policy.<sup>3</sup> In this manner, a framework was established for providing teaching units that can integrate preventive measures.

- 1 Cf. Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (BMFSFJ), Referat Öffentlichkeitsarbeit (Ed.) (2014): Die Rechte der Kinder. Von logo! einfach erklärt; [www.bmfsfj.de/RedaktionBMFSFJ/Broschueren/stelle/Pdf-Anlagen/Die-Rechte-der-Kinder-Logo/](http://www.bmfsfj.de/RedaktionBMFSFJ/Broschueren/stelle/Pdf-Anlagen/Die-Rechte-der-Kinder-Logo/) und Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung (Ed.) (2015): Kinderrechte. 2nd ed. Bonn.
- 2 Resolution of the Culture Ministers’ Conference of 20 April 2010, in the version dated 7 February 2013; Handlungsempfehlungen der Kultusministerkonferenz zur Vorbeugung und Aufarbeitung von sexuellen Missbrauchsfällen und Gewalthandlungen in Schulen und schulnahen Einrichtungen.
- 3 Landesinstitut für Lehrerbildung und Schulentwicklung, Beratungsstelle Interkulturelle Erziehung (Ed.) (2013): Vielfalt in der Schule. Für pädagogisches Personal. Religiöse Fragen in der Schule/Sport- und Schwimmunterricht/Sexualerziehung/Schulfahrten. 3rd rev. ed. Hamburg; on sex education, see pp. 20 ff.

## From Sex Education to Sexual Education

There were several competing concepts for providing sex education. Some approaches preferred the more biological and medical perspectives, whereas others were concerned with reducing so-called taboos – also those harbored by the teacher in charge. The feminist women’s movement made its own demands, e.g., “My body belongs to me,” which eventually found their way into the school sex-education curricula. Today, schools are strongly linked to the concept of “sexual education” or “sexual literacy,” which presume that sexuality is a life-long subject of learning, and that one should not be primarily concerned with accumulating knowledge, but learning how to communicate with others regarding sexual matters, and how to find own positions and value orientations. Pupils thus acquire competences that help them to form their own ideas of physicality, partnership, and sexuality while maneuvering a world full of media packed with images of sexuality.

### Integrating Parents – Facing Critical Opinions

The subject of “sexualized violence” tends to upset parents. “Won’t it make my child more anxious and distrustful?” “Will we and our family environment now become suspicious?” “How much physical contact is allowed for fathers, mother, grandfathers, grandmothers ...?” These are all questions that must be treated with circumspect. According to Paragraph 6 of Hamburg’s School Act, parents must be integrated in their child’s sex-education program. Practically speaking, this means carrying out parents’ evenings to inform them about when sex education is foreseen in their child’s curriculum. But it also means presenting the methods and contents of the curriculum, such as the actual work materials used (books, worksheets, films, etc.). It does not mean allowing the parents to determine in any way which of the contents, materials, and methods a teacher may apply.

From the vantage point of many teachers, this regulation can be more of a hurdle than an educationally sound approach: It may tend to give some parents who are critical toward sex education in the school classroom for religious or cultural reasons the idea to critically scrutinize the plans. Yet, experience shows that, generally speaking, a direct conversation with such parents suffices to allay their fears, since they are most often worried that age-inappropriate materials (even pornographic materials) are being used. It has proved advantageous in a number of schools that presentations be prepared in so-called easy-language versions which are then given on parents’ evenings. Further, in many schools in Hamburg the Ramadan period proved to be suboptimal for carrying out sex-education projects. Persons of Muslim faith normally refuse to speak about sexuality during this period.

### What Should Children and Adolescents Learn?

Hamburg’s Educational Master Plans set down the competences that pupils have to have learned at certain key points in time, including overarching competences. For example, the social competences include proper interactions with others, cooperating with others, consideration for others,

communicating with others, and appropriate behavior in conflict situations. This goal is also part of the prevention projects established to strengthen pupils’ personalities and to prevent violence in school. With respect to sex education we find the following formulations:

At the end of second grade, pupils should be able to

- Name examples of pleasant and unpleasant touching;
- Justify when a secret can be passed on to others;
- Regard certain forms of approach as unpleasant and express this directly;
- Learn and play with one another without resorting to sexualized language, particularly swear words;
- Get help when they or others have been molested.

At the end of fourth grade, pupils should be able to

- Register a broad range of feelings and express them directly;
- Designate sexual assaults as improper;
- Register certain forms of physical approach as transgressive behavior toward one’s own limits and consider this behavior to be improper;
- Ensure that no sexualized language, particularly swear words, are used;
- Get help when they or others have been molested.

### What Competences Must Teachers Have?

Sexuality is a very personal matter. Depending on their own experiences and value systems, educators of all types have very different ways of approaching the subject of sexuality. The goal, however, is always to grasp one’s professional role based on the given curriculum while also maintaining respect for oneself. The following questions have proved useful when considering these matters: “How do I react to the (for me) marginally acceptable questions some children may pose?” “Can/Should I answer all questions posed?” “How much do I reveal about myself?” Only when educators can engage in communication about sexuality and know their own personal “blindspots” are they in the position to effectively and responsibly teach sex education.

The subject of “sexualized violence” is an even more delicate matter. Teachers should consider the following questions in advance: “What is my definition of transgressive behavior?” “How do I design lessons dealing with this theme without upsetting the children?” “How do I react when a child reports to me a suspicion or a transgressive experience?” “How do I know who can provide support to me in any concrete situation?”

### What Is the Connection Between Sex Education and the Prevention of Violence?

The right to sexual self-determination is part of any sex education, as is learning the best communication forms for dealing with things such as feelings, physicality, love, and sexuality. Children must know the proper terms for, say, sexual organs if they are to talk about them and report on transgressive events. Sex education is one component in the prevention of violence and abuse. Sexual assaults must be classified as events of violence, so that preventive measures become part of the prevention of violence. In the prevention of violence practiced in the schools it is important to

maintain a good atmosphere in the classroom which allows everyone to interact respectfully with one another. This includes finding strategies for solving conflicts. Further, the school must be in the position to deal professionally with concrete cases of violence of varying degrees of severity based on both the school regulations and the sanctions laid down by criminal law. So-called “intervention chains” have proved useful here, as they provide step-wise reactions to concrete transgressive behaviors.

### Building Networks – Cooperation with Professional Counseling Services

Because most schools in Hamburg are all-day schools, cooperative agreements with local nonschool providers also provide a structure for working with professional counseling services on sex education and preventing sexualized violence. Some so-called autonomous schools have also developed their own guidelines and anchored them in their curricula and school rules for dealing with cases of violence as well as providing their own prevention and intervention programs.

Hamburg also has a number of workgroups in which the stakeholders regularly meet to exchange information. In the workgroup of the Hamburgische Arbeitsgemeinschaft (HAG; Hamburg Consortium) on matters pertaining to sex education, for example, there is much discussion on the psychosexual development of children or on how to best support persons with learning difficulties. The AK Grenze (Workgroup Limits) concentrates on how to deal with transgressive behavior in the school. This workgroup consists of representatives from the various counseling services on sexual education, the professional counseling offices for the protection against sexualized violence, the State Institute for Teacher Training and School Development, the counseling service on prevention of violence situated within the City Administration Office for School and Vocational Education as well as the Regional Educational and Counseling Centers (ReBBZ). Together, they developed a joint guideline for dealing with sexual transgressive behavior among children and adolescents.<sup>4</sup> Further, they have planned and executed special events in addition to discussing individual cases while respecting data privacy laws. A good cooperative effort has developed over time between these various services and authorities. The different vantage points complement each other very well and result in the offers of assistance being even better adapted to the structures and needs of the schools – while also corresponding to the quality criteria of the professional services.

### Assessing Prevention Concepts – Developing Protection Concepts

Over the course of the past few years, caused in part by the debates going on in the media and by the increasingly critical questions posed by parents, a certain uncertainty has ensued with regard to how best to teach sex education and to ensure the age-appropriate prevention of sexualized violence. In this context, here are a number of criteria that distinguish a good prevention project:

- During the preparation of the project, a seminar is offered for the school staff parallel to informing parents.
- Parents and pupils are supplied with an emergency

### Steps to Take when Dealing with Concrete Indications of Sexual Acts of Violence<sup>5,6</sup>

#### Immediate actions

1. The staff member should immediately put an end to what is going on (if necessary, ask for backup)
2. Take care of the victim's immediate needs (attention to person affected, find safe room, check whether medical care is necessary)
3. Supervise suspect

#### Notify important institutions

4. Inform the school management about the incident
5. Inform the Counseling Service for the Prevention of Violence (crisis intervention)
6. Inform both the victim's and the suspect's parents or guardians. If appropriate, recommend examination at the UKE Competence Center (UKE Kinder-KOMPT<sup>7</sup>)
7. Prepare a report for the Counseling Service for the Prevention of Violence (ReBBZ<sup>8</sup>, school authorities, police; use special report form, which also documents the case)
8. If necessary and appropriate, have the suspect suspended by the school director

#### Pedagogical, educational, and regulatory measures

9. Support and care for the victim in cooperation with the counseling services
10. Appoint a specific teacher to maintain contact with both the victim and the victim's family
11. Assess the case in cooperation with the counseling services
12. Provide a short report to the school staff and, if called for and appropriate, to other pupils in the school (e.g., class, grade, PTA)

#### Decisions and return to school life

13. Accompany and support the victim and the victim's family to help reintegrate them into school life
14. Accompany the suspect (in old or new school) in cooperation with the counseling services
15. Establish long-term plans for prevention measures (2–3 months later), with the cooperation of the Counseling Services on the Prevention of Violence as well as the Department of Counseling, Diversity, Health and Prevention

4 Landesinstitut für Lehrerbildung und Schulentwicklung, Beratungsstelle Gewaltprävention (Ed.) (2013): Sexuelle Grenzverletzung. Handeln bei sexuellen Grenzverletzungen unter Kindern und Jugendlichen. Revised edition, Hamburg.

5 Behörde für Schule und Berufsbildung, Hamburg, Beratungsstelle Gewaltprävention: Checklisten; <http://www.hamburg.de/sexuelle-grenzverletzungen/4079972/checkliste-sexuelle-grenzverletzungen/> (retrieved on 1 June 2015).

6 Landesinstitut für Lehrerbildung und Schulentwicklung, Beratungsstelle Gewaltprävention (Ed.) (2013): Sexuelle Grenzverletzung. Handeln bei sexuellen Grenzverletzungen unter Kindern und Jugendlichen. Revised edition, Hamburg.

7 Kinderkompetenzentrum des Universitätsklinikums Hamburg-Eppendorf; [https://www.uke.de/institut-rechtsmedizin/uke\\_KOMPT.pdf](https://www.uke.de/institut-rechtsmedizin/uke_KOMPT.pdf)

8 Regionale Bildungs- und Beratungszentren Hamburg; <http://www.hamburg.de/rebbz/>

telephone number (“Nummer gegen Kummer”) as well as the contact data of regional assistance services.

- All materials distributed and all methods employed are age-appropriate.
- The goal is to strengthen both the children and adolescents as well as their parents. Anything that creates anxiety as well as all types of confrontation exercises do not fit this concept.

The events that took place in the Odenwaldschule and other such institutions (esp. boarding schools) forced schools to ask themselves whether such incidents could also take place within their walls. Both school directors and school staff members are often unsure about how to react to suspicious cases. For that reason, it is recommended that a protection concept be developed so that such attacks do not occur in the first place or at least are immediately stopped.<sup>9</sup>

Schools bear an institutional responsibility for the children and adolescents in their charge and have the role of ensuring them an educational perspective. Part of that task means integrating prevention strategies as well as the strengthening of children’s rights and their personality development into plans for school development. To this end, schools need the support of the local environment, i.e., they need to be networked within so-called educational and prevention chains, which are gaining in importance.

## The Development of a Protection Concept in Five Steps

### Step 1

*The school director decides to establish a protection concept to prevent sexualized violence*

Arrange discussions and an exchange of information between the school staff, the parents, and the pupils concerning the necessity of establishing a protection concept and raising the consciousness of all involved; document this process, i.e., collect the pertinent questions, criticisms, suggestions, ideas, etc.

### Step 2

*Determine the areas of responsibility and competence for developing the protection concept*

Set up workgroups and/or expert teams; hold information seminars; gather support from local professional counseling services; provide school staff with training possibilities; document the quality development process (i.e., planning, goal definition, tasks, responsibilities, solutions)

### Step 3

*Perform a risk analysis with respect to each field and structural optimization*

Define the risks in the school system and analyze them with respect to all potentials for danger; adapt the organizational structures to fit the protection concept (e.g., complaint management, transparency, protection of victims, choice of personnel and personnel development, protection of privacy, etc.).

### Step 4

*Develop an emergency plan*

Determine the needs and qualify school staff members to be responsible for each area and define the steps to be taken in an emergency (crisis team, specialists); document set-up.

### Step 5

*Implement protection and prevention concepts*

Using the results of the risk analysis, execute the planned prevention plan together with the school staff, the parents, and the pupils (instruction in sex education, cooperation with parents, events, project work, information notices, etc.) as well as the public presentation of the school.

<sup>9</sup> Behörde für Schule und Berufsbildung, Hamburg, Beratungsstelle Gewaltprävention: Entwicklung von Schutzkonzepten, Kinderschutz an Schulen (as of Februar 2013): <http://www.hamburg.de/kein-raum-fuer-missbrauch/3854740/schutzkonzepte/> (retrieved on 1 June 2015).



---

*Dr. Christian Böhm is Director of the Counseling Services for the Prevention of Violence in the Administration of Schools and Vocational Education, Hamburg.*

**Contact:**

*Behörde für Schule und Berufsbildung,  
Hamburger Straße 31  
22083 Hamburg,  
christian.boehm@bsb.hamburg.de*



---

*Beate Proll is Director of the Department of Counseling – Diversity, Health, and Prevention of the State Institute for Teacher Training and School Development, Hamburg.*

**Contact:**

*Landesinstitut für Lehrerbildung und  
Schulentwicklung, Abteilung Beratung –  
Vielfalt, Gesundheit und Prävention  
Felix-Dahn-Straße 3  
20357 Hamburg  
Telephone 040 428842-740  
Fax 040 428842-902  
beate.proll@li-hamburg.de*

---

# Breaking Down Insecurities – Building up Competences: Protection Concepts Support Professionals in Dealing with Sexual Violence Against Children

*Johannes-Wilhelm Rörig*

In this article, the Independent Commissioner for Matters Concerning the Sexual Abuse of Children illustrates the urgent need for a better prevention of sexual violence and emphasizes the tremendous importance of establishing protection concepts in the respective facilities in which adults bear the responsibility for children and adolescents. Among other things, he presents the initiative “Kein Raum für Missbrauch” [No Room for Abuse] as well as the results of an ongoing monitoring survey. He also gives an overview of the important role schools and sex education play in this entire field.

## **Abuse Is Not an Accidental Act**

Many children are still not being sufficiently protected from sexual violence – even though we are well aware of the ways in which it can be prevented. Sexual abuse causes many more defensive reflexes than other types of endangerments to children, such as physical abuse, neglect, or other types of dangers such as mobbing or addiction. The impotence and helplessness of the young victims would seem to be transferred to those who are in charge of protecting them. For this reason, more effort is necessary to ensure the prevention of sexual violence. One of the most urgent tasks in the years ahead is to create a social consensus and promote more willingness to act in order to ensure the optimal prevention of sexual violence against children. The message must be: Abuse is not inevitable – there are concepts available that work against abuse.

Abuse does not happen by accident, but is an intentional act that is carried out according to a plan, a widespread phenomenon that occurs in dimensions we would not think possible. More than 12,000 cases are officially reported every year, though counseling services as well as both national and international studies presume that the estimated number of unreported cases lies much, much higher. In fact, the actual number of persons affected by sexual abuse is much higher than the number of children who are hurt or killed in traffic accidents. In order to protect children from such accidents, major efforts and measures have been put in place, from traffic regulations to strict licensing laws, police controls as well as educational efforts in schools and at home. There exists a high level of competence among all involved: No signs of defense, insecurity, or helplessness there! The goal must be to transfer this level of interest to the field of

abuse prevention, to make it a matter of course that children are cared for, that a basic knowledge is available and passed on, and that everything is being done to protect children from sexual violence.

## **Prevention Must Become a Quality Attribute of All Facilities**

In 2011, the roundtable “Sexual Child Abuse” made a number of excellent suggestions for the prevention of child abuse and the improvement of the protection of the 13 million children who are active in institutional facilities and other organizations, including sports clubs. Following the so-called abuse scandals of 2010, the focus shifted primarily to institutional facilities as possible scenes of such crimes. Today, however, we regard these facilities more as primary candidates for competence and protection centers – especially for the many children who have become victims of abuse within the family, at the hand of peers, or more recently in social media. The rise of social media in the past few years has produced completely new forms of sexual violence: from being confronted with pornographic and exhibitionist images and texts to the online initiation of sexual contacts, to so-called grooming, sexual mobbing, and sexual assaults through peers.

Nursery schools, kindergartens, schools, churches, sports clubs, boarding schools as well as in some cases children’s clinics and outpatient medical and therapeutic facilities are all called upon to become educated about the theme of sexual child abuse if they are to better protect children from sexual violence and provide them with quick and adequate assistance. Protection concepts play an important role in this process.

## Protection Concepts to Combat Sexual Violence Provide Answers in Light of Insecurities

Many professionals feel insecure when dealing with sexual violence and ask themselves: “How do I recognize when abuse has taken place? Who can I – may I – talk to about it? What should I do in light of such a suspicion? How do I approach a colleague who I think has exhibited transgressive behavior?”

Basic continuing education courses can serve to answer these questions and to impart the necessary knowledge concerning the extent and forms of sexual violence, the dynamics affected boys and girls may be caught up in, and how one can approach them without putting pressure on them or being suggestive. Such courses also deal with how the perpetrators plan and execute their acts and treat the specific risks and reasons why offenders tend to find their victims in such institutional settings.

For this reason, all institutions should take a look at their facility with the “eyes of the offender”: Are there weak points that can be exploited? Where do strict hierarchies and power imbalances play into the strategies of offenders? Where does false liberalism become enabling? Which children in such facilities are especially at risk? Where do offenders profit from the fact that sensitive situations are not being controlled but left up to the individual?

The results of such a risk analysis clearly show that there are many things that need to be put in place or regulated in order to prevent or thwart the plans of the perpetrators.

Yet institutions also have to look at things with the “eyes of the children”: How can boys and girls come to understand that their rights are being taken seriously? How do they know that there are competent persons available to confide in? Is it their everyday experience that adults are indeed “trustworthy” and willing stand up for them, to offer them assistance, to openly discuss with them matters that may be uncomfortable, awkward, or embarrassing? How do children know which of the staff members can be consulted about matters of abuse?

The importance of having protection concepts in place often becomes clear only after something has happened or is suspected. This may lead to feelings of helplessness and cause chaotic communication. For this reason, it is important that the staff be aware of the importance of the theme of abuse and can deal with it without hesitation – and develop protection concepts before any suspicions arise. The only solution is to ensure open and objective discussions and provide basic knowledge about these subjects. The directors of institutional settings bear an especially large responsibility: They must make the matter a priority and invest the necessary financial and personnel resources and capacities available despite chronic shortages. Experience shows that staff members can identify all the more with protection concepts if they have been jointly established and if it is clear that not just the protection of children is intended, but also protection from false accusations.

## Surveys in Institutional Facilities Reveal a Great Need for Information about Sexual Violence

The results of our two monitoring surveys from 2012 and 2013 on the development and implementation of protection concepts in institutions clearly show that there is a great need for offers comprising continued and further education as well as objective information on the subject of sexual violence toward children. Comprehensive protection concepts that include risk analysis, a behavior codex, continued education seminars, complaints bodies, internal and external liaisons, and emergency plans in case of suspicions are often missing, or only individual measures are enacted but not a comprehensive concept.<sup>1</sup>

In 2015, the survey is being carried out in cooperation with the Deutsches Jugendinstitut [DJI; German Youth Institute]. For the first time, qualitative questions are being asked in addition to the usual quantitative ones. Good-practice case examples serve to provide insights into which sorts of protection processes work best, where the stumbling blocks are, and what the experiences have been in exemplary facilities and organizations. In this way other institutions and professionals can receive inspiration for their own practice. Then, focus groups will be set up with experts and specialists to explore how to transfer these experiences and which circumstances contribute most to successful implementation.

These surveys are supported by the major public organizations that are also presently involved in establishing new agreements on the introduction of protection concepts. Besides their common commitment to an increased engagement for the protection of children and adolescents, these organizations get the opportunity to present their activities to others. At the same time, the goal is to use the individual agreements to strengthen the concrete activities of these organizations in order to introduce protection concepts that perfectly fit the respective local facilities and organizations.

## The Initiative “Kein Raum für Missbrauch” Provides Support for Institutions

The campaign “Kein Raum für Missbrauch“ [No Place for Abuse] is presently being expanded and adapted to more exactly fit the needs of the respective facilities and organizations, such as schools, sports clubs, as well as healthcare infrastructure. This campaign has the goal of informing professionals about the necessities and opportunities of protection concepts. In addition, it provides concrete instruments to be employed in order to provide active protection against sexual violence in classrooms and changing rooms as well as in clinics and private practices. The goal is to sensitize professionals to the signals emitted by affected children so that they can properly react in suspicious cases.

1 Cf. Unabhängiger Beauftragter für Fragen des sexuellen Kindesmissbrauchs (Ed.) (2013): Handbuch Schutzkonzepte Sexueller Missbrauch. Befragungen zum Umsetzungsstand der Empfehlungen des Runden Tisches „Sexueller Kindesmissbrauch“. Bericht mit Praxisbeispielen zum Monitoring 2012–2013. This publication can be ordered directly from the Office of the Independent Commissioner for Matters Concerning the Sexual Abuse of Children or downloaded from <https://beauftragter-missbrauch.de/praevention/schutzkonzepte/>

Both the school management and the entire staff should be supported in the implementation thereof in every single institution in which girls and boys are entrusted to adult supervisors.

This initiative provides the framework for institutions to start a dialogue about the relationship between closeness and distance and to shape the relationship between the professional caretakers and children – and finally to establish protection concepts against sexual violence.

The website of the initiative “Kein Raum für Missbrauch” ([www.kein-raum-fuer-missbrauch.de](http://www.kein-raum-fuer-missbrauch.de)) publishes a number of texts aimed at providing basic information for all professional caretakers of children. These professionals can also turn to our hotline (Telephone 0800-225-5530), which is both anonymous and free of charge, or visit our online help portal ([www.hilfeportal-missbrauch.de](http://www.hilfeportal-missbrauch.de)), which informs persons directly affected by abuse, their relatives, and their professional caretakers as well as maintaining a national database on assistance projects. The homepage [www.beaufragter-missbrauch.de](http://www.beaufragter-missbrauch.de) also provides more detailed information, for example, on the subject of prevention, whereby the focus lies on protection concepts, assistance measures, and legal questions.

### Schools Play a Special Role in Prevention

Schools play a central role in the prevention of sexual violence – because that’s where we can reach all children. The school system not only has the task of educating our children, it must also protect them: Education cannot function without a protective environment. Children who have been or are affected by sexual violence often perform poorly in school and are unable to concentrate on their lessons. They use up all their energy defending themselves against the abuse, they sleep poorly, and are exhausted during the daytime. Some children stand out by making themselves unpopular in class, display aggression, or withdraw completely. Failure in school and later failure on the job belong to the less well known but common consequences of sexual violence during childhood.

We can assume that every school class likely has a few girls and boys who suffer or have suffered from sexual violence, often outside of school in the family or during recreational activities but increasingly in the form of social media. For many children the school represents the only safe place in their lives. Some are exposed to sexual assaults by other children and adolescents, often by their peers. Schools bear a special responsibility here: The more quickly girls and boys can get help following sexual violence and the abuse is put to an end, the better they are able to integrate what they have experienced in their life and not be crushed by it.

Victimized children are on the lookout for trustworthy adults to confide in. They often choose persons outside their own family, in order to spare their own parents. Presently teachers and other school staff members do not necessarily belong to the group of persons likely to be consulted, but the adoption of a protection concept could change that state of affairs. Inasmuch as the protection concept comprises regular prevention efforts directed toward school classes, pupils will receive the support necessary to establishing their own competence to help their peers. Generally speaking, peers will likely remain the persons of choice to confide in, who then deal with getting further help for their friend.

Few schools can afford to develop a protection concept from scratch. They need professional support and often await a signal from the state authorities that such qualification measures are indeed desirable and wanted. They need solutions and answers to their questions and insecurities as well as basic recommendations on the part of the Culture Ministries and state institutes responsible for continuing education that can be adapted as necessary to local conditions. The schools can master this task only if the political decision-makers have created the necessary prerequisites: provision of personnel and financial resources, reform of teacher training and continued training, modifications in the weighting of the contents to emphasize social learning.

With the goal in mind of introducing broad and comprehensive protection concepts to prevent sexual abuse in schools in Germany, I talked with all Culture Ministers, and it is my expressed intent to continue this dialogue, together with the German Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA), which as part of the German Federal Family Ministry and in cooperation with the federal states sponsored the “Trau dich!” initiative that has sensitized many grade-school and middle-school pupils between the age of 8 and 12 years to this theme. The close link between the programs “Kein Raum für Missbrauch” and “Trau dich!” is a firm component of the overall concept forwarded by the Federal Family Minister, Manuela Schwesig. I and my entire staff support this venture wholeheartedly.

### Sex Education Is an Important Component in Prevention

Protection concepts in schools should emphasize the importance of well-executed sex education in their prevention efforts. Sex education fulfills the needs of girls and boys for information about sexual matters in an educational setting and enables them to openly discuss sexual themes. That is one of the most important prerequisites for children to learn to trust others and to get help following incidents of sexual abuse. In addition, sex education enables children to have a positive, accepting feeling toward their own body – a very important aspect in their protection against sexual violence.

Sex-education offers should be set up such that they accentuate the positive aspects of sexuality long before turning to the theme of sexual violence. Pupils must understand that sexual violence is not a variation on sexuality, but pure violence that uses sexual means. It must become clear to the children and adolescents how very valuable sexuality is in human life and what it means to establish respectful relationships with others. Sexual violence, on the other hand, has severe consequences and negatively affects the ability to trust other human beings.

Because most girls and boys already possess much more knowledge about sexuality than they need for their own personal psychosexual development, the task of sex education in the school is to sort out the impressions they have received, to set the record straight about certain matters, and to impart to them that some sexual subjects simply belong to adult sexuality. Girls and boys need help in orienting themselves in the jungle of sexual messages present in the media around them, in online portals, and social networks, which unsettle them and can disturb them in the long term.

A sense of shame is often one of the most important means girls and boys can use to protect themselves – they

need to get a feeling when boundaries have been crossed and how to take the necessary steps to stop this behavior. It is a well-known strategy of many perpetrators that they first get children involved in conversations about sexual matters and then try to break down their resistance by declaring it to be false shame. Girls and boys who have experienced transgressive behavior and thus may have become desensitized to it make for an easy target to such offenders. For this reason, it is of the utmost importance that such boundaries not be crossed in the course of sex education; on the contrary, it is important to impart the value of intimacy as well as mindfully dealing with one's own boundaries and with one's own body.

This guideline should apply to all methods employed. For example, making girls and boys discuss their own sexual experiences in the classroom already constitutes transgressive behavior and is not acceptable. The same is true for having to deal with pornographic depictions: Using such materials is transgressive because it may provoke sexual experiences in girls and boys – which definitely does not belong in the school classroom. And yet it is important to talk about pornography, as otherwise children and adolescents would be left alone with their thoughts and impressions. They need corrective measures to be applied to the messages they are receiving.

Modern, nontransgressive sex education is an important facet of the responsible and respectful attention paid to relationships and sexuality. It helps to avoid sexual violence and furthers open and tolerant relationships in the modern world. If sex education is to succeed in the school environment, then the school and the parental home must work together to complement each other. The goal is to garner the trust of the parents in the school-based sex education and its concerns, to eliminate insecurities, and to encourage parents to become actively engaged with this topic – and not leave everything to the school.

### **Sexual Violence Should No Longer Be a Basic Risk of Childhood**

A basic preventive approach to education, comprehensive protection concepts, a balanced sex-education program, media competence, and especially institutions committed to the protection of children against sexual violence – those are all things that are needed in order to provide children with orientation, protection, and assistance in the case of sexual assaults, which are becoming ever more prevalent both in the classroom and in the schoolyard.

Protection concepts in institutional settings do help children! Prevention in the form of education, further education, and continuing education on the theme of sexual abuse should no longer be interpreted as a sign of an endangered facility, but as a sign of a facility, organization, or practice that is stepping up to its responsibilities. Every facility that has been entrusted with the care of children is called upon to become active in the protection of children against sexual abuse. The ways to do that are clear and already exist. It is a scandal if they are not put into action. Sexual violence should no longer be seen as just another basic risk to childhood.



*Johannes-Wilhelm Rörig has been the German Independent Commissioner for Matters Concerning the Sexual Abuse of Children since December 2011. His tasks include supporting and accompanying the implementation of the recommendations of the roundtable "Sexual Abuse," in particular the introduction and further development of protection concepts against sexual violence in institutions and organizations. In addition, he supports the installation and provision of an independent appraisal of sexual child abuse in Germany. This includes continually including those affected by abuse in the ongoing social and political processes in the form of a council of concerned parties. He is also responsible for the hotline "Hilfetelefon Sexueller Missbrauch" [Help Telephone Sexual Abuse] and regularly informs the public on matters concerning sexual abuse, among other things through the initiative "Kein Raum für Missbrauch" [No Place for Abuse].*

**Contact and information:**

[www.beauftragter-missbrauch.de](http://www.beauftragter-missbrauch.de)

[www.kein-raum-fuer-missbrauch.de](http://www.kein-raum-fuer-missbrauch.de)

[www.hilfeportal-missbrauch.de](http://www.hilfeportal-missbrauch.de)

Hilfetelefon Sexueller Missbrauch:

Telephone 0800 2255530 (anonymous, confidential, and free of charge)





## Reports

- 3 **Sex Education and Protection from Sexualized Violence: Approaches from Sexuality Education and Violence Prevention**  
*An Interview with Anja Henningsen and Ursula Schele*
- 8 **Trau dich!**  
**A National Initiative for the Prevention of Sexual Child Abuse**  
*Stefanie Amann*
- 14 **An Interpretation and Analysis of the Prevention of Sexualized Violence**  
*Brigitte Braun*
- 19 **Experiences of Sexualized Violence: Select Results of the 2015 Study on Youth Sexuality**  
*Angelika Heßling, Heidrun Bode*
- 24 **The Disclosure of Sexualized Violence in Childhood and Adolescence: Personal and Societal Reactions**  
*Sibylle Rothkegel*
- 31 **Protecting Persons with Disabilities from Sexual Abuse**  
*Katharina Urbann, Sara Scharmanski, Pia Bienstein*
- 36 **Children and Adolescents Have a Right to Protection and Self-Determination**  
*Christian Böhm, Beate Proll*
- 41 **Breaking Down Insecurities – Building up Competences: Protection Concepts Support Professionals in Dealing with Sexual Violence Against Children**  
*Johannes-Wilhelm Rörig*

**FORUM** *Sexuality Education and Family Planning*

A series of publications from the Federal Centre for Health Education (BZgA)

Leitung: Dr. med. Heidrun Thaiss.  
Department Sexuality Education,  
Contraception and Family Planning  
Maarweg 149–161  
50825 Köln

[www.forum.sexualaufklaerung.de](http://www.forum.sexualaufklaerung.de)

The German Library – recorded under CIP as:  
Forum Sexualaufklärung; Informationsdienst  
der Bundeszentrale für gesundheitliche  
Aufklärung/BZgA

BZgA, Department Sexuality Education,  
Contraception and Family Planning – Cologne:  
BZgA

Published three times a year.

Included after 1996, 1

ISSN 1431-4282

## Conception:

Department Sexuality Education, Contraception  
and Family Planning

## Responsible:

Angelika Heßling

## Text and editing:

Heike Lauer, Frankfurt

## Translation from German:

Joseph A. Smith, Nörten-Hardenberg

## Layout and typesetting:

Dietmar Burger, Berlin

## Printing: Druckhaus Gummersbach PP GmbH

Edition: 1.1.03.17

## FORUM Sexuality Education and Family Planning

2–2015 is available free of charge from

BZgA, 50819 Cologne

Order No. 13327009

[order@bzga.de](mailto:order@bzga.de)

All rights reserved.

Articles bearing the name or initials  
of the author do not necessarily reflect  
the opinion of the publisher.

This publication is provided by the BZgA  
free of charge. It is not intended for resale  
by the recipient or third parties.

