

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Introduction

The Bernard van Leer Foundation is a Netherlands based independent organization operating with the objective of supporting children's development in a healthier, safer and supportive environment. For more than 15 years now, the Foundation has been providing financial and technical support to different stakeholders and partners in Turkey through various projects. The objectives of the Foundation's programme strategy in Turkey include understanding the dimensions of domestic violence against children and to mitigate its negative effects on children's lives by developing intervention methods together with all stakeholders.

In 2013, the Foundation supported Boğaziçi University, Humanist Bureau and Frekans Research to conduct a national scale survey on domestic violence against children aged 0-8 years in Turkey.

The main objective of the survey was to obtain concrete data on the prevalence of domestic violence against children, the forms it takes, and particularly circumstances that lead to the use of violence. With outcomes of this data-based research it was expected to present a situation analysis to different stakeholders in Turkey working in this field, and to lay a common ground for developing methods of intervention by sharing the findings of the research with the public, CSOs, the academia and the media. The report of the Research on Domestic Violence against Children aged 0-8 Years in Turkey was published in 2014 (references to the research in the present report are made as "Research" ([www.ailecocuksiddet.info](http://www.ailecocuksiddet.info))).

In 2015, a second study was conducted by the Humanist Bureau, again with the support of the Bernard van Leer Foundation, to assess implementation on the basis of this data. At this second stage, the objective was to identify shortcomings in implementation together with best practices and to enrich suggestions for solution. In this context, expert meetings were organized with those working in child protection services in 7 provinces (hereinafter referred to as "provincial meetings"). The present report contains the outcomes of these provincial meetings.

## Methodology

Provincial meetings were held in the period April-May 2015 in 7 provinces with the participation of professionals working in public sector in the field of child protection.

Provincial meetings were designed and conducted in two main parts: In the first session of the meetings the “Research on Domestic Violence against Children aged 0-8 Years in Turkey” (2013) was introduced and outcomes of the research were evaluated. The second session was allocated to the evaluation of province-level practices on the basis of specific cases.

Participants were given the case study below step by step and questions “Who would notice?”, “Where would it be reported to?” and “Which services are available?” were put to participants at each step.

### Case Study Used in Provincial Meetings

General information about the family: The mother (A) is primary school graduate and the father (B) finished high school. While the father is employed in shifts in a factory on minimum wage, the mother occasionally goes out for domestic work. The household has 5 members: Mother A. (27), father B. (34), child Ç. (5), elder sister (14) and grandfather Bb (72) who is ill.

**STEP 1:** Ç. is 1-year-old. Ç had no health examination after birth. While parents are out for work, Ç stays home with his elder sister (AB). Ç spends most of his time at home watching TV.

Additional information: While 10 months old, Ç’s hand got burned on stove and his palms receive medical treatment.

**STEP 2:** When Ç is 5 years old, neighbours frequently hear him crying. The mother complains to neighbours that Ç is disobedient, makes too much noise, does not eat well and frequently cries. One can see bruises and rashes on various parts of his body. Ç spends most of his time playing out in streets with his peers from the neighbourhood.

Additional information: Upon Ç’s frequent cries, bruises on body, and unattended presence on streets, K, one of their neighbours, calls ALO 183.

## Prevention: Detecting Neglectful Behaviour and Supporting the Family and the Child

### Detecting Neglectful Behaviour

There are many persons who, given their duties or positions, may detect cases of child neglect:

- Family doctors and other health workers
- Teachers
- Provincial Directorate of ASP ([Ministry of] Family and Social Policies)
- Imams, local headmen, local government workers
- Neighbours and close relatives
- Investigation and prosecution authorities

The dominant view is that these people, theoretically, have means and capacity to detect cases of neglect; in practice, however, most cases of neglect go unnoticed and, even when noticed, they are not regarded as cases for reporting or referral.

When members of different professional groups asked about means of capacity building such as risk assessment and referral to parent support services, responses point out to some efforts in this area. Examples given by participants include the following:

1. The Ministry of National Education is developing a form for teachers (ARDEF) for risk assessment; but it is yet to be put to implementation.
2. The Ministry of Health developed a ÇPGD program (Support to Child's Psychosocial Development) and started trainings for practitioners. However, the programme is yet at pilot stage and not nationwide. When the field survey was being conducted, it was stated that trainings of trainers was completed and it was the time for planning for trainers to train practitioners. It is considered that instruments developed under the ÇPGD will contribute significantly to the detection of cases like the one mentioned above.

### Measures that can be Taken in Cases of Neglect

In provincial meetings, participants said a professional noticing a case of child neglect may have two recourses: (1) Referring the family to any service unit or directly to the ASP Provincial Directorate or (2) Reporting the case to the ASP Provincial Directorate.

The working of the system in case there is reporting to an ASP Directorate with relevant causes of the case is summarized as follows: “A team is sent for examining the case. Both the person who reported the case and the family concerned are interviewed. The educational background of the elder sister is examined and also interviews are conducted with neighbours. Then there is search for a person from among close circles who can assume childcare function and mostly found. A social investigation report is prepared after.”

However, there are others who oppose the practice of immediate reporting to the ASP Directorate.

In the given case, services that can be offered to the family include the following:

### ***Economic Support***

Of parents covered by the research, 16% stated they have no social protection coverage, while 7.4% benefit from various social assistance schemes. Hence, findings indicate, at least as stated by respondents, that not all who need such services have access to.

### ***Elderly Care Support***

When participants in provincial meetings held the opinion that in the given case economic support to the family over children is not possible, possibility of elderly care for the grandfather in the family was investigated.

It was stated, in principle, that the ASP Directorate could cover the cost of home-based care for 72 years old grandfather. This assistance, however, depends on the need for care of the elderly person concerned and income status of his/her family. Further, it does not cover any examination concerning the living standards of children in the family or care capacity of parents.

### ***Family Education/Counselling***

Another line of service that participants to provincial meetings thought it could be appropriate for the family in the given case is family education or counselling services. It is stated that there are professionals trained in family counselling in some provinces and these professionals can be mobilized to extend counselling services to the family. It is possible, they say, to receive counselling services from social services centres given that the family is open to cooperation. It is further stated that education and counselling units within social services centres were actually created to conduct family-related work, but they cannot work effectively in this field due to their work burden in other fields.

***Free crèche***

It is said that directorates in many provinces have their yet vacant crèche quotas. The state of having vacant quotas that can be used in case of need varies with respect to the number of crèches active in a given province.

However, there are difficulties similar in all provinces in using these quotas:

- Crèches are generally located in quarters where middle and high income level families live which may be distant to low income families in need of such services.
- There is no possibility of covering the transportation cost of the family and there is no support in this regard.
- Free childcare services require that families concerned have no regular income, which prevents the use of these services by low but regular income families.

***Free medical treatment***

In provincial meetings it was stated that medical care for burnt hands of the child would be included in social security benefits and the child could benefit from either parent's social security rights. However, in case the father had yet unpaid social security contributions, the child can benefit from hospital services paying the required level of contribution, while the cost of medicine would be excluded from security coverage. In case there is no family member with social security coverage, then the child could benefit from general health insurance scheme. The requirement for cost sharing in medicine for families with unpaid security contributions may put limits to children's medical treatment.

***Building jobs and occupation***

During provincial meetings, participants discussed what can be done to support the family in economic terms when it was found that direct economic and social support was difficult. It was considered that job and occupational counselling could be used to improve family income and working conditions in a family of 4 where the mother was a casual worker and the father was employed on minimum wage.

Nevertheless, vocational courses offered in provinces have weak linkages to employment, and given the characteristics of family members in the case under discussion, it is hard to mention any specific course that would yield positive outcomes in a short period of time.

## Imposing Sanctions on the Family and Taking Probative Decision from the Court

Given that the family has some income, and services for supporting the family would not be functional since childcare facilities are distant, participants think of two solutions which point out to the importance of giving priority to preventive services:

- 1) Imposing sanctions on the family, and
- 2) Offering services necessary to support the family on the basis of court decision.

These suggestions indicate that people may opt for court intervention even when it is not necessary or compulsory in the absence of sufficiently effective services in combating circumstances that bring along cases of neglect

## Exposure to Witnessing Acts of Violence

### Detecting Acts of Violence

Given the case as it is, participants think the problem can be detected by teacher if the child attended preschool or by a doctor if taken to a hospital, but the highest possibility is that it is noticed firstly by neighbours and/or close relatives.

However, the field survey does not fully confirm this assumption. During the research, respondents were asked what they would do if they noticed or witnessed any act of violence against a child. Of those respondents who witnessed act of emotional or physical violence to a child, 4% to 12% said they had no idea about what to do. Depending on the nature of the case witnessed, 11% to 44% of respondents said, "It would not be correct for me to intervene". 15% of respondents say they would not intervene even witnessing a child being beaten in an injurious way.

These findings suggest that it is not so realistic to expect third parties to notice and report cases of abuse.

### Reporting Acts of Violence

#### **Authorities to report to and options**

When persons saying "I would inform authorities" were asked which authorities and whether this reporting would be of any use, the majority pointed to security units (73% as national average).

In other words, social services agencies and units come after security in the ranking of authorities for reporting.

Participants to provincial meetings also find layered structure of reporting/appeal as complex. The practice of referring the applicant to another unit and having to go from one unit to another is considered as a deterring factor.

### ***A specific service: ALO 183***

Although the security appears to be the first place to report, participants to provincial meetings state that ALO 183 is an effective channel of reporting too. Indeed, there were about 1,600 reports through this channel last year. While some participants think this number is low, it can be increased further by publicizing the line since anonymity brings in ease in reporting.

### **Procedures after report is received by the ASP Provincial Directorate**

The unit in charge of conducting social investigation varies depending on the source of reporting to ASP Provincial Directorate. It is stated that this procedure both makes follow up more difficult and leads to confusion in beneficiary. The case is that there may be different assessments of a given case by more than one agency.

In case reporting is via ALO 183;

Following the notification of the provincial directorate by ALO 183, investigation is conducted through social services centres in the province.

In case report comes from the security or prosecutor;

As to cases referred by the security or prosecutor, it is stated that the first intervention is by child protection units in which case the process takes a different form.

The following are stated as weak points in this procedure:

- In the absence of mobile teams, urgent interventions can be made by security units.
- There is no data/information collection and evaluation or practitioners have no information about any evaluation made.
- Social workers can do nothing but turn back since they have no authority in such cases as denial of admission to home, refusal to give information, etc.

## Possible Measures

During provincial meetings, participants were asked what kind of interventions could be made upon a reporting. Here, two alternatives are considered. The first is when the family refuses to cooperate. In such cases, it is stated that the child is placed in institutional care. If the family decides to cooperate, there can be various services that can be extended to the family mentioned in the given case. Participants stated, in any case, institutional care may turn out as the last resort.

- Counselling services for the family
- Imposition of counselling service for the child
- Referring the parent to mental health services
- Referring the child to mental health services
- Social and economic support
- Institutional care

However, also stated are the limitations regarding the outreach and quality of these services:

- There are no common standards regarding these services.
- Staff to take measures is not enough in numbers and level of specialization.
- The level of participation of families and children is low.
- Services cannot be offered nationwide.
- There are no social service units that receive children without any precondition in urgent cases.
- There are no standards to ensure that institutional care is used as the last resort to the best interest of the child.

## Inter-Agency Cooperation and Coordination

Procedures relating to the identification of cases of violence against children, their reporting, and taking measures of protection require the joint work of various agencies. The child protection map ([www.cocukkorumaharitasi.info](http://www.cocukkorumaharitasi.info)) illustrates these agencies and relations in-between.

While evaluating services delivered in the process from reporting to the implementation of measures during provincial meetings, there were also remarks on inter-agency cooperation and coordination.

Cooperation and coordination at the level of implementing personnel and institutions

- There is no cooperation and coordination between professionals from different agencies who are supposed to implement measures regarding a child.
- There is no mechanism of communication between courts and implementing agencies that would take due account of such issues as urgency and privacy.
- There is no follow up of implementation and its outcomes.

Cooperation and coordination between decision makers at district and province levels

- The coordination mechanism does not work effectively in all provinces.
- There is no follow up on issues addressed in coordination meetings.
- Good practices can be developed in case provincial coordination secretariats have sufficient time and personnel.

Communication between central, provincial and district coordination and practitioners

- There is no defined mechanism of information flow between provincial coordination bodies and field workers.
- Good practices such as the publication of decisions taken by coordination bodies are not extended.

## Suggestions

Participants' made their suggestions for solution with relevant priorities during provincial meetings. After these meetings, there was also a meeting with professionals engaged in issues related to child neglect and abuse. Problems identified as well as suggestions made in the whole process were presented at this meeting.

The objective was to enrich the "suggestions" part of the "Research on Domestic Violence against Children aged 0-8 Years in Turkey" (2013) with suggestions deriving from implementation. Hence, it will be better if these suggestions are considered together with that part of the research.

## Detecting and Preventing Neglect

There is almost full agreement that neglect in itself is a violation of the rights of the child, and also indicator of future abuse. The research shows that children are exposed to what may be considered neglect as a result of various reasons including the economic status of the family, preferences related to the utilization of available resources, existing beliefs, information and skills.

Article 18 in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child obliges States Parties to render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of their child-rearing responsibilities and to ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children.

At present, there are services in many provinces of Turkey to support parents in their childcare.

However, in spite of the existence of these services, the factors given below make it difficult to speak about a prevention-focused child protection system:

- Services have no specific target as preventing neglect
- Services are not offered as a part of a wider child protection system
- Services are planned and offered dispersedly
- Services are offered not on the basis of rights but existing institutional capacity

Given these, the priority step should be planning so as to ensure that 0-8 years old children are protected from neglect in such fields as education, health, nutrition and emotional support, and all children in this age group benefit from sufficient and quality services. This planning should include at least the following:

- Income security to support the care capacity of families in economic terms
- Services geared to improving families' information, attitudes and skills
- Services geared to enhancing care capacity of families (i.e. day care, temporary care, special parental leaves, etc.)
- Spaces of play, cultural and sports activities, etc. for children that are safe and responsive to different needs
- Utilization of health and education services while being protected from neglect

## Reporting of Neglect and Abuse and Intervention

### **Reporting process**

The research shows that the motivation to detect cases is augmented when the person who detects has information about easily accessible and reliable means and authorities to report what he/she has noticed.

Suggestions related to strengthening this particular stage are as follows:

- To encourage reporting of cases of child neglect and abuse, the receiving authority should not be the security but a social services unit with specialized professionals easy to reach at local level.

- This unit should have the capacity and authority to quickly cooperate (with the security) and intervene.
- Public should be informed about the importance, place and method of reporting. Various channels (headmen, imam, and teacher) and means (brochures, public spots) of communication should be used for this purpose.
- There should be a well-defined cooperation between persons who can detect risks for children and persons and units who will receive reports. The network should also include municipal services such as reconciliation and counselling services and local government people such as headmen.
- The ALO 183 line should work with the unit authorized to receive reports and intervene accordingly. There should be periodic assessments regarding the users of this line, when and in which cases it is used. Outcomes should be used in improving the service and shared with other relevant units in the province.

### ***Data collection and sharing***

Practitioners need to have quick and reliable access to information about the child and the family for properly assessing risks and developing and effective intervention plan in time. Recording and sharing of data is also stated as a need to keep things going after intervention.

The fulfilment of these tasks requires thorough assessment of indicators and, hence the existence of a source that can notice indicators in the first place. This points out to the necessity of developing a model for data collection and sharing:

- This model should enable public institutions rendering services in education, health, etc. and collecting and recording data in this context to use this data with due regard to the rules of privacy so as to evaluate various situations and cases.
- The model should also allow for recording and sharing of data related to examinations concerning the state of the child, decisions taken, and outcomes of implementation.
- Also, there should be legal arrangements regarding the recording and sharing of information, including rules about who would share what kind of information and with whom, supervision of compliance with rules and sanctions to be imposed in cases of violation.

***Needs assessment = Social investigation***

The step for examination that is taken after reporting is important in determining the quality of intervention. Presently, the ASP Provincial Directorate receiving any report launches social investigation with its personnel.

There is need to take some significant steps in relation to social investigation:

- Social services centres should organize at neighbourhood level and relevant policies and strategies should be shared both with public and personnel.
- Considering provincial population and existing needs a policy should be adopted to ensure the employment of adequate number of social workers and also a service model should be developed to ensure that social investigation is carried out by social workers.
- For social investigation, the assessment tool to be developed and used should be standardized with respect to levels of risk and proven that it is capable of making child and needs focused assessments.
- In the context of service standards, there should be established criteria as to time to be allocated to a social investigation and performance expected from a professional.
- There should be rules as to the protection, use and sharing within the judicial system of reports prepared and these rules should be known by all professionals.

***Measures***

After investigation, the next step is to deliver appropriate services to the child and the family. Here, the rule is to implement any child protection measure in cooperation with the family observing the principle that the child should stay with his/or her family. In case there is no family or family does not cooperate or it is considered that the family poses a risk for the child there should be court decision on measures to protect the child.

There should be extensive work in the field to improve the process of implementing measures adopted. There should be both service modelling and setting up of services and relevant service units. Suggestions in this context are as follows:

- There should be a service guide showing steps to be taken before applying to the court for any decision.
- There should be cooperation, including face-to-face contact and counselling between the professional who conducts investigation or implements any measure and the court that gave a decision.

- All parties to the issue should be able to observe the process and its outcomes and have the means to receiving relevant feedback.
- Professionals should be trained in legal possibilities and relations in-between and, if needed, legislative arrangement should be made in order to avoid any negative effect on the protection status of the child in case decisions given on the basis of different laws contradict. Professionals should be fully informed about such issues as guardianship, intervention to personal relations and procedures to be followed when any person fails to comply with decisions and measures adopted; they should also be skilled enough to exercise their authority in line with laws in effect and rights of children.
- The service concept should be based on the principle that failure to implement any duly taken decision means danger for the child and that the case should be closely followed.
- The procedure followed in conveying court decisions and their annexes to enforcers should be shortened to make direct contact possible, and transfer of documents should be arranged in a way to observe privacy.
- A service guide containing information about institutions, their services, capacities, roles and responsibilities should be prepared for all who work within the system.
- There should be a population based planning for the establishment of fundamental service units in the child protection system. In places where service units cannot be established due to sparse population, there should be prior plans shared by all professionals indicating where to apply in case of any event that necessitates the protection of the child.
- To ensure that persons in charge of implementing measures are specialized in cases of child neglect and abuse, there should be trainings for recruitment and regular performance evaluation and assessment throughout the service career.

### **Coordination**

Needs in child protection mentioned above should be addressed firstly at district and then province level. Issues that could not be fully addressed at these levels should be dealt with by the central coordination unit (ÇKK (Child Protection Law) 42).

There are child protection coordination units in almost all provinces and the Ministry of Family and Social Policies conducts trainings for provincial coordination units.

The following are the suggestions related to what needs to be strengthened in coordination units:

- While many issues can be handled at province level, both the centre and provinces should have a joint overall and province level implementation plans including targets and strategies and implementation of these plans should be closely monitored.
- Horizontal and vertical mechanisms should be in place to ensure information exchange between practitioners and decision makers. Some practices like website building and establishment of sub-commissions observed in some provinces should be followed and spread to other provinces.