

Tracking Footprints

Global Report 2002/ 2003

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**“Every child belongs to a family and grows with love,
respect and security”**

(Vision of SOS Children’s Villages)

1 The study and its objectives

Starting in 2001, Tracking Footprints is the first international, long-term research project undertaken by SOS Children’s Villages. It is designed to investigate the experiences of people who have lived in an SOS Children’s Village facilities (SOS adults) as well as to find out about how they live today. Major aims of the study are to learn from their recommendations and opinions in order to further develop the educational work and to make these results available to any external parties interested in who we are, what we do and what we achieve. The Tracking Footprints results also try to reflect whether the organisation is successfully following its mission, vision and values. Furthermore, the project strives to support the organisation’s attempt to contribute to a better life for many children around the world.

The present report is based on the findings gained from surveys made in 2002 and 2003. Only in case of significant differences will these be stated individually. The major findings are structured in the form of trends. The different national results are available in more detailed national reports compiled by the responsible project partners. (For further information please see the list of national reports included in the bibliography, p. 20)

1.1 Theory and values

The present report is a summary of the empirical results gathered from the different countries. At this stage the outcome is not discussed within the framework of general **theoretical concepts**, studies and research findings. We would like to point out that numerous connections could be drawn to expert knowledge in the areas of child development, bonding (family ties, form of family), etc. We see this as a next step which the project team will take after choosing a specific topic for further research or publication.

How did we – the project team – evaluate the results? In the following we will outline some of our **values** and positions which may help explain our approach.

Doing research within SOS Children’s Villages and, at the same time, belonging to its staff represents a big challenge to the research team: trying to be distanced, objective and independent as researchers while being confronted with tasks on the organisational development level. These issues demand positioning, judgement and a policy standpoint.

As researchers we are guided by our own values which influence our approach. With reference to values: we view every individual with respect and esteem. Every child has abilities and has the right to develop to an independent, self-determined adult. This is what we define as one form of success and where we are in accord with the organisation’s viewpoint. We adhere to a family concept which is based on dependable relationships

within a community of parent and children. At the heart of this community is the loving mother figure, a mature adult who guides and manages the group. The quality of relationship is one of stability and long-lasting support which goes beyond the time frame of the care offered by SOS Children's Villages.

1.2 Method

Based on a continuous co-operation with partners from the various SOS regions, the project follows a participatory approach and is meant to be decentralised so that in future the study can be carried out on an independent level in the different countries.

Treating the SOS adults as experts, the study applies a carefully designed questionnaire¹ which highlights their experiences during their time in the SOS Children's Village facilities, major events in their lives, their current situation, and what kind of values are important to them.

External interviewers are trained in the context of Tracking Footprints workshops and in most cases the evaluation of the results is carried out together with external researchers.

The main organisational units involved are the Hermann Gmeiner Academy, the International Office, Continental and Regional Offices, National Offices, SOS research experts (in co-operation with external research experts and universities)

1.3 About the target group

Countries

So far 20 countries from Africa, Central and South America, Asia and Europe have participated in the study:

Kenya, Zimbabwe, Nicaragua, Dominican Republic, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Poland (2002). Morocco, South Africa, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela, El Salvador, Honduras (2003).

Sample size and response rate

Number of interviewees	Average age of interviewees	Male	Female
1137	26 years	45 %	55%

¹ Some countries have adapted the questionnaire according to their special needs, so that the versions differ slightly. This is acceptable as the present report gives global trends and is not intended to compare the single countries' results.

The present study is based on a sampling procedure. The random sample consists of approximately 60 people per country representing the entire target group of the respective countries. In 2002 and 2003 a total of 1137 SOS adults were interviewed. The average age of the interviewees is 26. The number of participating females is slightly higher (55% female and 45% male participants).

The response rate is very high: Only 57 persons (5%) refused to participate due to lack of time or willingness, etc. On the whole SOS adults were very interested in participating in the study. Some even asked to be interviewed showing a big interest in sharing their experiences and opinions and therefore in contributing to the improvement of child and youth care.

Some data about the period of the interviewees' admission to SOS Children's Villages

Average age of admission	Average stay in SOS facilities	Average number of SOS siblings
6.5 years	10 years	7 brothers and sisters

2 Global trends resulting from the data

2.1 In general SOS adults live contentedly in small families and are satisfied with their housing situation

The majority of SOS adults are able to establish relationships and/or families

- More than 60% of the interviewees are living in a partnership or are married.
- Altogether 85% of the SOS adults are happy with their marital status.
- A little over half of those questioned have one or two children (see below).
- About 70% of the interviewees describe their living conditions as satisfactory.
- Interesting differences are observed between countries: In Morocco, for example, only 15% of the SOS adults report being married whereas 73% state that they are single (12% chose the answer category "no indication"). The category living "in a partnership" (other than marriage) simply does not exist. On the other hand, in South Africa, only 4% of the interviewees report being married. The majority state that they are living in some kind of relationship (59%). Different cultural habits and the age of interviewees could serve as explanations here.

Interview partners have mainly one or two children per family

- In Morocco and South Africa, the number of interviewees who have children is significantly low (23% and 32%), whereas in Honduras and El Salvador, for example, more than 60% of the interviewees have children. This may be due to the fact that in these two countries the average age of the interviewees is higher.

The majority of interview partners rate their housing situation as equal or lower compared to the remainder of the country

- 72% in El Salvador, 46,6% in South Africa rate their housing as equal.
- 37% in Honduras, 23% in Morocco rate their housing as lower compared to the remainder of the country.

About 70% of the SOS adults are satisfied with their housing situation

- This result is mainly supported by the Southern and Western Latin American countries 71% (a summary of nine participating countries in South America), El Salvador (82%) and in South Africa, where 57% indicate that they are content and 13 % very content with their housing situation.
- In South Africa the research team discovered an interesting phenomenon running contrary to expectations: Apparently, feelings expressed by the interviewees, concerning their housing situation, are not related to their standard of living. The hypothesis was that the interviewees' feelings would improve with a higher standard of living. (Muller and Seethal. Tracking Footprints. South African Report, p. 4).

2.2 In their process of becoming independent, the interviewees on the one hand experienced support but on the other hand also pressure and anxiety

For most of the interviewees “becoming independent” generally means to be responsible for oneself, to find a job and to be able to earn a living

- Independence tends to refer to a certain personal situation or notional condition than to attaining an economic or material position.

About 50% of the interviewed SOS adults indicate that they did not want to become independent

- In the Southern and Western Latin American countries about 50% did not really know how to cope with the process of “becoming independent” (for example, feelings of fear

or insecurity).

The support SOS Children's Villages offers adolescents is frequently associated with pressure

- In the Southern and Western Latin American countries (40%) as well as in El Salvador (70%), interviewees report that they felt under pressure in their process of becoming independent.
- In El Salvador, Honduras and Morocco about three quarters feel supported and taken seriously.

Integration into the community remains difficult. Feelings of inferiority and distance to the community could support the unclear (and also fearful) idea of the "world outside"

- For about 40% of the interviewees it was difficult to tell that they were SOS children.
- A distanced relationship between SOS Children's Villages and the community was perceived by a differing percentage. Examples: 33% in El Salvador, 58% in Honduras, 29% in South Africa and 27% in Morocco.
- Even if a relatively low percentage of the interviewees (examples: in the Dominican Republic 7%, in Kenya 21%, in Southern and Western Latin American countries 24%, in Honduras 37%,) report that they felt inferior to other children in the community, these numbers still remain alarming.

In general, SOS Children's Villages are perceived as a family, a good place to develop one's personality, shelter, offering possibilities for education and a better life

- A touching quotation from an SOS adult in Southern and Western Latin America says: *"La aldea en la niñez es un verdadero hogar, en la adolescencia es un ambiente frío y de poco apoyo, ahora la aldea es nostalgia. ("During childhood the SOS village is a real home, however, during adolescence it is a cold environment with little support, and now the SOS village causes nostalgia.")*.
- In Morocco for 75% of the interviewees SOS Children's Villages mean "a family, a home, happiness and peace and quiet, help and orientation".

2.3 In general the SOS adults are well educated, mostly have a job, but can only manage restrictively to live on what they earn

Although SOS adolescents are generally well informed about possible careers, an alarming number shows that they are not allowed to choose freely

- In El Salvador, 85 % are offered career information by SOS Children's Villages.
- In the Southern and Western Latin American countries, nearly 50% indicate that they could not choose their career themselves.
- A worrying result from South Africa is that 45% report about SOS Children's Villages being indifferent in this process.

An impressive number of SOS adults graduated from secondary school level (high school)

- This is especially proven by the results from South Africa (98%), in the other countries the average rate is about 50%.
- However, there are also worrying results showing that some interviewees have not completed any education. Examples:
17 % in Brazil, 1,7 % in Ecuador, 3,4 % in Nicaragua, 3,3 % in Kenya.

A vast majority of the interviewees have attended vocational training

Countries 2003	Completed %	Un- completed %	Countries 2002	Completed %	Un- completed %
Morocco	59	23	Kenya	75	10
South Africa	43	21	Philippines	55	05
Bolivia	90	05	Poland	29	00
Brazil	22	02	Zimbabwe	69	15
Chile	64	08	Sri Lanka	45	35
Colombia	47	18	Nicaragua	76	05
Ecuador	52	13	Dom. Republic	72	05
Paraguay	55	12			
Peru	84	11			
Uruguay	33	37			
Venezuela	52	03			
El Salvador	Not available	Not available			
Honduras	Not available	Not available			

- In 15 countries more than 50% of the interviewees have attended vocational training.
- By contrast, academic studies are very rare in general.
Example: South Africa 0%, Southern and Western Latin America 5% on the average. This is a tremendous difference to the general situation in the society: in the control group² interviewed in Southern and Western American countries 17% completed university studies.
- However, the results also reveal that a higher degree of education does not necessarily mean better chances on the job market.
- More men than women have finished vocational training.

² The Southern and Western Latin America countries had the possibility to compare their results with a control group, which is a group of people living in the society with comparable attributes (e.g. age, gender, social standard, etc.)

The unemployment rates amongst SOS interviewees differ strongly and reach from 7% in Sri Lanka to 41% in South Africa. On the national level they are similar to comparable groups in the society

- The average results of 2002 reveal a rather low unemployment rate of 14% amongst women, 7% amongst men.
- Comparing the results with the general unemployment rates of certain countries, we see interesting differences:
 - South Africa: the unemployment rate amongst SOS interviewees is **twice** as big as the national rate (41% versus 20%).
 - Uruguay: the unemployment rate amongst SOS interviewees is quite **equal** to the one of the control group (18% versus 16%).
 - Brazil: the unemployment rate amongst SOS interviewees is much **lower** than the one of the control group (25% versus 37%).

On the average about 60% of the interviewees can manage restrictively to live on what they earn, about 40% are satisfied with their financial situation

- About one third find it difficult or impossible to manage (e.g. South Africa 38%, Morocco 35%; in 2002 the results showed a span of 12% in Sri Lanka to 61% in Kenya).
- In Southern and Western Latin America the average income of the interviewees is higher than the one on the national level and equal to the control group.
- Those who have completed a vocational training or a higher level of education have a higher income.
- About two thirds of the interviewees do not receive any financial support from other people or institutions. On the contrary about 60% are financially supporting others (biological family, partner, children).

2.4 Family, reliable relationships, education and having a job are, in the final analysis, seen to be the most important values

“The Family” is of great importance to the interviewees

- About 50% dedicate their leisure time to their family (Latin America).
- 70% (Latin America) associate positive memories with the question about what happened in their family lives: *“El ser padre para mi ha sido muy importante porque yo no tuve papá”*. (*“For me it is very important to be a father because I did not have a daddy.”*).
- In general, 35% have negative associations with “family”, such as the loss of their biological family and failure of their own/new family (divorce, separation).

Relationships are essential in the interviewees’ present life

- Over two-thirds can rely on a social net to turn to for moral or financial support.
- The most important relationships for the interviewees are their newly-formed families (partner, children), friends and the SOS family (SOS siblings and SOS mother).
- In spite of the interviewees’ precarious financial situation about 60% take over responsibility for other people (partner, friends) which shows a very great awareness of “being supportive”. This could at least in part be seen as an achievement of “SOS values”.
- In some countries the contact with the SOS mother is rather low although she is rated as being very important: In Southern and Western Latin America 30% would not contact their SOS mother at all.

The vast majority of the interviewees have experienced positive relationships within SOS Children’s Villages

- About 80% of the interviewees describe a positive relationship to their SOS mother when they were children and adolescents.
- About two thirds of the interviewees indicate that they had more than two SOS mothers. The percentages range from 19% in Morocco to 90% in Honduras. An alarming result is that in Honduras 45% of the interviewees had 4 to 5 SOS mothers.
- Two thirds of the interviewees describe their time immediately after being admitted to the village as a period of love, security, feeling at home, happiness, obtaining a “new” mother and family. At the same time about 35% report having negative memories such as “loneliness, sadness, feelings of being abandoned, violence”.

Violence is a topic that can be found in almost all participating countries

- The various percentages are not high, but every single response reporting physical or mental abuse is one too many.
- In Honduras, 7% of the interviewees indicate that for them becoming independent meant being liberated from mistreatment by the SOS mother.

The longing for a warmer, more loving and family-like environment is clearly expressed

- A relatively high percentage indicates that their SOS mother rarely had time for them.
- In Western and Southern Latin America 23% say the SOS mother should be more loving and communicative with the children and young people.

In general, the majority (about 60%) did not miss a father within the SOS family

- Nevertheless, the number of those who did miss a father or even missed him very much must not be overlooked: 21% and 23% respectively in South Africa and in Morocco.
- In some countries a gender split is recognisable: men rather than women report that they missed a father. This is probably linked to the importance of a role model for male adolescents.
- In 2002, this question was formulated differently. The outcome was that 68% supported the existing concept of the SOS family without a father.

About 70% report that the contact with the biological family was supported or at least tolerated by SOS Children's Villages

- An exceptionally high percentage of the interviewees do not respond at all to this question (Sri Lanka 47%, El Salvador 30%, Morocco 15%).
- In Southern and Western Latin American about 30% of the interviewees did not have any ties with their biological relatives. Reasons: SOS and/or biological relatives themselves did not show any interest, or children refused to be in touch with their biological relatives.
- The contact with biological siblings was generally very close. This can be explained by the fact that they lived together in the same SOS family or village.

Education, having a profession and a job represent further significant aspects for the interviewees

- In every country (2002 and 2003) the interviewees' answers to the open question "What is important in your life?" included the issue of work and education.

3 Talking about success and failure: Relating the findings to the mission statement of SOS Children's Villages

What do these trends presented above show when related to the goals and principles of SOS Children's Villages? The interviewees' responses and perceptions offer a possible way to find out about the organisation's success or failure in its work.

3.1 Our mission

3.1.1 We build families for children in need

"We work for children who are orphaned, abandoned or whose families are unable to care for them. We give these children the opportunity to build lasting relationships within a family" (Who We Are). The Tracking Footprints results allow a deep insight into the realisation of the goals defined in the four principles of SOS Children's Villages.

The SOS mother: Each child has a caring parent

☺ In most cases the findings show that this central aspect of the SOS Children's Village concept has been accomplished. About 80% of the interviewees describe a positive relationship to their SOS mother when they were children and adolescents. Many of them refer to a **"close relationship" with their SOS mother** who "provides the security, love and stability that each child needs" (Who We Are).

☹ However, there are also cases of **physical and psychological maltreatment**. This information could be taken from 6 out of 13 national reports of those countries that participated in the study in 2003. There are quotes such as:

"(...) castigos, mucha disciplina, soledad, madre nerviosa que castigaba a los niños (...) recuerdo maltrato físico hasta que me cambiaron de madre."

"(...) punishment, much discipline, loneliness, a nervous mother punishing the children (...) I remember physical maltreatment until I got another mother."

☹ Interviewees also report a **distanced relationship**, lack of interest and attention towards the children, as well as their SOS mother's lack of time for them.

⊗ Many SOS adults had **more than one SOS mother**. This seems to be contradictory to the organisation's aim of creating long-lasting, stable and reliable relationships.

About 2/3 of all the interviewees indicate that they had more than 2 SOS mothers (19 % in Morocco, 90 % in Honduras). In Southern and Western Latin American countries as few as 34 % had only 1 SOS mother (36 % had 2 to 3 SOS mothers, 17 % had 4 to 5, 12 % had 6 and more SOS mothers).

Brothers and sisters: Family ties grow naturally

"...with natural brothers and sisters always staying within the same SOS family. These children and their SOS mother build emotional ties that last a lifetime." (Who We Are).

☺ The results show that in general **biological brothers and sisters** stay together in the same SOS family. For example, in South Africa "the vast majority (85.7%) of the research participants had biological siblings in their SOS family."

☺ The interviewees describe their **SOS brothers and sisters as very important** in their lives.

⊗ **Lifelong emotional bonds seem an illusion for many** people who have grown up in an SOS Children's Village. There are still a few individuals who are not in touch with SOS Children's Villages at all, not even with their SOS mothers.

The house: Each family creates its own home

"Under its roof, children enjoy a real sense of security and belonging." (Who We Are).

☺ A vast majority associate **a real home** with the SOS environment (for example Morocco 75 %).

☺ Interviewees experienced shelter and a **sense of belonging** within their SOS family.

⊗ In some cases the atmosphere within the family is described as **cold and uncaring** (for example during the time after their admission, 35 % experienced negative feelings, such as loneliness, sadness, violence etc.). Thus many of the interviewees express the wish for a warmer and more loving environment.

The village: The SOS family is part of the community

A major goal of the SOS Children's Village concept is to facilitate their children's integration in the community outside the village. This is an important issue closely linked with the process of becoming independent members of society. "They also live as integrated and contributing members of the local community (...) each child learns to participate actively in society." (Who We Are).

- ⊗ An alarming number say that within the SOS Children's Village they lived **far away from the "outside world"** and describe their relationships with the community as **distanced** (e.g. 33 % El Salvador, 58 % Honduras, 29 % South Africa, 27 % Morocco).
- ⊗ A high number of the interviewees **did not feel prepared** to leave the village and face the real world outside. About 50 % did not want to become independent!

3.1.2 We help them shape their own future

"We enable children (...) to be active members of the community (...) to recognise and express their individual abilities, interests and talents (...) receive the education and skills training they need to be successful and contributing members of society."

- ☺ The majority have completed **vocational training** (e.g. Zimbabwe 69 %, Dom. Republic 72 %, the Philippines 55 %, Colombia 47 %; see table in chapter 2.3) and have a **job** (unemployment rates range from 7 % in Sri Lanka to 41 % in South Africa).
- ⊗ The results reveal that SOS children and young people need **more effective assistance** in shaping their own future – many of them do not feel well enough prepared and under pressure in the process of becoming independent members of society (40 % in Southern and Western Latin American countries, 70 % in El Salvador).
- ⊗ A high number of interviewees say that they could not choose their professional career themselves (for example in Southern and Western Latin America nearly 50 %), which indicates that their **personal interests and talents were not primarily taken into consideration**.

3.1.3 We share in the development of their communities

- ☺ SOS Children's Villages has established special programmes that are designed to contribute in the development of the community, such as SOS Hermann Gmeiner Schools, Social Centres, Medical Centres and others. These programmes offered by the organisation are essential to meet the basic needs of many people, **bringing relief, sharing** in the development of society as well as **fostering** integration.
- ⊗ However, the Tracking Footprints results show that this is not enough as **integration into the community outside the SOS village remains difficult**. Sharing in the development of society is not yet lived as an attitude in everyday life in the SOS villages.

4 Relating Tracking Footprints to the Strategic Initiatives

The eight Strategic Initiatives of SOS-Kinderdorf International are intended to support the organisation's further development towards becoming "the clear global leader in the long-term-family based care of children" (Taking Action for Children. Strategic Plan 2003-2008, October 2002, p. 1). In order to ensure a clear direction, the organisation needs certain tools and scientific proof and discussion to learn where the SOS model should be re-enforced or improved. Tracking Footprints is designed to support this process.

Looking at each strategic initiative it becomes clear that the Tracking Footprints findings offer a helpful insight into the current stage of development from the point of view of those who have directly themselves experienced the SOS child care model.

Long-term family based care for children in need: Lead the Way

One of the major goals of SOS Children's Villages is to strengthen the core of their services: **"We will strengthen our ability to prepare children to become self-determining adults, through family life and education"** by evaluating the work continually. This helps improve the system and achieve external recognition in the worldwide discourse on child care and the rights of the child. Tracking Footprints is designed to cover an important part of evaluating SOS Children's Village work. The findings presented in chapter 2 offer orientation to further reach this goal.

Research to state our results and bring innovation

Within the context of this seventh strategic initiative, Tracking Footprints has started to establish a research culture that directly helps reflect upon the impact SOS Children's Villages has had on the lives of many children. This approach **supports other strategic initiatives** in further developing adequate ways of achieving SOS goals. Let us take the initiative **International participation and partnership** as an example. On an international as well as on a national level, cooperation with universities, research institutions and the like have been successfully established in the countries that have carried out Tracking Footprints. Thus, through its concept of cooperating with external research partners, Tracking Footprints contributes to this aim.

The organisation's wish to reach more children in need and to offer them the best possible care system seems realisable through the careful implementation of the knowledge and insights won through the findings of research projects such as Tracking Footprints.

The following chapter outlines possible ways of approaching this implementation.

5 Recommendations

“El camino se hace al andar.”

(Antonio Machado)

During its two year survey, Tracking Footprints has so far revealed findings which show both positive developments and experiences that should be supported, continued and developed further as well as negative developments and experiences that demand a serious review.

5.1 Being on the right track – things to be supported

It is remarkable that most respondents to this study interviewed in both years, 2002 and 2003, experience their current living situation as satisfactory. They have built up a social network, look back on a good education and have started on a career.

So what about the success of SOS Children’s Villages’ work from the respondents’ point of view? In general, SOS adults draw a positive picture of the organisation’s achievements and acknowledge its success in key areas such as:

Offering security by meeting basic needs

- SOS children grow up with security concerning their basic needs, without (fear of) lack of food, water or hygiene.
- This kind of security represents an important basis for a healthy development of the child on all levels and is not evident in many countries where the interviewees live.

Reliable relationships

- The possibility of developing lasting ties with SOS mothers, SOS siblings, other SOS staff contribute to a healthy development of the child and adolescent towards adulthood.
- Especially the concept of the SOS mother is very much confirmed in the interviewees’ responses and recommendations.
- Growing up within the quality of reliable relationships “nourishes” the child and adolescent for their whole life. This important aspect fosters their ability to establish reliable relationships and supports them later on, when they themselves have a partnership and family.

Education and professional training

- Although there is an obvious need for more adequate support in professional development, many interviewees express their gratitude for the possibilities they were offered. Without SOS Children’s Villages, good education would not have been possible in many cases.
- Education and efforts to support professional training are appreciated as an important basis to become independent and establish oneself in society.

It is also remarkable that many respondents were able to talk about what their lives have lacked and what kind of weaknesses there have been. They expressed their gratitude as well as disappointments and used the opportunity to shed a critical light on their own lives and on the work of SOS Children's Villages. This shows the interviewees' general maturity and self-determination as well as the ability to show differentiated reflection.

5.2 Things to be reviewed or changed

The following recommendations have been organised according to priorities in terms of "in need of action".

5.2.1 Avoid any kind of violence or abuse

„Children are protected from abuse, neglect and exploitation
(...) children have shelter, food, health care and education (...)”
(Who We Are – Our Vision)

- Maltreatment must be avoided at all costs. Interviewees and researchers involved strongly demand that all SOS staff treat the children and young people without any form of violence on a mental, emotional or physical level. In this context they especially mention SOS mothers and youth leaders.
- As one possible explanation, maltreatment or violence are likely to exist in cases where co-workers' are overworked or are insufficiently prepared. Offering adequate training as well as psychological support for all staff members, especially SOS mothers, children and youngsters could be a helpful step towards the prevention of such difficult situations.
- Sensitise all people involved (staff, children and young people) on the topic of violence; a necessary step would be to free it from all taboos.
An example: The research project "Seeing beyond Violence" has followed a positive approach where children choose areas that for them represent the absence of violence.

5.2.2 Greater awareness of the quality of relationships

- Each child's feeling of security and well-being must always be given top priority.
- More affection and communication between mother and children are strongly recommended by interviewees. The need for more individual attention is clearly expressed. As a consequence we have to ask: Are SOS families too large?
- The large number of interviewees who had more than one SOS mother is alarming! How can this be in keeping with the aim of SOS children's Villages to establish long-lasting relationships? On an organisational level this can be seen as mismanagement, from an educational point of view this could evoke destabilisation and mistrust in the development of the children!
- The topic of a father within the SOS family is still a controversial one. On the one hand, a majority of interviewees do not miss a father within the family. On the other

hand, a smaller group of interviewees clearly want a father as a role model: This should be researched further and discussed.

- Keep the doors open: the fostering of contacts mainly between SOS mothers and SOS adults (update addresses, invite them to the village for special events, sharing experiences).

5.2.3 More effective support in the process of becoming independent, education and finding a job

- From early on ensure that children and adolescents learn to develop self-respect.
- Already being aware of the process of becoming independent from day one when a child is admitted to the SOS village.
- More and better participation on the part of the children, especially in processes and decisions that are directly related to them. SOS Children's Villages should focus on co-operating **with** children and young people by involving them actively rather than only working **for** them.
"The evidence is that children become experts in the context of their own conditions of life (...)" (Seeing beyond Violence, p. 175).
- Analyse and evaluate the programmes that support the process of becoming independent! So far they do not seem to answer the young people's questions.
- Career development needs more awareness and more activities: offer children and young people more adequate vocational orientation, motivate and support them more in their studies; they should have a profession before leaving the SOS village.

5.2.4 The topic of integration should be reviewed on different levels

- Much more attention should be paid to the topic of integration as a **mutual** understanding of **everyday human co-existence** between members of the surrounding community and the SOS villages, their children and staff. In addition to the special SOS programmes offered in situations of and times of crisis or basic deficits, framework conditions should be developed to make a positive attitude to everyday life possible.
- Integration could be fostered by organising "everyday life" activities together with community members outside the village. This "sharing with the community" is a very important step in the process of becoming independent.
- Children and young people should be increasingly listened to and invited to take on responsibility for themselves as well as for community life both within and outside the SOS Children's Village.

5.2.5 Greater professionalism in the different staff groups

- The selection process of co-workers should be organised more carefully. Practical problems such as the lack of SOS mother candidates or the high turn-over of staff should still not lead to a solution such as accepting people who don't seem to fulfil the special requirements.
- The training for co-workers should aim at their personal and professional way of dealing with the special situation of each individual child.
- The topic of the right of the child must play a central role within the training programmes for SOS co-workers.
- Co-workers should be better supported in their daily work:
 - There should be an exchange platform for co-workers to reflect upon emotional reactions when dealing with the children who need special attention.
 - Co-workers should be able to count on professional psychological assistance so that they can learn new ways of dealing with exceptional situations like aggressive reactions or overstress.
 - Opportunities for sharing good practice should be created.

6 Consequences on the level of research

The results of Tracking Footprints have so far raised the following central questions:

- “The Family” has proved to be an essential aspect for the interviewees. What do they really mean by “family”? What is the indispensable principle of family regardless of its form?
- Do SOS children have a different concept of family to those children who grow up in their biological family?
- What influence does the relationship with biological parents have on the process of becoming independent?
- How could the trauma SOS children have suffered before their admission to an SOS Children's Village be dealt with adequately? And how could the trauma caused by the admission to an SOS Children's Village itself be dealt with?
- The quality and intensity of the relationships outside SOS are apparently less intense than within the SOS Children's Village community. How to bring together the “SOS internal” and “outside” world?

Critical findings, as well as the fact that one of the organisation's most important goals is to “help young people shape their own future”, have led to a consistent step: To look at the topic of “becoming independent” in a more concrete and explicit way. It will be

necessary to take into account the different cultures in which the organisation operates and consequently to find out if “becoming independent” really exists as a concept (and value) on an international/intercultural level: Are there different images or a different understanding of “completing development”, becoming mature? For example, is “becoming independent” in other cultures anchored in the concept of identity?

A corresponding project would consist of three steps:

1. **Theoretical discussion** of the issue of “becoming independent”. There is a vast variety of theoretical and interdisciplinary approaches regarding the topic of adolescence. However, there is no consistent theoretical framework for research available in this field.
2. The **empirical approach** could be carried out in case studies, for example, by the method of “participatory observation”; focusing on interaction processes between young people and care persons. Such surveys would serve as a starting point to deal with the complex topic of youth, the relation between generations and social change, education and work.
3. **The results** should be discussed with a special view to the abundance of possibilities SOS Children’s Villages offer young people. The advantages of growing up in an SOS family could be compared with those of growing up in a natural family. The results should be shared with the scientific community.

Thus further research could bring about significant clarification regarding a question such as:

What does the process of becoming independent mean in general? What do children and young people need in this process? How can SOS Children’s Villages best meet these needs? What makes youth care successful?

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