The importance of designing of information systems and data exchange possibilities to carry out multidisciplinary cooperation to prevent violence against children

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Abstract. **We live in a modern society where institutions have their data systems and databases. They are used to organize the internal work of the institution with the aim to serve people and the community. Almost each of the state institutions are having its own unique way to gather and collect data and it does not always mean that it is possible to connect these data or use them by all involved partners during multidisciplinary and multisectoral cooperation. Do these data systems serve people or do people "serve" them? Are these data useful and accessible to carry out research and to make policy conclusions and have cost-benefit analysis? The author is analyzing available data from the perspective of different aims of research, including cost-benefit analysis, which is not a widely used method in Latvia, especially, in the field of criminal justice. The article is also modeling the situational analysis in the case where there is a need to carry out crime prevention activities and rehabilitation for the victim of violence and how the implementation of Barnahus model can support that. How do institutions exchange data? Can they have access to the data systems and do these technologies serve the community and children? The answer is simple – the keyword is still humanity and the human aspect is still the main to make sure that data systems and databases are serving people and not vice versa.**

Keywords: Barnahus, Cost benefit analysis, Crime prevention, Data protection and exchange of data, Information systems for people, Multidisciplinary cooperation.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Conference Article is devoted to the analysis and research in connection with the implementation of Barnahus model (delivered from the Icelandic for "children's house"). Which, according to the definition given by Promise, Barnahus Network in the Council of Europe, is a child-friendly, multidisciplinary and interagency model for responding to child violence and witnesses of violence in Latvia and the importance of the design of the information systems and data exchange possibilities among institutions. Barnahus, initially brought to Europe in Iceland and Nordic countries, is well known all over EU and is now being implemented in Latvia. Recently passed changes in the Law on Protection of the Rights of the Child and regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers about the work of Barnahus in Latvia states the system and way how the program and service is implemented and cooperation is carried out between medical institutions, police and other law enforcement institutions, social service, and child care institutions.

Data about violence against children in Latvia are gathered by several institutions – NGOs, police and court system, social services and medical institutions. In order to make any conclusions, it is necessary to look for the available data in all publicly accessible databases and they are not giving the "full picture", not even in one segment (Berzina, 2023[7]). However, many researchers and policy analytics are concluding that data are fragmented (Baltic institute of Social Sciences, 2023[5]) and not comparable for policy planning. (OECD, 2023[3]) The author is also modelling the situations from possible cases in Barnahus in order to see a real application of the databases for crime prevention and if it is in the best interest of the child. It is concluded that there are a lot of gaps and weaknesses in the real situation and the need for

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human aspect is still remaining as the most important to solve the cases. It is essential that design of the information systems should be done in a way that would make it easier to use them in multisectoral cooperation.

The aim of the article is also to analyze the available information and policy documents, including the OECD (OECD, Towards a Child-Friendly Justice system in Latvia: Support to the Implementation of Barnahus in Latvia", 2023[3]), Report of the National Ombudsmen Tiesībsargs (Tiesibsargs, 2021[2]), available policy documents of the Council of Europe, European Commission and national policy documents to see what is the situation concerning the different ways and methods and evaluate the efficiency and cost-benefit analysis of the implementation of Barnahus model in Latvia. However, all of them show the necessity to improve existing practices, to gather data, and maintain data systems so that they can be used better for policy planning and to serve the community.

II.MATERIALS AND METHODS

The author is analyzing available data and research publications about violence against children from the perspective of different aims of research, including cost-benefit analysis, which is not a widely used method in Latvia, especially, in the field of criminal justice. The article is also modeling the situational analysis in the case where there is a need to carry out multidisciplinary cooperation and or rehabilitation for the victim of violence. By application of these methods we can see how Barnahus model can support crime prevention and how important is to exchange data or have access to them. During the modeling of case study of examples are provided to prove the necessity to improve existing practices as well to seek new methods and always have a personal and professional approach to each case.

III. RESULTS AND DISSCUSSION

A.WHY DATA AND DATA SYSTEMS ARE IMPORTANT FOR MULTIDISCIPLINARY COOPERATION?

Nowadays information systems and databases play an important role in any field of our lives. It is even more important in the case of multidisciplinary and multisectoral cooperation and the reasons are very simple. Cooperation needs information, but the information is available mainly online and fast pace of everyday life is asking for a quick and effective exchange of data.

Even though various statistical systems are in place in Latvia, it has been mentioned by several local and international experts that stakeholders reported concerns related to the quality of data collection and the consistency of evaluations of programs on child- friendly justice. In the latest research carried out by OECD, it was concluded that data is collected in an unsystematic fashion through a range of uncoordinated separate mechanisms, such as police and school records, as well as those kept by social services and health workers. There appears to be no systematic way through which such records are collected and utilized to inform policy development. In the meantime, Data protection laws are protecting the ideal to connect all of these data automatically, because we are talking about the sensitive data (Data protection Law of the Republic of Latvia, 2018[1]) Data are also secured and must be processed according to EU regulation (Regulation (EU) 2016/679, 2016[4]). In addition, there is room to strengthen data quality, sufficiency, and governance, particularly at the municipal level (OECD, Assessment, and recommendations for a child-friendly justice system in Latvia, 2023[3]).

Fragmentation of data and databases and also technical problems to connect and merge them are also mentioned in the most recent research carried out by the Ministry of Welfare (Baltic Institute of Social Sciences, 2023[5]). However, through the years the problem still remains unresolved and researchers and practitioners are the ones who try to make changes in the state policy.

From the point of view of specialists from the different professions in Barnahus there are several aspects:

• decision by the specialist to report the case of violence and enter the initial data in the system, for example, medical personnel (Berzina, 2023[7]);

• connection of different data in one system between specialists in the different institutions and also justification to access the data, if the systems are connected or not connected;

• technical solutions, information systems, and possibilities to seek and find information in one platform;

• human aspect is the most important – initiative to seek and ask for more information is in the best interests of the child and that is crucial.

B.CASE EXAMPLES

During the semi structured interviews multiple situations or case studies were revealed. Here are three situations concerning the multisectoral and multidisciplinary cooperation.

The first case is very simple and quite typical – ~~a~~ child A with serious injuries is in the main hospital of Riga and all the data about the health and possible violence are recorded in the electronic system of the hospital, but medical databases are not connected between the regional hospital systems nor other systems. Specialist X (court expert) is making ~~–~~expertise in the case and needs a full picture of the situation, including past situations with the child. From one point - data protection and security of sensitive data must be applied. According to the interviews with court experts, if the initiative is not taken in gathering ~~of~~ additional information, i.e. information about the previous episodes in regional hospitals or elsewhere, it might not be added to the main case and can delay the whole process. Specialist X needs to contact and write to the institutions, wait for long periods and add additional justifications to access the data and information. Result – effective investigation in the best interests of the child according to the article 3 of the UN Convention of the rights of the Child (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 2008[6]) is failing. If specialist does't practice due diligence, the case suffers even more. Of course, situations vary, but

each time human aspect and initiative to gather the information matters.

The second case (child B) is about early prevention. Social work and discussion about the united data system supporting cooperation between the several multidisciplinary players, schools, social workers, child care institutions, and other players matters a lot. It is about the national plans to further develop the national database system NPAIS (Information Support System for Juveniles) which was launched many years ago and still is not doing what it is supposed to and is not used for what it was created – to have multiple data from the different institutions. It should first signal about crime and be used for early crime prevention. In the case with ~~the~~ child B, information was needed to gather the initial information about the child, but specialists in Barnahus have no access to the system or ~~to~~ the SOPA system (Social Service Database System). Besides, there are several national systems for social services – Riga city has one system, but regions have other systems. It means, that to get to know about past situations, records from schools or social services about the family and household of the child, that could help in the early prevention of crime, all the information has to be collected manually and by the initiative of caseworker by approaching multiple specialists individually. Investigations prolong if families live in different places and it is a very common situation. It goes in total contradiction with the declared wishful thinking of the politicians about early crime prevention and policy strategies. We can't even know the total number of children at risk and another failure of this system is that specialists very often choose not to enter the data in the database because they have too many other duties and don't see the common picture of multisectoral cooperation benefits. Besides, some of the institutions still ask employees to write the same information to the partners in official letters (Ministry of Welfare, Baltic Institute of social Sciences, 2023[5]).

The third case (child C) is about forwarding data. Some information is missing that is an important part of the case. It is due to technical aspects of the program that is passing information to the regional social services. If suspicion about the crime is reported in the data system of Children Hospital by medical personnel, other specialists are supposed to be informed immediately (Berzina, 2023[7]). If the social workers receive the information and then information about child C is given to the other municipality in the region, a lot depends on specialists in the children's protection institutions and social institutions for follow-up and feedback. As mentioned above, databases are partially connected, but not fully. Not in all cases feedback or information is given back to the initial provider automatically. In the case of child C, there were multiple episodes of repeated violence that could have been prevented if there was full and precise information in the databases after the first episode. Child C came back to the hospital in Riga with even more serious wounds. The solution to these cases can only be a human aspect – making phone calls to get more details about the cases and to find out, if more information is available and why it is missing. There are two aspects that can help a child in need - the human aspect and databases that are connected and "talk" clearly to each other. Human aspect - willingness to help and have an individual approach for each case, updating the database, and checking in with a phone call can solve the case or, at least, make a difference. Unfortunately, we can't always rely on information in the database, at least not yet. Databases should be created to serve people, not the other way around.

C. COST-BENEFIT ANALYSIS

The last example is about how the data about the cost of the state services, especially, the efficiency and cost of criminal justice system work is calculated and compelled.

Cost-benefit analysis (CBA), sometimes also called benefit-cost analysis, is a systematic approach to estimating the strengths and weaknesses of alternatives. It is used to determine options that provide the best approach to achieving benefits while preserving savings in, for example, transactions, activities, and functional business requirements. A CBA may be used to compare completed or potential courses of action, and to estimate or evaluate the value against the cost of a decision, project, or policy. It is commonly used to evaluate government policy investments, what was also the need in Latvia.

It is not a widely known method in Latvia to see the impact of the investments in the development of state services. Nowadays social economic benefits for investments in the public sector are a must. However, the data must be trustful. An especially sensitive issue is cost-benefit analysis in the field of criminal justice and investigation. The first time the method was applied to measure the impact of provided support to the implementation of Barnahus in Latvia. It was done by the OECD in 2023. How long would it take to get a return on investment on the implementation of Barnahus model in Latvia?

What are the ways and challenges to overcome this and still prove the impact of investments to develop Barnahus model? How to get data in this situation when they are so fragmented and should be collected from several institutions, including law enforcement? Conducting the cost-benefit analysis of the implementation of Barnahus model is quite challenging in situations when there is no data available. Can the lack of data be considered data itself? Yes and No. Usually, there ~~are~~ is still some of the data available, for example, the average salaries of the employees in law enforcement (police, prosecutors, court experts, judges) and costs of premises and telecommunication. In the case of calculating the cost for the investigation of one case of violence against the child, these data are crucial because the benefit of the model is not only in the best interests of the child-, but also directly connected with the saving of money and time for professionals. In Latvia, no information was fully available about the average length of the case and the costs of the premises and telecommunication. According to the knowledge of the author of this article, no published attempts to measure and calculate the costs to investigate one criminal case from the very beginning to court judgment, followed by rehabilitation were ever made. Overall, modelling many situations and calculating the investments in renovation of premises and equipment for Barnahus, staff costs,

training, and other costs, social economic benefits for children, community and state are paying back. According to the OECD, investing EUR 2.8 million in providing integrated services to child victims or witnesses of abuse and violence can generate EUR 5.5. million in socio-economic benefits over 20 years.

Taking into account the above-mentioned information, the author can fully agree with another conclusion from the research carried out by OECD recently published research is that the uneven quality of data also poses a challenge to the capacity of policymakers and institutions to ensure that child protection and child justice programmes and services are informed by high quality evidence and analysis (OECD, Assessment and recommendations for a child – friendly justice system in Latvia, 2023[3]).

CONCLUSIONS

A. Fragmented data are not helpful for multisectoral cooperation, neither they help to prevent crime or its investigation;

B. Even with the best designed databases, the human aspect to enter data, to ask and compare information is crucial;

C. Design of the information systems should follow the needs of the client and possibilities to connect them among institutions in one field of work;

D. Resources of IT design and maintaining of services should be merged to serve the needs of the community;

E. No data are also a data and show the lack of policy planning and calculation of the costs to have more efficient state service;

F. Cost benefit method is not widely used to measure the impact and effectiveness of law enforcement work to investigate cases of violence against children.

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