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HISTORICAL ABUSE CASES IN SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES SURINAME

RESEARCH REPORT



HISTORICAL ABUSE CASES IN SOS CHILDREN'S VILLAGES SURINAME

Research report

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Colofon

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Foreword

You are reading the report of an research into cases of historical sexual abuse that took place in the SOS Children's Village in Suriname. This complex research covers roughly the period from the early seventies to 2006. The research took place partly in the Netherlands and partly in Suriname.

We thank all respondents for their cooperation. We are particularly grateful to the victims. They have been very open in sharing their very personal stories with us. Many victims said that this was the first time they had told others their experiences of abuse. For us, as Dutch people without roots in Suriname, this was a special experience. The victims took us into their confidence and most of them thanked us for listening to them. They hope that SOS Children's Villages International (CVI) will help them to get their lives back on track. We have drawn up an individual plan for the victims, reflecting their needs, and sent it to SOS CVI. From the first reactions we conclude that SOS-CVI is proceeding energetically. For the victims, it means a lot that SOS-CVI is giving their case the serious attention it deserves.

We are also grateful to Prof. dr. Micha de Winter (Professor of Pedagogy) for reading the draft report and for providing useful comments and suggestions.

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List of Abbreviations

PSHEA = Protection Against Sexual Harassment, Exploitation and Abuse

ICSR = Independent Child Safeguarding Review Global Report

KPI = Key Performance Indicator

SOS CVI = SOS Children's Villages International

UNCRC = United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

PSA's = Promoting and Supporting Associations

Summary

This first chapter describes the conclusions and recommendations. This chapter can be read as a reading substitute summary. For each research question, the main findings are described after which we summarize the key conclusions. First, we discuss some methodological aspects so that the reader can properly appreciate the results.

Preliminary remarks

Study covers thirty years

Commissioned by SOS Children's Villages International (CVI), Verinorm researched cases of abuse in the SOS Children's Village Suriname. The research began in 2021, with two reports of abuse that would have happened in the 1990s. During this research, the scope was broadened, both in length of time and in terms of the nature of the abuse. The stories of the victims show that abuse occurred from the foundation of the Children's Village in 1972 until its closure in 2006. The study therefore covers a period of over thirty years. The research also makes clear that there was not only sexual and physical abuse but also emotional and financial abuse. These forms of abuse are also included in the research.

Sources used

The following sources were used: desk research, mainly intended to provide context, a document analysis of internal (but publicly available) policy documents of SOS CVI and internal documents concerning incidents around 2004 in SOS Children's Village Suriname. In addition, individual interviews were held with, among others, victims, former employees of SOS Children's Village Suriname and former employees of SOS Children's Villages Netherlands and with experts, for example on the culture in Suriname. In total, 35 people were interviewed, nineteen of whom were victims. An overview of the web pages, articles and documents consulted and analysed can be found in the annexes.

Hidden cases

Although we have tried to bring all cases of different forms of abuse, including sexual abuse, to the surface, it is inevitable that some cases have remained hidden. In the interviews, several respondents spoke about other children who had lived in the Children's Villages in Suriname and had experienced some form of abuse there. The respondents indicated that they were aware of this. However, it is not clear exactly what they experienced. Therefore, only the victims' own stories/experiences of abuse were considered. In several interviews it is also indicated that they "know that" or "have heard about" others' experiences of abuse. Sometimes, names of victims we did not speak to were mentioned in this context. These have not been included in this study (in the counts) because it seems to be more about "hearsay" and these stories are therefore less reliable.

We were not able to speak to all the victims. Although an attempt was made to bring all cases of abuse to the surface, it is - unfortunately - inevitable that some cases remained hidden.

The actual numbers will therefore be (possibly) higher than what is presented in this report. An attempt was made, when victims spoke about other victims, to approach these people. However, they could not always be found and/or did not want to cooperate with the research.

Different forms of abuse

In addition to cases of sexual abuse, the study also looked at victims of other forms of abuse, such as physical abuse, emotional neglect and financial exploitation. Victims may have had to deal with various forms of abuse during their childhood.

Victims own experiences and truth finding

The victims' stories reflect their own experiences. We have not engaged in truth-finding. We were not able to investigate whether -all of the- the cases of different forms of abuse took place. Historical abuse in general is hard to prove. Forensic evidence is no longer available. The accused are hard -or not- to find. It does not mean the victims aren't believed. There is no discussion about whether abuses took place at all. The respondents were too unanimous on this point, besides the fact that senior staff member 1 was convicted of sexual abuse. It just means that we as researchers couldn't hear all of the accused and weren't able to gather all evidence. We have taken the victims' stories and experiences as a starting point in the way the victims described it (oral history).

Problems with causality

The children who stayed in the Children's Villages in Suriname all have a problematic past prior to arriving in the Children's Village. The children may have experienced a problematic attachment before they came to the village. During their stay in the Children's Village, the victims experienced one or more forms of abuse. In addition to the above, most victims also experienced problems after leaving the Children's Village. For many of the victims, their current situation is problematic and, in their opinion, a direct result of the abuse that they experienced in the Children's Village. This is their experience and perception. Whether this situation is entirely and directly attributable to the situation within SOS Children's Villages Suriname cannot be determined. It is also impossible to know whether things would have been better for this group of children if they had not been cared for at SOS Children's Village. From a scientific point of view, causal statements of this kind are therefore problematic; rather, one can speak of a cumulative effect in which the problems in the entire life history have caused their current situation. This should be kept in mind when outlining the consequences of the abuse and assessing their current living situation. The victims. However, often make a direct link with the abuse in the village and their later problems. We did not problematise this assumed causal relationship either. That was also not the research task, apart from the question whether that is possible given the long time that has passed.

Context

Because research has been done into events in a different place (Suriname) and time (1972-2006), it is important to take differences in standards and perception into account. A research

question also concerns the cultural, historical and organisational context of the events. In this respect it should be kept in mind, on the one hand, that upbringing varies according to place and time, but on the other hand one should be careful not to dismiss things as ‘it was part of the times’ or ‘it was common in Suriname to hit children’. Child abuse cannot be justified in any way, but by placing it in a certain culture and time, it can be better understood.

Answering research questions and key conclusions

At the start of the study, ten different research questions were formulated. They will be answered below.

1. What is the scope and nature of the abuse, including sexual abuse, in the period 1995-1996 in Suriname Children’s Village according to the victims?

The first research question focuses on the nature and extent of the abuse in the period 1995-1996. As is not unusual in research into historical (sexual) abuse, in the course of the study it became clear that there were many more victims of (more) different types of abuse in the SOS Children’s Village Suriname. Also, the period in which abuse took place turned out to be longer. What we have found is a large group of victims (nineteen) of different ages (baby to young adult), consisting both men and women (thirteen women and six men), who have experienced different forms of abuse over a long period, by many different (types of) perpetrators. By long we mean in this case both that the time frame between the first stories of abuse and the last stories is long (over 30 years), and that most individual victims speak about self-experienced abuse that lasts for several years. In terms of numbers, it can be concluded that the nineteen interviewed victims reported on a total of 58 situations of self-perceived abuse. Emotional abuse was the largest category, followed by sexual, physical and financial abuse. Some had been direct witnesses of abuse.

As mentioned earlier, not all abuse cases will have surfaced and it is likely, partly due to the fact that victims referred to other victims, that the actual numbers are higher.

In terms of the nature of the abuse, various forms have been identified: sexual abuse, involving touching, groping, forced oral sex and penetration. In addition, there is physical abuse, which includes beating and molestation. Emotional abuse is also often mentioned: (affective) neglect, mental abuse, unfair treatment and belittling. Another form of abuse is financial misconduct, particularly financial malpractice/exploitation. We also added a category of “direct witness” to the forms of abuse which involves directly witnessing (a form of) abuse. Some respondents talked about the traumatic experience to see a child (sometimes a family member) been (sexually) abused.

The sudden closure of the Children’s Village in Suriname in 2006 and the lack of proper shelter and aftercare has meant a lot to several victims. They feel abandoned and distrust people, in addition to their difficulties in getting on with their lives. There is some ambiguity about the financial exploitation, i.e. the stealing of money from the ‘godfathers’ or sponsors, intended

for the children. What is clear is that the children counted on receiving a sum of money when they left the Children's Village. That did not happen.

Key conclusions:

- In the course of the study it became clear that there are more victims of (more) different types of abuse in SOS Children's Village Suriname. Also, the period in which abuse took place proved to be longer than the years 1995-1996. Abuse has taken place within the Children's Village in Suriname during the entire period of its existence. In total, interviews have been conducted with nineteen victims of various forms of abuse.
- It is a group of different ages, both men and women, who have experienced different forms of abuse over a long period of time by many different (types of) perpetrators.
- Emotional abuse is the most common category, followed by sexual abuse, physical abuse and finally, financial abuse. Some victims have been direct witnesses of abuse.
- Many abuse cases were not dealt with. Children did not dare to speak about the abuse, were not believed or were themselves blamed for the abuse. The lawsuit involving the former senior staff member 1 (sexual abuse of minors taking place within the SOS Children's Village in Suriname) is due to a single aunt who did not leave it at that.

2. Are there indications that there are more victims and if so, what is the scope and nature of the abuse and what were/are the consequences of the abuse for the victims?

When this research question was drafted, only a few victims were in the picture. However, we have spoken to nineteen victims (and there are more). As mentioned earlier, victims have spoken about others who have also been victims of some form of abuse in the SOS Children's Village in Paramaribo, but for one or more reasons, it was not possible to speak with those people. This was due to the fact that these persons were difficult to find and/or did not want to talk to the researchers. To speak to (some of) these other victims, would take a lot of time and effort. So we know that in reality there are more victims than described in the study. We have no reason to assume that these other persons are subject to other forms of abuse than those discussed in the study. It will therefore be sexual, physical, emotional or financial abuse.

3. What are the characteristics of the perpetrator(s)?

Initially, at the start of the research, two persons were accused. These were two different former senior staff members of SOS Children's Village: senior staff member 1 and senior staff member 2. However, as indicated before, the abuse turned out to be larger in nature and scope than initially known and therefore more perpetrators were identified.

As far as senior staff members are concerned, the conclusion must be that from the 1980s until the closure of the Children's Village in 2006, at least five different senior staff members are accused of some (or multiple) form(s) of abuse by the victims. Considering the fact that there were not that many senior staff members, the number gives the impression that abuse

from senior staff members was structural in its nature. It paints a picture that abuse in the Children's Village in Suriname was not an incident. It suggests a culture in which transgressive behaviour was systematic.

As for the initial accusations, first of all senior staff member 1 was mentioned. The allegations towards this senior staff member were about sexual abuse of two girls who had lived in the Children's Village as children. Later in the research, it turned out that there were many more people with accusations against him. A total of eight victims said they had been sexually abused by him. Remarkably, several respondents indicated that he was a kind, quiet and smart man, who many did not expect to display such behaviour. The judge sentenced him to three and a half years in prison for sexually abusing a -at that time- twelve-year-old girl. The fact that both boys and girls of different ages were sexually abused is worrying. It paints a picture of a predator who 'grabs everything he can get his hands on'.

The other person who was accused is senior staff member 2. He was accused of misconduct and physical violence by, among others, a former employee and her (former) husband/journalist. Among most of the respondents however, the tendency is that he was a very nice person, a pleasant and kind man, a father figure. They said "under his time it was good".

Next to senior staff members 1 and 2 there are other senior staff members who are identified by victims as perpetrators of different forms of abuse. Nothing/very little is known about them.

SOS-aunts are particularly accused of physical and emotional abuse. Because victims do not always mention names, it is not known exactly how many aunts are involved. Therefore, not much is known about the individual aunts. We do know that victims indicated that the majority of the aunts were 'not nice'. Respondents (non-victims) said that aunts found it a difficult, heavy and badly paid job. There were also often many children in one house, with difficult backgrounds, which made parenting very tough. Some aunts had traumas of their own, had nowhere else to go and lacked (sufficient) pedagogical qualities. The (financial) dependence made them vulnerable to misbehaviour.

Biological sons of SOS aunts, other children from the Children's Village, an employee from the Children's Village and the Children's Village in general were also identified as perpetrators. The first two groups are mainly boys between fifteen and eighteen years old who also lived in the Children's village. Victims mainly accuse them of sexual and emotional abuse. An employee (driver) is accused of physical abuse and the Children's Village in general of mainly emotional and financial abuse: victims feel abandoned "by SOS" and have never received money that they were promised.

Key conclusions:

- There was a heterogeneous group of perpetrators: in terms of age, gender and function/role. This points to a culture where transgressive behaviour was not uncommon, and perhaps even normalised.
- This group consists of senior staff members, SOS aunts, biological sons of SOS aunts, other children from the Children's Village, a staff member and the Children's Village in general.

- From the 1980s until the closure of the Children's Village in 2006, almost half of the senior staff members, according to the victims, were guilty of (some form of) abuse.

4. In which cultural, historical, and organisational context did the abuse take place?

The context of the events studied in this research is of great importance. It puts events in perspective and may have 'explanatory value' for the occurrence and continuation of several forms of abuse. In this case, we looked at the historical, cultural and organisational context in which the events in the Children's Village in Suriname took place. Until November 1975, Suriname and the Netherlands had a statutory relationship, after which Suriname became independent. Since then, Suriname has had a turbulent history with several coups and changing of government parties. There is not one definitive 'Surinamese culture' because of the large number of subcultures, population groups and religions. This can be traced back to the colonial era. Important 'things' in Suriname are family, hierarchy, social control, an 'us-versus-them' culture, shame, politeness and respect. Doing your best at school is considered important. The (authoritative) mother ('aunt') is often the key person in the family and physical punishment was (and is) more common than in the Netherlands.

The historical study of different forms of abuse in the Children's Village in Suriname makes it clear that the emergence and continuation of abuse over a long period cannot be explained by a single cause. Various risk factors played a role, interacted and reinforced each other. The Surinamese culture is the context in which a hard upbringing style was (and still is) prevalent. This continued in the Children's Village where the aunts and several senior staff members also used a physical style of upbringing. The aunts did not know any better. In addition, some of the aunts had problematic backgrounds and took the job as an 'aunt' because of the remuneration and the fact that they received a house in return. Cultural aspects can explain the abuse, but do not justify it.

The line from a corrective slap to gross forms of abuse was regularly crossed. This is partly due to the lack of adequate supervision, at all levels not only within the SOS-organisation, but also outside. The Surinamese government kept its distance. There was no supervision, control or enforcement in the area of the government either. The continuing abuse can partly be explained by the fact that there was a culture of silence in the Children's Village: the children were not believed, the aunts did not want to hang out 'the dirty laundry' and senior staff members had an unassailable position. In other words, the level of dependency was high and played out on various levels: children towards their aunt and aunts towards the senior staff member(s). The untouchable position of senior staff members was reinforced by the fact that, although formally accountable to the board, in practice a senior staff member had a rather autonomous position. The factors mentioned above apply to a greater extent to cases of sexual abuse: in Surinamese culture, talking about sexuality in general and sexual abuse in particular is extremely difficult; we can label it as taboo.

The interviews revealed that everyone at the Children's Village was aware of the sexual abuse (or suspected) sexual abuse, but they simply did not talk about it. In fact, one of the victims was more or less blamed by a senior staff member for the sexually transgressive behaviour

because she as a child was 'always with men'. The 'blaming the victim' adage plays out here in full force. This is illustrated by the fact that one of the victims never received an apology from SOS Children's Village or any other reaction after the court case against senior staff member 1. The handling of such abuse cases, or more broadly the policy of SOS (International) in this regard, was non-existent since the founding of the Children's Village. Only from 2008 can we speak of developing policy and attention to abuse.

SOS Children's Villages International (SOS CVI) is a global federation operating in 137 countries and territories. The basic philosophy of the organisation is that children can develop optimally if they grow up in a situation that resembles the family situation as much as possible and therefore an SOS Children's Village imitates that situation as much as possible. The SOS Children's Village Foundation was founded in Suriname in 1972. Until July 2006, the Foundation was part of the international SOS organisation; as of 1 July 2006, the activities have continued under the name 'Foundation Praso, For the Child in Need'. The board of the SOS Children's Villages Suriname Foundation consisted of wealthy Surinamese people. The village director is in charge of the Children's Village. SOS mothers were at the head of the SOS family and were responsible for the development of their SOS children.

The research shows that the Children's Village in Suriname did not meet the quality standards that are currently in place. This applies first and foremost to the professional knowledge and know-how that is required to deal with children who have experienced trauma. The aunts were not selected on the basis of knowledge and qualities but on the basis of scarcity. Apart from exceptions, the aunts were mainly extrinsically motivated (compensation and shelter). Further training did little to change this. The hard Surinamese style of upbringing was continued in the upbringing of the children in the Children's Village, of whom most had experienced trauma. Senior staff members - as far as could be seen - were not selected for their expertise in working with this difficult target group either. In addition, the great power position of the senior staff members in relation to the aunts and children led to an imbalance of power and dependence. There were no/barely any external corrective forces to identify and deal with any abuses. Policy on this was completely absent. Again, with few exceptions, the children (at least those we spoke to) needed a stable, safe and warm environment because of their sometimes very problematic backgrounds. This is what was lacking.

Key conclusions:

- Suriname has a colonial past, a troubled history and many different population groups and religions.
- Important issues in Suriname include hierarchy, shame, politeness and respect. Talking about sexuality is a taboo, talking about abuse even more so. Beating children as a disciplinary measure is still accepted too.
- The basic philosophy of SOS Children's Villages is that children grow up in a situation that resembles a family situation as much as possible. This was not been met in the case of the victims. This is even more important because the children were very vulnerable and often already traumatised when they arrived at the Children's Village.

- Few mothers were available for such a demanding job. As a result, little or no attention was paid to the quality and expertise of the mothers ('aunts').
- There was a great inequality of power between the management and the aunts and children. This allowed abuses to arise and continue.

5. What have been the (physical and/or psychological) consequences for the victim(s)?

The victims went through traumatic experiences in SOS Children's Village Suriname and are still struggling with the consequences. A distinction has been made between short-term and long-term consequences. Regarding the short-term consequences, it appears that all victims suffer from psychological problems to some extent. Many felt abandoned and lost their trust in people. In addition, many have developed a (culture of) fear as a result of the sexual, emotional and/or physical abuse in particular: many children experienced the feeling that adults would not believe them if they spoke about the abuse and some continued to pee in their beds until later in life. Finally, victims mentioned negative consequences that were directly related to leaving or closing the Children's Village. For example, the Children's Village suddenly closed in 2006 and many children had to find a new home and this often proved difficult or they were placed in a problematic (family) situation -again-.

The traumatic experiences that victims talk about continue to have an effect on their - now adult - lives. Victims talk about consequences in the field of relationships and sexuality. They have disturbed ideas about this because of what they experienced in the Children's Village. Financial consequences are also mentioned, especially a "buffer" that children would get when they would leave the Children's Village but that they never got, which made building a new life financially difficult.

The victims however mainly mention the psychological consequences: almost every victim explicitly states that they are (still) struggling with (major) psychological consequences of their time in the Children's Village. These include distrust, feelings of despair and depression. Psychological consequences were also tried to be objectified by means of a psychological test, the Brief Symptom Inventory (BSI). The conclusions that can be drawn from the BSI are worrying. The results imply that persons who have been victims of (some form of) abuse in the SOS Children's Village Suriname suffer remarkably from (many) psychopathological symptoms. These include paranoid thoughts, depressive complaints, (social) anxiety and a withdrawn lifestyle. Men generally suffer from more different symptoms than women, while women on average suffer more "per symptom".

Key conclusions:

- In the short as well as in the long term, the victims experience problems because of what they have experienced in the Children's Village, especially psychological problems. The victims themselves establish this causal relationship. In the case of the Children's Village, the majority had a (very) problematic background before their inclusion in the village. After leaving the village, most of them also experienced problems in all sorts of areas.

- In the short term, there was a culture of fear among the children and, after the Children's Village was closed, they had difficulty finding a new safe place.
- Victims experience problems raising their own children.
- Victims have no/little trust in other people.

6. How can the victim's current situation/functioning be described?

Another research question focused on how the current situation and functioning of the victim(s) can be described. The most distressing situations are the urgent/emergency events in which several victims find themselves. These mainly concern housing and finances: several victims will become homeless in the near future if no action is taken. Almost all victims explicitly state that they are struggling with psychological problems and a large number of victims have children but are not raising them with the other biological parent. Many are single. A little more than half of the victims had a job, but most were not satisfied with it (financially or with their working conditions), most are not able to pay the rent and/or debts. Several victims indicated that they would like to work and/or study but that this is not possible due to health or financial problems. Over a quarter of the victims do not have a 'doctor's card', which makes access to health services very difficult. The victims' current situation, as well as their psychological functioning, was also tried to be objectified by means of a questionnaire. This list covered eight areas of life. Its analysis shows that the average victim is very dissatisfied in the life areas surveyed. In particular, the victims are dissatisfied in financial and psychological areas.

Key conclusions:

- The current living situation and functioning of the victims can be considered problematic across the board.
- Problems are particularly evident in the areas of housing and finance. More than half of the victims work, but most can barely make ends meet. Others want to work and/or study but are unable to do so due to psychological and/or physical conditions.
- A questionnaire showed that the victims were generally very dissatisfied in eight areas of life surveyed.

7. What are the current needs of the victim in terms of professional help and/or recognition because of the suffering?

The current needs and wishes of victims are extensively described in the individual plans, which have been handed over to SOS CVI separately from this report. In these plans, the victims reflect on the events he/she has experienced in the Children's Village in Suriname, their current living and problem situation and their wishes and needs. In particular, the victims have needs in the following areas:

- *Recognition and apology:* Almost all victims indicate that they would like to receive recognition of the suffering they experienced at the time in the Children’s Village. They also mention (public) apologies.
- *Housing:* Victims report that they are currently experiencing (serious) housing problems. Some of them are facing eviction because they cannot pay the rent. Others live with an former SOS-aunt or relatives/friends. Some have no gas, light or water. Housing is very urgent.
- *Psychological support:* Victims also have psychological needs. For example, they indicate that they want to talk to a professional or need some other kind of psychological support because of their traumas and/or support in raising their children.
- *Support in education and/or work:* Some victims want help with education and/or work. Some want to start their own business, others want to work with the elderly or with children.
- There is an urgent need for a professional, well coordinated and monitored, support system in Suriname.

Key conclusions:

- It is important that SOS CVI provides for the needs of the victims, as this can promote healing and allow the victims to move on with their lives.
- Victims have needs in the area of:
 - o Recognition and (official) apology from SOS CVI
 - o Housing (priority)
 - o Psychological Support
 - o Support in the area of education and/or employment
 - o Support system: professional, coordinated and monitored.

8. What was (during that time) the policy of SOS Children’s Villages regarding tackling abuse in general?

As far as this research question is concerned, the answer can be formulated rather concisely. As far as we know, at the time, and even until 2008, there was no specific policy on tackling abuse. At the time of the incidents in Children’s Village Suriname in 2004, there were no reporting procedures, protocols or codes of conduct, also according to respondents. A policy on abuse has been in place since 2008.

In 2016, the policy support documents “Child’s safety is everybody’s business’ and “SOS Children’s Villages Child Safeguarding Investigations” appeared in which a step-by-step approach is described what should be done when a reported concern is received. The documents outline minimum requirements, guidelines and procedures for a child safeguarding investigation and the investigation team. Up to and including 2019 there is little specification of who is responsible for (supervision of) the implementation of the policy and it also remains unclear what the consequences are of violating it. As of 2020 various cases of historical abuse have come to light in different countries. Policy documents and reports follow each other in rapid

succession possibly caused by the fact that a new CEO has been appointed as of January 2021 or by the publication of the Independent Child Safeguarding Review Global Report (ICSR report) in spring 2021. That report describes independent research into cases of violence and sexual abuse in four SOS institutions between the 1990s and 2021. Other policy documents from 2020 onwards relate to prevention, response and research of (historical) cases of abuse, whereby specific actions and KPIs are also formulated.

Key conclusions:

- There was no supervision, control or enforcement by the Surinamese government
- At the time of the Children's Village, there was no policy on dealing with or preventing abuse.
- There was little to no focus on prevention and there was insufficient monitoring, control and enforcement in the area of abuse.
- It was only in 2008 that policy on tackling sexual abuse was published. Before then, there were no codes of conduct, protocols or reporting procedures.
- From 2008 to 2020, the scope of policy documents is rather broad but it is taking shape. From 2020 onwards, policy documents become more concrete.

9. How did SOS Children's Villages act in the described cases?

With regard to the case of senior staff member 1, it is not clear how the local SOS Suriname management has reacted. We do know that some measures were taken after the arrest. We also know that several measures were taken in the Children's Village after the arrest, including supervision by one of the most experienced senior staff members from the South American region. Regarding (re)actions by SOS Children's Villages Netherlands and SOS CVI, it appeared that value was attached to the way the organisation presented itself to the press concerning "the situation in SOS Children's Villages Suriname". There is hardly any information available on (re)actions of SOS in abuse cases other than those on which the arrest of senior staff member 1 in 2004 is based. What is available mainly concerns the role of SOS mothers. This role is generally described as negative by respondents: mothers would 'not believe' victims, would know what was going on but do nothing about it or even had an active role in abuse because they were perpetrators themselves.

However, the SOS organisation did take some actions and measures as a result of the arrest of senior staff member 1 in April 2004. For example, a pedagogical audit was carried out in June/July 2004 by 'the most experienced SOS director from the South American region'. This pedagogical audit revealed several shortcomings in the village, but no evidence of adult sexual abuse was found at the time. However, what these 'different shortcomings' mean was not revealed to us. Moreover, this director, together with the project director who was appointed and the interim senior staff member, drew up a working plan. What exactly happened with this is also unknown.

The story of the former employee who denounced abuses to the (regional) board, concerning abuse by senior staff member 2, stated that the SOS organisation did not react well to her

reports, or at least did not investigate whether the misconduct she had heard of, was actually justified. The image arises that the SOS organisation did not take sufficient responsibility to guarantee the welfare of the children. Other respondents however stated that an investigation had been conducted regarding possible abusive behaviour of senior staff member 2. According to these respondents there were three reported incidents. When asked the report was not being found. After the investigation done by the SOS-village-doctor who was also the confidant within the village, the board decided that there was no reason for disciplinary action against senior staff member 2.

In the case of abuse, in addition to the potential perpetrator committing the abuse, other persons, organisations, institutions and systems are to a greater or lesser extent responsible for such an action and for the safety of the abused child. It is important to define these actors. Olfers and van Wijk (2021), in their study of transgressive behaviour in gymnastics, call this the circles of responsibility. It is about the tasks, responsibilities and authority of the actors involved, the existence of checks and balances (distribution of different roles) in the system and the extent to which policy can be effectively implemented. In the current study, too, it has proved important to map out which actors were (to a greater or lesser extent) responsible for the safety of the children in SOS Children's Village Suriname and how they responded. A distinction is made between four levels: individual (child itself), interpersonal (SOS brothers, sisters and mothers), community (senior staff members) and national level. The main actors are briefly outlined. First, the SOS mothers: according to the Children's Village, it is their task to ensure the well-being and safety of the child. Experiencing abuse is a major violation of a child's well-being and safety and therefore (partly) the SOS mothers responsibility. Misconduct of an SOS mother is also (partly) the responsibility of other employees of the SOS Children's Village, senior staff members and the local administration. Other actors on an interpersonal level are the biological sons of SOS aunts and other children from the Children's Village. According to (SOS policy), they do not have a certain specifically described role or responsibility towards the SOS children, except what may be expected from them based on decency standards. However, the abuse they committed is contrary to that. At the community level of the Children's Village, the senior staff members were important actors. They reported to the board of the Children's Village in Suriname, although according to the job description, senior staff members had less direct care for the children in the village than, for example, SOS mothers. The mothers were in the first place responsible for the welfare of the children. When abuse occurred in the village, they were held accountable. Senior staff members also committed abuse themselves. They can be severely blamed for this, because they were overall responsible for the daily business in SOS-Suriname.

The local government should have intervened. They appoint the village and therefore have a responsibility in how they conduct themselves in his position in the village. Finally, the Children's Village should adhere to the vision, philosophy and goals of SOS CVI and obviously abuse does not fit in with that, although no specific policy was found that said something about this at the time. It goes without saying that the Children's Village must ensure the optimal development of children with security, love and stability. These are components of philosophy. The events that took place in the Children's Village in Suriname do not fit in with that.

In conclusion, it can be said that persons who had the responsibility to protect the children in the Children's Village, by which we mean especially several SOS mothers ('aunts') and several senior staff members, not only failed in their task but can even be identified as perpetrators. This can be held against them extensively. It has become apparent that there were too few checks and balances that allowed a potentially unsafe situation for children to (continue to) exist. There were insufficient external controls/audits and, as far as is known, there was no policy on abuse. Roles and responsibilities were not sufficiently clear and/or defined at the time in the Children's Village. The role of the senior staff members proved to be (too) large: SOS mothers and children did not dare to report misbehaviour by the village director and other senior staff members because they had nowhere else to turn but to the Children's Village.

Key conclusions:

- Little is known about how the board of the Children's Village and SOS Netherlands and SOS CVI reacted to the abuse cases. Some measures were taken at the Children's Village and the way the media was communicated seemed to be important for the organisation to take action.
- Based on the circles of responsibility, it can be said that various actors failed in their roles and responsibilities and there were insufficient checks and balances.
- There was insufficient monitoring, control and enforcement at all levels.
- Reports and signals of abuse are not taken seriously enough in all parts of SOS.

10. What recommendations can be made to improve preventing and tackling abuse as well as to improve the situation of the victim(s)?

Finally, part of the study was to make recommendations to SOS CVI to try to prevent and abuse, including sexual abuse, and, moreover, to improve the situation of victims. The following recommendations were formulated:

- *Recognition:* With regard to improving the situation of victims, first of all (official) recognition of events and suffering and/or apology towards the victims is important. The organisation should (publicly) acknowledge the events and the suffering towards the victims. This can increase healing, acceptance and processing of the events.
- *Reimbursement and assistance:* The individual plans address the wishes of victims. It is very important that the victims are helped by the organisation in different areas of their lives.
- *Put the subject on the agenda:* Although for some years now, especially since the publication of the external study 'Independent Child Safeguarding Review' (ICSR), the subject of (historical) abuse has received increased attention, it is important to (continue to) put it on the agenda and to continue to address the subject and to underline its importance within all parts of the organisation.
- *Circles of responsibility:* Clearly outline what everyone's tasks, powers and responsibilities are. Also indicate the limits of these responsibilities. When these things are clear, it also

becomes easier to keep each other accountable for (undesirable) behaviour and to take appropriate action.

- *Improve local governance structures:* In the abuse cases researched in this study, the senior staff member was hired by the local administration. The senior staff member hired the SOS mothers. When a senior staff member is the perpetrator, a complicated situation arises where roles and responsibilities are unclear. People cannot keep each other accountable for their behaviour because of a relationship of dependency. This can encourage abuse. It is important that these structures are improved.
- *Make reporting channels more accessible:* Although more attention has been paid to reporting channels in recent years, it is important to look at their availability and use. For example, the SOS website can be used to report child abuse but it is not entirely clear to us to what extent people (children in Children's Villages) have access to it.
- *Give children a voice, no matter how young:* Much suffering has occurred because children were not heard and, if they were heard, not believed. Take children seriously.
- It is important to keep ensuring adequate control and enforcement of policies and practice regarding a safe and healthy environment and to set up regular and independent audits.

Key conclusions:

- The following recommendations are made to SOS CVI:
 - o Recognition of suffering and apologies
 - o Guidance/assistance and compensation to victims
 - o Keep safeguarding high on the agenda
 - o Make tasks, competences and responsibilities clear
 - o Improve local governance
 - o Make reporting channels more accessible
 - o Ensure sufficient financial transparency
 - o Give children a voice, take children seriously
 - o To keep ensuring adequate supervision, control and enforcement. Periodically carry out external audits.

Consideration

The research focuses on the bad experiences of the children. This does not mean that all children we spoke look back on their stay in the Children's Village negatively. Some of them, including some of the victims, also reported positive experiences. They refer to their education and the discipline they have learned to take care of themselves. They are not easily discouraged, no matter how difficult their situation is at the moment. Help and support from SOS can give them a boost.

Introduction

SOS Children's Village is a worldwide organisation, active in 137 countries and territories, that works for children who are orphaned, abandoned or whose families are unable to care for them. SOS Children's village mission is to give these children the opportunity to build lasting relationship within a family. The family approach in the SOS Children's Village is based on four principles. Each child needs a mother, and grows up most naturally with brothers and sisters, in their own house, within a supportive village environment. According to SOS Children's village, the mission is to 'enable children to live according to their own culture and religion, and to be active members in the community'. Next to this, to 'help children to recognise and express their individual abilities, interests and talents' and to 'ensure that children receive the education and skills training they need to be successful and contributing members of society'.¹

Independent external reviews initiated by SOS Children's Village show that in various countries there is evidence of historical abuse. These reviews have concluded that the organisation failed to act appropriately when these cases were reported (Keeping Children Safe, 2021). Since the results of the reports were made public, there have been additional victims that have come out to speak of abuse that they experienced. The international organisation is, at this moment, developing further measures to deal with cases of abuse. Allegations of child abuse are sometimes made many years after the abuse initially occurred. Although the abuse may have occurred in the past, the effects of the abuse for the victims can still be on-going. Critical factors are: the frequency, duration and the type(s) of maltreatment.

In 2021 SOS-CVI became aware of the fact that children in the care of SOS Children's Villages in Suriname had experienced severe abuse. This report was initially prompted by reports from 2021 in which two women indicated that they had experienced some form of sexual abuse by a senior staff member.² In this report, we refer to that person as 'senior staff member 1'. One of these women reported to SOS Children Village in the Netherlands that she was sexually abused on the part of senior staff member 1 in the years 1995-1996 while in SOS Children's village Suriname.³

This man (senior staff member 1) was sentenced for sexual abuse against minors, that took place in SOS Children's Village in Suriname. He served time in jail in Suriname. After his release, he passed away. A journalist, his wife worked at SOS Children's village, reported on incidents of abuse and the failure of the village to follow up on these cases of misconduct committed by another senior staff member, to which we will refer as 'senior staff member 2'. The described behaviour of the senior staff member mainly involved, according to both the journalist and his (former) wife, harsh punishments and authoritarian rule. The wife of the journalist did not experience the abuse herself but became aware of the abuse through others within the village. Both the woman, the (former) wife and the journalist claim that SOS-leadership were

1 Sos-childrensvillages.org visited December 2022.

2 In this report we use the term 'senior staff member' in case the person was in a management position or in a director-position.

3 210601-CS Incident Paper_Suriname_CV Paramaribo (1) (4).pdf.

aware of the misconduct and (a selection of the executives that time) were actively trying to cover up the accusations.

SOS Children's Villages aims to handle the Suriname-allegations in a responsible manner and holds the desire to do everything in its power to identify and deal with historical child abuse in a way that supports the victim(s) as well allows other victims to come forward during the research.

Research questions

In short, the study addresses the following main questions: What happened in SOS Children's Villages Suriname? How was it allowed to happen? What impact has it had on the victims? What was the role of the SOS organisation? What help can SOS offer to the victims and what learnings can SOS take on board to prevent future cases of abuse?

These main questions are divided into the following:

1. What was the scope and nature of the abuse, including sexual abuse, in the period 1995-1996 in Suriname Children's Village according to the victim?
2. What are the characteristics of the perpetrator(s)?
3. Are there indications that there are more victims and if so, what is the scope and nature of the abuse and what were/are the consequences of the abuse for the victims?
4. In which cultural, historical, and organisational context did the abuse take place?
5. What are the (physical and/or psychological) consequences for the victim(s)?
6. How can the victim's current environment / functioning be described?
7. What are the current needs of the victim in terms of professional help and/or recognition because of the suffering?
8. What was the policy of SOS Children's Villages regarding tackling abuse in general during the period of abuse?
9. How did SOS Children's Villages act in the described cases?
10. What recommendations can be made to improve prevention and tackling of abuse as well improving the general situation of the victim(s)?

This is the report of all findings. It outlines the results of the research and answers the primary research questions. The interviews with the victims also provide important input. This report provides an account of that.

Next to this report SOS Children's Villages International (SOS CVI), requested an individual victim statement of each victim. This contains the victim's experience in the Children's Village, the problems they encountered (and/ or still experiencing) as well as the wishes and needs with regard to help and support for any problems. Each report contains (with explicit consent of the victim) personal data of the victim in question. This way, SOS CVI is able to contact each victim and further help them if required.

Reading guide

In the next chapter (1), we describe how the study was designed and conducted. In Chapter 2 we provide some general information about SOS Children's Villages. Chapter 3 provides (more) context regarding Surinamese culture, and Chapter 4 provides a detailed description of the victim's experience in SOS Children's Villages Suriname. In Chapter 5 describes the effects of the abuse and the needs of the victims. Next, Chapter 6 discusses SOS's policies for preventing and combating of abuse is discussed.

Design and implementation of the study

In this chapter, we outline the design and implementation of the study. The research is qualitative in nature. Roughly speaking, two sources of information were used. Firstly, we studied relevant documents related to the cases and to SOS Children's Villages. Secondly, we interviewed individuals who could inform us of their own experience about daily life in the village, both victims and non-victims. These included individuals who worked in the Children's Village, such as aunts (responsible for raising the children who lived with them), or experts on Surinamese culture. All respondents live either in the Netherlands or in Suriname. Most victims are currently living in Suriname.

1.1 Document Analysis

SOS CVI has handed Verinorm various documents. The majority consist of 'historical documents' and relate to incident(s) that took place in SOS Children's Village Suriname around 2004. In particular, regarding abuse committed by a senior staff member 1 working in the Children's Village. This concerns about thirty different documents, including a press statement, interview reports, an action plan, reports on research and investigations conducted and internal communications (e-mails). These documents were viewed and analysed, with the research questions as the guiding principle. Some other documents were also handed over to Verinorm, including letters from the lawyer of two victims who reported abuses.

In addition, policy documents were reviewed and analysed with a view to finding out what SOS CVI's policy is (or was) in relation to dealing with abuse. These were obtained from the

website of the international organisation. When multiple versions of documents were available, the last versions were analysed. In total, there are (approximately) fourteen documents and several web pages. These are listed in Annex 1. The documents and webpages were examined and used to make an overview file in an excel sheet. This indicates, for each document, what the scope of the document is, a summary (point by point) of the contents, the reason for writing the document, for whom it is intended, who initiated it and who is responsible for its implementation or supervision.⁴

The above-mentioned documents do not give us a complete picture of the situation in the Surinamese Children's Village. In other words, much of the relevant information was no longer available. For example, we did not succeed in getting hold of the court ruling on the convicted senior staff member. Although both the police and the judiciary in Suriname were contacted for this purpose. There was also no data available on which senior staff members were in the Children's Village during which period. Nor how many children lived in the village during a specific time frame and how many aunts there were. This lack of possible relevant documents is due to the fact that it has been a long time since SOS CVI opened the village. In 2006, the village closed. If there was any data, it was not found. The organisation currently operating has also not been able to provide any data.

1.2 Interviews

Interviews were conducted with various persons relevant to the study. A total of 35 respondents were interviewed (see table 1). In total, there were nineteen victims and sixteen other respondents including aunts, a former senior staff member and a social worker. The victims mainly spoke of how they experienced life in the village, what they went through and how they coped both in and after leaving the Children's Village. The other respondents were able to talk about the broader context of the SOS Children's Villages, especially about the incidents that took place and how SOS Children's Villages dealt with them. In addition, contact was made with people/experts who could inform us about Surinamese culture, placed in time.

The interviews contributed to answering the research questions both directly and indirectly. Directly, for example, by hearing from a victim what impact the events at the Children's Village are still having according to the victim. Indirectly, e.g. by interpreting the context of life at the Children's Village for the children, staff and management.

4 A list of references and a list of consulted sources can be found at the end of the report and referred to with footnotes, and Appendix 1 contains an overview of the studied policy documents and internal documents of SOS.

■ **Table 1:** overview of the spoken respondents

	Frequency
Victim living in Suriname	16
Victim living in The Netherlands	3
Former regional director	2
Former SOS aunt SOS Suriname	2
Former senior staff member SOS Suriname	1
Former social worker SOS Suriname	1
Former employee SOS NL	2
Former employee SOS other	2
Other ⁵	6
Total	35

Interviews lasted between 45 and 90 minutes.⁶ Most of the interviews took place in person. A few respondents were interviewed by video link. A separate interview report was made of each interview. All respondents were informed before the interview started that the interview would take place on a completely voluntary basis. It was also stated that the report would be anonymised and would not contain any names of individuals. Eighteen of the nineteen victims wanted an individual plan.⁷ All eighteen were asked for permission to draw up an individual plan and were explicitly asked if the personal details included in the plan could be shared with SOS Children's Villages. In some cases, this also includes medical data. All victims have given their permission.

Almost all interviews were conducted in a healthy atmosphere, despite the sometimes strong emotions of the victims. The respondents were open and we felt that they were able to tell us what they truly wanted to say. We were also critical, in the sense, that we checked as much factual information as possible with other respondents. Some respondents were able to remember certain things clearly, especially around the abuse. While other respondents had more difficulty in describing events concretely and placing them in time (the when, who and where). During some interviews, we as researchers had to take into account the situation in which the interview took place, for example by not asking questions in too much detail because children were present. Or in one case only going into the main points because the respondent seemed to be under the influence of drugs. In the report, text is put in quotation marks when it concerns literal quotes from respondents.

5 This concerns a former student, a professor, a Surinamese member of parliament, a police officer in Paramaribo, an employee of the court of Paramaribo, administrator of the Prasoro Foundation.

6 A number of respondents were interviewed more than once.

7 One victim made use of a legal expert who made her wishes and demands clear toward SOS CVI and one victim did not want help and support from SOS because she now had her life in order.

1.3 Research Process

The research has been a lengthy process. This is a result of various issues. Initially, the assignment was to be commissioned by SOS Children's Villages Netherlands. A research plan was written for this purpose. At a later stage, SOS Children's Villages International accepted the assignment because reports of abuse had come in from other countries and they wanted a centralised approach to the problem. As a result, various legal and administrative formalities had to be completed. This took the necessary time.

Another reason for the relatively long duration of the study is that a number of victims (and other respondents) live in the Netherlands, but a large number - as it turned out during the study - live in Suriname (Paramaribo). We initially spoke to all the respondents in the Netherlands and in the meantime tried to make contact with people in Suriname. This took extended time and effort, without much result. During the research, it turned out there was a Facebook group of people who had lived and worked in the SOS Children's Village. After some effort, we were able to post a message on the Facebook group with the scope of the study and that we would like to get in touch with respondents. Some Dutch respondents also informed us about their contacts which they still maintained with other residents and/or aunts from the Children's Village. In June 2022, two researchers went to Paramaribo with two concrete leads. Just before their departure, another message was posted on Facebook. The members of the Facebook group have, as it turned out later, been informed about the arrival of the researchers in Suriname. After the first interview with a victim in Suriname, more victims immediately contacted the researchers present in Suriname.⁸ During the course of the research, trust in the researchers was established. In total, the researchers were able to speak to nineteen people in Paramaribo in one week, including sixteen victims.

The victims were happy with the research and were happy that the SOS-organisation at last was paying attention to their problems and needs. For some victims, we were the first persons they told their story to: most of them had never shared their experiences to anyone before. During the interviews, we comprehended that despite the sensitivity of the subject matter, the victims trusted the researchers and dared to share their story openly. When asked how they had experienced the interview, they all indicated that they had enjoyed it. It helped that the researchers were willing to travel to Suriname and were able to speak to victims in their own surroundings. Still, not all stories and details have been told.

1.4 Methodological reflection

Based on the available documents and the interviews, the information was collected, organised, and analysed in order to answer the research questions. However, there are gaps in the timeline. Some relevant documents are missing, including those related to the sexual abuse

⁸ A Dutch lawyer representing one of the victims played a mediating role between his client and the investigators.

trial in which a senior staff member of SOS Children's Villages Paramaribo was involved as a perpetrator. In addition, respondents sometimes could not remember exactly what had happened and in which time period. This is inherent to historical research. In addition, the incidents took place in another part of the world, in another culture, with consequences for the perception or experience of the events over time. Where the above led to gaps in the research, we have indicated this in the text.

Talking about sexual abuse is often surrounded by taboos, feelings of shame and guilt, especially among victims. According to experts, this certainly applies within the Surinamese culture. Contrary to expectations, the researchers found little evidence of this. Most respondents or victims spoke very explicitly about their experiences. At the same time, we are convinced that we did not hear everything. Not every victim will have told us everything in detail, at least that is what we suspect because some of the victims sometimes gave evasive answers to questions. These included the nature of the sexual acts and the duration of the sexual abuse. Sometimes it seemed as if they wanted to protect certain people because these people were 'not as bad' as others in the village. There is often a strong loyalty towards other children who stayed in the same house and towards certain aunt(s).

An important note is that the researchers expect that in reality there were many more problems in the Children's Village. With current research, a small part of the reality has surfaces. For example, we are sure that there are more victims than we have spoken to. This is evident from the stories of victims who mention other children/names we have not spoken to. We tried to get in touch with as many victims as possible. Some victims have no fixed abode or residence, or have no means of communication and cannot be traced. Some of the victims are sick and there are victims who do not want to talk about it and want to leave it behind.

The research mainly concerns the experiences of the victims. This has also been the starting point for gaining insight into the nature and extent of the abuse. Not all information can be fully verified. For example, one of the most important persons designated by victims as the perpetrator has since died. Respondents talked about other people (both possible perpetrators as possible victims) which cannot be traced. The research is not an research into people. For this reason, all information that can be traced back to individuals has been anonymised.

2

SOS Children's Village Suriname

The events of abuse took place in the SOS Children's Village in Suriname. This chapter provides the reader with a brief outline of SOS Children's Villages, focusing on its mission and philosophy. The chapter then focuses on reasons for the study.

2.1 Foundation, Philosophy and Vision

SOS Children's Villages International is a global federation consisting of 118 (member associations) and is active in 137 countries and territories (SOS Children's Villages, 2021). The organisation was founded by the Austrian, Hermann Gmeiner, who lost his mother at a young age.⁹ He himself held the conviction that helping (homeless) children is only effective when they grow up in a family context. This motivation led to the first SOS Children's Village in 1949. Worldwide, SOS Children's Villages has already reached more than 1.1 million children and young people, with almost 3,000 different programmes (SOS Children's Villages, 2021).

The basic philosophy of SOS Children's Villages is that children can develop most optimally if they can grow up in an environment that resembles the typical family structure as much as possible.¹⁰ In an SOS Children's Village, such a situation is replicated as much as possible by living with an SOS mother, brothers and sisters in one house. According to the documents,

9 Our History, SOS-Kinderdorpen.nl <https://www.sosKinderdorpen.nl/over-sos-Kinderdorpen/onze-geschiedenis/>.

10 'Mission and Vision' <https://www.sosKinderdorpen.nl/over-sos-Kinderdorpen/missie-en-visie/>.

important factors are “security and love in and from a family” (Wilmot, 2004). It is of great importance that every child has a caring parent (mother), offering security, love and stability. The family background, cultural roots and religion of each child must be recognised and respected.

2.2 SOS Children’s village Suriname

In Suriname, the SOS Children’s Village Foundation was founded in 1972 (Wilmot, 2004). In 1974, the then president of Suriname officially opened the foundation. The Village was founded by Serviceclub Soroptimist International Club Paramaribo. In 1994, it became part of SOS Children’s Villages International.¹¹ This was the first Children’s Village funded entirely by Dutch donations (SOS Kinderdorpen, 2021). A few houses were started at the time.¹² Over time, more houses were built, eventually reaching ten. In the years 1996-1997, the (now ten) houses were renovated.¹³ A school for pre-school education was also built during that time. The foundation was part of the international SOS organisation from 1994 to 1 July 2006.

In 2003/2004, Wilmot wrote her thesis on SOS Children’s Village Suriname within a framework of Social Work and Service training (Wilmot, 2004). She also visited the village for a few days. In her thesis, she gave an overview of functions that were present in the village at that time. Most of the information about that village was taken from her thesis. Unfortunately, there is little information available about (that time in) the Children’s Village in Suriname.

SOS Children’s Villages Suriname was a Surinamese foundation and thus a Surinamese legal entity. The foundation had a board of about five to seven people, all living in Suriname. The board appointed the Village Director and thus was the Village Director’s employer. SOS Children’s Villages Suriname was one of the many members of SOS Children’s Villages International. As a member of the SOS family, Suriname was particularly concerned with the South American region. Issues such as finances and renovation were mainly discussed with that region. The regional director was the regional point of contact for Suriname but not formally a director of the board in Suriname or the Village Director. From the relationship between Suriname and the Netherlands, there was also contact with SOS Children’s Villages Nederland. This mainly concerned Communication and Fundraising.

The Village Director responsibilities included directing the development of the SOS families and the village, supporting and guiding the SOS mothers (labelled as aunts in this report because respondents talk about ‘aunts’ instead of ‘mothers’), organising meetings with SOS mothers and ensuring that there was a strong link between each SOS family and the youth clubs. SOS mothers (‘aunts’) were the head of the SOS family and were responsible for the development and care of each child entrusted to her. She had to create a warm and loving home and run the SOS family and household. She also had to ensure the welfare of the child

11 ‘Onze Wortels’, Stichtingpraso <https://www.stichtingpraso.org/onze-wortels/>.

12 Foundation Praso’, [surisamen.org https://www.surisamen.org/projecten/afgeronde-projecten/stichtingpraso](https://www.surisamen.org/projecten/afgeronde-projecten/stichtingpraso).

13 ‘SOS Children’s Village Suriname’, <https://wjpvrhee.home.xs4all.nl/vvs/doelen/sosKinderdorp.html>.

through parenting and planning the child's development. SOS mothers had to cooperate with each other and support and help each other.

There was also a youth leader in the village who was responsible for guiding the development of young people (living in youth homes just outside the village) in terms of their personal, educational and career development. They had to ensure continuous contact and cooperation with SOS mothers whose children were living in youth homes and gave training to the youth.

Then, according to Wilmot's (2004) thesis, there were so-called 'support staff', who helped the SOS mothers where necessary. SOS-aunts lived in the village, SOS-family workers lived outside the village. SOS Aunties and SOS Family Helpers provided various forms of (general) support to SOS mothers, for example when they were on holiday or when they had busy periods at work. Child development staff were responsible for providing programmes and opportunities that supported SOS mothers in fostering the development of her children. These were the child psychologist, the social worker and the mother counsellor. These all lived outside the village and they had to work with SOS mothers in the context of child development. At the time Wilmot wrote the thesis (2003/2004) there was no social worker on staff, those services were taken over by the mother supervisor

The above-mentioned positions concern the persons who were directly responsible for the welfare of the children. In addition to these positions, there were also, among others, an administrator, a doctor, a driver, a cleaner and an accountant.

The aim was to have all children grow up in a familial structure. Each family had roughly eight to nine children and they lived together with their SOS-mother in a common house. They functioned as a regular family with the mother doing household chores, helping the children with schoolwork, and talking to children about problems. Wilmot quotes the parenting philosophy of some SOS mothers: "Honesty and openness are very important", "The mother is a role model", "Teaching manners, showing respect for adults and obeying" and "Learning young is doing old". When rules were broken, consequences followed. Mothers were not allowed to beat their children. If they did, they would be dismissed by the village director. As a rule, SOS homes have strict daily programmes, including outdoor activities, homework and meals together.

A SOS Children's Village resembled a regular village. A vital difference is that there was a fence/wall around the Children's Village, which was closed at night. The idea was that the village would be a realistic reflection of 'normal' society. The SOS Boys' Youth Home, where boys between the ages of fourteen and sixteen were prepared (under supervision) to function independently in society, also had a strict daily schedule and a variety of house rules. Aggressive behaviour such as, fighting and cursing was not accepted. The rooms had to be kept tidy and clean, agreements between parents and children had to be kept. Sanctions were imposed when these rules were broken. The sanctions could consist of having to read a book or not being allowed to go to an event.

The above picture of the organisation is based on the situation in 2003-2004, when Wilmot did her research. Of course, this is a snapshot. Before that time, some functions will have been present to a greater or lesser extent (e.g. a social worker). is in line with the image that the researchers got of the Children's Village in Suriname.

The Children's Village in Suriname was closed in 2006. As of 1 July 2006, the activities of the foundation were continued under the name 'Stichting Prasoro Voor het Kind in nood'. This foundation has no ties with SOS Children's Villages.¹⁴At the time, SOS Children's Villages indicated, in an official statement, why they were discontinuing SOS Children's Village Suriname. It is not made clear exactly to whom this statement is addressed. The document is no longer publicly available. According to the statement, which Verinorm received from SOS CVI, the reason indicated for closure was that there were too few orphans in Suriname and that there was a strong social system that could provide adequate care for orphans and other children who could no longer live with their biological families. Managers indicated that there was a financial crisis at the time and villages had to be closed down. According to the interviewed managers, Suriname did not fit in the bigger picture of SOS either. In most South American countries, SOS Children's Villages had one Children's Village in a very large population (e.g. one million inhabitants), whereas Suriname has relatively a small population. This was one Children's Village in a population of several hundred thousand. Reference is also made to the fact that there is an overrepresentation of one particular population group in the Children's Village. Other respondents, such as aunts, indicated that a lawsuit against a former director of the Children's Village had been the direct cause.

Since we do not have any documents or files on the Children's Village, it is difficult to determine the total number of children who lived there. According to a respondent who worked in SOS Children's Village Suriname in 1995/1996, there were 'at least 50 children' as well as children outside the village (among others in Youth Homes) who were cared for by SOS Children's Village Suriname. By the end, there were about 80 children. During the existence of the Children's Village, it is likely that hundreds of children lived there.

14 'Our Roots', [stichtingprasoro.org https://www.stichtingprasoro.org/onze-wortels/](https://www.stichtingprasoro.org/onze-wortels/).

3

The Context, Surinamese Culture

The abuse that is discussed in this report took place in Suriname. In order to better interpret and explain the previous chapter (as well as its findings) this chapter describes some characteristics of the country. In particular, its political and socio-cultural history, educational climate and how people think about the topics of sexuality and sexual abuse. Following this, we will look at SOS Children's Villages in general as well as the Children's Village in Suriname. We mainly base ourselves on public sources (articles and media reports)..

3.1 History and culture of Suriname

In this section, we will deal with the cultural characteristics of Suriname, namely: the political situation, population groups, language, religion, education and punishment.

3.1.1 Political Situation

Up until 1975, Suriname was a colony of the Netherlands for more than three centuries. On 25 November of that year, the statutory link with the Kingdom was severed and Suriname therefore became independent. A large amount Surinamese people left for the Netherlands.¹⁵ The result of this was that highly educated, qualified personnel left the country. Following

¹⁵ History Suriname', info-suriname.com <https://info-suriname.com/geschiedenis-suriname/>.

independence, the Surinamese economy sharply declined. There was widespread corruption and the government lacked authority. In 1980, a military coup took place, led by Desi Bouterse.

Bouterse failed to win the trust of the Surinamese people, which led him to impose a curfew and resort to heavy-handed violence.¹⁶ After the December murders of 1982, in which fifteen opponents of Bouterse's military regime were executed, the cabinet finally resigned.¹⁷ At that time, the Netherlands also ceased providing financial support to Suriname. In 1987 democratic elections were held. The National Democratic Party (NDP), founded by Bouterse, lost to the 'New Democratic Front'. The influence of the military leadership and Bouterse remained strong, however. In 1990 the telephone coup, also known as the Christmas coup took place, with the national army taking power again. In 1991, new elections were called and these were won by the New Front, with Ronald Venetiaan becoming president. At that time, the ties with the Netherlands were strengthened again with the conclusion of the 'Framework Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation'. A plan was drawn up to get Suriname out of its economic problems. The army's grip on the politics of the country was severed and, with difficulty a start, progress was made on economic reforms. However, the development that was intended for Suriname did not materialise and in 1996 the National Democratic Party won the elections, led by Jules Wijdenbosch who became president. During his presidency he spent heavily which led to a high level of national debt. In 1997, The Hague issued a warrant for Bouterse's arrest via Interpol for drug trafficking.¹⁸ This catalysed a further deterioration of relations between the Netherlands and Suriname.

In the 2000 elections, Wijdenbosch was defeated. He resigned and the New Front won the elections. Venetiaan became president again. The intention was that the economy would recover during this period. Finally, in 2010, the country's economic position plateaued at a healthy level. However, the incumbent government lost the elections again to Bouterse's NDP. Bouterse managed to form a government and become elected president. Diplomatic relations with the Netherlands were restored to a businesslike level and in 2015 Bouterse was again appointed president, despite the major economic problems. In 2020 the NDP lost and Chan Santokhi became president. Currently, there is sky-high inflation and a huge national debt. The current government is faced with the difficult task of getting Suriname back on its feet.

3.1.2 Population groups, language and religion

Largely due to the colonial era, Suriname is home to a large number of different cultures.¹⁹ It is complex to describe 'the Surinamese culture' because of the extensive variety of subcultures

16 'A secret dossier about Desi Bouterse's coup d'état was simply available for inspection in an archive in The Hague', De Correspondent <https://decorrespondent.nl/9712/een-geheim-dossier-over-de-staatsgreep-van-desi-bouterse-was-just-seen-in-a-hague> [archief/832533015776-ba607578](https://decorrespondent.nl/9712/een-geheim-dossier-over-de-staatsgreep-van-desi-bouterse-was-just-seen-in-a-hague).

17 'History Suriname', info-suriname.com <https://info-suriname.com/geschiedenis-suriname/>.

18 'Warrant for the arrest of Desi Bouterse', retro.nrc.nl <http://retro.nrc.nl/W2/Nieuws/1997/08/06/Vp/01.html>.

19 'Surinamese culture, what is typically Surinamese? Kapelkatravel.nl <https://kapelkatravel.com/surinaamse-cultuur-wat-is-nu-typisch-surinaams/>.

and population groups. Originally, the South-American (Brazilians and Indians), West-African (Creoles), East-Asian (Javanese, Hindustani and Chinese) and European (Boeroes) population groups were the most prominent in Suriname.²⁰ In addition, it appears that there are also differences between city and district children, and that these groups in turn differ from children who live far inland (Plet, 2003).

Every Surinamese speaks at least two languages. There is a strong hierarchical culture: as an employee, for example, it is not customary to contradict the manager or to ask many questions. There is also a high level of social control and the community is small, although this social control has diminished over the past decades.²¹ The family is very important. It is common for the whole family to live together, generation after generation.²² In general, Surinamese people prefer to avoid conflicts, which makes it difficult to address each other about misbehaviour.²³ As mentioned, Suriname is a melting pot of different cultures which ensues a wide variety of religious beliefs. Religion is important to many Surinamese people. The largest religion is Christianity, but Hinduism and Islam are also common.²⁴ There is religious tolerance in society, for example, the fact that there is a mosque and a synagogue a few metres away from each other in Paramaribo. There is also talk of a 'unique religious tolerance' in Suriname.²⁵

3.1.3 Education and punishment

Because there are so many different cultures living alongside each other in Suriname, there are also many different ways of upbringing, as explained in a presentation by the BMP Foundation.²⁶ Hindus and Javanese are the most traditional in their upbringing, Creoles are more liberal. In the BES islands (or Caribbean Netherlands: Bonaire, St. Eustatius and Saba) and Suriname, it is no exception that a mother raises her children on her own (Janssen, 2017). Matrifocality is a term described as 'mother-centredness' (definition of Tanner, 1974). This refers to the mother being structurally and culturally the key person in family life. The mother therefore has an important position in the family. In Suriname, it is not uncommon for children to live only with

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- 20 'Educating in Suriname', stichtingbmp.nl https://www.stichtingbmp.nl/cms/sites/default/files/pdf/Presentatie_Reina_Waalring.pdf.
 - 21 Social control then and now', dbsuriname.com <https://www.dbsuriname.com/2020/05/13/sociale-controle-toen-en-nu/>.
 - 22 'GETTING TO KNOW SURINAM CULTURE: SURINAM THE LAND OF THE UNTOUCHED JUNGLES AND PEANUT SOUP', Wearetravellers.nl <https://www.wearetravellers.nl/zuidamerika/suriname/surinaamse-cultuur/> <https://www.wearetravellers.nl/zuidamerika/suriname/surinaamse-cultuur/>.
 - 23 'Surinamese culture, what is typical of Surinamese?', Kapelkattravel.nl.
 - 24 'Population, language and religion of Surinam'. landenspecials.nl <http://www.landenspecials.nl/suriname/bevolking-taal-godsdiens/>.
 - 25 'Surinaamse tolerantie', trouw.nl <https://www.trouw.nl/nieuws/surinaamse-tolerantie-b6d0cac3/>.
 - 26 Educating in Suriname', stichtingbmp.nl https://www.stichtingbmp.nl/cms/sites/default/files/pdf/Presentatie_Reina_Waalring.pdf.

their mother.²⁷ She has authority, tolerates no contradiction and her will is law (Swedo, 2019)²⁸. Especially among Creoles, it is common for mothers to be responsible for the children. In these families, the children often belong to different fathers. This situation can be difficult, because the mother has difficulties both financially and pedagogically to take care of the children. Men are generally less present in the family both emotionally and physically. In parenting, a hierarchical relationship between parent and child is also important (Swedo, 2019)²⁹.

Children should behave politely towards elders and not contradict their parents. The use of physical punishment is not uncommon in Suriname. Although in recent decades a turn has taken place whereby there is more room for other kinds of punishments, parental discipline with both physical and psychological violence is still accepted and common in Suriname (Van der Kooij et al., 2018).³⁰ A study conducted in 2018 on the perception of corporal punishment among Indo-Caribbeans shows how violent forms of disciplining children are widely accepted and applied in Suriname (Van der Kooij et al., 2018). In the eyes of parents, this is a necessary and respected form of discipline.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Housing has brought the policy in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been ratified by Suriname (Plet, 2003). Another study among 1,391 Surinamese adolescents shows that a considerable number of Surinamese children experienced maltreatment (i.e. more than physical abuse). In total, 87% of adolescents and 96% of young adults reported to having been exposed to at least one form of child abuse during their lifetime (Van der Kooij et al., 2015).

In 2007, the law in the Netherlands was amended to explicitly prohibit corporal punishment as part of child rearing (Veira & Weitzen, 2011). Suriname has adopted the text from this amended article literally. But in practice, child rights are not yet fully respected by both the legislation and the society of Suriname. In addition to the laws and regulations, there is also the alleged right of various religious faiths to use corporal punishment as a means of education, Veira and Weitzen write in 2011³¹.

27 Why many Surinamese children grow up without a father', triaspedagogica.nl <https://www.triaspedagogica.nl/actueel/artikelen/Algemeen/Waarom-veel-Surinaamse-kinderen-opgroeien-zonder-vader/379/6/2/>.

28 Swedo, C. Mijn moeder zei altijd....<https://thesis.eur.nl/pub/50626/MasterthesisSwedoCM160619.pdf>.

29 Swedo, C. Mijn moeder zei altijd....<https://thesis.eur.nl/pub/50626/MasterthesisSwedoCM160619.pdf>.

30 'GViolence against children in Suriname', Unicef.org <https://www.unicef.org/guyanasuriname/media/181/file/Violence-against-children-in-Suriname-Report.pdf>.

31 Veira, M. & Wielzen, D. (2011). 'Corporal punishment, religion and education'. Tijdschrift voor Religie, Recht en Beleid (3), p. 5-16.

3.2 Sexuality and the Surinamese culture

According to the Surinamese-Dutch anthropologist Gloria Wekker, everyday life in Suriname is peppered with sexual jokes and allusions, but the question is: what is actually known about the sexual experience of Surinamese? (Wekker, 2008). Such jokes are often heard in bars, on the radio and on the street, and popular music and proverbs often have sexual overtones as well. Globalisation has also played an important role in this. Sex is often seen as something natural and inevitable. Conversely, a serious discussion about sexuality between parents and children is often difficult. Wekker writes that there is a clear lack of communication and knowledge on the subject, while teenage pregnancies and excessive sexual violence and/or abuse against women and children are common. The public sexual culture is challenging, stimulating, erotic and free, while the private culture is characterised by shame, low sex knowledge, skills and cultural sex taboos. These have a negative effect on open communication about sex (Terborg, 2002)³². A survey conducted in 2017 and 2018 at a school in Paramaribo showed that more than 95% of parents do not discuss sexuality before the age at which girls start menstruating (between eleven and sixteen years).³³

So sexuality is not easily discussed in Suriname. Sexual abuse is even less talked about. Few scientific studies are known. An exception is a study by Van der Kooij et al. (2019). They asked 1,120 adolescents aged twelve to seventeen years whether they had experienced child sexual abuse in the past twelve months. More than 16% of boys and 15% of girls reported that they had been exposed to some form of child sexual abuse in the past twelve months. Girls reported significantly more intrafamilial child sexual abuse by a minor than boys. Boys reported significantly more experiences of being touched or forced by a minor outside the family to look at or touch the abuser's genitals than girls. Moreover, sixteen and seventeen year olds were the most vulnerable. A significant proportion of child sexual abuse consisted of sexual victimisation between peers. Afro Surinamese adolescents were found to report the highest rates of child sexual abuse (Van der Kooij, 2019).

In addition to the aforementioned scientific study, the subject does come up in various media reports. In 2016, the Surinamese Minister of Police and Justice, Jennifer van Dijk-Silos, said that talking about sexuality is a big taboo in Suriname³⁴. In Surinamese society, there is an 'us versus them' culture and people tend to protect each other. Reporting family members is difficult and women who are raped or assaulted do not report this easily. In Suriname, there is a sense of shame, and subjects like incest, suicide, domestic violence or AIDS are not discussed openly.³⁵ Victims of violence for example, are brought up in a 'tap yu sen' (shame)

32 Terborg, J. R. H. (2002). *Liefde en conflict: seksualiteit en gender in de Afro-Surinaamse familie* (p. 162). Faculteit der Maatschappij- en Gedragwetenschappen.

33 'Praten over seksualiteit nog steeds taboe', Fathh.com.

34 Sexuality is a big taboo in Suriname', NOS.nl 'Sexuality is a big taboo in Suriname'. NOS.

35 Investigative Journalism, Trust, Shame and Culture in Suriname'. nikos.sr <https://www.nikos.sr/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Onderzoeksjournalistiek-Vertrouwen-Schaamte-en-Cultuur-in-Suriname.pdf>.

culture. Moreover, politeness and respect are very important in Surinamese culture and there are strong hierarchical relationships. In 2015, the website of Waterkant, a Dutch news website on Suriname, wrote about the indigenous community Apoera (West Suriname), where sexual abuse of girls is structural, according to Jennifer van Dijk-Silos, the then Minister of Justice and Police.³⁶ It involves incest and rape and, according to her, this seems to be part of a culture: everyone is aware of it, but no one talks about it. The police do not take action, not even when the perpetrators are known. Finally, the article states that Minister Ramon Dwarka-Panday had to resign in the 1990s because of an affair with a girl from Apura. Dwarka-Panday was Minister of Defence under Jules Wijdenbosch, in 1996. After three years as minister, in 1999, he was dismissed due to rumours of sex with underage girls from Apoera and Nieuw-Nickerie.³⁷ The district judge sentenced him to a suspended prison sentence of four months for ‘carnal intercourse’ with a then fourteen-year-old girl. Months later, however, he was acquitted on appeal: according to the judge, such a relationship would be normal in the indigenous culture where the girl came from. The girl had been having relationships ‘since the age of twelve, which is normal according to the norms of her community’.³⁸

3.3 Sexual abuse and the Surinamese culture

The oldest article we found on sexual abuse in Suriname dates from 1993³⁹. In this article in Trouw, it was stated that summary proceedings had been filed against a local journalist in Paramaribo. The journalist had written an article about a social worker who at the time was a supervisor at the Youth Care department of the Ministry of Social Affairs. After several cases of abuse of female clients came to light, the social worker was suspended. In addition to his job as a counsellor, he was also active as a social work student at the Academy for Higher Art and Cultural Education. The academy’s board and management took no position on the matter. They did, however, withdraw their confidence from the teacher who brought the incident to their attention. According to her, the academy management’s response was ‘everyone does it anyway’. The article states that ‘sexual molestation’ of women is an ingrained problem in Surinamese society. The teacher in question is secretary of the foundation ‘Stop Violence against Women’. In six months, the foundation received more than 200 reports of sexual abuse. Not much was written on sexual abuse in the Surinamese media as far as we have been able to determine. In 2017, an article appeared in the Parbode (a critical Surinamese opinion month-

36 ‘Sexual abuse of girls ‘structural’ in West Suriname’. waterkant.net <https://www.waterkant.net/suriname/2015/10/12/seksueel-misbruik-meisjes-structureel-in-west-suriname/>.

37 ‘Former minister Ramon Dwarka-Panday deceased’, dbsuriname.com Former minister Ramon Dwarka-Panday deceased - Daily newspaper Suriname.

38 ‘Ex-minister Ramon Dwarka Panday vrijgesproken’, dbsuriname.com Nationaal - Ex-minister Ramon Dwarka Panday vrijgesproken (archive.org).

39 ‘Ook Suriname ontdekt seksueel geweld’, Trouw <https://www.trouw.nl/nieuws/ook-suriname-ontdekt-seksueel-geweld~b23f2bce/>.

ly) about sexual abuse by so-called ‘boarding fathers’ or older boys in children’s and youth homes.⁴⁰ Various (harrowing) examples are mentioned of incidents in homes in Suriname and criticism is expressed on (the lack of) the approach: the homes are not closed down ‘because the laws that prescribe this are held up by lame policymakers’. Moreover, there is a lack of research into the incidents.

In some literature and articles, a link is made between certain norms, values and customs from Surinamese culture and abuse. The book ‘Adolescents and Respect’ by van Hennik (2010), for example, writes that in cultures where the emphasis is on maintaining honour, vulnerabilities are not discussed enough. The dirty laundry is not hung out in the open. Surinamese people also say they are not used to talking about sensitive matters that may involve uncertainty and shame.

Usha Marhé writes in May 2020 an online article about Surinamese culture and sexual abuse. Marhé is a journalist and author, born in Suriname but living in the Netherlands for many years. She writes about sexual abuse, lectures and is an empowerment coach. In 1996 she published the book “Tapu Sjén/Bedek je schande - Surinamers en incest”. In the article, she writes that as a child she asked questions to adults and was often asked “why”. She was taught not to ask too many questions. She was curious and this sometimes got her into trouble within the Surinamese culture. She also indicates that children are taught not to look very fondly at themselves and says that this is a consequence of Surinamese history. A history of colonialism, violence and slavery. In which survival, humour and resilience were important. Mistreatment and sexual abuse of ‘coloured bodies’ was common and in order to survive, it was necessary to be hard on oneself.

In May 2021, an article about a culture of sexual abuse was posted on the website of Women’s Rights Centre Suriname.⁴¹ Sexual abuse is sort of tolerated, because it is assumed that the child or teenager would have consented to it. The legislation surrounding sex offences is clear enough, the article says, but in cases that go to court, the final sentence is often much lower than the one that can be imposed by law. One of the reasons for this is grooming: a process in which the perpetrator gains the trust of a child with the aim of subsequently sexually abusing them. The perpetrator looks at how vulnerable a child is and what needs he or she has. The perpetrator knows how to fulfil the child’s needs and win his or her trust. Secrecy is an essential part of the process of grooming. The article states that in Surinamese culture people are very fixated on violence: a brutal rape is seen as unacceptable, but when no violence is involved (which is partly due to the previous process of grooming: because of the bond of trust, violence is no longer necessary) it is accepted much more easily. Because of the bond of trust, the child is ultimately made complicit: ‘you wanted it yourself’.

40 ‘Melkkoetjes en seksobjecten’, Parbode.com <https://www.parbode.com/melkkoetjes-en-seksobjecten/>.

41 ‘GROOMING, A CULTURE OF SEXUAL ABUSE’, Wrcsuriname.org <https://wrcsuriname.org/2021/05/04/grooming-een-cultuur-van-seksueel-misbruik/>.

In 2017 Usha Marhé wrote an article in *De Ware Tijd*⁴². She writes that in that year, the only official shelter for sexually abused children, ‘Stichting voor het Kind’, had to close due to a lack of subsidy from the government. According to her, this sends the wrong signal, because sexual abuse is a very serious problem in Surinamese society. Since her book appeared in 1996, there has been more discussion and publication on sexual abuse in Suriname, according to Marhé. Online, however, not much can be found about it. From 2000, according to Marhé, there was a structural effort to make people aware of this problem. Aid and relief started to arrive and the Ministry of Justice and Police worked with a special policy advisor on further professionalising the judicial system. With the closure of the only official shelter due to a lack of structural subsidy, it seems as if the social, structural chain approach that had been built up has been undone, Marhé says. Although action has been taken recently on certain ‘hotbeds’ of sexual abuse, such as in Apoera, these are only incidental actions. Marhé also states that reactions to reports of sexual abuse are distressing, with victims (often children) being blamed for seeking out situations themselves. Victims are blamed for the abuse and perpetrators are protected, as stated above. A perpetrator-friendly and victim-hostile culture is created, which makes it even more difficult for victims in the Surinamese shame culture to report on what they have experienced.

According to an article in *Dagblad De West*, dated 20 March 2021, figures show that some 70,000 children between the ages of eight and twelve are sexually abused in Suriname.⁴³ Victims are often blamed. According to the article, stories of violence against women have increased significantly in recent times and the abuse often continues for a long time because the victims do not dare talk about it. Abused children could make use of forensic care and social guidance from the Academic Hospital Paramaribo. For this forensic care, however, legislation is needed that makes it possible to trace the perpetrator by means of DNA research. The article raises the critical question of how long this will take. Legislation for sexual molestation in the workplace was already offered in 2011, but until the time of writing of this article, had not yet been addressed.⁴⁴

In the previously cited 2007 article from the *Parbode*⁴⁵ SOS Children’s Villages Suriname is also cited. This article was published after this Children’s Village was closed down and taken over by another foundation, *Stichting Prasoro*. It is said that only two of the eight houses are occupied. The SOS houses are deserted and the children as well as the name of the Children’s

42 Tackling sexual abuse back to square one’, schrijfsterushamarhe.wordpress.com <https://schrijfsterushamarhe.wordpress.com/2017/09/05/aanpak-seksueel-misbruik-weer-terug-bij-af-suriname-de-ware-tijd-september-2017/>.

43 70,000 CHILDREN IN SURINAME ARE SEXUALLY ABUSED’, dagbladdewest.com <https://dagbladdewest.com/2021/03/20/70-000-kinderen-in-suriname-worden-seksueel-misbruikt/>.

44 ‘70,000 CHILDREN IN SURINAME ARE SEXUALLY ABUSED’, dagbladdewest.com <https://dagbladdewest.com/2021/03/20/70-000-kinderen-in-suriname-worden-seksueel-misbruikt/>.

45 ‘Melkkoetjes en seksobjecten’, *Parbode*.com <https://www.parbode.com/melkkoetjes-en-seksobjecten/>.

Village have been destroyed by a senior staff member, because he sexually abused children, according to the article.

In 2012, the website of De Waterkant (a Dutch news website on Suriname) published an article on a couple running a children's home who were on trial on suspicion of abuse and ill-treatment of children in their home.⁴⁶ In the article, SOS Children's Village Suriname is also mentioned: "The director had a very strict policy. Because of his good management he could get a lot of donors to ensure the village was running smoothly. But his strict policy was not good for the "mothers" of the village. They could not continue their whorish and licentious lives. Something was quickly done. The director was jailed and has since died. The village is doomed. Where are those mothers and the children? All surely on the streets".

3.4 What was known by the researchers about SOS Children's Village Suriname, previous research

This paragraph provides some more in-depth information about the Children's Village in Suriname. Wilmot's (2004) research, quoted earlier, includes a description of her impression in the village. She indicates that, at first sight, the atmosphere is good. The village director speaks proudly about his village and the children appear happy. After Wilmot had conducted some interviews, she noticed that among this cheerful upper layer there were some less pleasant matters. Just before her visit, for example, an SOS mother had been dismissed for hitting a child. The management doubted whether she had really done this, but they were forced to dismiss her due to a threat from the teacher to the child concerned. The other SOS mothers feared for their jobs following this incident and became demotivated: they felt that it would take very little for them to get fired. One small incident could lead to dismissal and it did not even have to be true. Wilmot also heard that many SOS mothers were afraid to speak up during the so-called mothers' meetings. After this meeting, they regularly came to the mother's counsellor and tell her what they thought about certain things or what problems they were facing. They told the counsellor what they did not dare to tell during the joint meeting. There were also problems between the children: some of them showed sexual behaviour, which bothered other young people. Some small children were being bullied and there was a sense of competition between them. An example of this was in terms of educational attainment. Finally, Wilmot speaks of tensions between the youth leader and the management: the management did not involve the youth leader in the establishment of the second youth centre and did not sufficiently respond to initiatives for improvements in the village. Wilmot also indicates that a fairly general group of children can be admitted to the SOS Children's Village (semi-orphans and social orphans from zero to eighteen years of age), which led to varying problems among the children. These include attachment problems, trauma, aggression, sleeplessness or obsessive sexual behaviour. This sexual behaviour was also displayed between children.

⁴⁶ Prosecutor Surinam: acquittal for Mr. and Mrs. de Graaf', waterkant.net <https://www.waterkant.net/suriname/2012/02/21/om-suriname-vrijspraak-voor-echtpaar-de-graaf/>.

The researcher noticed other things during their research. For example, she noticed that the mothers liked to tell her that they found the work taxing because of the many roles they felt they had to employ (mother, teacher, sportswoman, etc.). The mothers held a desire to reduce the number of children in a family to five. The SOS mothers relied heavily on the mother counsellor. Disobedient children were often sent to the supervisor by the mother. The authority of the mother was undermined by some children, by plotting against them. An example of this is the following situation: a child did not want to eat her own food, but then begged from other children. The mother did not allow this, but the other children gave her their food. The mother told her to finish her own plate but the child wanted to drink. The mother did not allow this either, but another child poured a drink for her. The mother took away the drink, the child started crying and other children comforted her. Afterwards, the children huddled together, laughed sheepishly and the mother looked helplessly at the researcher.

Wilmot also noticed that some mothers were inconsistent in their upbringing and corrections to children. Some young people, because of their past, exhibit sexualised behaviour. It appears that SOS mothers find it difficult to deal with this. It has happened several times that a boy abused a girl within SOS Children's Village Suriname. One of these boys has reportedly been arrested for this. It was also said that the SOS Boys' Youth Home was also set up because some boys could no longer control their sexual behaviour. The Youth Home ensured that they made progress in their behaviour and school performance. It is not entirely clear how the Youth Home ensured this progress.

Wilmot then asked the village director why there were no men present in the village (apart from the director himself and the youth leader). The director replied that statistically men are more likely to commit child abuse. In another SOS Children's Village, a trial with more men/fathers was reportedly carried out, but this had indeed shown that abuse had taken place there. Little or no sex education was given and there was little supervision of the children between 16:00 and 19:00. Many of the SOS mothers went to sleep during these hours, for example. The supervisor of the SOS mother's had talked to them (the mothers) about this, but without result. The mothers had their own room in the houses for privacy reasons. A disadvantage of this is that they could not keep an eye on the children when they were in their room. This could also indicate a lack of supervision, according to Wilmot.

A former marketing and communication manager of SOS Children's Villages Netherlands was in the Children's Village in Suriname at the end of November 2003 for a documentary on Dutch television. She describes her visit in an internal document of SOS Children's Villages. She indicates that the Children's Village was a beautiful village with a nice playground in the middle of the houses as well as a football field. Behind the football field was the Kindergarten. Her first impression of the village was good. However, after she had been there for a week, she came to a different conclusion. For instance, she was not happy with the role of the SOS mothers. During the week she was in the village, she did not see a single mother with a child. She saw children working around the house and the mothers sitting on their verandas. The children were not clean and some of the clothes were ruined. She saw no affection in the SOS houses where the children were staying. When she spoke to the mothers, they all seemed tired and said it was a hard, poorly paid job. A staff member told her that an SOS mother had

been fired for abusing her three-year-old SOS daughter. Only the director of the Kindergarten was positive: she loved the children, her work and the organisation. The marketing and communication manager at the time concluded her piece by saying that she always left with a happy feeling after visiting a Children's Village, but that this was the first time she left crying and afraid of what would happen to the children.

4

Experiences in SOS Children's Villages Suriname

This chapter focuses on a description of the research into cases of abuse in the Children's Village in Suriname. In the absence of written sources, the findings are based entirely on the interviews with victims and other respondents who have knowledge of life at the Children's Village. To begin with, the definitions of the various forms of sexual abuse are given. This is followed by some general data in the form of tables. The focus is on victimisation and perpetration in relation to different forms of abuse. In the following section experiences of abuse are outlined, per form of abuse and per type of perpetrator. This consists of stories of victims who have experienced one or more forms of abuse in the Children's Village in Suriname when they were children.

4.1 Conceptual Framework

We distinguish in the area of abuse:

- *Sexual Abuse*

Sexual abuse refers to all forms of sexual (touching) contact against someone's will. Victims have spoken about different degrees of sexual abuse. Some victims talk about touching and groping. Others speak of forced (oral) sex. Some victims speak of (forced) penetration. The victims are sometimes still babies at the time of the abuse. The victims also spoke of forms of grooming and threats by the perpetrator(s).

- *Physical Abuse*
Physical abuse refers in particular to physical violence and harsh punishment. Often mentioned is the “beating” with a stick or whip, for example. Other words mentioned by victims include “whipping” and “molesting”. Also examples are mentioned of punishments related to eating: for example, children are forced to eat a whole packet of biscuits. Physical abuse in this report does not include a one-time corrective slap.
- *Emotional Abuse*
Emotional abuse involves mental abuse, bullying, belittling, manipulation and (affective) neglect. For example, some victims speak of bullying by SOS aunts or a total lack of love and affection.
- *Financial Abuse*
Financial abuse mainly refers to a form of financial exploitation: victims feel that they have been wrongly treated by/in the Children’s Village when it comes to money. The victims who mentioned this referred to the fact that money from donors, which was meant for them, did not reach them. A number of respondents indicated that fraud was committed by officials working for SOS.
- *Directly witnessing abuse*
Witnessing a form of abuse directly is included as a separate category because witnessing is extremely impactful. In terms of the form of abuse, victims mentioned sexual, physical and emotional abuse. For example, some respondents had witnessed one or more very serious acts of violence against babies (sometimes their own sister or brother).

The order of the forms of abuse mentioned here is also followed in the rest of this report.

4.2 Experiences in general, SOS Children’s Village Suriname

Before delving deeper into the experiences of respondents in this chapter, it should be noted that the children who entered the Children’s Village were mostly traumatised. This is critical information because such trauma may have influenced the behaviour of the children and it is not always clear whether and to what extent the consequences are solely due to what happened in SOS Children’s Village Suriname. As well as this, nobody knows how the children would have fared if they had not been admitted to the SOS Children’s Village Suriname.

For example, interviewed staff members and aunts indicated that some very young children were alcohol addicts when they came to the village, or had a history of severe abuse, including sexual abuse. This abuse sometimes then caused them to be brought to the Children’s Village. When asked what kind of children lived in the village, a former manager said:

“Most of them were traumatised children. Children had witnessed the murder of their own parents. The children had many different problems. A mix of things. They showed very unpredictable, sometimes difficult behaviour. Such as picking up at the police station, anger/aggression, one person had a knife, someone fell out of a tree. That’s why at a certain point a separate youth house was made.”

Given the children’s history, it was therefore very important for SOS Children’s Village Suriname to provide a safe environment for the child. However, the research showed that various forms of abuse still occurred.

4.2.1 (Additional) findings by the researchers about the context of SOS Children’s Villages Suriname

Chapter 3 already showed that Surinamese in general prefer to avoid conflicts, that there is no open culture, there is a harsh upbringing style and that sexuality, let alone sexual abuse, is a subject that is avoided in conversations. This is because of feelings of guilt and shame. Researchers recognise this picture and the one sketched by Wilmot, among others. Here, we describe our additional findings about the situation around SOS Children’s Village Suriname, the role of the government and the internal affairs of SOS Children’s Village Suriname.

During the years of SOS Children’s Village Suriname’s existence, the involvement of the Surinamese government was minimal, say respondents.

“The government had a hands-off role. We [former senior staff member and board member] tried to become partners with the government. With the goal of better cooperation. We asked: what is your responsibility? We also sat around the table with social affairs and the minister. They did not do much because SOS Children’s Village Suriname was a model village. There was no control inspection or guidelines. We received almost nothing, maybe 1 guilder per child at once. But if there was a fire at another children’s home, we did get the children.”

This meant that SOS Children’s Village Suriname was mostly self-reliant. There was no supervision, control or enforcement by the government. There was also little support or interference from the regional office. A regional director says he hardly ever visited Suriname.

Lack of mothers leading to lack of quality:

In addition to a lack of supervision, control and enforcement, the management faced a great shortage of mothers. In the early nineties, there were almost none of them. A recruitment campaign was also launched in the Netherlands and in Suriname. A former senior staff member of SOS Suriname confirms that there was pressure to recruit mothers at the time despite a shortage of them:

“There was pressure from SOS CVI to appoint mothers: only then did they get money for renovations. Mother shortage was a structural problem in Suriname. So those who did apply, you were more likely to accept. You probably don’t screen as much for pedagogical qualities.”

Because of the scarcity of mothers, some mothers were recruited who were not suitable for the job, according to managers. Some were eventually let go. One respondent indicated how she became a mother in the village.

“How I ended up there. I worked at [...]. You had to be 35 to become a mother there. [...] I heard another call. A mother wanted. [...] I had to start right away and I had no training. I got a house with ten children. I was used to it because my mother had many children and I was used to many people. I started with three and then four children who had gone through something bad. Their father had been cut down. Very naughty children from the lowest neighbourhood. They really had no manners. I took them in. And so I had three plus four children. Really very difficult children who had experienced terrible things at home. It was hard.”

Managers and mothers said it was a difficult job and that many of the mothers themselves had problems of their own and were often uneducated. They thought it was a “shitty job”. However, it was a conscious decision of the local organization not to make too many demands on mothers. A former senior staff member said:

“They were not always the most educationally astute mothers. You don’t have to be trained to be a mother. That was the philosophy of SOS CVI. Anyone can become a mother, with the support of skilled people. You had a trial period. Some were sent away. It was an escape for some women, you got a house. Women and orphans, how to bring them together, was the philosophy.”

This means that there were also mothers who were appointed that were struggling themselves. A former SOS mother says about this:

“The mothers themselves also had a hard time. They didn’t put so much energy into the children. I went further with them. Maybe too far. They were Surinamese women who also lived in poverty. If the mothers are not motivated to take care of the children, then neglect occurs. I had no words for it either. I was strict too. But if I wasn’t, you couldn’t keep the club together.”

In the SOS Children’s Village Suriname, however, attention was paid to the training of the mothers, according to a former mother from the village tells us:

“They taught us about communication, how to deal with children. What kind of food we had to prepare. They were people from social work. People who taught psychology. People

who had all their papers. I thought that was good. We were given many lessons. Also about hygiene, for example. [...] That was good.”

Emphasis on Education

The current study shows that the mothers placed a strong emphasis on education when raising their children. Education for the children was very important, if not the most important. Schooling, according to a former aunt, is extremely important because it allows you to transcend yourself. This is also important within SOS. In Surinamese culture, this was and is encouraged enormously by mothers, who are also made responsible for this. Respondents paint the picture that the management also analysed school achievements to judge whether someone is a good (or bad) mother. This is confirmed by managers:

“Schooling is very important because it allows you to transcend yourself. This is highly encouraged by mothers and mothers are responsible for this. Of course, orphans have nothing. You have to get a good education. SOS gives you that opportunity. That is very much part of it.”

No culture of confrontation, but a culture of silence:

The previous paragraphs exhibit how Surinamese prefer to avoid conflicts and that it is difficult to address each other. This is also shown in this study. Although mothers sometimes knew from each other that they had crossed the line, they did not call each other to account. A former mother says:

“There were mothers where when you talked to them, they seemed like good mothers. [...] But bad things happened in that house. A child came and said, mother hit me but I did not see it. They came and sat with me a lot. Children didn’t want me to go home for three days [because then another mother would come into the house]. They didn’t want that.”

Respondents indicated that aunts did not speak about bad things that happened. Things that were not deemed acceptable were not allowed to get out. There was a culture of silence. The senior staff members including the village director were too far away to intervene. In addition, there was little reflection on one’s own actions; the child was often blamed. Blaming the victim was more the rule rather than the exception.

Harsh parenting style:

There was a hard parenting style and physical punishment was common. Beating children is strictly forbidden within the Children’s Village, according to respondents. Still, some mothers indicated that Surinamese children need a hard(er) upbringing and a few punches are not bad for them. Some mothers admitted that they sometimes did this. As far as strict upbringing by mothers was concerned, one respondent, who had a Dutch background himself, said that it was difficult to determine to what extent hitting was part of Surinamese culture. He said:

“We knew that certain mothers had their hands loose. That was also the culture. Even though we were brought up differently. You adapt to that as well. It was still common to be beaten.”

Various respondents indicated that slapping was part of the upbringing. A former aunt said: “The Surinamese upbringing sometimes involved a blow. My own father and mother did not hit. I was not used to it. I don’t think beating helps. They are children who are actually outcasts, if you can’t bear to work there and have no love, then you start hitting a lot. You have to be able to tolerate and really love children. At meetings, it was the mothers [who were beating] that talked the most. I couldn’t interfere with other mothers. I then had three days off in the month when another mother came.”

In the Children’s Village in Suriname, it did not stop at a corrective slap. A respondent who lived in the village as a child said:

“Some aunties would beat with a belt. A girl couldn’t say soup properly and then the aunt would hit her hard. I hated seeing that so much. I heard her crying. Before I went to [aunt’s name] I wet the bed and I was not allowed to pee. I got a beating if I wet the bed and had to wash it myself. Half of the fifteen were nice aunts. The other half were not. One aunt that my sister had, was really mean. When I went to visit her, my sister wouldn’t eat. She wasn’t able to anymore. She was beaten and was not allowed to go outside.”

The various interviews show that talking about sexuality and sexual abuse within the Children’s Village was difficult. One respondent pointed out a double standard. On the one hand, people can express themselves in a very sexual way, which is accepted. On the other hand, sexuality was not discussed. In a number of interviews, it even went so far as to blame the child for sexually transgressive behaviour committed by the adult, because the victim, possibly due to sexual abuse committed prior to coming to the Children’s Village, already showed sexual behaviour as a very young girl. An aunt noticed that “the child seduced the perpetrator”.

4.2.2 Victimisation of different forms of abuse

In order to determine the extent of the abuse that took place at SOS Children’s Village Suriname, we looked at the number of victims who spoke of the various forms of abuse and which ‘type’ of perpetrator was responsible, according to the respondents. Each victim may have suffered multiple forms of abuse: for example, someone may have been sexually assaulted (sexually) as well as severely bullied (emotionally). The total number of cases of abuse mentioned (58) is therefore higher than the number of victims spoken of (nineteen). Table 2 shows how many different victims have spoken about a form of abuse, including the type of offender. For example: ten victims talk about an experience of sexual abuse in which a senior staff member was the offender. Another example: three victims talk about emotional abuse in which a biological son of an SOS aunt was the offender. In total, 58 separate situations of abuse were discussed. It is important to note that these were victims’ own experiences. Someone has either experienced the abuse themselves or, in the category of ‘direct witness’,

has seen someone else being abused with their own eyes. There is also a lot of talk about someone “knowing that” another person has been a victim of a particular abuse or “hearing that” something has happened to someone. These cases are not included.

■ **Table 2:** different forms of abuse, different types of offenders

(Alleged) offender	Sexual	Physical	Emotional	Financial	Direct witness	Total
Senior staff member	10	3	1	1	1 ⁴⁷	16
SOS-aunt	-	8	4	-	1 ⁴⁸	13
Biological sons of SOS-aunt	2	1	3	-	1 ⁴⁹	7
Other child from the village/house	3	-	1	-	-	4
SOS employee	-	1	-	-	-	1
SOS Village in general	-	-	9	8	-	17
Total	15	13	18	9	3	58

*Note 1: For example, trauma from sexual abuse or other emotional damage is only considered a consequence of sexual abuse and not counted as emotional abuse. This was chosen because in that case it is the direct consequence of the sexual abuse. In the case of emotional abuse, it is really about someone reporting that he or she has been mentally abused by an aunt, for example, or that someone has been severely bullied by an aunt’s son. It is about one event, so double counting is avoided.

*Note 2: If a victim says that she was “touched on the buttocks” once by a son, and once by a son in another way, this will be counted as one. So per victim, there can only be one “dash” per type of abuse.

In total, the victims name 58 experiences of (different forms of) abuse. It can be seen that the victims often mention emotional abuse. This mainly relates to emotional abuse by the Village in general and the feeling of having been abandoned by the Village when they were forced to leave. Eight victims accused the Village of financial abuse. This mainly refers to the fact that money from sponsors/people did not reach the children and/or was stolen by SOS staff. When someone accuses the ‘SOS Village in general’ of abuse it is not about accusing a specific individual but is more of an accusation towards the organization/Children’s Village in general

After emotional abuse, victims talk about sexual, physical and then financial abuse. Directly witnessing another being abused is the least commonly reported form of abuse.

As “perpetrator”, the victims most often indicate the Children’s Village in general (seventeen times), followed by a senior staff member, an SOS aunt, a biological son of an SOS aunt, another child from the Children’s Village and finally an employee of SOS Suriname. In terms of the combination of type of perpetrator and form of abuse, the most common are sexual abuse by a senior staff member, emotional abuse by SOS Children’s Village as a whole, financial abuse by SOS Children’s Village as a whole and physical abuse by an SOS aunt.

47 It involves directly witnessing the sexual abuse of others (type of gang rape).

48 Witness of an aunt hitting and bullying her sister.

49 Is about directly witnessing sexual abuse (brother).

4.2.3 Perpetrators and forms of abuse

To determine the extent of the different forms of abuse that has taken place in the SOS Children's Village Suriname, we also looked specifically at the number of perpetrators, by type of perpetrator and type of abuse. Table 3 shows the number of individual offenders, specified by form of abuse. So victims talk about at least seventeen different offenders: at least five different senior staff members, at least six different SOS-aunts, four different biological sons of an SOS-aunt (it is not clear whether those sons were children of the accused aunts or of other aunts), at least one other child from the Children's village/house and one SOS employee. Because of the fact that not all victims give specific names of offenders, it is difficult to determine exactly how many different offenders are involved. The table below provides as specific an approximation as possible to that number. One individual offender is sometimes responsible for different types of abuse. For example, one senior staff member was responsible for sexual and physical abuse according to the respondents. The total number of offenders (at least seventeen) therefore does not correspond to the total number of abuse cases that are discussed and where the type of offender is specified (31+). Also the sum of the numbers listed behind each type of offender, per type of abuse, is therefore higher than the number listed under "total" in the rightmost column. For example: next to "senior staff member" there are three cases of sexual abuse, three cases of physical abuse, one case of emotional abuse, one case of financial abuse and one case of direct witness. Adding up the numbers after 'senior staff member' from Table 3, there would be nine senior staff members. However, this is incorrect: it concerns (at least) five different, individual senior staff members: some senior staff members are responsible for multiple forms of abuse. Moreover, because some (individual) offenders are mentioned by more than one victim, the numbers in the table below are lower than those in table 2, which concerned how many victims spoke of a certain type of abuse, including the type of offender.

What is striking is that at least five different senior staff members are accused of some form of abuse. Considering the fact that there were not that many senior staff members, the number gives the impression that abuse from senior staff members was structural in its nature.

■ **Table 3:** the number of offenders, specified by form of abuse

	Sexual	Physical	Emotional	Financial	Direct witness	Total
Senior staff member	3	3	1	1	1	5 ⁵⁰
SOS-aunt	-	5 ⁵¹	4	-	1	6 ⁵²
Biological sons of SOS-aunt	4	1	2	-	1	4
Other child from the village/house	1+	-	2+	-	-	1 ⁵³
SOS employee	-	1	-	-	-	1
SOS Village in general ⁵⁴	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Total	8+	10+	9+	1	3	17+

4.3 Forms of abuse and perpetrators

Using the tables presented and discussed in the previous section, this section will present the stories of victims, by form of abuse and by type of perpetrator. We begin with sexual abuse. This is followed by physical abuse, emotional abuse, financial abuse and direct witnessing of abuse.

Specific allegations have been made against two senior staff members, which prompted the present study. For this reason, this section will also paint a picture of both individuals and what various respondents say about them (in a general sense).

4.3.1 Sexual Abuse

Victim's Stories

The following are stories of victims of sexual abuse that were experienced at the SOS Children's Village Suriname. These experiences are outlined per type of offender. In total, fifteen victims reported being sexually abused in the Children's Village. At least eight different perpetrators were involved: three senior staff members, four biological sons of SOS aunts and at least one other (older) child from the Children's Village. The exact number is difficult to determine

50 Does not become clear if there are five or six different ones.

51 Five separate names are mentioned. In addition, two more times are spoken of 'multiple aunts' or 'different aunts'.

52 Six separate names are mentioned. In addition, two more times are spoken of 'multiple aunts' or 'different aunts'.

53 Three different victims talk about sexual abuse by 'an older boy', but it is unclear whether this concerns the same person. In addition, one victim speaks of 'multiple children' committing emotional abuse towards her.

54 Because this concerns more general accusations towards SOS, for example the fact that someone feels abandoned by SOS, this cannot be specified or traced back to individuals and therefore not to a specific number.

because victims do not always mention names in interviews so it is not clear who exactly is involved.

Sexual abuse by a senior staff member

Ten different victims report being sexually abused by a senior staff member. Three different senior staff members are involved, but one in particular, according to the victims. Of the ten victims, eight cases involve that particular staff member. This is senior staff member 1.

We are told about his modus operandi. He often called over to one of the houses in the Children's Village and when a child picked up the phone, he asked them to come to his office. It was there that the abuse took place. There was also grooming in combination with threats. The children were seduced by the promise of sweets. The children were complimented. He told them that if they said anything, something bad would happen. He would say, for example, that he would kill them or he would point at a knife.

A woman says that she was abused by him and that it was always in the office. She was about six or seven years old when it happened. It involved groping her, "playing with her vagina". He did it often and she knows many people whom he "got hold of". At least until she was ten years old, senior staff member 1 did such things. She has also heard that he called her sister to come to him. Her sister also told her about what happened to her. She was younger than her. They were taught from an early age that they would be punished if they told.

It is striking that victims knew that the sexual abuse was happening to other children as well. It was a fact of general knowledge. One respondent stated that he had 'heard bad things', referring to abuse by senior staff member 1 (and also by boys from the village, but we will come back to that later). One respondent mentioned a case where the senior staff member 1 had abused a young boy and one male respondent said he had been abused by him. The rest of the cases involved girls who were victims. The male victim said:

*"I have also been diagnosed with PTSD. That's because of rape things and so on [...] I was abused between the ages of six and nine. It happened a few times, about ten times. It happened in the village, outside in the open. Between a fence and a building. This was done by *senior staff member 1*. He did tell me to keep my mouth shut about it, but I was not threatened or blackmailed".*

A woman indicates that senior staff member 1 "raped her by her buttocks" and "put his [...] in her mouth". She "went to him" twice in total. She was very scared. At that time, she was six years old. But many more children were raped by him, sometimes even in the presence of each other:

"We all had to bend down, we were all in the room, X was there. Six or seven were raped in the room. There was a girl older than us. She was twelve or thirteen. She had breasts. The

**senior staff member* put her on the bed and raped her. We had to turn around and plug our ears. He said if I hear anything, you know what it means. We did not dare to tell”.*

Another woman reports that he always called and she was always afraid. You then had to come to the back because he had something nice. She herself never went to him. But he always kissed them on the mouth when they saw him and they always got something nice from him. She knows from other girls that they had sex with him. “He was cunning, Mr. *Name of the senior staff member1*”. Someone else reports that her sister was abused from the age of three, both by senior staff member 1 and by older boys from the village. She herself was not sexually abused. Another woman says that her sister was raped when she was only one or two years old and that she herself was not abused either.

One of the most serious cases of sexual abuse by senior staff member 1 lasted for years. The abuse started when the victim was eight years old. She was often abused by senior staff member 1 and also sometimes by an older boy. She was afraid of everyone. The senior staff member always called her to attention by calling home even though she had done nothing wrong. She would shout, “What have I done wrong?” He would say that they had received complaints from the school. She had to take off her clothes and was crying. He then said that he was going to do something with her but that if she said anything, he would kill her. He put his hand over her mouth and put his finger in her vagina after which she started to bleed. After that, she felt terrible. The second time, she was forced by her aunt to go to senior staff member 1 when he called her. The abuse happened regularly, more than once a week. He would point a knife at her if she did not do what he asked. Things deteriorated for her. At one point she was very aggressive and “drew strange things”. One day they went on holiday and senior staff member 1 came with them. On this holiday, the abuse happened every night, when everyone was asleep.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, respondents also talked about sexual abuse by other senior staff members. One woman said that she had been ‘touched’ by a senior staff member, but she did not say much more about it. A third senior staff member is said to have been groping. We have no more information about this statement either. However, this story creates the impression that abuse by senior staff member was not just one incident in the Children’s Village in Suriname.

Sexual abuse by the biological son of SOS aunts:

It was not only senior staff member 1 who committed sexual abuse, but also biological sons according to the victims. Two victims report this, concerning four different sons. One woman said the following about two biological sons of the aunt in her living space.

“I saw their sons watching TV. I was five. I watched too, even though I was not allowed to watch. They then put yellow pepper in my vagina [...] The same son called us to the toilet.

We were in the toilet with him and were forced to suck his penis, my little brother and I. My little brother is two years younger”.

Another woman stated that one day she went to the house of an aunt, together with that aunt. Her son was also there and he wanted to have sex with her: “he had already taken his thing out”. She was ten at the time, he was sixteen or seventeen. She was scared and called the aunt, but she didn’t hear. She didn’t dare tell her because they wouldn’t believe her anyway. The same son is said to have raped a young boy from the village.

Sexual abuse by other children (boys) from the Children’s Village:

Finally, other children from the Children’s Village who committed sexual abuse of other children were mentioned. Three of them indicated that they had experienced this. A man who lived in the youth home in the Children’s Village indicated that abuse also took place among themselves. A woman says that her sister was raped by a boy from the village. The boy was eighteen at the time and her sister only one. Their aunt did not want to tell her what was going on with her sister but through another girl from the village, who saw everything, she came to know. That boy put his penis in her sister’s vagina and then the sister had to go to the hospital. She also says that a “big boy from the village” wanted to rape her but that “another boy” was able to stop him. Her brother was raped by an older boy in a boys’ home.

A woman also reported that a baby was abused by an older boy who lived in the same house. According to this respondent, the baby pulled her own hair out of her head. The boy had been detained at the time, she recalled. The same woman said that boys from the Children’s Village had also been abused by a woman who lived opposite the Children’s Village

Someone else says that her sister was abused from the age of three by both senior staff member 1 and older boys from the Children’s Village. Another report states that her sister had been abused from the age of three, both by senior staff member 1 and by older boys from the village. Yet another respondent said that she had been forced to perform sexual acts several times by a boy who lived in the same house. An aunt then took them to the youth police and they stopped. Once a boy was also ‘raped in the ass’ by an older boy from the village and that little boy died, according to one respondent.

In the interviews, some respondents also stated that there was a high level of sexualisation of (small) children in the Children’s Village. A former SOS aunt indicated that sexual abuse took place among “all the children”. She indicated that when she was at the neighbour’s house in the evening, all the children “went together” and then “were completely covered in rashes down below”. These were children of six or seven years old:

“All the houses suffered from this. They huddled together and played sexual games. Children sleep in rooms with their parents, go through everything.”

For some of the children the aunt knows this for a fact. For others, it is just a feeling. When asked whether it can be concluded from her story that sexual (transgressive) behaviour was quite common, she confirms this and indicates that everyone knew about it. Another former staff member says that they once took a young child to the doctor because of complaints about her stomach/vagina. She also “caught” children in each other’s trousers. These were children under the age of five.

In addition to the victims, non-victims also tell about sexual abuse. It is critically important to pay attention to this. For example, several non-victims indicated that a senior staff member was sexually transgressive with several children. Most of them refer to one specific senior staff member: senior staff member 1. Several respondents were aware that there was a legal case against him for the abuse. A former SOS aunt indicated that she had heard about the situation with senior staff member 1 afterwards. She said she was ‘not surprised’ when she heard; she ‘saw those girls hanging around him’. He was a neat, quiet man, “a young boy”. “If anyone was good with children, it was him”. She adds: “I do know that the teenagers were fooling around with him at the time. They provoked it”.

4.3.2 Physical

Thirteen individual victims recounted physical abuse at the Children’s Village. In eight of these cases, an SOS aunt was the perpetrator. In three cases, a senior staff member. In one case, a biological son of an SOS aunt and in one case an employee of the Children’s Village. As far as the number of individual perpetrators is concerned, there are at least ten different perpetrators. At least five different SOS aunts (as not every victim mentions names, this cannot be specified), at least three different senior staff member, one biological son of an SOS aunt and one employee of the Children’s Village.

Physical abuse in the Children’s Village, stories of non-victims

The following are individual stories of victims who have personally experienced physical abuse at the Children’s Village. Non-victims also report physical abuse towards the children. Physical abuse under the guise of “correcting” was quite common. Because of the dependence on staff members, there was a feeling of power play with the aunts and children. About the abuse by aunts a former SOS aunt says: “A quiet child does not need a beating”. The same person indicates that she did not see aunts beating children (with a stick or belt as an example) but that she believes it happened because of the stories she heard. Also senior staff members were accused of physical abuse by non-victims, among them a social worker. This social worker had heard stories of abuse by senior staff member 2.

Physical abuse by senior staff members

Several victims reported being physically abused by a senior staff member. They are talking about three different senior staff members and all three appear to have been one-offs. This physical abuse mainly involved hitting and “molesting”. For example, one victim says that she did not want to eat at her SOS aunt’s house. Senior staff member 2 then called her, when

she was eighteen, and he said: “I will show you what they do to spoilt girls”. He put her on his lap and hit her. An aunt then asked her what had happened and senior staff member 2 asked for forgiveness. Apart from the aforementioned incidents, most interviewed respondents, including most of the children who lived in the Children’s Village and the aunts, were (very) positive about senior staff member 2. He was a good person with a good heart and was good to the children. He was respectful towards everyone and he was amicable. Although people wrote negatively about him as a senior staff member on the internet, many did not recognise this at all. One respondent (a former child from the village) said: “Even if you were crying, you would get a smile on your face at his name”. It was also said about this senior staff member 2 that he ensured that everything in the village was in order: there was plenty of everything and the money was well spent. He was strict, but protected the children. Many respondents who had lived in the village as children praised him and were grateful to him.

It was often said that the time under senior staff member 2 was good, but that problems arose afterwards. About five respondents specifically mentioned this. For example, one woman said that it was very nice in the village, she had an aunt and they were spoilt by senior staff member 2. With Children’s Day they were spoilt and her godfather loved her. If she did her best, she was allowed to get dolls. They went to church and to the children’s club and that was fun. He was a father figure, “Papa *name of senior staff member 2*”. They also sometimes went on holidays. There was also a library in the Children’s Village where they could borrow games and books.

Another respondent, who lived in the Children’s Villages as a child, spoke of another senior staff member (we will refer to him as senior staff member 3) who, together with an aunt, hit her with all sorts of things. This affected her a lot:

*“The *senior staff member* abuses you, your mother abuses you... I wanted to die.”*

A last victim also says that she was beaten by another senior staff member, senior staff member 4 because she had “done bad work at school”. She then rebelled against her SOS aunt and the senior staff member then hit her with a lat. She says that the same staff member once “terribly mistreated” a boy because someone had stolen cigarettes. In front of 50 children, he was beaten. The boy’s whole face was swollen, and the wife of the senior staff member had to stop him.

Physical abuse by SOS aunts

SOS aunts appear to have a large share in physical abuse: eight different victims say they were physically abused by an SOS aunt and report on this in detail. In total, at least five different SOS-aunts are mentioned. Punishments by the aunts were harsh, children were not allowed to play and they were regularly beaten. These are incidents that recur in various interviews. Especially the more ‘difficult’ children were punished a lot, it is reported. For some, it also felt “like it was supposed to happen”. A former SOS aunt was interviewed. She herself says that aunts were indeed beating the children. She admits to having taken part in it herself: “Everything becomes too powerful. I found it very difficult. I found it very heavy”. Of the total of six

or seven aunts, maybe one or two were good for the children. A number of aunts were quite physical when it came to correcting children, she indicates.

It is striking that punishments often have to do with food. For example, one woman says that an aunt put yellow pepper in her mouth because she wanted to know who had done something naughty. About the same aunt, it is said that she did not allow them to do a number of things. The children had to stay inside a lot when they lived in her house. Only when there were activities in the Children's Village, which were an obligation, were they allowed to go there. They were not allowed to watch television and if they touched something that they should not have, they got a very hard beating. If they were beaten, they had to say that they had fallen. Regarding the use of food as a punishment, someone also told of a boy who had to eat a whole pot of porridge as a punishment when he could not eat any more, or another boy who had to eat a whole green banana. A woman says that she asked for a biscuit and then had to eat the whole packet as punishment. Later, she asked for ice cream and had to eat it all. When she threw up, she also had to eat her vomit. Another respondent said the following:

"Aunt XX was strict. One girl couldn't say soup properly and then the aunt would hit her hard. I thought that was so bad. I heard her crying".

According to some respondents, toilet training was also a topic that related to physical abuse. For instance, one woman said that when she lived at the Children's Village she still occasionally peed the bed and when it happened, she was beaten. Another woman tells a similar story. Someone says that her aunt was an executioner. Whenever visitors came, they had to sit under the stairs. They were not allowed to play outside and they had to pick a whip from the tree themselves. When the time came, for example, if they had wet the bed, they had to bend over the banister. For others, that house set the example, but when someone had done something wrong, it wasn't nice to be living in that house:

"In Suriname you get beaten. But we were not just beaten, it was abuse."

Sometimes the physical abuse had actual physical consequences. For example, one woman recounted that an aunt had thrown something at her biological daughter, who then needed stitches. But she had to say she had fallen. Another respondent recounted how her sister had been pushed down the stairs by their aunt because she was playing with an iron. Her sister was only one year old at the time. Children in the Children's Village were not protected, someone said, but there was a lot of self-interest: children were placed with a mother and with that "the task was done". Children should have been taken care of within SOS, but that did not happen.

In the Children's Village, aunts made a distinction between the cheeky and decent children. This was linked to strict/physical punishment. Two victims also make this assertion. One woman initially indicated that she herself was not beaten. She reports that children were sometimes beaten if they were cheeky: "if you did disrespectful things, the mothers would hit you. You were not allowed to be cheeky". She lived with the SOS aunt who was also interviewed and who admitted to beating children. She says she was not beaten by that aunt. However, her

sister says that she was. A young man also says that harsh punishment was “linked” to insulence: he was beaten “but he was quite naughty”. Other “naughty” children were also beaten. But, for example, a “sweet little girl of six” was not. The naughtiest ones were. They also say that they felt like they were “supposed” to be punished severely by aunts. A woman says: “It’s our culture. Don’t talk with your big mouth. Speak directly. That’s how I was brought up”.

A young man also indicates to have had the feeling that physical punishment was part of the culture. Sometimes he was hit or pinched because he failed a test. He was also beaten at school. It therefore felt normal: “doing something wrong means getting beaten up”. This beating happened with the stick or with the belt. It did not happen every day, but it did happen regularly.

Physical abuse by biological son of SOS aunts

One victim says she was physically abused by a biological son of an SOS aunt. She was beaten with a whip by one of her SOS aunt’s sons. This son lived in their house and he was very nasty and hurt her. She said:

“I was always with my little brother. The sons were in charge of me. My little brother had to hit me because of her son. Then we really had to fight.”

This is briefly discussed in the section on emotional abuse.

Physical abuse by staff members of SOS Children’s Village Suriname

One person reported being physically assaulted by a staff member of the Children’s Village. This was a driver. A stone was thrown against her head, after which she had to go to hospital.

4.3.3 Emotional

Emotional abuse (especially neglect), which also includes mental abuse and/or neglect, is a form of abuse that a total of eighteen different victims recount. They have all experienced this form of abuse themselves. Emotional abuse includes bullying and harassment, manipulation and unfair treatment. Of the eighteen cases, one case involved a senior staff member as the perpetrator, one case involved other children in the Children’s Village, four cases involved an SOS aunt and three cases involved the biological son of an SOS aunt. In the remaining nine cases, the Children’s Village is generally identified as the “perpetrator”. As far as the number of individual perpetrators is concerned, nine persons can be designated in any case: one senior staff member, four SOS aunts, two biological sons of aunt(s) and at least two other children from the Children’s Village. Regarding the latter, it is not possible to come up with a specific number because victims did not mention names, one victim told that she was “bullied by children in the village”. It is not clear whether SOS aunts or other employees within the Children’s Village noticed this but did not intervene and therefore it is difficult to determine whether this can be blamed on the Children’s Village.

The report refers to victims' own experiences of emotional abuse. However, non-victims also tell about emotional neglect in the Children's Village. A former employee of SOS (International) said she noticed that there was little emotional connection between the mothers and the children. They also did not hug each other "because then they say you are a lesbian". The mothers gave this reason to the researcher as to why there was no affection between mothers and children. A former employee of SOS Children's Villages Netherlands states that she did not see a hard parenting style but noticed that the children were scared. There were no loving relationships. A number of girls had come up to her and said: "It is not nice here. We are not happy". The mothers were young, cold and hard. The respondent further said:

"It was a heartless, loveless place where there was no room for authenticity, personality and growth.... Safety was not there. There was no connection. Everything you wanted in a Children's Village wasn't there and vice versa..."

Emotional Abuse by a senior staff member

One person was emotionally abused by a senior staff member when she lived in the Children's Village. This respondent did not remember the name of the senior staff member. In this report we will refer to this person as senior staff member 5. She said that senior staff member 5 was always very mean to her. He called her names, often gave her punishments without any reason and he never allowed her to go anywhere. He also allegedly sent children away from the village, which led to her running away herself at some point.

Emotional abuse by SOS aunt

Four victims say they were emotionally abused by an SOS aunt. This mainly concerns bullying, neglect and unequal treatment. One woman says she does not have pleasant memories of the Children's Village and that she was mentally abused there. The first aunt she came to live with made her very insecure. She hurt her a lot. For example, she locked her up without food or she had to sleep outside because she was late arriving home. When she sometimes peed in her bed, she had to sleep in the laundry room on the cold floor. She was then about six or seven years old. Because she still wet her bed sometimes, she was also bullied and beaten with a bedpan. She often hid her pyjamas when she urinated. The aunt also spread very bad things about her to others. In the morning, they always had to get up early and do chores. The aunt sometimes made her go to school "sloppy", without combing her hair. After school she always got a bad feeling "because then you had to go to hell again". Her sister was also treated very badly: if she lied about something, she had to say "I lie", and the rest of the children who were there had to scold her. One day, the aunt threw something at her own daughter, requiring stitches, but nobody was allowed to tell what had happened. They had to say that the daughter had fallen. This respondent also recounted a situation where her biological mother came to visit. She said she was hungry, so her (biological) mother bought some sandwiches. When her mother had left, her aunt threw away the sandwiches. Another person indicated that they never had free time and always had to do chores:

“We had no free time. We always had chores to do. Our weekday was getting up at five a.m. First we had to rank plants at the house and after that we had to go to school. After school we had to go to homework support and after that, we had to clean again. Going to bed at eight o’clock. That was our life.”

Another respondent stated that half of the aunts were “sweet” but the other half were not. She recounted a situation in which her sister did not want to eat any more, she could not. She was then beaten and not allowed to go outside. She herself still wet the bed (because of the stress) and when this happened, she got a beating and had to clean it all up herself as a punishment.

Many indicate that they did not feel love. One woman says that as a child she wanted love. But she did not get love in the Children’s Village. It was “super unsafe”. Someone else says she never had motherly love. She was always looking for it. She wanted a mother who was kind to her. Another woman also says she had no love. Only when she was ill, she received love. About this she says:

“I am tough. My eldest [child] says I am tough. I don’t know anything else. I never had love. I love my husband but I don’t really love him.”

Someone else indicates that there was no love for the children in the Children’s Village and that they were taught to beg, they were not taught to stand on their own two feet. She indicates that this made them dependent.

Someone speaks of an aunt with a “specific attitude”: she taught some children that they were great and others not. She discriminated. Other mothers also discriminated and gave some children “VIP treatment”. A certain house was preferred and this was done openly. Someone else says that the aunt in her house favoured one particular girl while she herself was locked in the shed and had to sit there all evening. Someone also mentions a certain negative preferential treatment: a woman who always had to do everything for the aunt. She was always called to help. “It was always ‘X, come’”. She was trusted more than the others and given the most tasks. For example, she had to clean the meeting room every week. There was a kind of competition between the houses. One respondent said that it felt like a competition for who had the best school performance. It also felt as if they had to defend their territory against boys of the same age and there was a lot of fighting among them.

Emotional abuse by the biological son of an SOS aunt’s

Three respondents said that they had been emotionally abused by biological sons of an SOS aunt. There were two sons, for instance, who got a respondent’s sister and brother to fight each other. These sons ordered the children to run their hands through their poo. If they did not do so, they were locked up by an aunt’s son or ‘whipped’ by him.

Emotional abuse by other children in the Children's Village

One victim says she was bullied by other children in the village because she “suffered from bed-wetting”. This victim has suffered from this for years.

Emotional abuse by the Children's Village in general

Nine respondents indicated that they felt abandoned by SOS Children's Villages Suriname when the village suddenly closed down. For example, a family with some siblings who had lived in the village said that they had been ‘chased away’ and that they had ‘ended up in hell’. Eventually the Children's Village closed, which, according to them, was “so sudden”. Everything was gone, they dropped them. They had nowhere to go and they never heard anything from SOS again. The siblings had to be separated: some went to their grandmother, some had to go to a boarding school. They also report that other children who suddenly had to leave the village are not doing well.

4.3.4 Financial

Nine respondents also mentioned financial abuse/ misconduct. In one case, it is a senior staff member who is guilty of the financial abuse and in the other eight cases it is an accusation more generally towards the Children's Village.

Financial abuse by a senior staff member

One victim speaks of financial abuse by a senior staff member. This was a senior staff member to which we have not referred yet even though we don't know his exact name, so we call him senior staff member 6. At one point, the victim was expelled from the village by senior staff member 6 because he told other (younger) children that the money meant for the children was used to fire a previous senior staff member (we refer to him as senior staff member 7). He stated that they were always told that they were being supported by godmothers abroad with the intention that when they left the village, they would have some money to build something. Senior staff member 6 was said to have had an affair with an SOS aunt and therefore had to be sacked. However, that cost money. SOS Children's Villages then used the money intended for the children to pay for the dismissal, according to the respondent. The respondent, who lived in the boys' home and was one of the elderly, heard this from another aunt because she also disapproved. He then told children about it because everyone hoped that later they would have some money, for example to rent a house and to start a life outside the Children's Village. Everyone thought they could get some money. The management got wind that he was telling this to others and gave him a warning to stop, but he didn't. He said:

*“But it was the truth. They needed to know because they had hope. Hope that they could rent a house, start their life. But you had to think of something else. It was difficult. The *senior staff member* came to me, if I didn't stop I would have to leave. But I wanted to keep telling the truth. I had to pack up his things and there was a car available to help move. I had to leave.”*

Financial abuse by the Children's Village in general

Eight different victims reported that they had been financially abused in some way by the Children's Village. In most cases, this concerns the fact that the money from the so-called "god-fathers", which was intended for the children, did not reach the children. The term 'sponsors' refers to people who sponsor a particular child from abroad. One respondent, a woman, also said that godmothers sent things and money, but they never got it: 'you could see the 50 in her hand, but you never got it'. A number of brothers and sisters recounted that SOS Children's Villages got international sponsors at a certain point. Children had a guardian abroad, but nobody received any money: "I didn't see any money".

One respondent recounted:

"We had savings cards... all the children. I never saw any of it...so it was stolen. It was not about love, it was only about money. There was no overview. Except when foreigners came, for fundraising... then they put on a play. Terrible."

One respondent did indicate that money was available to her. She said that she had been in another home before and that the donations never reached the children, but with SOS they did. In a few cases, an officer employed by SOS Children's villages is mentioned as the perpetrator, but also aunts and a former senior staff member.

A former senior staff member (not the one referred to above) said that withholding the money from the godparents, intended for the children, did happen before but that he changed the system afterwards. When godmothers sent money, a picture was taken of the gift that was bought with it and sent to the godmothers.

4.3.5 Directly Witnessing Abuse

Directly witnessing sexual, emotional and physical abuse

One person reports direct witnessing of sexual abuse by the senior staff member, namely senior staff member 1, one person witnessed sexual abuse by a biological son of an SOS aunt and one person of physical and emotional abuse by an SOS aunt. These are three individual perpetrators.

Regarding the sexual abuse by senior staff member 1, it concerns a kind of 'group rape' in which a victim was abused herself but also saw others being abused by senior staff member 1. This has already been addressed under the heading "sexual abuse".

Finally, someone directly witnessed physical and emotional abuse by an SOS aunt: a woman said that their SOS aunt was very mean to her sister. For example, when she did not want to eat anymore, because she was not able to, she was beaten and not allowed to go outside.

4.3.6 Positive experiences

Respondents, who are also victims, also speak of positive experiences in the Children's Village. However, in comparison to the negative experiences, this is not much. These positive experiences can be roughly divided into several categories: some simply say "it was nice there", they say they learned a lot in (the time in) the Children's Village and that some aunts were very kind. They also say that specifically the time under a certain senior staff member (senior staff member 2) was good and that problems arose later, when he was gone.

One respondent, who was also a victim, said that she liked living in the Children's Village. SOS aunts were sweet. What she liked best was to go for a walk. Some respondents said that they were still in touch with people they had lived with at the SOS Children's Village. Some respondents also said that they had learned a lot at the Children's Village. For example, one woman said that she had learned to respect, to obey and to be kind. Homework was also very important: before the children were allowed to go outside, they first had to do their homework. One man said that he had learned a great deal and that he owed what he was today to SOS. Some respondents also said that many/some aunts were really nice.

One woman said that she had also been in other children's homes, but that she did not like it there. The best memory of the Children's Village is that they did not lack anything. It was cosy and she could play with other children: "I would recommend SOS Children's Villages to all children". Another respondent said that things were worse at other boarding schools. At least in the Children's Village they received food, which was not the case everywhere. A group of brothers and a sister said it was "the best boarding school in Suriname". It was a good boarding school: the children were allowed to play sports and were actually allowed to do all kinds of things. Another respondent said she was very grateful, 'it was not like other boarding schools'. People lived together as brothers and sisters. Everything was done for them.

4.3.7 The Closure of the Village

In 2006, SOS Children's Villages in Suriname stopped functioning (which was abrupt for the victims) and the village was taken over by the Prasoro Foundation. This is also indicated in an official statement. On 31 January 2006, SOS sent a letter to the 'Village Friends' of SOS Children's Village Suriname. In this letter, the 'Friends of the Village' are thanked for their contribution and the organisation indicates that they have been having problems finding SOS mothers in Suriname years. Furthermore, the village was not fully occupied "due to the small number of orphans and abandoned children". That letter also referred to a letter of June 2005 in which a reorganisation was announced. It was then decided that the children would be returned to their biological families. In addition, it was decided that as of 1 July 2006, the new organisation would continue independently under a different name. SOS Children's Villages will continue to provide partial financial support for the new organisation for another two years. The question arises whether the abuse case of senior staff member 1 was the reason for the closure of the Children's Village in Suriname. The aforementioned official statement also includes a Q&A with questions about the takeover. When asked if the incidents surrounding the abuse had anything to do with the decision, the Q&A answers in the negative.

In the interviews conducted, the closure of the village was also discussed. In the interviews with aunts and victims, several respondents suggested that the sexual abuse scandal exposed by senior staff member 1 was the real reason for closure. SOS was, according to the respondents, afraid of losing donors because of the scandal.

An aunt tells:

“That thing [sexual abuse] of [name of senior staff member 1] was what caused the closure. The closure was a big disappointment. I don’t know anything else. For [name of convicted perpetrator of sexual abuse within SOS Children’s Village Suriname] it was a big blow. Suriname does not need SOS, that was also said. SOS was only there for orphans, it was said. I didn’t go there anymore. Many children had already been sent away. Most children have been sent away just like that. [Auntie’s name] has taken four SOS children to bring up. She loves children so much, she helps in all the homes.”

A victim indicates that this court case was one of the reasons for the termination of the Children’s Village. It was also a case of mismanagement and it was “no longer responsible to continue like this”. A former employee of the Children’s Village, who made one of the first reports after which this research started, indicates that when she heard last year that the Children’s Village had been closed down for a long time, she found this distressing. According to her, SOS Children’s Villages chose to let the village fall into disrepair and to protect the perpetrator(s). Some other respondents, who had served on the board in the Netherlands, indicated that they did not know whether the two cases were related. Another respondent, who had worked for SOS Children’s Villages for more than 25 years in various (international) positions, strongly indicated that there was no direct relationship between the two cases. She argues that it was a relatively small Children’s Village, which cost a lot of money and took care of relatively few children. In addition, according to her, in Suriname every population group with its own cultural background “took care of their own children”, which meant that the Children’s Village was not necessarily needed (anymore). Two former (regional) senior staff members confirm this picture. In short, they stated that the closure was due to the small population of orphans.

On the contrary, several respondents, including those who have had unpleasant experiences, indicate that there is a great need in Suriname for a place to take care of children.

It is a fact that the children who were still present at the time of the closure were taken by surprise by the closure and that some of them indicated that they were traumatised as a result. They ended up on the street, for example.

A respondent who was staying in the village at the time says:

“It was done so suddenly when SOS left. They chased us [respondent stayed there with other biological brothers and sister] away and I had to go and see grandma and then everything went to hell. Bam we [the children from the house where he was staying at the time] fell bam in a pit. The youngest of three went to boarding school. Everything was gone. They

dropped us. Just like falling into a hole. We had nowhere to go. Our eldest sister has been like a mother to me. She had to take care of me. It was hell. We didn't hear anything from SOS. SOS suddenly went away. All the brothers and sisters had to split up. They put us in hell."

4.4 (Re)actions of the Organisation

In the final section of this chapter, we will consider how the abuse cases have been responded to and acted upon, also focusing on the SOS mothers and how the Surinamese, Dutch and International organisations have reacted.

4.4.1 In the village (aunts)

In several interviews, victims indicated how the cases of abuse were handled in the village, especially by SOS aunts. Central to this seems to be that children did not dare to report what had happened to them because "they would not be believed anyway" and that SOS mothers themselves were part of the problem.

In general, the victims labelled the role of the aunts (with exceptions) as negative: they would not believe the children, or they knew what was happening but did nothing about it. For example, one respondent talked about the fact that some girls were abused by senior staff member 1 and also by boys from the Children's Village and he said that 'all the aunts knew that it had happened. If the children know, then so do they'. Someone else tells that at one point she told an SOS aunt that she did not like Mr. *name of senior staff member 1*: "he is bad. Don't say it, because he is going to hit me". A woman says that her sister has been abused since the age of three by both senior staff member 1 and older boys from the village. At one point, their aunt asked, "How do you smell like horny?". The mothers blamed the children. Another victim indicates that one of the boys from her house asked to suck his penis and that she could not tell the aunt "anything because she would not believe you anyway."

Children were blamed for sexual abuse. A former aunt:

*"I know those children [the victims of the *senior staff member* who was convicted of sexual abuse]. [Child's name said] My mother is a whore, I am also a whore. The child persuaded him [the senior staff member] for sex. [...] We received complaints about the children. They were abused at a very young age. With abused children, it is rooted in them. I saw two of them doing something in the closet. The girl was ten and he was also that age."*

As described earlier in the report, there was also an SOS aunt who forced a girl to go to senior staff member 1 when he called her. Another aunt helped her. After she followed the girl, she saw the girl went to senior staff member 1. Afterwards she said that she smelt and heard everything and she reported it to the police. She told what happened and was questioned by the police. Less than a week later, she was confronted with senior staff member 1 at the police station and that was very frightening.

In conclusion the children did not themselves report misconduct to the aunts because they were afraid they would not be believed and were afraid of the consequences.

4.4.2 Senior staff member 1

Respondents did not/less often talk about how SOS Children's Villages Netherlands or SOS CVI had reacted and acted on the cases. However, internal documents made available to Verinorm did provide some insight. We refer to these internal documents in annex 1. These internal documents relate in particular to the period 2004-2006 when senior staff member 1 was arrested and convicted of sexual abuse. This took place in 2004. However, in the current Verinorm research, victims speak about a much longer period, about more different forms of abuse and about extensive and different (types of) perpetrators. How SOS Children's Villages Netherlands or SOS CVI reacted to this remains unclear. Respondents/victims in the interviews barely mentioned "the layer above" (above senior staff member 1).

Internal SOS documents show that the then chairman of the board of SOS Suriname made a statement/declaration after the arrest of senior staff member 1. Senior staff member 1 was arrested due to sexual abuse of a girl. We also have a document in our possession that refers to "a conversation" with that chairperson. It remains unclear who had this conversation but it seems to concern someone from SOS Children's Villages Netherlands. In that conversation, the chairman of the board of SOS Suriname describes the developments since early April 2004, when senior staff member 1 was arrested. The board was surprised by the police report about the actions of senior staff member 1 and took several measures immediately:

1. The girl in question, who was presumably abused, was removed from the Children's Village and placed under supervision.
2. Senior staff member 1 was immediately relieved of his duties.
3. Appointed the director of the SOS kindergarten as temporary head of the Children's Village.
4. The Surinamese Supervisory Board was temporarily suspended.
5. A new senior staff member was recruited as of 1 May 2004: this woman was sent on a month-long training course in Venezuela on 4 May 2004.
6. Supervision by one of the most experienced senior staff member from the South American region.

Another document (investigation report) reports on an investigation being conducted into the case. It is not clear from whom or which organisation this document was written. This document describes conversations and meetings that were held as part of the investigation. For example, talks were held with the police officer in charge, with one of the victims in her new home (at Stichting voor het Kind) and with the accused senior staff member 1. On 1 May 2004, a member of the board of SOS Suriname also wrote a short memo, which was also included in this document. In it, it is indicated that the members of the board (of SOS Suriname) had a meeting with the SOS mothers and the senior staff member who was in charge at the time.

In our possession is a press/crisis document that indicates how to react to the “current situation SOS Children’s Village Suriname”. It describes what should be said to the press: the core message of the organisation should be clearly explained and there are some specific instructions: “do not repeat heavy words to the journalist”, “new facts that we are not aware of, do not respond, respond with “these facts are not known to us, we will investigate them and come back to this within twelve hours””, short answers with emotion”, “let the journalist talk and ask”. The measures that had been taken up to that point were also listed. These are the same measures as described above.

An official statement by SOS Children’s Villages International is also available. It is about the prison sentence of senior staff member 1. It states that he was sentenced to three-and-a-half years in prison for sexually abusing a twelve-year-old girl in the organisation’s care. It also states: SOS Children’s Villages condemns all forms of child abuse, and has undertaken all measures to ensure the proper care and protection of the children at the facility in Paramaribo.

Another document, dated 15 July 2004, contains a Q&A with various questions and answers related to the arrest of senior staff member 1. Here, it is again stated what measures have been taken. It is also stated that the Dutch SOS organisation is not responsible for the state of affairs in Suriname.

There is internal communication by email between different people from SOS CVI, SOS Children’s Villages Netherlands, SOS Children’s Villages Suriname and other parts of the organisation. This communication started at the end of April, shortly after senior staff member 1 had been arrested on suspicion of sexual abuse of a twelve-year-old girl and possibly other children. What is known, from the internal communication by email, is that a report (which we do not have) from a psychologist was conducted that contained eighteen different recommendations. These included offering professional help to children with behavioural/disciplinary problems and checking references of personnel that are recruited. It remains unclear whether and to what extent these recommendations were actually implemented.

Internal communication indicates that the judge decided on 24 November 2004 that senior staff member 1 should be given a three and a half year prison sentence. We have done several attempts to obtain documentation about the verdict. In Suriname, we have been in contact with police officers and a judge. Unfortunately, we have not been able to get hold of the documents. This documentation could have provided more insight into the background and arguments for the prison sentence. The internal communication does state that the sentence was based on the testimony of four girls: two of them no longer lived in the Children’s Village at that time, and two others still did. As the stories of the victims show, the convict would have shown many more victims (including boys).

Concluding remarks, some of the victims we spoke to longed for the help of and support by SOS during the trial. They felt left alone by SOS.

4.5 (SOS) senior staff member 2 and allegations of former employee

A respondent, who had worked in the Children's Village in Suriname, provided information on how the organisation responded to stories of abuse. She considers herself a whistle-blower. When she arrived at the Children's Village, she heard stories from various children and SOS mothers about misbehaviour by senior staff member 2. She herself had never seen any incidents, but 'the stories kept coming'. SOS aunts who told the respondent stories about senior staff member 2 stopped doing so at a certain point and she said that this was because senior staff member 2 had 'blown the whistle' on them. What the respondent also found disturbing was that he did not deny things (such as severe punishment) but played them down.

In the end, according to the respondent, she told the regional director that there were problems in the Children's Village and asked him whether that situation was acceptable. According to her regional director was going to discuss this with senior staff member 2 and to the former employee, it felt like she was being sidelined. There were several months between the time she told the regional director about the problems and the time she was suspended by him, according to her, because she spoke up. The suspension was done to silence her, she said. She did feel that the regional director had talked to senior staff member 2 about their conversation because senior staff member 2 had a slightly different attitude towards her after the conversation: he was less arrogant and more positive towards her, according to the former employee. Other respondents told the researchers that this description of the situation was not true. There was no hierarchical relationship between the regional director and senior staff member 2.

At some point the respondent told her partner, who was a journalist, about the abuse. The journalist published the story. In response to the above, senior staff member 2 said that the board of SOS Children's Village Suriname had suspended the former employee because of the reporting by her then partner, the journalist. The board had the allegations investigated by a doctor/confidant of the Children's Village. This revealed that there were three incidents. He was able to remain in his position after the investigation.

According to the former employee however, it is a classic whistle-blower story in which she could no longer find a job in Suriname and had to leave for the Netherlands, with all the financial and relational consequences that entailed.

5

Consequences of abuse and needs of victims

This chapter looks at what the short-term and long-term consequences of the abuse has been for the victims. This is followed by a description of the results of the questionnaires, which can be used to sketch the current situation. Finally, we pay attention to the needs of victims.

5.1 Consequences and current situation

According to victims, their experiences have had a great impact on them and still do in their current lives. Whether and to what extent the consequences of abuse can be attributed to the situation of abuse or rejection prior to placement in the Children's Village Suriname, for example, is impossible to determine. The consequences came up in interviews with victims, sometimes explicitly, sometimes between the lines. Below, the short term effects are firstly discussed, followed by long(er) term effects. In both sections, different "categories" of consequences have been distinguished and elaborated.

5.1.1 Short-term effects

The short-term consequences - i.e. the consequences immediately in the village or shortly afterwards - can be divided into a number of different categories. Firstly, according to the victims, there are mental consequences of the different forms of abuse, including fear and a strong distrust of others. Many respondents also reported difficulty concentrating or sleeping.

Mental consequences of abuse

All victims have had to deal, to a greater or lesser extent, with the mental effects of the abuse. Many victims say they feel abandoned and link this to the feeling that they cannot trust anyone. The impact of the abuse on their mental wellbeing only becomes fully apparent later in life. At that time in the Children's Village, it was a matter of survival.

A victim who was very seriously sexually abused by senior staff member 1 suffered a lot of psychological complaints because of the abuse. She became afraid of him and then afraid of everyone. The sexual abuse took place at least once a week for years. This already had a great impact on her in the Children's Village:

"I could not do anything. I was in fifth grade and the teacher noticed that I was going backwards. After that, it didn't go well at all. I was always drawing strange things, the teacher said. The teacher said that I always talked about killing. I drew weird, I was aggressive. They said I had to go to another school, it all went very badly."

When senior staff member 1 was arrested, the victim was interrogated by the police. She did not return to the SOS Children's Village after that. After less than a week, she was confronted by the police with the senior staff member. She did not feel safe at all, she cried and she was alone. She then went to another home where she stayed for two years. She later read in the newspaper that senior staff member 1 was given a prison sentence of only six months. She never heard anything more from SOS Children's Villages. She did hear from other victims of senior staff member 1. Since the abuse, she has not been able to learn at school because she did not feel safe anywhere.

Two victims specifically state that they felt abandoned and alone during/in the judicial process surrounding the arrest of senior staff member 1. They felt very lonely and unsupported at the time of the trial:

"SOS could have at least given me a handkerchief to dry my tears."

Culture of fear among children

One can speak of a culture of fear that prevailed among the children in the Children's Village, especially due to the emotional, sexual and physical abuse that took place there. Many were afraid of their SOS aunt and many children felt that adults would not believe them if they talked about abusive situations. The children have learned, through the fear generated by the abuse, that adults cannot be trusted.

One victim says that she was always afraid of her SOS aunt. Every day they had to get up at four or five in the morning to do all kinds of chores. Her mother hated her and made her "very insecure". She was punished almost every day by being bullied and tormented. She says that she was always reading a lot of books in the Children's Village. That was an escape for her:

“I can still remember the book Cockaigne. That was my dream world.”

Some victims also said that they wet their beds for a long time because of what happened to them at the Children’s Village. They were particularly afraid of the strict upbringing of SOS aunts. For example, one woman said that she continued to wet her bed until she had a child of her own, at the age of 24.

In addition, several respondents indicated that they (were afraid that) they would not be believed by the adults in the Children’s Village if they told them that they had been abused. For example, one victim, who had been sexually abused several times by a senior staff member said that even the people who knew that she was being abused, were angry with her. Not only at her, but also at others: “We don’t believe you when you say something now”. According to the victim, people were afraid that sponsors would withdraw. She is very damaged by what happened to her. She says she is afraid for her life and that she wanted to end her life several times. She was “broken, sad and angry”. Another victim says they were all taught from childhood that they would be punished if they told anything. Senior staff member 1 told another victim that he would kill her if she said anything. When she was first abused by him, he said this up to three times. The result was (even more) fear.

Negative consequences due to abandonment or closure of the Children’s Village

Several victims reported having experienced negative consequences when they had to leave the Children’s Village; in most cases, this was because the Children’s Village suddenly closed down. In 2006, SOS Children’s Villages stopped operating in Suriname and children had to be placed somewhere else and often ended up in very difficult circumstances because there was no safety net. Once, a victim ran away from the Children’s Village because of abuse and was not allowed to return. When senior staff member 1 was arrested for sexual abuse in 2004, the victim who filed charges against him was also removed from the Children’s Village. This felt like punishment.

Regarding the closure of the Children’s Village, it is clear that the children felt overwhelmed by this. Brothers and sisters were sometimes separated and some ended up in a dangerous situation. One victim says that when the Children’s Village closed, she was returned to her mother. There, she slept with a knife under her pillow because her mother always preferred a man over them. She did not feel safe. The last senior staff member (we think this might be senior staff member 4, based on the interview, however, this cannot be stated with certainty) in the Children’s Village had, according to respondents, returned many children to their parents before the village closed, even though it was not good for them to go back. The victims’ stories confirmed this picture. One respondent mentioned an example of a boy who had been placed back with his father where things were very bad. Nowadays, he is roaming the streets.

Some people were expelled from the Children’s Village: two respondents mentioned that they had been expelled and that this had had negative consequences. This mainly concerned the

fact that they had nowhere else to go. One of them had to leave because she had become pregnant. She was eighteen at the time. She said:

“I got pregnant when I was eighteen years old... I had to leave the Village. I had no one at all at that time. I was dumped by my family. I had nothing. I cried terribly, it was really painful, because it was my house”.

In the house where she eventually ended up, her son was sexually abused. She had nothing, not even food. She then went back to the Children’s Village to ask for help, but “they could not help her”. She was never asked how she was doing. SOS told her that she could not rely on them. She had no help of any kind, not even psychological. Nobody gave her any comfort. Another respondent was expelled from the Children’s Village by senior staff member 6 because he told the other children that the money which was meant for the SOS children, was used to fire senior staff member 6 who was having an affair with an aunt. He could not finish his school because he had no money to do so. Therefore, he left school and started working. He says that without a completed education, it is difficult to find a good job.

Another respondent left the village herself: she ran away when she was about fourteen years old because senior staff member 5 ‘was very mean to her’. He did not allow her to go anywhere. He punished her without any reason and spoke rudely to the children. Therefore, she ran away from the Children’s Village at some point. She could not go to her biological mother, who could not take care of her because she was ill. She then went to live with someone else. Things went badly with her. At some point, her aunt took her to the other side of the country. There, she got a boyfriend who seriously abused her. SOS did not allow her to return to the Children’s Village. At one point, her boyfriend took off the condom even though he knew he was HIV positive and infected her on purpose. At the time of the interview, she was not in a relationship and had no children.

The victim who filed a complaint against senior staff member 1, who was arrested for abuse, has (also) experienced many problems in the time after the Children’s Village. She spent some time with Stichting van het Kind, but had to return to her mother at a certain point. There, her stepfather tried to abuse her. She also reported him, she was twelve at the time. She told her mother that her stepfather tried to abuse her, but he told her to shut up. After that, she walked the streets for a week and slept there. Eventually she went to school and, through counselling, she was able to tell a teacher what had happened to her. This teacher ensured that she eventually took a course “for the kitchen” and she then went back to her mother, after which her stepfather “started again”. She was then about fourteen years old.

5.1.2 Long-term effects

Several short-term consequences of the abuse in the Children’s Village have just been described. Short-term refers to the time of residence in the Children’s Village or the time just after. For most victims, the time in the Children’s Village is now more than fifteen years ago, for

some even more than 30 years. It is also important to look at how that time in the Village has affected their lives further down the line and their lives now. It is not possible to say exactly which effects were directly caused by the abuse in the Children's Village and which effects are related to abuse that may have taken place before the arrival at SOS Children's Village. The consequences mentioned by victims can be divided into several categories: First, practical negative consequences of the time in the Children's Village are mentioned. For example, "everything was destroyed". There is also talk of problems in the area of (love) relationships and sex. Respondents had a distorted view of this. An important aspect of long-term consequences are; experiencing psychological complaints, such as flashbacks, trauma, insecurity and feelings of depression. Financial and physical consequences were also mentioned.

Practical implications

In terms of practical long-term consequences, one respondent spoke about the problems that arose because of what happened at the time in the Children's Village due to the abuse. She is currently facing many different problems, the biggest of which is that she is now staying in the Netherlands illegally. She has no papers after due to the fact she found out too late that her papers had expired. The IND (Dutch immigration service) could not help her. The papers that said they would expire were sent to her aunt in the Netherlands, but she was sent away from her aunt. That aunt did not inform her of the fact that papers had been sent to her. Because she has no papers, she cannot work, she is not entitled to benefits and she cannot take out insurance.

Several of the victims do not have a healthcare card. This is a card that is needed to get access to health care in Suriname. For example, one victim cannot visit a doctor for her handicapped son, because she does not have this card (anymore). Many victims are also unable to travel because they have no money for transport.

Love, relationships and sexuality

Several victims indicate that they find romantic relationships difficult because of what they have experienced in the Children's Village. One woman says that there is a recurring pattern in her relationships where all her ex-partners indicate that they want the best for her, but they still leave her, because she is fighting and does not give anyone the space to take care of her. She bottles up her annoyances and frustrations and this eventually leads to uncontrolled anger. Another victim says about the time in the Children's Village: "it affects my relationships". She is no longer together with the father of her daughter. She wants the love she deserves and he was not able to give any. "After everything that has happened, you are looking for love". In the Children's Village, she has not known love. The relationship with her daughter's father was more of an escape from what she experienced but she remained in an unsafe situation. Another victim says she finds relationships with men difficult because she was raped in the Children's Village. She is a single mother with four children. She is "done with men" because she has been through too much. She does not trust them anymore and for her, there is no such thing as love. Another victim also says she has never had love. She is hard on her children but "she doesn't know any different". She says she does love her husband, but then again, she

doesn't. Someone else says that she no longer trusts men or has a disturbed relationship with sex. She doesn't know what a normal sexual relationship is. She does not enjoy it. Another says she has slept with men for money.

Psychological consequences

As discussed earlier, many victims experienced short-term psychological consequences of the abuse they experienced during, or just after their time at the Children's Village. Not surprisingly, a large proportion of the victims also speak of long-term psychological consequences.

Anger and self harm

One victim says that SOS has "destroyed her whole future. Everything is broken". She cannot concentrate because of everything that has happened, so she cannot learn and now she does not have a good job. She has a "broken feeling" and a bad life because of SOS. She cannot be there for her daughter. She has now been made redundant as well and has lost her appetite for life. One victim also indicates that she is angry and calls it "self-harm". Another victim, who has experienced physical and emotional abuse, says that because of the upbringing within SOS she has not learned to stand on her own two feet. She learned to beg and could not take care of herself. Because of the way she was brought up, she was made dependent and trusted by no one at all. She was also angry, self-mutilated herself and often wondered "why big people do such things to small children". Another victim indicates being very angry with the world: "I was young and was thinking; Why didn't my mother take care of me?"

Some victims report having developed behavioural problems as a result of the abuse. For example, one says that she went to MOB (Medical Education Bureau) for "certain behaviour". No one was able to find out what had happened to her or what was wrong with her. She was quick to hit others.

Lack of trust

Many respondents indicated that entering into relationships in a 'normal' healthy manner was impossible. For example, a respondent said that she did not want to enter into loving relationships whatsoever. Another respondent said that she did not trust any men and therefore preferred to live with a woman. Many indicated that they no longer had confidence in people because of what had happened to them at the Children's Village.

Trauma and depression

A certain despair is also felt by almost all victims: "It is what it is", "It will not get better anyway". They talk about traumas, therapy and (psychological) examinations. Victims say they have depressive feelings, sometimes even suicidal thoughts, and they suffer from insecurity and loneliness.

Some victims talk extensively about psychological complaints they experience as a result of their experiences in the village. For example, one man states that he has been diagnosed with PTSD, which is (also) a result of the sexual abuse he experienced in the Children's Village. He

finds it very difficult to talk about traumatic events. Whenever he reads a message on Facebook about a paedophile, for example, he cannot suppress the urge to post an angry comment. In fact, he has not thought about the events for a long time, but a few years ago they suddenly resurfaced, out of the blue and for no specific reason. When he tries to go to sleep, the image of the abuse comes back. He recalls what happened. He feels anger and blames himself for what happened: “If only I had said no, if only I had run away”. Because he sometimes behaved in a rebellious manner and had a great distrust of everything and everyone. For example, he could not stand authority and made a lot of trouble when he was in secondary school. Later on, he spent several months in prison. When he was in high school, he also had a lot of trouble making decisions and often makes the “wrong” decision. He mentions an example: in order to get his driving licence, he had to arrange something at the municipality. It wouldn’t have been much trouble, but he still chose to spend time with his friends. He links many of his problems to his time in the Children’s Village. We were able to see psychological research reports on him in which they talk about his past and the influence it has had on him. It says that at a young age, he went through a lot that was traumatic for him. He is very closed off and those around him have little idea of what is going on in his head. In the past, EMDR has been offered, but he has refused it. EMDR is therapy to help you heal from trauma. Because of his burdened past, he has no trust in others. It feels as if he is on his own and there is a constant state of alertness. He rarely talks about his past, but it seems as if those events are still influencing his current functioning. He is, in his own words, distrustful of the world. It is also stated: “Experiences characteristics of PTSD. There are attachment problems. Has gone through traumatic experiences. He has never talked to anyone about the abuse. He was not ready for that”. With us, he was able to talk about it for the first time.

Another victim, a woman, says that she has suffered a great deal of pain and injustice in the Children’s Village. She is abandoned again and again. She says she is “tired and resigned”. EMDR has softened things. She worries about her children and wants to give them more than she can. As a single mother, fortunately with a job, she wonders how things would be if she had not been so traumatised by events in her childhood. Because of her traumas, all kinds of things are taken away from her, she thinks. Every time she “has a nice life again”, with a partner, a car and a house to buy, things go wrong again. She blames SOS Children’s Village’s for this. She herself moved to the Netherlands at a certain point, she “fled from Suriname”, with the help of her uncle. Her life in the Netherlands has been quite hectic and she has always had to fight to be who she is now. She often finds herself in conflict situations: “Why do I always have to beat myself up so much?” She says there are two sides to her: fighting, but essentially a very sweet and caring woman as well.

One respondent indicated that she feels depressed a lot: “Sometimes I also say, maybe out of anger, I’d rather jump in front of a train.... Because I don’t see a way out”. Another said that her time in the Children’s Village had been a trauma from childhood and that she would never place her children in a boarding school, even though it was difficult and demanding as a single mother with a couple of children. Another victim says that the doctor told her she is trauma-

tised. Life feels like a prison. She receives medication for psychological problems but because her doctor's card has expired, she can no longer go to her counsellor. She feels like an orphan.

Insecurity and loneliness

Insecurity is also a consequence that is specifically mentioned by several victims. One woman says she has become very insecure because of her SOS aunt. She was mentally abused and became very insecure as a result. Eventually, a change took place within her when her son was born a few years ago. She started attending therapy because she had such a negative outlook on life. She thought she was so ugly. She radiates insecurity, she can't stand big crowds and she always feels that someone is looking at her. Feelings of loneliness are also mentioned. One victim says she feels lonely and isolated. Several victims also mention this. Others take advantage of her good will, for example, by asking for money or help with problems.

Financial implications

Victims also indicated that they suffered financial consequences. In general, this refers to the fact that money intended for the children has not reached them. Such as godmothers who donate money and international sponsors who do the same. The children have not seen any of this money. Victims say that they are currently struggling with (great) financial worries and do not have enough money to get by.

One family, consisting of several brothers and a sister, says they have never seen money from sponsors and that they are still struggling financially. Another victim says that they have to keep "puzzling" to see what is or is not possible. Another victim says that where she lives now, there is no water, no light and that she will be evicted soon. She lives there with three small children. There is not enough money for the most basic living expenses. Another victim says she can barely make ends meet every month. She has a mentally handicapped son but has no health insurance. Her room where she lives with all the children is small and floods when it rains. A victim who lives in the Netherlands also says sometimes she does not know how to get through the month as a single mother. The withholding of the money and the financial problems the victims are currently experiencing are not directly linked. Rather, and this is how these financial problems should be seen, there is an accumulation of (traumatic) experiences that make it difficult for the victims to cope in various areas of life, including financially.

Physical consequences

Finally, some victims experience physical consequences of their time in the Children's Village. One victim in particular speaks explicitly about this: she is a heart patient and cannot (therefore) work. She has been ill since childhood (because of the village). Due to the large amount of antibiotics, her teeth are rotten and stress has caused heart problems. Her overall health is weak. She explicitly states that her childhood in the Children's Village contributed to this.

5.1.3 Questionnaires taken and current living conditions of victims

Brief Symptom Inventory

The BSI (Brief Symptom Inventory) is a self-assessment list for measuring psychopathological symptoms in adults (de Beurs, 2011). This self-assessment list can be used to obtain a first impression of the nature and severity of psychological complaints. The list contains 53 questions and nine different scales or dimensions, covering both common complaints and less common symptoms. With the questionnaire, complaints can be determined on nine different dimensions. Such a dimension can be seen as a particular concept or trait. These are the nine dimensions: anxiety, depressed mood, interpersonal sensitivity, hostility, phobic anxiety, paranoid thoughts, psychoticism, cognitive problems and somatic complaints. Scores can be compared with different norm groups. Someone can, compared to that group, score very low to very high. The scores of the victims of SOS Children's Villages were compared to two different norm groups: with the population sample immigrant (wo)men and with the (fe)male patients outpatient care. A total of fourteen victims completed this questionnaire. Because on average, men score differently on complaints lists than women, a difference in gender was made in norm groups. An equal score on a dimension for men can therefore be classified as high, while the same score for a woman is classified as above average. Because all respondents have a Surinamese background, we opted to use only the immigrant norm groups. No distinction was made on the basis of age in the migrant norm groups.

Below, a brief explanation of each dimension will be given and the results of that dimension will be discussed. It starts with some general conclusions that can be drawn based on the BSI analysis.

General Conclusions

Several general conclusions can be drawn based on the analysis of the BSI, both in terms of overall scores and scores per individual scale. The table below shows per gender and per scale what the average score was and how it can be interpreted in relation to the population sample and in relation to the ambulatory group.⁵⁵

The analysis of the BSI results showed that the respondents/victims scored high to very high on a type of overall score compared to the population sample. Twelve of the fourteen cases scored "very high" and the remaining two scored "high". When the comparison is made with the ambulant group, the victims score below average to high. In two cases they scored below average, in two cases average, in six cases above average and in four cases high. The average of this total score for the male victims is very high compared to the population sample and above average compared to the ambulant group. The same applies to the female victims. It can be concluded from this that, on average, victims suffer much more from various psy-

⁵⁵ The outpatient group consists of people who have applied for treatment at the outpatient department of a GGZ institution or at the Psychiatry Department of a university hospital.

chopathological symptoms than similar persons in the population sample. Compared to the outpatient sample, they suffer 'slightly more' from various psychopathological symptoms.

Table 4: Scale scores of victims compared with population sample and ambulatory group, based on gender⁵⁶

Gender	Scale	Average Raw Score	Standard compared to population	Standard compared to Outpatient group
Man	Fear	1,4	Very high	Average
Woman	Fear	1,59	Very high	Above average
Man	Cognitive Problems	2,25	Very high	Above average
Woman	Cognitive Problems	1,45	High	Average
Man	Depressed Mood	1,7	Very high	Above average
Woman	Depressed Mood	2,1	Very high	Above average
Man	Phobic fear	1,48	Very high	Above average
Woman	Phobic fear	1,58	Very high	Above average
Man	Hostility	1,16	High	Above average
Woman	Hostility	1,54	Very high	Above average
Man	Interpersonal sensitivity	1,9	Very high	Above average
Woman	Interpersonal sensitivity	2,22	Very high	Above average
Man	Paranoid thoughts	2,32	Very high	High
Woman	Paranoid thoughts	2,7	Very high	High
Man	Psychoticism	1,64	Very high	Above average
Woman	Psychoticism	1,73	Very high	Above average
Man	Somatic complaints	1,29	Very high	Above average
Woman	Somatic complaints	1,29	High	Above average
Man	Additional items	1,33	N.A.	N.A.
Woman	Additional items	1,94	N.A.	N.A.
Man	Overall score	1,62	Very high	Above average
Woman	Overall score	1,78	Very high	Above average
Man	Number of symptoms present	42,8	Very high	Above average
Woman	Number of symptoms present	40,1	High	Above average
Man	Severity Symptoms Present	1,97	High	Above average
Woman	Severity Symptoms Present	2,31	Very high	Above average

These general findings paint a worrying picture: people who are victims of any form of abuse in the SOS Children's Village Suriname suffer remarkably from (many) psychopathological

⁵⁶ The averages per group per scale should be interpreted with some caution because the number of victims that completed the questionnaire is very small and the scores may vary in some cases. The results are indicative and give a rough picture of current psychological functioning at group level.

symptoms. The picture is similar for men and women. Men generally suffer from more different symptoms than women, while women on average suffer more “per symptom”.

Conclusions by scale

The mean scores were calculated for all nine separate scales, the additional items, the overall score, the number of symptoms present and the severity of the symptoms present. The table above provides an overview. Below, some additional explanation is given, also with regard to the content and meaning of each scale.

Fear

This scale measures symptoms associated with generalised anxiety disorder (such as restlessness, nervousness and agitation) and those associated with panic disorder (including panic attacks). This scale consists of six items. The analysis shows that male victims score very high compared to the population sample and average compared to the outpatient group. Women also score very high compared to the population sample. Compared to the ambulatory group, they score above average. Women score higher than men on this scale

Cognitive problems

This scale measures both symptoms associated with obsessive-compulsive disorder (needing to control everything all the time and difficulty making decisions) and more general disturbances in the cognitive domain, such as difficulty concentrating. This scale consists of six items. The analysis shows that male victims score very high compared to the population sample and above average compared to the outpatient group. Women score high compared to the population sample. Compared to the ambulatory group, they score average. On this scale, male victims score higher than female victims.

Depressed mood

Several symptoms of depression are included in this scale, including negative affect and anhedonia (loss of interest). This scale consists of six items. It appears that the male victims score very high compared to the population sample and above average compared to the outpatient group. The same applies to women. Women score higher than men on this scale.

Phobic Anxiety

This scale is about fear of certain situations, which is associated with certain feelings and behaviours. An item with a more general scope is included, as well as items relating to agoraphobia. This scale contains five items. Both men and women scored very high compared to the population sample and above average compared to the outpatient group. Women scored slightly higher on this scale than men.

Hostility

These are symptoms that indicate hostility or anger. The items include thoughts, feelings and behaviours that indicate this. In total, this scale contains five items. Men score high compared

to the population sample and above average compared to the outpatient group; women score very high compared to the population sample and above average compared to the outpatient group. On average, women score higher on hostility than men.

Interpersonal sensitivity

This scale measures symptoms associated with social anxiety, such as fear of judging others. A high score on this scale can indicate a social phobia. This scale consists of four items. The analysis shows that both men and women score very high on interpersonal sensitivity compared to the population sample and above average compared to the outpatient group. On average, women score higher on this scale than men.

Paranoid thoughts

This looks at feelings that individuals suffer from delusions of grandeur, excessive suspicion and hostility. A high score may indicate a personality disorder, although additional research is required to officially determine this. The scale consists of five items. Both men and women score very high on this scale compared to the population sample and high compared to the outpatient group. Women score somewhat higher than men.

Psychoticism

This includes items that are associated with a withdrawn lifestyle, such as is found in schizophrenia, or that have a delusional quality. A high score on this scale may indicate a psychotic disorder, particularly when this high score is due to items concerning sinfulness and mind control. This scale consists of five items. Analysis showed that both men and women scored very high compared to the population sample and above average compared to the outpatient group. Women scored slightly higher on psychoticism than men.

Somatic complaints

This scale takes into account physical symptoms such as those that can be associated with a somatic condition, but also symptoms that occur during anxiety. These symptoms can have a psychogenic origin but can also be due to a physical condition. This scale consists of seven items. The analysis showed that men scored very high compared to the population sample and above average compared to the outpatient group. Relative to the population sample, women score high and relative to the ambulatory group they score above average. Men and women have an equally high mean on this scale.

Additional items

This is not a scale, but a collection of four items that load on multiple dimensions that are clinically relevant: they are items that can indicate (the nature and severity of symptoms of) a mental illness. They are part of the total score on the BSI but are not scored as items in any of the above scales. Because there are no norm tables for this 'scale', no further statements can be made about it. The analysis did show that the women scored higher on this than the men.

Finally

In terms of scales, the highest scores were obtained on the paranoid thoughts scale: both men and women scored very high on this compared to the population sample and high compared to the outpatient group. Next in line are the highest scores on the scales: depressed mood, phobic anxiety, interpersonal sensitivity and psychoticism. On these scales, both men and women score very high compared to the population sample and above average compared to the outpatient group.

In terms of items, some score remarkably high. The item with the highest score is: “The feeling that most people cannot be trusted”. This is followed by: “The feeling that others will take advantage of you if you are not careful”. Some other items that score very high are: “feeling lonely even when in company”, “feeling lonely”, “feeling gloomy”, “feeling that people are unfriendly to you and don’t like you” and “difficulty falling asleep”. Finally, these items are also more prevalent among the victims: “Feeling that most of your problems are the fault of others”, “Being easily annoyed by something”, “Being easily hurt or touched”, “Feeling inferior to others”, “Feeling watched or talked about behind your back” and “Feeling hopeless about the future”. The most important conclusions that can be drawn from this are: the victims suffer especially from paranoid thoughts which mainly involve excessive suspicion, depressive symptoms, (social) anxiety and a withdrawn/delusional lifestyle.

Living areas questionnaire

There was also a questionnaire on different life aspects/areas that was administered. It is a questionnaire with eight items/aspects, on which a grade between one and ten must be given. In addition, one stands for very dissatisfied or very bad and a ten for very satisfied or very good. It concerns the following aspects: housing and living situation, financial situation, family situation, psychological functioning, physical functioning, work and / or education situation, social functioning and filling of (free) time. In total, this questionnaire consists of eight items. Table 5 shows the average, lowest and highest scores per life aspect.

■ **Table 5:** mean, lowest and highest score per life aspect

	Housing and living	Financial	Family	Psychological functioning	Physical functioning	Work and/or education	Social functioning	Filling of time
Average score	4,4	3,8	5,2	3,8	5,9	4,4	4,5	4,4
Lowest score	1	1	2	1	3	1	1	2
Highest score	8	8	10	7	10	8	6	6

This questionnaire was completed by fourteen victims. Analysis of the data shows that the average total scores of the individuals are between 3.1 and 5.9 with an average of 4.6. This implies that the average victim is largely dissatisfied in the life areas surveyed. With regard to the different living areas, the lowest scores are given to the financial situation and psychological functioning: both receive an average of 3.8 (when not rounded off, the scores for financial situations are slightly lower than for psychological functioning). Work and/ or education situation, filling of (spare) time and housing and living situation are all scored with an average of 4.4 (when not rounded off, the lowest score is given to work and/ or education situation, followed by filling of (spare) time and then housing and living situation). Social functioning receives an average score of 4.5, family situation 5.2 and physical functioning receives the highest score: that aspect is assessed with an average of 5.9. It can be said that there are problems in every area of life: a 5.9 is the highest average and indicates that people are “just about satisfied” in that area. All other averages are insufficient. Two life areas receive only a 3.8. Thus, the greatest problems are found in the areas of psychological functioning and finances. The next section will zoom in on the victims’ current living conditions and problems. Here too, we can see that finances and psychological functioning are two areas in which a relatively large number of problems are experienced.

Current living conditions and problems of victims

In the previous section, the problems and situation of the victims were discussed in statistical terms. In the interviews, the victims were also interviewed about their current living situations and problems. We will zoom in on this in the next section. We will look at children, housing, work situation, health situation, psychological functioning and any urgent/emergency situations. As far as the children are concerned, it is striking that few victims raise their children alongside another person or with the biological parent, and that they find parenting difficult. Only a few victims have good housing and, in terms of work situation, more than half of the victims said they had a job but the vast majority were not satisfied. The only victim who talks specifically about her health situation says that she is HIV positive and almost every victim says that she suffers from psychological problems. Emergency situations are mainly related to housing and finances.

Children

The analysis shows that twelve of the nineteen victims have children of their own. Especially the upbringing of the children and access to care for them causes problems. Only one of the twelve victims is known to raise children together with the other biological parent. They are also married. One other victim is known to be cohabiting: this is a man who has three children with another woman who do not live with him, but he lives with his new girlfriend and her two children. Five of the twelve victims with children say they have difficulty raising them. One victim says that one of her children is mentally handicapped. She has no health insurance. Another victim says that one of her children has already been taken away by the Child Protection Services and that another child, an eleven-year-old son, cannot speak yet. Finally, someone

says that there is a court case between him and the mother about one of his children because she does not want him to see his child, while he does want to see his child.

Housing

Not everyone's living situation is known. One victim is known to have her own house for sale, in the Netherlands. Some victims in Suriname live with their mother (again) or with a (former) aunt in a small house and need their own house. They often sleep in one bed with a child. Some are in danger of being evicted from their homes because of debts. This is discussed further under "distress". One victim lives in the Netherlands in an institution for assisted living.

Work Situation

Twelve victims report having a job. Sectors in which they work include (food) retail, healthcare and security. Two of the working victims indicated that they were satisfied with their jobs in terms of content and salary. About five victims said they wanted to start their own business. Several people said they wanted to work and/or study, but that this was not possible due to financial constraints or health problems for example.

Health situation

One respondent said that she had been infected with HIV. In terms of health, she was reasonably well now, but she would have to continue taking medication. About five victims said they did not have a doctor's card or health insurance.

Psychological Situation

Seventeen of the nineteen victims explicitly state in the interview that they have psychological problems. They suffer from various issues such as loneliness, distrust, trauma, addiction, sadness, feeling hopeless and anger. Three persons say that they have considered suicide (at some point) or have had serious thoughts about it.

Acute Distress

Nine different victims speak of emergency situations in their current living situation. In this case, this refers to a situation in which major problems will arise in the short term if nothing changes. There is one victim who is currently living in the Netherlands illegally. This causes major problems in her life. Four victims had large, (urgent) financial problems and could not make ends meet. One of them is currently living in a boarding house. Two victims say they will be evicted within a month (after the interview). One of them also has no water and electricity at the moment. Two others also urgently need (different) accommodation.

5.2 Needs of victims

Based on the interviews with victims, an inventory was made of their needs in terms of professional help and recognition. These are also part of the individual plans, which have been handed over to SOS CVI separately from this report. The needs mentioned are individually unique, but some similarities can be seen.

First of all, almost every victim indicates that they find it important to receive recognition of the suffering inflicted on them in the Children's Village. Many of the victims still suffer (to a greater or lesser extent) from what happened to them. They also feel it is important to receive a (public) apology from the organisation. This can help them process it further, accept and heal. Help is also needed in the area of housing. A large number of the victims are experiencing problems in this area: some are for example about to be evicted from their homes because they can no longer pay the rent. Some currently have no access to gas, water or electricity. They also told us that some victims live in a very small house with, for example, their mother and child(ren). They need more and better space. This will help them a lot.

Two other areas where the victims need help are support in study and/or work and psychological support. Not all victims have completed an education, and not all of them have a job at the moment. A large number of the victims we spoke to would like to receive help in (one of) these areas. Some victims also indicated that they wanted to start their own business but they also needed help with that. Finally, psychological support: victims suffer from psychological problems, among others as a result of the events in the Children's Village. This interferes with their daily lives and they need support, for example by talking to a professional.

As mentioned earlier, the victims talk about their own experiences. They themselves make a direct link with the events in the Children's Village and the subsequent problems they experience in all sorts of areas and for which they want help and support from SOS CVI. From a scientific point of view, it is difficult to prove such a causal relationship. This is due to the past history also playing a significant role as well as the experience of the victims after their time in the Children's Village. However, this does not change the fact that the stay in the Children's Village was traumatic for most victims.⁵⁷

57 Some victims actually experienced problems after the sudden closure of the Children's Village. They experienced few problems during their stay at the Children's Village.

6

Child safeguarding policy framework

The research shows that most policies were developed and or implemented after the closure of the Village in Suriname. First, a few general notions are described in the documentation we found. We then look at the policy and approach each period in more detail. For this purpose, we will make use of both the studied documentation and the findings from the interviews.⁵⁸ It is only since 2018 that proper action has really been taken. In this sense, the recent policy has no ‘explanatory value’ for the emergence and persistence of abuse in the Children’s Village, which was closed in 2006. For the sake of completeness, we will briefly describe the organisation and the recent (policy) developments to show that SOS CVI is working on tackling abuses in the Children’s Villages.

6.1 General notions

Within SOS Children’s Villages, the guiding principle is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) (SOS Children’s Villages, 2021). Important principles from this convention, which are also of great importance to SOS Children’s Villages, include that children should not be discriminated against, that children have the right to survival and development in all aspects of their lives and that their best interests should be a primary consideration in all

⁵⁸ An overview of the studied (policy) documents can be found at the back of the report. The references to the documents discussed in this chapter are listed there.

decisions or actions that affect them. It is important to note that the promotion of children's rights principles is contained in a 2020 document.

In total, SOS Children's Villages International consists of 118 member associations, active in 137 different countries and territories. They all work on the basis of the same mission and vision and contribute to the international goals of SOS Children's Villages. Of all member associations, a total of eighteen are so-called Promoting and Supporting Associations (PSAs), which are responsible for 90% of fundraising for all international programmes (SOS Children's Villages, 2021). SOS Children's Villages International also has an International Senate. Supervisory Board members from eight SOS fundraising organisations are nominated for the International Senate of SOS Children's Villages International (SOS CVI). The Senate convenes several times a year and has various functions, including formulating policies and setting procedural guidelines. It makes decisions on all strategic matters and is the regulatory body of SOS CVI. In addition to the SOS fundraising organisations, ten other national SOS organisations have seats in the Senate.

The General Assembly is the main decision-making body of the organisation (SOS Children's Villages, 2021). Each SOS organisation has the right to participate and vote at the General Assembly. The General Assembly votes for the President and Vice President and for the members of the International Senate. The General Assembly (also) deals with:

- Approval of various decisions of the Senate
- Decisions on the Statutes that are taken
- The organisation's four-year plan and financial reports that are submitted for approval
- Policy and future activities of the organisation.

What is immediately striking when studying the available documents is that public policy documents concerning the approach to abuse can only be found from 2008 onwards. The document 'Our child safeguarding journey' does mention a 'Child Protection Statement', which is supposed to encourage an open discussion about child abuse and to further develop Child Safeguarding. However, this statement cannot be found. The first document was published in May 2008. This is the 'SOS Children's Villages Child Protection Policy' and it is the first time, as far as is known, that the organisation talks about protecting children. It describes how the organisation thinks children should be protected. Goals of this policy include preventing abuse, providing safe and transparent reporting channels and informing about the policy and procedures.

From 2020/2021 onwards, an increase in the number of policy documents can be seen. The question is how this growth can be explained. An obvious explanation could be the fact that in spring 2021 the Independent Child Safeguarding Review Global Report (ICSR) was published (Keeping Children Safe, 2021). This is a report of an independent research by Keeping Children Safe in which they examined the child safety guidelines of SOS Children's Villages. As part of the ICSR, historical cases of abuse at and around SOS Children's Villages in four countries in different regions of the world were reviewed over a period of four years. The appointment of a new CEO as of January 2021 may also have played a role. Another explanation may be that

the subject of abuse in general received a lot of national and international media attention in that year. We were not able to discuss this with the respondents.

The policy documents appear extensive, professional and comprehensive, especially in recent years. Over the years the policy has clearly improved. There is sometimes, in broad terms, talk of mistakes or incidents made in Child Safeguarding, with new documents/processes then being drawn up.

In the document ‘Our child safeguarding journey’, the organisation is making ‘new’ policies and rules of its own. ‘New’ is deliberately in brackets because, for example, the 2018 SOS Care Promise already includes important components for Child Safeguarding, such as gender equality, but these are then mentioned again in the Safeguarding Action Plan 2021-2024. ‘New’ focal points in policies are often a repetition of what has already been mentioned in another document. Another example is the previously mentioned Safeguarding Action Plan 2021-2024 in which an action plan on Child Safeguarding is described. In this action plan of SOS it is stated: “The report (ICSR) confirms lessons we had already been learning through our safeguarding work”.

6.2 Period 1995-2004

The foregoing already shows that in the period 1995-2004 (and thus also before that) there were no documents available that refer to a central policy on tackling (sexual) abuse. This also applies to the Children’s Village in Suriname. Interviews with a number of insiders have shown that the subject was not on the radar at the time. In addition, and this applies to SOS Children’s Villages, that organisation was in its infancy. Rather, it was a volunteer organisation with insufficient professional embedding. A former employee of SOS Children’s Villages says the following about this:

“In the early 2000s, there were only nine of us, it was a kind of volunteer organisation. Now it has become much more professional.”

The abuse case in Suriname in 2004 seems to be a marker. Yet it was not until 2008 before a policy was developed. It is possible, although there is no data on this, that the closure of the SOS Children’s Village has had a ‘delaying’ effect, in the sense of ‘the problem has been solved’.

We also spoke to one of the respondents who was working for SOS the Netherlands at the time of the abuse about whether or not there was a policy on abuse and other forms of transgressive behaviour. The respondent said that she and a colleague had taken up these problems at the time and raised the matter with SOS CVI. This respondent indicated that she did not feel she was being taken very seriously by SOS CVI. She also said that at that time there were no protocols for things that went wrong. There were no codes of conduct, reporting procedures or other procedures that looked like that. It was only because of these cases in Suriname that ‘they woke up at SOS’, according to this respondent. The organisation did not yet have any guidelines. She adds that the organisation has initiated many processes over the years.

Another respondent at management level could not remember there being any policy at the time, either nationally or internationally, on abuse and on how to act in the case of reports. He said the following in this regard:

“I know there was a protocol for when you went to the villages but that was more like a safety policy. Later, when I started working for other organisations, there were real protocols regarding reports of abuse. I don’t really remember that actively in the Netherlands with SOS.”

Now, the term ‘policy’ is quite broad. According to a third respondent, who visited the Children’s Village in 2003, it was indeed ‘policy’ that the mothers should not hit the children. In practice, we see that this ‘policy’ was not put into practice. There were no consequences if one of the mothers did hit the children. This respondent explained this discrepancy by the major transition the mothers had to make, namely from a culture in which it was (more or less) accepted that physical punishment was handed out, to the rule in the Children’s Village that this was no longer allowed. She says about this:

“What was said and written down did not correspond to reality. For example, that they were not allowed to hit children, but they did. It was done by a mother. They found it hard because they had been brought up in the following way: if you do something that is not allowed, you will be beaten. In the Children’s Village, you have a certain authority and suddenly you’re not allowed to do that anymore. I do understand that it is difficult to translate this. Mothers feel relieved.”

6.3 Period between 2005 and today

A detailed description of policies between 2005 and today can be found in Annex 3. In this section, a somewhat more general analysis is described.

In 2006, SOS Children’s Villages in Suriname stopped and the village was taken over by the Prasoro Foundation. One might wonder if the events surrounding the arrest of the senior staff member in 2004 had anything to do with this closure. SOS Children’s Villages Suriname itself states in an internal document that this was not the case.

In 2008, as far as we know, the first policy document around Child Safeguarding was published. This was the ‘SOS Children’s Villages Child Protection Policy’. It describes how the organisation thinks children should be protected. Then, in 2009, the ‘Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children’ was published, developing guidelines for alternative care for children, designed to improve the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Code of Conduct was released in 2011: this is a code of conduct valid for all SOS employees. The aforementioned documents are preventive in nature. In 2016, this changed through a new policy support document (Child’s safety is everybody’s business). Child safeguarding reporting and responding procedures in member associations’ and the document ‘SOS Children’s Villages Child Safeguarding Investigations’. This document describes how to respond

to incidents around Child Safeguarding and outlines roles and responsibilities. Subsequently, in 2018, the SOS Care Promise was published in which the care promise of the organisation was formulated. Later, in 2021, in the Safeguarding Action Plan, the organisation itself states that this SOS Care Promise has not been fulfilled.

About the authors

Verinorm is a Dutch research and consultancy firm where psychologists, criminologists and lawyers with a background in research and organisational consultancy work on issues of integrity and social safety. Verinorm specialises in incident research, culture research, education and training. Often, the causes are systemic whereby the behaviours and persons that are to be investigated have acted and are acting within an organisational and cultural context. In addition to research into the facts and circumstances and violations of norms, Verinorm advises on the approach and recovery. Verinorm's clients include companies, non-profit organisations and government and semi-government organisations. The board and management are Prof. Marjan Olfers and Dr. Anton van Wijk. Verinorm complies with laws and regulations in accordance with the Regulation on Private Investigation Agencies of the Ministry of J&V (POB number 1717.).

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Annex 1 - (Policy) Documents SOS Children's Villages

These are policy documents and internal documents of SOS that have been made available to Verinorm.


Naam	Contents	Obtained through
1 SOS Children's Villages Child Protection Policy	Child safety policy document	Child_protection_policy_English_version_2017.pdf (sos-childrevillages.org)
2 Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children	Policy document on alternative care of children	101203-UN-Guidelines-en-WEB.pdf (sos-childrevillages.org)
3 Code of Conduct	Code of conduct within SOS CVI	Code of Conduct (sos-childrevillages.org)
4 Gender Equality Policy	Policy document on gender equality in the work of SOS Children's Villages	gender-english.pdf (sos-childrevillages.org)
5 SOS Children's Villages Child Safeguarding Investigations	Examine policy document on Child Safeguarding	Child safeguarding investigations (sos-childrevillages.org)
6 SOS Care Promise	Policy document with the SOS care promise	SOS_CARE_PROMISE_EN_Web.pdf (sos-childrevillages.org)
7 Child safety is everybody's business (Version 2.0)	Policy document on notification and response procedures in child protection	Child safety is everybody's business. Child safeguarding reporting and responding procedures in member associations (sos-childrevillages.org)
8 Sexual Misconduct Regulation	Regulation on prevention of and protection against sexual misconduct	PSHEA International Regulation (sos-childrevillages.org)
9 Working together to protect children	Policy document on roles and responsibilities in child protection	Working together to protect children (sos-childrevillages.org)
10 Independent Child Safeguarding Review Global Report	Research by Keeping Children Safe into Child Safeguarding and cases of abuse within SOS	ICSR-Global-Report_EN.pdf (sos-childrevillages.org)
11 (Webpage) CEO responds to ICSR - SOS Children's Villages International	CEO's response to ICSR report	CEO responds to ICSR - SOS Children's Villages International
12 Safeguarding Action Plan 2021-2024	Action plan arising from ICSR	Child-Safeguarding-Action-Plan.pdf (sos-childrevillages.org)
13 Our child safeguarding journey	Description of the journey of SOS in the context of Child Safeguarding	Child-Safeguarding-Journey.pdf (sos-childrevillages.org)

Naam	Contents	Obtained through
14 Safeguarding Action Plan - Interim Progress Report	Update on progress on actions from the Safeguarding Action Plan 2021-2024	Safeguarding-Action-Plan-Progress-Report-(July-2021-Mar-2022).pdf (sos-childrensvillages.org)
15 Child Safeguarding Annual Report 2020/2021	Annual report on Child Safeguarding	Child-Safeguarding-Annual-Report-2020-21.pdf (sos-childrensvillages.org)
SOS Kinderdorpen Jaarverslag 2020	Annual report of SOS Children's Villages Netherlands	SOS Kinderdorpen Jaarverslag 2020 by SOS Kinderdorpen Nederland - Issuu
16 (Webpagina) Report a child safety concern	Web page where an incident can be reported	https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/report-a-child-safety-concern
17 210507-Initial report received by SOS Netherlands	Internal mail correspondence SOS	Internal document
18 210520_letter from lawyer to SOS NL	Letter from a lawyer of a victim to SOS NL	Internal document
19 210524_IOR LAAM exchange with reporters	Internal mail correspondence SOS	Internal document
20 210812_letter from lawyer to SOS NL_victim2	Letter from a victim's lawyer to SOS NL	Internal document
21 Suriname040426accusations	Internal mail correspondence SOS	Internal document
22 Suriname040429Update	Internal mail correspondence SOS	Internal document
23 Suriname040719Update	Internal mail correspondence SOS	Internal document
24 Suriname040723Update	Internal mail correspondence SOS	Internal document
25 Suriname041129Update	Internal mail correspondence SOS	Internal document
26 Suriname041206Update	Internal mail correspondence SOS	Internal document
27 Actieplan Suriname 15 juli 2004	Action plan on unrest SOS Suriname	Internal document
28 Articulo de Prensa	Newspaper article	Internal document
29 Audit REP ENG 2004_SOS 3e concept update	Audit/annual accounts SOS Suriname 2004	Internal document
30 Audit Suriname 2004	Internal mail communication regarding Audit/Annual Accounts 2004	Internal document
31 Letter Suriname Dorpsvriend - notification closure	Letter to village friends about notification of closure of SOS Suriname	Internal document

Naam	Contents	Obtained through
32 CVParamaribo	Report visit SOS Suriname by communications manager SOS NL	Internal document
33 ERW-PARA	Budget for SOS Suriname plans	Internal document
34 FW Suriname	Internal mail communication regarding arrest of SOS Suriname senior staff member	Internal document
35 Interview with Mrs A Guda	Report of conversation with chairperson SOS Suriname, Mrs Guda	Internal document
36 HA-SRE-a	Overview history SOS Suriname	Internal document
37 historySOSSurinam150206(2)	Overview history SOS Suriname	Internal document
38 INVESTIGATION SURINAME April	Report of investigation into events SOS Suriname	Internal document
39 JBSR2003e	Annual Report 2003 SOS Suriname	Internal document
40 JBSR2004e	Annual Report 2004 SOS Suriname	Internal document
41 KDI_Suriname_060126	Official Statement and Q&A on closure of SOS Suriname	Internal document
42 LA_SR_en	General information on (the establishment and development of) SOS Children's Village Suriname	Internal document
43 MEMO_GS_FVNL_DSGCOLA_IOD_21022006	Internal mail SOS CVI concerning the take-over of Children's Village Suriname 2006	Internal document
44 Official Statement by SOS-Kinderdorf International – sentencing senior staff membernr 1.	Official Statement by SOS CVI following the prison sentencing of a Surinamese senior staff member	Internal document
45 persdocument 137	Crisis (press) document on unrest in SOS Suriname	Internal document

	Naam	Contents	Obtained through
46	Persverklaring suriname	Press statement about arrest of senior staff member of SOS Suriname	Internal document
47	QandA-150704-surinameDef	Q&A on unrest in SOS Suriname	Internal document
48	QandA-engelse versie	Q&A on unrest in SOS Suriname	Internal document
49	RE informatie	Internal mail correspondence SOS regarding unrest in SOS Suriname	Internal document
50	RE SOS Kinderdorp Surinam	Internal mail correspondence SOS regarding court case SOS Suriname	Internal document
51	SOSsuriname	Memo as a result of visit to SOS Suriname by communications manager SOS NL	Internal document
52	surinam060829	Amendment of Statutes of SOS Children's Villages Suriname Foundation	Internal document
53	Suriname_Statement_final041217 (1)	Official Statement by SOS CVI following the prison sentencing of a Surinamese senior staff member	Internal document
54	Timeline SU	Timeline of events concerning sexual abuse in SOS Suriname in 2004	Internal document

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Annex 3 – Safeguarding policy from 2005 until now

This appendix provides a detailed description of available policy documents around SOS children (in general) between 2005 and today. When multiple versions of a given document exist, (only) the most recent versions of these were reviewed and analysed in terms of content. Various policy documents are discussed chronologically. We distinguish between documents until 2019 and documents from 2020 onward because from 2020/2021 an increase is seen in the number of policy documents around Child Safeguarding. Moreover, from then on, the content of the documents became more concrete.

Period between 2005-2019

In 2006, SOS Children's Villages in Suriname stopped and the village was taken over by the Prasoro Foundation. This was also indicated in an official statement. On 31 January 2006, SOS sent a letter to the 'Village Friends' of SOS Children's Village Suriname. In this letter, the Friends of the Village are thanked for their contribution and the organisation indicates that they have had problems for years with finding SOS mothers in Suriname and that the village was not fully occupied "because of the small number of orphaned and abandoned children". The letter also refers to a letter from June 2005 in which a reorganisation was announced.

The Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children were published in 2009. The reason for drawing up these guidelines is the finding of the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child that many of the challenges that children (without parental care or at risk of losing it) face on a daily basis are not sufficiently understood and therefore not taken into account in practice. This recognition of the gap between children's rights and practical policy implementation inspired the committee to hold its Day of General Discussion on the topic of 'children without parental care' in 2005. It called for the development, in cooperation with states, NGOs and academics, of a set of international standards that could ultimately guide the implementation of the UNCRC. Two important basic principles for alternative care are necessity and appropriateness. General principles and perspectives are mentioned, as well as a chapter on different aspects of alternative care provision: policy, legal responsibility, inspection and supervision.

In 2011, the Code of Conduct was published. This is a code of conduct that discusses standards to stimulate ethical and professional behaviour of SOS employees. The four main values in this Code of Conduct are: courage, commitment, trust and accountability. The Code of Conduct contains several different parts. Firstly, one should (as an employee) ensure respectful and responsible behaviour. Secondly, there should be professional behaviour in relation to children, including the promotion of children's welfare and development. The third component is professional behaviour in relation to other aspects of work, such as the use of a (power) position and the use of information. Finally, the possible consequences of breaching the Code, for example disciplinary action, are also mentioned. At the bottom of the Code there is space for the employee's signature. This makes the Code a contract between the employee and the organisation.

On closer inspection, the previous policy documents have a preventive purpose. In 2016, the policy support documents were published “Child’s safety is everybody’s business” and “SOS Children’s Villages Child Safeguarding Investigations” which describe step-by-step what to do when a concern is reported. The documents outline the minimum requirements, guidelines and procedures for an investigation child safeguarding investigation and the investigation team. SOS Children’s Villages, according to the latter said document, the responsibility is to respond and act on any reported incident. When an incident or concern is reported, it is thoroughly assessed and necessary action taken. A Child Safeguarding investigation may be one of these measures. In this document roles and responsibilities of all involved are defined. For example, it is indicated how both internal Child Safeguarding investigators and Child Safeguarding investigators in member associations are selected and should be supported. Also elaborated is how an investigation should be planned and which parts are important for that plan. Attention is then paid to the conduct of the investigation, the report and to the follow-up steps to be taken as a result of such an investigation.

In 2018, the SOS Care Promise was published. This care promise defines SOS Children’s Villages’ commitment to quality care for every child in their programme. Taking a child-centred approach, this promise builds on the already existing initiatives that promote the quality of their work. It lays the foundation for ensuring consistent quality all over the world, in very diverse and often challenging circumstances. Four care foundations are mentioned: care effect (caring for children makes the world a better place), international frameworks guiding care (including the UNCRC), principles and values (child, parent, family and community), and care solutions (nine care commitments, including creating a safe environment for children in all SOS programmes). In the Safeguarding Action Plan, published in 2021 and later expanded, it is stated that in some cases the SOS Care Promise has not been fulfilled and that SOS has failed in this. This statement/conclusion is quite general: there are cases of abuse in their programmes⁵⁹ where they have failed to meet the standards they set for themselves. The promises of SOS to keep children safe, which are expressed in the SOS Care Promise, have not been fulfilled.

Reviewing the policy during this period (2005-2019), it is noticeable that the scope of the documents is quite broad. Most documents state that the document is mandatory/binding for all member associations, all staff members, all partners and all associates of SOS Children’s Villages. The Guidelines for the Alternative Care of Children has an even broader scope: it is intended for all organisations, bodies and individuals who have to implement the International Convention on the Rights of the Child. It remains unclear which person or department is responsible for (supervising) the implementation of the formulated policy and whether and what sanctions may follow in case of when a rule is ‘broken’. The Code of Conduct describes consequences of violating this Code of Conduct. It states that everyone within SOS Children’s Villages must adhere to the Code of Conduct and that the organisation will respond appropriately to a breach of it, regardless of position, status or personal relationship, and in accordance with national and local laws and/or the General Terms and Conditions of Service as defined

⁵⁹ By programmes, SOS Children’s Villages means, for example, a Children’s Village or a youth programme, social centre or medical centre.

within SOS Children's Villages. Consequences may include disciplinary action, dismissal and/or a report to national authorities such as the police. Overall, it can be said that SOS CVI has established a legal basis for ensuring the welfare of the children under its responsibility.

Period from 2020 onwards

From 2020 onwards, various (policy) documents have been published that are more concrete compared to the previous period, partly as a result of the cases of historical abuse that have come to light in various countries.⁶⁰ In March 2020, the document *Child safety is everybody's business* (Version 2.0) was made public.⁶¹ The main purpose of this document is to ensure appropriate responses and effective management of concerns around Child Safeguarding. It sets out step by step what should happen when a report is received. This document is based on the Child Protection Policy but goes into more detail about the procedures. *Sexual Misconduct Regulation* is a document published in November 2020. It is a binding regulation that defines the approach around prevention of and protection from sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse, mandatory for all member associations of SOS CVI and all offices of SOS CVI including the General Secretariat and operations carried out by the General Secretariat. The key question is how to respond to cases of (possible) sexual misconduct. Issues addressed include the scope and implementation, the approach of SOS Children's Villages towards Prevention of Sexual Harassment, Exploitation and Abuse (PSHEA), its minimum requirements and prevention, reporting and response.

A version of *Working together to protect children* was already published in March 2015 and March 2017. These older versions were not found and not reviewed and analysed. A third, updated version was published in May 2021. One of the goals of this document is to clarify responsibilities around (reporting and responding to) child protection for individual GSC staff, functions and offices. Each GSC office should be able to define its own specific procedures. Step-by-step it is explained what to do when a report of an incident is received that involves the General Secretariat. What is also covered in this document is the monitoring of the implementation of the overall Child Safeguarding approach and communication about Child Safeguarding incidents.

The General Secretariat (GSC) plays a crucial role in monitoring. One important way in which this must be done is through the so-called annual Child Safeguarding surveys. Individual member associations submit to regional offices information on their progress regarding the implementation of the minimum Child Safeguarding requirements, as described in the SOS Child Protection Policy and related documentation. The member associations also have to provide information about reported and later confirmed child safeguarding incidents. These surveys and information can then be used for further analysis higher up in the organisation. Another means by which the implementation of the overall Child Safeguarding approach and communication about Child Safeguarding incidents should be monitored is through Child Safeguarding Audits, both internal and external. These audits focus on compliance with the Child

⁶⁰ We limit ourselves to the most relevant documents (for this study).

⁶¹ This is an update of an earlier version from 2016.

Protection Policy and other policy documents. Specific attention is given to incident management. Regarding internal audits, each individual SOS programme must undergo an audit at least every three years. This audit is carried out by the national office or it can be included in the overall internal audit. Because it is also important to monitor how the General Secretariat implements the child protection procedures, it is recommended that an internal audit takes place every three years in each General Secretariat office, whether it is an International Office or Regional Office. These audits may be conducted by staff from another General Secretariat office. For reasons of transparency, independent external audits are also important when there are serious concerns about the implementation of overall child protection in a Member Association or General Secretariat office. External experts will conduct these with significant knowledge in the field of child safeguarding and child protection.

An important document is the Independent Child Safeguarding Review Global Report (ICSR), published in May/June 2021. This is a report prepared by Keeping Children Safe, an independent non-profit organisation. They set internationally recognised child protection standards that ensure that all organisations working directly for and with children have comprehensive protection measures in place. In this report, the Child Safeguarding Practices of SOS Children's Villages were examined. The study and report were commissioned by the International Senate to find ways to address the complex issue of historical abuse and improve safeguarding practice. For example, the key message is how the victims of past abuse can be supported in their journey towards healing. The report, and the conclusions it draws, are extensive and also too wide-ranging to discuss in full. A number of core conclusions are as follows: in the time frame under examination, SOS CVI did not sufficiently take into account the risks surrounding child safeguarding. By doing so, it exposed children to abuse. There are considerable gaps in the available files, leaving many questions unanswered about the abuses, including their nature and extent. In addition, whistle-blowers have been abused/threatened and, finally, it is concluded that perpetrators have not been punished or have not been punished sufficiently. In the report, Keeping Children Safe also makes the comment that they are aware of the excellent and often pioneering child protection initiatives throughout the organisation but that this is not the focus of the report.

The Safeguarding Action Plan 2021-2024 was published in June 2021. This 24-part action plan, which stems from the aforementioned Independent Child Safeguarding Review Global Report (ICSR), aims to create a safe environment in various ways. Despite the fact that legitimate documents such as the Code of Conduct and Child Protection Policy have been drafted, cases of abuse have still taken place, as the ICSR has made clear. This has prompted the creation of the Action Plan. Keeping Children Safe, for example, concludes in the ICSR that the SOS Care Promise, published in 2018, has been violated in some cases. Four ways in which the organisation wants to improve Child Safeguarding are defined in the Action Plan: prioritising support for abused people, improving overall quality of programmes, improving policies and systems relating to safeguarding children and addressing wider governance and organisational culture. In addition, eight 'key actions' are described. These are: immediate support for people who have experienced abuse, establishing an ombudsman system, establishing an incident management system, child and youth empowerment, Code of Conduct and other human

resources initiatives, implementing PSHEA regulation, establishing an Independent Special Commission and supporting high-risk countries.

In October 2021 and March 2022, the Safeguarding Action Plan - Interim Progress Report was published. This provides an update on the actions in the Safeguarding Action Plan 2021-2024. The top priority is to ensure that all immediate/direct risks to children and young people in SOS Children's Villages programmes are addressed, and to lay the foundations necessary for consistent implementation of longer-term changes in all 137 countries. For each action, there is also a table with a summary of the action, CPIs (critical performance indicator) and the progress made so far in relation to the action. To illustrate, a number of actions will be discussed. Firstly, immediate support for those who have experienced abuse, where the status is 'on track' and the CPI is described as the number of national associations that have implemented a new global guide 'Listening and Responding to Individuals Experiences of Past Child Abuse'. This will eventually have to be 106 national associations. In 2021, there were 34. The second priority action is a Global Ombudsperson. The implementation of a global ombudsperson must be done by December 2023 and the status is 'on track'. However, the status of the CPI 'national associations covered by the system by December 2023' is 'off track'. The third priority action is an incident management system for people who have experienced abuse. The first CPI has already been completed: a real-time reporting platform on child safeguarding incidents of abusive behaviour developed by the end of 2021. However, the implementation of that system at national associations (the second CPI of this action) has yet to start. The fourth, and last, prioritised action concerns child and youth empowerment. The CPI for implementing the Protective Behaviours training programme in 30 national associations is 'on track' (SOS Kinderdorpen, 2022).

The Child Safeguarding Annual Report 2020/2021 has been published by SOS CVI in November 2021. The report provides an overview of successes, challenges and lessons learned from the period November 2020 to October 2021 and highlights some notable Child Safeguarding initiatives by member associations, such as establishing an independent special committee to review previous (abuse) cases, and providing additional support to member associations in high-risk contexts. The report also includes information on the organisation's compliance with its minimum standards and procedures on Child Safeguarding. It also contains details of Child Safeguarding incidents that have taken place, who the perpetrator was and so on. Important in this period was the aforementioned Independent Child Safeguarding Review Global Report (ICSR) in which historical cases of abuse within SOS were investigated by Keeping Children Safe and mistakes in the organisation's response to them were identified (Keeping Children Safe, 2021). The ICSR was initiated by the International Senate and Child Safety is Everybody's Business (Version 2.0) was initiated by the Programme & Strategy Competence Centre of the International Office. Its preparation was led by a working group consisting of staff from member associations from all regions.

The policy documents are also broad in scope. For example, several documents state that they are mandatory for all member associations and employees of SOS Children's Villages. The Child Safeguarding Annual Report 2020/2021 contains a clear overview of which section of the report is of interest to which target group. In some documents, it is not specifically mentioned

for whom the document is intended. In contrast to the previous period, a remarkable number of documents now state who is responsible for the implementation of what is stated in the document and/or what consequences or sanctions follow if the document is violated. Everyone is responsible for the implementation of the document Child safety is everybody's business (Version 2.0), published in March 2020. Consequences are mentioned for non-compliance: "Every co-worker must report any CS incident they become aware of. This commitment is included in the employment contracts of all SOS co-workers and associates. Reports have to be made even if the identity of the perpetrator is unknown. Failure to report may result in actions against the respective co-worker or associate. All co-workers, associates and partners need to be properly informed about possible consequences of failing to report a CS incident" (SOS Children's Villages, 2020). The document Working together to protect children from May 2021 clearly states who has which responsibilities around Child Safeguarding and what the possible consequences are for not following the guidelines:

"Every staff member must report any CS incident or concern they become aware of. This commitment is included in the employment contracts of all SOS staff and associates. Reports have to be made even if the identity of the perpetrator is unknown. Failure to report may result in disciplinary actions against the respective staff member or associate. All staff, associates and partners are informed about possible consequences of failing to report a CS incident or concern" (SOS Children's Villages, 2021).

The Safeguarding Action Plan 2021-2024 indicates that new human resources policies should be developed with binding standards to ensure clarity and consistency across the Federation. Also, an Independent Special Commission should be appointed to address past and present failures, including child abuse, corruption, misuse of funds and violations of UN directives, and to safeguard regulations that protect the human rights of children and workers.

In response to the ICSR report, CEO Johansen (June 2021) states that SOS Children's Villages has renewed its public commitment to ensuring a safe environment in all their programmes.⁶² Children and young people need to be able to trust adults, but in some cases the organisation has failed to meet its own standards. They have broken their promise to keep children safe. She apologises for this and calls for people to listen to those who have been harmed and support them in the healing process. They will investigate all allegations of misconduct. She mentions some old documents and indicates that these were positive steps but have not been enough. SOS Children's Villages is going to take an honest look at past mistakes and she indicates that Safeguarding should be a fundamental aspect of SOS Children's Villages.⁶³

Many of the incidents took place before the SOS Child Protection Policy was 'released' in 2008 and the Code of Conduct was developed in 2011. Since then, SOS has put a lot of effort

62 'CEO responds to Independent Child Safeguarding Review', sos-childrensvillages.org <https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/news/ceo-responds-to-icsr>.

63 'CEO responds to Independent Child Safeguarding Review', sos-childrensvillages.org <https://www.sos-childrensvillages.org/news/ceo-responds-to-icsr>.

into Child Safeguarding. A strong point of the organisation is its willingness to learn from past mistakes and to adapt policies and procedures appropriately. In 2017, SOS obtained the Level 1 certification of the Keeping Children Safe alliance (Keeping Children Safe, 2021). The certification process is an external audit to assess the extent to which a child safeguarding framework has been developed. Child Safeguarding Audits were introduced to check compliance with the Child Protection Policy and related documents. From 2018, Annual Child Safeguarding reports have been published. In 2019, a Child Safeguarding Incident Platform was created to share high level information about incidents with shareholders. Next to this there is a whistleblowing channel to allow anonymous reporting of incidents. A pool of twenty certified Child Safeguarding investigators from all regions has been created and prevention initiatives have been established in all regions. Part of these initiatives is the provision of training programs, such as Positive Parenting.

On 6 May 2021, SOS Children's Villages published a statement indicating that they had conducted their own investigations, which had revealed worrying results.⁶⁴ There was abuse in the areas of corruption and fraud, and child safety would be at stake. Moreover, cases of abuse in the past were not taken seriously enough. Children and witnesses were not believed and perpetrators were not held accountable. SOS Children's Villages has asked external parties to investigate previous incidents in the field of child safety and integrity⁶⁵. The International Senate has also established an independent commission to investigate why policies and processes have not always been properly followed. Keeping Children Safe carried out the Independent Child Safeguarding Review (ICSR), from which specific advice was derived⁶⁶ (Keeping Children Safe, 2021). The internal report of SOS Children's Villages was also widely covered by newspapers.⁶⁷


64 'Berichtgeving naar aanleiding van uitkomsten onderzoeksrapporten over kindveiligheid en integriteit', sosKinderdorpen.nl <https://www.sosKinderdorpen.nl/nieuws/statement-kindveiligheid/>.

65 'Onafhankelijke onderzoeken en actieplan', sosKinderdorpen.nl <https://www.sosKinderdorpen.nl/over-sos-Kinderdorpen/kindveiligheid-en-integriteit/onafhankelijke-onderzoeken-en-acties/>.

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67 'Geweld en misbruik bij SOS Kinderdorpen', NOS.nl <https://nos.nl/artikel/2379639-geweld-en-seksueel-misbruik-bij-sos-Kinderdorpen>; 'Kinderen slachtoffer van misbruik en geweld bij hulporganisatie SOS Kinderdorpen', AD.nl <https://www.ad.nl/buitenland/kinderen-slachtoffer-van-misbruik-en-geweld-bij-hulporganisatie-sos-Kinderdorpen-a8299a49/>; 'Kinderen slachtoffer van seksueel misbruik en geweld bij SOS Kinderdorpen', NRC.nl <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2021/05/06/kinderen-slachtoffer-van-seksueel-misbruik-en-geweld-bij-sos-Kinderdorpen-a4042692>.

In conclusion, the above shows that over the years, the policy on tackling abuse has become more explicit on the agenda of SOS CVI. In the period that the Children's Village in Suriname was operational, no policy was developed and implemented to combat abuses such as sexual abuse. The recently developed policy has resulted in concrete steps, such as having audits carried out and having external investigations conducted into cases of historical abuse.



SOS Children's Villages is a worldwide organization that strengthens vulnerable families in the care and education of their children and gives children without family a new home within an SOS family in one of the Children's Villages. In 1972 the SOS Children's Villages Suriname opened for families in need. In 2021 SOS Children's Villages became aware of the fact that children in the care of SOS Suriname had experienced severe abuse, including sexual abuse.

Verinorm was asked to research the nature and extent of the different forms of abuse in the former Children's Villages in Suriname, which was closed in 2006. The research examined, among other things, the cultural-historical context of the Children's Village, victim and perpetrator characteristics and the consequences of the abuse for the victims.

Extensive desk research has taken place and interviews have been held with victims and other parties involved in both the Netherlands and Suriname. This research as well as the individual plans enable SOS Children's Villages to provide the victims with the help and support they need.