

PSYCHOSOCIAL INTERVENTION IN CHILD PROTECTION IN SPAIN: EVOLUTION AND PROSPECTS

Joaquín de Paúl Ochotorena
Universidad del País Vasco

Se presenta una revisión de la evolución del sistema de protección infantil y de la distribución de competencias en la administración pública. Se hace especial mención a las dificultades que siguen existiendo para alcanzar los objetivos y los principios propuestos en la legislación vigente. Se analiza la necesidad de promover la coordinación entre recursos y profesionales y se propone el desarrollo y elaboración de documentos y guías de procedimiento en los que se describan con un lenguaje común las acciones básicas que se deben llevar para afrontar las diferentes situaciones de desprotección infantil. Se aborda la necesaria participación de los profesionales de la psicología para asumir con garantías la responsabilidad de los Social Services en la evaluación y tratamiento de las diferentes situaciones de desprotección infantil. Se hace referencia a la urgente necesidad de avanzar en la mejora de la calidad de la atención a los menores en situación de desprotección siguiendo un principio fundamental de adecuación de los recursos a las necesidades de dichos menores y sus familias.

Palabras clave: Intervención psychosocial, infancia, maltrato infantil, protección infantil

This paper reviews the evolution of the child protection system in Spain and the distribution of legal responsibilities between public agencies. Special emphasis is given to the difficulties for achieving the main objectives and adhering to the principles of the current legislation. With a view to improving coordination between resources and professionals, the paper proposes the development of guidelines and handbooks describing in plain language the main responsibilities and activities of professionals working in child protection. The important role of psychologists with specific training for the assessment and treatment of abused children and families at risk of child abuse is highlighted. For improving the quality of the child protection system, the author endorses the basic principle of developing resources so that the available services match the needs of children and families.

Keywords: psychosocial intervention, childhood, child abuse, child care

Child Protection in Spain would change fundamentally after 1987 as a result of legislation (Ley 21/87) that modified some of the articles in the Civil Code relating to adoption, and of the transfer to the Regional Social Services departments of responsibility for intervention with children in cases of family abuse or neglect. These legislative changes and transfer of responsibilities would give rise to a sudden "dejudicialization" and the beginning of a process of decentralization in matters relating to child abuse/neglect (for a full analysis of the national and regional legislation in this area, see González Soler, 2000).

This dejudicialization is considered to have occurred because from then on the Autonomous Regions became the authorities responsible for (1) assessing situations of abuse/neglect and proceeding to a so-called "declaration of abuse or neglect", and as a result of this, for (2) taking the child into their custody "automatically", without the

need for a prior judicial decision. However, the legislation in force in Spain since then guarantees the supervision of these measures by the judicial system and permits the procedure to be carried out with legal guarantees for the biological families from whom custody of the child or children has been temporarily or permanently taken away.

But the most relevant aspect in the development of child protection in these last 20 years concerns the fact that the Social Services of the Autonomous Regions and local authorities have had to take on almost all the responsibilities for child protection based on procedural principles different from those which they had been applying previously. These principles were laid down in the text relating to the changes to the Civil Code, or Ley 21/87.

It is not surprising that the way in which each Autonomous Region has implemented this process of change, and the pace at which they have done it, have varied so much. It is important to point out that neither throughout these last 20 years nor currently has it been possible to deal with similar child abuse/neglect situations

Correspondence: Joaquín de Paúl Ochotorena. Facultad de Psicología. Universidad del País Vasco. Apartado de Correos 726. 20080 San Sebastián. España. E-mail: joaquin.depaul@ehu.es

across the country applying measures based on similar procedural principles. The application of the principles governed by the 1987 legislation requires the existence of a considerable range of resources and large numbers of highly specialized professionals. In all probability, no Autonomous Region can currently claim to have access to such a variety of resources, nor to a sufficient number of such professionals; moreover, the wide discrepancy as regards resources and professionals between the different Regions is plain to see.

Therefore, it is important to stress from the outset in this brief review of the evolution and current situation of child protection in Spain that it remains a highly relevant challenge for the near future to ensure that throughout the country all children suffering situations of abuse or neglect and their families will receive the intervention that they need and that is in line with the legal principles currently in force.

In any case, to provide some context for what has been outlined above, to be able to analyze more precisely what has happened over the last twenty years and to be able to assess the needs for the development of the child protection system in each Region and in each municipality, it is important to review the changes intended (and to some extent effected) with the introduction of the child protection legislation of 1987. These can be summarized in some basic points:

1. Starting out from a situation largely characterized by passive receipt of the most serious and extreme cases of child abuse, the aim was to evolve toward the development of programmes and resources to permit the proactive detection of as many cases as possible, including the less serious cases. The 1990s saw a series of studies revealing a substantial increase of reports of child abuse or neglect in all Regions (De Paúl & Arruabarrena, 1995; Reina Sofía, 2002; Saldaña, Jiménez & Oliva, 1995). The increased awareness among professionals and the general population with regard to child abuse/neglect victims is at the basis of this increase in detected cases. However, this increase in cases notified to the Community Social Services and to the Child Protection Services has often led to crises in the child protection system itself. The creation of new resources and the incorporation of new professionals were never sufficient for dealing with such an increase in cases and at the same time providing the quality of attention required.

2. Given this constant increase in the receipt of cases, it has been attempted to introduce substantive changes in the way in which intervention should be handled. The idea was that the child protection system should gradually cease to be made up solely of resources which usually led to the separation of children from their biological family and their admission (until reaching adulthood) to a residential institution or their formal adoption. Fulfilment of the current legislation has obliged regional governments to organize the development of new programmes and resources capable of promoting, in addition to residential care, other types of measure. Prominent among such alternative measures should be those that give priority to maintaining the child in his or her biological family or incorporating him or her into a foster family. Moreover, resources should be available which, in case of the children being separated from the biological family, ensure that such an arrangement is provisional, opening the door to a possible reunification with parents.
3. This change in the intervention model required an increase in the diversity and organizational complexity of the different resources available. And this occurred basically because of a growing demand for individualized treatment of each family situation with its corresponding assessment, and because of a conviction of the need to make every technical and professional effort to improve the capabilities of families where there was abuse or neglect, with the goals of: (1) avoiding separation from the minor, and (2) promoting his or her reintegration in the family of origin in cases of necessary temporary separation.
4. The incorporation of psychologists into public or publicly-subsidized teams working in child protection took place gradually, but significantly in absolute terms, throughout the 1990s. Clearly, the work involved with families and children could not be carried out solely by social workers, who had been predominant until then in the social services context.

Any professional reading this brief review of the very recent history of child protection in Spain, and familiar with the system in this country, will be aware that in the majority of situations the changes mentioned have yet to attain their maximum extent, and that in some cases, indeed, they can be considered as still in their initial phase.

Elsewhere in this special section, other authors will deal with fundamental aspects of the assessment of families and children, intervention with families, foster care, residential care and adoption. It is not the aim of this work to review specific technical aspects of each of these functions; however, it may be of interest to offer an overview of the true capacity of the child protection system in Spain for guaranteeing that victims of child abuse or neglect receive the attention required by our legislation.

GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE CHILD PROTECTION INTERVENTION MODEL

The intervention model deriving from the national and regional legislation in relation to child protection involves effective fulfilment of the following functions:

1. Following reports of suspected abuse or neglect, to check whether such a situation actually exists and to identify the risk of the minor becoming a victim again.
2. To obtain all the relevant and necessary information on the family and the minor; that is, to assess them, with a view to forming hypotheses about possible risk factors explaining the existence of such abuse or neglect situations.
3. Based on all the information available, to draw-up case plans, sufficiently accurate and detailed, describing (1) the aims of the intervention, (2) the resources that should be deployed and the timescale of their application, and (3) the prognosis of this intervention.
4. In cases in which it is considered pertinent and necessary, the appropriate resources should be deployed for avoiding the separation of minors from their families or for ensuring that any temporary separation is as brief as possible. This necessarily implies the availability of effective resources for the treatment of families in which there are such situations of abuse or neglect. It should be pointed out here that the treatment of this type of family involved in serious situations of child abuse or neglect has been somewhat controversial. Some have called into question the possibility of achieving changes in families that are forced to accept intervention, and the majority of which have inadequate awareness of the problem or motivation to change (Arrubarrena & De Paúl, 2002). Nevertheless, there is general agreement that (1) in a reasonable percentage of families this type of intervention can be undertaken with guarantees of attaining improvements of sufficient scale to enable the child to re-

main with the family, and that, (2) should such results be achieved (despite the limited nature of the objectives), this represents an alternative more appropriate to the minors' needs than separation (De Paúl & Arrubarrena, 2003).

5. In the case of the child's separation from the family of origin, the alternative resource of first choice is foster care. As pointed out elsewhere in this special section, this is one of the most organizationally complex resources, given the importance of matching foster family characteristics and the needs of the child. Of particular relevance, therefore, are the quality and effectiveness of the professional resources concerned with (1) assessment and training of foster families, (2) selection of the foster family most suitable for each child, and (3) technical and professional support for foster families so as to ensure adequate integration of the children and coverage of their specific needs.
6. In those situations in which it is necessary to separate the child from the biological family but it is considered that he or she would not benefit from temporary foster care, the authorities should proceed to placing the child in residential care.
7. Finally, it is essential to point out that in any of the options taken for guaranteeing rectification of an abuse or neglect situation it is crucial to carry out a thorough assessment of the child in an effort to identify possible psychological harm, and where appropriate, to proceed to treatment for any after-effects of the abuse or neglect, with a view to the child's achieving the maximum possible level of psychosocial adjustment.

On reviewing the functions highlighted in the seven points above, it becomes clear that in all cases there is a need for teams of professionals with specialist training, and that in most of them it is essential to have recourse to psychology professionals with a range of specializations.

The verification of child abuse or neglect situations often involves activity which may be akin to that of professionals working in the field of forensic psychology; the diagnostic assessment of the family, of each parent, of the partners' relationship, of the minors and of the relevant psychosocial context constitutes one of the functions of psychologists with clinical training and a psychosocial background; intervention designed to improve the capabilities of families involved in situations of abuse/neglect vis-à-vis their children requires the participation of teams of professionals in which the figure

of the psychologist is essential; assessment of the suitability of foster families (be they from the extended family or unrelated) and of families applying to adopt includes a clearly relevant element based on psychological assessment, as does intervention to help foster or adoptive families with the process of the child's integration.

What we have seen so far in this review suggests that throughout these last 20 years, and for the foreseeable future, intervention in child protection situations has required and will continue to require the participation of a large number of professionals with high levels of specialization. But it also suggests that effective interventions will necessarily involve the participation of specialist psychologists, who are at the same time capable of working in conjunction with other types of professional, primarily social workers and social educators.

As the available data clearly shows, the incorporation of psychologists into the work context of child protection has been substantial in recent years. However, those psychologists working in child protection agencies (directly for the state or in state-funded teams) would probably admit that their training was neither sufficient nor appropriate for fulfilling the majority of the functions required of them. It continues to be of enormous importance for professionals in the area of child protection to have acquired the relevant specialist training. And this is applicable not only to psychologists, but also to social workers and social educators. Spanish universities and professional associations have considerable responsibility for meeting such training needs.

The aim of the assessment presented here on the evolution and current situation of the child protection system in Spain is to provide an overview from which to point out some of the areas in which improvement is needed. To achieve this aim it is useful to consider once more the issue of the decentralization of resources.

DISTRIBUTION OF CHILD PROTECTION RESPONSIBILITIES IN THE SOCIAL SERVICES

So far we have referred to the process of decentralization of responsibilities in favour of the Autonomous Regions and the challenges they had to face on assuming these responsibilities. However, throughout the period in question, and especially in the second half of the 1990s – coinciding with the publication of the Legal Protection for

Minors Act (*Ley de Protección Jurídica del Menor*, 1995) – we can see the development of what might be called a second decentralization within each Region.

This second decentralization takes place on the basis of a distribution of functions between the Specialist Social Services that form part of the regional governments and the Basic Social Services run by local authorities and councils, which in practice means an attempt to distribute responsibility for the cases dealt with by each of these two administrations (regional and local). Insofar as the authority for issuing a “declaration of abuse or neglect” and for assuming “automatic custody” lies exclusively with the Autonomous Region from the beginning of this new process, the Specialist Social Services for Child Protection working directly for the regional government take responsibility for intervention in the most serious cases, that is, those in which there is a “declaration of abuse or neglect”. In these cases their intervention concerns primarily foster care, residential care and adoption, that is, management of the intervention with the child and his/her family from the moment at which the separation takes place.

On the other hand, in general, it is considered that the Basic Social Services, as a resource that is “closer” to people's social reality, should assume the function of a “gateway” to the system for all those cases of neglected or abused minors, with the exception of those serious cases that enter the system via emergency procedures. Moreover, the Basic Social Services should take on in a general way all the functions related to the prevention of child abuse and neglect situations. By prevention we should understand, in this type of case, intervention in all situations of child abuse or neglect in which there is no official declaration of abuse or neglect. In 1995, Spanish legislation coined the term “risk case” to refer to cases in which a minor is in a situation of abuse or neglect, but a situation not serious enough to warrant a declaration (which would result in separation of the child from the family of origin).

Thus, it can be stated that on the basis of this distribution of responsibilities, in Spain the Basic Social Services assume responsibility for: (1) receipt of reports of suspicion of abuse or neglect, (2) investigation of such reports, (3) assessment of family situations where there is confirmation of suspicion of abuse or neglect, and (4) intervention with those minors and families in situations not deemed to attain a *certain level* of seriousness.

In sum, this decentralization of the functioning of the child protection system implies in everyday practice that some of the most relevant protection work (assessment of families and children and family intervention) relies on the resources of the Basic Social Services. In itself, there is no reason to consider this distribution of functions as adequate or inadequate, but it seems fairly clear that the effective functioning of the system as a whole depends on the capacity of the Basic Social Services to provide sufficient resources.

COORDINATION AMONG PROFESSIONALS AND AMONG RESOURCES

The problems deriving from this distribution of functions (found in the majority of Autonomous Regions) and resource allocation are probably best revealed by asking professionals working in child protection their opinion about the weakest points of the system. Replies to this question would likely indicate a consensus summarizing these weak points as follows: (1) lack of coordination and lack of common criteria among the different resources and professionals, and (2) insufficiency of resources for dealing with the set of functions that should be carried out with children and families.

When the terms “lack of coordination” or “lack of common criteria” are used, it is usually in reference to discrepancies of both a “vertical” nature – that is, between the Basic and Specialist Social Services – and a “horizontal” nature – between the professionals working in each type of Social Service. It is not usual to refer to specific measures for resolving this lack of coordination. Rather, it is considered to be some kind of “structural defect” for which those identifying it as such never feel responsible. A more rigorous consideration of this problem would suggest that to attain “good coordination”, in this case between child protection resources and professionals, it becomes essential that all professionals from the different services (1) know and agree upon “*what should be done*”, (2) know and agree upon “*who should do*” each of the parts of “*everything*” that is to be done, and (3) have access to a printed document with details of the actions to be carried out in each of the situations faced by such professionals, and that (4) this document uses precise terminology which permits all the professionals involved to make a similar reading of the content.

In our view, it is especially relevant to consider simultaneously the issue of a possible lack of coordination

between professional groups and that of a possible insufficiency of resources. Coordination between professionals, while much desired, is not an aim in itself; clearly, it is a means to achieving better-quality intervention with children and their families.

In drawing up any kind of document indicating “everything that has to be done” in each suspected child abuse or neglect case, it is important to include some conditions with a view to achieving the desired coordination between professionals, at the same time as guaranteeing that minors and their families are provided with the resources that allow them to achieve the objectives pursued by the protection system: to prevent situations of abuse or neglect and eradicate those already existing, to guarantee satisfaction of children’s needs, to ensure that mothers and/or fathers are sufficiently competent to take on the rearing of their children, and to palliate the consequences of the abuse/neglect situation for the children involved.

Putting the above into practice is the unavoidable responsibility of public Social Service systems. In specific terms, it is essential to achieve relevant improvements in the following aspects:

1. The capacity of professionals working in the Basic Social Services to investigate and assess families and minors in possible situations of abuse or neglect.
2. The availability, within the Basic Social Services, of treatment programmes for abusive families that permit minors to live in their own homes once the parents have been deemed capable of guaranteeing satisfaction of their children’s needs.

On reviewing the possible problems of coordination between the different professionals working in the child protection system, we have referred exclusively to the relationship between the two levels of the Social Services. However, within the child protection system, highly relevant roles are also played by other social resources, such as courts and Public Prosecutors, law enforcement, the education system and the health service. All of these have been extensively involved over recent decades in the development of resources devoted to dealing with situations of child abuse and neglect. Coordination between such different types of authority and between professionals with such different backgrounds is always complex and challenging.

But it is interesting to observe how one of the most relevant points of friction between different agents

involved in child abuse/neglect intervention is found between Social Services professionals (Basic and Specialist) and Mental Health professionals. It goes without saying that in a substantial percentage of these types of cases there is a need for psychological intervention, be it with children, with the family as a whole, with the couple or with just one of the parents. In some cases an intervention by the mental health services will have taken place before a child protection file was opened; in others, the majority, the intervention by mental health resources begins as a result of the assessment carried out after receipt of a confirmed child abuse/neglect situation. It is interesting to observe how professionals from the Social Services, including psychologists, consider that the greatest difficulties for working together toward intervention goals and in the development of treatment with these types of families and children occur when they have to work with mental health professionals, either psychiatrists or psychologists. The capacity of mental health resources to carry out psychological interventions in these types of cases is quite limited, but if this depends on a lack of sufficient resources, communication between professionals depends on the attitude with which each one approaches his or her role in each situation. And in this case, our view is that the definition of intervention goals and the ultimate purpose of the intervention – and hence its coordination – is the responsibility of Social Services professionals, of whom the necessary training should, in any case, be required.

TWO NEEDS IN THE CHILD PROTECTION SYSTEM

The development of a “common language”

But poor levels of coordination among professionals and among teams and a lack of common criteria may also derive from another problem affecting child protection not only in Spain, but also on an international scale, and which applies to a large extent also to other areas of psychosocial intervention.

We are talking here about the absence of a “common language” – in other words, about the limitations in this context for using a terminology with unambiguous meanings that permits professionals to communicate with the guarantee that they are referring to the same types of situation or the same type of professional activity or intervention resources.

At this point we can establish a link between the distribution of functions among Basic and Specialist Social

Services and the problems that can derive from the use of terminology that lacks clear and precise meanings. As mentioned above, in Spain the basic classification of child protection situations makes a distinction between so-called “risk cases” and “abuse or neglect cases”. The legislation on legal protection for minors (*Ley de Protección Jurídica del Menor*) in force since 1995 is quite vague in its definition of these two conditions, despite claims within the Act itself that the classification is “innovative”. The wording is as follows: “while in risk situations, where the minor is adversely affected but not to a degree of seriousness that justifies his or her separation from the family nucleus.....in situations of abuse or neglect, whose seriousness makes it advisable for the minor to be taken away from the family....”

“Risk” cases are the responsibility of the Basic Social Services, while those of “abuse or neglect” are to be dealt with by Specialist Services. The consideration of a case as “risk” or “abuse/neglect” is therefore highly relevant from the point of view of the organization of social services resources. If the Basic Social Services consider that a case should be categorized as “risk”, then in the majority of Autonomous Regions the specialist services will receive no information about it, ruling out the possibility of any kind of discussion over the categorization of that case. However, if the Basic Social Services rate a case as being sufficiently serious to warrant the label “abuse or neglect”, there must be agreement on this rating for the Specialist Services to proceed to a “declaration of abuse or neglect”, and hence to the assignment of automatic custody and the opening of a file. Therefore, disagreements, which occur fairly frequently, can only exist in the small percentage of cases in which one part of the system considers that a certain level of seriousness has been attained. At the present time it is impossible to know what the level of disagreement would be if all cases (both “risk” and “abuse or neglect”) had to be assessed by both parts of the child protection system.

The problem we are attempting to present and describe emerges because in reality, and as pointed out previously, it is very difficult to find precise and unambiguous definitions of what is understood by “a minor in a risk situation”, as opposed to “a minor in an abuse/neglect situation”. The implication of these terms is that a “risk” case is characterized by a level of abuse or neglect that is not sufficiently serious to be considered as “abuse/neglect”. However, we would probably be closer to what occurs in many situations if we considered that a

professional rates a case as “risk” rather than “abuse/neglect” when it does not demand the minor’s separation from his/her family of origin. That is, there is a tendency to classify a case according to the measure it is deemed necessary to apply. And this measure depends on the severity of the abuse or neglect identified, on the possibility of a repeat of such abuse or neglect with a high degree of severity, on the hypotheses about the possibility of the family modifying its situation, and, quite relevantly, on the capacity of the Basic Social Services (i.e., of the resources available) to deal with the family situation with minimum guarantees of attaining a certain level of improvement. It would be interesting to analyze whether the percentage of abuse/neglect cases were to fall as the Basic Social Services increased the resources devoted to intervention aimed at keeping the abused or neglected child within the family nucleus.

In any case, with the mere use of the term “minor in a risk situation” it will continue to be almost impossible to know whether a professional is referring to a case of “risk of abuse/neglect”, to a case of “mild abuse/neglect” with *risk* of the child coming to some harm, or indeed, to a case of “moderate abuse/neglect”, in which there is a *risk* of it turning into an “abuse/neglect” situation. Some Autonomous Regions and local authorities have been working in the last few years to include in the procedural handbooks an alternative terminology that permits a description of the different situations in which these two administrative levels intervene. In general, “risk of abuse/neglect” cases tend to be distinguished from those in which such abuse/neglect has already occurred, and within these, there is a tendency to identify levels of seriousness based on strictly defined criteria. Such initiatives set out to guarantee the use of common language among professionals. In some Regions, notably the Basque Country, it has recently been attempted to make progress toward the goal of common language, unifying among all the authorities involved (provincial councils and local authorities) a series of criteria that make it possible to assess with a high degree of reliability the severity of different abuse/neglect situations.

All such measures constitute attempts to tackle one of the possible causes of the so-called “lack of coordination” among professionals, and specifically that which derives from the use of inadequate or excessively vague terminology and from a lack of unified criteria for establishing the severity level of a given abuse/neglect

situation.

There is insufficient space in this brief article to refer to other terms widely used in this field, and which also need review with the aim of promoting the use of “common language”. But professionals working in the child protection system are aware of the difficulties involved in knowing exactly what is meant by “case assessment”, “working with the family”, “follow-up”, and so on. Their meaning may seem clear to those who introduce such terms, but they probably do not mean the same to all those who read or hear them.

MATCHING NEEDS AND SERVICES

Up to now we have analyzed some aspects relating to the existence in the Social Services of sufficient resources (primarily professionals) for carrying out with maximum guarantees of success all the functions considered necessary on intervening with families and children. The supply of human resources is probably the principal condition for being able to successfully confront the responsibilities and complexities of Child Protection. However, the availability of such resources is not an absolute guarantee of being able to provide minors and their families with the quality of service required of the child protection system.

We feel it important to stress that in the Social Services (Basic and Specialist) and in other areas of administration (health, education, etc.), resources should be provided following a basic principle which is essential, but which is rarely given priority: the principle of “matching needs and services”.

In the case of child protection there is a general consensus, based on rigorous theoretical and empirical work, according to which it is considered that the satisfaction of the most relevant psychological needs of minors is achieved in the context of a family. Therefore, it seems reasonable that one of the fundamental principles of intervention in child protection is that of maintaining the child in his or her family or their integration in an alternative family. Only in those cases in which the foster care process is not beneficial for the minor is it considered appropriate for him or her to live with other minors in residential care under the supervision of specialist professionals.

The application in child protection of the principle of matching needs and services requires clear identification of the basic needs of children in general, from each age group, and of the particular needs of minors in receipt of

child protection. On the basis of this assessment of the needs of different groups of minors, the application of this principle will require the existence of resources, sufficient in number and sufficiently diverse in their characteristics, to match the needs of minors receiving child protection.

For more than ten years now, the Spanish Ministry of Social Affairs has been publishing a useful text describing in a precise and rigorous way the needs of children at different developmental stages, making special efforts to distinguish between different types of needs – emotional, cognitive, social, etc. – and to consider the best ways of covering such needs for the different child protection resources (López, 1995). This document constitutes a basic element in the planning of the different resources of the child protection system. Another important source of support for implementing the principle of matching resources to needs are the reports of some interesting research projects carried out in the European context (Little, Madge, Mount, Ryan & Tunnard, 2000).

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

In this article we have tried to review some aspects of the functioning of the child protection system in Spain. It will be clear to readers that our review includes a considerable quantity of personal appraisals with which one may be more or less in agreement or disagreement. However, our goal was not to convince anyone of the views presented here, but rather to promote discussion about some of the points we consider most relevant in addressing the necessary improvements to our child protection system.

Finally, we should like to highlight some of the most important points among all those discussed:

1. The need to guarantee that throughout Spain there are no substantial differences in the capacity for dealing with situations of abuse or neglect, and for doing so in a way that ensures the maximum personal and social adjustment of child victims.
2. The need to guarantee the capacity of the professional resources of the Basic Social Services to investigate and assess families and minors in possible situations of abuse or neglect, and to do so fully and in the most valid way possible.
3. The need to guarantee the capacity of the Basic Social Services to implement intervention programmes with abusive families that permit minors to continue living in their family homes once their parents have been deemed capable of satisfying their children's needs.

The need to guarantee development of the resources necessary to make available sufficient numbers of foster families to provide temporary or permanent homes for all those minors who cannot live with their family of origin and who are suitable for fostering.

The need to guarantee that children's homes (residential care facilities) match the needs of all minors for whom this resource is considered the only one suitable for dealing with their problem. This implies the need for the provision of different types of residential care facilities suited to the specific needs and characteristics of each group of minors.

REFERENCES

- Arruabarrena, M. I & De Paúl, J. (2002). Evaluación de una propuesta de tratamiento para familias maltratantes, negligentes y familias alto-riesgo [Assessment of a treatment proposal for abusive, negligent and high-risk families]. *Intervención Psicosocial*, 11, 213-228.
- Centro Reina Sofía (2002). *Maltrato Infantil en la Familia. España (1997/98)*. Publicaciones del Centro Reina Sofía para el estudio de la violencia [Child Abuse in the Family. Spain (1997/98). Centro Reina Sofía Publications for the study of violence]. Serie Documentos, vol. 4. Valencia.
- De Paúl, J., Arruabarrena, M. I., Torres, B. & Muñoz, R. (1995). La prevalencia del maltrato infantil en la Provincia de Guipúzcoa [Prevalence of child abuse in the Province of Guipúzcoa]. *Infancia y Aprendizaje*, 71, 49-58.
- De Paúl, J. & Arruabarrena, M. I. (2003). Evaluation of a treatment program for abusive and high-risk families in Spain. *Child Welfare*, LXXXII, 413-442.
- González, O. (2000). Regulación Jurídica de la Protección Infantil [Legal Regulation of Child Protection]. In De Paúl, J. & Arruabarrena, M.I. (eds.). *Manual de Protección Infantil* [Handbook of Child Protection]. Masson. Barcelona.
- Little, M., Madge, J., Mount, K., Ryan, M. & Tunnard, J. (2000). *Matching Needs and Services*. Dartington Academic Press. Dartington, UK.
- López, F. (1995). *Necesidades de la infancia y protección infantil* [Children's needs and child protection]. Madrid. Ministerio de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales. Madrid.
- Saldaña, D., Jiménez, J. & Oliva, A. (1995). El maltrato infantil en España: un estudio a través de los expedientes de menores [Child abuse in Spain: a study through

minors' files]. *Infancia y Aprendizaje*, 71, 59-68.