

Anne Berit Sødal

“It should not be a type of bingo”

**A study of NAV family social workers descriptions of
Children’s participation**

Master in International Social Welfare and Health Policy
Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences,
Faculty of Social Sciences

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Abstract

The aim of this master thesis is to explore NAV family social workers own descriptions of children's participation within their work with low-income families. It asks what role the family social workers have in involving and listening to the child and how their choices are influenced by the structural matters surrounding street-level bureaucrats working in NAV, but also the normative personal values of the family social worker.

The theme springs out from my engagement for children's rights and the belief that children needs to be included in realities of their life to be able to develop and become the best version of themselves. My own working and volunteer experience with children in Norway, and me being a mum in Oslo makes me especially engaged in the topic of childhood poverty. Facing though critics the last years, NAV employees has got a somehow bad reputation. This thesis seeks to give the NAV employees themselves a voice, and possibilities to reflect upon possibilities and challenges related to children's participation in their work.

This thesis builds on qualitative in-depth interviews with six NAV family social workers in Oslo. They represent two different NAV offices that both have a «family team» where the social workers only work towards families with children. In addition to literature review of relevant research and laws, I was observing a hearing together with Save the Children on children's perspectives of childhood poverty. The thesis is influenced by my engagement and experience working with children.

Inspired by Lipsky's concept of street-level bureaucracy and Sommer et.al's understanding of the importance of differing between child-perspective and children's perspective I prepared for, listened to and analyzed the informants' descriptions of children's participation. Their descriptions linked children's participation to being concerned about the child during the assessment, asking the parents about the child, seeing the home-environment of the family, looking on the interaction between the parents and the child within the home, talking to the child itself.

The material indicates that children's participation in NAV is highly varying, but in most cases can be linked to what Sommer et.al calls *child-perspective* (2010, vi) where children's participation are seen as adults attention towards children experiences and perceptions of growing up in a low-income family. On the other hand, some describes bringing *children's perspectives* as very important and a goal in their work. Their differences in the children's participation can among others be linked to: structural matters, rationing, time-constraints and discretion, but also variations in personal values, perceptions of children's position and protection.

This thesis theme is particularly notable for social workers, but also for child protection workers, teachers and others working with children within their everyday work. Childhood-poverty is increasing in Norway, and those one working to assist them needs to find ways and search for approaches for children's participation that are assessing children's needs from

their own perspectives and treat them as citizens with their own rights, not only within the law, but also in practice.

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Anne Berit Sødal

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1. Introducing my Thesis

The likelihood of spending part of their childhood in poverty remains a disturbing reality for many children in poor, as well as in rich nations. Within the Norwegian society where most people are well-off, being poor is mostly a matter of difficulties of having the same standard of living than the rest of the people within your society, but has especially for children shown to increase the risk of social exclusion, school-drop out as well as being an emotionally burden, feeling different from their peers.

Norway has one of the most developed welfare systems and the state and the family has both a big responsibility in securing children's life-conditions. In Scandinavia, there has been a long tradition of family policy where the ideology has been a universal model for all children. The last decade however, both laws and research has put focus on the importance of treating the child as an individual. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC 1989) has been incorporated into the Norwegian law and was in 2014 taken into the Norwegian law and was in 2014 taken into § 104 within the Norwegian Constitution. With several laws on children's rights to participate the UNCRC has been an important tool both when it comes to strengthen the child's position within national and regional laws and regulations as well as increased the public's responsibilities concerning the individual child.

Norwegian Labor and Welfare Administration (NAV) is the institution within the Norwegian welfare state working closest to low-income families. NAV's responsibility was earlier linked to economic matters, and they were seen as, and worked with assessing people's need for economic support. The recent years, however, NAV has got a much more comprehensive responsibility in relation to supporting families and are now expected to give families holistic and well-coordinated services. The position of the child as an individual user in relation to NAV can however appear vague and confusing and NAV has been receiving critics for not investigating children's situation systematically enough (Helsetilsynet, 2013). However, most critics towards NAV are a result of external evaluation, leaving the social workers as those to blame without letting them tell their own perspectives.

It is the possibilities and challenges for children's participation within the setting of NAV that this thesis wishes to focus on. More precisely the aim of the thesis is to explore the "family

social workers” own descriptions of their role when meeting low-income families with a focus on how the individual family-social worker relates to children’s participation in their work

The theme of this thesis springs out from my engagement in children’s rights and my volunteer experiences working with children in the volunteer sector and professional experience working with asylum seeker children and their families in Oslo. It is inspired by the belief that children need to be involved, challenged and heard to engage in society and develop to become the best version of them self.

1.1 Background and Research Questions

Within the whole world, the economic gap between rich and poor increases. What it means to be poor is a matter of context and can vary from living a life in hard deprivation, struggling to meet basic needs as food and housing to in a short period of time not having enough resources to pay for activities and expectations the community you are living in put on you.

In an affluent country as Norway, it is necessary to define poverty from the angle of Townsend’s concept of *relative deprivation* claiming that: “... a person is poor if he or she is lacking resources to attend in the community activities where they are living and to maintain the standard of living in this community (Townsend 1979). This definition of poverty makes us see the phenomenon as something more than material deprivation. Through this definition, we can understand poverty in relation to lacking the possibility to attend socially, and it helps us to put the focus on the contextual setting and the social relations where individual people are living their daily-life.

Even though the proportion of child poverty is relatively small in Norway, the development the last 10-15 years have shown a considerable increase in the number of children living in families with long-lasting low income (Fløtten 2009). The latest numbers from Statistics Norway reports that more than 92.000 children in Norway are living under the official poverty line (60 % of median income). This means that there is twice as many children living within low-income families now, than in 1997-1999 (Statistisk Sentralbyrå (SSB) 2015). The Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youths and Family Affairs (Bufdir) recent report on children’s upbringing “*Økte forskjeller – Gjør det noe?*” tells that 1 out of 10 (around 100 000) children in Norway grow up in low-income families (Bufdir 2017).

There are several possible reasons for the increase in the number of children in low-income families the last years, but the increase in children with immigrant background is in many cases given as the main explanation, children within this group now constitutes more than half of all children living in low-income families (SSB 2015). The risk of poverty also seems to be more likely within families with one single parent and couples with children in the age of 0-6 years (ibid).

Within a European welfare state as Norway, the assistance poor people gets is highly dependent on the public authorities and what efforts the state put in place to handle the challenges. Norway has the latest years problematized living- conditions for children in low-income families with regular Action Plans Against Poverty (Royal Norwegian Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion 2008) and the government was for the first time in 2015 launching an own strategy for children: *Barn som lever i fattigdom, Regjeringens strategi mot barnefattigdom* (Regjeringen 2015). Improving all children and youth's well-being has been and still is one of the three partial aims in the action plans. Research has shown that poverty affects both children's present life-quality as well as the child's future possibilities in life (Nuland et. al 2009).

Efforts towards fighting childhood-poverty in Norway are threefold. The first strategy focuses on strengthening the families' economy. This is in a high degree done by using work- and welfare political efforts as central elements (Nuland 2011). Getting parents into, or back to work is one highlighted strategy here, and as Harsløf and Seim claims, "... *the main strategy of fighting poverty in Norway has been and still is work*" (2008, 30). The second strategy is to implement efforts to improve the children's situation in the time before the families' income is improved (Nuland 2011). Different subsidy schemes targeted to vulnerable children through for instance NAV and volunteer organizations are examples of this. Giving children possibilities to attend after-school activities or going on holiday-trips as their peers, is used to reduce the children's feeling of being excluded or different.

As Nuland et.al (2009, 164) points to; these measures will not reduce the poverty as showed in statistics, but will be of great importance for the living-conditions of children in low-income families right now, and could also contribute to that these children have less chance to be poor as adults.

As Nuland (2011) highlights, these two previous mentioned strategies should contribute to the third one, reducing the risk of poverty in the future. Reducing this risk of intergenerational welfare dependency is a much highlighted effort both within literature and within politics. As one of several recent researches, the NOVA- project: *Barns levekår. Betydningen av familiens inntekt for barns hverdag over tid*, has however recommended that there should be a greater focus on poverty-measures that are directed straight to children and not just channelized through the parents (Grødem & Sandbæk 2008).

NAV is one of the public authorities working closest to poor families and have a great responsibility in securing children's rights. Because children are not supposed to work themselves, they are defined poor in relation to their parents' income. Because the UNCRC and The Norwegian Constitution goes in front of the Social Service Act in NAV, the social workers should in all cases affecting children justify if the best interest of the child is considered or why this consideration are set aside. Reports like Helsetilsynet (2012), together with a number of other researches, authorities and volunteer organizations have addressed that the actual degree and opportunity for children to participate can be both random, (Helsetilsynet 2012, Save the Children, 2014) and in a great sense communicated only through adults (Phipps 1999, Save the Children 2014).

In 2012, The Norwegian Board of Health performed a nationwide inspection of social services in NAV and municipal processing of applications for financial support for people with dependents. The result was of worrying character. The county governors pointed to violation of the law in 49 of 70 municipalities in this audit, saying that these municipalities had not ensured that the children's situation and needs are actively and systematically investigated and that the surveys often was limited to how many children the applicant had and age of the children. Another point made in the result was the lack of methodically and systematically training and supervision of employees, their chances to discuss single-cases with each other and that there was a lack of a common understanding of the law was also so weakened. The Norwegian Board of Health was therefore expressing concerns about if the "...child's situation and needs are adequately seen, assessed and safeguarded in municipal processing of applications for financial support (Helsetilsynet 2012, 5).

Since the report from Helsetilsynet (2012) numerous of measures have been initiated to safeguard a better situation for children. For the first time the Norwegian government in 2015 launched a strategy against Childhood-poverty in Norway (Bufdir 2015). Within this strategy, NAV has the responsibility for several of the measures, including; trying out a new model for comprehensive follow-up of low-income families (Bufdir 2015, 24). Shielding of children and youths own income in relation to assessment of social assistance (ibid, 26) and being responsible for keeping politicians and other central parties oriented about the challenges within the local community (ibid, 68). There is however still lack of knowledge about how and in what degree children are involved themselves within social services, and it is this knowledge this thesis wishes to add on.

This thesis is about the actual use and understanding of laws and regulations concerning children's participation within NAV. Taking a bottom-up approach to the implementation of laws and policies, in this thesis I argue that the legal position children have, both within laws and policies, will work as guiding documents for children's participation within these public authorities. However, only through exploring how these laws are implemented, by the family-social workers we will have the possibility to find out how laws and policies are understood and used, in actual sense.

The research questions addressed by this thesis ask:

- (1) How does laws and conventions inform about the children's participation in the work of NAV?
- (2) How do NAV employees describe and see their role when it comes to involving and listening to children?
- (3) How can we interpret the found discrepancy between laws and regulations and the described practices?

Drawing on the concepts of *child-perspective and children's perspective* (Sommer et.al 2010), I will explore the dilemma described concerning children's participation in NAV. The concepts dealing with the differences between representing the child compared to letting the child represent him/her-self finds itself in-between the adults feeling of having to protect the child and their feeling of giving the child the right to be heard. Searching for the family social

workers subjective description of the concept of child-perspective in their work, the concept will be closely connected to the working-principle of user-participation within the Social Service Act with a goal to explore what it means for children. These concepts will also let us explore more deeply around what the principle of user-participation means for the children in relation to NAV.

I think furthermore that Michael Lipsky's (2010) concept of *street-level bureaucracy* will be important to understand the structural factors of the family social workers descriptions. By explaining street-level bureaucrats work with factors as high degree of discretion, combined with rationing and time-constraints I will discuss these formal factors in relation to the family social workers descriptions of their possibilities for children's participations.

I believe that Sommer et al's concept and Lipsky's concepts represent two important sides of the family social workers work. I will link the first one to the individual social workers own personal values, while the other one can tell us important things about the formal structures within the NAV-office. With discussing them next to each other, these two concepts can help us to see both the formal role as well as the personal role of social workers. It can improve the understanding of that implementation of policies and laws are dependent on both formal structures of being a "family social worker", but also the subjective experience of this role.

1.2 Methods

My fieldwork will take a qualitative stand, using in-debt interview, partly inspired by the vignette method. Qualitative research is research that usually emphasizes words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data, and embodies a view of social reality as a constantly shifting emergent property of individuals' creation (Bryman 2013). As a researcher this gives me room to be interested in what people think and how and why they act in certain ways in their social setting.

Talking about experiences and thoughts it will be possible to find out what NAV family social workers think about their role. Hopefully I will also by doing this find out more about how their experience shape and form the implementation process of giving social services to families with children living in poverty. Using in-debt interviews with a vignette in the beginning of the conversation I will be able to explore both the individual subjective descriptions and easier being able to compare and discuss these individual descriptions because it is put in the same framework.

To be able to know more about NAV employees perceptions about their role towards children living in poverty, we have to find a way where they will tell about their experiences and thoughts about this. As Byrne points out, to be able to get useful insight “...we have to create a situation where the informant wants to share his or her way of thinking, their stories and experiences” (2004, 184), I will try as best possible to learn from them their subjective experiences, thoughts and feelings attached to the involvement of children. The results of my study will be dependent upon me as a researcher and that I am capable of building the trust to gain this information from the interviewees.

1.3 Relevance of the Study and Research Objective

The choice of this particular research focus is taken both from an academic viewpoint and from my professional interests. There is limited research on the implementation process within social services, and especially caseworkers own perspectives on their work. Most theories and research about social services are studies of the level of social assistance, the living-conditions of the receivers and studies where social services are considered and described externally (Lorentzen 2007).

Practice-oriented studies, studies of the culture within the NAV-office and the social workers interaction with the users of social services has been of little focus in the research-literature (Hove & Langeng 1997). When I am in this thesis is addressing family social workers view on how to involve children – the family social worker’s descriptions around involving the child will be the main focus. It sees the child as an actor- in its own right and highlights the challenge of looking on family as one entity, experiencing their life-situation in the same way. It also gives a voice to the family social worker, and can bring important perspectives on possibilities and challenges in the field of children’s user-involvement in the setting of NAV. The objective of this study is to look on how social workers describe their role towards poor children and what factors that is important for the individual family social worker, when taking the decisions they do when it comes to children’s involvement. The family social workers subjective description of their role will be highlighted.

With this I wish to add useful knowledge that has been asked for by for instance (Larsen & Seim 2011, 172) addressing the need for research projects of sociology of law to get an empirical picture of how children’s rights are safeguarded throughout the assessment and decisions on social services. This has also been addressed by several other researchers

recently, in relation to child welfare cases where there have been revealed a failure of active and routine involvement of children in child welfare cases in Norway (Christiansen 2012, Sandbæk, 2001, Seim, 2007). Even though child welfare services can be said to have a much more obvious relation to children, children in contact with social services have the same rights of participation. It's the objective of this study to sort out what this involvement can mean in the context of social services, in the eyes of the case-worker.

There still seems to be an ongoing ambivalence in the understanding of childhood, where both child protection and children's right to participate are important. At the same time, it addresses the importance of looking on how the laws concerning children's participation is implemented. As (Healy & Darlington, 2009, Hubberstey, 2001) highlights it seems that acknowledging the importance of participation and having a will to facilitate participation do not necessarily mean that participation is implemented in practice.

There is some recent research that has been of special relevance for this thesis. One of these is HIOA's project: «Talk with us» that address children's participation in daily-life activities and in professional practice in relation to child welfare services, schools and asylums. Merete Thunestveit (2010) master; "Fattigdom –eit dilemma for barnevernet?" has given me important insights towards the field of the studies and Helga Johannesdottir's study: *Å treffe klienten hjemme* (2007) that looks on home-visits as a methodology in the social services has also given me important inspiration on looking closer into the home as a setting for children's participation and thereby given me relevant arguments during my analysis and my findings within the discussion.

This knowledge will be important for work with children and their families. In a long-term perspective good economic assistance as well as other accompanying services can be a great mean for mitigating and prevent childhood poverty in Norway. Fighting childhood poverty is important to secure children's welfare in the short run, and prevent poverty on the long-term basis by hindering children and youth to be marginalized when they become grown-ups. This study seeks to contribute to the understanding of how childhood poverty strategies are understood and implemented in the offices of NAV and hopefully thereby add to the strategies already implemented to fight childhood poverty.

The choice of research questions and concepts are developed in relation to a hypothesis that there is both challenges and possibilities for children's participation in NAV. Because I was

expecting to explore some degree of variations in my findings both the concepts, the research questions and choice of methods was developed to say something about these variations and why they are there.

1.4 Outline of the Thesis

The following chapter aims to link childhood-poverty in Norway with the setting of social assistance policy in the Norwegian welfare state. In the light of the action plans against poverty in Norway, I will address how CRC and laws important for NAV's work inform family social workers about involvement of children. Chapter three provides a brief overview of relevant research topics, focusing on causes and consequences of poverty for children before a review of previous research on social services and low-income families within a frame of childhood as a social phenomenon is presented. In the fourth chapter, I outline the theoretical framework that was used when analyzing the findings before I proceed by discussing my methodological choices and considerations in chapter five. In the previous four chapters, I discuss and link the findings to relevant themes. In the last chapter, I provide some concluding remarks and present suggestions for further research and action.

2. Contextualizing children's participation in NAV

The common interest in research of exploring what children mean and think from their own point of view can be drawn back to the 1990's when the term child-perspective were adopted in research, policy programs and in various businesses that affect children and childhood. Reviewing relevant research within the field of participation for children however, I found out that there is a great confusion about what having a child-perspective really means. In this session I will first present different approaches to childhood in relation to children's participation. I will thereby show how children's participation is understood within this thesis in relation to the view of children as subjects and by using children's own perspectives as a frame. Then I will look on how children's participation is formulated in UNCRC, before I look more in detail into what Social Service Act says about user-participation.

2.1 Children's participation

As already addressed, children's participation has gone through a fundamental development the last decades. More and more emphasis have been put on the importance of how the individual child is experiencing situations as individuals or subjects, rather than looking on them as objects, without own perceptions and experiences. This development has led to that

laws and regulations towards children has changed into laws that now reflects and emphasis upon children as citizens in their own right. As a reflection of this attention, there have been many studies of children's participation within child welfare and child protection services.

Arnstein (1969, 216) defined participation as: *'the redistribution of power that enables the have-not citizens, presently excluded from the political and economic processes, to be deliberately included in the future'*. Even though Arnstein's definition was developed many years back, his emphasis on inclusion and self-development that derives by being a participator is very important. His definition highlights the difference of being excluded, to being included as his main point why participation is important for have-not citizens. We have to see how we can make this concept more specific in relation to children as these citizens.

The new social studies of childhood, referring to names as James et al (1998) and Qvortrup (1994) has highlighted children as important participators within society. These studies are a reaction on the previous developmental paradigm in child research that confined children to a series of stages towards becoming an adult where the effects of early childhood, educational achievement and so on had been studied for their impact on the adult-to-be rather than on the child of the present. Christiansen (2012) points to this when he looks for a reason why children should be *seen* as people with agency. He also highlights that UN Declaration of Children's Human Rights (CRC) can tell us why we should treat children as people with agency.

Studies about children's participation generally agree that participation is important for several reasons. Many studies highlights that interventions seem to be more effective when they are tailored to the needs of the individual child (Archard and Skivenes, 2009, Hart 1992 and Redd Barna 2014-2017). Ridge's, highlights the importance of this within his findings, claiming that *"...to be able to make policies that is working for children, children have to be involved in policymaking as well, if children are not involved the policies run the risk of failing to respond adequately to the children's needs"* (Ridge 2002, 2). Save the Children, argument that children's participation is important, because this is the only way that decisions made will be in light of what children themselves see as reality and what they think is in the best interest of the child (Redd Barna 2014-2017).

Secondly, children's participation has shown to have positive influence on the development of the child. This thesis builds on the view on children as social actors and interpret the concept of participation as Robert Hart did when he said that participation is "*...the process of sharing decisions which affect one's life and the life of the community in which one lives*" (1992, 5). He refers to an active form of participation, where "*...children need to be involved to be able to handle challenges and become responsible adult citizens when they grow up*" (ibid.). Harts view of participation criticizes approaches using arguments such as that children's participation is a naïve practice, because children do not have decision-making power (ibid.). Within his approach he also takes distance from looking on children as vulnerable people who need to be protected from "*...undue involvement and responsibilities in the problems of society and that they should be allowed to have a carefree childhood* (Hart 1992, 5).

Therefore, taking on Hart's approach to children's participation will in this thesis look on families' challenges, in relation to economy as a matter concerning children, as well as their parents as participants and right-bearing individuals.

2.2 Children's perspectives on childhood poverty

There are a number of researches about childhood poverty in Norway, where children have been given the chance to give their perceptions. After interviewing children and youths about their experience of poverty it has become clear that one of the most important consequences for them appears to be the feeling of being socially excluded (Grødem & Sandbæk 2008, Redd Barna 2014-17, Ridge 2002).

Ridge's study involved children directly and where concerned on the perspectives of the children when growing up in poverty. Within his study he claims that, "*...children experience social exclusion within the immediacy of childhood among their peers* (2002, 6). This is because an important part of children's lives is in arenas outside their homes, in school and in after-school activities. Children that want to attend after-school activities like their friends, but cannot do so can start feeling lonely, sad and different. Because friendships and social interactions with peers are "*...key locations where children develop their social identity and enhance their social capital*" (Ridge 2002, 59) these settings are extremely important for children's experience of themselves, and children's experience if themselves within their community.

Both Ridge (2002) and Nuland et al. 2009, 173) found that one of the most important consequences for children appears to be the feeling of being socially excluded. And while approaches looking on children as vulnerable would say that children do not understand, and should not be involved in economic matters, several studies argue that many children themselves has a great insight within the families economic challenges, even without being told or talked to about it with anyone.

Redd Barna (2014-2017) highlighted for instance that some children in poor families consciously avoid to invite friends home in fear of showing their friends their poor housing, old furniture and other things. These are important remarks telling a lot about how children experience living in poverty. In these cases, it shows both that children have a feeling of being different when comparing themselves to other children. It also shows a mature child who tries to make a decision according to what he or she's thinks is the best. Sometimes this can also be done in compassion for the parents.

Reflecting on these findings; does the child, alone know if this is the best? If there were places where children could talk to professionals together with other children experiencing the same, wouldn't that be better for the child, both in the daily- life, here and now, but also as learned skills helping them to meet challenges later?

Save the Children is the biggest civil organization in Norway working for children's rights. Ahead of the Government's strategy against childhood poverty, (2015-2017) Save the Children Norway arranged hearings with youths in Norway. As a part of the preparations for this thesis, Save the Children let me assist them in one of these hearings. Through asking children about their views on childhood poverty as a theme, and how they think it is for children to live in families with low-income, children's perspectives on childhood poverty was brought. The children was both asked to discuss challenges and suggest solutions and after talking to several youths in different parts of Norway, the children's descriptions were summarized and made a part of the final version of the Government's strategy "*Barn som lever i fattigdom*" (Regjeringen 2015).

The children talked to was connecting childhood-poverty to a feeling of:

Being excluded and not being able to participate on social arenas:

When you can't go to your friends' birthday because you can't afford, they will in the end stop asking you if you would like to come. The friend disappears.

Boy, 18 years (Regjeringen 2015, 87).

An experience of being different:

When everyone has went on holiday except from you it is hard to tell what you have done in your holiday. You must have something to tell.

Girl, 12 years (Regjeringen 2015, 85).

They also experienced that many things costed money, also at school as equipment and going on school-trips and some children showed concerns about that the parents did not have jobs, education and that lack of money leads to worries and arguing.

They felt that after-school activities costed a lot and wished that the costs could go down and that it was possible to borrow equipment's for activities:

It is a bit hard to attend after-school activities when you are poor. It would be nice with a place where it was free to do karate, football and things like that.

Girl, 15 years (Regjeringen 2015, 88).

These insights into children's perspectives of poverty related issues brings important insights into what children think about in relation to growing up in a low-income family in Oslo. In the next part I will look into what UNCRC inform about children's participation, before I further explore the framework of children's participation in relation to NAV.

2.3 UNCRC about children's participation

The way in which the state relates to children as individuals becomes visible in the formal structure of the society. In September 2003, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was incorporated into Norwegian law. And as highlighted by Kjørholt and Lidén (2004, 63) "*...the incorporation of the convention in the Human Rights Act states a political will to take children's rights in general, and participation rights in particular, more seriously*".

The first of these two points can in my context point to that all children should have an opportunity to attend after-school activities, be able to do the same things as their friends and other children within their society. The latter point to the states obligation to assure that adults respect the views of the children and that children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account. Another important point to note is that

children are in this understood as “children in their own right” who have the right to express their views in all matters affecting them. However, the practical meaning of children's right to participation must be considered in each and every matter concerning children. When this thesis is addressing the implementation of the involvement of children in mapping poor families’ life-conditions, this point is important, because it opens up for a situational consideration of “when” and “how” children should participate.

This leaves all public employees working in Norway with an independent responsibility to respect and guarantee the conventions rights, in the same way as they are obligated to respect all other Norwegian laws. As highlighted by Scheie (2005, 6) in the presentation of what CRC means for the municipalities in Norway the Convention put claims on how the municipalities prioritize children. It sets boundaries for how far the municipalities can go in exercising authority towards children and array principles on processes that shall count in all processes where children are influenced. In relation to the theme of this thesis the laws in CRC concerning participation of children is especially relevant.

2.2.1 “The right to be heard”

Article number 12 in CRC gives the child right to be heard, claiming that:

“State parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with age and maturity of the child”
(UNCRC 1989, article 12).

This point to the states obligation to assure that adults respect the views of the children and that children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account. Another important point to note is that children are seen as children in their own right who have the right to express their views in all matters affecting them. However, the practical meaning of children's right to be heard is a discretionary matter and must be considered in each matter concerning children. This point is important in this thesis because it opens up for a situational consideration of “when” and “how” children should be heard.

2.2.2 “The best interest of the child”

Together with the right to be heard, the principle of the best interest of the child is central in the governments’ guidelines on children’s upbringing, claiming that:

«In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration» (UNCRC 1989, article 3).

CRC, article 3 highlights the importance of the child-perspective in all matters concerning children. The consideration of whether a matter is concerning the child can however be discussed and as Scheie (2005) points to it will be up to the councils, the different political committees; the municipality management, administration, each unit and each caseworker to consider whether a matter is concerning the child. The principle of the best interest of the child is also, in many cases closely linked to the right children have to protection highlighted in several laws.

Closely linked to the previous mentioned dichotomy between the child as vulnerable, and the child as a person with agency there can be seen a link between looking on the child as vulnerable and the wish to protect the child from unnecessary involvement. As we will see later within my findings, this dilemma is highly reflected upon by my informant as well.

Another article in CRC that is also important for the theme of this thesis is article number 27 who focuses on how the responsibilities towards the child is divided between the parents and the state. As Oppedal claims: *“The parents are formulated to have the primary responsibility to secure a satisfactory standard of living for their children, within their own economic ability, while the state has a secondarily responsibility for the realization of this standard of living”* (2008, 201).

We have seen that CRC, in different ways sets boundaries and array principles for processes involving children. The process of applying for support from NAV is such a process when the adult seeking support has children, but the way it is done is dependent on many factors. In the next part, we will look on some laws important for NAV that can tell us about the same issues.

2.4 Social Service Act about user-participation

In the recent decades, a user-oriented approach has emerged in the health care sector here in Norway. The background is that there is a shift from the traditional view on the relations between the professional and the client, where the professionals have been the experts and the clients have had little involvement in terms of their own lives.

In the Social Service Act § 42 user- participation stands out as a key working principle for case-workers claiming that: *“it is their duty to secure that the services as far as possible are designed in partnership with recipient and emphasis should be placed on what they mean”* (Lovdata 2009). With this, I understand that the individual user shall be involved in the process and be given a chance to influence on what kind of services and measures that is useful in his/her situation.

The content of user-involvement will be closely linked to the expression of user-participation within the Social Service Act together with reflections from Per Olav Tiller (2010) and Slettebø and Seim (2007) distinction between user-involvement and user-perspective. The concept that has been linked to power – redistribution and described as one of the goal of social services, because it can be used to include persons at risk of being socially excluded (Matthies, 2014). The concept used as a key quality criteria for evaluating how social services work (Helsetilsynet), and a new type of partnership and dialog between professionals and services users (Andreassen, 2009). Perspectives from Hilden et al. will thereby be used to address how we can address the issue of user-participation for children.

As I see it, there are two important questions here! Firstly; who is seen as the recipient of social services? Secondly, are the families seeking support, one entity where the parent is the recipient, or one entity with several individuals who all have this right to user-involvement? The spelling of ...as far as possible makes this especially unclear and opens up for different interpretations and I would argue that it leaves the once implementing the laws, with a lot of possible interpretations of how to understand the law.

The focus behind the user-oriented approach is that there should be more emphasis on what the clients mean, and that they should have self-determination in matters concerning their own lives. The client is the expert in his own life. For NAV another important reason for user-participation is that *it is a tool that help NAV to become user-oriented and deliver services that are fitting to the users' needs* (Andreassen 2009, 34).

As the child-researcher Per Olav Tiller (2010, 71) express, user-involvement builds on the belief that *“...effective implementation and successful outcome of planning assumes that the people planned for himself is involved in the process”*. As we saw in the previous part of this thesis one of the main principles in the Social Service Act, (Lovdata 2009) was to secure holistic and well-coordinated services to vulnerable children, youths and their families. To

secure this many researchers claim that user- involvement is one of the emphasized goals for making social services work for children (Nuland et. al 2009). We will see in the further presentation of laws important for social workers have a somehow vague relation to what user-involvement is, especially in relation to work with children.

According to the Public Administration Act § 17:

“...the administrative organ shall ensure that the case is well enlightened before decisions are made. Minors should always been given the opportunity to express their views, as far as they are capable of making views about the case. The minor’s views shall be given weight in accordance to their age and maturity” (Lovdata 1967).

Here, we can see that there is put especial weight on that minors should be given the opportunity to express their views, pointing straight to the child’s right to be heard in article 12 in UNCRC.

Seen together with Social Service Act paragraph 8-3, there can also be seen limitations concerning children’s right to be heard:

“A child under the age of 19 shall be consulted when the child's development and maturity and the nature of the case indicates this. A child may appear as a part in a case and a procedural right enforced if it has reached 12 years and understands what the case is about» (Lovdata 1967).

Here we can see the right to give an opinion is dependent on the child’s development maturing and the nature of the case. This can open up for different interpretations of the law and as Oppedal (2008) highlights give the social services an opportunity to consider additional limitations in the right to speak about what is required in Article 12 in CRC.

When families with children apply for social assistance there is in addition to the formulation of the law, several constraints in the circular that is about children. Considerations of the best interest of the child are a red line in the circular to the Social Service Act.

Point 4.18.2.6 refers to the best interest of the child:

If the recipient of social assistance has children, there should be taken a primary consideration about their needs in all assessments made. Children and young people should be assured a secure childhood and participate in regular school and after-

school activities, regardless of whether the parents have a difficult economy. This implies that expenditure on children and young people can be part of their sustenance, although equivalent expenses for adults are not (NAV 2012).

As we have seen, the laws are in different ways building on the articles in CRC. We see that the laws express a primary consideration on children and that a child's opinions should be given weight. We have also seen that the laws opens up for different interpretations in connection with who and when, something that will be dependent on the one implementing the law.

3. The role of the Family Social Worker

Social workers assessments on allocation of social assistance have been exposed to many studies within research (Terum 2003, Oppedal 2008). The studies points to variations in social workers assessments and allocation of social assistance. This chapter aims to link the role and responsibility of the family social workers towards low-income families with the framework of children's participation in NAV. First, I will look into their responsibility towards poor families, and then I will make a draft of the family social workers.

3.1 NAV's responsibility towards poor families

The state's efforts against childhood-poverty have been channeled both to child welfare services and to NAV (Nuland et al. 2009, 177). The municipal social services are a part of the Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV). What was earlier divided in office of National Insurance "Trygdeetaten" and the office for the labor market "Arbeidsmarkedsetaten" was merged together with social services through the implementation of the «NAV-reform» in the period of 2006-2010. The main reason for the reform was to give the users of the services a more effective and comprehensive assistance

Paragraph 1.1 in the Social Service Act points to NAV's responsibilities to improve the living-conditions for disadvantaged and gives an important picture of the broad mandate NAV has in their work:

"It shall promote social and economic security, hereunder that the individual get a possibility to live and stay independently, promote transition to work, social inclusion and active participation in society. The law shall contribute to that vulnerable

children and youth and their families gets comprehensive and coordinated assistance. The law shall contribute to equality and equity and prevent social problems” (Lovdata 2009).

In relation to the law, and the theme of this thesis; NAV’s responsibility can be divided into three important areas of responsibility:

Firstly; NAV should promote economic and social security and improve the living-conditions of disadvantaged, pointing to their responsibility in implementing tax- and social policy including entitlement of economic support to those who cannot support themselves through work.

Secondly; NAV should contribute to that ...vulnerable children and youth and their families gets comprehensive and coordinated assistance (Public Administration Act §17). These points partly to their responsibility in being sure that their assessment of the families living-conditions are well enlightened before a decision are made. It also points to the importance of knowing the situation of the whole family where both adults and children are able to meet the family’s needs and the importance of cooperation with other instances to assist them in the best way.

Thirdly: NAV should contribute to equality and equity to prevent social problems. Most importantly, this points to that all citizens should be handled equally. It also points to the importance of preventative parts of their work of poverty measure in addition to the mitigating measures of social assistance highlighted in the first part of the law.

3.2 Family Social Workers

The title *family social workers* will in this thesis point to social welfare workers in NAV having families as their user-group. The *family social workers* are one of the groups working closest to low-income families. When parents seek NAV for support it is their responsibility to map the family’s needs for both guidance and economically support, as well as meeting the family and making the assessment of how to assist them. As other social welfare worker employed in NAV, “...”they are acting on behalf of the public where the laws and regulations has been formed, but it is the social welfare worker who *do* the politics” (Lipsky 2010). As *family social workers*, my informants had only those users that had children, and where in this way the once in responsibility of doing politics for children within their office. Within the next chapter, we will look more into the social welfare workers working attributes.

Aamodt (2006) claims that, the authorities' talks with two tongues. With saying this, she highlights that the service providers are imposed to focus on both user-involvement and having a user- perspective. However, she also highlights that the institutions are governed by "...established routines and professional ideologies, policy guidelines, economic frames and administrative procedures...", and that "the service providers are thereby pressured to act in other ways, clashing with the user-perspective" (Aamodt 2006). As we will see later in the thesis this is also an highlighted point in Lipsky's concept street-level bureaucrats, later in the thesis.

3.3 Previous research

Because the studies on involvement of children within social services are very limited, I will draw upon some literature from the child welfare sector. Because child welfare services is a different public authority and can be said to have a much clearer position towards children, because of the fact that it's the child that is in focus of its services these studies can't be fully explaining the structures and experiences brought by social workers within NAV. However, children I found many of my informant's descriptions pointing to many of the main points addressed within research on involvement of children in the child welfare sector.

3.3.1 Participation of children in the child welfare services

Van Bijeveld et al. (2014) study of young people's and child protection workers perspectives on children's participation within the Dutch child protection and welfare services finds that both describe a level of informing, but that participation does not seem to have any influence on decision-making processes. *"Although they all see participation as important, there is no consensus on what participation entails"* (Van Bijeveld et. al 2014, 257). Another important finding in this study is that most of the young people interviewed do not believe that participation for them is something that will happen, and even if they are talked to, their views will not be acted upon (ibid.). This is addressed by Van Bijeveld et.al (2014) as a large gap between the young people who wishes to participate and be heard and on the other hand the case managers who consider that a child does not know what is best for him, should not be bothered with decision-making and be protected from making important decisions.

A recent project "Talk with Us" at Oslo University College (HIOA 2013) is done within the child welfare sector. The study finds interconnected links between the results, showing that child welfare case officers a) do not always talk to children at all, b) often find that they lack

competence and are uncertain of how to converse, and c) often think that not very much emerges from the conversations that they do have with children. A frequent objective among the case officers was to get to know/have contact with/see the child, which may result in diffuse interactions and make the role and purpose of the case officer confusing for the child. The work process of the child welfare service thereby becomes difficult for the child to follow, which limits his/her opportunities to participate (HIOA 2013).

The first of these two points can in my context point to that all children should have an opportunity to attend after-school activities, be able to do the same things as their friends and other children within their society. The latter point to the states obligation to assure that adults respect the views of the children and that children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account. Another important point to note is that children are in this understood as *children in their own right* who have the right to express their views in all matters affecting them. However, the practical meaning of children's right to participation must be considered in each and every matter concerning children. When this thesis is addressing the implementation of the involvement of children in mapping poor families' life-conditions, this point is important, because it opens up for a situational consideration of *when* and *how* children should participate.

3.3.2 Participation of children in the social services

The Norwegian child researcher Per Olav Tiller was one of the first to work with a concept of the child- perspective referring to it as "*how the world look for kids*" (Tiller 1991, 72). Tiller's approach to the child-perspective puts the individual child in focus, not children as a group. This recognizes the importance of talking to the individual child because they have their own way of understanding and experiencing the life they are in.

Helga Johannesdottir (1997) did a study on social workers experiences of home-visits in the child welfare sector. Generally she found that all her informants where concerned of the child's situation in the family and that home-visits in a large extent was explained as important because this was where they could see and meet the children. However, despite this view Johannesdottir (1997) addressed that even though child-welfare cases is about children, the child was in most cases invisible. She address that all informants justified the home-visit more or less with that they were going to meet the child. She argued however, that this justification was more an alibi towards the parents than the actual reason (Johannesdottir

1997, 90) and claimed that “...*the most important reason for going on home-visits was to look on the interaction between the child and the parents*” (Johannesdottir 1997, 193). This will be more explored within my findings as well.

Throughout her discussion she addressed several issues that can explain more about what her informants were thinking about involvement of children. She points to that the social welfare workers said that to be able to talk to children they had to meet the children where they were, play with them and let the child decide what they were going to talk about (Johannesdottir 1997, 98). This meant that they had to start where the child was and let the child decide what they were going to talk about. A challenge with this was that it was time-consuming and that some of the social welfare workers felt that they were lacking competence to approach or establish the contact they needed with the child. The lack of competence was linked to many different things, but the lack of education was important. However, by some of the social workers, who were mothers it was addressed that they used their own experience both with how approaching the children and with making the parents talk to the children. While those who did not have a lot of experience and did also not have children more often said that they preferred having the conversation with the parents without the child being present (Johannesdottir 1997, 100).

Even though some of the informants found it challenging to talk to the children, the home-visits were regarded as being very important because just being in the home, seeing the home- environment could tell them a lot about the child’s position in the house. The social workers often got information about the child’s interests and activities by looking in the child’s room. By seeing the football or the dolls they could have short conversations about what the child did in their free-time and holidays. The social workers felt that they, in this way got a good insight into the child’s life and that they also got an insight into if the parents were active with the child’s interests (Johannesdottir 1997, 94).

An important notice here is the researcher’s point that “*the subjective opinions about what was good and not good lighted their assessments*” (Johannesdottir’s 1997, 194). The social workers were careful about interrupting the relationship between the child and the parents too much. Children is by most people seen as parents property, even if the society says with its laws that children should be seen as individuals with their own rights. The social workers

difficult task is to control if the parents gives the child the care that the society means that the child is entitled to. With other words go into a very personal relationship that we all have an opinion about, but where there are no approved standards on how it should be (Johannesdottir 1997, 101). Within Johannesdottir's findings this, together with the time- constraints seemed to be the most important reasons to not put a strong weight on establishing contact with the children.

As Oppedal (2008) address about the government goal against poverty: *"The Government's goal is that all children and young people should have the same rights and opportunities for development regardless of their parents' economy , education and ethnic and geographical affiliation"*.. In such reviews children are rarely mentioned. and it is taken almost for granted that children's financial needs are covered by the allowance for subsistence include the entire family when the adult social receiver supporting children. In such contexts, the child's own needs are *"...gladly standardized in terms of economic size in the deliberations on how big the benefit amounts, which the family is entitled to* (Harsløf og Seim 2008, 187).

As we have seen in the review of the research, the literatures in different ways demonstrates and highlight children's participation as an important focus. As (Healy & Darlington, 2009, Hubberstey, 2001) claims, the literature also indicates what can be done to facilitate children's participation in child welfare and child protection services. However, studies of the prevalence of participation show that acknowledging the importance of participation and willingness to facilitate participation do not necessarily mean that participation is implemented in practice.

Researchers, political activists, NGO`s and child experts of various kinds share a positive attitude to implement children`s rights to participation in their local environment, in urban planning, in politics, in decision-making processes in families, and in influencing everyday life... (Kjorholt and Liden 2004, 64). Ridge (2002) points to that this can be seen in the light of traditional concerns about children that focus less on the lived experience of childhood and more on the child as an investment for the future or an adult-to-be. Volunteer organizations, such as Save the Children also make a stand in relation to this and say that even if it is a human right for children to be heard, *"...there is too much coincidence, access to resources, expertise or various adult motivation and attitudes that determine whether children are allowed to participate, are listened to and given influence"* (Redd Barna 2014-17, 8).

In relation to NAV as a frame (Stolanowski and Tvetene 2005, 59) relates the lack of children's participation to that children are not themselves participate in paid work, but are categorized as poor on the background of their parents' economic situation. Since they are not themselves, independent receivers of official income security it could be more likely that the family is seen as one unit.

Another central question is what it takes for children and youths to experience that the families economy is bad. Is it for instance age specific, in the meaning that you need to be able to compare oneself with others to understand that they lack something. This is also important to keep in mind throughout this thesis. In this case it would be likely to expect that children first will experience this when they are situations where there are social comparisons, meaning especially from the school-age and upwards (Backe-Hansen 2004, 16). From another perspective the youngest children's experiences of poverty is also very important because "The early years are a "sensitive period" for environmental influences; that is, experiences in these years have particularly strong and lasting effects.

When this thesis is approaching participation from a human right perspective, this is problematic. First, if participation is random, this means that children are met differently and that participation is more about luck than being a human right. Secondly, when recent research done with children themselves (ex on research) also finds that children's own descriptions and poverty differ from adult's descriptions of how the child experience it, it could mean that the communicated children's experiences of poverty are different from the actual experiences the child has. If this is so, would the measures put in place to help children be the right ones? It becomes important to take a second look at children's actual possibilities to participate.

In practice, the socio-cultural image of children may play an important role in how participation of children is understood. My position throughout the thesis is that when we talk about social services for families, everyone in the family should be defined as a client and given the right to be involved and listened to. We have also seen that research is highlighting children's participation as a topic; to do this in practice has raised many challenges.

4. Theoretical Framework

In this session, I outline the theoretical framework that was used when analyzing the findings. When choosing which concept to use it was significant to find a theoretical foundation that

could help me explain both the complexity of the family social workers' role and their choices concerning children's participation within their work. This theoretical framework is important both to understand the situation the family social workers find themselves in, but also in order to understand the ways they describe their experiences and choices. A very important focus within my research has been to address how family social workers relate to the laws of children's participation and to find out what *discretion* means in shaping their practice of these laws.

The epistemological standpoint of this study is constructionism. Constructionism is the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context (Crotty 1998, 42). I find this theoretical perspective fitting to my study because I'm dealing with rules and regulations implemented by human beings finding themselves in a social setting. As constructionism claims meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting (Crotty 1998, 43). I believe that the employees are guided by laws, but the laws give all of the employees some degree of discretion when it comes to deciding how to implement them in practice. In this way the theoretical standpoint of constructionism will back me up on understanding how choices are formed, constructed and understood by the employee itself, but also according to the social setting he/she appears in.

The main concepts for this thesis are Lipsky's (2010) concept of *street-level bureaucracy* and Sommer et.al (2010) concept of *child/children's perspectives*. These concepts will be drawn upon here in relation to social services, and the family social workers descriptions of the way they meet poor families with children. I believe that these concepts can be a resource to the understanding of the family social workers role in the performance of their work and can tell us important things about the relation between children's rights and rules and regulations and how these laws actually is implemented in practice.

The first concept helps us to understand the formal aspects of the family social workers' descriptions of their practices, while the second one gives us an opportunity to explore how the family social workers subjective understanding of children's position in society can influence on their descriptions of children's participation.

4.1 Street-level bureaucracy

Within their classic book on implementation, Pressmann and Wildavsky (1984) highlights, that implementation is a continuous process of action and reaction in which the policy is socially constructed. As a mean to explore the structural causes and strategic choices of the family social workers as implementers of the laws informing about children's participation I have chosen Lipsky's concept *street-level bureaucracy*.

Lipsky (2010, 196) describes the employees in social services as well as teachers, police officers and legal aid lawyers as street-level bureaucrats, because they interact directly with the people. As implementers of the law, but at the same time controllers of social assistance they both have to rationalize as well as meet procedural obligations and rights when putting the laws into practice. Being a family social worker means then to be able to balance between helping, mapping and controlling conditions surrounding the families.

Because street-level bureaucrats work very close to individual people they constantly have to ensure that, their services are responsive to individual needs of the users. To do this they are "*...professionals who are expected to exercise discretionary judgement in their field*" (Lipsky 2010, 14). Discretion gives the street-level bureaucrats the freedom they need to exercise their work role in their meeting with the users. As well as meeting individual people's needs this can give a considerable amount of freedom in the ways the family social worker relates to his/her work.

The core of Lipsky's argument is that discretion is not only inevitable but also necessary to welfare bureaucracies (Lipsky 2010). With this he points to the nature of complexity within public services, were the social workers needs to do their job with policy goals that are both vague and conflicting. Lipsky highlights that the street-level bureaucrats needs discretion because their working-life has to be able to meet individual demands. Together with limited resources, they face a limit upon what they are able to do through their work. Lipsky (2010) argues therefore that because street-level bureaucrats need to handle their work situation in the best way, they have to find ways to use limited resources to achieve the expected goals. and that this develop methods of processing people in a relatively routine and stereotyped way and extend their discretion.

Lipsky's concept can help us see how the formal aspects within social services are structuring the role of the social workers understanding of children's participation. While Lipsky's

concept can help us understand how the family social workers are påvirket characteristics and structures within the implementation agencies my findings have shown that there is more than this formal role that is determinate in the ways the family social workers are describing their role in involving children.

Terum (2003, 123) when he found that important reasons for the high level of discretionary assessment was that the social workers had different understandings of what values that was important and what was perceived as fair. He refers to research showing that there is big differences between municipalities' on the level of social assistance, but also find in his study that there is differences between the views of the social workers in the same office, which shows that the treatment the client gets depend on what social workers he or she meets (Terum 2003). His findings point to the importance of the personal values the individual social worker has. We will also see that as "street level bureaucrats" the case workers in my fieldwork address not only things in the formal system of their work, but that their more personal understanding of childhood as a phenomenon, and children's place in society are important for the way they talk and think about involving children. This brings us to the importance of the other concept chosen as the theoretical framework for this thesis.

4.2 Children's perspective

The essential goal within my thesis has been to address how the family social workers understand and use children's participation in their work. When choosing the concept it was very important for me to choose a concept that was highlighting the children as actors and at the same time help me to explain the different subjective descriptions that I got through my research.

The concept of children's perspective has developed as a specification of the concept of child perspective. As Sommer et.al highlights the term has been used with a wide variety of meanings in various child-related professions. The term child-perspective is however too broad for research and professional use because it can consider any view of children a child perspective (Sommer et. al 2010, 20).

The term "child perspective" derives from early childhood education and is used in many different ways. Sommer et al (2010) however claims that there is a need to focus on children's perspectives rather than on child-perspective because it may not be irrelevant whom you get the information from. Why this is also important in relation to research have been pointed on

from many different angles. According to Sommer et al (2010, preface) a *child-perspective* can be seen as “direct adult’s attention towards an understanding of children’s perceptions, experiences, and actions in the world” .

Children’s perspectives on the other hand “...represent children’s experiences, perceptions and understanding in their life world (Sommer et.al). With describing this distinction they highlight an important matter concerning the information you get and that it may not be irrelevant whom you get the information from. The important distinction between these two concepts lies in who is formulating the perspective; is it someone representing the child or is it the child himself/herself that bring their own perspectives that are taken into consideration and made use of by an adult.

The authors seek an understanding of what it is for adults to have a “child perspective”, and how that might differ from the perspectives held by the children themselves, what they call “children’s perspectives. “*A topic that creates a new space that lies between theory and practice, a space inhabited by those who go beyond the “new child paradigm” in sociology or contextual psychology*” (Sommer et. al 2010, Preface).

The concept of *children’s perspectives* empowers children and includes them as actors, it includes child- development and it gives the most specific insight into children’s own experiences of a specific life-situation. Having this view on children within society makes it easier to tailor the assistance that children need today, and can have positive influence on decreasing the chances of intergenerational welfare dependency.

This approach is useful when analyzing the role of the social worker in relation to children and how they implement the policies.

At the same time, as Strandbu (2007) address children are not “alone” in the world. In her work she is pointing to the importance of the dialectical relationship between the child’s experiences and opinions and the adult that the child interacts with when the child are admitted status as a participant. According to Strandbu (2007) the child-perspective contains of three parts. 1) It is the general view on children that has children’s right to participate as its consequence. It is the historical and cultural understanding of the child's position and rights of children as enshrined in the conventions and laws of society. Children have the right to participate, and the state is required to really do this in a way that is best for the child. The second is about how the adult uses the general view on children in their handling of the

concrete situation and in his/hers assessment of what is the best interest of the child. These adults must be adjusted to try to find solutions to this particular child's best interests including on the basis of what the child thinks and believes.

The third part is the child's own perspective and how it is tilrettelagt for the child to fremme their views in the grad they wish to. Children have different needs and priorities than adults.

The concept of children's perspectives includes children as actors, it includes child self-development and it gives the most specific insight into children's own experiences of a specific life-situation. This makes it easier to tailor the assistance they need today to the individual child and it can reduce the chances of integrational welfare dependency.

What does user-involvement mean for the users? What happens if the users are not involved? In their understanding of user-involvement Slettebø and Seim (2007, 28) brings some interesting points to the discussion of what it means to be involved. In their definition of user-involvement, they make a clear distinction between user-involvement, and the concept of user-perspective which is two concepts often mixed and misunderstood to be much of the same. They mean that the important meaning of user-involvement can lose a lot of its meaning by doing this. They argue for a clear distinction between the two concepts where user-perspective refers to the situations where professionals and employees shall have the user's interests or needs in focus. While user-involvement should be referring to cooperation, where the user is both participating and having influence. This distinction is important for the theme of this thesis, in two ways. Firstly, it tells us that user-involvement is something more than just assessing a user's need through the eyes of the caseworker. Secondly, it highlights the importance of the individuals, and thereby the child's own participation and chance to influence on their case.

I believe that these concepts can be a resource to the understanding of the case-workers role in the performance of their work and can tell us important things about the relation between child's rights and rules and regulations and how these laws are actually implemented in practice. The motivation for this research focus is closely linked to my interest for children's rights and the belief that children need to be involved on an individual level. Children experience challenges in different ways and parents or adults are not fully able to understand a child's feelings. As.... Puts it if involved in the families economic situation, and used as a

resource in the process of coping with poverty, the risks of bad consequences of poverty, both in the present and in future can be reduced

In relation to the theme of this thesis the degree of freedom the family social workers have can open up for many different understandings and practices both in relation to children's position in relation to NAV's work and also what it means to involve children, more generally. Throughout the interviews I was concerned with finding out more about the possibilities and challenges within discretion and also trying to explore whether discretion could be a reason for differentiation in providing benefits and guidance as well as giving the family social workers a great freedom to decide who of the children that should be heard.

5. METHODOLOGY

5.1 Subjective descriptions

To capture the subjective descriptions in relation to the family social workers role and understanding of children's participation I have chosen qualitative semi-structured interviews as my main method. Through using interviews, you can get knowledge about the participants' thoughts, opinions and experiences (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). My thesis concerns the family social workers thoughts around the laws on informing about children's participation, how they understand their role in relation to children's participation and how this can be related to structural matters on the one hand, and subjective opinions and experiences with the field on the other. I think that qualitative interviews as a method could provide me with the tools and flexibility I needed to be able to dig deeper into the interviewees' descriptions.

When first asking for participants I wanted to carry out focus group interviews and then have individual semi-structured interviews after on both places. I found out later that this was very hard for the participants to go through with, and got feedback from one of the offices that this was too time-consuming from them. Instead of having focus-group interviews I therefore decided to stick to the individual interviews and then instead use the vignette- method as an inspiration in the beginning of each interview to give me possibilities to compare the family social workers afterwards.

I believe that, in relation to my purpose of study and the limit of time, dropping the idea of using both focus group interviews and individual semi-structured interviews was good. After conducting the interviews and approaching the results I see that by using focus groups I could

have missed out on the interviewees' opportunity to speak openly and honestly about their understandings. As a reflection on the opposite, using focus groups could also have helped me to tease out important reflections of differences in views and practices.

How I used the vignette-method as an inspiration in capturing the family social workers assessments. In the beginning of each interview, a vignette was a central part and was a part of the interviewguide (see appendix...). Vignettes are "*Short stories about hypothetical characters in specified circumstances, to whose situation the interviewee is invited to respond*" (Finch, 1987, 105). The vignette method is especially facilitating to get knowledge about professionals thoughts, explanations, norms, assessments and ethical decision-making (Finch, 1987).

In the qualitative approach, the vignette-method has been used in several ways. Within my study, I used the vignette as a part of the interview. Within the beginning of each interview, the vignette was used as a starting point, as a way to put on the right glasses for the rest of the conversation. The reason why I did this was because I wanted to be able to start all the interviews from the same point of view. Doing this I could capture the descriptions of their overall role towards families.

5.2 Fieldwork in Oslo

Oslo is on the top of childhood poverty statistics in Norway. I wanted to talk to the most important service providers towards low-income families. I first made contact with NAV offices through e-mail in January 2016 explaining the topic of my study and asking if I could have interviews with some of the social workers working directly with poor families. The front desk in the respective offices helped me to get in touch with the right department manager which from that point was my point of reference conducting the interviews. I contacted 5 different local NAV offices in Oslo and got back reply from 4 of them. One of the offices were in the middle of comprehensive reorganization and did not find the time. Another one said they unfortunately did not have the capacity on that time. Two of the offices that I contacted were very positive to my study, and I received answers from the department managers in both offices that they wanted to be a part of my study in January 2016. Both of the offices had a "family-team" – working especially towards families with children.

When deciding who to interview I let the department manager decide which of the family social workers I was going to interview, according to a short presentation of the aim of my study and issues of interest. As criteria's for choosing the participants, I gave the department manager guidelines that all the informants should be working in the family team, but apart from this the two managers were free to decide who of their family social workers that was supposed to be a part of my study. I am aware that the freedom I gave to the department manager could have influence on my findings and the degree of differences between the two offices. The choice the two department managers did could also be a strategic choice from their side, wanting to *tell* something special through my study. However, looking on my findings I think that the selection criteria gave me a relevant variation of informants, descriptions and challenges in relation to children's participation in NAV.

Both the offices came up with three interviewees each. I carried out 3 interviews on one of the offices April 11th 2016 and the other 3 interviews on the other office April 28th 2016. All the interviews were carried out face-to-face and interviews lasted between 45 minutes- 60 minutes. I was In one of the offices the interview where conducted in the respective interviewees office, while in the other one we were sitting in the same meeting-room during all the three interviews.

5.3 Ethical considerations and challenges

“Ethical issues are a major concern when carrying out social research and should be considered during all stages of a study, from framing the research question to presenting the findings” (Bryman 2012, 10). Major areas of ethical concerns in the field of social research, include harm to participants, lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy and deception (ibid, 143).

I received ethical clearance for my research from the Data Protection Services for Social Research in Norway (NSD). In order to adhere to NDS's ethical requirements, prior to the interviews, I provided information to my potential informants setting out the purpose of my study, what participation implied, how personal data and information shared during the interview-process would be treated confidentially and the ways in which the empirical data would be stored and used in my thesis to ensure participants' anonymity (see appendix nr. 1), and thereafter deleted. All the six informants gave informed consent to take part in my study, and where made aware that they could withdraw from the study at any point.

Something that I have been particularly mindful of is the ethical considerations surrounding the presentation and dissemination of my work. NAV is an institution that has been criticized heavily the last years. It has therefore been very important for me both when preparing, while presenting the theme and talking to the informants, and then analyzing my findings to be highly aware of the possible consequences this study may get both for my informants and for NAV as an institution. To get as realistic descriptions as possible I had to make the informants aware of my goal for the study, telling a fair picture of challenges and possibilities within NAV from their own point of view.

During two of the interviews, this was more important than the others were; because I sometimes felt that they were trying to “tell me things that they thought I wanted to hear”. It was also important for me that they were aware that my research is independent, and that my thesis may produce results that are not what they expect. Within this relation it is important to highlight that the conclusions I make is based on the empirical data I collected on the two different offices and cannot generalize that this would be the results on a wider basis.

In relation to validity of my research, it is also important to highlight that all the interviews were done in Norwegian. There during the transcribing process, I had to translate all the interviews into English. Sometimes within the process I found this a bit problematic because I could feel that some of the informants expression did not mean exactly the same, even if the translation was correct. This can be limiting the validity of some of the statements brought in the thesis, but being well aware of it and by reflecting upon it during the process of translation, I feel that the descriptions I present within the findings explain what was told to me within the interview.

Another factor I have been well aware of during the interviews and my analysis of the informants descriptions is that some of the informant may wanted to be a part of the study to be able to correct some of the bad picture that NAV has got in relation to their assessments of children in their work. This can be problematic if the informants tried to tell me things that they do not do or do not mean, because they wanted to protect NAV. With presenting the purpose of my study with a goal of being fair, and just telling their own opinions about an important theme I think that I was able to reduce this challenge.

5.4 Methodological awareness

While doing the analysis it would be important to be aware of some of the different ethical considerations doing a fieldwork. Byrne (2004, 184) points out the importance of reflexivity that involves critical self-scrutiny on the part of researchers, who need, at all stages of the research process, to ask themselves about their role in the research”. In my case it would mean to be aware that my background and position does not affect the research. Remembering all these things would help me broaden my knowledge, draw better conclusions, and it would also importantly give my findings greater validity.

Today the term ‘research ethics’, as used by The Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees (2006), refers to a diverse set of values, norms and institutional regulations that help constitute and regulate scientific activity. Scientific knowledge is important, but we need to be aware of the ethical issues when conducting research on human remains.

By using interview as a method, I will have to recognize that my research involves human participants. Me, as a researcher are responsible to take care of the relationship made for the purpose of this study and fulfill the some basic requirements relating to the relationship between researcher and the one being researched.

Within a positivist methodological tradition, the interviews have been understood as a way of capturing knowledge that already exists. The researcher within this tradition is perceived as a neutral receiver of the interviewees’ experiences (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009; Thagaard, 2009, 87). On the other side data from interviews can also be seen as a result of the interaction between the researcher (the interviewer) and the interviewee and represent a constructionist standpoint. Within this framework both the interviewer and the interviewee contribute to the knowledge and this knowledge is dependent, developed and transmitted within an essentially social context (Crotty 1998, 42). I find this theoretical perspective fitting to my study because I’m dealing with rules and regulations implemented by human beings finding themselves in a social setting. As constructionism claims meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting (Crotty 1998, 43). I believe that laws guide the employees, but the laws give all of the employees some degree of discretion when it comes to deciding how to implement them in practice. In this way, the theoretical standpoint of constructionism will back me up on understanding how choices are formed, constructed and understood by the employee itself, but also according to the social setting he/she appears in.

5.5 Informed Consent

The person examined shall participate voluntarily in the study and be aware of the dangers and benefits. In this; four components will be crucial:

- Expertise
- Volunteering
- Full information
- Understanding

At the beginning of the study, I was information potential participants of the study. Because of this the interview process is done on a working place, I believe it is important to give brief information to the administration and other employees to. Doing this would hopefully help me, and answer questions other workers might have about my study. One crucial point, especially concerning NAV is the turbulent last years they had. It will therefore be very important to make the participants feel comfortable and trust the purpose of my research.

5.6 Requirements of privacy

The second point is to secure that the informants privacy is taken care of. As a researcher I will have to think through how sensitive the information collected is. In my study the respondent's views will have to remain anonym. This to take care of ethical dilemmas the employee may face after the research being published, if the information was not given anonymously. The information collected in the study does not ask for private information from its informants. The informants are asked about issues concerning their profession, this strengthens the possibilities of the research to be kept private for the individual. However, doing research on a working place, where people know each other very well and work closely together could bring challenges when it comes to anonymity anyway.

During the process I will be loyal to my informant's point of view and their presentations of the themes and topics. This loyalty can at the same time be challenged through me being a Norwegian citizen, having different experiences with NAV in the past. However the themes handled here are not private issues for me, so I don't think the knowledge I have about NAV will interrupt the loyalty towards the informants of my study. I will be loyal to my informant's

point of view and their presentations. I will also invite informants to co-analyse and interpret your data and try to include the informants understanding in my presentation.

Childhood poverty is a highlighted topic in Norway today. It is a political matter, it is a matter for parents and their families and it is important for those working with helping these families. To consider the possibilities that my findings will spread through social media, is therefore very important to keep in mind during the whole process. I would have to consider the possible consequences the publication of my work may have for the informants, possible political consequences for your informant's social group, for those who have commissioned your research or for their employer. As a researcher I have to be prepared to bear the consequences of my research.

5.7 Reflexivity

For me as a researcher it is important to be conscious about who I am. *Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) highlights that for the researcher it is important to be aware of her/his pre-understanding and reflect upon his/her own point of view. Both over emphasizing and claiming that this does not mean anything in relation to the research result is to misunderstand what is a fundamental thing in qualitative research.* It is therefore important for me to reflect upon and being aware of who I am.

Me! Being a researcher, female, a mum and middle class means something for my study. By clarifying my position as a researcher at a personal and political level, I recognize that who I am may have influence on my study. With experience from different places working with children both as an employee, a volunteer and as a child- right's activist, I have a quiet high belief that children's perspectives means a lot. That I am also a mum means that childhood poverty is a theme that I can relate to also in a personal matter. For me it has been very important to be aware of these things during the research.

Relating to NAV as an institution – I have an outside perspective. I do not have any experience from NAV, other than what I have learned about it at school and what I have read about NAV in media. Even though I am an outsider, especially the high degree of critics that NAV has got through media will be a part of my pre-understanding of the field that I wanted to enter. This insight, even though if it has been mostly negative gave me a necessary pre-

understanding, a pre-understanding that was very important for me to be able to be critical and see clearer the challenges and possibilities that the interviewees presented me for.

5.7 Process of Analyzing

The strategy used to analyze the empirical data is thematic analysis, which is concerned with extracting key themes from one's data (Bryman 2012, 717). The audio recording of interviews and the production of transcripts facilitated thematic analysis. During the transcription process I also had to translate all the interviews into English language. This as a very time-consuming process and a process I found challenging sometimes. The transcripts were thereby studied to identify key themes in the interviews, as well as deviant cases and similarities and differences between informants' responses.

I will in the following chapters explore my findings. The results have been discussed in relation to themes, and will be described, discussed and linked to the following topics: My role as a Family Social Worker, Settings for Children's participation and "It should not be a type of bingo. In the last chapter I will I will try to comprehend all my findings and make some concluding remarks what my findings can tell in relation to children's participation as a theme in social services.

6. Findings: My role as a Family Social Worker

In this part of the thesis, I will present my findings. This chapter will continue with exploring my informant's descriptions concerning how NAV employees experience their role when it comes to involving and listening to children. To be able to explore the similarities and differences between the individual family social workers descriptions all the informants were presented with the same vignette, about a single mum with three children (appendix....). Through presenting a vignette, I wanted to explore the individual informant's descriptions about their role in involving the child and then later, in my analysis be able to compare their thoughts. Because I have chosen a thematic presentation of my findings, my informant's descriptions will be presented in relation to themes. I have given my informants fixed names and for the purpose of being able to discuss the differences further on it will be important to remember that Lotte, Frida and Veronica works in one office, while Pernille, Hedda and Maja works in the other office.

In chapter 7, I will especially look into two settings; home-visits and girls- and boys groups. These settings where described as better places for involvement of children than including the

children in the conversation at NAV-office. In chapter 8 the focus will be on the formulation of the laws and my informant's subjective descriptions of things related to the freedom they feel they have when understanding the law and choosing how and when to involve children. The big variations I found both between the two offices, but also within the same office will be the main focus. Before I in the last session try to comprehend, what my findings can explain in relation to theory. How can we interpret the described practices in relation to the laws informing caseworkers in NAV about involvement of children?

6.1 Mapping the Children's Situation

A significant point in the assessment about whether the child's individual rights are safeguarded in assessment concerning their families' situation is that their situation is mapped and sought (Sandbæk and Grødem 2009). In the beginning of the conversation with my informants I was therefore presenting a vignette about a single mum with three children (appendix 2). My goal with this vignette was to see how each informant described their role in mapping and seeking the children's situation with a method that made it easier to compare their thoughts during my analysis. During the conversation about the vignette, my informants also got direct questions about what factors they would focus on during the conversation, how they found out about the children's situation, whom they talked to and their thoughts regarding children's presence in the meetings.

In both of the offices they had a scheme with basic questions about the parents, the family, the families' health and the children's health. The schemes also included questions about whether the children were attending after-school activities and what costs the family had for these things. All my informants said that this was an important tool for them in their first conversation with the parent; some said they used to bring the scheme with them; others did not want to bring it, but were rather writing it after the conversation. As all my informants said the first conversation they would have with this mum would take place at NAV-office in a conversation with the mum.

Lotte:

In the conversation about the vignette Lotte explains what her main focus is, when trying to get a comprehensive picture of the families' situation:

The primary thing here would be to find out about the economic situation. That is what she needs help to sort out, so I would go through the mums' economy and then look on

the money to cover after-school activities. That is an assessment we have to do on an individual basis, with each family where we take into consideration the families situation as a whole, like how long they have been in the system, how their life-situation is and how their health is.

Lotte explains that the most important thing for her is to find out about the mum's economic situation and that within this she is also concerned about what costs the mum has for the children, for instance paying for after-school activities. Talking about individual basis, she refers to the whole family and not a family with different individuals that all needs an individual assessment.

Lotte describes her role as a social worker:

It is about two things. We are supposed to contribute to make the family independent and make the family able to prioritize what is important and what is not that important for them. Then we are also supposed to supplement where we think that there is a need of money, or other things that we see could make it easier for the family to cope with their daily-life. This could for instance be girls-group (more discussed in next chapter) or a support person.

Lotte points here to the broad responsibility that the family social worker has in relation to families seeking for assistance. One part of her job is to assist the family with economic support, but it's also to be a supervisor and guide the family to become self-reliant. As a follow up question it would be interesting to ask her if and how she took use of user-involvement in this setting with the parents, but instead I asked her more precisely about if she talked to the child in this setting:

Unfortunately, it is mostly the mum that we talk to! It's because it's a bit limited how much we can talk to the children, and are allowed to talk with the children. Sometimes we also talk to school if we get approval we need to talk to them.

Lotte did not seem satisfied with her possibilities to talk with the children. She relates this to rules about confidentiality, limiting their allowance to talk to the children without the parents' consent. As Lotte explains it, this seems to be an important barrier for involving the child.

Frida

Frida also explained that she focuses on getting a picture of the whole family, but she also highlights the importance of finding out the families relations to other instances and to have a focus on making the mum able to pay for the family herself:

We go through and check where the children are going to school, other types of instances that they are in contact with. Is it a case in the child welfare services? In that case, we ask if we can get consent to cooperate with the child welfare services. If she is working, then it is okay, but if she is not doing anything, we are working with finding a goal for the mum.

The importance of making the parent self-reliant is also very important in Frida's descriptions of her role. This is expressed both in laws and regulations that NAV use, as well as in national strategies.

Frida is reflecting upon her own role as a family social worker in relation to this:

Our primary task is to make the parents self-reliant, but making someone self-reliant can be many things; is that only about economy or is it also about other things?

In relation to the family social worker's views on involving the child in cases at NAV, there is a chance that a lot of focus on economy can challenge the view on the child as an individual user. When Frida was asked about her view on involving the child her main point was about protection from things that may harm the child:

We do not want children under 18 to be interpreters. Then we rather cancel the appointment, if we did not get information that they need an interpreter. Some of it is about that we think that children should be allowed to be children and that if they start interpreting for their parents or get too much information about the adult-life, we think that it is unfortunate for the child. We have also seen that the parents lose their authority because it is the child who is in power. It is them that can tell the parents how Norway is and how the parents should behave.

Frida is referring to several challenges with involving the child. She legitimizes her views both through children's rights to protection, but also through securing that the power-relation between the child and the parent leaves the grown-ups as the one in control. This statement also has a very clear link to immigrant-families and can be seen as a way to try to empower

the parent in an “unknown” world, helping them not to lose losing their authority in relation to their children.

Veronica

In the beginning of the conversation with Veronica, she explains that she finds it very interesting to work within the family department because it is not only about the main client, but about different people within the family. As the others, she says that it is mainly the parents that come to the office and that she prefers that the child is not there. However, her main focus throughout this part of the conversation was that, even if the child is not present, they have a focus on the children all the time, even though it can be hard sometimes to find out the real situation when they are not visiting the office.

The challenges used to be much more complex than the parents tell us. I have had families where I find out that they have been trying to hide the challenges at home with the children. They wanted to show us that they want to be in activity, want to go to school, want to get a job, and then under the follow-up, I find out that it was much more complicated challenges in the home.

Veronica points to experiences she had with mapping the family’s needs, from office. Her statement shows the importance of the user’s impression of NAV and that this sometimes can lead to that the parents are trying to hide important challenges at home. Another understanding of this can be that the users tell the family social worker, what she/he thinks that he wants to hear and that the main goal for helping is to get the parents into activity. Veronica’s thoughts can also be closely related to arguments for home-visits because the described weakness she saw in finding out the “right” things through a conversation at the office. This will be more discussed in next chapter.

Even though Veronica expressed challenges in the conversation at the office, she tried to manage it with using a different tool and that the child was very important here.

When parents see that we really take into consideration the needs of the child it does something with the cooperation between us, it is no longer only about economy. When you ask for the children, you create a good atmosphere in the conversation. We are not an office that is assisting only with economic matters, and just make demands to activity. We are an office that should safeguard the family as a whole.

Veronica explains that she thinks cooperation is very important. She explains how involving the child, in the meaning of talking about the child and showing interest in the child towards the parents can help her in building a good collaboration with the parents. Firstly, this statement shows how Veronica highlights the importance of user-participation; it's not just important, but necessary to make the parents feel that they are doing this together. Secondly, she points to that it might be easier to cooperate with the parents if the case is not only about economy, but rather focusing on the child. By making the child a part of the conversation, indirectly she feels that she can make the case less about economy and thereby avoid that she appear too much as someone putting demands on the family determining the economic outcome, leaving the user as someone dependent on the caseworker. Veronicas thoughts can be closely linked to the well-known tension between "help and control" in social work, discussed for instance in Lødemel (1997) and Lipsky's findings claiming that: "*Client's seek services and benefits, street-level bureaucrats seek control over the process of providing them*" (Lipsky 2010, 60).

Pernille:

When asked about the children's position in the mapping of the family's needs, Pernille explains that:

Yes, we do the mapping with the parent. We never have a conversation when the children are present". I think that it is about the family's economy. The adults should be responsible for that. Often the children are in school or kindergarten too. So I think, to which extent should children be a part of something that is for grown-ups? I think that she (read: the mother) is the one that should talk her child's case, and safeguard her child and as a mum I think you would do that. Children should be allowed to be children.

Pernille uses the topics discussed in the conversation as an explanation for why she does not think it is necessary to involve the child. Children should not be a part of economic matters because this is the grown-ups responsibility. My informant points here to the earlier mentioned periphery position of children in relation to social services (Stolanowski and Tvetene 2005, 59). The way I understood my informant she did not mean that this was a way of involving the child, but that involving the child was not necessary because the information

she got about the children through the mum was enough for her because the mum would focus on her children's needs through their conversation.

It can look like since children do not themselves participate in paid work, and since the adult is the one responsible for this and the only one that can be claimed accountable, children do not have to be involved in matters concerning social assistance. Another important point made here is that the mum will talk the child's case. This can be understood as way of focusing on the child's needs, and could be understood as a way of involving the child. However, according to Sommer et.al (2010) difference between the concepts of child-perspective and children's perspective, this will be the adult's taking a child-perspective and cannot count as involving the child him- /herself.

The way Pernille percepts children's participation here is also closely linked to Sommer et. al (2010, vi) understanding of what they define a *child perspective*, or to "*direct adult's attention towards an understanding of children's perceptions, experiences, and actions in the world*". In relation to the importance and understanding of *children's perspectives*, it can be questionable whether Pernille will get the information that she needs through only asking the adults about what the child's needs. Lastly, there is a link to children's protection here.

A bit later on, Pernille adds:

It is nothing within Social services to have a conversation with the children. Then it is mostly youths coming to talk to us about their own case.

Pernille, by saying this, describes that she does not see it as a part of her role as a family social worker to talk to the children. This can be linked to several reasons: 1) she thinks as earlier described that children should be protected from economic matters. 2) she thinks that the parents are the only one that she can make demands and she sees it as an important part of her job to further add responsibility to the parents themselves: 3) it can be a witness of lack of knowledge about children's rights and position in the family. That further develops into a disclaim where the family social worker forgets her responsibilities concerning the child.

As a follow-up question, I asked Pernille whether she thinks that there is an age-limit when children should participate and not. Pernille explains:

No, I do not think so, but I think it is the parents who should decide. If they take their children to a conversation, it is not like the children can't attend the conversation,

but usually, they come alone. It is also that in our age group most kids are at school or in the kindergarden, so it is very seldom that we talk to them, and of course, sometimes I could wish that we had a chance to do that, that we could observe the children and the parents together to see how they are together.

Pernille thoughts: It can look like since children do not themselves participate in paid work, and since the adult is the one responsible for this and the only one that can be claimed accountable, children do not have to be involved in matters concerning social assistance. Another important point made here is that the mum will talk the child's case. This can be understood as way of focusing on the child's needs, and could be understood as a way of involving the child. However, according to Sommer et.al (2010) difference between the concepts of child-perspective and children's perspective, this will be the adult's taking a child-perspective and cannot count as involving the child him- /herself.

In addition to her explanation of how she gets information about the child, Pernille added a new thought to her description:

Yes, we map the children in our conversation with the parents. What does the child do? What school does he/she go to, but we don't have conversations with the children. So it's clear, the parents can tell us their own story.

She is clear about the fact that the social welfare unit gets information about the child through the parents, but at the same time, she is putting a question mark about if the information they are getting from the parents are the "true story". Pernille, within this description shows a degree of skepticisms, and she describes a dilemma in children's participation within NAV, where she feels that she is finding herself doubting if having a *child perspective* is enough. In the worst scenario, this can mean that parents are hiding the reality, but it can also mean that there is some doubt whether all parents are able to understand how their children experience this life-situation, even if they try their level best doing so.

Pernille's thought addresses a dilemma which she feels in her work and addresses the relevance of previous research like Sommer et. al (2010), questioning the difference between child perspective and children's perspective. As Sommer et.al (2010) concept does Pernille addresses that having a child perspective might not give us children's perspectives on their life-situation.

I think that we have to do that to, because very often the parents shares issues that the children should not witness. Many of the parents become aware of it themselves; right after they have disclosed a piece of information, which the child ought not to have heard, but some of the parents does not have that limit. That is why we do not want the children to attend the meetings here at NAV, but if they bring something that we think is about the child that can be anything, then we should go on home-visits on the next meeting eventually. And then preferably with the child present.

Pernille highlights here the importance of protecting the child. In the statement it seems that she see it as her responsibility to protect the child, when the parents are not doing it. She talks about harmful information for the child. She also highlights that the setting is quite important. And that she thinks of the NAV-office as a place where she and the parents can talk about this challenging themes. The was Pernille tells, when whe wants to see something about the child, that has to happen in the home, and not in the NAV-office.

Hedda:

Hedda expresses that she finds out about the children's needs through asking the parents about the children and using her common sense about what children need:

You know what children need, so we do not have to talk to children to understand that it is nice for the child to go to football, for instance. We do not involve them personally, and that is something I do not think that we should do either, but we always ask about the children and what after-school activities they are going to, and try to motivate the parent to let the so that the children attend some activities.

Hedda says that she think that there is a general knowledge among family social workers about what is the child's best and that she uses this knowledge to find out what the child needs. Comparing this to Pernille's thoughts above, we see that they can have a different understanding of their role when it comes to this. While Hedda points to general knowledge among family social workers, Pernille puts on the parents the responsibility of knowing what is in the best interest of the child. This statement can be seen in relation to the dilemma of who should be responsible for the child; the parents or the state?

Another important issue here is whether it is right to see the family as one unit. As (Strandbu 2007, 23) highlights; *"The child is a part of the family, but the child is also an independent l*

with its own rights and needs that the state shall protect. In most cases the parents and children interests and needs can be united in the family as an institution, but not always”.

However, it looks like both Hedda and Pernille highlight that the perspectives they get are given from adults. Above Pernille was putting a question-mark regarding if this is sufficient. Hedda seems to think that it is sufficient, and she brought two reasons explaining her thoughts:

I think that children should be protected from worries about housing and economy. That is not something you should not do when you are a child, I think. It's not necessarily stupid that children learn that their parents cannot afford things, but we often demand from the parents that they make an effort to take what is their and I think that it is okay for children to be protected from seeing their parents in that situation to.

Both these can be related to efforts of protecting the child. Hedda thinks that children should not be involved because children should not have to worry about economy. She also highlights their role as “control” (help and control: Lødemel 1997), having power over the parents. Children should be protected from seeing the power NAV has on the parents.

At the same time she addresses another dilemma:

We can see the children and we can mean that they should do things in a different way, but there is not really something we can do.

She also adds that there is a great limit in NAV’s “control”. Hedda explained here that she sometimes feels a bit powerless, because she might see things in a family that she would like to change, but if the parents after getting her advices do not change, there is nothing more she can do. She uses this partly to legitimize the involvement within each family.

As a follow-up question, I asked Hedda whether she thinks that there are some situations where it would be important for her to talk to the child:

No, I don't think so, not for us. But when I worked as a teacher at a school I saw that as a teacher it would be useful to talk to NAV.

We see here how Hedda uses her own experiences to reflect upon the issues raised. For her, talking to children is not described as a part of her role as a NAV family social worker. She

highlights instead that NAV has important knowledge that could be useful for other instances as the schools.

Maja

Like the other informants, Maja puts focus on the importance of after-school activities and their possibility to cover some of the expenses for kindergarden or “Aktivitetsskolen” (AKS) so that the parents are able to let the children attend after-school activities. When asked about how she understands the child-perspective in relation to her work with families Maja relates this to after-school-activities’.

Child perspective... It is in a way three years since we should know what each child is doing in relation to sports and other activities. We ask the parents and have a conversation with them about this. We ask if both boys and girls are attending after-school activities, or whether the girls have to be home instead. We are very focused on that we would very much like that children attend activities and at the same time go to kindergarden and AKS.

Maja’s description of child perspective explains that there has been a change within the office the last years concerning the attention they give to what the children are doing and their efforts to finding out about the individual child within the family. This shows that the child has become a more important focus within the conversation with the parents and that it’s the family social worker’s role to find out how the parent’s prioritize the children. On the other hand, having a child perspective for Maja, is highly connected to if the child is attending after-school activities or not. Understanding child perspective in this way can be closely linked to Kvello (2008, 29-30)’s thought around that user- participation can be understood as that one try to have a perspective about what one think that is best for the child, and try to safeguard those things one perceives is the child’s wish, but that this can’t be said to be the same as a “child’s perspective” – because that is something that only the child can have (Kvello 2008, p. 29-30).

Like Hedda, Maja is also questioning if NAV is the right place to find out more about the situation of the child:

I think that if it is something special with a family, there are other places where it’s easier to discover it than here.

Maja's thoughts can also be related to NAV's role as helping parents with economy and that children are not seen as a part of this matter. It also points to the challenges NAV can meet when trying to find out more about the child's situation, linked to issues of confidentiality, and that there is no arena in connection to NAV where it is possible to see how the children are, because involving children needs to be done by seeing them in the every-day-life.

We do not want the children to be translating here at NAV. There are many strange things that we are talking about like fraud, lice and scabies. It is not good that a young child comes back to school and have been talking about completely different things than what is normal for children.

Maja was not the only one mentioning that they have experienced that parents had brought children to the conversation at NAV because they need someone to translate for them. If we remember, earlier in this chapter, Frida (in the other office) also talked about this. As they both said, NAV uses professional interpreters that every public office is entitled to use if they need. However they found it hard sometimes to assess this information from their users, and that it could be within these situations that children were taken to the conversation because the parents knew that they were not going to be able to understand the family social worker.

For Maja it is important to protect the child from hearing about topics that is not normal for children. Earlier Frida pointed to this and saw her responsibility as a family social worker in relation to not giving children too much information about adult-life and to secure that the parent's did not lose their authority. We can see here that children's possibilities to be involved can be limited by different factors, and that these two informants feel a great responsibility not to harm the children in any way by letting them be too much involved.

Maja is also concerned about intergenerational welfare dependency, that has been highlighted by many as a big challenge in relation to childhood poverty. Maja sees it as her role to inform and educate youths to see their own responsibility when it comes to getting a job.

Many of the people who are clients here are working, but they need supplements to their income. Many of them get additional support for children and the worst period for these families is when the children turn 18, one by one. Because then they lose support, and after a while we start saying that the youths have to start working. It's also in a way a bit educative for them, and many of the young people they would

prefer not to do work, Because when mom and dad have not worked so why should they work?

Maja's concerns here are about how the parent's present situation as dependents on social assistance may have negative influence on their children when they grow up. This faired link between childhood poverty and social services has been an issue of big concerns and build on the belief presented for instance by Epland and Kirkebergs (2010) when they highlight that "What income the parents have as grown-ups, is influenced by what kind of household you grow up in. Children that belong to a household with single parents, low-income, are receivers of social assistance, bad working-connection and low educational parents, will have a higher risk of belonging to the low income-classes as grown-ups compared to other children.

Maja seems, with this in mind, that it is best to protect the children from knowing anything about the economic matters. I critical point here however is the question of how we can expect that a child will understand the reasons for why their parents got help, if they are not involved? Can we expect that they will understand why they have to work? If what the child knows is that the parents are getting money from NAV, it could make them grow up thinking that this is how it is supposed to be. When Hart (1992, 5) refers to *the "... importance of an active participation where children need to be involved to be able to handle challenges and become responsible adult citizens when they grow up"*, this could be one of the important reasons for his understanding.

We have seen in this chapter that children's possibilities for active participation in this first conversation at the NAV office are very limited. Children's perspectives within this settings is rare. All the informants seems however to show concerns about how the child is, and focuses on getting information about the child through the parents. Having a child-perspective is seen in relation to having a child focus within the mapping of the family and throughout the conversation with the parents and a lot of focus is put on giving the children a possibility to attend after-school activities. Throughout the conversations with my informants, I felt that some of them had question marks regarding whether it would be better to involve the child, because they were not always sure if the information they got from the parents were enough to know about the child. Others expressed that involving the child was not a part of their responsibility and saw this as either the parents' responsibility or other instances like the children's school, working closer to children in their everyday-life. We see that children's

small degrees of active involvement of the child within the first conversations are in a great sense legitimized by the family social workers responsibility to protect the child.

7. Settings for Children's Participation

Through the interviews I had with my informants, the setting for involvement of children where often brought as an issue. Even if there were no regulations forbidding the child to accompany the parents to the conversation at the NAV-office, it seemed like a "silent" compliance between the parent and the family social workers that the children were not supposed to accompany the parents to the conversations. Even though some would say that having a child-perspective, is seeing the child and being concerned about his/her need it others would say that children are not involved before they are talked to, and given a real chance to bring their own perspectives on board. During my conversation with the informants and later during my analysis, I discovered differences in how my informants related to this in their work. However, all my informants expressed that if they met and talked to the child, this was happening in the family's home, on home-visits, or as some said, within girls- or boys groups. In this session, I will therefore look on how my informants described home-visits as a setting for involvement of children and explore more closely the actual position of the child in these home-visits. In the latest part I will look into the boys- and girls groups.

One of the most frequently mentioned reasons for why my informants wanted to go on home-visits was to see and meet the children.

7.1 "We do talk to the children only when we are on home-visits"

Lotte describes home-visits as an important setting for children's involvement:

When I finally go on home-visits, I try to do it in the afternoon, because I think it's very interesting to try to come when the children are at home, specifically to see and talk to the children, to see what relation the children have to their parents and to get a broader picture. Immediately when we come home to our client we see a completely different world than we have seen when we had the conversation with them at the office.

Lotte explained to me that home-visits are something that they do sometimes, but mostly not. However when she finally goes on home-visits she highlights the importance of the children being present. She talks both about seeing and talking to the children as ways to find out how

the child is, but highlights the importance of observing the relationship between the parents and the children.

Yes. Home is very personal, and I think that the home can tell a lot about the family. So that is something that I think it is important, to hear with them if they are going to school, what subjects they like. What they use to do in their free time. Do they have friends? All those things, but then again it is very limited, in relation to the parents and what role the parents wants us to have and what we can dig in to.

When observing the child, Lotte finds it important to do it within the family's home. Here they can talk and she can look on their things. The topics that she discuss with the child concerns school, and what they like to do when they are not in school. We can see here a concern about how the child is in his/her everyday setting. However we can see a limit here in relation to the topics discussed, she is concerned about what the parents thinks is okay to talk about, and do not want to dig into something that she is not supposed to talk about, something that may could interrupt the private relation between the parent and the child.

Lotte:

Sometimes we are on home-visits, then we meet the children and then we usually talk to them a bit. What they like to do, and things like that. We are also very clear on that the children should not be involved in this with the social services. Because I think that, it should be up to the parents themselves to tell or not tell their children that they are in need of help from the public, and then us to clarify with the mum in advance what role she mean that we should have when we are coming home to them.

Lotte highlights the parents responsibility over the child, a responsibility that she is not supposed to interfere.

Veronica:

We use to go on home visits, and that is the place we mostly meet the children in the families. It is a completely different atmosphere when you come home to people, and the children are sitting there and the children are freer and run around and they are like on their home field then. Then you see a bit about how the parents and the children relate to each other are together, how the children are. How the bedroom looks like, what the home look like.

Home-visits are explained to be a location where the caseworker can meet the child and sometimes talk to the child too, but the topics for the conversations with children seems to be based on child-friendly things telling as little as possible about why the family social worker is there. Topics like what they like to play with, what they like to do and where they go to school are highlighted as common topics. This is in line with Johannesdottir's (1997) descriptions of home-visits in the child welfare sector says that even though the home is an arena where the caseworker can see and meet the child and see the home-environment of the children, the degree in which children are actively participating within this the home is very limited. However, talking to the child about the child's experiences does not seem to have a central place in the home-visits. The reasons for why this is the case seem to be more focused on protecting the child in my findings than Johannesdottir whose focus is on the lack of competence and children's loyalty to the parent.

Lotte brings interesting perspectives on why she don't feel that she should talk to children, but involve them through seeing them:

Maybe we cannot ask directly how the children think it is to be in a family that doesn't have a lot of money, because we don't know how the family chooses to dispose their money. There are some where almost everything goes to the children and others were nothing goes to the children. It's very different from family to family too. And then I also think how they experience it. It's not for sure that all our children feel they are living in a poor family, and then I think that is not something we should assume that they feel. However, I think that on home-visits we ought to ask about after-school activities, what they do, what they like, etc. Through all these things we at least see them.

Lotte highlights here that NAV family social workers also have a responsibility in being critical in relation to how they present themselves in relation to the children. Johannesdottir (1997) also found this when she saw in her findings that the social worker did not want to present him/herself as a social worker in relation to the children within the home visits. Within this point the responsibility for the child is clearly put on the parents, and the family social worker have to be careful to not interfering this. Not bringing children's perspectives here is legitimized by not interfering this responsibility.

Frida explains why she thinks it is better to go on home-visits than asking the children to come to NAV-office:

We have been talking about that when we come on home-visits we should have had a conversation with the parents in advance, on how and as whom we present our self as, because it is not always that the parents are open about it. Some parents are open, and say it's the same and that the children knows that they are getting money from NAV anyway, but others think its unpleasant and then if we ask the children to come here, it would give them a feeling of being different in a way. Therefore, it's better if we come on home-visit and that we already have made an agreement with the parents and what we are going to say, who we are and what we work with.

Anne Berit: Should the children be protected from something to?

And sometimes we have had late home-visits to be sure that the youth in Secondary high school has been able to come home. Beacuase mostly it is the smallest children that is home if we go on early home-visits. and its gjerne there we talk a bit to the children and get to say hi to them and all those things. and if we think tha there is family issues that we think that it is so heavy that the children should be protected then we talk about this with the parents before we go on the home-visit.

Inst. i think that your son should not witness that we can take it another time when we are at the office. When I come home, it's mostly to visit, that we take care of them in that way. Then I always thinks it's fun to talk to the children. How they are at school, many is very shy, while others are used to tell. Ask them about how school is, homework if its youths. What is your plan, are you going to take secondary high school, did you think about getting a summer job? Talking about these things I feel that we makes ourselves less scary in a way.

Hedda about the question if home-visits:

Do you think that if there where more time for home-visits, that it could be easier to se the children then?

Yes, then we are in their home, but then it's about that there is not really something we can do, It's more that. We can see the children and mean that they should do things in a different way, but it is not really anything we can control. We can give advices, but

in the end it is the parents who have to prioritize and decide. But, maybe we see more what needs they have when we are home.

Hedda focuses on her lack of power to do something. She also reflects upon the parent/child relationship in relation to her own position as a family social worker, as Pernille and Lotte already has done, but she sees it from a different point of view. Hedda seems to highlight that if she did find out something about the child, she as a family social worker does not have power, or are not even allowed to further this information, she describes that she it can be hard to do something at all.

It is both, actually, but we do have normal office-time, so when we are on home-visits the children are not there, they are in kindergarten or at school. So it is rare that we see the children, and it is mostly the parents we should talk to. But we see how the living-environment is and that is something we are concerned about and if we get worried then we have to report it to the child welfare services.

This is in line with previous research focusing on children as dependents Nasman, need for protection from problems in society (Hart 1992).

Maja tells that they do talk to children when they are on home-visits, but that this there is some uncertainty about if the children are really the one “talking»:

We do talk to them when we are on home-visits. Then we talk to the children, but in many cases they have been told what to say in advance.

Maja explained that she thinks home-visits is the best way to find out the real situation of the family, because here they can see much more about the family. She also described that the home-visits can be a chance for the parent to make a scene, according to what they think the caseworker wants to see or to show as much bad things as possible to be sure that the caseworker understand that they really need help, but that the home-visit is crucial to find out about this.

Maja tells about the importance of home-visits but that it is hard because of the time-pressure:

I am sure that it would be for the best for the child. Because the more home-visits we have and the more we see that they are missing in their home, the more we can see if it's because of bad economy or if its more about the way the parents prioritize when

using the money. We find out those things when we are there, but we do not have time. It is just in emergency cases that we go there and go around with a magnifying glass. It is very stupid! We have many families.

Maja explains that she think it would be better for the child if the caseworkers had more time to go on home visits. At the same time, her example shows that the important reason for going on home-visit is to see the home-environment. (Johannesdottir 1997). This is also a very good example on rationalizing, as (Lipsky 2010, 100) said: “*Street-level practice often reduces the demand for services through rationing*”.

Maja:

It's on home-visits that we can find out how the children are. But, then I think that the children spend much of their time in kindergarten and they attend school and they see the children a lot more, so I have to say that I lean on that they pick up these things at the children's schools.

And that is something I could surely have wished for that sometimes I could have done. That one could observe children and parents together to see more how they are, or observed the interaction between them, but it is very limited.

7.2 Girl- and boy's groups- a free after-school activity

As we have seen previously one of the important goals in the Action plans against poverty is to improve the children's situation in the time before the families' income is improved. One of the ways to do this is to offer children in low-income families free-after school activities. Mostly these free after-school activities are arranged by volunteer organizations and NAV's role is to inform about these activities in the meeting with low-income families. However, in one of the offices, NAV was themselves responsible for coordinating girls- and boys groups, an after-school activity for the children they had seen did not have other opportunities. One of my informants had this job before becoming a caseworker, and one was working there now. All the three informants from the office having these groups mentioned this as a way they felt they could involve children, directly. Through activities and discussions in these groups, they could find out more about what kind of challenges the youths had and then use this information indirectly in their previous work with the children families' cases. One of the groups was for boys between 10-13 and another one for boys between 13-16 years. The third group was for girls going to high school.

These groups had been started because they had seen that especially girls with immigrant background stopped attending after-school activities when they finished primary school and were explained to be an alternative to an after-school activity for those children that did not have any other activity.

Lotte explains how the girls- and boys groups started and what the idea behind these groups was:

It's all the family social workers that prioritize who they think should attend the girls-group, an assessment based on information we have about their life and where we think there is a need, either because there is something special with the family, sickness or other things that can be bothersome (belastende) for them.

Before recruiting children to the girls- and boys groups we go on home-visits and then we talk to the child that is relevant for the group and with the parents.

So it started with trying to get the girls out of their home, at the same time within secure conditions and that they were picked and followed back home, and that they should get a place where they can talk about things that it's hard to talk about at home.

How are children involved in the girls-groups?

The girls-group is for girls in secondary high-school. Here we have seen a different need than in the boys group. The girls show a bigger interest in having conversations together than the boys who wants do different activities. We have seen that the girls need to talk about things that they don't have any other grown-ups to talk about. They have a chance to do that in that group. We have different ways that we do it, but it can be that the girls put notes in a box anonymously, with themes they want to talk about.

Frida explains that it can be a challenge that many of these cases are also cases within child welfare services and that it can be hard to hear the children is perspectives and at the same time keep the information because they want the children to be free to talk in these groups:

We do not want these groups to be a place for observation in relation to child welfare services, even if we are very clear on our disclosure duty to child welfare services

concerning cases of violence and abuse. It is sometimes challenging that we want the children to be freely in the groups and our duty as social workers, and how concerned do we have to be before warning? We do not want to break our trust with the girls.

Frida also explains that because of this it can be hard to use the information from the groups directly within the children's cases, but that the groups give them more information about what youths think and experience and what things that is important for them: Through these groups we get to know some of the children and we get a more general picture of how they really are.

Lotte explains that presenting herself as an employee at NAV is not something she does if the children are not asking themselves:

I don't know if their parents have told them, but I'm not necessarily telling the children that I come from social services. That the children are there because the parents have contact with NAV, is not necessarily something I present for them. If they ask, they ask, but I think that is a way of normalizing their attendance.

Frida also tells that the groups gave another result for the youths attending:

We have some funds every year through the project KOM, giving summer job for youths, and then they get salary that they can keep themselves. This is not money that we use for our income estimates so they go out in the other end, and to these jobs we have now decided that the girls and boys above the age of 14 should be prioritized for these groups.

Lotte also explains how she thinks that working in the girl-group gives her more space to get to know the children and that it's easier to get a different kind of direct contact with the youths in these groups:

In the girls- and boys groups there are more room to talk about different things, with the children. Like in the girls-group, we discuss themes like family, economy and school. It's always very interesting and I think it is useful for us as a department to have these groups because it can give us an idea on how it is out there, how it is in their homes. So even if we can't go around and say that this girl tells this and this we can learn about what is important for them, more about the general things.

Veronica explains how she thinks that her experience with working in the girls-group has affected her in her previous work as a caseworker:

Because I worked in the girls-group when I started her, I feel that I have a complete different view when I am following up the families, but also when I am discussing with the other caseworkers. I feel that me and the other people who has been working in the girl group we are fast on thinking about the children, maybe faster than many of the other caseworkers.

The girls-group could be a good example on what NAV could do to increase children's participation based on children's perspectives. For many children within this situation it will be very important to meet other children that experience the same. This could also reduce the children's thoughts of feeling different and could also build the child's self-esteem and empower the child.

Even though all my informants talked about the importance of the home-visits in relation to finding out about the child, I got an impression that going on home-visits was something that was not done, in most cases and also that the number of home-visits could be related to the importance the individual caseworker put into seeing the child. In the second part I will briefly present the work within girls- and boys groups, a practice that was only used by one of the offices, but described as important for their work for understanding the children's own experiences. Several of my informants were asking for more time to go on home-visits so they could have a direct contact with the child and see the relation between the parent and the child within their home-environment. They categorized the information they got on the home-visits as "the best" and also highlighted that this was the place where they actually could talk to the child. This points to home-visits as an important setting where children right to be heard can be met.

8. "It should not be a type of bingo"

Both Norway's Constitution § 14 and CRC regulates children's rights to be heard in cases that concerns them. Family social workers are obligated to follow laws and regulations both on national level and on an institution level, such as the Social Service Act.

During my interviews and then later on when doing the analysis of the material, I recognized that there is a quiet big difference between how my informants describe children's

participation in relation to their work. This could be linked to a difference in resources, level of childhood poverty, type of measures, resources and projects in the two districts, placed in different parts of Oslo. However, looking on the statistical background on the level of children in low-income families in the two districts it was a bit odd to find that the office placed in the district with lowest proportion, was the office where I saw most efforts to involve the children. As my material, also shows there are different interpretations within the same office. This makes me think that the structural differences cannot be the whole story. In this chapter, I want to explore what my material can tell us about the reasons for these variations.

With using Lipsky's (2010) concept about street-level bureaucracy, I will in the first part discuss the discretionary matters of the laws and capacity issues as one possible reason

8.1 «We have been struggling a bit to see it in a way»

Remembering the laws informing about children's participation, UNCRC and Social Service Act in chapter 2 we will now look closer into the family social workers position in relation to putting these laws into practice. As Terum said *"the social worker are in a position of authority where the distribution of the welfare states public benefits are central"* (Terum 2003, 84). Within this authority position, Lipsky highlights the formal structures of the street-level bureaucrats, arguing that street-level bureaucrats make decisions dependent on these formal structure, the time frame of their work. Within this frame, the street-level bureaucrats make choices with reference to the Social Service Act, they have to decide what to do, how to do it and how much resources that should be used. Because the street-level bureaucrats finds themselves in a constant time-pressure Lipsky (2010) highlights that it's important to remember that laws are incorporated and formulated, but it is the street-level bureaucrats who implement the politics.

The control the formal structures of the street-level bureaucrats seems to have within Lipsky's concept was especially interesting for me. I was therefore interested in exploring my informants own descriptions of the process from understanding the laws in relation to their descriptions of what they did do in practice. A part of the interview I had with my informant's concerned topics as thoughts about the formulation of laws important in their work, discretionary matters and their thoughts about how they thought that both structural matters and

the family social workers subjective opinions could be related to children's possibilities for involvement.

When talking to Frida about how she relates to the child's right to be heard in her work she said that:

We have been struggling a bit to see it in a way. Yes, children should be seen and heard, but it says nothing about how we should do it in social services, social services is basically for adults, because they need money and then there has been added something to our service. We constantly have a sort of challenge that we are not the social welfare service, while we are doing child welfare tasks, at least it was child welfare tasks before.

Frida is clear on that there are no specific guidelines on how children should be seen and heard in NAV and that this can be a challenge. She feels that social services are basically for adults and relates this to NAV's responsibility in economic support. Frida also says that there has been a development in relation to NAV's responsibilities changed from being about economy to having to think more comprehensive (find reference on this). However, it can be hard to know how to use the children's rights to be heard in their work. Frida's explanation shows that even if this change has found place there is still seems to be challenges in relation to how to put it out in practice. She also describes that there is a constant "krysstjenester" with social welfare services and that she doesn't know how to relate to tasks she feels is too similar to child welfare tasks.

We talk about that children should be heard! That is something that we discuss because we report on it. Therefore, that is something we discuss on meetings regularly, how we do it and how we can say that we do it. And I see that that is something we are actually doing through meeting the oldest children and having these girls- and boys- groups.

Pernille:

Det er jo litt det som er med sosialtjenesten at vi ligger litt sånn mellom barken og veden. På en måte så skal vi jo forvalte et lovverk i forhold til hva det er de på en måte har krav på. Hva er det du er berettiget? Og samtidig hva vi tenker at det er rimelig at du får.

8.2 The law, discretionary matters and capacity

Discretion is one of the most important working-attributes for family social workers as well as other groups of social workers. In relation to the incorporation of laws and regulations, they are confirmed, but it is NAV as welfare-organizations and the street-level bureaucrats that implement the politics (Lipsky 2010). I will here highlight the issue of discretion through the varying descriptions my interviewees seems to have on children's participation. This was especially visible between the two offices, but also within the same office.

Det ene kontoret i mye større grad dro veksler på samarbeid med eksterne grupper og skoler og også hadde egne jente- og gutte- grupper der fokus var akkurat det og involvere barn, ikke direkte til saken hos NAV, men gjennom å snakke om viktige tema sammen.

Hedda and Maja argues that social workers are not doing different things:

Hedda:

Yes, but then there is a circular that elaborates the legislation, and then it depends on which line the office settles on, because it is different from place to place. The subsistence norm is not fixed, so that is up to the different offices, but is within on office it is discussed. So it is not supposed to be like that one family social worker does one thing and another does another thing. That is also why there is a manager that approves the cases to. So it might look like there is done different reviews, but that is because you may not know all the families equally and know what lies behind the decision.

At the same time, another challenge can be how and who to define what is normal. As Fløtten (2009,17) address it "... it is not a must that we all have the same understanding of what should be put in the category of normal living standard, or what is a reasonable activity level". This consideration is important for the topic of this thesis because it can give rise to different understandings within the implementation process.

Maja:

We are social workers, so we are thinking very similar and are in a way similar raised. We try to see all the possibilities of what this family needs and if I should have seen a colleague's decision in relation to my decision, it's pretty similar. We can write

it differently, but the money that comes out or what is being done in a case is quite similar.

Social workers are different and think differently about children, therefore can to much discretion both harm and secure children's involvement

Veronica:

It should not be a type of bingo who you get as a social worker. Right? I think that is very wrong, but many of us are parents, many of us are not parents and all this, but it should not be a crucial part of interpreting a families situation. One must keep an eye on the same things, one should see the same things, and everyone should see the children. It is not just that we are going to follow the CRC, but we should see the comprehensiveness in that if a child is not good, how can we expect the parents to be able to think about something else?

The main strategy of fighting poverty in Norway has been and still is work (Harsløf og Seim 2008:30) within this framework children's possibilities to participate is on risk. Because we have seen in the review of the laws concerning children's participation that it is not clear on when or how children should be participate we find ourselves in a context where the family social workers seems to have a very high degree of freedom in deciding when and how to do things. The social worker has to find out what should be done, how it should be done and how much resources that should be used. This situation is based on a relative autonomy, and it is expected to use discretion (Lipsky 2010).

They also got questions about discretionary matters and how they meant that both structural matters and the family social worker's subjective opinions and values influenced children's possibilities for involvement.

I experience, I think there has been a process. I started working here after the family department was established, but regarding our role. I think that there are many that can think it's a bit strange that we start asking a lot of questions about their children. Why should we know, and why is it interesting for us? So I think it's a restructuring process for them to suddenly start talking about their children. I'm here for money, sort of!

Lotte problematizes here the diffuse position in relation to other things than economy NAV they have.

Yes, at least it is not that square. I Think that it could be a bit more square in a positive direction for the children. Because I think it is very different or I have an experience, that it is very different from place to place how big the focus on children is. Therefore, I think it would be nice if it was a bit clearer. But I like to be able to decide a bit myself, so it is both.

Lotte.....

Yes, and that is what is a bit scary. That I think that, this is not something we have to do, but you choose to do it, and both things can be defined inside the law. I think there should have been a bit more focus on the children within the law. That would be very good.

I think that it is both! It is negative because it runs on individual basis that not everyone gets what they should get or could have got. At the same time, I like it. I like the freedom to think individually, because it is so important. And then there are many things that we have to do after law, and then there are some things that we can do, and then it's about time and resources.

Lotte's statements are in line with Lipsky (2010) when he argue that discretion is necessary.

Lotte:

But I think it is very nice, because I think that for instance with the girls-group and when we go home to families and in a conversation where you have kind of no leashes. That this should not be about economy, but it can be about how you organize your day. When you wake up, who takes the children to kindergarden. All these things, right? When you have these conversations, I think that it gives us a lot of important information, both in targeted work but also how we can work towards work and improve the situation of the family.

Anne Berit: But do you think it can be a bit random who gets support?

For the children it might be like that, but it is hard to say. To put it that way, the extreme cases, where there are many different issues I think those are treated

equally... (...) But on those cases that are a bit (...) where things are running in a way, I think that it can be more unequal. That is the group where there is most ine quality.

Here Frida points to that the cases where it is hardest to secure an equal treatment of the children is the cases which are a bit blurred, and the children seems to be okay. Because in those cases where it's really a problem, all case-workers do something with it, but where you really have to spend time to find out about the situation it is more a matter of discretion and where the individual case-worker puts the focus.

The informants are reflecting upon time-pressure as an important limitation in relation to children's participation. All the informants talked about that they do not have enough time with each of the families.

Pernille explains about the visibility about the child-perspective:

I think that we are not equally good in writing about the children in the decision It is very focused on the parents and that they should attend activities, tiltak and then be able to get work. It is the main objective of the Social Services Act to get people into work, and that is our main focus. Then within families with greater challenges, we map the children's life-situation. But in what degree does the decision show that this has been done, I think that is about the workload.

Within this she refers to a lack of time to each family. She explains how the time-pressure effect her in her work and can lead to a difference between the family social workers in relation to assessments of the families and make these assessments random to.

I see challenges in the capacity, but we can meet the children if we want and we also do that. But then it is also about the children's expectations and what possibilities we have to influence if there is hassles that the child mention that is outside our responsibility.

Talking about challenges when it comes to involving the child Frida talks about both time-constraints and that she think it can be hard to talk to the child because if there is something, then it's anyway hard for her to do something with. As we saw earlier, Hedda also had these fair of finding out something about the child that she don't know what to do with. Save the Children has been critical towards this views from the NAV that they mean shows a lack of knowledge about children and not knowing how or hwo to tell. Save the Children has several

times asked for communal action plans that contains a plan for developing good cooperation routines between det public offices as child welfare services, NAV and schools. They also highlighted that these action plans must include education for NAV social workers giving them childhood competence and knowledge about what consequences poverty has for children (NRK 2015).

Yes, and then it's about the number of cases. Our primary tasks are to make the parents's self reliant. And then it is about what being self-reliant means, is it only about economy, or is it about other things? It's a bit hard, but the we also have an action plan where there is also som focus on the children.

Frida here legitimizes the way she do her things with that the children's challenges are someone else's problems, and because this is hard, and she also don't have time, maybe it's easier not to talk to them.

Frida also adds another thought in relation to this:

Then we can get the feedback that, you are not child welfare services, so now you have to calm down.

Anne Berit: Where is this feedback coming from?

From the management. What we actually get money to do and how, but at the same time we are supposed to contribute to normalization, we are supposed to prevent, and that is what we feel that we are doing with the girls- and boys-groups. That is prevention, and then we also have "community worker" for some few children that we also think are helping to prevent.

Frida highlights here that she uses her own experience and office-culture in her assessments. Frida express here that she sometime feel a pressure from the management, and that these pressure is not always the same as her own perceptions of what should be done.

8.3 "We are also different"

Terum (2003) showed in his study that the caseworkers disagrees about what values that shall be emphasized when the cases are assessed on a discretionary basis and that they have different views on normative issues concerning the level of living-conditions that NAV should support with.

I was asking Lotte whether she thinks that she and her colleagues have the same perception of what should be the focus:

Yes, I think so, but we are also different, so I think that there are some things that I am more engaged in, that someone else might think is not that important. And then there is something they think is very important that I don't think is that important. That is the way it is... but the foundation.... That children shall be seen. It's important that they are fine. All these things I mean that we are all concerned about in my department.

Veronica explains about why she thinks that family social workers do different things

I feel that even in this department we are considering cases in very different ways. We, as family social workers also have different background and we interpret situations in different ways and that affects us in relation to the follow-up in our cases too. Some can be more focused on the economy part than thinking broader and others think broader and are not very good in focusing on the economic challenges itself. It's very different. And therefore I think that it's good that we do share experiences and assessments with each other, and that we should do it even more than we are doing it now.

Veronica here makes a point that can be linked to the importance of the individual values of the family social worker (discuss that she addresses that the different family social workers interpret different things in different ways, and that she think that this can affect the degree of focus on the child. Also discuss of Veronica thinks that the degree of difference between individual values can be limited if the family social workers work closer together and share experiences.

Anne Berit: So you're saying that, legislation in some contexts feels like it is too vague? Yes. And it's a bit hard to know how to use the law in your daily-life doings?

Frida:

Yes, and it's probably also why it is so different from office to office, because when do you think that the children are seen and heard? Do you think that it is enough to just talk to parents and ask parents how their children are, and if the parents say that the children are fine, it's okay? Or should we listen a little more, talk to the children

themselves? Now we have not received any training like this type of child conversation and I'm not sure that we shall either. So it is a bit difficult.

Frida highlights here the question of who can talk behalf of the child, and that she thinks this is an important reason for why it is so different from office to office. The caseworker points to different understandings of when they feel that they have seen and listened to the child and asks questions about if it is enough to talk to the parents about the children, or if we are missing something important for the child then?

She also points to that they do not have any training in how to have a conversation with the children, which can be another reason for why it can be hard to talk to the child. There is also uncertainty in this statement concerning if this is something that they a social workers for NAV is supposed to do.

As we have seen in the last three chapters, the interviews with the family social workers in NAV showed a quiet big variation in descriptions of what child participation means. All of the family social workers described that they show interest in and is concerned about finding out about the children's situation. Many of the interviewees I talked to meant that to talk to the parents about the child is enough to find out how the child is. This description were also linked to that they do not mean that it is the social workers role to talk to the children and that it was more relevant for other departments, as the school and child welfare services to talk to children. Some meant that it is not "good" for the child to be involved, and that it was no reason to involve the child in social service matters because the families economy it the grown-ups responsibility. On the other side, some of the other family social workers saw it as their role, and said that they wished that they had better possibilities to let them participate, for instance through going more often on home-visits.

9. Interpreting the found discrepancy between theory and practice

Throughout my findings, we have addressed several ways of understanding children's participation within NAV. The different types of participation the family social workers talked about warried from 1) Thinking about the child, 2) Asking the parents about the child, 3) Seeing the home-environment of the family, 4) Looking on the interaction between the parents and the child within the home, 5) Talking to the child in the home and, 6) Talking to the child in the girls-boys groups.

Reviewing CRC laws related to children's right to participate we have seen that CRC gives important and quiet clear guidelines towards children's right to participate. CRC highlights that states should take into consideration the importance of children's right to participate and children's right to be heard. However, also visible in my findings, the best interest of the child is highlighted. This is important, but does not always lead to a fulfillment of the children's right to participate and be heard. My findings suggest that the best interest of child is often closely linked to the kind of children's participation that concerns:

1) Thinking about the child 2) Asking the parents about the child, and 3) seeing the home-environment of the child.

These kinds of participation are built on having a "child- perspective" with the meaning that Sommer et. al (2010) puts into it. It does not let children participate him/herself, but leaves the child as a passive object, where the information about what they need are formulated from an adult point of view.

Another child's right that was highly visible within my findings was the family social workers focus on protecting the child. The link between the best interest of the child and protecting the child seems to be very close. As earlier highlighted some of the family social workers legitimize their choices in relation to this.

The NAV family social workers highlight several settings within the NAV system that can harm the child:

The possible harm that bringing the child to NAV-office can lead to are highlighted by all my informants. Talking about giving the child a feeling of being different and ashamed is one point. Another one is that in the NAV-office the NAV family social workers seem to have a power over children's parents and children should be protected from seeing anyone having this kind of power over their parents. It can lead to a challenge in the relationship between the child and the parents, because the parents can lose some of their authority over the child.

Some of the NAV family social workers also points to that NAV-office is the place where they talk about economy. My findings confirms Stolanowski and Tvetene's (2005) periphery position of children in social services. Some of the informants talks about that it is their responsibility to protect the child from this "issue that is for grown-ups".

The dilemmas between the different laws in CRC seem therefore to be an important issue. Children's participation in relation to NAV is a difficult and challenging matter. But we can see that there is a dilemma between child-perspective and children's perspectives already from the starting-point of CRC laws.

This dilemma is also visible in the formulation of the laws and regulations in Social Service Act that inform about children's participation. We see that ss Oppedal (2008) highlights "the reasons for this high degree of discretion are in many cases explained by a vague formulation of rules and regulations, giving the individual social worker big influence on how to understand it". Remembering the review of the laws, we saw that the formulation when and how children should participate is vague. Giving the family social workers vague guidelines both how to understand and practice them. One of my informants was clear on the challenge that the formulation of the laws gives her when she said that it would be much easier to know how to use the laws if they were clearer on when and how children should participate.

The formulation of the laws means a lot for how NAV family social workers describe and see their role, but cannot explain all the challenges and possibilities of children's participation. My findings have shown that the complexity of NAV family social workers choices in relation to children's participation can be linked to at least two important topics:

Firstly it can be linked to the formal structures in the NAV-institution and in the NAV family social workers work as street-level bureaucrats. Secondly, it can be linked to whether the family social worker looks upon their role in relation to children's participation as 1) having a *child-perspective* 2) exploring *children's perspectives*.

9.1 Formal structures within NAV

My findings can both support and challenge the concept of street-level bureaucracy. Partly the findings from my interviews confirm the importance of the formal structures that Lipsky (2010) says it is the structures that pushes street-level bureaucrats to do the things they do. For sure, these formal structures are important in determining the street-level bureaucrat's choices because they have to meet the time-pressure they face in the best way. NAV's lack of resources compared to the demand the system puts on them gives the street-level bureaucrats, no other choice than being effective.

9.1.1 Routines and rationing:

However, this is a much-highlighted phenomenon and standardized rules and routines have been implemented to give the clients as equal treatment as possible and make the work more effective. Lipsky (2010) addressed a dilemma: *“The extentional problem for street-level bureaucrats is that with any single client they probably could interact flexibly and responsively. But if they did this with too many clients their capacity to respond flexibly would disappear”* (Lipsky 2010,99). “When confronted with the dilemma of serving more clients or maintaining high quality services, most public managers will experience great pressures to choose in favor of greater numbers at the expense of quality” (Lipsky 2010, 99). However he also points to an resistance when he points to that some social-bureaucrats ...”may devise ways to sabotage management efforts to reduce interactions with clients. The costs of achieving compliance may sometimes be more than managers want to pay (Lipsky 2010,100).

Street-level bureaucracy – a rationing service:

“Street-level bureaucrats often work in situations too complicated to reduce to programmatic formats” (Lipsky 2010, 15) *“Street-level bureaucrats promotes workers’ self-regard and encourages clients to believe that workers hold the key to their well-being”* (Lipsky 2010, 15). For both workers and clients, maintenance of discretion contributes to the legitimacy of the welfare-service state, although street-level bureaucrats by no means establish the boundaries of state intervention (Lipsky 2010, p.15).

Studies have also shown how some children in poor families consciously avoid to invite friends home in fear of showing their friends their poor housing, old furniture and other things (Fløtten 2009). These are important remarks telling a lot about how children experience living in poverty. In these cases, it shows both that children have a feeling of being different when comparing themselves to other children. It also shows a mature child who tries to make a decision according to what he or she’s thinks is the best, sometimes this can also be done in compassion to the parents.

9.1.2 Involving children takes too much time

Etabulating contact with children demand other methods than with grown-ups (Killen 2004). Det å få til en god og tillitsfull kontakt med barn krever tid og engasjement.

A good example on what extra time and resources can do for children’s degree of participation is the girls group that one of the NAV-offices has organized, within these groups

the focus is exactly this, for the girls to come together and talk about their own perspectives. Thereby these girls-groups create a possibility for exploring children's perspectives. All of the family social workers explain that it is important to keep these groups apart from NAV, but that this meeting means a lot, both for the NAV family social worker and the work with children. One of the family social workers, whose herself been working with these groups tells that it gives her important perspectives from children themselves that is important for her in her work at NAV. For the children these kinds of groups will create an opportunity for attending a kind of after-school activity and will give the children deeper insight into topics that is important for them.

It is however important to remember that Lipsky's findings do not especially deal with children as a specific user-group, as this thesis does. This is important because I see that there is fundamental differences in my informants perceptions of user-participation for the parents, or grown ups, compared to user-participation for children.

Children and childhood is important for how we interpret the child's position within the family and society. My findings show that there is a variation between the informants in whether children are looked upon as «human becomings» or «human beings». And that this affect how they emphasis the involvement of children.

9.2 Normative personal values

The normative personal values related to children's position within society and in relation to NAV direct the family social workers in their decision. Because the laws are vague concerning children's participation, family social workers have quiet big degree of freedom in relation to how they handle their cases. High level of discretion can result in both low and high level of user-involvement of children, but is dependent on both factors of kontorkultur/institutional structures and personal values (related to "parents and the state" and their "view on children. Factors that direct them are:

9.2.1 Dilemma between participation and protection

These kinds of thoughts are highlighted in the descriptions were the family social workers focus on NAV that children do not need to participate because it is about money or because the child should be protected from harmful topics that can increase their feeling of being different. The family's social workers legitimizing their descriptions in this way in a high degree see the child as vulnerable and see it as the family social workers role to protect the

child. The importance of protection is both related to the child's own feelings related to the family's economy, and their thoughts about themselves when comparing themselves to their peers.

In relation to research showing that children most often relate their feelings of childhood poverty in a relational matter. To protect the child from entering discussions and places where he or she feels even more different from the peers can be legitimized.

But are children protected by not being involved? Not to harm the child in its relations to other peers could then be a reason for why the caseworker thinks that the child should not be involved in the conversation at NAV-office. have shown that children experience poverty in an early age and experience a cross-pressure between the economic situation in a low-income family and how they should handle this in relation to their peers. Children hiding birthday invitations from their friends because they know the parents can't afford a present is one example on that children and youths knows a lot about the family's economy and worry about the situation. Could it be that NAV workers use best interest argument (protect- not to harm the child) to avoid doing what they should do? The problem arises in relation to children's best interest. Here the dichotomy between protection and participation becomes relevant. For who are responsible for bringing forward the best interest of the child. Is it enough to talk to the parent, or do we have to talk to the children to be able to get the correct information? Is it the parents responsibility or should the state sometimes interfere when they see that it's important. BUT! Are children protected from the harm of poverty issues if they are not talked to?

9.2.2 Their thoughts about their responsibility

A matter my informants turn back to repeatedly is where their responsibility starts, and where it stops in relation to children. They reflects quite high degree of feeling that the parents are responsible for their children, and legitimized there in many ways their choices of not bringing children's perspectives to that they don't want to interrupt this parents/state.

As family social workers working in a welfare organization NAV's biggest responsibility is to maintain the normative values and the desired goals that the state puts on them. The guidelines for the practices in relation to this lays in their thoughts around in what degree they think that it's NAV's responsibility to secure children's perspectives, and the importance they think that these perspectives have. These structures are both found in the formal structures of

the culture in the NAV- office, thinking and talking together about how this relationship should be. These thoughts will also be dependent on their thoughts about their responsibility compared to other instances also, that may have a clearer position in relation to children.

We see how one of the family social workers are very clear, saying that it's not anything within social services to talk to children, while the others reflects upon this in different ways saying that they don't really see how to do it, they don't have time, or some of the family social workers highlights that it is not easy to prioritize it when they have so many other things to do. We can see that Terums argument that *"...the problem is that when assessments are based strongly on the social workers private values and norms, they become arbitrary and does not fulfill the claim of equal treatment and rule of law* (Terum 2003, 123).

In relation to Slettebø and Seim's (2007) distinction between user-perspective and user-involvement in chapter 2 it will be relevant to discuss the dichotomy between child-perspective and children's perspective in relation to the question of who should be seen as a user in social services. We can see that, in the same way as the user-perspective was understood as perspectives done with an interest in someone else life, but formulated from another adult's view, Sommer et. al interpretation of child-perspective brings many of the same attributes. Could we then say that using a child-perspective, as an information-source cannot be said to be user-involvement, because it does not bring children's own perspectives.

The informant problematizes the earlier mentioned difference between child perspective and children's perspective. We can say that if the formal structures was the determining factor making street-level bureaucrats interpret the laws we would not have seen the degree of differences within the same office as my findings shows. Was the reason to the barriers of involving children- all the case-workers would have done "the same thing". Because they are all street-level bureaucrats with the same client-group, and with the same system around them, they would have described my vignette and my in-descriptions a bit more similar.

If children are excluded from NAV and also the numbers of home-visits are very few this is a

10. Concluding remarks:

The aim of this master thesis has been to explore NAV family social workers own descriptions of children's participation within their work with low-income families. It has asked what role the family social workers have in involving and listening to the child and how

their choices are influenced by the structural matters surrounding street-level bureaucrats working in NAV, but also the normative personal values of the family social worker.

The theme springs out from my engagement for children's rights and the belief that children needs to be included in realities of their life to be able to develop and become the best version of themselves. My own working and volunteer experience with children in Norway, and me being a mum in Oslo makes me especially engaged in the topic of childhood poverty. Facing though critics the last years, NAV employees has got a somehow bad reputation. This thesis seeks to give the NAV employees themselves a voice, and possibilities to reflect upon possibilities and challenges related to children's participation in their work.

This thesis builds on qualitative in-depth interviews with six NAV family social workers in Oslo. They represent two different NAV offices that both have a «family team» where the social workers only work towards families with children. In addition to literature review of relevant research and laws, I have been observing a hearing together with Save the Children on children's perspectives of childhood poverty. The thesis has also been influenced by my engagement and experience working with children.

Inspired by Lipsky's concept of street-level bureaucracy and Sommer et.al's understanding of the importance of differing between child-perspective and children's perspective prepared for, listened to and analyzed the informants' descriptions of children's participation. Their descriptions linked children's participation to being concerned about the child during the assessment, asking the parents about the child, seeing the home-environment of the family, looking on the interaction between the parents and the child within the home, talking to the child itself.

The material indicates that children's participation in NAV is a matter of high variation, but in most cases can be linked to what Sommer et.al calls *child-perspective* (2010, vi) where children's participation are seen as adults attention towards children experiences and perceptions of growing up in a low-income family. On the other hand, some describes bringing *children's perspectives* as very important and a goal in their work. Their differences in the children's participation can among others be linked to: structural matters, rationing, time-constraints and discretion, but also variations in personal values, perceptions of children's position and protection.

Appendices

1. Request for interview and statement of consent

2. Interview Schedule

Appendix 1: Request for interview and statement of consent

Invitasjon til å delta i forskningsprosjekt som omhandler barnefattigdom og NAV- ansattes implementering av barneperspektivet i møte med barnefamilier.

Mitt navn er Anne Berit Sødal, jeg er samfunnsviter og studerer på Høgskolen i Oslo og Akershus der jeg tar en master i internasjonal sosial velferd og helse. Jeg er nå i gang med å skrive min masteroppgave. Mitt overordnede tema er barnefattigdom i Oslo og barns rett til å bli hørt. Som innfallsvinkel til oppgaven har jeg valgt å studere NAV- ansattes implementering av barneperspektivet, i møte med barnefamilier som søker om sosial stønad. Min veileder heter Ivar Lødemel og er professor og forsker på avdeling for samfunnsfag på Høgskolen. Jeg ønsker å bidra til å øke kunnskap og bevissthet rundt implementeringen av Lov om sosiale tjenester i NAV og mer spesifikt muligheter/utfordringer knyttet til barns deltakelse i denne prosessen.

Jeg ønsker å snakke med saksbehandlere som jobber opp mot barnefamilier på to ulike NAV-kontor i Oslo. Jeg ønsker å velge ett kontor som er organisert med familieteam, og ett kontor som ikke er det. I tillegg har kriterer til beliggenhet og nivået på målt barnefattigdom i de ulike bydelene i Oslo vært viktig for mitt valg av NAV-kontor.

Samtalen vil ta cirka en time og jeg vil bruke en semi-strukturert intervjumetode. Dette innebærer at jeg har noen åpne spørsmål, for eksempel hva hvordan barn kan delta under saksbehandlingen for og si sin mening og betydningen av det å lytte til barn. Jeg ønsker å fokusere på din opplevelse og knytte det til begreper som omhandler implementering, grad av valgfrihet, deltakelse og beskyttelse.

Du bestemmer selv hva du vil, og ikke vil fortelle om. Det er kun jeg og min veileder som kommer å ha tilgang til de personopplysningene du deler med meg og jeg skal oppbevare de utilgjengelig for andre. I oppgaven kommer du å være anonym, det skal ikke være mulig å knytte det du forteller om til deg. Jeg vil gi deg mulighet til å lese og kommentere det jeg skrevet før jeg publiserer det.

Jeg vil gjennomføre samtalene på norsk. Vi kan gjennomføre intervjuet på din arbeidsplass, men hvis det ikke passer for deg kan du få bestemme en annen plass vi kan møtes. Under samtalen kommer jeg å ta notater og bruke en lydopptaker som kan hjelpe meg til å huske nøyaktig det du forteller om. Prosjektet skal etter planen avsluttes innen november 2016, alle notatene og lydopptaket skal jeg da slette.

Å delta på prosjektet og snakke med meg er frivillig. Hvis du deltar kan du også ombestemme deg og trekke deg når du vil og du trenger ikke å oppgi noen grunn. Jeg vil gjennomføre kun en samtale men hvis du i etterkant oppdaget at det er noe du vil fortelle eller endre kan du kontakte meg. Jeg vil også spørre deg om jeg kan kontakte deg senere hvis noe er uklart for meg.

Dersom du ønsker å delta setter jeg stor pris på det! Du kan ringe meg på telefon [redacted] eller sende en mail til meg på [redacted] Min veileder kan nås på [redacted]

Studien er meldt til Personvernombudet for forskning, Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS.

Samtykke til deltakelse i studien

Jeg har mottatt informasjon om studien, og er villig til å delta.

(Dato og deltakerens signatur)

Appendix 2: Interview Schedule

Intervju-guide

(Semi- strukturert / dybde-intervju)

Utstyr: lydopptaker og notatutstyr

Introduksjon

Fortell om studien, konfidensialitet, anonymitet og deltakelse.

Bakgrunn

Utdanning, alder og profesjonell bakgrunn.

Møte med fattige familier i sosialtjenesten (et eksempel)

En familie med en mor som enslig forsørger og tre barn søker om sosial stønad. Familiens inntekt er under fattigdomsgrensen. Når moren kommer til NAV sier hun at hun strever med å betale alle regninger og sitte igjen med nok til å betale for mat, klær og vanlige aktiviteter.

- Hva er din rolle som sosialarbeider i møte med denne familien?
- Hvordan ville du møtt denne familien? Hvilke faktorer ville du ha undersøkt nærmere? Hvem ville du snakket med, og hvordan?
- Hva ville du gjort for å forbedre denne familiens situasjon?

Lover og reguleringer

Er du kjent med lover og regler knyttet til barns rettigheter under saksbehandlingen? Kan du i tilfelle utdype dette litt mer? F.eks. Relevans for saksbehandlingsprosessen, relevans for deg som saksbehandler, hvordan du bruker det?

Kjenner du til den internasjonale barnekonvensjonen? Utdyp i tilfelle.

Hva er bra/utfordrende med lovverket i møte med barn og barnefamilier?

Involveringen av barn (deltakelse vs beskyttelse)

Hvordan går du frem for å finne ut hvordan barn opplever/berører av deres foresattes lave inntekt?

Hvem ville du snakket med? Hvilke faktorer ville du undersøkt?

Hvordan ville du prioritert undersøkelsene dine? Støtte? Kapasitet? Arbeidsmiljø? Lovverk?

Hva syns du om å la barn delta? Hva betyr det at barn skal delta? Hvorfor bør/bør ikke barn delta? Hvor og hvordan kan barn delta? Hva betyr det å beskytte barna fra og delta? Hvordan opplever du relasjonen mellom deg og familien som søker støtte? Har det noe å bety og la barnet delta?

Implementeringsprosessen

Hvordan avgjør du når du skal la barna delta? Er du den som gjør denne beslutningen eller tar du avgjørelsen sammen med noen andre? Team? Interne retningslinjer? Eller er det noen andre gjør beslutningen for deg?

Er det andre faktorer som påvirker måten du implementerer / forstår loven? Utdyp?

I saker der barn er involvert, hvordan gjør dette? Er det hindringer knyttet til barns medvirkning? På kontoret, familie, andre faktorer? Hvis noen, hvilke begrensninger ser du i systemet forbundet med å hjelpe disse familiene å bedre situasjonen for barna?

Hvordan vil du beskrive din egen makt til å bestemme utfallet? Måten du møter familien du møter familien, og hvilken støtte du gir familien?

Samarbeid med andre

Når barn blir hørt! Er det din oppgave å snakke med barna? Hvis ikke, hvem sitt ansvar er det?

Er det andre organisasjoner/instanser som er viktige i forhold til det å snakke med barna? Hvis ja, hvem er disse og hvilket ansvar har disse? Hvordan bruker du informasjon fra andre instanser i ditt arbeid?

Er det noe jeg har glemt å spørre om/noe du vil tilføye?

Tema/kategorier (ikke spørsmål)

Implementeringsprosessen, deltakelse, beskyttelse, skjønn.

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