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# Children's voice and participation in social welfare investigations.

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## **ABSTRACT.**

There is a principal consent both in the convention on the rights of the child, the Swedish social service act and in “Barns behov i centrum” (BBiC, similar to the British “Looking after children”, LAC) that children should participate and have an impact on matters that affect them in relation to their age and maturity. This thesis focus on how children’s voices are recorded in social welfare files and how their participation in the investigation is constructed.

I have read the interviews and the social reports of ten children, conducted by social workers in a municipality in the outskirts of Stockholm. The children’s voices in the files are a secondary voice, they are the social worker’s interpretation of the interviews with the children.

I have used thematic analysis in order to answer my research questions. The result shows that all children had been able to talk to the social worker and nearly all of them were informed about why there was an investigation. The children’s stories were valued as true by the social workers and they were referred as information givers. Most of them were only interviewed orally, without support from child adaptive methods. They had very limited impact on how the investigation were conducted, how their information would be used and on the choice of intervention.

**Key words:** children, social workers, social welfare file, participation, intervention

## **PREFACE.**

I would like to thank my contact person in the municipality where this study is conducted. Thanks for the help collecting the files and giving me a place to work in the social welfare office and thanks to the social workers of the unit for interesting discussions about children’s participations in social investigations.

I would also like to thank my supervisor Karin Zetterqvist Nelson for her help and guidance both in understanding what I was trying to say and in the structuring of my result.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION AND AIM.**

My focus in this master thesis is on children's participation in child welfare investigations in social welfare offices. What I mean with the concept of children and other key terms is defined in Appendix 1. I have been working as a social worker in social welfare offices for many years, have met a lot of children and interviewed them about their situation. My experience is that children respond if you ask them about their lives, but when they have told their story, their impact on the forthcoming investigation (see appendix 1) and interventions is limited by social workers, parents and the structure of the investigation itself. But it is at the same time obvious that children have a goal when they describe their situation, or even when they refuse to talk to a social worker. They have insight and views about what kind of change that needs to be done to their situation. I am interested in studying how these children's abilities to participate is captured in the files; in interviews with children and in the reports. Do children's opinions and views have an impact on the outcome of the investigation or have they just been allowed to tell their story.

My data corpus are children's files; that include both interviews with children and the social reports written by social workers (see appendix 1). They shows how the social worker understands the child's situation and what they believe is important and needed to be included in the files. There could be more said between the child and the social worker, things excluded from the files, and the child's own understanding of a situation and experience can be different from how it is outlined in the texts. Nevertheless, these texts are important, the reports are the base for interventions of support and protection and will be read by the parents and social workers working with the particular child, and they will be saved for at least five years. These reports will be valued as a true document of the child's situation.

On national and international levels there is a principal consensus that children should participate in matters that are affecting them, such as investigations in social welfare offices. According to The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (which Sweden ratified 1990), a child that can express a view should be heard and their views must be given due weight in relation to age and maturity (UNHR 1989 p.4). These rights, of participation and having a voice in matters that affect them is incorporated in the Swedish Social Service Act (SSA) (SFS 2001:453), the Care of Young Persons Act (CYPA) (SFS 1990:52) and the Parental Code (PC)(SFS 1949:381) (Leviner 2014 p.207). As children are seen as agents and capable, this means that they also have the right to refuse to speak with a social worker, but

the social worker still has an obligation to continue with an investigation if it has been initiated. If children are too young to express their views, the social worker shall try to clarify their opinion in other ways (SSA 11:10). Social workers have also the opportunity to talk to children without their parents' consent or against their will (SSA11:10) (Hultman & Cederborg 2014 p. 1; Eklund 2007 p.171). But, as Leviner stresses, there are few guidelines conducted by the state regarding the principles of the right for the child to be heard and the principle of the best interest of the child (Leviner 2014 p.212). The 290 different municipalities in Sweden have to create their own guidelines and praxis as the SSA have few concrete statements in for example how health shall be assessed (Hultman et al 2014 p.1). In a Swedish context, children do not have the right to appeal against not being heard or involved in their own social investigation (Hultman & Cederborg 2014 p.1).

On a local level, when being investigated in a social welfare office (see appendix 1), children have to relate to adults, both parents and social workers. Teachers and others give their views of the child's strengths and weaknesses. Social workers listen to all different voices carried out in the investigation, analyse the child's situation and make suggestions of interventions if needed.

A particular structure for investigations and interventions, "Barns behov i centrum" (BBIC) (Child's needs in focus) (see appendix 1), is used by most of the municipalities in Sweden. When social workers talk with a child, BBIC emphasizes the importance of a child feeling that the environment where the interviews are conducted is a safe place. It is also important that the methods and procedures are well adapted to the child's circumstances and that the child receives relevant information. Both the importance of having the child in focus and the importance of seeing the child as a part of its family and of the surrounding environment of influencing people is underpinned in the concept of BBIC (Socialstyrelsen 2013 p.24, 25).

According to SSSA chapter 11 § 1, a social welfare office must take a decision about to start an investigation or not when it gets a report about a child being maltreated or an application for interventions. If the office decides to start an investigation the legal guardians must be informed and the child being informed depending on maturity and age. During the investigation the social workers uses a structural form; BBIC. Depending on the question at hand, different areas of a child's life are being assessed in seven aspects e.g. health, emotional and behavioural development and family and social relations. The social worker interviews the child, the parents and others such as relatives, teachers, nurses and other professionals that

have information about the child or their guardians. These interviews have to be recorded in the child's file. In the final report, the different aspects of the child's life are taken into account and the social worker suggests if there should be an intervention to change the conditions of the child (SFS 2001:453 p.5).

There have been several studies focusing on children exposed to domestic violence and their contact with social workers in the context of family law proceedings. For example, Maria Eriksson points out that it is a challenging task for social workers to at the same time validate children's experiences of violence and offer them participation (see appendix1) in the investigation process (Eriksson 2005 p.205).

When a child meets a social worker in a social welfare office, there are underlying values that has to be conducted such as the child's right to be listened to and to make its wishes clear. The child also has the right to be a participant in the investigation, more than just being heard, to get the opportunity to tell their story. In the same time there are limitations for the impact of the child's participation. Different partakers have different impacts, different ponderosity on the outcome of the investigation. The children's situation and behaviour are interpreted by parents as well as other adults such as teachers and by the social worker. My intention is to see how children's participation in social welfare investigations are constructed and how children's participations impact the interventions.

### **Research questions:**

- How is the child's own voice, opinions or wishes presented in the final report and has the child's opinions an impact on the outcome and eventual interventions?
- How are children's participation constructed in child welfare investigations?

## **2. PRIOR RESEARCH.**

To find relevant articles I have been searching in databases accessible through Linköping's University Library, DiVA and Google scholar and have used the key words child\*, social work, children's voices, participation, social worker and rights of the child in different combinations.

## **2.1. Children's voice in social welfare files and reports.**

### 2.1.1. Children's voices.

The county administrative board in Stockholm, Sweden (Länsstyrelsen i Stockholm) points out in its report 2008 "Barnuppdraget i Stockholms län" that 85% of all children in social reports, somehow had been given a voice and there were no differences according to gender. The county report stresses the importance of children having a voice, as the quality of the reports increases when children participate in the investigations, especially if the child had been talking to the social worker several times. The needs of the child and the parental ability is better described when the social worker had been speaking with the child (Länsstyrelsen 2008 p.16). In their United Kingdom context, Horwath and Tarr, points out the fact that giving a child a voice does not mean allowing them to decide what they want or should have. "Rather, practice that is child-centred requires that workers maintain a focus on the child and their needs throughout the assessment and subsequent interventions". It is not only about giving the child a voice, it is about observing the child's behaviour, their interactions with others and understanding the effects of their daily lives. It is necessarily for social workers not only to consider parenting behaviour, but also the effects of those behaviours on each child. This must be done by taking into account the child's daily life experiences, and their perception of that experience (Horwath & Tarr 2014 p.2).

The child's age has an impact on if a child's voice is represented in a social report, mainly older children, teenagers are quoted. This was found in a study by Hultman & Cederborg in their Swedish context and also by Roose et al in their study in Belgium. They were surprised, as the new way of working (Looked After Children) should have secured that the voices of children would be heard (Hultman & Cederborg 2014 p.5; Roose et al 2009 p. 328).

### 2.1.2. Children's perspectives in social reports.

In Looked After Children (LAC), participation is an important part in social work with children and their families. Roose et al studied social reports in Belgium and found that it was a huge diversity in how children's and parents' perspectives were given attention and incorporation of the their voice did not necessarily stand for a participatory approach. The structure of the social report, by the use of titles that indicate a part of the report where the child's own thoughts is described, could have another content than the title indicated and be

the social workers own interpretation of the child's situation. The child's voice could be used to strengthen their professional views rather than clarifying the child's perspectives (Roose et al 2009 p.328). In the Swedish context, with the same approach to social interventions implemented, Hultman and Cederborg found in their study of social reports from 2008, that out of 57 investigated children, children's views were represented in 12 cases. None of the children's views contradicted the social workers or any other adult's opinion. The reports also focused on the children's ability to give their view and only in two cases were the children's detailed opinions recorded. The descriptions contained few details of the child's opinion and were often used to confirm a previous statement or opinion by another person. But, when only reading the reports, the researchers reflects, it is possible that the social worker have taken the child's opinion into account but chosen to omit its views in the reports in order to protect the child (Hultman & Cederborg 2014a p.5, 6). Children can be put in a difficult position if they can be seen as responsible for inventions made by the social welfare unit. E.g. if the child is taken in foster care because he/she is telling the social worker he/she being abused by parents.

### 2.1.3. Unspecific descriptions of children in social reports.

In their study of the files of welsh children investigated by the social workers, Horwath and Tarr (2014) found that the needs of children were often described in general rather than in specific terms, and merely of concerns with parental behaviour. They were studying how children's identities were described and found that the practitioners described the children's identity in a very limited way, by for example mostly focusing on nationality and language. The children were labelled with other identities, such as "naughty boy" or "a bully" but this was not taken into considerations in the files. By ignoring the diverse aspects of a child's own experienced identity it is difficult to identify what this particular child's needs are, and how they can be met. They also found that the reports were superficial in descriptions concerning the child's wishes and feelings. The social workers asked the children about their wishes but didn't ask them further questions about how it was to live in their situation. In one example, a child told the social workers that he/she wanted the mother to stop drinking, but the social worker didn't ask how it was to live with a mother who misuses alcohol and the child's fears about the drinking (Horwath & Tarr 2014 p.6,7). This superficial description in reports was confirmed by Hultman and Cederborg (2013 p.76) and of Nicole Hennem in their studies.

The descriptions of the children in the reports were very similar in their narratives, no matter the real differences in the children's lives. Contradicting or complicated information were

excluded (Hennum 2011 p.343). Thomas and Holland confirmed this in their study, identity sections in social reports were standardised and they found that the children were not described as individuals, the terminology was taken from the Assessment Framework guidance and siblings' identities were described with primarily the same text, only with the names of the children changed. The textual closeness in certain sections in reports of different children brings into question if these are "unique, individualised and child- focused documents" (Thomas & Holland 2010 p.2627).

Horwath concludes that "there is a lack of insight into the lived experience" of the investigated children, how the children's experiences of neglect is understood by children themselves. This seems to be the result of the social workers limited engagement with the children. "The generalized assessments ... contribute to practitioners having a limited understanding" of the child's understanding of itself. Social workers have difficulty focusing on individual children in a sibling groups and focus on parental behaviour instead of the outcome for the child of the interventions (Horwath & Tarr 2014 p.11).

Even after the implementation of the Assessment Framework in United Kingdom and many other countries, with the specific instruction to include the views of children and young persons in assessments reports, the findings suggests that it can be difficult to gain a sense of the child and their views from the reports (Thomas & Holland 2010 p.2621; Hultman & Cederborg 2014b p.6). There is also a lack of referencing to the child's own voice in descriptions about the child's health. The children's health was described by others, had no clear sender or only described the child's behaviour. An argumentation about decisions could include only parents and professionals view, not the child's own experience, thoughts and wishes. There could also be an uncertainty of where the information came from; the child, parents, professionals or the social workers own observations (Hultman & Cederborg 2014 p.3, 4).

Only in three, out of thirty-two identity sections on children's identities in a Welsh study on social reports, children's own view about their identity was reported, and these three were fairly disparate in content. But interviews with the children in the files showed more of children's voices than in the final reports (Thomas & Holland 2010 p.2625). A similar study conducted in a Swedish context showed explanatory descriptions of children's identities with a coherent rendering including the child's own voice of its identity, but the focus was still on the problematic aspects. Their conclusion is that, even though the social service legislation

and regulations emphasise that children should be treated as agents and actively take part in their own life, this is not still achieved (Hultman & Cederborg 2013 p.78).

## **2.2. Children's participation in social investigations.**

Despite the fact that children are agents and capable of participating in matters that affect them, stated in CRC and SSA, children are dependent on others, like all people living in a society. The child's narrative need to be interpreted in the context of where it is given. Has the child understood the importance of telling the truth, does the child understand the questions, can it answer in a way that feels appropriate for the child, is the child dependent of a person so that this influence their story? Has the social worker understood the child, clarified its thoughts and wishes? These aspects affect the child's level of participation in the investigations and the social worker should be aware of this. The child's right to participation also include the right to be informed of the circumstances they are participating in and how their opinions and narratives will be used. The fact that children, as other people, do not always act autonomously and the demand for participation doesn't regulate the power differences between the child and the social worker. It is the social worker who sets the limits for a child's participation, and determines how this participation is conducted ((Näsman 2012 p.10, Roose et al 2009 p. 324).

### **2.2.1. Social workers methods in communication with children.**

Most of the interviews with children at social welfare centres are only conducted orally so their influence on the reports depends on if they can explain their situation in a mature way. But the knowledge of children's capacity to perceive and communicate, from the time they are born and onwards, has increased. If adults acknowledges that children communicates in other ways than adults, it would open the possibility to take part in even small children's experiences of their situation (Näsman, E. 2012 p. 9). This could be to use drawings, pictures or other artefacts in order to support the child in describing its reality.

For a child living in neglect, this life, often is "the normal life". Therefore, a social investigation of a child should include the child's day-to-day life, how it affects the child and the child's perceptions, wishes and feelings about its situation. Social workers also need to be mindful of that different experiences effect individual children differently (Horwath & Tarr 2014 p.2).

In her study 2012 Eriksson interviewed children about how they were approached by the social workers and included during the investigations because of custody conflicts. The 17 children in her study described the consequences for them of these approaches in a spectrum from “participated” to “protected” to “disqualified adults”. The participated child were informed about the reason of and about the outcome of the investigation, was interviewed with methods adapted for children and were given the possibility to read the interview as well as other parts of the report. This was very rare, only one child of seventeen described the social workers approach in this way. The majority, 16 children described the social workers approach to them as protected or as disqualified adults. The protected child described the social worker as sensitive and emphatic but the child had limited opportunities to have an impact on for example where or when the meeting should take place. They got “very little information about the aim of the encounters, and they have had very little feedback concerning the continuation and outcomes of the investigation”. The children treated as “disqualified adults” were treated in a combination of protected children and interviewed as they were adults. They were supposed to talk about their situation without support from child adapted methods, to sit still and focus during the interview on the subject that the social worker wanted to talk about (Eriksson 2012 p.211-214).

#### 2.2.2. Children’s participation in the investigation process.

Eriksson & Näsman stresses the importance for especially children that have witnessed domestic violence to have the possibility of getting information, an overview, control – to be participants in the process. But the need to be participant can include all children that are being investigated by social workers. Eriksson & Näsman argue that seeing the child in need of care and protection and seeing a child as a participant are not mutually excluding. ”Here, the rights principle and the care principle merge. While children’s participation is often mainly associated with an actor and rights perspective, we argue that participation can also be defined as something central for children within a care perspective. It can create possibilities for validation of children’s difficult experiences and following from that, support for children’s recovery after violence and abuse” (Eriksson & Näsman 2008 p. 272).

Several studies conducted in Norway, Sweden, Belgium and Wales confirm that children’s participation is limited (Hennum 2011 p.337; Hultman & Cederborg 2014 p.2; Roose et al 2009 p. 323; Horwath & Tarr 2014 p.7,8). Hennem found in her study that children in Norway seldom take active roles in investigations about their own lives, despite the new law

that states that children under 12 years of age also in special situations could be heard in cases that affect them (Hennum 2011 p.337).

To conclude; according to these studies, children's voices in social reports are still shallow and often interpreted by social workers despite the implementation of LAC, or national variations of it. The children's participation is limited by lack of information and social workers are not using child adaptive methods when interviewing them. It is therefore important to examine how children's voice and participation in social investigations has evolved until today.

### **3. MATERIAL AND METHOD.**

#### **3.1 Material**

The data consists of ten social welfare files of children being investigated according to SSA and include both interviews with the children as well as the social report. The child's voice in the files is a secondary voice, interpreted by the social worker. The social worker also chooses what's important to write in the files. These files have a purpose and are constructed in a certain context which reflects their content (Silverman 2011 p.240). The social reports have to meet certain criteria, described in BBiC, and don't necessarily describe a child's and its family's total situation.

I have had access to and read the complete file, with the social report and the underlying interviews with children, siblings, guardians and other adults as well as all decisions made during the investigation. But I have only used the interview with the children and the social reports as my data material. The data can't show how children think about their participation but instead how their participation is constructed, how their voice is presented, expressed and not expressed by the social workers in the text. Interviewing is an interaction and the recorded interviews in the file are a construction of what the social worker asks and what the child wants to talk about (Silverman 2011 p. 152, 165).

These 10 investigations of children are conducted at a social welfare unit in a municipality of nearly 90 000 inhabitants in the outskirts of Stockholm. The division I had contact with conducted social investigations of children from the age of 0 to 12 years. Other divisions conduct social investigations of children and youth between 13 and 21 years. 1375 children (age 0-21) were investigated by social workers in this municipality during 2014. There are

290 municipalities in Sweden and this is one of the 25 largest ones and the social workers have a lot of experience in investigating children. The empirical material consisted in ten files and reports conducted between 2012 and 2015. I chose to study files where the children were between 7 and 12 years old, because I wanted them to be capable of talking and explaining their thoughts and wishes to the social worker. I also wanted the investigations to end with an intervention, because these reports are more comprehensive and should include interviews with the child. My contact person in the social welfare unit selected files where the intervention had ended and the case was closed. The selection was done during April 2015. I got fifteen files and could use ten of them as they fitted my criteria. The other five included children too young for my study and siblings (the social reports of siblings tend to be very similar both in structure and in content). I wanted my data to be as diverse as possible.

### **3.2 Method of analysis.**

I have been using thematic analysis, as a qualitative method, in order to answer my research questions. With the starting point in my questions I have used an inductive approach and in my data searched for descriptions that could answer my research questions and coded these descriptions, without using a predefined coding frame or coding set. I have searched for patterns of variation and consistency in both the content and structure of the interviews with the children and in the reports.

I wrote down extracts and coded them as I work through the files. Braun and Clarke points out the importance of coding for as many potential themes as possible and to include a bit of the context in the extracts and to be aware of inconsistencies and tensions in the data (Braun & Clarke 2008 p.89). The codes were then formed in themes relating to my two research questions.

The files have to be understood in the context the investigation is conducted, the laws that influence the procedure and how the municipality can provide a certain praxis of procedure and interventions. The codes included e.g. descriptions of participants and absence of the same; how children described the underlying rules, possibilities and opportunities that master their choices. The absence of text has also been information for my analysis, e.g. when the reports didn't include descriptions of how children are informed about how their story will be used in the investigation. The absence of this information has an impact on the child's opportunity to participate and has an impact on the social report (Braun & Clarke 2008 p.83).

As a social worker I have a lot of pre- understanding of the subject which could provide me with a “blind spot”, only to see the familiar. On the other hand, my knowledge from my work in different municipalities gives me an understanding of how investigations are conducted in the daily work in different social welfare units and how local practice influence the outcome of the social report.

### **3.3 Ethical considerations.**

The new paradigm of child studies changed the view on children, they became seen as worth studying in their own right, competent and as agents, affecting both their own lives and the society. This also has an impact on the ethics in doing research with children. Silverman points out four goals for a good ethical research: voluntary participation, handling the collected data corpus confidentially, protecting participants from harm and “ensuring mutual trust between researcher and people studied”. Silverman suggests that we as researchers should think about the motivation for our research, what is our aim. Will the children we study benefit from our research or will they be exploited? (Silverman 2011 p.90, 97) There is a risk in studying children in harsh conditions, the outcome of the study could reinforce preconceptions. Fair ethical research should explore both positive and negative experiences of life, the report should not worsen their situation (Farrell 2005 p.29).

In my study I have read files of children without a consent from the child, his/her guardians or the social worker who has written the file which can be seen as violations against their integrity. But in my study I don't focus on the reason for the investigation, the situation of the child, its family or other sensitive information, my aim is to study the child's participation in the investigation. It is the procedure of investigation and the social workers methodology to increase the child's level of participation that is in focus, not the children. My study will, hopefully, increase the knowledge of complications and identify ways to enhance the participation of children in the investigations. Such an approach will hopefully lead to children transforming from objects to subject in child welfare investigations, strengthening their roles as participating agents.

All files of children accorded to the social service act are restricted through confidentiality, but the social service office can permit research on the files under certain conditions. The information I took note of will still be restricted by the Law of Confidentiality (Offentlighet- och sekretesslag) as it is very sensitive material about children and families during a vulnerable and harsh period of their lives (SFS 2009:400).

My study can also be seen as sensitive in relation to the social workers who have conducted the investigations and written the files. But my aim is not to criticize, but to discuss different ways to increase children's participation in investigations and improve the social workers way of including children. My results can have an impact on further investigations in order to better fulfil the rights of the child in CRC.

The files are sensitive material and in order to read them I had to sign an agreement of confidentiality related to the municipality's social welfare office. I read only data relevant for this study. The files, copies etcetera were studied in the social welfare office and handled like other confidential material there, nothing could be removed from the office. My copies of the files were in a safe place during my study and were destroyed afterwards. The data in my thesis was anonymized. All names and IDs were removed as well as circumstances that would make persons identifiable.

### **3.4 Presentation of results.**

My research questions are both about how children's voices are described in the files, if this description has an impact on the interventions and on how children's participation is constructed, if e.g. the quality of their participation influence the choice of interventions. So children's impact on the interventions are both mentioned under the headline of sections on children's voices and under children's participation.

The social workers sometimes record the words of the child literally in the file.

*Micke says that when they heard the fuzz they both went to the door, then mum told them to go back to their room again. They did. Micke went over to his sister's bed, curled up next to her and hugged her. They closed the door and turned on the TV in order not to hear it. (Micke 9 years).*

But the quote does not necessarily reflect how the conversation was carried out in practice, the quotes demonstrate a way of recording the investigation.

*The child seems to think that it is ok to participate in the interview, he says that he doesn't mind talking with the social worker. He understands why there has to be an investigation and why we need to talk about what he has said in pre-school. During the conversation he recants his previous statement and says that it didn't happen that way. (Benjamin 7 years).*

I have made a literal translation of the quotes from the files.

The names of the children are changed as well as their age and some details, which not have any impact on the analysis, in order to further increase the children's anonymity.

## **4. RESULT.**

### **4.1 General description**

All children in the files that I have studied had been talking to the social worker at least once and the interviews had taken place in the social welfare office as well as in the child's home. Six of the children had talked to the social worker two or three times. The interviews with the children were recorded in the files and quoted in the social reports.

The files show a diversity between children giving a huge and detailed information about their own life, quoted about different aspects of their life and children that only are recorded giving limited information and quoted in just a few sentences.

### **4.2 Children's voice in the social reports.**

#### 4.2.1 Differences in the amount of information from children recorded in the files.

Some children gave more information than others. My data doesn't show if this depends on the age of the child, topics or if the child is in need of protection. Recurring interviews can both imply that there is a huge amount of information recorded in the file or that the child is quiet and refuses to talk with the social worker. Most of the children were interviewed about topics related to the reason of investigation, family and friends, parental rearing, school and emotional and behavioural development. The children got questions about both good and bad things happening in their life but there were few examples of the child initiating a subject.

In one file an 11 years old child had the most comprehensive interview, despite only meeting the social worker once. The child's descriptions of her daily life, the impact the neglect had and her opinions influenced both the report and the interventions. The social worker writes in the report:

*Cecilia has told the social worker that when she gets sad, she has no one to turn to at her father's household. She describes situations when her father and his girlfriend mess with each other when they are drinking and the girlfriend hits her father. She has witnessed several of these occasions and has become*

*worried. She think that she can't talk to her father about what she feels, she has tried to explain to him but he got angry. She tells the social worker that her father drinks almost every weekend.*

The file showed that she had been interviewed before and was experienced talking to social workers and that could have an impact on their conversation. But the social worker didn't only interview her orally, asking many follow up questions. She also used scale questions in order to clarify the child's situation and opinion on the matter and asked what would need to happen so the situation would be better.

When there is extensive information from the children in the file this had an impact on the social report. The child's view was recorded on every subject in the social report together with the adults' views and when there were differences it could be seen. From a social report of a 7 years old child the social worker wrote:

*The difference between Benjamin's story and his father's is that Benjamin describes the father as angry when he is hitting, but the father says that Benjamin and his sibling are practising wrestling at home. Benjamin described that he felt pain but stopped himself from crying. The father said that Benjamin and his sibling sometimes get into a fight and that they could have hurt each other.*

The interviews with the children are reproduced in the files by the social worker and the questions are seldom given an account for, but you can get a glimpse of them through the children's answers. After a conversation with a twelve years old child the social worker wrote in the file:

*Moa explains that her father got angry at her when she lost a key. He yelled at her but she didn't get punished. She says that she is afraid of him getting mad at her. He doesn't talk to her and doesn't look at her when he is mad. Moa gets sad and cries in her room. She can be sad until nightfall if they don't speak to each other. Moa thinks that it would be better if they talk and settle the argument.*

One child, 11 years old, described her situation in school, she informed the social worker that she needed more help with her school work and both questions and answers are recorded in the file.

*Cecilia says that she is fine in school but that the teachers don't help her so much during the lessons, because the classes have been larger. There is not enough time for everybody to get help. She wants more help from the teachers and has told the teacher so and she said that she will try to help Cecilia more. As answer to a question Cecilia says that she has told her mother a couple of times that she need more help in school.*

The social worker asked more and the child explained what her teacher and her mother had said about the subject. In this way, the conversation become richer and the child's voice were nuanced and clear for the reader of the report. When the social workers used child adaptive methods together with follow up questions the material in the files became even richer.

In some cases the children's voice were very limited in different aspects. Two children, 9 and 12 years old, are not quoted at all in the social report about how the issue at stake (witnessing domestic violence) had affected their life, despite that there had been an interview. The social worker met the 9 year old child three times and saw the police interview with him. But the social workers interviews with the child were not about how his experience of domestic violence affected his life. His stories were conflicting and he was not treated as a reliable source. The file about the 12 year old child showed that the interview with her was very short and neither this child was asked about how the domestic violence interfered with her daily life. In the social report the social worker wrote about how children in general experience domestic violence and how this interfere with their development.

*When a child experience domestic violence, the child gets emotionally abandoned and loose protection. Neither the person that is violent and fearful nor the person that is threatened, beaten and frightened can comfort the child and give security. (Anna 12 years)*

Both these children's parents were treated as reliable sources.

#### 4.2.2 Evaluation of the child's story as true or false.

The purpose of the social investigation is to evaluate the child's situation and need for interventions, the child should be the protagonist, the most important person in the social report. In nearly all reports, the children's voices, their understanding of the reason of investigation and their opinion about the investigation was referred to, together with adults' views and the social workers arguments for interventions. The children were quoted in 8 of 10

social reports. The children were in focus and the social worker did not question the child's feelings or story, even when it was contradictive. This was the most common interpretation in the reports. The child's story and interpretation of an event was the base for the social report. The children's descriptions of violence, that it hurt, felt a burn or that it was afraid are most of all the centre, guardians and other adults' stories relate to this. One social worker writes: "*It's Elise's experience of its situation that is important. If the parents, as they say, are not abusive, they are in trouble if Elise experiences their behaviour as violence*" (Elise, 10 years). The social workers use the child's word to argue for the interventions.

Even where there is no proof of the child being abused, the social worker argues that the child's expression of its feelings of the situation should be taken seriously. The social worker writes in one report: "*It is important that Benjamin's story is confirmed and taken seriously. We don't know if Benjamin has been abused or not, but there is always a reason why a child says that it has been abused*" (Benjamin, 7 years).

Most of the children were thoroughly interviewed, getting a lot of follow-up questions to increase the understanding of the child's own experiences and opinions. Their stories were valued as "true", there were no accusations of the children telling lies or exaggerating from the social worker.

According to the files, nine children had either witnessed domestic violence, were victims of violence or both. Most of the times the social worker addressed this as violence. But in two cases they changed the word from violence (våld) to fuss/hassle (bråk) in her interviews with the children. The children had described and used the word violence when they talked about their experiences but the social worker uses the word "fuss" in the social reports which is a milder description of the child's experience.

The same happens with the words "corporal punishment" (aga). In two of five cases it is changed to "foster" (gränssättning) in the reports.

*"Anton told a school teacher that he is being hit by his mother every morning because he is late for school. He feels pain when she hits and it feels like a burn."* (Anton, 9 years). This is not mentioned in the final report, only the interview with the child where he refuses to talk about the abuse. In the final report is written: "*The mother seems to have problems with fostering Anton. Earlier investigations confirm that the mother have difficulties in respond to Anton in conflicts and with fostering*"

Some parent complains according to the files over the investigation and the impact it has had on their family life. The mother of a 9 year old child says:

*Anton says that he will say in school that she hits him if she don't buy him more toys. He will tell both the teachers and the police that she hits him...He used to listen to his mother when she said no to buy toys but not anymore. Sometimes Anton gets angry when she says no.*

There were no discussion in the file about the meaning of this. Could this have been an implicit critic about how social workers are valuing children's stories as true and worth taking serious? Other parents express a similar critic and the social workers sometimes recorded their response in the file.

#### 4.2.3 Children changing their story

Most of the children hold on to their stories about being abused or witnessed domestic violence despite living together with the abuser, according to the files. There were plenty of time for family members to influence their stories during the period of investigation. Only in two cases the social workers had to relate to children changing their story. Two children (out of 5) that had told school teachers that they had been exposed to corporal punishment changed their stories when talking to the social workers. One child repeated several times during the second meeting with the social worker "*daddy don't hit, he speaks with me*" (Benjamin, 7 years). The other child explained, during the second meeting, that the parents didn't hit her but that "*she is so hard to rear, it has to be her own responsibility to change and behave in a correct way so they don't need to discipline her*" (Elise, 10 years). There were no discussion, according to the file, with the child whose responsibility it is to avoid corporal punishment. Both these children were living with their abuser during the investigation and had to deal with the family's reaction to their story, the parent's reactions on being investigated and have their privacy intruded.

There is no description in the file of how the social worker reacted and commented on the child's descriptions and thoughts about who's responsible of the corporal punishment. There were also no description of how the safety of these children were guaranteed or if this was discussed with the child.

#### 4.2.4 Children's voices in suggested interventions.

The municipality where I conducted my study has a programme to deal with domestic violence, a combined programme conducted by therapists for the whole family; one programme for the offender, one for the abused person and one programme for the children that have witnessed and been exposed to the violence. All children exposed to domestic violence got these interventions and their guardians took part in the programme for adults. One social worker wrote in the file: *“Informs Anna that she will meet and talk to someone if she wants, dad will get help to learn not to beat and mum will get help to feel better”* (Anna, 12 years). Some children got complementary interventions such as contact person, these children were more thoroughly interviewed.

When the social workers hold on to one subject at a time and asked follow-up questions, the information got more detailed. The child then has a greater impact on the result of the investigation. The interview with the child, mentioned earlier, ends with a summary of the interview and a list of what the child want the social worker to discuss with her parents:

*The father must stay sober when Cecilia is staying with him, the fathers girlfriend must stay out of his home during the days Cecilia stays with him so there would be no domestic violence, the father must not talk badly about Cecilia’s mother* (Cecilia 11 years).

One of the linchpins in SSA and BBIC is that children are competent and should have a say about their own lives, in accordance with their age and maturity. All children in the files were given an opportunity to talk about the reason of the investigation, but not all of them got questions about how this affected their own lives and what they thought should be done about it. Only four children were asked about what needed to be changed in their family and in their own life. In discussions with these children, the social worker found motive for the interventions together with the child and used this in the reports as well as to persuade their parents.

### **4.3 Children’s participation in the procedure of investigation.**

#### 4.3.1 The introduction of the investigation.

In all 10 reports there were positive marks on the assertions “Fulfilled the obligations to inform the child according to 11:10 SSA” or “The child/the young person has received relevant information according to 3:5 SSA”, (depending on if the social workers used the earlier or later form that had been revised). This can imply that all children are informed about

the investigation and the reason why, despite it's not described in the file of everyone. These two sections from SSA states that children shall be informed and have a say; "The child's opinions and views shall be given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child" (11:10 SSA). There is no exact description in the law of what is necessary to explain for a child or how it shall be conducted. It is therefore hard to tell how much information a particular child involved in the investigation has received, when it's not recorded in the file.

The social workers have recorded in the files that 8 of 10 children have been informed about the initiation of the investigation as well as the reason why it was started. 6 of them also got information about what will happen in the nearest future. For example that the child would meet the social worker again or that the abuser would leave the house. Less than half of them got information about how the investigation process and their participation would be outlined.

A 10 year old child had received information about why the investigation was initiated during a conversation, alone with the social worker, when a risk and protection evaluation was taking place. *"The social worker informs Elise that an investigation is initiated due to her telling the school that she is abused by her parent"*.

Very few of the children were confirming, according to the files, that they had understood the purpose and were giving their opinion about the subject of the investigation. An example of an exceptions is an 8 years old child that received information about the reason for the investigation and commented on this. *"The child says that it doesn't have an opinion about the notification"* (Nils, 8 years).

Half of the investigations in my data was initiated because the child had told an adult at school that it was being abused at home by a family member. Despite this, only one of them was informed that this was the reason for the investigation, according to the files.

#### 4.3.2 The investigation procedure.

A special BBiC-document outlines the process and contains information about what areas will be investigated and with whom the social worker will talk. One purpose with this document is to inform and make clear the reason of the investigation but also to increase the participation of both child and guardians. It's signed by all participants and everyone gets a copy.

The files don't show if all parents are informed this way, in line with the method of BBIC, but, according to the files only one child received this information, which it got together with its parents. The file doesn't describe if the language and the information is presented in a way

that this 7 year old child can understand. There is no comment from this child about the information he received and no description about if he contributed to the process in any way.

According to the files, five children were informed orally of what an investigation is and how it would be conducted. The social worker writes in a file: *“The child has been informed about the child investigation process and been given a chance to speak with the social workers”* (Cecilia, 11 years). There is no description in the file about how the investigation process was clarified to the child.

In most cases there were often no explanation, neither in the interviews or the reports of how the child had received this information, or if the child had confirmed that it understood the process as well as the child’s opinion about the reason of investigation. There is no description in the files of the social worker using tools such as the BBIC-triangle (see appendix 1), pictures or brochures in order to simplify and explain the process of investigation for the children. It seems like all children are informed orally.

But in some files the social worker wrote more comprehensive: *“We explain for John about why we are doing a social investigation of him, what’s the purpose of our job and that we want to meet him again”*. The child’s reaction to this information was recorded. *“John is satisfied over that A no longer lives with his family and that his mother has promised that he will not move back to them”* (John, 8 years).

There were no significant differences in the amount of information given to the children depending on which year, during the period from 2012 to 2015, the report was completed. The five reports that included descriptions of how the children were informed of the process of the investigation were both earliest and latest conducted. Their age or maturity had no impact, these children were both among the youngest and oldest. On the contrary, the social worker made efforts to explain for the child that has a minor mental retardation about every step in the investigation in order to make her understand. The social worker exchanged phone numbers with her, so she could call her if she felt insecure. The child’s feelings and reactions were recorded in the files together with the social worker’s doubt over whether the child understood what she had explained.

There are very few comments in the files about if children had an impact on how the investigations were conducted. The only example of this recorded in the files are children refusing to speak to the social worker or questions about if they wanted to be accompanied during the interviews. There are no comments about where the children would prefer to meet

the social worker or if children had the possibility to suggest relevant people to interview. There were no signs of discussions of what time or day the children preferred to meet the social worker, in consideration of the child's school time or recreational activities. Even though all children's participation were taken for granted, three children got questions about if they wanted to talk alone with the social worker or wanted their guardian to support them. These three children belonged to the cohort of five children that previously had been informed about the investigation process. One of these children refused to talk to the social worker during their second meeting, "*asks if Anna and her sibling wants to talk to us. None of them want to do it*" (Anna, 12 years).

#### 4.3.3 Social workers' methods in communication with children.

The most common interview were conducted orally. The child told the social worker about its situation in home, both about their interaction with its parents/guardians, with siblings and with friends. The children also told the social worker about school, both about the learning situation as well as their relations with teachers and schoolmates.

There were differences in how much data the social worker received from the child and it became fuller when it was complemented with child adaptive methods. In the interviews with three children the social workers complemented their oral interviews with other methods such as taping, "a day" and scale questions. The social workers used these methods early in the interviews, they were not "second choices" if the oral interview didn't function. One social worker used taping in her interview with a child. Together they drew a picture of the family's apartment and used small dolls to symbolize the members of the family. With the help of these dolls the child described his interactions with his parents and siblings as well as what would happened during a day. One social worker made a timeline together with an 8 years old child and used it to explore who is supporting and taking care of the child during a day. An 11 years old girl got the scale question "How is your situation with your father/mother?" The child answered with numbers and the social worker used this as a starting points for an interview about the child's feelings in her relations with her parents and what needed to be changed, in the child's point of view.

*Cecilia says that she wants the social worker to address her wishes of recreational activities, need of support in school and the problems with her father's alcohol use and the domestic violence in his house-hold with both parents (Cecilia, 11 years).*

#### 4.3.4 Interventions

All children in the reports that I've studied received voluntary interventions from the social welfare unit; in home parental training (which included the child), therapy in the programme for children that has witnessed domestic violence, contact family and weekend camps for children. There are no signs in any files or reports that the choice of interventions were discussed with the children, at most they were informed. The social workers didn't argue with the children about different interventions, discussing pros and cons or letting the child propose an intervention. In contrast one social worker argued with a dad about how he and his child would benefit from the proposed intervention, reproduced on a whole page in the file.

Six children didn't get any information and were not included in discussions about the interventions, despite these interventions requiring or including their participation, for example in interventions such as talking to a therapist about traumatic events of violence in their family. One child didn't receive any information at all of the reason for the investigation, the process of the investigation or the intervention.

Five children were being investigated because they had told an adult about being abused by a guardian. Only one of them were included in a discussion concerning whether or not they felt safe after the abuser had been informed about the accusation, and none of them were included in a discussion of how and when their guardians should be informed. The interviews with them had an impact on the interventions, but the choice of interventions were not discussed with them.

Four children received information about the interventions that included them as well as their parents. The descriptions in the files range from

*The child is positive to the intervention” (Nils, 9 years) to “Micke is very interested in getting questions about being sad or angry. He is very interested in, but clearly influenced not to talk about parents and violence... He asks the social worker to meet again and talk about such things. The social worker assesses that he has witnessed traumatic events he is in need of processing. He seems to be enough motivated to take part in therapeutic treatment (Micke 9 years).*

But two children had a greater impact on the interventions, the needs of the children were discussed with them. Interviews with two children ended with the social worker summarizing

their discussion and pointed out a bullet point list of what the children has said needed to be changed, but preferred interventions were not a topic.

One child was protected and being taken into foster care for a while, with the support of Care of Young Persons Act, after having told her teacher that she had been punished by her stepfather for a long period of time (SFS 1990:52). Every step in the investigation was explained and discussed with her. She had an impact on how things were implemented, no step was taken before she assured the social worker that it was ok for her. The child expressed during the process that it felt nerve-racking to meet the stepfather again. The social worker asked what she meant. The child expressed that she was afraid of the dad being angry at her. The situation is described in the file:

*The social worker informs Moa that we have been talking to her dad and he is not angry with her. He is going to get support and help from the social service unit to make the child feel secure and he is not going to punish her. Moa is being informed that the social service are going to visit them during the weekend to ensure that she is being well taken care of. Moa says that that will be fine and want to go home with her dad (Moa, 11 years).*

She, and another 11 years old child, were informed from the beginning about the process of investigation and why it was conducted. These children were also informed about the suggested interventions, which were in line with the dialogue between the child and the social worker. The eleven years old child describes how she witnessed violence between her dad and his girlfriend. They were drinking alcohol and the girlfriend hits her dad. The social worker wrote in the social report

*Cecilia told the social worker that she had witnessed several of these occasions and then became worried. The child feels that she can't talk to her dad about this, as he has become angry with her when she has done that. When Cecilia describes situations of domestic conflicts, she describes that her father is drunk almost every weekend... It is of great importance that her dad is aware of how the conflicts in home can influence a child. Children who lives in an environment of domestic violence combined with high alcohol intake are at risk to be harmed, and the risks for the child increases with low age and long term exposure. (Cecilia, 11 years).*

These two children have an impact on the choice of interventions, as they are closely related to their expressed needs.

## **5. CONCLUSION.**

### **5.1 Children's voice, opinions and wishes reflected in the files**

All ten children in the files I've studied have been talking to the social worker, the interviews were recorded in the files and reproduced in the reports. A study conducted 2008 by the county administrative board in Stockholm, Sweden (Länsstyrelsen i Stockholm) showed that 85% of all children in social investigation reports, had in some way been given a voice (Länsstyrelsen 2008 p.16).

The social reports I've studied were conducted between 2012 and 2015, all were made using the form of BBiC. In these forms, social workers have to describe in what way the child has been informed and had an impact on the investigation. The form itself is a reminder of the importance of talking to the child. This, together with the huge education initiative for social workers that was launched in 2006 in order to implement BBiC could have led to the high level of children's voices, in these files. Näsman points out that several evaluations have shown that the implementation of BBiC has increased the numbers of children being heard in the child investigations (Näsman 2012 p.9).

All children got questions about the reason of investigation (abuse, witnessing domestic violence and neglect). The children described what they were doing when they saw one parent beat the other or the sequence of events when they were abused by an adult of the family. But few of them got questions about how this affected their emotional state, daily life, interactions with the guardians/adults or their understanding of the situation in the family. This result is in line with other studies (Horwath & Tarr 2014 p.6, 7; Hultman & Cederborg 2014a p.5, 6).

All social workers used the method of "The child's needs in focus" (BBiC) but they only used some of the areas of investigation that are suggested in the forms for the interviews. This has been criticized by Hultman & Cederborg who means that this often excludes the area of identity and makes the reports shallow and limited. But to make a short report, and limit the amount of areas that are investigated, is in line with the instructions from SSA to "not investigate more than needed" (11:2 SSA). How to limit the investigation is a choice made exclusively by the social worker. Children and their guardians can suggest contacts to be

taken but the social worker decides about the amount of data that is needed for the investigation.

When the social worker uses BBiC forms as a structure for the interviews, the areas are covered more deeply and the child's experiences and situation are clearer for the reader. One area is explored at a time and the social worker asks follow up questions which clarifies the issue.

It was clarified in the files and forms of the social reports that I've studied who was the sender of the quotes. The BBiC form uses headlines to separate quotes from the child, the guardians and others such as teachers. Contrary to Hultman & Cederborg study from 2008 (Hultman & Cederborg 2014 p.3,4) it was therefore obvious if it was information from the child, guardians or professionals that was quoted in the interviews and reports.

All children's stories were valued as true, even when the child changed their story or their stories were contradicted. The social workers held on to the child's first narrative and discussed the change of story in the analysis of the report but not in connection with e.g. the child's vulnerable situation, living together with the abuser. The social workers held on from the children's description of an event from interviews to report but in four cases the words used by the child was changed to a milder form; from corporal punishment to child rearing and from violence to fuzz. This was an adaption to the guardian's point of view.

All children that had experienced domestic violence got the same interventions, the tripartite municipality programme for children, for battered women and for offenders. This was a programme managed by the municipality and I can't tell if the choice of intervention were influenced by the individual interviews of the children. The social worker described the programme for a 12 year old child in the following way: *"We inform Anna that she will meet and talk to someone if she wants, dad will get help to learn not to beat and mum will get help to feel better"* (Anna, 12 years). However, Horwath & Tarr point out the importance of not only talking to the child but also observing the child's behaviour and his/her interactions with others. According to the files I've been studying, only in two cases the social workers visited the child at home. The social workers experience of one of the children's overcrowded home led to her adding an intervention for the child in question. This means that he received more interventions than the other children that had witnessed domestic violence.

The children's version of their day to day life was often described in the social reports but there were very few comments of the children's own opinion and wishes about what needed

to be changed in their situation. But it was the children's own story, according to the five children that had been subject to corporal punishment, which had been the reason for starting the investigation that resulted in an intervention.

## **5.2 Children's participation reflected in the files.**

Eriksson (2012) points out that participation in the social investigation not only is a right for the child but also an act of care, to help the child cope with traumatic events. In her study of 17 children she discusses that only one child was fully participating in the social assessment. The social worker was sensitive and emphatic, explained the investigation process and used child adaptive methods. The child was able to read her interview afterwards and other texts in the draft, before it was sent to the court. (Eriksson 2012 p. 208, 209, 212). None of the files I've been studying described that level of participation for any child.

All social workers in the files I've studied used a "mild voice", supporting and empathetic, when recording their interviews with the children. The children were treated as liable sources and, according to the files, the social workers argued with the guardians/ parents to make them accept the interventions that would protect and support the children.

All ten children were given the opportunity to speak about the subject of investigation and describe parts of their life, to have a voice. But few of them were included in the investigation process, few got information about how the investigation would be outlined. No pamphlets were used to explain this process for the children, using words or pictures that would help the children understand. None of them were told how their interviews would be used and had an opportunity to read how the social worker had understood their thoughts and descriptions.

Only two out of five children that had told an adult that they were battered by a care giver got questions from the social worker if they felt safe at home. They had not, according to the files, any influence on the place or time for the interview. This can be important for children who don't want to refrain from sports or recreational activities or are embarrassed to explain for the teacher that they are leaving the lesson for a meeting with the social welfare unit.

Näsman (2012) points out that children can communicate from very young age but in different ways than adults. These different forms should be valued as communication in their own right and not in relation to adults' ways of communicating. The social worker should observe the child in its environments such as home and preschool/school and use other ways to communicate than talking, methods to facilitate communication by using for example

visual design such as taping or “Bear-cards” (cards of bears showing different emotions) as a starting point for discussion. Other ways could be ”mapping” a form with the titles of “problematic events”, “good events” and “things needed to be changed” where children write down examples from their own life on the paper and both the child and the social worker gets a more holistic view over their experiences. In my study the most common method was oral interview, only three children were interviewed another way. The children’s participation and impact on the investigations is limited if the choice of methods is more suitable for adults or teenagers (Näsman 2012 p.9,16). Two children were asked to describe a regular day and one child described her life with help of dolls, the method taping.

When the child describes a day, from the time the child wakes up in the morning until it is going to sleep, the social worker gets information about the child’s own experience during a day, if the child is taken care of, and from whom described with the child’s own words. This is a useful method in cases with neglect but also in cases involving violence against the child. Two of the children answered the question “If you were a magician and could change your situation what would you do?” and scale-questions about how the child experienced its situation with the respective parent. These are methods used in short term therapies with focus on solutions and in the method of Signs of safety, often used in courses for practitioners in social work. However, used here they are taken out of their context and used partially. Despite this, by using these methods the child’s opinions and wishes became clearer. The child can use specific descriptions connected to these images and not only words, it becomes easier for the child to talk about desirable changes. One child was asked to choose a number between 0 and 10 describing how it feels at the home of her parents. Then the child was asked to describe what will make it increase by 0.5, a small change. This method involves the child and her wishes in a way that creates hope and makes change understandable for the child. In both these cases the social workers ended the interviews with the children with a conclusion about what have been said and the child’s wishes of change in the future.

The children in the files I’ve studied were informed about that an investigation was initiated and the reason why. They gave information that can be identified in the report but they received very limited information from the social worker about the interventions.

All children were included in the interventions but only four of them got any information and agreed to participate. The amount of information given to the children were diverse, from sparse to more detailed descriptions. This poor outcome contradict the purpose and meaning

of both 12 article in CRC and in 11:10 the Social Service Act: When a measure affects a child, the child must receive relevant information and the view of the child should be clarified to the greatest extent possible. Account shall be taken of a child's wishes with regards to its age and maturity (SFS 2001:453 p.3).

There are few guidelines suggesting how the social workers would achieve this (Leviner 2012 p.212; Hultman et al 2014 p.1).

The children were all valued as reliably informants and the interviews were conducted orally with limited support from methods that use other senses. The social workers decide how a child's participation in the investigation is realized, the social worker has the power to include or exclude the child. To be able to participate in the investigation, the child needs to be treated as capable, to get information about the process and how their participation would be used. The social worker needs to use child adaptive methods that can support the child to describe their situation. In order to strengthen children's participation, social workers need guide lines and knowledge about how this should be put forward. Knowledge of appropriate methods and appropriate context; time and place for this to take place. My findings, that the children's participation is limited are in line with earlier research.

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## **APPENDIX 1**

### **Explanation of key terms.**

#### Children.

The term children means humans in the age 0-18 years.

#### Social workers/practitioners

In this study, the term social workers/practitioners means employees at a social welfare centre, that investigates children. Social workers can also work with interventions, as counsellors et cetera, but that is not the focus of this study.

#### Social assessment/social investigation

When the social welfare centre gets knowledge of a child that might be in need of protection or support from the unit, because of abuse, neglect or other circumstances an investigation according to 11:1, 2 SSA has to be done. The investigation shall result in a report that includes the ground for the investigation, the child's and the guardian's view on the matter, a thorough description of the child's situation and the child's, the parents' and other, for the child important persons view on the matter. The investigation shall not be more extensive than needed (11:2 SSA). The social worker shall analyse the child's situation and suggest interventions if needed. The report shall include the child's and parents' view on the report and the eventually suggested interventions. (SFS 2001:453 p.13; Socialstyrelsen 2011 p.21-36).

#### Social welfare centre, child department

In many larger municipalities, the social welfare centre is divided into different departments. The files I read were conducted in a child department where the social workers investigated children 0 to 12 years old.

#### BBiC (Barns Behov i Centrum) – The child's needs in focus.

BBiC has its origin in the British Looking after children System (LAC) and Assessment for Children in Need and their Families (AF). It has been adapted to the Swedish context by the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen) and were launched 2006. The purpose of BBiC is to strengthen the child's perspective and participation of children, young people and their families, both during the child investigation and during the voluntarily

or compulsory interventions. The system shall also ensure consistency across the country and to improve and maintain the quality of the social child and youth care. A conceptual triangle is used during the investigation with sides describing needs of children, parenting capacity and environment and the concept emphasize seven principles that underpin BBIC. Different forms are used during the process; from investigation to different forms for interventions and reviews.

### Participation

The principles of BBiC underpins the importance of children's participation in the investigation process and during the interventions. The social worker should use child adaptive methods and the child should be informed about the process and the content of the investigation. In every decision that include the child, the social worker should describe in the social report if and how the child's view is acquired and taken into account.