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Violence Prevention in Family, Kindergarden and School System

Concurrent developmental psychological research emphasizes that the infant's emerging socio-affective functions are fundamentally influenced by the communications with the caregivers, usually the parents. The parents sense and modulate in the infant's life the nonverbal and affective expressions of the infant's psychobiological states. Events that occur during infancy are indelibly imprinted into the brain structures that are maturing in the first years of life.

However, parents and infant can become trapped in dysfunctional interactions that result in early symptoms of the infant. Especially maltreatment, sexual and emotional abuse and neglect during childhood contribute to the development of aggression and violent behaviour. Aggressive behaviour of parents and later of children against their parents or peers may occur if the infant and the parents develop dysfunctional vicious circles including escalation processes in interaction. These harmful interactions can be assessed more frequently in multi-problem-families.

In our violence prevention approach we support very systematically parents and children at risk. *Focusing parents:* We consider it a societal obligation to provide perinatal and post-natal support to mothers/parents who do not have sufficient resources to get their babies off to a good start in life. The project "Nobody Slips through the Cracks" is a 3 step program that has the goal to approach at-risk families very early on. In step 1, families linked with maternity wards who initiate help during pregnancy are referred to a family midwife. During step 2 these trained family midwives provide support with the goal to increase the basic parental competencies through the psycho-educational program called "Understanding your Baby" and through an individualized



home-based early parenting program. After working with a family midwife in the parenting program and the home visits, most parents are motivated in the 3rd step to get involved in the governmental post-natal well-checks and other programs for infants. An initial evaluation of the "Nobody Slips through the Cracks" program has shown that significantly more parents who went through steps 1 and 2 take advantage of governmental programs (step 3) than parents who did not participate in the program. The "Nobody Slips through the Cracks" program is currently implemented and researched in three states in Germany.

Focussing children: The development of social-emotional competencies became an elementary part of our psychosocial prevention programs. Children with good capacities in problem solving are less at risk to show violent behaviour in difficult emotional conflicts, because they don't tend to stabilize and compensate their self esteem in these situations. Relevant core dimensions concerning psychological development can be taught systematically in social-emotional learning lessons. Teachers in kindergartens and schools are presenting the series of lessons. A growing number of studies in this field show good effects. In Germany FAUSTLOS has been developed as an evaluated and systematically constructed tool for preventing aggressive behaviour in children visiting kindergartens and elementary schools. During these programs 28 lessons are presented in kindergartens and 51 lessons in elementary schools. Follow-up studies with FAUSTLOS show significant changes in emotional competences and pro-social developments in children. Prevention seems a pertinent way to reduce the risks and effects of violent behaviour.