

FACTSHEET

Structural Loss of Protection in Numbers

Data Source: Shadow Report “*Structural Loss of Protection*” (2026) | **N = 232 survivors of domestic violence**

The data paints a picture of a support system that many survivors no longer experience as a place of protection, but rather as another source of stress, mistrust, and institutional powerlessness.

1. The Competency Vacuum

Lack of Expertise Regarding Psychological Abuse and Perpetrator Strategies

75.0% of respondents state that police, youth welfare offices, and family courts lack sufficient expertise regarding manipulative perpetrator strategies such as **Coercive Control**.

The consequences of this knowledge gap appear severe:

Perpetrators who present themselves as calm, controlled, and convincing are often perceived institutionally as credible. Trauma-related stress reactions in survivors, however, are at times misinterpreted as “instability,” “overreaction,” or a lack of cooperation.

The data provides strong indications that violent dynamics are therefore systematically misjudged.

2. The Crisis of Trust

Survivors of Violence Are Losing Trust in State Institutions

69.4% of respondents report not feeling taken seriously by authorities.

53.3% state that official institutions simply did not believe them.

64.1% rate the state support they received as insufficient, ineffective, or even harmful.

The findings point to a profound crisis of trust between survivors of violence and state institutions. Many survivors no longer experience institutional contact as protective, but rather as another source of powerlessness, delegitimization, and secondary traumatization.

3. Withdrawal from the Support System

When Protection Itself Becomes a Risk

46.0% of the women surveyed report that they now consciously avoid contact with youth welfare offices or courts.

The primary reason is fear of negative institutional consequences — particularly victim-perpetrator reversal, loss of credibility, or serious disadvantages in custody and visitation proceedings.

The data suggests the emergence of a structural dynamic of silence: violence is not concealed because it is irrelevant, but because disclosing it within institutional procedures is experienced as a potential risk.

4. The Institutional “Echo Chamber”

How Misjudgments Become Systemically Reinforced

58.3% of survivors report being repeatedly referred back and forth between institutions without receiving effective support.

The testimonies point to an institutional “echo chamber”: misjudgments — such as reframing unilateral abuse as mere “high conflict” or “parental disputes” — are uncritically adopted and perpetuated between youth welfare offices, counseling services, expert witnesses, and courts.

For many survivors, this creates the experience of a closed institutional cycle in which violent dynamics are not independently examined, but institutionally stabilized into a form of legal “truth.”

5. Peer Support as a Countermodel

Why Survivor Expertise Is So Effective

While many survivors experience formal state services as inadequate, the survey demonstrates an exceptionally high effectiveness of civil society–based peer support services.

Only **12.0%** of respondents experience state support services as effective, whereas **55.8%** rate private and civil society initiatives as significantly more helpful.

Direct support from individuals with lived experience (**peer support**) is rated as highly effective by **95.0%** of respondents.

Shared experience enables a depth of emotional resonance and validation that conventional support systems are often unable to provide.

At the same time, this enormous potential is being obstructed by the system itself:

16.8% of engaged survivors report having been actively hindered by state or municipal authorities when attempting to establish their own support initiatives.

Support Service Rated as “Helpful / Effective”

State Support Services 12.0%

Support Service

Rated as “Helpful / Effective”

Peer Support by Survivors 95.0%

The findings suggest that qualified survivor expertise fills a critical knowledge gap within violence protection systems — particularly in dealing with psychological abuse, **Coercive Control**, and **Litigation Abuse**.

At the same time, **16.8%** of initiatives report that their work has been obstructed or made more difficult by state institutions.

This points to a structural paradox:

The very forms of support that survivors experience as most effective continue to receive only limited institutional recognition.

Methodology & Theoretical Framework

Empirical Basis

The analysis is based on a **mixed-methods approach** combining quantitative survey data with a systematic evaluation of **133 qualitative written testimonies** from survivors (total sample size: **N = 232**).

Methodology of Text Analysis

The qualitative data was analyzed using **Qualitative Content Analysis** (following Mayring’s methodology). The testimonies were systematically structured and grouped into thematic clusters in order to objectively identify recurring patterns of institutional dysfunction and systemic failure.

Theoretical Framework

The findings are contextualized using current academic literature as well as expertise from the fields of psychology and sociology. The report connects the lived realities of survivors with international human rights and legal standards.

Research Focus

The report examines the actual protective effectiveness of the **Istanbul Convention** in practice. Particular focus is placed on the identification of **Coercive Control** and the analysis of institutional dynamics such as **Institutional Betrayal** and the phenomenon referred to as the “**Professional Echo Chamber**” (with reference to Articles 5, 9, 15, 18, and 31 of the Istanbul Convention).

Current Relevance

The report reflects the current situation within the German support system and family court structures, based on data collected up to **2025**.

Independence

The report was submitted as an official **Shadow Report (Alternative Report)** to the Secretariat of the Istanbul Convention of the Council of Europe as part of the evaluation process of the Federal Republic of Germany.

Cooperation

The project was realized in cooperation with T.o.B.e. e.V., a nationwide organization that was recognized within the **startsocial 2025** initiative under the patronage of the German Federal Chancellery.

PRESS RELEASE

“Systematic Distrust”: New Study Reveals Massive Loss of Protection for Survivors of Violence in Germany

Publication Date: April 27, 2026

The shadow report on the Istanbul Convention published today, “*Structural Loss of Protection,*” paints an alarming picture of the institutional treatment of survivors of domestic violence in Germany.

The study is based on 232 survivor testimonies, which were systematically analyzed and contextualized using international research on **Coercive Control, Institutional Betrayal, Litigation Abuse,** and **Court and Perpetrator Induced Trauma (CPIT).**

The findings point to profound structural deficiencies within the violence protection system. Many survivors report that contexts of abuse are not adequately recognized by authorities and family court proceedings, but are instead misinterpreted as mere “high-conflict cases” or “parental disputes.”

According to the testimonies, protective reactions shown by survivors — particularly mothers — are at times pathologized, while manipulative perpetrator strategies often remain institutionally unrecognized.

Key Findings of the Study

- **69.4%** of survivors report not feeling taken seriously by authorities.
- **53.3%** state that official institutions simply did not believe them.

- **75.0%** report that police, youth welfare offices, and courts lack sufficient expertise regarding manipulative perpetrator strategies such as **Coercive Control**.
- **64.1%** rate the state support they received as insufficient, ineffective, or even harmful.
- **46.0%** now avoid contact with institutions out of fear of negative consequences — particularly victim-perpetrator reversal or disadvantages in custody and visitation proceedings.

The analysis also describes an institutional “echo chamber”: misjudgments and problematic narratives are uncritically adopted and perpetuated between youth welfare offices, counseling services, guardians ad litem, expert witnesses, and family courts, without independent correction mechanisms.

“Many survivors no longer experience the support system as a place of protection, but as a continuation of powerlessness, control, and institutional distrust,” explains author Stefanie Reich.

“The data suggests that violent dynamics within family court contexts are frequently not adequately recognized, causing the actual need for protection to systematically disappear from focus.”

The report further refers to current scientific and human rights analyses documenting comparable structural problems internationally.

In particular, it references research on **Institutional Betrayal** as well as international studies on **Court and Perpetrator Induced Trauma (CPIT)**, which describe how court proceedings themselves can, under certain conditions, become part of ongoing dynamics of violence and psychological harm.

Key Demands of the Report

The shadow report calls for, among other measures:

- the immediate establishment of independent ombuds offices with genuine intervention powers,
- mandatory training on **Coercive Control** and psychological abuse for police, judiciary, and youth welfare offices,
- independent quality assurance mechanisms in family court proceedings,
- stronger institutional recognition and funding of qualified peer expertise within violence protection systems.

The report aims to contribute substantively to the professional and political discussion regarding the actual, practice-oriented implementation of the **Istanbul Convention** in Germany.

Press Contact

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Press Release Authorization

This press release may be freely used and quoted provided the source is acknowledged.

Press Material & Media Contact

Stefanie Reich: Expert on Coercive Control, Trauma, and Institutional Dynamics in Violence Protection

Stefanie Reich is an author and trauma-informed practitioner with a strong focus on the systemic shortcomings of violence protection systems in Germany. Her work addresses issues that are still widely overlooked in public discourse: **Coercive Control** (psychological abuse and control), manipulative perpetrator strategies, and the dynamics of institutional retraumatization.

With her monitoring report “*Structural Loss of Protection*” (2026), she has presented a groundbreaking survivor-centered investigation. Based on 232 anonymized case reports, the study highlights the profound discrepancy between the human rights obligations of the **Istanbul Convention** and the actual institutional practices within Germany.

Key Topics for Media Inquiries

- **Coercive Control & Psychological Abuse:**
Analysis of the patterns behind “invisible” forms of violence.
- **Institutional Betrayal:**
Why protection systems reach their limits when dealing with strategically manipulative perpetrators.
- **Court and Perpetrator Induced Trauma (CPIT):**
The specific psychological burden caused by prolonged family court proceedings.

- **Victim-Perpetrator Reversal:**
Institutional manifestations of strategies such as gaslighting and litigation abuse.
- **Survivor Expertise:**
Why lived experience is indispensable for effective violence protection.

Profile & Background

Stefanie Reich combines international research findings — including work on **CPIT** and **Institutional Betrayal** — with many years of experience in peer-based support work.

She is a trained **Somatic Mindfulness Coach** (Stillpoint Method) and author of the professional reference book *“Too Nice and Sick – Healing in Toxic Relationships”* (*“Viel zu nett und krank – Heilung in toxischen Beziehungen”*).

Her commitment has been recognized, among other things, through the award received by her cooperation partner T.o.B.e. e.V. במסגרת the nationwide **startsocial** competition, held under the patronage of the German Federal Chancellery.

She is regarded as a distinguished advocate for trauma-informed and structurally anchored victim protection.

Press Contact & Media Inquiries

Stefanie Reich is available for interviews, expert contributions, podcasts, and lectures.

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Glossary

Understanding Key Concepts: Why the System Often Fails

Many terms related to domestic violence, psychological abuse, and institutional dynamics are complex or not widely understood. This glossary explains the report’s central concepts in accessible language and illustrates why certain mechanisms within violence protection systems can have such severe consequences for survivors.

▼ Institutional Betrayal

When Institutions Fail the People They Are Supposed to Protect

What does it mean?

Institutional Betrayal describes situations in which institutions that are supposed to provide protection — such as youth welfare offices, courts, police, or counseling

services — fail to adequately protect survivors or cause additional harm through misjudgments, ignorance, or institutional distrust.

Why is this important?

Many survivors experience institutional contact not as support, but as another source of powerlessness, invalidation, and emotional strain. The report shows that **64.1%** of respondents rate state support as insufficient, burdensome, or harmful.

The consequence

Trust in state protection mechanisms deteriorates. Survivors withdraw or avoid seeking help out of fear of further harmful experiences.

▼ Coercive Control

Controlling Abuse and Psychological Domination

What does it mean?

Coercive Control describes a form of abuse that is not primarily based on physical violence, but on control, isolation, manipulation, surveillance, intimidation, and psychological pressure.

Why is this important?

This form of abuse often remains invisible because it frequently occurs without visible injuries. At the same time, it can have severe psychological, health-related, and social consequences.

The knowledge gap

75% of respondents report that state institutions fail to adequately recognize manipulative perpetrator strategies such as Coercive Control. As a result, central patterns of abuse and risk frequently remain unaddressed in institutional proceedings.

▼ Halo Effect

The “Blinding Effect”

What does it mean?

The Halo Effect is a psychological phenomenon in which individual positive traits — such as appearing calm, controlled, or charming — disproportionately influence the overall perception of a person.

Why is this problematic?

Perpetrators often appear calm, rational, and cooperative in institutional settings. Trauma-related stress reactions in survivors, on the other hand, may be interpreted as “unstable,” “overly emotional,” or “problematic.”

The devastating consequence

The assessment increasingly becomes shaped not by the actual dynamics of violence and risk, but by the perpetrator’s ability to present themselves convincingly.

▼ The Institutional “Echo Chamber”

When Misjudgments Reinforce One Another

What does it mean?

The institutional “echo chamber” describes a dynamic in which misjudgments are adopted and perpetuated between authorities, counseling services, expert witnesses, and courts.

How does it develop?

If violence is initially classified as merely a “relationship conflict” or “high-conflict dispute,” this assessment is often no longer independently reviewed during subsequent proceedings.

The problem

Misjudgments solidify into an institutional “truth” that survivors can hardly challenge or correct.

▼ Peer Expertise

Lived Experience as Professional Knowledge

What does it mean?

Peer Expertise refers to qualified support provided by individuals with lived experience of abuse who possess specialized knowledge about manipulative perpetrator strategies, trauma, and institutional dynamics.

Why is this important?

Survivors often recognize subtle patterns of abuse and control earlier and more accurately than institutions that lack adequate training regarding psychological violence.

The report’s findings

While only **12%** of respondents rated formal state services as helpful, **95%** described peer support as particularly effective.

The problem

This expertise still receives insufficient structural recognition and is rarely integrated systematically into violence protection procedures.

▼ Independent Ombuds Offices

Oversight and Accountability within Violence Protection Systems

What does it mean?

Independent ombuds offices are external oversight bodies with professional and legal independence. Their role is to review misjudgments, structural problems, and institutional failures.

Why are they being demanded?

Many survivors currently experience no effective mechanisms for correcting problematic institutional decisions.

The goal

Independent ombuds offices could serve as corrective mechanisms, make institutional failures visible, and place the safety of survivors and children more firmly at the center of institutional practice.

▼ CPIT

Court and Perpetrator Induced Trauma

What does it mean?

CPIT describes a form of cumulative traumatization in which the consequences of domestic violence are further intensified through court proceedings and institutional processes.

Why is this relevant?

International research demonstrates that family court proceedings can, under certain conditions, themselves become part of ongoing dynamics of violence and psychological harm.

The consequence

Survivors report persistent fear, loss of control, exhaustion, social destabilization, and severe retraumatization caused by institutional processes.