

Committee on the Rights of the Child

Day of General Discussion

Friday, 28 September 2001 – OHCHR (Palais Wilson, Geneva)

Violence Against Children within the Family and in Schools

Submission by **WHO - Regional Office for Europe**

Statement:

'Child Protection and the Development of WHO strategies in the European region: a public health approach'

by Professor Kevin Browne (k.d.browne@bham.ac.uk)

Temporary Advisor to WHO European region

and

Professor of Forensic and Family Psychology, University of Birmingham

After fifty years of separate ideologies, networking between Eastern and Western Europe has led to new challenges in the theoretical understanding of children's needs. For example, most of Eastern Europe is unfamiliar with the writings of John Bowlby's 'Attachment Theory', and have developed theories based on classical conditioning much more extensively than in the West. This theoretical orientation has led to the maintenance and use of Institutions to address the needs of children in adversity, rather than the development of substitute parenting (foster care and adoption).

The importance of attachment theory to highlight the limitations and negative consequences of childhood institutionalisation cannot be underestimated. Neither can the importance of good peri-natal practices, baby friendly hospitals and the promotion of breast-feeding be ignored, in relation to the prevention of infant abandonment.

Observations of infant attachment patterns in the family can also give early warning signs of pathological parent-child interaction (Browne, 1999). In combination with other risk factors poor parenting may go on to become and abusive or neglectful, so early intervention is essential (Browne, and Herbert, 1997).

Instruments have been developed in other parts of the world for the identification of families who are high risk for child maltreatment (Browne et al. 2000). These can be usefully applied in Countries who have child health checks to help doctors and nurses develop a tradition of screening for the possibility of child abuse and neglect by their primary caregivers in families and institutional settings.

Methods for the study of incidence and prevalence of child maltreatment and the identification of risk factors for use in screening families in need is the focus of current projects in Russia and Romania.

The development of an algorithm for child protection screening and intervention is essential and there is a possibility that this could be incorporated into the World Health Organisation's IMCI (Integrated Management of Childhood Illness). It is suggested that a Public Health approach to child protection, which links with good peri-natal/maternal care and the integrated management of children's needs, is the most appropriate model for central and Eastern Europe.

References:

Browne, K.D., Hamilton, C., Heggerty, J. and Morton, N. (2000). Identifying Need and Protecting Children Through Community Nurse Home Visits. **Representing Children** 13 (2): 111- 123.

Browne, K.D. (1999). Mother and baby attachment in early life and child abuse. In World Health Organisation (eds) **Strategies for Child Protection**, Denmark, WHO Regional Office for Europe pp53-58

Browne, K.D. and Herbert, M. (1997). **Preventing Family Violence**. Chichester: Wiley,

Submission:

Violence prevention activities combined with the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child at the WHO Regional Office for Europe

- **Technical support to the Committee on the Rights of the Child**

The WHO Regional Office for Europe has sent comments on health and development of children and adolescents, in particular on child abuse and neglect (CAN), including child sexual abuse to the Committee on the Rights of the Child on the following countries from September 2000 to September 2001: United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland - Isle of Man, Slovakia, Tajikistan, Latvia, Lithuania, Denmark, Turkey, Uzbekistan, Portugal. A compilation of texts of law concerning CAN and child protection, including sexual abuse has been conducted in parallel with the CRC reporting process. This compilation of texts has been used to provide the Committee with information dealing with national legislation.

- **Report on the 1999 WHO Pilot Survey in Tajikistan “Violence Against Women”**

Such survey involved 900 women including 154 girls aged between 14-19 years, in order to assess the scope and extent of gender-based violence in Tajikistan, including sexual abuse. Recommendations are adopted, because this survey also aims to raise awareness among policy-makers of Tajikistan and to promote and encourage international cooperation in order to discuss possible concrete follow-up projects.

- **WHO programme in Romania/Survey on the prevalence of CAN in Romania**

This survey aimed to provide information on CAN in Romania in both qualitative and quantitative angles. The World Bank supported the project. The survey involved 1 500 households in diverse geographic locations in order to obtain a national random sample of families. A questionnaire was sent to schools for students, and parents received a questionnaire. A group of 100 professionals belonging to different specialities analysed the results. The results of the survey were presented in Bucharest in December 2000; policy-makers could use such an estimate of CAN to respond by adequate policies.

- **De-institutionalization of children in Romania**

In 2 pilot institutions, the WHO Regional Office for Europe helped develop a programme of de-institutionalization of children and the re-integration of them into family-based environments, based on the principles of Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969). The WHO Regional Office for Europe aims to evaluate the programme of de-institutionalization with support from the European Union.

- **Samara pilot programme on CAN**

The British cooperation agency DFID supports this programme in the Samara Oblast (Russia). This project aims to the assessment of needs of children and child protection structures in combination with perinatal care and management of illness programmes.

- **Training and Guidelines materials for health providers on CAN**

The WHO European Office for Europe develops training and guidelines materials for health professionals in order to address issues of CAN and domestic violence.

- **Meetings organized on CAN**

Organization of first meeting on the strategies for child protection with technical experts and advisers from the European region in Padua (October 1998).

Organization of a one day, pre-conference, workshop for Central European Republics in Jerusalem (July 1999) and for Russian-speaking Eastern European/Central Asian countries in Istanbul (August 2001).