

Child Endangerment in Switzerland

**Frequency of incidents, agency responses
and political implications**



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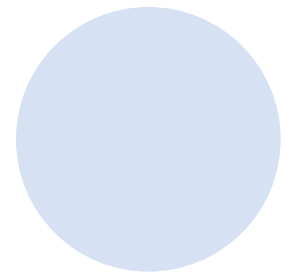
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Knowledge is power



Phyllis Costanza,
CEO UBS Optimus Foundation

Each year, up to 50,000 children in Switzerland come into contact with child protection organizations because their welfare is threatened. The good news is that these children can rely on a well-developed, multi-faceted system to support them. The bad news is that these children represent just the tip of the iceberg, as many cases go unnoticed. Worse, until now, we didn't even know whether children – once in contact with the child protection system – were getting the support they need, independent of where they live, their gender, or their age.

That's why, for the past ten years, the UBS Optimus Foundation has focused on improving understanding of the scope, scale and context of violence against children and the response of child protection systems to establish a solid basis for action, both public and private. It did so by initiating and funding the Optimus Study series, a multi-country epidemiological survey conducted in Switzerland, China and South Africa. To learn more about all previous Optimus Studies you can visit www.optimusstudy.org.

It's concerning to see in this current study that relatively few cases are referred by schools or early childhood care providers,

and there is a pressing need to invest in ways to promote early detection and further sensitize pediatricians, midwives, and teachers, among others. The survey results also uncovered inequality of access to services across regions in Switzerland, meaning that depending on where they live, children have different levels of access to support.

What can be done to address these gaps? This study is not an attempt to name and shame. What is at stake is far greater than that, the welfare of our children, and we recognize the dedication, commitment and professionalism of the people who are working tirelessly across the child protection spectrum. But in order for them to do their jobs effectively, we need studies such as this to provide the information needed to reach our shared goal of protecting all our children no matter who they are, or where they live. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Switzerland, obliges States to collect and analyze data on child endangerment. This is a duty of the State, which, currently, is not being sufficiently fulfilled in Switzerland. However, this study has shown it is possible, without undue burden, to create the basis for the standardized collection of data

needed to judge the health of the entire child protection system, and allow adjustments to be made where necessary.

A lot has been achieved since we initiated the Optimus Study series, but there is much still to do. This new study is intended as a call to action, with concrete recommendations to further advance the protection of children in Switzerland.



The Optimus Study: Greater knowledge for greater child protection



In order to develop healthily, children need trusting, dependable and nurturing relationships with their parents and care-takers. Unfortunately, many children also experience violence and neglect. They need support.

This study sheds light on the situation of such children in Switzerland. It shows, yet again, that here too, many children are affected by violence and neglect. The study does much to show, for the first time, the degree to which support services from public and private organizations are used in cases of child endangerment. At the same time, it also makes clear how little we know about child endangerment in Switzerland and the help and support systems and their impact. Almost every result from the study throws up new questions that we are currently not in a position to answer.

Children must be nurtured, and grow up burden-free, so that they can go through life as adults with strength and self-confidence. This is why child protection is important. It is essential that we learn more about the way in which child protection works in Switzerland, the strengths and weaknesses of the system, so that we can purposefully target the



Ludwig Gärtner,
Domain Leader, Family,
Generations and Society
Federal Social Insurance Office

“Greater knowledge, more exchange and especially, greater will are needed if child protection is to be strengthened.”

weaknesses. More knowledge is needed, as is greater exchange between the actors, and above all, the will to strengthen child protection.

A quick summary

Children need protection from violence, assault, and neglect. In Switzerland, a range of public and private organizations fulfil this challenging role. Very little is known, however, about which forms of child endangerment they are most often confronted with, if all affected children receive the support they need, and how well the whole system works. The third cycle of the Optimus Study gives, for the first time, a comprehensive overview. 351 child protection organizations provided information about the cases they manage.

Over the survey period of three months, 10,000 new cases were registered. This means that each year, between 30,000 and 50,000 children are admitted or re-admitted to organizations in the child protection system.

It is very likely that this is just the tip of the iceberg. The results suggest that the support programs and services are not exclusively oriented to meet needs. For one thing, there are significant regional differences, which means that the type of support a child receives depends very much on where they live. In addition, there are differences in the degree to which child welfare organizations capture

the same kinds of child endangerment in boys and girls. It is conceivable that the types of danger perceived, assessed, and recognized – or not – depend on the gender of the child.

The data also show that children who have suffered physical maltreatment come into contact with organizations in the child protection system relatively late: they are on average older than ten years, even though much younger children experience physical violence.

Therefore, awareness-raising mechanisms will be needed for all affected children to receive the support they need, no matter where they live, how old, or which gender they are. In order to better understand the reasons for possible inequalities and gaps in care, improved, standardized data collection for monitoring are needed, and, as the present study shows, possible.

Introduction



Knowing what it is about

Protecting children from violence is an obligation of the State. To date, we know too little about which children where receive what kind of support and protection. This study is a first step towards changing the current situation.

Children need two things to develop healthily: roots and wings¹. The fundamentals of these are loving relationships with their parents and other caregivers, which are characterized by affection, trust, respect and reliability. Unfortunately, many children do not get enough of these: instead of developing freely, they experience violence in a wide range of forms.

Some still grow roots, some still grow wings. Many, however, are limited in their later life, develop perhaps psychological problems, or transmit the patterns of their childhood to future generations. No one can want this. It is in everyone's interest that special measures are taken to ensure early detection of all kinds of violence against children. Such measures need to be both targeted and effective, knowledge is a prerequisite. Only those who understand the problem thoroughly are in a position to solve it.

Incomplete statistics

Unfortunately, the Swiss databases on child endangerment are incomplete. Very little is known about how well the vari-

ous child protection and sentinel agencies are interconnected, which forms of violence against children are referred to them, if there are gaps in care, or high-risk groups of children that the services do not reach. The statistics from victim support, police, clinical child welfare groups, or the conference for child and adult protection services provide useful information, but are not very compatible or comparable. In addition, they only cover a part of the services on offer. The data from a large number of public and private organizations are not integrated into supraregional statistics.

Having signed and acceded to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Switzerland is obliged to do everything in its power to protect children. This includes monitoring of the provision of services, and the uptake of existing measures. The UN has notified and criticized Switzerland several times about its shortcomings in this regard.

The Optimus Study set itself the goal of responding to this critique. Ten years ago, the UBS Optimus Foundation estab-

¹ **Johann Wolfgang von Goethe allegedly said:**

“There are two things parents need to give their children: roots and wings.”

Having signed and acceded to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Switzerland is obliged to do everything in its power to protect children. This includes monitoring of the provision of services, and the uptake of existing measures. The UN has notified and criticized Switzerland several times about its shortcomings in this regard.

lished the Optimus Study series, an internationally oriented research project to collect representative data (for more details see box on the right). In 2009/2010, a survey was conducted with around 6,700 Swiss school children in Grade 9, asking them about their experiences with sexual assault. About 8 percent of boys and 22 percent of girls recorded having experienced sexual violence with physical contact. The results were consistent with comparable studies from other countries, all of which show a high rate of assault, and generated considerable interest.

This was an important initial step. However, the study limited itself to experience of sexual violence, but said very little about if, and how, affected children and youth were helped. And yet, this is key to coordinate and improve the various intervention measures. The first Optimus Study did attempt to survey public and private institutions involved in child welfare, but the level of response was too low for meaningful results. Of the more than 1,200 organizations approached to participate in the survey, only 320 responded. There are many reasons for this: filling out surveys requires

time and effort. There are also data protection considerations, and for most organizations in the child protection system, sexual-violence cases make up only a small proportion of cases.

New organizations

Much has changed in the meantime when it comes to protection of civil rights of children: since 2013, tutelary authorities are no longer situated at the communal level as previously, but fall within the remit of the new cantonal child and adult protection services (KESB/APEA) in the context of the new child and adult protection legislation. The number of authorities responsible for child protection has as a result decreased from around 1,400 to 142, and there are no more lay authorities.

The Optimus Study

The Optimus Study was launched in 2007 as a comprehensive, internationally oriented, ten-year research project. The goal was to collect representative data on the extent and forms of violence against children and youth, in order to identify gaps in child protection systems, and to devise more effective preventive and intervention strategies.

Data on violence were collected in various cycles in China, South Africa, and Switzerland. The results can be found on the following website:

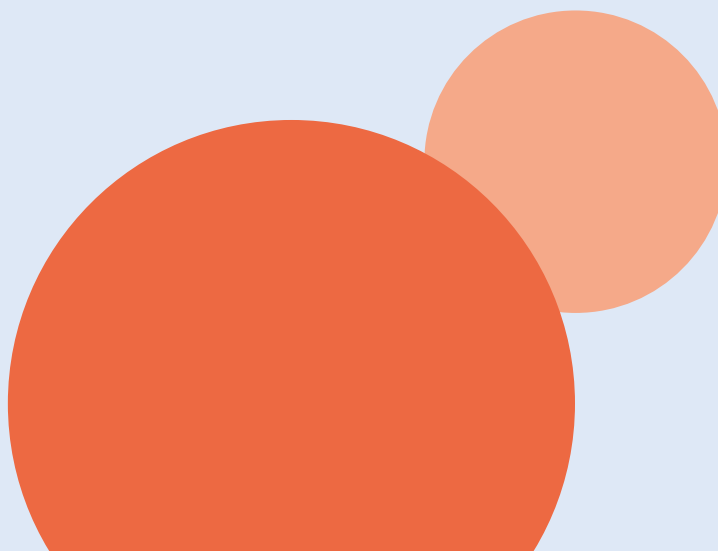
> www.optimusstudy.org

This report presents the results of the third and final study cycle in Switzerland.

Inclusion as a concept

Against this background, this new Optimus Study in Switzerland decided to include within its scope a renewed effort to collect national data – this time with a focus on the provision of care. In order to motivate the various actors in different parts of the country to participate in the survey, the decision was taken to constitute an interdisciplinary research team in two locations, under the leadership of Prof. Andreas Jud at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts and Prof. René Knüsel at the University of Lausanne. The researchers laid great emphasis on timely integration and involvement of survey targets in the project, as well as on simplification of the data collection process for their organizations (see here the following chapter).

This report presents the results of this project. In sum: the work of the research team proves that it is possible to collect data at the national level with a limited burden placed upon the affected organizations. The results show that taking a closer look at provision of care for child welfare protection is worth it. And should be done regularly.



Why the Optimus Study data are needed



“Child protection is a joint responsibility of the Confederation and the cantons. In order to match the support services to the needs of the affected children as closely as possible, it is important to have data on the national situation in Switzerland. Numbers like these help to reliably evaluate what works where and why, and where which kind of gaps remain. The aim is to obtain a carefully constructed support system.”

.....
Diana Wider,

Secretary General of the Conference
on Child and Adult Protection



“The Optimus Study III provides data on the national scale of child endangerment for the first time. This kind of survey is needed on a regular basis in order for Switzerland to be able to fulfil its duties in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and to do everything possible to protect children.”

.....
André Woodtli,

Head of Office for Youth and
Careers Counselling, Canton of Zurich

The process



Together towards reliable data

In order to optimize the quality of the study, the project involved important stakeholders in the field of child protection in its implementation from the start. With success: over 80 percent of the organizations approached made their data available to the study.

81%
of the child protection organizations surveyed made their data available. This exceptionally high rate of participation gives an indication that professionals in this field are convinced of the relevance of this study.

The data collection process was calibrated against the experiences from the Optimus Study in Switzerland 2009/2010. In a preliminary phase, the researchers established numerous contacts with important actors in child protection. The needs and wishes of these actors in relation to data collection were clarified in meetings and conversations, and then further explored in regional meetings with key stakeholders. Newsletters were used to regularly inform all contacts about the progress of the project and about the results of other research and events on the subject.

Innovative data collection

To limit the burden on the organizations participating in the survey, the Optimus Study research team developed a new process to collect data. In contrast to common practice, most organizations were not required to fill out surveys. Instead, they could upload their existing raw data from their caseloads from their databanks onto a web-based study databank. Consistent with comparable

international studies, and in order to limit the volume of data to a manageable level, the researchers decided on a time span of three months for this process. Data from all new cases in the period September to November 2016 were recorded.

The different forms of child endangerment were in some cases defined very differently by the various organizations. For that reason, a set of unified definitions were used for data analysis (please see the box on page 17). In order to create these definitions, reference was made to – among others – the definitions of the World Health Organization, and attention was paid to the inputs of child protection actors from the preceding meetings.

The data were anonymized before upload, and data transfer electronically secured. Various cantonal data protection agencies assessed the concept positively. In addition, the Ethics Commissions of Northwest and Central Switzerland registered no objection to the project.

High participation rate

The early integration and active participation of target organizations, as well as

a presence in German- and French-speaking Switzerland proved correct and valuable. A stratified randomized approach was used to select 432 survey targets from a pool of 643 KESB/APEA child protection, social, health, and penal organizations. 81 percent of the 432 child protection organizations surveyed made their data available to the research team, in part using national databases from the Federal Statistics Office.² This exceptionally high rate of participation gives an indication that professionals in this field are convinced of the relevance of this study. It also shows that it is entirely possible to collect national, representative data on the issue of child endangerment. In accordance with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, this would actually be the responsibility of the State, and a must, if the ambition was to provide children and youth with the necessary protections and the maximum possible room for their unencumbered development.

Forms of child endangerment

Psychological maltreatment

The child is made to feel worthless, inadequate, unloved, unwanted, threatened or only as valuable as she/he meets the needs of others. This is done by humiliation, bullying, exclusion or isolation.

Physical violence

This includes such behavior as hitting, kicking, biting, shoving, shaking, strangling or tugging, deliberate burning or scalding of the child.

Neglect

The basic physical, emotional, medical and educational needs of the child are not met. This also includes inadequate protection and security for the level of development and the emotional needs of the child.

Sexual violence

This covers every type of sexual interaction inflicted on the child, either against the child's will, or because the child as a minor cannot knowingly consent to the sexual act.

Witness to partner violence

This is an indirect form of violence: the child is witness to physical or psychological forms of violence between his/her parents or caregivers within the home.

²Police Crime Statistics and Victim Support Statistics 2016

The results



Recorded cases of child endangerment in Switzerland – the numbers

Do affected children receive help irrespective of where in Switzerland they live, their age or their gender? The results give an indication that they do not and that the support services do not always correspond to need alone.

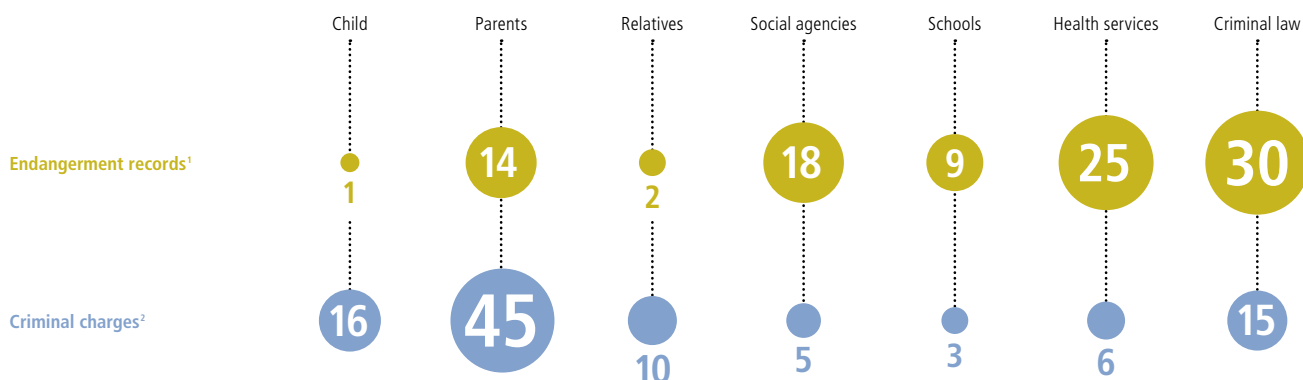
How many cases of child endangerment are handled by child protection agencies in Switzerland? What forms do they most frequently record? How do they support the affected children? The Optimus Study provides nationally representative responses for Switzerland to these and many other questions, and also gives indication of the likely gaps in the system.

How many cases are acknowledged?

The first question is how often child endangerment is even recognized. In the

survey period (September to November 2016) the participants recorded a total of 7,651 new cases. Extrapolated to all child protection agencies in Switzerland, this suggests 10,035 cases, or 66 cases for every 10,000 children, in three months. This means that every year 2 to 3.3 percent of all children living in Switzerland come into contact with a specialized agency for child endangerment. That is a total of 30,000–50,000 children – and only those that are new cases. These numbers are high, but comparable to

Illustration 1: Sources for the records of endangerment and criminal charges (percentage)



Note: ¹Extrapolation based on 1,511 cases. Total of 99 percent owing to rounding differences; ²Complete survey of all 951 cases.

Every year
2–3.3 %
 of all children living in
 Switzerland come into
 contact with a specialized
 agency for child
 endangerment.

similar data from the Netherlands in 2010.

Who reports the endangerment?

It is at least as important to know how children come into contact with protective agencies as how many do. The data show that the various types of agencies receive their information from very different actors. The analysis here is limited to civil law and penal organizations in which statutory enforcement measures can be taken. Civil law interventions begin with the recording of a threat of danger, whereas penal measures begin with a criminal complaint. These statutory remedies are used very differently. Criminal complaints very often are reported by the victims themselves or people in their immediate surroundings. Reports of a threat of danger are generally made by professionals who have come into contact with the affected child, such as pediatricians or school psychologists (see Illustration 1).

Schools turn to child protection agencies remarkably seldom, even though teachers and school social workers know the daily routines of children very well, and are well placed to notice any changes.



Good to know

- > The study used a so-called stratified randomization to select and survey 432 organizations. 351 made their anonymized case files from the period September to November 2016 available.
- > Participants included the child and adult protection authorities (KESB/APEA), social services, public prosecutors and juvenile courts, the police corps, victim aid services, clinical child protection teams, regional and cantonal child protection teams as well as private counselling services on violence against children in all cantons.
- > The data do not capture the total number of affected children, but the number of recorded cases. It is possible that data on a single child is recorded simultaneously by more than one organization.
- > For the analysis, the findings were extrapolated to the whole of Switzerland after weighted adjustment.
- > Some findings were extrapolated to cover the period of a year to improve comprehension. As a rule, a range was specified as many agencies experience seasonal variations in recorded cases, the extent of which are hard to estimate.

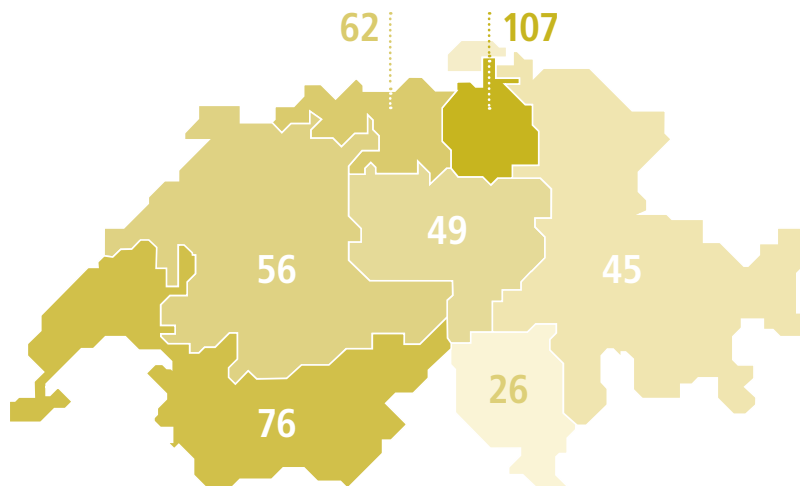
Schools
turn to child
protection agencies
remarkably
seldom.

Where are the greatest number of cases recorded?

There are also significant differences in the geographical distribution of cases made known (see Illustration 2). For the analysis, the number of cases per head

was compared against the greater regional units as used by the federal agency for statistics. The data show that child protection organizations in the greater Zurich region provided care to most of the cases per 10,000 children. They recorded, by

Illustration 2: **Recorded cases of child endangerment by greater region**
Number of cases per 10,000 children (September to November 2016)



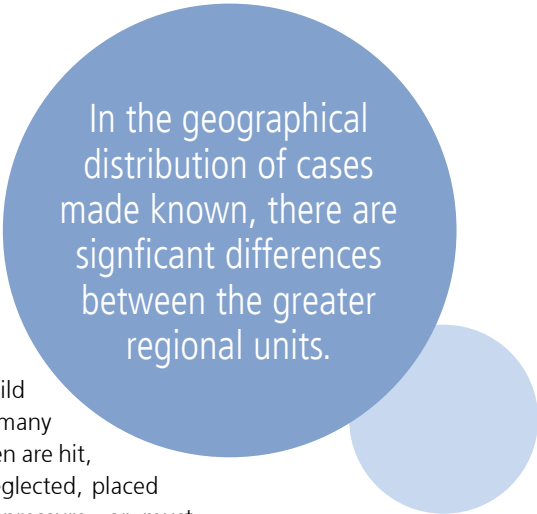
Note: Extrapolation based on 7,651 cases.

extrapolation, 107 cases per 10,000 children from September to November 2016. The fewest cases were recorded by organizations in Tessin, with 26 cases per 10,000 children.

How do these differences arise? On the basis of current knowledge, it is unlikely that there are significantly fewer cases of affected children in a given region. It is far more likely that more use is made of the organizations in population-dense canton of Zurich and Lémanique region. As a result, they may have greater experience and be better able to recognize early signs of endangerment. There are no significant differences between the German- and French-speaking regions of Switzerland (see Illustration 3).

What types of child endangerment are most often recorded?

The welfare of a child can be threatened in many different ways, children are hit, sexually exploited, neglected, placed under psychological pressure, or must witness violence between their parents (see the related definitions on page 17). In order to recognize the important gaps in care, a differentiated review of the cases recorded by child protection and sentinel organizations by type of endangerment is necessary. There are, however, gaps in the documentation itself. Many organizations record the type of services they provide and the type of endanger-



In the geographical distribution of cases made known, there are significant differences between the greater regional units.

Illustration 3: Recorded cases of child endangerment by language region

Number	Total	per 10,000 children (September to November 2016)	per 10,000 children (2016)	
			lower limit	upper limit
German-speaking Switzerland	7,171	68	207	342
French-speaking Switzerland	2,711	67	205	338
Italian-speaking Switzerland	153	25	77	127
Switzerland	10,035	66	198	330

Note: Extrapolation on the basis of 7,651 cases.

The results of the study are a wake-up call



"I find it particularly disturbing that the youngest, and therefore the most vulnerable children are the least protected. Furthermore, the geographical and gender-specific differences are alarming: A child's right to protection should in no way be dependent on where a child lives and whether it is a boy or a girl. And this is only the tip of the iceberg, which is a reason for concern!"

.....
Myriam Caranzano,

Director of the ASPI Foundation and Councillor ISPCAN



"The higher rate of cases in the Lake Geneva region is probably due to the significance of the network responsible for child protection here. Through communication, prevention and cooperation, the various partners from the education, social, medical and police sectors have developed effective measures to recognize new cases and provide services to the affected accordingly."

.....
Eric Schmutz,

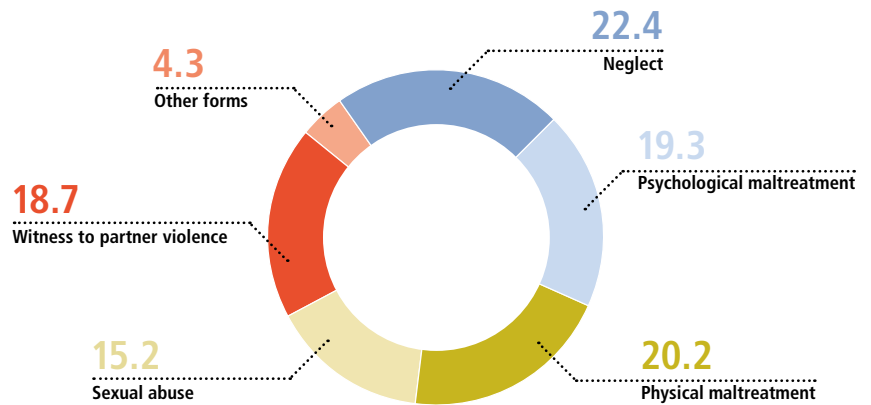
Deputy Head of the Criminal Investigation Department,
Canton Vaud Security Police

ment under the same point. This results in a mixture of content that makes it impossible to make any inferences about the reasons for notification of endangerment. For that reason, the results about the type of child endangerment are limited to the 4,735 cases (62 percent of the total number of cases) where the data are clear.

By this measure, the most frequently recorded type of endangerment is neglect (see Illustration 4). In 2016, between 28 and 46 new cases per 10,000 children were recorded as resulting from neglect. Similar numbers of cases were recorded for psychological or physical maltreatment.

The number of neglected children is relatively low by international comparison. In a current population study in Germany for example, around 40 percent of those surveyed said they had experienced at least mild forms of neglect and over 10 percent had experienced serious neglect. One reason the Optimus Study recorded lower numbers of neglect could be that it might have been included in the imprecise "other reasons" category. This type of child endangerment is harder to categorize. It often also appears as neglect of

Illustration 4: **Frequency of the primary forms of child endangerment**
Proportion of recorded cases by percentage (September to November 2016)



Underlying data

Form	Total cases	per 10,000 children (September to November 2016)	per 10,000 children (2016)	
			lower limit	upper limit
Neglect	1,384	9.17	28	46
Psychological maltreatment	1,192	7.89	24	39
Physical maltreatment	1,250	8.28	25	41
Sexual abuse	940	6.23	19	31
Witness to partner violence	1,155	7.65	23	38
Other forms	268	1.77	5	9
No response	3,846	25.47	77	127

Note: Estimates based on 7,561 cases with documented forms of endangerment. Sum of 100.1 percent due to rounding differences.

supervisory duties, as, for example, when a child is frequently absent from school.

By contrast, a surprisingly high number of cases of sexual violence is recorded by international comparison. This has probably to do with recent public sensitization campaigns in this regard, which has led to an increase of cases recorded, and subsequently captured by the Optimus Study.

What do the records show?

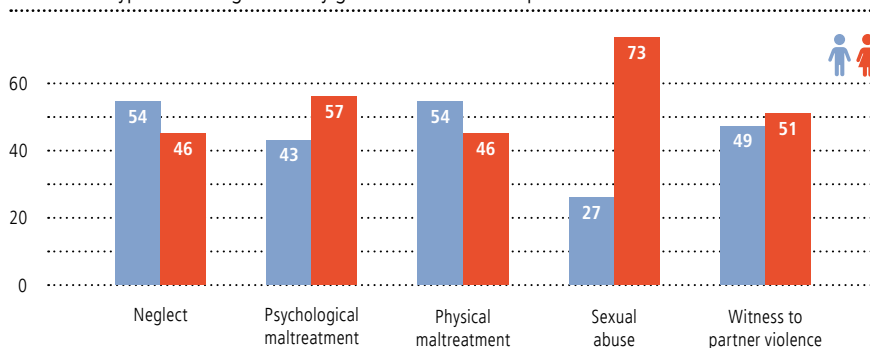
Is there a connection between personal attributes, like gender or age of the af-

affected child and the recognition of child endangerment? The data suggest there is. Consistent with other research work, the Optimus Study also finds, for example, that cases of sexual or psychological maltreatment are more often recorded for girls than for boys. Conversely, child protection agencies record a higher number of boys than of girls when it comes to physical maltreatment or neglect (see Illustration 5).

It is, however, unclear if these differences really are a result of gender, that is to say

Illustration 5: **Type of recorded child endangerment and gender**

Type of endangerment by gender of the child in percent



Note: Extrapolation based on 4,656 cases.

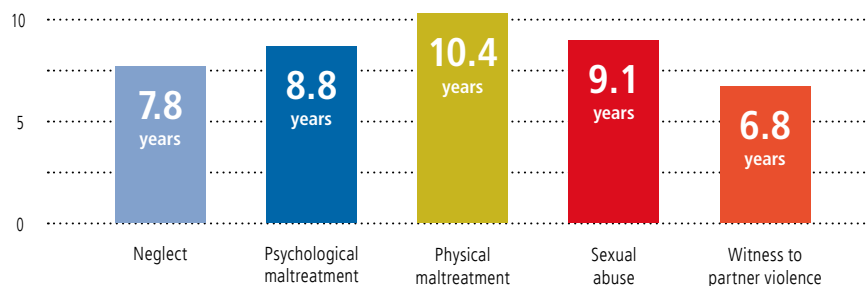
A surprisingly high number of cases of sexual violence is recorded by international comparison.

that boys and girls are affected differently. For sexual abuse, international research is clear: numerous population studies show that girls are more likely to experience sexual abuse than boys. The data is less clear for the other forms of child endangerment. Still, there is little to show that there are significant differences by gender. It is therefore conceivable that threats are differently recognized by gender and type. Neglected or physically abused boys may be more visible because, studies show, they are more likely to react to these forms of abuse with aggression or attention dis-

orders. By contrast, because social norms may lead to psychological forms of maltreatment of boys being less widely recognized, these are less likely to be recorded.

Population studies show: All forms of child endangerment affect children of all ages: But is endangerment recognized and brought to the attention of a child protection organization for all ages? Apparently not. The relatively high average of age, at which children are recorded of having been victims of physical maltreatment, is quite noticeable (see Illustration 6).

Illustration 6: **Type of recorded child endangerment and average age**



Note: Age = Average age at which endangerment was recorded. Extrapolation based on 4,537 cases.

On average, children are older than ten years when they come into contact with a child protection organization, and in the penal sector, even older than twelve. This is surprising because it is clear from various studies that much younger children are affected. The results may be an indication that in Switzerland physical maltreatment is in some areas of care first recognized and recorded as such at a very late stage.

In addition, with regard to personal attributes, a relatively small number of children with physical, mental, or psychological disabilities is recorded. Their share in the Optimus sample is 2.3 percent, and is approximately representative of the percentage of children with these impairments in the total population. However, it is well known that impairment increases the risk of maltreatment, so that their share in the sample should consequently be higher. It is possible that child protection and sentinel agencies do not collect data on impairment in a standardized fashion. It is also possible that this is a gap in services and affected children are not recorded.

In Switzerland physical maltreatment is in some areas of care first recognized and recorded as such at a very late stage.

Who endangers children?

Those children accompanied by child protection and sentinel organizations nearly always experience violence and endangerment from their immediate surroundings: in three-quarters of cases, the responsible party is a close personal contact. With the exception of sexual abuse, endangerment is caused in every third case by a parent. When it comes to neglect, primarily women are recorded as responsible party. In all other cases, men are recorded as being the responsible party.

These results are however to be treated with caution. They draw only on records from clinical child protection teams, victim aid services and the police. These are the only organizations that collect data on the responsible parties. The KESB/APEA and the social services do not collect these data. They often depend on cooperation with the parents and so with potential perpetrators.

What help do affected children get?

How do child protection and sentinel organizations concretely support affected children? The Optimus Study gives interesting insights. By far the most common form of support is psychosocial family

counselling. In approximately half as many cases, therapy is provided directly to the affected child. About as often, the organizations record the cases to the KESP/APEA. This agency in turn undertakes civil statutory intervention measures as necessary, and, for example, appoints a child deputy (see Illustration 7). The numbers do not indicate the total number of counselling sessions. They only show how often a given type of service is provided.

In total, the organizations surveyed provided over 12,500 direct services in the period September to November 2016 and made almost 9,500 referrals. Extrapolating over a year, this means that, in total, between 67,000 and 111,000 services were provided.

What can be concluded from these results? First, it is clear that Switzerland enjoys a well-developed network of organizations working against the various forms of child endangerment. It remains, however, difficult to evaluate whether the various services respond adequately or cooperate satisfactorily. Many organizations do not collect in a standardized fashion data on why a child has come to them, or who has caused their endangerment.

There is no meaningful difference between the number of acknowledged cases in Switzerland and those in other countries. But, internally, there are signifi-

Switzerland has a well-developed network of organizations working to address the various forms of child endangerment.

Illustration 7: **Total number of different services provided either directly or by referral** (September to November 2016)

Service	Direct services	Referral
Psychotherapy – child	433	723
Psychotherapy – family	276	491
Psychosocial advice – child	1,441	452
Psychosocial advice – family	2,658	1,980
Special needs measures	125	182
Medical measures – child	281	321
Family support	247	398
Day care	253	177
Foster care	308	639
Legal advice	1,105	560
Financial support	406	223
Judicial investigation	643	
Civil law measures	3,314	
Investigation	785	71
Other services	467	227
Report to KESB/APEA		1,458
Transfer to victim services		395
Report to police / office of the public prosecutor		1,125
Total	12,742	9,422

Note: Extrapolated on the basis of 7,561 cases, as well as on the number of services and referrals in each category. Numbers reflect how often which type of service was provided. They do not include e.g. the number of sessions per service.

Within Switzerland, not all affected children have access to the same level of protection.

cant regional differences. This means, in the end, that within Switzerland, not all affected children have access to the same level of protection.

The number and form of recorded cases of child endangerment also vary depending on whether the affected child is a boy or a girl. The data are however only consistent with the real levels of maltreatment when it comes to sexual violence. And even here, there are probably gaps in recording. It is worrying that physical maltreatment against children is brought to the attention of child protection services relatively late.

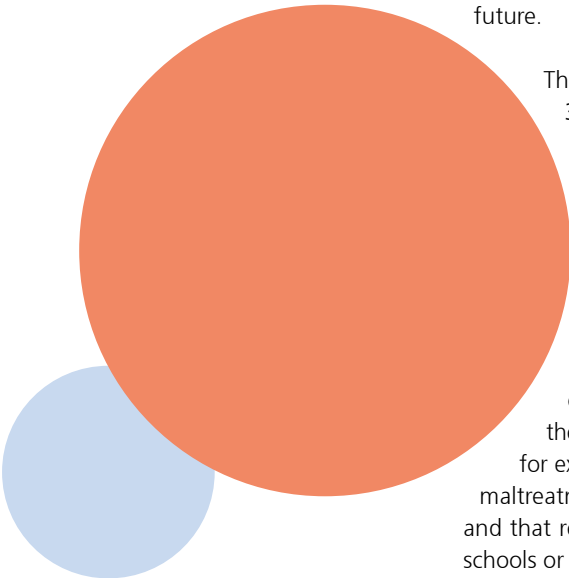
Discussion and outlook



Closing the gaps

Every year, a large number of children in Switzerland receive support through the child protection system. But there are also gaps and inequities in services. And this requires action.

Year after year, between 30,000 and 50,000 children come into contact with child protection and sentinel organizations as new or repeat cases, because they have experienced direct or indirect violence and need help. The good news is that they can rely on a well-developed, multifaceted system. KESB/APEA, police, public prosecutors, child protection teams and a large number of voluntary private organizations offer a wide range of instruments to support affected children and enable them to enjoy a violence-free future.



The bad news is that these 30,000 to 50,000 children are just the tip of the iceberg. These are the children whose cases are known by a child protection or sentinel organization. This number does not include all those children whose cases are unrecorded. This Optimus Study offers some clues as to who these children could be. It shows, for example, that especially physical maltreatment is recognized very late, and that relatively few cases come from schools or early childhood care providers. There is much room for improvement

here. It would be useful to further sensitize pediatricians, midwives, teaching personnel, or employees of infant health care centers as well as kindergartens and crèches with targeted measures. Ideally, such a campaign would be linked to a general campaign against corporal punishment. The earlier patterns of violence are disrupted, the better for the affected child.

The Optimus Study also shows different degrees of contact with child protection agencies for boys and girls, depending on the type of maltreatment recorded. For boys, neglect or physical maltreatment are more frequently recorded by child protection organizations. Girls are more likely to come into contact with these organizations because they have experienced sexual violence or psychological maltreatment. Previous research does not show any differences in forms of violence for boys and girls except when it comes to sexual violence. For the other kinds of child endangerment, it is more likely that gender plays a role in whether or not they are recognized. If all children – independent of their sex – are to get the protection they need, the necessary sensitization measures will have to be taken.

What experts would like of politics



«Child maltreatment in all its forms is a relevant sociopolitical problem. Campaigns to create awareness about non-violent upbringing should be supported so that they can – in a second step – be legally implemented. Furthermore, professional training for people working with children must be expanded to include greater attention to child maltreatment.»

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Markus Wopmann,

Head Physician of the Hospital for Children and Youth, Cantonal Hospital Baden



«The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child obliges Switzerland to do everything to protect children. As a basis for this, it is necessary to have access to standardized and therefore comparable data. Because: only comprehensive evidence from data can help to identify problems and to close gaps in support services. And the duty to advance this work is the task of our politicians.»

.....
Elsbeth Müller,

Manager UNICEF Switzerland
 (until March 2018)



«The most efficient measure would be to create a legal basis for child protection at the federal level, as experts have been demanding for years. But, at a minimum, the coordination of child-protection-related issues should be established at the federal level, either by the Conference of Cantonal Directors of Social Affairs or the Federal Social Insurance Office. This is the only way to obtain reliable data on these issues.»

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Christian Nanchen,

Head of the Cantonal Office for Youth (Wallis)

Collect data, sensitize stakeholders

- > It would be useful to further sensitize pediatricians, midwives, teaching personnel, or employees of infant health care centers as well as kindergartens and crèches with targeted measures. Ideally, such a campaign would be linked to a general campaign against corporal punishment.
- > If all children – independent of their sex – are to get the protection they need, the necessary sensitization measures will have to be taken.
- > Comparable data would be necessary that cover the various areas of care, and so give an indication of what problems exist and what solutions could be provided.
- > A standardized data collection system would be desirable, which gives an indication of the functioning of the entire system and allows adjustments to be made where necessary.


Where a child lives should play no role in whether or not she/he gets help. What sounds so obvious is unfortunately not reality. In the greater Zurich region, and around Lake Geneva, the well-developed care infrastructure means that per head, more cases of child endangerment are recorded, as compared with the greater Tessin region, for example. In the end, this means that depending on where they live, children have different levels of access to support.

To uncover and close these (and other possible) gaps in care, reliable knowledge is needed. Comparable data would be necessary that cover the various areas of care, and so give an indication of what problems exist and what solutions could be provided. The current study has proven that it is possible, without undue burden, to create the basis for the collection of such data. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified by Switzerland, obliges States party to it to collect and analyze data on child endangerment. This is, then, a duty of the State, which unfortunately is not sufficiently fulfilled in Switzerland.

The high response rate to the Optimus Study shows that child protection organi-

zations support the initiative. A standardized data collection system would be desirable, which gives an indication of the functioning of the entire system and allows adjustments to be made where necessary. This would also always have to include the reasons for child endangerment as well as the responsible party. This is not in order to 'name and shame' them, but in order to enable analyses of the concrete contexts of different forms of endangerment. The option to provide multiple answers is key. It is the only way to identify highly complex situations leading to diverse problems. And only with complete information is it all possible to reach the ultimate goal: to better protect all children.

UBS Optimus Foundation



UBS Optimus Foundation is an award-winning, expert grant-making foundation that helps UBS clients use their wealth to effect positive social change for children. We connect clients with inspiring entrepreneurs, new technologies, and proven models that bridge the gap for children between surviving and thriving. We select programs that improve children's health, education and protection, and have the potential to be transformative, scalable and sustainable. And as UBS covers all our administrative costs, we guarantee that 100 percent of all donations go to support program partners, including research and development activities that benefit children. In 2017, we reached over two million children directly.

For many years, UBS Optimus Foundation has been working worldwide for the protection of children, often focusing on important issues that are neglected by others. It selects, funds and guides innovative programs throughout their life cycle to ensure maximum impact. The Optimus Study series aims to fill a knowledge gap crucial to understanding and addressing child endangerment. By gathering such reliable data the effectiveness of prevention and intervention efforts can be evaluated and changes made where

necessary to ensure all children are protected.

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