

Does specialization in social work imply an increased risk of marginalization for children, youth and families?

Specialization is one of the most dominant organizational trends in social work since the 1980s (Blom, 1998; Bergmark & Lundström, 2007). Specialization is therefore central to the development of the context of social work and social service.

In order to examine what specialization means to children, youth and their families, a research project was established in municipalities with specialized departments for child- and youth care. We examined three different typologies of specialization: Problem based specialization, problem- and age based specialization and finally multi-specialization including practice based specialization with separation of assessment and support units.

In the project we are working with two different perspectives the professional perspective and the user perspective for children, youth and families.

The degree and the kind of specialization in the municipality is in various ways creating possibilities and limitations in the decision making processes, involvement and participation of the children, youth and their families.

The number of different departments and social workers the children, youth and families are meeting during the bureaucratic - administrative process is of significant importance for their opportunities to make use of their competences to self-determination and to take action.

The project suggests that a high degree of specialization may imply a risk of further marginalization of children, young people and families in the social service.

Specialization in child and youth departments' is a 3-year practice research project undertaken by Birgitte Zeeberg, associate professor, Maja Haack, senior consultant and Annemette Matthiessen, associate professor from University College Metropol in Copenhagen, Denmark. The project combines an examination of Danish municipalities including field work in two municipalities.