

# COMPARING CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND RISKS





# **Comparing Children, Families and Risks**

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## Forewords

*Atte Oksanen, Eija Paavilainen & Tarja Pösö*

Childhood and Family Research Unit Perla, University of Tampere arranged an international seminar *Comparing Children, Families and Risks* in November 10–11, 2005. Seminar addressed the question of how and with what implications children and families are constituted as a locus of risks. The theme of the seminar was discussed multidisciplinary and the definition of risk was meant to be broad and include different perspectives, measures and disciplines.

The seminar touched the growing tendency to locate risks in families and children in different spheres of life. Risk assessment methods are used in professional practices of public health care and social work in order to target support as early as possible to those in need and at risk. In addition the seminar provided information about the extent of risks in terms of nation-wide and cross-national statistics.

The notions of children and families at risk involved an analysis on cultural and social change. Different risk theories in the social sciences have brought forward ideas how the whole socio-cultural milieu is touched by constant life-changes and self-pressures. Risks have become individualized, though they are as concepts rather ambivalent and uncertain, or even virtual. Risks in our late modern societies are part of self-formation and subjectivity-construction.

The collection of papers presents a second publication in Childhood and Family Research Unit, Perla internet publication series (<http://tampub.uta.fi/childhood/951-44-6184-3.pdf>). These texts include 3 plenary presentations and 10 workshop presentations reviewed by the editors of this publication. The discussed themes include for example fatherhood, divorce, child abuse, school bullying, children's home and health risks in families, as well as late modern identity problems such as body dissatisfaction among children and ambivalent transitions between childhood, youth, and adulthood.

We would like to especially thank all the people present in the seminar for their participation and interest on the topic as well as the Academy of Finland, Ministry of Social Welfare and Health and Tampere Graduate Centre for Social Sciences (TAMCESS) for financing the seminar.

## **Introduction to the theme of comparing children, families and risks**

*Anja Riitta Lahikainen*

While the young child is not the sole purveyor of truth on his/her security, welfare and experience her/his own voice cannot and should not be ignored. This is not only a scientific but an ethical principle of great importance, already acknowledged in the Declaration of Children's Rights.

Nevertheless one can contend that the art and the very idea of listening to the child are of recent origin dating from the pioneer years of Sigmund Freud and Maria Montessori. It is also helpful to recollect that the Latin word "infans" originally meant a state of speechlessness, but in historical times both older children and other marginal groups were considered to be bereft of full powers of speech and hearing, in a word, "infantile". The Voice was the privilege of the Master.

In the last twenty years the new sociology of childhood has brought forward the question of the subjectivity and the discourse of the child in the field of social studies and thereby increased the awareness and transparency of childhood in society at large.

It is not only a question about the expert's or the parent's willingness to listen to the child but about her/his limited prerequisites and competences to hear what the child has to tell her/him.

A few years ago I suggested that the concept of structural indifference usefully outlines the variety of obstacles which adults generally confront in their serious endeavours to listen to the child (Lahikainen 2002). In everyday life in family or in day-care, there hardly ever is enough time to guarantee the children's rights to be heard impartially and reliably.

Although there are other kinds of structural indifferences, scarcity of time has wide-ranging and seemingly over-whelming economic and political implications. It cannot

be solved within each family separately, but a concerted political and social effort is required in order to transform the relationships between families and labour-markets, between mothers and fathers, between families and institutional and professional providers of care and last but not least, hopefully, between children and adults. This kind of paradoxical and seemingly insoluble socio-political situation has been called by Ulrich Beck and E Beck-Gernsheim (1995) “the normal chaos of family”. Families do their utmost to cope with the pressures and burdens of everyday life, but their best efforts are only sufficient to postpone the risk of oncoming chaos and disorganization.

How to listen to the child is a key to a deeper understanding of today’s main topic, risks, in more than one sense. Many risks of children and families are as a matter of fact consequences of a long-lasting history of neglect concerning the child’s authentic voice. The fact that we need children as narrators and experts of their lives has been obscured and forgotten.

For instance, we need children to inform us what is risky from their point of view. We need their co-operation in constructing the concepts of risk and safety but paradoxically there always remains a risk that we have not been able to make ourselves understood by them.

### **Literature:**

Beck, U. & Beck-Gernsheim, E. (1995). *The normal chaos of love*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Lahikainen, A.R. (2002) *Estääkö rakenteellinen välinpitämättömyys lapseuden?* Iltapäivätoiminnan kansallinen seminaari 16.- 18.11.2002.

[Http://www.uta.fi/laitokset/sosio/Staff/lahikainen/koululaisten\\_iltap4.pdf](http://www.uta.fi/laitokset/sosio/Staff/lahikainen/koululaisten_iltap4.pdf)

## **Plenary lectures**

## **After-school hours: A risk of being alone?**

*Hannele Forsberg & Harriet Strandell*

### **The concern on after-school hours and the cultural politics of childhood**

The background of our paper is formed by the recent increasingly heated public concern on the after-school hours of young schoolchildren in Finland. In this public discussion the after-school time of children (while their parents are working) was highlighted as *a risk*. This risk talk forms the starting point of our study.

In the heart of the debate was the lack of a comprehensive system of institutional care services during after-school hours, which as such has a long history in Finland<sup>1</sup>. The lack became considered as a significant social problem only after the mid 1990s, as adult activists started to make claims on new kinds of institutional arrangements. Children start school at the age of seven and until recently it has a culturally typical and accepted practice that young schoolchildren spend their after-school hours either alone or with their friends or siblings, or with their mother or father or some other adult in and near their homes. The general security of society, the hot meal provided at school and the social norm which has allowed children to spend time alone have made this local practise possible. With the new public concern something seemed to be changing. “Normal” after-school practices were questioned and highlighted as a social problem, as a risk. The lack of a comprehensive system of institutional care services was seen as a developmental risk adding to the insecurity of children.

The rise of concern was in this case however not linked to a phenomenon which has activated debate on public child care elsewhere in Europe, that is, the increased frequency of women/mothers working outside the home. The full-time gainful employment of Finnish mothers with school-age children has been regarded as a

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<sup>1</sup>Internationally, Finland is often regarded as the model country of public child care services for children under school age. This is probably justified, as Finnish children below school age have a statutory right to day care, which is the case only in few countries. In addition, almost all forms of child care – home care for children below 3 years of age, day-care centres, family day care and private day care – are covered by public subsidies (see Anttonen 2003, 160-161).

cultural self-evidence for decades<sup>2</sup>. It was something else that made after-school hours a contemporary social issue in Finland. We will suggest that the debate reflects *a change in attitudes towards childhood*. The debate was very powerful, resulting in an Act on children's morning and after school care, which from the autumn 2004 guarantees supervised municipal after school care for all first- and second-graders who opt for it<sup>3</sup> (Laki koululaisten... 2003).

What is this change in attitudes towards childhood about? We identify in the public debate of children's after school time ways of connecting children and risk that have not been articulated in the same ways and to the same extent earlier. We refer to the extensive talk requesting extended supervision and control of children in order to avoid the devastating consequences and risks of being alone in after school time, when parents are working.

We "read" this activated concern and risk talk in the context of what has been called a shift into a new wave of institutionalisation of childhood (Kampmann 2004). Institutionalisation refers to the organisation of day care and schooling in a way which essentially structures children's daily lives and social contacts. Children's lives are increasingly fitted into the frameworks of institutions and professionals with regard to time, space and social control. Recent trends in the discussion about institutionalisation is not that focused upon questions of quantitative expansion of school and day care, but rather on new forms of investing in the "quality" of childhood. Contrary to e.g. Sweden or Denmark, the two stages are difficult to separate in Finland when it comes to after school time, because they are both going on at the same time. However, our interest is addressed towards the "second institutionalisation" (ibid.), meaning a qualitatively new and deeper interest in childhood on behalf of society, largely arguing in terms of risk and control.

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<sup>2</sup>E.g. in 1961, over 50% of the mothers of children below 16 years of age were gainfully employed outside home; the employment of Finnish women has also been characterised by full-time jobs (Takala 2002, 12).

<sup>3</sup> In addition to afternoon care, the new turn concerns the possibilities of extending or reorganising the school day. The working parents of first- and second-graders are also now entitled to work less than full time. (Laki työsopimuslain... 2003.)

Discussing children in terms of concern is not as such a new phenomenon. Many children also suffer very concretely from consequences of different kind of oppressive social conditions. So that is not new either. What is at stake here is *how the public concern for children might articulate with a broader 'cultural politics of childhood'*. Allison James and Adrian James (2005, 1-2) define the concept of cultural politics of childhood as an attempt to theorise the production and reproduction of childhood in society. It involves examining the cultural determinants of childhood and “the identification of the processes by which these cultural determinants and discourses are put into practice at any given time, in any given society, to construct ‘childhood’ in society” (James and James 2004, 7). The concept also includes the ways in which children themselves experience, deal with and in turn influence the processes of ordering and control, and the regulatory framings of who they are (ibid.).

In correspondence with these ideas we have been wondering if we can reveal some new tendencies by *analysing public conceptions of children and their after-school hours as a site for theorising cultural politics of childhood in late modern Finnish society*. To make the possible new conceptions more clear we have been using children’s own accounts on their after-school time as a mirror for the public concern on the after-school hours. By this methodological construction we also give voice to children, the party who is normally silent in the construction of concern on children. This way we will approach the public concern and the related risk talk on the after-school hours as an example of the broader on-going redefining process of childhood in contemporary Finnish society.

### **Data and analysis**

The paper draws on two different bodies of empirical data produced separately in different research projects, but addressing the same issue of after-school hours. The first set of data consists of the *public discussion on schoolchildren’s after-school hours* during the last 15 years. The public debate is here represented by writings on the topic in the greatest daily newspaper in Finland, Helsingin Sanomat, during the period 1990-2004. The data consists of 294 items, of which 39 % are domestic news, 32 % letters to the press and 9 % editorials. We have focussed on items telling in what places children should or should not be and what activities are appropriate or

inappropriate for children, thus defining boundaries of childhood. In the paper we concentrate on the mainstream of the debate. There are in the debate also a few voices questioning either the existence of a problem or the solutions offered<sup>4</sup>.

The second set of data consists of *accounts of 8-year-old second graders of their after-school activities*. The data is derived from urban children who were recruited through two different city centre schools in one of the biggest Finnish towns during the school term 2004-2005. The reason for studying 8-year-old second graders was connected to a presumption that for Finnish children, the age of 8 years represents a strong transition phase towards increased independence in dealing with everyday life. The 32 children from different socio-economic groups were approached by various means of qualitative research: fill-in diaries on the after school hours, photographs, drawing of maps of social networks and interviews, the aim of which was to shed light on the chronological, spatial, social and experiential structure of the children's after-school hours<sup>5</sup>.

We suggest that the children's accounts of their after-school activities mostly describe the local culture or "normal practices" of organising after-school hours. The public discussion, on the other hand, aims to question and redefine these practices and at the same time the boundaries of childhood.

Our paper will focus on the meanings of childhood and after-school hours that emerge from the data. In the next section we will first discuss meanings of home as a place, a field of social relations and a mental experience of children during after-school hours, because home forms the important space and anchoring point in the afternoons of most of the children in the study. Home also forms one of the dominant topics in the public debate. Secondly, we will reflect upon our findings from a risk perspective.

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<sup>4</sup> Towards the end of the period studied a majority of items dealt with how after school care should be arranged and financed. These discussions are mainly left out of the article. The data has been collected by M.Soc.Sc Lotta Haikkola as part of Harriet Strandell's research project "Childhood, space and age order of society", funded by the Academy of Finland.

<sup>5</sup> The data is gathered as part of Hannele Forsberg's research project "Anybody home? After-school activities, Configurations and (In)security of Small Schoolchildren" funded by the Academy of Finland. In addition to the author the data gathering was done by Outi Kauko, Master Student of Sc.Sciences at the University of Tampere.

Finally, we will return to our theoretical starting point, the cultural politics of childhood, and conclude the findings.

### **Home as a social space of after-school hours**

On the basis of the 8-year-old second graders' accounts, the majority of the children do not, at the time of the research, attend public after school care. Instead, home forms the important space and anchoring point in the afternoons of most children. After the short school-days<sup>6</sup>, the children walk home and not to an after school club, even though in principle all of them have the right to such activities within the current service provision. This everyday arrangement is natural for children, but is equally socially, historically and culturally constructed. Only one of the 32 children in the study tells that she regularly spends her after-school hours at a club, and four of the children report that they visit a club a few times a week<sup>7</sup>. The majority of the children in the study told, however, that they participated in supervised after-school activity during first grade, so they have experience of it.

According to the children's descriptions home as a space forms a particular environment for their after-school hours. Flats in larger or smaller blocks of different types, or detached or semi-detached houses, where most children have rooms of their own (although many shared a room with a sibling) form the after school space. Some children spend their after-school hours in *two homes*, alternating between the homes of their mothers and fathers, spending alternate weeks at each parent, or according to some other agreement. In particular when there are no adults at home, the children seem to be able to use the whole space available, including objects and equipment, as resources for their activities. This way, children appear to have a personal and direct ownership of the home in after school time. However, home is not only limited to the flat or house, but it also essentially includes outdoor space, such as the garden or grounds and eventual outbuildings.

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<sup>6</sup> At the earliest, the school-day ends at 12 o'clock, and at the latest, at 2 p.m.

<sup>7</sup> This situation corresponds to the broader picture in the city, in the opinion of the co-ordinator of the after-school activity. 8-year-old second-graders participate in supervised after-school activities much less frequently than 7-year-old first-graders (whose attendance in supervised after-school activities has increased appreciably after the new Act came into force).

Although the majority of children return home after school, few of them tell that they are completely alone at home. Some of the children spend afternoons at home with an elder sibling. For others, either mother or father spends their afternoons at home at least part of the week. The parent can be at home during afternoons because of night work, shift work, telework, studies, or the care of a baby or toddler at home. Sometimes grandmother lives nearby, and the children can stay with her for part of the time. Two families occasionally engage a paid childminder. This patchwork-like way of arranging children's after school hours has been reported in other studies as well (see Lammi-Taskula 2004, 58-73; Koululaisten aamu- ja iltapäivätoiminnan... 2002, 2-11).

The majority of the children describe the adults and siblings being at home as *background figures* who are indeed present, but mostly engaged in their own activities: the father is asleep after a night shift, the teleworking mother is reading, the studying parent is working at the computer, the mother caring for smaller siblings does household and care work. The afternoons of family members who are at home appear to be individually differentiated; in some families, each family member even takes care of his or her own meals according to individual convenience. However, the child is surrounded by a network of adults in or near the home, who can keep company if needed and make the child feel more safe (see Kiili 1998, 33-36).

In the public debate, on the other hand, children's after school hours are crystallized in the category of *empty home*. With the exception of a few items, children's after school hours at home are described as a social vacuum in which children have to manage without safe adults. The fact that a considerable number of mothers of second graders are at home for different reasons and that parents make all kinds of arrangements to surround the child with 'a safety network' during the afternoon hours, is mostly ignored in the debate. Little trust is invested in the capacity of parents to arrange their children's after school hours:

*“Children do not have grandparents in their daily environments: these live too far away. Nor do they have older siblings close to adulthood. There's no lady next door they can trust and with whom they can spend some time in the afternoons, no housekeeper to be present as a stable adult. No janitor to keep an eye open that children don't tease each other or are not hit by cars. There are only strange adults that children have to learn to fear. Children wake up in the morning, go to school*

*and come home alone... There are no stable adult people in their local neighbourhood.” (Letter to the press 13.9.2000)*

The public debate portrays children’s after school hours as *socially empty space*. The debate produces the home as ‘empty’ and the child as ‘lonely’ – constructions which start to live their own life as self-evident truths, which are repeated routinely. That only the presence of an adult can make the home less empty is an interesting statement of the debate. According to the debate the company of other people – siblings or friends – cannot reduce emptiness. Only through adults, then, the child can gain access to a home that is not empty. ‘Family’ and ‘home’ thus combine to constitute the ‘dependent child’. Children acting ‘too independently’ raise increasing public concern (James 1998).

### **Peers, street and the new media**

The social relationships which children define as the most important during their after-school hours in the home sphere are relationships to friends; nevertheless living in blocks of flats in the city centre, in the middle of cars, shops and a lot of people seem to imprison children at home and not to support forming of social relations. The elbow-room of these children is much more narrow than for those children who are able to move more unhindered in the environment around their home. Whenever possible, peer relations give space to children’s activity, as is shown by the following extract:

*I: What are you going to do today? Or do you know yet, at all?*  
*C: I don't know, because me and Anna and Ida have agreed that we'll first go fetch each other...*  
*I: Mmm.*  
*C: ... and then we'll spend time the three of us ...*  
*I: Mmm.*  
*C: ...and think about whose house we'll be at.*  
*I: Mmm.*  
*C: Then sometimes, maybe if we're out of doors at, at our house, then sometimes we go, ()*  
*I: Mmm.*  
*C: And sometimes we play detectives.*  
*I: Mmh.*  
*C: Then, then when we're indoors, sometimes we make a play, and sometimes, this is something that me and Ida thought of...*  
*I: Mm, mm.*

*C: ...sometimes we get stuff from the attic and the wardrobe, big piles of costumes for it ...*

*I: Uh-huh*

*C: ...pile them on the floor and decide which are the best costumes and then make a play for them.*

Play and games organised spontaneously by the children themselves occupy a crucial position. The relationships with friends associated with this activity are what makes or breaks the contentment of afternoons spent at home (presence vs. absence of friends). Friends are, in fact, the most crucial and important social network, and after-school hours may be described as a *space with friends* in the overall chronological structure of children's weekdays: mornings are spent at school, and evenings are a time for both leisure pursuits and time with family. Also those children who, due to their living environment, cannot easily be together with friends, would appreciate this possibility.

In the public debate, on the other hand, the company of peers is depicted as a bad substitute for the company of and supervision by adults. When the company of adults is lacking, children 'have to' put up with peers. Peers cannot reduce children's loneliness and feeling unsafe; on the contrary they make it even worse

*"We know that children spend time alone at home playing computer games or watching adult videos. Fear and a feeling inside of being unsafe are bad company. The company of peers does not compensate for adults." (Letter to the press 29.10.1999)*

The representation of peers in the debate associates them with loafing about and engaging in obscure and risky activities, which are in a symbolic meaning characterised with the concept of 'street'. The 'street' is a strong metaphor for all situations in which children are not under adult supervision and which cannot thus be part of a 'good childhood' (Matthews et al. 2000). The 'street' and the risks connected to it are strong symbols for the vulnerability and dependence that are projected as the natural state of childhood (Prout 2005, 13).

The company of peers is in the public debate associated primarily with bad pastimes or uncontrolled use of space. The debate does not pay attention to those arguments stemming from childhood research which have pointed to the importance of peer

relations in children's social worlds (see e.g. Corsaro 1985; Frönes 1995, Strandell 1997).

### **Home as a mental experience – particularly in the light of being alone and loneliness**

Although most of the children report to have a “background” person at home (a parent or an elder sibling) and some of them occasionally attend the afternoon club, from time to time most of them nevertheless report to spend after-school hours alone at home. Only 1/3 of the 32 participating children are hardly ever alone at home. One of them attends the afternoon club on a daily basis. The others always go home, but either the mother, a child-minder or an elder sibling is always there.

For the children themselves, being alone is both a positive and a negative experience. The positive aspects of being alone are emphasised over the negative ones in the children's accounts. They want to be alone and long for it, hoping for some *personal space*. This is associated with the desire to find respite, calm down and spend time by oneself, to counterbalance daily situations in which children need to act in a and on the terms of the group, following the rules and schedules of the group. In addition to finding breathing space and calming down, crises in the family, such as serious illnesses or separations and the moving away of a family member, may create situations in which the children want to withdraw in order to process their own feelings. In the following extract, Nora describes her longing for a space of her own to the interviewer:

*C: Yes, but in fa-fact I'd like to have a room of my own.*

*I: I see. Why would you like to have a room of your own?*

*C: I sometimes want to have somewhere that I can be just by myself and not bothered by others.*

*I: Mm. Well, where do you go if you want to be just by yourself?*

*C: Well yes but I can't, can I.*

*I: No, not at home at least, but do you mean you have to go somewhere else if you want to be by yourself?*

*C: Hmm.*

*I: So do you have a place somewhere, out in the garden or somewhere, where you can be alone?*

*C: Well, that's where I usually go, see I've built a sort of house under the stairs.*

*I: Is that outdoors or indoors?*

*C: Outdoors.*

*I: I see.*

*C: Under the steps out of doors.*

*I: All right, and that's where you can be by yourself.*

*C: Because, you can't even see it really, because there's a sort of rug hanging in front, in front of the mouth.*

*I: I see. All right.*

Nora's house is built underneath the steps outside the house serves as a substitute for personal space. Nora's account forms part of a context which justifies the need for personal space. She has a chronic illness which causes some strain on her daily life. She needs a respite after the hectic day at school. Also, the recent serious illness of her elder sister is shadowing her thoughts. However, many children also report that they occasionally try to spend time alone at home without any particular drama in the background, because in some sense they enjoy it. For most children, the opportunity to be alone, by oneself, may only be possible during after-school hours.

It is worth noting that both the positive experience of being alone and the more negatively felt loneliness are told to be marginal moments in the children's daily lives. As a rule, the children lead their lives embedded in various social networks: their circle of friends, the school, the parents, the siblings, and other adults.

The children distinguish between being alone and *feeling lonely*, which is often described as a negative feeling. None of the children tells that he or she feels lonely during their after-school hours. At most, a child may say that they have felt lonely temporarily; the feeling is mainly associated with their relationships with friends: "when no one wants to be with me" or "they're always together, the two of them". Although children rarely say that they have felt lonely during after-school hours, they are able to define loneliness. Expressions like "boring", "time goes slowly", "not that much fun", "stupid" and "sort of an unhappy feeling" are eloquent. The children do not link the possibility of being lonely only with their homes, but they also think that a child may feel lonely in the after school club, when suitable company is lacking. Loneliness can be dealt with by seeking contact with other people, e.g. by phoning or going to see a friend, talking to the lady next door or calling dad at work, or by finding something to do in order to forget the feeling of loneliness.

Being alone does not necessarily mean idleness. Sometimes idleness is a deliberate choice, sometimes not. The public debate, nevertheless, does not distinguish between being alone and loneliness when discussing children's after school time; the two dimensions are discussed as synonyms. One of the central arguments in the public debate on young school children's after school time has been that being alone has dramatic consequences for children's well-being. The argumentation rests on strong assumptions about causes and effects:

*"... if a child spends more than 4 hours a week after school without adult supervision, the risk of using drugs increases. The risk doubles if the unsupervised time is more than 10 hours a week. Beside drug use, the child will become more depressed and have less success in school."*  
(Editorial 9.2.1997)

The two editorials appeal to an authority person in the Finnish debate on children's after school hours, Lea Pulkkinen, a professor of psychology.<sup>8</sup> The argument saying that 'being alone means dramatic consequences' has obtained a status as an undisputable "fact" in the mainstream of debate. Many of the claims-makers of the debate have contributed to producing and repeating the "fact": educational authorities, organisations, politicians, professionals, and some parents. Being alone has been argued to lead to underage drinking and smoking, alcohol and mental problems, restlessness, inactivity, bad school achievement, marginalisation, undesirable activities, light-fingeredness and even to the beginning of a criminal career.

"Wrong" notions about children's autonomy and competence often seem to be under attack in the debate. Leaving the child alone could be interpreted as gradually increasing trust in the child's capability to manage on his or her own. The debate, however, turns the phenomenon into a question of 'abandonment of the child'. The villains are both the parents and the society who are neglecting the supervision of children:

*"In Finland we are proud of our "independent" children, although children's independence is used just as another word for abandoning children... No one should be proud that a 7 year old child can walk alone to school, make his food in the microwave oven and spend five or six hours alone at home without the company of an adult."* (Letter to the press 22.3.2001)

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<sup>8</sup> Appealing to the status of authority is a typical rhetoric strategy in constructing social problems. In the data concerning the public debate it is not always easy to see what the person in question has actually said or written and what is the role of the media in claims-making.

What could be thought of as *competence* is in the debate 'revealed' as 'wrong beliefs', 'imagination' or 'falsity', which will threaten a child who suffers from too little care and who for this reason desperately longs for safe adults. Also a few critical voices are heard in the debate:

*"If being alone for a few hours is regarded as equal to abandonment of the child we are throwing the baby out with the bathwater in the discussion about children."* (Editorial 20.1.1998)

As we have seen from comparing children's accounts with the public debate, two very different, not to say contrary, versions of children's after school hours have emerged. In the public debate, home is characterised as empty and the child as lonely. For the children, on the other hand, home represents autonomous time use, time organised independently or in cooperation with parents, siblings or friends, sometimes being bored and having nothing to do.

### **Are all children at risk?**

Although the central villains of the issue at hand seem to be the parents who neglect their responsibilities for upbringing, claims are not made for the parents to solve the problem. Mothers are not particularly requested to return home. Accordingly, we do not have to do with a variant of the traditional "mothers-should-return-home" argument - an argument which has been kept alive in the debates about day care for children *under* school age already since the 1970s. The emphasis is instead on claims for institutionalised and supervision after school care, which means that the gainful employment of the parents is the self-evident starting point for the mainstream of the debate.

The disinterest shown in the debate in how parents and children together organise after school time indicates that there is more at stake than just to ensure that the child is taken care of, either in the context of the family and the home, or in care arrangements outside the family. There seems to be a deeper interest in controlled and supervised care arrangements than just to offer a complement to family organised care. We identify in the debate a *new interest in society* to intervene in a life sphere

that has until now in the first place been the responsibility of families and the children themselves. The interest is largely directed towards how children use their time and how they could use their time learning new things. Children are seen to be too much idle in after school time. Their self-organised time is largely regarded as time used for doing nothing. Their time should be put to more systematic and efficient use; children even have to be taught how to use their time. In Finland, after school time has until recently been the most significant free time zone of school children. In the debate we see efforts to utilise this “resource” for purposes serving the economic and social success of (future) society more efficiently than up to now. Adult supervision and control in organised after school care, then, should offer an answer to a much greater “need” than to ensure good care for the children: it should *reorganize* children’s after school time, form a new basis for children’s use of time for purposes of *learning*.

Another characteristic of the public debate telling that there is more at stake in the debated after school care than to offer a complement to what families and the children themselves can come up with (which was more characteristic for the first “wave” of institutionalisation of child care) is that *all* children spending their time at home ‘alone’ after school are treated as being at risk. The debate does little to consider differences between children, between families, between (life) situations, between physical environments of the home, between children’s access to peers or other aspects influencing the qualities of children’s after school time. The great *diversity* in existing arrangements for children’s after school hours is mainly ignored. The logic of the argument seems to be that if one child is at risk then all children are at risk (James & James 2005). The debate does little to identify which particular children might be at risk or in which particular situations children might be at risk. The debate does not in particular address those families and children who might have problems, but *all of us*; it “educates” us to think in new ways and in new terms about what is good for children and what constitutes a good childhood.

In addressing all children, childhood as such becomes constructed as a series of risk situations, and the child as being at risk and increasingly dependent on adult supervision. The debate has thus added a new risk to the list of childhood risks: the risk of being alone at home in after school hours, having consequences also for how we can think about children’s agency and boundaries of childhood. The notion of risk

justifies bringing children under new forms of control, and risk is used as a technique of control (James and James 2005).

### **Back to the cultural politics of childhood**

The core ideas of the contemporary cultural politics of childhood in many Western countries seem to be crystallized in the notion of risk and in the idea of protection (James and James 2005, 2). A growing moral panic about childhood is also a theme in the research (Stephens 1995). As a case, the debate on Finnish after-school hours is thus not unique, rather it is in line with current trends. Thus it is possible to understand the current social anxiety about children's safety during after school hours as an expression of a wider, historically specific, anxiety. According to some social theorists (Beck 1992; Giddens ) risk and protection against risk have become a dominant feature of Western life (and discourses) in late modernity. Risk theorists maintain that this has happened largely because major threats can no longer be controlled. In a risk society the symbolic value of childhood is great, because of its reference to childhood innocence. One of the pertinent questions to ask is then what the actual risks to children are and what role risk anxiety or risk rhetoric plays?

The strong contrast between public talk and children's accounts on after school hours revealed in our data can be interpreted as a rhetoric strategy of public claims makers. According to social constructionist theory of social problems (Spector & Kitsuse 1977; Best 1990; Contrane & Hickman 1992; Calcraft 2004) contrasting and other rhetoric strategies (like black-and-white thinking or generalising from the worst cases) are typical means in the "game" of constructing social problems, or if you like, risks. Rhetoric is the art of persuasion, aiming to win sympathy of the audience. From this perspective the language of articulation might be part of the raised risk, not necessarily the actual practices of after-school hours itself.

Discourses of risk call for new forms of socializing and disciplining children. The specified solution to raised risk in our case consists of controlling children's time use by adults supervision. The public concern about 'empty homes' can be understood as part of an increasing institutionalisation of childhood going on in many post-industrial countries (e.g. Cohen et al. 2004, 5-6).

Having heated this late, the Finnish public concern seems to be a very special case, given the fact that Finnish mothers have been working outside home for decades. This tells us that for some reason or another we have had a strong tradition of the independent or competent child. The debate seems to introduce a qualitatively new and deeper level of institutionalisation of childhood. In this process, childhood is assessed with methods of control and efficiency on the same footing as other social phenomena (Kampmann 2004, 129). Childhood is increasingly institutionalised, collectivised and brought into the public sphere (e.g. Frønes 1994; Brannen et al. 2000, 7). The future more than present guides the public ideas.

Society shows a new interest in guiding children's use of time and locating childhood in supervised space. In a Foucauldian sense, time is a central device for exercising modern power and control. It guarantees productivity and predictability. It produces a clear rhythm and repetition, the modern individual (Jenks 2001, 72-74; Foucault 1977). These ideas are very much in line with the spirit of postmodern information societies, in which competition, efficiency, lifelong learning and risk anticipation are key terms (ks. Cohen ym. 2004, 191). Against this background constructions which make the home 'empty' and children 'lonely' and dependent on adult supervision and guidance become understandable. The constructions make it possible to intervene in what from society's point of view appears as inappropriate childhood space and use of time. The old meanings of time use and home as a childhood space have to be "removed" in order to bring in new and different stuff.

Heightened concern for children 'at risk' locate problems in the individual (parents) and masks possible connections between constructions of pathology and structures or practices of late capitalism. On the basis of our data, we argue that the after-school debate reflects a form of risk anxiety rather than an informed appraisal of any real risks to children. This is not to say that there might not be real risks or problems for children during after-school time and that it is important to identify and address them. Children themselves are able to name problems they face during after-school hours. Having no friends or missing their father, who has moved out from the home are examples of problems the children have experienced. Nevertheless, these are not connected to the form of children's after-school arrangements as such, but to their

everyday life and life situations as a whole. Children's accounts are also linked to present rather than to the future. Finally when searching for a risk-free childhood, childhood in itself begins to be seen as a social problem. What are the impacts of this new attitude to children and childhood for individual children and their families? And what values can be lost in the search for a risk-free childhood?

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# **Usage of social indicators in comparing welfare of families and children in a transitional society**

*Dagmar Kutsar*

## **Welfare and social indicators**

There is no single understanding of welfare and we can have multiplicity of ways how to define and conceptualise it. In parallel to the construct 'welfare' several other terms, like 'life satisfaction', 'happiness', 'well-being' and 'quality of life' are used. We can proceed from needs or resources to define 'welfare'. For example Allardt (1993) points out three dimensions of welfare, based on the basic needs conception, as "*Having*", "*Loving*" and "*Being*". "*Having*" concerns welfare resources that an individual owns – income, housing, health, education and so on. The "*Loving*" dimension refers to belonging – community and family attachment, friendship patterns. The "*Being*" dimension of welfare from Allardt's perspective means personal prestige, in-substitutability, one's political resources and "doing interesting things". Andrews et al. (2002) see wellbeing as 'healthy and successful individual functioning, positive social relationships and a social ecology that provides safety'. Both, Andrews and Allardt in their definitions highlight multidimensionality of welfare or wellbeing. In both definitions, an individual performance and social relationships play substantive roles.

Social indicators research emerged during the 1960s. Throughout the following years it was established as an independent field of empirical social research. Social indicators by Zapf (1977) are all data that enlighten us in some way about structures and processes, goals and achievements, values and opinions. The United Nations document (1994) define social indicators as statistics that usefully reflect important social conditions and that facilitate the process of assessing those conditions and their evolution. Social Indicators are used to identify social problems that require action, to develop priorities and goals for action and spending, and to assess the effectiveness of programmes and policies. In general terms, social indicators are aggregated

quantitative data indicative of developments in the areas concerned, used to inform the public and policy makers.

Social indicators form an important tool for evaluating a country's level of social development and for assessing the impact of policy, addressed to both sides – researchers and policy-makers. Social indicators can seldom be used as direct planning instruments but they are able to provide general information on social conditions, to broaden perspectives and to enlarge public agenda, all of which indirectly aids understanding and influences policy decisions.

Functions of a social indicator by Friedrichs (1995) are *methodological* (a social indicator links theories to empirical research), *practical* (a social indicator measures the extent of concrete social process or condition in a given spatial unit, reflects various dimensions of social life) and *political* (a social indicator responds to demand of social policy, which requires a unified system of concepts and indicators, so that a consensus among the policy-makers could be achieved).

The social indicators can be objective (statistics which represent social facts independently of personal evaluations) and subjective (emphasise the individual perception and evaluation of social conditions). They can be quantitative (answer to the question “how much?”) and qualitative that answer to the question “why?” As measures the social indicators should be related to individuals or private households rather than to other social aggregates; should be oriented towards societal goals, and measure the output not the input of social processes or policies.

As welfare indicators, social indicators always have a direct normative relationship, and one should be able to interpret changes in indicators unequivocally as improvement or deterioration of welfare or the quality of life (Zapf, 1993). They enable ‘societies to inform their policies, galvanise and reward effort, mark their achievement, introduce accountability and be a means by which sustained pressure can be brought to bear for the fulfilment of political promises’ (Ben-Arieh et al., 2001).

## **Social welfare indicators of children and the families**

Social welfare indicator is a measure that assesses welfare at a point in time, over time and across geographic areas and population groups. Very often statistical units of social indicators by Vogel (1994) are “individuals and households, aggregated into groups”.

There is a broad scale of indicators that reflect family welfare. In general they can be drawn from living conditions and quality of life of the family (housing conditions, health, etc), general performance of the family unit (income and expenditure patterns) and its integration into the society and social networks (connectedness to the labour market, participation in organisations, etc.).

The child’s perspective looks at children ‘here and now’ as an active social agents and childhood as a social phenomenon in general (Qvortrup 1991). A deeper understanding of children as subjects could move onto the research agenda only with discussions over human rights (the 1959 Declaration on the Rights of the Child and the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child). New perspective on children as active agents or social actors and as units of observation crystallised as a new field of sociological research in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Children represent a particular interest group in political decisions that may differ from the other interest groups in the society. Children and adults form two separate social groups that occupy dichotomous positions in research methodology and political discourse.

One could ask, are there specific welfare indicators of children? Taking a child in focus, the family or household can be dealt as a background variable for assessments of the child welfare.

There are many ways of framing child welfare indicators, proceeding from multidimensional nature of children’s lives. The child welfare indicator reflects a child’s physical, mental, emotional, behavioural, spiritual and moral wellbeing, intellectual capacities, health and identity on one hand and social relationships (in the family and with peers) and safety on the other (Hanafin & Brooks 2005). The child

welfare indicator should be comprehensive, cover children of all ages, clear and understandable. As social indicators in general, child welfare indicator can be positive (reflecting positive sides of children's lives) and negative (e.g. maltreatment as a reflection of low parental capacities). Child welfare indicator can be objective (statistics that reflect social facts) as well as subjective (personal evaluations). Child welfare indicators similarly to social indicators of adults can be reflective of social goals.

Child welfare indicators can have several purposes. By Fitzgerald (2004) they can enable the state of the nation's children to be charted, to track change over time, to benchmark progress in relation to other countries and to identify policy problems, issues and failures. Ben-Arieh et al (2001) point out that the use of child welfare indicators can be in comparing children from different backgrounds (i.e. family structures; migrant and local families, etc.), to identify groups of children at risk or disadvantaged relative to others and thus to elaborate interventions and preventive services. And opposite – they can be of use in identifying groups of children who have avoided risks, thus giving insights into best/good practices of children's lives. Last but not least, child indicators can demonstrate how well a country is dealing with its obligations to children and to assess the success and failure of policies, progress towards social goals and effectiveness of resource investments. The indicators have a purpose in holding agencies, governments and communities to account for improving child outcomes.

### **Harmonisation of welfare indicators and the need for child mainstreaming**

In the frames of the enlargement of the European Union, characterisation of the states concerned on the basis of unified indicators and dimensions is unquestionable. Although, this procedure carries the ideas of the comparability, i.e., the universalist approach where the local factors always stay behind of the received numbers. Unified data of different countries are less problematic in the case of so-called stable societies and uncover specific problems for the countries in rapid transformation. The harmonisation of social indicators for the purpose of cross-group comparisons or doing cross-national and cross-time comparisons foresees the agreement over

definitions, unified conditions of data collection as well as agreement over aggregation and disaggregation at presenting data.

The transition countries like Estonia have undergone different social, economic and political experience than the Western Europe; their development has been directed by a totalitarian system, which diverted them from their own developmental tracks. The collapse of the totalitarian system has provided the opportunity for transition, turning transition countries towards the European mainstream. Therefore, the transitional countries should not directly copy the strategies of the 'advanced' countries but should fix the point of departure and find a way of their own of reaching nationally fixed aims. Evaluation of the advancements needs correct social statistics and the presence of objective and comparable universalist criteria, i.e., social indicators that, by no means will forget about the cultural aspects of the country.

Estonia joined to the European Union on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 2004, during the forth wave of enlargement of the EU. The current situation signals a new political era, but also changed priorities and identities internally in the country. Social surveys document that the transition from post-socialist country towards the membership of the EU has been accompanied by substantial human costs in the form of unemployment, poverty and social exclusion, the decreasing welfare of households and individuals.

Atkinson et al. (2005) in their independent report to the Council of the European Union pointed out that seven out of ten EU new members from 2004 go to the poor, high poverty risk cluster of the EU countries (p.56). They also stated: "...all except three of the new Member States (Cyprus, Estonia and Slovenia) had child-at-risk-of-poverty rates in excess of the adult rate" (p. 23). This statement contradicts Estonian national research and social practice where children face the highest risk of poverty (figure 1) and social exclusion.

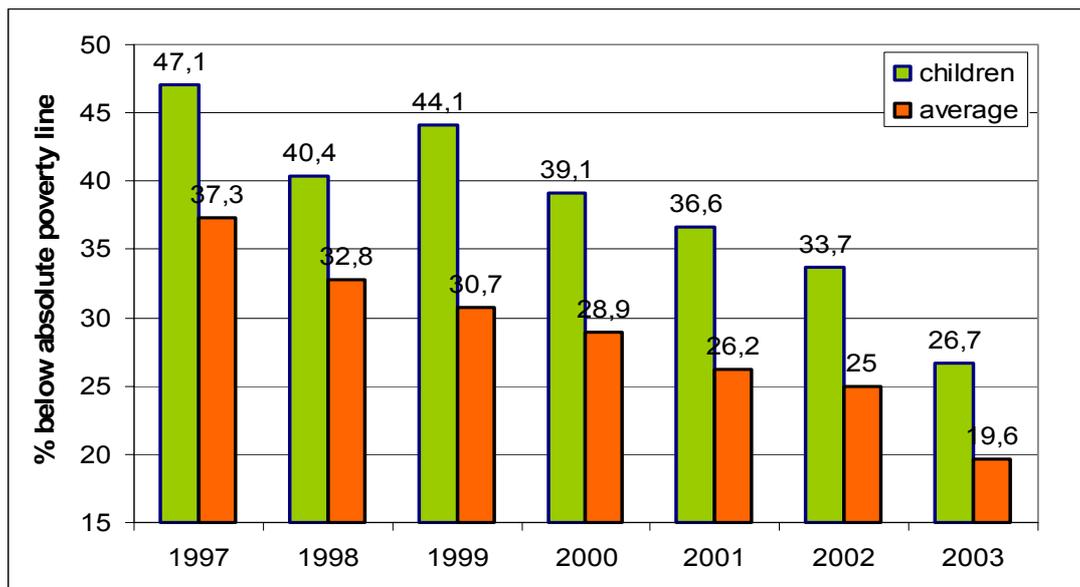


Figure 1. Children below poverty line compared to the population average, 1997-2003.

Children can “multiply” poverty themselves: children of large families have to manage with the resources less than the poverty line (figure 2). As a matter of fact, children in Estonia can be described as poor in a number of domains – material deprivation, social deprivation, emotional deprivation, neglect and poor health.

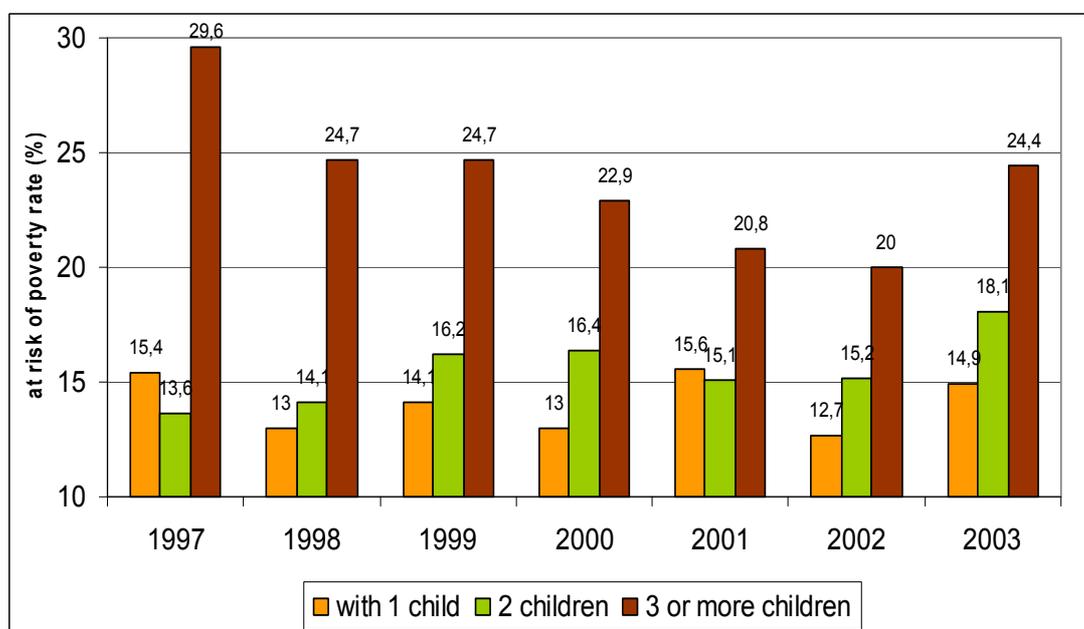


Figure 2. Poor households with children in Estonia, 1997-2003 (data from the Estonian Household Budget Survey).

Table 1. Households, individuals and children in poverty (%) by different poverty definitions, 1997-2002.

Categories of the poor/ year	Poverty definition: 60% of the median income			
	Equiv. scale (OECD) 1:0.7:0.5	Equiv. scale (OECD, modified) 1:0.5:0.3	Equiv. scale (Estonia) 1:0.8:0.8	Subsistence minimum 500 EEK (32 Eur)
Households				
1997	12.9	14.9	13.6	5.4
2000	14.6	16.1	15.0	3.0
2002	14.0	16.7	14.4	2.2
Individuals (children incl.)				
1997	14.5	13.5	16.8	6.8
2000	16.1	14.9	18.2	3.7
2002	14.7	14.4	16.3	2.6
Children				
1997	19.1	14.5	25.1	11.0
2000	21.1	16.4	26.9	5.5
2002	18.1	14.4	22.3	3.9
Single retired				
2000	9.2	22.9	5.1	0.3
2002	6.9	23.6	5.2	0.2
Retired couple				
2000	2.2	2.4	2.2	0.5
2002	3.3	3.9	3.3	1.0
Single-parent's nuclear family				
2000	26.9	24.7	32.1	5.2
2002	28.0	27.9	30.0	2.7
Hh. with 3+ children				
2000	20.1	14.2	34.1	5.7
2002	21.5	15.2	27.8	5.1

Source: Kutsar et al., 2004(data from Estonian Household Budget Survey).

Universal prescription where not-universal measures are used, may give us unexpected results. As an example, setting the poverty line on 40%, 50% or 60% of the median income expresses a universal prescription. Also average income of the households can be universally counted but uncovers differences in distribution of the incomes in different countries. As a result, the transitional countries have about the same amount of relative poverty as the neighbouring welfare societies. To be more specific – the poverty line in this case will be drawn ‘among the poor’. The problem is that if there is an agreement over some criterion, e.g., 50% of the median income of the household, the real distributions behind the percentage are not explored any more.

Also the equivalence scales suggested by OECD (e.g., 1; 0.7; 0.5) may not reflect the real situation and should be re-calculated taking real socio-economic situation of the country into consideration. The calculation of the poverty line in Estonia proceeds from the socio-economic situation of the country and is purposeful for national aims. But now the number of the poor is not comparable any more with that of the other European countries. In this case, national aims dominate over the universality (see: Kutsar et al., 1997).

All this shows how the harmonisation of welfare indicators of families (households) and children must be dealt with caution. In the case of transitional countries like Estonia, Cyprus and Malta (referring to the Atkinson's Report) the modified OECD equivalence scale while applied by measuring poverty rates, has the effect of reducing the proportion of children at risk of poverty (table 1). In poorer countries of the EU, application of the OECD-modified scale is not adequate because individual consumption, especially consumption of children is given inadequately low weight. The major risk is that by approaching universally to cross-national comparisons, children as well as the families with children can move out of the sight of the decision-makers while setting the priorities between short-term and long-term policy aims.

The universal measures of poverty are especially critical concerning children because in a post-socialist country policy-makers are looking for a balance between policy frameworks and rapidly changing reality. They must be quick in their policy responses. In a situation of a rapidly changing social reality, they better focus on the immediate than the longer-term effects of policy, i.e instead of forward-look, they better stick on 'fire-fighting' against the current social problems.

'Children mainstreaming' (the term by Atkinson et al., 2005) means treating children as active social agents, who constitute a structural part of every society. Children have their own well-being 'here and now', they are poor and excluded 'here and now'. Those at risk of poverty are at risk of losing choices and at risk of social exclusion from peers. Socially excluded children 'here and now' uncover risks of social exclusion for the next generation of children. The low level of children's well-being

today is a basis for their low 'well-becoming' as future adults and low well-being for the next generation of children.

Children mainstreaming refers also to the use of child welfare indicators by keeping children as subjects on policy agenda. This child-centred approach to welfare indicators may uncover unexpectedly powerful impact on the social cohesion of societies in a long run.

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# **Analysing and Locating Health Risks in the Family**

*Patricia Short Tomlinson*

## **Introduction**

When examining the risks to children and families the field of health and health care must be included since health is a ubiquitous stressor and one increasingly of danger to families because of contemporary changes in health care and in patterns of illness. The concept of health risk is a foundation of public health theory, which in practice most often concerns itself with perils to the individual or to the community. Within this view, the family is often seen as key to preventing health risks or the proximate cause of community health failure with concerns about the family that traditionally have been related to prematurity and high risk parenting in economically high risk populations. Practically speaking this has mostly involved children and their mothers.

Another point of view exists within the nursing paradigm (Anderson & Tomlinson, 1993). From this view while the strategies of primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention in health care of individuals and community is clearly a significant concern, the centrality of the whole family is dominant. This perspective claims that one of the main risks to health lies within the family through its interactional and meaning structures during health challenges, and secondarily on its relationship to its environment (Mu & Tomlinson, 1997). This as a particularly cogent perspective for nursing practice since historically nurses have always functioned at the boundaries between families, health, environment and health care (Aastedt-Kurki, Paunonen & Lehti, 1997; Tomlinson & Harbaugh, 2004).

This view that health, illness, and health care is embedded in the realms of family dynamics and experience is a very systemic view of health risk estimation, but one that opens new doors for locating health risk. It helps explain how the family is challenged to maintain integrity in the face of including health professionals who assist with care giving; how it maintains interaction within the family and between the

family and the immediate community, including the health care community; how it maintains or develops new coping strategies; and how it manages all of the changes due to health alteration (Tomlinson & Harbaugh, ; Tomlinson, Kirschbaum, Harbaugh & Anderson,1993).

The importance of assessing and intervening with health risk in families is growing for a number of reasons related to social and health culture change that makes health itself a potential risk. For example, because of modern health care and changes in health practices we are creating new risks for families through increased chronic health problems across the life span. So that, in addition to generalized greater longevity, technology which saves infant or aging lives previously lost often leaves its survivors with long term complex chronic health care needs. This is coupled with greater dependence on families for care of those who need it the most because of new organizations in health care. This organization delivers comprehensive care in the most acute phase of illness but delegates the rest to the family. Thus, the changed relationship between culture, health care, and families has created a greater imperative for locating risks to the family undergoing health challenges.

The purpose of this paper is to 1) analyze factors determining the nature of family health risk and 2) discuss strategies for locating these risks in health care of children and families. The paper examines 3 major types and levels of family related risks that increase family vulnerability in health care. The first is social and family factors that can lead to risky health behaviors; the second is the role of family characteristics that determine vulnerability, and the final are factors in health problems themselves that have a significant impact on the whole family system in responding to health threat.

### **Locating risk in the near environment**

It is not possible for this level of analysis to include all external effects that can influence family risk. Nevertheless, there are several factors in the near environment that may be considered essential in contemporary problems that face the family in health care. Sociocultural factors associated with poverty and race is commonly cited. However, a silent accompaniment to these issues is the effects of discrimination and stigmatized health conditions on family relationships and developmental interfaces.

Moreover, the political environment itself can be a potent effect by influencing the health of the environment and access to health care. Finally, the near environment includes time and the increasing intrusion of work on family life, both of which have an enormous effect on family health care giving capacity.

It should be noted that in the near environment, community health values are so significant that some believe that interventions at the individual level are of little value and only community campaigns designed to change attitudes can change health behaviors.

### **Locating risks within the family**

If we accept the view that the family is an integrative concept, then there must be a critical analysis of this level. As a first step, locating risk inside the family must take into account 2 levels of analysis; both the family as a whole and the individuals in the family. In health care this is particularly important because there is always a target patient and the family becomes known through this contact. Holding a simultaneous view of both levels of analysis is central to a systemic approach in family care. Therefore, risk in families is characterized by both the hazards to the family itself and the risk to individuals within the family, by risky health behaviors exercised by the family such as substance use, and by family dysfunction, particularly when the dysfunction affects children's safety and psychological development.

Individuals within the family on the other hand may be vulnerable because of age or health condition. For example, infants and children are always vulnerable to external family risks, risky health behaviors and family dysfunction. If the infant or child is premature or chronically ill the vulnerability ratio is very high if the family risk is correspondingly high. The reverse is also true. That is, if a family is low risk even if a family member is vulnerable there is less risk to the individual.

Obviously a low risk family without vulnerable members is an optimal condition, but one which health professional seldom deal except for health monitoring at certain life stages. With either a high risk family or a vulnerable member further evaluation is

always recommended. For a highly vulnerable individual in a high risk family there is always an immediate need for intervention.

A second step narrows the perspective further by looking specifically at cognitive and behavioral factors within the family. There are 3 areas to consider: family health knowledge, health behaviors, and family health care capacity (Denham,1995). Family health knowledge and beliefs about health practices, disease prevention, and health promotion underlies most health behaviors( perhaps except addiction) and are the traditional intervention areas for health professionals

The family's health care capacity is a distinct risk factor for both the family and the individual patient. Some of the caring capacity rests in the actual caretaking ability of one or more family members, some in the resources of the family,( financial, practical, and emotional), and some rests in the family perception; that is, whether caretaking is seen as a burden or whether it is seen as reciprocity for past or future nurturance needs.

Finally, almost all serious health risk is accompanied by alteration of family function whether for a limited time or an indefinite period. This can take many forms; role reversal, role overload, greatly increased stress load, personal distance changes, alteration of family rules. Therefore , a comprehensive assessment of family risk will consider some form of estimating family interact ional modes

However, determining family response to threat is a large area of study. Two efforts stand out. The first is Olson's seminal work on family typology and the second is the emerging family concept of resiliency, both of which contribute enormously to the debate about how families respond to health risk( Olson, 1989; Olson 1991).

Olson's typology concept posits that there a 2 major dimensions in the family, family adaptability and family cohesion, that determine how a family will respond to stress. Adaptability is the ability of the family to be flexible when responding to demands, or put another way, the relative lack of rigidity in meeting new family problems, Cohesion is the degree of emotional closeness among the family members. Both dimensions are theoretically orthogonal and distributed normally in a population so

that it is possible to estimate both dimensions simultaneously. This type of analysis yields at least 16 family subtypes based on openness and closeness with the most extreme types combinations either pathologically enmeshed, not connected, without rules or rule bound. According to Olson, the optimal family state is one where there is intermediate adaptability and emotional connections, with some alteration depending on the developmental state of the family.

This schema has been useful in verifying change in families when exposed to health risks by estimating change patterns in typology of families during and following prohibitive health care routines imposed on families as the result of unexpected prenatal and postnatal events(Tomlinson, Kuo, Fredrich & Olson, in press). It is also a well established model that has been tested vigorously for clinical work with families. This perspective allows a practitioner to see the central dimensions of the family as a point in space that has meaning regarding their functional capacity to handle stress where both family flexibility and bonding can be estimated simultaneously.

A second point of view is represented by Family Resilience Theory based on Antonovsky's (1979) theory for understanding how individuals manage stress. It is a relatively new concept adapted for determining family vulnerability, although most family scientists are reluctant to transform individual level concepts into a family level since levels of analysis can have significant differences. In this case , resiliency has been tested and shown to apply(Hawley & DeHann, 2005). In the family, resilience has been described as the fit between a family's strengths and the circumstances of stress. This concept is more philosophical than Olson's but is a way to get at the importance of perception and world view in developing a family schema which in turn influences family response to stress or threat.

The stressors of illness and health care pose a particular set of circumstances of stress and make the resiliency perspective a possible key in determining family health risk because it influences outcomes of both health and social interventions. Antonovsky's original construct is based on three concepts; comprehensibility , manageability and meaningfulness. These concepts can fit perfectly an application in family health risk as follows: comprehensibility is the degree to which events surrounding a health situation make sense cognitively, manageability is the degree to which a family feels

comfortable there are adequate resources to meet the demands of the caretaking, and meaningfulness is the degree to which the family believes the health problem makes sense emotionally.

Put another way, resilience is the fit between a family's strengths and the parameters of a particular set of circumstances related to alterations in health of a family member. It is the way a family addresses adversity and includes values, attitudes, goals, priorities, expectations; in short, the family's world view. Thus it is very useful concept in predicting the way a family may address the adversities in a health related event- or after the fact it helps explain how a family has addressed recovery or loss of a family member. According to Hawley and DeHann (2005), resilient families respond positively to these conditions in unique ways depending on the context, the developmental level- there is an interaction between risk, protective factors and the family's shared outlook. One of the strengths of the family resiliency construct is its ability to examine the family ethos or the shared perspective. Useful in interventions with families, it provides the foundation of "reframing", that is, finding new meaning in a health situation that greatly alters the family structure and function. This is strength inherent in many families; it can also provide the foundation of an intervention strategy to help a family see alternative definitions of circumstances.

There are suggestions here that a strong family schema stresses investment in the family unit, shared orientation to life, a relativistic view of life, and willingness to accept a less than perfect solution to life's demands. In this we see a reflection of Olson's optimum family type.

Some say that if families have resilience enabling process it helps them create a path that is adaptive and even lets them thrive in response to stressors over time (Hawley & DeHann, 2005). There are many clinical examples of this. This concept helps explain how in times of great stress, especially that which occurs over time, relationships within the family often undergo profound changes, either negative or positive. Families often cite how the experience is important to the family as it changes appraisal of what is important to the family and helps them reorder priorities. Negative affect can also occur as individuals in the family no longer are able to support each other because of their own private and profound grief. These feelings

may dominate without family resilience which enables the family to interpret their response differently and in the service of the family. However, it must be noted that adaptability in this sense has a developmental trajectory, that is, it takes time, and assessment of a family must take that into consideration. It is also important that assessment of resiliency consider both the individual and the family as a whole.

The value of adding the resiliency concept to Olson's typology construct of risk is that it provides a better formulation for developing interventions with the central concepts of comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness.

### **Locating risk in the health condition**

The most central issue and the final domain in locating health risks are in the conditions of the health event itself. Families are at risk for known health threats due to specific health factors which include characteristics unique to each occurrence. That is, this risk takes into account chronic, acute, and catastrophic health conditions as well as the sequelae, such as blame and guilt, rapid emergence of the condition and preparedness as examples (Mu & Tomlinson, 1997).

Using a model of comprehensive illness stressor characteristics can describe a profile in any given health situation, thus giving a situational stress level that can be used for baseline information (Anderson, 1993). Rolland's Illness Typology Model (1984, 1987b) is arguably the best attempt at patterning characteristics of illness into a cogent construct for families. It turns out this is a quite complicated structure as it includes at least 10 dimensions of illness and their multiple permutations that must be taken into account in order to estimate most possible effect on families. However, by using this model an estimation can be made of all dimensions of health by evaluating the health situation from the perspective of its central medical characteristics (onset, cause, severity, extent) the course and prognosis, the centrality to family (manageability and resource needs) and stigmatization. One example of the permutations to just a single category is in the "anticipated course of the disease". That includes 4 possibilities; progressive, constant, relapsing, and recovery. It is obvious that each of those outcomes is associated with different demands in the family.

The point of this kind of inclusive estimation is to determine impact of health on family life and the resultant family stress load. Without this multidimensional approach a diagnosis means very little in locating risk. With it the intersect between illness severity and demands on the family can be analyzed (Anderson, 1993). Some of the known illness dimension groups that carries the highest family risk include sudden trauma (especially of a child), catastrophic illness of more than one family member, long term chronic illness with poor life trajectory, and premature infants with developmental inadequacies of the mother.

### **Summary and conclusions**

This paper was a conceptual exploration that took a broad look at the contributors to the relationship between family health, illness, and risk to family outcomes. It examined this association from the perspective of the near environment, the family's role, and health conditions themselves in generating health risks to the family. The goal has been to promote a comprehensive and systemic view of risk factors in health care of families and not provide a formula for assessment.

So how does one use the suggestions made in this paper? It is quite obvious that locating health risks in families means finding a unique fit in each situation. It is clear also that some health situations would be especially risk prone. Perhaps there are prototypes of greatest vulnerability when there are multiple environmental stressors, when the family typology is in a borderline state and/or family resiliency does not fit the demands made on it and when the health condition is high on illness stressor characteristics. Only studies in health science using this comprehensive view in controlled investigations can make this claim legitimate (Tomlinson, Thomlinson, Peden-McAlpine & Kirshbaum, 2002). It should be noted that valid clinical measures for each of these suggested models do exist.

Nevertheless, it is clear that locating health risks in the family is not an easy task. The perspective presented here argues that the most important domain to explore with families undergoing health threat resides inside the family and is accessible only through exploring experiences, perceptions, beliefs, practices, and responses. This

approach requires a systemic perspective that is rooted in both family and health science. Such cross disciplinary models are increasingly necessary even though this adds to the complexity of design. These models also require expert practitioners to implement. However, a less sophisticated practitioner can learn from this approach the areas that if included will give a truer window into where the risks lie for families with a serious health problem and will provide an appreciation of the value of the holistic approach, and perhaps will be encouraged to study further some of the suggested models discussed here as the means to locate risks families face in health situations.

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## **Selected research notes**

# **The Emergence of a New Developmental Stage: 'Twenhood'?**

*Aurelie Mary*

## **INTRODUCTION**

This article studies whether the birth of a new developmental stage within the actual lifespan is imminent. In today's western societies, the social status of an increasing number of young adults has become substantially ambiguous. Indeed, a growing number of young adults in their twenties and early thirties live in an extended period of transition. Many noticeably delay their entry into adulthood and do not fulfil most of the requirements characterized by the adult status. They are situated in a phase of liminality that in turn increases the difficulties in determining their social identity (Turner 1992).

Young adults in their twenties and even in their thirties caught in a widened transitional stage actively contribute to the creation of a new phase within the traditional lifespan, which could be defined as 'twenhood'. 'Twenhood' designates a category of young people who seem to distinguish themselves apart from the rest of society, on the basis of idiosyncrasies particular to their vision of the world. This phenomenon appears to be spreading in western societies, and might therefore become a concept on its own in later times.

Simultaneously, the concept of age is losing credibility in determining individuals' roles and social positions. It seems to be increasingly relative and fluctuates around people's social settings. Individuals operate according to the situations they are in, and adapt their behaviour and 'age' in function to their living circumstances. Hence, not only young people inhibit their entry into adulthood, but many children and teenagers demonstrate precocious abilities to act like little adults.

The emergence of a new transitional stage and changes in age categories nevertheless cannot be studied by dissociation of the social shifts that industrialised societies have undergone since the 1960s and 1970s, perceived at the social, political, economic and

cultural levels of the wider structure, alongside technological transformation. Existence's traditional foundations have been disturbed; consequently, many young adults lack anchorage in the social structure (Beck 1992). Their current change in attitude towards the world and future therefore embodies an alarming response against today's ontological insecurities. Due to the recent appearance of the phenomenon of 'tweenhood', it has only received little academic attention. This process nevertheless deserves greater recognition for it is only in its early stage and is more likely to expand in the future, as opposed to being a simple trend. Its mechanisms are deeply rooted in the wider social sphere, and might, in turn, seriously impact on society as a whole.

This article examines the emergence of a distinguished intermediary phase – the one of 'tweenhood' – taking place in the actual life course within the present western socio-cultural context, both as an age group and as a new social status. In addition, the concepts of age, youth and adulthood are being evaluated; these 'established' ideologies are indeed losing consistency and credibility in today's post-modern world.

Methodologically, this paper is based on a small-scale research, based on literature analysis, qualitative data collection and secondary data analysis, such as online discussion forums. These forums are online public meetings for open discussions, where people can voice their ideas and get comments back. Semi-structured interviews have been conducted in Canterbury, England, in the spring of 2004, through a random sample of twelve young adults in their twenties, coming from England and a number of other European countries. The same amount of males and females, and of students and working people, were included in the sample. The main issues investigated concerned young people's attitude towards the importance of playing and 'fun' (including playing with toys, doing games, participating in leisure activities, hobbies, and also partying) in both their childhood and in the present time, and their current feelings towards the past and their childhood. The results obtained through the interviews confirmed some of the hypotheses brought up by the literature and the secondary data material.

## **EVALUATION OF EXISTING CONCEPTS**

### **Childhood and Adolescence – Historical Aspects**

The concept of childhood is highly taken for granted today, yet, it did not exist as such in traditional societies. According to Corsaro (1997), the distinction between the statuses of childhood and adulthood started to be established only a few centuries ago, more precisely from the sixteenth century. However, the evolution of the status of childhood within society and more particularly within families became more apparent during the nineteenth century, when it became associated with a time of innocence and purity; therefore, children were to be increasingly idealised and valued (Sommerville 1982). Childhood has been socially constructed and romanticised in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, initiating at the same time a new conception of young age.

Until the start of the twentieth century, children represented an economic necessity both for the maintenance of family organisation and its functioning, and for the reproduction of society itself. They were trained by their family in order to become active and responsible members of the community (Bridenthal et al. 1989). Later, education replaced work as the dominant feature of children's lives that, in turn, became dependent on their parents. Childhood was extended into a new phase called adolescence (Sommerville 1982). The new regard on the social phenomenon of youth paralleled cultural and structural modifications. New social concepts often appear when the times and the social structure are favourable, as a response to economical, political and cultural changes. In this trend, the industrialisation of western societies and the emergence of compulsory schooling in the nineteenth century was a major social factor that produced the "invention" of the adolescent (Stevens-Long and Cobb 1983). Over the years, the concept expanded and entered in the traditional order. Kett (1997) explains that the era of the adolescent truly emerged in Europe and North America in the two first decades of the twentieth century, which coincided with the appearance of both the institutions and the psychological features that regulated the social treatment of young people for much of the rest of the century. Nonetheless, sociological interest in youth as a life-stage of its own became recognized much later and became particularly influential in the 1960s (Bynner et al. 1997).

## **Adulthood – New Patterns Of Transition**

The life course tends to be presented under the acknowledged categories of childhood, youth, adulthood and old age, but Giddens (1993) is more specific in its classification, which comprises childhood; adolescence; the young adult, increasingly distinguishable as a stage; mature adulthood and old age. Mature adulthood represents the time between education and old age, shaped by the labour-market and family formation. Markers of the transition to adulthood include leaving school, being in full-time employment, moving from the family of origin to the family of destination, getting married and having children (Shanahan 2000).

However, economic and historical events can greatly influence trends of transition to adulthood. For instance, critical economic conditions can affect inter-cohorts' patterns for getting married, having children, entering the labour-market and continuing education (Shanahan 2000). Personal agency and the choice for one's life course is a dominant feature today that may, however, be seriously in disarray if young people are unable to carry out their set-up plans. As a result, they develop different patterns of coping strategies, either by withdrawing from the mainstream society or by becoming much more effective. According to Miles (2000), conceptions of youth transitions need to be more flexible in taking account of the multitude of youth transitions which are not homogeneous as one might think. Youth is related to age but not determined by it; therefore, sociologists of youth need to focus on the social processes that contribute to the construction of youth as a way of life rather than on the characteristics of young people of a particular age group. Transition to adulthood is more indeterminate today, which shows that the lifespan itself is not a fixed feature but can evolve as well. In this sense, the emergence of new intermediary stages within the life course, such as the one of 'tweenhood', a phase of 'post-adolescence' and 'pre-adulthood', seems imminent now. The social factors that are engendering this phenomenon will be analysed in more details in the following section.

## **STRUCTURAL CHANGES**

### **Ontological Insecurity**

Giddens (1993) define social change as the alteration in the underlying social structure over a period of time. To be able to identify it, one needs to analyze the modification or the maintenance of the basic institutions of a society during a specific period. The turn of the 1960s has witnessed important transformations, identifiable in the physical environment, the political organization, economic and cultural aspects (Giddens 1993). These shifts have contributed to significant social changes that have influenced people's lives. For instance, developments of the welfare state, the process of deindustrialization, the growth of globalisation, secularization and changes in the family structure are all elements that have greatly contributed to the disruption of the traditional foundations of existence, that used to follow routinized and predictable patterns (see Fulcher and Scott 1999, Giddens 1993).

In particular, Western societies' labour market has undergone important alterations. Mainly, employment has shift from the manufacturing to the service sector, paralleling the course of deindustrialization. Also, women have increasingly been involved on the market, and part-time jobs have become prevalent (Fulcher and Scott 1999). However, structural unemployment has emerged and expanded, and is now part of everyday life. The structural shifts undergone by the labour market make careers increasingly difficult to plan. As Bauman (1998) points out, coherent and durable careers are no longer an available option, and founding one's identity on work is to a great extent improbable now. As a consequence, young people suffer from confusion as to what direction to follow in life. The conception of labour itself needs reconsideration, and requires a novel approach (Bauman 1998). Increasingly, feelings of insecurity, powerlessness and alienation are overwhelming young people, who can no longer construct their identity around a predictable vocation. Although many twenty-year-olds still manage to integrate a rather stable road, for a growing number, locating themselves into the actual fluid world is more laborious than ever.

Successively to the process of de-traditionalization, society has become inclined to individualism. People have become the central device of their own biographies,

destinies and also of their own social connections. Self-identity is thus tied to individual choice, self-monitoring and self-reflexivity (Sweetman 2003). From this perspective, entry on the labour market not only depends on opportunities available to individuals, but also on personal skills. However, although the degree of decision making and choices for one's life has increased considerably, de-traditionalization has brought new risks and hazards obscuring the path people should follow (Cieslik and Pollock 2002). Young adults also suffer from the contradictions produced by the capitalist culture, which is highly based on competition and tends to label people as either 'winners' or 'losers'. One interviewee, Alexander (20), stated: "competition and pressure to succeed today is hard, and at the same time there is a lack of recognition of our own skills and abilities". The emphasis set upon individual achievement indeed contrasts the real probability of reaching one's aspirations and of achieving one's goals. Young people feel high pressure to lead a successful life while risks of failure engendered by the present economic conditions have worsened. This situation intensifies youths' vulnerability and feelings of alienation towards the world. It stimulates their pessimistic attitude that compels them to withdraw from the mainstream ideologies and to focus on immediate rather than long-term plans.

Young adults are lacking the guidance that could ease their process of transition into adulthood, exacerbated by the fact that no existing theories and knowledgeable experience of the present situation can be referred to as a reliable landmark. As a consequence, not only they are reluctant to grow older, but many present an anomic and apathetic behaviour at different levels of the social sphere, such as disengagement towards citizenship or political involvement (Calcutt 1998).

### **Glorification of Childhood and Devaluation of Adulthood**

Today, childhood is increasingly praised and given a sacred image to while adulthood is devaluated by society. In a youth-oriented culture, childhood is portrayed as a golden area whereas growing up is perceived as losing one's innocence and freedom (Calcutt 1998). Adult status is increasingly described as dubious while children are put on a standard level with adults, mainly with the rise in 'children rights'. Furedi (2001) talks about an emptying out of the adult identity, and argues that the media and the government heighten the dysfunctional conception of adulthood. The embodiment

of adults as negative stereotypes is also supported by the phenomenon of ageism in western societies, where the majority of the population is ironically growing older. According to Arber and Ginn (1991), ageism is institutionalised and age-segregationist policies contribute to the negative perceptions of elderly people; whereas youth is prized, older people tend to be denied equal social prestige.

The dilemma concerning twenty-year-olds' situation is amplified by today's social obsession around youth, that promotes a forever young and Peter Pan-like aspiration to remain immature (Furedi 2001). Perpetuated youth has become the new objective, and children and adolescents are now taking a larger space within the social sphere. They are indeed given a disproportionate status, which does not only undermine the roles held by the adult population, but also intensifies the lack of clarity in the separation between childhood and adulthood. If more and more grown-ups' behaviour resembles that of teenagers, ironically, children play at being adults and are both encouraged and rewarded by society for their precocity. Moreover, unlike older generations, children these days appear to live in a comfortable cocoon; nevertheless, this view might be erroneous. Indeed, if most children's material and emotional needs are successfully provided, many feel pressure coming from the media, their peers and their family to demonstrate precocious skills and abilities. Stevens-Long and Cobb (1993) clarify that propelling children to achieve set-up goals at a very young age can have the immediate and forthcoming negative impact of insinuating in them the fear of failure and competition. The consequences of such early development can be illustrated by young adults' melancholy and unwillingness to detach from the apparently wonderful epoch of childhood, as they grow up and discover the veritable difficulties of reality.

While in the 1950s teenagers could not wait to grow up and to 'escape' from the negative claws of childhood constraints, today's adults maximise their efforts to remain adolescents. As exemplified by some interviewees: "it's wrong when you grow up too quickly when you are little. I was like a woman from the age of 12, wearing make up, high heels and fashionable clothes, but now I feel I missed out and I need to go back. [...] Now I'm married, my husband takes care of responsibilities (like bills), so I can relax and be more like a child" (Liz, 27). Greg (27) also stresses clearly that "when kids are small or teens they want to act like adults and when they

grow up they want to go back into what they missed out". According to Calcutt (1998), the media are supporting this movement of infantilization, as seen in the popular comedy series "Friends" or "Absolutely Fabulous", written around the life stories of people experiencing an extended adolescence. The author relates this phenomenon to the fact that today's post-modern societies lack adequate images of adulthood on which youths could look up to. In this sense, the significant change in the conception of youth leads to an open debate concerning the meaning of the notion of adulthood itself. The fact that children can act like adults in some situations suggests that 'real' adults are no longer essential to the functioning and development of society. The discrediting and disempowerment of adults by society raises concern for the socialisation of children. One might wonder how future generations will cope with life and sustain society itself.

### **Culture of Hedonism and Cherished Immaturity**

Simultaneously, alongside the elevation of the status of childhood, post-modern societies tend to regard leisure and enjoyment as the central device of existence. Simultaneously, the significance of work itself is changing. In the past, it used to represent the centre of one's life and to determine one's identity. Today, it has been devaluated with the primary focus on its dehumanising and alienating aspects, while free time is increasingly publicised as the key to personal development and happiness. More and more, leisure comes to replace work as a key determinant of self-definition, so that status becomes constructed through non-work activities (Calcutt 1998). Evidently, work still holds a significant meaning in one's life, therefore most people still choose to invest in a career, but even then, work's value is often judged by its capacity to generate pleasurable experiences (Bauman 1998). From another point of view, compared to adults, young people possess a considerable amount of free time, and youth cultures are essentially socially constructed through leisure activities (Roberts 1983). Contentment has become the new directive of a fervent population. As stated by Laura (25), a respondent: "we live in the culture of fun, happiness and contentment today, in opposite to the past, when glory was to be found in work and when leading a successful career". For such reasons, youth is much more appealing than the deceptively demanding and tedious grown-up life.

However, the present culture of amusement is strongly linked to the entertainment market that promotes individual gratification. The development of leisure activities and the enormous production of goods and toys for children have significantly increased at the turn of the 1970s, alongside the general increase of material consumption in western societies. Companies encourage the development of a perpetual youth and the image of immaturity, aiming at young people's nostalgia. For toy and game manufacturers, grown-ups are a new target, and represent a new exploitable economic sector which is more likely to develop in the future. The range of merchandise available for Kidults has already expanded considerably, and the number of consumers of past children's icons is escalating. As an example, in Japan, the market for toys sold in capsules (initially designed for children) from vending machines has noticeably widened among male adults in their twenties and thirties (Oguni, <http://mdn.mainichi.co.jp> 2003). Kidults have a tendency to buy and collect character toys that awake the child inside of them and evoke good memories, which provide them psychological comfort. Laura (25) stresses that she "used to play with toys and watch cartoons until I was about 12, then books replaced the toys. But at the age of 18-19 I went back into toys. There's so much more toys and choice now, it's appealing and I felt that I was missing out". Through the marketplace, young people found a way to preserve and retrieve their childhood, and to re-materialise earlier enjoyable experiences. In other words, young adults come to merge their present life with an enhanced reconstruction of their past. In this sense, the intense development of the market for Kidults is both a response and an initiator of the fetishizing of childhood.

While according to authors such as Kiley (1983), the phenomenon of infantilization, or "Peter Pan Syndrome", was more inclined to men, the interviews and secondary data analysis revealed that young females were concerned too. This process has been highlighted by a recent study from the USA, communicated by the Entertainment Software Association. They discovered that 26 percent of video game players were women 18 or older, while 21 percent were boys aged 6 to 17, and that the average age of players has risen to 29 (Berkowitz <http://www.forbes.com> 2004). Infantilization is increasingly spreading across gender, status and age groups. Even if adults have always been playing games in the past, the present approach towards 'fun' seems to have changed, in the sense that it is given priority rather than occurring from time to

time, and young adults happily and proudly display their willingness to enter into an unrestricted and unlimited period of entertainment. Most of my interviewees' accounts co-ordinated with these observations. As Henry (28) mentioned, "people no longer work for work but for their self-development and to meet the culture of entertainment's requirements." From a positive stance, Miles (2000) underlines that if young people are more hedonistic than ever, their common willingness to have fun unites them as a group.

## **THE TRIGGERING FACTORS OF 'TWHENHOOD'**

### **Rejection of the Traditional Structure**

The issue of the birth of a new transitional stage within the conventional lifespan is essentially founded on post-modern ideologies, that tends to reject the traditional order. This has been demonstrated through a series of political and social movements mostly generated by young people. Bertens (1995) stresses that the anti-modernism movements of the 1960s triggered the cultural and political transition that is taking place today. Post-modernity can be perceived as a reaction against the rational and stringent character of the modern ideologies, characterized by rationality, authority, technology and science (Inglehart 1997). Therefore, the movement encourages the deconstruction of the established structure, but also the rise of new values and lifestyles, with an emphasis upon individual agency (Sarup 1993).

One can relate this issue to the beginning of the modern epoch, when Rousseau perceived nature as the source of all good, and man's institutions as the cause of evil in the world (Sommerville 1982). Today, after the general loss of faith in the grand narratives and of the modern character of industrialised societies, the western world might in fact seek nothing else but a return to its origins. In a society where people lack landmarks to build up their future, they increasingly look for guidance in an idealistic past. Through the present juvenile tendencies, young people equally express the desire to avoid the negative aspects encapsulated by the status of adulthood. One might draw a parallel between the eagerness to escape from both adulthood and the modern era, and the willingness to reunite with both the inner child and the pre-modern period. Young adults seem to reject the modern structure to such an extent that they even

resist the conventional life trajectory by changing its chronological pattern and by following an unexpected path.

### **Going Nowhere: Identity Crisis**

This reveals the social order not as a fixed entity but as a constantly moving device. However, in paradox, the post-modern conditions have brought new dilemmas that challenge individuals' lives. Old constraints have been replaced by new ones, specific to the contemporary culture. As underlined by Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1995) the traditional ways of interpreting the world have become ineffective today, and individuals are left alone to deal with their life. Not everybody can find answers, and what remains are new doubts, anxiety and a growing sense of insecurity. Even people's destiny seems to rest upon them, although it remains undeniably influenced by a web of external socio-economic forces. Young people's experience of life and entry into adulthood today are entangled by the quickly changing social world they live in, and where the paths taken by the previous generations cannot be viewed as a model anymore (Aapola and Ketokivi 2005).

Many scholars or experts analysing youth cultures these days might simply label young adults as defeatist as opposed to the previous generations. However, as Merton (1968) previously revealed in his researches related to crime, one device for alleviating anxieties is to lower one's level of aspiration; therefore fear produces inactivity. The pressure to develop appropriate skills and the consideration of possible downfalls push young people to adopt an anomic behaviour, preferring to wait for something to happen rather than to explore challenging routes that might end up in failure. Their engagement with the world hence looks more passive than active (Hutson and Jenkins 1989). This is nonetheless encouraged by the present social circumstances rather than being a deliberate choice. The transition from childhood to adulthood brings confusion and fear as to what to expect in the real world. Twenty-year-olds, in a similar way to teenagers, experience a second identity crisis, or 'quarterlife crisis' (Robbins and Wilner 2001).

Dominated by doubt, many choose to invest in an academic career, both as an attempt to multiply their chances to obtain the desired position on the market, and to postpone

adulthood. In this respect, during the interview process, Rob (28) stressed that he would “prefer to remain in university a longer time rather than having an underpaid or unsatisfactory job.” Sandy (26) explained that “we grew up in a care-free time our parents’ generation built up after the Second World War. In contrast to them we never experienced what it means to lack of anything. But now society is changing so quickly, we struggle to find jobs. [...] The theories about life do not match the reality. In that sense, doing a PhD allows me to push away the time when I will have to fight for a place on the labour market.” In this respect, Furlong and Cartmel (1997) express that “having parents who experienced very different transitions, young people often perceive the process as filled with risk and uncertainty. Many, fearing the consequences, shelter from the labour market as long as possible by remaining in education. [...] Even young people from privileged social backgrounds and with excellent academic credentials frequently worry about failure”.

Irwin (1995) argues that structural unemployment and the collapse of employment opportunities, alongside the increasingly limited opportunities for young people to secure their independence leads to the questioning of their ability to attain not only adult lifestyles, but also an adequate way of life. This change in attitude among young adults indeed increases their dependency upon their family for a longer period than it used to be the case in earlier times. Processes labelled ‘Nesting Syndrome’ (Valerie Wiener 1997) and ‘Boomerang Kids’ have been identified, concerning young adults still living at home or returning to the familial dwelling in their twenties and even thirties. Home is indeed perceived as a safety net. Robert MacDonald explains that the youth phase has been extended, following shifts in the world of work, education and training, that have, in turn, contributed to the increase in the dependency of young people on their families and to their postponed access to the identities and activities previously considered as symbols of the adult status (in Vail et al. 1999). This nevertheless can vary, depending on the country young adults come from, for various ideologies operate in different societies, and influence people’s lives in divers ways.

### **State of Liminality**

In every type of society, particular rites of passage give rhythm to the evolution of social beings. People undergo transitional steps and move out and onto new statuses,

in accordance with their social structure. In the beginning of the twentieth century, Van Gennep identified that rites of transition were marked by three phases: separation, margin (or limen), and reaggregation (Turner 1992). The first stage separates individuals from their original status, the second involves an interval apart from any traditional statuses, and the third confers a new status upon them (Davies in Holm 1994). The middle stage, distinguished as 'liminality' by Van Gennep, represents a phase where people are positioned across a threshold for a certain amount of time, belonging to neither one status nor another. In western societies, adolescence has been regarded as a transitional interval between childhood and adulthood before becoming a status on its own. Considering social developmental stages, Furlong and Cartmel (1997) distinguish the physiological from the social processes of maturation, and the notion of youth that covers a much broader period of time; extended today from the mid-teens to the mid-twenties, which is a social concept that lacks a clear physiological base.

Regarding the present situation of young adults, the transitional period between adolescence and adulthood is largely lengthened, and the clear boundaries dividing the two statuses have become difficult to distinguish. Young adults' position of liminality has been extended, therefore, rather than moving on, they delay or even avoid their logical reaggregation into adulthood, the subsequent stage of their social evolution. Consequently, young adults' social status is now indeterminate. Their social identity presents ambiguities and is under negotiation, as they are still categorised under the status of 'adulthood', while a growing number of them feel situated in an undefined and 'in between' social position.

### **Predestination of a New Status**

Furthermore, the lifespan itself is not a fixed feature but can evolve as well. The life course has become more ambiguous today, and existence is sporadic and fragmented. People increasingly live a life of their own, following a much more un-linear trajectory. Great variation has been noticed in young adults' current living arrangements, which fluctuates alongside socio-economic upheavals. This is mainly a consequence of the disappearance of the traditional cyclical patterns and of the formal life cycle in which consecutive cohorts followed each other through the same

predictable and familiar routes (Roberts in Helve and Bynner (eds.) 1996). Before, a normal child was expected to go through a series of cycles experienced by the previous cohorts. After the stage of childhood as a life apprenticeship, people would simply reach the status of adulthood without much contest. Nonetheless, jobs were abundant and guaranteed to last for a lifetime before, which provided a secure framework onto which one could shape his life.

In this line, the life course is shaped by socio-historical processes, and its evolution cannot be denied (Harris in Bryman et al., 1987). Roberts (1996) supports that earlier cohorts' channels into the workforce have been broken but they have not been replaced by efficient equivalents (in Helve and Bynner (eds.) 1996). Therefore, 'tweenagers' have started to create their own reference framework. In other terms, they are socially constructing their own notion of youth and adulthood, and deviate from traditional evolutionary trajectories. Turner compares people or societies in a liminal phase to an institutional capsule that contains the seeds of future social developments and social change (<http://www.creativeresistance.ca/> 2003). Like adolescents several decades ago, 'twens' or 'tweenagers' are increasingly distinguishing themselves as a separate cohort within the present social sphere. In the present chronological haze, there is no longer a relevant concept appropriate to 'pre-adults'. In fact, many articulate their sense of not being teenagers anymore but not yet adults. According to a 24 year old young man from France, the word 'youth' is very broad, normally associated with teenagers, while there is no real notion identifying people in their twenties. He adds that he feels trapped 'in between' two statuses, and does not feel he belongs to either of them (<http://www.moveandbe.com/> 2004)<sup>1</sup>. This statement is actually echoed by a growing number of young adults in western societies.

In this perspective, Turner (1992) raises the issue of 'communitas', and the feelings of unity young adults might experience, such as when undergoing a common identity crisis. As Davies claims, the term *communitas* can help describing people's feelings when going through a liminal state. Whereas hierarchy divides people, *communitas* unites them (in Holm 1994). Hence, this would explain the collectivity of the movement of infantilization stimulated by young adults, and their detachment from the established social perspectives such as the traditional life course. This process might be a solution to re-enact community, and to feel connected to each other, as

well as being anchored somewhere, in order to counterbalance the lack of landmarks available nowadays. Turner (1992) goes on explaining that in western societies small groups nourishing *communitas* tend to withdraw voluntarily from the mainstream and eventually from the total system, often perceived as a source of alienation. *Communitas* allow them to escape the alienating nature of a social system and simultaneously contributes to the creation of social antistructure (Turner 1992). In turn, anti-structural movements can influence and modify the apparently static established order, into unprecedentedly experienced routes, as it seems to be the case with 'tweenhood'.

## **CONCLUSION**

Today's children are having important difficulties growing up because western civilisation itself is experiencing an identity crisis (Sommerville 1982), therefore the western world can no longer offer a clear framework to its population. The current tendency of delaying one's entry into adulthood and extending youth embodies a post-modern reactionary movement to today's ontological insecurities. It also proves that the lifespan is being de-constructed, and that people are increasingly reinventing their own identities. They are simultaneously reassessing the social concepts of childhood, youth and adulthood, consequently hazing their respective meanings. From this perspective, one might stress that the former rational way of determining social features is coming to an end, and that new definitions, more suitable to people's present way of life are required.

On a broader level, providing that age is no longer a criterion to participate in youth culture, one may question its relevance per se. The present concept of age seems increasingly unsubstantial today, however, many social institutions are still based on the principle of age. A reconception of the notion of age might have implications for the regulation of society itself, such as governmental laws and policies, especially in terms of all the social issues currently determined by this notion. Similarly, reassessing the question of age implies a reconsideration of the traditional milestones established to define the current social positions, such as the statuses of childhood and adulthood themselves. The recent shifts in the conception of youth and adulthood leads to open debates concerning their real significance and implication in today's

society. Thus, if physical maturity, income, marriage, or having children are no longer the relevant rites of passages to enter adulthood, one might wonder what basis will determine this status in the future. This idea incontestably raises problems that may be worth analysing in deeper details in further research.

From a closer stance, the issue of 'tweenhood' is to some extent illustrated by today's young people's prolonged liminal position, that might in fact be nothing less than a preparation to a better entry into a 're-conceptualized' stage of adulthood, so that it might benefit people's needs in a more appropriate manner later on. As emphasized by Turner (1992), individuals involved in antistructural liminality do not necessarily intend to produce chaos but wish to establish more effective ways of integrating new elements of life experience for which there is no traditional precedent. This may at first cause disarray among the representatives of the conventional order, but might in fact be an innovative response to situations that require societal reordering. Seeing that the world itself is entering a rather ambiguous era, people merely seek new structures more adapted and conformed to their present requirements. Individual change can act as the matrix of social evolution and initiate future forms of systems. Hence, the emergence of 'tweenhood' is a double way process both produced by and contributing to social change, which might, in the long term, impact on the direction of society as a whole.

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# **From risks and crisis to the aspects of power and caring. How children make the home of a divorced man**

*Leena Autonen-Vaaraniemi*

## **Introduction**

The rise in numbers of divorce rates has become a central demographic feature in most European countries. Also cohabitation has become more frequent nowadays. According to statistics it is the men who lose in divorce; this can be seen in their added alcohol consumption, their health problems, loneliness, suicide rates etc. It also seems that men are suffering from losing the family in divorce, because in Finland children usually remain with their mother. In divorce, the home is often a source of conflict in many ways. Leaving home or moving away from home is a situation where considerations about locality, property and family relationships are reassessed.

What kind of knowledge do we need about the changing family structures and the everyday lives of the divorced men? Instead of speaking about the risks of the divorce, I'm going to shift the focus to the aspect of power and caring of divorce. What are the interconnections with men's practices, power, home and children?

This paper is based on a case study of a divorced man. I've selected excerpts from the interviews of a divorced man from the viewpoint of home, children and separation after co-habiting. I've constructed themes or categories and tried to interpret some of them. The data is from my ongoing dissertation work "Men at Home. Constructing masculinities in domesticity during the life course."

According to the studies on men and masculinities men are considered a social category. It is the variety of social practices that reproduces masculinities. (Connell 1987; Sipilä 1994.) The concept of men's practices focuses on the materiality of what men are actually doing in their relations with women, children, and other men. It focuses on the social problematising and challenging of men, especially in relation to men's power. (Hearn 1996; Pease & Pringle 2001, 1-13.) Following this notion, the

emphasis of this paper is on a man's practices with children from the viewpoint of spatial and material aspects of home.

The physical and spatial character of the home is the ground for the reproduction of social action (Saunders & Williams 1988, 82-85). The home is a site where spatial and temporal boundaries in relation to domestic and public space are negotiated and challenged between household members (Valentine 2001, 71-73). Households reproduce gendered conceptions of time and space and they are also organized around these dimensions. The temporalities and spatialities of home are multiple and complex, and it is in these processes of time and space, where gender and age relations are constantly being created, modified and structured by the family members (Morgan 1996, 136-155; Saunders & Williams 1988, 82-85.)

Home can offer ambiguous and contradictory experiences to household members (Moran & Skeggs 2004). How the home is experienced depends on the power relationships: who has the power to determine how the domestic space and its social relations are produced (Valentine 2001, 76-85). In all, time and space may be considered as aspects of power within family relationships (Morgan 1996, 148-150).

People redefine their own space in a different way as their relationships to work and interests change and they acquire more personal possessions (Valentine 2001, 75). In divorce, the home is often a source of conflict in many ways (de Bruijn, Homm & Talasterä 1994, 63-65). Leaving home or moving away from home is a situation where considerations about locality, property and family relationships are reassessed. Changes in personal circumstances, such as divorce, may become a threat to the balance between identity and the stability of the home. (Morgan 1996, 176-178.) In my study the separation after co-habiting is a point where the home, as well as the man is in transition in various and often contradictory ways.

### **Home as social relationships**

Veikko is a 39-year-old single man. He separated five years ago, the cohabitation lasted about eight years. He's sons, Anssi and Aki are seven and nine years old and they live with their mother Pirkko. The parents have a joint custody. Nowadays

Veikko goes steady with Erja, but they don't live together. Veikko's girlfriend Erja has two children. Veikko lives alone in a two-room flat in an apartment building in the downtown area.

I gave a disposable camera to Veikko and asked him to photograph important and meaningful aspects of a home to him. Veikko had taken three photographs about his two sons.

*I: "Could you say something about those pictures, I mean when I asked you to take photos of the meaningful aspects of your home, so why did you take just these?"*

*V: "Well in fact these are the important things in the home, like what we said before these are just my digs, where I spend time, but when the boys are here there is something more like a home and especially this photo where they're playing a game, this is maybe the best description of what mainly happens here, that there's a bit of a mess all round and a bunch of guys playing Playstation."*

*I: "I see. What things is it that brings the feeling of home because of the boys?"*

*V: "Well I couldn't say really."*

*I: "I mean, that your digs become a home?"*

*V: "Well I suppose it could simply be because there are more people there. I don't know, I've always sort of disagreed when some feel that even just two people make a family. I don't think a two-person household is a family, that's a two-person household. So that's even more so, if you're on your own that's anything but a family. Somehow in my world of ideas home and family are linked. So I don't know if there's any deeper logic to this."*

The sense of home is an emotionally based and meaningful relationship between people and their environment (Dovey 1985, 34-41). The nuclear heterosexual family is often presented as a synonym with the home (Gubrium & Holstein 1990, 132-137, 151-160; Valentine 2001, 84). In Veikko's case, the separation didn't mark the actual 'end' of a home. For Veikko, the dwelling is turned into a home by his children, when living alone he doesn't feel at home at all.

Home is a gendered space in many ways. In the light of women's and men's biographies, the core of home is a family and its near relations. However, there is a gender difference in perspectives. Unlike women, men describe their social

relationships from the outside, not being a part of them. Home becomes significant for men as matters of housing arrangements or building a house, that is, creating the preconditions of a home. (Vilkko 1998, 30-72.) According to some studies on divorce, the sense of home for men is formed first and foremost through family connections. It's especially the children, rather than any other people, who make the home to the divorced men. (de Bruijn, Homm & Talasterä 1994, 76-77; Hokkanen 2005, 132-134).

### **Spatial and material practices**

I asked Veikko about important material objects and things which he needs in his daily life.

*I: "You said that the boys' beds are important, but are there any other things here which belong to them, objects or something?"*

*V: "Pretty few, now that they're big enough to use the same plates and dishes as adults. Well of course they have children's forks, knives and spoons, but they no longer have anything like, you know when they're little they have their own teddy bear mugs and such. I've taken them all to the new place (interviewee is building himself a leisure home in the country) because they're the kind that won't break if you drop them so I'm using them there. Then they do have some clothes here, but not that many, because they generally bring what clothes they need when they come."*

*I: "What about their toys and such things. Do they bring them when they come?"*

*V: "Well in fact they don't really play with toys all that much, they maybe bring books and then they play the Playstation, they bring their own games but they always take them back with them because that's how I want it. I mean I've told them they shouldn't bring stuff like that here because in the first place there's quite enough of stuff here anyway and secondly they'll leave them here and they get lost and then they'd need them at the other place, so – as little as possible. Then when they come they bring their skates and swimming gear and indoor bandy gear, whatever we're planning to do. So in the main all the stuff here is mine."*

After divorce, objects and rooms make children present to the non-residential parent. When the children leave to the other parent's home, the non-resident parent experiences homelessness. A divorced, non-resident father may feel homeless while the children are away, because there aren't necessarily many children's objects at his

home. (Hokkanen 2005, 132-134.) Veikko also tells about his sons through objects and rooms. However, Veikko doesn't want his sons to leave any toys or things at his home. In this way, Veikko sets boundaries to his home, which doesn't include his sons. As a matter of fact, he seems to construct the boundaries of fatherhood through spatial and material practices.

The home becomes important to Veikko through the shared spaces and practices with his sons. Every room makes the territory of the sons, too. At the same time, home is Veikko's private and personal space. Household members negotiate and contest the spatial boundaries of a home. There are rules governing the rooms and objects. The power dynamics of home include the way in which the power to control activities and space is exercised, contested and resisted. (McNamee 1999.) Men, women, children and adolescents have different capacities for action and they encounter different constraints of action within home. For adults, the home is typically experienced as a realm of autonomy where they can choose how their rooms are arranged etc. For children and adolescents, on the contrary, the home is often experienced as a domain dominated by adults. (Saunders & Williams 1988, 82-85.) Between men and women, for example, cleanness and tidiness may become means of regulating gendered domestic space and social relations (Welzer-Lang & Filiod 2003).

### **Hideaway from social fatherhood**

*V: "When I go to visit Erja (girlfriend), I often read books or actually I quite often don't do anything that's to do with studies, it's more like, I stretch out on the sofa. Then sometimes I come here, since Erja has two kids as well, and sometimes you just can't do anything there, so I come here to get a bit of a rest, it's nice here because you're not disturbed. Nothing but traffic to make a noise."*

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*I: "Then what about, you said that your girlfriend also has kids of her own?"*

*V: "Yes, two."*

*I: "So do you consider yourself as their step-father?"*

*V: "No, not that, not at all, no."*

*I: "Why not?"*

*V: "I just, they've got a father of their own and that's it [in English]. Actually I haven't even thought about my relationship to them, meaning what it's like. I think about them just like I think about my own children or about all other children for that matter, I mean I don't make a difference according to who is whose kid and so on. I think there's a lot of, in society at large as well, that one should always define all relationships, I think that's the sort of weird psychoculture that's really common these days that everyday things are made into something terribly complex. Like, thinking about the village communities in the old days, they didn't spend all their time thinking about whose children these are and can I tell them off and can I teach them to behave, and people lived somehow more sensibly in those days. These days everything's supposed to, I think they're just ridiculous the articles you read in some magazines that two adults who have children from previous relationships, that they form, now what is it you call it, is that one of those step-families or what?"*

*I: "Yes, step-family or..."*

*V: "Step-family, yes, and then when they have children together then you're supposed to have terrible difficulties defining the relationships between each. I can't say I have had anything like that at all."*

*I: "So you don't consider yourself as living in a step-family"?*

*V: "No-o, no, no, no."*

*I: "Is that because you have digs of your own, a separate place, and they live on their own?"*

*V: "Well it can be because of that, but it's true I've thought about it, like even if I did live with them I still wouldn't, wouldn't think such complicated thoughts about it. I tell those children not to do something just the way I tell my own kids or, overall, if I have friends visiting and they have children and they need to be told something then I do, though not everybody likes that, it's true. So this, I don't know, I haven't thought about it in those terms."*

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*I: "About living alone, what would be the good sides about that?"*

*V: "Well I think there's this, I mean you have your own space, by which I don't mean that when Erja (girl-friend) is here, that she shouldn't eat and drink and do as she pleases, but still it's like something pretty basic that I can always slip back here when I want to be left alone. And I don't mean because of arguments, just that if I'm tired and stressed out, I just come here since she, Erja that is, has two children. The girl, Lotta (girl-friend's daughter), she's starting school now, and for some reason she's really keen on me. I often draw pictures with her and that sort of thing, and she tends to be all over me, like let's do this and let's do*

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<sup>1</sup> \*\*\*\*\* means I have selected passages from different points in the interview and arranged them under the thematic headings in this paper.

*that, so if I come here I can be left alone, with nobody disturbing me. And I really don't mean that Lotta's a great deal of bother, but even so, I'm the supervisor of a class at school and also have a heavy teaching load, which means my days are really hectic and I get to deal with quite a lot of all sorts of less pleasing matters, to sort out the messes that teenagers get into. We've got all sorts, suicides, mental problems, drug abuse, alcoholism, there's a fifteen-year-old girl who's pregnant, I mean when this is what you deal with on a daily basis, then you haven't got all that much energy for creative projects in the evening. I just like to hole up here reading the Orwell's Animal Farm or something like that."*

Veikko seems to feel that he has the right to be alone at home. He has also the freedom of choice with home: he can stay in his own flat or go to his girlfriend's apartment. The home crucially constitutes privacy, because it's the locale where we are 'offstage' (Saunders & Williams 1988, 88-90). For Veikko, the children turn the dwelling into home, but these children aren't just anyone. They are his two biological sons. Feeling at home doesn't relate to his girlfriend's children. Thereby, home means a kind of hiding place from social fatherhood.

### **Separation after co-habiting: whose home?**

*I: "Then how did you agree about other things, I mean about where each of you would live and how you'd divide your stuff, your property?"*

*V: "Well actually what happened, if you look at it in terms of money, I really paid dearly for this separation, but I don't think of things in terms of money. I think money's just, it's just money. In fact it's my house, I mean I own the house where they live. And there is an agreement on what I should pay to support the boys, but I have never paid a single penny of that, seeing that they live in the house with no rent. And about other things, there was no particular agreement, the only bad side about Pirkko is that she is completely unable to manage her finances, so I have had to, time and time again to pay all sorts of bills, starting with the electricity, for she just can't manage to keep her finances in order, poor thing. I mean I have paid lots of things that I really shouldn't have to, but I don't think about that so much, I just think someone has to pay them, and Pirkko's not using me, she does pay me back in her own time, but the children, the boys, will have an awful time otherwise, so that's what I have to think about. We're none of us going to take any money with us when we go, and that's a fact."*

*I: "You said that financially the separation was pretty hard on you. Could you say anything more specific about that?"*

*V: " --- Like if this had been the sort of traditional divorce with lots of conflict, the sort that it appears my friends have at least, so if I'd wanted to play it mean I could have thrown them out of the house and put it up for rent. I could get, at*

*the moment I could get a thousand euros per month for it in rent. And when you deduct the monthly building maintenance, and actually I still pay that at the moment, I suppose I'd be left with about five hundred per month. And if I'd pay the normal child support which in itself is ridiculously low, then I suppose I'd be getting something like one and a half, two grand in old currency [pre-euro] every month. And then again if you think that I might live in the house, then I could put this up for rent, this'd bring in quite a nice sum, so there would have been options, but as I said I'm not out to calculate all that. By and large my finances are all right at the moment. I need very little money, I've got no expensive hobbies. So my expenses are low, I build musical instruments, that's my hobby and it's starting again, and I play in several bands myself. That works out cheap, I just bought my stuff the once and that's it. I couldn't be bothered thinking about something like money. Money comes and money goes, just like the buses."*

The matters of property and ownership are linked with locating individuals in space. Property and ownership shouldn't be seen merely as economic relationships but also in terms of power linked with e.g. themes of individualism and choice. (Morgan 1996, 172-178.) Personal autonomy and ontological security are contributed by home ownership (Valentine 2001, 73-75).

In divorce the division of ownership becomes an issue. For some, losing their family home in divorce can cause severe grief and trouble. According to an empirical study on divorced men, if the man remained in the family home, he felt pain and the place didn't feel like home to him anymore. Moving and house-hunting were great sources of stress to those men, whose family home remained to their ex-wives'. Some of the divorced men lived temporarily in caravans, country cottages or with acquaintances. Housing problems and economical troubles connected with divorce caused problems to non-resident fathers in meetings with their children. (de Bruijn et al. 1994, 63-65.)

In my study, Veikko owns his current home and also the family home, where his ex-spouse and children live. The family home has monetary value to Veikko and he has invested financially in it. Home ownership enables, at least theoretically speaking, Veikko's control over his ex-wife and children. What would happen, if Veikko suddenly decided to sell the family home?

## Concluding remarks

According to my empirical data, a divorce may become a means to using power in family relationships. The divorced man's choices of living together and living apart in family relationships are intertwined with his physical housing arrangements. His power is enabled by home ownership, the freedom of choice between different apartments and setting the boundaries of home. In these situations fatherhood may become a matter of choice, a kind of conditional fatherhood.

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# **‘The ordinary’: preliminary findings and conceptualisation of ‘the ordinary’ in children’s home**

*Tuija Eronen and Riitta Laakso*

## **Background**

This presentation is based on the *preliminary findings* about a theme we encounter at the children’s homes. The ordinary becomes one of the themes in both professional interviews and former resident’s narratives of living in children’s homes. It’s something that care workers described “like an ordinary housework”, acting like “as a home” or working “based on normality”. Former resident construct it in their stories as living in “a sort of home” and being “same kind of child as anybody else”. We were confused about these stories, because recent studies emphasise the troubles and special needs of the children in last resort child protection. At the same time the new methods and “good practices” used in residential care are constructed to assess risks and special needs.

Residential care in Finland includes care in children’s homes, detention homes, youth homes and shelters and extra-familial group homes. The main form of residential care in Finland is a unit for 5-8 children with 5-8 care staff members who work in three shifts. In one “home” there can be several home units. Living in care is considered as last resort in Finnish child protection. Despite many new models of working with parents and families the number of children in residential care has constantly increased. In 2004 there were 14 704 children and young people living in out of home placement. 38% of them were in foster families, 46% in residential care (in institutions and group homes) and 16% in other out of home placements (Säkkinen & Kuoppala 2005, 20). The ideological ethos prefers still foster families to children’s homes.

Research tradition about residential care in Finland is thin and there is only few researches about this phenomena (Jahnukainen, Kekoni & Pösö 2004, 8). Researches about children in children’s homes made by Hukkanen (2002), Pasanen (2001) and

also Kalland (2001) emphasise the children's psychical symptoms and the importance of the therapeutic orientation in residential care. Törrönen (1999) concentrated in her doctoral thesis on children's every day life in children's home. Tuovila (2001), Tervonen-Arnkill (2000) and Timonen-Kallio (2000) have emphasised special methods in residential care for developing the work and used methods in children's homes.

Stakes (National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health) organised a research project in detention homes during years 1996-2001. In this project Pösö (2004) concentrated on young peoples experiences in detention homes. Jahnukainen (2004) focused on the life courses of young adults after they have left detention homes. Kitinoja (2005) describes in his dissertation young peoples life before detention homes. Analysing documented case files he finds different paths for these children through social and educational system to detention home. The aim of these research was to produce knowledge about children and young people living in detention homes, their families and clienthood in child protection.

Mainly all post-doc researches and dissertations of residential care in Finland are made in detention homes or with strong psychological or psychiatric orientation. There are strong voices about the speciality and special needs of children in residential care units. Based on these research findings there is pressure to increase psychiatric treatment facilities for children. In this special professional discourse care workers are considered to be helpless with children's growing special needs.

## **Inquiries**

The title of Riitta Laakso's inquire is "Doing child protection in children's homes". The main interest in her dissertation is to *describe and find concepts for residential care in children's homes*. The main questions are: What is the nature of residential childcare in children's homes? How is daily residential care described and conceptualised by care workers?

*The method in Riitta Laakso's research is ethnographic based on fieldwork, interviews, participating observation and everyday documents made by care workers*

*in children's homes.* Riitta has participated in everyday life for about three days a week during six months and at the end of the fieldwork periods she *interviewed the care workers.* She has done her intensive fieldwork during autumn 2004 and spring 2005. *This presentation is based on her first interviews with care workers and fieldwork notes during autumn 2004.*

Tuija Eronen tries to understand what children's homes are as lived experiences in former residents' narratives and autobiographies of living in children's home. Her dissertation is an article collection. First article was published in December 2004 and it is a narrative analysis of subject positions and shades of shame in 24 autobiographies written mostly by women and girls (Eronen 2004.)

*This presentation is based on interviews and discussions with two young women, Kati 19 years and Katja 21 years old.* They have both lived their childhood and youth in the same children's home. Before the interviews they had already done lots of identity work (Gubrium & al. 1994) by reading their papers and borrowing home videos from children's home. In this case "identity work" seems very common, concrete and ordinary "everyday activity". The research method used in this study is both narrative and *co-operative or collaborative.* (Wilkins 2000.) This project relies strongly on the accounts of the children. In that sense, the empirical approach is narrative, in its very wide meaning, with a special interest of 'giving voice' (Plummer 2001) and Tuija also shares the ethical view with Arthur W. Frank (2003) that narrative analysis (or research in general) goes far beyond the production of knowledge from and about people's stories. Research is participating in storytelling and researchers are due to be aware about the power relations in all states of research process (see Wolf 1996.) *This method also connects in empowering social work research tradition, where research aims are to hear the "silent" voices and make visible vague resistance of the dominant stories.*

### **The ordinary in special care**

The ordinary in this context refers to an idea that all children need to be cared for and they need other peoples help. Children need to be fed, comforted and clothed. Children need to belong and be visible and meaningful for someone. They need to be

welcomed. Touching and hugging are important for all children. Children have their basic human needs regardless where they live. The ordinary also refers to all those periodical and repeating little events in our everyday life, to those concrete day-to-day situations and relationships between children and adults and their identities. *We argue that the ordinary is one important frame* (see Goffman 1974; Bateson & Bateson 1987) *in understanding, giving and making sense of everyday living* in residential care. In our approach there is a quite strong phenomenological, constructionist and also narrative background (Berger & Luckmann 1966; Arendt 2002; Riessman 1993; 1994a; 1994b).

We are both concerned that we know so little about the ordinary and everyday life of children and families. We also have a lack of understanding of the everyday life in institutions. *In children's homes concepts like institution, home, family, parenthood, childhood, professionalism are mixed and fluid. (also Ungar 2001, Ward 2004) These concepts are constructed and reconstructed in every day situations and relations between care workers and children.*

First we read separately our data and noted that both were telling about the same theme, that we named "the ordinary". After that we discussed our findings, read other research and tried together make sense what that theme means. We find two main dimensions which construct "the ordinary" 1. Everyday routines and rituals, 2. Sensitivity and intimacy in relations.

### **Everyday routines and rituals**

Daily living in children's homes consist similarities of living in an ordinary home. In Riitta's field notes many descriptions of care workers' everyday doings are much like parents: cooking together with children, washing clothes, helping children with their homework, reading a story-book in evenings, watching television together. That looks quite ordinary daily living with children.

*All the children and three adults sat around the table. One girl asked who of the adults would come watch them ride the horses. Hannu said that he would go. It was obvious that the girls were very pleased that it was Hannu, who would go with them. The older girl continued with the*

*conversation and said how the muscles get sore after riding a horse. She also talked about her trip to Tampere that Saturday. During the meal, one care worker talked with Riku about winning the lottery and about a possible chance to move to his own apartment. The care worker wondered if something else is required when you move on your own. One of the boys was rocking with the chair so the care worker went to straighten it. The care worker also made sure that the children thanked when they left the table.*

*After the meal, the girls went to ride the horses with Hannu. Their riding lesson lasts for an hour and during the time the care worker stays there with them. One care worker had made an agreement with the girls that they could clean up their rooms after riding. One of the boys cleaned the table and filled up the dishwasher with a care worker, Mikko. The boy said that he could not play football because he had to wait until the dishwasher had finished washing so he could empty it. Mikko told him that he could go play if he just came back before 6 o'clock to empty the dishwasher. The boy left happy and went to play football. (fieldnotes 48, A)*

Like Ward (2004, 211) emphasises, we must not lose sight of the fact that for most of the time everyday life must also feel ordinary. This daily care in children's homes can be understood like simple "worthless routines" but also significant rituals that construct children's identification and reproduce social order. Care workers noted that everyday housework is meaningful for children to have experiences that are common at home. Making things together construct relationship between care workers and children. Everyday routines and rituals also include trips outside the children's home. Care becomes visible in videos that are filmed on these trips.

In Swedish research made by Sallnäs (2000, 199) the care workers answered that their main working method in children's homes is providing homelike environment for children. Sallnäs noted that the claim of family-likeness might be an ideological claim that does not relate to the care in practice.

In our findings family-likeness is constructed in former residents memories of living in "The home". It is present in photographs and in stories. Family, relatives, school friends, other children, the staff and their families, children and relatives are either physically present in daily living or present in stories that people tell. According to O'Connor (2002) there are three kinds of stories i: stories we love to tell ii: stories we could never tell and iii: those that must be told. Stories that can't be told usually include taboo, but over time they can become stories that must be told. Telling stories

and narratives of life to and with children is part of the daily living also in residential care. *Stories of family secrets and sharing them with trusted ones are ways of bonding.* Ellerby (2001,48) argues that secrets and families are so tied together that secrets are the core of family. Both children and care workers construct those stories and some of those are told only orally and some are written in daily report.

In this point the frame of the ordinary and especially trustworthiness is fragile and can be suddenly broken. In those situations Hyden and Överlien (2005) argue that core element of working in child protection is then how workers are part of constructing stories either by confirming or disregarding children's stories. Still care workers have ways of bending the institutional reporting rules and constructing trustworthiness in everyday living.

### **Sensitivity and intimacy in relations**

In children's homes the relations between care workers and children are considered to continue for a long time, sometimes for several years. Everyday living with children offers many ordinary situations to deal difficult things and issues with children. Special episodes with children appear during everyday living, usually suddenly and without planning. That is ordinary in children's homes and relations between children and care workers. Relations between children and care workers construct from concrete doings together, touch, discussions, manners, smells, quietness, confrontations and avoiding each other. In those everyday situations are many potential opportunities for children to be offered "therapeutic" help by care workers through an immediate and thoughtful response to a challenge or an incident (Ward 2004, 222). This sensitivity and intimacy bring up many questions about good care and relations, which are not common when we discuss about the quality of the social or therapy work. Much of professional work is based around everyday events interactions and much less is done by way of formal interview or meeting with and individual client (Milligan 2003, 287). In following discussion meaningful relationship between child and worker is not constructed by the terms of a professional working relationship, but as personal and emotional relationship between two people.

*Tuija: Well, it's written here that "Kati was a quite shy child. She didn't want to talk about her life. First in children's home adults must build up trustworthiness in relationship between them and the child. Especially key workers did consciously work in constructing trust in relationship with Kati". (long silence) What do you think about this? Was it like this?*

*Kati: ...yea...(whispering)*

*Katja: Was it Karin who was your first key worker?*

*Kati: Yes.*

*Katja: Well, yes. I remember that she was exactly that kind of person.*

*Kati: Yes*

The relations between care workers and children in everyday situations *seem to* include many of the same questions as *discussions about good enough parenthood*. When children described distance in relationships to some staff members they used words as "*just working*".

Staffs have practical and material parental tasks in relation to the children in residential care. They also have various emotional depths in relations with the children. There is ambivalence how to characterise these relations. Care workers do not describe residential care as parenthood or as paid labour for children in care. Those are mixed concepts in residential care. We should study carefully such concepts as "professional parenthood" and compare that to the discussion about modern family and parenthood (see Forsberg & Nätkin 2003). Understanding of professionalism in residential care needs to be reconstructed.

Both relations to adults and peers give children and young people an audience to perform the identities they construct both inside and outside the home.(Ungar 2000; 2004) Peer relationships are important and meaningful in daily living in children's homes. Becoming friends, fighting, telling secrets, taking care of smaller children or negotiating and constructing gender and sexuality are basics for children both in and outside the children's home. There are meaningful attachment relations between children even more close than relationships to siblings. Kati told that she felt totally lost and alone when all the older children whom she was attached to moved away during the same year.

We all are familiar with such feelings like pain, shame and distress as well as anger and sadness. Some emotions in our culture are easier to live with, share and deal - some are much more difficult. Emotions are present in everyday situations and relations between care workers and children in children's homes. Emotions of children and care workers were sometimes as real and strongly present as material things (also Anglin 2002; Pösö 2004).

*Care worker: But somehow... so... (teary)*

*Boss: What it is going on...? (emphatically but serious)*

*Care worker: I don't know. I'm crying again...*

*Boss: So ?*

*Care worker: So, I was thinking about what happened on Sunday when Joonas hit his head, that Joonas, that he is so ...so like, that he didn't let me go to his room to comfort him, and then.....I already bawled about it to Mari on Sunday, that ...*

*I 'm not allowed to do anything although I'm his key worker ... so even me... he does not make any contact in any way... (gulping and sobbing)*  
(recorded episode between a care worker and a boss in the children's home)

It is crucial how care workers interpret their own and children's emotions and behaviour because this interpretation has some times direct consequences in child's life (see Karnik 2001; Överlien 2004; King et.al 2003). Are emotions seen as symptoms, sign of something that should to be anticipated, controlled and disciplined or acceptable emotion that should be shared and lived with children? If emotions are constantly interpreted as symptoms children learn to hide their emotions and children can become painfully aware of being under surveillance, being monitored and assessed.

*Tuija: What if you were sad?*

*Katja: It was one of the best things in moving own home that I can cry whenever I want to. Nobody thinks I am crazy.*

It is important that care workers don't lose their sense of normality of emotions as a part of children's or their own every day life. If they lose it at the same time they lose ways of comforting and sharing and living through both hard and happy times together with children. Anglin (2002) uses concept "sense of normality" and "pain-based behaviour" to describe both children's and care workers struggle in every day situations in children's homes.

## Conclusions

In our findings there are some similarities with James P. Anglin's (2002) conceptualisations of residential care. He emphasises *the meaning and importance of every day living and care* when measuring the quality of residential care. We agree with Ward (2004) that this "ordinary life" approach in residential care is implemented through planning everyday routine events in such a way that they will feel more like "family life" than "institutional living". We also agree with him that this "ordinary approach" carries significant risks of normalization. We have to be aware that the ordinary is constructed in the extra-ordinary life circumstances.

Everyday situations with children and care workers are significant. These ordinary situations are also the stage for children's needs, emotions and behaviour. It is essential how care workers understand and interpret those situations and respond to children's needs and what frame they are using in this understanding. Are they constructing the special or the ordinary? The ordinary is constructed by acknowledging the meaning and importance of everyday routines and rituals and sensitivity and intimacy in social relations between people in children's homes.

## Notes

1. This article is modified and further analysed version from our presentation in Eusarf conference in 25.9.2005 Paris.

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# **Fatherhood and violence in custody disputes**

*Teija Hautanen*

## **Introduction**

The relationship between fatherhood and violence is an under-researched area in Finland.<sup>1</sup> Neither is there much Finnish research about how child custody and contact are arranged in case of violence in intimate relationships. I combine these themes in my research which handles fatherhood and violence in the context of custody disputes. I am interested in how fatherhood of a man who has acted violently towards women and/or children is supposed to continue after separation.

The aim of this paper is to present some preliminary results of this ongoing research. First I will tell what kinds of problems are seen in Finland considering child custody and contact arrangements in relation to violence in intimate relationships. After I have described my research setting I will look at how many custody disputes had some kind of a mention about violence when I collected the data, who is claimed to be violent and how violence is pictured in the court records of custody trials. Finally I will think over how do the courts relate to violence and how important factor violence is to their decision making. Mostly I will describe my data on a quite general level. The results will later on become much more precise.

## **Problems with child custody and contact arrangements**

In Finnish legislation there are two main principles about how the separating parents are supposed to arrange child custody and contact visits after divorce. These basic rules also apply to unmarried parents who have been cohabiting.

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<sup>1</sup> Previously I have written two articles about this lack of interest (Hautanen 2002 and 2005.) In my consideration the possible explanations for it can be found in the Finnish ways of conceptualizing violence against women in a gender neutral way and as a matter which concerns only adults in the family. Two further explanations for bypassing the relationship between fatherhood and violence I have found from the ways in which parenthood tends to be understood. The focus of parenthood is still very much on motherhood, and therefore, a violent man is generally not defined through his responsibilities as a father. On the other hand, much is expected from the new fatherhood, and this way the talk about fathers concentrates mostly on the positive sides of fathering.

One vital principle is that both mothers' and fathers' parenthood should continue after separation and that it will happen via joint custody and contact visits. The Act on child custody and contact that took effect in 1984 prioritised joint custody in all situations and the right to contact also became central. Continuing relationships with both of the parents are considered as a child's best interest. Law's emphasis on joint custody and the right of access indicate also on an assumption of equal parenting. (Kurki-Suonio 1999, 462-465; Kurki-Suonio 2000, 195-197.)

The other basic principle is that the parents should achieve an agreement about the custody of the children, their housing and right of contact. The ideal is written in the legislation and it is also widely carried out in practice. (Kurki-Suonio 1999, 481; Kurki-Suonio 2000, 194.) Only under ten percent of separating parents with underage children end up into a custody trial. Agreement can be reached through family mediation provided in municipal social services and also when the judges probe the chances of an agreement during the court proceedings. This principle is based on the assumption that an agreement between the separating parents is a far better starting point for the future and for the upbringing of the children than litigation (Auvinen 2002, 117,158-159). On the other hand, lawyers may often feel that these kinds of family issues should not be handled in the courts (for example, Pettilä and Yli-Marttila, 1999, 36-37).

Kurki-Suonio (2000, 194) points out from the cultural point of view that in Finland the ideals of joint custody and mutual agreement as well as divorce legislation reflect strong confidence in the possibility of ending a relationship amicably – like there were two mature adults separating as friends.

The principles I presented above - the idea that both parents should continue their parenting and the avoidance of custody disputes - are largely endorsed by public opinion and a variety of professionals. It is not usual to criticise these principles. Nevertheless, some researchers and shelter workers have expressed their anxiety about these principles, because they see that the rules do not fit situations where violence prevails. There are several concerns in child custody and contact rights practices:

1. Joint custody, so popular in Finnish society, has not proved to be a good solution in situations which involve violence. It works often poorly when there has been violence. The relationship between the parents is very troubled in those cases and doing decisions about children's issues together can be very difficult. Under cover of joint custody it is possible for the other parent to pressurize and harass the other one constantly. (Kurki-Suonio 2000, 197- 199; Perttu et al 1999, 24.)

2. Contact visits can be a serious security risk. Violence towards the other parent or children can continue via contact visits. They can also cause a psychological risk to children when children have witnessed violence. Children may be traumatized and feel afraid – that's why the contact visit may become very hard for children. (Aaltonen 2004, 69- 70; Lehtonen & Perttu 1999, 101; Oranen 2001, 93; Perttu et al 1999, 24.)

3. The ideal of agreement and negotiation: the ideal of equal negotiations does not come true and the mediation process itself can mean a serious security risk for women in case of violence. The threat of violence may be the other parent's (most often fathers) way to get what he wants. It has been maintained that many women who have been subjected to violence are traumatised and become easily tired by the divorce process. They may agree to accept nearly all of the man's demands, so as to make an end to the harassment and accusations and to get some peace. (Oranen 2004, 11; Perttu et al 1999, 22-24.)

These are the problems seen in Finnish legislation and practices. In other Nordic countries there has been similar problems as well as in Great Britain (Eriksson, Hester, Keskinen & Pringle 2005). On the other hand, Australia, New Zealand and USA have developed their legislation so that the courts are told to take violence in intimate relationships into consideration in custody disputes (in USA there can be differences between the states). Also Canada is enhancing legislation towards this direction. (Jaffe, Lemon & Poisson 2003.)

## **The research questions and the data**

I am approaching fatherhood, violence and child custody and contact arrangements from an institutional perspective and with the theoretical background of gendered violence and parenthood as a gendered phenomenon. My central research questions are: What kind of decisions about custody, living arrangements and visiting rights do the courts make when a father has exhibited violent behaviour within his family circle? How are these decisions justified?

The data consists of court records of custody disputes from the year 2001. At this point of the research there are 164 cases of which 89 from district courts (Helsinki, Oulu and Tampere) and 75 from courts of appeal (Helsinki, Itä-Suomi, Rovaniemi and Turku). It is presumable that I'll do some additions and the final amount of the cases will be a bit higher. The data includes reports given by municipal social welfare boards. With this data it is possible to analyse understandings created both in justice system and in social work.

When I collected the data I chose those cases in which there were some kinds of mentions of physical violence or sexual abuse. The perpetrators of violence are not solely men in my data: I have chosen also those cases where mothers' or step-parents' violent behaviour comes up. Later on I will do comparison between men's and women's violence in my data. Does their violent behaviour differ a lot and do the courts handle them differently?

## **Preliminary results from the court data**

### The rate of "violence cases"

Collecting data from the courts wasn't very easy. The filing systems defer a lot and there was also variation whether it was possible to read the whole documentation directly. The proportion of those cases in which there were mentions or claims about physical violence was however significant. Especially in the courts of appeal the rate of "violence cases" was considerably high, being about 40-60 %. When collecting the data I used a pretty strict definition of violence. If there were only some vague

mentions about aggressive behaviour or threats which weren't specified, most often I didn't collect those cases. So, it is very likely that there are actually more cases with some kind of violence in the courts.

#### Who is claimed to be violent in the data?

1. 2/3 of the cases include a mention about father's violent behaviour.

Most common of these accusations is that the father has been abusive towards the mother. Other accusations say that the father has been violent towards both the mother and the children or just children.

2. 1/3 of the cases include a mention about mother's violent behaviour.

These accusations say that the mother has acted violently towards the father or the children. Some accusations say that the mother has been violent towards both the father and the children.

3. 1/10 of the cases include a mention that father abuses or may have abused the child sexually.

In these cases it is usually so, that the mother has brought this question up. In one case it is the social board which tries to push it through. In some cases the possible victim of sexual abuse may have been the parents' older child who is not in other ways part of this trial.

4. 1/20 of the cases include a mention that mother's new partner or husband has acted violently.

These claims say that he has been violent towards the mother, the children or the father. For example, the father may be very concerned about children witnessing violence when living with the mother.

Other claims can be like this: The father's new partner or wife is accused of being violent, the father claims that the mother has abused the child sexually, the father says that the mother's new partner's children hit his child, the father says that the mother's brothers have assaulted him, etc. Additionally, there are also some mentions about violence like "there has been violence between the parents" or "there has been domestic violence".

In some of the court cases there is just one accusation about violence, in others there may be two or more accusations. This means, for example, that in the same case both the mother and the father may say that the other parent has been violent, the father can be suspected about abusing the child sexually, mother's new partner is told to threaten the father, etc. It seems that in these complex cases the living conditions and human relations of the parties are filled with violence and other social problems. The child welfare may know these families very well and the children may have been taken into the social board's custody.

Violence came up differently in different cases. The accusations of violence are not always strongly brought up by the parents, although in many cases they were written into the parents' grounds of demands or statements. In others, it came up in the social workers' reports or the psychiatrist's opinions. In some cases it was the child or children who brought it up in the reports from the experts.

#### How violence is described in the court data?

It is usual in the court records that the severity of violence and the number of violent acts are not clearly defined. For example, it can be said only that someone has acted violently. On the other hand, there are cases in which violence is better portrayed. In these cases the severity of violence varies from pushing and grabbing to stabbing. Violence against children is pictured often as discipline, roughness or hard-handedness. Anyhow, some threats to kill the children did come up.

There is not much written evidence of violence in the court records. When there is, it can include reports from police, sentences of assault and battery, medical certificates, reports from women's refuges, etc. The lack of written evidence is part of the usual problems of violence in intimate relationships. When there is violence between family members, it is not common to go and see doctor or contact police. Neither it is common to speak about it openly to relatives or friends. Therefore it may difficult to get someone to tell about it in the trial. When there is doubt of sexual abuse of children, situation is often different. If the doubt is presented seriously, child is examined and then experts' opinion of these examinations is given to court.

## How do the courts relate to violence?

How does violence in intimate relationships then affect to the courts' decisions? When the courts motivate their decisions the impact of violence is often left open: in many cases violence is not directly mentioned. In some cases violence comes up implicitly or one can read it between the lines. For example, violence can be included in the expression "quarrelsome relationship". The court can argue that the parents have so quarrelsome relationship that joint custody can't work in practice. This can be one way of taking a stand to violence. In some cases, one can conclude from the decision that violence has been perceived as an important factor — for example contact visits are ordered to happen under supervision.

When there is question about sexual abuse and child has been examined because of it, the expert's opinion is usually also part of the court's argumentation. The court pictures then what kind of this opinion is and whether sexual abuse has happened or not and what are its consequences to the result of the custody dispute.

Bypassing violence in the justifications is problematic in different ways. It can mean that violence really wasn't seen as an important factor in these cases. This is a major problem. Or, it can mean that violence has affected the decision, but for some reason the court doesn't want to bring it up. This is a problem too: in my view the parties of the dispute need to know why the decision is such as it is, and in principle every citizen has the right to find out what are the facts that the decisions are based on.

One reason for not to mention violence is that the courts aim for positive expressions when they give reasons to their decisions in custody disputes. This came up in some courts when I collected the court records and had some conversations with the staff. The courts try to argument in a supportive way and they want to point out the future possibilities of mothering and fathering. This kind of argumentation can also be seen in part of the social workers' reports. This is a well-meaning practice, I guess, but at the same time it is a part of the culture that says that violence in intimate relationships is something that is not a proper subject to talk about openly.

When the courts take violence into consideration openly, first they usually define whether it has happened or not. If there isn't written evidence then the statements heard in oral hearings are estimated. If there isn't any other evidence than other parent's statement and nothing else supports it, usually the courts come into the conclusion that there isn't enough evidence of violence. In public discussions it has often been argued that social workers and judges believe mothers always when mothers tell that a father has been violent or abused children sexually. My data doesn't support this belief.

There are some typical ways of how the courts justify their decisions when they have concluded that violence has happened. When they say that violence has an impact on the decision they can argue that it supports the assumption that the parents have a quarrelsome relationship which complicates joint custody. They can also seriously consider the risks caused by violence and conclude that unsupervised visits danger children's safety and harmonious development. Feelings of fear are thought over in some of the cases. It can be said that violence has caused feelings of fear and insecurity for the children or that violence has made the mother feel afraid which in turn affects the children.

There are also cases where the courts conclude that violence has happened but it does not have an impact on the decision. This kind of conclusion can be justified in different ways. One way is to express that violence has not been directed to the children. The other way is say that violence is part of the past but it is not happening today: courts can say that violence has happened a long time ago or just during the marriage or co-habitation. Sometimes violence is not seen as an important risk because it is understood as just a temporary part of the divorce crisis. The nature of violence can also be described as such that it doesn't form an actual danger to the children. In some of the cases it is said that the children feel no fear and like to be with the parent, and therefore violence is not considered as an essential part of the decision making.

What kind of alternatives courts then have in case of violence? Violence can affect on the living arrangements: the courts choose with whom children are going to live permanently. It is also possible to order single custody. In my data single custodies

are ordered clearly more than joint custodies. The contact visits can be ordered as supervised or the courts can order that the visits start and end supervised or that someone else than the parents brings and returns the children. In the data it is so that when the other parent demands supervised visits they are often ordered by the court. If sexual abuse of children has been proved, the visits are almost always ordered as supervised. The visitation rights can also be denied, but this is very rare.

## **Conclusion**

At this point of research my main result is that the Finnish courts don't have a uniform way of viewing violence in custody disputes. This is true for both men's and women's violent behavior. There are no homogenous practices in estimating the possible violence. Neither is there unity in how the estimated violence effects on the result of the case. This variation concerns also the work of social services and other authorities who give their reports to the courts. On the other hand, dealing with the possible sexual abuse of children makes an exception of this. Authorities handle it more homogenously.

My message is that the possible violence must be estimated carefully. We should now strongly develop authorities' awareness and practices around this issue. The perpetrators and the victims must be defined as well as the amount, quality and continuity of violence. The authorities should evaluate also the physical and psychological consequences of violence and also the risks it may cause it in future. The whole process of this kind of evaluation should include sensitivity towards gender issues and understanding of how the violence affects the children whether they have been victims of physical violence or not.

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## **Definition of uncertainty and risks in youth policy – from deviant behaviour to management of risks**

*Tapio Kuure*

In the history of sociology the most well known discourse on the problem youth is connected to the concepts norm and deviant behaviour. So called sociology of deviance draws the long line from the old Chicago school in 1920`s via Parsonsian sociology in 1950`s to the constructionist sociology of outsiders in 1960`s a`la Howard S. Becker. The problem youth was displaced by youth culture in the analysis of 1970`s by Birmingham school. During 1980`s and 1990`s the “underclass” debate both in its` conservative and radical version focused on risk behaviour of the underdog young people.<sup>1</sup>

The change of the concept risk took place during 1990`s in the transformation of the welfare state`s social policy, based in paid labour, into so called new liberalism, based in entrepreneurship. According to the new liberalist missionaries the ethos of paid labour was changing into the ethos of entrepreneurship.

The concept of risk in the use of new liberalism is to be traced back in management science, from where the most of new concepts are coming from, e.g. self management, time management and risk analysis. The management –type –of – concepts took their space not only in the discourse of social sciences but in our everyday life as well. In the new liberalism way of thinking the individual (no more talking about citizen) must be able to take risks. Taking risks is normal and acceptable behaviour in new liberalist society. To put briefly, if you are as person not able to take risks, you are a loser. As an individual, you must have competences to make risk analysis of your own. If your analysis is wrong, or under some circumstances you take too big risks, you are going into trouble. If you are going into too big trouble, you will loose your contact to the world outside.

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<sup>1</sup> Ulrich Beck`s risk concept is structural in formulas like individualization of risks in reflective modern, while underclass debate, especially in its` conservative version concentrate into the individual`s everyday life and regeneration process.

However, in Finland we do not have any pure new liberalism. Most structures of welfare state still remains and the vocabulary used in definition of individuals' problems are still based on social sciences. This does not mean that concept of risk is left outside from the covernance of society. The concept of risk is used in the identification of risks and measuring the risks. The new information technology gives all the time updated data to the politicians and civil servants to formulate "knowledge based management" and "evidence based politics". The risks are identified and measured in the construction process of social indicators. After the first wave of social indicators debate in 1970`s we have now the second wave, started in the middle of 1990`s.

The social indicators used in Finnish youth policy are based on concept "young people's living conditions", developed in the beginning of 1990`s in the Ministry of Education. The variables are quite traditional ones. In the internet data base (free for everyone in <http://www.nuoret.org/>) there are over 100 variables concerning living conditions. The variables are divided into 10 sections

- employment
- education
- housing
- internal and international move
- parenting
- income
- health
- crime
- accidents and deaths
- exclusion

The variables that are indicating risk behaviour are quite rough in comparing with other sections: sentences set by courts, amount of accidents, suicides, deaths. The conventional risk analysis used in youth policy is based on three variables: the amount of young people who do not have any particularly place to go after compulsory school, so called *status zero youth* - without a work, outside upper secondary schooling or training or they are long-term users of social benefits.

The well-or ill-being variables, developed and used by STAKES are more focusing to the problem behaviour than variables on young people's living conditions. The variables are divided into 8 sections:

- teenage pregnancies
- suicides and injuries
- employment and income
- child welfare
- smoking and substance abuse
- social relations and sexuality
- schoolwork and health
- juvenile delinquency

How about young people themselves? What are their own experiences about uncertainty and risks in their life?

In the survey, conducted by Jani Eerola, young people were asked about their own experiences of uncertainty (Eerola 2004). The list was quite different than official lists of problems. Young people, age between 18-29 in the end of the year 2003 worried about:

- environment
- attitudes and values in present society
- international politics
- aging of population

Young people were not worried about their

- income
- safety and welfare of their family
- continuity of social relationship

In the same survey young people were asked about their feelings of risks: In what kind of things risks are connected in your life? The risks were located in:

- drugs
- guarantee somebody's loan
- gambling
- stock-market
- own enterprise
- one night stand –type of sexual relationships
- short-term loans

The risks were not seen in drinking alcohol, going out in the evening or discussing with strangers.

Many criminological studies have shown that the feeling of uncertainty or risk and the street level reality of getting into trouble do not necessarily correlate. The most typical examples are young men, who do not have fear to go out in the night, but they actually are the most likely victims or perpetrators in the context of street violence. In order to get coherent picture about the uncertainties that we live with, we have to get data from both sides, from official statistic organizers and from the feelings of citizens.

The new kind of information society with its` updated data based on registers and surveys gives us a lot of information about the living conditions, attitudes, beliefs, opinions and fears of citizens. The dream of knowledge based management and evidence based politics in the modern history of mankind has produced totalitarian nightmares. The strategy to avoid the totalitarian nightmare in the future is transparency, one of the basic concepts in the White book of governance in the European Union and in the Lisbon strategy of the Union. The key element in the transparency of society is the transparency of data production and open dialogue both in data production and interpretation of the data.

## **Costs and Outcomes of Taking Children into Care**

*Heidi Laitinen*

When talking about postmodern society, individualism in contrary to good old communitarism, is often mentioned. Boys don't follow in their fathers' foot steps in their occupation anymore as well as girls don't plan a career as a wife and a mother. We have moved from a career dictated by tradition to creating continuously our own potential future in occupation and other spheres of our lives. (See Beck, Giddens & Lash 1995, 8–9). Actually, we are expected to be autonomous in good interaction with surrounding society, which requires flexibility and capability to tolerate insecurity (Kajanoja 2005, 239). We don't have merely a freedom to choose our own life and future, but an obligation to do so. Individualization means a destruction of the securities of industrial society and an obligation to find and invent securities for ourselves and for others left without them. We do this within the limits and regulations of a welfare-state. Even traditional marriage and forms of family are transformed to be matters of decision making and are with all their conflicts to be seen as personal risks. (Beck 1995, 27–29.)

Bonss (1993; in Beck 1995, 21) talks about “the return of insecurity in society” by which he means, that social conflicts are no longer handled as disturbances but as risks. It is typical for a risk that there are no simple solutions for it. It is, instead, recognized by a basic ambivalence that can be dealt with – but not removed – by estimating probabilities. Belief in ability to technically control society disappears. Beck (1995, 16) defines the concept of risk society as a stage of development of the society, where social, political, economical and individual risks are lost of the hold of follow-up and secure institutions.

In postmodern society taking children into care is not seen as a disturbance but as a risk. Everyone is welcome to make his or her own decisions in their lives – and everyone is accordingly responsible of the consequences of their choices. Child protection does not prevent and correct a disturbance in a family anymore but tries to estimate from different prospects of the child's future with known or, more likely,

unknown probabilities the best outcome with certain measures used. Indeed, what are the costs – both human and economical – if you take a child into care? What are the costs if you don't?

## Background

The number of children and young persons placed outside home is increasing in Finland by 2–5 % each year during the last ten years. The costs of placing children in children's institutions and professional foster homes in Finland in the year 2003 were 222 m€, 33 m€ (15 %) more than the previous year. (*Child welfare 2004; Equalizing system of great expenses in child welfare 2003.*) That figure does not include the costs of for example placing children in families or the costs of open care.

**Table 1.** Statistics on Taking Children into Care.

Sources: *Child welfare 2004* and *Equalizing system of great expenses in child welfare 2003* (2004 figures, except 2003 figures regarding residential care)

<b>Statistics on Taking Children into Care</b>	
Children and young persons placed outside the home	14 704
Children and young persons taken into care	8 673
Increase of the number of children and young persons placed outside the home / year	2 - 5 %
Increase of the number of children and young persons taken into care / year	1 - 6 %
Net costs of residential care in 2003	222 m€
Increase from the preceding year	15 %

The number of children and young persons taken into care grew in 2004 with 3,9 % from previous year in Finland. The rate of growth declined some from the year before. 20 % of all acts of taking children into care were involuntary, about 15 % of them were urgent. There were 27 % (of 59 912) new clients in open care in 2004. The total number of children and young persons placed outside the home increased by 2,4 % in 2004. One percent of all children and young people under 18 were placed outside the home. 62 % of them (9 151) were placed in institutional or other care and 38 % (5 553) in foster families. (*Child welfare 2004; Equalizing system of great expenses in child welfare 2003.*)

The period of being in care in Finland ends at the age of 18, when a young person reaches one's majority. After the age of 18 begins after care period, which ends at the age of 21. It can happen that a child or a young person is placed back and forth between home and different placements which, of course, is not recommendable.

The laws that regulate the act of taking children into care in Finland are the Child Welfare Act, the Child Welfare Decree and the Child Custody and Right of Access Act. They are grounded on the UN's Declaration of Human Rights and the International Declaration of Children's Rights. The actions taken by social workers are also regulated by the Ethics of Social Work set by the International Federation of Social Workers.

There are three criteria that have to be valid simultaneously when taking children into care in Finland according to the Child Welfare Act (5.8.1983/683 § 16):

- 1) conditions or care in the child's or adolescent's family are insufficient and threaten to endanger health or development of the child or adolescent or the child or adolescent endangers him-/herself his/her own health or development by using drugs or alcohol, doing more severe than a minor criminal act or by another comparable behaviour
- 2) **and** community care measures of support are not appropriate or possible or if they have been proven insufficient
- 3) **and** if foster care is in the advantage of the child.

There have been suggestions for the criteria for clearing up preconditions of taking a child into care, evaluating the conditions of the home from the child's point of view, evaluating the detrimentality of the lifestyle of the child, evaluating community care support and evaluating the child's advantage (Taskinen ed. 1999, 14–15, 19–23). Department of Health and Security has also released a motion of measures of developing the proceeding of taking children into care. Those measures consider documentation, hearing of the child, parents, partners of co-operation, co-operation, working in crisis situations and strengthening of expertise (Jokinen 2005).

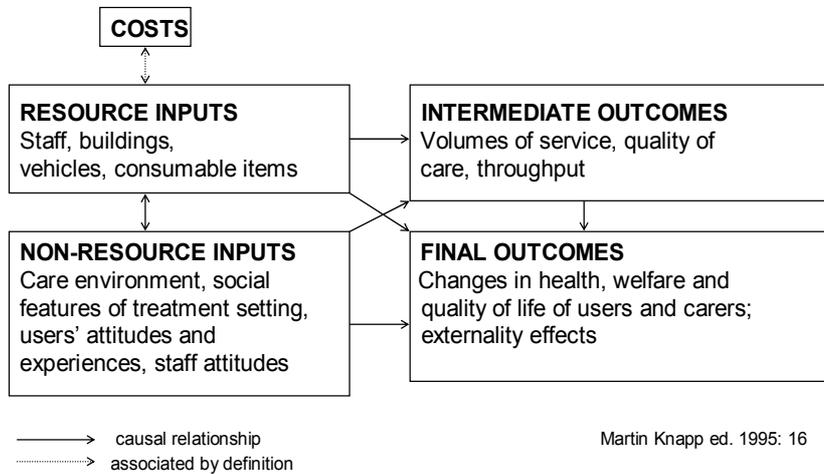
The Child Custody and Right of Access Act (361/1983) lists parent's tasks and responsibilities. These are the good things that we want for every child to have in their

lives. Those valuable things are good care and upbringing, control and care according to the child's age and stage of development, safe and stimulating surroundings for growth, education corresponding to the child's talents (tendencies) and wishes, understanding, safety and tenderness, physical integrity / inviolability and a possibility to become independent.

### **Theoretical framework**

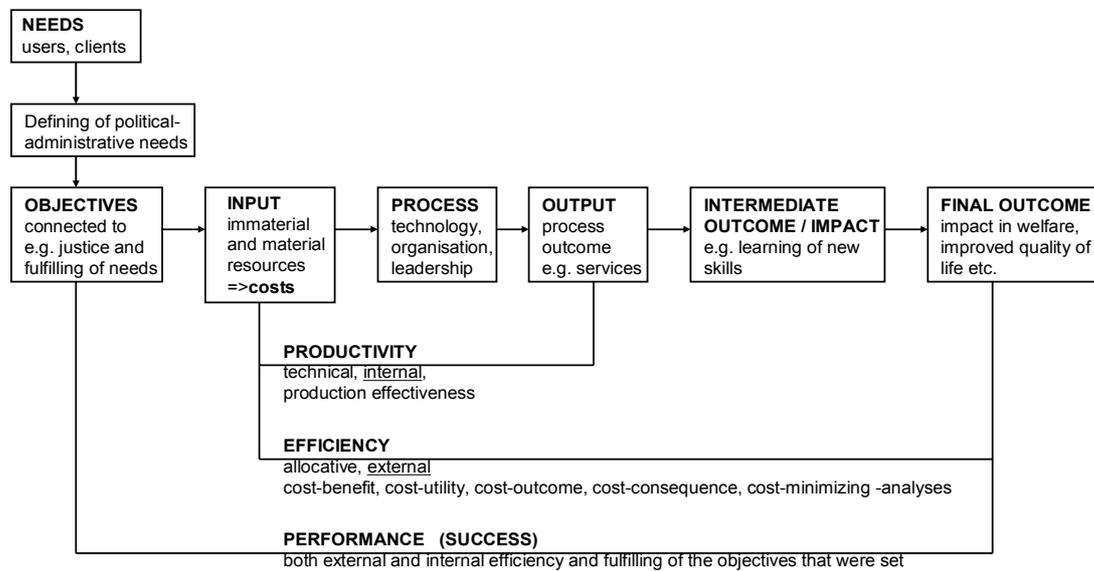
Martin Knapp (1995, 16–20; see also Vaarama 1999, 10) has introduced the production of welfare approach (figure 1) as a framework to help discussion and interpretation of any empirical measures.

The approach is derived from the economist's approach to resource allocation in general and has been developed in detail in relation to social care services, especially for elderly people. In production of welfare approach resource (material) inputs like staff, buildings, consumable items, costs (resource inputs expressed in monetary terms) and non-resource (immaterial) inputs like care environment, social features, attitudes, experiences etc. are taken. Intermediate outcomes (volumes of service, quality, throughput) can be produced from different combinations of these inputs. Final outcomes are changes over time (changes in health, welfare and quality of life of users and carers, externality effects). Knapp represents the approach as a framework on which to hang an evaluation.



**Figure 1.** The Production of Welfare

The production of welfare –framework is adapted to Marja Vaarama’s (1995, 82, 293) framework Effectiveness of the Care of the Elderly in Public Services, which both together form figure 2 Evaluation of Public Services (Pusa, Piirainen and Kettunen 2004, 30). There input-box includes both material resources, immaterial resources and costs by which in a process an output is produced. With different processes you get different output out of same input. Output means process outcome, for example services. Intermediate outcome is compatible with the intermediate outcome in Knapp’s approach, so is the final outcome. The whole process starts with customer or user needs, which gives an impulse to political-administrative needs definitions. Political-administrative needs leads to setting of objectives connected to justice and fulfilling of needs. In order to reach objectives the society makes investments in both immaterial and material resources by which through a process a service is produced. Production of that service has an intermediate outcome or impact, for example learning of new skills. As final outcome there is an impact in welfare, an improvement in quality of life.



Pusa, O. , Piirainen, K. and A. Kettunen 2004, 30 adapting Vaarama, M. 1995, 82; adapted

**Figure 2.** Evaluation of Public Services.

Pusa, Piirainen and Kettunen (2004, 28–30) describe evaluation of public services (see figure 2). When evaluating effectiveness of social services one has to take both economical aspects and social objectives set to activity into consideration. That is because, according to Vaarama (1995, 79), the objectives in social politics are wider than in material economics. Thus you have to understand the activity that you are evaluating.

According to Vaarama (1995, 79–80) socioeconomic evaluation should combine *both* increasing efficiency by decreasing costs and increasing the productivity of welfare services *and* objectives like equality between citizens, the quality of services and correspondence of services to the needs of the users. When making an economic evaluation a study is made from the basis of scarce resources in proportion to needs and you study productivity of services. In non-economical evaluation people’s needs and objectives of activities derived from the needs are being as basis instead and you

study their realization against the criteria set for evaluation. Socioeconomic evaluation should combine the two approaches: economic and non-economic evaluation.

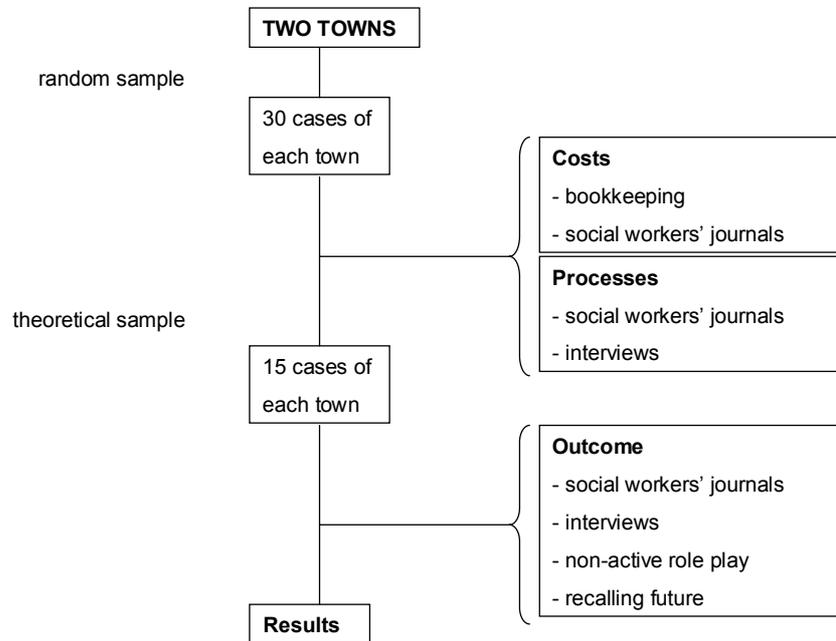
In socioeconomic evaluation not only how many services you can produce and by what costs are calculated, but final outcome in proportion to needs of the users and objectives set to fulfil them are studied. Because you have to combine two different approaches (economic and social political) you have to use different research methods and, in an explorative study like this, try to create new ways to study the problem. To increase validity of an explorative research, it is advisable to use triangulation (see for example Vaarama 1995, 104 of use of both quantitative and qualitative methods in the same research; see also Karvinen 2000, 26–29).

### **Research objectives and the arrangement of the research**

The main objective in my research is to analyse and explain whether we get all those good things that we aim to, when we take children into care, what are child protection processes like in the municipalities, what kind of outcomes are attained by child protection measures with used resources and which factors affect success. Other objectives are to analyse and explain by what costs children are being placed outside home, costs of organizing child care, costs of taking children into care and what are the costs for society when you do and when you don't intervene.

The examinees are children or young persons taken into care in 1990–1998 (during 1990's before the equalizing system of great expenses in child welfare). By selecting this period of time it will be secured that it has gone adequately time since the act of being taken into care, so that the situation of a child/young person has had time to settle down and it can be assumed that efficiency is possible to be evaluated.

At the time of collecting the empirical data a child or a young person is at the moment in substitute care, has returned home, is in after-care or lives by him/herself because he/she is over 21 years old. It gives the study a longitudinal touch even though it is not a longitudinal research. A longitudinal touch will be attained also by studying child protection processes from documents and by interviews from the beginning of the custom in child welfare till the time of the research.



**Figure 3.** The Arrangement of the Research.

The research will be conducted in two middle-sized towns in Finland by first taking a random sample of 30 cases of each town (figure 3). Of those 30 cases both costs and processes will be studied thoroughly from the bookkeeping, social workers' journals and by interviewing the social worker that is familiar with the case. From the original 30 cases a theoretical sample of 15 cases will be selected of which outcomes are studied from social workers' journals. Outcomes will also be studied by interviewing the social worker in case, the child in question, one of his/her parents and a foster parent or a worker in substitute care of each case. As a part of studying outcome, a non-active role play and recalling future -methods will be used parallel to interviews in order to get an understanding of different parties' aspects of the prospects for the child's future.

Varian (1990, 209) says that uncertainty is a fact of life: we face risks every time we walk across the street. In microeconomics in contingent consumption understanding

choices under uncertainty are studied. When getting different consumption bundles of goods a consumer is concerned with the probability distribution, which consists of a list of different outcomes and the probability associated with each outcome. Different outcomes of some random event can be thought as being different states of nature. Then a contingent consumption plan can be thought as a specification of what will be consumed in each different state of nature – each different outcome of the random process. In that case a contingent consumption plan means a plan that depends on the outcome of some event. (Varian 1990, 209–213.)

In child protection social workers make decisions to buy different child welfare measures. The choices are based on assumptions of the outcome of each measure. We probably can use the theory of choice (Varian 1990, 73–94) to analyze those choices. If we know the outcomes (good and bad), the states of nature in question, we can estimate a budget line associated with the purchase of the measure (for example a placement in a foster home). Indifference curves that a social worker might have for contingent consumption can be drawn. Given the indifference curves for consumption in each state of nature, we can look at the choice of which measure to purchase with certain costs and outcomes. But, in order to get this calculated, we have to know the outcomes first.

Of course, in social work - especially in child protection – social workers don't make choices of purchase only on the basis of costs. Naturally the criteria set by laws and the child's best interest have to be their first priority. But in situations, where social workers have multiple choices for their actions, presuming that laws and child's best interest have been taken into consideration, this kind of reasoning can have its place when explaining social worker's decisions and when justifying their actions to for example the municipal social welfare board. Perhaps this kind of substantiation can be at some point even a basis for decision making.

In child protection the stakes are high: in Finland a social worker makes decisions at her/his own risk. S/he is personally responsible in the eye of law for the decisions s/he has made. Of course decisions of taking a child into care (if someone opposes the decision) are ultimately made in the municipal social welfare board, but the decisions are made at the referral of the social director, who has prepared the matter with a

social worker familiar with the case. The costs of placing a child outside home are high and in small or poor municipalities high costs can have a crucial influence on decision making. When deciding whether or not to take a child into care, a social worker has to decide for the child's whole future for a long time coming. There are great emotions involved in the process for all parties. In worst case a social worker risks for example the child's in question, some other family member's or even her/his own life when taking a child into care. There is no room for mistakes.

However, mistakes do happen. Everything doesn't always go so smoothly. When everything goes wrong, the long term outcome of being taken into care - or not being taken into care when needed - can be for example exclusion from the society. As a result from exclusion or marginalization a status of an individual or a group is lower than his or her former status, s/he lacks power, has a weakened connection to modern society, other people and one's own self. S/he is often excluded from paid labour, social relationships and power and receives often last-resort social assistance. Securing the welfare of children has been one of the main socio-political goals as deficiencies in the environments of children have been found to have extensive and long-lasting effects on the later development of individuals. (Forssén 1998, 157–158.)

Jouko Kajanoja (2005, 234–244) debates upon the question of connection between good childhood and flourishing national economy. He refers to Lea Pulkkinen's (1997, 2002) follow-up studies about circumstances in childhood's consequences to a person's ability to function. Pulkkinen found that favourable developmental background during one's childhood has a significant importance to future social ability to function as adult. The World Bank has calculated that human resources, that is human capital (individual's knowledge and competence) and social capital (confidence, interpersonal communication and the rules of the game in society), make two thirds of the growth of GNP in high level of income –countries. The rest comes from the increase in physical capital (engines, buildings, roads, soft ware, nature resources etc.). Kajanoja found that on the basis of several researches both in Finland and abroad, circumstances in childhood and success in national economy have a strong connection. Favourable conditions in childhood are crucial in development of human and social capital and human and social capital are crucial factors that

influence economic success. Therefore, Kajanoja asks, can it be that the key to flourishing economy is favourable circumstances in childhood?

Of course there are many factors effecting to flourishing economy, as Kajanoja states, nevertheless the question is interesting. There have been some attempts to calculate different aspects of the costs of becoming excluded from society. Kajanoja has made calculations with 1996 data (Kajanoja 2000, 233–249; Kajanoja 2005, 240–244). In Finland being excluded (unemployed without any possibility to become employed ever again; compare with Forssén 1998, 157) from society in 1996 “cost” 3 mFIM (0,5 m€) calculated as a loss in GNP, 2 mFIM (0,33 m€) as loss in economics of public sector. Exclusion from society through circumstances in childhood might become a self nourishing phenomenon. Excluded parents may create unfavourable circumstances in childhood to their children, which in turn can lead to the children’s exclusion from the society as adult. So, if exclusion is one unfortunate outcome of being taken into care or being not taken into care, it has severe consequences to the national economy as well as for the individual.

### **The significance of the research**

By this research new knowledge about the costs and outcomes of taking children into care is attained. New (socioeconomic) research methods and models by which to describe different aspects of the phenomenon are going to be developed. The objective is, based to the results and experiences of this research, to make a national research of the subject that can be generalized.

From the results of this research possible needs to re-evaluate the emphasis of the child welfare process can be perceived. Needs to develop further child welfare measures and working practices can also be detected and recommendations and suggestions can be made.

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# **Child abuse as a social problem in Russia**

*Ksenia Limanskaya*

## **Introduction**

Child abuse is the most common kind of abuse in Russian families. According to data of the State Office of Public Prosecutor of the Russian Federation, in 2002 3 272 children died as a result of child abuse in families, heavy harm to health was caused to 3 919 minors, all in all during year 2002 - 94 121 children suffered from abuse (Kravchuk, 2003), which amounts to 6 % of all children in Russia. However, these data do not reflect the real situation in full.

Basing on of these and other data it is possible to tell, that the rights of the child to have protection against abuse by parents or persons, replacing them, proclaimed by the Constitution of the Russian Federation and the Family Code (1995) Russian Federation, are not fully maintained. The subject of research – child abuse in families as a social problem.

## **Methodology**

I used contextual construction in research of a social problem as the basic theoretic methodological approach. The given approach opens an opportunity to analyze a social problem as defined, designed, considering its objective components.

The analysis of a problem in the given work is carried out from a position, basing on the works of such authors as Spector and Kitsuse (1977), which deal with a social problem as matter of definition. Spector and Kitsuse define a social problem as an "activity of individuals or the groups which are showing discontent and putting forward the statements of exacting character concerning some prospective conditions. Dynamics of a social problem is understood as some stages of a social problem: occurrence, legitimization, mobilization of action, formation of the official plan of action, realization of the official plan. Thus, designing of a social problem is a

process, the beginning and the end of which depend on how the society defines a problem, reacts to it and participates or does not participate in solving the problem.

The concept "child abuse" is defined as specific behavior of parents or the trustees, consisting in doing moral or physical damage to the child. Such damage is done meaningfully or due to obvious neglect of child's needs.

The subject of research – child abuse in families as a social problem. The basic attention in work focuses on physical violence (Tzeng,1991; Mills,1998). The problem of emotional and sexual home violence and neglect is also mentioned in the given work, but mainly, in a context of the forms accompanying physical abuse.

The problem of child abuse in family is rather "young" social problem, which Western countries have faced only in the last three-four decades of XX century, and in Russia - last fifteen years. Up to now there hasn't been carried out any national representative research on revealing scales and features of child abuse in families in Russia.

## **Method**

Methods of receiving the concrete empirical information are: personal leitmotif interviews, the analysis of documents, a content analysis and the analysis of the secondary information.

The analysis of such data has appeared the only possible for the research of interfamily violence, as child abuse occurs in the private sphere closed for outside observers.

### *Personal leitmotif interview*

The chosen method of personal interviews gives ample opportunities in research and interpretations of child abuse in families. Personal interviews allow tracing these cases and the facts, as well as estimation of emotional background and value judgment, which quite often plays a significant role in reconstruction of the events under investigation.

Location of the empirical research: the social organization - Social first aid for the minors who remained without care or have got in criminal situation - " the Child in danger ".

#### *The analysis of documents*

Two groups of documents were used in the research: the documents concerning investigated cases of violence over children, legislative and statutory acts. The first group – personal profiles of children, records of conversations with parents, letters of children. The second group of documents consists of legislative and the statutory acts defining the responsibility of parents for child abuse.

The documents are analyzed from a position of the obligations of the state proclaimed in them in relation to children, protection of their rights, with the purpose of revealing of principles and priorities of a state policy in the field of protection the rights of childhood.

#### *The content analysis*

In research I used the content-analysis of sociological magazines: "Sociological researches" from 1993 till 2004, "Magazine of sociology and social anthropology" from 1998 till 2004, "Monitoring of public opinion", and "Magazine of researches of social policy" from 2003 till 2004. The semantic analysis of texts for revealing materials on a theme of child abuse. Also has been realized the content analysis of the city newspaper "The St.-Petersburg Vedomosti", newspapers from 1993 until 2004. Criterion of analyzed publications were words "violence over children" and "child abuse" the mention has served in all of them grammatical variations.

#### *Desk research*

To describe the dynamics of child abuse as a social problem, I analysed the information on the initiative groups, which have put forward the problem on public arenas, i.e. the work of women's movements, the conferences where theme of child abuse was mentioned, the publication of materials on this theme, foundation of asylums for children who have suffered violence.

## **Results**

### **Essence of a social problem of child abuse**

The essence of a social problem of child abuse consists in the fact that normal development of children is restrained due to irresponsibility or absence of actions of those responsible for children. As normal development we understand the one defined in the United Nations Convention on the right of children. The social problem of child abuse, basically, has latent character. Situations of child abuse take place in different public groups, in families with a different social and income level. The problem of child abuse in families is widespread in all Russian Federation.

The analysis of the local researches, the information from telephone hotlines and psychological services shows, that after 1991 the quantity of cases of violence over children in families increases, and child abuse occurs in families to a various level of a material prosperity and education.

### **Characteristics of the help system to children, having suffered child abuse in Russia**

Child abuse has very high level of abeyance, as parents (or persons replacing them), knowing about the responsibility for such attitude to children, are interested in concealment of such information, and other people have no chance to find out about the cases of abuse.

Children seldom apply for help, due to many reasons, among them: fear of punishment from parents, fear to appear in orphanage, fear of distribution of the information at school and among friends, doubt concerning efficiency of legal aid.

It is necessary to note, that, according to Family Low the Russian Federation, "officials and citizens who will know about threat to life or health of a child, about infringement of its rights or legitimate interests, are obliged to inform on it in social service". However, experts note that it is practically impossible to bring the guilty of such events to account.

Research has shown that although the structures of help to victims of family violence organize activity on rendering assistance to children and their families, it in most cases isn't effective. Parents might as a result be deprived parental rights, or the major right of the child will not be realized (the right to protection (item 56 Family Law the Russian Federation)), or the child will go on living in this "unsuccessful" family. In any case, within the limits of this system of the right of the child can not be realized.

The law on prevention of violence in family, first edition of which has been developed in 1995, still hasn't been passed. The analysis of the existing legislation shows that it is directed mainly on prevention of adverse consequences for the child when harm is already done, and also on an establishment of the responsibility to those who has already committed crime.

The system of help consists of: first – receiving the information on such cases from various sources; secondly - taking the abused child away from family, staying in which threatens its life and health; thirdly – checking the received information, gathering of materials on deprivation or restriction of the parental rights; fourthly - transfer of the claim about deprivation of the parental rights to consideration in legislative bodies. Further, in case of claim satisfaction, the accommodation of the child and the organization of maintenance of its rights.

In real practice depriving a parent of parental rights based on child abuse is rather complex procedure. The matter is that it is very complex to prove the fact of abuse. Thus, it turns out, that the majority of cases do not reach the court.

During research we investigated how the participants of child abuse situations define such cases of child abuse. Parents or persons replacing them tend to consider their violent actions normal. Even some social workers and employees OPPN (crime prevention among minors department) consider physical violence as one of comprehensible tools of children education. When examining a situation social workers tend to “keep biological family together”, they are convinced, that in an orphanage a child's life would be a lot worse. A social worker has two choices: to take the child away from family, to deprive its parents of the parental rights, or to

leave in family. Deprivation of the parental rights does not provide observance of the rights of the child, in particular its basic right - the right to have a family. According to the experts, children rarely apply for help on their own initiative, despite the fact they have legal right to do so.

There are the several reasons for that:

- A part of children who have suffered violence in family, has no opportunity to address for the help because he or she is too young;
- Children "pity" their cruel parents;
- They are ignorant of their legal rights and services to address in case of abuse;
- Children-victims of violence are intimidated by their parents.

These fears are not groundless. Even in case with minors, the militia (the police) tries not to institute legal proceedings, it does not guarantee privacy and safety to a victim, often treats such complains mistrustfully or even with jeer.

In addition, the level of artificial abeyance is very high, as the crime, known to the police, is not always registered. Concealment of crimes from registration speaks aspiration to decrease artificially parameters of crime in the region and thus to rise the level of crimes investigated, which is the level the police is evaluated upon by its authorities.

As a result, such information comes late and from such sources, as hospitals where children checked in with severe physical, psychological and mental traumas.

### **“Child abuse” as a subject in scientific publications in Russia**

We have discovered only seven publications on the theme child abuse in sociological magazines. First of them has appeared in 1998. In 1999, 2000 and 2001 one material on a theme of child abuse in families appeared in press, in 2003 in magazine "Sociological researches" has appeared three publications on this theme.

In these publication questions of a state policy concerning children, experience of research of cruel child abuse in family rose, systems of reaction to violence over children in the western countries were described.

This in itself is rather indicative and testifies, in our opinion, that the Russian social scientists are not ready yet for active discussion of this social problem and its representation on public arena.

### **“Child abuse” as a subject in Saint Petersburg city newspaper**

The analysis of the city newspaper " The St.-Petersburg Vedomosti " from 1993 till 2004 has shown, that modern mass-media tends to create the stereo typified images of various social groups excluded from full participation in a public life: such as single mothers, the unemployed, the alcoholics, and other persons ranked as “deviant”, and impose these images in mass consciousness.

The quantity of the revealed publications on cruel treatment of children in families is insignificant; the problem is listed there among other social problems, they sometimes inform about thematic conferences, or about the organizations working with given social group. The empirical research carried out allows concluding that journalists of "The St.-Petersburg Vedomosti" are not anxious to present this problem to their readers.

Questions of revealing and social preventive maintenance of violence over children abused in families have not received the necessary legislative decision so far.

### **Possibilities of contextual construction in research “child abuse as a social problem”**

The contextual construction approach in research allows to define a social problem of child abuse from the point of view of its public definition and a recognition, a role of various subjects of a public life in definition of this problem, its decision.

The approach assumes consideration of a social problem of cruel treatment of children in families as dynamical, as sequences of the certain events. The approach enables to study a social problem as having an active role in designing a new reality.

The approach allows studying an opportunity of participation of various subjects of public life in interventions in a problem.

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# **Inadequate Self? Bodily Appearance, Risk and Identity among Preadolescent Children**

*Mia Lähde*

## **Introduction**

In today's media-saturated society more than ever, children are to face the demands of 'right' and desirable appearance at early age. Concerns of bodily appearance are an everyday experience for a number of children and adolescents throughout the Western world. Despite the increasing focus on bodily matters both in psychological and social scientific child/youth research, there is still a lack of empirical approaches that would consider preadolescent bodies and bodily experiences of both young males and females.

In this paper, I concentrate on how the concept of risk associates with bodily appearance and negotiations of self in preadolescent girls and boys. How can the appearance-related risk be understood in respect to children who are just building up their own sense of self and identity? I shall, first, discuss shortly some theoretical starting points for my current research on schoolchildren and the meaning of appearance in their lives. Second, some of the empirical research findings from my masters thesis '*Children and bodily appearance: a multimethodological study of the physical identity of 10-13-year olds*' (2004) are used to illustrate how the risk can be understood in the light of 'appearance stories' written by 10–11-year old children themselves.

The paper is part of a doctoral research 'Childhood, bodily appearance and identity'. Approach here is social psychological, but it aims at interdisciplinary discussion and creating understanding across the dimensions of cultural impact as well as lived, emotional experience of young actors inhabiting their appearances (c.f. Frost 2005).

The above-mentioned masters thesis can be considered a pilot study for the current research. It was a part of a research project '*Inequal Childhood: a Comparative Study*

*in the Nordic Countries*' (2002-2004), where school children's well-being and life chances in Finland, Norway and Sweden were investigated (see Järventie & Leiulfsrud, forthcoming; Leiulfsrud & al. 2003). In one of the research questionnaires used in our project, the 'Children's Depression Inventory' (CDI), is included a question concerning a child's satisfaction on his/her bodily appearance. That question, and the notably high degree of negative answers by Finnish children (especially girls) to it, inspired me to explore more closely what appearance means to school children and how it constitutes a child's sense of self. I was kind of interested in appearance-related 'risks to identity'. To develop the idea of *how* appearance is produced as meaningful in daily lives of school children, I collected written story data from pupils on the 4th grade (10-11-year-olds). Quotations from those stories will be looked at later in this paper.

### **Children's identity as a bodily making – a sociocultural view**

The question of sociocultural impact on children's bodily self is particularly important in the frame of child development (Bruner & Haste 1987; Giddens 1991; Silverman 1994). As the latency years and preadolescence, or the so-called middle childhood, are a vital period of identity construction (see e.g. Mangs & Martell 1982; Kellett & Ding 2004),

“the hunger for new information and for new channels of expression, which are used to revamp and build the content and organization of the psychic structures (...) makes the quality of ongoing experience and environmental input a very important consideration” (Silverman 1994: 224).

A child in primary school age is just building up his or her idea of 'what I am in relation to this world' and, therefore extremely sensitive to what is expected of him/her. Children are, however, not necessarily in position to look at those demands critically (e.g. Järventie 2001). During the past decades, there has been an increased awareness of the high prevalence of body image problems in adolescents and children, girls in particular, in the Western countries (Anglé 2005: 23; Grogan 1999). Much of the research concerning children, however, has concentrated on evaluating actual and ideal body size or shapes and self-esteem (Grogan 1999; McCabe & Ricciardelli

2004), but does not really address to why girls and boys are dissatisfied, or what other feelings and practices are involved as regard to body. What is also striking is how little work there has been on body image in adolescent and preadolescent boys.

A key notion underlying my work is the significance of body (and) aesthetics in the late modern Western societies – and indeed, the growing importance of physical appearance as a definer of individual's identity (Featherstone 1991; Giddens 1991). Giddens (1991), for instance, has stated that body has become a central means of identity construction for individuals in the late-modern society. Through the intense commercialization and mediation of everyday life – and indeed children's lives too – messages of desirable clothes and looks, beauty products, dieting and sexualized body presentations efficiently reach children at younger and younger age (e.g. Herbozo & al 2004; Buckingham & Bragg 2004). According to Giddens (1991), designing body is an essential part of self-identity, and the constant interest in body forms an essential part of social behavior.

The concept of *body image* is commonly used to refer to a person's perceptions, thoughts and feelings about the body and bodily experience (Grogan 1999). Body image experiences are intertwined with feelings about the self. How we perceive and experience our bodies – and how we think other people might see us in our bodies – relates significantly to how we perceive ourselves (Pruzinsky & Cash 1990 ref. Anglé 2005: 21.) Body image dissatisfaction then, can be broadly defined as a person's negative thoughts and feelings about his or her body (Grogan 1999). A major part of the more psychological body-related research has actually dealt with body image dissatisfaction and it's link with obesity and eating disorders (Thompson 1996; Grogan 1999; Cusumano & Thompson 2001; Anglé 2005 etc.).

In this research, I am not particularly interested in body image dissatisfaction as such, but in how children perceive (their own) appearance more generally; how they give meanings to it. Because of focusing on *appearance* and the *complex* nature and *making of* body image, I have found the concept of body image insufficient. I have therefore endeavoured to define a conceptual tool that would better describe my research interest.

In this conceptual work, I have found very helpful the idea of narrative identity (Bruner 1990; Hänninen 1999) where the concept of identity is taken to refer to a conscious and verbally expressible form of the self. Being a linguistically produced and thought self-definition (that can be performed to others), identity is also responsive to intentional modifying projects (Giddens 1991; Järventie 2001). Even though narratives do not represent children's 'inner world' as such, do they serve as important ingredients for interpretation and reconstruction. By studying texts written and spoken, it is possible to understand how people interpret their lives by capitalizing social frames, narrative and visual models given in the culture (Hänninen 1999).

So, the concept of *appearance identity* emphasizes, first, the kind of analysis that takes into account also the social relationships and cultural factors in and through which the individual body image is negotiated. (Body image referring to both the person's idea of the meaning of body to 'me' and the image he or she conveys to others.) Second, the concept stresses children's agency in creating their own identity (cf. James, Jenks & Prout 1998; Prout 2000) – but takes into consideration also their immaturity, change and vulnerability in this ongoing process (Lee 2001). Third, it refers to children's body concepts *as narrated* – “identity as a story-like construction of myself which I narrate to other people” – as a focus of study (see Hänninen 1999: 13-72). Appearance stories must be regarded as situational accounts, produced for a certain purpose in the interactional frame of research activity.

### **Body and risk in children's 'appearance stories'**

Now, let us have a look at the 'appearance stories' written by 10–11-year old children themselves. In spring 2002, one fourth-grade class from our research school in Tampere, Finland, wrote stories on the subject 'My bodily appearance'. There were altogether 22 pupils who took part in the writing task, 9 girls and 13 boys, during a school hour. The children followed a written instruction, in which they were encouraged to choose their own perspective and write freely about how they felt about their looks and what things they found important with regard to their own body and appearance. The basic idea in thematic writing is to let children choose what they want to tell and define how to portray themselves. What kind of appearance-related

risks can be traced in the narratives? How is the risk constructed, and how are the ways of understanding it gendered?

Through a data-driven analysis and gender sensitive reading of data, three common features could be traced in the writings: First, there is a strong norm of ‘good out-looking’ and being slender. Being ugly (fat) – or different – represents a potential risk of becoming bullied. Second, the self is being evaluated in relation to the interest and acceptance received from the other sex (i.e. according to heterosexual norm) especially. Third, it was brought up that unsatisfactory appearance could be compensated with other treats and qualities; e.g. having ability at sports or schoolwork being regarded as such.

It is also possible to find some clearly gendered ways of evaluating body and appearance. The boys’ stories emphasize muteness in issues relating to outward appearance; bodily issues are not discussed or shared with other people. There is also a clear pattern of a masculine discourse with emphasis on physical exercise and the importance of bodily strength. Many of the boys described in detail how many stomach muscle – or other – exercise they could do, or how they wanted to start ‘building their bodies’ as they grew older.

*I've thought a little about starting to build my body in a new shape when I go to secondary school. I'm tall enough, not any 2 metric but about 140 cm. I have quite enough muscle, but I'd probably like a bit more muscle in my arms. (...) Maybe in the future I'm a good bodybuilder. [Boy10, 4<sup>th</sup> grade]*

*Strength is important to me. I contribute to it myself. I don't talk about my outward appearance with friends. [Boyl, 4<sup>th</sup> grade]*

Talking about bodily experiences to others, for boys, might mean revealing insecurity and thus losing the masculine control. Sharing thoughts about bodily weaknesses can then be understood as a risk for social respect becoming questioned (see Connell 1995; Tolonen 2001). The girls’ stories, instead, followed more a descriptive mode of telling about the aspects of appearance, discussion of beauty and practices involved in it, and the importance of social relationships in bodily issues.

The will to be slim and fear of being fat (and becoming bullied) were common in both the girls' and the boys' accounts. Both boys and girls tended to estimate themselves in respect to their own subjective experiences and other people's opinions and evaluating looks.

*I don't know – but many older people often say that I have lost weight. Then I'm flattered. But I think I've only lost weight because of my hobbies. [Boy3, 4th grade]*

As many recent studies on body satisfaction suggest (e.g. Bordo 1993; Grogan 1999; Frost 2003), are slenderness and 'good looks' commonly associated with success and happiness in social relationships and life in general – something that can be seen in children's narratives too.

*I'm just afraid, that after some time I won't be as beautiful as now, and my dreams will disappear or they can't be fulfilled anymore. [Girl4, 4th grade]*

Considering risk, the experience of unsatisfactory looks for young children may even be internalised as indicating a bad person.

The fear of bullying and name-calling was present in the stories of both girls and boys – those satisfied and dissatisfied with their bodies. Deviation from the normative 'common' body ideal (e.g. due to body size, shape or color) was understood as a potential risk of becoming bullied or socially excluded.

*I'm happy that I am not called names so much. (...) My wish is to be thinner. I'm afraid of being called names a lot. (Undefined3, 4th grade)*

*I think I'm quite pretty. I'm only little darker than others, but I'm still called (boys usually) nigger, or negro sometimes. It hasn't bothered me, I've traveled so much that I've got tan. [Girl5, 4th grade]*

When evaluating body, children tended to use very strong and normative expressions. Fat – the fear or discontent of getting too much of it and contentment of not having it were brought out explicitly throughout the data. It was the most evident feature of bodily appearance to worry and evoke strong expressions of emotions.

*I'm not unsatisfied but very happy that I have such a good body. I hope I'll stay this thin also in the future. I'm afraid that I'll get too much fat. [Girl2, 4th grade]*

*My body is normal. I must not be too fat. [Boy8, 4th grade]*

In many of the stories, there is an association between looks and heterosexual love. Interestingly, it was boys even more often, who considered themselves as objects of girls' evaluative looks and wanted to look good for the 'female gaze'. Appearance was clearly understood a significant factor in how to get social approval and awake girls' interest – in addition to avoiding risk, the unwanted attention among peers.

*I like girls and quite many girls like me. It's my appearance and my emotions inside that girls like in particular. [Boy10, 4th grade]*

*I think I look ok, I'm not called names or bullied in other way. (Boy8, 4th grade)*

Body image for children, especially girls, seems to be based strongly on the contradiction between the real and ideal(ized) body. A full satisfaction on appearance is something impossible to achieve as social environments constantly flow with images, examples, and subtle advice of how and from which part to be 'beautiful in the right way'. What also the research narratives suggest, is that young girls in particular acknowledge the unachievability of the perfect looks; you could always look better – always improve your beauty.

*I'm content with myself that I'm not fat but I may be a bit too thin. (...) Even if I'm quite nice-looking I'd like to be more beautiful. Sometimes I talk with my best friend about the looks and how to be more beautiful. [Girl1, 4th grade]*

Despite their efforts for better looks, children had commonly adopted the idea that it is better to *conform to* one's own bodily appearance – were you satisfied with it or not. Also, it was clearly brought up that body dissatisfaction and feelings of insufficiency related to bodily appearance could be compensated with many other things and qualities. Various practical skills, talent and social relationships were regarded as such.

*How I look is important to me. On the lower grades I was bullied a lot because of my cheeks. Nowadays they don't at all, because I've got capable hands. I'm the best basketball player in our class. [Boy3, 4th grade]*

*I'm happy that I'm not big, because the small have their own advantages. I'm lucky I haven't got any injuries. [Boy4, 4th grade]*

Even with all the insecurity and a variety of wishes for – somehow – better looks, children in the data seem to be somewhat content with themselves. In 14 writings of all 22, there was an explicit statement about being at least ‘quite happy’ about how one looks. Six writers said quite as precisely, that they were not so satisfied – but that things were not so bad either, they could be worse. Appearance was not then identified as one and the most important source of identity to these children. Its meaning, however, was highly renowned by both girls and boys.

### **Inadequate self - concluding words**

Children's body narratives are marked with feelings of insufficiency, a strikingly clear norm of ‘proper slenderness’, and the fear of becoming bullied because of bodily difference. Bullying and name-calling, because of being fat in particular, were the most explicit risks mentioned. However, the stories suggest that young girls and boys negotiate their perception of appearance and bodily self in complex ways in relation to their significant others. According to stories, that is close adults and peers in school environment in particular, while the influence from media remains less recognized in children's accounts.

There is evidence from many studies that dissatisfaction with one's physical appearance peaks during early adolescence. Concerns with body image, nevertheless, do begin earlier (see Anglé 2005: 23). Body image dissatisfaction in ever younger children is definitely of concern, as it may be a trigger for adverse action, like dieting, severe eating disorders, and other self-harm. As body becomes such emphasized means of difference making in society, as it has been apparent in past few decades, it easily develops to a burden on individual level. Failing to live up expectations and sense of self as inadequate, in long run, may result in social withdrawal, psychosomatic symptoms or other identity problems.

The high degree of children's worries about their appearance can be seen evidencing a conflict between the personal ‘me’ and increasing cultural demands. Individual bodily appearances go hand in hand with the commercialization and mediation of also

children's culture. The conflict – if there is to be one – however forms in the interpersonal relationships of children's everyday lives.

This paper has emphasized the importance of a child-centered – as well as sociocultural combined with psychological – perspective in the study of children's body concepts. That way we can search for better understanding of the meanings and mechanisms through which (negative) body image develops and may become a risk for the identity construction. It is important to look at how children negotiate identity through making their (and others') bodies meaningful. I finish with this short but thought-provoking story of just two phrases: one that tells I am ok – beautiful even, and the other providing with negative judgment from significant others.

*I am small and beautiful. Mum and [a male name] knock on\* me. [Undefined5, 4th grade]  
(\* in Finnish' haukkuvat')*

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# **Fathers still go unnoticed at maternity clinics**

*Helinä Mesiäislehto-Soukka*

## **Introduction**

Finnish fathers have been involved in maternity clinics from 1970. First they joined wives during antenatal family training and for their own baby's delivery. Later the main point has been to grow into fatherhood and equal parenthood. (Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö 1999, 2004.) However, there is still great need for improving the services by including the whole family in the antenatal care. It is recommended that special attention should be paid to meeting the future fathers' individual needs and varying degrees of preparedness. There are few studies on fatherhood in nursing science (Kaila-Behm 1997, Liukkonen ja Vehviläinen-Julkunen 1997, Soukka 1997, Vallimies-Patomäki 1998, Viljamaa 2003, Paavilainen 2003). In this research and my study, there is lack of support to men growing into fatherhood and poor understanding of the *real* meaning of fathers. Risks to family life after the birth of a baby are not yet adequately discussed from the viewpoint of fathers.

## **The research process**

The purpose of my study was to describe fathers' experiences in the context of family life after the birth of a baby – during pregnancy, the delivery and the new child's first three years. The participants were biological fathers of their children. Fifteen (15) fathers in maternity hospital, who had expressed willingness to take part in the study, were selected for the first open discussion in 1999, three months after the child's birth. Three years later the same fathers were interviewed again in 2002. There were both first-timers and more experienced fathers among the informants. I wished for participants with different family backgrounds, family compositions and numbers of children and with adequate verbal expression. The fathers came from various parts of the South Ostrobothnia Hospital District. Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the management of the profit centre. Research ethics was respected by

ensuring the participants' autonomy, confidentiality and voluntary participation. Special attention was paid to the reliability of qualitative research.

The research problem was: What kinds of experiences do fathers have of pregnancy, the delivery and the new child's first three years? The open, conversational interviews yielded 650 pages of material, which was analysed by the phenomenological method developed by Amadeo Giorgi (1985, 2000) and in Finland by Juha Perttula (1995a, 1995b, 2000). In this process, the holistic view of the human being by Lauri Rauhala (1988), was important.

### **The results**

There are two levels of results in my study. First, individual, situational meaningful structures of 15 different fathers and secondly, common core knowledge, formed with the help of the individual meaningful structures. The main result was labelled *creation and construction of home* and it was followed by six dimensions:

- 1) *the wife's pregnancy, delivery and the new child as meaningful stages in the family,*
- 2) *growth into fatherhood, father model, sharing responsibility and love,*
- 3) *bringing up children, acting as a father, combining work and family and use of time,*
- 4) *reminiscence of the father's childhood experiences in the context of having a new child,*
- 5) *a working husband-wife relationship as the foundation of the home's atmosphere,*
- 6) *mother-oriented health services and exclusion of fathers.*

From the viewpoint of this article, the information about individual, situational meaningful structures of 15 different fathers, especially the mother-oriented health services and the exclusion of fathers are the most important findings.

The results of my study (Mesiäislehto-Soukka 2005) showed that fathers are a very heterogeneous group. There was great a difference between highly educated and less educated men, for example as regards observing the child's development, spending time with the child, giving mental support, even caring for the child or feeding the child, when the man was left alone with the child. The men suffered from physical

and mental problems, drug and alcohol abuse, burnout and stress. For some men, financial difficulties prevented them from living normal lives. The reality was that there were crises in the family life, problems within the new stepfamilies, divorces – two men were divorced during my study. Men with families work more than other men. Women also seek to promote their careers, but without giving up family life. Furthermore and most alarmingly, mental disorders among children and adolescents have increased (Sinkkonen 2001, Harava-projekti 2004, Tamminen 2004); parenthood is partly lost. Family violence, of which 5 % began during pregnancy (Sinkkonen 1998, Heiskanen ja Piispa 1998, Haapasalo 2002), is also aimed at children in many unbelievable ways (Paavilainen 1998) has also increased. In conclusion, all the conflicting aspirations of men and women are a source of daily stress.

Certain details in the fathers' descriptions show how they feel excluded from the maternity services. For example, some fathers expect that they are invited to the clinic, there will be a chair waiting for them and somebody will discuss with them, too. They are not invited to participate in breastfeeding counselling. The midwives are busy, and the fathers can therefore not take part in the baby's first-time care and counselling. In the delivery room, nobody remembers to ask if the man has fathered the other children the woman has had, or if this is his first child. The father is treated as if he were an "old hand" with a lot of experience. In case of Caesarean section, the father needs professional support. The men feel that they are left outside health care services after the first child and after divorce. Women are generally much happier with the services than men. For men, there is not enough discussion or peer support, and too little mental training beforehand. To sum up, the fathers want to be involved in the process and they expect individual services, peer support and groups with genuine discussion.

## **Discussion**

Fatherhood is an important part of the man's personal life (Erikson 1980, Snarey 1993, Lamb 1996, Huttunen 2001, Sinkkonen 2003). Both fatherhood and parenthood are a part of the adult man's identity. Achieving manhood is a central resource throughout the man's life. It is also important to transfer the fathering skills to the next generation, especially to sons, but as far as family dynamics are concerned, also

to daughters (Erikson 1980). It is alarming that only few men reflect on their own fatherhood. It is important to organize opportunities for that. There is also a break between the past and present. The man finds that he must start his career as a father with empty hands. (Vuori 2004.) Several studies (Hyssälä 199, Kaila-Behm 1997, Soukka 1997, Viljamaa 2003, Paavilainen 2003, Taskinen 2003) show how meeting a family with a holistic and client centred approach in health care is not adequately implemented in Finland. The greater the number of children, the less the fathers are involved, although Viljamaa (2003) states that the second-time fathers wanted to reflect on themselves and the relationship between them and their children. On the other hand, divorced men had no more contact with the health clinic. My results are convergent with other studies.

Father's participation in daily family life and bringing up children has changed during the past years (Huttunen 1993, 1994, 2001). Also the man and fatherhood have changed (Huttunen 1993, Aalto 2004a, 2004b). Both mothers and fathers are needed, but today men need to be fathers much more than their own fathers, whereas the mothers are less mothers than their own mothers were. Jordan and Wall (1990) show how to develop fathering is a demanding task. Fathers' role in upbringing and breeding is remarkable. That is why they should be involved in health care from the beginning of the wife's pregnancy throughout the different stages of family life.

Visiting maternity clinics is like a norm to mothers (Laki äitiys- ja lastenneuvoloista 242/1944) in Finland. Nowadays mothers expect support and active participation in antenatal services from their spouses (Bondas 2000, Melender 2002, Paavilainen 2003). Also according to Hyssälä (1992) fathers in lower socioeconomic classes need more information. Professional men need information of mental processes. Fathers are the most significant source of support and encouragement to the mothers. That is why they also need updated information about breastfeeding (Hannula 2003, Vauvamyönteisyys -ohjelma 2004.) The results of my study were in agreement with this finding. The same applies to several other studies: Fathers got little information in connection of the Caesarian section in maternity clinics (Kalliovalkama 2003). The men felt excluded in maternity care (Vehviläinen-Julkunen 1987, Hyssälä 1992, Kuronen 1993, Kaila-Behm 1997, Soukka 1997, Viljamaa 2003). It is very sad that it makes no difference to some fathers if they are involved or not. The content of

information given by experts was not changed (Paavilainen 2003) when the father was present. The methods, discussions and groups during antenatal family training still do not include fathers and there is too little peer support (Vehviläinen-Julkunen 1987, Soukka 1997, Viljamaa 2003).

To sum up, my research results (Mesiäislehto-Soukka 2005) show that our work with pregnant families is mother-oriented and very valuable as such, but ignores the fathers. The men expect information and getting prepared for fatherhood. They want to process their feelings and experiences before and after the delivery. They would like to have individualized services.

There is need to develop new ways to involve fathers. It is clear that Finnish fathers appreciate their families and want to invest in promoting their families' welfare. The men's experiences of fatherhood are affected by their individual histories. The variety in fathers' experiences results in a need for individualised support from maternity services. The fathers' experiences involve indications about the families' future. The indications of problems or risks are not recognised by the professionals, and fathers and some families with problems remain without the support needed (Kangaspunta et al. 2004). The future health clinics should provide easy access and a flexible, functional and comfortable venue for families, including the fathers. (Johansson and Jons 2002, Rimpelä 2002, Sosiaali- ja terveystieteiden ministeriö 2004). In this case it is also possible to work with many experts together. Finally, the national health policies stress equal parenthood and expect the health clinics to support men's growth into fatherhood.

Maternity services are not to bear the responsibility for preparing men to fatherhood alone, but comprehensive schools should take an active role in the task as well. The share of family education in the curricula should be increased and the course contents and methods improved. Further research is recommended on the professional helpers' attitudes, experiences and need for further training.

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# **The risk of becoming a victim of school bullying: A gendered aspect**

*Marju Selg, Judit Strömpl, Beata Shahverdov*

## **Background of the study**

Violence is widely discussed last years as a serious problem in Estonian society. The public discussion focuses on three general issues: school bully and aggression between peers (Ainsaar 2004, Kõiv 2000, 2001, 2003, Peets and Kikas 2006), domestic violence against women (Kase 2001, 2004) and child sexual abuse (Soo 2005, Soo and Kutsar 2004).

The researches on school bully express the adults' perspective to this topic (Adorf 1999, Kõiv 2001, 2003; Kõrgesaar 2001, Leipälä 1999, Linde 2001, Peets and Kikas 2006, Vaarandi 2001, etc.). The pupils' perspective on school bully and aggression is also studied, but first of all by quantitative inquiries (Ainsaar 2004, Soo 2005, Kõiv 2001, 2002, Peets and Kikas 2006). Other studies that examine different kind of violence and child abuse (Soo and Kutsar 2004, Soo 2005) make use of a translated questionnaire and are a part of comparative researches. These studies focus on the sexual behavior and attitudes of secondary school students (16-19 of age; n=1943) p.18. There are some master's and bachelor theses completed on school bully (Argos 2005, Juurma 2005, Sepp 2002, Talts 2005, etc.).

Violence against and among children and young people is considered a great problem in Estonia. Despite the actuality of the issue, and animated discussions among pedagogues and child protection authorities, there are still gaps in the knowledge of the situation. Both school bully and other topics of children's violence are studied using quantitative methods that mostly test an adult concept of this phenomenon. Regrettably, the children's vision and interpretation of the topic was almost missing until now in Estonia.

In this research we are going to fill this gap and examine the children's interpretation of the violence. We try to encourage young people to express their own point of view on violence; doing so we give them an opportunity to participate in discussion concerning their own life.

The sampling consists of ordinary school pupils aged 13-15 who attend 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> form, including two groups of children's home residents. 10 group interviews were carried out with both Estonian and Russian children. In total, 36 children participated in focus groups, 20 girls and 16 boys.

We are grateful to Estonian Ministry of Social Affairs for financing the study "Violence and abuse: the children's perspective", and to all children who participated in the interview groups. We would like to thank school principals, teachers, social workers and psychologists for their cooperation in carrying out the study.

### **Method of study**

A mixed method is applied during the study. The research is realized through sequential exploratory strategy (Creswell 2003: 215). We used focus group interviews on the first phase of study, and a questionnaire on the second phase. On the basis of the results of the qualitative analysis we formulated a block of questions to be added to the international ISRD-2 questionnaire<sup>1</sup>. Originally there are some questions about violence in ISRD-2, but we pose questions which aim is to test some hypotheses that arose during the group interviews.

The groups were designed each differently. One way was to bring together adolescents who do not know each other<sup>2</sup>. Another group consisted of the boys from the same school who were acquaintances<sup>3</sup>. We had mixed-gender groups and one only boys and one only girls group. The sizes of the groups were 3-5 interviewees and two interviewers. In designing the groups, we followed the principles suggested by Morgan (2002), Honkatukia, Nyqvist and Pösö (2003). In completing the groups, we kept in mind the principle of interviewing children suggested by Eder and Fingerson (2002). One group was different; it was larger (5 pupils) and three of us. We discussed the block of questions for the questionnaire. Typical duration of the interview was about one and a half hour; the shortest of them lasted just one hour, while the longest one took two hours and 15 minutes.

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<sup>1</sup> International Self-report Delinquency study (ISRD-2) Estonian national sample 13-15 years old n>2700 Estonian and Russian schools classroom inquiry. The Estonian performed by Institute of Law University of Tartu.

<sup>2</sup> Three groups of pupils who do not know each other: from different schools, but same age from different Tartu schools.

<sup>3</sup> One group in Estonian small town

The interviews were carried out mostly by Marju and Judit (together 5, by Judit 1 and by Marju 1); two interviews were done by Beata and Judit and one by Marika, Judit and Beata.

The qualitative part of research is committed on principles of grounded theory, which means that we continue concurrently data collection, coding and data analysis (Strauss and Corbin 1990). Beata transcribed the digitally recorded data, and after that we processed the data by open coding (Strauss and Corbin 1990, Charmaz 2002, Ezzy 2002). Then we categorized the emerging themes by places (school, classroom, public places etc), by actors (pupils, teachers etc), by gender and age both of the respondents and the stories' characters, by manner of descriptions, and so on. Each research team member (Marju, Beata, Marika<sup>4</sup> and Judit) worked on coding separately. Then we came together and compared our results. We also constructed a hierarchy of categories on the same topic. For example, we compared the relations between the slices of data that we separated as the category "gender". On ground of the individual work we brought out the common categories that we all find as core codes (*ibid.*). This procedure was repeated from time to time during the whole research process. During these meetings we discussed the topics to be specified in the following interviews and in the questionnaire. Next interviews were more deeply concentrated on the gender aspect and on the relations between teachers and pupils.

The most important topics appeared to be:

- Classification of violence on the basis of its method/modus;
- Classification of people directly connected with bully;
- Gender differences in using violence;
- Differences in children' and adults' assessment of violence as humiliating and painful activity.

Discrepancy between the real students and the image of the "perfect student" appeared as a core category in our data. Differences were found on several levels: gender, family background and personal characteristics of children. Differences between students and ignorance of these differences in Estonian school produce stress that might be a reason of violence (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990, Herr and Anderson 2003). In this article we focus on the gender aspect of school violence and try to transmit the children's interpretation of this phenomenon.

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<sup>4</sup> Marika Tammaru is the fourth member of our team.

## **Boys' and girls' descriptions about violence in general**

Interviews tended to evolve in a similar way, i.e. the respondents declared in the very beginning of the interview that violence becomes divided into the mental and the physical ones, while the physical one occurs between boys and the mental one between girls. Generally, this first classification was followed during the interviews: *“Boys fight with each other but disputes take place between girls”*; *“Girls revile and make a noise between themselves /.../ assault and battery don't occur by girls”*. The other kinds of violence (girls fighting, boys' mockery and fooling, the physical and the mental violence between boys and girls) were considered in passing; children alluded to them as if unintentionally. However, we found during the interviews that the children' descriptions of their actual practice substantially differ from these preliminary classifications.

Children named many instances of physical violence, first of all “fighting” but also “beating”, “kicking”, “tearing of hairs”, “pushing” and so on. Children said that fighting was much frequent in the younger grades (until 6th grade, especially in the 3rd-5th grades). The Estonian children pointed out that in elementary schools fights mainly take place between boys. Girls fight with each other and also with boys in first grades, but in middle grades they usually stop participation in assault and battery:

*“Katrin: A girl assailed a boy by her nails in 3rd or 4th grade. The boy still has marks.*

*Eve: I too quarreled in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade in previous school.”*

Our respondents explained that the mental violence occurs in manner of hurting by words and displeasing. Respondents took many examples of mental violence. First, spread of gossip, which means that children speak bad things about a new or somehow different classmate behind her or his back. Second, total neglect of the victim was described as the most terrible kind of mental violence. It means that nobody does speak to the victim. Mostly they told that girls ignore girls. Third, children' public verbal abuse occurs by open taunt, displeasing, mocking etc. Fourth, children described several occasions when the whole class supplants a person, until she or he is enforced to leave the class or school (supplant is valid also in case of unpleasant teachers). The first impression is very important in children community. One wrong step can cause dislike by the whole collective and initiate the mental violence.

Despite dividing violence to physical and mental, some of respondents specified that actually even during the physical violence more terrible is not the physical pain, but the humiliating words that accompany hits.

An interesting point became obvious; neither boys nor girls did speak about boys' violent behavior against girls. Our findings contradict literature that reports largely teenager boys bullying of girls; this phenomenon is explained by sexual maturation and attaining masculine role (Aaltonen 2002, Emerson, Dobash and Dobash 1998, Gordon 2004, Gordon and Lahelma 2003, Huuki 2002). Participants of our study did not describe this phenomenon. On the contrary, boys said proudly that "*women must not be beaten*" and that "*such things are not done to girls*". A girl in a Russian group told that a boy of the interview group constantly tortures her, thereupon the boy turned red and smiled shamefully. According to our respondents the heterosexual identity is extremely important among teenagers. This might be the reason why boys use more violence and girls are ready to tolerate some bully if they expect that it confirms their female identity.

The mental violence between boys was described very frequently. The boys' taunt was described differently from the girls' taunt, which seemed to be very smutty, sharp and unfounded (bitch, etc). Boys hurting were described as more situative; these are used during specific conflict or fighting.

On the contrary, girls themselves told about their mental violence against boys. When describing conflicts of different youth cultures', the girls said that some other girls mock boys who have a "wrong" haircut or music preferences. Boys did not speak about this, only one boy said that: "*When girls do something to boys, boys commonly don't pay attention to this*".

The girls' physical violence was evaluated as extraordinarily discreditable and description of this was avoided generally. Still some cues during conversations show that girls' assault and battery actually exist: "*it's not very nice when a girl assault somebody*". Russian girls and Russian children' home boys did not have such a negative view of girls' fighting, they stated that "*girls must stand up for themselves*".

A new and unknown phenomenon became obvious. Estonian children from many schools described the practice that many little first grades' boys (2th-3th grade) assault older pupils,

including girls. Little boys ram them, kick, call very bad names and run away. Our respondents commented that children did not behave this way during their own elementary school years.

The tales of the two little town children differed from the others' in some measure. Although they described the same practices as the other children, both girls and boys stated that bullying is not a problem in their school. They (mostly boys) told that "*the stronger ones protect the weaker ones*" and "*girl wish intervene [when the boys fight]*". We got a warm feeling by listening the little town children' chat about playing games in breaks.

The boys' and girls' manner of talking about violence differed somehow. Boys preferred to speak about physical violence and girls about boys' physical violence; girls preferred to speak about mental violence and boys about girls' mental violence. Boys' fighting was commonly less disapproved than mental violence. Both boys and girls told that it is better to have a small fighting than long psychic pain.

### **Girls about girls and boys - describing and assessing violent behavior**

The girls' favorite topics were their mutual relations in class. Relations were described through separate groups and societies. The categories "conventional", "normal", "neutral" girls and the "babe girls"<sup>5</sup> repeated in telling of girls from several schools. These groups were described as competing with each other. Girls explained the school bullying mostly through the antagonism between groups.

In the interviews, girls described most of all kinds of bullying the mental violence between girls. Both girls and boys told that there is more mental violence in girls' interactions, compare with ones between girl and boys and among boys. Mental violence appeared as very different in girls' descriptions, including bad words, which are told straight to face and, contrary, harming each other by default, in hidden manner: "*the taunt comes just round the corner. They might have a say it but not!*"

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<sup>5</sup> Childen name by "babe girl" the girl who point out her hyperfeminine appearance (mini, cellular stocking, superfluous make-up) and seek for social relations with older youngster outside the school. Frequently, they are remained in the same form for second year and have a poor school performance.

The hidden harming occurs mostly by spread of rumor:

*“When a new girl comes into our class then usually speak bad about her”;  
“When a girl in our class have fatty hair they will be told many bad things, will be discussed that there is something wrong with here in addition”.*

The total ignoring of a person was described as a very painful kind of bullying:

*“Karin: A girl is in our class, nobody talks to her, I don’t know even why. I don’t know. I myself came into fourth grade into this school. And beginning from this time until the seventh grade nobody talks to her”.*

Ignoring is highly problematic practice because of its hidden nature; it is not too easy to discover and handling it. Even by the obvious signs of neglect can happen that it would not been understood as serious aggression neither by offender nor by victim and adult people:

*“Mari: Nay, for example, it [ignoring] can’t be punished, too. If a teacher comes and says that why you don’t talk to her...*

*Judit: Yeah.*

*Mari: Then she says that she doesn’t like me and it’s all then. Teacher isn’t able to do nothing. Nay, nobody can be forced to talk!”*

Girls had many talk about open offence, mockery, fooling, ridiculing, taunt and humiliation. Our respondents did not speak about face-to-face offences; nevertheless one should not draw a conclusion that they do not appear.

An extra phenomenon is the girls so-called jokes, for example “oh, you dinky bitch”, “you bloody wench”, etc. Girls introduced utterances which they use and said that these ones are very common and are said “friendly” and “jokingly”: *“That means, it is such kind of language, that perhaps somebody who isn’t in these surroundings, think that the people are on bad terms with each other very badly, but actually it’s sort of slang, neither don’t take to heart it so much”.* These are the eyewitnesses’ descriptions. Nevertheless, it is unclear how the target of these “jokes” realizes the situation because nobody in our sampling speaks about her or his own experiences as victim.

The following extract illustrates the teacher’s helplessness in handling girls’ “jokes”:

*“Liisa: [A girl] continuously hurts another [girl], totally taunts her, so that in the time of class, she calls her cow. And she brought along a baby animal [a toy] who moos as a cow and every time when this girl something said in classroom, she pressed the animal”.*

Girls described some occasions when mental violence led to supplant of victim that is to the forced leaving the class or school:

*“Riina: In the third grade, a girl came to our class. And from the very beginning someone set to tell bad things about her, that disease and fleas, and she came round alone always. And then this year she attended school awfully seldom /.../ Nay, at present she left our class and got tutoring at home”.*

Girls described the girls’ mental violence against boys only a few times. Boys themselves did not speak about it. Mockery takes place on ground of belonging to different groups: so-called “babe girls” ridicule the long hair of the boys who belong to another youth culture (punk, rock) and mock the needy boys for wearing not nice clothes: “A girl touches a boy “accidentally” and says “fie!””

Likewise, our respondents described the boys’ mental violence against girls very seldom. Girls told about mental violence only, the physical violence was not mentioned. One girl said *“boys ridicule girls who are too developed or underdeveloped”*, that boys sketch foolish pictures of girls and show them to everybody.

We mentioned above the phenomenon of the total ignoring of a child by the whole class. One should draw a conclusion that boys collaborate at ignoring because without it the total ignoring is impossible. Though, nobody mentioned the boys’ participation.

The girls’ views about taking off and hiding personal belongings differed. Girls’ stand seemed to depend on the taker’s intentions, sometimes it was not at all recognized as violence. The little town girls explained that for example the practice when a boy takes a girl’s pencil-case and runabout with it in classroom or hides it in his desk drawer is not violence but catching their attention. The girls told about it very merrily.

Girls told about physical violence commonly in a prudent manner. The Estonian girls’ tales started with a statement that girls use mental violence only. It was grounded by several reasons:

*“Helen: Girls are very catty towards each other. Girls don’t mix it up /.../ Girls are weaker and they can’t show force but girls are fluent, they can comment.*

*Piret: Nay, yeah, the physical, that they do not assault somebody. It’s not very cool when a girl assault another one, it don’t make a good impression, that is why instead of it girls can offend very fine and comment a little more.*

*Marju: That means one forgive to girls as long as they do something by words, but if a girl assault and battery, it is a very bad thing?*

*Helen: That if a girl assault and battery then it causes the boys’ stand that this girl is a little psycho”.*

When the talking proceeded, Helen acknowledged: “But really, nay, I don’t know. I own, I grew angry once and assaulted this way. But now it’s finished.”

By the Estonian girls’ meaning the girls’ assault and battery is something very terrible. Fighting was discussed only using past tense. We got an impression that each girl has some touch with fighting. The 14-year-old girls laughed together at their foregone childishness, when looking back on it:

*“Ave: In the 3rd or 4<sup>th</sup> grade a girl attacked by nails a boy, the marks are up to here.*

*Silvia: I struggled with boys too in the previous school in the 4<sup>th</sup> grade”.*

When talking about fighting, girls found it important to emphasize that it does not suit to girl and one must free oneself from it. The boys’ opinion was highly valued by girls (also see the extract above):

*“Marju: How it [fighting] game over?*

*Helen: I found just that I am too violent a little. Classmates [girls] said that they can’t nothing to say next to me because they afraid that I fall upon them suddenly.*

*Liisa: Nay, the more you grow up the more you think about that I can’t say bad things ever. I should hold back it that then will be any conflicts too. If you speak out everything then everybody take you for a psycho and all the boys in the class have a bad opinion of you that you are nervous all the time”.*

The Russian girls told one openly about the girls’ fighting; they find it quite normal that girls stand for themselves this way.

Girls described boys’ fighting frequently and in a vivid manner, for instance:

*“Tiina: In our class, there were very many fights in last time. Just a week ago a fight was amongst eighths. Just agree upon, go out and start to fight. /.../ [It rises] from absolutely trivial things, when somebody says something wrong or says something and then the war starts /.../*

*Karl: Nay, to my classmate happened couple days ago that just in dining hall was this way that one [boy] from a parallel class stared at him, wordy warfare started, they agreed upon and game to fight.*

*Tiina: And others stay around always.*

*Eve: Sometimes friends are taken along that “help out!” when a more large-scale fight occurs.*

*Tiina: And sometimes they taunt terribly the adverse party, they make a noise and provoke as “oh yeah, go ahead!”*

A specific contradiction appeared in these descriptions. On the one hand girls condemn the boys' fighting but on the other hand they speak about it with admiration. Girls prefer to speak about fighting amongst boys and other physical bullying but they mention the boys grouping or societies in classes and the mental violence amongst boys very rarely. Likewise, the girls' tales about the boys' violence behaviors against the girls themselves were transient and vague (see above).

In their tales, girls alluded that one should not show her weakness: *“/.../ It's quite bad when one find out your weak points”* and that the role of victim is a discreditable one. Compare with boys, girls tended more to blame victims: *“A person must be active her selves, then he find friends”*.

### **Boys about girls and boys - describing and assessing violent behavior**

Boys described their mutual relations similarly to girls more willingly. To incite boys to speak about girls, many questions were needed. As a first thing, boys usually stated, *“Girls fight amongst themselves”*. When we inquired, what does it actually mean, boys explained: *“Girls do not assault and battery, they just abuse each other”*. The boys' description of the girls' mental violence was very similar to the girls' ones. Likewise, boys told that girls use very dirty words amongst themselves and *“they don't think, they just say”*.

Boys commonly described ignoring a victim less times, but some boys said that the most terrible thing for a girl in school is *“when you are just ignored and no one socializes with you”*. Boys also quoted ignoring as more hurtful compared with the open abuse. However, we found among boys opinion that open bullying is worse than ignoring, and physical violence is the worst one. Here the opinions seem to depend on either boys see the violent behavior from their own perspective or from the girls' one.

The girl groups and societies were described similarly to girls. Boys stated that boys try to attract attention by fighting and girls try this by make-up. The little town boys told that *“girls laugh [at make-up girls] behind their back”* and admitted that they also laugh at girls who are engaged too much with their appearance and are *“too painted”*: *“who make up herself is “filler” or “plaster”*”. It was unclear whether girls heard it.

Only one boy told about the boys opposite groups in class and about verbal abuse between boys: “By us, sportsmen are mocked, not just too much but that sportsmen are stupid” and “in our class there are many longhairs who listen heavy music, [they are] a little different /.../ and shorthairs say that “yarns” and [the others] that “bald” and like that”. Hair commonly seems to be a very important topic for children. One of the most terrible things for which to mock each other seems to be fat hair both by girl and boys.

Boys did not talk about the boys’ violent behavior against girls. They were confined to saying that “girls shouldn’t be treated so”. Boys from a little town said that some girls, especially “babe girls” abuse boys like: “*you bloody bastard*”, and so on. However, one boy explained “*when girls do something to boys then boys overlook it*”.

Boys distinguished fighting and bullying. Bullying was described as a quite usual behavior: “That [someone] come up to and starts to knock in every way thus and pick a quarrel”. As mentioned above, boys try to attract attention this way: “that he wants to be a boss in the opposite direction”. Boys said that offenders select some of the weaker boys.

Boys frequently described taking away and damage of personal belonging: “*For instance, when a schoolbag is let fly into carbage can /.../ or someone plays basketball with my schoolbag*” or “*Take other’s pen and throw out of window. It is like bullying*”.

Compared with girls, boys discussed more about how the “taunt more jokingly” takes effect on the victim. Even though teasers and bystanders state that it was joke, “*victim takes it not as joke perhaps*”.

Similarly to girls, boys also told much about the direct physical violence amongst themselves. Frequently, the fights are agreed upon and take place before others’ eyes as if demonstration (see the girls’ description above). However, unlike the girls, there is less passion in the boys’ tales:

*“Peeter: Nay, I wanted to break in always but there are also some who say that don’t go, let them fight.*

*Judit: What do you feel about it?*

*Janek: Some have fun.*

*Peeter: Some [cry] “oh yeah lets go!”*

*Marju: And what the girls do?*

*Janek: The same.*

*Marju: That all the girls and the boys are around?  
Ilmar: No, the girls rather intervene.*

Boys acknowledged that “everyone usually selects a weaker one for fighting”. Unlike others, the boys from small town told that both they themselves and the girls try to interfere with fighting and to stand up for victim. Contrariwise to children from big town who said that standing up for victim rather damages his/her status, the boys from small towns stated that some support empower the victim: “When somebody stands up for victim then he/she want to do something himself/herself to overcome this.”

### **Teachers’ role in reproducing traditional gender stereotypes**

Some examples of interactions between teachers and pupils appeared in our data, which were extremely interesting with reference to reproducing traditional gender stereotypes by teachers. Children did not point out directly the gender discrimination, but they just described examples of unfair and abusive treatment of children of the opposite sex by teachers. Some girls from several schools reported of male teachers who declare their negative attitude toward girls. As rule, they told about science teachers’ biased stand toward girls, for instance: “[A teacher tells] that you are so stupid, so stupid, so stupid, that [you are] babes and so on, and many, very many girls think that they are incapable of learning because they are babes. A kind of “babe talk” goes all the time. That means a prejudice [appears] all the time. So a kind of inferiority complex arises.”

A girl from another school reported of an analogous situation but here the male teacher also set an example for boys, how to relate to girls:

*“Rita: [science teacher] all the time talks about us [three female friends], all the time stares us during the lessons and laughs and makes a kind of “blonde jokes” and then boys laugh at us, too.”*

Another girls’ conversation demonstrates, that male teachers can be quite successful in teaching traditional gender roles to girls:

*“Liina: And /.../ the [male science] teacher is duly strict, nobody risks to do something during his lessons.  
Annely: But /.../ it’s quite good...  
Liina: But he is too strict. [He] taunts that “fathead” and “retarded” and “idiot”. He wanted to hit me with ruler when I was solving an exercise on blackboard. Behind me as if hitting me with this big ruler.*

*Signe: He told me "butterfingers".*

*Annely: He is likely a good teacher but too strict.*

*Liina: Nobody risks to ask anything, straight away he starts to bawl, "damn!" and slams his fist on the blackboard, "fatheads, you understand nothing!"*

*Signe: [He] Says, "I take off the belt!" Frightens fully!*

*Annely: Surely, he makes good jokes too."*

The girls' talk was very vivid and expressive but somehow ambivalent. Simultaneously, we perceived admiration ("good teacher", "duly strict", "makes good jokes"), disapproval ("too strict", "taunts") and nonverbally some fear, respect for power, and humility.

In children tales, we found only one example of female teacher's gendered abuse of boys. When we asked children to give some general examples of violent behaviors at school, one boy said surprisingly "*feminism*". He explained that he meant a situation when the female teacher keeps boys five minutes longer after lesson in the classroom "*because like girls don't cry in hall and so*".

## **Conclusions**

The most important concern of us during the research planning and data collection process was to achieve positive contact with children to discuss the highly sensitive topic of violence. Hopefully, we succeeded in this effort. Besides that, we tried to understand precisely meaning of children's words both during the interviews and the data analysis.

When children talked to us about violence they proceed from classifications that already exist in society. Thus, the description of violence they started with dividing it to physical and mental violence. However, the more children explain the content of physical and mental violence the more they find that physical and mental violence are intertwined with each other. Children bring a gendered aspect into the differences between physical and mental violence. But again, the more they describe the differences between physical as boys' activity and mental as girls' activity the less difference there is. It became evident that with growth of age both boys and girls use less physical and more mental violence. According to stories and descriptions that our respondents told us, we conclude that the notable gap between children on the basis of gender becomes evident from the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. The same seems to be valid by violence, too. Boys and girls observe each other with interest, but mostly from distance.

However, girls are pleased when boys try to attract their attention, even when they use some violence for this.

Gender identity becomes very important to children of age 12-15. Children compare themselves with mates and discuss their weaknesses and strengths. Both boys and girls tend to consider that physical power is important by boys and beautiful look by girls, besides of other important characteristics which are more common for the both sexes, like sociability, cleanliness and so on.

One important evidence of gender differences seems to be finding that that shyness raises the risk to become a victim of violence for both boys and girls, while boys' weakness and girls' physical violence and elevated irritability makes them vulnerable to several kinds of violence.

Our respondents told about boys' fighting as if a self-evident thing. This is a bad, but accepted, so called normal behavior for boys; it belongs to masculine role, while girls' fighting is unpleasant. Using physical power is not in accordance with feminine role. By fighting boys demonstrate their power, while girls do not need such a power. We think this attitude contributes reproduction of traditional gender stereotypes in Estonian school in which teachers also play an important role. Similar result was found by Huuki (2002) in Finnish school. In Russian groups there was a different attitude towards girls' physical power and fighting. Both Russian boys and girls considered that girls should have fighting skills to defend themselves.

According to children's opinion, adult people are commonly more concerned by physical violence and react to it sometimes too dramatically. The adults' reactions are based on the opinion that physical violence will disturb more the all situation and have deeper negative influence on victim compared with mental violence. On the contrary to adults, both boys and girls consider negative impact of mental violence deeper for the victim than that of physical violence. Both boys and girls considered total ignoring of a victim the worst modus of violence, and here the gender aspect is of secondary importance. Teachers, in children's opinion, do not recognize or do not notice, i.e., do not testify this as a problem. It is also worth mentioning that so far, to our knowledge, there had been no questions about ignoring in quantitative studies on school bully and/or violence performed in Estonia.

In children's descriptions of violent behavior clear difference appeared between their preliminary wording of traditional attitudes proceeding from gender roles, and the subsequent vivid descriptions of their real practices in which these gender differences were not so clear. Therefore, both the researchers who study the children's violent behavior and all the adults who have to deal with it should be armed with patience to listen the children's talk until they end to repeat conventional things and start to speak on their own behalf, about their own experiences.

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