

## **Report *Child Sexual Abuse : Prevention of the First Acting Out Event***

### **Executive Summary**

At its outset, the DIS NO Association focused mainly on the prevention of child sexual abuse, but has since then has changed course due to various studies highlighting the inadequacy of this approach. Having chosen **to not lay the burden and responsibility to protect themselves on the children**, it had to explore other avenues, the most obvious being upstream prevention, aimed at the perpetrator and even further, towards the « potential perpetrator ».

Given that the field of prevention of sexual abuse is the primary mission of the Association, our question was : **should one wait until the irreparable has been committed** and that a criminal report has been made before intervening, while information and prevention campaigns exist in all other areas related to public health (domestic violence, alcohol dependence, drug abuse, etc.) ? The DIS NO Association therefore investigated whether there were structures where a person who has a motivation to sexually abuse children can turn for help before the first acting out event.

This was how the project Potential Perpetrator-Oriented Prevention (POPA)<sup>1</sup> was born, driven by the idea of developing forms of prevention of child sexual abuse aimed at adults and adolescents, in order to dissuade or prevent them from acting out. This is backed by our conviction that it is essential, but insufficient, to deal with victims and perpetrators once an abuse has occurred. Studies show that once a first abuse against a child has taken place, the risk is great that these adults will reoffend, with the same child and/or others, as long as they are not brought to justice.

The report *Child sexual abuse : Preventing the first acting out event* is thus the result of several years of research on this theme as yet little explored. It consists of two parts : the first is the body of the Report, while the second, designed to be consulted in a targeted manner depending on the different interests, details the results of the inventory of existing preventive measures, internationally and in Switzerland, that are aimed at adults and adolescents at risk of a first acting out event.

A systematic review of the literature, carried out under mandate by the School of Criminal Sciences of the University of Lausanne, complements the report by the DIS NO Association.

The gathering and analysis of information for the Project, as well as the contacts and reflections that were made, highlighted several aspects and key elements of this little-studied theme and allowed us to :

- Contextualise the emergence of prevention before the first acting out event in the evolution of concepts of prevention of child sexual abuse
- Better define the target groups concerned by the project
- Propose a model to better differentiate those affected by the recommendations
- Obtain epidemiological markers on the number of people affected by this issue

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<sup>1</sup>The concept of « potential perpetrator » found in the name of the POPA Project has been redefined following reflections and discussions with various professionals in the field. The Project led to the Report *Sexual abuse against children: Preventing the first acting out event*.

- Better differentiate minors with sexually problematic behaviour and those at risk of acting out with younger children
- Make an inventory of these initiatives at the international and Swiss levels
- Confirm that a number of persons belonging to the target groups concerned by this report look for help in order to not act out
- Analyse and present the results of this inventory in terms of projects that are ongoing or abandoned (with the reasons for the abandonment)
- Give recommendations presenting the protocol of the preparatory and pro-active phases for the implementation of a pilot project for prevention of the first acting out event in *French-speaking Switzerland*.

## Better define the target groups who *show or have shown a motivation to commit child sexual abuse*

This report focuses on the target groups who had never acted out. It is however important, in order to have a global vision of the prevention of child sexual abuse, to consider the situation of persons at risk of acting out (PRAO): persons at risk of a first acting out event (PRFAO) and those at risk of recidivism (PRR).

That is why we have dedicated an appendix to the process leading a perpetrator of child sexual abuse to be discovered by the criminal justice system and another to the overview of descriptive and statistical data on the discovered and undiscovered perpetrators.

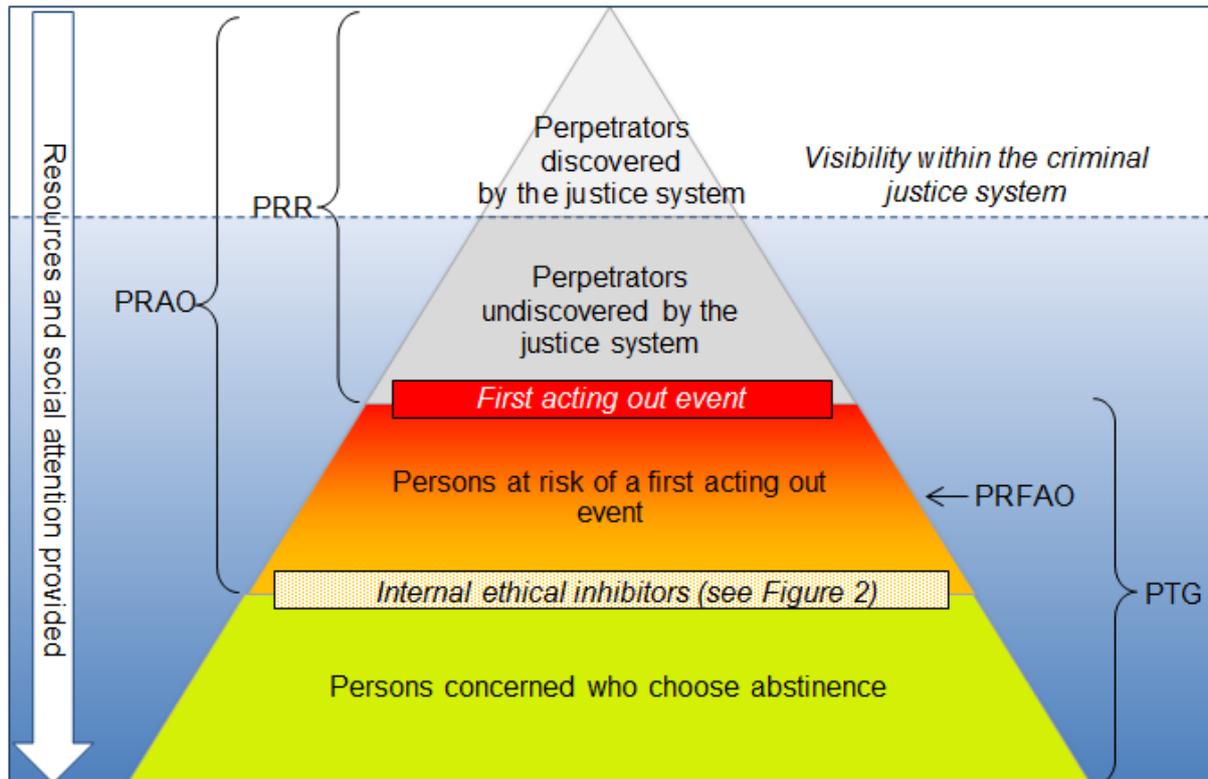


Figure 1: Overview of persons who show or have shown signs of a motivation to commit child sexual abuse, depending on the resources and social attention they receive.<sup>2</sup>

The two groups at the bottom of the iceberg, situated before the first acting out event, represent the Project priority Target Groups (PTG). They consist of all persons, including their social circle, who are affected by the recommendations given in this report.

### *Absence of a common and consensual terminology*

The lack of a common and consensual terminology to designate the target groups concerned by this report (e.g. « potential perpetrators », « persons at risk of acting out », etc.) shows that reflections on this issue are still in the embryonic stage.

<sup>2</sup> This iceberg shape is not representative of their numerical proportions, but their visibility in the eyes of the criminal justice system (perpetrators) and of society (undiscovered perpetrators and persons who have never committed a reprehensible act).

Therefore, how does one define and characterise those at risk of a first acting out event of child sexual abuse? Can we assume that anyone who has thoughts about sexual relations with children is at risk of acting out?

Exchanges with various experts made throughout this project led us to an important observation : **even the most frequently mentioned risk factor, sexual attraction to children (paedophilia), is not sufficient alone to predict the risk of acting out.**

This observation allowed us to develop an exploratory model (Figure 2) taking into account the difference between those at risk of a first acting out event (PRFAO) and those who feel sexually attracted to children but who, for various reasons, are not at risk of acting out.

Our research has allowed us to:

- clarify a characteristic common to the whole population of the Project priority Target Groups (PTG), namely the *motivations* for child sexual abuse (sexual attraction to children, pornography addiction, impulses, deviant thoughts or behaviour, etc.).
- highlight the stages of the process leading to the first acting out event, which are due to crossing the different barriers of internal and external inhibitors (such as ethics, egocentrism, and purely external constraints).

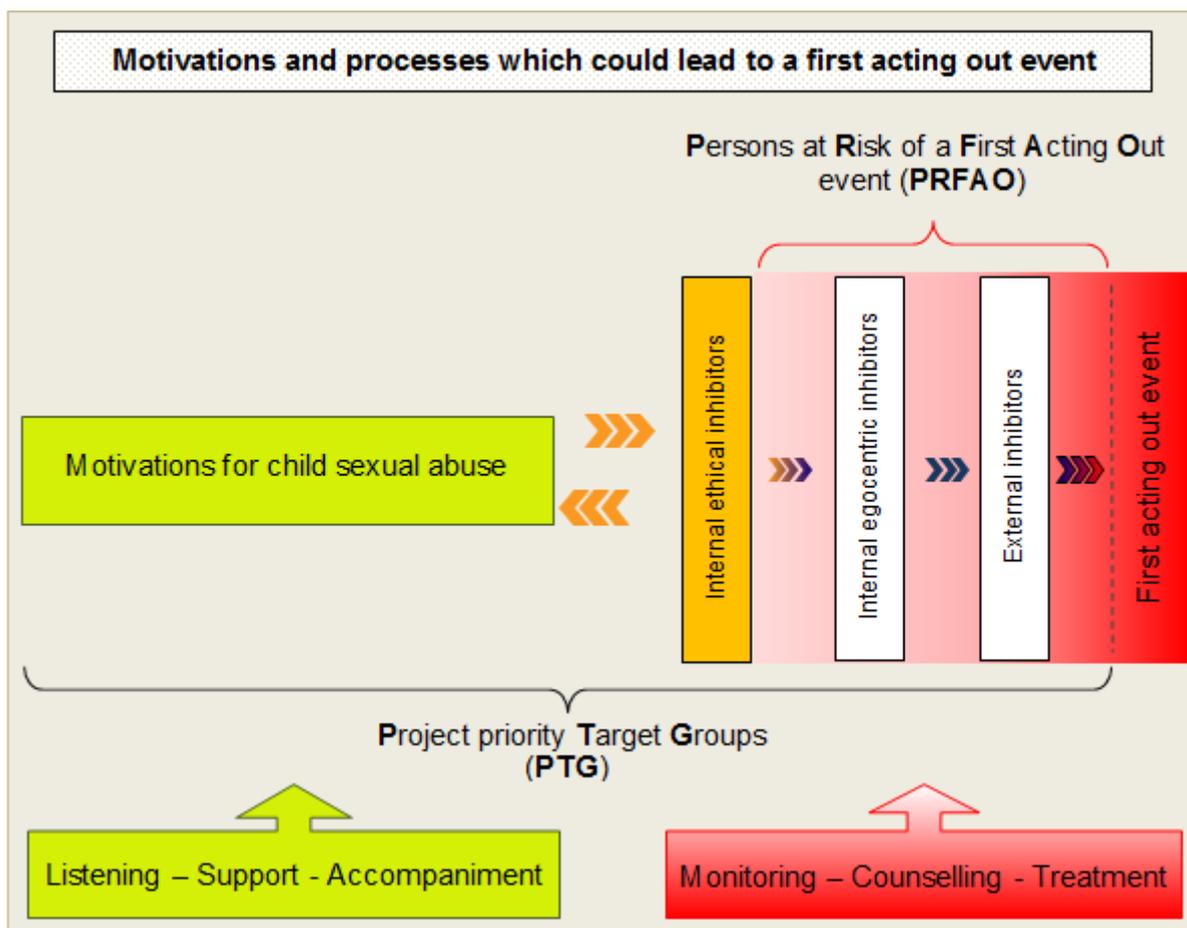


Figure 2: Motivations and processes which could lead to a first acting out event

It is during this process that some of the persons concerned can be reached and, depending on the phase in which they find themselves, be informed or deterred by prevention campaigns and adequate offers of assistance.

Figure 2 shows that PRFAOs are only one of the target groups concerned by this project. It enables therefore to not stigmatise the entire population that we wish to reach out to and to differentiate the methods and services after the first contact, thus avoiding the immediate referral of persons who have sufficient personal resources to inadequate services (discussion groups for convicted offenders, psychiatric institutions, etc.). This would be a premature judgment as well as a deterrent.

### *A staggering number of persons concerned. Epidemiological markers*

Given that persons belonging to the target groups concerned by this report have no reason to be subject to judicial control, no statistics exist on their number. Some rare studies have examined the propensity for child sexual abuse. These provide ranges for a broad estimation of the proportion of the population.

In a recent study by Becker-Blease Friend & Freyd (2006) on a sample of 531 students (male), 7% of them admitted that « they were attracted sexually to little children. »<sup>3</sup>

The website of the treatment programme « Kein Täter werden » in Germany<sup>4</sup> mentions that up to 1% of men have a partial or exclusive sexual attraction to children<sup>5</sup>. The website of this project estimates the size of this population based on scientific evidence. In Germany, there are around 250,000 people who are (partially or exclusively) sexually attracted to children. This figure concerns only men aged 18 to 75<sup>6</sup>.

In the notes of the Swiss French Television used in the preparation of the programme "36.9" of 9th April 2008, « *Pédophilie : en savoir plus* », we read: « By extrapolating Canadian data to Switzerland, we can assume that approximately 50,000 adults (male and female) feel a sexual attraction towards children »<sup>7</sup>.

### *The target group of minors*

We focused our attention not only on adults but also on minors as persons who could act in a sexually abusive manner towards other children. A separate chapter (chapter 3) is devoted to this particular and delicate issue, to reflect their specificities compared to adults. We present the results of our research on two populations :

- Children 12 years and under with sexually problematic behaviour (SPB). These children « are in the developing stage and their behavioural problems are an expression of difficulties experienced, often in their home environment and in urgent need of assistance. » (Montreal Youth Centre-Research Institute, 2010, p. 67)

<sup>3</sup> Becker-Blease, K., Friend, D., & Freyd, J.J. (Novembre 2006). Child Sex Abuse Perpetrators among Male University Students. [Page Web]. Access : <http://dynamic.uoregon.edu/~jjf/istss06issd06/bbffISTSS06.pdf> (Consulted on 14th September 2011).

<sup>4</sup> [www.kein-taeter-werden.de](http://www.kein-taeter-werden.de)

<sup>5</sup> <http://dont-offend.org/story/86/3886.html> (Consulted on 13th December 2011).

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.kein-taeter-werden.de/story/18/3818.html> (Consulted on 12th December 2011).

<sup>7</sup> *Pédophilie : en savoir plus. TSR television programme « 36.9*. (2008). Notes having served for the preparation of the programme of 9th April 2008. [Web page]. Access: <http://www.tsr.ch/emissions/36-9/plus/1004458-pedophilie-en-savoir-plus.html> (Consulted on 14th September 2011).

- (Pre-)adolescents at risk of committing sexual abuse of significantly younger children :

Although about 50% of adult sex offenders « mention having committed their first offense during adolescence (Abel, Mittelman & Becker, 1985; Freeman-Longo, 1983; McConaghy, Blaszczynski, Armstrong & Kidson, 1989) », we know at the same time that only a minority of adolescent sex offenders « will commit further sexual assaults in adulthood [...] 6% to 20% ». (Tardif, Hébert & Béliveau, p. 151).

A new threshold could be crossed by recognising that there are minors, teenagers and children at risk of committing a first sexual assault and that it would be desirable, given the acquired and existing knowledge, to anticipate and intervene in order to avoid the first acting out event.

### **This extensive research has resulted in an inventory at the international and Swiss levels**

We observed, analysed and catalogued more than 130 structures and methods of different magnitudes, conducted by state agencies, universities, hospitals, or through private initiatives. We selected 50 which meet the research criteria, which are grouped as follows :

	BE	CA	DL	FR	IR	NL	SE	UK	US		CH	CH <sup>8</sup>	CHg	Chi	Total by object
Surveys and research							1								1
Information campaigns			1								1				2
Structures, resources and welcome centres		5	1	1	1			1	2		1	1	1		14
Telephone hotlines					1			1	1						3
Websites		1		2					1			1			5
Supports (brochures, publications, games, manuels)		1		1								2			4
Programmes		3													3
Training for professionals				1					1				1		3
Ongoing or abandoned propositions	1	2					1	1				4	1		10
Structures, programmes and supports for adolescents and children with SBPs		5													5
<b>Total by country</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>5</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>50</b>

Figure 3: Summary table of structures and methods listed by type and country

<sup>8</sup> CHf : French-speaking Switzerland ; CHg : Swiss German-speaking Switzerland ; Chi : Italian-speaking Switzerland.

## Observations from the analysis of ongoing or abandoned projects

### *A field very little explored*

As part of this research, a mandate was given to the School of Criminal Sciences of the University of Lausanne to conduct a systematic research of the national and international literature on the subject of prevention aimed at potential perpetrators of child sexual abuse. It appears that **very little data are available**.

Indeed, there are very few studies that address – as a central issue - the subject of prevention of child sexual abuse before the first acting out event. Therefore, **this report could well be the first document dealing specifically with this issue**.

### *Difficulties in finding information in the field*

In general, we observed, among the structures listed, a **great lack of visibility concerning the services** for people belonging to the different PTGs. This is one of the elements that made the research more complex, requiring many personal exchanges outside the research literature.

### *Few structures and services*

The inventory highlighted a **lack of structures, low-threshold welcome centres, specialised professionals, supports and programmes** for the PTGs, although some initiatives have emerged in various countries observed.

### *The certainty that persons belonging to the PTGs seek assistance*

When services are available, requests for help are received from people who have never acted out. This was the case for the two largest programmes identified in the area of research : those of Stop It Now! In England and the United States, and *Kein Täter werden* in Germany. These two structures are the most important sources of information and data, due to their national dimension as well as their experience.

**Contrary to what one might think a priori, some people belonging to the PTGs are looking for information, listening and support.** The data published in the report of Stop It Now! for the period 2005-2009 show that about a quarter of adult callers concerned about their situation have never acted out<sup>9</sup>.

## Recommendations for French-speaking Switzerland

Due to the complexity of the field of minors with SBPs or at risk of a first acting out event, which requires very specific skills, the Steering Committee decided to restrict the Recommendations to adults and adolescents of 12 years and older.

The DIS NO Association will continue its work by implementing **13 recommendations**, approved by the Project Steering Committee, based on four principles :

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<sup>9</sup> Stop It Now! (2005-2009). Stop It Now! Helpline Report 2005-2009. Together we can prevent child sexual abuse. Stop It Now ! UK & Ireland - The Lucy Faithful Foundation, pp. 18-22. [Page Web].  
Access : <http://www.stopitnow.org.uk/files/Stop%20it%20Now!%20Helpline%20Report%202005-2009.pdf> (Consulted on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2011).

*Principle 1* - The recommendations relate specifically to PTGs (Project priority Target Groups).

*Principle 2* - **The creation of a structure specific** to the field of prevention before the first acting out event **is necessary**.

*Principle 3* - The recommendations will be implemented in two successive phases. The first consists of developing a network of professionals as well as creating tools and ad hoc services. The second consists of promoting and opening these services to the general public.

*Principle 4* - The implementation of the recommendations is driven by a spirit of collaboration and synergy.

*Set of recommendations for French-speaking Switzerland*

**1 Structure specific to the field of prevention before the first acting out event**

- 2 French speaking Swiss network
- 3 Database
- 4 Media library
- 5 Website
- 6 International network
- 7 Training modules
- 8 Response (hepline, emails)
- 9 Information materials
- 10 Survey on the perception of the issue
- 11 Information/awareness campaign
- 12 Prevention programmes
- 13 Evaluations

1. *Specific structure*  
The main recommendation is to create a structure specific to the field of prevention before the first acting out event. This structure will not directly offer support at the care or treatment levels, thus positioning itself as an intermediate listening centre, providing referrals to other specialised network services and documentation. It is around this central agency that the other measures advocated in the recommendations will be developed and coordinated, either directly or in partnership.
2. *French-speaking Swiss network*  
In order to be ready to respond to various requests arising from the information and awareness initiatives contained in the recommendations, it is essential to prepare the ground and to create and coordinate a network of structures and professionals prepared to collaborate and respond to future requests.
3. *Database*  
A database containing all the relevant information related to the issue of prevention aimed at the PTGs (publications, structures, programmes, materials, training, etc.) will be built up and made available via the internet.
4. *Media library*  
A media library will list all the relevant information, as well as any supports and tools developed during the implementation of these recommendations (brochures, documents, programmes, etc.).
5. *Website*  
A website dedicated specifically to the issue of prevention of a first acting out event will be designed in order to anchor the existence of a new concept and to give it high visibility.
6. *International network*  
During the inventory, various contacts were made on the international level with different experts, professionals, associations, services and organisations. They will be maintained and developed to facilitate the exchange of experiences, tools, materials and ideas for prevention before the first acting out event of child sexual abuse.
7. *Training modules*  
Different types of training courses on the issue of PRFAOs could be designed according to the identified needs, such as continuing education, modules to be integrated into other courses, conferences, discussion days, seminars, etc.
8. *Response*  
Different methods of contacting the specialised structure will be put in place : via the website (email address), phone or mail. People will be trained to respond and call protocols will be developed. A systematic data collection on the number and nature of requests will be made.
9. *Information materials*  
Information and communication materials (brochures, press releases, audio-visual materials, books, games, etc.), for professionals, PTGs or their social circle will be created or adapted from already existing material.

#### 10. *Survey*

A survey is planned as a precursor to an information campaign in order to assess its impact. It will be made with the general public prior to the launch.

#### 11. *Information/awareness campaign*

An information and awareness campaign will be designed for the general public and widely disseminated by various media. It will mark the transition from the preparatory phase to the pro-active phase.

#### 12. *Prevention programmes*

Prevention programmes for different target groups (adults and minor PTGs and their social circle) will be created or adapted on the basis of materials and experience already operational.

#### 13. *Evaluations*

Evaluation is a fundamental stage and procedure in all the steps described in these recommendations. It will allow for the assessment of some of the impacts of the actions taken and provide a basis for analysis and reflection vital to adapt and improve the services offered, as well as the communication strategies.

## Conclusion

This report has enabled us to highlight the fact that reflection on prevention before the first acting out event is taking place, and that this aspect of prevention is more necessary than ever. This is a real public health problem, the consequences of which are serious and expensive - humanly and socially - for both the children and the future adults they represent.

Although still rare, **the measures already in place are very promising**. We sincerely hope that the results presented and the recommendations resulting therefrom will encourage people from different backgrounds, in the other linguistic regions of Switzerland or abroad, to continue the reflections and develop new structures for these target groups still rarely taken into account.

The prevention of child sexual acts before the first acting out event is, for all the contributors to this report, an approach that we have the ethical duty to explore.

At this stage, to not consider other avenues of prevention than those that exist at present would mean accepting and resigning oneself to the fact that, faced with the problem of child sexual abuse, there is nothing else to do than wait until the abuse has taken place before taking action.

**Our recommendations for French-speaking Switzerland are achievable in the short term and without excessive financial commitments.** The reliance on an existing network and the creation of a structure to coordinate all the work are fundamental.

This report contains strong arguments which no longer allow to cast doubt on the need to take concrete measures in the direction of prevention of a first acting out event.

Experience will allow us to refine the tools to reach out to the persons concerned and to impact on the reduction of the number of first acting out events, meaning, *de facto*, a decline in the number of child victims.