

Participatory Research on Child Maltreatment with Children and Adult Survivors

Emerald Studies in Child Centred Practice

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Participatory Research on Child Maltreatment with Children and Adult Survivors: Concepts, Ethics, and Methods

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

This book is dedicated to all children and adult survivors of child maltreatment, in all its forms. The researchers who wrote this book aim to learn from and with you, day by day, in order to improve the quality of the research that is done in this area. We hope we can make a difference and encourage other authors to use participatory research. Your voices and decisions matter.

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Foreword

Andreas Jud

In a world still full of atrocities, disasters and widespread poverty, there is consensus that children are among the most vulnerable in our societies: As adults, they suffer from the aforementioned phenomena, including victimisation by strangers or peers. In addition, some children are subjected to violence by those responsible for their upbringing: parents and other close caregivers (for a detailed conceptualisation of children's victimisation in multiple settings, see Finkelhor, 2008). This type of violence is commonly labelled *child maltreatment* and encompasses the subtypes of neglect, sexual abuse, physical abuse and psychological maltreatment. Unfortunately, academia and child protection practice have not yet converged regarding a uniform and operationalised definition for child maltreatment; varied definitional approaches are still abundant (e.g. Jud & Voll, 2019). Consequently, epidemiological research on the prevalence of child maltreatment is associated with large variances and lack of comparability (e.g. Jud et al., 2016). Still, findings have unanimously confirmed the large size of the problem: Studies regularly identify that more than 10% of respondents have suffered from violence at the hands of caregivers in their childhood (e.g. Sethi et al., 2015; Stoltenborgh et al., 2015). Despite definitional challenges, there is a steadily growing evidence base on the prevalence of child maltreatment both around the world and in Europe. Empirical information on who gets services and protection by which type of services in a multidisciplinary field, however, is either lacking completely for some countries or lacking relevant variables and reliable coding in others. Additionally, available administrative data on child maltreatment lack comparability across countries. Administrative data, however, are needed to understand how well a child protection system addresses its challenges and serves its vulnerable population, identify potentially underserved populations and unintended regional variances in protecting vulnerable groups and so on (e.g. Jud et al., 2016).

To counter the lack and deficiencies of administrative data in different sectors of child protection systems on the European continent, more than 130 academicians, researchers and professionals from different disciplines in 35 countries have gathered in a network labelled Euro-CAN (<http://www.euro-can.org>), an acronym for its title: Multi-Sectoral Responses to Child Abuse and Neglect in Europe: Incidence and Trends. The initial 4 years of the network were sponsored by the European Cooperation on Science Technology (COST) as COST Action 19106.

Euro-CAN has established five working groups in an effort to mobilise knowledge in improving data collection on documented incidents of child maltreatment. Working Group 1 focuses on the challenging task to find pathways towards making definitions of child maltreatment more comparable and standardized. Working Group 2 collects information on available administrative data on child maltreatment in Europe and tries to access these data for secondary analyses and comparisons across countries. In close connection with the latter, Working Group 5 tries to elucidate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on reported incidents of child maltreatment. It is essential to not only ‘preach to the converted’ who embrace the importance of data collection on child maltreatment incidents but also advocate for this relevant task among policymakers and administrators who are responsible for data collection. Working Group 4 dedicates its efforts to the communication of our goals and output. The book you have started to read, however, is a valuable output of Working Group 3, which focuses on participatory approaches in epidemiological research on child maltreatment. We are adamant in our convictions that victimised individuals are not to be perceived simply as respondents of surveys or individual data points in records or child files but empowered subjects in research on their suffering. Participatory approaches will improve efforts to better understand how child protection systems work and ultimately, minimise child maltreatment in upcoming generations.

Although the literature on participatory approaches in child protection is – fortunately – trending upward in general, participatory approaches to epidemiological research on child maltreatment are still largely terra incognita. This edited book contributes to mapping the territory in 17 chapters contributed by 36 Euro-CAN members from different countries, disciplines and child protection sectors. The coleaders of Working Group 3, Maria Roth and Ravit Alfordari, together with Gemma Crous have assembled an overview that both highlights gaps and needs and also identifies opportunities and examples of good practice. Excerpts from four chapters give exemplary insight on major takeaways: Filistrucchi et al. (2023) clarify that participatory approaches will not necessarily bring up issues that are entirely new to professionals and academicians in the context; they will, however, always add an additional layer and perspective to better understand and contextualise the complexity of child maltreatment incidents. Having been objectified for a major part of their life, survivors of child maltreatment might once again feel objectified by non-participatory research on child maltreatment and consequently, decline to respond, as Schlingmann (2023) highlights. Giving voice to survivors might thus increase response rates. Participatory approaches, however, move beyond increased response and an improved, holistic understanding of child maltreatment. The ethical component of giving voice to survivors of child maltreatment has the power to contribute a restorative value to epidemiological research on the topic (Filistrucchi et al., 2023). Being heard might thus potentially support a process of healing. In an overview of recent participatory research projects with children on maltreatment, Alfordari et al. (2023) highlight that there is a need not only for more participatory research in general but also for higher degrees of children-led participation. The overview on legal prerequisites in Europe for participatory research with children not only

reveals both a large variance in pertinent legislations but also identifies potential barriers for future research on the topic (Ntinapogias & Nikolaidis, 2023).

As the Chair of the Euro-CAN network and COST Action, I strongly recommend that you read this entire book to find additional takeaways, spread and multiply them, and include participatory approaches in your research. Ultimately, this might add a mosaic puzzle piece to minimising children's suffering in the future. As Albert Einstein, the most famous son of the city that hosts my university, allegedly put it: 'There are no great discoveries and advances, as long as there is an unhappy child on earth'.

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