



CHILDHOOD FREE OF VIOLENCE, A FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT

Coalition of NGOs for Child Protection – KOMF,
in partnership with UNICEF

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INTRODUCTION

For the purpose of further development of KOMF and its members, during 2017, the Coalition of NGOs for Child Protection in Kosovo – KOMF established four thematic working groups aiming for exchange of experiences; overpassing mutual challenges; capacity building; drafting mutual statements, etc.

Aiming to accomplish such goals, within the Thematic Group on Social and Child Protection, Klevis Vaqari, Ujëvara Lluga and Donjeta Kelmendi from the Coalition of NGOs for Child Protection – KOMF drafted this publication on the occurrence of violence against children as one of the most blatant violations of their rights.

The publication you are viewing describes children's fundamental right to grow up without violence and in a safe environment, their current situation compared with violence and its different forms and levels of use, as well as main challenges encountered for the improvement of such situation. At the same time, it provides an overview of some of the most important aspects which should be taken into consideration during the development and implementation of policies, by suggesting concrete recommendations on how the goals should be accomplished.

The Coalition of NGOs for Child Protection in Kosovo – KOMF, established in 2011, is a coalition composed of 27 local and international non-governmental organizations working in the child protection field, with the joint mission to advocate and protect the rights of children in Kosovo.

KOMF member organizations are:

Associazione Amici dei Bambini, Association for Social Training, Research and Advocacy – ASTRA, Action for Mothers and Children, Balkan Sunflowers Kosova, Initiative 6, Kosovo Education for Sustainable Development, Kosovo Rehabilitation Center for Torture of Victims KRCT, Youth Organization AKTI, One To One Kosova – Family Counselling Centre, One to One Children's Fund, OPFAKKOS, Civil Rights Program, PL4Y International, Kosovo Education Centre – KEC, Centre for Protection of Victims and Prevention of Trafficking in Human Beings – PVPT, Centre for Advanced Studies FIT, Save the Children, SOS Children's Villages Kosovo, Hope and Homes for Children in Kosovo, Terre des Hommes, VoRAE, World Vision, The Ideas Partnership, HANDIKOS, PRAK Kosova, Childproof/ CIPOF and Education Comes First.

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CONTENT

Executive summary	7
Child Development – fundamental factors for a healthy development	9
Violence as a global phenomenon	11
Abuse and myths.....	11
Types of maltreatment / abuse.....	11
Consequences of violence against children	12
Protection of children against violence in Kosovo	14
Legal infrastructure.....	14
Statistics on violence against children in Kosovo.....	16
Environments where violence is exercised.....	16
Domestic violence.....	16
School violence.....	16
Community violence.....	16
Violence as instrument of disciplining.....	17
Household / low awareness.....	17
Children’s perceptions and attitudes regarding violence.....	17
Identification / Low referral.....	18
Service provision.....	19
Limited financial support.....	19
Conclusions	21
Recommendations	22
Reference	23

ACRONYMS

MICS	Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey
KOMF	Coalition of NGOs for Child Protection
CRC	Convention on the Rights of Child
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
KAS	Kosovo Agency of Statistics
CPI	Child Protection Index
CSW	Centre for Social Work
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
WHO	World Health Organization
SOP	Standard Operating Procedures
LSFS	Law on Social and Family Services

“We owe our children, the most vulnerable citizens in any society, a life free from violence and fear”.

Nelson Mandela

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our society considers violence as a method which serves to education and disciplining of children. Violence and physical punishment of children in Kosovo remains a social norm accepted and applied by parents and our society. It has been established that up to a certain level, physical violence is justified also by children themselves, considering it more as a form of disciplining.

According to Kosovo Agency of Statistics¹, 61.4 per cent of children in Kosovo have confirmed experiences of physical/psychological violence within the family environment, during the last month of the interviewing. 59 percent of children had suffered from psychological violence, while 24 percent of children were subjected to physical violence. It is strongly recommended to increase the awareness at national level, targeting the wide population and institutions, on child protection, promotion of positive parenting and disciplining methods, and eradication of violent methods of disciplining and corporal punishment.

Based on the outcome of the Child Protection Index 2.0², published by KOMF in 2018, Kosovo actions in the prevention of all forms of violence against children are more evident in its laws and policies (0,823) and coordination protocols (0,757) from a total of 1.0 points. Kosovo capacity is more limited with 0,400 and establishment of appropriate services that prevent, intervene and support children exposed to violence is reflected in a result of 0,611. Accountability to beneficiaries, families and other stakeholders is low with a result of 0,474.

Through its Constitution and local legislation, Kosovo has endeavoured to prevent actions that may be qualified as “violence” or that may lead to

violence, by institutions such as schools, justice system or family environments. Nevertheless, use of violence still remains high in these environments. Developing parenting and positive discipline programs is recommended for parents, care-givers and professionals involved in child protection, in order to decrease violent practices in disciplining and proper child rearing, thus generating new non-violent generations.

On one hand, the current budget allocated by the government and municipalities is insufficient to guarantee qualitative services for children victims of various forms of violence. In responding to the number of children in need of care and services, many residential centres and day-care centres that are part of non-governmental sector, face with issues of securing their existence or financial sustainability and with the risk of terminating such services. On the other hand, Centres for Social Work are overloaded with cases involving children, due to low number of social workers in CSWs and the huge number of children in need of such services. For these reasons, an intervention is required to establish financial standards for social services and to grant budgets that will provide for a sustainable financing of services funded through MLSW and Municipalities.³

Referrals of institutions working with children remain of a low level, especially in cases of school violence. It is recommended that Kosovo commences with trainings and awareness increasing campaigns at national level in order to remind the state officials and professionals of their duty to report cases of suspected violence against children.

Violence remains to be under-reported also due to hesitation of children, families or peers to report it. Consultations with children prove that children's highest level of information is mainly in relation to violence. Upon discussing with them, it was established that up to a certain level, physical violence is justified by children themselves, considering it rather as a form of disciplining.

Concerning school violence, children admitted the existence of incidents of violence in school premises and they listed teachers, their peers, and even parents as persons who exercise violence against them. Their stance towards case reporting or complaints appears to be highly sceptic. Children have no trust in the efficiency of current reporting and complaining mechanisms because of not being taken

into consideration but also due to fear of eventual retribution. On the other hand, children have little information on sexual abuse and its consequences, whereas neglect remains an entirely unfamiliar notion to them. It is recommended to encourage and promote peer-reporting, as well as self-reporting, through awareness increasing campaigns amongst children.⁴ Additionally, in the frame of self-reporting and peer-reporting, establishing a new help line, designed with and for children, is recommended. Also, awareness increasing activities are recommended which would enable children to become familiar with types of violence, including its most cruel form – sexual abuse – and to avoid potentially dangerous situations.

CHILD DEVELOPMENT – FUNDAMENTAL FACTORS FOR HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT

First years of life are extremely significant and important for child development. Healthy development during childhood, growing up in a warm and friendly environment, positive experiences and sustainable relationship with other persons, are elements of immense influence in the following years of every individual, after reaching the adult age. The foundation of child development during the course of these critical years is the physical and mental health, which affects everything; starting from the lifespan to the perpetual learning capacity, from ability to adjust to the ability to endure in negative circumstances. Lacking these aspects leaves long-term, often inerasable, marks, harms self-esteem, mental development, but also individual's behaviour during his/her entire life. Early negative experiences, e.g. unsustainable nutrition, deprivation of love or even stressed situations related to neglect and maltreatment, increase highly the likelihood for a weak health and development during their entire life.

The main factors that affect child development may be grouped in four main fields:

- **Biological factors**
Biological factors include child's general health, including physical and mental health, inheritance elements, healthy practices and routines such as breast feeding, regular sleep schedules, etc.
- **Environmental factors**
Environmental factors are related to housing conditions, family economic conditions and how they affect the child, child education which is interlinked also with the level of parents' education, etc.

- **Interpersonal relationship**
Interpersonal relationship include the safe attachment with parent or the main care-giver, parenting styles towards the child, such as authoritative parenting, uninvolved parenting, etc., level of child socializing with his/her peers and other adults, level of acceptance of the child by others, etc.
- **Early experiences**
These experiences include early use of all child's senses during its first contacts with the parent or care-giver.

All the above-mentioned areas are important to child development. Childhood experiences have deep effects in the entire development process of a child. However, the role of the family as the main model governing the upbringing and development of the child, and at the same time building safe and warm relationship of the child with other members of the family, starting with parents, is essential for the future of the child even after reaching the adult age.

Family is the first and most important environment for a child, where first experiences are developed, first social relations with the closest persons, parents and care-givers in the first place, and then also with other family members. Given that family is of vital importance for a child, an environment that promotes violence and growing up in conditions of an environment where violence is exercised has severe consequences on the very development of the child.

Beyond the family factor, of great importance are also child peers, the school and the wider community. These aspects can promote sound and safe relations,

independence and support which have an influence in developing individual's personality or, in contrast, may provide inappropriate models, such as the one of violence and abuse, which provokes the feeling of insecurity in children, decreases self-esteem and affects their entire future.

Violence constitutes one of the most severe forms of violation of children's rights. Early exposure to different

forms of violence, either as a victim or witness of it, is critical or has a devastating effect on the child. Beyond endeavours to prevent forms of violence and abuse against children, this phenomenon remains current and requiring an immediate need for addressing and intervention in every level.

VIOLENCE AS A GLOBAL PHENOMENON

Abuse and myths

Facts and empirical data, but also different reports from researches conducted on humiliating punishment, neglect, abandonment, and other forms of child abuse, show that child abuse is a phenomenon which existed at every period of time, starting from ancient civilisations to the present days.

Notwithstanding numerous myths defining child abuse as a phenomenon belonging to a certain historic era, or a phenomenon occurring in certain societies or families only, world reports on abuse and its forms indicate that it is an immense global problem that affects every society regardless of its level of development.⁵ It transpires in different forms and is often based on cultural, economic and social practices of a society.

On the other hand, abuse may occur in any environment where the child develops its existence, including here also those environments where the child is supposed to be safer and more protected, for example in family or with its other relatives, with teachers in schools, professionals mandated to provide services for them, their peers, and all the way with other persons who may be strangers to the child.

Regardless of anyone's beliefs, children may also be subject of abuse in institutions meant to provide them protection, including here also non-governmental organizations and professional staff engaged in provision of services for them. Based on the global statistics, data indicate that children with limited capabilities are several times more exposed to risk of turning into victims of different forms of abuse, sexual abuse including. This happens due to their greater

vulnerability compared with other children, as well as their inability to flee from the scene, inability or limited capability to identify and/or report the abuser.

Another characterising feature of abuse as a global phenomenon is the fact that it continues to remain under-reported due to a range of reasons. Among the factors of failing to report abuse may be children's inability or fear to themselves report it, families' hesitation to report mainly because of fear of becoming stigmatised in the community and wider, lack of adequate system of public institutions to prevent and combat the phenomenon as well as existence of the mentality and tradition relying on or justifying violence as an instrument of discipline and education of these children.

Types of maltreatment /Abuse

World Health Organization defines child abuse or maltreatment⁶ as: all forms of physical and/or emotional maltreatment, sexual abuse, neglect or different forms of exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child's health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power. On the other hand, WHO also distinguished four types of child maltreatment:⁷ physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional / psychological abuse and neglect.

Physical Abuse

Means use of physical force against a child, resulting or has high probability to result with harm to child's health, existence, development and its dignity. This includes, but is not limited to, hitting, beating, slapping, kicking, pinching, shaking, biting, gripping, scalding,

poisoning and strangling. To a great extent, physical violence against children within a family environment is used as a means of punishment.

Emotional abuse

Emotional and psychological abuse includes both isolated situations/incidents and continuous ones of parents or care-giver's failure to provide and ensure an appropriate environment for development and support, including here facilitating a principal figure for attachment in order to for the child to develop sustainable emotional and social capacity in line with the its personal potential, and in the context of the society where the child lives. Such abusive actions may harm physical or mental health of the child, as well as child's development. These actions include, but are not limited to: restricted movement, deprecation, blaming, threatening, intimidation, discrimination or derision, as well as other non-physical forms of refusal or hostile treatment.

Sexual abuse

Sexual abuse is the harshest form of child abuse. Sexual abuse refers to anyact of sexual nature performed with a child by an adult person or an older child. It includes, but is not limited to: encouraging or coercing a child to engage in sexual act regardless of the outcome or consent of the child, any act of sexual nature involving or not physical contact with a child, with or without penetration, it may include touching of child's genital parts, or forcing the child to touch the adult's, man's or woman's, genital parts, forcing a child to watch pornographic materials, engaging a child in pornography, etc. Consequences of sexual abuse may be long-lasting and may leave inerasable marks on children.

Neglect

Neglect, as one of the child abuse forms, is failure of child's parents or custodians to fulfill his/her basic needs for a healthy growing-up and development. It includes failure to secure and provide special health care for the child, supervising, clothing, proper nutrition, adequate accommodation as well as other specific needs related to the physical, emotional,

educational and social development, and safety of the child.

Consequences of child abuse

Based on various researches⁸, some of the most flagrant violence consequences, inter alia, can be:

Death which constitutes the most extreme consequence of violence. Although this possibility is usually underestimated, often times the reason that may lead to death is "intention to punish the child".

Serious physical injuries which may be inflicted on a child as a consequence of violence. These injuries may leave on children serious consequences in future, bearing in mind that physical and cognitive development in childhood is particularly important in establishing his/her physical and mental health in adulthood.

Physical diseases, such as heart conditions, lung or liver illnesses, cancer, obesity, etc., which may result as consequence of different forms of violence administered on children. These children are more prone to suffer from these chronic diseases during their adult age.

Cognitive development can also be severely harmed in abused and neglected children. Lack of positive stimulants damages child's brain development by making difficult its recuperation at later stages.

PTSD or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder may be caused as a consequence of experiencing extreme situations of violence or which are repeatedly experienced during childhood. Additionally, other forms of disorder such as depression, anxiety disorders, nutrition disorders, etc. may be related to different forms of violence administered on children during their childhood.

Behavioural difficulties which may reflect in later years of life and during adulthood with these children. They may include consummation of alcohol, abuse of substances and all the way to engaging in high-risk sexual activities. Empirical data indicate a greater risk

for these children of breaking the law and to become parents in their adolescence.

World researches prove that slapping, as part of corporal punishment, is related to aggression, anti-social behaviour, mental health problems, cognitive difficulties, low self-esteem and other negative aspects. This study⁹ collected data from over 150.000 people, during an over 50 year's period of time, and concluded that slapping does not produce any positive effect. Meanwhile, there are 13 mental health problems that result from its use.

No doubt, children need discipline in their life by setting limitations. However, we must be aware that corporal punishment produces only negative effects in the long-term mental development of children, thus creating precedence for violence in the future.

These are only a few of consequences that may be caused as a result of exercising violence on children. Children victims or witnesses of different forms of violence may suffer one or more consequences simultaneously. For this reason, in order to address violence, a holistic approach is required to solve problems of poverty, discrimination, but also behaviour/customs that increase the odds for violence against children.

Although consequences of violence against children differ based on its nature and severity, short-term and long-term consequences may be devastating. Exposure to acts of violence in early age affects the development and maturity of the child's brain in later stages. In cases of prolonged violence, including cases where children are witnesses of violence, consequences may lead to social, emotional and cognitive damages, as well as to behaviour causing sickness, injuries and social problems. Exposure to violence in childhood may also result with excessive sensitiveness to permanent social, emotional and cognitive damages, to obesity and may lead to health-risking behaviour such as, abuse of substances, early sexual activity and smoking.

Problems related to mental and social health include anxiety and depressive disorders, hallucinations, poor performance at work, memory problems, as well as aggressive behaviour. These risks may manifest at later stages of life in the form of different lung, heart and liver diseases, sexually transmitted diseases, as well as violence against the partner and attempts to commit suicide.

PROTECTION OF CHILDREN FROM VIOLENCE IN KOSOVO

Every child enjoys his/her right to physical and personal integrity and to protection against all forms of violence. Children, as human beings, are entitled to all rights guaranteed under different international treaties on human rights which are established under the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

States have a responsibility to protect children from violence, abuse, neglect and to guarantee that their rights are being safeguarded and respected. Children's right to live a free life and without violence is a right guaranteed not only through international instruments but also through Kosovo national legislation, which is in full compliance with the requirements of highest international legal acts. United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) is the highest international act that guarantees children's rights and acknowledges the responsibility of states and governments to protect and respect those rights. Article 19 of CRC¹⁰ acknowledges the right of children to grow up without violence and at the same time engages states parties to undertake all necessary measures to protect children from any form of violence.

Legal infrastructure

Notwithstanding its political status, Kosovo is a ratifying party of CRC; it has included CRC across its local legislation, starting even from the country's highest legal act – the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo. Article 22 of the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo¹¹ guarantees that international agreements and instruments, including CRC, are directly applicable in Kosovo, and in case of dispute they shall prevail over legal provisions and other acts of public institutions. Also, Article 50 of the

Constitution guarantees that children enjoy the right to protection and mandatory care for their welfare and that every child is entitled to protection from violence, maltreatment and exploitation.

At the same time, local primary legislation is also in line with the principles of CRC. Kosovo has approved a range of laws which tackle and address protection of children from violence, such as:

- Family Law of Kosovo¹²
- Law on Social and Family Services¹³
- Law No. 04/L-081 on Amending and Supplementing the LSFS¹⁴
- Law on Pre-University Education in the Republic of Kosovo¹⁵
- Juvenile Justice Code¹⁶
- Criminal Code of Kosovo¹⁷
- Criminal Procedure Code of Kosovo¹⁸
- Law on Emergency Care¹⁹
- Law on Health²⁰
- Law on Protection against Domestic Violence²¹
- Law on Prevention and Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Protection of Victims of Trafficking²²

According to results derived from Child Protection Index 2.0, published by Coalition of NGOs for Child Protection – KOMF in January 2018, which is a monitoring tool that monitors and measures government efforts in protecting children in need of institutional protection, Kosovo actions on preventing all forms of violence against children, are more evident in its laws and policies (0,823) and coordination protocols (0,757) from the total of 1.0 points. Kosovo capacity is more limited with 0,400 and establishing proper services that prevent, intervene

and support children exposed to violence, reflect in a result of 0,611. Accountability towards beneficiaries, families and other stakeholders is low with a result of 0,474. Results show the existence of a significant discrepancy between certain Kosovo services and its capacity to implement them effectively. Another huge gap is made evident between laws and policies of Kosovo and the implementation of those commitments with a result of 0,336.

Meanwhile, besides the primary legislation, secondary legislation or necessary supporting documents were also drafted which address issues of violence against children and they guide institutions and professionals on the immediate measures required to be undertaken for the protection of children from violence. They are:

- Standard Operating Procedures for Victims of Trafficking
- Standard Operating Procedures for Protection against Domestic Violence
- National Strategy and Action Plan against Trafficking in Human Beings
- National Strategy and Action Plan for Protection against Domestic Violence
- Minimum Standards of Care for Victims of Trafficking in Kosovo
- Protocol for Prevention and Reference of Violence in Institutions of Pre-University Education

Throughout the entire above-mentioned legislation, one can observe that Kosovo has made efforts to prevent activities that can be defined as “violence”, or that can lead to violence by institutions such as schools, judicial system or family environments. Law on Pre-University Education sanctions corporal punishment in educational institutions, whereas Law on Family forbids acts of violence in family environments and it provides for restrain or banning parental rights in such cases.

In addition, Standard Operating Procedures for these specific categories were drafted. Their goal is the establishment of a coordinated system of institutions

that respond immediately in cases of domestic violence aiming to provide qualitative assistance and protection to victims of domestic violence, including cases where victims are children, but focusing on domestic violence cases but not also in cases when violence derives from other environments outside domestic one.

Protocol on Prevention and Reference of Violence in Institutions of Pre-University Education sets forth obligations, roles and procedures of institutions on preventing, identifying, collecting information, referral, dealing, reporting violence against children, but in none of its parts does it present identifying tools of risk factors and indicators of violence and sexual abuse of children.

In spite of all the efforts, the legal framework does not provide financial standards for all the state provided or sponsored services related to prevention of violence and exploitation. **Therefore, it is recommended that Kosovo provide financial standards for all the services provided or sponsored by the state.**

The legal or regulatory framework does not require mandatory licencing of services provided by government entities; it requires, however, mandatory licencing of services provided by NGOs/private entities. **In order to increase the quality of services, it is recommended to require mandatory licencing of services provided by governmental organizations based on the requirements of minimum standards of quality.**

Finally, Kosovo is in the verge of finalizing and adopting the Draft Law on Child Protection which, once adopted, shall improve the country’s governance towards protection of children; it will consolidate a range of more than 14 laws that govern stakeholders and will establish policies on children.

Statistics on violence against children in Kosovo

Data from Kosovo Agency for Statistics – KAS, speak of high figures of violence against children in Kosovo, where 61.4 percent of children in Kosovo confirmed experiences of physical/psychological violence within the family environment, during the last month of interviewing. 59 percent of children had suffered psychological violence, while 24 percent of children had suffered physical punishment.

According to the data of Kosovo Police, in 2017 were reported in total 243 children victims of different forms of violence. On the other hand, during 2017, MLSW reported a total of 225 cases of children that were victims of different forms of violence and abuse.²³

Environments where violence is exercised

Save the Children²⁴ conducted a research in public schools, aiming to perceive the prevalence of cases involving violence against children, which was carried out with 660 children aged 10 – 14 years old, 70 teachers and 70 parents. The outcome of this study proved that violence against children extends in schools, families and community. Violence is mainly exercised in community (91% children, 84.5% teachers and 90% parents), then in schools (85.9% children, 40.8% teachers and 88.5% parents), whereas at home/families (67.5% children, 63.5% teachers and 85.7% parents).

On the other hand, researches in schools indicate that brawls among peers occur on daily basis and that these brawls often result with serious injuries. Up to 90% of interviewed children stated that they have seen weapons, knives in most of cases, in school premises, and 30% of them stated that they do not feel safe at school. Moreover, violence between groups of friends against another group of friends in the form of harassment, threatening or vandalism is widely spread.²⁵

Domestic violence

Researches in the country indicate a larger group of types of domestic violence which are related to physical violence, neglect, forced labour, and exposure to violence occurring in the family. Beating by using a belt or some other hard item, as a severe form of punishment, then forcing to conduct humiliating work, lack of sufficient food, conducting work that is dangerous to health, threatening or intimidating by using different means or weapons, forcing to carry out hard physical labour, lack of protection, care and support of the family, as well as inflicting marks (bruises) on the body as a result of use of hard items or weapons, are only some of the types of violence reported at this level.²⁶

School violence

School and institutions of education are also premises where teenagers often experience violence. Statistics show that the main forms of violence exercised by teenagers is related to damaging and destroying property, then forms of psychological and physical violence all the way to the physical violence in the form of pushing, pinching, strangling. Threatening and verbal intimidation is ranked in the second group, all the way to “various body touching for sexual purposes”. And, third group lists “robbery or forcible appropriation of personal items” all the way to “sexual assault or attempted rape”.

Community violence

Forms of violence occurring often in a community are those related with various insulting and mocking, then different threatening and intimidation. Damaging and destroying property, theft of property, as well as hitting, punching of teenagers. Violence between peers is also one of most spread-out forms of violence, through ridiculing, threatening, labelling of children based on their physical or psychological features, etc.

Violence as a disciplining method

Our society, to a great extent, considers violence as a method serving to educate and discipline children, thus justifying it. Meanwhile, the negative and long-term effects that use of violence has in the wellbeing of children have been circumvented and ignored.

Parents themselves are often those who may resort to use of different forms of violence, such as physical or emotional violence. At the same time, they may also encourage it in other environments outside the family where the child spends his time, at school for instance. Although many initiatives have already begun, which promote positive styles of parenting and education of children, there is still a lot to do in order to eradicate the mind-set that violence disciplines.

Violence and corporal punishment in Kosovo remains an acceptable social norm that is applied by our society as a tool for educating and disciplining children. This finding is based also in the outcome of the Qualitative Research on the Social Norms related to Violence on Gender Basis and Physical Punishment of Children in Kosovo, published in 2016 by UNICEF.²⁷

Empirical data prove that domestic violence deteriorates sound relationship between parents and children. It generates lack of trust and emotional support during the period when children need to rely on and trust their parents. At the same time, use of violence for better achievements in school does not improve the results of children at school. On the contrary, children that are victims or witnesses of violence display a decline in learning, even risking dropping out school.

Development of positive discipline for parents is recommended, as well as for guardians and professionals involved in child protection, in order to decrease violent practices for disciplining and facilitate well rearing of children by developing new non-violent generations.

Household / Low awareness

Other factors that influence the probability to exercise violence against children are poverty and the low level of education in the family. The results derived from Kosovo Agency for Statistics in the Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey also reflect such a thing. Beyond these two aspects, the wide community acknowledges use of violence as a reasonable tool which contributes to discipline and learning of proper behaviour by children.

In general, families of low level of education and those of poor economic level are more likely to find physical punishment as a necessary method for disciplining children. According to KAS, 11% of mothers believe in the necessity of physical punishment of children, compared with 8% of fathers and 9% of other grown-up members of the family.

Children's perceptions and attitudes on violence

In the frame of children's participation in processes that directly affect them, KOMF has organized children focus groups in order to obtain their viewpoints and opinions regarding different phenomena, including here violence against children. Results from meetings and consultations with children prove that children's highest level of information is mainly related to physical violence, for which they are aware that it should not be accepted and should be reported about. Nevertheless, following a discussion with them, it was ascertained that up to a certain level physical violence is justified also by children themselves, seeing it more as a form of disciplining.

Therefore, awareness-increasing activities on violence are recommended, which would enable children to identify types of violence, including its harshest type – sexual abuse, and to avoid potentially dangerous situations.

As far as school violence is concerned, children admitted the existence of incidents and violence in school premises and listed teachers, peer students

and even parents as persons exercising violence on them.

Their attitude regarding reporting cases or complaints results to be highly sceptic. Children do not trust the efficiency of current reporting and complaint mechanisms because of not being taken into consideration, but also due to fear of eventual retribution.

On the other hand, children have little information on sexual abuse and about its consequences, whereas neglect remains an entirely unfamiliar notion to them.

Children observe that there are different types of factors causing violence against children, including video games, social networks, and their presence in locations where violence is present. It means that Kosovo children are exposed to different types of violence where they risk of suffering long-term trauma resulting in anxiety and constant feeling of danger, which in turn affects directly the development of the child.

Children themselves recommend organizing different activities on topics related to violence and child abuse, so that they would have opportunities to become better informed with the rights of children and with responsible institutions for protection of their rights whom they can address and report to.

Identification / Low referral

Identification and reporting children in situations of violence is the first step in protecting children. The legal framework obliges all public officials and professionals whose duty is to take care of children in the sectors of health, education and justice, to report cases of suspected violence to the respective Centre for Social Work or to the Kosovo Police authorities. However, referrals from these institutions remain at a low level, especially on school violence cases, despite the fact that the school, inter alia, has a significant educational role with particular focus on prevention of violence by creating friendly environments for students where they are protected from: injury, violence, and emotional pressure, prevention of

abuse, incidents and violations of any type. It is therefore recommended that Kosovo begins trainings and awareness campaigns at national level to remind state officials and professionals of their obligation to report cases of suspected violence against children. Following the identification and referral of a case to the social services, case managers at social work, or social workers from the CSW, must monitor children by referring them to certain services. Kosovo minimum standards for social services govern the maximum number of cases that a case manager can handle simultaneously. However, case managers within the Centres for Social Work are overloaded with cases involving children due to the small number of social workers at CSWs and the big number of children in need of such services. Therefore, it is recommended that Kosovo increase capacities and financial investment on social services for the implementation of policies, laws and regulations protecting children from violence.

On the other hand, violence remains under-reported also due to the hesitation of children themselves, families or children's peers, to report the case. Often, it is the feeling of embarrassment, fear and of being stigmatized in the family, community and society, which influences the low number of referral of such cases. This phenomenon often remains "inside the family walls" in order to avoid eventual stigmatization of the family.

For this reason, it is recommended to encourage and promote peer-reporting and self-reporting, through awareness-increasing activities among children. Also, in terms of increasing self-reporting and peer-reporting, establishing a new toll-free telephone line, designed with and for children, is recommended. The service must receive phone calls and provide support, counselling and develop a network for children encountering situations of violence, abuse, and other forms of exploitation.

Finally, further increase of awareness is recommended at national level and it must be directed towards wider population in order to promote positive methods of parenting and disciplining and to eradicate violent methods of disciplining and corporal punishment.

Service provision

Kosovo chose to provide services of rehabilitation and re-integration for children victims of violence by sub-contracting of non-governmental sector.

Kosovo institutions sponsor services for victims of violence, which are provided by different NGOs. However, financial limitations and lack of allocation of a certain budget for social services, limit the provided level and quality of such services.

While responding to the number of children who are in need of care and services, many residential centres and day-care centres that are part of non-governmental sector, face difficulties in securing their existence or financial sustainability, thus risking even termination of such services.

Children that benefit such services are forced to transfer from one form of care into another one, which constitutes serious violation of children's rights because this may have a negative impact in their physical and psychological development.²⁸

Children victims of different forms of violence are most vulnerable children. According to the legislation in force, the state must guarantee protection for these children. It is recommended that MLSW and Municipalities allocate a sustainable budget in order to guarantee the rights of children to protection, a right guaranteed under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo and local legislation in force.

Limited financial support

In 2016, the MLSW budget for subventions and transfers was 351,311,674 €, namely 97,7% of the total budget of the said ministry, including here the pension schemes, schemes for protection of categories emerging from war, schemes for Trepça miners, etc.

Through the public call process, the MLSW continued to support direct provision of services provided by non-governmental sector. The maximum amount of financial support through subventions, for an NGOs providing services, may reach the amount of 10,000-

40,000 € per project (regional or national). The timeframe for implementation of project proposal activities is ten (10) months.

Nonetheless, this support appears to be insufficient considering the cost of provided services. The average cost per child for a year of staying in residential care is 7,500 EUR, which includes accommodation, basic food and professional institutional care. On the other hand, municipalities do not publish calls to fund services provided by non-governmental sector. Support from municipalities remains ad hoc and varies from one municipality to another. There are municipalities which do not allocate budget at all and do not support social services provided by the non-governmental sector, unlike some municipalities which allocate symbolic annual funds of 500-10,000 Euro which guarantee neither sustainability nor quality of services.

The current level of municipal funding does not even closely fulfill the needs required by these services in order to be of the optimum level of functioning. However, a certain number of municipalities have every now and then allocated certain amounts of funds to sustain the services in specific moments when these services were at risk of closing down. If this form of financing continues, the situation may deteriorate to the extent as to turn the Centres for Social Work and non-governmental organizations into non-functional, and in other cases turn them into organizations with poor performance or becoming incapable of providing such services.

The grievous situation the social services are currently in, where the cost of services has not yet been established (financial standards) and a plan for sustainable funding of social services has not been developed by the MLSW and Municipalities, an intervention of both levels is necessary: central and local level (MLSW and Municipalities) until a sustainable solution of funding social services is found.

The threshold of minimum financing of direct social services provided by non-governmental sector must be increased by the Ministry of Labour and

Social Welfare, in order to enable the ongoing of provision of services to vulnerable children and, on the other hand, to eliminate the created time gaps between calls for funding of such services by the MLSW. Municipalities must undertake all measures to ensure the funding of direct social services within their own municipality, to enter into contracts with

licensed non-governmental organizations which are proven, experienced and professional organizations in providing social and family services on behalf of the municipality.

CONCLUSIONS

- Our society in Kosovo considers violence as a method serving education and child discipline. Violence and physical punishment of children in Kosovo remains a social norm accepted and applied by our society. Upon discussing with children, it was ascertained that, up to a certain level, physical violence is justified also by children themselves, considering it more as a form of discipline.
- According to Kosovo Agency for Statistics, 61.4 percent of children in Kosovo confirmed, during the last month of interviewing, to have had experiences of physical/psychological violence within the family environment, 59 percent of children were subjected to psychological violence, while 24 percent of children had suffered physical punishment.
- According to Child Protection Index 2.0, published by KOMF in 2018, Kosovo actions in preventing all forms of violence against children are more evident in its laws and policies (0,823), as well as in coordination protocols (0,757) from a total of 1.0 points. Kosovo capacity is more limited with 0,400 and developing proper services that prevent, intervene and support children exposed to violence reflects in a result of 0,611. Accountability to beneficiaries, families and other stakeholders is low with a result of 0,474.
- Referral from institutions working with children remain low, especially in cases of school violence. Violence remains under-reported also because of hesitation of children themselves, families or children's peers to report it.
- Concerning school violence, children admitted the existence of incidents of violence in school premises and they have listed teachers, children's peers, and even parents as persons exercising violence against them. Their attitude related to case reporting or complaints, results to be highly sceptic. Children have no trust in the efficiency of current reporting and complaint mechanisms because of failure intaking into consideration and due to fear of an eventual retribution.
- Consultations with children prove that the highest level of children's information is mainly related to physical violence. Children have little information on sexual abuse and its consequences, whereas neglect remains a notion entirely unfamiliar to them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- An increase of awareness at national level, targeting the wider population and institutions for child protection, is strongly recommended in order to promote positive methods of parenting and disciplining, and to eradicate violent methods of disciplining and corporal punishment.
- It is recommended that Kosovo starts trainings and awareness campaigns at national level, in order to remind public officials and professionals of their duty to report cases of suspected violence against children.
- Development of parenting and positive disciplining programs for parents, guardians and professionals engaged in child protection, in order to decrease violent practices of disciplining and well rearing of children, developing thenon-violent generations.
- Strengthening implementation of policies and laws in order to protect children from violence. Provision of services and support to children victims of violence and of their families, as well as punishment of abusers. Such services help children to confront with their situation and also to break the abuse cycle and decrease further harm.
- It is recommended to encourage and promote peer-reporting, as well as self-reporting, through awareness-increasing activities among children. Likewise, in terms of increase of self-reporting, and peer-reporting, it is recommended to establish a new toll-free telephone line, designed with and for children. On the other hand, it is recommended to have awareness increasing activities on violence which would enable children to learn about violence, including its most cruel form – sexual abuse, and how to avoid potentially dangerous situations.
- Establishment of financial standards on social services is recommended in order to approve budgets that enable sustainable financing of services funded through MLSW and Municipalities.
- It is recommended to have corporal punishment sanctioned by law in all environments where the child develops its existence.

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