



AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF ARMENIA
College of Business and Management

Children At Risk in Armenia

Research Paper



Students: *Marine Jamkochian ID 2469*
Armen Fahradyan ID 2452

Submitted to: *Dr. Judy Newton*
Dr. Dana Stevens

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*“A person without a family and without connections
is a person, in essence who does not exist” A.I.M. [40]*

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Executive Summary

Among all population, especially during times of transition, children living in institutions are the most vulnerable of all and, the most the subject to the impact of a large number of risk factors. Many children living under institutional care have suffered mental and/or physical disabilities as result of being institutionalized during their entire lives.

Among the institutionalized Armenian children there are mentally, physically disabled as well as fully abled, healthy children; there are also orphaned and abandoned children as well as those who have family relations, street children and children allegedly with deviant behavior. Many differences divide these children but they all have something common: they are deprived of socialization and the most necessary requirement for all children in this world: the family's loving care.

The cumulative combination of several negative factors derived from the ongoing social, political and economic changes in the Republic of Armenia have a harmful effect on the welfare of children, hindering in numerous cases their possibilities of full and harmonious development in the family environment. As a result of the hardships felt by the Armenian population since the break-up of the Soviet system and transition into a free market economy, thousands of children are in risk of being separated from their families and forced to live in isolation inside institutions. The Armenian Government officially recognizes its responsibility to protect the rights of children and to intervene to assure their safety and development when those responsible for their care are unable to do so. However, most of these institutions, created under the Soviet system, still are ill equipped, some in advanced state of deterioration, lacking adequately trained staff and without the basic resources to cover their recurrent costs, subsisting only thanks to the humanitarian emergency assistance brought by foreign agencies.

It is known that among various categories of children in difficult circumstances in Armenia, those affected by mental and/or physical impairments are in most critical conditions, whether they live in institutions or together with their families. Such as it happens in many other countries and societies, Armenian parents of disabled children are confronted with feelings of loss, despair and uncertainty regarding the future of their disabled children. Yet, unlike many countries, Armenian parents do not have other alternatives and/or resources to take care of their children at home. Moreover, culturally induced beliefs in causes of disability determine negative attitudes of families, caregivers and community toward children with impairments, hampering their understanding and acceptance of disability, and consequently, sharpening negatively their expectations as regards the child's future.

The move to market relations undermined the centrally planned social support network of the Soviet period, based in low prices for basic goods, free services and virtually guaranteed jobs. During the transition period, the Government of Armenia has

been trying to identify the most effective approach for the provision of assistance to the most needy persons, based on principles of social justice.

This research describes current situation for children in Armenia, particularly those living in institutions, children living and working on the street and the children with disabilities. It also describes both the overall situation for families and children, as well as the child protective care system, types of care, and conditions of the institutions. This research reasons why children are increasingly at risk in Armenia, but also somehow offers variety of possible solutions.

Introduction

Since Armenia's independence from the former Soviet Union in 1991, the country has been afflicted with a variety of challenges, which have had drastic effects on the nation's stability. In addition to the efforts to transition to a market economy, the aftermath of a severe earthquake in 1988 and the effect of the Nagorno-Karabagh war with Azerbaijan in 1993 have sent Armenia into an economic depression. The gradual collapse of Armenia's industrial output to just 40% of its previous capacity, and the effect of being a landlocked nation with closed and tense borders, have led to unemployment rates estimated to be as high as 70% and more than half the nation of 3,798,239 (officially) living below the poverty line (10,784 drams or \$21.50 per month) [1], contributing to a mass exodus of ¼ of the population over the past decade. All of these circumstances have resulted in an increase in social problems, which have been worsened by the overall collapse of social services such as free education and health care. Provided universally under the Soviet Union, the government of Armenia has struggled to provide even basic social supports, as low budgets and internal corruption immobilized the effectiveness of many government offices. This general collapse, as well as the inheritance of problems inherent in certain aspects of the Soviet system, have resulted in greater strains on the Armenian family and have increased the number of children at risk.

Currently in Armenia there are over 10,000 children being cared for in some 59 institutions. In addition there are an estimated 8,000 children with disabilities and some 1,000 street children who are consistently isolated from mainstream society. Many of the children in all three of these groups are often denied access to adequate and appropriate nutrition, health services and education. Since Armenia's separation from the former Soviet Union in 1991 and the subsequent transition to a market economy, the nation has had many complex economic and social difficulties to face. Although the country has gradually stabilized and improved throughout the 90's, 27% of the population remains below the food line (6,612 drams or \$7.90 per month), 54.7% remain below the poverty line and as much as 70% [2] of the population is unemployed. This, along with the exodus of the quarter of the nation's population over the past 10 years, has put an

incredible strain on traditional community and extended family supports for families. This breakdown has put many individuals, but particularly children, at risk. Children in institutions, with disabilities, and living on the street have been particularly hard hit by these changes. As the numbers of 'orphaned' and street children have risen over the years, it is an indicator not only of the vulnerability of those individual children, but of the increased vulnerability of families throughout Armenia [3].

More than 10,000 children (enrolled in some 59 children's institutions) are separated from mainstream Armenia and are partially or fully isolated from their families and communities. Further, there are children with disabilities who live with their families but who, due to inadequate assistance and cultural biases, remain isolated from mainstream Armenian society. The latter group of children often remains without access to even basic education.

Note: According to UNICEF's "Situational Analysis of Children and Women in Armenia", in Yerevan 54% of the children registered, as attending an institution are permanent residents. Outside of Yerevan 82% of the children reside in the institutions during the day and return home at night to sleep [39]. It is believed that as much as 90% of the children living in orphanages are not orphans, those who do not have a living parent, but are in fact social orphans¹ [41].

All institutionalized children fall into a range of following categories: children from socially vulnerable families, mentally and/or physically disabled, abandoned or orphaned children, 'difficult' children in institutions is an inheritance of the Soviet era during which a system of institutions was developed to care for children with different needs. In the past, these needs mainly constituted physical or mental disabilities. Today, poverty constitutes the main reason why Armenian children attend institutions.

In Armenia, the collapse of the Soviet Union and declaration of independence in 1991, were further complicated by a severe earthquake in 1988 with some 50,000 [4] people dead and thousands injured. This earthquake destroyed several cities, disrupted all utilities and left about 500,000 people homeless. A high number of children were left invalids after this earthquake, and due to medical problems or lack of disability accommodations no longer attend school. On December 30, 1991, there was declared the end of the Soviet Union. The result, in Armenia as in the other Soviet republics, was an economic collapse, resulting in high levels of unemployment, hyperinflation and plummeting incomes. In 1993, a full-scale war broke out between Armenian and its neighbor, Azerbaijan, over the province of Nagorno-Karabach. Although a cease-fire was agreed in 1994, the conflict still constitutes a financial and human cost for the region. In the wake of these events, Armenia is struggling both to reform and rebuild its economy and resurrect its social infrastructure.

¹ A social orphanage is a child who has at least one, if not two, living parents who are unable or unwilling to care for them (see Appendix).

The impact of economic collapse was felt with particular acuity in the non-revenue earning social service sectors, in particular education and health. The government has been unable to finance monolithic and crumbling structures in these sectors. There is a need for reform to replenish Government budgets. Also there is a need for structural reorganization of an ineffective and inefficient system.

Since the economy achieved macro-economic stabilization (according to the official data, which are not supported by unofficial data) in the mid-1990s, the situation is gradually improving. The economy experiences a 3-6% [5] growth rate per year, setting the country on the course of recovery. However, the distribution of economic growth is notably unequal.

In 1998 over half of the population (54.7% [6], in 2000 - 70%²) remained below the poverty line and a quarter (27% [7], in 2000 - 20%³) is below the food line. As in all societies, economic difficulties at times translate into further difficulties for families, such as conflict, criminality, alcoholism and psychological and physical illnesses. As in all societies, children are the main victims of the economic and social upheaval.

The vulnerability of Armenian population is made worse by the partial or complete destruction of the Soviet system of extensive and universal services. Decreased quality, prohibitive fees or closure of essential services for children, such as kindergartens, schools, after-school activities and health services, exacerbates the difficulty for families to cope. Material assistance, such as the snack programs, including distribution of milk to all schools, as well as the distribution of free school materials, has been eliminated. For some families, institutions remain the only available option for addressing theirs or their children's problems.

Families' financial difficulties and the break down of social services may be correlated to the sharp increase in numbers of children enrolled in institutions. For example, between 1995-1997, the number of children in institutions jumped from 8,453 to 10,131 [8], an increase of 20%. The current situation is unsustainable due to the sheer number of children flooding the institutions and the high price these children have to pay in the form of falling standards of education and care at institutions struggling to cover their increasing expenses.

Research objectives

One of the objectives of this research is to make possible the involvement in and influence over the problem of children at risk communities, Armenian families, decision

² Unpublished source from an informant in the Ministry of Statistics.

³ Unpublished source from an informant in the Ministry of Statistics.

makers, service providers, staff at institutions and officials. This research provides information and some analysis on a group of children who are not attending Armenia's mainstream primary (general) schools.

The goals for this research were as follows:

- Evaluate the current situation of boarding institutions and institutionalized children in Armenia;
- Identify problems faced by families and by children (also most pressing needs of this population);
- Determine consequences, effects and attitudes rising from institutionalization;
- Assess available services other than the boarding institutions;
- Recommend reasonable actions and/or alternatives;
- Identify opportunities for future actions;
- Provide information that can be used in order to focus attention on problem of children at risk.

The hope is that this research will provide an assessment of the current situation and needs of children in Armenia, as well as a variety of alternatives.

Chapter 1: Boarding institutions in Armenia

This chapter describes boarding institutions in Armenia. It provides both a brief background of the system during the Soviet era and a description of the current system.

1.1 Background

A system of boarding institutions for children was first conceived of after the Russian revolution, when they were opened for street children as a way to protect them from abuse and starvation. As was the case in many countries undergoing similar efforts to build a universal welfare system, the Soviet state took on responsibility for providing for its most vulnerable citizens by building a network of institutions for children and old people. The system evolved to include additional categories of children. Today, the following categories of boarding institutions exist (see Appendixes 1, 2):

- Institutions for children with special needs (due to mental and/or physical disability);
- Institutions for children from socially vulnerable families;

- Institutions for gifted children;
- Sanatoriums for children suffering from health problems (such as TB, arthritis);
- Orphanages (where children only live while attending general schools in the vicinity).

The publication "For Assistance to the Directors of Special Schools" written by the Ministry of Education of Russia and published in 1982, is the most recent book of instructions regarding the aim, operation and admission criterion for children's boarding institutions. It provides a detailed regulatory framework on most aspects of running an institution and of the services, which should be made available to eligible children.

In Soviet times, while the overall responsibility of admission and operation was assigned to ministries or to local or regional departments of education, the actual identification of children's specific situation was commonly performed by primary school teachers. Although this research does not have access to the Soviet texts regulating teacher's responsibilities beyond teaching, oral evidence outlines a decentralized system of social work performed by class teachers. Among their social work responsibilities, class teachers informed the relevant authorities of children who needed material assistance and could refer children and families to psychological or medical care. This official responsibility for the children's well being sometimes translated into teachers offering troubled children to live with them or join them for holiday trips. The system has been praised as being effective as teachers working close to children are judged to be in a good position to assess children's individual circumstances and needs for assistance.

In the case of children identified by teachers as suffering from mental or physical disabilities, professional examinations were required. These were conducted by the Medical, Pedagogical and Psychological Commissions. There were 54 such commissions⁴ working throughout Armenia, staffed by psychologists, doctors and pedagogues (teachers) who volunteered their time. The 54 commissions were subordinated to the Medical, Pedagogical and Psychological Center in Yerevan. According to the regulations, in those cases where final diagnosis could not be confirmed by the commissions, a system existed whereby children could stay a maximum of one year in institutions and attend special diagnostic classes to be assessed by staff, which formally was assigned to make the final diagnosis. For institutions serving mentally and physically disabled children, the following definitions of disability made a child eligible for enrollment:

Decreased mobility: Light cerebral palsy, polio and scoliosis

Speech disability (for example stammering)
Impaired sight
Hearing problems
Mental retardation

⁴ The source is the publication of an unknown author provided by an official of one of NGOs.

Psychically delayed development

The medical criterions used for mental disability were:

1. Oligophrenia and Down's disease
2. Organic dementia, caused by infection, intoxication or head injuries
3. Light forms of Epilepsy
4. Schizophrenia

The responsibility of the boarding institutions for mentally and physically disabled was to provide education, professional orientation and teaching of skills, such as carpentry or sewing. The goal was to provide the child with skills necessary for independent life as adults. The institutions for disabled children were obligated to employ staff with medical expertise: pediatricians, psychologists and medical nurses. According to the book "For Assistance to the Directors of Special Schools", methodology and medical policy for individual cases could be formulated in cooperation with any psycho-neurological institution in the vicinity such as mental hospital or polyclinics. It is worth pointing out that the regulations only allowed children aged 7-9 years to be admitted to institutions for disabled children, with exceptions being made only in special cases.

It is important to note that the regulations in "For Assistance to the Directors of Special Schools" specifically excludes from institutions those children who suffer from 'heavy form of backwardness', 'imbeciles', 'idiotism' and 'disadaptation' and absence of self-control'. In other words, children with more severe disabilities who could be argued to be in more need of specialized assistance were not eligible for enrollment in institutions for children with disabilities. It is unclear, whether there are any official policies regarding their care.

1.2. Current Situation

According to the data completed by the Ministry of Education, there are 59 children's institutions operating in Armenia today.

Out of these ten are kindergartens. The majority of institutions used to fall under the direct responsibility of the Ministry of Education. This has recently been changed, so that all but one orphanage now fall under the Ministry of Social Security, whereas some 39 institutions are the direct responsibility of the Marz administrations. Only 10 institutions still fall directly under the Ministry of Education, 2 institutions, Nork orphanage in Yerevan and children's unit at the mental hospital in Sevan are under the Ministry of Health and one institution is under the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the center in the Zeitun district in Yerevan, where children in conflict with law are taken for assessment⁵.

⁵ Undetermined source from the Council of Ministers.

The regulation for the boarding institutions passed by the Armenian Government on 30 June 1997 "Criterion for Children in Need of Special Education", adopts the same admission criteria as during the Soviet system. However, new admission criteria have been added, to include 'deviant' children whose 'delayed psychiatric development' can be related to "environmental (cognitive) restriction caused by pedagogical neglect related to unfavorable microsocial conditions". This additional eligibility criterion reflects the general concern expressed in Armenia that some children's development is bound to be effected by the social disruption caused by recent economic decline. The additional admission criterion illustrates both how Armenian policy-makers acknowledge the problem of children being affected by the socio-economic difficulties currently experienced, as well as how a system designed for other purposes is assigned the responsibility of caring for these children.

Commissions for examining children still operate in some areas. There are currently three different kinds of commissions who work with children and who may at some point advise or decide on enrollment of children into boarding institutions.

First, Medical, Pedagogical and Psychological Commissions are planned to operate at Marz level, reducing the number from 54 to 11⁶ compared with the Soviet system. A second commission is the Commission on Adoption, Trusteeship and Foster-Care. It is supposed to both be present within the Marz administration as well as at the 54 locations of the Territorial Centers of Social Protection. It appears that decisions regarding adoption currently takes place at all administrative levels of society. At community level (the hamaynks), the mayor's office or the Council of Elders (Avaganineri Xhorurd) receive applications from couples wishing to adopt. It appears that final decisions are made sometimes at the hamaynk level, and sometimes they are referred for examination and approval at either territorial center level or in Marz administration. The third commission is the Commission on Minors. It reports to the Ministry of Interior and is usually represented by a local police man who makes decisions on children who are committing crimes or who are 'delinquent'- child prostitutes, street children and beggars. The majority of these children end up either in the children's prison run by the Ministry of Interior in Yerevan, or may go to one of the few institutions specialized on street children (one recently opened in Vanadzor and one is run with the assistance of Medecins Sans Frontiers-France in Yerevan (Vardashen). Again, the need to find quick solutions may lead to these children being improperly referred⁷.

Armenia passed a Law on the Protection of the Child in 1995. However, there is no commission whose responsibility is to enforce and monitor children's rights. Professionals, working with children who have been abused, do not have any legal resource to protect the children they encounter. Staff at the Gynecological Center for Children in Yerevan, explain that they can only determine that a child has been victim of sexual abuse. However, they do not know of any instance for reporting the cases in order to protect the children from the perpetrators. Similarly, reports on children being

⁶ Source from the administration (marzpetaran) of Stepanavan.

⁷ For further details about the Commissions, their types and admission procedures, contact authors.

physically abused are not likely to be filed by the police unless the child dies from the injuries.

1.3. Financial Situation

The actual conditions of the children's institutions vary widely and seem primarily relative to the tenacity of the director. One reason for this is direct result of the government's inability to appropriately fund the institutions. In general, boarding schools, orphanages and the Distribution Center, receive 504 (\$0.95) per child per day from the state to cover the cost of food. However, some institutions reported that the government taxes this amount with a 20% Value Added Tax, reducing the amount to 403 drams (\$0.76). According to the director of Nork institution⁸ they get 576 drams (\$1.05) per child per day for food only (the last payment was made in May 2000). Other needs (clothes, medical support, etc) are covered by charity organizations only.

Teachers receive a salary between 7,000-10,000 drams (\$13.21-18.87) a month. While this salary is 15-20% higher than that of a teacher at general schools, teachers at the children's institutions report not being paid for months at a time. Full annual budgets were reported as being between \$2,000-5,000. According to Ophelia Petrossian the director of the Ministry of Social Security "Due to lack of finances the directors of the orphanages are encouraged to collect funds from other sources". The institutions, which are doing the best, are those, which have assessed support from NGOs and the Diaspora, in addition to state support. However, many of the informants felt the amount of assistance provided by non-governmental sources, particularly from the Diaspora, has dropped in recent years as "they go off to put out other fires in the world" [23]. The institutions, which have utilized supports the best encourage donations of everything from diapers and toys to whole buildings, or allow staff from other agencies work alongside their own. Monetary contributions seemed to be discouraged by the more savvy directors, as the Armenian Government apparently continuous to tax large charitable donations [24].

1.4. Admission Procedures

Documentation is usually required for admission into boarding institutions. These have to correspond to the original function of the institution. However, due to the sharp increase in applicants coupled with dwindling financial and human resources, documentation at times serves a more ceremonial than substantive function. The current process of admission at times is an unregulated and informal, usually managed by the directors of institutions.

⁸ For more information you may contact to the director of Nork institution by phone 651362.

To be admitted in institutions, children should submit the following documents:

1. An application written by the main caretaker, motivating the necessity of admission.
2. Birth certificate.
3. Certificate proving that the area where the child lives is not affected by any diseases.
4. A child's health certificate.
5. If the child is referred by its ordinary school, the explanation by ordinary school why child is recommended to change the boarding school.

Today, it appears that the main criterion for admission is the level of poverty of the family. Parents expressed their gratitude with the directors of the institutions, (saying she/he was very kind to have accepted their application as she/he assists them in their poverty). Hence, the director decides on the criteria of eligibility and who meets these criteria⁹.

In Vanadzor, if families refer the child, the same documents as listed above are required, with additional documentation to prove mental disability. A certificate of mental disability can be obtained from doctors against a fee. Children are also referred by their general schools, which compile lists of children who are not making sufficient progress or who are considered unruly. As it was explained by the director of one of Vanadzor institutions, these children are then assessed by the Medical, Pedagogical and Psychological Commission in Vanadzor, which appears to mainly consist of staff from boarding institution itself. The director explained that if parents of children recommended for her institution disagreed with their evaluation, she and other actors involved in admission process would try to convince the parents that they should accept that their children are mentally backward. Some parents would give in whereas others would move their children to a village school, where the competition would not be as fierce. She also explained that all children enrolling in that institution were taught to understand that they are mentally backwards.

During the research, several cases of inappropriate referrals were encountered. As mentioned above, one reason is the overcrowding of institutions, mainly by poor children, which tends to set aside the rules of admission. A second reason appears to be that institutions do not mind accepting children who do not officially meet the eligibility criterion, but who have been referred for other reasons, such as for misbehaving in their general schools.

During the Soviet times, as explained by one institution's deputy director, they had problems filling the institutions. The management of the institutions would advertise for children in the media. Today, the increase of applicants and a corresponding watering down of admission criterion gives directors and staff at boarding institutions considerable influence over how many and which kind of children can be admitted at their institutions.

⁹ The source is the publication of an unknown author provided by an official of one of NGOs.

This is further compounded by the fact that directors and/or staff of boarding schools often sit on the commissions who decide on children's abilities.

For example, the director of boarding school for mentally disabled in Echmiadzin is also head of the Medical, Pedagogical and Psychological commission in Echmiadzin. As such, he controls the flow of children into institutions in his area, including his own.

The same situation exists in Vanadzor's institution, where staff (1 defectologist, 1 psychiatrist, 1 speech therapist, and 1 pedagogue) makes up the commission who visits and examines children selected by the general schools. The current arrangements do not allow for a second or an independent opinion regarding the abilities and status of each individual child and may be abused by boarding institutions that receive funding calculated on the number of children attending their institutions.

1.5. Management of Boarding Institutions.

In accordance with new system, most institutions now fall under the administrative responsibilities of the Marzpet. This includes appointment of staff, budgets and monitoring. Due to the changes being recent, it is too early to evaluate their outcome. Although the new system constitutes decentralization in theory, the beneficiary assessment documented extensive frustration on the part of employees in the public sector with the reduced responsiveness and efficiency of the new administrative line of command. As in the past policy and decision-making were taken at ministerial level. The addition of the Marz structure is commonly viewed as an unwelcome hurdle in the line of communication with the decision-makers. Whereas in the past, managers of hospitals, institutions, etc picked up the telephone and spoke directly with the ministries regarding administrative or financial issues, management at institutions now report to the Marz administration which does not have the same experience or capacity as the ministries. The Marz administration is not elected by the local constituency, but is appointed by the government. As such, it does not necessarily allow for more democracy or local influence in decision-making.

In the case of monitoring of children's institutions, it is still not clear exactly which checks and balances the new system will provide.

Some findings may cause some concern regarding the appointment of staff to children's institutions. For example, the director of one of the institutions is the wife of the former director, who recently died. The deputy director is the son of the director. In addition, the director employs her daughter as a speech therapist. According to the ministry of Education, it is allowed to employ members of the family on the condition that they do not have any responsibility over the institutions' finances. There is nothing inherently wrong with members of the same family working in the same organization. However, apart from financial issues, experience in Western Europe shows that it can be negative to employ members of the same family for working in care institutions. The

reason is that the monitoring component, which is crucial to ensure, that no one takes advantage of the inherent vulnerability of children in care, is weakened when family loyalties exist between members of staff. When staff at institutions is relatives, it reduces the likelihood of wrongdoing being reported for investigation.

Chapter 2: Overview of Services in the Soviet Union and Current Situation.

The Soviet system provided universal and extensive services to families and children. Citizens were guaranteed jobs and benefits, ensuring economic security for families. Education was free of charge and school material, transportation and sometimes school lunches were provided at no or little charge. All families had access to child care in the form of day care centers, kindergartens, and after school activities. In addition, political organizations, such as Pioneer organizations and the communist party's youth organization Comsomol, organized leisure activities throughout the year, such as sports and drama. In summer, children's camps were organized, offering different leisure activities and courses.

Health care was also predominantly free for all citizens. For disabled persons, there were also material subsidies in the form of financial benefits, lower cost or free utilities and free passes for local transport, to name a few.

Today, over half of Armenians are living in poverty. While a large amount of families live in economic insecurity, the cost of primary as well as secondary education has partly been transferred to families in the form of purchases of school material and, as reported by most families interviewed, in the form of 'gifts' to teachers. Further, costs for health care have increased, with many families reporting having to pay for services, which officially are free¹⁰ [9]. Simultaneously, support services in the form of child care have either shut down completely, or are operating with staff and material shortages. The findings show that quality child care can only be obtained in exchange for payment, either from government kindergartens or in the form of private baby-sitters. This effectively excludes a large number of families. The extensive subsidies for disabled children and adults have been discontinued or partly replaced with disability cash transfers.

There are today two kinds of material assistance provided or distributed by the state: One is the still extensive system of financial benefits, which are based on beneficiary categories. The main beneficiary categories are children, invalids, pensioners

¹⁰ For further information, please see "Social Assessment Report on the Education and Health Sectors in Armenia", by Elizabeth Gomart.

and unemployed. In the first half of 1998, there were 305,002 persons registered some form of monthly financial benefit. The average value of financial benefits is 2,026 drams (\$4)¹¹ per person and month. In addition to financial benefits, humanitarian assistance to Armenia is distributed via 54 Territorial Centers for Social Protection. The system is called PAROS and eligibility is defined according to physical characteristics (age, disability) and marital /legal status (divorced, widowed, orphans, refugees). The material assistance is typically in the form of food items or fuel during the winter.

Poverty combined with lack of affordable child care services means that families have to shoulder greater responsibilities with fewer resources. As reflected in the following chapter on the reasons for enrolling children in boarding institutions, the result is that some families cannot cope and seek assistance in institutions.

Chapter 3: Reasons for Attending Boarding Institutions in Armenia

During the interviews with staff at institutions, as well as with the general community, the opinion was sometimes expressed that the reasons for attending boarding institutions lie with the children themselves. It was argued that children attending institutions do so either because of their own bad behavior, such as being disruptive or being bad learners, or because they are not loved by their parents. Although respondents expressed pity with children who they considered to be involved, they also concluded that it could be the fault of the child. Although these attitudes were not shared by the majority, they were expressed often to cause worry, as the underlying message is that the children 'deserve' to be separated from their peers and family to be 'corrected' in boarding institutions. Armenian society holds conservative values regarding the upbringing of children, where children are expected to show obedience, diligence and respect for their elders. When a child is not obedient or diligent, parents may be blamed for being 'immoral' or lacking in discipline, but the child may also be considered faulty. This view may translate into children being blamed for the failures of the adults, parents, teachers and decision-makers, who are responsible for their well-being.

It can be very difficult to identify the background to why a child is 'difficult' or to access the reasons for learning difficulties. Therefore, this analysis does not attempt to access the credibility of the reasons given by the interviewed families for enrolling their children in the boarding institutions. In one case, the main reason given for referring a child is the child's unruliness, while the source of the child's behavior could be a violent father. Similarly, whereas a family may explain that the reason for enrolling their child is

¹¹ Undetermined source from the Ministry of Social Security.

their precarious financial situation, it could be the case that the child is not prioritized by its parents, who wish to hide that they spend their money on alcohol and gambling. In the case of a child being disabled, a respondent may identify the disability as being the reason for the child attending an institution, whereas the real reason is that the parent's new spouse rejects the child out of jealousy. These three examples serve to illustrate how social taboos and individual tragedies may at times hide the truth behind why children end up being sent to institutions. This is a difficulty inherent to researching issues, which touch on the most intimate aspects of people's lives.

Respondents of interview of the level of poverty in the household were assessed to be 1) non-poor, 2) poor, 3) very poor, based on the following criteria: income, what and how many times the household had eaten in the last 24 hours, and what items money had been spent on. This allows for an insight as to whether a family is able to meet its basic needs: food, shelter (including heat, electricity and for land owners, water fees), health, education and finally clothes. A household able to meet these needs is considered to be non-poor, whereas a poor household can meet some of these needs and a very poor household can only meet their most basic needs, mainly food, only some times. Further, there was made visual observations regarding the condition of the people living in household, such as clothes and people's health. Finally the state of the house and household assets were assessed, such as whether the refrigerator and television functioned, and the state of disrepair of the residence.

3.1. Poverty.

According to the Armenian State Department of Statistics' Household Budget Survey, conducted in 1996, over 54.7% of the population remains below the poverty line. In addition, some 27% of the population falls below the food line. In Lory Marz, the incidence of poverty is 51.5% [10] of the population, a few percentage points below the national average.

Now, according to the unofficial sources, about 4% of population of Armenia control over 93% of welfare. and 90% of population is in the category of extremely poor families.

~~Families interviewed informed that poverty was the main reason behind their decision to enroll one or more children in a boarding institution. About 55% of families of institutionalized children were judged to be very poor and most of them explained that poverty was the reason for sending their children to boarding school¹².~~

¹² Unpublished information taken from officials of institutions

Table 1. Measures to Assess Level of Poverty.

Measures	Definition
Poor	Households with per capita expenditures below the poverty line – 10,784 drams per month (\$21.50)
Very Poor	Households with per capita expenditures below the threshold of food line – 6,612 drams per month (\$13.20)
Extremely Poor	Households with per capita expenditures below the amount needed to attain the minimum caloric norm with 1-2 staples – 3.960 drams per month (\$7.90)

Data Source: Armenia: Profile of Poverty 1996, World Bank Draft Report, 1998.

For families who are unable to meet even the basic needs of their children, the food, clothes, educational material and beds provided at boarding institutions constitutes crucial assistance. The majority of poor families meant that the fact that food was served at the boarding institutions constitute the key aspect influencing their decision to send their children to the institution. After food, the second most important aspect is that the education at boarding schools is entirely free. Unlike at general schools, the families of children at boarding schools do not have to use scarce resources on pencils, notebooks, schoolbooks and good clothing for their children's education. At boarding institutions, education material is provided for free. Furthermore, the children at times receive clothes and shoes from humanitarian and charity organizations. The high expenses of general education are generally regarded as a very significant obstacle for the respondents¹³ [11]. Although the Armenia tradition is to emphasize education as one of the most important investments society and family can make, current economic realities force parents to make other priorities. At times, poverty is also causing a change in attitudes. One parent told he asks himself at the beginning of each year "May his child go to school this year," referring to the high cost of education.

3.2. Disability

Article 23 of CRC¹⁴ is devoted to the rights of children with disabilities. It emphasizes that the State is obligated to recognize that a child with a mental or physical disability "should enjoy a full and decent life in conditions which ensure dignity, promote self-reliance and facilitate the child's active participation in the community". Article 26 of the Armenian law emphasizes "social rehabilitation, full life, and participation in social life" [12], which implies minimizing the use of institutions. However the level of awareness in our society regarding children with disabilities is very low and some level of discrimination still continues. Even the number of children with disabilities is difficult to estimate because the majority of these children live at home and many are not registered for social benefits (precise data is not available).

¹³ For more detailed information on this problem, please see "Social Assessment Report On the Education and Health Sectors in Armenia", by Elizabeth Gomart.

¹⁴ Convention on the Right of the Child.

According to data from the Ministry of Social Welfare, the total number of people with disabilities is 118,000 (the same number was in 1995 (strangeness or coincidence?)) around 8,400 of who are children under 16 years of age. According to unofficial sources that number is much higher, approximately 203,000 (more than 10,000 children).

The Armenian state department of Statistics reports the total number of persons with different disabilities to be 108,000, out of which there are an estimated 8,000 children.

From the informant in the Ministry of Health, we got just information, that the number of children with disabilities registered in institutions in 1997, in 2000 it increased by 41%. According to data from the Ministry of Health, there were 4,808 (64%) boys and 2,702 (36%) girls registered in institutions in 1997.

The system of government-supported childcare has broken down, making finding affordable and appropriate child care more difficult [42].

Note: Social Services for Children with Disabilities: Government services are provided to children with disabilities up to 16 years of age by the Ministry of Health, after which time responsibility shifts to the Ministry of Social Security [13]. The services from the Ministry of Social Security currently consist of monthly payments of 4,000 drams (\$4-6) per registered child. Although, there is a lengthy list of other benefits that are guaranteed free of charge by the government, the economic conditions under which all Ministries are currently working prevents the implementation of most of the services for people with disabilities. In Addition, public transportation and playgrounds are not designed for the physically disabled. The majority of buildings in Armenia are not wheelchair accessible [14].

At some institutions included in this research, information was collected regarding the children's mental and physical status. The information was obtained both through the registration documents on each child and by crosschecking the information therein with members of staff.

Many categories of mental and physical disability are medically inappropriate. For example, among physical disabilities are included the following wide range of afflictions: diabetes, stammering, problems with eyesight, impaired hearing and bed-wetting. Among mental disabilities are included slow learners (referred to as 'slight' mental disability) and epilepsy.

Table 2. Number of Children Born with Disabilities

	Total Number			
	Jan 1995	Jan 1996	Jan 1997	Jan 1998
Children with disabilities	6,433	6,788	6,848	7,055

Data Source: Ministry of Social Security, RoA, 1998.

About 40% of children attending special institutions for disable children are not judged by their families to have no disabilities, 45% to have slight disabilities and 15% to have severe disabilities.

Table 3. The fraction of children with disabilities attending special institutions.

No disability	Slight	Severe	Total
40%	45%	15%	100%

Data Source: Research provided by Liana Haroutunyan, graduated student of Armenian State University, Sociology Department, RoA, Yerevan, 1999, [15].

Table 4. Primary reason for enrolling children in boarding institutions.

Poverty	Disability	Behavior	Total
70%	25%	5%	100%

Data Source: Research provided by Liana Haroutunyan, graduated student of Armenian State University, Sociology Department, RoA, Yerevan, 1999, [16].

It is significant that only 25% families reports that their child's disability was the primary reason for the child's enrollment in a boarding institution which is designated for the mentally disabled and 35% families reported disability to be a second reason. The remaining families reported poverty and the child's behavior to be the main reason for enrollment. Further, and more importantly, 60% children of these families are considered normal by their families yet have been enrolled in an institution for children with mental disabilities.

By enrolling their disabled children, parents reported wanting to achieve two things: first, a chance for their children to socialize with the outside world and meet children their own age while receiving some basic education. Secondly, families expressed a need for some time off from caring for their disabled children.

It is important to mention that after 'graduating' the institutions, there are only two options for disabled children, either to return home into the care of their families or to be placed into an institution for adults. According to the director of Abovian boarding school for children with mental disabilities, after the age of 18 "the children go nowhere".

3.3. Dysfunctional family

Dysfunctional families are the families whose internal relations have disintegrated or in other ways have become unhealthy. The composition of the family may or may not affect the quality of the interaction between family members. For example, a traditional nuclear family may be deeply dysfunctional, creating a damaging environment for the children, whereas a single mother may create a harmonious and supporting environment for her children.

Table 5. Marriage and divorce Patterns in Armenia

	1980	1985	1990	1995	1997
Crude Marriage Rate (per 1000 population)	10.4	9.9	8.0	4.2	3.3
Crude Divorce Rate (per 1000 population)	1.1	1.2	1.2	0.7	0.6
Divorce/Marriage Ratio (Divoces/100 Marriages)	10.6	12.1	15.2	16.7	18.2

Data Source: Ministry of Statistics, RoA, 1998.

There is very little information available on single-parent households in Armenia. It is known that the reported number of the households is increasing (12%¹⁵ with comparison with the data published in 1997). There are few reasons for the reported increase. Although divorce rates in Armenia remain among the lowest in the FSU, the divorce/marriage ratio has steadily increased over the past two decades (see Table 5) [17].

The reasons for family's disintegration and disharmony can be manifold. It is clear that the economic difficulties (now, the reason of 43% of all divorces are economic difficulties¹⁶) experienced by many Armenian families at times sows seeds of disharmony in the household as conflict erupts from the daily stress of not knowing how to make ends meet. Other reasons are alcoholism, mental illness, or lack of interpersonal skills and empathy on part of the adults. Not all adults when becoming parents have the necessary skills for creating a loving and supporting environment for their children. Further, the earthquake of 1988, in which a significant proportion of people lost family members and assets, as well as the trauma of war and refugee flows, add to the psychological and material stress of the Armenian population.

It is always problematic to judge whether a family is dysfunctional or not. By definition, it involves using subjective criteria for what constitutes a 'functional' versus a 'dysfunctional' family. In additional societies the definition of family and the roles of the different family members are often rigidly defined and upheld by a societal consensus regarding what is 'correct' and what is 'incorrect' behavior. The family described above was considered dysfunctional by those judging it from outside. However, the reason given by the family itself for enrolling their children in boarding schools is poverty - the motivating factor is that the children receive food.

3.4. Single Parenthood

The phenomena of judging caretakers who enroll their children in boarding institutions as being dysfunctional is particularly common in regards to single mothers. Women who are sole caretakers of their children also suffer from the additional bias in

¹⁵ Information of the informant from the Ministry of Statistics.

¹⁶ Information of officials from Court (Kentron (Central) District).

that for women, being dysfunctional is considered almost synonymous with being immoral.

In Armenia, the official statistics show 12,525 single mothers and 14,102 [18] families in which parents had divorced. It is not clear whether separate statistics exist for families where the husband has gone abroad to find work and who has failed to return and who is not sending money for the support of his family. In total, 23,841 children of single parents (never married) are registered to receive benefits. Further, 38,178 children with divorced parents, and 28,831 one-sided orphans are registered with the national social security system. This makes a total of 90,850 [19] children registered as living with only one parent, predominantly with the mother.

Table 6. Number of children born to married and unmarried mothers in Armenia.

	Number of Births (%)							
	1989		1990		1995		1997	
To married mothers	69,340	(91.2)	72,475	(91.7)	41,539	(84.8)	32,590	(74.2)
To unmarried mothers	5,910	(7.8)	7,407	(9.3)	7,421	(15.2)	11,339	(25.8)
Total number	75,250	(100)	79,882	(100)	48,960	(100)	43,929	(100)

Data Source: Ministry of Statistics, RoA, 1998.

Few lone parents actually live on their own with their children. The majority live in households, which include members of the extended family. There are no official statistics on the number of single-parent households in Armenian as a whole. However, of the 40 families randomly sampled for interviews in one of the regions of Armenia, half were single-parent households (19 female-headed and 1 male-headed). The level of poverty is significant with 43.9% of single parent households falling below the poverty line. Without the assistance of an extended family, these households were found to be extremely vulnerable.

Lone parents more frequently listed poverty to be the main reason for institutionalization, compared with two-parent households. It is difficult to judge to which extent reasons other than poverty contribute to lone parents' decision to send their children to boarding institutions. However, most accounts by lone mothers also include descriptions of challenges other than poverty. One concern of single parents is the sheer workload of caring for children without someone else to share the responsibilities and worries with.

Single mothers, particularly those who never married, but also those who are single due to divorce or abandonment, describe how they are likely to be looked down upon by their peers. Being single reduces a woman's status in a household and vis-à-vis the general community. One woman who was rejected by her boyfriend when she realized she was pregnant lives with her brothers and their respective wives. She explains that she is allowed to stay if she cares for her five nieces and nephews, with the additional

condition that her own daughter stays at an institution. Her brothers and sister-in-law do not want an 'illegitimate' child in the house. Her role in the household is to serve the other adults and their children. She has accepted this, as she cannot afford, either economically or socially, to live on her own. She expressed gratitude and respect toward her relatives for allowing her to stay with them at all, but suffers from knowing that her daughter will never have a chance to experience normal family life. Her daughter has been at a boarding kindergarten since birth.

Some of the women are further isolated by the stigma that is at times quite frivolously assigned to them by the general community. For example, staff at the institutions when describing the children's family often equated a divorced or single mother with prostitute. Equally, the decision-makers and service providers in focus group interviews often expressed their concern and dislike for 'all these immoral women' who have children on their own. It was quite remarkable how often individual mothers living without a partner, whether following a divorce or because they were never married, were assumed to be prostitutes.

3.5. Child care

Working parents, whether single or married, report using boarding institutions as a form of child care. Although this may also have occurred during the Soviet System, it was rare as the state provided well-equipped kindergartens and organized after-school activities for all children without charge. Today, kindergartens charge a monthly fee of 1,000-2,500 drams (even more)(\$2-5). Few families today are able to afford this amount and instead have to rely on kin and neighbors to care for their children. The survey in Echmiatsin shows that increased cost of kindergartens creates a tendency for parents to pay an entrance fee to gain access to boarding institutions, as these are free of charge. The director one of the kindergartens explained that due to the institution's fiscal difficulties, she was forced to accept applicants who can pay over those who cannot. The result is that children of very poor parents, who may have greater need for the food and free educational material at this kindergarten, are rejected in favor of children whose parents can afford to pay. Indeed, the director described that her kindergarten is becoming very popular with the upper class, as it receives considerable attention from the humanitarian community.

Another result of the increased cost of child care was encountered in Vanadzor. A kindergarten closed down due to financial constraints, after which the decision was taken to open a class "0" at the boarding institution for mentally disabled. Able and disabled children attend this kindergarten, which is free of charge.

Caretakers interviewed reported that having their children in boarding institutions allowed them to work without having to worry about their children being without supervision. Children remain at the institutions until late afternoon, receiving a third meal

and assistance with their homework. Both employed and unemployed parents expressed a need for childcare in order to tend to their other responsibilities.

3.6. Domestic Violence

The research reveals several cases of family environments marked by violence. In order to protect children, parents, predominantly the mother, or other relatives may decide to enroll children in boarding institutions. Another aspect is that some women are terrorized by their husbands to the extent that they cannot cope with the responsibility of caring for their children. There were encountered children of a woman who left her family due to the constant beating by her husband. The father was not capable or willing to take on her responsibilities as primary caretaker and therefore enrolled the children at boarding school. There are no statistics available in Armenia on the number of women and children who seek medical assistance for injuries caused by domestic violence. There also are no statistics on the number of people killed by their spouses each year. In this research, three cases of women being exposed to domestic violence were encountered. One woman died and two chose to leave their spouses. As it has been established that economic difficulties cause an increase in domestic violence in most societies, while also making it more difficult for women to leave abusive husbands for economic reasons, it is crucial to provide services for victims of domestic violence and their children when working to prevent institutionalization of children.

A small study conducted by the Yerevan State University, Department of Sociology, looked at the perceived causes of domestic violence in the Armenia family and the reasons that women stay in abusive situation. Violence in the home was attributed to a number of different factors, including alcohol and drug abuse, lack of respect between husband and wife, frustration, repetition of behavior that occurred in husband's own family, feelings of betrayal, revenge, husband's need for self-affirmation, method of conflict resolution, and method of control. Women reported many reasons why they remained with their husband in the face of systematic abuse. These included the desire to keep the family together for the children, financial dependence, sympathy for the husband, reassurance by husband that the violence will end and fear of public opinion. Some women felt that violence was normal, especially those that experienced domestic violence as a part of childhood [25].

3.7. Proximity

There is an evident that some children attend boarding schools because it is close to their homes and 40% of families of children attending institution in Stepanavan gave this as one of the reasons for why their children attend the institution. In contrast, no families in Vanadzor mention proximity as a reason for enrolling their children. One reason may be that the families interviewed in Vanadzor tend to live further away from

the institution compared with families in Stepanavan. Further, the difference also lies in that Stepanavan's institution is a much more attractive school, with newly renovated buildings and a new sleeping quarter, located on top of a green hill with fields and forest around. The class rooms are freshly painted and have been equipped with material donated from humanitarian organizations. Vanadzor's one is a collection of almost derelict, temporary buildings, with children housed in small and dark class rooms overlooking muddy slopes. The director complains that they do not receive the attention of the humanitarian organizations and that they cannot afford to improve their environment.

3.8. Child's Behavior

Being considered a trouble-maker or a bad learner may lead to a child being transferred to a boarding institution. It was not possible to discern any common set of criterion used for deciding on transfers of children with behavioral or learning difficulties. It appears to be left to the individual teacher or parent to make the judgment of the child's status. Unruly or hyperactive children appear to be diagnosed as having a 'slight disability' at Vanadzor's institution for mentally handicapped. It is not clear whether any effort is made to assist the child to prepare him or her to be transferred back to their general schools. Although no statistical data is available, testimonies from staff at institutions suggest that once enrolled, children do not leave the boarding school until graduation.

The likelihood of being transferred back may be further reduced by the fact that a child's character and abilities may be judged by different commissions, using different criteria. For example, staff from one of Vanadzor's institutions consists of the Psychological, Pedagogical and Medical Commission, which decide on whether a child should be transferred from a general school. If a child applies to transfer back to his/her general school, it is not the same commission, which will conduct the test, but rather a commission consisting of members of staff of the general school. It is difficult to see how two different commissions, both made up of staff from the respective educational institutions, and using different sets of criteria to judge the child, will represent the child's interest.

Out of twenty families interviewed in Vanadzor, eight families did not consider their children to suffer from any disabilities. Although it was not within the scope of this research to test each child to determine their physical or mental abilities, it is clear that fully healthy children are being inappropriately referred to boarding institutions for mentally disabled children. Apart from parents making these decisions due to poverty, it appears that children who are not desirable for different reasons are 'dumped' in boarding institutions through decisions of their general schools and/or commissions.

3.9. Refugee children¹⁷

Approximately 350,000 refugees that have entered Armenia since 1988 are roughly equivalent to 10% of the entire population of the country [20]. The majority of refugees were ethnic Armenians considered to be coming back to the motherland¹⁸. As of July 1 1998, the total number of refugee children still residing in Armenia was 33,178, 40% in cities and 60% in villages. The number of children in refugee families still residing in temporary dwellings, entitled to allowances, was 4,072, or 12.3% of all refugee children [21].

Table 7. Number of refugees/IDPs in Armenia.

Category	Number	Percent
Total Number of Refugees	311,328	100
Location		
In the country	245,921	79.0
Out of country	65,407	21.0
Sex		
Male	137,302	44.1
Female	174,026	55.9
Age		
Under 16 years	65,380	21.0
16-60 years	154,107	49.5
Over 60 years	91,841	29.5
Higher Education	15,566	5.0
Disabled	12,105	3.9
Employed	59,930	19.2
Number of Families	77,032	---

Data Source: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Liaison Office, 1998.

The Russian department at Stepanavan's institution is the pride of its staff. "We fought to be allowed to keep Russian as part of the curriculum," explains the director. In Stepanavan, it is the only educational institution offering classes in Russian. One child from a non-poor family enrolled after he was unable to perform in his general school due to his poor knowledge of the Armenian language. For him, the only reason for enrolling in a

¹⁷ Authors have similar information about: 1) Children Living or Working in the Streets; 2) Children in the Conflict with the Law. For further information, please, contact authors.

¹⁸ There were also small number of refugees from Abkhazia (Georgia) and Chechnya (Russian Federation).

boarding institution is the availability of Russian. A total of three cases were encountered in Stepanavan, children attend the boarding institution partly or entirely due to the availability of Russian classes.

With a few exceptions, after the fall of the Soviet Union and with it the dominance of the Russian language, education in Armenia is almost exclusively conducted in Armenian. This makes it difficult for the children of non-Armenian speaking minorities to get by in general schools. According to the Armenian State Department of Statistics, in this year's estimate, there are 311,328 refugees residing in Armenia. Most of these are Armenians from Azerbaijan, not all of who speak Armenian, and there are also significant groups of Georgians, Russians as well as other nationalities.

It appears that those children of refugees who do not have a good command of the Armenian language are harassed at general schools. One mother reported that her son had been very discouraged at the general school due to the other children taunting him and calling him names. Since transferring to Stepanavan's institution, he is at ease and likes other children. Though it needs to notice that children there ranked Russian speaking children quite low in their play ground hierarchy. As becoming a refugee is fraught with loss and sometimes severe traumas, refugee children need special attention and care in general schools and boarding institutions.

3.10. Other Reasons

Large family

In Armenia, four or more children constitute a large family size. Having many children may affect the economic situation of the household, and, some argue, as contraceptives and abortions have become prohibitively expensive, the reverse also holds true. Poverty statistics indicate that 45.4% of couples with one child fall under the poverty line. For couples with three or more children, 55.5% fall below the poverty line. The poorest category in Armenian society is households with eight or more members, with 63.6% falling below the poverty line. A full 40.2% [22] of the last category of households falls below the food line.

About 10%¹⁹ of families interviewed in one of the regions reported that the size of their family was a contributing factor for sending one or more children to a boarding institution. Families described the challenge of having a large family to primarily be economic in nature. Further, as for lone parents, families with many children at times need assistance with the sheer workload entailed in caring for a large number of children.

¹⁹ Information from the staff of one of the NGOs.

To avoid military service

One older boy was interviewed who explained that the reason for him to drop out of school and transfer to the institution for mentally handicapped children at the end of his primary education was to receive a graduation certificate from a school for mentally disabled. He does not want to enter the army and reports that the certificate would make him ineligible for military service.

Children of staff of institutions

Staff working at boarding institutions constitutes another category. Several staff chooses to enroll their children in the institution where they work as it allows them to stay close to them. At Stepanavan's sanatorium several staff members live with their families in houses on the premises, making it convenient to enroll their children next doors. It is also plausible that teachers at boarding schools are motivated by the lower cost of education. Although teachers at boarding institutions receive on average 15-20% more compared to teachers in general schools, the average income of 6,000 drams (\$12)²⁰ still falls short of providing economic security for a family. In addition, payment of salaries in the public sector is not always regular. A teacher working at there mentioned that she had not received her salary for over three months.

Chapter 4: Review of Available Services

4.1. Financial Support

Financial benefits

Due to high unemployment rates and insufficient and/or irregular salaries, a large proportion of Armenian households today rely on assistance from state and non-state actors for their survival. During the first half of 1998, there were 305,002 persons of 135,018 families registered to receive financial benefits from the state. Government assistance mainly consists of small cash transfers, with the average value of 2,026 drams (\$4)²¹ per person/month. The main beneficiary categories are children, invalids, pensioner and unemployed. The system in place when the research was carried out gave child allowances to all children under the certain age, as well as to one-sided and two-sided orphans, children of single mothers, children of divorced parents, children of invalids and children of army recruits. A change of the current system will be implemented in January

²⁰ Information from the staff of one of the institution.

²¹ Information from the official in the Ministry of Social Security.

1999, with an estimated decrease in the number of beneficiaries by some 70,000. Instead of targeting recipients using various categories, the new system for social protection aims at making a more holistic analysis of the level of poverty in households, in order to grant a 'family benefit' to the neediest families. The new system will not provide a financial benefit to all children. It is not possible to ascertain how those families will fare who today to a large degree depend on the general financial benefits.

PAROS

In addition to cash transfers, humanitarian aid to Armenia is distributed via 54 governmental Territorial Centers for Social Protection. Citizens apply to receive donated food and fuel for heating and their eligibility is assessed using the PAROS formula. PAROS calculates eligibility based on the assumed vulnerability stemming from physical characteristics (age, disability) or marital/legal status (divorced, widowed, orphans, refugee). Actual income does not enter the calculation of eligibility. The system has been criticized as it includes all persons falling into the beneficiary categories, whether poor or not, while it excludes needy persons who do not fit the eligibility criterion.

While the majority of respondents receive some form of material assistance, the level of poverty encountered in the majority of households show that the assistance is not sufficient. Respondents report the sum received to only cover a part of the household's material needs. Further, a significant number of families report that although registered, the benefits sometimes do not arrive at time, with delays of up to three months reported. Finally, families explain that they are not eligible to receive humanitarian assistance under current PAROS criteria²².

With the majority of caretakers reporting that the main reason for enrolling their children in boarding institutions is poverty, the lack of employment combined with insufficient levels of material assistance constitute a great challenge which necessary needs to be addressed in order to reverse the current trend of institutionalization.

4.2. Specific Support

Child care

Families of children attending boarding schools report that a reason why they keep their children in there is the need for affordable child care. The research found that organized after-school activities have ceased to operate, with only privately organized child care available for those parents who need child minding in the afternoons. So, boarding institutions may be filling a void left when other services cease to function.

²² Unidentified source from one of the NGOs.

Although there are kindergartens available in most villages and towns of Armenia, all now charge a fee while the quality of care has been significantly reduced, according to caretakers and the general community²³. With a large number of Armenian families living in poverty mainstream child care remains out of reach. Some parents are able to enroll their children in boarding kindergartens. At boarding kindergarten in Echmiatsin, the majority of parents pick up their children in the afternoon, as at regular kindergarten, with the difference that the services are free of charge. As mentioned above, after a local kindergarten was closed down, it was decided to open a kindergarten class at Vanadzor's institution. It is not clear whether children attending "Class 0" at Vanadzor's institution are disabled or not.

Of all families interviewed, only one non-poor family in Stepanavan reported using childcare facilities other than the boarding institutions. The family's youngest son is enrolled at the kindergarten run by the "Psychological Center," which was opened by the Ministry of Education in 1990 as a way to offer counseling after the earthquake. Fifty children attend this kindergarten. The Ministry of Education agreed to open this kindergarten after staff at the Psychological Center conducted a test of all pre-school children in Stepanavan. According to the director of the Psychological Center, there was found that seventy-three percent of all children are psychologically and intellectually unfit to begin primary school, so this is a kindergarten where parents who care and who have money can send their children. In director's opinion, the low level of ability in pre-school children is due to either lack of or low quality of regular government kindergartens. The fee at Psychological Center is 2,500 drams (\$ 5) per month, making this an inaccessible form of childcare for the majority of families interviewed.

Mental health

There are four Psychological Centers in Armenia, two are operating in Stepanavan and Vanadzor. The main mandate of the Psychological Centers is to provide psychological services to children and their parents. The centers are well-equipped with highly qualified staff. However, none of the families interviewed, nor their children, use this services. There are two reasons for this: First, as the main preoccupation of families in poverty, psycho analysis and group therapy are not necessarily prioritized. Secondly, it appears that psychological services carry a negative stigma, causing people to stay away. For example, in the month of April, only four adults had visited the center in Stepanavan. A certain patriarchic and rather patronizing approach to clients could be identified, which may serve to alienate people further. Services are currently free of charge but fees will be introduced this year, making the services even less remote for families interviewed.

²³ Kindergartens are no longer under the Ministry of Education, but have been decentralized to fall under the most local administrative level, the hamaynk, whereas primary and secondary schools fall under the eleven Marz departments of education. Hence, preschool and primary school education is split up between two different administrative entities.

Leisure activities.

The lack of leisure activities is often pointed out by families and staff interviewed. The universal availability of summer camps has ceased to exist. Some families report having sent their children to summer camps paid for by Diaspora organizations and other NGOs. The camps are regarded as a rare opportunity for children to have fun. Some institutions have a "Children's Center" offering various leisure activities. However, they charge a fee and therefore exclude a large number of children. Neither boarding school offers any toys nor sport equipment. Children play with rocks and sticks. Staff and parents identify this as a main concern.

Children in conflict with the law

General and juvenile crime rates in Soviet Armenia were very low. This was mainly attributed to a strong family structure, good educational system and strict controls over the movements and activities of the population by the Soviet regime [34]. The deteriorating economic situation and increasing liberalization of the society has led to an increase in crime. The juvenile crime rate (number of crimes per 10,000 14-17-year old population) increased 56% from 1989 (10.5) to 1996 (16.2)²⁴. Unofficial figures for the first half of 1997 show that the rate again increased between 1996 and 1997 by over 60%. The majority of the offenders are male and the prevailing crime is theft [35].

According to the unpublished, but reliable information from the Ministry of Internal Affairs currently the juvenile crime rate decreased and the number of crimes are about 400 and this process is continuing.

Table 8. Youth Sentencing Rate (number of juveniles 14-17 years old sentenced per 10,000 relevant population)

Country	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Armenia ²⁵	4.9	5.5	8.2	12.9	15.1	14.3	11.0
Georgia	6.4	9.2	9.0	6.1	7.6	9.0	---
Azerbaijan	6.1	5.5	5.8	10.3	12.8	11.6	---
Moldova	32.1	30.1	30.1	20.3	34.3	42.1	44.1
Ukraine	35.2	42.7	38.5	39.7	49.7	57.7	---
Belarus	56.5	74.1	76.1	80.6	100.4	101.6	106.8
Russia	76.7	96.2	102.0	107.7	122.5	128.9	130.5
Romania	26.6	19.5	37.1	43.7	66.2	83.0	---
Hungary	80.5	62.1	72.0	78.6	76.0	90.5	110.4
Poland	73.4	85.5	81.6	76.8	69.5	62.8	---

Data Source: *Children at Risk in Central and Eastern Europe: Perils and Promise. Regional Monitoring Report No 4, UNICEF, International Child Development center, Florence, Italy, 1997.*

²⁴ Ministry of Statistics, RoA, 1998. Note that all crime statistics are based on unreliable population figures, and the increase may be higher than reported here.

²⁵ Data Source: Ministry of Statistics

The juvenile justice system in Armenia is not fully developed. There are no special laws concerning young criminals, even there is no special juvenile courts. There are three indicators frequently used to measure the extent of the problem of children in conflict with the law: juvenile crime rate, juvenile conviction rate and the number of juveniles incarcerated. Reliable official data regarding these indicators are difficult to obtain from the Ministry of Internal Affairs due to the sensitivity of the information [36].

Table 9. Ratio of Juvenile Sentences to Number of Crimes

Year	Number of juveniles sentenced	Number of juvenile crimes	Ratio
1989	116	243	.48
1990	133	256	.52
1995	297	403	.74
1996	364	450	.81

Data Source: Ministry of Statistics

Table 10. Crimes Committed by Juveniles Currently Incarcerated in Abovian ELC

Type of Crime	Number of Convicted Juveniles
Theft	53
Homicide, intentional murder, deliberately causing serious bodily injury	10
Theft by assault	8
Violent sexual acts	4
Robbery	3
Deliberate destruction to property	1
Obscene actions against children	1
Cruel behavior against animals and birds	1
Illegally obtaining narcotic drugs	1
Total Number	82

Data Source: *The Status of Juveniles in the Juvenile Colony*. National Center for Democracy and Human Rights for UNICEF.

Table 11. Children Registered at the Underage Receiving and Distribution Center

Fate of Children	1995	1996	1997
Sent back to parents or guardians	---	260	187
Sent to orphanages and boarding schools	---	24	12
Sent to Republican Special Complex	---	25	20
Sent to Yerevan Special Boarding School ²⁶	---	35	87
Sent to Medical Institutions ¹	---	6	19
Total	100	350	325

Data Source: Ministry of Internal Affairs

²⁶ Special institutions for children with disciplinary problems

There are Commissions on Minors in each town in Armenia. These usually consist of police men and fall under the department of Interior in the marz administrations. Their mandate appears to be to 'collect' those children who are in trouble, for instance, child beggars, thieves and prostitutes. As there are practically no social workers in Armenia to work with children and their families, the only option available for these commissions is to either send the children back to their homes, refer them to boarding institutions, or, in some cases, keep them in detention/penal institutions. In addition to the Commission on Minors, in some regions there are additional commissions, which deal specifically with teenagers. After representatives of the department of interior have identified and registered a teenager in trouble, the case is referred to the tribunal Commission for Teenagers, which makes a decision as to where the teenager should go. Again, the only available option today is to send the teenagers to boarding institutions, or to prison.

Chapter 5: Community-Based Approaches

This research offers two crucial findings: One is that the majority of caretakers and children are negative to the boarding institutions, as are the local authorities and service providers working with children's issues. The reason for this view is mainly found in the perception that children attending boarding institutions do not receive acceptable levels of education and care, are stigmatized, and will therefore suffer negative consequences as adults. Secondly, available services in Armenia do not suffice or are not accessible to the families interviewed for this research. Hence, there currently does not exist any viable alternatives to institutions. Families enroll their children because it is the only solution available.

The institutional solution, apart from being damaging in that children are separated from their communities, is also quite expensive for the state.

When asked about alternatives to boarding institutions, the majority of respondents, families, decision-makers, service providers and general community, argued that money is the only alternative. Families need employment and realistic salaries in order to provide for their children. Without the economic means to meet even the basic needs of their children, children will continue to go to boarding institutions.

However, as it was mentioned earlier there are other factors than poverty, which contribute to or cause institutionalization. These cannot be solved through money only. One of the alternatives is a form of family center providing a wide range of different services.

5.1 Description of a Community-Based Family Center

By family center is meant a local resource center for families and their children, which houses different problem solving initiatives. Such centers typically house expertise in social work, with both the ability to provide tailor-made support services for unemployment, alcoholics, children, teenagers, single mothers, etc., as well as the ability to give advise and referrals to other social services available in society. For example, one mother reported being insecure of her ability to property care for and communicate with her children. She would like to attend parenting classes. Other respondents expressed the need for legal advice concerning their land ownership, divorce, and army service. When the center does not have the solution or the expertise, it refers the visitor to that institution or person who does. For example, a mother of a girl who has been sexually abused should be able to get advise as to where to turn for medical and psychological care and legal advise. Similarly, a man who is threatened with eviction from his apartment should be able to either receive legal advise at the center or a referral to an external legal expert ties to the center.

5.2 Interested Respondents.

Twenty-eight out of sixty families, constituting 46%²⁷ of respondents, report that they would use a family center. Respondents see this as a chance to focus a range of services under the same roof. They argue a holistic, multi-disciplinary approach to be necessary for solving their problems. Secondly, they argue that a center, which is geographically close to their home, will make services more accessible. Respondents report that lack of affordable transportation makes it difficult to use services located in larger towns. Respondents are interested in a family center, which offers services for the unemployed. Children's well-being is another priority. In one of the parents' opinion, center should have different professionals, to help children with different needs including the need of intellectual stimulation and entertainment.

People encourage using existing structures. One respondent argued that it would make more sense to provide food and services at general schools, rather than in a separate building.

Parents of disabled children hope to get access to rehabilitation for their children. In addition, they would welcome activities which offer disabled children contact with other children.

²⁷ Data from a survey provided by one of the NGOs.

5.3. Disinterested Respondents.

Eleven out of sixty families, constituting 18%²⁸ of respondents, report that they would probably not use a family center. The main reason is that respondents do not consider themselves to be in need for anything else but money. "Open one if you want, but people here only need material help," comments one respondent. Hence, they feel a family center to be irrelevant, and point out that if the Children's Initiative would include additional financial assistance, it would make sense to use the existing structures for distributing financial benefits. Another reason is a lack of interest or a feeling that such a center could not contain the necessary assistance. In Alaverdi, some respondents were of the opinion that the proper place for poor children are at boarding institutions, so a family center was not to their liking.

5.4. Respondents Who Do Not Know.

Twenty-three out of sixty families, constituting 38%²⁹ of respondents, report to not know whether they would use a family center. One reason for this appears to be a problem conceptualizing such center. Respondents would like to visit such a center before being able to know whether they would use it. Another reason reported by the team is the hopelessness and lack of engagement observed in some respondents. Some parents expressed a concern for their children's futures, but had no ideas or wishes for alternatives to boarding institutions.

5.5. Foster Care and Adoption

So far this research has presented findings on what children and their families feel and think about institutions and their alternatives. In Armenia, there are 3,140 children registered who do not have parents. Many of these live with their relatives, whereas some end up in orphanages and boarding institutions. The findings show a great sense of sadness for these children. At the same time, it is argued that orphans should stay at orphanages and boarding institutions, in order that they are surrounded with similar children, and other vulnerable children, so as to not feel different. The idea that some categories of children should attend different schools than general schools, testify to close attention being paid to that which is believed to make children 'different' and that this 'different' children should be separated from those schools where 'normal' children go.

In formal foster care has always been away through which Armenian society provides assistance and protection to children who are orphaned, in need or abandoned. Several stories were told of children who stay for short or long periods of time with adults

²⁸ Data from a survey provided by one of the NGOs.

²⁹ Data from a survey provided by one of the NGOs.

rather than their parents. In most cases, it is relatives who shoulder the role as foster parents.

There is no financial assistance available for foster parents. They are only entitled to whatever benefit the child independently receives.

UNICEF is conducting an assessment of the existing legislation on adoption. The aim is to work for laws, which safeguard the right of children and their families to safe adopting practices. This includes a harmonization with international adoption laws (see Appendix), to ensure that children are not victims of illegal adoption, neither domestically nor internationally.

Foster Care

In Armenia, like other former Soviet republics there has never been any formalized system of foster care. Despite this, it was always present in Armenian culture. Family connections were always highly valued and children, who loose parents or when parents were unable to care for them, were immediately taken by relatives or sometimes even family friends. Sometimes, family members tried to support parents themselves to improve their circumstances. However, the changes in the past decade cause the situation where many families, because of lack of resources, are unable to provide such kind of support and take additional child. Falling this traditional system of family support makes its contribution in increasing the number of children entering the institutions.

Adoption

During Soviet period, it was believed that adoptions are mainly made by the child's extended family members, while it was internationally accepted that adoption is excellent method of providing a child's welfare and long-term development, as well as protecting child's rights. In case of Armenian family, infertility was considered shameful and an adoption of children by a couple who are not able to have their own has an element of stigma attached to it, which results the situation when most of couples, who adopted children, avoid to speak about adoption with their neighbors. Currently, the same legislation, which was used under the Soviet Union, is still in effect, although according to the Ministry of Social Security, it is currently under the revision. Children, who have been orphaned or abandoned, can be adopted up until the age of 18. It can be provided by two different ways. The first one is when the child was abandoned and has no contact with parents for six months and the second is when the mother signs a release, which puts the child up for adoption immediately. Children can also become available if their parents are declared incompetent. Children can be adopted from orphanages or directly from the child's birth family, but the requests of the persons interested in adoption has to be brought to one of several regional commissions where it will be determined whether prospective adoptive parents are appropriate. There some criteria, such as adoptive parents have to be younger than 60, have an evidence of good health, have a regular source of income and an appropriate home environment. The process is supposed to be

and closed, that is adopted child will no longer have any contact with her parents and has no claim for inheritance or support.

Social and economic changes in Armenia resulted a decline in the popularity of adoption and effectiveness of government structure, which supports the adoption process. The number of children adopted between 1989 and 1993 alone decreased from 176.3 per 100,000 children between 0-3 years to 59.4 per 100,000 children [26]. The majority of children adopted today in Armenia are infants taken directly from the hospital or from the family home. Only 16 children were adopted from five of the seven orphanages in Armenia. The other two orphanages had no adoption take place [27]. According to the report of the Ministry of Social Security 35 children were adopted from only one orphanage alone in 1998 but was unable to show documentation to support this. The frequency of the adoption commissions is broken down, because of the lack of finance can be months between meetings while they are supposed to be every two weeks. There are also reported some illegal action of people willing to adopt and who turn to the hospitals and maternity homes to find faster way to obtain a child, there also some cases of bribes requested from prospective adoptive families. In addition, some children are selling by hospitals for a bribe while they are supposed to send children to the orphanages. These actions violate the child's rights act as deterrent to families who might otherwise adopt. There are a tendency that the main part of adopted children are infants and very young. There were registered that 82% of children adopted in 1998 were under the age of six [28].

Table 12. Adoption from five orphanages in Armenia

	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998 (to May 1)
Total Number of Children Adopted	16	16	23	23	46	16
Number of girls	8	12	16	13	24	8
Number of boys	8	4	7	10	22	8

Data Source: Ministry of Social Security

Although, the majority of children in orphanages has at least one parent and is not available for adoption, for those of them who are available the chance to be adopted is wishful thinking because of corruption in the adoption system and economic conditions of many families.

Although some international adoptions do occur, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it is not represent a large proportion of all adopted children. According to the Ministry of Social Security 6 of the 35 children adopted in Nork orphanage in 1998 were sent abroad. The floodgates have certainly not open anywhere near the extent that took place in Romania in the early 1990's when the conditions in institutions were broadcast worldwide. In that case, in addition to the throngs of potentially loving adoptive parents,

came individuals interested in exploiting children [29]. At the situation worst, a large black market in child trafficking was created. According to the International Standards and CRC, it is preferable for the child to be adopted within their own culture. But if that is not possible, international adoption is a much better option than life in an institution. International adoption is a possibility, which should be promoted for the children available, particularly for older children and those with the disabilities, who are the least likely to be adopted inside Armenia. However the situation must be closely monitored and the bribe system and black market removed in order to prevent travesties like that, which occurred in Romania [30].

Chapter 6: Conclusion

As a result of challenges, which have taken place in Armenia, there are rapid increase in number of families and children needed support, but do not get it from government. The childcare infrastructure was not ready to meet these changes because of lack of resources to improve its disintegrated and ill-equipped means.

This research attempts focus attention on a diverse set of issues concerning boarding institutions in Armenia. First, in this research there was mentioned that children are the main and the least powerful victims of the economic and social problems experienced in post-Soviet Armenia and identified the reasons (a range of problems in families, from the overriding predicament of poverty to the existence of domestic violence, result in children being enrolled in boarding institutions) behind why some children attend boarding institutions instead of general schools. Second, the research shows that a majority thinks that boarding institutions are not an appropriate solution to the problems families and children experience. Although families and children enjoy several benefits at institutions, such as free education, food and care, the negative consequences of institutionalization are considered to override any benefits. Third, the research makes an assessment of existing services other than institutions. These are found to be insufficient, inaccessible or prohibitively expensive. A main concern is the number of families who cannot afford to send their children to general schools due to the recent increases in associated costs. Another concern is the lack of rehabilitation and training opportunities for disabled children. There is a clear relation between the lack of sufficient alternative services and children entering boarding institutions. The majority thought that jobs and financial assistance would solve most of their and their children's problems. The concept of a community-based social service center is somehow appreciated.

Currently, because of crisis in Armenia, the original capacities of the institutions are not able to meet the pressure to care or/and educate children who do not fit into the categories for which the institutions were once designed. Unfortunately, institutions do not provide solutions; they merely serve as a containment of problems.

This research encountered the negative consequences associated with the practice of using institutions. Institutions provide badly needed free education and food, care for disabled children or protection from dysfunctional families, they ultimately serve to separate some children from mainstream society. With the additional problem of falling standards at institutions, for disabled and able children alike, the price children pay to receive free education, care and food is excessively high. The current social policy of separating children who for various reasons are different from other children is at times merely a temporary 'warehousing' of children for whom no other services are available. This exclusion is contributing to a creation of a separate class of children who are marked by stigmatization, by extreme poverty and by having fewer opportunities to partake in either their own or society's development in that they lack access to further education, resources or social ties. In the long term, this policy risks creating an 'under-class' of citizens who will not have equal opportunities and who will depend on the state for their survival³⁰.

The research identifies harmful experiences where children are exposed to harsh or frightening incidents. Many children have strong feelings of being 'different' from other children. They described feelings of sadness, guilt, abandonment and inferiority. Other experiences are direct assaults on their persons, such as attacks by other children in the neighborhood while traveling to or from the institutions or beatings, sexual harassment or even assaults by stronger children against weaker ones³¹.

Chapter 7. Recommendations

The main findings are outlined below and where possible, linked to corresponding suggestions for dealing with the key problems identified.

7.1. Poverty

As it was mentioned in Chapter 3, poverty is the main reason behind their decision to enroll one or more children into institution and that institutions are an important form of financial assistance for a growing number of Armenian families. As the costs both for the state and the children and families are considerable, finding alternative ways of the targeting the most vulnerable families through other means of financial assistance must be a priority.

As free education and meals are a major motivating factor for caretakers to enroll their children in institutions, the obvious alternative is to target the poorest families with

³⁰ Source of unidentified author provided by staff of one of local NGOs.

³¹ Authors prefer do not mention about punishments used by staff

assistance, which would enable their children to attend general schools. One suggestion is the restoration of former services, such as distribution of food at general schools, providing free textbooks to the poorest families. Another suggestion is to introduce school uniforms (provided free for the poor families) to reduce the current financial burden of purchasing appropriate clothes for school children. As several poor children mentioned that they feel ashamed of their clothing and therefore do not think they can attend general schools, school uniforms may serve to reduce the socio-economic differentiation among children.

Calculation of the amount of money needed for implementation of this suggestion is derived from following factors:

1. Number of children of poor families in a given school;
2. Food (500–1000 drams (\$1-2))
3. Set of books (7,000-15,000 drams (\$13.21-28.30) depending on class);
4. Uniform (7,420-10,600 drams (\$14-20) depending on season).

7.2. Disability

The arrival of able children of poor families into institutions for disabled children cause diverts an attention and resources from disabled children. This reduction in the quality of care for disabled children is a main concern expressed by both decision-makers, staff at institutions and families.

There are great need of rehabilitation, training and appropriate care and education for disabled children. Few families can afford even basic technical aids and medical treatments and the institutions' current financial dilemma combined with over-crowding leave disabled children with only the most basic services.

While improvements in infrastructure, equipment and pedagogy at institutions are immediate concerns; services need to be developed to also enable disabled children to remain with their families, and in their communities. The predominant argument for why disabled children should attend separate institutions is that they should receive specialized care and education. However, there is also opinion that disabled children needed to be protected against the prejudices or negative feelings of the general community. It is necessary changes in service provision as well as attitudes for an integration of disabled children into society³².

Moreover, it is important to measure each child separately in order to avoid misdiagnosis as well as ailments, which cannot be considered disability yet.

³² By the way, the advocacy training for families of disabled children planned by UNICEF will have an important role in empowering families to demand changes in attitudes, practices and services.

It is possible to make calculations based on following factors:

1. Free of charge medical treatment (no idea);
2. Free medication (\$5-20 per month);
3. Free of charge accessories such as hearing aids, wheel chairs, walking sticks, etc. (\$60-800 depending on the type of accessory);
4. Free tuition upon admission to higher educational institutions (\$30 per month)³³.

7.3. Dysfunctional Families

In contrast with Western countries, Armenia does not have a system of social workers, which can identify and assist troubled families. When children have not been properly cared for, or have become unruly due to circumstances in their home, the only officially supported solution available is enrollment in institutions. Sometimes it is difficult to make decision whether enrollment in institution is the best solution of the problem, because a child has a right to a family and hence, other alternatives for caring for children need to be implemented. For example, there is a need to develop and support official foster care policy. Current arrangements are unofficial and offer no financial support to foster families. As such, families may not be able to take on foster children, who often are in great need for adult support and love, for a longer period.

Although, institutionalization of the child is possible solution, it would be better to develop the programs directed to the assistance to troubled families. Despite existed services, which offer psychological counseling, there are two main reasons, why families do not apply them. First and foremost is that in Armenian society it is uncommon and somewhat shameful to seek professional help for psychological problems or disruptive relations. Second, many families are in such financial difficulties, that they may not prioritize psychological support services.

There are no professionally trained social workers in Armenia and this specific position is usually occupied by persons with various kinds of professional background who, in some cases, went through short periods of training either in Armenia or outside the country. There is presently one-year course in social work included in the Sociology studies program. Nevertheless, a complete program of studies in social work at superior level is urgently required in order to secure professionals with a wide variety of knowledge and skills, capable of helping the Government to tackle the huge task of poverty alleviation and to support the development of community based services for the population.

So, one of the suggestions is to make the visits of social workers to such families free of charge and in some cases even obligatory. Social workers can act as a bridge

³³ According to the one of the directors of an institution for disabled children

between troubled families, and the services and assistance they need. Social workers will learn about their problems and identify individual solutions.

The financial part will be represented in form of additional payments to social workers (average salary of such workers is about \$12-18 per month and additional \$10-15 per month will make them motivated and more sensitive to the problems of dysfunctional families). The main factor for calculation total expenses is the number of dysfunctional families in given region.

7.4. Single Parenthood

It is not a secret, that lone parents are often isolated and carry heavy burdens, both financial and social. They face a range of problems associated with being alone, from the burden of caring for children alone, to trying to make ends meet on one person's income. Moreover, there are especially negative attitude to lone mothers, who are stigmatized in Armenian society, where they are often accused of being immoral. Many of lone mothers assumed that they use institutions as a means to get both financial and child care assistance. They as well as other poor families are in great need of affordable childcare facilities, but it is not the worst part of the problem, because it is impossible to measure the level of psychological trauma for the children, who feel ashamed because of their origin.

One of the suggestions is, at first to change the mentality of society, which is long-term process, and then think about financial issues (which is the same as for any poor family).

7.5. Domestic Violence

One of the reasons for enrolling children in institutions is domestic violence. It is impossible to get information about mortality rate and the number of injuries from domestic violence. Officially, the main victims of domestic violence are women, but the children are also affected by this problem. It is common that victims stay with their abusive parents both due to financial dependence and the disempowerment resulting from being abused. The consequences of domestic violence for individuals and society are manifold, from medical problems ranging from black eyes to death and psychological illnesses for the women affected, to the disintegration of families. The consequences for children are also severe.

Actions of violence are often not judged because of some legal or moral standards. Apart from the horror of being abused, victims of domestic violence in some societies do not have any legal recourse. Further, while women and children remain financially dependent on their spouses and parents, they are less likely to leave abusive relationships.

Without legal assistance and counseling, it is practically impossible to overcome this problem.

So, suggestion is, in order to both provide care to victims and to prosecute perpetrators, victim's shelters need to be complemented by legislation and training of police and health care staff (there is no idea about financial issues).

7.6. Refugee Children and Proximity

As it was mentioned in Chapter 3, some parents enroll their children in institutions due to availability of classes in Russian and proximity. Some refugee children cannot fully participate in education at general schools due to their poor knowledge of Armenian. Refugee children constitute a particularly vulnerable group of children. To become a refugee is an experience fraught with difficult emotional experiences and economic and social difficulties. For refugee children, integration into their new society is a crucial step toward normalization. It appears that language barriers serve to exclude them from mainstream society in that they cannot attend general schools or, if they do, they may not be able to fully benefit from the education.

The parents do not judge their children to suffer any negative consequences and hence decide on the educational facility closest to home. Further, it is a major incentive for parents to enroll their children in a free educational facility closest to home. Further, it is a major incentive for parents to enroll there in a free educational facility as opposed to general schools. If the financial assistance currently obtained through the boarding institution could be transferred to help the needy families meet costs associated with general schools, their children would not have to be educated separately from other children. The current system in some ways consist of two parallel educational structures, with institutions providing education for free to those families who cannot afford the costs of education in the general schools. This is ultimately not the most cost-effective way of providing financial assistance to needy families.

As described above, it is possible to find solutions to children's difficulties in the general schools instead of at institutions, by providing specialized teaching staff. In this case, multi-lingual teachers are needed to provide refugee children the necessary assistance.

Financial part will be represented by the salary for additional multi-lingual teachers. Every school has to have at least one Russian class (five or six teachers for each school with salary of \$10-12), which will solve both proximity and refugee children's problems.

7.7. Child's Behavior

Some children were transferred from general schools to boarding institutions either due to learning difficulties or behavioral problems. It seems that teaching staff, families and children themselves view this as a form of punishment. According to famous Russian pedagogue (teacher) "children with special needs do not need punishment, they need appropriate assistance".

The system of special needs teachers common in Western Europe provides extra support for children who experience difficulties. With extra help, such children will be able to succeed in mainstream schools³⁴.

7.8. Alternatives to Boarding Institutions

There are a lot of problems experienced by families and children for which there are currently few or no services. In addition, some available services do not provide the necessary assistance. While boarding institutions provide a form of financial assistance in that education and meals are free, assistance can be made available in more cost effective ways, which do not carry the negative consequences identified in this research. For disabled children, the current level of service provided by institutions does not appear to be sufficient. Further, disabled children obviously also suffer negative consequences from being separated from their families and communities. As such, alternatives are necessary to allow disabled children to remain with their families while having access to education, training, specialized medical care and socialization.

The community social service centers described in this research are a way for providing solutions in the communities and thereby allowing children to remain with their families. Such centers would have as their main responsibility to create custom made solutions or services to address families' diverse needs. The problems identified in the research cannot all be solved by a community social service center. However such a center can act as facilitator or bridge for families and children to obtain the necessary means to address their problems.

The majority of respondents, including decision-makers, feel that institutions are not a good way to address the problems, which have lead to large numbers of children attending boarding institutions. Most describe the current situation as a travesty but that families have no alternative.

³⁴ UNICEF is looking at ways for initiating a system of special needs teachers in general schools. So authors abstain from suggestions.

7.9. General Recommendations

It is quite clear that there is a need for reform in children's institutions in our republic. Children in institutions deserve a better life than they have. Moral and ethical pressure (beside CRC) must be sufficient for making necessary changes in this system. Changes need to be made in the legal system so that laws are actually put into practice, and that all participants are aware of them and know how to use them. The government must be active partner in this reform; the heroic efforts of the NGOs are not enough. The current system consists of fragmentary responsibility spread over 4 ministries, which, seems, do not communicate with one another. Each ministry finds reasons to find another ministry responsible, and therefore no one is really responsible and nothing gets done. The ministries must coordinate their efforts, in order to find effective approach for solving problems. They, also, need to work with NGO's (international NGOs should take on a role of strengthening the efforts of local NGOs in order to sustain the impact of the initial investment by building local capacity and due to the sensitive nature of this work provide the necessary cultural awareness and context for reform efforts)³⁵. One important thing too, instead of spending money (funds) in to repairs and reconstruction of an outdated system, they should be directed to alternative forms of economic and social support. Money and human resources should be used to support programs, which support families, not institutions. For those children who are already in institutions, alternatives to a lifetime of institutionalization must be explored.

Ways to improve care quality

During Soviet times ideology of institutionalization was focused more on the group rather than the individual. In Armenia, there are not ready yet the structures and qualified labor force for implementing an individualized care model for children (especially in difficult circumstances). So, staff retraining is crucial to the improvement of care of children of institutions. On the staff level, the training should occur in an integrated long-term basis. However, re-training of institution staff at the staff level is not very effective. It may be appropriate on the administrative or medical staff level, where the audience is already more or less trained, but need to refine scales (for example, doctors in many institutions are quite receptive to seminars on new techniques or the use of new medicines or diagnostic tools). This approach might also be useful in training administrators in effective budgeting procedures or staff arrangements. Many of the caretakers, who deal directly with the children, the nurses, bathers, cooks, attendants and night staff are relatively untrained and unskilled. Furthermore, the staff often resents the 'outsiders' who come in and make changes their system [31]. And when they see positive results, feelings of resentment may build. They see these results as work of the outsiders or international organization, but never their own efforts. That is why they do not continue changes, after the intervention was stopped. Re-training programs need to emphasis the staff doing the program on its own by taking personal responsibility for the changes and development. With the respect to administration of institutions, a move from

³⁵ Opinion of chief of one of the international NGOs.

centralized system to a more individual and independent system would have a positive impact on both the running of the institution and the quality of the child-residents lives. A positive alternative to centralized ministry control as it was suggested by one of directors of local NGO "is one whereby each local government region would elect a governing council to each institution, made up of medical and child specialists, who independently run the institution. Such an administrative council would make all decisions regarding the day to day running of the institution; and would make sure that practices and procedures were in compliance with national laws and standards. A national review board could be responsible for monitoring these administrative councils. This would have the benefit of increasing of autonomy of the institutions, while at the same time assuring compliance with national an international laws."

Ways to promote and facilitate foster care and adoption

In order to increase the number of children living in family rather than institutional environments, it is necessary to make adoption and foster care practical and acceptable options. "The national character of Armenian society does not make it socially acceptable to adopt a child from an institution or take a street child into their home. In relatively infrequent cases of adoption was considered preferable to adopt child from a hospital in an informal, confidential manner; later completing the formal paperwork. The procedure for this type of adoption was extremely informal; basically, the family found a young, unmarried, pregnant girl, investigated her background and made arrangements to relieve her of her supposed unwanted child. Children in institutions were considered undesirable adoptees - they roots were unknown and the adoptive parents could not be sure that they came from good families and were 'normal'." [32] Thus in order to encourage a family based care system, their need to be regulations, adopted which may legal provisions for foster care of children including foster care by individuals (for example, guaranteed financial support or permanent assistance to foster families or adoptive parents) as well as group foster homes. Such provisions should be flexible enough so as to allow, for example, non-profit, private for-profit, religious and other communities to organize and manage such foster care arrangements.

In order to encourage adoption, it is very important to create precise laws and regulations concerning the legal procedures to child adoption. Legal governments, private attorneys, churches, etc need to become possible facilitators of adoptions. Moreover, a standardized procedure must be developed for assuring that the child's welfare, safety and rights are not compromised by an adoption.

Ways to reduce the number of institutionalized children

One way for reducing the number of children in institutions, is finding alternative care options for children. For those children, who are already in institutions, the focus needs to be on developing alternative exit programs. (Unfortunately, there are two essence exits from a children institutions, either death or transfer to another institution, generally of the same nature based upon the child's diagnosis or misdiagnosis.) There is a need for finding a proper care solutions for these children, for example, thorough

evaluation and diagnosis of their medical conditions or disability, if any at all. This will facilitate the possibility to at least place them in the environment, even if an institution, more conducive to their development. It may also open doors for alternative placement of these children with foster families, adoptive parents or (the most desirable situation) with their natural parents.

There are two main target groups that need to be considered when attempting to reduce the number of children who may end up being institutionalized, if the environment is not changed:

1. Those children who are in institutions because of their family's socially and/or economically vulnerable situation.
2. Those children who have disabilities, either physical or mental (may be also a part of first group)

It is necessary to consider not only the child and her/his needs, but also to look at families of these children and the communities in which they reside.

Preventing the institutionalization of the first group primarily depends on creating alternative social security nets (for example meal provision centers) so that families are able to keep their children at home. Usually their families feel that they will be better fed in the institution, and, hence, place them there in order to take advantage of the meal provided. Other supportive systems, such as day-care centers, pre-schools and kindergartens would offer many of the daily benefits to the families who otherwise place their children in institutions, while allowing the children to spend nights at home and live with their families.

The second group requires a more long-term, multi-faced approach. These children require more supportive services, not currently available in institutions, much less in home-based system. Thus, when beginning efforts to improve the services to children with disabilities, new expenditures and investments should focus on home based alternatives to institutionalization. Supportive services must be provided for parents, both of technical and emotional nature. Finally, education and public awareness measures need to be undertaken throughout the general community, especially in the primary school system. Such educational programs need to target parents, teachers and pupils (students).

Vocational support and vocational training

On the question³⁶ "What was most needed to help children in Armenia?" the second most popular answer, after "financial support", was "work". So, one of the suggestions (broad suggestion), in order to improve the financial situation for families who place their children in institutions, is to create self-sustainable financial supports to families who are unable to care appropriately for their children. One such program is

³⁶ The question was asked to randomly selected population three districts of Yerevan and six regions of Armenia by authors.

already being run by one of the international NGOs (UMCOR) in Armenia: Noah's Ark³⁷ Project. The UMCOR project is still in initial stages, the believe is that this micro-businesses will empower the families [37] "to care for their children at home" [38]. It would be better to see not only international but also local NGOs involved in this process too.

Existed vocational training system at institutions is enormously limited and inappropriate for children's needs. It does not take into consideration neither the child's own interests and abilities nor the demand of the market. Besides, because of lack of materials children get insufficient level of training. So, suggestion for local and international NGOs is to follow the program of "Bridge of Hope", one of NGOs, which is running computer-training program. In future the networking ability will help a child to find a job.

Why many people in official positions, in ministries and institutions, assert that society is not ready to accept children with disabilities, in order to make society ready?

The majority of children in the broader category of 'children in difficult circumstances' are not in institutions [33]. Despite the great hardship and poverty, the majority of families do not put their children in institutions. Children are care by their extended families even if they have no parents. Unfortunately, this informal system does not work in case of disabled children, either physical or mental. This causes the situation when the majority of orphans without disabilities are not in institutions and vice versa the majority of children with disabilities, even if they have parents, appears in institutions

This situation has both positive and negative sides. As positive side it can be mentioned that there is strong social network, which does not allow the children without disabilities to be enrolled in institutions. The negative side can be represented by the fact that the possibilities of integration and de-institutionalization of the children with disabilities are restricted by the mentality of society, when family resists accepting child not because of financial and economic, but social and cultural factors. This fact has to be considered in future, while developing programs for children with disabilities. In order to overcome the problem of social non-acceptance of disabled children, it is important to address it through public awareness programs in the general schools, which may help to facilitate the eventual acceptance of these children in their homes and general schools. If 'normal' children accept their disabled peers, integration of such children in general schools may be more feasible. It seems, that it is problem for the parents rather than their children, who resist seeing their children in the same classroom with disabled ones.

Suggestion for our sponsor Jinishian Memorial Program

As JMP is involved in and interested with this problem, suggestion will be to establish a center, which will serve as a model to other institutions on appropriate care. We are sure that such a center may improve the lives of children. There is much to do in

³⁷ Network of Orphans Attaining Hope and Security through Agricultural Resources and knowledge.

this area and JMP may become the pioneer in making real positive changes in the lives of institutionalized children in Armenia. It will create new style of institution, which will provide the moral and financial support to deprived children, who will enjoy the family atmosphere, be able to get good education, get some professional skills and whom will be given all necessary bases to survive in the competitive market place. This idea has its negative and positive sides. The negative side is the problem connected with the limitation of the number of children who may attend this institution. The positive side is that such experience will assist in the establishment of new orphanages or in the reconstruction or remodeling of the existing ones. Approximate calculations show that implementing this idea with 55 children requires about \$650,000 for pre-start phase and \$200,000 each operating year in order to cover running costs³⁸.

³⁸ For further and detailed information, please, contact either JMP or authors.

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Appendix 1

Institutions operating in Yerevan, Armenia

	Location of Institution	Type of Institution	Supervision	Total Number of Children	Number of Children Staying Overnight
Children with Special Needs					
1.	Nork Masiv 2	Musculoskeletal Disorders	MOES ³⁹	88	66
2.	Avan	Visually Impaired	MOES	172	34
3.	No 6, Avan	Mentally Handicapped	MED ⁴⁰	131	72
4.	No 14, Avan	Socially Vulnerable	MED	464	91
5.	Mamikoniants St	Blind	MED	85	62
6.	Nersisian 5	Hearing Impaired	MED	146	73
7.	No 8, Nersisian 3	Speech Impaired	MED	105	61
8.	No 1, Nubarashen	Mentally Handicapped	MED	150	95
9.	No 11, Nubarashen	Mentally Handicapped Orphans	MOES	148	148
10.	Norki Ayginer	Mentally Handicapped	MED	108	108
11.	No 5, Kuznetsov St	Mentally Handicapped	MED	251	138
12.	No 8, Simon Vratsian	Mentally Handicapped	MOES	215	120
13.	Norki Ayginer	Deaf	MOES	122	93
14.	No 11, Kanaker	Sanatorium	MED	167	80
15.	No 2, Nersisian 3	Socially Vulnerable	MED	170	0
16.	Nubarashen	Juvenile Delinquents	MOES	80	55
17.	Zeitun	Juvenile Distribution Department	MOIA ⁴¹	30	30
Orphanages					
18.	Zatik	Orphanage	MOES	120	120
19.	Nork	Orphanage	MSS ⁴²	65	65
Kindergartens					
20.	No 202, Shengavit	Socially Vulnerable	Community	156	23
21.	No 279, Malatia	Socially Vulnerable	Community	102	82
22.	No 280, Kanaker	Mentally Handicapped	MOES	27	27
23.	No 268, Nork Masiv	Socially Vulnerable	Community	100	54
24.	No 135, Zeitun	TB Sanatorium	Community	75	75
25.	No 311, Aresh	Socially Vulnerable	Community	200	100
Total				3477	1872

³⁹ Ministry of Education and Science⁴⁰ Municipality Education Department⁴¹ Ministry of Internal Affairs⁴² Ministry of Social Security

Appendix 2

Institutions Operating In The Regions Outside of Yerevan

	Location of Institution	Type of Institution	Supervision	Total Number of Children	Number of Children Staying Overnight
Children with Special Needs					
1.	Giumry No 10	Mentally Handicapped	MED ⁴³	135	28
2.	Giumry No 26	Speech Impaired	MED	252	60
3.	Giumry	Sanatorium	MED	505	80
4.	Giumry No 1	Visually Impaired	MED	222	42
5.	Vanadzor No 3	Mentally Handicapped	MED	154	70
6.	Vanadzor No 3	Visually Impaired	MED	301	20
7.	Vanadzor No 18	Mentally Handicapped	MED	175	98
8.	Abovian No 7	Mentally Handicapped	MED	130	71
9.	Gavar No 17	Mentally Handicapped	MED	119	35
10.	Ashtarak No 18	Mentally Handicapped	MED	103	37
11.	Hrazdan No 1	Mentally Handicapped	MED	88	0
12.	Echmiatsin No 9	Mentally Handicapped	MED	139	29
13.	Echmiatsin	Mentally Handicapped	MED	232	30
14.	Kapan No 5	Mentally Handicapped	MED	125	53
15.	Kapan No 27	Sanatorium	MED	1178	196
16.	Goris	Visually Impaired	MED	248	60
17.	Sisian No 13	Mentally Handicapped	MED	140	85
18.	Stepanavan No 21	Sanatorium	MOES ⁴⁴	235	83
19.	Biureghavan No 4	Sanatorium-Rheumatic Diseases	MED	140	50
20.	Dilijan No 19	Sanatorium	MOES	134	113
21.	Armavir No 9	Mentally Handicapped	MED	83	60
22.	Artik No 16	Mentally Handicapped	MED	86	18
23.	Spitak	Boarding School	MOES	163	0
24.	Spitak	Mentally Handicapped	MSS ⁴⁵	30	30
25.	Sevan	Mental Hospital, Children's Unit	MOH ⁴⁶	13	13
26.	Vardashen	Juvenile Delinquents	MOES	70	70
Orphanages					
27.	Kharbert	Orphanage	MSS	200	200
28.	Gavar	Socially Vulnerable	MSS	130	130
29.	Vanadzor	Orphanage for street children	MSS	37	37

⁴³ Municipality Education Department⁴⁴ Ministry of Education and Science⁴⁵ Ministry of Social Security⁴⁶ Ministry of Health

30.	Giumri	Child House	MSS	76	76
Kindergartens					
31.	Armavir No 202	Sanatorium	MED	110	30
32.	Giumry No 15	Sanatorium	MED	82	45
33.	Giumry No 20	Physically Handicapped	MED	60	0
34.	Echmiatsin No 6	Sanatorium	MED	222	159
Total				6117	1108

Appendix 3

Orphanages in Armenia

Name of Orphanage	Age Limit	Number of Children	Including					
			Orphans		Single Mother	Divorced Mother	With 2 Parents	With Disability
			2-parent	1-parent				
<i>Under the Jurisdiction of the Ministry of Social Security</i>								
Kharberd Specialized Orphanage	5-18	200	28	11	9	5	147	200
Lori Vanadzor Orphanage	0-18	50	13	10	2	17	8	0
Shirak Giumry Children's Home	0-6	76	20	5	1	11	39	76
Yerevan Children's Home	0-5	66	29	1	30	0	6	9
Geharkunik Gavar Orphanage	5-18	133	17	22	88	4	2	3
<i>Under the Jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Science</i>								
Yeravan "Zatik" Orphanage	5-18	122	26	28	34	31	3	2
Nubarashen School No 11 for Orphans and Abandoned Children	7-18	150	55	73	10	5	7	3
Total		797	188	150	174	73	212	293

Data Source: Ministry of Social Security

Appendix 4

Glossary of Terms

- Accessible** - Having structural or social supports which enable a disabled individual to access a particular environment.
- Adolescence** - The period of life between 10 and 19 years of age.
- At risk** - A catch-all phrase indicating a child in danger of experiencing malnutrition, lack of health care, lack of education services, separation from family or involvement in criminal or dangerous activities, as a result of their social and economic situation.
- Child** - A person under the age of 18.
- CRC** - Convention of the Rights of the Child.
- Disability** - Any physical, mental, or developmental challenge which measurability interferes with basic life activities including seeing, walking, talking, eating, learning, breathing, etc.
- Institution** - Any facility which provides either short term or long term residential care for children.
- LRC** - The Armenian Law on the Rights of the Child.
- Orphan** - A child with no father and no mother.
- Refugee** - Person forced to migrate out of their place of origin, across national borders.
- Rehabilitation** - Treatment or care given to an individual in order to restore their former abilities and capacity.
- Social Orphan** - A child who has at least one, if not two, living parents who are unable or unwilling to care for them.
-
- Socially Vulnerable** - Individual or group at risk for being unable to create or obtain basic life needs i.e. food, health care, shelter etc.
- Special Education** - Education curriculum which is adapted to meet individual learning needs. Example: textbook in braille for blind student.
- Street Children**- Children living and/or working on the streets.

Appendix 5

List of Armenian NGOs.

- Bridge of Hope** - Armenian advocacy group for parent's with a child with a disability. Also provides inclusive recreation and vocational services.
- Catholic Relief Services** - An international relief organization which provides humanitarian aid, civil society development, micro-finance and building projects, as well as local capacity building initiatives based on the Catholic faith system.
- Fund for Armenian Relief** - International Armenian relief organization which distributes emergency aid and promotes local capacity building. Currently funds and runs the Underage Receiving and Distribution Center in Yerevan in partnership with the Ministry of Inferior Affairs.
- Medicines Sans Frontiers-Belgium** - International medical relief and support agency. Currently training midwives to provide reproductive health support to women. In involved in a social marketing campaign to increase contraception options available to women. Working with the children's ward at the Sevan Psychiatric Hospital to improve the quality of care and promote family re-unification.
- Medicines Sans Frontiers-France** - International medical relief and support agency. Currently working with the staff of the Vardashen boarding school to improve the condition at the institution as well as promoting family re-unification through social work.
- New Armenia** - Provides social rehabilitative services and advocacy to families and children working on the street, as well as funding for children's concerts and summer camps.
- Oxfam** - International agency working with to change the public's perception of children with disabilities and promoting their inclusion in the community schools.
- UNICEF** - Part of United Nations, this organization works to encourage sustainable support within countries in transition which protect children's rights. Particularly concerned with children "in need of special protection" which includes, children in armed conflict, in vulnerable region, refugees, disabled and institutionalized children, and orphans.
- United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR)** - International relief agency working within countries in transition. Provides development and loan

programs, as well a cheese distribution program to orphanages, and vocational support program for families with children attending an institution.

Union Astghik - An Armenian advocacy group for parents of children with a disability.

Appendix 6

Summary of Law 5880

Additional Guarantees For social Security of Orphans and Children Left Without Trusteeship

The above law was accepted by Duma of Russian federation on 4-th of December 1996 and was approved by Advisory Committee of Federation on 10-th of December 1996. It is currently still force in the Republic of Armenia.

This legislation defines the general principles of Governmental care and support for orphanaged and abandoned children, as well as adults up until the age 23.

These are terms of Law 5880:

Orphans - children up to 18 tears old, whose parents died (both or with only one living parent).

Children left without trusteeship of parents - children up to 18 years old who were left without supervision of their parents by the cause of parent's death, limited parent rights, parent's incompetent, parent's hospitalization, imprisonment, parent on executive duty at pretrial prison, parent being at pretrial prison because of suspicions of crime commitment, parent's deny to take care of their child, and parent's denial to take them back from institutions or organizations of social security of population.

Organizations for children left without trusteeship of parents - educational organizations where children receive educational services; organizations of social services for population (boarding school for children with developmental disabilities, physical disabilities, chronic illness or mental illness); social rehabilitation centers.

Trusteeship and supervision - the set up of state system for orphans with the goal of keeping, educating, and defending their rights and interests; **supervision** - for children under 14 years old; **trusteeship** - for children from 14 to 18 years old.

Adopting family - based on the mutual agreement between adopting parents and an executive body from municipal organization of trusteeship and supervision an orphan joins the family (or single citizen willing to bring up a child).

Full Governmental insurance of orphans and children left without trusteeship and supervision of parents - to provide care in an appropriate government or municipal organization, or with, foster parents. Free food, free set of clothes and shoes, free medical services will also be provided at least until the age of 18 years old and up to 23, but not more than 23. Free education at universities will also be provided.

This law regulates relationship between governmental organizations and orphans, in connection with providing an additional guarantee in social security of orphans or child left without trusteeship or supervision.

The legislation about additional guarantees of social security of orphans and children left without trusteeship or supervision is based on Constitution, standard acts, executive orders.

If International Agreements have other rules than the ones in this law, the priority is given to that agreement.

Additional guarantees of social security are provided and secured by government. Federal orphans who have an executive power work on planning the budgets allocating considerable funds to secure and defend children rights.

Financing

Expenditures for realization of all additional guarantees of social security are taken from government budget, government non-budget funds, NGOs and other legally provided sources. The rules of monthly payments are set by government executives for food, clothes, shoes and soft furniture for each physical person.

1. Children can take preparation courses before passing exams at the institutes and universities for their general education and choose their future specialization (profession).
2. Children who lost both or the only parent during their studies are fully financed by government to complete education.
3. Children can be financed for each year to buy necessary literature and stationary. Total sum received by student is equal to their three months scholarship. This sum is paid within 30 days at the beginning of studies from above mentioned budgets.
4. If graduates are employed they are provided with clothes, shoes, soft furniture and also (all at once) payment which is equal to five months minimal salary. By the graduate's will money compensation can be received at special deposit account at the governmental banks.
5. The administration of institutes or universities (or other educational organizations) are providing children with free transportation (except taxi).



Deaf and Dumb school



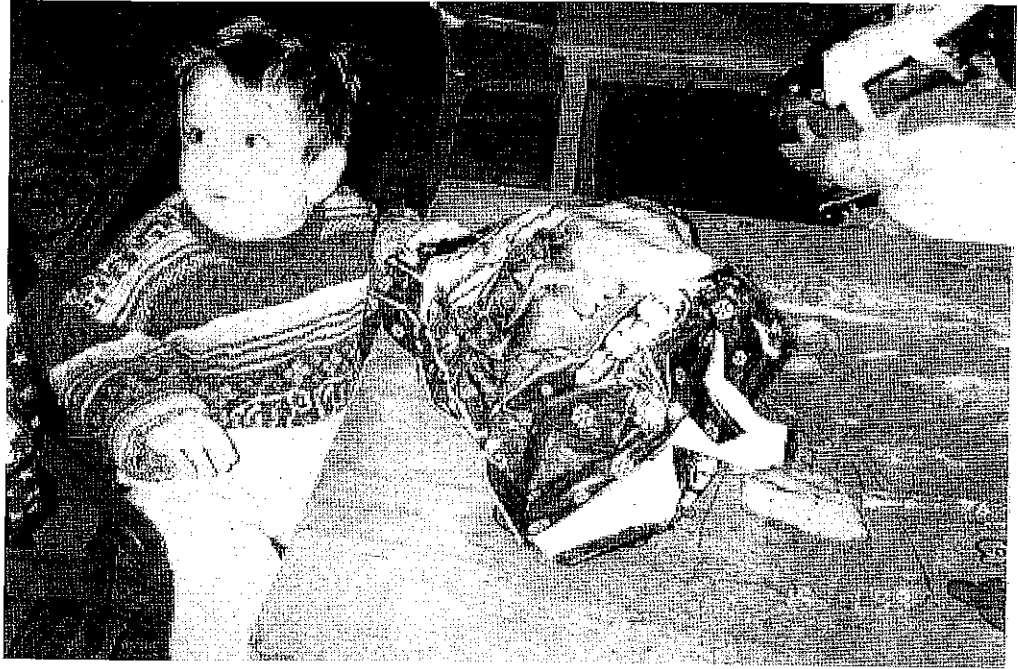
Sevan: Mental Hospital



Deaf and Dumd school



Sevan: Mental Hospital



Nork orphanage



Zatik orphanage



Clinic No 1 (foundling)



Giumri orphanage

Giumri Orphanage

