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# Barnahus as implemented in Iceland

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Bragi Guðbrandsson, Director General



# The “Silent revolution” - Barnahus

- ✓ Barnahus has assumed a key role in the Justice as well as Child Protection System of the Nordic Countries
- ✓ The common mission is to avoid re-traumatisation of child victims by child-friendly and multiagency response to CAN
- ✓ Recommended in CoE standards and by bodies such as
  - ✓ the Lanzarote Committee
  - ✓ Congress of Local and Regional Authorities



# The growth of Barnahus among Nordic Counties

- ✓ Allowing for difficulties of definitions it is estimated that the total number is 50 in Iceland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Greenland and the Faroe-islands
- ✓ Engaging few hundreds of professionals full time and even more part time
- ✓ Providing multiple services for tens of thousands of children suspected of being subjected to maltreatment and abuse



# Barnahus in the Nordic context

- ✓ Paths of coming into being
- ✓ The role of the state, regional- and the local authorities
- ✓ The legislative framework
- ✓ Affiliations: social services/police
- ✓ Juxtaposition: responsibilities of partners
- ✓ Collaboration: from being structured to informal
- ✓ Target groups: victims sexual abuse or CAN generally
- ✓ Investigative interviews
- ✓ Medical examination
- ✓ Treatment strategies



## The background to Barnahus Iceland

- ✓ Increased international awareness following the Stockholm Congress on commercial sexual exploitation of children in 1996
- ✓ Followed by the first research conducted on the incidence of child sexual abuse in Iceland
- ✓ The rate of child sexual abuse higher than imagined
- ✓ The research outcome created a public demand for improved strategies in handling of child sexual abuse cases
- ✓ Barnahus established as a nationwide center in 1998, rooted in the US CAC approach



# Child Sexual Abuse - The Unique Crime

- ✓ The vulnerability of the child victim
  - ✓ Child victims do not normally bring charges against their offenders
  - ✓ The “silent” crime, secrecy of the abuse
  - ✓ Child victims difficulties in disclosures
- ✓ Lack or absence of evidence other than the child’s disclosure
  - ✓ Medical evidence in less than 10% of cases and only conclusive in less than 5% of all cases
  - ✓ Other hard evidence or witnesses other than the child victim’s rarely exist



# The Unique Intervention

- ✓ The Child's disclosure is the key for:
  - ✓ Ensuring the safety of the child
  - ✓ Providing assistance to the child victim with the aim of physical and psychological recovery
  - ✓ Uncovering the crime in terms of criminal investigation, prosecution and sentencing
  - ✓ Preventing the perpetrator from reoffending
- ✓ Addressing Child Sexual Abuse requires multiagency intervention



# Multiple interviews – Harmful to the Child Victim

- ✓ All the different agencies: the Child Protection Service, the Medical Profession, the Police etc. need to have the child's account
- ✓ Repetitive interviews by many professionals in different locations can have very harmful effect for the child victim
- ✓ Retraumatization – re-victimization
  - ✓ Refers to painful/stressful re-experiencing of trauma as a consequence of sexual violence



# Violation of the “best interest of the child”

✓ *Retraumatization!*





# Multiple interviews – Harmful for the Criminal Investigation

- ✓ Repetitive and unstructured interviews can distort the child's account
  - ✓ Suggestibility
  - ✓ Leading and misleading questions
  - ✓ Discrepancies in the child's story
- ✓ Additional harmful experience: the Absence of a child-friendly facilities
  - ✓ High level of stress precludes optimal expression
  - ✓ Police stations or Hospitals: Wrong messages!



# “In the best interest of the child”

✓ The UN CRC, Article 3.1

✓ “In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interest of the child shall be a primary consideration”



# Multiagency collaboration

- ✓ The Gov. Agency for Child Protection
- ✓ The State Police
- ✓ The State Prosecution
- ✓ The Police Dep. in Reykjavik
- ✓ The University Hospital – Dep. of Pediatric and Dep. of child Psychiatry
- ✓ Association of the Directors of Local Social Services
- ✓ The Child Protection Services in Reykjavik





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# The Barnahus in Reykjavik





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# Children's waiting room





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# Waiting room for teens





# CAC/Barnahus

Medical Exams and Evaluation	Joint Invest. Interviews: court statements/ CPS interviews	Victim Therapy
Family Counselling/ Support	Consultation and advice to local CPS	Education, training and research



# Court testimonies

- ✓ The Court Judge is in charge of the procedure
- ✓ The Prosecution
- ✓ The Police
- ✓ The CPS representative
- ✓ The Child's Legal Advocate
- ✓ The Defence
- ✓ Testimonies in Reykjavík Court
- ✓ Police interviews with victims  
15-16 years





# CPS exploratory interview

## Guidelines:

- ✓ At the request of the Child Protection Services
- ✓ Disclosure is absent or very weak/ambiguous
- ✓ Offender has not been identified
- ✓ Offender is below the age of criminal responsibility(15 years)



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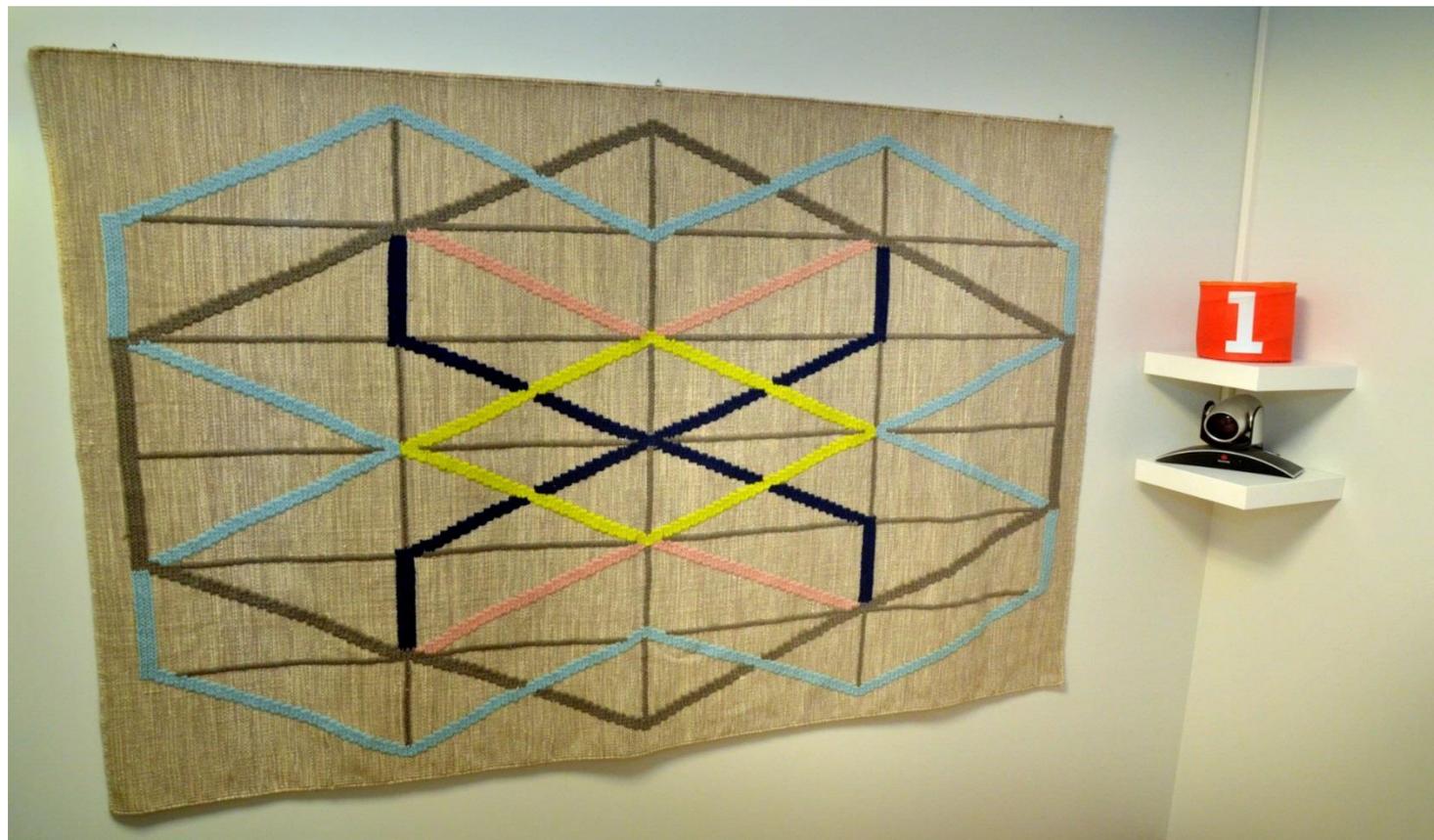
# Interviewing room





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# Camera in the interviewing room





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# The observation room





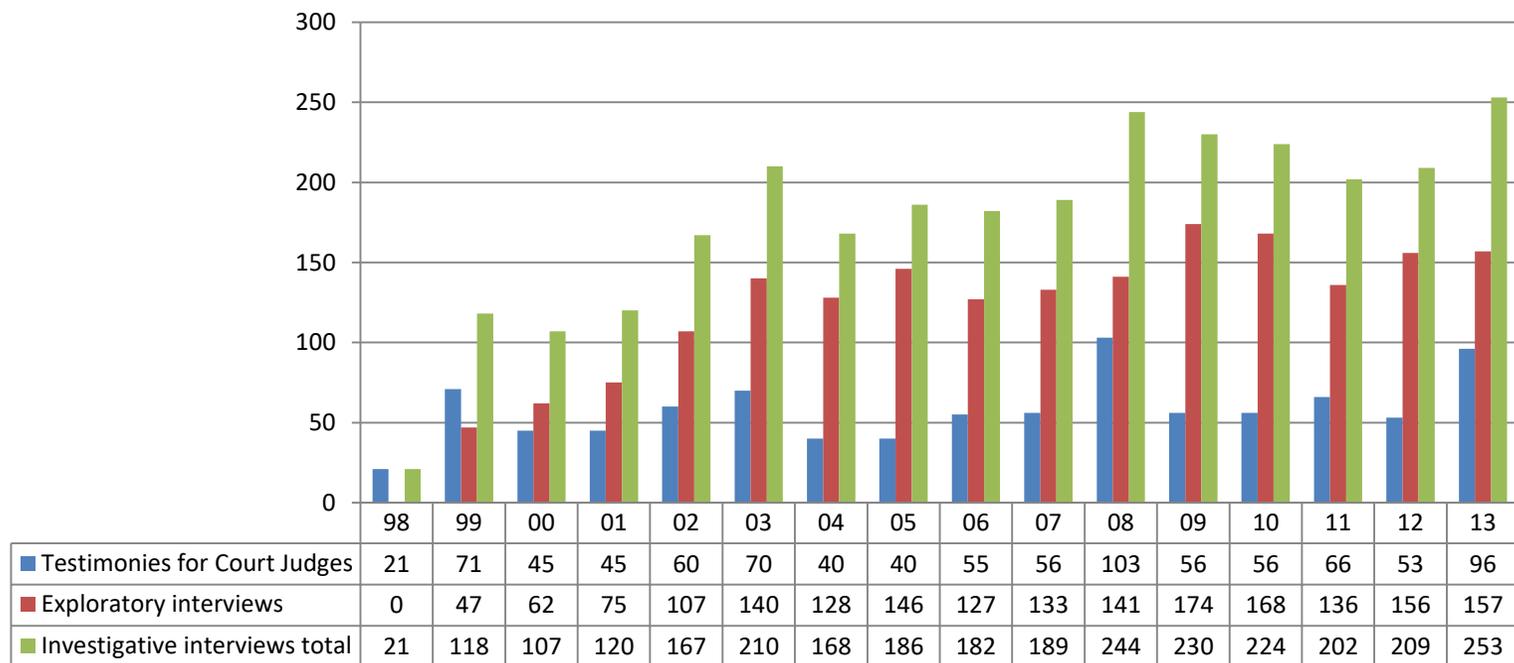
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# Cort session via IT - technology





# Numbers and breakdown of investigative interviews in Barnahus 1.11.1998-31.12.2013





# Medical examinations

- ✓ At the request of the Police, the CPS, the Child or the Parents
- ✓ Implemented by experienced paediatrician, a gynaecologist and a trained nurse
- ✓ A child friendly examination room
- ✓ The use of “video-colposcope” and it’s therapeutic value by active participation of the child
- ✓ Anaesthesia exceptional
- ✓ Acute forensic medicals performed at UH





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# The medical room





# Victim therapy - family counselling

- ✓ The child and the non-offending parent(s) receive (legal) counselling after the investigative interview
- ✓ Victim therapy can start soon after
- ✓ The dual role of interviewer/therapist excluded in individual cases
- ✓ The videotaped child's disclosure is used for initial assessment and treatment plan
- ✓ TFCBT (Trauma Focused Cognitive-behavioural) therapy – group therapy under way
- ✓ The therapists are generally required to submit reports and testify in court proceedings

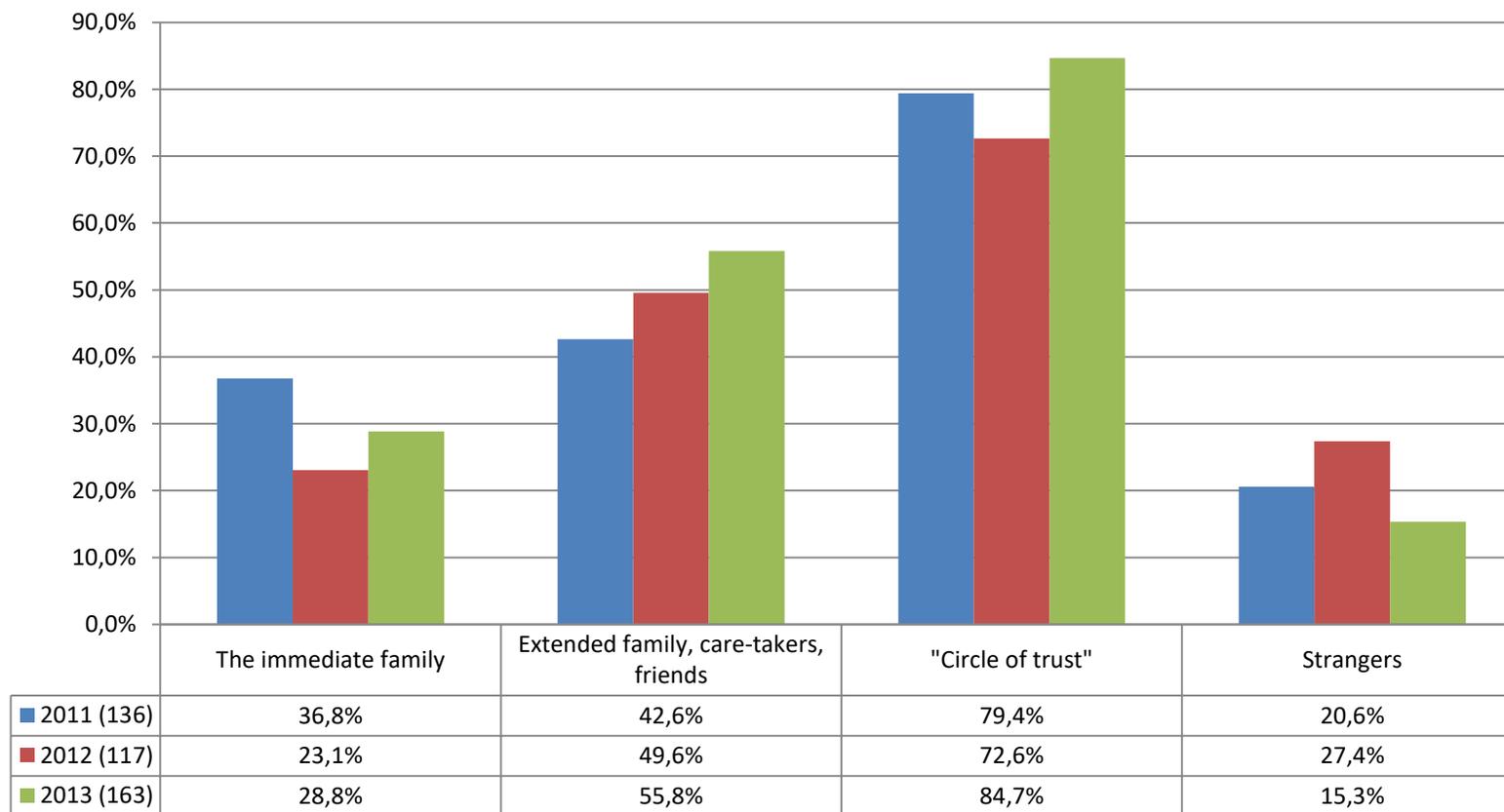


## Additional benefits: Research from Barnahus on the ability of victims to give credible evidence.

- Objective: to investigate age related differences in factors associated with the nature of the allegations and the competence to give evidence and witness abilities.
- Findings:
  - ✓ The great majority of the youngest children, and almost all of the older children, have the basic competence to give testimony, although there are important age-related differences in basic abilities related to witness competence.
  - ✓ Important age related differences were found in relation to the nature of the allegations.
  - ✓ The youngest children had greatest problems with sustaining concentration during the interview and to provide detailed disclosure on the suspected abuse.
  - ✓ *Journal of Forensic Psychiatry and Psychology, 2010*



# Barnahus: Breakdown of victim's relations to offender, the "circle of trust", 2011-2013



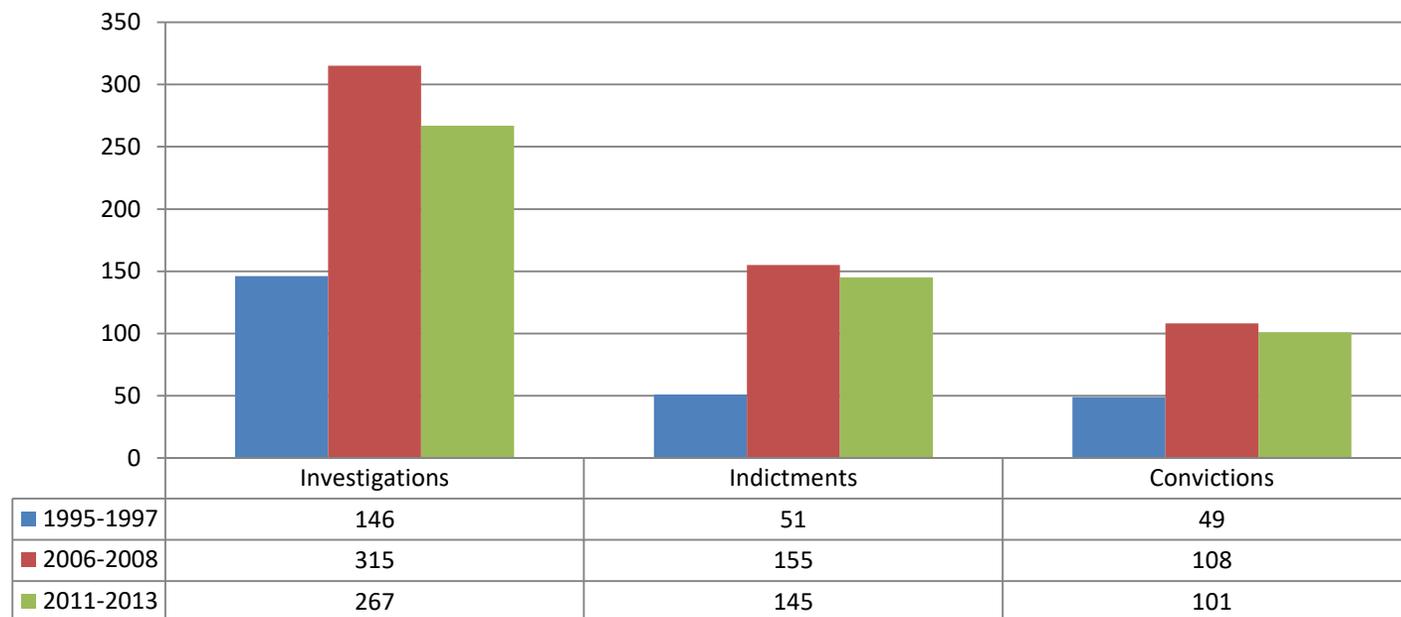


# More than 16 years of experience

- ✓ Over 4.000 children have been referred to Barnahus from the onset in 1998; appr. 250 - 300 annually in recent years
- ✓ The number of:
  - ✓ Cases investigated have more than doubled
  - ✓ Indictments pr. year have more than tripled
  - ✓ Convictions pr year have more than doubled
- ✓ Evaluation shows significantly better outcomes for child victims and their families

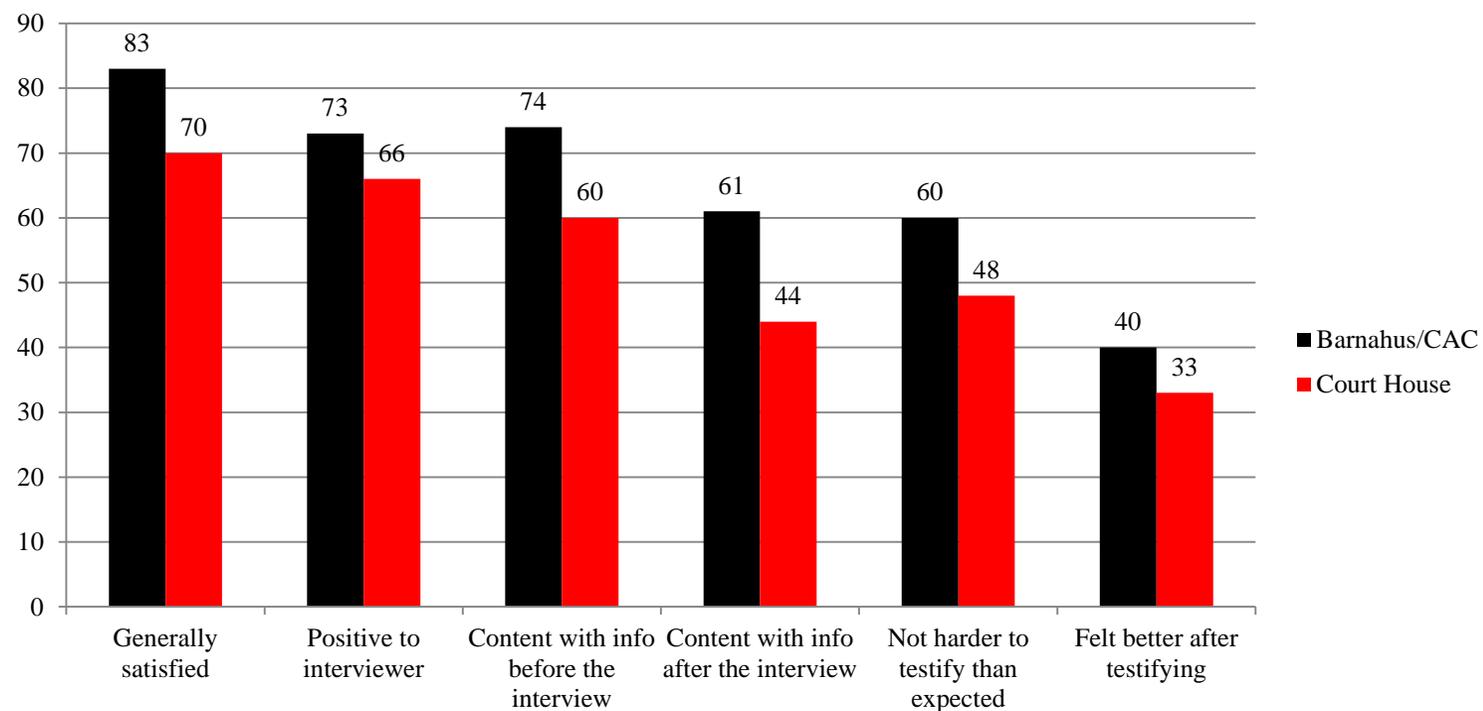


## Before and after: investigations, indictments and convictions of sexual abuse and sexual exploitation



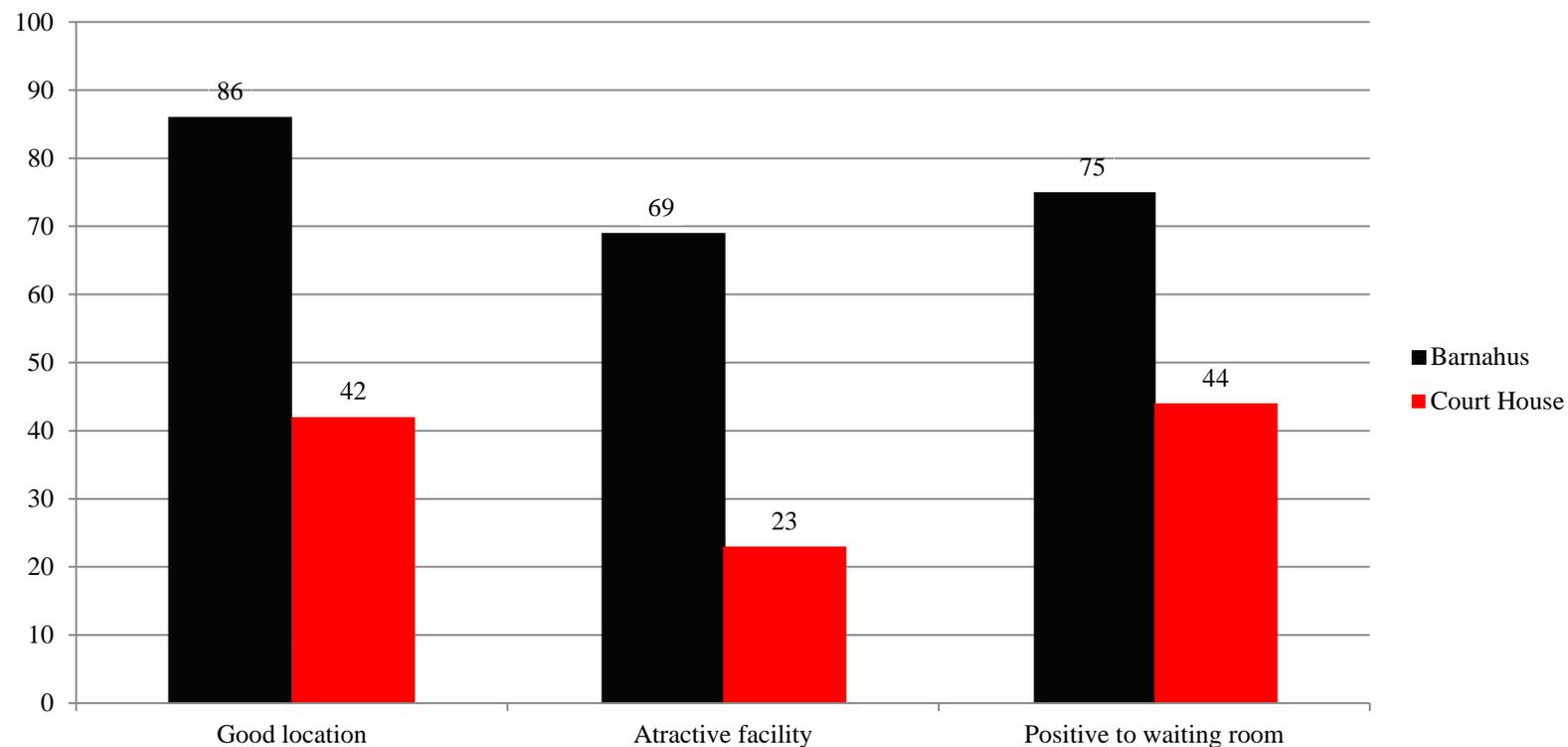


# *Evaluation outcome Iceland:* Child-friendly testimony



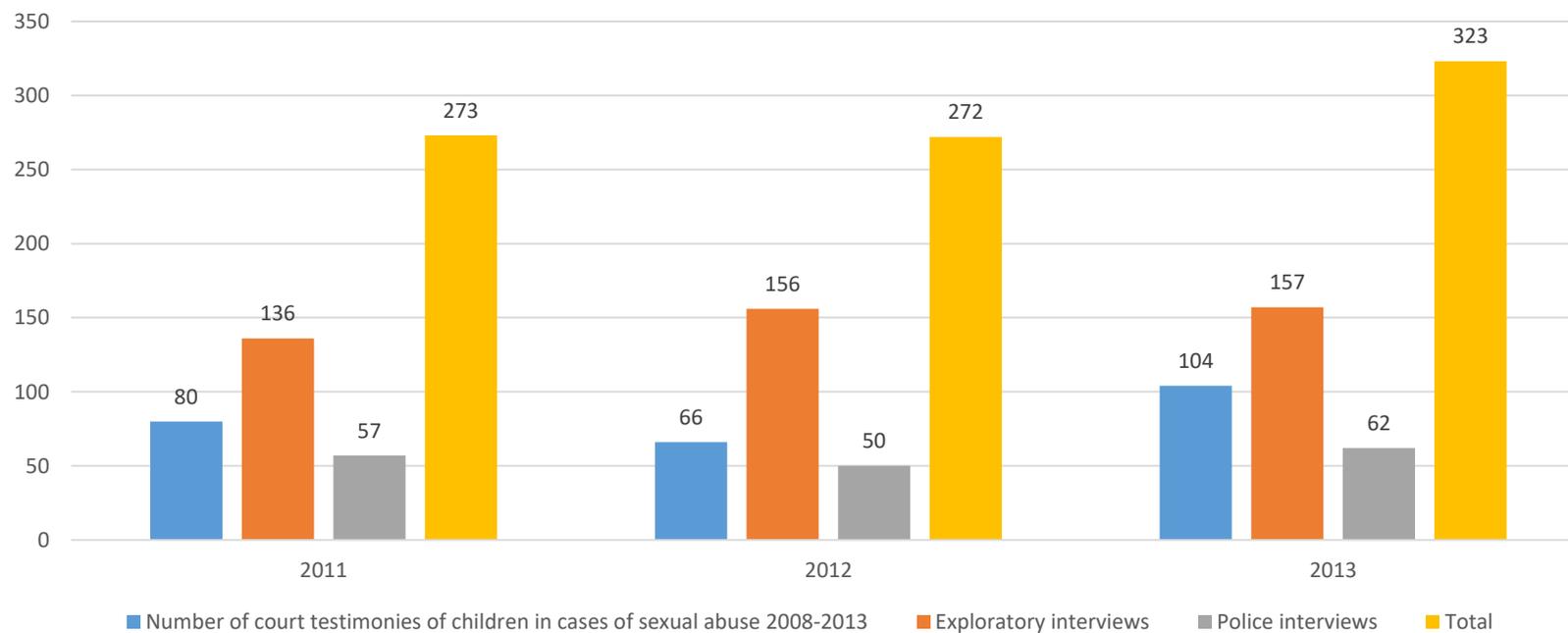


# *Evaluation Outcome Iceland:* Child-friendly environment





# Investigative interviews/Court statements





# Epidemiological intervention CSA

probability of referral 0 -18 y (%)

