

Romanian Preliminary Report: Survivors' experience of violence in child protection institutions

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This report is part of the project **“Support to adult survivors of child abuse and neglect”** (SASCA, www.sasca.eu) financed by the European Commission, and led by Artemisia Association, in Italy and running in Italy, Greece, Ireland and Romania. The project is funded through the EC Justice Programme in line with its specific objectives to facilitate the effective access to justice for all victims of violence, including promotion and support, and compensation for the victims”. It will analyze the results of the interviews realised with 45 survivors of child protection institutions in Romania, and the results of 1 focus group realised with the participation of 4 survivors. The interviews were realised with the following objectives:

- to understand and addresses the problem of child abuse in institutional settings, particularly in residential care, from the perspective of adult survivors
- to understand the long terms effects of such events,
- to understand how and if the survivors of these crimes may find protection and compensation in the existing legal framework
- to understand how their experience may enlighten prevention strategy for the protection of children living today in residential care.

Some of the evaluated aspects:

- Collect information on experiences with violence and trauma of children in child protection institutions. In the project we distinguish three distinct forms of institutional violence against children:
 1. physical, sexual, or emotional abuse committed by those individuals directly responsible for the child's care (childcare workers or foster parents);
 2. program abuse which occurs when programs operate below acceptable standards;
 3. system abuse that is not committed by a single individual or a single agency, but it occurs when the childcare system is stretched beyond its limits, and it is also related to inadequate control by the agencies responsible for the care of the children.

Our objectives are

- To collect information on long term consequences of violence and the traumas suffered in child-protection system
- To understand the opinions of survivors on the necessary changes in the residential care system, in order to better safeguard looked-after children
- To gather opinions on possible compensation for suffered abuse for adults out of care.

Recruitment of the survivors

We built up a sampling based on snow-balling mainly through

1. contact with associations and non-formal groups of survivors and local services (Council of Institutionalized Young People and „Gyeri” Club)
2. contact with local social services
3. advertisement on SASCA Facebook page, radio and newspaper’s announcement, distribution of project flyers

Demographic data of interviewed persons

During the seven months of data collection (May-November 2017) 45 alumni of residential care consented to interviewing by the SASCA research team and to audio-registering it. The gender distribution of the sample shows 24 (53.3%) female and 21 (46.7%) male survivors. Only 1 person was born in Italy. As for age distribution, the age of 20 to 30 is best represented: only 2 persons (4.4% of respondents) bellow the age of 20, 26 persons (58%) between 21 and 30, 15 persons (33%) between 31 and 40 and 2 persons (4.4%) between 41 and 50. Regarding their professional status, 23 persons (51.1%) had full time jobs, 5 persons (11.1%) had part-time jobs, 2 persons were students (4.4%) and 4 were on maternity leave (8.8%) in the period of the interview. The rest of the persons didn’t have a job, with 7 of them on unemployed status (15.6%), 4 (8,8% on disability allowance or retired for sickness, and 3 (6,6%) working occasionally. Regarding education our sample was composed of 21 university graduates (46.6%), with 6 of them (13.3%) graduates of a masters or doctoral degree; 11 persons (24.4%) have gained high school diploma, 8 persons (17.8%) graduated professional schools, 3 (6.6%) middle schools and 2 (4.4%) primary schools. Regarding the number of institutions, only 6 persons (13.3%) were growing up in one institution, 13 persons (28,9%) in 2, 12 (26.7%) in 3, 9 persons (20%) in 4, one person (2.2%) was living in 5 and one (2.2%) in 6 different places. Sometimes the changes were positive, like moving from a large institution to foster care, or moving from a family type residential home to a transition home or from abusive foster parents to a “good enough” foster family, there were many negative changes as well: from caring foster parents to residential home, from a family type institution to abusive foster parents. Although all 45 interviewed persons grew up in at least one form of residential care (large institution or family type institution) many of them had experiences in foster care and

transition homes as well. Among the 45 persons 36 (80%) had experience in growing up in large institutions, 28 (62.2%) in family type residential homes, 29 persons (64.4%) in foster care and 14 persons (31.1%) in transition homes for young people. The interviewers insisted to reveal experiences in the residential care, but several respondents revealed traumatic experiences they had to deal with before entering care, or during their stay with foster families. Regarding the age of institutionalisation, 20 persons (44.44%) were institutionalised before they were 2 years old, 15 (33.3%) after their birth, 18 persons (40%) at age period 3 to 7, the rest of 7 persons were older than 8 years old at their institutionalisation. The maximum age of institutionalisation in our sample was 16 years, the mean age was 3.93. They spent on average 17.6 years in the child protection institutions, minimum 7 and maximum 30.

The focus group. Four people with experiences of childhood in residential care agreed to take part in the focus group, and disclose in a collective discussion their experiences in the residential care, the impact of these experiences on their actual lives, the needs for their adult lives, including achieving justice for themselves. As for gender, this was a mixed group, one woman and three men, with their age range between 22 and 28 years of age. Before addressing the questions, we resumed the scope of the focus group, and clarified that we want to register the interview, and we asked CM (26, the only female in the group) if she was comfortable to talk about her experiences in front of the men. Participants invited two of their friends to be in the room along the focus group, and we agreed that they would not interfere at all in the discussions. They were women, so gender became balanced with the two observers. In preparation we gave the participants the information sheet and the consent sheet, and asked to read it carefully. We explained again, that registration will be used to record what they would say, and this would be transcribed, without any mention to their real names. All the four participants to the focus group signed the consent forms. The discussions took place in a friendly and very emotional atmosphere. Two of the participants are bachelor graduates and one has participated in several actions for the rights of young people in residential care.

RESULTS

I. Experiences of sexual abuse

Abuse from the part of professionals

Out of the 45 interviewed persons, three respondents (a woman and two man) accounted personal experiences of sexual abuse, cases in which the abusers were professionals (educator in a family type institution, a few educators in a large institution, a journalist who was bringing aids and a doctor). The abusers were men in all of these situations. In the first case (E) the abuse had lasted for one year, when the 17 years old girl disclosed the abuse to the school

psychologist. In the case of A. the first perpetrator (the journalist) had access to him many times, and probably to other children as well. When he met the second perpetrator he already was aware of the strategies and stopped the abuse, but he knew about other boys who might have become victims. I. had been abused by a few educators from the large institution in which he grew up, who gave money and other advantages to the boys whom they abused. I. thinks that the abuse is continuing in that institution even in these days.

'But I experienced sexual abuse too, because there were quite hard cases there too. It started when I was in the 11th grade, at the beginning... It lasted for one year. 'Cause I couldn't bear it anymore, I broke down.' (E, female, 29)

'And in fact he liked not only my speech, but maybe me too, when I was little. And of course he asked permission to take me from O. [name of the city], to various places, but I was always sleeping next to him, and I woke up many times that he was caressing me, or I fell asleep or woke up without pyjama-trousers, and all these events left harsh, deep marks on my life, I didn't dare to tell about it.' (A., male, 36)

'And I refused to give in, I didn't leave, so in fact this doctor wanted me to go abroad, that's what he wanted, because I told about my dreams, to become a nurse or doctor or psychologist. I was still in the 10th grade, and the doctor told me he supported this, he thought it was a good idea, I could study in Hungary too, I could start again the 9th grade in Hungary, and then to go to the medical university. Of course that I... I was very enthusiastic, but when I started to notice these, because I was there in Hungary, I was sleeping at his place, and then I said no. Later there were two more boys he tried to do the same with.' (A., male, 36)

'Yes, also sexual abuses occurred, a lot of them. I suffered abuse for uncountable times. These sexual abuses stopped when I turned around 15. From the part of other older youngsters and educators and... The thing is that it didn't occur just once.' (I, male, 29)

'These things happened very often, committed by educators too, employees who were working there. In order to get a sexual type of service, they woke up one of us, I was waken up too, first you have to clean the bathroom, then you were called in the room where he stayed, in the educator's room or the service room, it was called the service room. And there you had to do things like...' (I, male, 29)

'Do him oral stuff, masturbate him and let him... well, let him fuck you. You couldn't resist, you couldn't say anything, in fact he tried to buy me, he eventually gave me money, he gave me... (So there was one specific person who requested this from you?) Not only one, no. There were also among the younger and the older too, youngsters,

who didn't have... at a certain point there were some who did this for cigarettes, other kids for I don't know... for money. And believe me, it's still going on now.' (I, male, 29).

Another youngster accounts a situation which was strange for him, an unnecessary activity with sexual implications: *'I remember one more thing, once when I was taking a bath, an educator came in to measure my penis with a ruler. I don't know why, he just simply measured it and left. I don't remember anything sexual about it, but I didn't understand why he was doing it.'* (A, male, 23)

Several interviewees accounted situations when someone else from their institution was the victim of abusive acts, and the abusers were either men or women.

'Or alike, the girls, those in professional school were sexually assaulted by male educators. My cousin too told me the same, that they wanted to do this to her too, and to her classmates as well, because they were there too, and it also happened that they raped girls.' (M., female, 31)

'No, no, it occurred that the boys from the care home had affairs with female educators.' (E, female, 30)

'She told me they were having an affair. (...) He didn't abuse her, it's just they established something together, well I don't know whether the girl really wanted this or not.' (R, female, 36)

'And I'm telling you not as voyeurs, because we weren't voyeurs, but one could not avoid noticing that the woman [educator] wasn't wearing pants. (...) She comes in to the institution hoping to have an encounter with one of the older boys. 'Cause we had such things too.' (F, male, 28)

'There was an educator who abused a child, who was well developed, in the evening, around 3. And unfortunately this woman is still working in the system, who abused my colleague, who's 30 years old now.' (I, male, 32)

Sexual abuse from the part of older children

Sexual abuse from the part of older children, especially boys was a well known phenomenon by many of the interviewed persons coming from various mammoth institutions. Although the interviewees related events in which the victims were girls and boys alike, many of them told us that sexual violence against smaller boys was a routine in the institution where they grew up. In most of the institutions there were rules at place regarding the access of older boys to younger girls, in turn the smaller boys were at the sight of the older ones most of the time, and thus

they were extremely vulnerable regarding victimization. Among the most frequently mentioned forms of abuse they related about were oral penetration, forcing the small boy to fellate. But the touching of the organs of the small boy, the forcing of the small child to touch and manually manipulate the older boy's penis and the forcing of sexual interactions between two small children (two boys or a boy and a girl) were also accounted.

'Abuse, yes. Well, I think that in the children's home we, boys were more who had been abused than girls.' (A, male, 36)

'It was well known that the older were sexually abusing smaller children. Watch his penis, and if not, you got beaten, or you were surrounded by several boys, they took out your penis and kept pawing it, things like that... It also happened that they took out their penis, now touch it, hold it, if not, they beat you. You had to do even if you didn't want to.' (G, male, 27)

'I think the hardest thing was when the older boys made the smaller ones suck their penis. So in my opinion it was even worse, so I don't feel I would have been subjected to some sort of violence or how to put it, but that was among boys, sexual violence, I remember. And they told us about all this when we were already at a family.' (P, female, 30)

'Me too, I went through this: when I went to a camp, an older boy in institutional care raped me, forced me to have sexual intercourse with him.' (V., male, 33)

'That wasn't the problem: they called me back and one of the older boys told me to give her a massage. I gave her a massage, she tells me: 'Take off your underpants.' I took it off. Give her a massage from the head to the feet. I massaged her between the toes, on the head, the nose, the forehead, occipital, parietal, the muscles, then started the naked massage from head to feet. After that she grabbed my head to give her oral sex, each night. Each night, Ms. A. I was sick, I couldn't ask for help from the educators or directors, because they beat us.' (V., male, 33)

'I was tied to the bed by both legs with a rope. I was under the bed so that I couldn't move. I was tied by the genitals, very close to the genitals and under the tummy and by the chest, close to the heart and by the neck. From then on two boys started to abuse me sexually. They ripped off the ribbon from my lips, inflated my eyes, kicked me and started to abuse me orally. That's how the whole story begun: orally. They were so many. So many people abused me. Later on, one night the older boys in the institution told me that if I was to denounce them to the director: 'It won't be the director who would sleep with you, but me.'' (V, male, 37)

'I had to suck the sex organ of an older boy to be able to stop something. It wasn't a most pleasant thing to do. (...) I was 8 or 9.' (BA, male, 23)

'It even happened that the older were in there, and well, the educators were out to have a coffee, and those who looked after us chose two boys or a boy and a girl to put together their genitals, and they were laughing at this.' (G, male, 27)

We registered accounts about various forms of sexual abuse against girls as well, starting from the inappropriate touching of the genitals of the smaller children and forcing them to touch the sex organs of older boys to rape, exposing smaller children to rape, exposing them to sexual scenes, forcing sexual interactions among small children.

'In my class too, it happened to a girl, one night we've been running up and down the staircase, we've been playing before going to bed, we've been playing hide-and-seek, when a big boy came and grabbed that girl from our class and assaulted her physically, so what did we do. The entire group, we all hid under the bed, watching from there what this boy was doing to that little girl, my classmate, then we all united and told the educator about what this big boy had done to her. (...) He was grasping her body, her genitals, and told her look what I got, hold it. The girl had to hold it, and I remember that some of my male classmates were laughing at this.' (E, female, 30)

'I remember also that, oh it was very bad, the older boys abused older girls, and once I... I was sent to sleep to a place where an older girl was laid down, I didn't understand why I had to sleep next to her anyway, because I was small. And this SZ came in, you see, he was beating this girl, because she didn't let him to... well, didn't want to sleep with him, to say it. So he kept being violent, I remember him getting over her, and I was so scared. I covered my head, I kept praying, Jesus, my Lord, please watch over me, but I couldn't sleep. I didn't get any harm, but that fear you experience, when the other is being abused next to you. It was hard.' (M, female, 31)

II. Verbal abuse

All participants to the focus group mentioned that the way the personnel talked with them knocked down their self esteem, crushed their personality. *"Psychological abuse is the worst of all"*, explained A., (male, 23) who was hosted in a private home, where, as he says, the conditions of housing were good, they lived in comfortable rooms, did not suffer from lack of food, or other material deprivation. All other four participants commented on verbal abuse, as they remembered that they were called "handicapped". *"They talked to us as we were dull, and handicapped. This word handicapped finished me, killed me. I felt it constantly bumping in my head"*(A., male, 23). As adults, it made them very angry that they were not allowed to stand up for themselves, and any such attempt was

defeated. They felt that the specialists who were supposed to help them contributed to make them lose control and feel powerless. According to C. (female, 28), the psychologist, or probably the psychiatrist ordered medication for rebellious behaviour, which then resulted in dumbness, loss of energy and capability to learn. Verbal abuse is seen by RC as a tool for controlling the young people, and it is paired with different forms of punishments, in case they did not subordinate. *“they told us all the time that we are handicapped and are not able to do anything. I tried to tell them (to argue with them). I was at the psychologist, who was paid by them. If they give you medication, you are not willing any more to do anything, you don’t learn, you become dumb, start to hallucinate”*.

III. Experiences of exploitation

Exploitation from the part of educators/staff members

In large institutions, but also in family type homes the most widespread forms of exploitation were the following: In many institutions the staff delegated many of their responsibilities to older children, and by not supervising the activities, it set the law of the jungle in the institution. In certain institutions there was a supervisor for each room, an older child, who was responsible for smaller children, and who had full right to discipline and exploit no matter how younger children.

We were all put in the same room, all the little girls. And we had a room supervisor, room chief, an older girl. (P., female, 30)

In certain institutions, some of the common works were supervised by older children, while the staff didn’t participate in the process, or consented to the cruelty the children were treated with who didn’t work as expected.

A Gypsy big boy, he came in, and you know, the nurses delegated the task to the older ones, so he came in and said, make your beds. Imagine that a child of kindergarten age is supposed to make the bed. You do it, if the sheet wasn’t even, I had that bad luck, I remember it all, he grabbed you by the ear or hair, gave you a big slap, put you – I remember this – in front of the wardrobe, lined up, imagine this, as a kindergartener, you had to lean against the wardrobe with this finger. You know, if you had to step behind, they kicked your leg to go further back. And you had to lean against the wall. You were trembling, you couldn’t bear, ‘Oh, you can’t stand it?’, gave you one more slap, you see, so do the same again, and the nurses didn’t say a word. (M., female, 31)

There were institutions where the unpleasant works (for example washing the toddlers and changing their diaper) were the task of children, even if they were too small to be able to perform these tasks:

In general there were a lot of children who wetted or made a mess in the bed during the night, and when we grew older, we, the older children had to change them, wash them, replace the linen, so that’s how usually the morning begun. (R, female,30)

The staff’s own responsibilities were delegated to children against a reward or by punishing them (usually by

beating them) if they didn't meet the request, while not taking account of the children's needs:

*In the night, they introduced these in the night, they came to your room or called you to give you a job in the night, go **clean the bathroom**, go... they didn't do anything, don't imagine they would have do the cleaning or anything else. We were doing everything. (I, male, 29)*

Requesting personal services to children which made them feel uncomfortable: starting from massage, manicure, washing the car, carrying during the night the staff's own clothes washed in the centre to sexual services:

They treated us rascally, made us do things, massage or painting the nails of the educator. To give a massage to the educator. To deliver various services. Massage, cleaning the car with which they came to work or whatever they wanted. Smoothing the nails... to women, who wanted this. You think it isn't happening now? It is. (I, male, 29)

Yes. With one of the educators. It happened that we went home from school and we were tired, and me and my roommate, we had to walk with her own clothes at half past eleven in the night, because she had her clothes washed in the children's home, and we had to take them home for her. We were very much afraid, because she lived in the other part of the town, where it was quite dangerous. And we had to do this every second night, while she invited her friends to our house and drank there. (A., female, 26)

Seizing of children's goods: Christmas presents, clothes, toys, hygienic products, sweets, especially those received from abroad as aids:

When we were getting packages from foreign people or Neo-protestants who were bringing bananas and chocolates, they would take it away and put it in our wardrobe saying that we should keep some for the next day too, but we didn't find those things anymore, we didn't see them ever: chocolate, clothes the Danish people had given us, we didn't have them anymore. I don't know what they did with the stuff. (C., male, 25)

We were receiving washing powder, shampoos like Dove, Palmolive. He (the director) would seize them and give us shampoos made of nettle, which was worse. Sportswear, socks, shoes, blankets, duvets, he would take all these to his storeroom. He would give us pillow, duvet and linen once in a year. (C.,female, 22)

Many of the respondents accounted that the educators as well as the cooks took home part of the food of children, despite the fact the children were given too small portions. In some of the institutions the dessert of children was systematically taken away:

The food was very little. It was far from being enough, and we couldn't get filled with what they've been giving. We kept saying we wanted more, but if they wanted, they gave us, if not, then not. It also happened that when the food was poorer, they said they have more, and when it was better, they said it was over.

'Cause they also used to steal there, in the centre. And they were stealing. Also people working in the kitchen. (V, male, 37)

Oh, [the dessert] was taken from us each day. Each day they would take away what was better. The teachers. They would pass next to our table, and put things in their bags. 'If someone asked, you had eaten your dessert.' (C., female, 35)

At a certain point I had a period when I hated children, because there was an educator, who took something sweet from the portion of a child, and gave it to her own child. I was very upset in that moment, I didn't know how to express myself, but I kept thinking: 'Why is she taking it away from my mate who can't afford to buy it, and give it to her child, who can afford to buy?' And I said: 'These children are too much indulged, I don't like their children!' (A., female, 36)

Seizing the money of the children:

We've been working for people, with firewood, collecting plum, grapes... The educators were keeping our money, and we didn't know how much money we entrusted them to keep safe. The educators could be wrong. At a certain point I gave 15 millions to somebody, I'd been working hard, only I know how much hard, and she gave me back 13 millions. Well, try and tell her something. She could tell I was a liar or an asshole, 'cause she's been keeping my money and I thought she would be a thief.

In foster care the most common forms of exploitation were the involving of children in hard works, which solicited their free time entirely, using the money received for caring in own purposes, the seizing of the children's money.

At first it was very odd, because just as I got there, at seven in the morning the next day they woke me up to go to the field, so work from the beginning, I had to work. They said it was good to get used to how rural life was, because I had grown up and lived in a town. Well, it was very hard and terrible for me, because we were also travelling a lot, I was tired too, and we got to the foster parents at 9 in the evening, and at 7 in the morning they already called me to go to work. It was a terrible feeling for me... I never had some time for myself, some free time to go playing, to feel how it was to be a child, because I had to go to the field all the time. I was biking 20 km to get to the field after school. I never had a free day, I said at least let Sunday be a day when I could feel I was free for a while. (A., female, 26)

I was living in a huge house, a villa with three stories, so two and the ground floor, and my sister and I had to clean the entire house. (A., female, 24)

'Yes, I was sent to work, they were building two houses in the courtyard where I was living, and they put me to carry buckets full of sand, cement, finally, they put me work at the construction of a house. I was working in construction.' (L. male, 23)

'When we left from her, she didn't give me all my clothes, later on I couldn't get them back all, she had put them in sacks and placed in the attic, the better ones.' (A, female, 19)

'The money I got at school or the money I got at the corner of the street when a dead person was passed by had to be given to them, irrelevant of my opinion.' (L, male, 23)

Exploitation from the part of older children

Older children were taking away the goods from smaller children both in large institutions and in residential children's home, and were imposing on the smaller children to deliver them all kinds of services. The room supervisor, where there were such children assigned, had full powers over small children day and night: made them wash clothes, make the beds, clean, bring water, make sandwiches at any moment of the day, took away their food received from home, their dinner, toys, everything the little one had was seized by the room supervisor if the supervisor wanted to have it.

'At Christmas, yes [we had our toys], but we were examining them for a while, and there were the group supervisors in the bedroom, they laid hold of them, and that was it about our toys.' (E, female, 30)

One or two were already developed, were having their period, and all of us got their pads, but she took them away from us, and we had to use cotton wool. She didn't care if we were having our period or got wetted because of the cotton wool. (I., female, 33)

When my parents came to see me and brought me something, usually I tried to eat everything my mother brought me, but I didn't always manage to. So she really always brought me home made chocolate, hotchpotch, all sorts of tasty stuff, but no way I could eat them all at once, and when the night came, I had to deliver it to the room supervisor. (R., female, 30)

'It happened then when at night we had to wash the trousers of the group supervisors, those big heavy jeans.' (E, female, 30)

'It also occurred that during the night we had to collect the garbage or had to bring water, make them sandwiches. Well, they were the kings in the home.' (I, female,, 33)

'The older children took away all the money of the smaller ones, or the latter had to hand over part of their pocket-money. The small kids were afraid to protest and didn't tell it to the educators. The rule was that the little ones had to submit themselves entirely to the big ones. If you managed to have a good relationship with a few older children, they protected you. Otherwise, the small kids were at the mercy of the old ones.'

'Or when we were getting scholarship: since we were given a scholarship too until we turned 18, three girls got you at the corner, beat you and took away your scholarship, they sent you to ward.'

The presents, the food received from home, the sweets and toys were regularly seized by the older children. They also took away the food and especially the dessert. They requested all sorts of services from the smaller children: starting from collecting fruits from the orchard of the institution in the night, the writing of the homework, washing, cleaning, up to stealing and collecting butts. The methods used to force them were usually mockery and beating.

'Guests from France brought us many presents, they brought us of everything. But we couldn't enjoy these, because when we were little, in the institution for juveniles and youngsters, we had grown-ups who took these away, they beat us, sent us to steal, to collect butts in the village, they made us fight against each other.' (V, male, 37)

'We had a very big orchard in the unit's courtyard, but behind the two buildings. They sent me to pick up apples without any bruise on them. Now think about it, can you find at four in the morning apples without bruise. Finally I brought them apples. But that wasn't the problem: they called me back and one of the big boys told me to give her a massage.' (V, male, 37)

'If they didn't like the apples or nuts or plums you brought them from the orchard, or didn't bring as much as they would have liked, besides the fact that they heavily mocked you, they also beat you. They trashed you hard, and kicked your head against the door, impeded you, kicked you with their fist, pulled your hair and beat you really hard.' (V., male, 33)

'They made us do their homework.' (C, female, 31)

'For getting so much beating we already knew we had to give the dessert to T or A. We were so traumatized that we

knew that if we went out, we couldn't pass through them, and there were some even who picked them from the dining room.' (A., male, 32)

'We had to submit and do whatever they said, to wash their clothes, to clean their shoes, to make their bed, if they sent us somewhere, we had to go.' (L., female, 41)

'We were given each month hygienic products: a brush, a toothpaste, soap, a deodorant, cotton wool, when you were having your period, 'cause there weren't pads in that time, a roll of toilet paper. I didn't like it, because that day you got it, put it in your wardrobe, in the evening when you got home your wardrobe was broken, all the stuff was taken and nobody knew, nobody saw.'

IV. Experiences of physical violence

Physical violent acts

Children were beaten in different circumstances, both by professionals and other children, both in public and in private homes, both in large institutions and family type homes. Some children experienced very brutal forms of physical violence, even witnessing the murder of other children

'I could see them taking him and pulling him from the leg, they put him on the bed and put those very thick blankets over him, those brought by the English, and five persons put him on the ground, an angel of 4 years. When we were praying one night, that night they killed him. (Older boys a little child)' (A., male, 32)

'Yes, I had one more friend I had cooperated a lot with. That was in 2000, 2001. He was burnt alive, they actually set on fire his bed, because the mattresses are made of foam and the child didn't feel. Only we felt when we saw the smoke coming out from that room and they took off the grids, but by the time they took off the grids the boy turned to ashes. (Who burnt him alive?) His roommates.' (A., male, 32)

'In fact I had two very good friends I couldn't save. I recall it well, in bedroom number 8, one of my friends died by being beaten by his colleagues. There was a guy, H, who made his colleagues, older boys, beat him, and in 5 seconds he passed. The other one, the same thing, also because of the beating, I was terrified, not only me, all the 17 from there, and we were shaking and staring at him, we knew he was dead, for his face was yellow. I tried to utter that he was deceased, but he scolded: 'Did you say something? You, in the corner?' I didn't say anything then, 'cause I knew if I was to say something, I could be the next.' (A., male, 32)

Usually educators used different forms of physical violence in order to discipline children, some of them mild, others severe forms, one of the most severe forms being locking children in the isolation rooms.

Locking up the misbehaving children in closed places is one of the punishments that was reported as personal experiences. Two of the four focus group participants reported being locked in for variable number of days, and even weeks in the "white isolator", together with other tens of naughty children. This was a small room, very crowded, full of tiered raised beds, with very little space for moving for the children, with no windows, and locked door. They had a TV which was playing all the time on the same channel. Food was portioned, and personnel was sometimes checking on the children, when they heard too much noise, but in rest the children were entertaining themselves fighting among each other. "We were injected. The isolator was like a boxing-ring" (CR, female, 28), a metaphor meaning that that strongest remains on his feet, the rest are knocked out, and that they had to stand up for themselves if they wanted to survive.

According to the focus group participants, among the experiences that marked them the most, for all four participants, both male and female, were the different forms of beatings.

"My colleagues were beaten so badly, worse than animals. And they hit in the head... They were beaten with the hose. The nephew of the director was the person appointed to beat the children".

Hitting and beating were usually used as discipline methods but sometimes as entertainment as well. The contexts in which hitting and beating were used could be related to any aspects of the children's lives: getting up, being late to the breakfast, learning, doing homework, going to the bed, not listening the adults, etc.

At breakfast, precisely at 8, if you weren't punctual, they came and pulled your earlobe, they would call it the pulling of the ear-hair. This was the system like, you had to be punctual. (A., female, 26)

I remember that the male educator, when we didn't know the maths homework, called us out to write it on the blackboard, but he used to say: write it, get lost, away with you, go there, bring it here, so he addressed us so formally, yet in a condescending, dictating, suppressing style. Now come to the blackboard! So I stand up instantly, I go. Write the homework on the blackboard! So I start writing. Work it! I couldn't. I couldn't, because I didn't know maths. He would step behind you, and you see, he would push your head against the blackboard. It even happened that he kicked a girl so hard, a classmate of mine because of the maths that we thought she would die, I swear she couldn't breathe, and he kept kicking her. And we didn't dare to tell him to stop. 'Cause if we did, he would kick us as well. Oh, one could easily just die in front of our eyes, and we do nothing, because we don't dare. It was very rough. (M., female, 31)

I remember that I had another teacher, she lives just opposite to the care home. Well she with the alphabet, so don't worry, I know it by heart. Oh, she beat me so hard because we couldn't learn the alphabet. (M., female, 31)

Our nanny was deplorable, I really dreaded her when it was her turn, because each night I had to give a massage to

her feet for hours, and I kept falling asleep, so I got a slap which woke me up and I kept giving the massage.

The evening routines were an other occasion when many children were hurt, slapped and beaten, Bathing in the large institutions was usually not a good experience when they were washed not very gentle and many children were disciplined with soap in their eyes. Children were often beaten for not sleeping or beaten before going to bed.

Going to bed was like this: first going to the toilet, and before going to bed, we stood in line again, and I remember one more educator, who had this habit that she had a plank, I think, or it seems to me it was a plank from a bed, so we lined up, and she two pandies to all of us, so we went to bed with that so that we would fall asleep while crying. This was the everyday practice. After a while, whoever became a favourite child, so I remember holding out my arms, and she didn't hit my hand, so those who became favourites or she liked, those didn't get pandies, but at the beginning everybody got the same. (R., female, 30)

And it also happened that – out of fun – whoever wasn't sleeping, they called them out to the corridor, now you squat, walk like a dwarf, I don't know how meters long, and the night guard came in and watched. And if you didn't do it properly, they would kick you up, on the ass, or beat you right there. And if you cried... 'Are you crying, mister?' if you cried, they hit you harder, and on and on... It was very tough. (M., female, 31)

Being sick, having different kind of problems: vomiting, enuresis, speech problems were all reasons for physically abusive behaviour from the behalf of staff.

The night switch came, and if someone wetted the bed, the night guard didn't mind we were all sleeping, switched on the light, took out of bed the kid and beat him hard for wetting the bed. (I., female, 33)

Or there was a woman, I couldn't pronounce her name, it had an 'r' in it, and I said I don't know what instead. So she didn't beat, just kept frightening me with a stick, 'Tell it again!', she hit the table, and repeat it again, and I fucked it up. Now again! (M., female, 31)

I was vomiting and she beat me hard for vomiting (I., female, 33)

Beating were performed by hand or with different tools: hose, sticks, stripes, plank, keys, etc.

I remember it even now, he had a plastic stick, with stripes, and with that. It was so painful, we got such hard blows on our bottoms and backs you wouldn't believe. Or we would get taws, those with a rod. (I., FEMALE, 33)

There was a man everybody feared, everybody dread him. It was a male educator, a short, elderly, bald-headed man... He had a ruler or a stick, I don't know anymore, however... the normal way to be for him was to beat somebody all the time

Other forms of physical abuse were: kneel on pebbles, kneel in the snow, didn't get to eat, forcing the spoon into the mouth of children, cutting the hair, washing the kid's eyes with a sponge, forcing the child to write with her bare hand,

I told you they cut down the girls' hair, and everybody was equal, all the boys and girls. One couldn't tell if you were a boy or a girl, because of the short hair. (A., female, 26)

There were children they didn't like, or there were naughty children, they sometimes brushed those kids' eyes with a soapy sponge. (R., female, 30)

Yes. They gave us some syrup, which we didn't like, because it was bitter, but they forced us to drink it. They grabbed us and forced the spoon into our mouths. (I., female, 33)

It also happened that we had to kneel on pebbles, because we didn't listen to the educators, to the nannies or teachers, so we got beaten hard by the nanny. It even happened that because of one kid we all got beaten. (I., female, 33)

The educators were very stern, and very hard with the kids, they hurt us too very frequently, for they kept saying that 'You're nuts, you know nothing', they despised children. (...) They gave a slap, or we got taws frequently with a wooden ruler, or we were kneeling out in the snow, in shorts, in wintertime. Because of learning. If someone didn't know or made a mistake, all of us suffered because of that kid. One for all. And this was during the quiet hour with the educators. (A., female, 26)

Ouch, such a hard thrash, I always lost my pencil. I don't know why the hell, but I lost it, and I had to write with my bare hand all the after-noon. And she (a teacher) was watching if I was done, and I still wasn't done. What could there be written? Oh yes, we experienced such things.

Not everybody was beaten equally, some survivors remember that Roma children with brown skin were beaten more often. Relationships among children and children or relatives of educators were not allowed:

"I tell you that they didn't hurt those with white skin, I was one of these, but whoever had brown skin, got trashed." (I., female, 33)

"Or I recall that this B had a, I'm not quite sure, it wasn't his daughter, but his sibling's daughter or what, she was of the same age as we, and one boy... well some sort of childish love, we were small, we were learning the alphabet, so this boy liked that girl, and he kissed her lips. Wow, how hard he beat him. He beat him so hard, we couldn't understand at that age why. Later he told us that the boy kissed her on her lips. Anyway, to beat him so hard just for that?" (I., female, 33)

In family type homes basically in many homes the same behaviours continued because the staff didn't change, the same persons were continued to work with smaller groups of children.

“We had three educators, and the third was on duty during the night, who came at 11, they beat the small children a lot, because they didn’t want to sleep. It also happened that the night switch watched TV in the same room with the kids. There was the living room with the TV, but we were too many, and they had to place 2 children there too. At 11 the children were still awake, even if they went to bed at 10, but at 11 they weren’t sleeping, wanted to watch TV. They very often talked badly to the children, like: ‘You little snotty, go to bed, who do you think you are to jaw.’ He made 2 children hit each other. Or he denied us the food if we didn’t arrive home in time. (E, female, 29) Once he (educator) convinced my little brother to hit the other child, and he got money for that. He rewarded him for beating the other kid.” (E, female, 29)

“C was also beating, with a ruler, that wooden or plastic ruler, which causes such a sharp pain, with that one”. (P., female, 30)

He made us smell the toilet as a punishment, or didn’t give us to eat. He made quite odd things. (E, female, 29)

The director at that time, he was that sort of person we didn’t dare to talk to. (...) He was severe and also abusive, if you didn’t behave properly, he beat you. We were frightened when he came to visit us. (...) Later he was relieved because of the abuses. (E, female, 29)

Yes, when I smoked my first cigarette, the educator broke my head. That D broke my head in those times with a key, and he grabbed my hair and, how to say it, he kept pulling me in or out holding my hair. Oh, I lost a lot of my hair those times. I was seventeen when I lighted my first cigarette, and I did it in my room. Well, I was forbidden to leave my room for three months, because I smoked in the room. They didn’t leave me out for three months. (P., female, 30)

Let me give you an example: one day, when I was having lunch with the small group (since I was older, I was helping the children from time to time as I could), one of the children, aged two and a half, since he didn’t manage to eat the macaroni with the big spoon he was given, and he heard the warning of the educators that we had to hurry with the eating, put the spoon aside and started to eat with his hands. He was putting two handfuls of macaroni in his little mouth, for so hungry he was. One of the teachers saw this, went to him and grabbed him by the hand, put him in a corner and shouted that that’s not the way how one should eat, and he’s punished, he can’t eat anything until dinner. As I saw all this, I called the teacher’s attention to the fact that her behaviour wasn’t correct, that it was too much even for an adult not to eat anything from morning until evening, so for a child it’s something inconceivable. She gave me an angry look, let Andrei continue eating and asked me to leave the hall, since she wouldn’t need my help anymore.

The next day the director informed me that my help at the small group isn’t needed anymore (A, female, 27)

In **foster care** the main form of physically abusive behaviours which were told to us were: hitting, keeping the

children out of the house, switching off the heating, gripping the neck staying on knees an entire night,

If we left school at two and didn't arrive home let's say at two and a quarter, she would keep us in front of the house for two hours, no matter if it was winter or summer, if we moved away, she shouted to us to stay there, in wintertime she was leaving the door of the balcony open to let the room become cold, she was switching off the heating. (A., female, 24)

If I did something she disliked, she would put me to kneel an entire night in the hall, so there are things which can't be surpassed, once she gripped my neck because she was nervous, I think that was the last nastier thing she did, then my sister went to the centre and told them it was over, we had to stop. You have to move us from here, because it's not good, 'cause she kept on saying that when they were visiting us, we needed to say we were fine, because if we didn't, she was very harsh. Nobody called her to account, because everybody thought it was ok. There were visits from the social work once in a month or once in a while. She knew when it was going to happen, and tell them it was fine, blabla, but it wasn't. Perhaps we were quite little, and we were afraid of her, we kept on saying everything was just fine, we were very happy, (...) but it was terrible, but we weren't happy at all. It was not a good period for us. (A., female, 24)

In the large institutions sometimes the most terrifying experiences were related to **older children** who either were not supervise by educators or sometimes even encouraged to discipline and abuse smaller children. Sometimes a child from outside the institution was put responsible to beat and discipline the children. Children disciplined smaller children but they also beat them many times for fun.

If an educator didn't want to fight, for not being him or her who hit you, they would put the elder ones, so the elder kids would beat the little ones, and that was hard. (M., female, 31)

Or the weeding... Harvest, 'cause we had a large courtyard, and we had these big... we had a lot of vegetables growing etc. If you didn't pick them fast enough, was lagging behind, they hammered you in the ground, you see? They beat you hard. The leaves had to be raked, for in Şumuleu Ciuc the care institution has a big orchard, a large kitchen garden, a football ground, all these green areas. We had to do it with our hands, I remember we were lined up, and you had to collect the leaves with your bare hand. If we left one there, a leave or perhaps a piece of wood, or if you dropped behind, you were finished. They beat you hard, and the educator didn't say a word, although he should have supervised all this, but he rather went to the teachers' room to have a coffee. (M., female, 31)

'They told me: get on the chair and bend down your head, don't look at them. And you wetted your pants because of the fear, because you knew it would be your turn too to get tortured thoroughly: they made you run from one place to the other, and they would put their leg in front of you to make you fall, you weren't allowed to jump to avoid falling, because they beat you so hard, as you can't imagine.' (V., male, 33)

'In the evening, when we went to bed, they blew over your eyes, and if we blinked, that was it, with the slippers on the head. Then, with the blanket, like this one we have here, let me show you, they lifted us up to the ceiling and pulled the blanket afterwards to let us fall. That's what they did to us. Very, very tough. Very. Even the educators were afraid of the boys not to get beaten.' (R., female, 34)

'But there were moments when older girls enjoyed watching us, children fighting: they put us in a circle and chose: you, kiddy, with that one, now fight. And if you said you didn't want to fight, you got beaten by all the kids. And better to be beaten by all, so you preferred to get a trash from one. That was the moment of survival. But most of the time it was me who got beaten.' (A., female, 36)

'No, because we got a lot of beatings, and we were taken away the dessert. We got already used to, so we were putting the dessert in our pockets, and I remember there was a door where 4 boys older than we waited, and they would stop you at the exit, if you gave them the biscuits, ok, if not, they took you behind, and there was their world. But we didn't get beaten only by them, but also by the staff there.' (A., male, 32)

Disclosure of abuse

The disclosure of violence didn't happen because children were threatened, ashamed or didn't know whom to disclose, or if it happened children rarely were listened or their situation became even worse after they filed a complaint.

One of the focus-group participants: RC (male, 26) related that himself and others tried to complain about beatings, but the directors, police or representatives of DGASPC did not listen to them, did not react to what they disclosed, which endangered even more the children who dared to file a complaint. According to RC those who have the mission of monitoring and eliminate violent behaviour are not competent to detect abuse. Monitoring visits are arranged, and children are not asked, or if they speak up anyway, they are not listened to: *"they do not beat you so that it can be seen. And if you complain, they do not believe you. There is a lot of incompetence from the part of the professionals, but also the DGASPC"*. L. describes his opinion in the same sense: *"They forced me, they shouted, they beat me. This affected me. I do not like to fight. When I see that there is someone smaller, who is beaten, I try to*

help. I think there should be some measures taken against those who abuse children. They who work in centers need specialization, if they want tot o work with children. If I would do an inspection, I would ask educators, personnel, but also the children.” (L.).

In sexual abuse situations the most important reasons for children not requesting help were: loyalty towards the perpetrator, fear of the perpetrator, fear of the consequences and shame. In some situations, although the situation was known in the institution, there wasn't any intervention out of wrongly understood confidentiality. It was needed a report from a specialist outside the institution for something to happen.

In those cases, when sexual abuse didn't imply physical violence, the affected children were older, and the abuse occurred within heterosexual relationships, it was more difficult to interpret the incidence as sexual abuse even by the children, which can be detected in the wording of the interviewees as well: *they were in a relationship, I don't know if she wanted it or not.*

‘And it didn't result in any trouble, it didn't become known. If it came out – but it happened very rarely, one had to be very brave for that –, then the educator was fired for real, in that case, of course. But the educator could get away only with that, with being fired.’ (M., female, 31)

‘I kept on bearing until I got in the 12th grade, then I told the school psychologist, and they took measures. They made my write it down and submitted my letter.’ (E., female, 29)

‘I didn't dare to tell about it, because he threatened me. So they didn't know in the institution, but I could do nothing. I feared the consequences and what the institution would say. I also wanted to go to university...There was an educator whom I told everything, but I asked them not to do anything, so they couldn't take measures, but I always talked about it with that educator and cried on their shoulders.’ (E., female, 29)

There were educators who paid attention not to leave any trace, if they beat us, and this was like that, he knew that he shouldn't leave any trace if he beat us. (R., female, 30)

Compensations

Regarding the modalities to provide compensation for traumatic experiences suffered in residential institutions, the interviews shows three categories of answers. Some of the interviewees think that they don't need compensation, and those who admit the necessity of compensations, either refer to certain legal rights to satisfy

mental and material needs of people who were in institutional care when they were children, either underline the importance of being offered moral compensation for the abuses they had suffered.

The respondents who sustain that they don't need compensations argue that they already succeeded in processing past traumas, respectively can't imagine any compensation which could neutralize the negative experiences they had suffered:

'I don't think it exists now, I don't even think about it, in the sense that I left it behind, in the past, I'm quite relaxed, I wouldn't say I'm careless, but I don't take these in serious, so they passed and it's over, that's it.' (A., female, 24)

'Me personally I don't ask for any compensation for myself, because I made the best thing out of the worst.' (M., male, 28)

'In my opinion it can't be repaired anymore. Nobody and nothing [could be a compensation for the young people who are already grown up, and had suffered so many things in care homes].' (R., female, 36)

'Well, who grew up in this system or grew up like this, whom could they ask for compensation, who can account for that? I think it would be useless.' (S., male, 30)

Some of the respondents think that the moral satisfaction given by the fact that the personal development level they managed to reach despite the unfavorable conditions surpasses the educational and moral level of the educators from the part of whom they had suffered contempt is the most important compensation for them:

'Well, yes, once I understood why all those things had happened, I don't see any point in reporting them. For example it means a satisfaction for me that I could tell to this educator when I left that she had done all that because she was jealous, because it was annoying for her that she had tried to go to university and didn't manage, and it bothered her that me, who was a nobody, I succeeded, and I could do it. It was a satisfaction for me that I could tell her this. I don't feel I should do more than that. I'm certain it was enough for her.' (R., female, 30)

'Oh, but he got it back on his turn, he, who, I remember... So when I saw how much he broke down, I could see on his face, and how he came to ask for pardon and so humbly, and I don't know... as if I was a gentleman in his eyes, that's how he talked to me, and as if... he almost addressed me with mister, so much... I don't know.' (A., male, 36)

Providing psychological counseling for those who didn't manage to surpass the childhood traumas is a form of compensation frequently mentioned by the respondents:

'Well, for example children should have been taken to psychologist, to recover mentally, to relieve them from all that poison.' (E, female,30)

'Emotionally yes, by all means [they would need compensation].' (G.,male,27)

'This, one who's a grown-up, who's more mature, can help in this, with words. Because just as it is possible to destroy through words, it's possible to build as well. 'Cause you stand next to the child, you can lead them in school, while learning, and also an organization could be established, which would follow the development of a group or of an entire institution.' (F.,male,28)

'Yes. [They should get compensation.] First of all psychological. To discharge ourselves emotionally.' (Magda)

Some of the respondents referred to the necessity of material and instrumental compensations, which would assist young people to handle difficulties when leaving the institution, who are left without resources when starting an autonomous life:

'First, a little bit more of state support. (...) Yes, after... State support, because I don't know to what extent it's true, but we were provided for in all respects for years, then, after I finished my studies, I have two weeks to leave. That's it, two weeks, no state support at all, not an amount to get started with, no apartment where I could stay. (...) They should ensure at least an apartment for a while, until you can provide for yourself. Let them live in hostels or something. I know that in Germany they have this, that if you're from a children's home and you work, they give you housing. And if you work for 30 years, that house would be yours. You don't need to pay rent, only the electricity and things like that.' (A., male, 23)

'Emotional support is very important, and material support too. But before you get out, and after you get out too, the follow-up, but on a friendly basis, or on the level of a good professional, like me, social worker. Where are you wondering about? Where are you? What are your goals? What do you need? Can we help you? Of course there should be, at least for three or four years, and later on they should help too. Because in some way you're also responsible, meaning the child protection, the educator and the social worker, the psychologist that the child grew up like that. And it's not that person's fault that they can't stand on two feet, but on one or not even on one.' (DM)

'These, who come out from the orphanages, should be given a job and a place where to stay. It's not ok that they let them out and let them get along. (...) That's what I'm telling you, these kids, after they are done with the school, should get a place where to work and not to stay alone and go and make foolish things, 'cause that's what happens to them, they should get a place and where to stay.' (L., female, 41)

'Programs of social integrations, social and professional recovery etc.' (ALA)

'Certainly, yes. Well, from the point of view of... if they could pay attention to the youngsters who are out, where are they, and to help them find their place, in life, at work, if they have difficulties in this respect, or to find an apartment. Yes, for example in this field. Or perhaps, I don't know, they could get offerings if – let's suppose – for their household, or stuff like that.' (A., male, 36)

The importance of ensuring moral compensation for the suffered abuses is mentioned in many interviews. Some of the respondents mentioned the public excuse from the part of the staff of the institutions where they suffered abuse as a form of moral compensation:

'(...) and the first thing, which is very important, that they ask for pardon. The apology... they should ask for pardon to each of them separately.' (M., female, 31)

There are survivors from residential child care institutions who would address to the media in order to make public the abuses suffered from the part of institutions, which is seen as a first step in the impeachment of the abusive staff:

'A lot of them, there are certain youngsters, who keep thinking about making a film about this, so to reveal at least for the media how these institutions were, how those people were, or there are people who still work in the system, and committed those things, they should be exposed, so that they would never ever be allowed to work with children.' (R., female, 30)

'In the newspaper too, with a big smiley, yeah [I would make them publish the events].' (P., female, 30)

For some respondents the impeachment of the abusive staff would mean the moral compensation for the experiences they suffered. The mentioned modalities of making staff liable are various:

- firing of the abusive staff:

'They should be kicked off. (...) But replace the entire system. Well, in this system, these educators work.' (P., female, 30)

- financial liability:

'And let them pay a lot of money, I mean to the state, because the child wouldn't know what to do with that money, for being too small. I don't know, but to impose them such a punishment...' (P., female, 30)

'I think that the family where I stayed should be punished in the following manner: material compensation, but all their goods should be seized, and work for the community' (L., male, 23)

- criminal liability:

'I would [sue the system] if I was there with the mind I have now, I would be the first.' (P., female, 30)

'To prison with the management of the child protection system' (L., male, 31)

'I think they would have the right to sue the educators who hurt them, let them get what they deserve.' (A., female, 26)

In conclusion, the liability of the abusive staff appears as a form of moral compensation, although the majority of the respondents would not wish to initiate personally legal procedures. Providing material entitlements and access to different supporting services for people who lived in residential child care institutions is perceived as the most useful form of compensation for the experiences suffered within the child protection system. In the same time ensuring certain legal rights for this category would mean a form of moral compensation, by publicly acknowledging the needs ensuing from the deficiencies of the child protection system.

Young people who participated to the focus group, understand that part of the problems of child protection, including violence against children is related to lack of professionalism and they are very critical on incompetence of educators, without proper education, social workers and psychologists. *"They need specialization, when they want to work with children"* (L., male, 25). The survivors feeling of justice is related to the needs of the many young people who are released each year from residential homes, without enough provisions for their security and

social inclusion: *“For example, I want that the state helps young people to be better integrated in the society” (L., male, 25).* When asked about possible compensations. A. links needs and rights, when he explains *“I think that at least afterwards you should be getting support. You have suffered a lot, so the state should help start your life: give such people a land, so you can build a house with two rooms and have a family, money to build a home, counselling at some social services. There are so many (of us) who cannot deal with the start in adult life”.* *“One is obliged to pay the costs of living. I think the state would compensate by offering a place to stay with low cost renting.” (I., male, 22).* As A.M. asks for *“Moral support and psychological support”*, participants agree with the need for moral support, but I mentions his distrust in psychologists, but A. explains that social services should give support to people who are vulnerable.

Suggestions regarding the improvement of the child protection system

The suggestions regarding the improvement of the system were formulated by the interviewed young people as messages to the professionals working in the child protection system. These ideas cover a wide range of aspects, starting from suggestions regarding the proper attitude of the staff towards the children, the qualification of the staff for the work with children in institutional care, the phenomenon of burn-out of the staff, to suggestions regarding the organization of residential child care, through which the chance of abuse among children would be reduced. A further category of the suggestions refer to professionals: psychologists, social workers, who in the view of the interviewees would have the role of providing professional support in handling the traumas and in the personal development of children and youngsters in institutional care, and the role to control the activity of the staff being in charge of caring for the children.

The messages of youngsters regarding the preferred attitude of the staff underline the importance of the interest towards the children, of the emotional and moral support to the children from the part who have the role of a parent:

‘I wish to today’s generation, to the young people not to be afraid, and especially to the educators to be able to pay attention to the children, ‘cause in those times, for us this didn’t work, and I wish the educator can spare an hour, some time destined to the child, so that the educator can see that the child isn’t doing better, and why doesn’t he or she have good marks at school. What’s the reason why he or she can’t get along with the other children in the children’s home or the family centre. If one hour is too much, then let it be half an hour, so that the child can see that yes, I’m a soul too in this house. So that the child can feel that I’m a centre too, and the educator can learn what trust means between the educator and the child. If the child is saying something, if he or she wants to talk about his or her interior life, the educator should stop chatting with the colleagues, but her task is that oh, that’s the child wish, then you have to trust.’ (E., female, 21)

'They should pay more attention to the children, and if they assume this job, then they should do it with all their heart, just as if they should look after their own children, for they are together each day, as if they spent time with their own. This should govern their attitude, they shouldn't be there out of a hobby, but of a calling; since that's what they had been studying, how to work with children, they should show how much they liked children. I'm not saying they should show maternal love, but try to pay attention to them, guide them about what is good and bad, how things need to be done, and if the child makes a mistake, they shouldn't shout on him, but support him.' (R., female, 36)

'More attention, probably, more attention, in the sense that children should be listened to, because that's what they feel, that they are not listened to.' (A., female, 24)

The lack of expectations or the negative expectations undermine the self-esteem of the children and adolescents, who thus lose their belief in their own abilities, and may give up their plans for the future. In this sense, the messages of the interviewees refer to the importance of guiding the children in designating and fulfilling their objectives, coupled with the avoidance of critiques and negative predictions.

'I think that in every child care institution there should be qualified people, who would guide children, but those people should be kind and should show patience towards the children, not like most of the staff from the institution, who are able only to criticise and judge, only their opinion matters, only what they say is right.' (A., female, 27)

'In turn, I would teach them continuously that one needs to start and finish something, because things have a beginning and an end. That one should set a purpose and succeed in that objective, to experience success, no matter what. (...) Why stressing in front of a child that he would become a jailbird? Why not saying instead that man, you can become a lawyer, you can be the best, you can be the fair lawyer, one could highlight this too, it takes the same effort than to utter that you would become a jailbird, with the same effort you can just utter that you can become a good person, a wonderful person.' (F., male, 28)

'They should support children to become successful, because it was only [that goal] to have the minimal 5 marks, and they would leave you alone.' (E., female, 29)

'The point is that they should care more for the child, well, this... care more for that child, because I'm observing my mates with whom we had left together the system, where they've reached to, and... since they weren't cared for, weren't given attention, well it's not possible to pay attention separately to everybody, well, however, it could be ensured somehow.' (S., male, 30)

In the view of the interviewees, part of the inappropriate attitudes and behaviour of the staff is due to the lack of

their qualification, consequently, to the lack of knowledge regarding the needs of the children and the specificity of the work with this category. In this sense the messages stress upon the importance of employing trained staff as educators, and they also underline the importance of the aptitudes to work with children besides expert knowledge.

'But they are not experts. Please don't take it as an offence, but they aren't professionals. Although I didn't study that at the university, but I would be more capable, because I experienced it and I know what's there. I know what a child needs. But these should learn a lot. They do all this out of a routine, they can hardly wait to have their switch over, and until then just shout. I think they should go to university, and they shouldn't do this because they could get a good salary, it is also necessary by the way, but rather because I want to help that person. So that concern to deliver to that child something, to let them out in the world with that. Care, I can't say they should be given care, because it's fuckin' hard with these youngsters, so it's really very hard with these young people. In turn once they should learn what social work is about, then they would know better what all this is about. 'Cause these aren't trained educators.' (I., female, 33)

'I would replace the staff as well where needed. That's it. And I would make a selection, for example when applying for a job, no matter where, you need to pass a test. And that test would be much more different than it is now. For example now you need to pass a written test. It would be less important or it wouldn't matter at all. The applier struggles to get a nine or ten. This isn't important. What it matters is that that person should be able to help that child to develop over time, and after they developed that child, at his turn the child should be able to help others.' (L., male, 23)

The importance of the personal experiences of the educators was also mentioned, as a factor of raising awareness towards the problems of children in institutional care:

'If I were to work out a system and to work with experts, I would look for experts who had some sort of negative experience, and could help through their experiences. (...) Or I would look for people as educators, who had been living in children's home, because that person knows what and how should be done with that child, starting from their experiences gained at that age.' (G., male, 27)

Placement in foster care raises different problems, the most frequently mentioned issue being the difference between biological children and those taken in foster care:

'I wouldn't assign as foster parent people who have their own children, and first I would test them thoroughly.' (A., female, 19)

'They shouldn't have children, they shouldn't be alone either; I'm thinking of foster parents as to a mother and a

father. 'Cause finally a family takes you, you should be their first child, you should be the one who's more indulged, and later on, if they want children, let them have. Or if they already have, they should treat them the same way, but no, you won't really find.' (A., female, 19)

Part of the messages to professionals expressed by the interviewees referred to combating the phenomenon of burn-out among the staff, which, besides the lack of knowledge and abilities, was considered as one of the reasons for the lack of implication from the part of the staff:

'(...) The educators should go at least once in a year to a training or supervision, or even to both, where they would be reminded what is it they started to do this work for, and they would be assessed if burn-out occurred, how that could be handled. I think that burn-out is one of the biggest problems. So many teachers came with great ideas and a huge love, and so rapidly, within half a year or one year they burnt out, then negligence followed, or the opposite, the shouting and hissy and punishments. Shouting, that's something continuous.' (A., male, 23)

'They shouldn't get numb of what they are doing; it's quite easy, I experienced it as well as an adult, that you set off as a young person with a noble purpose, and then you can just become indifferent, because you are confronted with the fact that that's what the world is, and it's much harder to hang on to your purpose. My message to them is to find an interior resource, and to remember why they are doing what they are doing. To stay vigilant and be aware to avoid burn-out.' (M., male, 28)

The motivation of the staff through attractive wages was mentioned in one of the interviews as a basic condition to the improvement of services within child care institutions:

'The other thing is that I've been thinking about how this system could be improved. I came up with three ideas. The first idea, let's increase the wages of the educators. If you're getting more money, in general, then you do a better job. It's worth for you too. All the educators work for almost the minimum national income. Now if you're getting a minimum wage, you can hardly pay the rent, the bills, plus the food, you're left with almost nothing. And you're supposed to be patient and not to hit children. When you don't have money, you keep thinking how to get by, how to get on in life, how, how, how. So you're stressed, and the stress can be seen at your workplace too, especially at a workplace where you're raising children, who are very sensitive to the teacher's mood who's educating them. First of all higher wages for the teachers.' (A., male, 23)

The professionals – psychologists, social workers – are seen as key persons with respect to the psychological comfort and development of children in institutional care:

'Learning is not the point, but to be able to develop mentally and to process mental traumas. They should hire

experts who are good in these.' (E.,female,29)

'Perhaps a psychologist who would offer some time for each child, who would help them gain higher self-confidence.' (E.,female,27)

'In my opinion a psychologist and social worker are needed, because it is very indispensable in such institutions. (...) A lot of talking, I think, with the children, because I think these children are very traumatised mentally too, not only in other ways, and very much need to share this with someone, and that person to feel sympathy for them a little bit at least. I think it counts a lot.' (M., female,23)

The framework of the meetings with the psychologists and social worker as established by the system wasn't considered efficient, either because the meetings occurred much too rarely, either because the experts were considered as part of the system regarded as abusive, which was an impediment to establishing a trustful relationship. The solution suggested by the interviewees was to involve external experts in this work:

'Outsider! Clean, strange people, who know nothing about the children's home [should be the social workers, psychologists]. That's it, external people should come in, who would open up the child's world, so that the child becomes free, so that the children wouldn't be confronted with only negative things all the time, and those persons shouldn't listen to the management, to the educators. Their task would be that the child takes their hand and takes them out for a walk, and talk out there, just them, not in the room where the educator would listen, or where the director needs to know about everything. Let rather that expert learn why they wanted to work with the child, and they should earn their trust.' (E.,female,30)

'Once in four or five months came a psychologist to visit us, so you could hardly talk to them.' (E., female,29)

The lack of the proper surveillance of children increases the chance of abuses among children, thus the improvement solutions include also the improvement of the relationship between educators and children.

'Definitely the proper solution is to have less children and let's say five educators.' (G.,male,27)

Putting together children who are in different phases of their development into the same group, coupled with the lack of proper surveillance increases the chance of abuse among children. Many respondents highlighted the importance of separating the children according to age groups:

'If children were grouped according to age [that would have helped]. Yes, not this way when 60 children are together, from 1 year to 18, but grouped.' (G., male, 27)

'And I would separate them, small children with small children, older ones with older children.' (A., female, 19)

'And these children, from I to IV [grade] to be ok, and those of V to VIII to be separated, and the educators should spend more time next to the older ones, 'cause it's not the little ones who make troubles, the older ones cause troubles to the little ones, who, by the time they become of age, it's over, kaput, they are destroyed for the rest of their lives.' (L., female, 41)

The visits for monitoring, the control at the placement centres were perceived by the respondents as having the most important role in discovering abuses and contributing to the feeling of safety for children. However, these visits can fulfil their purpose only if they surpass the limits of pure bureaucracy, otherwise the visits reduce the trust of children in the system, and cause them feelings of being abandoned and helpless.

'This is certain, more controls, so that not only once in a year would come Vas Mari and listen once in a year that it's ok, well then it's ok, you get it. Someone, a person whose look suggests that the person is someone reliable, well. (...) I think children in care centres consider whom they would let to get close, for all those many swindles, disappointments.' (P., female, 30))

'They should apply different methods when they go to supervise the situation, they should make random field work. It is very important that they talk to the children, because often they don't even ask them. They check if there is food, if there are clothes, and that's all. They should talk with children about their feelings, assess even through plays whether that child suffered abuse, because the child is very afraid and won't tell. No matter with which method, they should discover if the child was abused or not. Many children turn inward, become introvert and can't talk to anybody and don't want to talk. (...) I remember the expert kept coming until I turned 19: 'So, how was your day, how are you been doing?' 'Are you fine? Yes? Fine then.' But he never asked directly about how I was feeling, tell me about this or that. He should have made me tell, but he wasn't even curious.' (A., female, 26)

Emotional difficulties were also accounted caused by multiple substitution of families and child care institutions, changes which are seen as sources of re-traumatisation for children in institutional care:

'Not that the child is given [to a family] when little, then he or she is already seven or eight years old, it happens to be even seven or eight when gets back to the large system, and is broken down. I did practice, the children suffer this, I could see. And these three boys, as I can put it with their own words, became scoundrels: they fight, cheat, steal, lie, they don't even mind being killed, because they resurrect and continue with the same. It's really tough. And the foster parents don't accept them back, not even for a visit. This isn't right.' (M. female, 31)

'In each institution or place where I'd been there would be things to change, but perhaps the most reasonable

change would be if a youngster or a child wouldn't be placed so many times in so many places. All these are breaks.' (R., female,30)

One of the messages highlights the importance of the support provided for vulnerable families in order to prevent the removal of children from the family:

'In my opinion the families should be supported, so that their children won't get into the system. Child protection should be in charge of this, to protect them inside the family, and this should imply especially the parents, and the children too, and if it's not possible anymore, because many children get into institutions like us who got in from the street.' (M. female,31)

The respondents expressed their doubts concerning the possibility to achieve substantial changes in a system in which the same staff continues to work which was compromised due to abuses and neglect towards children:

'So that's what is needed, for youngsters and children alike, to replace the system and let really good experts work, they should break down all of it, on which this system is built, and replace the people who work there, because the person who worked in that system and is still in, can't change in my opinion. It is difficult, or I don't know if it's even possible to step out of it.' (M. female,31)

'Well, it would be better only if they put people into the system who are really interested in all this. How could it be better, if a social worker, who's working in this field for forty years or I don't know for how many years, and gained their experiences throughout these years in the old system, and is doing the same thing, well, one can't expect anything better from there. The world has changed, the years have passed, the needs have changed, and I think all this requires a change in the attitude, not like... like it happened in Târgu Secuiesc.' (S., male,30)

In conclusion, starting from their own experiences of abandon and neglect from the part of the persons who had the role of substitute parents, the respondents, through their messages to experts, looked for solutions which would enhance the experiences of future generations. The staff, which would have the duty to raise and educate children who can't live within their biological families, needs to be trained, motivated financially and given emotional support in order to prevent burn-out. Nevertheless, the monitoring of the process of upbringing children in institutional care can fulfil its objective – of surveying the safety and well-being of children – only if it surpasses the limits of bureaucratic routines.

Survival and resiliency

When talking about survival and how they were affected by the violence they lived through, participants to the focus group told us about their mates who could not pull their lives together. *“I am the only one that study at a university. I have colleagues who use drugs, are on the streets. 12 of the girls are prostitute.”* said A. (male, 23), who benefited from being looked after in a children’s home.

I have a colleague who became a mother and behaves in the some way with her child as they behaved with her. She is yelling and shouting and beating him. (A., male, 23) In order to protect themselves from the continuous emotional and physical attacks, boys and girls became aggressive. RC has been known among his mates to be very aggressive, *“but usually not with children but with the personnel’* he explains it by his decision to survive, resulting after he stayed in the hospital, after a forceful beating: *“I was beaten very hard, I stayed 3 moths in the hospital; afterwards I became so aggressive. I took a chair and kicked a women educator”*. He also saw this mechanism in his female mates. *“Girls are so abused. There are girls, who became boys, to protect themselves (C., female, 28)”*. A.M. agrees with him, saying *“if I would have not been boyish, I would have not survived”*, and than she tells her story, that she trained herself to be a kick-box fighter, and everybody was afraid of her, including professionals and other children.

Respondents believe that their traumatic experiences left incurable marks on their development: *“Even (if) I’m ashamed that at my age I didn’t manage to succeed in life, but these consequences won’t allow me, because I have this big fear in me all the time of stepping further.”* (V., male, 33). Some fragment of the interviews show that as adults, they connect the violence they suffered with a number of different symptoms and disorders that have generally been associated by the survivors with exposure to childhood traumatic events: somatic symptoms, substance use, difficulties with trusting others and in forming positive and lasting relationships, affect regulation problems, identity disturbance, difficulties with employment, aggression and criminal behaviour. *“At present, what happened in the past, remains an incurable history. Only a very few managed to integrate into a family and make a family. Those are only one or two. The rest are lost and sad cases.”* (V., male, 37).

The connection between trauma and somatic symptoms, well known from literature, is visible to the interviewees: *“I got ill out of annoyance, ‘cause too many things accumulated, you know? Many problems in my family, many things happened in my life, and I developed many diseases.”* (M., female, 33). As for substance use, the literature knows it is very common among those exposed to traumatic events, especially to the victims of interpersonal violence (Briere, Scott and Jones, 2015). Respondent are aware of the linkages between their life stories and their dependency, as a way of medicating themselves, and of the high rate of delinquency among their peers: *“I was drinking, using drugs, womanizing, playing on slot-machines...”* (F., male, 28). *“Many turn to crimes, robbery, stealing, prostitution, and get behind the bars”* (V, male, 36); *“And they become either prostitutes, either thieves or...”* (L, female, 19).

Respondents also see the responsibilities of the system that allowed the violence and did not take measures to respond to it: *“Being a child, with no proper food, beaten, maltreated, tortured, marginalized, no mother or father, it was very difficult, a shock for us. This is why I said we need to be strong, to avoid getting mad, because some of us, I am not lying to you, got mad, they were hospitalized in Gataia¹, where the crazy people are, where they are kept in straitjackets because of the educators and the big boys, and because of the child protection system, which did not take any measures, because the Directorate of Child Protection did not intervene. They said we lied, and they believed the educators.”* (CC, male, 25).

As they connect personal histories with the sad outcomes of seeing themselves and their peer on deviant pathways, they expect remedies from the responsible services: *“Many become delinquents, engage in robbery, thefts, prostitution and get behind bars: because society does not accept them and the individuals cannot fit in. And here we talk about support. It is the same Directorate (The County Directorate of Social Assistance and Child Protection) who should offer them support for such things.”* (VI, male, 37).

Beyond the traumatic experiences of the men and women who recalled to us their violence stories, but through their lenses we could see the inner words of the total institutions, as had been defined by Goffman (1961): sleeping, eating, playing, learning are defined by the same fear of authority, with often cruel rules, which leaves the children at the good will of an unprepared, sometimes villain and corrupt, and mostly uncontrolled staff; it impedes on the process of identity development, by developing a system of privileges, of obedience and fear of punishments. The adaptation process of some of the interviewed people revealed a history of seeking to fit in and struggle through school, high-school or vocational high-school, eventually higher education towards employment and family life, to become the ‘success’ cases, hoping for an independent future (Porumb, 2010). Or, this process might have been marked by struggling against the rules and developing a rebellious behaviour, becoming eventually lost between drugs, psychiatric institutions, social services, prison, gangs, homeless shelters and prostitution.

Conclusions

Besides being exposed to peer violence, abusive treatment by staff, and marginalization by community, many survivors of institutional violence suffered by the absence of a complaint framework and of a system of supportive professional relationships. Although – due to the sampling procedures – no reliable generalisations about the child protection system are possible, the analysis of the interviews revealed us pages of the traumatizing childhoods of those who were looked after in Romania’s child protection institutions during the last 30 years. Most of the testimonies (especially of those who have experienced large institutions, but also of those who had been placed in smaller units), made it clear that instead of being a place of healing for separation, loss and/or previous trauma, the

¹ A big mental health hospital for chronic psychiatric illness in Romania

child protection residential care resulted in a place of added trauma and suffering.

The existence of positive attachment figures was more of an exception than a rule. The many institutions the persons changed, the loss of the few caring persons they met, the daily abuse and neglect in its different forms left long-lasting marks on the lives of these children. Many of the interviewed persons grew up in fear and terror, being victims of severe physical abuse, a few were witnesses of murder. Severe emotional neglect and abuse was a rule than an exception in many child-protection institutions. Sexual abuse was a well-known phenomenon, especially (but not only) against boys.

While it is obvious from the interviews that in the last 15 years there were extensive changes in life-conditions (cloths, meals, intimacy) comparing with life in mammoth institutions, and some forms of abuse and neglect became less frequent (sexual abuse of boys from the behalf of older boys, exploitation and physical abuse from the behalf of older children), unfortunately abusive adults continue to work with children and according to the interviewed persons a caring, loving professional (even in foster care) is more an exception than a rule.

The staff, which would have the duty to raise and educate children still needs to be properly selected, trained, motivated financially and given emotional support in order to prevent burn-out. Nevertheless, the monitoring of the process of upbringing children in institutional care can fulfil its objective – of surveying the safety and well-being of children – only if it surpasses the limits of bureaucratic routines. As formulated by some of the interviewed persons, it is outrageous that some of the most abusive educators well known for hundreds of children and for personnel (including coordinators and directors) are still working in the child protection system.

Regarding compensations providing material entitlements and access to different supporting services seems to be perceived as the most useful form of compensation for the experiences suffered within the child protection system. The liability of the abusive staff appears as a form of moral compensation, although the majority of the respondents would not wish to initiate personally legal procedures.

Although – due to the sampling procedures – no reliable generalisations about the child protection system are possible, the analysis of the interviews revealed us pages of the traumatizing childhoods of those who were looked after in Romania's child protection institutions during the last 30 years. Most of the testimonies (especially of those who have experienced large institutions, but also of those who had been placed in smaller units), made it clear that instead of being a place of healing for separation, loss and/or previous trauma, the child protection residential care resulted in a place of added trauma and suffering. Until the present days children's disclosures of violence were not sufficiently monitored and did not become instrumental in eliminating violence from the child protection system, as they were overshadowed by information coming from more credible sources. Therefore one of the recommendations for this paper is the need to build a system of listening to children that could reveal both peer and adult forms of violence and develop ways to handle them. A second recommendation is the training of staff to listen to children, to take their complaints seriously, to support them when they disclose experiences of violence and

treat their fears, is essential for helping children develop their own goals and become autonomous. Whatever investments upgrade its facilities or costly programs are adopted, no institutional care will be perceived as positive unless it offers security from all forms of violence, either coming from adults or from other young people.