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Fight against Child Sexual Abuse

Recommendations

**According to the report on the situation in Hungary,
as part of the international project, PANDORA'S BOX**

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About the “Pandora's Box” project

“Pandora's Box” is an international project, financed by the European Union Directorate General for Enlargement, with the goal of generating cooperation between child protection, educational and media organizations and experts to fight against the sexual abuse of children in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Hungary and Serbia.

The first phase of this project involved the creation of a **report** in each of these countries, which summarized the situation using data collection, analysis and school surveys. The report, which was made public in September 2011, consisted of an overview of the following areas: the analysis of police and court data available on child sexual abuse; the results of a questionnaire-based survey of primary school teachers and students; the experiences of social support organizations; and the media portrayal of child sexual abuse using a case study.

Based on the conclusions of the report and considering expert studies and experiences, the Hungarian partners elaborated **recommendations** aiming at the *prevention of child sexual abuse and the handling of registered cases*. In some areas, they urge *national measures*, but they also recommend specific steps at the *professional and local levels*.

A part of the recommendations targets law makers and enforcers in order to provide a more efficient protection of victims' rights and dignity, while others propose improvements to institutions and organizations in the field (including education, social welfare and media). The recommendations, which can be considered an action plan, emphasize the importance of the collaboration of experts from various fields, and that of sharing good international and Hungarian practices.

Throughout the implementation of the project, partners in Hungary have experienced the helpful cooperation and interest in change on the part of experts fighting against child sexual abuse. This cooperation remains crucial to develop a national strategy for child sexual abuse.

The action plan is available on the websites of the “Pandora's Box” project and of the Center for Independent Journalism: www.pandorasbox.rs and www.cij.hu

I. The legal framework and a summary of research studies

Sexually abusing or exploiting a child is a criminal act which falls under the provisions of the criminal code. The criminal law defines three age groups regarding child sexual abuse, which offer different levels of protection: children under the age of 1; children under the age of 14; and children under the age of 18.

Children **under the age of 12** are considered to comprise persons incapable of self-defense. Therefore any sexual activity involving them would be a criminal offense (Articles 197–198 of the Criminal Code).

Children **between the ages of 12 and 18** are given no special protection against sexual violence, harassment or abuse; their protection is identical to the protection of adults. The only exception is in the case of the perpetrator being related to the child as a parent, teacher, guardian, supervisor or attending medical professional; or if the sexual abuse is committed by multiple perpetrators at the same time (being aware of each others' acts).

In the case of children **between the ages of 12 and 14**, “non-violent” sexual crimes are called “*defloration*” (Article 201 of Criminal Code) and punished by a less severe, prison term of 1–5 years.

The crime of *incest* (Article 203 of Criminal Code) renders punishment for sexual intercourse, or other sexual activity, with a first-degree relative. If the victim is under the age of 18 at the time of the event, then he or she is not punishable, but victims over the age of 18 can be punished, which indicates that the law's view of this issue is not consistent with the actual nature of sexual abuses in the family. There is no age limit on the culpability of sexual relationship between siblings, so both parties can be punished, irrespective of whether the event occurred with or without consent.

Moreover, the above acts are classified as “crimes against sexual morality” within the Hungarian legal code. This reflects the view that the injury which happens is not an injury to the victim's integrity, autonomy or basic human rights; but instead an injury to “public morals”. It is a direct consequence of this view that the legal practice – with the exception of children under the age of 12 – expects **active physical self-defense** against the attacker. Also, the terms “defloration” (in literal translation: “impairment”) and “incest” (in literal translation: “blood contamination”) severely stigmatize the victim.

Children **under the age of 18** are protected from sexual exploitation by the articles on *child prostitution, child pornography and human trafficking* [Articles 202/A, 204, 205 (3)a), 207 (3)a), 175/B (2)a) (4)a), b) and (5)].

Most of the crimes (“defloration”, and the non-aggravated cases of rape and “fornication”) can only be prosecuted by private motion if the victim is over 12 years old, which means that the prosecution can only be initiated upon the request of the victim, and only within a 30-day timeframe. The fact that child sexual abuse cases are prosecuted by private motion raises serious human rights concerns, and disregards the realities of domestic violence.

In a study between 2000 and 2003, Diószegi¹ investigated cases of **child sexual abuse**. According to this study, the police took no restrictive measures whatsoever against the alleged perpetrator in half of the cases. The child victims had to endure more than one hearing in 84% of the cases; and in some cases, there were no fewer than six or seven hearings. Although there are spaces which are specially equipped for the hearing of children, such a space was only used in one case.

It can be concluded from the study that the **collection of evidence** was markedly poor in these crimes: mostly, these were based on the interrogation of the alleged victim and the alleged perpetrator, and on the forensic psychologist's opinions. Crime-scene investigation took place only in 20% of cases, and the police were slow to take action. Authorities routinely applied **confrontational measures** with the alleged perpetrator, which is a highly stressful and traumatizing experience for the victim, and consistently (in 100% of the studied cases) proved to be futile, thus unnecessary. Additionally, the study revealed that sexual crimes are always accompanied by **other forms of violence**, but the investigation very rarely covered these issues.

II. Analysis of police and court records in the period 2006–2010

The following findings are based on the information provided by the Press Department of the National Police Headquarters and the Computer and Information Division of the General Prosecutor's Office. The analysis also takes into account the conclusions of relevant studies and the experiences of the NGOs working in these areas.

The number of victims and the types of registered crimes

From 2006 to 2010, the number of victims of child pornography, rape, assault against decency, defloration, soliciting child prostitution, complicity and obscenity decreased by half (from 1,401 to 696). This reduction can be mainly attributed to the **drastic decrease** in the incidence rate of **child pornography**: the cases coming to the attention of the police in 2010 was 5% of the 2006 figure (a decrease from 951 to 45).

An increase has been observed in the number of persons convicted of **more serious crimes** (between 2006 and 2010, the number of “rape” cases increased from 79 to 116; “assault against decency” cases increased from 185 to 244; and “defloration” cases increased from 159 to 175). This may mean that the justice system is starting to take these issues more seriously. On the other hand, child prostitution cases were almost non-existent in the records (the authorities recorded only seven cases of “soliciting child prostitution” in the period of 2006–2010, with 15 persons being convicted), so it appears that the majority of cases remain unresolved.

According to police statistics, 84% of crimes against children are committed outside the family, but the proportion of crimes committed within the family are gradually increasing: in 2006 the proportion of such cases was only 7.2%, with this increasing to 25% in 2010. Unfortunately, this figure is still far behind the proportion that other surveys suggest.

The characteristics of perpetrators and victims

¹ Gábor Diószegi (2005): *A gyermekkorú személyek sérelmére elkövetett nemi erkölcs elleni bűncselekmények*. Downloadable from: www.remet.hu/cms/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=4&Itemid=4

Both the police and the court records indicate that in 95% of cases, the perpetrator is male. On the other hand, 82% of the victims are female.

According to police records, the majority of perpetrators had received no education beyond primary school. This figure does not reflect reality, but only illustrates the fact that people with lower social status and income are more visible to the social welfare system and the authorities.

According to police records, crimes against children under the age of five are the least visible and least investigated. The ratio of victims under the age of 12 is just 41%, which shows that a high number of child victims are older than 12 years, who would also need special protection.

The perpetrator–victim relationship

From police statistics, it appears that sexual crimes against children are usually committed by strangers, but both experts on this subject and related national/international studies say otherwise. Unfortunately, in police records, anyone other than immediate family members and direct neighbors are considered to be “strangers”, which can lead to misinterpretation.

Case outcomes

If we examine, in the statistics, how many of the registered crimes are followed by accusations, how many accusations are followed by convictions, and how many convictions involve punishment, then certain trends can be observed regarding where most of the cases can potentially “disappear” in the legal system. We may call these “trends” because these cases never end in the same year that they started (in child sexual abuse cases, the pronouncement of the sentence typically takes 3–3.5 years);, so a case which appeared in the police statistics in 2007 would only appear in the court statistics in 2009–2010.

According to these trends, in the period of 2006 to 2010, only 64% of reported crimes were followed by any kind of accusation, and the perpetrators were punished in only 36–37% of cases. So, a large proportion of cases end before the accusation would take place, and another significant proportion also end after the accusation, during the court proceedings. If we break down these figures according to the crimes committed, then it can be noticed that “child pornography” cases are the least likely to come to court, and these are also the least likely to end in punishment: the ratios are respectively 20% and 16%. The crime with the highest ratio is defloration, where 58% of cases are brought to court and 50% of cases end in punishment.

Table 1: Outcome of cases, by crime types (2006–2010)

	Total	Convicted	Punished	Ratio of conviction	Ratio of punishment
Child pornography	1686	342	278	20%	16%
Rape	459	189	184	41%	40%
Assault against decency	1003	385	371	38%	37%
Defloration	877	512	442	58%	50%
Soliciting child prostitution*	7	15	15	214%	214%
Complicity	167	68	64	41%	38%

* The data on the victims of this crime is not recorded in the criminal statistics database (ENYÜBS).

Among the **reasons for the termination of investigation**, the most prominent is that “the identity of the perpetrator cannot be determined” and that “it cannot be determined that the accused committed the crime”. Except for 2010, the two reasons above comprised more than one third of the reasons for termination, which makes it clear that the investigation and the collection of evidence are indeed highly important.

The statistics on the **punishment of perpetrators** show that, on average, 39% of the perpetrators received imprisonment and 30% received a suspended sentence. The ratio of suspended sentences (instead of imprisonment) is alarmingly high in “defloration” cases (53% on average). The number of registered child prostitution cases is startlingly low.

III. Experiences of the social-support system

There are very few organizations in Hungary which are specialized in helping the victims of sexual violence. The child-protection notification (alert) system is not working properly. In the justice system, it is not standard practice to provide psychological care or physical protection for child victims, not even in cases when it can be assumed that they are severely traumatized. Thorough attention is rarely given to child sexual abuses by the child-protection services, and even if it takes place, the lack of proper tools prevent them from providing effective protection from the threatening situation, or providing effective assistance in healing the trauma. Moreover, too much focus is placed on investigating the provability of the crime. The children who fall victim to sexual abuse or prostitution in their own family, or in an institution, are the worst affected.

The number of child victims and the number of people who ask for help is difficult to estimate because governmental and non-governmental organizations do not maintain relevant statistics. But even accurate statistics would not reflect the real number of victims, since even the more conservative estimates state that for every reported incident, there are another 24 which go unreported.²

The victims’ mental condition and the care given

According to experts, the mental condition of child victims varies significantly and depends on several relevant factors, such as the type and duration of violence, the age of the child, and his or her relationship with the perpetrator. Also, there are a number of partially or totally independent factors (e.g. the personality of the child; possible coping strategies; the lack or availability of a safe and supportive environment; previous experiences of violence) which do influence how the child can cope with the incident. Since the type of treatment is often adjusted to the symptoms, a great variety of therapeutic care can be provided for children – from a few sessions of crisis-intervention therapy to a deep trauma-healing therapy lasting several years. Both individual and group methods are used, and depending on the symptoms and complaints, cognitive methods or art therapy can also be implemented to improve the patients’ self-knowledge. Medicinal treatment is rarely applied.

² Ferenc Irk (ed.), *Áldozatok és vélemények*. OKRI, 2004, p.75.

A) General recommendations for the treatment of cases and prevention

Child sexual abuse is a human rights and social problem which requires collective measures to prevent and treat effectively. Similar to domestic violence, child sexual abuse is not usually a single occurrence but a longer, continual process. Any intervention which precedes further abuses can actually be considered a preventive measure, too. This is why it is essential for the authorities to act in a coordinated and effective manner. They should be aware of the fact that their actions might prevent further abuses, and similarly, their failure to act properly might give room to additional violence.

- The results of the survey in the project revealed that in Hungary, **there is no proper legal definition of “abuse”**, and this could be responsible for the problems of detecting and reporting abuse cases. An unambiguous definition of **child sexual abuse and violence** would be a significant step towards prevention.
- There is a general need to dispel **common myths and false preconceptions in society** regarding violence and sexual abuse. It is important to educate children about which types of bodily contact are safe and which are dangerous; what rights they have; and where they can get help if they fall victim to sexual abuse. Adults also need to know the facts (for example, that the perpetrator of sexual abuses is most often a relative or an acquaintance). It is also important to educate people in how to recognize the signs of abuse, and what they should do about it. Information sources regarding these issues should be readily accessible for all professionals in the field.
- Both the prevention and the effective handling of registered cases would benefit greatly from a **national strategy for combating child sexual abuse**, which should be based on further investigations and research, and should be done **in collaboration with all related expert fields**. It is crucial to carefully review the effectiveness of the existing child-protection alert system, coordinate all related protocols at a national level and introduce their monitoring.
- There is a need to support the **development of national and local cooperation**. Such cooperation would make it possible to design and carry out larger research projects, compare research data, conduct trainings, develop training resources, and organize conferences. A national survey – which may use the questionnaire-based school survey methodology of this project – should embrace the most exposed age groups, and ideally, include the adult population as well. Research conducted has so far revealed that the majority of sexual abuse cases remain unreported.

A/1 Recommendations for organizations assisting and handling victims of child sexual abuse and handling such cases

- Professionals must use the **child-protection signalling system** every single time they recognize a child victim.
- Authorities, professionals, and caregivers should **never exhibit any form or degree of victim-blaming**; children should never be blamed for the acts of violence or abuse committed against them. Authorities should take into account that these acts of abuse are often part of a **process**.
- Every institution involved in abuse cases should have a **mandatory protocol describing** proper procedure. The development of these protocols could rely on existing practices which have

proven effective in other countries, and also to take into account the experiences of Hungarian civil organizations.

- Effort must be taken **not to expose victims to further trauma**. In practice, this means that the investigation should take place in a protective environment; multiple interrogations and confrontation with the perpetrator should be avoided; and children should be out of the reach of the perpetrator to prevent exposure to further abuse.
- **Victims should be provided with specialized care** which supports their **protection and healing**. These services should be available **in every part of the country**. The workers of existing institutions (family support centers, temporary homes, child welfare institutions) should be provided with further training, in order to enable them to recognize signs of sexual abuse and give effective support to victims.
- **Special training should also be provided to other professionals who are in contact with victims**, including police officers, judges, forensic experts, child-protection workers, teachers and health care providers. In the case of social workers, psychologists, teachers, and other professionals who regularly work with children, appropriate training is particularly important. Information and instructions on how to deal with sexual abuse should be part of their standard training, so that they can be prepared when confronted with such cases.

A/2 Recommendations for law enforcers

- The report published in the project suggests that police and court data are not accurate, and that registered cases only represent the tip of an iceberg. The **registration system needs to be differentiated**.
- The **law specifying victim assistance and compensation** should be fully endorsed in the cases of children who are victims of sexual abuse or violence.
- **Integrated customer care** methods should be implemented, where a psychologist, a lawyer and a social worker work in close cooperation to help the victim.
- Professionals in justice administration, health care, education and social welfare, should strictly respect the **protocols on child abuse**, fulfilling their responsibility to report and cooperate. All involved professionals should have the primary motive of protecting the victim. Professionals who deal with sexual abuse cases should **unequivocally take a stand against the violence**, because misdirected “neutrality” or “impartiality” usually pushes the victim into guilt and excuses the perpetrator. Professionals who work with children should **actively monitor** the signs and symptoms of sexual abuse, instead of only dealing with issues which are raised openly.
- The police should apprehend the perpetrator or employ other **coercive measures** to make sure that the victim is out of the reach of the perpetrator during the investigation. Also, they should use other available methods to ensure the safety of witnesses and the injured parties. Moreover, the police need to deploy all available methods and measures to collect **evidence** of a sufficient quantity and quality, to avoid relying solely on the testimonies of the involved persons. Efforts should be made to shorten the procedures and make them more efficient.

- In cases of sexual abuse or violence, experts should routinely investigate the occurrence of **other types of violence within the family.**

IV. School survey on child sexual abuse

In spring 2011, an anonymous, questionnaire-based survey was conducted in 11 schools in Budapest and the countryside. The survey was based on the project’s internationally agreed methodology and content. It included a wide range of institutions: large and small schools, suburban and inner-city schools in Budapest, and schools from regional centers and rural areas.

Altogether, **446 students from the upper grades** of primary schools participated in the survey, from which 13–15 year-old students represented the vast majority (76.9%). Only students who had the written consent of their parents were allowed to participate. Teachers indicated that the children who did not return the parental consent were often the ones who were presumably affected by this problem.

The majority of the participating students (86.7%) had heard about child sexual abuse, primarily in an indirect manner – for example, from the television (76.2% – news, movies) or from the internet (8.14%). Only a very few students indicated that they had first heard about the subject through a direct conversation with parents, relatives, teachers or friends.

Table 2: Sources of information regarding child sexual abuse

	Where did you hear about sexual abuse?	Percentage
1.	From the television (news, movies)	76.2%
2.	On the internet	8.14%
3.	From parents or relatives	6.33%
4.	In school (special education class)	6.33%
5.	From friends and acquaintances	4.9%

From the children who were aware of the subject, 46.6% had already discussed it with somebody. Only a relatively small proportion (24.7%) mentioned school classes. This is important, because children should be provided not only with information from school, but they need opportunities to ask questions and discuss their experiences on the subject.

The experiences of the interviewers also seem to support such a need. They indicated that the behavior of several children (their symptoms of anxiety) during the survey revealed what they had been exposed to. After the survey, many of the students asked questions and talked about their (or their friends’) experiences. This showed the interest of the students in the subject, still a taboo in many places, despite the fact that 30.1% of the surveyed students indicated that they knew at least one child in their environment who had experienced sexual abuse and had talked about that experience.

The survey clearly demonstrated the significant problem of sexual abuse: **every sixth child – 17% of the participants – reported that they had personally experienced some form of sexual harassment.** The majority mentioned single incidents, but there were also mentions of continual exposure.

It seems that the internet can be identified as a new risk factor and incident scene, in addition to the family home and its surroundings. One in five students (21%) indicated that an adult had asked them to chat or make a video call using a webcam; to send pictures or videos of themselves; or to consent to a secret personal meeting. Most of the abuses had affected children aged 12–14 (8.7% being affected) and between 10–12 (4% being affected). Children who had experienced some form of sexual abuse usually felt helplessness and/or anger. Some of them reported what had happened to their parents. When asked about what they would do if experiencing such situations, most indicated that they would relate their experiences to their parents or friends. Only a few students responded that they would relate them to a teacher or other school personnel.

Parallel with the students' survey, a questionnaire was conducted among teachers. The majority of the **206 respondent** (39.4%) were experienced professionals who have been working for 21–30 years. Half (54%) of the teachers indicated that they had some knowledge about the subject, but a significant proportion (35.6%) felt that they had very little information (63.6% of the teachers with more than 21 years' experience). The teachers' knowledge about the child sexual abuse is often insufficient to confidently formulate suspicion or report a case. Although the majority of teachers said that their school had protocols for child abuse, in practice, these protocols usually do not provide a reliable framework to intervene and they do not clearly define scopes of competence. Many teachers have doubts concerning the success of any intervention; they are afraid of potential revenge from the family and/or community; they are worried that the family might hurt the victim; and they are not sure about the proper solution for the problem. These factors hinder them in their duty to report suspected sexual abuses.

After the survey, the teachers attended a training session on sexual abuse. The training dealt with the meaning and the types of sexual abuse; the symptoms; the risk factors; the potential methods of providing help for the victims; and the problems with our child-protection notification system.

The teachers were interested, but at the same time felt uncertain about the topic and their roles. Their majority believed that the family was mainly responsible for informing children about sexual abuse, but they expressed their desire to learn more about these issues through training sessions and forums. Moreover, there were teachers in every school who had consulted the psychologist concerning a current case.

B) Recommendations for educational institutions

The school survey conducted as part of the Pandora's Box international project, concluded that *child sexual abuse may concern a broad range of students at primary school age*. The ratio of unreported cases is alarming, even if the project survey was not aimed at detecting their specific types. *Schools are not the primary place of abuse* (responses indicated low ratios), but educational institutions have a crucial role in identifying the cases and initiating appropriate procedures.

Public education should play an important role in the prevention, detection and reporting of cases of abuse. The hidden and traumatizing nature of this problem, the fear of legal consequences, potential violent retribution, and the uncertainties of provability, seriously hinder schools' ability to take effective and independent action against the abuse. The removal of these obstacles and education on child sexual abuse are cardinal factors in improving the situation.

B/1 Recommendations concerning the education of children

- **Methods of prevention and education should be elaborated** and added to the curricula of schools. Moreover, the initiatives which have already proven successful in Hungary should also be extended. Information on toll-free or online **helplines** should be made available to children in educational institutions and other places.
- **Educational materials, leaflets and interactive media content** should be developed for students as early as possible. These resources should be easily understood by children, they should not intimidate or cause trauma, but assist them when in need. Children should be advised as to who they can contact for help in their own environment.
- Students should learn about children's rights via **informative and preventive programs** in school at various levels, involving teachers and external experts.
- These resources should be **readily accessible for children**, to organize **educational campaigns** during important school events and student council days.
- Additionally, the school should introduce to students those staff **responsible for child and youth protection, as well as psychologists** who can be contacted at school or after school when needed.

B/2 Recommendations for schools and teachers

- **School protocols should be reviewed.** In order to facilitate this process, discussion events should be organized with experts on child sexual abuse, so that they can get to know each others' work in order to more precisely understand their roles and competences within the alert system. School protocols should, for example, clearly define when and how a team (consisting of the homeroom teacher, the director, the person responsible for child protection, and a teacher who is not in direct contact with the child) should decide on the psychological support of a child in case of suspected abuse. External assistance (supervision) for schools should be also available in such cases.
- **Professional and personal liabilities** should be enforced. Although the law defines them, in practice, the persons who fail to act or act inappropriately, are rarely held liable.
- By **providing training for teachers** and strengthening their relations with external support structures, the schools could provide more effective protection for the children against sexual abuse. This training should consist of specific methods and techniques (for example, how to recognize signs of child sexual abuse, how to listen properly to children, and how to report the abuse and provide support).
- **Teachers also need training resources** which help them teach children's rights, address different age groups, and offer a variety of methods; they also need training and curriculum development assistance.
- The role of education should be strengthened at various levels. For example, homeroom teachers should be encouraged to keep **closer personal contact with families**. By thematically organizing open homeroom classes, discussions and parents' meetings, and providing fact sheets, parents could become better informed. It is important to **bring children's rights to the attention of parents**: the parent or guardian of the child should attend at least one school event to learn about children's rights and child abuse, including the relevant responsibilities of parents.

- **Safe internet use should be a part of media training at schools**, to teach children to better protect their privacy and recognize potentially dangerous content.
- **Teachers often require external help** to notice cases of sexual abuse and act appropriately. For this reason, it is important to strengthen existing relations and build new cooperation locally with social, medical and judicial experts, and organizations.
- There is a need to establish a **national organization** against child abuse and child sexual abuse, with the participation of representatives in various fields. This organization could coordinate the training of teachers and supervise the application of school protocols.

B/3 Recommendations for those working in child protection and mental health

- Professionals working for child protection and mental health should receive special **trainings on sexual abuse**. Ideally, such training activities for child-protection professionals should be **coordinated region-by-region** in Hungary. Their content should be harmonized with training and educational materials for teachers.
- The report highlighted the **need to employ psychologists and/or child protection professionals in schools**. Currently, it is the school's responsibility to decide, but the regulation should be revised in a way to make their employment mandatory. If the child protection and public education laws were amended to include this provision, incurring problems could be dealt with locally by a qualified professional. Moreover, the scope of competence of the child protection professionals should be strengthened to more effectively coordinate partnerships inside and outside the school.

V. Media analysis of child sexual abuse, using a case study

Between January 1, 2010 and May 30, 2011, the media covered ten individual cases related to child sexual abuse in Hungary.³ These reports, almost without exception, can be classified as simple crime reports. Some of the papers published psychologists' opinions on the cases to complete their reports, but none of them discussed the possibilities of prevention, the responsibility of the authorities, and community members, and the systemic defects or the real prevalence of abuse.

The most serious of these recent cases is probably one which occurred in a northern Hungarian village called Rásonysápberencs. But the seriousness of this case hasn't changed the media's outlook. Nearly all of the papers reported the case in a way similar to other child-abuse cases: in the form of brief crime news. This can be partly because coverage of child abuse and domestic violence is mostly linked to jurisdiction procedures – either because they report them, or because journalists use them as an opportunity to discuss the topic. According to police sources, there have been no child sexual abuse cases so far in which a prosecution was initiated on the basis of a published media report.

³ If we don't narrow our search to cases within the family, we find cases discussed in the domain of paedophilia by the press. The coverage of these cases differs somewhat from the family violence cases. This is probably due to the fact that media coverage of paedophilia has largely been church-related, and these reports discuss this context as well. It's also interesting that there is far more news taken from foreign sources when it comes to paedophilia outside the family.

The Rásonysápberencs case, which we choose for the analysis, also received extensive but superficial and short-lived media attention when the Prosecution Office of Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén County announced that the public prosecutor had brought accusations against the caregivers.

This is particularly interesting because the problem of domestic violence in general was discussed in a lot of media publications during the examined period.⁴ It seems that if the abuse or harassment is reported by the police, then the public prosecutor or the court, the media present it as an “ordinary” criminal report, and do not search for a deeper social context.

Summary of the case

In Rásonysápberencs, four children were sexually and physically abused on a regular basis for several years – by their mother, her husband, and the husband’s father. The first reports of this most serious child-abuse case in recent decades were published in October 2010, after the official announcement that the public prosecutor had brought accusations against the defendants. In 2008, the 4–10 year-old children were placed in foster care, after which they told the foster parents the horrors they had endured. In May 2011, the perpetrators were sentenced to 14, 12 and 10 years in penitentiary for child sexual abuse and other crimes. The verdict is still inconclusive.

Main features of media coverage

The news about the case **reached a large proportion of the population**; it was reported by several national, regional and local media publications.

The majority of media **consumers had access only to general pieces of information**: the basic facts, the public prosecutor’s actions, some details of the accusation, the medico-legal opinion on the psychiatric condition of the defendants, and a few facts about the situation of the children (that the boys needed psychiatric care, struggled with serious behavioral disorders, and were continuously under medication).

Most of the media coverage was not in-depth but rather **tabloid-style**, although the **reports were quite low-key**. Even the tabloids **refrained from their usual sensationalist approach**. This moderation can be seen as a tactful attitude towards a delicate issue, but also as a sign of indifference. The media perceived it to be the “most interesting” crime news of the day. It might have been considered more horrible than usual child abuse cases, but for some reason, it was not extraordinary enough to merit more in-depth or persistent coverage.

Interestingly, **national dailies and respected weeklies** which usually publish in-depth, analytic reports, **didn’t write about the case**, neither at the time, nor later.

Unlike many examples in Western Europe, the Hungarian media **failed to properly analyze** this particularly shocking story. **Neither did they keep it on their agenda for a prolonged period of time. With this, they failed to call public attention to the defenseless situation of the children, the shortcomings of the child-protection notification system, the preventive options, or the responsibilities of local community members.** With the exception of one journalist and a TV presenter, no media raised the issue of the possible **responsibility** of the authorities, the child

protection services, policy makers or community members, and no other media coverage called for earlier interventions in similar cases or urged improvements of the child-protection system.

Based on the language and terms used in the media coverage of the Rásonysápberencs case (and also in similar cases), it can be assumed that editors and journalists condemn such crimes, but view them as distant and inevitable, much like occasional natural disasters in faraway countries. According to this thinking, the media have to report these cases, but members of society have role to play, except to be horrified.

C) Recommendations for media organizations

C/1 Recommendations for ethical guidelines and other self-regulatory methods

- The new media regulation adopted in 2010 provides stricter protection of minors. **Media should also actively facilitate the protection of children.** The industry should **adopt ethical guidelines**, and individual media organizations should adjust their internal codes of conduct and professional standards. **Media self-regulation can** lead to better quality and ethics of journalism, and eventually can shape editorial attitudes more efficiently by calling public attention to the problems of child abuse, including child sexual abuse.
- Newsrooms are generally open to ethical recommendations on a variety of topics. Journalists and editors can benefit from **guidelines on recommended methodology covering child sexual abuse cases.** These materials can outline the proper journalistic/editorial approach, including special interviewing techniques, to respect the interests and the dignity of the victims; the use of precise terminology and language; advice on avoiding sexual (and other) stereotyping; and also special guidelines on images. As a basic principle, reporting on sexual violence should never attribute blame to victims.
- Journalists should **learn about the nature of trauma** and covering traumatized persons; they should provide facts and the context of specific cases, make conclusions on social lessons, and always inform the public about options to help and assist. Any recommendation can be effective and acceptable for journalists, if they are developed jointly by representatives from various media sectors and experts from relevant fields.

C/2 Recommendations for media providers and educators

- The project's media analysis highlights that the Hungarian media publishes relatively few stories on child sexual abuse using their "own sources". Most newsrooms simply pick up stories reported by the Hungarian News Agency (Magyar Távirati Iroda, MTI), which thus has a crucial impact on media coverage in Hungary. Through targeted training, MTI stories on these topics **could provide more detailed and thorough coverage** (providing information on the case background, quoting child protection and other authorities, and indicating liabilities when needed).
- It would be important to **collect good international case studies** of exemplary media coverage of cases of child sexual abuse. These materials could be discussed in newsrooms and/or introduced to journalists at professional events.

- It could prove particularly useful to develop **training curricula** based on ethical recommendations and internationally recognized methods, **to be used by journalism schools**. Training should include **hands-on sessions** with experienced journalists – helped by psychologists and other experts if needed – to teach young reporters how to cover sensitive issues in an informative way, while at the same time respecting human dignity.
- **Further training of journalists and publishing in-depth, investigative stories on these topics are important.** Media content covering child sexual abuse should contain information on **educating and providing assistance**. It is similarly important to use the media as a channel to let victims know that **there is help for them** and **they are not alone**. When reporting on sexual abuse, publications should be asked to include the phone number of a help organization.
- In order to shape public opinion, **awareness-raising campaigns** should be launched in all media sectors, but primarily on television and online. They should be designed and implemented **in an interdisciplinary manner** – to harmonize them with the implementation of steps in other fields, as recommended in this document.