

Intergenerational Connections in Swiss Child Protection: From Verdingkinder to Present

The research into potential connections between historical Verdingkinder-era officials and current positions of power in Swiss institutions reveals a complex picture of documented systemic patterns alongside notable gaps in specific genealogical evidence. While direct family lineages from Verdingkinder-era officials to current KESB and judicial positions remain largely undocumented, the research uncovered substantial evidence of mechanisms that enable intergenerational transmission of both trauma and institutional power.

Patrician families maintain centuries of Swiss institutional control

The most comprehensive documentation of multi-generational power in Swiss institutions comes from a Cambridge University study analyzing 5,199 urban elites from 1890-1957. The research identified **171 patrician families** maintaining power positions across generations through strategic marriages and co-optation networks. In Basel, the Burckhardt family held 72 positions, while Geneva's Pictet family secured 29 positions. These families demonstrated five distinct strategies for maintaining power: some declined after losing patrician privileges, others fortified positions through dense networks, and some maintained influence without extensive kinship ties. The study reveals how **40.8% of these families showed stable power trajectories** across the period overlapping with the Verdingkinder era.

Contemporary concerns about "Vetternwirtschaft" (nepotism) persist. Transparency International and the Council of Europe's 2017 evaluation identified Switzerland's "embedded culture" of cousin networks as a systemic vulnerability. [\(Wikipedia +3\)](#) Philippe Lévy of Transparency International Switzerland describes these as "networks of influence" where personal connections facilitate mutual assistance. [\(Swissinfo\)](#) [\(Swissinfo\)](#) Despite ranking 12th globally in corruption perceptions, Switzerland faces criticism for "petty nepotism" enabled by military service connections, professional associations, and family networks operating within the country's consensus-based political system. [\(Swissinfo\)](#) [\(Wikipedia\)](#)

The victim-to-perpetrator cycle affects institutional staffing patterns

International research provides robust evidence of victim-to-perpetrator cycles in institutional abuse contexts. A landmark Cambridge study of 843 subjects found that **35% of male perpetrators had previously been victims**, compared to only 11% of non-perpetrators. Among male victims, 59% later became perpetrators, with rates reaching 75% for those experiencing multiple abuse types. Crucially, no evidence exists of this cycle in female victims, with only 2% becoming perpetrators. [\(Cambridge Core\)](#)

[\(PubMed\)](#)

The psychological mechanism driving this cycle is "identification with the aggressor," where victims unconsciously adopt their abuser's perspectives and behaviors as a survival strategy. Victims become hypervigilant to aggressors' needs, suppress their own identities, and may later recreate the power dynamics they experienced. Research consistently shows trauma survivors are disproportionately drawn

to helping professions - one US study found 22% of social work students reported childhood sexual abuse versus 2% of business students.

However, Swiss-specific data on Verdingkinder survivors' career choices remains limited. While the University of Zurich's National Research Programme 76 extensively documented mental health outcomes for survivors, no systematic studies track their entry into child protection roles. This represents a significant research gap given Switzerland's estimated 10,000 living Verdingkinder survivors ([Wikipedia](#)) ([Das Lamm](#)) and the reformed child protection system established in 2013.

Canton Zug reveals institutional breaks but limited transparency

Research into Canton Zug's administrative and judicial families found no specific evidence of multi-generational families spanning from the Verdingkinder era to present positions in courts, KESB, or child protection systems. The **2013 establishment of KESB created a clear institutional break** from the earlier municipal guardianship system. ([NZZ +2](#)) Current KESB Zug leadership under Mario Häfliger (since 2020) followed founding president Gabriella Zlauwinen ([Zentralplus](#)) (2013-2020), who led the transition from decentralized municipal authorities. ([Luzerner Zeitung](#)) ([Kanton Zug](#))

While Canton Zug maintains comprehensive historical records through the Zuger Personen- und Ämterverzeichnis covering 3,755 persons in 161 offices since 1848, Swiss privacy laws limit access to detailed genealogical information about government officials. ([Kanton Zug](#)) ([Kanton Zug](#)) The 2022 research report "Fürsorgen, vorsorgen, versorgen" provides the most comprehensive historical analysis of Canton Zug's social care system from 1850-1981, ([Zug Kultur](#)) ([Kanton Zug](#)) but public access to family lineage data remains restricted.

Abuse patterns perpetuate through multiple documented mechanisms

Swiss research demonstrates clear mechanisms for intergenerational transmission of institutional abuse patterns. ([ScienceDirect](#)) The University of Zurich's studies of Verdingkinder offspring found they experienced **5.2 times more physical abuse** and **2.5 times higher total childhood trauma** than controls. ([Uzh](#)) Parents were described as less emotional and mothers as significantly more punitive. ([PubMed Central](#)) These patterns transmit through biological mechanisms (shortened telomeres, epigenetic changes), psychological pathways (disrupted attachment, maladaptive coping), and social processes (stigmatization, institutional cultures resistant to reform).

The historical scale is staggering: historians estimate 100,000-200,000 children were affected by the Verdingkinder system between 1920-1970, ([Wikipedia](#)) ([Wikipedia](#)) with at least 60,000 people administratively detained in 650 institutions without judicial oversight. ([Storiadellasicurezza sociale +3](#)) The Independent Expert Commission documented how poor and marginalized populations were systematically targeted by militia bodies making administrative decisions without judicial review.

([Uek-administrative-versorgun...](#))

Institutional culture mechanisms identified by researchers include resource scarcity, poor working conditions, authority indifference, and normalized maltreatment becoming routine. ([Taylor & Francis Online](#))

Swiss cantonal autonomy enabled these patterns through decentralized authority, local elite network control, minimal federal oversight, and inter-cantonal agreements facilitating abuse networks. Modern vulnerabilities persist through institutional cultures slow to change, decentralized systems enabling local abuse networks, and historical patterns prioritizing institutional reputation over child welfare.

Whistleblowers expose ongoing scandals but face retaliation

Multiple investigations have exposed contemporary failures in Swiss child protection, though specific documentation of intergenerational family connections remains limited. The KESB system, established in 2013, became "the most hated authority in Switzerland" within two years amid scandals including the Flaach tragedy (where a mother killed two children rather than return them to KESB custody) (Unibe) (The NRP 76) and the Meilen financial scandal (where 450,000 CHF disappeared from an elderly woman's account under KESB supervision despite family warnings). (NZZ) (NZZ)

Investigative journalism by Republik and WOZ has exposed corruption networks, particularly in construction and politics. The Graubünden construction cartel involved 190 million CHF in fraudulent contracts with local politicians implicated. (Swissinfo) (Columbia Journalism Review) However, Switzerland lacks comprehensive whistleblower protection laws, and those reporting misconduct face institutional retaliation. (Swissinfo +2) The banking sector cases of Bradley Birkenfeld and Hervé Falciani demonstrate how whistleblowers face prosecution for violating secrecy laws even when exposing massive fraud.

(CNBC) (Wikipedia)

Small cantons enable institutional capture through intimate networks

The phenomenon of institutional capture through family networks is well-documented in small Swiss cantons. Academic research defines "Vetterliwirtschaft" as mutual favors and preferential treatment enabled by Switzerland's small-scale federalist structure. (Global Informality Project) (Swissinfo) **Appenzell Innerrhoden**, with just 16,000 inhabitants, exemplifies how "everyone knows everyone" environments concentrate power (PeakVisor) - it was the last canton to grant women voting rights (1990/1991) only after federal court intervention. (Encyclopedia Britannica) (Growingupwithoutborders)

Small cantons face structural vulnerabilities including limited administrative capacity for oversight, higher probability of overlapping relationships, greater influence of individual families, and reduced candidate pools for positions. The consensus democracy model can mask conflicts of interest behind collective decision-making facades. Academic analyses reveal that while Swiss nepotism is more democratic and inclusive than traditional "old boy networks," it remains "tenacious" at local levels where high social capital paradoxically facilitates both democratic participation and nepotistic practices.

(Global Informality Project)

Systemic patterns persist despite reform attempts

The research reveals clear patterns of intergenerational institutional dysfunction, though direct genealogical connections from Verdingkinder-era officials to current positions remain largely

undocumented. The mechanisms enabling both trauma transmission and power perpetuation are well-established: biological impacts of abuse affecting subsequent generations, psychological identification with aggressors, social stigmatization preventing help-seeking, institutional cultures preserving historical practices, and structural factors like cantonal autonomy limiting oversight.

The 2013 KESB reforms created institutional breaks from historical guardianship systems, [\(Kanton Zug\)](#) potentially disrupting some family continuities. [\(Zug Kultur +3\)](#) However, contemporary scandals demonstrate ongoing vulnerabilities. [\(NZZ +2\)](#) Switzerland's 2013 federal apology and 300 million CHF compensation fund acknowledge historical injustices, [\(Worldcrunch +3\)](#) while National Research Programme 76 documents extensive impacts. [\(Storiadellasicurezza sociale +2\)](#) Yet proposed reforms face resistance - a 2018 popular initiative to limit KESB powers failed to gather sufficient signatures, and multiple attempts to strengthen whistleblower protections have been rejected. [\(Swissinfo\)](#)

The absence of systematic studies tracking Verdingkinder descendants into child protection roles represents a critical research gap. Accessing Swiss Federal Archives under the 30-year rule and conducting genealogical analyses of judicial appointments could reveal specific family connections currently undocumented. [\(Swiss Federal Archives\)](#) The intersection of Switzerland's consensual political culture, federal structure, and small-scale governance creates unique conditions for both democratic participation and institutional capture - a paradox requiring nuanced solutions that strengthen accountability while preserving legitimate local autonomy. [\(Encyclopedia Britannica\)](#)

This research underscores how historical abuse systems cast long shadows through multiple transmission mechanisms, even when specific family lineages remain opaque. Understanding these patterns is essential for breaking cycles of institutional harm and creating child protection systems that truly serve vulnerable populations rather than perpetuating historical injuries.