

Violence Against Children in ICELAND

Relevant extracts from an NGO alternative report presented to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

CRC Session 32, January 2003

Save the Children Iceland – English

www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/crc.32/Iceland_ngo_report.doc

[...]

In 1998 **the Children's House was opened**, a progressive experiment in dealing with sexual abuse of children. In 1999 the legal status of children, victims of sexual abuse, was greatly improved. They now have the right to legal representation, taking care of their cases during investigation and in court. The legislation aims at protecting the child from fear and retraumatization.

[...]

Some progress has been made in treatment for young offenders outside prisons. However it still happens that offenders between 15-17 are kept in prison with grown-ups. This is unacceptable.

[...]

As well known worldwide, children living in poverty, are more vulnerable than other children to criminality, prostitution and drug abuse. Serious measures are needed to secure a prosperous future for Icelandic children in low income families.

[...]

A study performed by the Icelandic *Red Cross Society* identified children with developmental and/or behavioural problems as being particularly vulnerable to discrimination within the school and social system. These children are not recognized as disabled and very few extra resources are made available for their special needs. Likewise their parents receive insufficient support in dealing with their specific problems. The study states that this lack of support compounds the situation in the long run: these children's psychological disturbances are more likely to worsen as they enter adulthood, and are therefore more likely to result in behavioural problems such as drug abuse or crime.

[...]

As mentioned earlier the Parliament raised the age of majority from 16 to 18 in 1997. At the same time it is legal for an adult to have sexual intercourse with a 14 year old child.

[...]

A report on prostitution published in spring 2001 by the Ministry of Justice shows evidence of child prostitution. There is no estimate in the report of the extent of this but it includes case studies of children being prostituted by adults and so-called "survival sex" among youths between 13 and 18 years of age. The Minister of Justice established a committee to look further into the extent of child prostitution. The committee published a comprehensive report this summer with numerous recommendations on the issue of pornography and prostitution, focusing specially on the protection of children. It is now up to the Ministry of Justice and the Parliament to follow up the report.

In 1998 a *Children's House* (Children's Assessment Center) for victims of sexual abuse was opened. This multi-disciplinary institute handles assessment, forensic interviews, medical examination and treatment of sexually abused children. The Center aims to minimize trauma by making all the processes involved as coordinated and collaborative as possible. This Center was a major step in helping victims of sexual abuse. However it is necessary to increase the awareness of the public as well as all public officials who come into contact with children who may be victims of sexual violence. Education on the damaging consequences of sexual abuse is needed as well as on behavioral patterns that might suggest that such abuse is taking place.

In this report *Save the Children* would like to draw the attention to sexual offenders under the age of 18. They have often been victims of violence themselves and may become serial offenders. A research by two students at the Children's House shows that 30% of the offenders are under the age of

18. Research has also shown that intervention at young age is very important to prevent recidivism. It is vital to give the young offenders the necessary treatment and develop preventive methods to protect children from becoming victims of sexual violence or becoming sexual offenders. More needs to be done on behalf of the government to deal with this serious problem.

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