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Vesna Leskovšek, Tadeja Kodele and Nina Mešl
(Eds.), *Child Protection from Violence and Neglect in
Slovenia* (In Slovene: *Zaščita otrok pred nasiljem in
zanemarjanjem v Sloveniji*), Fakulteta za socialno delo
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This book on child protection from violence and neglect in Slovenia represents an answer to the needs in practice, explain the editors in the preface. They argue that despite the progress in legislation, the advancement of reporting violence, and collaboration between institutions in Slovenia, there are still difficulties when it comes to the actual procedures. Acknowledging the complexity of the procedures and the knowledge needed to comprehend this phenomenon, the thirteen contributing authors emphasise the importance of an interdisciplinary approach, which they demonstrate by collaborating in different combinations of two to three co-authors in the majority of the chapters. The book consists of eight chapters besides the preface and concludes with two reviews.



Following a line from general to specific, the content is structured in two parts, each consisting of four chapters. In the beginning of the first chapter, Jasna Podreka and Veronika Tašner present a historical overview of the concept of the child in the European and Slovenian context and demonstrate its development into the modern conceptualisation. They place the concept of the child in a legislative framework and elaborate questions on systemic protection of the child's best interests. In the discussion, they integrate the term 'child's voice' as a key term in forming the highest degree of child protection in theory and practice. The authors analyse this term in the area of divorce as a civil procedure, stating that this area represents the foundation of child protection. Their findings show that in practice the interest of the child is (too) often in conflict

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with the interest of the parents, even in cases where it is clear that the parents are not able to work in the (best) interest of the child.

This topic is further elaborated in the second chapter, in which Katja Filipčič integrates the child's interest in legal terms and legislative rules and explicates the state's jurisdiction in the area of protecting the child facing violence. The author demonstrates the fragile balance between the state's responsibility to intervene within the family while avoiding interventions that are too intensive or too fast. She gives a detailed presentation of the duty to report and the legislative procedures for child protection, with special insight into the restraining order. The author shows the role of the child who appears as a witness in criminal proceedings, and reveals that the chances of secondary victimisation of such children have decreased since some major steps were undertaken in the implementation of certain legal institutes in Slovenia. Nevertheless, she adds, Slovenia is still facing parallel and unconnected legal procedures that create situations in which the child gets lost within them.

In the third chapter, Gordana Čižman presents the area of assessing and defining the interest of the child in protection procedures in social work centres. The author emphasises the complexity of this professional duty due to various reasons. One is the lack of clearly defined measures of the notion the child's (best) interest and the extreme lack of research on this topic, which offers professionals the discretionary right to determine the child's best interest by themselves. The only indirect guideline is court practice. Another reason is clearly the complexity of situations, which leads to similar circumstances having a different degree of importance for the child's interest in different cases. It is therefore crucial that the social worker uses dialogical work to thoroughly investigate the child's world and interests. The third reason concerns the professional conditions for undertaking this task. Often social workers in social work centres are informed about the child's circumstances far too late to be able to work gradually from prevention towards more intrusive procedures. The author argues that it is crucial for other services (medical services, school) to acquire the knowledge to recognise the risks within the family and connect with social services, as well as to develop sensitivity towards violence in society in general.

In the next chapter, Darja Zavrišek, Ksenja Domiter Protner and Maja Drobnič Radobuljac discuss two preconditions that must be satisfied in order for professionals to recognise, prevent and support children facing violence: interdisciplinarity and intersectionality. The interdisciplinary perspective helps to overcome the limits of a specific discipline and to connect knowledge, which leads to enhanced flexibility when thinking about specific problems, while the

intersectionality perspective helps to understand how different social categories overlap and thus create new forms of inequalities where risks are piling up. The authors clearly illustrate this with examples of children and their life situations. These examples not only punctuate the theory, but also indicate the meaning of intersectionality when working in the area of child protection. Moreover, they show the role of each of the professionals (teacher, social worker, counsellor, policeman, doctor, etc.) included in cases of child protection and the extensive impact that each of them has when (not) accomplishing his/her professional duties.

To sum up, there are two main topics of the first part of the book. One is the aforementioned diversity of the characteristics of children's contexts and therefore risks, while the other is the understanding that the child should not be a by-stander in procedures that determine his/her future. Understanding the variety of circumstances and enabling the child's active participation when it comes to understanding her/his best interests represent the ground on which to construct the viewpoints on the procedural implementations that comprise the second part of the book.

Danijela Frangež, Maja Drobnič Radobuljac and Tadeja Kodele open the second part with a chapter on revealing violence against and neglect of children. They review the forms and signs of violence and neglect, examine the differences that arise depending on whether the child or the adult reveals this violence and neglect, and describe the continuum of reactions of all of the parties involved (parents, perpetrators, professionals, environment). The authors conducted a qualitative study to gain a better insight into how professionals recognise violence, how it affects them and how they react to it. The findings show that physical violence is detected most frequently, that it is important for professionals to be trained to recognise violence (and since most professionals obtain this training outside the institutions in which they work, this calls for extra financial resources for institutions), and that these situations are emotionally demanding. In the conclusion, the authors suggest some important strategies for the further development of this area and draw a distinct line of difference between revealing abuse and reporting it.

The latter is a central theme of the next chapter by Vesna Leskošek, Neža Miklič and Sanja Sitar Surić, in which the authors start from the premise that reporting violence is the key point for legal prosecution and for enabling violent acts to be proven. They describe the reporting procedure that professionals in different institutions perform and their further *ex officio* actions. In Slovenia, there is a need to decrease the number of cases where children are requested to recount the experienced violence many times throughout the procedures. With this in mind, the authors present the conditions and characteristics of

conversation with the child at the police and the social work centre, with special attention devoted to helping the child feel safe during the procedures. They also present the programme of the House of Children (an implementation of Iceland's Barnahus model), which is in the process of implementation in Slovenia with the main object of providing all of the initial parts of the procedures subsequent to the report in one place.

Such an approach is more than necessary for children who have experienced violence and neglect, because these are children who, in many or most cases, have experienced trauma, as Nina Mešl and Maja Drobnič Radobuljac point out in the seventh chapter of the book. The authors align many perspectives of conceptualising trauma in order to grasp its contemporary definition. The issue of children very often experiencing violence from the same person(s) who should be the caring figure(s), which results in developmental trauma, is specifically addressed. In order to avoid (re)traumatisation by institutional policies, practices and procedures, the authors present a trauma-informed approach and the necessity of its implementation in practice, illustrating it with the results of five interviews with children included in protection procedures.

The book concludes with a chapter on interinstitutional cooperation, its problems, challenges and good practices by Ksenja Domiter Protner, Vesna Leskošek and Danijela Frangež. The authors first define interinstitutional cooperation as professional actions in the child's best interest, and present models of such cooperation with an understanding of the child's position in it. They then review the legislative framework of interinstitutional collaborating, especially in the area of sexual exploitation and abuse, children with special needs, and migrant children, refugees and asylum seekers. They conclude the chapter with a presentation of the experiences of coordinators for violence at social work centres in the field of interinstitutional teams.

I would like to emphasise one specific quality of the present book. Besides extensive theoretical insight, often supported with their research projects, the authors offer significant examples from the practical field. The cases presented act as compendium of warning signs of professional mistakes, showing the way towards examples of good practice and institutional practices that actually enable children who have faced violence or neglect in their life history to (re)gain safety. From this perspective, the book has achieved its aim of acting as an invitation for the readers/professionals in the field of child protection to collaborate and combine their knowledge, experience and expertise to act in the child's best interest.

When thinking about readers of presented work, I agree with the editors that the first cohort consists of professionals who work with children who share

the aforementioned experience of mishandling in their life history. Needless to say, this includes all children, because sometimes – or, unfortunately, often – neglect and abuse are well hidden, and are embedded in every social class, nationality, religion, etc. (UNICEF, 2014). Following the idea of intersectionality, the professionals of interest are not only those who work directly in the area of protecting the victims (in Slovenia, this includes social workers, judges, lawyers, policemen, criminologists, psychologists, social pedagogues, etc.), but also all professionals who work with these children in other contexts of their lives (such as teachers in schools, nurses and doctors in hospitals, coaches in sport teams, teachers in music schools, etc.). The present book also aims to reach policymakers in the area of child protection. Moreover, it is an important source of study for all students who are following the path to become professionals who will work with or have contact with children in some part of the children's lives. It can be a valuable support for the knowledge of volunteers in child and youth work, and all other non-professionals interested in this phenomenon. If it were written in English, it would be interesting reading for non-Slovenians to gain an insight into the state of the art in Slovenia; on the other hand, that would necessarily decrease the number of the readers in Slovenia, who are in fact the target group.

In the end, it is inevitable to mention the underlying message of the book, which is in line with the basic dynamics of violence as an phenomenon experienced by an individual, by social groups or by societies in general. It is traumatic to experience violence and potentially traumatic to reveal it. As such, throughout history, as well as in modern times, humankind has often failed to address violence, trying to push it to the unknown, to deny and forget it, as Lewis Herman (2010) postulated decades ago. The reviewed book speaks about this topic, helping not only to talk about it, but also to address it correctly in the case of different institutions and their professionals in Slovenia, and to offer guidelines for further development.

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