

## **Preventing Child Maltreatment in Los Pipitos**

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in Nicaraguan Local Facilities of Los Pipitos  
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### **Abstract**

Child maltreatment can lead to all sorts of short- and long-term consequences. Los Pipitos would like to minimise the risk of maltreatment in their organisation by developing and implementing a Child Protection Policy. In order to facilitate Los Pipitos' development of this policy, the current study explores to what extent the situation of the local facilities of Los Pipitos are able to prevent child maltreatment. The Situational Crime Prevention (SCP) model has been used as a guide to analyse the local facilities. The main focus of this model is to decrease opportunities to commit crime by implementing four strategies: increasing effort, increasing risk, controlling prompts and reducing permissibility. Each strategy includes different techniques. The data has been collected through observations of seven local facilities and 13 interviews with staff members. The main results show that the local facilities of Los Pipitos only apply the strategy controlling prompts completely. The other three strategies are partly applied, because some techniques are still missing or are not applied sufficiently. The fact that all strategies are seen, indicates that Los Pipitos does prevent child maltreatment in the facilities to some extent. To ensure the full protection of children in the local facilities, improvements are needed.

*Keywords:* child maltreatment, Situational Crime Prevention model, Nicaragua

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## Preventing Child Maltreatment in Los Pipitos

Child maltreatment can have great personal impacts in various ways. These include behavioural problems, physical and mental health problems and problems in social and cognitive skills (Helander, 2011; Felitti & Anda, 2010; WHO, 2002; 2013). The estimates for child maltreatment worldwide are high. For example, Helander (2011) estimated that 50% of the world's population has been sexually, physically and/or emotionally maltreated before their eighteenth birthday. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), 20% of women and 5 to 10% of men have been sexually abused as a child. Moreover, 25 to 50% of children indicate that they are being physically abused (WHO, 2013).

In some countries, maltreatment is more common than in other countries. One of the countries in which it is common is Nicaragua, a developing country in Central America. Violence within families and the community is not unusual. The prevailing culture in this country is also known as a macho culture, wherein men are often described as *machistas*. Men use violence within the household regularly, not only toward their wives but also to discipline their children (Castillo et al., 2006; Lourdes Bolaños et al., 2008).

In order to fight child maltreatment in Nicaragua, different Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) give attention to the prevention of child maltreatment (Child Hope, 2013; Keeping Children Safe, 2013; Terre des Hommes, 2013; War Child, 2013), including Los Pipitos. This organisation supports the development of children with a disability with the involvement of their parents (Los Pipitos, 2013). In order to ensure the safety of disabled children within Los Pipitos, they began developing a Child Protection Policy in 2013<sup>1</sup>. This study will contribute to their further development of the Child Protection Policy. It will give an overview of the current child protection strategies that are being applied in order to prevent child maltreatment within the organisation. In this qualitative study, the focus is on local facilities of Los Pipitos. These are located throughout Nicaragua, where direct help is offered to children<sup>2</sup>. The research question is: *'To what extent is the situation of the local facilities of Los Pipitos able to prevent child maltreatment?'*

In the next section of this thesis, a brief description of the organisation Los Pipitos is given. Then the theoretical background will follow with the consequences of child maltreatment, the causes of child maltreatment in Nicaragua, child maltreatment in organisations and finally situational crime prevention of child maltreatment. After the

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<sup>1</sup> Verbal communication Harold Urbina and Zuinglio Carcache (2013, February 7)

<sup>2</sup> Verbal communication Harold Urbina and Zuinglio Carcache (2013, February 7)

theoretical background, the method of this qualitative study will be described. Results will be discussed next and the conclusion and discussion section will end the study.

## **Los Pipitos**

Los Pipitos is a parents-managed organisation and is committed to integrating disabled children into society with equal opportunities to other children (Los Pipitos, 2007a). The mission of Los Pipitos is that parents, family members and friends of children with a disability work together in a Los Pipitos formation. Los Pipitos' goal is to educate other families, national and international communities and governmental institutions on the human rights of disabled people with the purpose of improving the general development of disabled children and improving the quality of their lives (Los Pipitos, 2007b).

The organisation consists of facilities on different levels and with different activities: a chapter, local facility (CET), regional facility (CRRET) and the main institute (IMPP). The smallest component is the chapter, and raises awareness in the community about children with disabilities. Parents work as volunteers within this formation. The local facility provides services to disabled children from the local area. Their main focus is early stimulation for children under the age of six. However, older children and adults are not excluded. An important characteristic of the local facility is that parents participate in treatment of their children. Parents of disabled children and sometimes professionals run these facilities. In addition to the services provided by the local facility, the bigger regional facility can also diagnose children. The biggest and most specialised facility of Los Pipitos is the institute in Managua. In this facility, most of the diagnoses are done and many professionals are employed. In this research, the focus will be on local facilities with the reason that local facilities are the most common facility within Los Pipitos and are most of the time organised by the community.

## **Theoretical Background**

### **Consequences of Child Maltreatment**

The concept of child maltreatment can be understood in different ways. To describe child maltreatment, the WHO (2013) used the following definition:

Child maltreatment, sometimes referred to as child abuse and neglect, includes all forms of physical and emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect, and exploitation that results in actual or potential harm to the child's health,

development or dignity. Within this broad definition, five subtypes can be distinguished – physical abuse; sexual abuse; neglect and negligent treatment; emotional abuse; and exploitation ('Child Maltreatment,' para1).

Maltreatment during childhood can have major consequences for physical and mental health, social skills, cognitive skills and behaviour (Helander, 2011; Felitti & Anda, 2010; WHO, 2012). Physical injuries, such as burns and bruises, are examples of short-term consequences of maltreatment. Injuries can be a result of, for example, slapping and burning (Hettiaratchy & Dziewulsky, 2004; Maguire, Mann, Sibert, & Kemp, 2005).

Another health consequence of maltreatment is stress, which interferes with the early brain development of a child (Bremner & Vermetten, 2001; Wilson, Hansen, & Li, 2011). Due to disruption in brain development, children with a history of maltreatment have a higher risk of developing behavioural, physical and mental health problems (Helander, 2011; WHO, 2013). Problems such as obesity (Boynton-Jarrett, Rosenberg, Palmer, Boggs, & Wise, 2012; Mamun et al., 2008), risky sexual behaviour (Felitti & Anda, 2010), alcohol and drug abuse (Cheng & Lo, 2010; Dube et al., 2006; Dube et al., 2003; Schäfer, Schnack, & Soyka, 2000) and involvement in violent crimes (Swanston et al., 2003) are common. Furthermore, men and women who have been sexually abused can suffer from various health problems: chronic fatigue, headaches, indigestion (Taylor & Jason, 2001), medical illnesses, poor physical functioning and physical pain (Leseman & Drossman, 2007; Maniglio, 2009). In addition, such persons have a higher risk of becoming infected with sexually transmitted diseases (Kawsar, Anfield, Walters, McCabe, & Forster, 2004; Maniglio, 2009), experiencing menstruation problems (Taylor & Jason, 2001) and having chronic pain in the pelvic area (Leseman & Drossman, 2007).

Maltreatment can have a negative effect on a child's cognitive functioning and school performance (Goodman, Quas, & Ogle, 2009; Mills et al., 2009; Schury & Kolassa, 2012; WHO, 2013). Additionally, physical abuse can cause more aggressive behaviour in later life, and neglect can lead to emotional regulation problems (Lee & Hoaken, 2007). Moreover, child maltreatment creates a higher likelihood of becoming addicted to alcohol and drugs (Cheng & Lo, 2010; Dube et al., 2006; Dube et al., 2003; Schäfer et al., 2000), a greater chance of committing or attempting suicide (Brown et al., 2009; Ystgaard, Hestetun, Loeb, & Mehlum, 2004), a higher risk of engaging in criminal behaviour in later life (Engqvist & Rydelius, 2007; Rebellon & Van Gundy, 2005; Swanston, 2003) and a bigger chance of dying prematurely (Brown et al., 2009; Lee & White, 2012).

In summary, child maltreatment has big personal consequences in the short and long term. This demonstrates the social relevance of studying how to improve protection within children's organisations.

### Causes of Child Maltreatment in Nicaragua

Nicaragua has a high percentage of sexual abuse and physical violence within the household (Castillo et al., 2006; Lourdes Bolaños et al., 2008; Olsson et al., 2000; República de Nicaragua Ministerio de Salud, 2007). A study by Olsson and colleagues (2000) showed that 20% of men and 26% of women have been sexually abused before their 18th birthday. A third of the men and two-thirds of the women indicated that this type of violence was mainly carried out by a family member. The average age of these victims was 10 years old when the first sexual abuse occurred. The rate of physical punishment in order to discipline children is high among Nicaraguan parents (Castillo et al., 2006). Even though physical punishment is more frequent in rural areas (38.9%), the percentage of physical punishment in urban areas is also high (30.7%) (Castillo et al., 2006; República de Nicaragua Ministerio de Salud, 2007).

To explain the causes of maltreatment, the *ecological model* of Bronfenbrenner (1986) is increasingly being used among researchers. This model shows that child development is influenced by a reciprocal process, meaning that not only the environment has an influence on a child, but the child affects the environment as well.

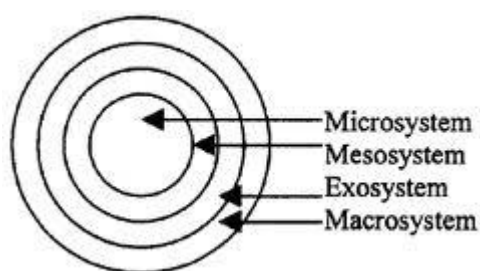


Figure 1. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model

The ecological model distinguishes four layers that represent the environment of a person (see Figure 1). The first layer, known as the *microsystem*, depicts the child's direct relationships, like family and school. The second layer, the *mesosystem*, shows the relationships between the microsystems, such as the relationship between a parent and a teacher. The *exosystem* is the third layer. This system represents the context wherein the child does not have an active role. This includes the broader area where the parents of a child live,



the working conditions of the parents and the network of the parents. The last layer is the *macrosystem*. This is the largest system and describes the political and social structures of a country, such as religion, poverty or the presence of war. All these layers of the ecological model affect the development of a child (Belsky, 1980, 1993; Belsky & Jaffee, 2006; Bronfenbrenner, 1986).

For this thesis, the ecological model is used to describe and explain the possible causes of violence towards children in Nicaragua. First of all, the macrosystem includes the political and cultural circumstances. A macho culture dominates in Nicaragua, wherein men are often described as *machistas*. This dominant behaviour can lead to violence within the household, as women are often seen as inferior to men (Lourdes Bolaños et al., 2008). Furthermore, poverty increases the risk of child maltreatment (Freisthler, 2004; Freisthler et al., 2006; Freisthler, Midanik, & Gruenewald, 2004; Freisthler, Needell, & Gruenewald, 2005). Nicaragua is one of the poorest countries in Latin America and almost half of the inhabitants live below the poverty line (World Bank, 2013; World Food Program, 2013). The combination of the macho culture and a high poverty level in Nicaragua impacts the amount of child maltreatment in the country.

Within the exosystem and mesosystem, the neighbourhoods where children grow up can be described. Different environmental factors influence the risk of child maltreatment (Freisthler et al., 2006; Kohen, Leventhal, Dahinten, & McIntosh, 2008; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000) such as a poor neighbourhood, unemployment, poorly educated neighbours, no adult supervision, many vacant houses and easy access to alcohol and drugs (Freisthler, 2004; Freisthler et al., 2004, 2005, 2006; Kohen et al., 2008; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000). Many of these features are characteristics of various villages and cities in Nicaragua. First, various cities and villages are very poor (Human Development Reports, 2011; World Bank, 2013; World Food Program, 2013). In addition, the education that children receive is of poor quality. Thirteen percent of the children cannot read nor write. Although the amount of children going to school is increasing, 16% still do not receive primary education, and 34% do not go to secondary school (Child Info, 2013; UNICEF, 2013). Furthermore, various young people are unemployed (Human Development Reports, 2011). In conclusion, the different features of meso- and exosystems that contribute to child maltreatment in Nicaragua are poor neighbourhoods, low quality of education and youth unemployment.

Within the microsystem the environment and children directly influence each other (Belsky, 1980). Normally, the closest relationship a child has is with his or her parents. Different factors of a parent such as a low income (Bugental & Happaney, 2004), low-income

stress (Conger et al., 2002; Yeung, Linver, & Brooks-Gunn, 2002), a lower educational level, alcohol and/or drug addiction and no work are possible risk factors for parental child maltreatment (Belsky & Jaffee, 2006). Not only do parental characteristics influence maltreatment, but also children themselves can influence maltreatment (Belsky & Jaffee, 2006). A child has a greater risk to be maltreated when he or she is born prematurely, has a low birth weight, is a cry-baby or has a disability (Belsky & Jaffee, 2006; Sullivan & Beech, 2002). Furthermore, poor countries have a high percentage of children born with a disability due to poverty, bad hygiene and malnutrition (Liliane Fonds, 2013; UNICEF & University of Wisconsin, 2008). Not only parents, but also organisations such as Los Pipitos have close and direct contact with a child, as children spend a lot of their time there.

### **Child Maltreatment within Organisations**

This thesis discusses maltreatment within different local facilities of Los Pipitos in Nicaragua. Therefore, child maltreatment within organisations will be briefly described. Although maltreatment mainly occurs within families, organisations that work with children are also vulnerable to maltreatment. Recently, cases of abuse within organisations have been in the news. An example is the abuse case in a childcare centre in Amsterdam, where Robert M. abused over 50 children (Elsevier, 2010) and other examples are the various abuse cases worldwide within the Catholic Church (NOS, 2013; Nu.nl, 2012). Within organisations, sexual abuse is particularly committed by non-family members (Higgins, 2004; Irenyi, Bromfield, Beyer, & Higgins, 2006).

Research on child maltreatment within organisations is still in its infancy, and most studies focus on sexual abuse. Little research is available on physical and emotional maltreatment and neglect within organisations (Higgins, 2004; Irenyi et al., 2006). What is known, however, is that children who are maltreated usually perceive multiple types of maltreatment and abuse (Bromfield & Higgins, 2005; Higgins, 2004). In addition, children who are maltreated by family are more likely to be maltreated by non-family members in organisations (Bromfield & Higgins, 2005). An explanation for this is that the effects of previous maltreatment on the psychological development of the child increase high-risk behaviours (such as being a cry-baby or having a disability) (Bromfield & Higgins, 2005).

Various studies have shown that boys are generally more physically maltreated than girls. However, on average girls are more sexually abused than boys (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2004; Sobsey, Randall, & Parrila, 1997). Nevertheless, boys more often experience sexual abuse by non-family members (Bagley & Pritchard, 2000), and boys with a disability

receive more physical and sexual abuse and neglect than girls with a disability (Sobsey et al., 1997). These studies show that it is important that organisations that work with children consider that both boys and girls can be victims of child maltreatment, in particular children with disabilities (Irenyi et al., 2006; Sullivan & Beech, 2002).

### **Situational Crime Prevention of Child Maltreatment**

In order to prevent child maltreatment, possible causes need to be minimised. A theory that is known for crime prevention is the *situational crime prevention* (SCP) model (Clarke, 1995). The key element within this theory is the interaction between the crime and the situation. Environmental factors, such as an anonymous environment and no supervision, can influence a person's decision of whether or not he or she to commit a crime. SCP is based upon reducing these situational factors in order to decrease opportunities (Clarke, 1995). SCP originally focused on property crime, for example robbery and theft (Clarke, 1995). However, this approach is increasingly being used for different kinds of crime. Sexual abuse is one of them (Wortley & Smallbone, 2006). According to Beyer, Higgins, and Bromfield (2005) little research has been done in regard to environmental factors in relation to other kinds of maltreatment. Yet the core principles of the SCP-model have a general set up so that it can be applied to various sorts of crimes (Clarke, 1997). When the SCP-model is applied to sexual abuse, Wortley and Smallbone (2006) distinguished four strategies: increasing effort, increasing risk, controlling prompts and reducing permissibility, each with different techniques. Table 1 shows the strategies and techniques of the SCP-model with each of them explained below. Every strategy and technique has a number in the text that matches the numbers in the tables in order to create a clear overview.

**Increasing effort (1).** By increasing effort, it will become harder for potential perpetrators to abuse children. Generally, it is argued that perpetrators of sexual abuse will choose children to whom they have easy access to and children are vulnerable in this respect (Colton, Roberts, & Vanstone, 2010). In addition, research has shown that sexual abuse that occurs in an institutional context is mainly in response to the opportunity that arises rather than as a result of planned employment within the organisation (Wortley & Smallbone, 2006). Research by Colton and colleagues (2010) showed that perpetrators of sexual abuse not only know the vulnerability of the children but also the vulnerability of the organisation. Perpetrators were particularly interested in organisations that would give them easy access. Techniques within the increasing effort strategy include controlling access, target hardening and controlling tools.

Applying controlling access (1.1.) to the institutional setting may be achieved through regulating access for visitors (e.g. visitors report, guard) in order to create predictability and a feeling of safety (Hoffman, Fainstein, & Judd, 2003). Controlling access can also be achieved by screening employees and volunteers for previous convictions relevant to maltreatment (Westcott & Jones, 1999; Wortley & Smallbone, 2006; Wurtele & Miller-Perrin, 1992, in Kaufman, Hayes, & Knox, 2010). In addition to a formal background check, a structured interview process should follow (Wurtele & Miller-Perrin, 1992, in Kaufman et al., 2010).

Target hardening (1.2.) should consist of educating children and youth on how to be assertive and to say 'no'. Several meta-analyses suggest that children who participated in such educational programs showed more protective behaviour in comparison to children who did not participate (Daro, 1994; Rispens, Aleman, & Goudena, 1997; Zwi et al., 2007). Research on perpetrators found that when a child is assertive, this could lead to a change in the perpetrator's behaviour (Colton et al., 2010; Smallbone & Wortley, 2001, 2000).

Another way to increase effort is by controlling tools (1.3.) in order to increase the effort required to maltreat a child. An example that Wortley & Smallbone (2006) gave is having regular audits of Internet use to scan for pornography to decrease the opportunity for sexual abuse. Nineteen percent of offenders use pornography to either arouse curiosity in victims (Wortley & Smallbone, 2006) or as an aphrodisiac before offending (Marshall, 1988).

**Increasing risk (2).** Risk of detection plays a role in whether to commit a crime. The increasing risk strategy increases the likelihood that the perpetrators' behaviour is detected. Different techniques within this strategy can be distinguished: extending guardianship, strengthening formal surveillance and increasing natural surveillance (Cornish & Clarke, 2003).

A parent or caregiver has an important role in safeguarding a child. Therefore, within the extending guardianship technique (2.1.), educational programs can be implemented to inform parents and caregivers about the importance of supervision and protection of children (Wortley & Smallbone, 2006). The programs' content should not only focus on the risks posed by strangers, but also on the risks posed by the people within the social sphere of the parents and children, since most maltreatment occurs by someone the child knows and trusts (Sullivan, Knutson, & Ashford, 2010). Within an institutional setting, the institution is responsible for the behaviour of staff members. Supervising staff is another example of extending guardianship within an organisation (Wortley & Smallbone, 2006).

A way to increase the risk is by strengthening formal surveillance (2.2.). This includes regular third-party inspections and reviews. Also the use of closed-circuit television cameras

around the institution that record behaviour of staff members could be applied.

Increasing natural surveillance (2.3.) can be done by applying certain physical features that increase supervision. Examples of this technique are the use of well-lit rooms and glass panels.

**Controlling prompts (3).** This strategy identifies and removes situational triggers. An example of a situational trigger for a perpetrator to offend could be doing intimate activities, like washing a child. The personality of a child, such as a short temper and aggressiveness, can trigger a person to maltreat a child (Administration for Children and Families, 2006; Belsky & Jaffee, 2006; Sullivan & Beech, 2002). Training about alternative solutions on how to discipline a child could be provided (Theoklitou, Kabitsis, & Kabitsi, 2012), and a clear policy on what the organisation stands for and follows is important.

**Reducing permissibility (4).** This strategy includes different techniques, such as clarifying responsibility (4.1.), rule setting (4.2.), clarifying consequences (4.3.) and personalising clients (4.4.) (Wortley, 2001). These techniques reduce permissibility as perpetrators may excuse their behaviour (Sykes & Matza, 1957). Wortley and Smallbone (2006) came up with some suggestions for organisations within this strategy: utilisation of an explicit code of conduct and the possibility for clients to complain. Training staff in what is allowed and what is not allowed is important as well, as studies show that the kind of attitude a person has towards corporal punishment influences the effectiveness of the protection of a child (Ashton, 2000). For example, when a person approves of corporal punishment, the chance exists that he or she will not respond in a direct manner to incidents of maltreatment (Ashton, 2000). In addition, training staff can create a more open culture about maltreatment and an increased willingness to report suspicious circumstances (Beyer et al., 2005).

In summary, possible causes of child maltreatment are diverse and depend on what situational opportunities an organisation unconsciously offers. The SCP-model can be applied to the situation of Los Pipitos as this model has its focus on a setting or place (Welsh, 2010). Kaufman and colleagues (2010) described how the SCP-model fits within an organisation:

The added value is in the fact that it also considers the potential contributions of the characteristics and location of the setting, relevant policies and regulations, routine activities of individuals using the setting, and other possible facilitator that may increase the risk of sexual violence (pp.2).

The way Los Pipitos has arranged its policies, regulations and activities in local facilities can influence the opportunities to maltreat

*Table 1. SCP-model of sexual abuse*

<b>Strategy</b>	<b>Technique</b>
<b>1.Increasing effort</b>	1.1.Controlling access 1.2.Target hardening 1.3.Controlling tools
<b>2.Increasing risk</b>	2.1.Extending guardianship 2.2.Strengthening formal surveillance 2.3.Increasing natural surveillance
<b>3.Controlling prompts</b>	
<b>4.Reducing permissibility</b>	4.1.Clarifying responsibility 4.2.Rule setting 4.3.Clarifying consequences 4.4.Personalizing clients

### **Method**

In order to study to what extent the situation of the local facilities of Los Pipitos are able to prevent child maltreatment, a field study in Nicaragua was carried out. The data collection was organised from the 6<sup>th</sup> of February until the 1<sup>st</sup> of May. A total of seven local facilities were observed and 13 interviews of staff members (employees and volunteers) from 10 local facilities were carried out. The strategies and techniques of the SCP-model were used as guidance during the observations and interviews (see Table 1). The transcripts of the interviews and observations are analysed in de data-analysis-program Nvivo. The goal of this research is to inform and support Los Pipitos in developing their policy concerning child protection against maltreatment within the organisation.

More than 50 local facilities of Los Pipitos exist in Nicaragua (Los Pipitos, 2013). To get a general view of the local facilities, a wide variety of facilities were approached. The local facilities were located in rural and urban areas throughout Nicaragua, and the size of the facilities varied from small to large. The data-collection methods (interviews and observations) are described below.

### **Semi-structured Interviews**

In total 13 individual interviews with staff members of the various local facilities were carried out. Due to the sensitive topic, visits to the local facility were done twice. The goal of the first day was for researchers and interviewees to get acquainted with one another and to do the first observation. During the second day, the interview was done and a second observation of the local facility was carried out. Furthermore, the interviews were conducted in an isolated and quiet room, in order to guarantee the interviewees' privacy.

Each interview began with an introduction and was followed by semi-structured questions, so that interviewees had the opportunity to talk about their own opinions and experiences. A checklist of strategies and techniques of the SCP-model (see Table 1) was used as guidance during the interviews and observations. An example of a semi-structured question used during the interview is: *'What could the institute of Los Pipitos do for this local facility in order to protect the children?'*

### **Free Observation**

The observation served two purposes: to check what was said in the interviews and to gain extra information about the local facility as little was known about these facilities. Observations were carried out for at least an hour in order to minimise the observation-bias (Baarda, de Goede, & Teunissen, 2009) as the observers had a non-participating role.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Reliability means that the results are not obtained by accidental circumstances and that the results are representative of the reality (Baarda et al., 2009; Boeije, 2010). In this study, various barriers were experienced. First of all, the interviews were held in Spanish, which created some difficulties in understanding. Reason for this is that even though the level of Spanish of the interviewers was advanced, interviewees spoke with Nicaraguan accents. In order to minimise problems caused by language, two techniques were used. Firstly, researchers made a complete list of topics and key words, such as *suspicious circumstances* and *protocol of acceptable behaviour* in Spanish. The second technique was to use a dictaphone during the interviews, so that conversations could be transcribed for maximum understanding.

Another difficulty in collecting reliable answers was the sensitivity of the topic child maltreatment. In order to decrease social desirability, *triangulation* of instruments was used. This means the use of more than one research instrument (Baarda et al., 2009; Boeije, 2010).

A third factor that could affect reliability is that interpretations of interviews and observations are personal. Results depend on the insights and personal character of the researcher. To diminish personal influences, *inter-interviewer* and *inter-observer-reliability* were used. Interpretations and thoughts about the observations and the interviews were independently evaluated by the two researchers (Baarda et al., 2009).

*Internal validity* means that the design of the study describes the reality correctly (Baarda et al., 2009; Boeije, 2010). The first possible problem concerning the validity is that each local facility was visited twice for a relatively short period of time. The risk of seeing just a snapshot of each facility is that some information is not observed. This could affect the results. A second risk is the presence of the researchers. They were strangers for the staff members, parents and children at the local facility. This presence could affect the behaviour of attendees and therefore the measurements and results. In order to increase the validity, triangulation in instruments and in researchers was used, and the local facilities were visited twice. In addition, researchers observed the local facilities in such a way that working conditions for parents and staff members were not disturbed during the observations.

Finally, *external validity* means to what extent the results are generalizable (Baarda et al., 2009; Boeije, 2010). Due to the broad variety of visited local facilities, the research is expected to be generalizable to other local facilities of Los Pipitos. However, results are not applicable to other Los Pipitos' facilities, because the study only has been conducted within local facilities.

## **Ethics**

During the research, ethics were taken into account. First, all observations and interviews were conducted anonymously. Furthermore, researchers worked with *informed consent*, which means that the participants knew what would happen with the information and agreed to that (Baarda et al., 2009; Boeije, 2010). In addition, participants allowed recording of interviews and agreed to pictures being taken during the observations. Finally, the observations did not disrupt therapies, as employees and parents were able to continue their work and treatment during the observations (Baarda et al., 2009; Boeije, 2010).



## Results

In total, seven local facilities in urban and rural settings were visited where observations were carried out and ten interviews with staff members were conducted. Three extra interviews were held with staff members of three other local facilities. However, the results are mainly based on the information obtained from the seven local facilities, as no observations were possible in the other three local facilities. Therefore these three interviews were used as additional information.

The section below describes the results found per technique of the strategies of the SCP-model. Each technique consists of one or more topics. In order to make an overview, the findings are carefully summarised in tables. A three-point-scale is used to determine whether a strategy, technique or topic is not applied (-), partly applied (+/-) or applied (+).

### Increasing Effort (1)

This strategy focuses on increasing the effort for a potential perpetrator to maltreat a child in an organisation. The results of the three techniques within this increasing effort strategy are presented in table and described per technique.

*Table 2.* Increasing effort strategy per visited local facility

<b>Increasing Effort</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>Result</b>
<b>Controlling access</b>	Visitors	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	Staff members	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Target hardening</b>	Assertiveness	/	/	/	/	/	/	/	/
	Other trainings	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
<b>Controlling tools</b>	Audits internet use	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+

**Controlling access (1.1).** Information was collected in order to see how local facilities controlled access for visitors and staff members. All local facilities had certain ways of controlling access for visitors and therefore scored well on this topic. All the facilities had gates that were closed, however not locked. One local facility used a guard during the day. Although most local facilities did not have security at the gate, most of them had the office or working area located right at the entrance (see Image 1), except for two (see Image 2). Visitor's reports were not present in any of the local facilities besides one.



Image 1: Office at entrance



Image 2: Open area before arriving at LP

Local facilities did not control access for staff members. No history or reference checks were carried out. One local facility mentioned asking for a c.v. as a check up. The reason the interviewees gave for not performing a check was that finding volunteers is already difficult as it is: *'Any references? No! That is not right, because they don't get a salary. They come as volunteers. Why should we ask for a curriculum? We are not going to ask that, because if we would ask for a curriculum, their papers, their studies,... then they should get a payment, a salary. It is not right to ask them for that.'*

In summary, the technique controlling access was considered as partly applied. Controlling access for visitors was present whilst controlling access for staff members was non-existent.

**Target hardening (1.2.).** All local facilities informed children in different subjects. Subjects included sexuality, self-respect, body-concept and independency. The information was given by staff members either directly or indirectly to the child. Direct information was given by staff members to children individually or in groups. Indirect information was given to parents, with the purpose of passing it to their children. Information about sexuality was mostly given via parents and sometimes directly to youth. Interviewees mentioned the difficulty talking about sexuality with parents. Explicit assertiveness information for children was not mentioned by any of the interviewees.

Overall, the target hardening technique was partly applied. Although no interviewee mentioned training assertiveness, information about different subjects was provided either directly or indirectly to children. Nevertheless, information about maltreatment within the organisation was not given to children, parents or staff members.

**Controlling tools (1.3.).** The technique 'controlling tools' aims to decrease the possibility of sexual abuse by regulating Internet use. Computers were only seen in two local

facilities. As no computer had Internet the controlling tools technique was not applicable to the local facilities.

### Increasing Risk (2)

The purpose of this strategy is to increase the risk for a potential perpetrator of getting caught. The results of the three techniques of the increasing risk strategy are presented in Table 3 and described below.

Table 3. Increasing risk strategy per visited local facility

Increasing Risk		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Result
<b>Extending guardianship</b>	Awareness raising	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Supervising staff	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	Supervision children	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	Supervision visitors	+	-	-	+	+	+	+	+
<b>Strengthening formal surveillance</b>	Third party check	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Guard	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Increasing natural surveillance</b>	Physical features	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	Safe area	+	-	+	+	+	+	-	+

**Extending guardianship (2.1).** Both staff members and parents did not receive any awareness trainings about the utility of supervision in order to prevent maltreatment in the organisation. Even though there was no awareness raising about supervision, supervision was always carried out. Staff members were supervised in all local facilities by either another staff member or by parents when working with children. Most supervision was carried out without the intention of supervising and checking each other (informal), such as the next comment explains: *'In general I am always with the mothers, mothers are always with me, I am never alone with a child'*. A formal supervisor did not exist in the local facilities as nobody was present with the intention to supervise staff. Moreover, all children were supervised due to the reason that parents were constantly present during treatments. This was difference for youth though as they came alone. Youth were always in groups nonetheless. Finally, visitors were not constantly supervised in four of the seven local facilities.

In summary, the technique extending guardianship was applied. Information about the importance of supervision was not provided to either staff members or parents. Informal supervision of staff members and children was carried out by staff members and parents. Supervision of visitors and formal supervision of staff was lacking in most of the local facilities.

**Strengthening formal surveillance (2.2).** The police played a surveillance role at one local facility. The reasons for this were a dangerous area and to keep a close relationship with the police. The same local facility made use of a guard during the day. Overall, the strengthening formal surveillance technique was not applied. Most local facilities did not have any formal surveillance.



*Images 3 and 4: Open and spacious working areas*

**Increasing natural surveillance (2.3).** The majority of the visited local facilities had a cheerful, bright and open building. A spacious and transparent main area characterized all local facilities. The doors were open and windows were always present (see Images 3 and 4). Even though most local facilities had open and transparent rooms, four local facilities did have extra rooms for individual psychotherapy and these were smaller and darker. Not all local facilities were located in safe neighbourhoods, whereas with one of them the treatments got actually affected by the danger outside as children got yelled at and thrown at with stones by strangers.

In summary, the increasing natural surveillance technique was applied. Most local facilities had transparent and spacious areas and were located in a safe neighbourhood.

### Controlling Prompts (3)

The purpose of this strategy is to identify and remove situational triggers. Four topics that could reduce triggers of maltreatment are presented in the Table 4 and described below.

Table 4. Controlling prompts strategy per visited local facility

Controlling Prompts	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Result
Decrease intimacy	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Separation	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Information disciplining	/	/	-	/	/	/	/	-
No alone time	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+

First of all, intimate activities with children were minimized. Although intimate activities, such as massages and changing diapers, were observed, the activities were mainly carried out by parents and in public. Furthermore, in every local facility children and youth were separated. They were scheduled on either different times during the day, on different days, or in different rooms. None of the local facilities mentioned provision of information about how to discipline children. One interviewee reported that this kind of training would be helpful; as she described it: *'There is a lack in solutions'*. The last prompt is being alone with a child, which was minimized by the presence of the parents during their child's treatment. Youth got treatments in group form in all facilities. Only psychotherapy was given individually: *'A psychologist comes every Tuesday and works while I am working over there. She is here alone with a child, because with these children you have to work alone.'*

In summary, the controlling prompts strategy was applied, because employees did not carry out intimate activities, children and youth were separated, and children were never alone since youth always worked in groups and parents accompanied their children. However, information about disciplining children was not provided to staff members.

### Reducing Permissibility (4)

The strategy tries to reduce the permissibility of maltreatment, which means that perpetrators cannot justify their behaviour. The four techniques of reducing permissibility are shown in Table 5 and described below.

Table 5. Reducing permissibility strategy per visited local facility

Reducing Permissibility		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	Conclusion
<b>Clarifying responsibility</b>	Information maltreatment	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	External Contact	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	Internal support	+	+	/	+	+	/	/	+
<b>Rule setting</b>	Code of Conduct	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Protocol behaviour	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Alternative	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
<b>Clarifying consequences</b>	Clarifying consequences	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Personalizing clients</b>	Know all children	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	Possibility complaining	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+

**Clarifying responsibility (4.1.).** Within the interviews, three ways of determining responsibilities in case of maltreatment were spoken about. Firstly, as is shown in Table 5, staff members and parents did not receive any training or information about their responsibilities in case of maltreatment occurring in the local facility. Moreover, no information about maltreatment within the organisation setting got discussed. Only the occurrence of maltreatment within the home and community setting was sometimes talked about. The chance that maltreatment could take place within the local facility seemed not to come up in with any of the interviewees. Staff members mentioned that they would like to get more training about maltreatment and sexuality for themselves with the goal of informing parents and children.

Secondly, ten interviewees reported that parents and staff members did know what external institutions could be contacted when suspecting maltreatment. External organisations are organisations other than Los Pipitos that could offer help to a victim in case of

maltreatment, such as the police and family-support-organisations. Nevertheless, interviewees associated possible maltreatment only in the home or community setting.

Finally, help from Los Pipitos itself was mentioned. One local facility reported that Los Pipitos offers support in case of maltreatment by offering a lawyer, and three local facilities mentioned that they would support the victims by visiting hospitals or police stations. Again this was in regard to the home and community setting.

Clarifying responsibility was applied, as staff and parents knew where to go for help when suspicious circumstances occur and Los Pipitos would offer support in case of maltreatment. However, no information was given to staff or parents about the responsibility they have in case of maltreatment in the local facility. Furthermore, interviewees only spoke about maltreatment occurring outside the local facility.

**Rule setting (4.2.).** No written rules, such as a code of conduct or a protocol of acceptable behaviour, were set up by Los Pipitos. Only one local facility indicated that by providing verbal agreements, the volunteers learned how to behave and act with the children. Two other local facilities stated that the only behavioural guideline in the local facility was having respect towards children and that ensuring that all children are treated equally. Furthermore, staff members and parents talked about the law, wherein the rights of the child, respect and equality are outlined.

Although no protocols for behaviour were present, no physical punishment to discipline a child was observed. However, in one local facility, a staff member threatened physical punishment during observations. Threats were used to make a child do what the staff member wanted her to do. The staff member was also the mother of the child. Threats such as, *'If you do not sit still, I will hit you!'* and *'If you do not shut up, I will call your father!'* were used. In addition, an interviewee talked about colleagues using threats of physical punishment. Threats were not put into action nonetheless.

Overall, the rule setting technique was considered as not applied, since no local facilities used a code of conduct or protocols for acceptable behaviour. Concerning rule setting, only the law was used as guidance.

**Clarifying consequences (4.3.).** Consequences for child maltreatment by staff members were unclear. When asking questions about maltreatment within the local facility, interviewees immediately stated that it did not exist in their local facility, such as in the next example: *'Noooooo, this has not been the case. Sexual abuse in the centre. Never, no no... Nothing like that has happened. (...) Nobody has seen that, neither the youth. We have never seen abused children nor youth. No, thanks to God!'* Only one interviewee explained that

they would talk with that particular person. Clarifying consequences was not applied, since no consequences were applied.

**Personalising clients (4.4).** All children in the local facilities were known by staff members, with the exception of newcomers. In three interviews, good communication was mentioned. All interviewees reported that parents and staff members have the ability to complain within the local facility and to contact external organisations. The personalising clients technique was applied, since all children were known and there were possibilities for people to complain.

### Conclusion

Child maltreatment can lead to all sorts of short- and long-term consequences. Los Pipitos would like to minimise the risk of maltreatment in their organisation by developing and implementing a Child Protection Policy. In order to facilitate Los Pipitos' development of this policy, the current study explored to what extent the current situation of the local facilities of Los Pipitos is able to prevent child maltreatment. The SCP-model was used as a guide to analyse the local facilities through observations and interviews.

*Table 6. Main results prevention child maltreatment*

<b>Strategy and technique</b>	<b>Conclusion</b>
<b>1.Increasing effort</b>	<b>Partly applied</b>
1.1.Controlling access	Partly applied
1.2.Target hardening	Partly applied
1.3.Controlling tools	Inapplicable
<b>2.Increasing risk</b>	<b>Partly applied</b>
2.1.Extending guardianship	Applied
2.2.Strengthening formal surveillance	Not applied
2.3.Increasing natural surveillance	Applied
<b>3.Controlling prompts</b>	<b>Applied</b>
<b>4.Reducing permissibility</b>	<b>Partly applied</b>
4.1.Clarifying responsibility	Applied
4.2.Rule setting	Not applied
4.3.Clarifying consequences	Not applied
4.4.Personalising clients	Applied



The conclusions are carefully summarized in Table 6, based on the same three-point-scale as used in results-section. The table shows that only the strategy controlling prompts (3) is fully applied in the local facilities of Los Pipitos. Situational triggers for perpetrators to maltreat a child are minimalized, since a child is never seen alone with a staff member.

The other three strategies – increasing effort (1), increasing risk (2) and reducing permissibility (4) – are partly applied in the local facilities. For all three strategies some techniques are observed to some extent.

First of all, the effort for potential perpetrators to maltreat a child is partly increased (1) due to two partly applied techniques: target hardening (1.1) and controlling tools (1.2.). Children do get some information about sexuality and information about respecting themselves, but no assertiveness training is given. Furthermore, it is remarkable that potential staff members do not get screened and have easy access to the facility. A positive fact is that children are always in groups or with their parents, so neither staff members nor visitors have easy access to a child alone.

Secondly, there exists a risk for potential perpetrators of maltreatment in the local facilities to be detected, since the strategy (2) is partly applied. First of all, parents, children and staff members are present during treatments, which results in good guardianship (2.1.). Secondly, the physical features (2.3.) of the rooms in the facilities are light and open. The surveillance and the transparent rooms increase the possibility for a potential perpetrator to get caught. Moreover, most of the local facilities were located in safe neighbourhoods. Unfortunately, almost no facility uses formal surveillance (2.2.), such as police checks or a guard.

Finally, some techniques are used in order to reduce the permissibility (4) for perpetrators to excuse their behaviour, such as staff members knowing all children and staff members and parents knowing where to go to complain when maltreatment would occur. Important to note is that participants only spoke about domestic and community maltreatment and the possibility that maltreatment could occur within the facility seemed taboo. It is striking that almost no rules (4.2.) considering acceptable behaviour are present. A code of conduct and a protocol for acceptable behaviour are missing. Finally, staff members are not aware of the consequences of maltreating a child in their local facilities.

In conclusion, all strategies are applied within the local facilities, although only one is fully applied. The fact that all strategies are present, indicates that Los Pipitos does prevent child maltreatment in the facilities to some extent. However, some techniques are still

missing or not applied sufficiently. To ensure the full protection of the children in the local facilities, improvements are needed.

### **Discussion**

Several discussion points can be made in regard to this study. First of all, it is notable that even though a majority of the techniques within the strategies are applied in the local facilities, it does not mean that the techniques are set up intentionally to prevent maltreatment within the organisation. An example is the fact that parents are always present during treatment of their children, so that they can practise with their children at home. This does, however, help prevent child maltreatment as well.

Secondly, in this study the topics of every technique were valued equally. This does not mean, however, that a certain topic is as important as any other. For example, parents that always accompany their children make the opportunity for a potential perpetrator to maltreat much smaller and can be considered as a topic with a greater value. This also accounts for the neighbourhood the local facility is situated in. Most of the local facilities were located in a safe neighbourhood and therefore the technique scores well. Nevertheless, one local facility had to deal with maltreatment from outsiders on a daily basis. Children got bullied and physical attacked with stones by people outside the building. All topics can be covered but when the location is unsafe it will be difficult to prevent maltreatment.

Another point of discussion is that staff members are not aware of the chance that maltreatment could happen within the organisation, because no information is provided about this possibility. Staff members did say that they would like to get more information about the subject, which possibly indicates that they are open for trainings about maltreatment within the organisation.

Further, generalising the conclusions to all local facilities of Los Pipitos should be done with caution. Even though results between the local facilities show a lot of similarities, this study only focused on seven local facilities, while more than 50 local facilities exist through Nicaragua. To maximise the generalisation, the local facilities in this study were situated in both urban and rural settings. Additionally, generalisation to the whole organisation of Los Pipitos should also be done with discretion, as no other existing facilities of Los Pipitos were studied, such as the regional facilities or the institute itself. Compared to

the local facilities, the other facilities have a higher rate of professionals employed and more activities are carried out<sup>3</sup>.

Finally, the way the current study has been carried out has some limitations that need to be addressed. A first limitation is that the interviewees could have responded or acted in a social desirable way because their headquarters informed the local facilities about the visits and because of the sensitivity of the subject child maltreatment. Moreover, in every local facility, the coordinator, who is responsible for the local facility, was interviewed and might have made the situation looked better than it is in reality. Social desirability can cause over- or under-reporting of behaviour during the interviews and observations, which interferes with the accuracy of the results. An attempt was made to minimise socially desirable answers through triangulation of research methods.

A final limitation of the research is that interviews were carried out in Spanish. A language barrier existed as Spanish was not the native language of the interviewers, and interviewees spoke with Nicaraguan-Spanish accents. It might be possible that more detailed information could have been collected in the native language and that some information was lost due to misunderstandings. Losing relevant information is minimised by recording the interviews and having two interviewers present. The limitations caused by social desirability and the language barrier could have resulted in less accurate responses. Techniques could have scored higher or lower than is stated.

Los Pipitos could use the results of this study in order to improve the current draft of their Child Protection Policy. The study offers an insight in the strengths and weaknesses of the local facilities in protecting children against maltreatment. However, further research within Los Pipitos is needed, since this study only covers a part of the organisation, namely the local facilities.. In addition, a follow-up research could be useful to study the progress and changes Los Pipitos has made in preventing child maltreatment in their organisation.

Although the SCP-model has been previously used in other studies for preventing sexual abuse, this study shows that the model can be applied to the whole range of child maltreatment. Other children's organisations could consider the use of the SCP-model to analyse their organisation in what they currently do in preventing child maltreatment.

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<sup>3</sup> Verbal communication Los Pipitos: February 2013

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