SESSION 2 ABSTRACTS

Option 2 A: Decision and assessment processes focusing on children

Findings from a qualitative study on Norway and England’s arrangements for children’s indirect participation in care proceedings: when speaking with the child, how does the representative enable the child’s participation?

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Context: Norway and England have developed different arrangements for securing and fulfilling the child’s right to indirect participation in care order proceedings. In each arrangement, there are two respective actors that speaks with the child and forwards its view to the court, the Children’s Guardian and the Child’s Spokesperson. Children’s Guardians in England are qualified social workers who have a dual role of representing the child and assessing the work done by the local authority. The professional requirement of the Child’s Spokesperson in Norway is that he or she has extensive experience in speaking with children, and its mandate is only to present the child’s views. Does this divergence affect the way they proceed in eliciting the child’s views?
Method: This study has conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 22 Spokespersons and 6 Children’s Guardians about their role and how they elicit the child’s views.
Findings: What is their understanding of the child’s right to be heard when they speak with the child? Findings from the study on this subject will be presented and discussed, where a children’s rights approach and insights from sociology of childhood is applied (see Tobin 2012; Lundy and McEvoy 2012; Ulvik 2015; Bilson and White 2005). The presenting author will particularly focus on how children are assisted in exploring and expressing their view(s) freely, inter alia in view of the (physical) setting of the meeting with the child, how much information the child receives and what ways the child forms a view.
Conclusion: Findings from this study can contribute to a knowledge base and wider discussion of what practice is needed to fulfill the duties of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and assist children in freely voicing their views in proceedings that may drastically alter their lives.

Trauma-informed foster care psycho-educational intervention: an early stage evaluation

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Context: This presentation seeks to report findings of an early stage evaluation of Fostering Connections: The Trauma-informed Foster Care Programme. This is part of a larger study as part of doctoral research that involved the design, and development of this programme informed by the Medical Research Council guidance for complex social interventions (Craig et al., 2008).
Methods: Grounded in the pragmatic paradigm, a mixed-method research design (questionnaire and focus groups) was used to conduct this early stage evaluation. Using a pre-test-post test case controlled quasi-experimental study design, quantitative data was collected over two-time points (before and on completion,) to examine whether there were improvements of pre-defined outcomes (N=81). A booster session will be given (February 2018) to the intervention group prior to time point three data collection (16 weeks’ post-intervention). Qualitative data was collected post intervention through focus groups (n=21). Using a sequential explanatory design (Creswell 2006), statistical analysis was conducted on the quantitative data first (time point 2) and then qualitative data analysed which was used to complement and explain the quantitative findings.
Findings: Findings to date (Time 1 and Time 2 analysis) show that foster carers who attended Fostering Connections: The Trauma-informed Foster Care Programme have significantly higher scores in 1. Trauma-informed Fostering, 2. Tolerance of Misbehaviour and 3. Fostering Efficacy than those in the control group as measured by the Knowledge and Beliefs Questionnaire, (KBS), (Sullivan et al., 2016). These foster carers have not reported a higher reduction in observed emotional and behavioural difficulties in the children they are fostering at Time 2 compared to the control group as measured by Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire(SDQ), (Goodman, 2001).
Conclusions: All analysis will be completed and results presented.

Building better futures for children and families: a model for assessing and enhancing parenting in child protection

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Dr Mandi MacDonald [M.macdonald@qub.ac.uk]
Context: The presentation will outline an original model for assessing and enhancing parenting capacity in child protection.
Method: The model has gone through successive stages of theoretical and evaluative development over 12 years, involving (in the last two years) staff in all of the regional HSC Trusts implementing it and then taking part
in a multi-faceted, mixed methods evaluative study (which included feedback from service users) to further develop the model.

Findings: The model has been published in an international peer-reviewed journal, in two monograph editions, and will appear in the forthcoming book, The Child's World (3rd ed.) – a best-selling social work text in the UK. The authors will summarise the main components of the model and then highlight one of its central parts: the decision on assessment, decision-making, risk analysis, planning and review of a parent’s capacity to change.

Discussion: In the final part of the presentation, we will briefly outline how the model has been developed and evaluated and the findings emanating from this process. We will also comment on the learning arising from academic and practitioner collaboration in developing effective models of practice.

Short cuts in dialogues with social workers and young persons: social worker, organization and legal framework

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Context: Decision making in social work is a topic that is characterized by heuristics/bias – rules of thumb (Munro, 2008; Munro, Cartwright, Hardie, & Montuschi, 2016; O’sullivan, 2011; Taylor, 2010; Taylor, 2017). Research has identified various kinds of heuristics/bias and shown empirical examples of how social workers make shortcuts in their complex task. We will argue that the use of short cuts depends on the autonomy of the social worker. Colleagues and managers influence through personal interactions a social worker’s decisions. Also the legal framework plays a role in the meeting with the child/parent. Decisions will depend on whether and how these aspects are synthesized into a strategy before such a meeting and on how the social worker carry out the conversation. This article will identify heuristics in the conversations with young people in child protection and discuss to which it depend on social workers, organizational norms and the legal framework.

Methods: The research is based on an ongoing project – “My social work partner” (MRP) (Birkholm Antczak, Mackrill, Steensbæk, & Ebsen, 2017). MRP has collected 350 videos of social workers dialogue with vulnerable young persons. First we analyze two very different videos with the same social worker. Then she is interviewed to uncover reasons for what she did and what decisions followed. We focus on shortcuts used and how they relate to the acquaintance of the young person, professional experience, colleagues opinions, legal framework, organizational norms, available support and care, etc.

Findings: We discuss how this research contributes social workers decision-making by looking specific into dialogues. We will consider research e.g. from another project on decisions (Svendsen, 2017) to discuss how conversations links to other sources of influence than social worker and young person.

Conclusion: We will discuss what can qualify the use of shortcuts and how this can improve the work of social workers as professionals and as part of a Child protection system.


Option 2 B: Learning about and understanding decision making and risk

Can real life decision making skills be taught in the classroom? The seeing through the eyes of experienced practitioners (steep) study

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Context: There are debates about whether good decision making skills can be taught in the classroom or whether they must be learnt through real life practice. Classroom teaching on decision making has been criticized for often using classical models drawn from economics. Using these technical-rational models, students are encouraged to engage in careful evaluation of all of the available options in order to determine the optimal choice in each situation. However, there is evidence that this does not reflect how experienced
practitioners make decisions in real life situations. Instead, experienced practitioners make decisions swiftly based upon a form of cue and pattern recognition and story building that draws upon their existing repertoire of knowledge (Whittaker, 2018). The problem often identified with this approach is that it does not fit well with traditional notions of formal knowledge so it is assumed that it cannot be taught in the classroom. The current study intends to test this assumption by examining whether rapid digital feedback for expert practitioners can help inexperienced social workers to learn cue and pattern recognition skills.

Methods: The study is a randomized control trial of the ShadowBox™ educational intervention, where students are presented with real life vignettes in a computer lab and must make key decisions. Those in the intervention groups will receive immediate video feedback after each decision from a panel of highly experienced practitioners, who explain what information they would have paid attention to. Those in the control group will receive no feedback. Data will be collected using Qualtrics software and a within-participants analysis of variance (MANOVA) will be conducted to assess the impact of the intervention on participants’ decision making abilities.

Findings: Data collection and analysis are ongoing and the paper will present the final results.


Emancipatory learning through critical reflection on own learning and practice as social work students
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Context: Pilot study involving ten students and two teachers from Oslo Metropolitan University/OsloMet (previous: Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences). The aim of the study is to find out if critical incident analysis through all three years of BA degree in social work is making a difference when it comes to 1) a greater in depth understanding of power issues on an individual-, relational-, organizational- and structural level 2) a greater ability to address power issues on all these levels and 3) a greater ability to empower oneself as a social worker. The students in pilot group have applied critical incident analysis on own incidents related to skills training, community work, two periods of practice placement and final thesis.

Method: Focus group interviews with pilot group and control group of fellow students. The presentation is based on four focus group interviews with the pilot group.

Findings: Key issues from the pilot-group after three years using critical incident analysis:
1. Enhanced awareness of individual and relational issues;
2. Enhanced awareness of the influence of structural issues;
3. From confusion to integrated critical reflective practice; and
4. Emancipatory learning through co-teaching.

Conclusion: The presentation will be concentrated on elaborating these four key issues – all considered relevant for assessing and managing risk as well as professional judgement in a complex practice field.

Implementation of evidence-based practice in the Swedish Social Services – the top-down argument
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Context: In 2008 a Swedish governmental report pointed out that the social services in Sweden increasingly need to conduct their work based on an understanding of the effects of their services. The report stressed the development of an evidence-based practice as the long-term objective. However, this imperative and the state authorities’ EBP work have been criticized by researchers in social work for being a top-down approach in relation to the professionals in the social services, and several tensions between authorities, researchers and practitioners have emerged in relation to EBP and how it should be pursued in practice. The Swedish Agency for Public Management now strongly recommends that the authorities change their approach so that it becomes more focused on dialogue with practitioners. This study examines the top-down argument and poses the following questions: When should a top-down approach be characterized as an unjust top-down approach (in this particular context), and how are we to decide this? And are there any characteristics to suggest that would make a certain EBP organizational process less vulnerable to the top-down accusation?

Methods: Philosophical methods will be used in order to explore the arguments. Conceptual analysis aims at clarifying and/or defining concepts. Argument analysis describes arguments and evaluates their validity and relevance.

Findings: The characteristic ‘sufficient proximity’ is suggested to be a good-making characteristic in an EBP organizational process or at a particular EBP unit (such as an ‘evidence centre’).
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Conclusion: The characteristic needs to be present in a practical sense (for accessibility and reachability), but also in a “symbolic sense” (to achieve legitimacy from practitioners). However, the characteristic ‘sufficient proximity’ does not in itself contribute general answers; it is argued that the assessment of whether the characteristic is present or not should be made by those concerned.

Option 2 C: Decision processes with adult clients

Client participation (CP) and household competence: decision processes in partnerships with clients and social workers from municipal social services (MSS)

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Context: Welfare policy in Norwegian MSS point out the ideal of CP which presupposes active clients. Traditional client-social worker relationships have been characterized by “passive” clients, and practitioners who define what help clients get. Consequently, CP implies a redistribution of power between clients and practitioners.

Method: The purpose of this presentation is to compare perspectives of clients and practitioners from MSS. How do they experience meaning of CP, when aiming at strengthening clients’ household competence? The assumption is that for CP to work well from each position’s perspective (client and practitioner) in partnerships, there needs to be a shared understanding of what CP means to the participants involved. Household competence strengthens the possibilities that clients stabilise their housing-situations, which might bring about more participation in the society. What this means has to be negotiated by the participants in each partnership. This presentation focuses on household support for clients with addiction and/or health challenges. It is based upon a project which enlightens how CP is experienced by clients and practitioners in MSS. Four clients and four practitioners attended in semi-structured interviews.

Findings: The findings show that UP is an abstract concept, which gets empowering meaning when it is practiced. It is the continuing decision-making, which gives UP meaning to the collaborators. The clients emphasized not losing more control. The practitioners expressed their efforts to be sensitive to their clients’ needs. The clients’ life-situations were characterised by “turning-points”, which changed directions from the better to the worse or the opposite directions.

Conclusion: In better periods plans for the future with higher CP could be carried out. More challenging periods were the right timing for lower CP, where the practitioners rather focused on caring work. The “turning-points” were mentioned as important “to seize the moments of possibilities” for CP. Implications for social work practice, welfare policy and research are discussed.

The decision-process of transforming from family-social-work to engagement in policy-practices and community-based perspectives— a qualitative analysis

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Context: In Israel, most social workers are trained as case-managers/family-workers, while a smaller percentage specializes as community developers. The training of family-workers focuses their work on direct assistance, rather than on working to change the political and regulatory arena in which they and their clients operate. Recently, workers find themselves called-upon to engage in policy changing activities. Thus, the research question was what factors influence the decision of social workers to broaden their perspectives to include community development approaches and engagement in policy-practices to help clients at-risk?

Methods: The study was a qualitative study, combining focus groups and individual interviews with social workers. Three focus groups of 15 members, and 35 personal interviews were conducted, transcribed, and analyzed thematically.

Findings: The findings highlight the "decision tree" social workers trained as case-managers and family-workers face when presented with the need to engage in policy-practice in order to help clients. By dealing with a series of decision-making processes vis-à-vis internal and external barriers, social-workers go through a significant professional transformation.

Conclusions: Barriers to job performance create a role conflict that in turn serves as a catalyst for a personal and professional process of decision-making and action that influences broadening practice perspectives to include community development and policy changing activities. This process is dialectic, representing a constant change in the perception of professional role and is differential and contextual. This personal and professional process of decision making helps social workers overcome the barriers and expand their involvement in the community and policy arenas.

Adult safeguarding legal duties and powers to intervene

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Reflections on the social worker’s role in preventing radicalization – Norwegian social workers’ experiences

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**Context:** Social workers in Norway are, like in the UK, involved in the government’s strategy to prevent radicalization into violent extremism (RVE). The role of the social worker in this context is, on one side, to give assistance and guidance to those at risk of entering RVE, but also being a tool for the government to cooperate with police and security police. This implies an element of securitization of social work, and possibly both new tasks, responsibilities and dilemmas in social work. The project, which is ongoing, aims at describing how social workers experience their interaction with the target group and how they reflect upon the potential role conflict between support and control in this practice.

**Methods:** This paper explores through qualitative interviews how social workers in Norway perceive and reflect upon being a part of a government strategy combating radicalization. Approximately 40 informants from services with specific responsibilities to prevent RVE will be purposely sampled. Theories of interaction by Goffman serves as the project’s theoretical framework.

**Findings:** Preliminary findings from pilot interviews suggests that Norwegian social workers experience their professional role as challenged by being involved in the government’s strategy to prevent RVE. This relates firstly to how they experience their relations to the target group, and secondly how they perceive their own practice and duties as social workers. Social work has at its core elements of both support and control, but there are signs of the latter element outgrowing the former in this context, according to the pilot informants.

**Conclusion:** This might imply a change in how social work is perceived by both the target group and the social workers themselves, and possibly increase the distance between the two groups. The study will be carried out from March 2018 and further findings might surface from that point.

Using the Decision Making Ecology Framework to describe the decision making process in Scottish Children’s Hearings

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**Context:** The Children’s Hearings System is Scotland’s care and justice system for children and young people. Established in 1971, it took over most of the court’s responsibility for making welfare decisions for children and young people who commit offences or who are in need of care and protection. Decisions are made by a lay panel following an open discussion involving the young people, their family and the professionals involved in their lives. Research suggests that child welfare decision makers are influenced by many factors beyond the direct case characteristics of the child’s circumstances.
Method: This research seeks to use the Decision Making Ecology Framework (Baumann, Dalgleish, Fluke & Kern, 2011) as a descriptive tool rather than an analytical one, to describe how children's hearings make decisions in order to better understand the factors that influence this complex and diverse decision making process. The research aim is to be able to identify the non-case factors which influence decisions and to describe this complex decision making process in terms of the organisational, external and decision maker factors associated with judgements and decision making under conditions of uncertainty. I am conducting semi-structured discussions with the decision makers and professionals who take part in Hearings, to explore the process of arriving at child welfare decision in this forum.

Findings: Research is ongoing at present but early findings indicate that participants are able to identify a wide variety of factors which influence the decision making process.

Conclusion: This paper will present emerging themes from early analysis and relate them to the theoretical underpinnings of Decision Making Ecology.

Local authority social workers as professional witnesses in care proceedings (in England): legal and social work evaluations of expertise

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Context: Reforms to care proceedings in England now restrict the use of independent expert witnesses (e.g. clinical psychologists and psychiatrists) to ‘necessary’ cases (Children and Families Act 2014, s.16(6)). This has meant a shift in the role of local authority social workers in care proceedings, and they have resumed a position as a main source (along with the Children’s Guardian) of professional social work knowledge and opinion evidence about outcomes for children, in many cases. The President of the Family Division of the High Court of England & Wales, Sir James Munby has said clearly that local authority social workers should be treated as experts in care proceedings (Munby J, 2013). However, judges regularly express dissatisfaction with the quality of local authority social work evidence in published judgments. Additionally, social workers are faced with legal protocols and judicial ‘guidance’ within published judgments, which direct the construction and presentation of written social work evidence for care proceedings, to meet the requirements and expectations of the legal process.

Method: This paper will present findings from a qualitative socio-legal study, which has explored legal and social work evaluations of local authority social workers’ written and oral evidence in care proceedings, particularly in relation to understandings of expertise. Analysis of data from focus groups and interviews with legal and social work professionals, as well as observations of contested court hearings, highlights similarities and differences in emphasis between these professional groups and their understandings and evaluations of social work expertise in care proceedings.

Findings: Also highlighted within the data are key features of local authority social work evidence that influence judicial evaluations about the quality of the evidence and the reliability of the social worker as a professional witness.