

## CHAPTER III

### ABUSE IN INSTITUTIONS

*Article 19:*

*“1. States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.”*

(UN Convention on the Rights of the Child)

#### **3.1. Psychological Abuse**

Psychological abuse is defined as those actions and practices of adults (who have children in their care) by means of which children are prevented from becoming autonomous. This is expressed in the children’s incapacity to manage their relationship with the physical and social environment, and in their inability to act adequately in everyday situations.

Psychological abuse alters the children’s individual and social skills by inducing anomalies in the structuring of their behaviour, that prevent them from exploration and experimenting, making them withdraw into their own person (an example of this would be the self-stimulating behaviour seen in institutions, manifested by rocking movements, or self-inflicted pain, banging etc.).

Children are exposed to psychological abuse when the environment where they live fails to provide them with adequate conditions for structuring their socially supported and required acquisitions, practices and behaviour.

In an institution, children live in an unnatural environment, unlike that of everyday life, which prevents children from acquiring the experiences that are necessary for developing their life skills. The experiences in a household environment, in a physical environment outside the institution, participation in a variety of everyday situations are as many resources for social integration that are totally absent or very limited in the case of institutionalized children (interaction with the neighbourhood and neighbours, using

community services and institutions: post office, various shops, cinemas, theaters, parks, etc.).

☺ I don't like holidays, they are very boring, there is no program organized for the children.

☺ I miss some kind of activities, they should do something mainly for the younger children, but the caregivers do not attend to the small ones as much as they should.

☺ And there is something else I have to say: life in this center is very boring – spending two full holiday months in this institution watching TV or listening to music all day long and doing nothing else is no good at all. This institution is sure very boring.

☺ I have never liked being in this placement center, because they never organize any outings. For instance:

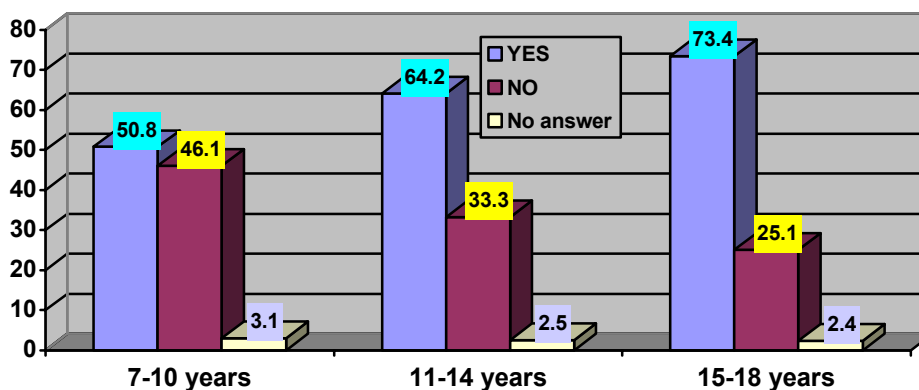
- in winter they could take us skiing or sleighing, or hiking in the mountains or some other places.
- in summer they could take us camping to the seaside or to the mountains, and many other things.

In a way, our teachers are very strict on us and do not take us anywhere, so we are all locked up in our units.

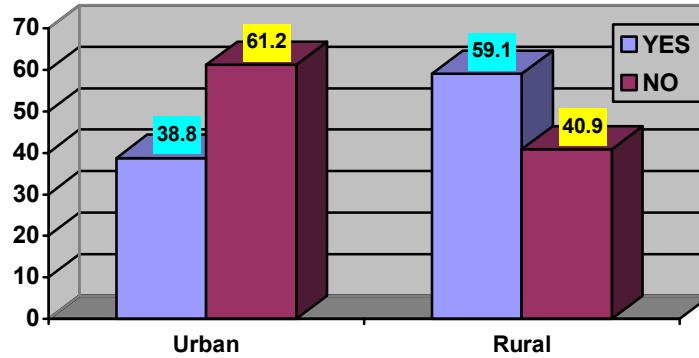
☺ I would like them to organize a gym in this institution and they could also start an English language lab, because I have nothing to do during my spare time.

The insufficient involvement of children in everyday activities such as the daily cleaning, deciding on the menu or washing personal items can also be seen from the data shown in Figures 3.1.1., 3.1.2., 3.1.3.

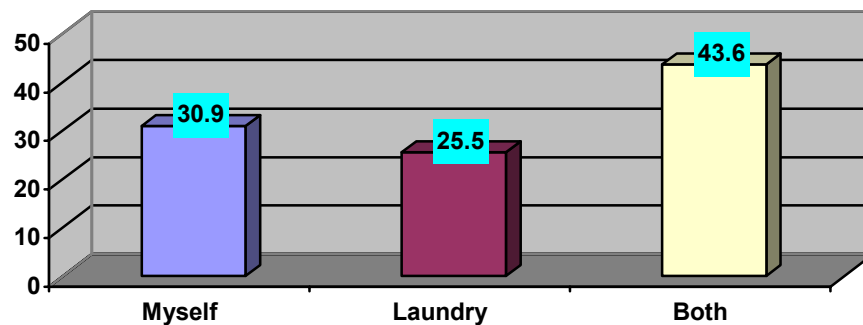
**Figure 3.1.1.**  
Breakdown (in %) by area of residence: urban / rural  
according to the answers provided to the question  
*“Who does the cleaning in your room?”*  
children aged 7-18 years  
- ABSUR 2000 -



**Figure 3.1.2.**  
 Breakdown (in %) by area of residence: urban / rural  
 according to the answers provided to the question  
*“Do you, children, also participate in making decisions on the menu?”*  
 children aged 7-18 years  
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**Figure 3.1.3.**  
 Breakdown (in %) of the answers provided to the question  
*“Who washes your personal items?”*  
 children aged 7-18 years  
 - ABSUR 2000 -



☺ I don't like it that they don't allow us to cook in the kitchen.  
 ☺ I am 17 and I don't know how to do anything. I don't know how to cook. When I go to the canteen to try to learn, the doctor scolds me and others who do the same.

The limited participation of children in real life activities leads to a failure in their social integration, because children (young people) are “introduced” into society when they have already been stigmatized as different from all others.

- ☺ People in the community label those who come from institutions as uneducated and thievish.
- ☺ The children in the community are mean to the children from the institutions.
- ☺ We have a poor image in society. The girls are considered to be tramps, and the boys are seen as thieves.
- ☺ People outside the institution think that we should be walking about in rags. Why do we always get poor quality or old things here at the institution?
- ☺ Many teachers at school discriminate between children from the institution and other children.

*(children’s accounts)*

Quite frequently, institution staff responds in a partial or inadequate manner to the children’s need for exploration, preventing them from satisfying their curiosity and their willingness to take risks while acquiring knowledge. Children compensate this lack by self-stimulation.

**What do you do with children who suck their thumbs, rocking themselves or bang their heads against the wall?**

**- focus group discussion -**

- ? We give them more attention, we offer them all sorts of toys, we talk to them. Being isolated and ignored, they will continue to suck their thumbs and bang their heads against the wall.
- ? We distract their attention, we talk to them and tell them that what they are doing is wrong.
- ? We apply occupational therapy to them.
- ? In the case of children who suck their thumbs, we get the best results by giving them something to do with their hands. Those who bang their heads against the wall and rock themselves also require the emotional presence of an adult. These children hurt themselves in order to catch attention, so they have to get that attention.
- ? We need to spend more time with the children in order to break their bad habits.
- ? Such behaviour can be seen in most institutions, and it is caused by the limited amount of attention children get, but I think that a more determined involvement by the adults can solve this problem, at least to some extent.
- ? The rocking, the thumb-sucking are signs that they need to be playing all the time, so that they do not get bored.

*(staff accounts)*

Emotional deficiencies also belong to the sphere of psychological abuse, because they are an expression of the impossibility to establish a relationship of attachment. It is well

known that the relationship of attachment coagulates psychological structure during the formation of the children's life skills.

In residential institutions, emotional deficiencies appear mainly because the relationship of children with their families are discontinued and the possibility to resume that relationship is uncertain. This induces a state of uncertainty that blocks the desire for building relationships and acquiring knowledge, which both require "risk-taking".

The data collected from the interviews conducted with children aged 7-18 years again demonstrated that the relationship of attachment is impossible to establish because of the shallowness of relationships between parents and children. **Figure 3.1.4.** shows that almost half of the children are visited at best once every 6 months, while over one third of the children have not been visited at all during the last year or since they were institutionalized. The children who are in institutions located in the rural area receive visits even more infrequently than their colleagues in the urban areas (**Figure 3.1.5.**).

The psychological de-structuring caused by the discontinuation of the relations between children and their parents generates "unnatural" behaviour and responses in children. Therefore, one third of the children who have parents do not wish to return home, or they are indifferent about that possibility (**Figure 3.1.6.**).

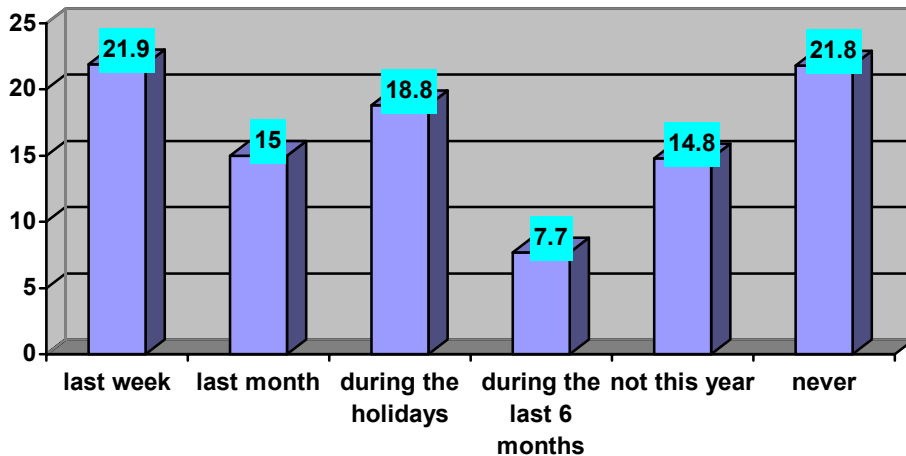
However, the frequency of visits between parents and children does not unconditionally determine the child's desire to return home (**Figure 3.1.7.**).

Only 45% of the children who receive frequent visits (every week/month) wish to return home. Likewise, 30% of the children who receive infrequent visits (every six month or once a year) want to return home, and only 25% of the children who do not receive any visits at all want the same thing (**Figure 3.1.8.**).

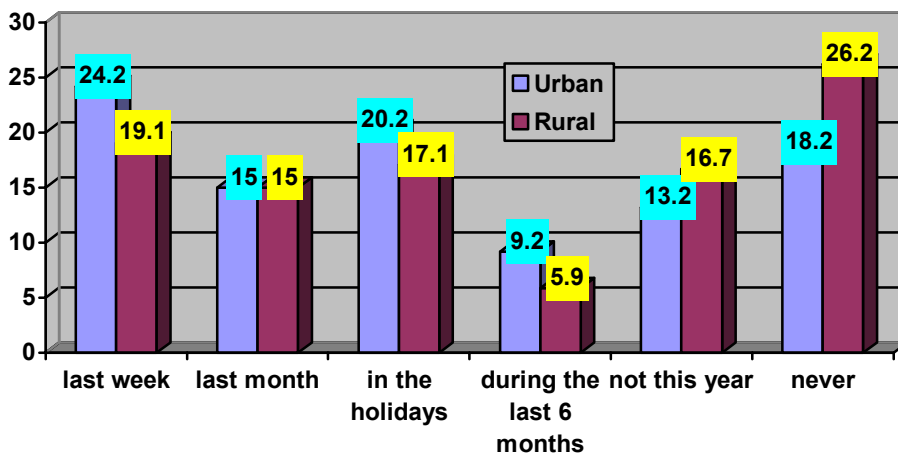
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**Figure 3.1.4.**  
Breakdown (in %) of the answers provided to the question  
*"When did your parents last visit you?"*  
children aged 7-18 years  
- ABSUR 2000 -

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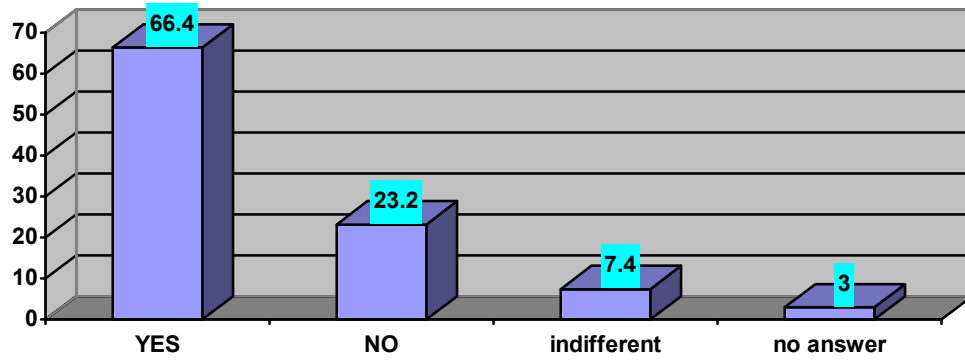
**Figure 3.1.5.**  
 Breakdown (in %) by area of residence (urban / rural)  
 of the answers provided to the question  
*“When did your parents last visit you?”*  
 children aged 7-18 years  
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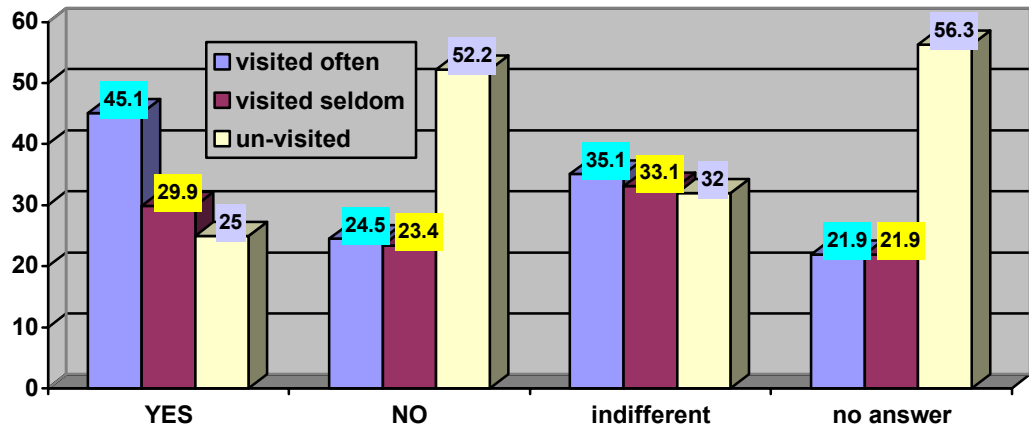
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**Figure 3.1.6.**  
Breakdown (in %) of the answers provided to the question  
*“Would you like to return home?”*  
children aged 7-18 years  
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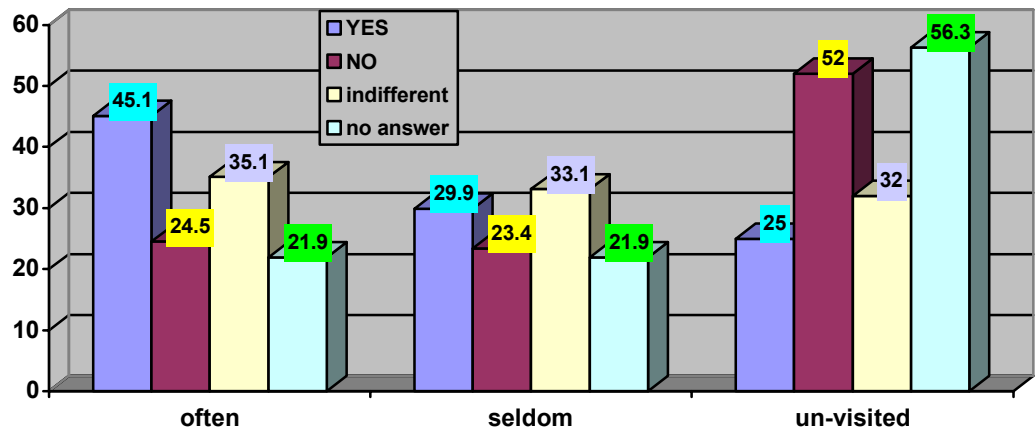
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**Figure 3.1.7.**  
 Breakdown (in %) of the answers provided to the question  
*“Would you like to return home?”*  
 by the frequency of visits - children aged 7-18 years  
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**Figure 3.1.8.**  
 Breakdown (in %) of the answers provided to the question  
*“Would you like to return home?”*  
 according to the frequency of visits – children aged 7-18 years  
 - ABSUR 2000 -



### Case Study

X P.A. – 13 years old, has completed her 5<sup>th</sup> grade

*“How long have you been here?”*

“I’ve been here for two years. I only have a father. I don’t know my mother. My parents divorced when we were very young. I have a sister with me here. She is one year younger than me. Two years ago our grandmother died. The police and the mayor in the village of Bujoreni decided to have us sent here. Father drinks a lot. He would beat us a lot. I am not living with my sister because the girls are organized in the rooms according to the grade they are in. She is in a different grade. But we do get to see each other.

Father works by the day in the village of Gura Vaii. When I was younger, he worked with an oil-drilling company. He also worked as a confectioner. But he was drinking, so they kicked him out. Father shares a house with my uncle, who is also divorced. Grandma died two and a half years ago. My uncle builds houses, he is a mason, he is also providing for my father. They took us away straight from school – from the teachers’ room – and they brought us here in November 1998. I only went home once (it’s a 15-minute bus-ride from here). We also visited the school once. Nobody recognized us, not even the teachers. I have two more brothers that I haven’t met. Mother gave one of them away, I don’t even know to whom. She sent the other one to an institution. That brother was given my mother’s maiden name. I like it here because they have a TV set. I watch movies and music all day long. On Saturdays, there is dancing at the canteen. The TV set is in our room.

At home we didn’t have electricity. We used wood to make fire. We had to go get wood and then also cook. That’s why we could not study there. We also had to work the land. Father used to have an apartment when he worked at the oil derrick, but he sold it. We then rented a room with a lady who told my father that, if he looked after her and promised to have her buried properly, she would leave her house and land to us. But the woman lost her senses. She walked the streets to beg for food. She died and we buried her. But no documents had been drafted. My uncle had started a foundation and had 700 bricks to start a house. The woman’s relatives would not recognize the deal she had made with us – so that in the autumn they harvested the crops from the land we had worked all summer long.”

*“When did your father last visit you?”*

“Father visited us yesterday. He brought us wafers and juice.”

*“Can you talk to your father in private?”*

“Yes, parents can spend time with their children in their rooms, if they leave some identification at the gate.”

*“Would you like to return home?”*

“When I was at home, I wasn’t doing so well at school. Now my grades are all above 8. The ladies help us with our homework.”

*“Is there any discrimination in your school between children coming from the institution and the other children?”*

“No, there isn’t any.”

*“Do older children exploit younger ones?”*

“No, they don’t.”

*“Have you got a friend here?”*

“I don’t have a friend here, and I don’t have a boy-friend either. I used to be friends with a girl back in Gura Vaa. I wrote a letter to her some time ago, but she never answered.”

*“In case someone threatens you, who can you ask for help?”*

“Our caregiver.”

*“How do you get along with the night attendants?”*

“Well”.

“After we get up – now this is at 7:30, when we are at school, it is 6:30 – we do the cleaning. We are scheduled for doing the cleaning in a particular spot during a week. There are two cleaning ladies in the institution who do the cleaning by rotation. We clean everything – the sinks, the showers, the toilets. The night attendant organizes and supervises the morning cleaning.”

Institutionalization at a very early age and for extended periods produces “children without history”.

Children cannot retrace their own life history because they lack information about who they are, where they come from, who they belong to and who belongs to them. Their life story is materialized in no more than a few data contained in their medical records under the rubrics: PPhyA (personal physiological antecedents) or PPathA (personal pathological antecedents), and few of them know when they were brought to the institution, why they are there, when they walked first, what they liked to do or eat when they were a certain age.

In the residential care institutions included in the survey, almost a quarter of the children do not know *how long* they have been in the institution (**Figure 3.1.9.**). Most of the children who do not have that information belong to the 7-10 age group (**Figure 3.1.10.**). Almost one third of the children (34.3%) *are unaware of the reason* why they are in an institution (**Figure 3.1.11.**). Again, it is mostly the children in the 7-10 age group who are unaware of the reason why they are in an institution (**Figure 3.1.12.**).

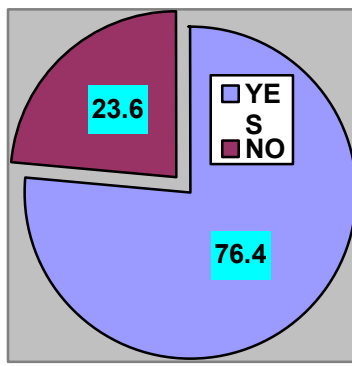
**Figure 3.1.13.** illustrates that one third of the children state that nobody has told them *how long* they are due to stay in the institution, those most affected by this state of uncertainty being again in the 7-10 age group (**Figure 3.1.14.**).

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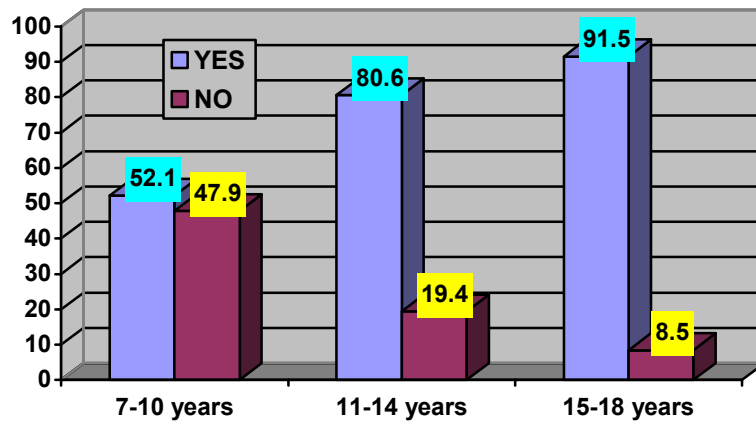
### **Figure 3.1.9.**

Breakdown (in %) of the answers provided to the question  
*“Do you know how long you have been in this institution?”*  
children aged 7-18 years  
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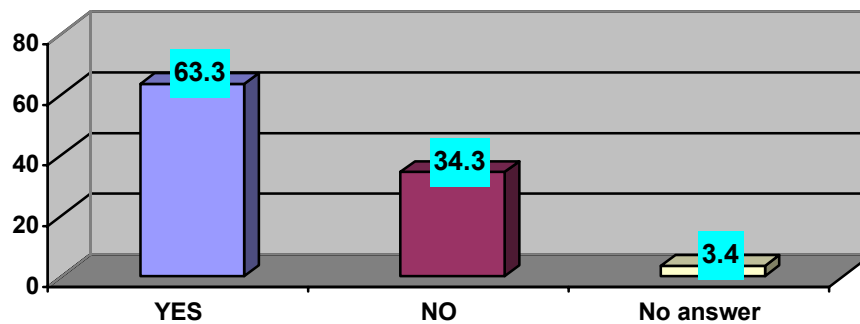
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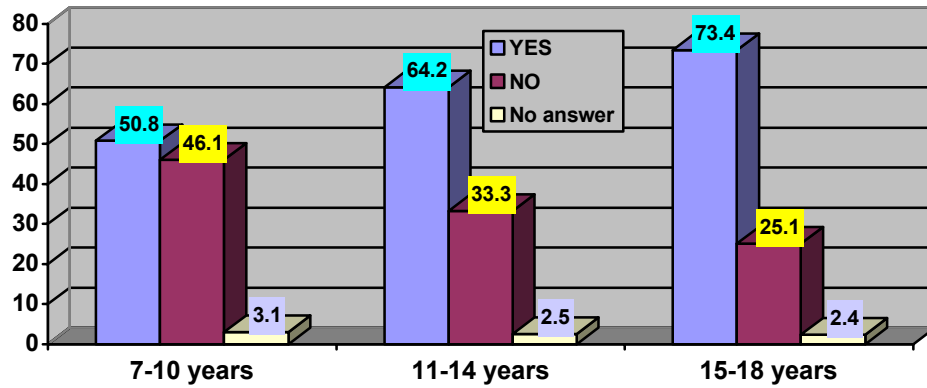
**Figure 3.1.10.**  
 Breakdown (in %) by age groups of the answers provided to the question  
*“Do you know how long you have been in this institution?”*  
 children aged 7-18 years  
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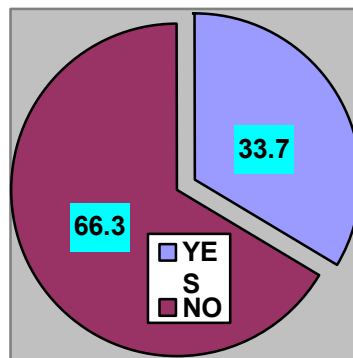
**Figure 3.1.11.**  
 Breakdown (in %) of the answers provided to the question  
*“Do you know the reason why you are in this institution?”*  
 children aged 7-18 years  
 - ABSUR 2000 -



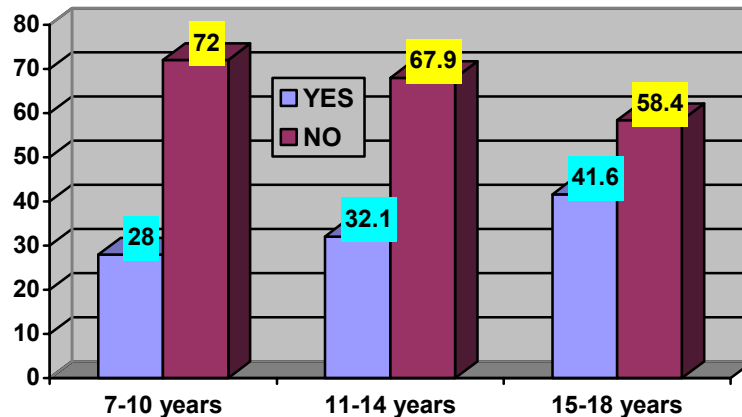
**Figure 3.1.12.**  
 Breakdown (in %) by age groups of the answers provided to the question  
*“Do you know the reason why you are in this institution?”*  
 children aged 7-18 years  
 - ABSUR 2000 -



**Figure 3.1.13.**  
 Breakdown (in %) of the answers provided to the question  
*“Have they told you how long you have to stay in this institution?”*  
 children aged 7-18 years included in the sample  
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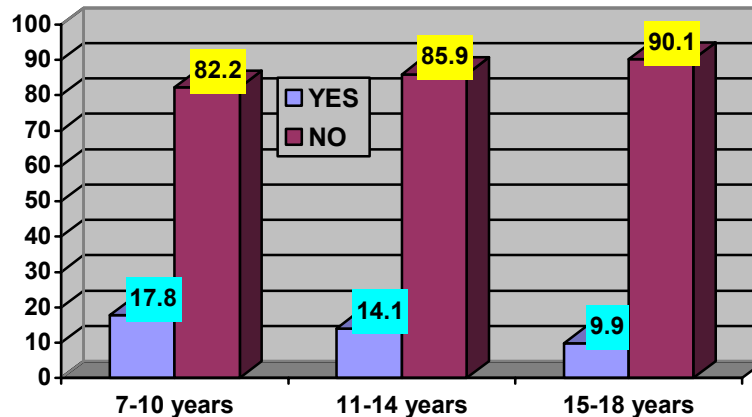


**Figure 3.1.14.**  
 Breakdown (in %) by age groups of the answers provided to the question  
*“Have they told you how long you have to stay in this institution?”*  
 children aged 7-18 years  
 - ABSUR 2000 -



The percentage of children who **do not know where they lived between the ages of 0-3** is over 80% for all age groups (**Figure 3.1.15.**). This sad reality, that characterizes almost all institutionalized children, as it emerged from our survey, can be explained by the fact that the history of a person at that age is made up before everything else from the accounts of the people around, parents, relatives, neighbours, as well as from information that is recorded in diaries, on video and audio tapes and photographs. These are integrated and organized around the skeleton of self-memory on which personal memories are built and that add up to shape a specific, individual and unrepeatable psychological structure.

**Figure 3.1.15.**  
 Breakdown (in %) by age groups of the answers provided to the question  
*“Do you know where you lived between the ages of 0-3?”*  
 children aged 7-18 years  
 - ABSUR 2000 -



These points of reference do not exist for institutionalized children, a reason why the history of their early childhood is a blank spot.

### *Case Study*

**B** G.L. – 14 years old, family-type home

(...)

*“Where did you live between the ages of 0-3?”*

*“With my parents, but I don’t remember anything about the time I lived with my family.”*

*“Why are you here?”*

*“I think my parents could not afford to provide for me. I would like to return home, even if the conditions there are worse than the conditions here, and although I love my social parents, because they treat me well.”*

*“How do you get along with the other children?”*

*“Now we are all right. But when I was younger, they would beat me up to get my desert. They even burned my face with a lamp.”*

*“How do you find life in this family-type center as compared to the (traditional) one where you lived before?”*

*“It was very bad there. Younger children were beaten up and made to work by the older ones. We had 5 caregivers in the whole institution. It was horrible. They would make the big ones beat us so that they would not be made accountable for such things.”*

*“Have you heard that in other homes there are children who are constrained to have sexual relations?”*

*“Yes, I have. I feel sorry for them. It is difficult when you don’t have anyone to complain to.”*

*“Have you heard about concrete cases?”*

*“I don’t know, honestly speaking, I’m afraid to speak about that. I’d rather not tell you anything. Or if you wish, we can talk about something else.”*

(...)

*“Do you have any health problem?”*

*“Yes, I often pee in bed at night, but I don’t know why, because I don’t drink too much water.”*

Specialized literature also mentions other forms of psychological abuse in institutions: punishing young children for activities that are normal at their age, depriving children from an authentic emotional relationship, holding them up to ridicule and humiliation, ignoring the children’s performances, setting rules and requirements that the children cannot observe and meet, keeping up a permanent state of insecurity and uncertainty, lack of confidence in other people, making children wear clothes that are inappropriate for their gender and age, not providing children with adequate opportunities for making their own choices and decisions.

In the qualitative survey, the children mentioned some of these forms of psychological abuse.

☺ I don't like it when a child who graduates high school or vocational school is kicked out of the center. There are many children who don't have parents, they have nobody to look after them and they live in the streets, they have to steal and do stuff.

☺ Many of the girls who left here are prostitutes in Greece, they had nowhere else to go. They have parents, but they have nothing to eat and nowhere to sleep.

☺ These last years some things have changed for the better in the institutions, but there should be more hope for the young kids who finish school, who don't have a place to live or a job.

☺ If you tell the caregiver that you are still hungry after a meal, or you complain about something you don't like here, she says: why do you complain, are your conditions better at home than here? As if we could be blamed for being here. We don't get any respect at all, as if we meant nothing.

☺ I would like the children to stop being envious, mainly the older girls: we keep sapping each other.

☺ What I resent most is our caregivers' mistrust, they often let us down that way.

☺ I don't like gossip, ugly words, stealing, hypocrisy and lack of understanding from some people.

☺ I'm very sad that there is nobody here that I could trust, and I mainly think of the caregivers there.

*(children's accounts)*

Psychological abuse is also manifested in institutions by inadequate behaviour of the staff concerning the differentiated conduct that they should adopt according to the gender of the children.

With institutionalized children, loss of gender is a visible development, materialized in the impossibility of telling boys from girls. This happens because the requirements for the shaping of femininity and masculinity in children are ignored.

The constitution of femininity and masculinity is achieved mainly by the cultivation of a certain type of adult-girl and adult-boy relationship, by specific appearance and clothing (particularly at young ages), which are all ignored in institutions.

The uniform behaviour of the staff towards the children mainly affects the girls. Specialized studies have demonstrated that with girls there is a specific dynamics of autonomy and dependence that leads to the formation of gender identity. Because of that, extended institutionalization is more devastating for girls than for boys.

### 3.2. Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is defined in the literature as the adults' deliberate acts whereby they inflict physical suffering on the children.

In institutions, physical abuse is manifested by: beatings, suppression of meals, physical isolation, submission to various humiliating jobs – applied as punishments.

Punishments are applied in order to discipline the children.

#### **Is punishment necessary to discipline the children?**

? Punishment is necessary to correct things that are wrong.

? Yes, punishment is necessary, but we do not need to use it too often, as children will get used to being punished, and everything will be in vain.

? Children have to be punished, but the punishment has to be mild; after all, punishment is part of a child's education.

? I don't think punishment is necessary, blackmail could work much better. You won't get desert if...

? Sometimes punishment is necessary, because like any other being, children develop the feeling of fear at an early age: fear of being hit, fear of not getting something, of not having mother around. They will have to know that they can or cannot get what they want at a given moment.

? Punishment only makes a child's conduct worse.

? Punishment isn't necessary because it works as an inhibitor on children.

**(staff opinions)**

Discipline is the conscious acceptance of rules. Before the physical and psychological ego of the child is formed (which supposedly happens around the age of 3), rules are only the routine of everyday activities that allow the children to know what will happen next and that they need to conform to. Everyday routines become rules and they are structured into norms that guide the child's actions.

In the qualitative survey, we acquired information from the staff concerning the age at which children begin to be disciplined, the manner in which that is done, and what punishments are applied to young children.

**At what age do you start imposing discipline on children?**

- ? Children have to be disciplined since they are born, little by little.
- ? An important role is played by the mother's actions, the permanent dialogue with the mother is crucial.
- ? We start disciplining children when they start talking and walking, and when they understand that mothers guide them towards a normal behaviour.
- ? Discipline means that the children should know that we are advising them about what they should do and how they should behave.
- ? Teaching discipline should start at the age of 9 months.
- ? Teaching discipline should start at the age of 12 months, when the child starts understanding certain things and can already utter a few words.
- ? Teaching discipline should start as the child begins to acquire speech.
- ? Teaching discipline should begin at the age of 3, when the child already has some sense of responsibility and discretion.
- ? I think that the disciplining of children should start at the cradle stage, when they acquire the initial data about the environment and about the community they live in.

**(staff opinions)**

**How do you go about disciplining children?**

- ? Children have to be disciplined by the day-to-day activities that we perform with them.
- ? Children have to be constantly guided and supervised, but they should also be allowed to do a variety of things, in order for them to find out in time what they should and what they should not do.
- ? Discipline is taught by means of role models. The first models for all children are their parents. We need to be almost perfect for our children, in order to encourage them to be disciplined.
- ? We need to teach discipline to our children with patience, kindness and goodwill.
- ? You teach discipline to children by making them observe a well-ordered lifestyle and by personal example.
- ? Children will learn discipline through dialogue and a lot of communication.

**(staff opinions)**

### What punishment do you apply to young children?

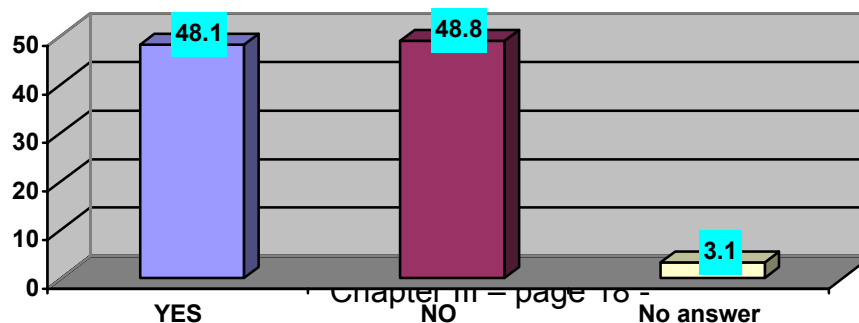
- ? Depriving the child of a particular toy or game, or isolation.
- ? Making the child stand in a corner, or sit on a chair all alone and think about what he or she has done.
- ? Reproof, not allowing them to go out, denying them their favourite toy.
- ? Verbal reprimand, interdictions, spanking at times.
- ? Subduing the child, asking for the opinion of the group, feigning anger by the caregiver and sometimes pulling the child by the hair.
- ? Washing the child's face with a lot of water and soap, so that the eyes smart.
- ? Denying desert.
- ? Not talking to the child, not giving him or her any attention.
- ? Not talking to the child, because this works better than beating.
- ? With small children we mainly apply blackmail, or we deprive them of some sweets or their favourite toys.
- ? Isolating the child from the other children when they play.
- ? I don't think young children should be punished.
- ? Mild scolding.
- ? In the case of young children, we have to apply punishments considering their age. We can impose rules on them, and when they break them, we need to warn them several times that they will have to bear the consequences – minor interdictions.

(staff opinions)

The data obtained from the interviews with children aged 7-18 illustrate the prevalence of the various forms of physical abuse manifested in the institutions. They are cases of physical abuse inflicted by the staff upon the children.

**Figure 3.2.1.** shows that almost half (48.1%) of the children in the 7-18 age group confirm that beating by the staff is a common punishment for children in institutions.

**Figure 3.2.1**  
Breakdown (in %) of the answers provided to the question  
*"In this institution, are there children who are severely punished  
(beaten) by the staff?"*  
children aged 7-18 years  
- ABSUR 2000 -



Most of the children who are punished by beating (51%) belong to the 11-14 age group (Figure 3.2.2).

In response to the question whether in their institution there are children punished by beating inflicted by the staff, 49.3% of the boys and 46.8% of the girls provided an affirmative answer (Figure 3.2.3).

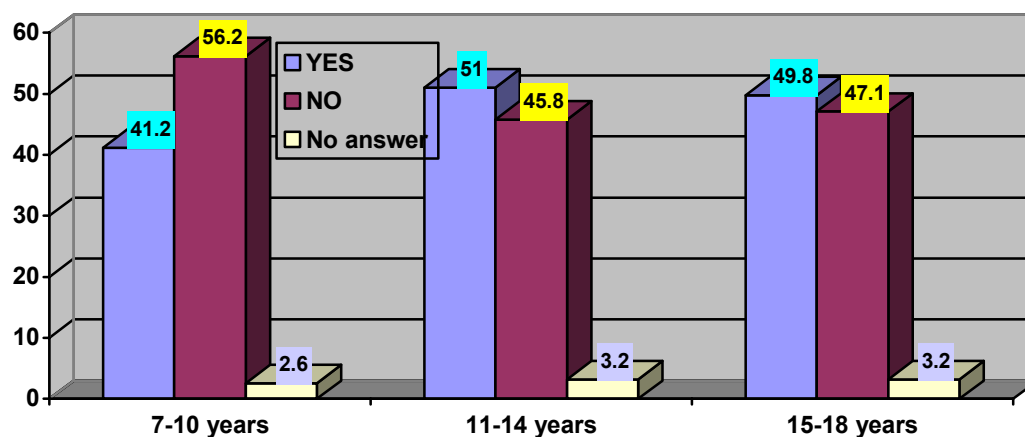
The largest proportion of children punished by beating have been identified in the traditional residential care institutions (56%), followed by the children in family type institutions (46%), while the lowest share (34.4%) of children punished by beating can be found in the mixed type (Figure 3.2.4).

When asked whether they have ever happened to have a personal experience of punishment by the staff, the percentage of those providing an affirmative answer was of only 37.5% (Figure 3.2.5.) and the share of boys was higher than that of girls (Figure 3.2.6).

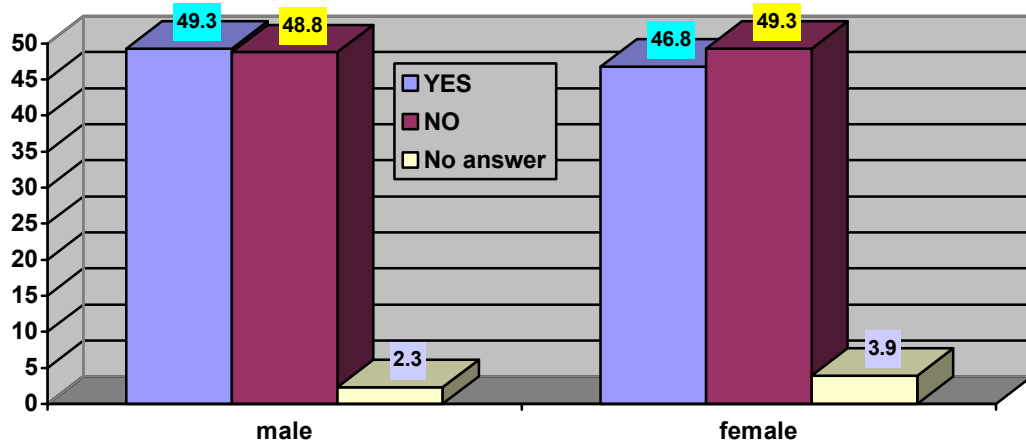
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**Figure 3.2.2**  
Breakdown (in %) by age groups of the answers provided to the question  
*“In this institution, are there children who are severely punished  
(beaten) by the staff?”*  
children aged 7-18  
- ABSUR 2000 -

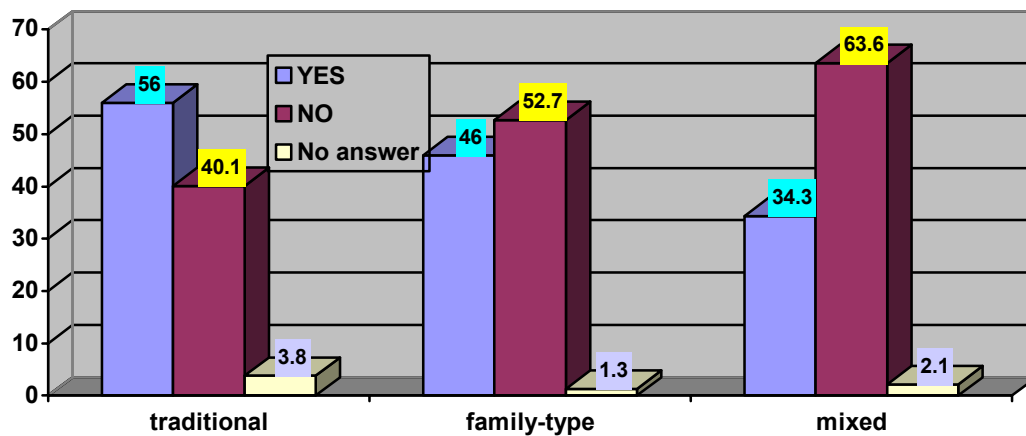
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**Figure 3.2.3.**  
 Breakdown (in %) by genders of the answers provided to the question  
*“In this institution, are there children who are severely punished  
 (beaten) by the staff?”*  
 children aged 7-18 years  
 - ABSUR 2000 -



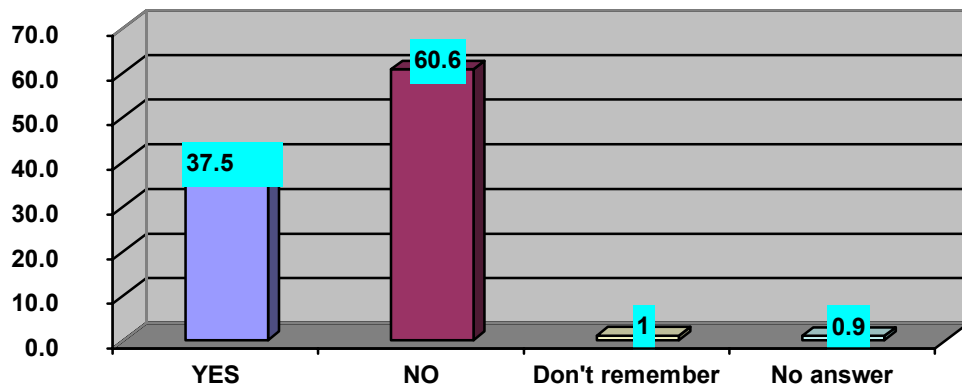
**Figure 3.2.4.**  
 Breakdown (in %) by types of institutions of the answers provided to the question  
*“In this institution, are there children who are severely punished  
 (beaten) by the staff?”*  
 children aged 7-18 years  
 - ABSUR 2000 -



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**Figure 3.2.5.**  
Breakdown (in %) of the answers provided to the question  
*“Have you happened to be severely punished by the staff?”*  
children aged 7-18 years  
- ABSUR 2000 -

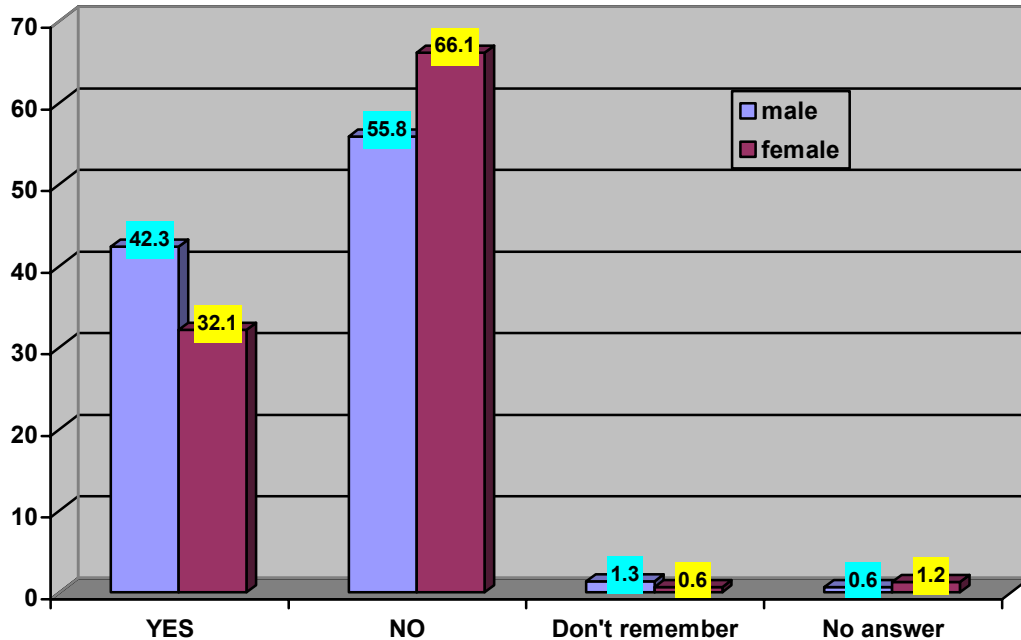
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**Figure 3.2.6.**  
Breakdown (in %) by genders of the answers provided to the question  
*“Have you ever happened to be severely punished by the staff?”*  
children aged 7-18 years  
- ABSUR 2000 -

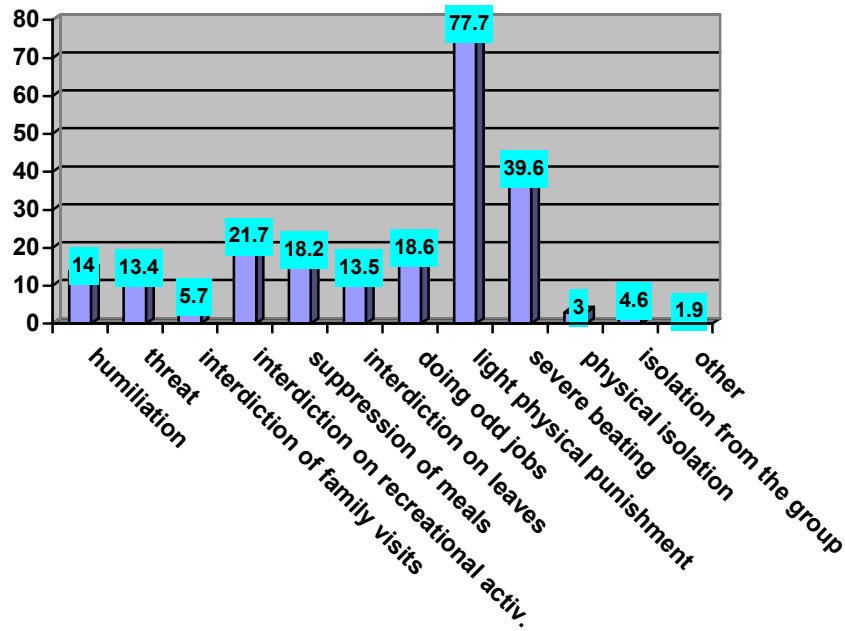
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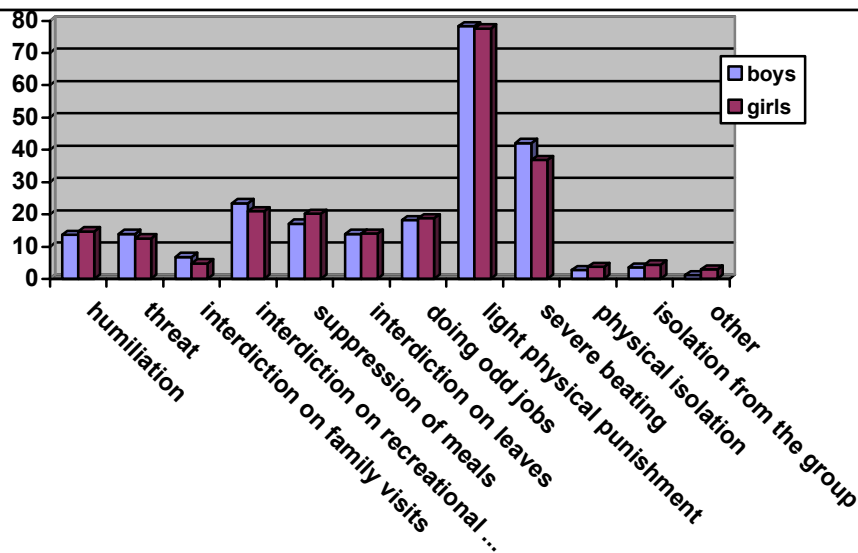
The content and prevalence of the types of punishment are presented in **Figure 3.2.7**. Higher prevalence is held by physical punishment (beatings, doing odd jobs, suppressing meals, interdiction to participate in recreational activities). Humiliation, threat and isolation from the group are also included in the range of punishments inflicted (**Figure 3.2.8**). There are no major differences among boys and girls concerning the types of punishments applied (**Figure 3.2.9**). Most of the punishments were inflicted by the educational staff or the night attendants. It is significant that all staff categories inflict punishments on the children to a larger or smaller extent. Moreover, almost 9% of the children refuse to reveal the identity of the person who inflicted punishments on them (**Figure 3.3.10**).

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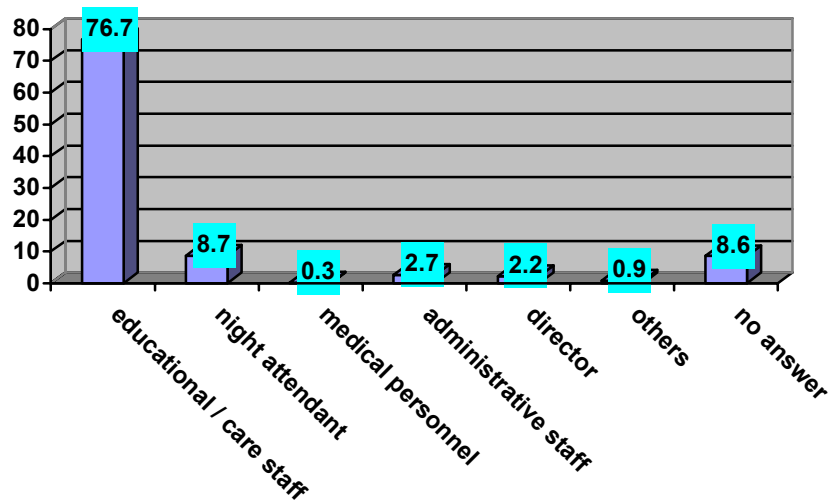
**Figure 3.2.7.**  
 Breakdown (in %) of the answers provided to the question  
*“What was the punishment?”*  
 children aged 7-18 years (n=628)



**Figure 3.2.8.**  
 Breakdown (in %) by genders of the answers provided to the question  
*“What was the punishment?”*  
 children aged 7-18 years (n=628)  
 - ABSUR 2000 -



**Figure 3.2.9.**  
 Breakdown (in %) of the answers provided to the question  
*“Who inflicted that punishment on you?”*



### What punishments do you inflict on the children?

? Kitchen duty, bathroom duty, interdiction on going out to town.

? Interdiction on watching TV, on the right to visits (with parents), performing activities that are unpleasant for them.

? Severe reprimand and warning.

? Restrictions on desert.

? Considering that they have various backgrounds, with a variety of disorders that cannot be corrected with pedagogical means only, I punish them by telling them that I won't take them along on a trip, a camp or exhibition, and I also threaten them with not allowing them to go home to their families.

? To put them back on the right track I punish them by making them do things like: sweeping the classroom for 3 days, doing kitchen duty, watering the flowers, refilling the drinking water, no TV watching, interdiction on going home.

? I do not inflict physical punishment, I use personal or public reprimand, or I refer the child to a social assistant, I talk to the police if necessary.

*(staff opinions)*

### What was your punishment?

- ☺ They made me mop the floors in the corridors, clean the toilets and the shower room. I haven't been punished since. But if they were to punish us, they would make us do the canteen five times a week, we would not get any desert, or they would not allow us to go out to town for several days.
- ☺ The punishments in this institution are canteen duty, bathroom duty and the like. Some girls are sent home, where they have a miserable life, some of them are not allowed to go on the camping trips (when they are on) or to a movie, or they are denied their meals.
- ☺ Because I once used the main staircase, I was punished to sweep and mop up all the sectors, together with all the girls who used the same staircase as myself. On another occasion, I was not allowed to have dinner because I had climbed a tree.
- ☺ The night attendant punishes us depending on her mood. I don't really remember why, but once she made me sweep the whole courtyard at midnight.
- ☺ Because I left the institution without leave to go to the gym, and then I took a walk in town, I was made to sweep the dormitory all the week, but that was easy. When I was in the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, they gave me a poor grade and for two weeks I was not allowed to leave the "house" (the school is in the same building as the institution).
- ☺ Two years ago, the former director used to punish me by making me clean the toilets. I had to clean the shit with my hands, not only myself, but some of the other kids as well, she would supervise us until we finished the job.
- ☺ My punishment was no food and spanking.
- ☺ They punished me by not giving me anything to eat and not letting me go out.
- ☺ When I was in my 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, my teacher punished me by making me go without lunch for a week, of course without a reason.
- ☺ They would beat us every day. The mildest form was when they made us go down on our knees, and then gave us several kicks in the back and butt. This used to happen in the institution where I lived before coming to this one.
- ☺ Before, they used to beat us with a plank or a wet rope, and they did that whenever there was some minor conflict, in any case it happened every day.

*(children's accounts)*

The qualitative survey revealed that the "severe" physical punishments (beatings) have gone away from residential care institutions during these last years. In their accounts, the children made frequent mention of that change.

After the new legal framework was implemented in 1997, the children in most residential care institutions were informed about their rights, and so they found out that there was an interdiction on any kind of physical punishment.

In our discussions with the directors of the County Directorates for the Protection of the Rights of the Child, we found that their reactions were extremely firm to the situations when children could have been exposed to beating: "in all job descriptions, we made a particular provision putting a ban on beating, and all staff members had to acknowledge

by their signature that any act of beating inflicted by them on a child would result in immediate canceling of their labour contract”.

These interdictions generally concern “severe” beatings, yet the so-called “light” punishments are easily overlooked. A slap, a box on the ear, a punch, a kick, hair-pulling or the like, used quite frequently (several times a day), induce a permanent state of insecurity, and they destroy the children’s self-esteem.

### *Case Study*

**X** C.A. – 15, 11<sup>th</sup> grade

“ I have grown up here, I was abandoned when I was born, actually when I was one day old. My mother tried to use pills to get rid of me. I was born in Bucharest, in the 4<sup>th</sup> district. This is my mother’s home town, this is why they brought me here. My father lived in a small, one-room flat (in Bucharest) – he was a medical student. My father was a foreigner. I don’t know my father, actually he doesn’t even know I exist; mother never told him. All I know about my father is that his name is David something, some African name I can’t pronounce or remember. Mother also had another child with a foreigner, my brother. Mother would have liked grandma to take me to live with her, because she is old and sick, and I could help her. Grandma has 3 rooms, she lives in a village 10 km away, together with my mother’s two sisters and their kids, my cousins.

This year, on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March, I went home with a bunch of flowers and a very beautiful letter I had written. Mother took the flowers, but didn’t talk to me. I didn’t like the way they treated me (a cassette had gone missing, and they suspected me of having taken it).

I could never go home before my grandfather died. My brother was admitted to an institution when he was 7. I last saw my brother last Christmas, he was with a family. My mother is working, but she doesn’t go out after work because she is ashamed. The staff used to call me “gypsy” (because I’m dark). When I was in preschool, one of the ladies on the staff liked me and took me to her place for days. She saw I was afraid of people. She wanted to adopt me, but my mother refused to sign the papers.”

*“What changes have you seen in the institutions during these last years?”*

“I noticed the first changes about 5-6 years ago – for instance, they talk to us different. Before they were very rude. Before the Directorate for Child Protection was established, we didn’t need a written note to go out to town. The foreigners would come to visit us here. Now the foreigners go to them. Organization has changed. The former classroom is now a dormitory. On DCP orders, we now have guards. Curfew is at 8 p.m. If we go out without leave ten times, they throw us out of the institution.”

*“Where do the girls meet their parents when they come visiting?”*

“There is no space where you can talk to your parents undisturbed, in private. You usually meet them at the gate.”

*“Do the teachers discriminate against the children from the institution in favour of children coming from families?”*

“Yes, 3 or 4 of them do. They would sometimes say: you, kids, you are nitwits, you steal, you don’t dress right, you are in bad need of a bath, and you look rather famished. Once

they gave us no money at all between summer and winter, which money would have been 24,000 lei for children under 14, and 36,000 for children between 14 and 18. You get a craving, of course, when you see the kids with families having all sorts of things for snack, and sometimes you simply have to ask for a bite. We do better about the clothes. We buy them in second hand shops. In summer they give us shorts and T-shirts, we change them once a week. But we have several clothes for winter, because we go around the town singing Christmas carols and people tip us. I have managed to save 1.6 million from those tips. I like offering gifts to the ladies here – soap bars, shampoo. Before, some English gentlemen would come to us and bring candy boxes for each of us – I have given many of them away as gifts.

There used to be a teacher I was afraid of. Although I studied a lot, and I repeated my lessons several times, when she called upon me, I forgot the answer; I was shaking, sweating all over, my face was burning. She simply couldn't stand children from the institution. She would insult us, although we usually did our homework. She would say: "You're no good. You're only worth a 5!" Still, I managed to get good marks even from her. But then there were also teachers who didn't know we came from the institution. My form master would sometimes say: "You won't be able to pass your exams, nobody will take you on. The schoolmaster at the gymnasium once dragged one of my colleagues along the corridor, pulling her by the hair. He is very violent. He also grabbed me by the blouse one day. He wanted to hit me with a stick. He is a history teacher and he's been a schoolmaster for two years. When I saw that girl, my classmate, being dragged along as if she were an animal, I wanted to go to our form master to ask him to help her. But our form master is new – although he is 45, he is new to the school – he did not intervene, he just tried to calm us down. When you see things like that, your blood curdles; I can still feel the shivers down my spine. The schoolmaster used to punch the kids in the belly. A girl once smoked in the loo – he also dragged her along the corridor to his office, so that we should not see what he did to her. But why does he do that only to the girls from the institution? Some of the kids with families used to play truant, did all sorts of stupid things, sometimes very bad things, and still he wouldn't punish them. I say there are so many things you can do to discipline a child; why should you use beating before everything else? Why did he beat 4 girls from the institution? He wanted to beat me a second time; but I escaped. I told him later: 'I know you are quick-tempered, that's why I ran away!'"

*"What do you dislike about this place?"*

"That you have to get out of bed in the morning, even if you have nothing to do. There are no organized outings; once we used to go camping or on trips. Some people would come and hire us for odd jobs: picking plums, harvesting corn, weeding the garden or cleaning jobs in apartments. The schoolmaster and the caregivers allow us to do that. We are happy to be able to go out, even if we have to work. Now they have even stopped doing that, nobody comes to hire us. I once went to pick mushrooms, I had to work from 8 in the morning till 8 at night, but they paid very little – 20-24 thousand. Some other time I picked plums for a month and I was paid 14 thousand. I couldn't believe my eyes! We were on a list in a notebook, 40 girls. I'm sure somebody took us in.

In winter they no longer let us go sleighing in the clearing nearby. I passed my exams so I could go on to high school. I said to myself: this summer will be my summer. They said they would take us on trips during the holidays, but then they didn't. But I spent some

time in a camp. We go on trips when we are sponsored. Some of the kids go to 5 or 6 camps on sponsor money.”

*“Are the younger kids exploited by the older ones?”*

“They used to be. I’ve been through that. In the mornings, when we were in the club, the older girls would beat us, because they had also been beaten in their turn. They waited until we got to our desert, and then they just made a sign and we, the younger ones, had to give them up, not eat them. And we had to keep what presents we got from the foreigners visiting in our rooms, and not eat them either. They beat us with their slippers or with sticks. They did that in the evening, or at 6 in the morning. The caregivers would come on duty at 8. But they knew what was going on. We also had to wash their clothes and underwear. We had to give them the money we earned singing carols for Christmas. In the evening, they tied our hands together, blindfolded us, and then made others beat us. The blows were sometimes so hard that we staggered on our feet or fell over. If we cried, the beating got even worse.

When I was in a camp with children from other counties, the girls were envious and they would beat me with bare hands or with a stick. They didn’t allow me to make friends with other girls. They kicked me or they pulled my hair. When they gave us our food, they forced me to give it to them. 30 older girls would beat 200 younger ones. One would say: “I kind of don’t like this girl.” The other answered: “Then beat her!” Now no more. I keep telling them: “You are lucky! Before you had to show deference to the older girls. Now you can treat them more as your equals. Before there was no way you could get into a row with an older girl. If you did, you were a dead man.

When I was in preschool, there was a woman who used a wire to beat us; I still have a mark on my leg. I would hang on to the bed-panel and protect my head with my arms, or get under the bed so she could not reach me. When our director at the time heard what was going on, she filed a report on her and cut her salary. After that, whenever the director came visiting, she would hold me in her arms.

Now the children are no longer beaten up very bad; I keep telling the new girls that they are living good times. They sometimes get yelled at, but before, if you got yelled at, you necessarily also got a good beating to go with it.”

*“Have you heard about homosexual relations in the institution?”*

“With us they never happened. The boys sometimes get drunk, so they might be doing improper things then.”

*“Have you got friends?”*

“I have some friends, some girls I met at the gym. There are also boys I see, but they are like brothers to me. I don’t have a really close friend. When the girls have a row, they tell others all your secrets. There are things I won’t tell anyone.”

*“What would you like most?”*

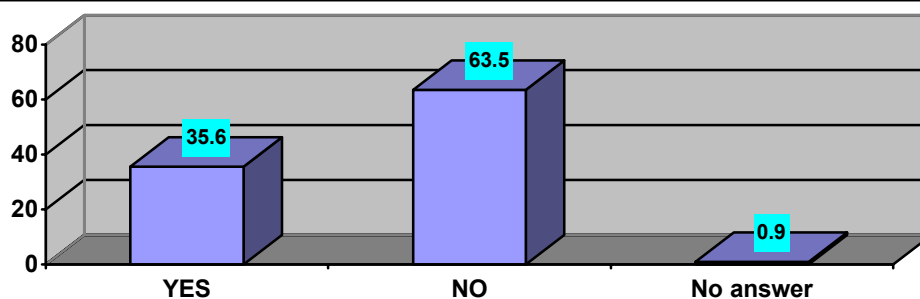
“To see my father, to see his face. To graduate high school and take an admission exam to university. But I also need money for that, so we’ll see.”

In many institutions, it is a common practice among the staff to use the children for housework in their own homes. Such activities include helping with the cleaning or odd jobs in agriculture. The children are sometimes paid for their work.

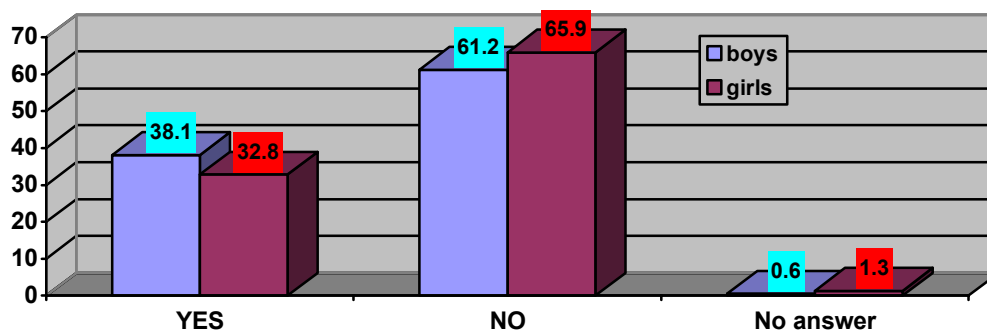
The staff think that they can use the children for performing various activities in their own households because such activities have not been banned or discouraged so far by any laws or regulations.

**Figure 3.2.10.** shows that 35.6% of the children have been called upon to do housework in the staff's own homes. The boys are used much more than the girls, and the children in rural areas are called upon more than those in the urban areas (**Figure 4.2.11., 4.2.12.**). The children are mainly required to do such activities by the educational staff (80.2%) but there have been times when other categories of staff also used the children (**Figure 4.2.13.**).

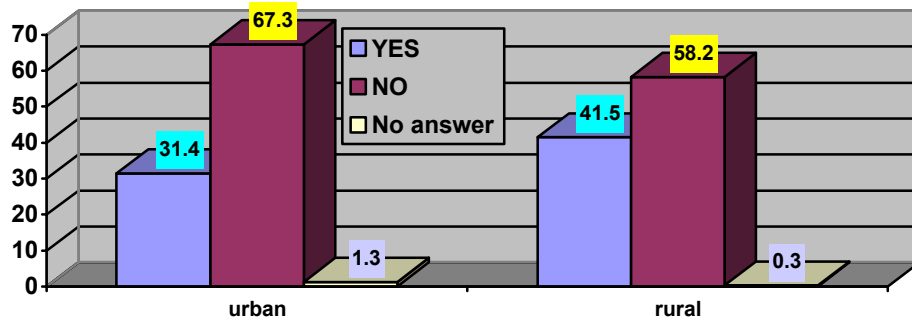
**Figure 3.2.10.**  
Breakdown (in %) of the answers provided to the question  
*“Have you ever been required by someone on the staff to help with housework?”*  
children aged 7-18 years  
- ABSUR 2000 -



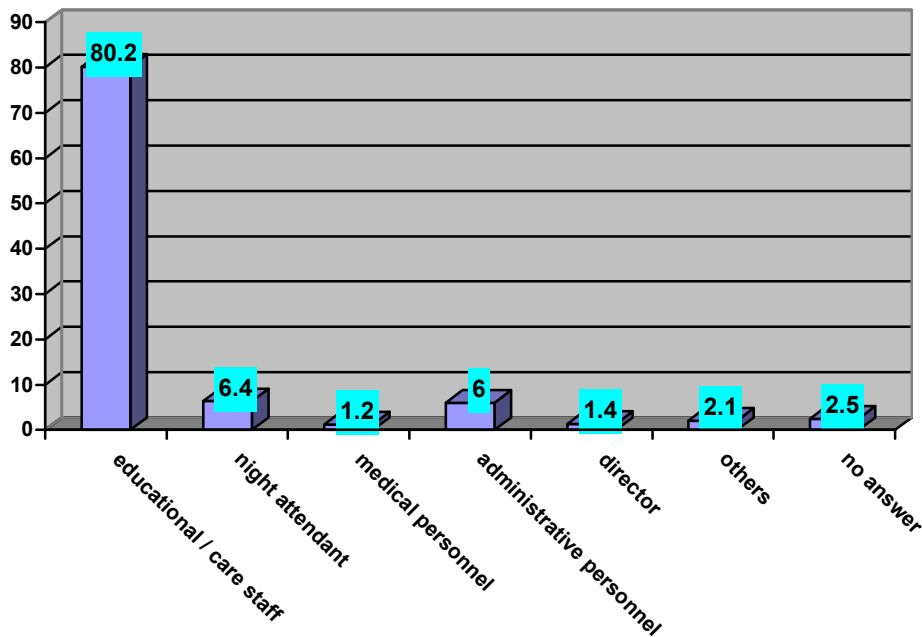
**Figure 3.2.11.**  
Breakdown (in %) by genders of the answers provided to the question  
*“Have you ever been asked by someone on the staff to help with housework?”*  
children aged 7-18 years  
- ABSUR 2000 -



**Figure 3.2.12.**  
 Breakdown (in %) by area of residence - urban/rural  
 of the answers provided to the question  
*“Have you ever been asked by someone on the staff to help with housework?”*  
 children aged 7-18 years  
 - ABSUR 2000 -



**Figure 3.2.13.**  
 Breakdown (in %) of the answers provided to the question  
*“Who asked you to do odd jobs for them?”*  
 children aged 7-18 years (n=562)  
 - ABSUR 2000 -



*Case Study*

**B** Danut – 12, 5<sup>th</sup> grade, placement center in northern Romania

Friendly, kind, polite, very communicative. He is neatly dressed, he looks nice. He has been institutionalized since the age of 3, and he comes from a disorganized family with 5 children, where he is the youngest child. The father – an alcoholic – used to inflict physical and psychological abuse on the whole family. The parents are divorced now. The father lives in a village in the vicinity of the placement center; he never visits his son. The mother works in Bucharest, she is a housekeeper with a company; she doesn't come to visit very often either.

He has two sisters in the same placement center. Two of his siblings are in prison. Last year he fled with one of his sisters to go to Bucharest for two days, to see their mother. He was not punished for that.

In the institution there are both good things and bad things, but what annoys him most is that he has to go to bed much too early. When he was younger, the caregivers would beat him, but now it is only the older boys that give him some trouble. They often take his supplement – his pocket money – to buy themselves cigarettes and other things. If he won't obey the older boys, they beat him up, and if he complains to the caregivers, they always side with the older ones. Sometimes the night attendants also punish the children by beating them, because some of the children would like to stay up longer to watch TV.

Other punishments applied by the caregivers include: slashing the children's palms with the ruler when they don't know how to do their homework, interdiction on playing in the open for a week, interdiction on TV watching, making the children clean and arrange their lockers. In their building there are no individual lockers, but the 6 children in the same room have a locker that they can share.

Another problem he has is the food. He thinks he doesn't get enough food, and when he wants to have a snack between two meals, he hides some bread or cookies under his pillow. Some of the staff, mainly the kitchen staff, sometimes call on him for odd jobs at the institution, but also in their own households. In the latter case, they give him money and he can buy sweets or whatever else he wants to.

He gets along well with one of the woman caregivers with the preschool group. His relations with the children his age is good, and he has many friends both in the institutions, and in the wider community. The children at school call the children coming from the placement center *caministii* ('placeys'), while the children living in the neighbourhood are called *cartieristii* ('neighbies'). Sometimes he gets into a fight with the children at the school or those who live in the neighbourhood. His classmates sometimes help him with his homework, and he gets along with the girls best. He had a good relation with his primary school teacher, but he doesn't know what to expect, since in secondary school he is going to have several teachers. When he was in preschool, and during the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grades, he used to pee in bed; they never beat him, they only made him change his bedclothes. He doesn't know whether they punished other children suffering from the same problem. Children with enuresis were accommodated in the same rooms with the other children.

What he would like most would be to go to his mother together with his two sisters, because he liked the time he spent in Bucharest, and mother was nicer than the “ladies” at the center.

He likes playing football and he loves animals: in the courtyard of the center there are many dogs “he has made friends with”.

He is only allowed to leave the center with written permission from a caregiver, but then he goes out to town quite frequently.

He wants to become a priest, because his favourite subject at school is religion. They have made some trips to monasteries, and sometimes they stayed there for the night.

One of the few happy moments he has in the center is when he receives presents from his Belgian sponsor. Some of the children have Belgian sponsors who send gifts to them. It is a joy for them to receive what they want and to send their sponsors thanking letters, where they can maybe also add some other wish they have.

### **3.3. Emotional Abuse**

Emotional abuse is manifested in inadequate actions and practices by adults that induce in the children negative experiences, emotions and feelings such as: fear, terror, insecurity, uncertainty, pain, unhappiness, anxiety, etc. The experiences are intrinsically subjective. The tolerability threshold expands on the whole range of direct or indirect experiences across individuals.

With all the subjectivity, emotional experiences are the binder and driving engine of existence. By experiencing things, we mobilize or demobilize all our (rational, motivational, etc.) psychological mechanisms. Emotional experiences are more deeply engrained in our memories than the events filtered through our reason. All the life of an individual unfolds on the background of emotional experiences. This is why it is important to eliminate emotional abuse that may send a life down the wrong path.

There is a tendency among some professionals not to differentiate emotional abuse from psychological abuse.

In the case of emotional abuse, the foreground is taken up by the negative, painful experience of an event. Children are as a rule very much aware of what is going on, while adults may, but do not obligatorily come to that awareness. In the case of psychological abuse, both the abused (the child), and quite frequently the abuser himself (the institution staff) are unaware of the fact that they are abused or that an abuse is being committed.

**β**

The most frequent punishment is that they threaten you with suppressing your meals, or with making you kneel for an hour or two with your arms up in the air. Sometimes they beat us with a glass fiber, without looking what they are touching. But

for me the worst punishment is when they tell me “you are stupid, you won’t get anywhere”, “you can’t succeed anyway because that is simply not possible”. This makes me cry and suffer the most.

*(excerpt from a case study)*

Many forms of emotional abuse are applied in the institutions with the purpose of disciplining children.

Some of these have already been mentioned by the children in the quantitative study illustrated in **Figure 3.2.7.** (humiliation, threats, isolation, etc.).

Emotional abuse may accompany any other form of abuse. For instance, physical abuse, beside causing actual physical harm, most of the time also induces negative emotional experiences.

## **Sexual Abuse**

### ***Article 34:***

***“States Parties undertake to protect the child from all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse”.***

(UN Convention on the Rights of the Child)

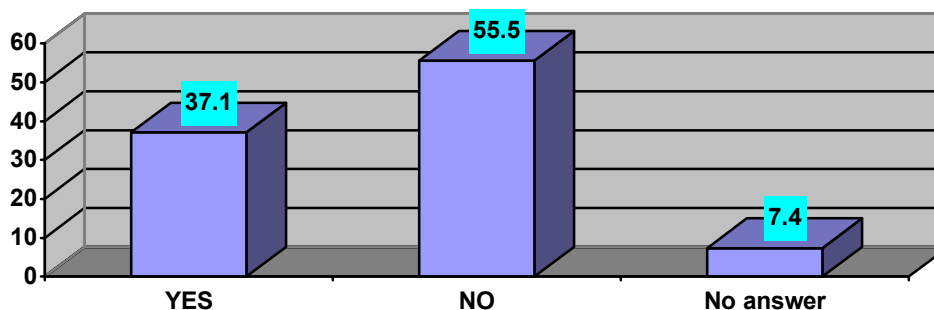
Sexual abuse can be defined as an act of exposing, involving or forcing a child to have sexual relations with either genital, oral or anal contact or without contact by making advances, propositions, and gestures, by fondling, viewing etc., by an adult person of the opposite or same sex. Such persons may be either adults or children capable of imposing themselves (on the younger children) by physical force, power, corruption, blackmailing, intimidation, etc.

The literature says that when the aggressor is a child, the age difference beyond which we can speak about abusive relations is of 5 years. The decision whether a relationship is abusive or not is made in the context where there are sexual relations that happen between children of about the same age, where they take the form of sex games mutually accepted by the adolescents. When sexual relations happen as a result of the use of (any kind of) force, they acquire an abusive character (Maria Roth).

Children in residential care institutions may become the victims of sexual abuse both from members of the staff, and from adults who come into institutional contact with them (teachers, physicians, etc.), adults who are not connected in any way to the child/institution, or older children in the same institution, from other institutions or outside the institution.

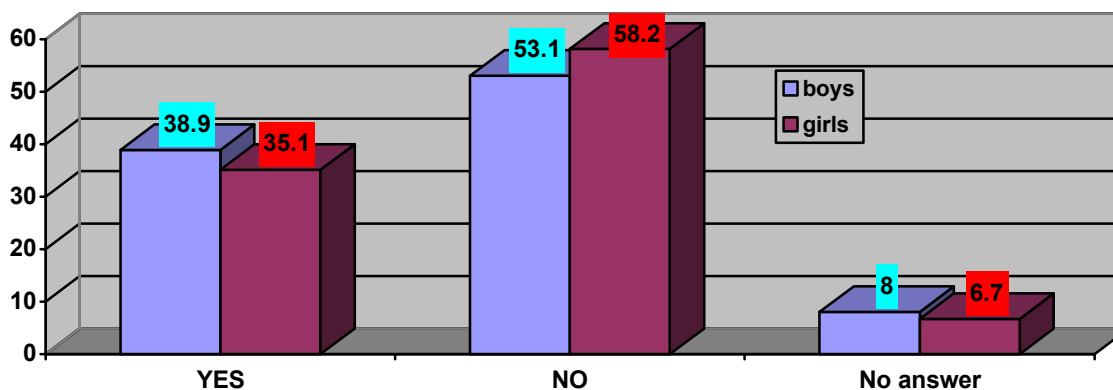
The data of our survey revealed that 36.1% of the institutionalized children are aware of cases when children were constrained to have sexual relations (**Figure 3.4.1**).

**Figure 3.4.1**  
 Breakdown (in %) of the answers provided to the question  
*“Have you ever heard that there are children in the residential care institutions who are constrained to have sexual relations?”*  
 children aged 7-18 years  
 - ABSUR 2000 -



The share of boys who have heard about cases of institutionalized children who are constrained to participate in sexual practices is larger than that of girls (**Figure 3.4.2**).

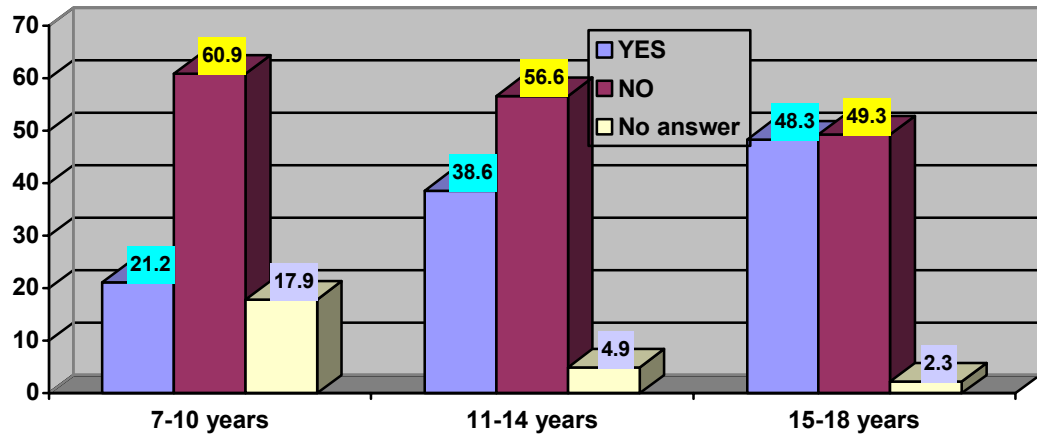
**Figure 3.4.2**  
 Breakdown (in %) by genders of the answers provided to the question  
*“Have you ever heard that there are children in the residential care institutions who are constrained to have sexual relations?”*  
 children aged 7-18 years  
 - ABSUR 2000 -



Among the children who have heard about the existence of sexual abuse, 21.2% are in the 7-10 age group, 38.6% are in the 11-14 age group, while 48.3% are in the 15-18 age group. The share of children who refuse to provide an answer is higher in the 7-10 age group (**Figure 3.4.3**).

**Figure 3.4.3**

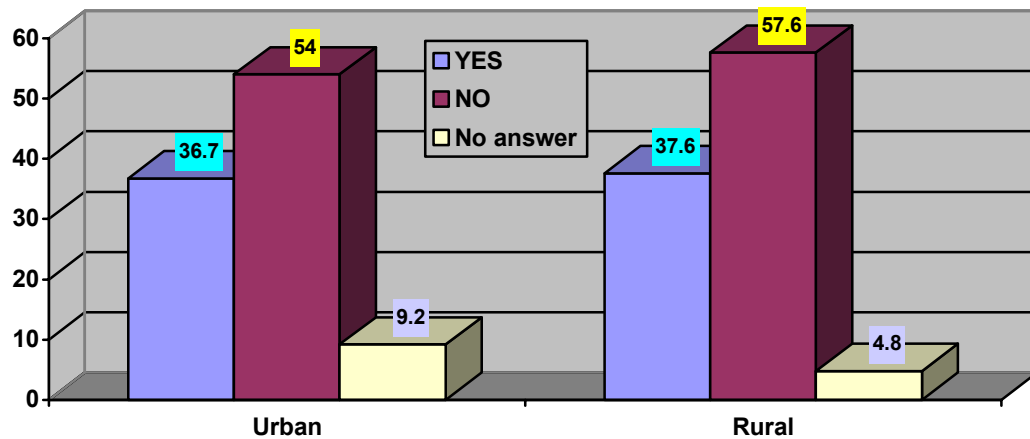
Breakdown (in %) by age groups of the answers provided to the question  
*“Have you ever heard that there are children in the residential care institutions who are constrained to have sexual relations?”*  
children aged 7-18 years  
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These practices are known both to children in the urban area and to children in the rural area (Figure 3.4.4).

**Figure 3.4.4.**

Breakdown (in %) by the area of residence (urban / rural) of the answers provided to the question  
*“Have you ever heard that there are children in the residential care institutions who are constrained to have sexual relations?”*  
children aged 7-18 years  
- ABSUR 2000 -



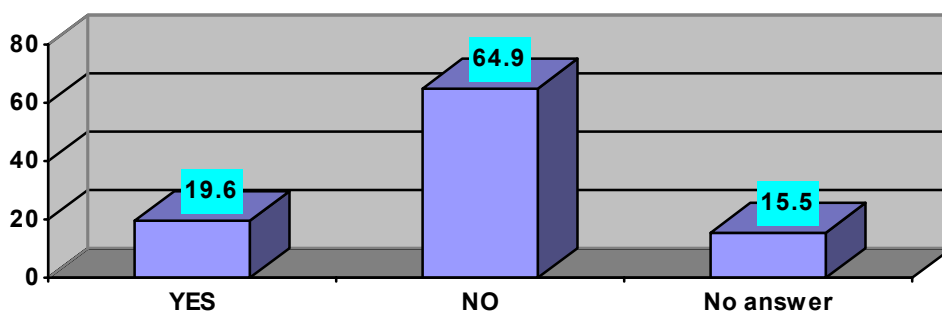
As in the case of other forms of abuse, the percentage of children who will admit that such things do happen in their own institution is much lower (**Figure 3.4.5.**)

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**Figure 3.4.5.**

Breakdown (in %) of the answers provided to the question  
*“Are there in this center children who are constrained (blackmailed) to have sexual relations?”*  
children aged 7-18 years  
- ABSUR 2000 -

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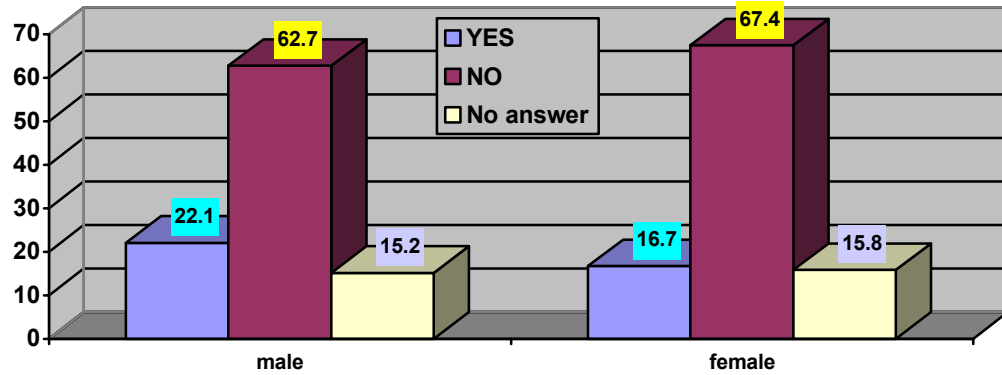
Boys will more readily admit to the existence of sexual abuse in their own institution than girls (**Figure 3.4.6.**).

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**Figure 3.4.6.**

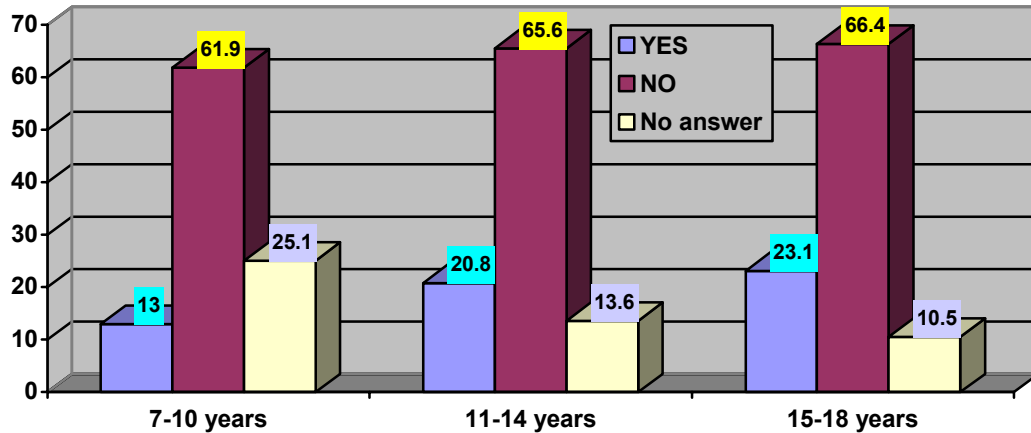
Breakdown (in %) by genders of the answers provided to the question  
*“Are there in this center children who are constrained (blackmailed) to have sexual relations?”*  
children aged 7-18 years  
- ABSUR 2000 -

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Children who admit to the existence of such abuse mostly belong to the 15-18 age group. On the other hand, most of the children who refuse to answer that question belong to the 7-10 age group (Figure 3.4.7.).

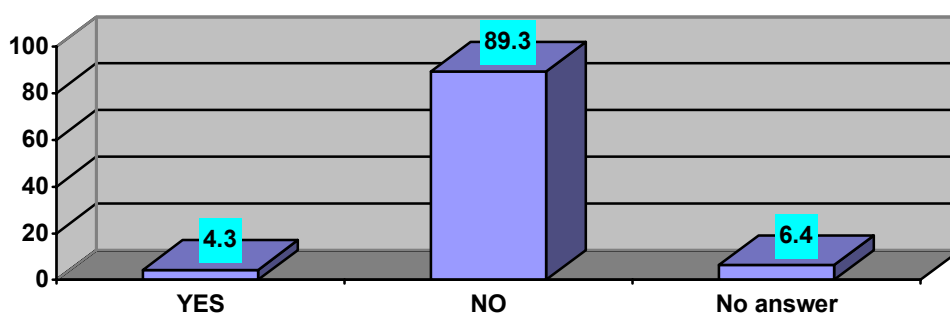
**Figure 3.4.7**  
 Breakdown (in %) by age groups of the answers provided to the question  
*“Are there in this center children who are constrained (blackmailed) to have sexual relations?”*  
 children aged 7-18 years  
 - ABSUR 2000 -



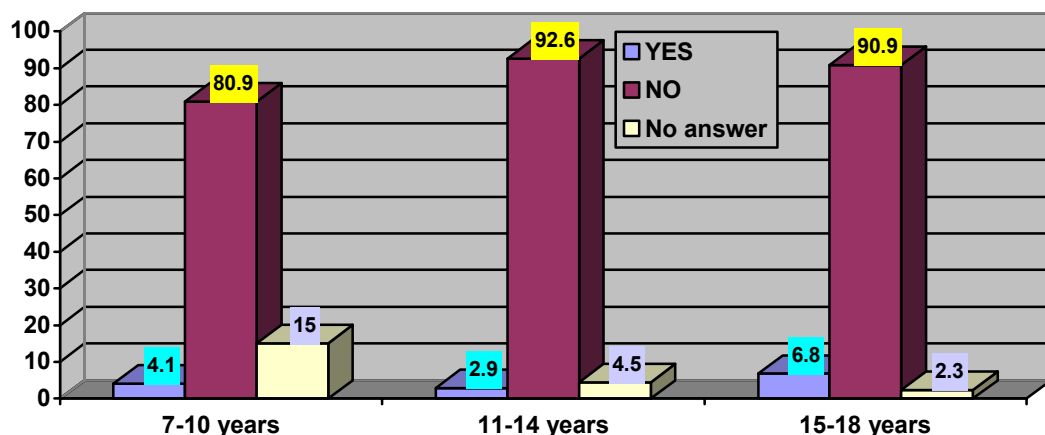
Very few children (only 4.3%) took the courage to admit that they had been the victims of such abuse themselves and their percentage does not vary too much across age groups (Figure 3.4.8. and 3.4.9.). But the number of children is in reality much higher. In all the institutions where we had children in the 7-18 age group (with the exception of two), there was at least one child who admitted to having been the victim of sexual abuse.

The literature says that, as a rule, children will keep the “secret” over such events and will deny them when asked a direct question. The abusers make sure that what happened will be kept “secret” by threatening and corruption. Institutionalized children will keep the “secret” because they have the feeling they would not be believed and defended. Children admitted to having been the victims of sexual abuse mainly during the case studies.

**Figure 3.4.8.**  
 Breakdown (in %) of the answers provided to the question  
*“Have you ever been constrained to have such a relation?”*  
 children aged 7-18 years  
 - ABSUR 2000 -



**Figure 3.4.9.**  
 Breakdown (in %) by age groups of the answers provided to the question  
*“Have you ever been constrained to have such a relation ?”*  
 children aged 7-18 years

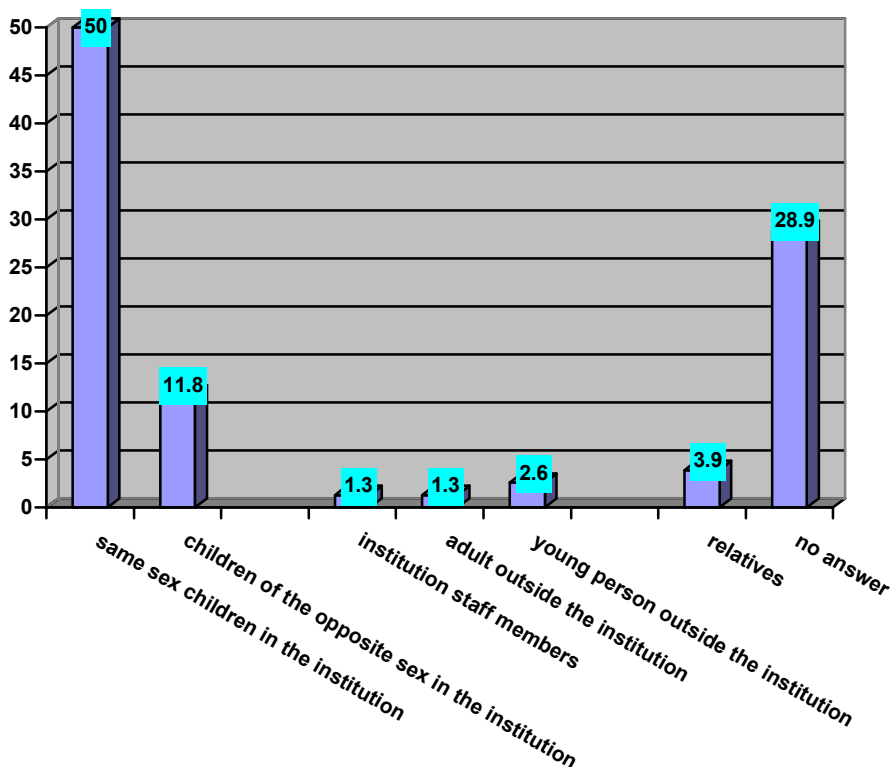


- ABSUR 2000 -

**Figure 3.4.10.** indicates that 50% of the children claim that they have been the victims of homosexual abuse by a child in the same institution. 11.8% of the children claim they have been the victims of heterosexual abuse by another child in the institutions. Among

those committing sexual abuse, children also quote the institution staff, children from other institutions and the children's relatives, in a proportion of less than 5%. It is significant that almost 30% of the children are unwilling to say who the abuser was.

**Figure 3.4.10.**  
 Breakdown (in %) of the answers provided to the question  
*"Who constrained you to do it?"*  
 children aged 7-18 years (n = 76)  
 - ABSUR 2000 -



The most frequent type of abusive sexual relationships in institutions are homosexual relations where the abuser is an older, stronger child in the institution.

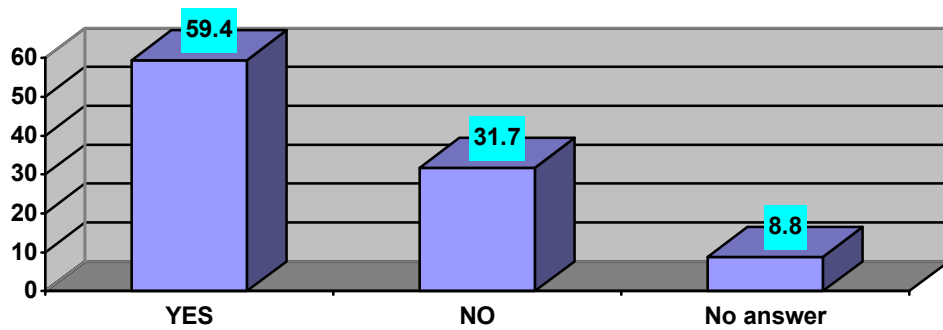
Emotional deficiencies are compensated by an exacerbation of sexual impulses.

The daily program in the institutions is more often than not monotonous, without any guidance or satisfaction that could influence sexual precocity and sexual relations themselves.

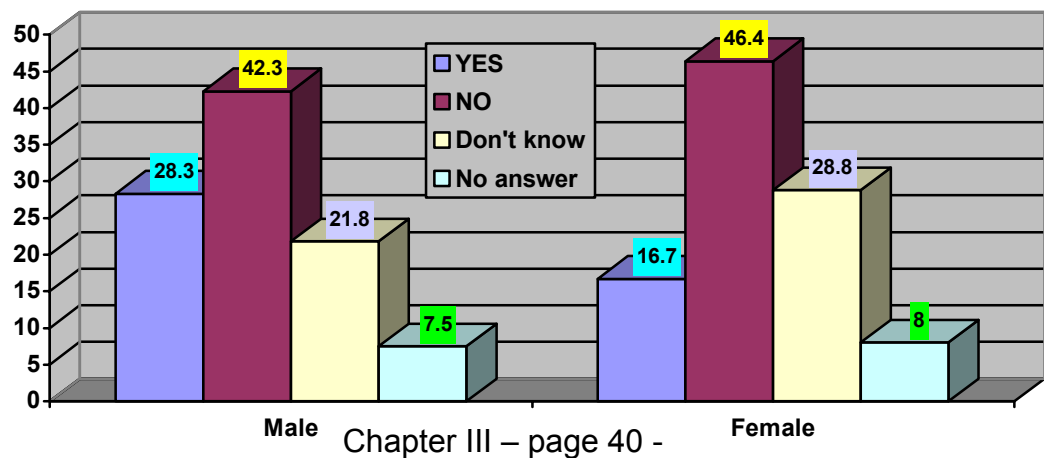
Homosexuality results from a lack of a gender reference point already in the early years. As it has been shown in previous chapters, before and during their preschool years, children are even confused about their own gender.

Almost 60% of the children claim that they have heard about homosexual relations between the children in the institutions (**Figure 3.4.11**). 23.3% of the boys and 16.7% of the girls say that they know about homosexual relations even between the children in their own institutions (**Figure 3.4.12**).

**Figure 3.4.11.**  
 Breakdown (in %) of the answers provided to the question  
*“Have you heard about sexual relations between children of the same sex?”*  
 children aged 7-18 years  
 - ABSUR 2000 -



**Figure 3.4.12.**  
 Breakdown (in %) by genders of the answers provided to the question  
*“Are there children of the same sex who have sexual relations in this institution?”*  
 children aged 7-18 years  
 - ABSUR 2000 -



In all age groups children state the existence of homosexual relations, the highest prevalence being characteristic of the 15-18 age group (**Figure 3.4.13**).

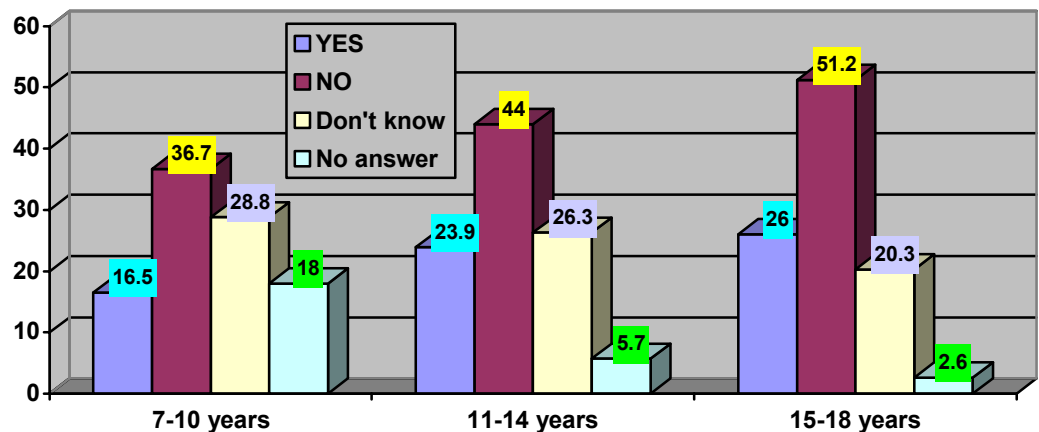
**β** M.I., a boy of 15 at a placement center in the rural area.

I had found out from other kids that he would be one of those who commit sexual abuses in the institution. I tried to talk to him, but at the beginning he was very scared and would provide mechanical answers to all my questions. But then he gradually eased up and told me that when he was 9 and in another institution, he was beaten up and constrained by older boys to have oral homosexual relations. He did not tell anyone about it, because the boys kept threatening him. After he was transferred here, he started doing to younger kids what the older kids had been doing to him. The center director found out and handed him over to the police. At the precinct, they interrogated him and they beat him up. After returning to the center, he refrained for a while, then he restarted raping the younger boys: “I know what I’m doing is wrong, I tried to stop, but I can’t”.

*(excerpt from a case study)*

**Figure 3.4.13.**

Breakdown (in %) by age groups of the answers provided to the question  
**“Are there children of the same sex who have sexual relations in this institution?”**  
 children aged 7-18 years  
 - ABSUR 2000 -



The case studies and focus group discussions have illustrated the special types of behaviour that inflict abuse on children. They also revealed difficulties generated by the often inadequate treatment of these problems by the staff, who cannot find an explanation or a solution for them. Another finding was the lack of adequate knowledge and skills

among the caregivers, that they could use to curb the children's unwanted and inadequate manifestations at that age.

**How do you react when you discover cases of abuse and homosexual practices involving the children?**

? I have seen them masturbating, but in the institution where I work I have not seen cases of sexual aggression.

? I have only noticed cases of masturbation. I consider that in such cases the children involved need several sessions with a psychologist to correct their deviant and potentially aggressive behaviour.

? I have seen cases of masturbation – in that phase they get agitated, and this is why we have to supervise them more carefully.

? I haven't seen cases of sexual violence in our institution, but I have seen children masturbating, both boys and girls. In that case, we involve the doctor, who prescribes sedatives to the more aggressive ones, and we try to tell them that what they are doing is not nice. Masturbating children should be placed in separate rooms, so that they can be supervised all the time.

? I have not seen cases of homosexual relations, but there are very many cases of masturbation. Those children are given sedatives (Calmepan, Bromoval). The children need to be isolated from the others, so that they should not see them masturbating and start doing the same.

? We don't make a public issue of it. We involve the children in various activities and we talk to the psychologist about them.

? In the case of homosexuality, we try prevention, we try to explain to the children that it is against the laws of nature. We pretend not to notice that they are masturbating, and we try to involve those children in various activities (to keep their minds off masturbation).

? When we are confronted with cases of homosexuality and masturbation, we involve the doctor.

? We haven't had any cases of homosexual relations so far, but I've heard that they are a reality in the institutions. I think they should take these children to a doctor where they can talk about it.

? In such cases we perform collateral counseling, without making direct reference to the case (except when we deal with cases of abuse).

? It is very important that the identity of those identified should be made public. We first talk to those involved, and then we refer them to a specialist for professional intervention.

? In such cases, we try to answer the following questions: have the relations been generated by the culture of the institution, by personality features, or simply by curiosity? We weigh the contribution of these factors to the case under consideration, and then we decide on the type of intervention that is most appropriate in that particular instance.

? If I were confronted with such problems, I would ask the children involved what made them do what they did, and then I would try to explain to them that such behaviour is unethical.

? I would not blow the affair out of all proportion by informing everybody about it. If they sleep in the same bedroom, I would try to separate them.

? When I have such cases, I will first try to remove the cause in order to solve the effect.

? I would talk to the kids to find out whether it was an experiment, it happened between consenting partners, or it was an abuse. Then I would refer the case to a psychotherapist and treat the matter in full confidentiality.

? First I'll talk to the children involved to see what they think or whether they are aware of what they are doing.

? I will tell them about the disadvantages of these practices.

? Several years back, I had a case when the children told on each other, so we had to call the police. They made statements to the police, but one of them denied everything, so everything went into suspension. If there are gay couples among our children now, they are hiding it very well, because we have never caught anyone in the act.

? In general it is very difficult to identify such practices among the children. They will deny even when they are caught in the act.

*(staff accounts)*

☺ I have never heard of such things.

☺ Actually it happened to me, my math teacher tried it twice with me.

☺ Such things have not happened for a long while in our center. There used to be a lot of sexual abuse before, it was either the older ones abusing the younger ones, or pairs of older ones and pairs of younger ones wanted to do it together.

☺ Five years ago there were two women among the teachers who did all sorts of improprieties, when we were younger they would send us all to the dorm, and they would do things with two boys who have left since, but then they were found out, and I haven't heard or seen anything since then.

☺ There was a case among my colleagues, that is one of the boys forced a younger child to do things with him, and he threatened him with beating from a bigger boy if he told on him.

☺ I haven't heard a thing, because that girl doesn't speak out loud about what she is doing, she only talks to her girlfriend about it.

☺ It's never happened to me, but I have heard stories.

☺ It's never happened to me, but I know that such things did happen at the placement center.

☺ One of the teachers, who is now working with the police, used to make the girls take their clothes off, and then beat them with a hose or call them to room 5 and punch and kick them, but he never abused them sexually.

☺ Some years ago, the deputy manager, who was fired in the mean time, lured girls over 12 to his office where he had sex with them, in fact he raped them and threatened to throw them out of the institution if they let on about what happened there.

☺ I know that the cook in my institution used to abuse the girls sexually, but he was fired.

☺ I only know about one such case, when a 17-year old boy abused boys in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grades. But he was discovered and moved to another institution.

*(children's accounts)*

### 3.5. Other Forms of Abuse

#### 3.5.1. Exploitation of Younger Children by Older Children

*Article 36:*

*“States Parties shall protect the child against all other forms of exploitation prejudicial to any aspects of the child’s welfare”.*

(UN Convention on the Rights of the Child)

#### **Do older children exploit younger ones?**

☺ When I was 6, my parents sent me to an institution. What I disliked most about it were the so-called army years, between the ages of 7 and 10. Why am I calling them that? At the time, there was a generation of older kids who would order us about and make us do all sorts of things, such as: wash my socks, bring me this, bring me that, rub my back, or I’ll break you. They made me lift things from the shops, so I could bring them what they wanted. I was really terrified, because if you failed to do what they wanted, they beat you dead.

☺ Ten years ago there were older children who were very mean, and who used to beat us and scoff and sneer at us every day. They made us do all sorts of things, whatever came to their mind. Now that I have grown up, I am trying to forget these years that I spent as if I were in the army.

☺ When I was younger, I didn’t like many things, because the older boys kept beating us. But since I have been in the institution for 8 years now, I have got used to it and I am all right now.

☺ When we were younger, they would all make fun of us, there were older boys who used to beat us and do all sorts of mean things, and even the caregivers were sometimes afraid of them.

☺ Several years back, there was a different mentality about life. Life in the institutions was sheer terror for some of the kids. A lot of aggressiveness and violence coming from the caregivers and the attendants, but also from the older children in the institutions. There was a lack of protection from the educators and attendants, who closed their eyes to

whatever was going on around. They couldn't defend the younger children from the older ones, because they were in danger of being attacked by the older children, I say older because they were around 17 or 18, and they did not care much about going to jail, or about any other problems they were going to be confronted with in their lives.

☺ I didn't like the way the older children behaved with us several years back, they used to beat us for just about any reason.

☺ Younger children are exploited by older ones, but they don't complain about it, or else they get beaten up.

A particular form of abuse in residential care institutions is the exploitation of younger children by older children. That exploitation may be assimilated to physical, emotional, psychological or sexual abuse.

The shortage of staff, and sometimes insufficient training are among the causes generating these phenomena.

Exploitation is cyclical, meaning that the abused become abusers in time.

In many institutions, these relationships among children are well-known, tolerated, and sometimes even cultivated by the staff, out of indolence.

The children's accounts about these relations during the interviews, focus group discussions and case studies have revealed a variety of extremely serious forms of abuse.

One category of abuse refers to the obligation imposed on younger children to work, steal, beg, give away their personal belongings in favour of older children.

**Figure 3.5.1.1.** indicates that 32.5% of the children have been forced to perform various odd jobs (washing, ironing, other housework), to steal, both inside and outside the institution (16.2%), to beg (12.8%) and to give away their personal belongings (29.7%).

The children who are most exposed to these forms of exploitation are in the 11-14 age group (**Figure 3.5.1.2.**). Children in the institutions located in rural areas are more exposed to these forms of exploitation than children in urban areas (**Figure 3.5.1.3.**).

The percentage of children who admit to having been exploited by their older colleagues is lower than that of the children who say that such things generally happen in residential care institutions (**Figure 3.5.1.4.** as compared to **Figure 3.5.1.1.**).

There are more boys who are made to do "odd jobs" or give away personal belongings than girls. On the other hand, girls tend to be mainly forced to steal or beg for their older colleagues (**Figure 3.5.1.5.**).

Almost 40% of the children complained to someone in the staff about some form of exploitation/abuse (**Figure 3.5.1.6.**) they had been exposed to, but the perpetrators of those acts were only punished in 46% of the cases (**Figure 3.5.1.7.**).

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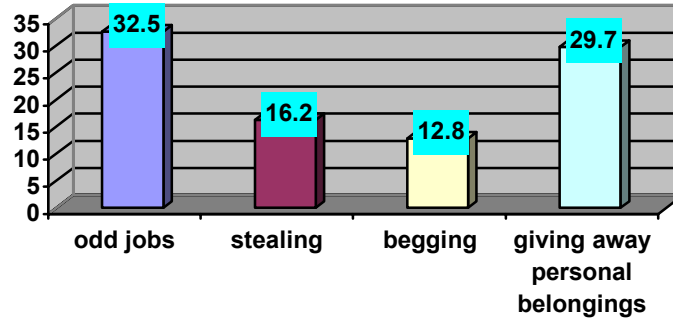
#### **Figure 3.5.1.1.**

Breakdown (in %) of the answers provided to the question  
***"Do older children in institutions exploit younger children, forcing them to do odd jobs, steal, beg, and give away their personal belongings?"***

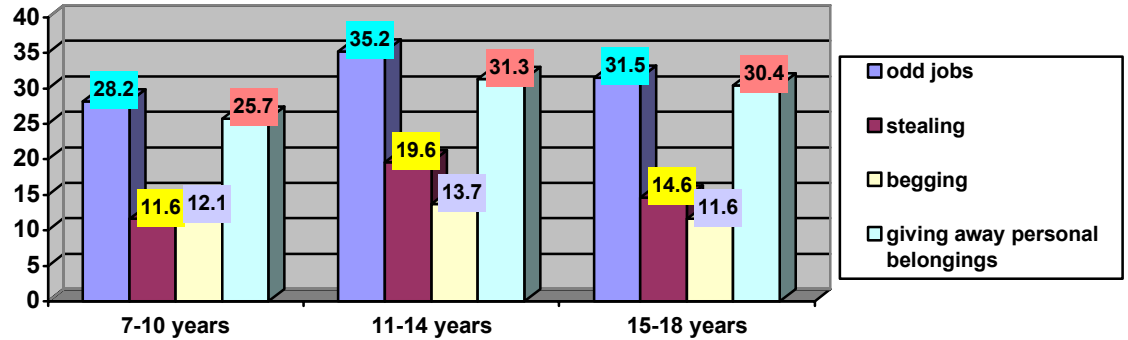
children aged 7-18 years

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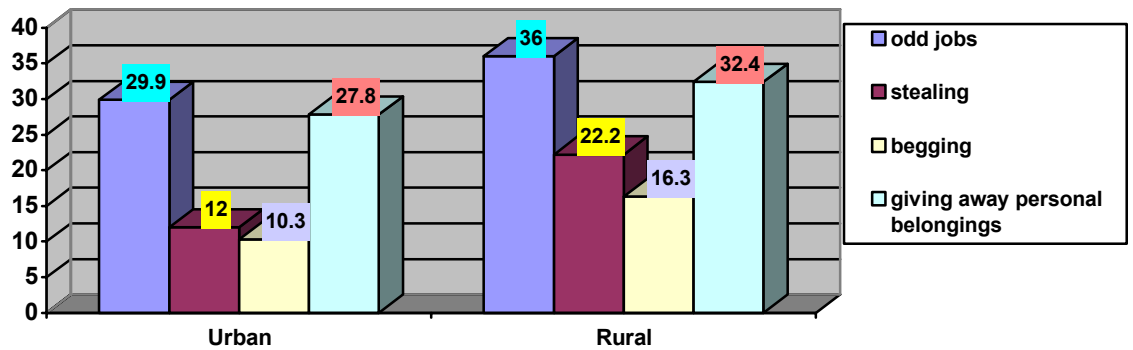
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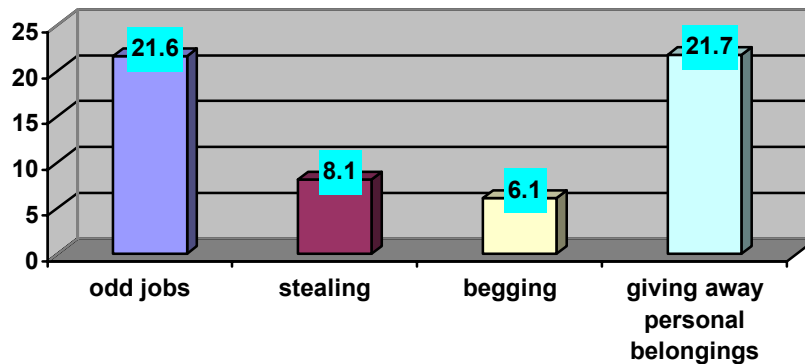
**Figure 3.5.1.2.**  
 Breakdown (in %) by age groups of the answers provided to the question  
*“Do older children in institutions exploit younger children, forcing them to do odd jobs, steal, beg, and give away their personal belongings?”*  
 children aged 7-18 years  
 - ABSUR 2000 -



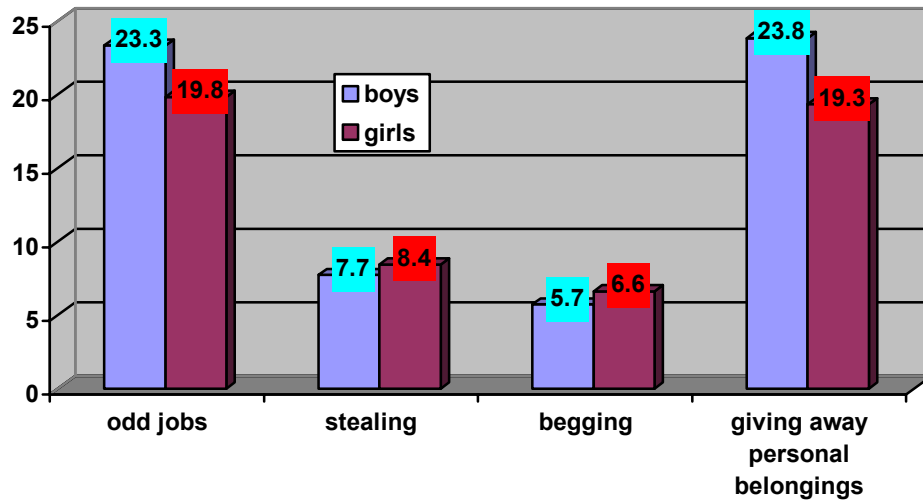
**Figure 3.5.1.3.**  
 Breakdown (in %) by area of residence (urban / rural)  
 of the answers provided to the question  
*“Do older children in the institution exploit the younger ones?”*  
 children aged 7-18 years  
 - ABSUR 2000 -



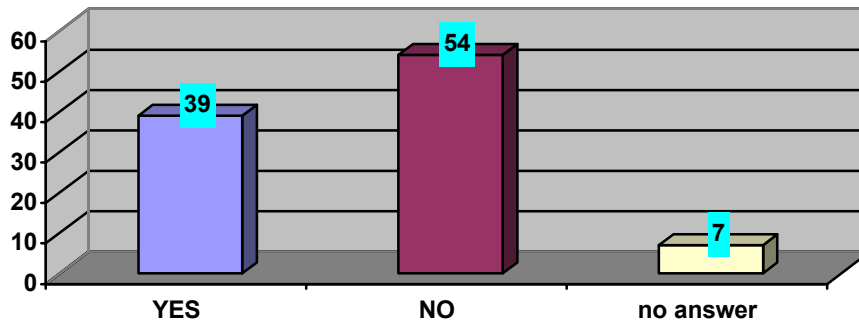
**Figure 3.5.1.4.**  
 Breakdown (in %) of the answers provided to the question  
*“Have you happened to be constrained to odd jobs,  
 stealing, begging, giving away personal belongings?”*  
 children aged 7-18 years  
 - ABSUR 2000 -



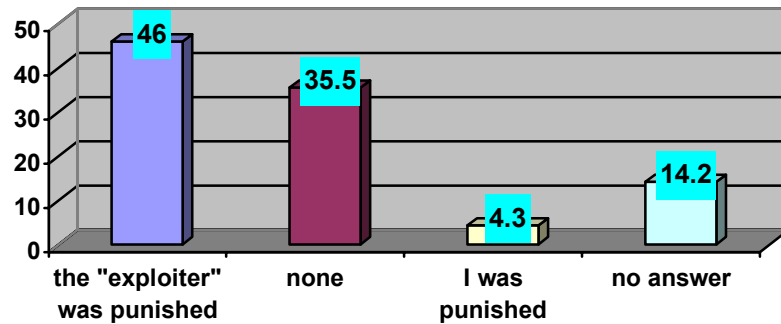
**Figure 3.5.1.5.**  
 Breakdown (in %) by genders of the answers provided to the question  
*“Have you happened to be constrained to odd jobs,  
 stealing, begging, giving away personal belongings?”*  
 children aged 7-18 years  
 - ABSUR 2000 -



**Figure 3.5.1.6.**  
 Breakdown (in %) of the answers provided to the question  
*“Have you ever complained to anyone about what has happened to you?”*  
 children aged 7-18 years  
 - ABSUR 2000 -



**Figure 3.5.1.7.**  
 Breakdown (in %) of the answers provided to the question  
*“What were the consequences?”*  
 children aged 7-18 years  
 - ABSUR 2000 -



### Case Study

**β** Z.C., 18, male, student in a construction high school

*"You have been in this placement center for 4 months, how do you feel?"*

*"Terribly bored."*

*"Do they beat you when you don't behave properly?"*

*"No, I haven't had any of that here. But in the other institutions I was at, the older children would beat us and do all sorts of mean things to us. When they saw that one of us, the younger ones, was a strong fighter, they made him fight two older kids at a time. The older ones would ask: "who do you fear and obey?" And if you failed to respond 'you', they would beat you until you said you only feared and obeyed them."*

*"Did they also exploit you?"*

*"They made us wash the older children's clothes, and if we did not give them our desert, they would beat us "in circle". The older ones would stand in a circle, and the younger ones would be in the middle, and get all the kicks and punches."*

*"Did you complain about that to someone?"*

*"Who could I complain to?! The older ones were very good friends of the attendants there, and the director wouldn't even look at us. When I was there, I thought the best thing for me to do was to play by the rules of the group, rather than go tell the director or the caregivers. Some of them couldn't care less about what was going on there. When I was younger, I couldn't wait to grow up; I would have given anything to be able to beat someone."*

*"Have you beaten younger kids yourself?"*

*"Yes, I have, but I did not expose them to the kind of beatings I had been exposed to."*

*"Why did you beat them?"*

*"I don't know, maybe it was just that I wanted to take it out on them, I wanted them to go through what I had been through. But I wasn't rough on them, really."*

*“Have you heard about sexual relations between children of the same sex?”*  
*“Yes, in the institution where I come from such things did happen.”*  
*“Have you ever been forced to have sexual relations with older boys?”*  
*“Yes, just once.”*  
*“What about here?”*  
*“Here, it can’t be. First, I am 18 and I am the oldest among them, and second, the oldest boys here are no more than 16.”*

### 3.5.2. Enuresis

In the institutions, a large number of children of all ages suffer from enuresis. Most of the time, enuresis does not have an organic cause, but it is a manifestation of emotional insecurity.

According to the literature, only 23% of the cases of enuresis among children have an organic cause.

Some specialists are of the opinion that enuresis is equivalent to masturbation.

In residential care institutions, enuresis is often mistaken for a willful violation of a disciplinary norm or for a sign of mental retardation.

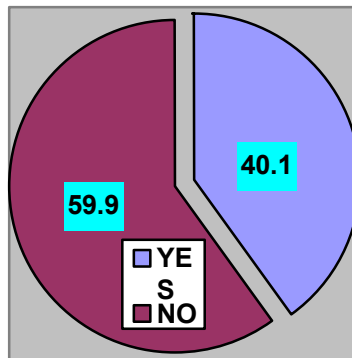
Consequently, the staff think that this must be corrected by various “punishments” (they make the children stand in front of the group, they separate them from the other children, etc.) or by using methods such as waking them up during their night sleep and the like, etc.

**Figure 3.5.2.1.** presents the discriminatory treatment children with enuresis are submitted to in the institutions.

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**Figure 3.5.2.1.**  
Breakdown (in %) of the answers provided to the question  
*“Are children suffering from enuresis accommodated separately from the other children / made to sleep in the same bed with another child?”*  
children aged 7-18 years

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Being a manifestation of emotional insecurity, enuresis is difficult to treat in institutionalized children. The reaction of the staff towards these children is most of the time inadequate, which only makes matters worse and aggravates their condition. Data from the qualitative studies have demonstrated that.

#### **What do you do about children with enuresis?**

? If the children pee in bed at night, we make them go to the toilet more often, we explain to them why that is necessary, and we use the other kids who go to the toilet as positive examples.

? We try to help them verbally, we tell them it's not nice and normal, and the children are going to make fun of them when they go to kindergarten. We explain to them that what they are doing is bad, because urine smells bad and the other kids will laugh at them.

? In order to help the children urinate faster, we make them sit on the toilet and turn the tap on.

? Such children should not be scolded or punished. We must find the cause of their condition, some state of conflict or medical cause. The condition can be treated by using medication that makes sleep lighter.

? It can be solved by waking the child up 2 or 3 times per night, and by limiting liquid intake after 4 p.m.

? We ask for the doctor's and the psychologist's advice.

? We wake them up at night, and scold them in the morning.

? Enuretic children should be spared emotionally, and a doctor's or a psychologist's advice should be sought (but we don't have any in our institution).

? You need to wake them up during the night to make them go to the bathroom, but you should do that carefully, without scaring them.

? I think they should not be marginalized and made to sleep in separate bedrooms, because that prevents them from adjusting within the group.

- ? In the case of enuretic children, we bring in a bucket (that's what we have available) the child pees, and then we empty the bucket at the toilet.
- ? Enuretic children need to be woken up at night every 3 hours.
- ? To avoid their peeing in bed at night, I tell them in the evening that I will give candy to all kids who don't pee in bed, and then I keep my promise.
- ? I make two of them sleep in the same bed, to keep warm.
- ? We make them stand in front of the group.

*(staff opinions)*

### **What do they do about children with enuresis?**

- ☺ Children who pee in bed are beaten and (some of them) sent to special schools. None of them has received any treatment.
- ☺ Now when the kids pee in bed, they take them to the Mental Health Center and they give them some pills.
- ☺ I know a girl, Ileana, who used to pee in bed, and they took her to an MHC before taking her to a special school.
- ☺ The girls who pee in bed are beaten and sent to the MHC, but maybe they are sick and they need care.

*(children's accounts)*

## Case Study

Χ C.A.M. – 18 years, graduated from forestry high school

*“What is your life story ?”*

“I have been here for 12 years. For a year, I was at the preschool center (which is on the other side of the fence), between the ages of 3 and 4. I don’t know why they brought me here when I was 3 in the first place. Then they brought me back when I was 7. My parents had divorced. Between the ages of 4 and 6 I lived in Bucharest.

Until I was in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade, father would come to visit. Then he took up drinking again, he sold both the house and the car. He worked in Germany with my uncle. They built houses. Before then, he came to visit every day. He took us home sometimes, to his apartment. I don’t know what problems he had, maybe it was my mother. My brother lives in another institution, because this one is only for girls. I have two brothers who are in Bucharest with mother. First the court decided that all the four of us should live with father. But then our parents decided to split us.

Mother never came to visit us during primary school. When I was in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, mother came to visit us once, and we spent 5 minutes together. When I was younger, my mother would treat me very bad.”

*“What changes have you seen here lately?”*

“Changes? Well, they have turned the classrooms into bedrooms. We live four in a room. This change was made two years ago. There has been no other change.”

*“Do you like it here?”*

“Yes, I do like it here. I went to spend 2 weeks with my aunt’s in Bucharest, but I left before the time was up. My aunt said she had wanted to adopt me when I was 3, but my parents were against it. I also met the girl she adopted instead of me. But I felt something was not exactly right. I didn’t have people to talk to, like I do here at the institution.

My godmother lives in this town. When I was younger, she would come to visit almost every day. But two years ago we stopped seeing each other. It was because of my father’s material status. When you are better off, then you have relatives, friends, acquaintances. When you have nothing material, nobody knows you or visits you any more!”

*“Have you ever been punished?”*

“I remember a punishment I got when I was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. I had to write a term paper in Romanian, and I didn’t tell the caregiver about it. All the girls from the institution got a 4 for that paper. The caregiver was cross with me, because I was a good student, and she had not expected me to do what I had done – that is not tell her that we had a paper coming, which prevented her from helping us prepare and revise the material. My punishment was a light spanking. Until the 4<sup>th</sup> grade, I studied here, at the institution. Each caregiver had to attend to 12 children – and we used to do our homework in the afternoon in the same room where we had classes in the morning. Now the girls who live in the same room are also in the same class at school.”

*“Would you like to go back to your parents?”*

“I would like to see my brothers who live with my mother in Bucharest. I don’t even know what they look like. And I don’t know their address either. Grandma should know. They also have a phone, but she won’t tell me the number. Mother owns a house in Bucharest. Father left everything to her. They live somewhere near the Bellu cemetery. I last saw my father when I was in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, at my grandfather’s funeral. I could see he was upset. My brother went to him before Christmas carol-singing and, imagine, he wanted to give him 10.000 lei to help him.”

*“Do the teachers discriminate against the children from the institution in favour of children coming from families?”*

“I’ve heard that some teachers don’t treat the children from the institution as they should. We were four of us in the same class, but the teachers never discriminated against us. We had very good teachers in Forestry School from this point of view. Children coming from families chipped in so that we could also attend the school-leaving party.”

*“Do older children in this institution exploit the younger ones?”*

“Yes, they do. But I never had older girls coming to me to make me wash for them or give them sweets. But this is common practice among the boys, my brother has told me.”

*“Have you heard about homosexual relationships between children in the institutions?”*

“No, I haven’t.”

*“Do you have friends?”*

“I have a boyfriend in the institution. We’ve been friends for a year and a month. My brother introduced him to me. He gave me a gold bracelet for Women’s Day. The rings were given to me by a friend when I was in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. She had come to visit with her friend from the institution. She graduated high school. I told her: “I like your rings very much.” And she said: “You can have them!”. I like silver very much. During the Easter holidays, I was baby-sitting for a businessman’s children (who were 4, 5 and 6 years old). I was introduced to that man by a boy in the institution who worked for him.”

*“Have you ever been exposed to threats of beating or other punishments?”*

“My father talked to the director and the caregivers to ask them not to treat us badly. I was a spoiled child, I wasn’t scared, my father had never beaten me, but I couldn’t keep my mouth shut. The older girls used to yell at me before, but no longer. Maybe they realized that what they were doing was wrong, or simply they are no longer allowed to do that.”

*“How do you get along with the night attendants?”*

“Very well. There are two of them on each floor. The older children are not much of a problem, they aren’t noisy. In the evening they wash and then they watch TV. Curfew is at 10 p.m. The older ones can stay up longer – and now that we are on holidays, the younger ones can also stay up somewhat later. During the holidays, we get up at 8 a.m., but older children can get out of bed whenever they want.”

*“What would you like most?”*

“I would like to become a teacher of English or Romanian. I haven’t taken an admission exam this year. At school, they advised us to go on to the college in the same specialization, the Faculty for Wood Processing in Brasov. But I liked English more. Actually I can’t find a job, because we did not study anything practical in school. I don’t know how to paint, or polish wood, how to make a door or a chair. There are still places

left at the post-secondary course in wood processing, but I need a sponsor. Those who complete that course can share an apartment with 3 or 4 other persons, and they get free meals until they can save some money from their work. My boyfriend is 20. But we can't really get married. Our parents may disagree. He abandoned high school, and now he is attending an apprentice school, studying to become a joiner or a carpenter. The girls who are some years older than me have tried to get jobs, but they say that employers are thieves. Sometimes this institution appears to me more like a jail. You can't say a thing, someone will surely hear you, and then everybody will find out and talk about you. I'm glad I could talk to you, I feel relieved."