Socialsekreteraren och det familjehemsplacerade barnet
Om relationen, erkännandet och de institutionella förutsättningarna

av

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Akademisk avhandling

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Abstract


The aim of this thesis is to study, analyze and understand the relationship between children and youth in foster care and their responsible child welfare workers. The empirical material consists of qualitative interviews with foster children (n=53, three interviews/child, in total 159) and child welfare workers (n=17) conducted in a national evaluation of a pilot project with supervision representatives, and two focus groups conducted for the thesis. Examples of central theoretical concepts in the thesis are institution, role, professionalism and recognition. The interviewed children highlighted that the relationship with child welfare workers is negatively affected by a lack of time, availability, and trust. The children desire close and trustful relationships with child welfare workers, but generally they expect a relationship characterized by distance and formality. The child welfare workers emphasized that the relationships are affected by organizational constraints, such as time pressure and lack of continuity. Further, the work is characterized by role conflicts and contradictory expectations of professionalism. On the one hand, the child welfare workers stress the importance of closeness and trust in the relationships. On the other hand, they are expected to maintain formality, distance and functional specificity. The current relationship is affected by institutional prerequisites that are made visible by prevailing regulative, normative, and cultural-cognitive expectations. These different expectations shape and constrain the child welfare workers’ discretion, at the same time as they also create internal conflicts. By applying the theory of recognition, it becomes evident that the foster child is expected to be recognized through closeness, rights, and solidarity by the child welfare worker. Under current institutional conditions, tensions arise between these different forms. The discussions focuses on which form of recognition should constitute the starting-point for the relationship, and how closeness versus distance is affected by recognition through rights.

Keywords: foster care, foster child, child welfare worker, social services, relationship, institution, role, professionalism, discretion, recognition.

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