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Horst Schreiber

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Experiences with SOS Children's Villages

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Preface

Waltraud Kannonier-Finster, Meinrad Ziegler

Family structures, pedagogy and rationality

SOS Children's Villages is one of the largest charitable organisations in the world. Around 50,000 children are cared for in over 2,000 facilities spread across 133 countries.[1] The core area of SOS Children's Villages' activities is still the establishment and operation of children's villages. Since 1950, when the first SOS Children's Village opened in Imst, Tyrol, over 7,000 children have grown up in SOS facilities in Austria. These children's villages are now part of a wide network of other social facilities. In Austria there are eleven children's villages and some of these also have kindergartens and small group homes. There is also a medical centre, six counselling centres and six aftercare centres. SOS Children's Villages is also involved in projects for employment and refugees. Since 1993 a pedagogical department has been working on the principles and standards, arranging for the education and training of pedagogical staff and maintaining links with scientific research. The high international acclaim accorded to the organisation is reflected in its advisory status as an NGO in the UN Economic and Social Council.

The founding aim of SOS Children's Villages was to do something for the "abandoned children" who had lost their homes as a result of the Second World War and its consequences.[2] The idea was developed in Innsbruck at the end of the 1940s by a group of young men and women who represented a socially responsible and committed Catholicism. Idealistic and with the courage to improvise, their aim was to explore new paths beyond the established care organisations of the church or state. In Tyrol at the end of the 1940s there were around 2,500 widows, 4,600 children who had lost a parent and a large number of unmarried mothers. The last-named had no support from public welfare. Around 50 per cent of Tyrolean school children were considered to be undernourished.[3] The Tyrolean welfare system was really in no position to cope with the resulting problems. The founders of SOS Children's Villages considered the situation in the children's homes and foster families as insufferable. They were aware of the lack of financial resources and beds, the overcrowding in the homes and the lack of trained staff. They also knew of the authoritarian and military-style upbringing in the homes and the

exploitation of child labour in the foster families on farms. In the preceding years details had emerged of the extent of poisonous pedagogy and the abuse of children and young people in child care institutions.[4] An alternative to the conditions in the out-of-home care of children was needed.

The first step for an initially undefined relief organisation for orphans was the founding of the association Societas Socialis in 1949. The association's name, however, had a further message for Maria Hofer, one of the founders:[5] its abbreviation was to stand for "Faith and Action: SOS = Save our Souls". When the project was put into practice, it catered not only for orphans in the narrower sense but also children from marriages and families which had foundered due to material and social problems in the post-war conditions. Another of the founders, Hertha Troger, introduced the idea that SOS should also provide support for the children of working mothers.[6] Most of the children who were admitted to the first children's village in Imst after 1951 came from the most adverse circumstances and were often in a poor state of health.[7] Around 70 per cent were boys because girls were easier to place in adoptive or foster homes. Many of these children had already been in several care placements before being taken in by SOS. They were largely children sent by the district welfare departments. Outside Tyrol SOS quickly became known for helping at short notice and without a lot of red tape, even before the financial side had been clarified. Children whose parents and relatives were unable to pay or for whom no maintenance contribution was to be expected from the public welfare were accepted in the spirit of emergency relief, in some cases without their citizenship being established. We can assume that the social background of the children's village children was not significantly different from those who were registered in pubic and church homes.

There were principally two areas in which SOS Children's Villages differed from the inherited structures of state-run care. *First* the differing practice when accepting a child into care, i.e. the spontaneous help in urgent cases enabled by funding from donations.[8] In the early years the state of Tyrol refused the new project any help. A modicum of goodwill and support came from some local authorities: the local political players were aware of the social suffering in the area for which they were responsible and hoped for assistance, even if this developed outside the traditional and established institutions. Initially the established Austrian aid organisations such as Caritas or Pro Juventute viewed SOS Children's Villages mainly as an unwelcome competitor and doubted the initiative's sustainability and professionalism. The founding members then set up a number of fundraising initiatives aimed at the broader public, but women in particular. A fundraising campaign in which women were invited to

have their names included in a women's group to sponsor SOS by donating a Schilling per month was very successful. A Christmas card campaign was launched with the help of the Tyrolia printing works, producing cards which were considerably cheaper than the normal trade price. A brick fundraising campaign also turned out to be successful because it reached a broad public through the involvement of many of the stores in Innsbruck. To illustrate the fundraising goal, models of SOS Children's Villages were exhibited in the salesrooms. Soon the expensive direct mailing was successfully replaced by a newspaper as a marketing tool, the "Kinderdorfbote" (Children's Village Courier).

The *second* area was the care concept in the children's villages. This consisted of reproducing a family situation for the children, both in terms of its social and spatial structure. A children's village consisted of several individual houses in which up to nine children lived with a female carer as though in a household. The carer functioned as a substitute mother. She had to live a celibate life in order to devote all her energy and attention to the children. The idea was that motherly care in an organised family environment would work as a great healing force on neglected and wounded children compared to life in their family of origin. The male position in the simulated family was occupied by the village director. As the substitute father he represented the element of order, obedience and sanctioning powers. This model of the family – distorted by a conservative patriarchal attitude – formed the core of the pedagogical concept for SOS Children's Villages for many decades. Or, more precisely, it led to the belief that there was no need for any professional concepts. But this omission was not evident at the start. Amongst the group of founders, Maria Hofer and Hertha Troger were qualified social workers. There are numerous indications that they were aware of the necessity of professional qualifications for women in social work projects.[9] However, both women left SOS after a short time. At the same time one man from the group of founders, Hermann Gmeiner, became prominent as the central figure in the organisation. And Gmeiner did indeed have a strong influence on the early years and on the organisation's development. His communicative abilities, his persuasiveness and his handling of the media and the public were important factors for SOS Children's Villages' lasting success. However, along with his characteristic energy and capacity for enthusiasm he also established the above-mentioned concept of the children's village, something which hindered the development of the organisation's socio-pedagogical professionalism for a long time.

This study sets out a detailed description and analysis of the weaknesses of this concept. Two of these are of particular importance: the lack of expertise of the care personnel on the one hand and the conceptually

founded sexual hierarchy between the female carers in the family-type communities and the male-occupied managerial positions on the other. These can be viewed as structures providing the opportunity for the practices of violence and abuse towards children and young people in the children's villages. At the same time Horst Schreiber makes it clear that the out-of-home care in SOS Children's Villages differs in a positive sense from that in a home or foster family. The children's village is basically an open facility and not a closed institution like a home. Not only individual children but groups of siblings are accepted into a "family". The children attend public schools and integrate into the life of the local community. The work of the carer with her group of children is designed for the long-term and for creating a relationship of trust. None of these characteristics applied to the running of children's homes in the post-war period. Studies on foster families in the 1950s and into the 1970s have shown that conditions in this form of out-of-home care were no better than in the homes.[10] Most foster children lacked adequate hygiene provisions, they were denied emotional and respectful treatment in the foster family, and systematic exploitation of their manpower and experiences of violence and abuse were the rule.

What needs to be emphasised at this point is that SOS Children's Villages developed in the 1940s and '50s from the founding initiative of young committed men and women who pressed ahead with this project with passion and enthusiasm. The objective conditions for implementing and successfully developing the idea of children's villages were anything but favourable. The houses in Imst were very simply equipped; running the households with the groups of children suffered from a chronic lack of funding and the carers wages were very modest. Being able to improvise was just part of daily life, as was the willingness to deal with the overwork associated with this. However, the fact that the idea worked cannot be put down solely to the conscientious approach to work by those involved. An additional special factor was that real people were prepared to dedicate their lives to the service of a great ideal.[11] "Children with no parents find a mother and a home. An idea has not only found somewhere to take root but has found hearts which can overcome all the difficulties which naturally oppose a huge project of this kind (...)", is how the Tyrol daily paper of 3 December 1949 described this ideal.[12] It was not only the direct founders of SOS who provided these "hearts" – to the point of self-sacrifice to the project – but also the women who worked as the carers in the substitute families. Their high level of commitment is understandable: work as a carer meant not only a personal income but also the opportunity for these women to pursue a socially recognised gainful employment. This was not something to be taken for granted in the conservative Tyrol of the post-war years. At the time, the middle-class women's movement had established social work as a special "women's cultural duty", however

the professional form of "social motherliness" was always linked to a particular training.[13] For the first decades of its existence, SOS Children's Villages believed it could do without this professionalisation of the care work in the children's villages. Women who were to take on the position of "SOS mother" did not need special qualifications, only a willingness and ability to apply motherly care which was seen as something conferred by nature. Against this background, many women saw their life's aim as putting all their efforts into devoting their own working capacity to the social world and thus to relieving the social suffering of children.

But cultural values and ideals were often at odds with reality. This applied particularly to the institution of the family which, since the development of our modern industrial society in the 19th century, has become an almost mythical place of balance and stability in face of economic crises and cultural upheavals.[14] This modern idealisation was preceded by the transformation of the family from a primarily economic unit to a primarily emotional system of relationships between the parents and their children. The extended family – enhanced in various ways by unrelated manpower – appeared as a relatively flexible structure in the sense of an economic unit which could also survive emergencies and periods of hardship by exchanging people and other forms of cooperation. In contrast, the new nuclear family which functioned primarily as an emotional unit appeared vulnerable when one member of the family was absent or could no longer perform their duties due to war, accident or other unpredictable events of life. From this perspective Richard Sennett[15] pointed out that the modern nuclear family of the 19th century cannot be interpreted as a rationally developed acquisition of a historical phase of social change, but resulted from an unintentional side-effect of industrialisation, which was subsequently legitimised through a great deal of effort by middle-class thinkers predominantly of the male sex. The argument which was applied when assessing the value of the new form of family can be summarised as follows: the strength of the historically new form of nuclear family would arise from the simple organisational model in which the man, woman and child have a fixed place and fixed role. This organisation guarantees the development of the different individuals. The nuclear family functions especially well for the children because they can relate to few but permanent and reliable attachment figures and their expectations. This is seen as the basic requirement for the development of the child's personality.

It is undisputed that, to develop, children need at least one person who gives them affection and recognition, regardless of any particular situational actions or misbehaviour. Usually, but not necessarily, this person will be the mother. The experience of being completely accepted and cared for are important, enabling children to develop curiosity for the

outside world and to throw themselves confidently into the process of exploring this world.[16] But the family is far from being a social place where these forms of care and recognition are practised without fail. The family was and is an extremely ambivalent social unit and is often beset by uncertainty and disrespect for persons, especially children. The historical emotionally charged element in this intimate social environment is precisely what causes all those involved to treat each other with conflicting feelings of love and hate as well as excessive expectations and unachievable hopes.

In the 1920s, pedagogical reformers racked their brains about the right methods for working in the newly established state care homes. Siegfried Bernfeld recorded that, in this context, public child care institutions (roughly equivalent to approved schools) had the common problem of having no specific concepts for maintaining order in their institutions.[17] The pedagogical practice of the time was less due to rational deliberation and more the result of the usual methods used in other educational establishments, combining or modifying these as necessary. Bernfeld argued in favour of making an objective decision as to which pedagogical models should be used and to this end developed a comparative description of those educational institutions which frequently serve as models.

According to Bernfeld, the characteristic of the family is that the child's main task is to display good behaviour towards those in authority, usually the adults.[18] There are only vague rules which the child can follow and these are subject to constant change. For example, if they make a noise while playing, on one occasion this will anger the adults and give rise to a corresponding law for the behaviour. However, another day the rule no longer applies and the adults make it clear that they would like a different kind of behaviour. So, the child cannot model their behaviour on specific rules and regulations but learns to adjust to the good behaviour required at the time.

From this point of view the social order in the family must appear to the child like a tyranny within certain limits. However, there are some limitations to this arbitrariness: *first*, traditions which underlie the social order of a particular family have a stabilising effect on its prevailing rules. *Second*, the psychological structure of the adults gives rise to an approximate regularity in their wishes. Children know a lot about the specific wishes and rules of the adults with whom they are regularly involved. And, *third*, the degree of dependency which the adults have on the children is important: this determines their willingness to give up their own wishes in terms of the child's behaviour out of love.

Bernfeld stresses that the difficulty for children in understanding social order in the family is also connected to the fact that the demands of authority are often presented as the requirements of love. These demands can sometimes be complied with, despite disobedience to the rules: another time, however, the adults' demands will not be met, even though the child tries to be obedient. This mixing of rational and emotional elements also applies to the children. Breaches of the rules of social order are always experienced as conflicts of love. These conflicts can rarely be solved in a way which the child understands. As the rules and boundaries are difficult to recognise, all sanctions are interpreted as personal disrespect and rejection. The strong emotional element in family relationships is closely connected to the tendency towards a lack of rules. For this reason Bernfeld characterised the type of social order prevailing in the family as irrational.

In many educational institutions the pedagogical practice is a mixture of family discipline and the military form of discipline.[19] What is meant by "military discipline"? In a barracks all the actions of those subject to the command structure are regulated clearly and precisely by a strict formal order. Strict supervision and the use of severe punishments ensure that the rules are obeyed. Military discipline represents a rational and straightforward tyranny. This type of discipline is important in reformatory child care institutions because it contributes to correcting the irrationalities of family discipline. Of course, the absolute dictatorship of military discipline can only be partially applied in child care institutions. The rational dictatorship lacks any kind of pedagogical effect, there is no place for the development of an "understandable order".[20] Military discipline can easily change into a spiral of violence when attitudes of disparagement and exclusion towards those who are subject to the command structure become dominant. This was the case in the child care institutions in the decades after the Second World War.

Bernfeld pinned his hopes for an improvement in the conditions in reformatory child care institutions on a third form of discipline, the democratic form.[21] Its basic idea consists of allowing children and young people to participate in developing the social order. Democratic discipline demands obedience towards "self-imposed laws".[22] In a system which replicates the family, the child is not faced with rules but with people. Military discipline demands obedience to rules which are determined by those in command. In a democracy, citizens are confronted with their own rules. This ensures a higher degree of rationality. Even before these considerations by Bernfeld, the Polish doctor, pedagogue and writer Janusz Korczak had developed a pedagogy based on practical experience as the head of an orphanage in Warsaw in which children were introduced at a very early age to aspects of a democratic culture.[23] The central

element of a democratic form of discipline was a "comradeship court".[24] This process, in which the children took an active part, controlled the adherence to and continuous improvement of the house rules. It represented a democratic authority between the carer and the child which had to be recognised by both. Korczak was convinced that this institution would also educate the carers. *First* it would lead to children being seen in a new perspective, as people, who do not think "less, or more poorly or worse than the adults", but only differently.[25] And *second*, it would force the system to consider every one of the children's issues seriously and carefully. A court as a democratically constructed facility to maintain order would end every form of despotism which defines the rules in the family structures: all judgements about the child depend on good will and on the good and bad moods of the carers.[26]

Last but not least, these few pointers to the historical alternatives to the original concept of SOS Children's Villages enable the clarification of the social consequences of differing forms of upbringing. On the one hand is the effort to get children accustomed early to the – doubtless difficult and taxing – practice of a democratic culture. On the other hand is the introduction of the children to a patriarchal and authoritarian culture in which both the hierarchy between the children and adults and that between the sexes prevail as a representation of an apparently naturally occurring order.

With reference to current pedagogical concepts, it may be useful to make a comparison between the model of the children's village family, or "SOS family", and that of the supervised small group home. SOS families are artificially produced living communities in which a few children live with an adult carer. Supervised small group homes are also organised like a family. While in most facilities the children do not live with the adults, the structure encourages the creation and strengthening of a personal relationship between the children and the carers. In modern social work these relationships are considered to be the basis for pedagogic action. At the same time, social work theory is familiar with the problems associated with this relationship. Bernfeld's conceptual framework suggests that social workers are trained to recognise and manage the dangers of despotism and irrationality which arise as part of working with the logic of family-type relationships. For many decades SOS Children's Villages worked under the assumption that a personal relationship in the form of maternal care already implies pedagogic action. The simulation of the family was confused with professionalism. Nowadays it should be clear that the family as such is not an instance of pedagogic action. In social work we need the rationality of professional action in order to control the risk that family-type relationships can lead to excessive irrationality which spreads and gains acceptance.

Introduction

In 1949 Hermann Gmeiner, Helene Didl, Maria Hofer, Josef Jestl, Ludwig Kögl, Franz Müller, Herbert Pfanner, Hertha Troger and Hedwig Weingartner established the association "Societas Socialis" (SOS) to combat the suffering of children after the war using a new model of out-of-home care. The first SOS Children's Village opened its doors in Imst in Tyrol in 1950. The aim was that orphans and children deprived of parental care should grow up in conditions similar to a family and that the mass upbringing in homes should be a thing of the past. In the 65 years since its foundation, SOS Children's Villages has developed into a worldwide organisation which enjoys a good reputation and is highly respected for its services in the out-of-home care of children and young people. The successful part of this model is largely known to the general public.

Why this study came about

A little over four years ago, people who grew up in children's and care homes, Catholic boarding schools, Federal education institutions, homes for the disabled, those living in private care, child observation wards and in psychiatric institutions for children and young people began to break their silence. They recall the experiences of violence during their childhood and adolescence which have had a lasting adverse effect on their whole lives. Children's and care homes had the public duty of looking after the welfare of poor, orphaned or abandoned children and young people, those deviating from the norm and those who had committed offences. Their task was to raise them to maintain civil order and to give them an appropriate education and vocational qualification so that they would become useful members of society. For the children and young people classedified as "neglected", homes replaced the poorhouses, workhouses and prisons that aimed at punishment and correction. The focus was directed instead on a compensatory upbringing as, in the eyes of the authorities, the parents were incapable of fulfilling their educational responsibilities. The care in the homes was also intended as a political instrument in order to segregate the – in the eyes of the authorities – increasingly rebellious children and young people of the lower classes and to reintegrate them into civil society by means of a tough upbringing in the home and an education in keeping with their class and sex.

In reality the educational routine in most homes was marked by systematic abuses of human rights right up to the 1970s and in some cases beyond.[27] The children and young people were governed bureaucratically

in a cost-saving mass upbringing and not seen as individuals but only as part of a group. The attitude towards them was stigmatising and prejudiced from the outset. Those subject to the institutional routine were bound by a tightly woven network of rules and regulations which robbed them of their private lives. Every deviation from the norm resulted in violent punishment. This phenomenon of structural violence took place behind closed doors and with scarcely any external regulation. Many children and young people went hungry, either because they were deprived of food as a means of punishment or because the little ones could not hold their own against the big ones and the adults looked on without intervening. A large proportion of the young people did not receive any vocational training but had to provide their labour for nothing or for a meagre wage, often without being state-insured. These exploitative conditions were in the tradition of a training for work through work and were justified as an educational method by those running the homes. Working instead of learning was part of this economic violence.

The violent practices in many homes aimed at undermining solidarity amongst the children and young people. Those who linked themselves to the educating powers and betrayed and informed on others were rewarded with small privileges, attention and sometimes even with something like affection. Social violence also revealed itself in the separation of siblings. In the majority of children's and care homes the physical and psychological violence was of a type and degree which exceeded all limits and was far beyond that which was legally permitted or was justified on educational grounds. There was a high probability of becoming brutalised under the conditions of pervasive violence. In many children's and community homes the law of the jungle applied for settling internal conflicts, a constant struggle for a place in the hierarchy, privileges and the favour of those in control. During the day the smaller children were often exposed to terrorising by the adults, at night the martyrdom of psychological, physical and sexual violence continued amongst the groups of children and young people. Ritual humiliation, the desire for power or for the satisfaction of their own desires on the part of those in charge was a repeated occurrence in the homes in the form of sexual violence. The particular situation in the children's and care homes – isolation of the home from the outside world, the lack of supervision and stigmatisation of the children and young people who were rarely listened to and who only in rare cases had a trusted person to turn to – made it easy for the perpetrators to find victims. The violent traits of the home upbringing were reflected in the constant fear and intimidation in which a large proportion of the children had to live. They experienced violence

disconnected from any discernible meaning. However, when a child was unable to see any connection between their own mistakes and the punishment, then this removed any possibility of being able to avoid the punishment by correct behaviour. Unpredictability produced a feeling of powerlessness and weakened the belief in being able to control your own fate. Children in care suffered particularly because almost no one cared about them: only a very few carers gave them tenderness, attention, security, appreciation or praise. This feeling of total isolation, abandonment and defencelessness was one of the worst things which happened to these children and young people. Reforms only began in the 1970s: better trained care workers with a more child-friendly attitude were employed in the homes whilst a committed movement began to develop in social work which tried out new models of out-of-home care.

The results of investigations into violence in out-of-home care homes run by the Austrian provinces and districts and Catholic orders provided the impetus for a discussion in the governing bodies of SOS Children's Villages Austria to examine their own history in greater depth and to follow up the subject of violence in the upbringing provided by SOS Children's Villages. This received a further incentive when, in 2011, adults who had been in facilities run by SOS Children's Villages Austria in their childhoods got in touch with the management in Innsbruck and reported having been the victims of violence in the past. Discussions took place between SOS Children's Villages and the author towards the end of 2011, reaching a conclusion in the months following. Elisabeth Hauser, Head of the Pedagogy Department of SOS Children's Villages Austria, made the following observation in this context:

"The increased public interest in uncovering the truth ties in with our requirement for transparency and openness. We cannot close our eyes to the negative events in the past which are part of our history and whose painful result is particularly noticeable right now, but wish to face this with the greatest degree of objectivity possible and our best efforts to provide an explanation."[28]

The governing body of the national umbrella association of SOS Children's Villages assigned the head of the pedagogy department the task of describing and analysing violent types of educational practices in SOS Children's Villages. As the most sensible course of action appeared to be an investigation by an external researcher with the relevant expertise, Horst Schreiber took on this task. He agreed to a joint project with Bettina Hofer and Christina Lienhart, research staff in the Research &

Development department (formerly the Sozialpädagogisches Institut) of SOS Children's Villages, who collected text modules for developing the pedagogy in the children's village which the author of the study has incorporated in several chapters. They include developments in the training of educational staff in the areas of education of children and young people in the SOS Children's Village and in the aftercare of former SOS children. Similarly, the educational work with boys and girls was provided in publications and research reports, as was the subject of the SOS family and family of origin and developments in educational aims, methods and provisions in SOS Children's Villages. The two education researchers also supplied feedback on the manuscript of the book from a pedagogical perspective. Waltraud Kannonier-Finster and Meinrad Ziegler have contributed to this book in a twofold manner. They have provided critical and constructive feedback on the manuscript in their role as editors of the series. Along with Hedwig Presch they have also provided their expertise from a sociological and social education perspective in a number of detailed discussions. Many suggestions from these discussions have been included in this study.

The issues

This study investigates violence towards children and young people in SOS Children's Villages between 1950 and 1990, in an organisation which was established in order to be separate from and a deliberate contrast to the upbringing in a children's home, as a substitute family to provide children in need with the necessary emotional affection and support. The analysis focuses on the structural basis and systematic weaknesses of SOS Children's Villages, rather than on individual failure. The reader is presented with the history of the children's village over the first 40 to 50 years of its existence in which those voices which recall violent and hurtful experiences are heard for the first time. These cannot be reconciled with the picture presented by the media of a carefree happy childhood in the large children's village family.

In order to be able to identify the causes of the violent phenomena in the SOS Children's Village, it is necessary to focus on the nature of the special system of out-of-home care represented by SOS Children's Villages and examine the characteristics of the concept. The study concentrates both on an analysis of the educational approach of SOS Children's Villages, the training and working conditions of the SOS mother, her support network and the resources which SOS provided her

with and the investigation of the role of the SOS mother and village director, the power hierarchy and the method of dealing with sexual violence in the children's village. The study discusses when and how the organisation acquired professional qualities, what education, vocational training and aftercare were available to the children and young people. A point of particular interest is the investigation of the relationship of SOS Children's Villages to science and the evaluation of the work at its Child Therapy Centre in Hinterbrühl which was set up to provide a scientific foundation. This enables a proper answer to the question of which children SOS viewed as unsuitable for the children's village and for what reasons, and why it therefore refused to admit them or discharged them early from its care against the child's wishes. A key topic is the nature of the upbringing, the forms of violence and an assessment of their extent in the children's village. In evaluating the failures but also the successes in care, the practice in children's and care homes and the attitude of society in general to children provide an important comparison in addition to SOS Children's Villages' own high expectations of itself. This applies in particular with respect to the legally permitted and actually applied forms of violence in the families. The study aims to present and judge the work which SOS Children's Villages carried out in the past from all angles, but its view is primarily aimed at the negative side of the children's and young people's experience of growing up in the SOS Children's Village and its causes.

The limits to the period covered by the study are based on the following: the wide-ranging reforms in the 1990s in the wake of the youth welfare law of 1989 brought completely new arrangements for youth welfare. It affected state bodies for out-of-home care just as much as SOS Children's Villages. Many of the causes blamed for the violent educational measures in this study became less important. An account of the phase of wide-ranging reforms and restructuring of the institutions of SOS Children's Villages and the current problem areas would require a study of their own.

However, distressing experiences of former SOS children which extend beyond 1990 are included in this study. On the one hand, I wish to avoid giving the impression that this date marks the end of all possible circumstances for being subjected to violence in the facilities of SOS Children's Villages. In some cases a further reason for documenting and analysing experiences of violence which occurred after 1990 lies in the fact that prosecution of the perpetrators often began at a very late date and the court documents now available enable a multifaceted view into the

mechanisms of how SOS Children's Villages dealt with infringement of the limits.

The study investigates questionable child raising practices and incidents of violence in the SOS Children's Villages and in its Child Therapy Centre. Other facilities such as the youth facilities are only mentioned in places. This publication generally provides an overall picture and is not an analysis of individual SOS Children's Villages. It focuses on the question of how violence can be explained in the SOS Children's Village model of family upbringing.

"I had the misfortune of not growing up in an ideal children's village family. It is very important to me that my experiences are written down and made public so that what has happened is acknowledged, because in the past no one would have believed it and nobody would have been concerned," Dorothea Wiesinger states. For those who experienced violence in facilities run by SOS Children's Villages it is even more difficult to talk about than is normally the case. For one thing because many of them, in contrast to most former children's home children, also had positive experiences in out-of-home care and often had a caregiver they were very fond of. In the majority of cases although not always, this is an SOS mother whom those affected wish to spare from accusations. Reservations about speaking of what has been suffered are based on the fear of harming the SOS Children's Village. Some have a particularly hard time because they themselves work in the organisation. Others report that for a long time they believed it to be pointless to start speaking about their concerns in view of SOS Children's Villages' media profile. Some former SOS children but also SOS co-workers stress that particular topics and the role of important respected people in the organisation were taboos up until now: often unstated ones. One interviewee who was suffering from the psychological consequences and wanted to speak about her experiences shied away from this at the last minute. Whilst she had an especially close relationship to her SOS mother, there are experiences of individual SOS mothers who practised both physical and psychological violence up to very recent times. There are also cases of sexual violence from adults who had access to the village and violence between SOS children. All these forms of violence were ignored.[29]

In this study the people who describe the violence they suffered in an SOS Children's Villages facility are agreed in demanding that SOS Children's Villages should face up to the unpleasant and distressing sides of its history; and in particular should stand by those who in the children's

village "fell out of the nest" for a second time, to quote Hermann Gmeiner. They would like to receive a hearing, recognition and acknowledgement. Some also want material "compensation".

The framework for reference and comparison: violence in the family

The general social, political and ideological reference framework for out-of-home care for children and young people in Austria has already been pointed out in previously published studies and commission reports on institutional upbringing. I shall therefore generally refrain from presenting this here. However, because SOS Children's Villages claims to provide a family upbringing, the description of the attitude towards punishment and the issue of the extent of violent educational practices in Austrian families forms an important framework for reference and comparison.

In order to understand how recent the perception of family violence as a social problem is, it is worth taking a look at the legal regulations. It was primarily the women's movement which, at the end of the 1960s, initiated a broad public debate and provided the driving force for change.

The right of corporal punishment was only abolished gradually in Austria between 1975 and 1989. The Austrian General Civil Code (Allgemein Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch ABGB) placed less importance on the rights of children than on their duties. They owed their parents and the parents' "authority", whose boundaries defined the needs of the child, respect and obedience. "Parental authority" expressly included the right of parents to administer corporal punishment. Accordingly, parents were "authorised to punish immoral, disobedient children or those who disturbed the domestic order and peace in a manner which is not excessive and does not damage their health". By this the legislator meant in particular the right to administer corporal punishment. Contemporary legal commentary also judged locking children up to be a suitable educational method. Criminal law doctrine viewed corporal punishment by parents as a justifiable action in view of higher interests. Maltreatment leading to injury was prohibited and could incur legal consequences. If punishment resulted in visible signs and effects, this still did not make parents liable to prosecution. The crucial factor was whether medical treatment was required.[30]

In 1975, Para. 413 of the criminal law which had also justified the parental right to administer corporal punishment was abolished. With the reform of the parent and child law two years later, the National Assembly also abolished the private law provision in the ABGB, according to which