

**The Fathers and the Child Protection Service.
A qualitative study of perceptions and experiences.**

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Abstract

This research project is a small-scale qualitative study aiming to get insight into the Child Protection Service (CPS) perceptions of fathers, fathers' experience from meeting the CPS, and how the disproportionate female dominance among CPS workers can influence the perceptions and experiences. Knowledge about this is collected from two qualitative focus group interviews with CPS workers and five individual interviews with fathers. CPS workers discuss how they perceive fatherhood and what consequences this may have for the service delivered. The fathers talk about how they have experienced contact with CPS and how this has affected their relationship with the CPS and their identity as fathers. Such knowledge is essential for understanding the parents' needs, for them to provide good caring and development conditions for their children.

The main methodology was a discursive and narrative approach. The findings from focus group interviews with the male and female CPS workers provide insight into their desire to include fathers versus a view of fathers as more dispensable than mothers. Gendered language may be a challenge, and anger is experienced differently between male and female CPS workers. The fathers' stories are about mixed experiences from meeting with CPS, ranging from very good relationships to deep conflicts.

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1.0. INTRODUCTION

“Why don’t you help me?” Henrik was clearly upset. He looked us right in the eye and asked this question in a low voice. Henrik had not had access to his son George (8) for the past three months due to conflicts with the child’s mother and her vague suspicions that their son was the victim of neglect by the father. The family had been in contact with the Child Protection Service (CPS) for several years. George seemed sad and bored, had been absent from school for a while, and a lot of resources had been put into action to get the boy back at school. The author and another female colleague from the Child Protection Services family counselling team were engaged to find a solution to the situation. I replied, “We understand that this must be difficult for you, and we will try to find a solution to your access arrangements with George. One of the things that makes it difficult is George's mother's distrust of you. ” Henrik answered, “If there’d been a man helping me, I think he would have made a concrete plan and get the situation sorted. You women are more concerned with listening and paying attention to all parties. You have a lot of empathy, but because of that, very little happens”. I resisted the temptation to correct Henrik’s views and instead followed up with a question: "Have you had any male contact persons in the CPS during these years?" Henrik replied, "I've actually counted, and the truth is I've met two men and thirty women, but when I pointed this out to CPS, I was criticized for being discriminatory". Henrik continued, “What if there was a mother who was denied access to her child for three months, based on her father's vague suspicions? Then you would have intervened”.

Henrik's story is not unique. During my 28 years in the Child Protection Service, I have met many fathers who have expressed similar views. They feel less important than the mothers and believe that the many female employees affect the services

provided, but this cannot be pointed out as it may give the impression that they have a condescending view of women.

As a woman and a part of the Child Protection Service that Henrik was concerned about, I wish to spotlight these issues. How does the large proportion of female CPS workers influence the general perception of fathers within the CPS. Do women and men have different perceptions of fatherhood? Can the father's viewpoint affect the way they interact with the CPS, and how do their types of interaction contribute to maintaining or correcting the CPS' perceptions of fathers? This is the starting point for my research question.

1.1. Research question.

HOW DOES THE GENDER DISTRIBUTION IN THE CHILD PROTECTION SERVICE IN NORWAY REFLECT THE NORWEGIAN IDEOLOGY ABOUT GENDER?

Sub questions:

Does the large proportion of women in the CPS affect the protection of mothers' parental rights?

What are the CPS workers' perceptions of fathers?

How do fathers as clients experience interactions with the Child Protection Service?

1.2. My choice of a discursive and narrative research approach.

I have used Discourse Analysis as an analysis tool for focus group interviews with CPS workers to investigate how particular discourses can create subject positions for fathers containing instructions on how to live and behave (Neumann 2021, p.115). I have used Narrative Analysis for interviews with fathers to gain insight into

how they talk about their contact with the CPS, and how they shape their self-perception of identity through their stories (Bruner 1985; Sørly and Blix 2017, p.63).

Some definitions

The terms Child Protection Service (CPS) and Child Welfare Service occurs throughout the thesis. Unless otherwise specified, both refer to the Child Protection front-line service which is responsible for receiving and following up reports of concerns regarding children.

Gender is also a consistent theme throughout my thesis. According to the World Health Organisation (2024), gender refers to the characteristics of women, men, girls, and boys that are socially constructed. This includes norms, behaviors, and roles associated with being a woman, man, girl, or boy, as well as relationships between individuals. Butler (1999) stated that gender is created through our language and our performative actions. The view of gender used in the current thesis is primarily normative. I had the impression that my participants were normative when they described women, men, fathers, and mothers. In retrospect, I see that I could have been more exploratory in relation to how the participants defined gender. However, views of gender more generally were not the focus of the current study.

1.3. Background for the project

I live and work in the city of Bergen with almost 300 000 residents, which is a large city by Norwegian standards. I have worked in the Child Welfare field for 28 years, as a case worker for 8 years, and 20 years as a family therapist. The last 8 years I worked as a family therapist for families in acute crisis, in close cooperation with CPS offices that receive reports of concerns about children and interact with affected families. One of the main aims of the family team where I work, is to prevent acute

placements of children or to make placements as short as possible once these have been effectuated. We serve the entire city of Bergen, which means that we have a lot of contact with different district CPS offices and their families. I observe families and CPS workers together and separately, and the female overrepresentation among the CPS workers is very clear, and something I notice almost daily.

My interest in the experiences of fathers in contact with the CPS has gradually emerged after meeting parents such as Henrik mentioned above in various contexts over the years, hearing and seeing how they experience their contact with the CPS, observing how the CPS refers to fathers, and reflecting on my own attitudes. I have asked myself questions such as who would I contact first if I needed information - the mother or the father? The likelihood is that I would contact the mother first, without having a sound reason for doing so.

As a family therapist, I have been strongly influenced by Systemic understanding, where the focus is on relationships and interactions (Johnsen and Torsteinson 2012, p.30). I have hypothesized that fathers find the interaction with CPS more difficult than mothers, and that the strong overrepresentation of female staff in the CPS is a challenge. My interest is in shedding light on what makes it difficult. Why might it be a challenge to be a father meeting a female CPS worker and how do fathers' attitudes influence the relationship with the CPS?

My doctoral project which concerns families and parenting, takes place in Norway in the 2020's and must be understood in this context. According to Foucault (Hall 2001, p. 74), the concept of "truth" is only relevant within a specific historical context.

Bourdieu (1998, p. 66) discusses the difficulty of defining "family." Family is a social construct that is influenced by the principles of the social construction of reality.

These principles are part of our Habitus. Social construction involves mental structures that develop in the mind through socialization within cultural contexts, reflecting both collective and individual experiences. I believe this perspective also applies to definitions of gender equality.

1.4. Gender Equality in Norway

According to Swan (1997), Norway is considered to be ahead of many other countries in terms of gender equality. In Norway, it is widely accepted that women and men should be treated equally.

Internationally, Norway is recognized as a world leader in promoting gender equality, as highlighted in the Global Gender Gap Report. This report annually assesses the state and progress of gender equality across four key dimensions: Economic Participation and Opportunity, Education, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment (WEF, 2023). Additionally, Statistics Norway (2023) indicates that gender equality is also evident in the distribution of household chores.

The issue of who has the authority to define the meaning of gender equality is crucial, as stated by Siim and Stoltz (2013, p. 19). Feminist scholars argue that the constructions of gender and gender equality are embedded within national narratives and the politics of belonging (Youval-Davis 2011; Siim & Mokre 2013 in Siim and Stoltz 2013, p. 2).

Historically, the primary objective of gender equality policies has been to enhance the status of women and minorities. However, improvements for one gender should not come at the expense of another. In several areas, boys and men as a group are at a disadvantage compared to girls and women. This is evident, for example, in

certain aspects of the education system, the opportunities for equal caregiving, and interactions with various parts of the public service (NOU 2024, p.5).

The Men's Equality Committee (MEC) (Norwegian: Mannsutvalget) was established by the Government of Norway in 2022. This public committee has been tasked with investigating the gender equality challenges faced by boys and men throughout their lives. The creation of the MEC arises from the recognition that boys and men have not been adequately included or supported in the development of Norwegian gender equality policy and public discourse. Moving forward, the next step in advancing gender equality involves a greater focus on the challenges that boys and men experience (NOU 2024.p.5).

In 2024, the MEC published a report titled "Gender Equality's Next Step," which addressed the challenges related to gender equality impacting boys and men in various areas, including family life, education, employment, leisure, health, violence, and social exclusion. The Committee proposed measures aimed at creating a more equitable society, emphasizing that both men and women should have equal opportunities to support themselves and their families through work and to share caregiving responsibilities. Historically, promoting women's participation in the workforce has been a primary goal of gender equality policy. However, the men's committee argued that there needs to be increased support for men's opportunities to take on equal caregiving roles, even after relationship breakdowns (NOU 2024, p. 9). Political guidelines affect the Child Welfare Service's discourses regarding fathers in addition to current legislation at any given time.

1.5. The Child Protection Service in Norway

Various factors, such as laws and regulations, influence the discourses and services from the CPS. According to the Act relating to Children and Parents, Chapter 5.

Section 42. the child has right of access to both parents even if they live apart. The parents have mutual responsibility for implementing the right of access and the child is entitled to care and consideration from those who have parental responsibility.

Parental responsibility is the right and duty parents must decide for their child in personal matters. The parents must exercise parental responsibility based on the child's needs and interests (Regjeringen, no 2022).

The Child Welfare Act § 1-9 highlights the importance of teamwork by encouraging the Child Welfare Service to engage with children and their parents with kindness and respect. It also emphasizes the role of family and support networks in creating a nurturing environment for every child's growth and well-being.

The Child Protection services goal is to ensure that children and adolescents who are living under conditions that represent a risk to their health or development receive the help they need, and to contribute to children and adolescents growing up in safe, secure and caring conditions. In Norway, child protection policies and regulations rely on three main principles: The child best interest is a fundamental consideration in actions and decisions that affect children. In cases where the child's best interests' conflict with those of the parents, the child's rights must take precedence. The biological principle underlines the importance of family ties. This means that the state has a duty to facilitate the child's development, preferably within its own family. The principle of 'the least intrusive' form of intervention. When there are concerns about a child's wellbeing, the least intrusive intervention should be

used first. A child should only be removed from the home after attempting home based assessment has proven to be inadequate (Bufdir.no 2024).

My research will take place in the Child Protection front-line service. The Child Protection system in Norway can be divided into state-run organizations responsible for establishing foster homes and institutions and municipal Child Protection front-line services (CPS) responsible for investigating reports of concerns regarding children. The CPS is also responsible for implementing necessary measures, such as family therapy and parent guidance.

Attachment theory

Storhaug (2015) states that in the new millennium the Norwegian CPS have chosen a professional orientation that focuses on developmental and attachment psychology, assessments of parent-child interaction, and risk assessments related to parental functioning. Traditionally, working in the CPS has built upon the assumptions of Bowlby's research and the importance of mothers. Bowlby's attachment theory has laid the foundation for perceptions about the instinctive attachment between mother and child. The mother is most important, and the father is either insignificant or, at best, a supplement (Bowlby 1969; Storhaug 2015, p.18).

When mothers are assigned such an important role, it highlights the significance of a child's attachment and emotional connection. Infants require a safe "base," which is crucial for balancing their need for closeness with their desire to explore their environment (Hareide & Moe, 2000).

This emphasis on the exclusive importance of mothers has led to rigid attitudes that unfairly burden working mothers with chronic guilt and hinder their ability to

participate equally in society. Additionally, this perspective has contributed to the undervaluation of fathers as caregivers (Hareide & Moe, 2000).

However, Johnsen and Torsteinson (2012, p.91) state that recent attachment theory suggests that children can develop secure attachment also later in life and with other significant persons, not just the mother. According to Storhaug (2015, p.17) the Norwegian society has abandoned the view that mothers are the most important parent, but it has remained within the CPS.

One of my concerns is whether the CPS is sufficiently aware of its obligation to cooperate with both parents. I also wonder if the significant overrepresentation of females in the CPS could influence parental rights and responsibilities. Could this prevalence result in prioritizing the interests of mothers above all else?

The sample size is small, making it difficult to determine whether the high proportion of women in the CPS protects mothers' parental rights. However, my goal is to provide some insights into whether this may be the case and to identify factors that could either enhance or counteract this effect.

Language

Language can significantly contribute to the barriers between parents and child welfare services. Although only 16 percent of participants in the survey "The New Child Welfare" reported that Norwegian was not their mother tongue, many still found the language used by Child Protective Services (CPS) to be foreign (Lichtwark, et.al.2019). Jacobsen (2018) notes that research have shown that the language employed by CPS has become more professionalized.

If language poses a challenge, parents may find it difficult to interact satisfactorily with Child Protective Services (CPS) workers. Angel (2007) discusses the concept of

the "Goffmanian frame," emphasizing that without an understanding of the appropriate social framework for each situation, meaningful interaction becomes impossible. We rely on these frameworks to determine how we should present ourselves and how to interpret the behaviour of others. It is essential for all parties involved to express and maintain a shared understanding of the situation (Goffman, 1992). Research indicates that CPS tends to cooperate more effectively with parents who have higher social status, which often correlates with their familiarity with the same language used by CPS workers (Jacobsen, 2018).

In addition to having a professional language, the CPS is characterised by being a female-dominated sector that may affect communication. In 2021, 84 percent of the employees were women (KS 2021). Jones (1995, p.106) states that we should be aware that language and our way of speaking can be characterized by gender roles (Spender 1980, Cooper 1990, in Jones 1995, p.106). In English-speaking cultures, there is a tendency for women to use language characterized by emotions and relationships, and during conversations, they help others to participate, such as by ending sentences with, "Yes, isn't it," or "All right?". Men often speak in sentences about the character or truth of assertions and have a clear ending (Jones 1995, p.106).

The linguist Uri (2008, in Aksnes 2022) has looked at language differences between the genders in Norway. Women tend to use more small words than men and to add more reservations or conditions in a conversation. Such small words are referred to as 'discourse markers', and include "yes", "well", "enough", "just", "that is", "in a way". Uri (2008, in Aksnes 2022) claims that women and men have different goals with conversations. Women are more concerned about equality and community, and in a conversation, they will seek to establish this. Men on the other hand, are more

concerned with emphasizing themselves and strengthening their position. I believe language may have an impact on fathers' interaction with CPS, which in turn may have consequences for fathers' opportunities to take care of their children.

1.6. Family life in Norway

According to Statistics Norway (2023), families with children in Norway consist of: 302 437 married couples with children 0–17 years; 185 632 cohabiting couples with children 0-17 years; and 107 184 single mothers/fathers with children 0-17 years. Single mothers are overrepresented among families in contact with CPS (Storhaug, Kojan, and Kvaran, 2012).

In 2020, Pedersen and Egeland conducted a study in Norway, examining the everyday lives of families with children through 15 semi-structured interviews with families in and around Oslo. They found that the daily lives of these families were characterized by demanding logistics, balancing the pressures of paid work with the routines of caregiving. The ability to combine paid work with caregiving is somewhat influenced by the parents' working hours, whether they have flexible or fixed schedules.

Most caregiving in the family occurs in the afternoon when families spend time together. Parents strive for an equal division of household and caregiving responsibilities. Although they perceive themselves as equal caregivers for their children, mothers often take on the responsibility of organizing these tasks and tend to do a bit more housework than fathers (Pedersen and Egeland, 2020, p. 5).

1.6.1. The third shift

Smeby (2017, p.245) suggest that in the family, there are a wide range of tasks which can be divided into different types of 'work shifts. One type of shift is paid

work, another type involves all the practical and care tasks in the home. In some families, the work is evenly distributed between mothers and fathers. In addition, there needs to be a feeling of belonging to the family. Bourdieu (1998, p.68) states that to create and maintain a "family feeling" it is necessary to take account of all the practical and symbolic work that generates devotion, generosity, and solidarity. This work seems to fall more typically to the women, who are responsible for maintaining relationships through visits, correspondence, and telephone calls.

I find Bourdieu's idea, like Pedersen and Egeland's (2020) findings and Smeby's (2017) concept of "The third shift" concerning family responsibility. "The third shift" comprises the administration of everyday life - coordinating the child and the parents' activities - and turns out to be strongly related to gender. Smeby pointed out that even for parents that have equal practices in the first and second shifts, the paid and domestic work, it is the mothers who perform "The third shift".

Due to the downsizing of health and care institutions in the 90's, Greve (1994, in Viljugrein 1998) argues that families are patients' most important resource and are sometimes the only "institution" that can provide continuous care for persons with special needs. Some call this "the fourth shift". A study by Brekke and Nadim (2016) indicated that it is usually mothers who have the main responsibility for "the fourth shift". In an attempt at a better distribution of parental responsibility, the father quota was introduced in Norway in 1993.

1.6.2. The father quota

Holter (2012, in Storhaug 2015, p.33) argues that one can distinguish between three different historical phases of fatherhood: The first dates to the 1970s and early 80s and is referred to as "criticism of the absent father", the 1980s and 90s were

characterized by the "helping out" phase; and the 2000's Holter refers to the "sharing of care" phase.

These periods partially overlapped, but the focus changed during each period with a significant increase in general expectations and the normative pressure for fathers to be active caregivers for their children. According to the Norwegian Parliament (2008-2009, in Regjeringa 2012) "the new man is more gender equality oriented. Men today are particularly involved in the care of children, and the changes in fatherhood are significant".

As mentioned, it is regarded as an ideal in Norway that the rights and responsibilities of parents should be equal. One example is that parents in Norway 2024 are entitled to parental leave following the birth of a child for a total of 12 months. 15 weeks of this parental leave are reserved for the mother and 15 weeks of the leave are reserved for the father, known as "the father's quota" (NHO 2024).

The percentage of fathers utilizing the father's quota is on the rise (Statistics Norway, 2023). This trend suggests that, on average, fathers are spending more time with their children. Some characteristics of parents who do not take full advantage of the quota include: one or both parents being born outside the Nordic region, having low income and/or education levels, and the father being self-employed (Schou, 2019, p. 5).

1.6.3. Class differences.

Siim and Stoltz (2013, p.10) argue that the focus on gender inequalities in terms of categorical differences between men and woman, as these cut across the class-based categories of capital and labour has led to a "epistemological blind spot",

which makes it difficult to incorporate inequalities of race/ethnicity and more particularly the intersections between gender, class and race/ethnicity.

An ethnographic study from the United States was presented by Anette Lareau (2002, p.747). Here it emerges that middle-class parents engage in concerted cultivation by attempting to foster children's talent through organized leisure activities and extensive reasoning. Aarseth (2008, p.10) addresses how middle-class men in Norway view the need to be with their children. "The fathers aren't just involved by driving children to training or sports tournaments. They're the coach, the theatre instructor, and the team leader".

According to Lareau (2002, p. 747), working-class and poor parents focus on the "accomplishments of natural growth," creating conditions that allow their children to grow while leaving leisure activities up to the children themselves. These parents tend to use directives rather than reasoning in their interactions. Additionally, the influence of race is less significant than that of social class.

In contrast, middle-class families place a strong emphasis on reasoning.

Observations have shown that middle-class mothers are more willing than fathers to engage their children in prolonged discussions (Lareau, 2002, p. 763).

The researchers Fauske, Kojan and Storhaug (2018) base their research on interviews from the project "The New Child Welfare Service" in Norway, in which 715 parents who have been in contact with the Child Protection Service were interviewed. The study revealed that parents without a stable income from employment were significantly overrepresented among the participants. This trend also held true for unemployed parents. Almost one-third of all mothers were not participating in the labour market. According to the researchers, parents who are

unemployed or in typical working-class jobs experience the child welfare system differently compared to those who have higher levels of education and income.

Parents from lower social strata are far more likely to have negative experiences with the child welfare services. They feel less seen, heard and taken seriously (Jacobsen 2018)

In addition, Lareau (2002, p.749) suggest that compared to the middle-class counterparts, white and black working class and poor family members are more distrustful of professionals. The fathers in my study I will categorize into middle class and working class. Johnny, Adam and Jim within the middle class, and Oscar and Ali within the working class.

1.6.4. The importance of fathers

In 2000, Hareide and Moe, published the booklet "Fathers and Children" as part of a parental guidance program and with the support of the Norwegian government.

Hareide and Moe referred to that it was not until paternal research from the 1970s that there was a real break with the traditional mother/child thinking. This gave us a new and sometimes surprising picture of the child's social world, and much of the mother-centred research from before the 1960s was discarded (Hareide og Moe 2000, p.44).

Hareide and Moe (2000, p. 44) argue that infants can form close, trusting relationships with more than one person from the very beginning. Therefore, a newborn is ready to receive care and affection from the father from day one.

Hareide and Moe outline several prerequisites for caregivers to establish a safe "base" and foster strong attachment in children. These prerequisites include:

1. Empathy: This refers to the caregiver's ability to empathize with

the child and respond sensitively to their crying, smiles, and other signals.

The caregiver should be able to react immediately and appropriately to these cues.

2. Self-knowledge: This is a lifelong journey that involves being honest about our own feelings, even those we may find uncomfortable.

3. Ability to reconcile: This includes the need for internal reflection

as parents, as well as the ability to make amends with others when necessary (Hareide and Moe, 2000, p. 36).

Hareide and Moe (2000, p. 36) state that research clearly indicates that fathers, when placed in situations where care and empathy are expected, can develop a nurturing capacity like that of mothers. Fathers can be just as sensitive and empathetic as mothers. It is not gender that matters most, but rather the situation and cultural background.

Additionally, Parke (as cited in Hareide and Moe, 2000, p. 43) suggests that play is likely the most significant contribution a father can make. Fathers tend to emphasize play more than caregiving. Mothers play with their children in a way that is more attuned to the child's level. They often maintain proximity and allow the child to progress at their own pace, giving them the opportunity to take the lead. In contrast, fathers engage in play that is more physically stimulating, incorporating elements of challenge, initiative, and independence. This type of play is characterized by its robust, spontaneous, and creative nature, devoid of the traditional rigidity associated with male roles, and is often perceived as more thrilling. Research has shown that fathers' play can have a significant impact on various aspects of development, including emotional mastery and intellectual growth.

Hareide and Moe (2000, p. 45) referenced research findings that suggested the most crucial factor in developing empathy during childhood is fathers' involvement in caregiving. Fathers who spent significant time with their children—cooking for them, bathing them, and engaging in other activities—raised children who grew up to be the most empathetic adults.

Hareide and Moe (2000, p. 44) concluded that a father's most significant contribution to a child's upbringing is the presence of two caregivers. There is no need to compare the contributions of mothers and fathers, as both are essential. When they work together, they create a complementary and holistic environment that benefits the children.

I contend that considering the statutory rights of both children and parents, the child welfare service's duty to involve both parents, and research suggesting the significance of fathers in children's development, it is crucial to investigate the relationship between Child Protective Services (CPS) and fathers. This research is necessary for improving child welfare services.

1.7. Guide to the thesis.

Chapter 1.0. Introduces the thesis.

Chapter 2.0. Contains a presentation of articles that are relevant to my research question.

Chapter 3.0. Contains a description of the methodology used for collecting and analysing data,

Chapter 4.0. Presents a Foucauldian Discourse Analysis of two focus group interviews with CPS workers.

Chapter 5.0. Presents a Dialogical Narrative Analysis of five stories from individual interviews with fathers.

Chapter 6.0. Contains a summary of findings from the focus groups and interviews with the fathers.

Chapter. 7.0. Contains discussions of findings.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to identify general patterns in findings from multiple research studies in the same area (Robson, 2016, p. 52). Although the review is not exhaustive, it includes significant Norwegian research on the topic as well as some international studies, which helps to highlight the main issues relevant to the current study.

The literature review was primarily conducted after the analysis phase. This approach was inspired by Glaser and Strauss (Sharmaz and Thornberg, 2020, p. 310), who argued that immersing oneself in both the research and theoretical literature before conducting a study could influence researchers and shape their perceptions. According to Glaser and Strauss, effective theorizing and high-quality research should be based on direct knowledge of the phenomena being studied.

In this context, I found it appropriate to conduct most of the literature review following the analysis phase. This approach allowed me to be less influenced by previous findings. However, identifying a clear "gap" in the literature proved to be more challenging. I assumed that research on the gender of child welfare workers was limited, and this assumption was confirmed during my literature searches. For instance, when I searched for "fathers and CPS" in the Essex library, I found 706 matches. In contrast, the search for "gender and CPS worker" yielded only 153 matches, and searching for "female and male CPS worker" returned 161 matches.

2.1. Searching for relevant literature

I conducted searches for relevant literature through books and articles, as well as digitally via platforms like Google and Google Scholar. Specifically, I explored the libraries of Tavistock and Essex University, along with databases such as Ebsco,

PubMed, and Oria. My search terms included "Fathers," "Fatherhood," "Child Protection Service," "Child Welfare Service," "Male CPS Workers," and "Female CPS Workers." For example, when I searched the Essex digital library service using the term "Fathers," I found 230,123 matches. When I added "Fathers and the Child Protection Service," the count narrowed to 706 matches. By further specifying the search to articles, I identified 623 matches. After limiting the results to peer-reviewed articles published from 2000 to 2024, I was left with 163 relevant articles. I read through the abstracts to find literature pertinent to my project, focusing on topics such as CPS workers' perceptions of fathers, the significance of gender among child welfare workers, and fathers' experiences of engaging with CPS.

I excluded articles published before 2000 and those with more specific themes, such as "A Focus on Fathers with Intellectual Disabilities and Child Protection" by Ćwirynkało and Parchomiuk (2024) and "Parents' Experiences of Seeking Health Care and Encountering Allegations of Shaken Baby Syndrome: A Qualitative Study" by Hogberg et al. (2020).

I utilized both English and Norwegian search terms during my online searches. Additionally, I sought specific literature that I discovered through bibliographies, lectures, and recommendations from supervisors and peers.

I was primarily interested in Norwegian research. However, I also came across articles, research reports, and doctoral theses from countries including Sweden, England, and the USA, which addressed fathers' experiences and the influence of gender among CPS workers. I found these studies to be relevant and they contributed valuable perspectives to my findings.

The articles are organized thematically, and I have also analyzed the literature chronologically from the period 2000 to 2024 to identify developments in child protection services (CPS), perceptions of fathers, and fathers' experiences with the CPS. Attached is a table providing an overview of the publications (Appendix 2).

I selected publications that could illuminate my research question. Some were clearly relevant, such as the studies by Angel (2007), Storhaug (2015), and Sentio (2018 a+b), which are Norwegian and comparable to my own study. Other literature was chosen based on its suggestion that gender issues in CPS have international relevance.

2.2. The CPS workers perceptions of fathers

Neumann (2001, p. 116) argues that groups often exist as stereotypes, and we have an expectation that these stereotypes will be confirmed each time we encounter someone from a particular group. When an individual does not conform to these stereotypes, they often feel compelled to fight an ongoing battle to be recognized in their uniqueness, in relation to the expectations of others. As a result, strong group stereotypes can act as self-fulfilling prophecies. I believe this concept also applies to the socially constructed group of "fathers."

Risley-Curtiss and Heffernan note that much of the literature on fathering is matricentric, meaning that mothers' behaviors are often considered the standard against which fathers' behaviors are measured (Silverstein and Phares, 1996; Risley-Curtiss and Heffernan, 2003, p. 7). Research and practices in child welfare reflect societal constructs surrounding mothers, fathers, and families. A prevailing assumption in Western society is that a mother's behavior directly influences a child's behavior (Corcoran, 1998; Risley-Curtiss and Heffernan, 2003, p. 7). Moreover,

fathers are underrepresented in research on child development and developmental psychology (Silverstein and Phares, 1996; Risley-Curtiss, 2003, p. 7). The biases researchers bring to their work may also have skewed data collection. For instance, mother-oriented theories have led to research designs where families are rarely observed later in the day, when more fathers may be present (Greif & Bailey, 1990; Risley-Curtiss and Heffernan, 2003, p. 8).

Risley-Curtiss and Heffernan (2003, p. 8) assert that significant progress has been made in recent decades. American society has moved away from the outdated belief that mothers are to blame for autism, schizophrenia, and homosexuality, as well as the 19th-century notion that only mothers can raise children effectively. However, it is essential to involve fathers in research design. Researchers should examine their own gender stereotypes and develop strategies to reduce the influence of these biases on their studies.

Arvidsson (2003, p. 278) suggests that the limited attention given to fathers in research and social work can be attributed to two main factors. First, their minimal visibility in the literature contributes to the common perception that fathers of socially vulnerable children are absent from their lives. Second, there tends to be an overemphasis on mothers, resulting in a female overrepresentation in child welfare services. Hedin and Månson (2000; Arvidsson 2003, p.12) believe that a large part of social work research has been 'gender blind'. This means that attention has not been paid to the gender-specific issues underlying difficult life situations and that women's and men's life pathways are inherently different from the experiences of fathers and mothers.

Risley-Curtiss and Heffernan (2003 p.13) found that we need to deconstruct outdated beliefs and biases about gender and that Child welfare researchers can and should lead the way. My research follows on from this idea looking more closely at beliefs about gender and parenting among CPS workers in Norway.

Fathers as a risk

In 2003, Arvidsson completed her doctoral thesis at Lund University in Sweden, "Questionable fathers – Different images of fathers of socially vulnerable children". Arvidsson's thesis was based on studying documents in addition to interviewing CPS workers and fathers in Sweden. The aim of the thesis was to examine how perceptions of fathers were expressed in documents from 40 child welfare investigations and in interviews with 23 CPS workers, and how 19 fathers describe their experiences from contact with the CPS.

Arvidsson's thesis addressed several elements highly relevant for the current thesis. It examines perceptions of fathers by CPS workers, fathers' experiences from contact with the CPS and how female overrepresentation in the service can affect the relationship between fathers and CPS workers. A social constructionist perspective was central to Arvidssons thesis (Arvidsson 2003, p.286).

According to Arvidson (2003, p.49) during the 90's it became more common for fathers to be contacted by the CPS workers. CPS workers' previous perceptions of fathers were characterized by ambivalence. On the one hand, they had a perception of children's best interests coloured by socio-political intentions. On the other hand, in certain cases children need to be protected from their father (Arvidsson 2003, p.275).

The perception that children may need protection from their fathers is based on valid concerns. According to Isdal and Lorentzen (Sogn 2024), men have a greater potential for violence than women. In the Nordic countries, 10-15% of men have used or are currently using violence against their partners. In the USA and Canada, the figure rises to 25%, while in Turkey and Central America, it jumps to 50%. In Pakistan, an alarming 90% of married men have been reported to exhibit violent behavior (Sogn 2024). These statistics may contribute to the perception of fathers as more threatening and, consequently, more expendable than mothers, which has significant implications.

According to the Norwegian Institute of Public Health (FHI 2023), in 2022, 70% of patients undergoing treatment for substance abuse issues were men, indicating a significant overrepresentation across all main diagnoses. The most notable disparity was among patients treated for cocaine problems, where 87% were men. This trend has remained stable from 2012 to 2022.

Brandon et al. (2019, p. 1) state that when child protection professionals have difficulty engaging with fathers and father figures, assessments may not accurately capture the mix of resources and risks that these men present for the children in their care. This could potentially endanger the children or lead to the exclusion of men. Philip et al. (2019) suggest that families entering the child protection system often face various challenges, including material deprivation, physical and mental health issues, substance misuse, and domestic abuse. While there is interest in adopting whole family approaches, the longstanding issue of professionals not effectively engaging with fathers persists. Phillips et al.'s paper highlights the difficulties in building working relationships with men, notably the tendency to view fathers in binary terms—either as a 'risk' or a 'resource.'

Based on their qualitative longitudinal study of men's experiences with child protection in England, Phillip et al. (2019) highlight how organizational and cultural factors can obstruct the relationship between social workers and fathers. They advocate for a more gender-sensitive approach to social work practice to address these challenges more effectively.

Fathers as a resource

Findings suggest that for children who become involved with the child welfare system, involving multiple parents often increases the chances of the child returning home, results in fewer placement episodes, and reduces the trauma that may arise from separation anxiety (Campell et al., 2015, p. 1). Additionally, research indicates that communities with high reports of absent fathers tend to experience elevated rates of poverty, crime, and incarceration among young men (Blankenhorn et al., 1995; Campell et al., 2015, p. 2). Children from households with absent fathers are 2 to 3 times more likely to use drugs, have special educational needs, and experience more health, emotional, and behavioural problems than those with present fathers. In contrast, children with actively involved, healthy fathers tend to perform better in school and maintain higher self-esteem and self-concept (Horn and Sylvester, 2002; Campell, 2015, p. 2).

In 2006, Young and Reiger conducted a study on the involvement of fathers in the child welfare system for children placed in foster care in the U.S. This study, commissioned by the Department of Health and Human Services, involved interviews with child welfare administrators, caseworkers, and data linkage among child welfare systems in four states. A total of 1,222 local agency caseworkers were interviewed.

Young and Reiger (2006) found that non-residential fathers of children in foster care are often not involved in case planning efforts; nearly half of these fathers are never contacted by the child welfare agency during their child's stay in foster care. Efforts to locate non-residential fathers are inconsistent, with over 44% of cases lacking any method other than asking the mother. Caseworkers and administrators had mixed attitudes regarding fathers. While they generally agreed that a father's involvement can enhance child well-being, only 53% believed that non-residential fathers wanted to participate in the decision-making process about their children (Young and Reiger, 2006, pp. 3-5).

Implications and recommendations resulting from Young and Reiger's study included the importance of seeking out fathers early and providing training to caseworkers on locating and involving fathers. Findings suggested that engaging fathers was important, as it could have potential benefits for the child-father relationship and may be helpful in expediting permanent placement decisions and acquiring resources for the child (Young and Reiger 2006, p.7).

In 2015, Anita Skårstad Storhaug submitted her doctoral thesis "The Child Welfare Services understanding of paternity". The topic was explored by Storhaug as part of a larger study in Norway. A nationwide survey and 4 Focus Group interviews were conducted consisting of a total of 14 informants in 4 child welfare services. 2 men and 12 women participated in the Focus Groups. In-depth interviews were conducted with 15 fathers who had contact with CPS, and who have the main responsibility for their children because of the mothers' substance abuse or mental health problems.

Like Arvidsson (2003), Storhaug (2015) has examined the CPS' understanding of fathers, fathers' experiences from contact with the CPS and how female

overrepresentation can affect the interaction. This thesis is of importance in relation to the current project as it is recent and deals with fathers' relationship to the Norwegian child welfare services. The issues were explored within a social constructionist framework of understanding, where discourses were used as an analytical tool and a way of eliciting different understandings of fatherhood (Storhaug 2015). Storhaug's findings show a slow development in CPS attitudes towards fathers.

Numerous studies indicate that interventions are most effective when fathers are involved and that their participation significantly enhances the mother's care (Guterman et al., 2009; Lee et al., 2009; Storhaug, 2015, p. 92). However, Storhaug (2015, p. 92) found that this understanding is not fully integrated into the models that child welfare workers use for assessment and intervention.

Gordon et al. (2012) suggest that current policies regarding child protection services are placing increasing demands on providers to engage fathers whose children are involved in the child protection process. This requirement highlights the ongoing challenges that fathers have historically faced within these systems.

While the history of child welfare has emphasized serving mothers (O'Donnell et al., 2005; Gordon et al., 2012), social science research increasingly underscores the important role that fathers play in children's development (Cabrera et al., 2007, in Gordon et al., 2012). Specifically, fathers' involvement is crucial in children's permanency plans during interactions with Child Protective Services (CPS). Fathers' active participation in and adherence to the case plan enhances the likelihood of shorter foster care placements and a greater chance of reunifying children with their birth families (Coakley, 2008, cited in Gordon et al., 2012).

Fathers as less important

According to Phares and Compas (1992) and Risley-Curtiss and Heffernan (2003, p.1), fathers have become increasingly involved in raising their children, and their role in normative child development has received more attention. Despite these changes, late 20th-century ideologies about fatherhood still reflect a belief that mothers are obligated to provide daily care for their children, while fathers' involvement is often seen as optional (Silverstein and Phares, 1996; Risley-Curtiss and Heffernan, 2003, p.1).

Angel (2007, p.5) presents a Norwegian study involving parents who attended courses designed for those with children in foster care, along with their own experiences as parents in relation to their contact with Child Protective Services (CPS). The empirical material consists of interviews with six mothers and three fathers. Statements from the participants indicated that the CPS expected the mothers to ensure quality care for their children, while they essentially expected nothing from the fathers (Andenes, 2000, in Angel, 2007, p.69). This dynamic may perpetuate social issues and legitimize the marginalization of men's caregiving roles, which contradicts public policy efforts aimed at encouraging fathers to take more responsibility for their children. Angel concludes by suggesting that this situation can be understood through the traditional models relied on by CPS, which often emphasize the significance of the child's relationship with its mother, particularly through attachment theories (Angel, 2007, p.70).

Storhaug (2015, p. 13) found that Child Protective Services (CPS) workers believe they have a gender-neutral view of mothers and fathers. However, they often perceive fathers as being either more or less involved in their children's lives.

Sometimes, CPS workers feel that fathers want contact with their children but often choose to withdraw.

Among the CPS workers, mothers are generally viewed as more natural and responsible parents, better at communicating, and more competent in caring for their children. In contrast, fathers are seen as more distant and less attuned to their children's needs, which leads to different expectations for each parent. This discrepancy means that the threshold for implementing assistance measures is lower when problems arise for mothers than for fathers. Expectations for fathers are lower, and it takes less for Child Welfare Services to be satisfied with their parenting role (Storhaug, 2015, p. 81).

Mothers as gatekeepers and CPS workers preference.

According to Hilte (2000, in Arvidsson, 2003, p. 48), women are often socially constructed as the primary caregivers, while men are seen as secondary caregivers. Conversely, Storhaug references a Norwegian study conducted by Halså (2008; Storhaug, 2015, p. 21), which indicated that, despite facing significant challenges, mothers were uncertain whether fathers could provide the warmth and comfort their children required when they took on the primary caregiving role for a period. Mothers often did not trust that fathers understood their children as well as they did.

A study conducted by Campbell, A.C., et al. in 2015 examined reviews and interviews, as well as focus groups that included social workers and fathers involved with the child welfare system in Connecticut. In their systematic review, the researchers found that social workers were more likely to adopt an "all-good" or "all-bad" perspective regarding fathers. Once a father was labelled as "bad," his level of involvement was often limited or completely absent (Maxwell et al., 2012; Campbell

et al., 2015, p. 4). The findings revealed that staff members were influenced by past experiences, both professional and personal, and noted that documentation and protocols did not identify fathers as potential resources. Additionally, staff were affected by mothers' perceptions of non-resident fathers and the negative stigma associated with incarceration (Campbell et al., 2015, p. 9).

Findings also revealed that services and processes focus on the mother, and that inconsistent and unclear expectations were a challenge for fathers who wanted to be involved in their case (Campbell et al. 2015, p.13). Campbell et al. (2015, p.15) summarize that involvement of fathers is a critical and historically overlooked component to an effective family centred practice model in child welfare. Given the lack of clear policies and protocols around this issue, there is a need for agencies to build a system that allows service workers to systematically collect data on fathers and properly assess fathers' motivation for engagement and their ability to support the return of the children to the family (Campbell et al.2015, p.15). Campbell et.al's findings correspond with findings from Storhaug (2015) and Arvidsson (2003). CPS workers do not view fathers as resources, fathers feel that they are not heard, and that the focus is on the mother and her role. Campbell et.al. has not addressed the large proportion of women employed by the CPS and how this affects contact with fathers, which was an issue in Sentios study (2018a).

A survey was conducted in March/April 2018 by Sentio Research Norway on behalf of the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs in Norway (Bufdir). The background for the survey was that most of the children who receive assistance from CPS measures live with only one of their parents – most often the mother (Sentio 2018a, p.1). The data collection was carried out using a web survey aimed at all employees in the child protection services in Norway. A total of 1062

CPS workers responded to the survey in 232 municipalities. The sample consisted of 89 % female CPS workers and 11 % male CPS workers. In summary, Sentio found that some of the comments from the child welfare staff may indicate that there has been a change in the CPS in recent years in a positive direction, with more focus on involving the father and a wider network (Sentio 2018a, p.40). This study directly addresses two topics in the current thesis, i.e., CPS perceptions of fathers and the relevance of gender in the CPS.

Based on the growing focus on the relations between fathers' and the CPS, in 2018 a survey on fathers in child welfare was ordered from the Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (Bufdir). The findings showed that in recent years, only 4 % of the employees had attended education, courses, or seminars where fathers' position in relation to child welfare services has been a key topic. However, 89 % of employees in the child welfare service believed that the involvement of fathers is to a large or some extent an issue they were concerned about where they work. There is no general perception in the child welfare services that it is easier to communicate with mothers than fathers. 55 % find that it is sometimes or often more difficult to involve fathers from non-western countries than fathers born and raised in Norway (Sentio 2018a, p.5).

There is a relatively large variation in whether the employees feel that they have the time and resources to involve fathers who do not take the initiative themselves.

About half believe that they would have the time, the other half believe that this is too little time or not true that they would have time. The main reasons why the father does not become involved are that the father is unknown, the father does not have contact with the child, the father does not want contact with the CPS, having contact with the father is not in the best interests of the child, the father does not want

contact with the child, and reasons related to crime and/or substance abuse (Sentio 2018a, pp.6,7).

Sentio did see a tendency that the older the employees, the more strongly they believe that fathers should be involved in assessments and interventions, and a larger proportion of men than women believe that there is too little focus on fathers in the CPS (Sentio 2018a, p.12). Sentio found that it is considerably more common for child welfare employees to believe that the mother does not want to involve the father, than that the father does not want to involve the mother (Sentio 2018a, p.17).

A somewhat larger proportion of women than men respond that they sometimes find it more difficult to involve fathers from non-western countries than fathers born and raised in Norway, while men to a greater extent than women answered that they rarely or never experience it (Sentio 2018a p.19).

The proportion of employees in the CPS who believe that the involvement of absent fathers is an important task for the CPS increases with the age of the employees. 44-45 % of those over 40 believe that this is true, compared to 18 % among those under 30 (Sentio 2018a, p.27).

A slightly larger proportion of men than women respond that they always consider the father as a placement option if a child living with the mother needs to be placed acutely and the father does not have parental responsibility. It is among those who have worked the longest in the CPS that we find the highest proportion who will consider a father as a placement option (Sentio 2018a, p.31).

Most employees (52 %) believe there is a great need for concrete measures to increase fathers' participation in child welfare cases. Male employees perceive the need for such measures as greater than that of female employees. There is a

tendency for older employees and those who have worked the longest in the service to believe that there is a need to implement concrete measures to include fathers (Sentio 2018a, p.38)

Scourfield et al. (2006) highlights significant evidence from around the world indicating that child welfare services predominantly focus on working with mothers during the child protection process, often failing to adequately engage fathers (Brandon et al., 2009; O'Donnell, Johnson, D'Aunno, & Thornton, 2005; Strega et al., 2008, in Scourfield et al., 2006). Research suggests that the issue is not merely attributed to individual practitioners but rather to the strong influence of occupational culture. This culture often leads to certain gendered perspectives on family issues and responses becoming accepted norms within organizations (Scourfield, 2003, in Scourfield, 2006). The underrepresentation of men in these processes is complex and involves several factors, including men's own reluctance to engage (Schock & Gavazzi, 2004, in Scourfield, 2006) and mothers acting as gatekeepers (Malm, Murray, & Green, 2006, in Scourfield, 2006).

Imber-Black (1988, p. 186) noted that many larger systems primarily engage mothers in treatment processes, directing change-related activities around them. Women are not just family members and clients of these systems; they often also serve as workers within them. As family therapists increasingly incorporate consultations with larger systems into their practices, it becomes essential to consider gender dynamics in these interactions. Often, larger systems neglect to acknowledge gender as a critical factor in identifying problems or proposing solutions. A consultant who recognizes and addresses gender issues can help reframe challenges, making these dynamics more visible (Imber-Black, 1988, pp. 196-197).

Arvidsson concluded her thesis by stating that more awareness about the father's own perspective and about CPS perceptions of "questionable fathers" may result in better communication between fathers and CPS workers. This could in turn lead to a strengthening the coherence of experiences for vulnerable children in contact with the CPS (Arvidsson 2003, p.288).

In England in particular, there has been an increased focus in recent years on the implementation of procedures to help increase the involvement of fathers. These procedures include testing of structural routines for collecting information about fathers, inviting fathers to meetings and making thorough assessments of fathers' influence on the childcare situation (Osburn 2014; Scourfield 2012; Storhaug 2015, p.93). Storhaug (2015, p.93) summarizes her thesis by saying that there may be a need to introduce similar procedures and routines in Norway to identify the parent who does not live with the child. There is a need for a greater degree of reflection on this topic, and in cases where fathers are withdrawing, reflection on why they withdraw. For the CPS worker, it may be important to become aware of their own role in the cooperation.

Following Storhaug's findings and recommendations, an E-learning course was created for employees in the child welfare service and in education.

(<https://reform.no/kurs/e-laeringskurs-fedre-i-barnevernet/>). However, none of the 10 CPS workers in my focus groups knew about this course.

In summary, research indicates that Child Protective Services (CPS) workers have mixed perceptions of fathers. On one hand, they express a desire to involve fathers in the child welfare process; on the other hand, they sometimes view these fathers as potential sources of risk, particularly regarding issues like violence and substance

abuse. Efforts to engage non-residential fathers are inconsistent, and attitudes among caseworkers and administrators vary widely. CPS workers generally hold mothers to high standards of care, expecting them to provide a nurturing environment for their children. In contrast, fathers are often subjected to minimal expectations. This discrepancy may stem from CPS's emphasis on attachment theories, which prioritize the mother-child relationship. Consequently, fathers face lower expectations, and it takes little for child welfare services to feel satisfied with their involvement. Once a father is labelled as a bad parent, his participation in decision-making processes is often limited or non-existent.

However, there has been a positive shift within CPS in recent years, with an increased focus on involving fathers and building a broader support network.

2.3. Female Representation in the CPS

I found limited research addressing the significance of the gender of Child Protective Services (CPS) workers. Imber-Black (1988, p. 199) notes that gender differences between clients and helpers are a prominent aspect of the macrosystem. These differences are often either dismissed as insignificant or exaggerated to the detriment of women. Instead, it is essential to recognize and analyse these differences to understand their role in the larger family system dynamics.

In Arvidsson's study (2003, p. 275), the predominance of women in the Child Protective Services (CPS) was identified as a concern among CPS workers. Some believed that factors such as age and ethnic background were just as significant as gender. All the CPS workers in the study expressed a desire for more male colleagues, while the two male CPS workers felt their presence was essential for creating balance within the service. The female majority was viewed as problematic

because women tended to focus more on mothers, leading some men from ethnic minorities to feel threatened by female CPS workers (Arvidsson, 2003, p. 275)..

In Arvidsson's research, two male CPS workers noted that being men might help them connect better with fathers. One worker believed that fathers likely find it easier to talk to a male worker. Conversely, another worker suggested that clients might view women as primarily associated with children and caregiving, leading to the perception that the CPS workforce should mainly consist of women (Arvidsson, 2003, p. 162).

Arvidsson (2003, p. 278) also points out that many social workers are constrained by cultural stereotypes and may not recognize the existence of female 'enclaves' that undervalue and suppress male communication styles and perspectives.

Storhaug (2015, p.87) states that the CPS can be characterized as a female arena. Mothers are overrepresented among clients, and women are overrepresented among employees. Storhaug had two male child welfare workers among her informants. Based on interviews with these, Storhaug concluded that although they believed that it was a matter of course that fathers should be involved and that they in some cases believed that they could cooperate more easily with fathers than their female colleagues, no clear differences emerged from the female informants when it came to understanding motherhood and fatherhood. Storhaug believes that this may strengthen the perception that the individual's construction of paternity is largely limited by the workplace's dominant understandings. Some employees assume that the overrepresentation of women in the support system can be a challenge in connection with the involvement of fathers. It is pointed out that there may be a need for more knowledge about how to meet men in a way that makes them feel

acknowledged and understood, and that too much of their theoretical knowledge base concerns mothers and their children.

Sentio (2018a) refers to a quote from a participant who raises the concern that fathers' emotional language is often labelled as deficient according to the child welfare service's usual standards. "It doesn't mean that fathers are emotionally unavailable, but that they have a different form of language. Many of the fathers the child welfare services are in contact with show good emotional care but find it difficult to describe the nature of this care with language". The female CPS workers find that mothers, to a greater extent, have the same language as them and that it is, therefore, easier to talk to the mother about the child (Sentio 2018a, p.40).

Some of the fathers in Sentios study stated that all the CPS workers they have met are women and that they miss more male CPS workers. One participant said that it can be difficult to reach out to the fellowship women have between themselves.

Another father points out that it is important for a father to meet another man to feel understood. Men are "more practical, more concrete. We communicate in a better way. I know that I would have been understood better" (Sentio 2018b, p. 20).

In summary, findings from various studies suggest that the dominance of women in Child Protection Services (CPS) may pose challenges for CPS workers and fathers. Additionally, differences in age or ethnic background may be equally significant as gender. It's important for CPS workers to possess both life experience and relevant professional training.

Some studies indicate that female CPS workers may focus more on mothers and fathers might find it easier to communicate with male workers. However, there are no

clear distinctions between female and male CPS workers regarding their understanding of motherhood and fatherhood.

Furthermore, fathers' emotional expressions might be perceived as inadequate according to the conventional standards of child welfare services. Social workers may be constrained by cultural stereotypes, which can obscure the presence of female 'enclaves' that undervalue and suppress male communication styles and perspectives. Men are perceived as more practical and concrete in their approaches.

2.4. The fathers' experience

Fathers are assigned a specific role influenced by societal discourses and the perspectives of child welfare workers. This discourse outlines expected behaviours, not only in specific social situations but also in broader contexts (Neumann, 2021, p. 114). There can be a mismatch between expectations across different environments, such as within the family, in society, or during interactions with Child Protection Services (CPS).

In her study, Arvidsson (2003, p. 164) discovered that many fathers felt misunderstood by CPS. They expressed feelings of desperation, powerlessness, and judgment. These fathers often had to struggle to be recognized as involved parents in their children's lives. Additionally, they frequently questioned their own suitability as fathers. In interviews, CPS workers were rarely viewed by fathers as trusted experts. While fathers often present themselves as eager to be active partners in parenting, they also frequently see themselves as victims in their interactions with Child Welfare Services. This sense of victimization may provide some advantages, allowing them to deflect responsibility for their circumstances and

assert that they wish to be involved in their children's lives, even if it often requires a fight to do so (Arvidsson, 2003, p. 283, 288).

The fathers in Angel's material expressed that they cared about and would take care of their children in the case where the mothers were no longer suitable caregivers.

The fathers spoke about a CPS that is seemed almost shocked that the children had fathers who were still in the frame. The CPS seemed suspicious as to whether they were genuine fathers, but instead of investigating whether this was the case, the CPS continued to handle their children's case as if their fathers did not exist. For example, they did not provide what the fathers needed to do to protect their interests in relation to their child (Angel 2007, p.68).

When the fathers began a process to have the children living with them, they had the impression that the CPS disliked this and worked against them with all the means at their disposal. This includes being in control of the flow of information and questioning the integrity of fathers. This is what Habermas describes as "strategic actions", a systemic idea whereby the relationship between the public and private domains is regulated by using symbols of power in the form of rules and decisions, time agreements, technical terminology, and the control of information (Angel 2007, p.68).

Storhaug (2015, p.11) analysed seven in-depth interviews with fathers who had recently been in contact with the CPS, and the key questions were how the fathers perceived being assessed as caregivers by the CPS. Three discourses emerged that were identified as central to the interview material: irrelevant fathers, fathers as a threat, and fathers as better than mothers. The fathers communicated experiences of not being heard about their opinions about what is best for the children, and that they

were met with old-fashioned attitudes about mothers being the most important caregiver. In cases where the father expresses concern about the mother's ability to care, the fathers feel that they were not taken seriously (Storhaug 2015, p.11).

The fathers' understanding of fatherhood is also partly influenced by a gender-specific understanding. They position themselves as fathers by distancing themselves from feminine characteristics regarded as "typical" for mothers. Fathers believe that they can set boundaries for their children and are competent at accompanying their children to activities. This is something that they see as their 'domain', and mothers do not have much to contribute to this area (Storhaug 2015, p.82).

Storhaug's (2015) thesis highlights that CPS work takes place between the competing influences of ideology and practice. The fathers communicated that they were met with out-dated attitudes about mothers being the most important caregiver, despite the stated aims of public policy in this area.

Sentio (2018b, p.4) conducted a qualitative survey of fathers in CPS. The study was conducted using in-depth interviews with 11 fathers in Norway. It was found that fathers have varying experiences with the CPS. Some are almost exclusively positive, while others have more mixed or only negative experiences. What seemed to influence their experiences was whether the CPS made them feel seen, heard, and understood. Of further importance was whether they felt prejudged or that their capacity as a man was brought into question, for example due to a troubled past. A poor relationship with the mother led to fathers feeling that they were disadvantaged from the start, and several fathers are called for equal treatment in the way the CPS workers proceed in relation to both parents.

A father expressed the belief that it is essential for child protective services (CPS) workers to have both life experience and relevant qualifications. He noted that there are "a lot of young people making decisions about the lives of people older than them" (Sentio 2018b, p. 19).

Additionally, I became aware of a study by Westby from 2021, which I learned about during a lecture I attended. At that time, she had conducted one of the most recent research projects in the field of child welfare in Norway. I decided to include her research to explore any developments in how child welfare services perceive fathers and their experiences when interacting with these services. Westby carried out a narrative study that dealt with families' experiences with vulnerable families in 2021. The study also looked at fathers' experiences.

The thesis is based on the larger child welfare research project «The New Child Protection Service» 2008 – 2012 (Westby 2021, p.6). Westby's thesis is a qualitative study employing narrative methods. The empirical data consist of 11 life-history interviews. The thesis sample compromises 10 mothers and one father. I was particularly interested in the father's story, as it was relevant to my own research question.

The father in the Westby study talked about how the family were naturists, which led to a situation where the CPS became concerned that the father was abusing his daughter, He stated "...and especially in relation to when you become a single dad with two girls... yes on the whole, it's really scary when a man is naked "(Westby 2021, p.187). The father explains how he thinks CPS workers should have life experience to be able to meet parents and families in a respectful manner. The father points to experience-based knowledge, and links this to age, life experiences

and having children of one's own. He believes that CPS workers without such a knowledge background are unable to help families who are in difficult life situations, where care tasks are perceived as challenging. The informant describes the young age of case workers as challenging and says that the family's case officer could have been his daughter in terms of age. This participant expresses the desire for recognition as a father and the values he has as a parent (Westby 2021, p.244).

In summary, the findings suggest that many fathers experience feelings of desperation and powerlessness and feel judged by Child Protective Services (CPS). They often encounter outdated attitudes that prioritize mothers as the most important caregivers, despite the goals of public policy in this area. Some fathers may believe that CPS disapproves of their willingness to care for their children when the mother is unavailable.

Fathers' experiences with CPS can vary significantly. While some have predominantly positive interactions, others report mixed or entirely negative experiences. A key factor influencing these experiences is whether CPS makes fathers feel seen, heard, and understood.

2.5. Summary

By summarizing and comparing these research findings chronologically, I find that there have been quite consistent perceptions and attitudes over the past 20 years regarding how CPS workers view fathers and fatherhood and how fathers experience contact with the CPS. There is a tendency among CPS workers to have lower expectations of fathers, and fathers often feel like second-class parents.

My research project will focus on how and why the gender of CPS workers may affect perceptions and experiences. Storhaug (2015) found that no clear difference

emerged between the female and male CPS workers regarding understanding motherhood and fatherhood. Still, the Literature Review suggests that female overrepresentation may be seen as a problem among CPS workers and fathers. There are assumptions that women focus more on mothers and that female CPS workers recognize themselves as mothers. There are also assumptions that immigrant men may feel threatened by female CPS workers and further that it may be difficult to reach out to the fellowship women have between themselves, that men are more practical and concrete, and communicate better. There are assumptions that there is a need to make fathers feel more seen and understood and that it may be easier for fathers to talk to a male CPS worker. Recognizing that I don't necessarily feel seen and understood by other women, I wanted to take a closer look at the phenomenon. What does it take for fathers to feel understood by the CPS? What distinguishes male and female caseworkers in their encounters with fathers? And what significance does a CPS worker's gender have for fathers?

The next chapter is about the methodology for collecting data for my research project.

3.0. METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology and methods used in my research project. Methodology identifies a general approach to studying research topics, whereas method refers to a specific research technique (Silverman, 1993; Willig, 2022, p.9). Research methods involve data collection, analysis, and interpretation methods that researchers propose for their studies (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018, p.250).

Denzin and Lincoln (2018) state that the world can never be visualized directly; we only study representations of the world, and they can be represented in different ways. My ontological and epistemological stance has been decisive regarding the methods I used to collect and analyse data in my project.

3.1. Ontological and epistemological stance

All qualitative methodologies recognise that the researcher is, in one way or another, implicated in the research process (Willig, 2022, p.14). My fundamental belief system will influence how I interpret the data. A paradigm is based on Ontological, Epistemological, and Methodological Assumptions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.107). While epistemology questions the nature of knowledge and how we come to know about the world, ontology is concerned with what kinds of things exist and make up this world (Willig, 2022, p.8).

The current research is set within a social constructionist paradigm. According to Gergen (2010, p.13), a social constructionist approach assumes that what we know of the world depends on what access we have, and our access depends on the social relations we are part of.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2018, p. 20), social constructionism operates under a relativist ontology, which recognises the existence of multiple realities. This relativism does not prioritise one perspective as more valid than another.

Constructionists emphasise the importance of diverse voices, including feminists, ethnic minorities, the elderly, the poor, and anyone who challenges established "truths." Constructionists do not assert that their own reality is superior to that of others. However, it is important to note that any assessments and comparisons will still carry assumptions about what is real and what is good (Gergen, 2010, p. 221).

In relation to this thesis, I accept these foundational assumptions. My constructions aim to contribute to a broader understanding of the topic. I have tried to be as transparent as possible by presenting my background, my preconceptions, and how I have constructed and categorized what has emerged in the interviews. This is based on a social constructionist understanding. Other researchers may arrive at different conclusions, highlighting the existence of multiple realities. Nevertheless, my constructions hold equal value and credibility compared to those of others according to Gergen (2010, p.221).

I have chosen methods of analysis based on this basic understanding. Discourse Analysis, which believes that experiences of reality are constructed through discursive practices that qualitative researchers can uncover (Lorås and Ness 2024, p.22), and Dialogic Narrative Analysis, which is based on stories and human work together, creating the social that compromises all human relationships, collectives, mutual dependencies, and exclusions. That symbiotic work of stories and humans creating the social in the scope of socio-narratology (Frank 2010, p.15).

Social constructionism assumes a subjectivist epistemology, which means that both the knower and the respondent co-create understanding. In this framework, terms like credibility, transferability, and confirmability are used in place of traditional criteria such as internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity. The goal is not to uncover objective truths but to ensure that the data is trustworthy and verifiable. In this study, I have aimed for transparency so that others can interpret and verify my “findings”. These “findings” are construed and categorized by me and not presented as objective truths but as indications and hypotheses regarding the relationship between CPS workers and fathers.

Social constructionism is appropriate in relation to my study, which is about what discourses may exist and are exchanged between CPS workers, how fathers' narratives from encounters with CPS workers are influenced by their understanding of the situation, and how relationships affect this understanding.

Gergen (2010, p.51) states that our relationships require an ontology, which is a common perception of "what there is." When we develop an ontology, we establish a basic morality. That is, when we coordinate our speech and our actions in different contexts, we also determine what is the right way to do things. The establishment of "the good" creates contexts for "violations of the good."

Language is the primary medium we use to navigate reality and morality, as noted by Gergen (2010, p. 52). In this thesis, I utilized focus groups to explore how child welfare workers discuss fathers and how a shared understanding is formed during these discussions. I applied Dialogical Narrative Analysis to examine how fathers use language to express their experiences with the child welfare service.

Additionally, I recognized that this exchange occurs within a dialogue between the

participants and myself in a specific context. I analysed the participants' stories and aimed to be transparent in my interpretation of their perspectives. A subjectivist epistemology suggests that my findings are not objective, universal truths but are socially constructed through interactions among and between the participants and myself.

The discourses prevailing in Child Protection Services depend upon who we talk with and what kind of stories are opened for by those who work there. At the same time, the CPS is influenced by the political context, economic issues, the media, individual needs, shared values, attitudes, and research at the time. This, in turn, will affect assessments and types of action within the CPS.

3.1.1. Conceptual tools

My research is characterised by a Systemic understanding, where the focus is on relationships and interactions (Johnsen and Torsteinson 2012, p.30). A systemic point of view can be traced back to systems theory. Gregory Bateson often referred to systems theory together with Communication theory, Cybernetics, and Game theory. Cybernetics is linked to Norbert Wiener and deals with regulation and control. Control, regulation, and influence require communication to and from what we want to regulate (Ølgard 1991, pp. 31-38) In game theory, we are dealing with a relationship between intentional actors who regard each other as intentional actors (Elster 1979; Ølgard, 1991). In a systemic understanding, the focus is on the interaction between the various elements within the system rather than on the study of the various elements. The communication between the members of a system becomes interesting to understand the different members' behaviour (Hårtveit and Jensen 1999, p.56).

Systemic practice has something to contribute to the place of relationality in research, research relationships, writing research for readership, and especially on relational reflexivity, relational know-how, and relational ethics (Simon and Chard 2014).

A systemic approach means actively engaging in critical reflexivity about practices and the theories supporting them. Being aware of one's preferences and how they can serve to turn away countering voices and alternative narratives (White & Epstein 1990 in Simon and Chard 2014, p.7) opens possibilities for ethical consideration of the relationship between theory, practice, and ideology (Leppington 1991 in Simon and Chard 2014, p.7).

I have presented some societal factors, theories, and guidelines that influence the CPS worker's discourses regarding parents, such as Bowlby's attachment theory, "The third shift", and legislation in the 2020s, and have compared this to the Norwegian ideology of gender equality. In the thesis, I have questioned my own practice and preconceptions and what consequences this may have for how I meet the participants, ask the questions, and construe and categorize the answers in my research project. Such reflections allow for critiquing power and culture in relationships, according to Simon (Simon and Chard 2014, p.23).

We can frame the practice of systemic inquiry as caring, involvement in others' lives and communities, openness to being changed by others' words and feelings, and preparedness to be moved to action in and beyond the consulting room or classroom (Simon and Chard, p.13). My aim is that the discourses and narratives among the CPS workers and the fathers' stories in this thesis will affect and move "slow" discourses and inappropriate practices within the child welfare service.

Systemic practitioners and inquirers have reclaimed the importance of the working relationship and have recognized how different relationships and contexts bring out other parts of us and different stories, resulting in different telling, hearings, and meanings (Simon and Chard 2014, p.15). This means that the inquirer cannot be outside the system. The only choice is the kind of relationship one chooses for inquiry (Cronen 2000 in Simon and Chard 2014, p.15). In my project, I have described my background and preconceptions, my meetings with the participants, and my constructions. I have included quotes and stories as background for my constructions, knowing that another researcher could have asked different questions and received various answers.

Systemic practice is an ethics-led way of being and doing with others (Simon and Chard 2014, p.14). This also influences systemic research. The relationship between writer and reader is also to be considered. The research is expected to be accessible to an audience, and a challenge in critical reflexive praxis is to make transparent to the reader the range and extent of inner dialogue in either the application of a method or in the spontaneous responses between people (Simon and Chard 2014, p.18). By describing myself and my prerequisites, presenting several quotes, and explaining how I constructed my results, I aim to give the reader the best possible prerequisites for interpreting my constructions.

Since I was introduced to systemic understanding as part of my family therapy training about 20 years ago, it has been an essential part of my professional and personal orientation. A systemic perspective has been useful and invaluable in my work as a family therapist in the CPS, helping me retain curiosity and assess how families' challenges may arise and are maintained.

Systemic theory fits naturally into a social constructionist paradigm, and discourse can be an essential tool as part of a systemic conceptual framework, and one which will be focussed on in the current thesis.

A definition of discourse is systems of meaning-production rather than simply statements or language, systems that 'fix' meaning, however temporarily, and enable us to make sense of the world (Shepherds 2008; Neumann 2021, p.21). A more comprehensive description of discourses is found in Chapter 3.5.1 and Chapter 4.0.

The discourses that characterise the CPS are influenced by the types of stories that circulate among employees and discourse trends in wider society. Discourses that concern what CPS workers consider "good parenting" may be highly resistant to change.

Foucault claims that power gains momentum as more people come to accept the views associated with a belief system as common knowledge. Belief systems define their authority figures, such as priests or medical doctors. Within a belief system, ideas seem to deal with what is right and, what is wrong, and what is expected and what is deviant (Schanning 1993; Jensen 2012, p.5).

Another concept is Narratives. "A narrative is a story that tells a sequence of events that is significant for the narrator and his or her audience and has a plot, a beginning, a middle, and an end. It has an internal logic that makes sense to the narrator, and relates events in a temporal, causal sequence" (Denzin 1989; Sørly and Blix 2017, p.20).

Narratives can impact our experience of who we are, and our cultural context gives us access to narrative resources (Johnsen and Torsteinson 2012, p.36). A more detailed presentation of narratives is presented in 3.5.2 and chapter 5.0. I selected

narrative analysis to explore how fathers' stories reflect their relationships and interactions with the CPS and how these narratives might influence their identity as fathers.

Systemic, Discourse, and Narrative are conceptual tools that form the basis for my qualitative research design.

3.2. Quantitative and qualitative research

Historically, there has been a heavy emphasis on quantification in science, and mathematics has been termed the queen of science (Guba & Lincoln 1994, p.106). Quantitative research often focuses on testing hypotheses or claimed relationships between phenomena, while qualitative research generates hypotheses suitable for such research (Ryen 2002, p.29). Qualitative researchers tend to be concerned with meaning. They are interested in how people make sense of the world and how they experience events (Willig 2022, p.9).

Robson (2016, p.409) states that you would have to work quite hard in a research project not to have at least some data in the form of numbers or that could be sensibly turned into numbers. In my project, I have also referred to Sentio's (2018a) quantitative research.

3.3. Research design

To answer my research question, I chose to collect data from child protection workers from the front-line services and fathers who have been in contact with the CPS, to shed light upon how CPS workers perceive fathers and fatherhood, and how fathers experience contacts with the CPS. I chose Focus Group interviews to investigate how CPS workers discussed the topic of fathers and individual interviews with fathers to hear their individual stories arising from their contact with the CPS. I

used a semi-structured interview guide for all interviews. (Appendix 7,9) They contain topics to be covered and suggested questions while being flexible and open to modification (Kvale 1997, p.72).

Burck (2005, p.237) states that many of the qualitative research methods developed in the social sciences are well suited to exploring research questions from a systemic perspective. Discourse analysis, Narrative analysis, and Grounded theory are particularly useful for the research of subjective experiences and meaning. In my project, I used Discourse analysis and Narrative analysis to study perceptions and experiences.

I used a Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (FDA) for the focus group Interviews. Discourse analysis requires conceptualizing language as constructive and functional (Willig 2022, p.121). FDA is concerned with what characterizes the world people inhabit, how discourse constructs the objects of 'reality,' and how discursive constructions and practices influence how we experience ourselves (Willig 2022, p.143).

Dialogical Narrative Analysis (DNA) was used for interviews with the fathers. Riessman (1993; Willig 2022, p.150) explains that a narrative analysis will look carefully at a participant's story and determine how they impose order to the flow of experience to make sense of events and actions in their lives.

3.4. Data generation

Frank (2012, p.38) suggests that all qualitative research begins as ethnography. Narrative research can enter a dialogue with people's stories only if the researcher has sufficient proximate experience of the everyday circumstances in which people learn and tell their stories. At the same time, Neumann (2021,p.47) points out a

critical prerequisite that must be satisfied before the researcher can step out into the field, i.e., one should have a general knowledge of the terrain being explored. One must have a certain degree of what anthropologists call 'cultural competence'.

According to Cresswell & Cresswell (2018, p.247), ethnography is a qualitative strategy in which the researcher studies an intact cultural group in a natural setting over a prolonged period by collecting primarily observational and interview data.

Getting into the field happens in different ways and some engage in activities as working participants and turn that into research (Draus 2004; Frank 2012, p.38). I am familiar with the Norwegian context, and I meet many fathers outside my work. My job consists of meeting fathers and CPS workers both together and separately. As a family therapist, I observe almost daily the interaction between fathers and CPS workers and listen to the stories afterwards from all parties about how they experienced the meetings and reflect about what has happened. In other words, much of my time is spent directly with people and issues relevant to the current study, and research takes place in a field and in situations I know well. Still, I noted the impressions I formed during the interviews described by Phillippi and Lauderdale (2017). One example is attached (Appendix 12).

3.4.1. Research Context and Details of the Participants

I collected data from male and female Child Protective Services (CPS) workers and fathers who have had contact with CPS. I invited men, women, and fathers to participate in my project. None of the participants identified as transgender, non-binary, same-sex parents or non-biological fathers.

I had 15 participants in total. One Focus Group consisted of 5 female CPS workers from different offices and different parts of Norway. Their age ranged from 30 to 50,

and they had worked in CPS from 4 to 25 years. Another Focus Group consisted of 5 male CPS workers. They came from different CPS offices but in the same area.

Their age ranged from 30 to 60. They had worked in the CPS from 0.5 to 8 years.

I initially planned for the CPS workers participating in the group to have at least one year of experience in the CPS. One participant fell short of this requirement, but I decided to include him to contribute to the discussion. I noticed a difference in language between the participants based on their experience. Those who were newer to the CPS tended to use more inclusive language, often saying "we" and "with us." In contrast, those with more experience frequently used phrases like "I'm experiencing" and "I believe." While this could be coincidental, it may also suggest that participants become more confident and independent in their roles as CPS workers over time, possibly becoming less influenced by the prevailing discourses at their workplace.

I also interviewed 5 fathers aged 40-60 years. They came from different parts of Norway. Four were employed, while one was living on disability benefits. Four were single parents, while one lived with the mother of the children. All fathers had children living with them.

The only criteria for participation in my project were that participants had to be competent to consent voluntarily, be CPS workers in the front-line service, or define themselves as fathers who had been involved with the Child Protection Service.

3.4.2. The CPS Workers and the Focus Group Interviews

According to Kamberelis, Dimitriadis, and Welker (2018, p. 693), focus groups can be utilised in various ways, depending on the researchers' expectations, as they serve different purposes. The research is grounded in social constructionism, where

knowledge is understood as a social construct primarily created through language. Participants are valued for their perspectives, and research findings emerge from the dialogues between researchers and participants.

Sheila McNamee (2014, p. 74) suggests that from a relational constructionist viewpoint, we are interested in exploring what kinds of worlds can be created through our interactions and discourse. Focus group discussions are a valuable method for examining how the social environment and discourses is constructed among CPS workers.

Willig (2022, pp. 38-39) emphasizes that focus groups leverage participants' interactions as a vital data source. The strength of focus groups is their ability to encourage participants to respond to and comment on each other's contributions. When the goal is to understand how meaning is socially constructed within a group and how consensus is reached through discussion, every contribution is significant for our analysis.

The benefits of choosing focus group interviews include the ability to challenge, extend, develop, or qualify statements, which can generate rich data for the researcher. Additionally, focus groups may provide a more natural setting compared to one-on-one interviews, leading to data with higher ecological validity and focus group interviews are also more time-efficient than individual interviews (Willig, 2022, p. 38).

However, there are challenges associated with focus groups. It can be more demanding to find a common time for all participants, and it may be more difficult to ensure that every participant feels heard. Willig (2022, p. 29) notes that focus groups are not suitable for all research questions. Individual interviews may be more

appropriate if participants are expected to discuss intimate or sensitive aspects of their experiences. This was one of the reasons I chose to conduct individual interviews with the fathers.

I chose Focus Groups for the CPS workers to hear how they talked about and discussed the topic of fathers. I also chose to divide the groups into a male and a female Focus Group, to see if different discourses would emerge in the conversations concerning gender.

Choosing separate groups of male and female CPS workers can have some potential disadvantages. According to Willig (2022, p. 38), this separation may lead to more heterogeneous groups, which can reduce the challenge to participants in their statements. Consequently, this limitation may hinder the depth of discussion and the exploration of the topic.

Participants for the focus groups were recruited through two main methods: direct contact with Child Protection Services (CPS) and referrals from acquaintances. I reached out to CPS by sending an email to management, introducing my project and including supplementary information for potential participants (see Appendix 8).

In some instances, participants learned about the project through acquaintances. Those participants expressed their willingness to participate by submitting a signed consent form after getting more information about the project. In these cases, their employers were informed about their employees' interest in participating. They were provided with details about the project and asked if they had any objections.

I knew some of the participants from a work context, and this made access easier. Seidman (1998; Ryen 2002) argue that the easier the access, the more complicated the interview becomes. This may be because the participant does not feel free to

speak openly, or that the interviewer may avoid follow-up questions. One can be blinded by feelings of mutual understanding, and refrain from exploring assumptions.

I offered to meet the participants both in person or on a communication platform, according to what was possible and what was preferred. Due to multiple locations and busy schedules, focus group meetings took place via the Microsoft Teams communication platform. I chose Teams because this is an accepted, widely used, and well-known platform in the Norwegian public sector.

I sent out suggestions for dates and times and it was eventually agreed to schedule the meetings at 3 p.m. at the end of office hours. This was to be able to reach the participants at the most opportune time between leaving work and coming home. With a drop-out of one person in each group, the resulting focus group size was 5 participants in each group. Due to time considerations, it was not possible to follow up on the reasons for the drop-out.

I had planned and received approval from the participants to take film and audio recordings of the group discussion for use in transcription. However, after problems with the visual technology, it was eventually decided to only use auditory recordings. In any case, when using online technology, it is quite difficult to accurately record non-verbal conversation.

Some participants knew each other, and others knew me from a work context. I wasn't sure how this would affect the discussion. Would those who knew me talk more? I found that some participants spoke more and others less, but this was independent of whether they knew me or each other. I started the interviews by welcoming everyone and reiterated the purpose of the study. All participants were

aware of professional confidentiality and in addition they were asked to preserve the confidentiality of the focus group.

There were skilled and verbal participants in both groups, who participated actively, were reflective, and supported each other during the discussion. My original plan was to have a mixed group consisting of both male and female CPS workers. After experiencing how demanding it is to recruit a focus group among very busy CPS workers, find common time and conduct the interviews, I chose not to recruit a third group. I used a semi structured interview guide (Appendix 9) The interviews were conducted in Norwegian and were transcribed by me and then translated into English. It may have been an advantage that I knew the field and the issues that might arise. On the other hand, there is a sense in which one can be too quick to understand, which may lead to not following up on relevant statements.

3.4.3. The Fathers and the Individual Interviews

The fathers were recruited through the Reform Resource Centre for men and via acquaintances. I sent a request to the administrator of the Reform Resource Centre's Facebook group, asking for permission to post an invitation. The administrator then shared a post in the group introducing my project and providing my contact information for those interested in learning more.

Two participants were recruited through the Reform Resource Centre, while an additional three were recruited through acquaintances. All participants received detailed information about the project, and those who wished to participate were instructed to return a consent form. Participants who submitted the consent form were subsequently contacted for an interview.

I chose to invite the fathers to individual interviews (Appendix 6) I wanted to listen to each person's individual story and sensitive topics might arise. Taking care of everyone would be easier at individual meetings.

I had never met the fathers face to face before. I started by reintroducing myself and my project. Then, I asked them to tell their story from where they thought it was natural to start. Some started by explaining the reason behind their initial contact with the CPS and how it developed from there. Others began to tell their story from around the time of their children's birth. I experienced that they all were good "storytellers", they had good verbal skills and spoke openly, and the interviews lasted for about one hour.

The fathers were given the option to meet me online or in person. All of them chose to meet in person. We met in meeting rooms adjacent to hotels, or in public meeting rooms. This allowed me to serve beverages. As in the focus group interviews, I used a Dictaphone, and I transcribed into Norwegian and then translated into English. First, I listened to the interviews several times before I started transcribing. This was to become better acquainted with the content.

After reading the transcriptions, I decided to sort each father's story chronologically as I understood it. This was a useful aid to understanding.

Maintaining anonymity can be a challenge, especially with the extensive stories shared by the fathers. At the same time, it's vital to avoid omitting essential parts of their narratives. The participants have been anonymised by not disclosing their names, ages, occupations, CPS regions, hometowns or diagnoses. Regarding their children I have not disclosed their ages, gender and number of siblings. In Ali's case, I noted that he is from the Middle East, but I did not provide any further details. Some

identifiable facts have been paraphrased. With these measures, I have done my utmost to maintain the anonymity of the participants without losing the essence of the stories.

3.4.4. Researching sensitive topics

My daily profession consists of discussing highly sensitive topics, together with all the issues of client confidentiality involved. The difference when it comes to being a researcher is that people do not talk about this based on a helping relationship. I chose to be open about my background as a CPS worker and family therapist and did not regard this as a disadvantage. To the extent that it may have affected the relationship, it has probably had a reassuring effect. However, there is a possibility that it may have led the participants to adapt their answers according to what they thought I could tolerate or wanted to hear as a family therapist within the CPS. It may also have affected how I listened and followed up on the answers, for example, responding to issues as I would as a therapist, showing support and understanding.

Walker (2015) says that we can “trust” researchers when they are writing from a position of knowing. This entails that they have practiced related knowledge, while at the same time being open to collaboration with the participants and their real-life experiences. This style of researcher produces a specific type of knowledge that will be reflected in their work, setting it apart from researchers who don’t have this practice experience.

I noticed that discussing their children, their roles as fathers, and their interactions with the CPS deeply affected them. I observed a range of emotional expression — smiles, laughter, tears, change of voice and gestures—that indicated their commitment and emotional involvement. This became a significant consideration for

me as I reflected on the experience. I wondered about the extent of the strain compared to the relief they felt in sharing their stories, and what I exposed them to by interviewing them.

After each interview I asked the fathers what it was like to tell their story, and everyone said it was a positive experience. Some of them even said they really enjoyed doing it. I brought up that it can be difficult for some people to talk about challenging events and asked them to contact me if they had any difficult thoughts or feelings afterwards. I did not hear from any of the participants after the interviews.

3.4.5. Data recording and transcription

All interviews were recorded on a Dictaphone and transcribed by me. This was a time-consuming but useful process. I used verbatim transcription which refers to the word-for-word reproduction of verbal data, where the written words are an exact replication of the audio recorded words (Poland, 1995; Halcomb and Davidson 2006). I transcribed the words as they were spoken and included pauses as ... and interruptions as (...). Kvale (1997, p.116) points out that transcription is a hybrid between the oral discourse that took place face to face in a vivid situation, where what was said was addressed to a specific person present, and a written text intended for a widely distant audience. An excessive focus on transcription can lead to the analysis being fragmented, and the transcription from speech to text and from one language to another may influence the outcome. Meaning may be lost under both the transcription process and the translation process. Willig (2022, p.35) states that an interview transcript can never be a mirror image of the interview.

After transcription, the interviews were translated into English. Nes et al. (2010) address challenges in relation to translation from non-English to English. Challenges

can be in relation to the translation of research findings and translation of quotations, and after publication, a new translation challenge may be faced when translation back to the original source language is undertaken. Nes et.al. (2010) experienced that talking and reading in English lead to thinking in English as well. To avoid potential limitations, they recommend staying in the original language as long and much as possible. I used the Norwegian transcription as long as possible when analysing. When reading through the Norwegian transcripts, I found that I read with the voice of the participants in my head. When I read in English, these voices disappeared, and my own voice was the one I heard.

However, I have tried to translate as credibly as possible. Some sentences have been modified by me, to make them more reader friendly. Examples could be incomplete sentences and some words and phrases. Some expressions are difficult to translate into English. Particularly idiomatic expressions which are unique to a particular language. In such cases I have tried to translate the meaning of the expression or find an expression in English with the same meaning.

3.5. Data analysis

3.5.1. Discourse analysis.

For analysing the interviews with the CPS workers, I choose a Foucauldian Discourse analysis. Discourse analysis provides us with a way of thinking about the role of discourse in the construction of social and psychological realities and can help us approach research questions in a way that pays attention to the constructive and performative aspects of talk and texts (Willig 2022, p.144).

There are various approaches to Discourse analysis. Foucault begins from what he refers to as the archive, which encompasses a set of practices - a way of expressing

things that can be done well or badly – that enables the formulation of truth claims (Neumann 2021, p.18). Foucauldian Discourses analysis (FDA) focuses on what kind of objects and subjects are constructed through discourses and what kind of ways-of-being these subjects and objects make available for people. FDA seeks to describe and critique the discursive worlds people inhabit and to explore their implications for subjectivity and experience. (Willig 2022, p.18)

It is important to note that the discourses were interpreted and categorised by me, meaning that another researcher might have chosen other constructions to address the research question.

I had a semi-structured interview guide (appendix 9), and the interviews were conducted on the Microsoft Teams communication platform. To do the analysis, I was inspired by Myra et al.'s (2017) research article on pregnant substance abusers where they used FDA.

I conducted a Foucauldian-inspired discourse analysis (FDA) as outlined by Carla Willig (2022). Willig describes six stages in the analysis.

Stage 1 Discursive constructions

The first stage involves examining how discursive objects or subjects are constructed in communication. The specific discursive subject we focus on depends on the research question (Willig, 2022, p. 135). In my research, I was interested in how CPS workers talked about and perceived fathers, so I chose "fathers" as the discursive subject.

I read through the transcriptions to find statements mentioning fathers and fatherhood and categorized four main discursive constructions. The caseworkers talked about fathers as parents in statements such as *fathers like to play*; as part of

the parenting system, for example, *to let the dad contribute*; as a client, for example, *whom we have contact with*; and as an angry man, for example, *this dad may be threatening*.

Stage 2 Discourses

The next step is to highlight the various constructions and different discourses within broader contexts (Willig, 2022, p. 135). I explored how fathers are portrayed and the various discourses related to them. I perceived that discourse about parents may rely on a biological discourse, suggesting that a parent's ability to care is described as innate and fundamental. One example is by suggesting that fathers basically have a lesser capacity for mentalization. On the other hand, care may be construed within a social discourse that regards care as something that can be learned and is dependent on the social environment, like keeping track of appointments.

Stage 3 Action orientation

This stage involves the discursive contexts within which the different constructions of the object are being deployed. What is gained from constructing the subject this way, what is its function, and how does it relate to other constructions? (Willig 2022, p.135).

One example is that both groups expressed views indicating that CPS workers have lower expectations of fathers regarding organizational skills. This perspective may justify the tendency of CPS workers to contact mothers more frequently than fathers.

Stage 4 Positionings

This stage is concerned with the subject positions that the constructions and discourses offer. A subject position within a discourse identifies a position for persons

within the structure and rights and duties for those who use that position (Davies and Harre 1999; Willig 2022, p.136).

For example, if caring ability is regarded as a biological trait, fathers can be at the mercy of their innate prerequisites. This leaves little room for faith in development, and fathers who accept this position may fail to take responsibility. If care is viewed as a skill that can be learned, it leads to the expectation that fathers will take responsibility and strive to reach their potential. This mindset fosters hope and motivation. These two perspectives appeared to emerge among my participants.

I found statements like, “This means we (men) don't engage in deep conversations; instead, we focus on activities.” This may position fathers as “playmates” rather than emotional supporters. I also found statements like “I have seen fathers become very good at active caretaking. They can learn”. Here fathers may be positioned as a resource willing and able to learn.

Stage 5. Practice

This stage is concerned with the relationship between discourse and practice. In what way do discursive constructions and subject positions open or close opportunities for action? (Willig 2022, p.136) For instance, if fathers are viewed as potentially dangerous, it may prevent CPS workers from meeting them without security measures. This concern also emerged among several female participants.

Stage 6. Subjectivity

The final stage analyses the consequences of taking various subject positions for the participant's subjective experience. What can be felt, thought, or experienced from within various subject positions (Willig 2022, p.136). This is the most speculative step. During the analysis of the focus group interviews, I assumed what the fathers

may think and feel, which makes it difficult to provide any empirical evidence during the focus group interviews.

I assume that fathers may experience coping and joy, shame, depression, or anger depending on which subject positions are offered and accepted. The fathers' thoughts and feelings were a theme among the participants in the focus groups, which was researched in more detail during the interviews with the fathers in my project.

3.5.2. Narrative analysis

A narrative approach is committed to a holistic perspective whereby it is the account as an integrated whole, its structure, and its function as a story that is of interest to the researcher, and this is what differentiates most clearly from discourse analysis (Willig 2022, p.157).

According to Frank (2010, p.p.71,74), DNA is a method of Socio-Narratology, which is about studying how stories give people the resources to figure out who they are, and how stories connect and disconnect people. Socio-Narratology is the theory and DNA is the method. DNA does not involve a fixed set of procedures or rules.' Frank prefers to use the term "movement of thoughts".

I chose to use a dialogical narrative analysis (DNA) to analyse the interview with the fathers. DNA studies the mirroring between what is told in the story – the story's content – and what happens because of telling that story – its effect (Frank 2010; Blix et.al. 2013, p.268). Three types of questions are relevant: recourse questions, what is at stake, and identity questions. (Blix et.al 2013). In my project, it is relevant for me to analyse; How do the stories describe how the fathers experienced contact with the CPS, and how do these affect their identity as fathers?

According to Barrera (2019), there are various ways to approach Dialogical Narrative analysis. It can be done by building narrative typology like “chaos” or “quest” narratives, documenting the effect of an event through stories, how stories assemble groups, storytelling as institutional emplotment and action as an effect of stories. In this context, I will analyse the effect of an event through stories. The event is in contact with CPS, and the stories may reveal its effects.

There is no straightforward step-by-step guide to Dialogical Narrative Analysis (DNA). Frank (2010) and Barrera (2019) suggest that DNA is best learned through examples. Researchers can understand how to conduct DNA by examining how previous studies obtained their data. I found valuable insights in the article by Blix, Hamran, and Normann (2013), titled "Struggles of Being and Becoming: A Dialogical Narrative Analysis of the Stories of Sami Elderly."

Choosing stories for focused analysis is a crucial task in DNA. It is essential to consider each story as a whole; methods that fragment narratives serve different purposes (Frank, 2012, in Blix, Hamran, and Normann, 2013).

In my transcripts, I searched for how fathers view their roles within the broader childcare system. What resources did they use to tell their stories? What is at stake when fathers share their stories in this manner? Will their self-confidence be reinforced or challenged? How do they manage their situations, and who or what supports them? What discourses do they believe are shaping the Child Protective Services (CPS)? Do they assume that CPS views them as resources within the larger care system?

As said in the introduction to this chapter, the results of the analysis work will be influenced by methodology and personal circumstances. Everything is said by an

observer. As Maturana (1988) pointed out, we as observers do not listen in a vacuum. We always apply some pre-formed distinctions. This is "objectivity-in-parentheses". By taking this position, we accept that we are human, a living system, and that our cognitive abilities are ultimately biological phenomena, applying criteria of acceptability to what we see and hear. This is an issue relating to reflexivity. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018, p.250) reflexivity is the process of reflecting about our biases, values, and personal background such as gender, history, culture, and socioeconomic status, and how this background shapes our interpretations formed during a study.

3.6. Reflexivity

According to Willig (2022, p.11) there are two types of reflexivity: Personal reflexivity and epistemological reflexivity. Personal reflexivity involves reflecting upon the ways in which our own values, experiences, interests, political commitments, wider aims, and social identities influence our research.

3.6.1. Personal Reflexivity

My personal values dictate a belief that all people are valuable and should be met with respect and kindness. I am interested in human encounters and studying people and human relations. I am particularly fascinated by how people adapt to demanding situations.

I was raised as an only child in a working-class family in a typical suburb of Bergen, Norway. I established a family early and had children at 18, with marginal work experience and education. When I had my first child, I could easily feel insecure and alone when meeting more experienced mothers and helpers like school nurses. I experienced how some people could make me feel insecure and incompetent, and

how others could make me feel like an important person in my child's life just by the way they looked at me and talked to me.

I have met fathers in different contexts, privately and professionally, reflected on how they tried to fulfil the role of father, what resources, limitations, and challenges were part of the role, and have also observed how they struggled to live up to different expectations. Some have told me that they felt alone and insecure when meeting the CPS, which is something I can relate to on an emotional level and affects my work and motivation for my doctoral thesis.

Participants in my research project might initially see me as a mature, white middle-class woman, as someone comfortable and protected from stress. This may then affect the interview if participants believe that I have little basis for understanding their situation. But to feel alone, underestimated, and insecure are feelings that easily resonate with me. It may be like what Per Jensen (2012, p.1) calls 'relational resonance', a concept developed for understanding how therapists' values and personal and private experiences create a context for their therapeutic work.

Before embarking on my research, reflecting upon my personal discourses about men and fathers was also necessary. I concluded that men are valuable, essential and fulfil many functions in society, I perceive them as often stronger physically and more predictable than women. They are often the main breadwinners and have better wages, and therefore a "more important" job than women. As fathers, they are important contributors in the lives of children and families, while at the same time I consider mothers to be primarily responsible for their children's well-being. I often call mothers first and expect them to take time off work to see the CPS. At the same time, I hope fathers can accompany them if possible. Some of these realisations

were quite difficult to accept. I thought I had a more modern view and was more concerned with parental equality.

The motivation for my thesis is grounded in compassion for fathers who feel alone and misunderstood, to be able to speak up for them, and to be able to take the fathers' perspective. At the same time, it is also a goal to be able to take different CPS workers' perspectives. These two perspectives pull in different directions, which is important to be aware of. I hope this project will lead to an increased awareness of fathers' position in relation to professional work within the CPS, and that this may bring benefits for children, parents, and CPS workers themselves.

Personal reflexivity also involves thinking about how the research may have affected and changed me, as a person and researcher. I have become more aware of how discourses are formed and maintained and how this affects relationships and people's stories and experiences of themselves and others. Overall, I have become more critical of knowledge and established truths. As StPierre (2010; Simon and Chard 2014, p.4) commented "I'm tired of old research designs being repeated so many times that we think they are real – we forget that we made them up!"

I can see how I can contribute to broadening perspectives as a researcher, but I am also aware of the limitations of research projects. Frank (2012) argues that describing the world must be the most effective way to change it. I believe that description may lead to reflection. Reflection leads to emotional reactions and actions. Actions have the potential for change and development. In addition to personal reflexivity, it is necessary to look at how the research design may have influenced my findings.

3.6.2. Epistemological Reflexivity

Epistemological reflexivity requires us to engage with questions such as: How has the research question defined and limited what can be found? (Willig 2022, p.11) I have not included the mothers' stories or the children's stories. This could have broadened the perspective and shed light on the issues in other ways.

One may also ask, 'How has the study's design and the method of analysis constructed the data and the findings?' (Willig 2022, p.11). The sample of participants was small, and semi-structured interviews can also lead to a very wide range of data.

There may have been limitations on what issues could be raised in the focus groups. Not everyone knew each other, which may have caused them to hold back some controversial thoughts. There may also have been biases operating in the one-to-one interviews. I may have shown clear interest in voice and non-verbal communication when there were topics that were important to my project and shown more hesitancy if they were not.

Bateson says context and metacommunication classify or categorise the message (Ølgaard 1998, p.59.) Whether I am a researcher or a child welfare worker can classify the message I am making. A question such as 'How do you perceive yourself as a father?' may aim to assess a personal narrative or aim to assess a person's caring ability. The answer will be influenced by the relationship to the interviewer and the context. In my case, the participants were aware that I was a child welfare worker as well as a researcher.

The participants may have adapted the response to what are termed 'canonical narratives' (Phoenix 2013, p.73) i.e., what it is accepted to say and do in Norway in 2022.

How could the research question have been investigated differently? (Willig 2022, p.11) I could have angled the question: 'How do fathers want to be met by child welfare services? 'Tell about a good meeting with them'. I could have had individual interviews with CPS workers and focus groups with fathers. I could have used Thematic Analysis on the transcriptions to recognise and organise patterns in content and meaning in the data. I could also have used Grounded Theory to identify, refine and integrate categories and carried out continuous comparisons of the data (Willig 2022 pp.65,80)

To what extent would another research methodology have given rise to a different understanding of the phenomena under investigation? (Willig 2022, p.11) I initially considered Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). However, I ultimately chose FDA and DNA as I found this specific and suitable for my project that was about perceptions, discourses, experiences and narratives. IPA was excluded as I found this method suitable for investigating the detail of the participants view of a topic (Smith, Jarman and Osborn 1999, p.218) but considered DNA and FDA more suitable for my project that had a systemic and relational focus.

Regarding other research projects I have searched and included, it is difficult to see how another methodology could have provided a completely different understanding. Sentio (2018a) used quantitative methods and found that despite the increased focus on fathers nowadays, there are still obstacles to accepting fatherhood as of equal value to motherhood.

Maybe if I had had a bigger solution focus in my conversations, asked about exceptions and asked for 'thick' descriptions of positive meetings. For example, one father said he had met an experienced CPS worker, and in the focus group one participant said that they had focussed on fathers in her workplace. I could have followed up these statements and asked for more detailed descriptions. This could have led to more positive descriptions of the relationship between fathers and the CPS.

Critical language awareness (Fairclough 1995; Willig 2022, p.11) forms part of reflexivity. Language has a constructive dimension; it does not simply mirror reality. The words we use to describe our experiences play a part in the constructions of meaning that we attribute to such experiences (Willig 2022, p.11) I hope I managed to show critical awareness through my analyses with CPS workers and fathers.

In retrospect, I see that some questions are quite leading, as when I asked Adam if he thought it would make a difference if there was a man involved, and if CPS would more easily take a mother's side in a conflict. Ryen (2002, p.108) states that since questions in qualitative studies are often only written as key words or arise spontaneously in the conversation, there is an argument that through the formulations one is in danger of influencing the direction of certain associations or answers. The problem with leading questions is that the researcher gives the participant terms that he or she is expected to describe his or her experiences with. This often leads to the participant having no other way out than to accept the researcher's view. The participant should be able to choose their own terms.

I assume that my leading questions are a consequence of my desire to lead the topic into the fact that there are many women employed in the CPS, in combination with

an assumption that this could be a challenge for fathers. Although the fathers conveyed different views on the importance of CPS workers gender, it cannot be ignored that these leading questions have influenced the answers and the results.

The questions could have been asked as: "What would the situation be like if there was a man involved from CPS"? and "How would a mother be met by the CPS in a conflict situation»?

3.6.3. Studying Norwegian culture and language

After searching for literature regarding the relationship between CPS workers and fathers, I became aware that this is also an issue in other western countries, such as Sweden (Arvidsson 2003) and the USA (Young and Reiger 2006).

As mentioned earlier, Norwegian culture is characterised by a focus on equality and democratic values. We are a small country, but the goal of equality is very much alive. Figures show that Norway is a relatively egalitarian society, characterised by smaller socioeconomic differences than many other western countries (OECD 2015 in Sølvsberg and Jarness, 2018).

I have tried to bring out and translate the different voices of the CPS workers and the fathers. Some information may have been misinterpreted or lost in translation.

Another researcher could have punctuated differently and emphasised statements that I have not included. Nevertheless, I believe I have addressed the important issues to the participants.

3.7. Research ethics.

Ethics and reflexivity are central topics in research. This is also true in narrative contexts and approaches. Stories take place in relationships, and knowledge is

created in dialogues. Relationships are based on security and require vigilance in terms of both ethics and reflection (Sørly and Blix 2017, p33). I have followed the recommendations according to Elmes et al. (1995; Willig 2022, p.28). The 15 participants were fully informed about the research procedure and gave their consent to participate in the research before the data collection took place. There has been no deception of participants. They have been ensured they may withdraw at any time without having to give any reason and without fear of being penalised. The participants have been informed about the full aim of the study, and they will have access to publications arising from the study. Complete confidentiality regarding the participants has been maintained during the research process.

I contacted the Regional Ethical Committee (REK) in Norway with a description of the project. I received feedback from there that the project was not considered obligatory to be submitted to REK (Appendix 3). In addition, I submitted the project to the Tavistock Research Ethics Committee (TREC) and received approval (Appendix 5). I also received permission to carry out research from the municipality of Bergen (Appendix 4). One dilemma I experienced was in relation to drop-out. I wanted to find out the reasons underlying the drop-out, but there was an ethical dilemma in terms of how much to 'search' for answers to this.

3.8. Strengths and Limitations of the Research Methods

In total, I had 15 participants in this study, which limits the generalisability. One way to assess their representativeness is to compare them with similar research projects. Nevertheless, from a social constructionist and relativistic perspective, my findings hold validity comparable to those of any other study. According to Gergen (2010, p.

221), constructionists do not claim their understanding of reality is more accurate or superior to that of others.

Focus groups are effective because they encourage participants to respond to and comment on each other's contributions (Willig, 2022, p. 38). However, I found that this format gave me less opportunity to explore topics in depth or to follow up with individual participants. Individual interviews gave me the opportunity to go more into depth in relation to the individual's story. The subject matter was more sensitive, and the participants were expected to share more private aspects of their experiences (Willig 2022, p.39). On the other hand, input from others is absent, and it may be more difficult to distinguish between the therapist role and the researcher role.

Discourse analysis research shows how discourses are formed and maintained. FDA claims to say something about the relationship between symbolic systems, human subjectivity, and social relations. According to Willig (2022, p.141), issues of subjectivity, ideology and power raises several difficult theoretical questions for FDA, including questions about to the extent to which we can theorise about subjectivity based on discourse alone, and the relationship between discourse and material reality.

Narrative analysis is a way of eliciting the participants' experiences. At the same time, the fathers' stories are told to me in a special context and interpreted and translated by me. In translating stories, the researchers play an active role, not limited to their knowledge of the two languages but including their understanding of the fully lived and spoken contexts of those two languages (Temple, 2005; Esin, Fathi, and Squire, 2014).

The next chapters contain the findings from my research. Starting with the Foucauldian inspired Discourse Analyses of the Focus Group interviews with the CPS workers.

4.0. DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF TWO FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

4.1. Introduction

In Discourse Analysis, it is believed that our perceptions of reality are socially constructed through discursive practices that qualitative researchers can explore. This approach emphasizes how statements create effects of truth in discourses that are not inherently true or false. The goal is to describe how these discourses facilitate specific experiences and actions (Brinkmann 2024, p. 22). Michael Foucault's analysis of discursive power relations has inspired later forms of discourse analysis (Foucault 1972, in Brinkmann 2024, p. 22). Foucauldian Discourse Analysis focuses on what kind of objects and subjects are constructed through discourses and what types of way-of-being these objects and subjects make available to people (Willig 2022, p.118).

To analyse the focus group interviews with CPS workers, I used a Foucauldian inspired discourse analysis (FDA) as described by Carla Willig (2022, p.133).

Discourses can be defined as sets of statements that construct objects and arrays of subject positions (Parker 1994; Willig 2022, p.133). Willig (2022, p.133) refer to that FDA is a qualitative method inspired by Foucault's perspective on the role of discourse in the constitution of social life and points out that even though FDA is strongly influenced by the work of Foucault, FDA do not address some of Foucault's key concerns, such as genealogy and governmentality. Foucault called genealogy a history of the present (Neumann 2012,p.55). Governmentality captures the way governments and other actors draw on knowledge to make policies that regulate and create subjectivities (Bevir 2010).

My goal was to analyse how the CPS workers perceived and construed fathers and fatherhood, and what possible consequences this might have for their relationships. I gathered male and female CPS workers in separate focus groups to analyse if different discourses emerged. The differences observed between the groups may not necessarily be attributed to gender. My approach to questioning could have varied. I might have identified more with the female case workers, which could have made me more closed off to their style of questioning and interpretation of responses. Conversely, I may have been more receptive to alternative perspectives in the male group. The lack of familiarity among individuals may also have led to the suppression of views that contradicted those of the majority.

I choose “fathers” as the discursive subject as they are construed by some CPS workers in Norway in 2022. These constructions were, in turn, constructed and categorised by me; as previously mentioned, they are different ways of being a father. In the focus groups in my study, I got the impression that they were mainly referring to biological western fathers, although foster fathers and non-western fathers were mentioned. I identified four different ways in which the child welfare workers constructed “fathers”: fathers as parents, fathers as co-parents, fathers as clients, and fathers as “angry men”. I focused on the differences between the constructions and what other discourses the discursive constructions were based on. For example, an assumption that fathers are not good at mentalizing is within a gender and childcare discourse.

4.2. Analysis and results

The main discourses I construed were:

1: Father as parent. Biology and learning.

2. Father as co-parent. Responsibility, trust, and division of roles.

3: Father as client. Power and powerlessness.

4: "The Angry Father". Fear and understanding.

4.2.1. Discourse 1: Father as a parent. Biology and learning.

I perceived that a theme in both focus groups dealt with whether caring ability was defined as something basic and fundamental, a biology discourse, and at the same time how caring ability was something that could be learned and developed if parents were given trust and responsibility, a learning discourse.

Caring ability as biology

In the focus groups, I noticed that certain statements reflected a gendered perspective on parenting, and I perceived that some parenting skills were described as linked to biological differences. The assertion that men are generally more playful recurred frequently, while comments suggesting that men basically lack the ability to provide emotional care were made by CPS workers.

One of my questions to the focus groups was about whether, as CPS workers, they had different expectations of mothers and fathers.

“I believe that we try very hard not to have it, but I think I can also recognize statements such as ‘fathers like to play, while mothers are the ones who comfort’. Some of these stereotypical gender roles come into consideration when we discuss things internally in the service, so there might be a little different expectation” (Female CPS worker).

Where do these expectations come from? The female CPS workers drew on their own experiences as group leaders who helped maintain the discourses. One female

participant had experience with parental guidance groups. "My experience is that mothers are more adept at emotional regulation, how to comfort and address the needs of children, and what clothes they need. The fathers were not that concerned with these things".

Another participant talked about her experiences with groups for parents and children: "The fathers have a great deal of focus on activities. And they have a lot of nice times where the kids obviously have fun and enjoy themselves" (Female CPS worker).

One participant had separate parental guidance groups for mothers and fathers. She said, "But in the group of fathers, it was very quickly established that sitting around talking about this... it quickly became boring" (Female CPS worker).

In the focus group for male CPS workers, they also addressed the discourse that fathers are more playful and have more activities with their children. "We men are perhaps more concerned with joking around a bit and want to appear like typical dads, doing things together". Another male participant said, "I think about what a dad can bring in, I think about this more than women can do...I think about playing and fooling around and getting the contact that the fooling around actually entails".

One male participant talked about an experience at work in a kindergarten when he was younger and a person who loved playing guitar and playing with the kids, especially the boys, jumping and fighting. Then the female colleagues joined them, and the rough play stopped right away because they thought the play was too unstructured.

Based on CPS workers construction and discourses concerning fathers one available subject position may be "The Playful, Active Father." A father who

embraces this role may feel valued if he, the mothers, and the CPS workers recognize the importance of rough-and-tumble play. Play is a fundamental form of life and learning (Utdanningsdirektoratet 2024).

In Chapter 1.0, I referenced Hareide and Moe (2000, p. 36), who identified several prerequisites for the care needed by children to establish a secure "base" and develop healthy attachment abilities. These prerequisites include empathy, self-awareness, and the capacity for reconciliation. In the focus group for male case officers, statements were made suggesting that they may have lower expectations than their female colleagues of fathers.

"I believe that we tend to be more easily impressed by fathers than by mothers. Men appear to have lower expectations of fathers compared to those of mothers. When a father shows insight and mentalization, we often respond with 'Wow, he has real understanding!' We seem to be more positively surprised by fathers because there's an expectation that mothers should excel in these areas." (Male CPS worker).

However, there are statements suggesting that lower expectations regarding fathers are also found among female CPS workers. "I think it's easier to acknowledge fathers for what they do well than the mothers. Maybe to some extent. And that we might not like to believe it... but I think we do" (Female CPS worker).

This is a childcare discourse, which suggests, like Hareide and Moe (2000, p.36) that it is important to be able to mentalize, which is the ability to understand the thoughts and feelings of others and to be able to comfort them. The participants in both focus groups have greater expectations that mothers should be high on this, and lower expectations of the fathers.

These discourses surrounding gender and childcare may offer the role of "The Insensitive Father. This can have a function if the CPS worker does not put much effort into getting in touch with the fathers. Fathers might feel he is less important than the mother and may accept or reject this perception.

Interestingly, the focus groups in my project showed minimal differences in expectations for mothers and fathers. Both male and female CPS workers talked about having lower expectations regarding fathers. This observation might be coincidental, but it also suggests that the gender of child welfare workers does not influence how fathers are evaluated by the child welfare service.

At the same time in both focus groups, there were assumptions that care capacity is something that can be learned and I perceived that it was primarily fathers who ought to learn the mothers' tasks. To learn, learning opportunities are needed.

Caring ability and learning

Emotional care was presented as a trait that mothers were particularly qualified for, while at the same time, it was something that fathers could learn if the mothers allowed them to participate. "I think that fathers can do just as good a job as mothers, both in terms of comforting and in relation to other things. But this is a learning process, and it requires practice" (Female CPS worker). "Outside of my work in the CPS, I have seen fathers become very good at active caretaking. They can learn, and they do» (Female CPS worker).

In the focus group for male CPS workers, fathers' inability to meet their children's emotional needs was partly explained by the fact that men do not have the same vocabulary as women and could lack opportunities for developing the 'language of care' and the ability to mentalize. There are assumptions in the focus group for male

CPS workers that female CPS workers expect the same quality of mentalization from mothers and fathers, even though male CPS workers believe there are differences in ability.

"We men are maybe a little more limited when it comes to describing our children. That doesn't necessarily mean it's deficient, but maybe we use fewer words and it's possible that we also have a little less intimate contact with our children. That is to say that we don't have such deep conversations, we have more activities» (Male CPS worker).

One male participant said that men can feel incompetent because of these lower expectations. "I've seen it with some of those foster fathers when we describe shame, sadness and so on — they lack words. And for some female CPS workers who is very good at putting things into words, you can feel quite incompetent». Some fathers are excused for not being more competent, thinking that this must be seen in a historical perspective. "We have to keep in mind that it wasn't that long ago that men of a certain age were supposed to have a limited range of basic emotions. They should be happy or angry" (Male CPS worker).

A historical discourse is highlighted here. Showing emotions is interpreted as a modern phenomenon. Men of the "old school" arouse sympathy and are considered difficult to modernize. Where are the natural learning opportunities for learning about care and developing a caring language?

In the group for male CPS workers, some were concerned that women are more social and thus have a larger network of people who are concerned with the same topic and thus have access to more knowledge and acquire more relevant language. "I find that women are incredibly good at relationships and having friends, girlfriends

and networks. Others that they can talk to. The girls have more words for things, there are also more who are concerned with the same topic» (Male CPS worker).

One participant said that he found that some fathers were quite lonely and had an explanation for why they had a smaller network.

"At some point in their lives, they've established a family and then started to cut contact with friends, not living in isolation, but when they're finished at work, they go home and then they're there. So, they have very little opportunity to talk about their feelings or the home situation and what they think about their own children, or how they are afraid or feel insecure about their own role» (Male CPS worker).

In the female focus group, an assumption emerged that men talk less when there are women present. Some CPS offices have taken the consequences of this with separate groups for mothers and fathers where they can exchange knowledge about parenting.

"A colleague of mine said she had a group just for fathers (...) She felt that she got much more dialogue out of the fathers, compared to when both fathers and mothers were together. It is often the mothers who speak the most. When she had a group of fathers only, they were much more talkative. I found this quite exciting and interesting" (Female CPS worker).

The assumption that fathers may experience loneliness and lack self-confidence offers a subject position known as "The lonely father." This perspective indicates that a father might be underestimated and could withdraw from his surroundings due to a lack of faith in himself. Additionally, learning opportunities may not be easily available to him.

4.2.2. Discourse 2: Fathers as co-parent. Responsibility, trust, and division of roles.

In both focus groups, discussions about gender and the sharing of caregiving responsibilities highlighted that fathers often do not take as much responsibility for their children's follow-up care as mothers do. This disparity may stem from perceptions of fathers among CPS workers, such as fathers lack of mentalization abilities, limited vocabulary, lack of learning opportunities, or the perception that fathers are disregarded by mothers, and discourses concerning mothers and "The third shift" as described in chapter 1.0. current thesis. This dynamic may place a significant burden on mothers, who are expected to manage most childcare responsibilities and ensure that fathers contribute their fair share to caregiving. The CPS workers express cultural care discourses that are about the mother's responsibility to let the father contribute and trust him as a competent parent.

The female CPS workers felt responsible for encouraging the mothers to hand over some responsibility to the fathers. They also used themselves as examples when talking about this,

«We saw in several cases that the fathers need to be more involved(...) Women are so good at organizing. We have our duties and our roles, right, but we can learn a lot by letting the dad contribute, let the dad take them to kindergarten, make lunch bags, organize.... Show them that we are trying to encourage them. They tend to get a little passive because a lot of mothers like to be at the helm" (Female CPS worker).

One explanation for why the fathers were not allowed to contribute was that the mothers had an idea of how things should be done and did not trust that the fathers

could do it satisfactorily. The opinion probably may stem from a cultural discourse about what good care is. It is important to be able to organize. A trait that is attributed to mothers.

“They must be allowed to be fathers in their own way. Not fathers the way the mother wants them to be fathers (...) I always refer to myself (...) I'm sure I was one of those mums when my kids were little. And that it was my way of being a mom” (Female CPS worker).

“I think that the child needs two parents. In other words, the child is much more content if they have a good relationship with their dad as well (...) I mean in general terms, not just in CPS. We must understand that it's not just our way that's good for our children” (Female CPS worker).

Subject positions offered as a co-parent is «The resource” or “The assistant”. These fathers may well be fully capable of caring for children but may be accepted by the mother first. The fathers may feel inferiority or feel important when accepted.

The above points refer to discourses about mothers and fathers as caregivers. How is this expressed when they cooperate with the CPS, and is it different for female and male case officers?

4.2.3. Discourse 3: Fathers as clients. Power and powerlessness.

The discourses concerning gender, parenting, and caregiving affect how CPS collaborates with fathers. Based on a realization that I was inclined to contact the mothers first and foremost, one “action orientation”, what is gained from construing fathers in a certain way, was a response to the question; When you want to call the parents, who do you call first?

"Better call mum"

"I would say that most often we call mothers first, unless there is something in the referral that suggests we should call dad. So, it's quite a funny question really, as I recognize it from my own life. I have noticed that it's always me who gets called from kindergarten and things like that. So, this is probably quite common (Female CPS worker).

The participant suggests that the discourses concerning fathers as less responsible than mothers is a social discourse, that appears also in other areas.

Another female participant said that she sometimes contacted the fathers and then it was the mothers who called back. This may be due to fathers handing over responsibility to the mothers, if he accepts the subject position as a second-class father, or that the mothers feel a responsibility and want to have control over the contact with the CPS, if she accepts a subject position as the main responsible parent.

In the focus group for male CPS Workers, the contact with the parents was a theme.

"I think I'm in contact a lot with the fathers when the parents both live together, or when they work well together. But maybe a little more contact with the mothers, I find that if you want to convey a message and make an appointment, you usually instinctively call the mothers, for some reason»
(Male CPS worker).

Another male CPS worker said, "But the fathers are good in their areas, but maybe not at keeping track of appointments, right". The same pattern was highlighted among foster fathers.

"...so, we have only a few 'active' foster fathers (...) only a handful there. So, it is most common that only the foster mother is present on our home visits or follow-up visit (...) the word 'foster father' is not used very often (Female CPS worker).

By relying on a discourse about fathers that they are not good at keeping track of appointments, fathers are not contacted. Fathers may refrain from taking responsibility or think that it is perfectly ok to stay out of thing which helps to maintain the impression of fathers' inability to keep track of appointments.

One subject position offered is «the unorganized father," who can avoid contact with Child Protection Services. He might feel disregarded or free from responsibility. This can make it possible for the child welfare worker to avoid contacting the fathers and for the fathers to make themselves more unavailable.

Unavailable fathers

In the focus group for male case officers, issues relating to single mothers and the lack of contact with fathers were both topics as a response to whom they contacted. "...it's very much single mothers, and fathers are out of the picture for various reasons...whether they've passed away or just don't have access rights..." (Male CPS worker).

One male participant says that he worked at a CPS office some years ago, where they had some contact with single mothers who were all in need of respite care.

From the female CPS workers, he learned that,

"The fathers kind of opted out (...) They were seen as more or less not useful (...) so I contacted many of the fathers and they were overwhelmed to be seen

as resources for their children. They had been thrown out of the collaboration between the mothers and the female caseworkers” (Male CPS worker).

The participant's statement can be interpreted as a perception that female CPS workers were concerned about mothers' parental rights and responsibility to protect their children from a potentially dangerous father.

The same participant explains that there are fathers who have been “thrown out” by the mothers, with support from female caseworkers. This statement is supported by a statement from the focus group for female CPS workers.

“I feel like I live in the Stone age, but there has been a historic development. Years ago, if the mother had sole custody of a child, one could see in the service that the father's parental rights were ignored, especially if there was conflict after the separation. By not contacting the father, the mother was often supported in her view, that it would be complicating and directly harmful if the father was contacted” (Female CPS worker).

This view may have consequences for further cooperation. They describe that some fathers have given up the fight and just quit. Here, a war metaphor is used to describe the ‘battle’ being fought and withdrawal from the battlefield as a deliberate act. But fathers who are described as having given up the fight and becoming the losers may gain support and alliances. Fathers who are perceived as having opted out are probably rarely contacted. How we understand and describe a situation has consequences for our experiences and our further actions.

In some situations, the mother may be presented as dismissive and the father as an outcast. One male caseworker presents himself as someone who sympathizes with the father, while the mother has the sympathy of the female caseworkers in this

situation. In relation to my research question, which deals with how female overrepresentation within the CPS may lead to overlooking the rights of fathers, this is relevant. At the same time, the participants point out that there has been a positive development in relation to fathers' rights in recent years.

CPS workers have made statements such as, "There has been a history of improvement," and "I believe I'm in regular contact with the fathers when the parents live together or when they collaborate effectively." These comments reflect an understanding of the importance of involving the father when he is available.

This can be a challenge if the fathers do not live with the children, are not actively involved by the mothers, or if the case officer gets a blurred picture of the extent to which the father is available. This may be one reason why they have the most contact with and relate mainly to mothers.

One subject position offered is "The excluded father." He can either fight for his role or stay away. If the CPS worker has the time and energy, they may try to encourage the father to become involved. The father may feel exasperated and unappreciated.

Accessibility as contextual

In the focus group for female case officers, accessibility to the fathers was referred to as context dependent. One participant mentioned single fathers, fathers in prison, and fathers with substance abuse problems. These fathers were considered more accessible.

"I have some single fathers, and I find that they telephone more than the mothers I have contact with. They call more for advice and guidance than the mothers in other families do" (Female CPS worker). This may be because single fathers are more

concerned with the child's needs or that the fathers need more support in this situation.

"Many of the fathers who in prison (...). They are very good at calling and asking how the kids are doing and what they are doing (...). There are also mothers in prison. But I don't hear much from them...from the mothers. And I have experienced (...) that the fathers with drug issues manage to consider the child's perspective better than the mothers with drug issues. The mothers tend to feel sorry for themselves, or they are so repetitive that they are not allowed to see their children, and it is so sad and 'poor me' while the fathers call and ask how they are doing at school. They are a little more practically oriented (...). When we tell them that their children are enjoying themselves with friends, they ask; what are they doing? So, they have a slightly different focus" (Female CPS worker).

It appears in both focus groups that who they have the most contact with is not necessarily about gender. "I think it is more dependent on who these fathers and mothers are than it is about gender" (Female CPS worker).

"I'm working with foster care, and I have two foster families where I talk much more to the foster father than the foster mother. And I notice that I'm a bit like I said at the beginning: if the fathers are more active, then it's okay that we talk to them. So, I don't find that I must talk to the foster mother, to put it that way then, when I've had a nice dialogue and that we're on the same level, and things are going the way they should, then that's fine" (Female CPS worker).

Times change

In the female focus group, they suggested that they are more concerned with having contact with and involving the fathers nowadays at the CPS offices. “There has been a shift in focus. We are more concerned with fathers nowadays” and “I would say there has been an increase since I started in the CPS” (Female CPS worker).

In the group of male case officers, there were also assumptions that CPS workers talk much more now with fathers. "It's only natural to seek both parents, as it's important to have a dialogue with both" (Male CPS worker).

I analysed the different subject positions that are available to fathers in relation to being a client of CPS. The "withdrawn father" may choose to stay away, avoiding contact with the CPS; he might feel disappointed or freed from responsibility. In contrast, the "contact-seeking father" can receive significant support and guidance, and is often perceived as engaged, which helps him feel important to his children. The "servant father" also plays a key role; he is seen as engaged and can feel a great sense of responsibility. I hypothesized that the lack of contact with the father may partly stem from fear and uncertainty concerning the CPS workers.

4.2.4 Discourse 4: “The angry father”. Fear and understanding.

Based on my own experiences, where I could be uncertain about the reactions of men and fathers in a work context, this became a relevant question to raise in the focus groups. So, I asked them how they experienced and met angry mothers and fathers.

About body, voice, and language.

“I've also experienced the fact that you're most warned about men... and I have felt most threatened by men. I don't remember feeling threatened by women. But it's clear that big, strong men, or they ... some, have good verbal skills and controlling body language. Who can do something to us. So that doesn't mean I haven't met ladies who absolutely know the art, but definitely it's mostly men” (Female CPS worker).

Threatening men was also a topic in the male CPS workers group. "Some fathers are aggressive and hot-tempered, and fathers can let anger go over to being physical and threatening" (Male CPS worker).

CPS workers are cautious in relation to fathers who are strongly built and who are angry and acting out. This is an issue of physical characteristics. Fathers may have limited verbal language but more threatening body language.

In the female Focus Group, descriptions of fathers were often about being physically larger, more powerful and having a louder voice volume which feels threatening. “I also think that it is due to their physical stature and much louder voice volume and the fact that one feels quite small in that situation. I think that's due to basic biological differences” (Female CPS worker).

“I've experienced being threatened. But also, the fact that colleagues are probably hesitant towards big strong men shouting and screaming and that it seems more intimidating and I'm pretty sure most case workers would have wanted other colleagues present” (Female CPS worker).

Some participants assumed that fathers used the fact that they appeared threatening deliberately. “But some fathers, because maybe I'm small and they're big, they're

going to seem more threatening. And some might use it deliberately” (Female CPS worker).

“Yes, when (she) said that I thought a bit more about men being triggered more and many men use words like 'bitch'... I mean, they use more gender-specific words, and I often feel that the CPS women don't understand their problems, and then some shout so loudly that you can't hear what they're saying, because they shout so terribly” (Female CPS worker).

This is based on a power discourse and one subject position offered is “Big, strong, angry men that use anger deliberately” This may arouse respect and fear among the CPS workers and allow them to take their precautions in the face of the fathers. Such men may feel powerful if they accept or frustration if they do not accept this subject position.

Triggers

I asked the participants if they believed that women and man get triggered by different things. “I think so... that women and men are triggered by different things. Definitely. I believe that, because we can say that we are equal and stuff, but we know that we have differences” (Female CPS worker). Some statements indicated a perception that women can trigger men from a power perspective.

” And I think it's just our nature. So, there's a difference between men and women whether we like it or not. Eh... and then it may be that we women might be able to trigger men in a different way than if it had been a male colleague maybe. I've been thinking about that” (Female CPS worker).

“We work with very sensitive things, some of the most vulnerable things anyone can work with (...) also, the fact that we're women. I'm sure it could

trigger an extra strong reaction from a father who feels threatened” (Female CPS worker).

At the same time, opinions are also expressed that women can have a calming effect on men.

“Being smaller and less threatening can be an asset in these situations. I've noticed that there are many more female bouncers today. And I think in many ways they are better at the door of a nightclub than men. There is a higher threshold to use aggression against women than men. I don't know...”

(Female CPS worker).

Cultural differences and gender factors

The focus group for female CPS workers showed that there could be different attitudes among fathers from cultures which were not ethnic Norwegian.

“I think that it is challenging for them. I sometimes wonder if the authority assigned to us by society is devalued based on gender in the eyes of some cultures, leading to the perception that female Child Protective Services (CPS) workers do not hold the same authority as their male colleagues.” (Female CPS worker)

“My experience is that if I bring along a colleague who is older than me, I'm now in my 30s, then some of these fathers speak to me differently” (Female CPS worker). Another participant said “They have more respect for senior staff. It's not that they're rude with me, but I notice they take senior staff a little more seriously. I'd have to use more “power” before they accept my arguments” (Female CPS worker).

One participant said that these attitudes were not only to do with culture.

“The thing about age, I don't think that has much to do with culture. Of course, a little bit, but I think we meet it in Norwegian families as well, whether it is men or women. If there are very young CPS workers going to meet a family in crisis and who are going to be advised about their role as parents, then it may seem more provocative if the CPS worker is young (Female CPS worker).

The participants in the focus group for male CPS workers believe that it can be good for fathers to meet someone with a similar background. It can be easier for a father to meet a male caseworker and to have someone with whom he can talk and reflect. “I think that they may also feel that the other person is equal in terms of experience and understanding, and how it's easier to put their own feelings and descriptions of their children into words” (Male CPS worker).

Another participant believes that fathers can feel uncomfortable when they must meet two female CPS workers, as sometimes is the case. Men may feel alone and not properly understood. “Today, there are a lot of men, old and young, who struggle with mental health, so it can be good to have a man to talk to. It may be advantageous to discuss difficulties with another man” (Male CPS worker). At the same time, another male CPS worker said that “You should be man, but not be too masculine to be able to fit in as a man in CPS”.

This may indicate that age and experience are important regardless of gender, and that young age may lead to disrespect and low cooperation. This, in turn, can affect how fathers appear and are perceived by CPS officers.

Anger discourses

The female CPS workers talked about how they could understand the fathers' anger. "They're all pretty much all right. It's just emotions coming out" (Female CPS worker).

"No, I think in general that there's a little bit of a difference between women and men in how we react. That men more often show it in anger. That doesn't mean the women... There is usually frustration and despair and powerlessness behind it. I think in general we must put up with emotions and that it's kind of healthy" (Female CPS worker).

This may be an emotional focused understanding, that men are in fact hurt, but they show it in anger. In the women's group, a cultural discourse came up:

"I came to think of it (...) that men are often trained not to cry, and women are raised so that they must not be angry. And that it's more acceptable for a boy to be angry than a girl to be angry, and vice versa in terms of crying and stuff" (Female CPS worker)

The focus group for male CPS workers was also asked how they perceived angry fathers, and whether they perceived them differently from angry women. Some participants report that they are more uncertain about women who are angry.

"It may be somewhat easier to relate to angry men. Perhaps some women who are angry become a bit like it's all black or white(...) But I like it when people show anger. So that's my thing, I think it's worse with people who complain with a kind of whining voice, it's a huge trigger for me. But that's something that I ought to override..." (Male CPS worker).

Other participants point out that in the case of angry women it is easier to start thinking of mental illness as an explanation of anger. "It's so abnormal and unexpected for a woman to have a blowout like that» (Male CPS worker).

Here there is a gender discourse. A woman is not expected to show anger in the same way as a man. In the female Focus Group, thoughts emerge that it is less acceptable to be an angry woman and that many women cover up their anger.

The fact that women have more words and can have richer emotional language may also be a challenge for male case workers. One male participant believes that "It's easier for me to understand why a man is angry. Men can explain in simple terms what it is that makes them angry, but women can use many more words when they are angry" (Male CPS worker).

Another participant also believes that women may get heavily side-tracked by their emotions "and you can be stuck in a dead end and don't get any further. If we stagnate, and it happens most often with women, then I get fed up eventually" (Male CPS worker).

For the male CPS workers in the group, it seems easier for them to relate to angry men than angry women. This may indicate that men's anger is not a factor in why fathers are not contacted by CPS workers in this group. One participant had also experienced that in connection with conflicts about access rights, the mother could become more overwhelmed and that fathers were easier to relate to. For fathers who are perceived as angry, this can make them feel seen, heard, and understood. The mothers can use a very large number of words to convey their message – something that can be counterproductive, according to the participants in the male Focus Group.

"I find that it is easier for me to understand why a man is angry. Men are very real. They manage to say in a few short words what it is that provokes them "(Male CPS worker). Another participant says that 'these may be the wrong words, but I find that men seem a little more rational... I can more easily understand why they're so angry" (Male CPS worker).

Discourses emerge that are about fathers having a blow-out, getting quickly over it and then being more easily reassured. At the same time, fathers may show anger as secondary emotions, an emotion that may cover sadness or frustration.

"I believe that hysterical and angry men can often be understood as simply lacking the words to express themselves. This could relate to their difficulty in finding appropriate language, which becomes an obstacle to calming down.

The male participants in the focus group noted that fathers tend to use short and precise sentences, which they appreciated."

Understanding the expression of feelings and the differences between genders can be challenging. Male CPS workers in my focus group recognize how male anger is expressed and understand the underlying issues that drive it. They may approach this emotion differently than their female colleagues. In my study, female CPS workers described anger as a secondary emotion.

I identified several subject positions associated with angry fathers. One perception is that they are seen as "big, strong, angry men who are also sad." These fathers may experience varying degrees of understanding or misunderstanding from those around them and often feel powerless. In contrast, there are "angry fathers who communicate clearly and effectively." These men tend to receive understanding from others and may feel cared for and safe in their interactions.

4.3. Summary

The discourses arising from this analysis include cultural childcare and gender factors that shape perceptions and actions among CPS workers.

My constructions suggest that some male CPS workers assume that fathers' contact with female CPS workers may entail fathers finding themselves in a setting where they fall short in conversations with persons who have a greater ability to talk about feelings. Male CPS workers in current study assume that fathers' may be unable to meet their children's emotional needs since men do not have the same vocabulary as women and could lack opportunities for developing the 'language of care' and the ability to mentalize. Male CPS workers may feel more comfortable when meeting angry fathers than angry mothers. Male CPS workers may experience that women may use emotions to manipulate others, and that this may lead to a stagnation of progress in the case.

Male CPS workers in my focus group assume that fathers are better at playing than organizing when it comes to childcare. Some male CPS workers assume that they may have lower expectations of fathers than their female colleagues. However male CPS workers assume that it may be good for fathers to meet a male CPS worker with a more similar background.

Some female CPS workers believe that they may 'trigger' the fathers, and that men and fathers could use the fact that they appear threatening deliberately. Female CPS workers may assume that men are often not expected to cry/show sadness, and women are raised so that they must not be angry. Some female CPS workers assume that mothers have difficulty handing over responsibility for care to fathers. Fathers must wait for 'permission' from the mothers, who believe that the fathers

can't live up to their standards. At the same time, fathers could learn more if mothers allowed them to participate.

Both male and female CPS workers in my project assume that fathers may be less qualified and less important than mothers when it comes to childcare. They perceive that fathers do not take as much responsibility for the follow-up of children as mothers and that this could be due to biological differences, such as differences in the ability to mentalize, as well as differences in social skills and vocabulary. At the same time, they consider that care capacity is also something that can be learned if fathers gain confidence and are given the right learning opportunities.

Mothers are considered competent in emotional care. Both focus groups had experienced fathers who had been excluded by mothers with support from female CPS workers. However, both male and female CPS workers believe they are more concerned about fathers nowadays and aim to involve fathers where they are available.

The next chapter contains a Dialogical Narrative Analysis of five individual interviews with fathers, where they tell their stories from their contact with the CPS.

5.0. NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS WITH FIVE FATHERS

"Then they asked me to describe the kids to them. I knew that they wanted to make sure that I "saw" them and who they were, and I tried as best as possible to give them what they wanted, reluctantly, because they mentioned that they had no children of their own and could not relate to my experiences in the same way. At the same time, I was nervous, groping for the words, finding what I said inadequate and revealing". The Norwegian author Karl Ove Knausgård's description of his meeting with the CPS in his biography «In the Spring» 2020 (My translation).

5.1. Introduction

The interest that guides my doctoral project is to what extent the gender distribution in Child Protection front-line services reflects Norway's ideology of equality between genders. Will the significant overrepresentation of women in CPS affect the rights of mothers and fathers, the perception of fathers, and how fathers perceive contact with the CPS?

According to Frank (2010, p.74), DNA does not involve a fixed set of procedures or rules.' Frank prefers to use the term "movement of thoughts".

What narrative resources do fathers use to describe their identity as fathers? Identity questions relate to how stories teach people who they are and how people explore who they might become by telling stories (Frank 2010, p.77). According to Bakhtin (1991; Frank 2010, p.13), a person's access to narrative resources depends on their social locations: which stories are told where they live and work, which stories they take seriously or not, and especially which stories they exchange as tokens of membership. Also what is at stake and how do they hold their own against the

threats to their self-regard (Frank 2010, p.77). Stories are social constructed and told in a context. Gergen (2010, p.57) refers to standards of narrative construction. What conventions or rules, according to Western standards, apply to the construction of an acceptable narrative?

One of the research questions I will investigate is how fathers experience their relationship with the Child Protection Service. I utilized Discursive Narrative Analysis to explore the implications of these experiences. This approach allowed me to examine how fathers construed themselves in their role as parents, the threats they perceived to their self-esteem, and the strategies they employed to counter these threats. The Foucauldian Discourse Analysis that I used in relation to the interviews with the CPS workers offers ways of seeing and ways of being (Willig 2022). A Dialogical Narrative Analysis of the interviews with the fathers will be an opportunity to take a closer look at the effect of the discourses in practice.

I reviewed the transcripts multiple times and reorganized the stories chronologically. My goal was to understand how the individuals described their identities as fathers and their roles in parenting. For example, Adam mentioned that he was always the one who took care of the children and picked them up from school and nursery. As a result, his children developed a strong attachment to him. Adam's experience of himself as a father could be different from how the CPS perceived him, and thus affect his experience of the relationship with CPS. At the same time, this could help to shed light on the last part of the FDA "Subjectivity" (Willig 2022), and how the CPS discourses have implications for the individual's experience. Adam said he experienced that the CPS workers distrusted him, and this was not a good feeling.

I considered potential threats to the fathers' identity. For instance, Adam mentioned that CPS produced documents claiming he was uncooperative. During my exploration, I looked for ways he maintained his self-esteem. Adam seems to uphold his self-worth by expressing that women are untrustworthy and often have negative intentions toward men in general. This perspective might help him avoid taking personal insults to heart.

“Every narrative tale – from the Iliad to the latest Pulitzer Prize-winning newspaper serial- has the same narrative structure...: a central character encounters a problem, struggles with it, and in the end either overcomes it, is defeated by it, or is changed by it in some way. If the story lacks one of those elements, you should not write it as a narrative” (Bruce DeSilva, “Endings” in Frank 2010, p.20).

This chapter is based on the stories of five fathers who have been in contact with the CPS. They have all had their struggles, but they have all ultimately overcome them or changed in some way. The stories were told in the context of qualitative research interviews during the summer of 2022.

5.2. Five stories from fathers meeting with the Child Protection Service

In the following section, I will present and analyse the stories of “Johnny”, “Adam”, “Jim”, “Ali” and “Oscar”. I intend to explore how the fathers experience contact with the CPS and how they present their identities through the stories.

5.2.1. Johnny. A story of insult.

Johnny is a mature ethnic Norwegian man living in a relatively big city in Norway, and we met early one afternoon in his hometown in a hotel conference room. Johnny began his story by saying he was divorced a few years ago and had initially shared custody of the children. The children wanted to live with their father, but the mother

did not agree to this. One of Johnny's children had a medical condition that required frequent medical attention, and the doctor sent a report of concern to the CPS regarding how the child was doing at home.

Johnny and the children's mother were invited to meetings with the CPS, and Johnny says

"I experienced these girls... 20-year-olds who were young for their age, very inexperienced. They're almost kids... who wanted to know what was going on. And then we had a caseworker... She was a bit strict and misunderstood the issues. She was difficult from day one".

Johnny says that he experienced that the CPS believed that this was about a parental conflict, while it was, in fact, about the mother's health problems, and it took a long time for the CPS to figure this out.

«So, in principle, I found that these girls didn't realise much then, that they didn't have enough knowledge, or what should I say... competence". Johnny had been informed that if the parents did not cooperate, they could take the children from them, and Johnny felt that this was said as a threat. Johnny said that he had previous knowledge of the CPS from a work context, and this made him aware that this could not be correct, but he still perceived it as an insult.

Eventually, a new CPS worker was assigned to the case. She was a mature woman who kept the focus on the child and had less focus on the parents, Johnny said and described the new CPS worker as very clever and someone who had worked for many years in Child welfare. She had a lot of experience in the same geographical area where Johnny and his family lived. Johnny says that the different CPS offices gain experience from different issues. He believes that in the better-off areas, CPS

workers gain more experience with neurotic mothers, while in tougher areas they must deal with more immigrant issues, talking to people about war, major mental health issues, violence, and drugs.

I asked what expectations Johnny felt the CPS had of him? Johnny said that at first, he was disappointed because he felt he was being treated like a man who didn't understand. Johnny said it didn't have much to do with whether it was a male or a female CPS worker, but whether the CPS worker had experience. He stated that "these girls, maybe they should get married and have children before they can work in child welfare. Get life experience, or maybe follow a case for a few years".

Johnny said he thought there may be stereotypes operating in the CPS, that women have a little more trust in women for example. He suggested that it is always the man who is 'enemy number one'.

"Women tend to believe that mothers are good people (...) Perhaps women have different values than we do. Because of giving birth, from their own body, because they feel 'property rights' over a baby that came out of their womb (...) the mother thinks she has the right to... She kind of owns the child. While I, as a father... Oh well...".

Johnny experienced that the CPS had thoughts that as a man he should understand that the mother had control and a right of ownership over the child. However, Johnny believes that we only have the children on loan for a little while. We can only walk behind or next to them, he says.

"Mothers think it goes from my belly so it's my property. And I'm responsible for this child, not the father. He's just sort of in it for the ride, whereas as a mother, I'm 100% responsible. I'm the one who gets hurt if it goes to hell."

Johnny thought it was a bit pathological and not a healthy thought that 'I own my child.'

Johnny said he was never furious or angry, but he was able to express himself clearly. "It's funny how I sit and look at my ex-wife and the female CPS worker in heated conversation... And I thought, don't you see that that woman is full of rage and hatred and anger? And then you're supposed to be having a dialogue?" He asked them afterward if it was only he who had experienced the whole thing as 'women talk', that they could not tell the mother that they felt that she had lost complete control. He felt that the female caseworkers did not address it.

"It wasn't an option to say, 'Now you have to pull yourself together.' They made some statements, referring to that usual mantra about regulations or something... but back and forth and back and forth with an angry woman... If I had been responsible, I would have said, 'no, wait a minute, this isn't right'".

Johnny believes that a man would have said loud and clear "you need help? because something is not right here'... because women are often used to crazy women...". Johnny had some suggestions about how a man would have been more to the point:

"Wait a minute, we'll stop here' (...) or end it by saying that 'first, we're not going anywhere with these conversations, because we've decided. Your children have said this and that, and what do you want to achieve with us listening to you for half an hour, 40 minutes? It's not the first time we've had a conversation'. »

After some years and many conversations with the family, the CPS decided that it was the best solution for the children to live with their father. Johnny believes that

this could have been solved much earlier, but the mother's resistance, mental health problems, and the CPS's lack of understanding of the issue meant that it took a long time for the children to move in with him.

For Johnny, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and universal rights were important to have as a compass in relation to how he should be a parent going forward. Johnny's goal was to offer his children "a safe haven". That was his job no matter what else happened. Johnny believed that if this was in place, the children didn't really need to talk about feelings.

A male family therapist accompanied the family. When I asked, Johnny replied that for him it was important that it was a man and that he could understand what it was like to be a father in this situation. Johnny said he believed there is a fundamental difference between women and men. Johnny found that the family therapist understood his situation much better than a woman could have done.

I asked Johnny how he experienced the interview afterwards. Johnny says he thought it was very positive. He also points out that as a father, he was never offered any conversations where he could talk about how he saw things. Johnny believes that this should be part of the system. He missed that.

Analysis of Johnny's story

I see Johnny as a devoted father who is committed to providing his children with security and stability. He highlights his perspective on fatherhood by referencing the International Convention on the Rights of the Child and using the term "safe haven." This metaphor illustrates his role as a valuable and competent caregiver. The phrase "safe haven" originates from a maritime context, signifying a place of safety and shelter. Kerns et al. (2015) explain that the attachment construct refers to a child's

reliance on an attachment figure as both a safe haven during times of distress and a secure base from which to explore the world.

There is a prevailing public narrative that parents should work together and share responsibilities in the best interests of their child, creating what is often referred to as a "safe haven." This idea aligns with the perspective of Hareide and Moe (2000), who suggest that infants need a "safe base" that is crucial for balancing the need for closeness with the desire to explore their environment. These expectations hold true regardless of whether or not the parents live together.

Family counselling offices provide courses to enhance parental cooperation. One such course, called "Still Parenting," is designed for individuals who wish to foster a constructive parenting partnership with an ex-partner following a breakup. The course emphasizes the importance of demonstrating to children that their parents can collaborate and communicate effectively after the separation, thereby making the children's daily lives as predictable and safe as possible (Bufdir.2024).

I interpret Johnny's identity as a cooperative co-parent when he expresses happiness about having shared custody. He acknowledges that the child wanted to live with him, emphasizing that the child's best interests are more important than the mother's interests.

Johnny appears confident in his ability to care for the children, stating that they preferred to live with him. He refers to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and universal rights as guiding principles. However, I sense that he has fears about losing the children, particularly when he mentions a caseworker who suggested this could happen, which he perceives as a threat. Johnny sees the possibility of Child

Protective Services (CPS) depriving him of his child as not only an insult but also a challenge to his identity as a fully competent parent.

From Johnny's story, I gathered that the CPS tends to focus heavily on the mother while not fully understanding the issue at hand, and they seem sceptical of the father. Johnny believes that female CPS workers should address this matter as part of their professional development. This may be a key reason why he wants to participate in my project; he aims to shed light on this issue.

According to Holstein & Gubrium (2000) and Blix et al. (2013), public narratives are part of the discourse-in-practice, which outlines both possibilities and limitations, as well as the discursive practices of self-constitution. Johnny shares his experiences of being positioned as an ignorant father who does not understand that mothers are the most important figures. However, Johnny rejects this characterization. He also discusses "crazy women" and "women's talk," at times making disparaging remarks about women, which may lead others to perceive him as easily provoked by them. This perspective could, in turn, have affected his relationship with Child Protective Services (CPS).

I observe that Johnny successfully maintains a positive identity and asserts himself through his understanding of the CPS, his children's desire to live with him, his ability to reflect on experiences, and the support he receives from organizations like Reform and the Men's Resource Centre. Johnny is standing firm in his rights as a father, but his negative attitude toward CPS workers may challenge their professionalism. As a result, CPS workers may feel compelled to defend their identities as competent professionals (Frank, 2010) by relying on laws and regulations and focusing on paperwork (Hårtveit and Jensen, 1999).

I witnessed Johnny calmly share his story, infused with a mix of sadness, wonder, sarcasm, and disappointment in his voice. He seemed to have lost much of his respect for the Child Protective Services (CPS), and he was puzzled and almost incredulous that such inexperienced caseworkers could be part of the CPS. He remarked that "these girls didn't realize back then that they lacked sufficient knowledge or competence." Johnny discussed important issues that remain unaddressed, including the neglect of children and fathers who feel unheard, as well as mothers being supported by women who prioritize a belief in women. The next story is somewhat like Johnny's.

5.2.2. Adam. A story of battling

Adam is an ethnic Norwegian man living in a small village, and we met in his hometown. He had many appointments that day, which made it clear that his time was limited. Adam began to share his story about the challenges he faced after a breakup. He and the mother of his children attended mediation meetings to work out arrangements for care and access. However, things escalated when his ex-partner took their children to a shelter following a breakup that included allegations against him.

"This was a few years ago," Adam stated, "and it was utter nonsense. It was simply to destroy me. The accusations came completely out of the blue for me." Before this situation arose, Adam had been the primary caregiver for the children, regularly picking them up from school and their training activities. Afterward, Child Protective Services got involved. Adam expressed his belief that "nobody... absolutely no one could support claims of me being violent."

Adam stated that the mother got nowhere with the allegations, nor did the CPS place any faith in the mother's allegations of violence from the father. The children then stayed 50/50 with their mother and father. Adam expressed that he felt that they received very good follow-up from the CPS during this period. "They sort of looked behind the noise you might say... behind the actions, and it turned out really well".

After a while, the children began to be reluctant to be with their mother. "So that strong connection — they had that for me", said Adam. The children's development continued to develop in the wrong direction and Adam said that "the CPS largely understood why and that there was a need for less contact with the mother". But after a short period, the mother took legal action to restore full custody.

Parallel to this, the family had been reassigned to other CPS workers. Adam was worried that all knowledge of the family's history would disappear and that the case would be reset, and he felt that his suspicions were correct.

When asked, Adam replied that the new CPS workers were women. The previous CPS workers consisted of a woman and a man. I asked if Adam thought it made a difference that there was a man involved. Adam replied,

«Yes...It was a different perspective, a different approach. They didn't take the mothers story at face value. And so yes, yes, I think it's important to have men in CPS to balance the culture. It's not a good thing to be greeted by just female employees in CPS. It's not a good experience to be left with the feeling of being mistrusted. That they're kind of indirectly saying that 'yes, that's your experience sort of, but that's not how it's like'."

The new CPS viewed the situation purely as a custody conflict. "So, I told them this is not a custody conflict, this is about something completely different. The children do not want to be with their mother. Things happen. I don't know what".

Adam believes that the CPS are reluctant to investigate cases where they believe that there is a parental conflict. "It's like in meetings with the CPS, the mother serves up stories about how living with me was horrific. So, they had this as a hypothesis and weren't interested in other hypotheses".

I asked what Adam thinks the CPS's expectations of him as a father were. Adam said that

"They produce documents that say something about me being uncooperative (...) So my thoughts are really about the CPS being dysfunctional when it comes to anything other than these traditional categories like obvious violence and sexual assault. Then it is very easy for the CPS to handle those cases. On the other hand, you have people who lack the ability to nurture close relationships and who do not understand when they are hurting others, it is difficult for the CPS to deal with these cases".

Adam said he was very depressed during the trial and had follow-up from a psychologist. The psychologist became very worried and sent a new referral to the CPS. There were several such referrals during this period, and all were dismissed by the CPS. Adam complained about the dismissals. I asked if he thought the situation would have been different if it was the mother who had reported him to the CPS. Adam said, "I think that as a man, I can't be right in what I say, it can't be the way I say it is".

I summarized my understanding of what Adam was saying: "When the issue becomes more diffuse, it becomes difficult for the CPS to handle, and even more difficult when it is a mother it is about". Adam replied, "Yes, and it's widely agreed that the child needs a mother. I don't know if there are any kind of guidelines that the CPS follow (...) it takes more for the mother to be an unsuitable caregiver than the father (...) I know there's a difference".

Adam refers to the concept of the 'reversal of violence'.

"That it is very easy for female perpetrators of violence to turn the charges against a man, so that the man is left with the accusations and accusations of violence, when in reality it is the mother who has committed the violence, the psychological violence".

At the end of interview, Adam pointed out that he felt that the CPS had been hostile to him. "It's been very aggressive, especially these documents that they're producing". Adam have had psychologists who have looked at the reports written after conversations between Adam and the CPS. "The psychologist called it madness and documented incompetence". Adam had also recorded a conversation between him and the CPS and played it for the psychologist, "who believed that these were women with negative intentions towards men. They have an aggressive way of dealing with me (...) they use suppression techniques (...) which is about them wanting to put me down".

Analysis of Adams story

Adam presents himself as a competent and responsible father. He claims that he has always been the one to take care of the children, picking them up from school, and training activities. Adam notes that the children have consistently preferred to live

with him and appear to thrive better under his care. "If there was talk of a strong attachment, they had that for me," he states. In doing so, Adam is indirectly referencing developmental and attachment theory (Johnsen and Torsteinson, 2012, p. 39) as well as public narratives that suggest "good parents drive their kids to activities" (Aarseth, 2008, p. 10).

Adam says that after the breakup, the parents attended some mediation meetings and were in a process of figuring out care and access, by this Adam presents himself as a co-parent who wanted to get regulated agreements and a good working relationship, and he experienced that this was challenged by the fact that the mother did not accept the terms and went into conflict with Adam.

Adam has experienced that as a father he was mistrusted, as when he states that female CPS workers distrust men, and it takes a lot more before a mother is considered unsuitable as a caregiver.

Frank (2012, p. 33) argues that stories can change people's perceptions and understanding of the world around them. Threats to Adam's identity as a good father were influenced by his perception of the CPS' assumption that this was a child custody case, and the CPS showing favour towards the mother. Adam expresses that the CPS can underestimate men, and he talks about the strain it has been to be met with distrust, and feeling they wanted to belittle him. Adam said, "It's not a good experience to feel mistrusted. It's as if they are indirectly saying, 'Yes, that's your experience, but that's not how it is.'"

I interpret that Adam maintains his self-worth by his awareness of the children's wishes to live with him, in addition to receiving support from lawyers, psychologists and from a support centre for Men.

I interpret Adam's statements as an effort to maintain his self-confidence as a capable father. He expresses concern about negative perceptions of men, particularly when he mentions, "It's not a good thing to meet only female employees in CPS. It's not a good experience to feel mistrusted."

Adam discusses a Child Protective Services (CPS) environment that favors mothers, suggesting that fathers are often viewed as second-class parents or potential perpetrators of violence. He states, "I don't know if there are any guidelines that CPS follows... it takes more for a mother to be deemed an unsuitable caregiver than for a father." Additionally, he points out, "It is very easy for female perpetrators of violence to turn the charges against a man."

With these statements, Adam may risk being perceived as a man who is provoked by women, and this may affect the relationship with the CPS. This is the same mutual distrust and circular understanding that we saw in Johnny's story.

Frank (2010, p. 77) points out that when one person strives to maintain their own position, it is often perceived as a threat to someone else, who then feels the need to defend their own stance. According to Frank (2012, p. 46), Adams story aligns with what Frank describes as a chaos narrative, where one negative event triggers a series of unfortunate events, leading to a person's life feeling as though it is unravelling. Attempts to halt this downward spiral are often in vain.

Adam didn't know until 30 minutes before the interview if he would be able to attend that day because of many appointments. The situation with the parents was ongoing, and I found myself in a situation where Adam's lawyer called during the interview. Adam was alone with the children and had to respond to any contact the children made with him. This meant that Adam got to demonstrate the "live" stress of what

being in his situation was like, in addition to describing what is happening to him as part of the interview. Despite this, I perceived that Adam wanted to tell his story and hoped that it could contribute to better services provided by CPS. I chose to keep the interview short but tried to make sure that Adam felt he had said what he wanted to say.

I believe that my experience from emergency work in the CPS and constantly having to adapt to unexpected events, helped me to be unaffected by unforeseen things that happened during the interview. At the same time, it cannot be ruled out that both Adam and I may have been influenced in relation to how he told his story, and how I listened that day. The next story is Jim's, who seemed to have a different perception of his encounter with CPS

5.2.3. Jim. A story of gratefulness

Jim is an ethnic Norwegian married man in his 40s. He lives with his wife and their children, in a small village. I meet Jim in a pleasant meeting room which was part of a local hotel. Jim started his story with a description of his family, and stories of the children growing up. One of them developed behavioural problems. On one occasion, Jim was accused of violence against his child. Jim was stopped by police on his way to work and asked to come in for questioning. "So that stuff there, it was a horrible experience." During this period, Jim felt frowned upon. "And it was me who got the blame, you know... a circus (...) I understood f_ nothing(...) There were endless interrogations, and then lawyers and stuff were called in."

After the interrogations, the police decided that it was a matter for the CPS rather than the police. Jim said, "Of course I am very happy, because we have received

fantastic help from the CPS (...) because with my child, there has only been an increasing need for help, support and protection”.

Due to major care tasks, the parents were granted some respite care but felt very alone. By having contact with the CPS, they “got to talk to someone who understood what we were talking about”. Jim says that “it was worth its weight in gold. Me and my wife talked about it ahead of meeting you, that we... We agree on that, and I've said that to those involved, that we've really appreciated that and received good help”.

I asked if Jim have had met any male CPS workers? Jim said they had contact with some male CPS workers and I asked if it was different for him as a father to talk to a man. Jim replied, “No... No, I don't think so”. This was after his child had an outburst of anger that meant Jim had to physically stop the child. Jim and his wife began to think they could not cope with having the child living at home and applied for the child to be admitted as an inpatient for psychiatric care and assessment. “But it's... this is difficult. There's a lot of emotion involved when you get to that point and are thinking of going that far”.

Following this decision, the parents were summoned to another meeting with the CPS. It turned out that the child had been reported for sexually assaulting other children. Jim says he was stupefied and speechless when he got the news. In the CPS office there was one male and one adult female CPS worker of approximately 40 years. Jim describes her as “very clever.” The incident in which the child was suspected of abuse had consequences for the entire family. Among other things, they experienced that neighbours shut them out.

Jim said that they had mostly talked to CPS workers who were quite mature. Except for the one they currently have, who is young and inexperienced. "She's fine, but it's kind of like... I don't know what to say... I don't know what to call it ...".

The child ended up being taken into care. A tough period again followed for the family, and his wife was badly affected during this period.

"I've handled it much better than her (...) I've said that to my wife several times... that I am much better at sorting the thoughts. You can't drag all the shit going on... so to speak. Dragging it back home with you and churning it over is no good. It's not good for the head, that is. It's not good for the mind".

Jim says that he finds that they are treated as outcasts by neighbours. They have lost much of their social network, but their network of professional helpers, including the CPS have been an important support in the situation. They have had many long conversations with support persons in their network of helpers. "And we haven't had anyone else to talk to." Jim recounts conversations with a woman from the support system "she's amazing".

I asked if they felt that they had been met differently as mother and father? Jim says he doesn't feel this because his wife is very organized.

"So there's 'Ordnung must sein' (...) she has an insane order in everything. She's systematic about everything. So that's why we have binders neatly sorted by date and everything, so we have all the documentation on everything. I lean on her a bit because I don't have to search for what I need. And we work well together. And obviously things like that, and we've been to all the meetings together the whole time(...) yes everyone... always... always (...) So, in a way, we have an agenda you might say. At least if it's a multi-

agency meeting. Then we take notes a little bit differently, and then we ask (participants from agencies) and then we fill in, and then there's a good mix out of it".

Jim answers questions about how they have experienced the support from CPS during the period.

"They've been very supportive(...) It's been written about in the media (...)both positively and negatively. The only thing I've experienced is that no one knows what's going on (...) So what comes out in the media is one thousandth. And then it kind of becomes populist (...) so I don't relate to that at all (...) So in a way, I think if we hadn't had this support system, I don't know how we would have handled it".

Jim talks about the need for stability in the staff at the CPS. On one occasion they had a case officer who had a surname that could lead to disqualification. This led them to choose someone who was "more or less newly qualified and it has worked fine (...) but it might have been okay if it was someone else".

Jim tells of a female child welfare worker who was involved with the child being placed in appropriate care. She was described as "very straightforward and clear (...)" And then in the autumn suddenly she had left. And we didn't get any notification, not a word that she had left. She was over 60 years old and with a lot of experience. A lawyer involved in the case had said: 'That lady was superefficient. There aren't many like her in the CPS'. According to Jim "That woman was direct and could jump over hurdles. She sorts of fixed things She said she might have gone a little beyond her mandate, but she got things done". Jim continued to talk about this woman:

"And the fact that she pulled out, there were certainly natural reasons for it. But we wanted to at least thank her for the job she had done, because we were getting on well with her. But the ending it seems it could have been more (...) Because there are things you want to say or (...) it's kind of like that to just cut off and not... It would have been nice to have the last half hour to put it that way (...) She disappeared, and we are trying to find out from the CPS what the reason was. No, she was replaced, she had been moved or whatever the heck she was. Whether this was true or not I have no idea, whether something had happened... I don't know. We all had a civil tone, got on well. No, I've never gotten feedback on that, and I thought that was a bit badly handled".

Jim points out that there's been an extreme turnover of personnel in the CPS

"And it's been extremely unfortunate in a way. You must go into everything again It's sort of like starting from scratch with the same story from one to the other to the fourth and the tenth (...) it shouldn't be that way. Because it's a little unfortunate you might say, because it's a vulnerable situation. Things are hard and can be... and I think that's unfortunate».

Analysis of Jim's story

Jim begins by describing his family, and I notice that he lights up when he talks about them. It seems that being a father is a significant part of his identity; he is deeply fond of his family and strongly committed to caring for them. He shares the challenging situations they face, as well as the difficult emotions that can arise, such as when his child was placed in a psychiatric institution.

Furthermore, it is a story of two parents cooperating and supporting each other both emotionally and practically in times of adversity. Both Jim's description of himself as a father and as part of a wider care system evoke associations with the marriage vow "For better or for worse." Jim's story describes what this looks like in practice.

My impression is that Jim perceives that the CPS is there to support and provide protection, and they are generally up to the task. Jim finds that the CPS treat mothers and fathers equally. If there is any hint of criticism in the story, Jim tells it with caution and in a considerate manner. The young caseworker is described as "straightforward, but...". Jim gives the impression that he works well with the CPS. Jim says instability and a lot of staff turnover is unfortunate, and CPS workers can leave suddenly and without explanation. This part of the story dealt with an experience of positive cooperation, but which was ended too abruptly, and Jim had some unfinished business.

This may impact Jim's identity as a valuable co-partner with the CPS. I believe Jim emphasizes the importance of professional relationships and how crucial it is for CPS workers to be mindful of how they begin, maintain, and end these relationships. He notes, "It's a little unfortunate, you might say, because it's a vulnerable situation. Things can be challenging, and I think that's unfortunate."

Jim's story isn't about him being judged differently than the mother. This may be a reality, while the fact that the parents live together and function as a team may mean that this has not been a relevant issue. Jim is holding his own by telling me about support from good helpers and the friendship and love between Jim and his wife, and their supporting each other in tough situations. This may at the same time protect him from discrimination as a father. They fulfil each other as parents. As a

typology Jim's story is a "quest" narrative. They are narratives about how a person encounters a sequence of obstacles and gains wisdom and structure through the process of overcoming these (Frye, 1957 in Frank 2012, p.47).

Jim gives a positive picture of how he perceives himself and his contact with the CPS, but Oscar's contact with the CPS, which is discussed below, is somewhat more complex.

5.2.4. Oscar. A story of ambivalence.

Oscar is an ethnic Norwegian man. He starts to tell me that he has a history of heavy substance abuse. This has led to contact with drug using communities and the prison service. In one drug community he met a woman, and they had a romantic relationship that resulted in a pregnancy. When Oscar learned of this pregnancy, he was in prison. However, they decided to keep the child "because at that time I said we'll go for this. We'll make an honest attempt to make this work".

The couple received close follow-up by substance abuse services, the health service, and the CPS in connection with pregnancy and childbirth. The prison service was supportive, so that Oscar could attend both ultrasound appointments and childbirth. The mother had complications after the birth, so Oscar was alone with the child for a few hours. Oscar said "I remember cutting the umbilical cord, but I didn't get that wonderful feeling that everyone talks about. Then I became very scared and sad and insecure (...) So, when I got the baby in my arms, a lot happened in the first four or five hours".

The mother and child were followed up closely at a parent/child centre. Oscar received a court ruling that he could be with them at the parent/child centre during his detention. Oscar tells about a prison employee who was present in a meeting

with the CPS at the time. "He presented me in an incredibly good and nice way: Here is Oscar and he is a good man, a great guy and he's doing what he can to straighten out his life ". Oscar continued,

"The baby was no more than 3-4 months old at the time and needed a diaper change during the meeting. So, I changed the diaper perfectly and impressed the hell out of everyone there, including the two female CPS workers. I came to the meeting wearing sweatpants and a hoodie and looked pretty rough. But I decided that I'm not going to fight the CPS. I'm going to cooperate and do everything they ask for, whether I understand it or not, for the child to have a good life. For this to go well, I've never said no to anything, and I've asked for help too. I wanted parental guidance. I wanted to know the next step. What is the child trying to tell me? What does the child want me to do?".

After a period, Oscar was informed that the follow up from the CPS would be terminated, after both him and mother had shown clean tests and a stable lifestyle over time. "It was kind of scary to get that phone call then. No one was keeping an eye on me anymore". Oscar says he was constantly exposed to temptation. Despite this, Oscar remained drug-free and got a new partner who also had a drug-free and stable lifestyle. In addition, Oscar got a job at a health institution.

After some time, Oscar discovered that the mother of his child was starting to use drugs again. This led Oscar to contact the CPS with concerns about the mother's substance use. Oscar wanted the child to live with him.

Oscar said that it has felt like a struggle to get the CPS to take the father's concerns seriously. Despite repeated reports of concern about the mother, the child has continued to live with her. In addition to contact with the CPS, Oscar has been in

contact with a male therapist at a Family Counselling Office in relation to parental cooperation. "The family therapist understood me" Oscar says.

Some weeks ago, the child moved into Oscar's home, at the child's own request.

Oscar's goal is to share custody when the mother has shown that she is stable for a period. Oscar says that he has experienced the CPS as a support.

"But to get a decision to move the child from the mother to me was a nightmare. Common sense is absent, it's f__ tragic. Despite several reports of concern from different agencies, the CPS is completely paralyzed when it comes to moving childcare from the mother to the father... I've cried so many times that they can't (...) If the situation had been reversed and it was me as a father who had received many reports of concern that concerned me, I would have been denied all contact with the child. Case closed".

Oscar continued "It's tragic when it's so blatantly obvious what the situation is. I would have been denied all contact with the child. At best I would have had supervised contact on the condition of clean urine samples in advance".

The CPS believes that Oscar is well-functioning so that he compensates for the mother's deficiencies. Oscar says that this just makes his situation more difficult.

"I'm very happy that I'm well-functioning, and my partner is a unique person who has made this possible. But I am so exhausted of fighting year after year, day in and day out". Oscar said that he was on sick leave because of the stress this has caused, but at the same time believes that he has been very cooperative and understanding.

Oscar has met many male CPS workers but had a female CPS worker for a period.

"She wrote in her report that I left the conversation in anger. But I was at most

frustrated, and I've sat and cried many tears. I have generally a very good chemistry with most people. But I find it difficult to work with this one CPS worker".

In relation to what Oscar thinks the CPS expects of him as a father, he says: "Well, they expect me to put the child first, support its needs and give the child a safe and good upbringing". Oscar believes that the CPS expects the same from him as from the mother.

After the child moved to the father on his own initiative, the CPS supported Oscar in having the child with him and asked if he wanted guidance. "But it's not really guidance I'm looking for. I'm looking for confirmation that the things I'm doing are right". Oscar feels that he and his partner are doing what is right for the child. As a father, Oscar believes he can offer; "Security and understanding towards other people, good routines and I can support and guide the child on his choices and stand by his side".

Oscar uses his past to talk to his child about not being judgmental of others. He believes that he is incredibly lucky not to have been more harmed by the life he has lived. Oscar believes that this has to do with his own qualities and having supportive people around him.

Oscar talked more about the contact with the CPS and the decisions they are making now.

"What annoys me, or amazes me, is that (two male CPS workers) ... I don't even think they have children themselves, then they're going to sit there and fight two very intense drug addicts, who have been in the system for a long time. So, I'm kind of distraught then".

Oscar suggests that it's not so much about gender, but about experience. The most experienced should have worked in front-line services, he believes. Oscar says he has thought about the difference between male and female CPS workers,

" They are all caring people who work in these professions, and they want the best interests of the child, there's no doubt about it. But then they have some laws and regulations that they must comply with, and then they have some messages from their supervisor or department head that they must deal with. But what I was thinking about... (The male family therapist) at the Family Counselling Office. He has been there many years and is experienced and has worked in several roles. He understood me and he comforted me when I needed it and kicked my backside when I needed it. More importantly, he didn't beat around the bush. He said, 'Oscar, now this is what you must do!'"

Oscar believes that women in care professions become mothers.

"Because they have maternal instincts, right. It's just something that happens to you. So, I feel like (male family therapist) with his many years of experience. He dares to be honest with me, and straight forward. But many male contact persons in child welfare they are quite recent graduates. And they have female colleagues, female supervisors. So, before they have gathered the experience they need, they have the same approach as their female colleagues. The same start of the phone call, the same everything. But when they have gained the experience and are confident of themselves, then the man comes out".

At the end of the interview, Oscar says that he believes that CPS workers should be more concise and say things bluntly. "We can help you with this, we can't help with

that. You must do this yourself, or you must do that yourself and that's it". Oscar goes on to say that

"The child is my reward. It has seen and experienced more than enough bad things, so it deserves the best. I have two things; I have my child and then I have my job and that's where my duties lie. And that's why it hurts when I feel like the CPS can't do their duty".

Analysis of Oscars story

I perceive Oscar as a warm and caring father who provides both practical and emotional support for his child. He expresses this when he asks, "I want to know what the child is trying to tell me." Oscar also states, "I can offer security and understanding to others, establish good routines, and support the child in his choices while standing by his side."

Through these statements, Oscar indirectly references elements of attachment theory and emphasizes the importance of addressing the child's physical and psychological needs. His approach aligns with concepts such as mentalization, empathy, and daily routines. This perspective supports Hareide and Moes' (2000, p. 36) assertion that empathy is a crucial prerequisite for the care necessary for children's development.

I recognize the concepts from the CPS, which Oscar may have adopted after his interactions with them. Oscar wants to embrace these principles to affirm his identity as a good father. This aligns with the statement by Hareide and Moe (2000) that an infant needs a "safe base." This safe base is crucial for balancing the need for closeness with the desire to explore the environment.

A threat to this identity as a father may be when Oscar experiences not being taken seriously by the CPS and is misperceived as angry when he is in despair. I perceive that Oscar also presents himself as a father who seeks cooperation with his child's mother and that the cooperation between the parents had previously worked well but became difficult when the mother began to use drugs and Oscar sent reports of concern to the CPS.

Oscar conveys that he appreciates the support from Child Protective Services (CPS), but he becomes frustrated when he perceives that they prioritize mothers over fathers and are often sceptical of fathers' concerns. This frustration arises when the CPS does not take his reports about the mother's substance use seriously. Oscar has noted that CPS discussions often portray drug addicts as manipulative, particularly after experiencing severe substance abuse. He expresses this by saying, "then they're going to have to contend with two very intense drug addicts who have been in the system for a long time."

The CPS' low expectations of fathers may be evident in the story when Oscar changed the nappy and he "impressed the hell out of everyone there". Oscar also believes that the CPS can be naïve and be manipulated by experienced drug addicts. By presenting himself as a former substance abuser, Oscar may risk being perceived as particularly vulnerable to falling back into substance use. People who don't believe in recovery, may be sceptical to acknowledge Oscar's story. Oscar has a familiarity with a tough environment. He is aware that CPS do not have the same knowledge, while at the same time safeguarding children who grow up and live in such environments. I perceive that Oscar considers the CPS' naivety in relation to both substance use and mothers' ability to care as potentially harmful and represents

a blind spot and a weakness in the competence of CPS workers. This is partly the same as Johnny's and Adam's experiences.

My impression was that Oscar manages to hold his own through the love, generosity, and help from supportive persons. Oscar's story gave me an understanding that he is capable to take care of the child, the mother and himself in a demanding situation and have enough energy to be able to fight a powerful system. At the end, however, Oscar tells how demanding the situation has been, when he said he was on sick leave due to stress. The last story is about Ali, which is a story about patience.

5.2.5. Ali. A story of patience

Ali comes originally from a country in the Middle East but has lived many years in Norway. He lives in a relatively large city in Norway, and I met him there in a public office. Ali was the only participant in the study to relate about a childhood lived in another country. He said that he grew up as one of several siblings, and of his parents he says, "My mother was very bossy, while my father was weak, but only because he loved his family".

Ali lost his mother early and he and his siblings grew up with their father. Ali expresses that this went well. Ali said there are a lot of men who drink and go out and don't care about their family. "But my father was the best father in the world. I was very young when my mother died, and my father did everything." Ali believes that a good father is a good father, regardless of where in the world they live.

I asked if his father wanted to get married again. Ali replied that he didn't. "No, a new wife can never take mother's place. In the Middle East – if you get a new wife, you get an abuser for your child". He goes on to say that women have a lot of emotions.

“Women are the boss in my country 90% of the time. Men are afraid of women. You Norwegians just don't get it. You think ‘poor thing, she's oppressed’, but that's not true. They're bosses — especially at home”. Ali believes that women are mentally strong and can punish men if they wish. He answers in the affirmative when asked if his own father is a model for how to be a good father.

Ali had a child after a short-term relationship in another country. Ali expresses that he has followed up the child to the best of his ability while living abroad, and says that he not only loves his child, but he also has a duty. “You can't just make children and walk away from them”.

There were some difficult negotiations with the mother, before Ali had the child moved to him in Norway. After the child moved in with the father, the child fared gradually better, but Ali felt that he needed respite care. Ali says he never had problems with the child, but he is a single father and needed respite care because he himself had limitations in terms of health, and the child had major challenges after being exposed to trauma when living with his mother abroad.

Ali was in contact with school staff and the family counsellor, and they approached the CPS to ask for respite care for the father. Ali says that when CPS contacted him, they started by taking the child to a single room for interviewing, despite the child having a known history of trauma. Furthermore, a psychologist had previously told Ali that the father should always be present in this kind of conversation, because such children are deeply insecure and will feel safer if the father is present.

“I tried to joke and smile, but they went through everything, they wanted to talk about everything except what I was there for, they went through my life, my health (...) I told CPS that if they had a better option than me, they could take

the child. It is not my property; I just want the child to have the best life possible".

Ali has an opinion that there is favouritism operating in the CPS. "You go to a caseworker, and if she likes you then you get a lot". Ali goes on to say that "today you lose human contact with people, those who are doing things and stuff. They only see papers; they don't see you as a human being".

Despite the extensive investigation, the CPS nevertheless considered that respite care was not necessary and believed that Ali was a good father. "But I said, I don't have any friends and family here. I'm alone with a child who has a lot of challenges, who has nightmares, has trauma and has been through a lot".

Ali said he tried not to take things personally. There were a lot of phone calls between Ali and the CPS, and Ali experienced at one point that he was subjected to "rudeness" from the CPS worker.

Along the way, the CPS wanted to talk to the mother, even though she was in another country. Ali was initially opposed to this, believing that this was an excessive degree of investigation for a straightforward application for respite. Ali believes that "if it had been his mother, it would have gone through right away". He says he is convinced that being a father affected the CPS's time spent. Ali goes on to say that "it's common for people to be sceptical of me, so that's fine (...) Some government offices, I'll tell you, that I go there and argue a case and they say — 'no you know what, I have bad experience with people like you'. Yes, some can be so rude". Ali said it could be a combination of him being a man and from the Middle East.

"A lot of people will drive you until you explode. They're looking at you...

'You're stupid, you misunderstood'. I just took it easy. They sort of waited for

me to explode. I just smiled. Many will make you angry for testing your limit. But I can't say that what I experienced with them is something every man experiences. Because it was someone special. (...) I never yell, I never get angry, I don't show any emotion".

Eventually, Ali got a new CPS worker. "And she was understanding. She was more professional, more factual. And went more into the matter". Ali experienced getting the help he had asked for and that respite care was put in place.

Now Ali has asked the CPS to find another family, a permanent foster home for the child. "The child also misses a female, a mother," says Ali. The CPS is in the process of finding such a family, and Ali thinks this can go smoothly: "The child is confident in me, and confident in the system. I've taught my child to be open to people". Ali wants his child to experience Norwegian life. Therefore, he wants the child to be connected to a Norwegian family. "If the family has a holiday cabin, that would be great".

I ask if Ali has met any male caseworkers, and Ali answered that he hasn't. Ali thinks that it would have been a different experience to be met by a man in the CPS. Ali replies: "At least it wouldn't have been the same problem. Maybe it would have been something else, but it wouldn't have been the same. Maybe he hadn't done the same thing they did, just said 'we think you'll make it with your child'".

Ali says he doesn't think there would be enough capacity if they were to have males for men and females for women. "And at the same time when there are such matters... I don't really mind if I'm served by a woman or a man, because I've had positive experiences with women." Ali describes the caseworker he is in contact with now. "Now I have a young girl. She's efficient, she works well. She doesn't do anything extra than the most important thing she's supposed to do—and she does it".

I ask if Ali thinks that the CPS will more easily take the side of mothers in a conflict and listen more to them. Ali believes that they will.

"Because women are a little weaker physically. That's why they get more sympathy. I think women are much stronger than us too. Poor men too. I'll tell you that women know how to punish a man psychologically. Much more than a man can punish them. For example, women may act angry, but they're not really angry. A woman can be angry here (pointing his head) but here... (Pointing at his heart and shaking his head) but a man can get angry (Ali shows his muscles and growls)".

Ali says that there should preferably be female CPS workers allocated to women.

"Because a man can also take the woman's side more if it's a male caseworker. She is more likely to influence a man than to influence a woman. It's not necessarily that it's in favour of man. It may be the opposite, in favour of the woman. I know women can have the caseworker on their side more easily if it's a man. I don't know if anyone has seen it. I think it's important to tell the men that women are more likely to brainwash a man".

Analysis of Ali's story

My impression from Ali's story is that Ali presents himself as a father who takes responsibility and brings his child to live with him when the mother is unable to look after him. After the child has come to Ali, he 'surrenders' him to give the child the best possible upbringing. Ali compares himself to fathers who don't care about their children. Protecting and not drinking alcohol are important parenting qualities, according to Ali.

Ali discusses his commitment, which drove him to bring his child to Norway. This perception of himself as a responsible father is a consistent theme throughout his life story. He also conveys a sense of identity as a mentally strong man, believing that showing emotion could be viewed as a sign of weakness. I assume that this mindset may hinder him in an emotion-focused child protective services context (Bjerke 2024).

My understanding is that Ali does not expect the child's mother to assist with anything related to the child, but he still wants someone to share the responsibility with him. He has applied for respite care, and, in the future, he hopes to find a Norwegian foster home that also has a woman involved. I was surprised by this admission. Gradually, I realized that my perspective is shaped by an individualistic culture and a Western mindset. My conception of family was quite narrow, as I considered it to consist solely of parents who bear total responsibility for the care of their children. Ali had probably grown up in a collectivist society, his family and extended family are considered co-responsible for the care of the child and child-rearing. Based on this view, it is not as alien to let the child grow up with someone else. In societies where extended families are common or group cohesion is particularly strong, more adults than just the biological parents may regard the young as the children of the family, tribe, or group (Bunkholdt and Kvaran, 2015). For Ali, handing over responsibility to others was a sign of good parenting.

Voluntarily handing over a child to someone else for the purpose of providing a better life may contradict a prevailing narrative in the Western world. This narrative, influenced by attachment theory, suggests that biological parents are the most important figures in a child's life and emphasizes the significance of the nuclear family (NDLA 2021).

This narrative may in some situations make it difficult for parents who see that they are not up to the task, and lead to children living too long in neglect situations.

Ali presents himself as a patient and caring man, who is badly treated as middle eastern immigrant Norway, and as a single father. Ali also talks about women who want to deceive men and who are stronger than them psychologically. This may have to do with his own experiences but may have an impact on how Ali meets female CPS workers, and the relationship he develops with them - like Johnny and Adam. I perceive that Ali is holding his own by being highly regulated and maintaining a sense of dignity and talks about supporters he has met.

5.3. Summary

The fathers share their experiences with Child Protective Services (CPS) through their stories. They reflect on their identities as fathers and how CPS attitudes towards them can jeopardize this experience. Additionally, they discuss how they strive to maintain their self-esteem and pride as responsible fathers while also being valuable collaborators with professional workers.

My findings suggest that some fathers have experienced that female CPS workers tend to empathize more with mothers and take fathers less seriously, and that female CPS workers can be hostile to fathers. One father had the view that when men start in CPS, they are trained by women and adopt feminine forms of communication.

Fathers assume that the gender of the CPS worker might not always be the most important factor for the fathers in feeling that the CPS worker understood them and was sympathetic to them. The CPS worker's age and experience are also important factors in the service they receive.

Some fathers think that it is not just any form of experience that is important. CPS workers get different experiences from the different places they work. One father said that it is difficult to hand over the responsibility to someone else, while another talked about allowing the children to grow up in a foster family can be an act of care

Four fathers say that they seek and desire good cooperation with the mothers, while at the same time, they are ready to follow up their children when the mother for various reasons cannot take care of her part of the parenting. Some fathers have experienced that in the case of parental conflicts where cooperation does not work as expected, there is a tendency among the CPS workers to support the mothers.

The fathers in my sample gave the impression that they may fight against CPS discourses about fathers as second-class parents, believe that female CPS workers distrust men, and believe that it takes more before the mother is seen by the CPS as an unsuitable caregiver.

Four fathers experienced that the CPS has strategies for keeping fathers at a distance. The fathers talk about records and documents that they do not relate to, being talked to in condescending ways and CPS workers investigating their case far more deeply than is necessary. Some fathers experience CPS workers as being too young and inexperienced and who do not understand what is challenging for the child.

The next chapter contains a summary of the findings from the focus group interviews with the CPS workers and the from

6.0. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

My main research question is: How does the gender distribution within the child protection service in Norway reflect Norwegian ideologies about gender? In the introduction, I noted that Norway is widely regarded as a world leader in gender equality (WEF, 2023). Additionally, there has long been a gender equality policy goal to ensure that women have opportunities to participate in the workforce. The Men's Committee emphasizes the need for better arrangements to give men equal opportunities as caregivers, even following a breakup (NOU 2024, p. 9). According to the Child Welfare Act § 1-9, the Child Welfare Service must cooperate, as much as possible, with both children and parents, treating them with respect. Furthermore, child welfare services must facilitate the involvement of the child's family and support network.

This reflects aspects of Norwegian ideology regarding gender, which served as the foundation for my doctoral project. How is this ideology manifested in Child Protection Services? Are fathers and mothers treated equally? Additionally, will the significant proportion of female CPS employees influence the relationship with fathers?

The current research is based on a systemic and social constructionist understanding, which implies that my findings must be seen in the context of what happened in the interviews and in the relationship and communication between myself and the participants. I am a mature white woman and an experienced child welfare worker, like the women in the focus group. This background may have led me to quickly understand their perspectives, potentially limiting my openness to alternative viewpoints during the interviews. In my interviews with fathers, I found it

challenging to differentiate my role as a family therapist from that of a researcher. Some of the guiding questions I posed may have been influenced by my own experiences, which I was attempting to validate. It was enlightening when participant provided answers that contradicted my assumptions; for instance, when I asked Ali if he thought it would make a difference to meet with a male case worker, he responded that he did not believe it would. Additionally, my role as a researcher, rather than a therapist in this context, may have created uncertainty for the participants, leaving them unsure about what they could share.

According to Krause (2012, p.13), it may be challenging to become aware of how our ideas, attitudes, knowledge about the world, relationships, bodies, personhood, and subjectivity are socially constructed. The participants and my own interpretations and assumptions are influenced by the culture and the society in which we live. With this as a backdrop, I present seven main findings from my study, which I found relevant according to perceptions of fathers and the father's experiences of meeting the CPS. These findings present ideas and attitudes among the CPS workers and the fathers, which may be a challenge in their interaction.

1. Fathers and CPS workers assumed that the dominance of female CPS workers may lead to a challenge to involve the fathers, and it may be a benefit to meet male CPS workers. Four fathers in my study said that they perceive men as more precise and more determined than women, a trait they appreciate. The large proportion of women working in the child welfare service can lead to a "feminization" of the language, which makes communication between the child welfare workers and the fathers more demanding than between the child welfare service and the mothers.

2. Fathers and CPS workers believed that CPS worker's age and experience are as important as gender. The five fathers in my project stated that CPS workers' age and experience are important factors in the service they receive. Four fathers in my sample experienced that CPS workers are too young and inexperienced and do not understand what is challenging for the child. Female CPS workers experience getting more respect as they become older.

3. Both male and female CPS workers expressed lower expectations of fathers regarding emotional care and organizing skills. They assume mothers may be better at mentalizing, comforting, taking responsibility, following up on appointments, and taking care of emotional care. Both male and female CPS workers expressed discourses about fathers' liking to be active and playing. Male CPS workers assumed that fathers are better at playing than organizing. Among the fathers in my sample, their unique ability to play and be active was not mentioned. This suggests that both male and female child protection workers prioritize mothers' parental rights over fathers' rights when it becomes necessary to compare the two parents. Furthermore, achieving a more balanced gender representation among child welfare workers may not necessarily change this tendency. This was a concern in my first sub research questions.

4. Male CPS workers believed fathers may lack the language of care and proper learning arenas. Some male CPS workers in my project assumed that fathers meeting with female CPS workers may lead to fathers finding themselves in an arena where they are falling short in conversations with someone who has good language to talk about feelings. Both male and female CPS workers believed that care capacity can be learned if the fathers gain confidence and find themselves in the right learning arenas.

5. Both male and female CPS workers expressed a desire and an obligation to involve the fathers. Some female CPS workers believed that mothers struggle to delegate caregiving responsibilities to fathers. However, if mothers permitted them to be involved, fathers could gain valuable experience.

6. Different perceptions of anger existed among male and female CPS workers. My study suggests that CPS workers may assume that men are often trained not to cry, and women are raised so they must not be angry. Some female CPS workers perceive anger as a secondary emotion, and sadness may be the primary emotion. Male CPS workers may feel more comfortable meeting angry fathers and find it easier to relate to angry men than angry women. This can also be a challenge as there are most women employed in the child welfare service.

7. Four fathers in my study shared their experiences of how Child Protection Services employed strategies that kept them at a distance. Ali's story highlighted culture and race as important factors influencing how he was treated. The fathers believed they are just as competent as the mothers, but they have experienced being offered a subject position as second-hand parents. Still, they manage to maintain their self-esteem as proud, responsible fathers through the ability to reflect on what is happening and through the good support of others in private and public networks.

I will discuss these constructions in the upcoming chapter.

7.0. DISCUSSION

7.1. Introduction

My study is concerned with the gender distribution in the CPS in Norway and whether this reflects the accepted ideology of gender equality in Norway. I am particularly interested in how the large proportion of women employed in CPS affects discourses about fathers and the fathers' experiences. My constructions and categorizations are based on discourses among 10 child welfare workers and stories from 5 fathers, and this has been analysed at a given place and time, and in relation to earlier research and theory that has been selected by me.

Studies suggest that interventions from the CPS have the most significant effect when fathers are involved and that the father's involvement is significant for the mother's care of the children (Guterman et al.2009; Lee et al. 2009;Storhaug 2015, p.92). Despite these findings, studies like Angel (2007) and Storhaug (2015) have revealed that a gendered understanding of parenthood is conveyed among CPS workers, who have most contact with mothers and consider her as the most important parent. This is consistent with my constructions from the focus groups for CPS workers, where mothers are regarded as the most competent and reliable parent. At the same time, some of the fathers I interviewed experienced that the CPS treated them as second-class parents.

Some of this may be due to the large proportion of women employed in the CPS service, and this was my main reason for carrying out this study. I found limited research on how the CPS worker gender might affect the service and meetings with families. I aim to share knowledge that may contribute to developing the child welfare system in Norway, and I refer to Frank's (2012) statement that the best way to

change the world may be to describe it. My thesis contains a description of some perceptions and experiences that exist among CPS workers and fathers in Norway in 2022.

My research sub-questions are: Does the large proportion of female CPS workers affect the protection of mothers' parental rights? What are the perceptions of fathers in the CPS? How do fathers perceive contact with the CPS? The discussion will be organised under these themes.

7.2. Does the large proportion of women in CPS affect the protection of mothers' parental rights?

Based on my participants feedback, certain aspects of work in child welfare may be influenced by gender, particularly in relation to communication and emotional expression. This can impact how CPS workers interact with parents. Additionally, the parental rights of mothers are accompanied by responsibilities and expectations. Ultimately, the focus is on the rights of the child.

According to the Act Relating to Children and Parents, Chapter 5, Section 42, a child has the right to maintain a relationship with both parents, even if they live apart. Parents share a mutual responsibility to uphold this right, and the child is entitled to care and consideration from those who hold parental responsibility.

I wanted to research if a female-dominated child welfare service affected how the fathers were met. Some statements among the participants indicated that female CPS workers may find it easier to relate to mothers and their approach to caregiving and communication. As a result, these CPS workers might prioritise safeguarding mothers' rights to take care of their children, at the same time leading them to expect mothers to take on a greater responsibility for their children's well-being.

My own personal attitudes may have influenced how I asked the questions and how I interpreted the answers. One example is when I asked Ali whether his father had remarried after his mother's death. This question may stem from a personal assumption that children need a mother figure.

There are fathers in my study who gave the impression that female CPS workers pay attention to mothers and may be hostile to fathers. Still, age and experience may seem more important than gender. This is also a theme in both focus groups. In the current study, differences between male and female CPS workers were most remarkable regarding perceptions of anger. This section discusses these issues in more detail.

Gendered communication

One of the constructions that emerged among my participants was that there were different ways of communicating for men and women. Parents in Norway in 2022 may be expected to have a language to talk about feelings, as well as the ability to mentalise, i.e., to take the child's perspective. The idea that women and mothers were better at mentalizing than men and fathers emerged in both focus groups. This is also addressed by Hareide and Moe (2000, p. 36), who outline several prerequisites for effective caregiving, one of which is empathy. A male child protective services (CPS) worker in the focus group for the current project mentioned, "I've seen it with some of those foster fathers when we talk about shame, sadness, and so on—they lack the words." This sentiment was shared by both male and female CPS workers, suggesting that it could lead to an underestimation of fathers' capabilities as caregivers.

Supporting this view, a survey by Sentio includes a comment from a female CPS worker who notes that they often face the issue of fathers lacking the emotional language that meets CPS standards. She observes that mothers, in contrast, tend to have a more similar emotional vocabulary to the workers, making it easier to communicate with them about their children (Sentio 2018a, p. 40).

The predominance of women in Child Protective Services (CPS) may lead to mothers being more readily listened to and understood. This dynamic could create the impression that mothers are more competent parents. As a result, mothers' parental rights and obligations may be prioritized and protected more than those of fathers.

A historical discourse was highlighted in the male focus group, where showing and talking about emotions could be interpreted as a modern phenomenon. Men of the "old school" aroused sympathy among the male CPS workers and were considered difficult to modernise. This understanding may lead to lower expectations of fathers the older they are and to an increase in the expectations of mothers. Another relevant statement is when Ali says he doesn't show emotion. To show emotions may be to present oneself as vulnerable. According to Horbowitz (2009), it has been proven that our culture can influence the construction and perception of emotions. Ali and others from different cultural backgrounds may face additional challenges related to language. They might not have adequate Norwegian language skills, particularly when it comes to expressing emotions. Furthermore, Ali may also encounter difficulties associated with societal expectations of masculinity.

The fathers, Adam and Johnny, talked about language, Johnny, in terms of how some female CPS workers seem to tolerate and listen to almost anything from

mothers. They had long conversations with his children's mother without realising that she was angry and beyond regulation. Adam talked about language in relation to how female caseworkers formulate themselves in writing. In the first story, language is used to create dialogue and keeping a good relation in a demanding situation. The second example illustrates how language serves as power, as discussed by Foucault (1972 in Lorås and Ness 2019, p.80) and can be employed to oppress individuals.

Language was also a topic in the female focus group. It was noted that, in a purely male parental guidance group, male clients tended to speak more. Individuals may become silent when they feel unsafe or incompetent in a particular area. This uncertainty clearly impacted the Norwegian author Karl Ove Knausgård during his encounter with Child Protective Services (CPS). Knausgård (2020) says in his biography "I was nervous, groping for the words, finding what I said inadequate and revealing,

All the fathers I interviewed and participants in the Focus Group for male CPS workers expressed enthusiasm for clear and concise speech, which was associated with men and masculine language. This is consistent with The Norwegian linguist Uris (2008 in Aksnes 2022) statements that women and men have different goals regarding conversation. Women tend to prioritise equality and community in their conversations and seek to affirm these values. In contrast, men often focus more on asserting themselves and reinforcing their own positions. This dynamic suggests that dialogue between female caseworkers and fathers can be challenging, especially in high-pressure situations. Female CPS workers hold a position of authority, which can lead to tensions. Women may feel provoked when they perceive men trying to assert control, while men may become frustrated with women who communicate unclearly.

Social constructionism assumes that humans construct their reality primarily through linguistic interactions with other people (Burck 2005, p.237). These assumptions emerged in the focus group for male CPS workers in my study, where some suggested that women are more social and have a larger network of people concerned with the same topic, thus having access to more knowledge and acquiring appropriate language.

According to one male CPS worker in my study, meeting with female CPS workers may lead to fathers finding themselves in an arena where they are falling short in conversations with someone who can speak fluently about feelings and emotions. Furthermore, he believes that it can be good for fathers to meet a male CPS worker with a similar background. At the same time Oscar was concerned about our ability to adapt to our surroundings. He believed that when men are employed in child protective services (CPS), they tend to adopt a more feminine style of communication and that it can take time for their original masculine voice to re-emerge. This suggests that changing a linguistic culture may require both time and enough exposure. In a mixed cultural environment, one might wonder whether a predominantly masculine way of speaking will characterise the language.

This is also my personal experience; as new CPS workers we try to adapt to the culture and the language of the workplace, and it takes time to become confident and assert one's own personality. Due to the high turnover of staff in the CPS, there will naturally be a shortage of CPS workers that show this type of confidence, regardless of gender.

We learn practical care by observing others but are dependent on suitable opportunities and trust to be able to put this into practice. I assume that if fathers are

not given trust and opportunity, and if what they are doing feels insufficient, at some point they might give up. Meeting with someone of the same gender can create a more equal environment. A female CPS worker may find it easier to understand and support another woman's argument, which can enhance the mother's parental rights. When women are significantly overrepresented in a workplace, this can lead to a shift in the language used, often becoming more feminine. Oscar mentioned this phenomenon, stating, "The male CPS workers have female colleagues and supervisors. Initially, they adopt a similar approach to their female counterparts in their phone conversations and overall interaction. However, as they gain experience and confidence, their true selves begin to emerge."

Kimmel (2011) states that despite differences between genders we are all together at the same workplace, evaluated by the same criteria for raises, promotions, bonuses and tenure. Maybe this is what make one male CPS workers in my study state "You should be man, but not be too masculine as a male CPS worker". I assume the same can apply when CPS workers meet mothers and fathers. They are assessed according to the same criteria, where fathers may struggle to reach an acceptable level of standing.

"Women pay attention to women and may be hostile to men".

Sentio (2018a) found that CPS workers believe that the dominance of women in the support system may be a challenge in relation to involving fathers. There is a need for making fathers feel more acknowledged and understood.

This relates to my own study where some fathers believe that female CPS workers tend to trust mothers and to take fathers less seriously. I assume that it may be a difficult starting point when fathers have contact with a CPS where women are

overrepresented. Repeated negative experiences between CPS workers and clients will lead to a difficult working relationship. Fathers' scepticism and distrust may be met by female caseworkers who have been warned about the same fathers. Here are some examples from a focus group of female Child Protective Services (CPS) workers: "The fact that we're women can trigger a stronger reaction from a father who feels threatened." and "It's clear that big, strong men can be intimidating. Some of them have good verbal skills and controlled body language, which can be concerning".

This can lead to a self-reinforcing pattern based on a circular understanding, as described by Watzlawick et.al. (1967; Schødt and Egeland 1991, pp.37-39). We often punctuate differently, and thus look at what is happening differently. My research suggests that repeated negative experiences with fathers, potential entail female CPS workers being able to relate more easily to mothers and contribute to a perception among fathers that female CPS workers pay attention to mothers and may be hostile to men. Adam stated "I think that since I am a man, I cannot be right in what I say, I cannot be taken seriously (...) it takes a lot more for the mother to be deemed as an unsuitable caregiver than the father".

At the same time, I construed that age and experience were also significant factors in whether a father felt understood and heard.

Age and experience

Age and experience may foster confidence. The CPS employs many young women and some young men, which impacts the service. Westby (2021, p. 244), highlights one father's belief that case officers should possess sufficient life experience before interacting with parents and families. In my study, Jim describes a mature female

Child Protective Services (CPS) worker who is characterised as "very down to earth and capable." However, age and experience are not the only important factors. Ali shares insights about a young female caseworker who is "skilled and efficient." This aligns with my results, which suggest that men value efficiency and clear communication. This emphasis on clarity may be linked to traditional notions of masculinity, which could be somewhat lacking in a CPS predominantly staffed by female employees.

Female CPS workers in current research experienced getting more respect as they become older, and this corresponds with some fathers' statements in my sample that express that some CPS workers are too young and inexperienced and do not understand what is challenging for the family.

CPS workers acquire different experiences depending on what district they work in, which will come in addition to their unique personal experience. In Arvidsson's study (2003, p.275), it emerged that the behaviour expected from CPS workers depended on the district in which they were working. This aligns with Johnny's statement in the current study, where he asserts that caseworkers have varied experiences depending on their work locations, which can influence the services they provide.

The challenges they encounter and the experiences they acquire can differ significantly. Johnny suggests that in more affluent areas, CPS workers tend to gain more experience dealing with neurotic mothers. In contrast, in more challenging areas, they face issues related to immigration, such as engaging with people about war, managing serious mental health problems, and addressing concerns related to violence and drugs.

Norway is a country with relatively small differences relating to class and income. However, differences permeate all societies, and one source of such differences is related to educational level, according to Madsen and Norberg (2021). In Norway, most of the employees in CPS front-line services, have a college education and are by this definition associated with the middle class.

The researchers Fauske, Kojan and Storhaug (2018) referred to research that indicated that parents without a fixed income from work were strongly overrepresented among those who were represented in the study, and parents without a job, or who are in typical working-class jobs, experience the child welfare service differently than parents who have more education and income, according to the researchers. Among my participants, I would categorize the fathers Johnny, Adam and Jim as belonging to the middle-class; Oscar and Ali I would categorize as working-class.

For example, if an adult immigrant man with a working-class background, such as Ali in this study, who meets a case worker who is a newly educated young western female CPS worker, it can be a demanding starting point for dialogue and understanding. He will encounter a western, middle class understanding and a professional, feminine language with perhaps a youthful jargon. This is a typical scenario in my experience, demanding considerable relational and cultural competence on behalf of the CPS worker.

Children and young people with minority backgrounds, especially first-generation immigrants, are overrepresented in the child welfare statistics in Norway (Allertsen and Kalve 2006; Kalve and Dyrhaug 2011 in Paulsen, Torshaug and Berg 2014 p.3), both in terms of assistance measures and taking over care. Some may be about

«cultural misunderstandings» or different understandings and interpretations of what constitutes «good care» (Aadnesen and Hærem 2007; Vike and Eide 2009 in Paulsen, Torshaug and Berg 2014 p.4), and other factors deal with the fact that the immigrant population represents a social and economic underclass in Norway. Refugee-related factors deal with the consequences of war, flight, long stays in asylum reception centres, exile situation and possible repatriation, and how this affects mental health, parenting competence and children's care situation (Varvin 2003; Berg and Valenta 2008; Berg 2010 in Paulsen, Torshaug and Berg 2014 p.4). These factors can be assumed to affect the child welfare service's discourse on families from other cultures and, in turn, how familiar experience the encounter with the child welfare service. "I'm used to people being sceptical of people like me...", Ali said. These cultural factors may come in addition to gender issues.

The CPS workers in both focus groups in my study thought that it might be good for fathers to meet a male CPS worker to feel understood, but that age and experience were just as important factors. However, a difference emerged in the two focus groups in terms of how they perceived and met angry parents.

Angry men and emotional woman

A theme in my study relates to the subject of anger and fear. CPS workers in both focus groups have respect for fathers who are physically strong or who are angry and physically disruptive. This is a discourse based on biological differences and deals with physical characteristics. Fathers may have limited verbal language and more threatening body language. When we add the factor that men have a greater potential for violence than women (Isdal and Lorentzen 2024, in Sogn 2024), it is natural that they may appear more threatening than woman.

Some female CPS workers in my research believed that the very fact that they are women can sometimes trigger fathers. I assume that this may lead to female CPS workers appearing more uncertain and unclear when they feel threatened. One cannot not communicate (Watzlawick et.al. 1967).

At the same time, some male CPS workers in my study said that they can be triggered by mothers. For example, they spoke about how they could be triggered by women who complained a lot or had a whining voice, and how they felt more comfortable when meeting angry fathers where there could be bursts of anger that would quickly pass. Women may be intimidated by men blowing out, while men may be triggered by women who use many words and complain. This fits in with Jones' (1995, p.106) statements about emotional language, and that men are clearer in their communication.

In the female focus group, a perception came up that men are often brought up not to cry, and women not to be angry. One female participant mentioned that this could also be cultural in western societies. She had noticed that in her meetings with some African families, it was the mother who was the angry one and the father who had a calming effect on the mother. Is it more acceptable to be an angry woman in other cultures? Are men from other cultures trained to be more in control of their emotions? As mentioned earlier according to Horowitz (2009) it has been proven that our culture can influence the construction and perception of emotions.

For the male CPS workers in the focus group, it seemed easier to relate to angry men than angry women. This may indicate that men's anger is not a factor in not contacting the father in this group. For fathers who are perceived as angry, this can

help them to feel acknowledged when meeting male CPS workers, as opposed to when meeting female CPS workers.

In the female CPS group, one participant describes anger as being an expression of something else, such as sadness or grief. This is a psychological understanding; men are hurt, but they show it in anger. An Emotion Focused understanding describes anger in terms of primary and secondary emotions. A primary emotion is considered a direct reaction to what is happening in one's surroundings (Greenberg and Safran 1989; Stiegler 2015) Secondary reaction is a response that comes after the primary and is a delayed reaction to underlying emotions (Stiegler 2015). This may be a redefinition of the symptom as described in the Milan group (Johnsen and Torsteinson p. 224) to maintain a more even relationship between the fathers and female CPS workers; sadness can be easier to relate to compared to anger.

Is anger a feeling that is recognised and faced among male CPS workers, and sadness a more acceptable feeling for female CPS workers? Can women trigger men with their emotional and relational language? Henrik, from the introductory chapter, was concerned that women had so much empathy that nothing happened. Johnny observed how the female CPS workers continued to talk to the mother of the children and did not realise that she was so angry that she was unable to listen and understand. So, it may be the case that women may trigger men, especially if there is something important at stake, such as the father's relationship with his child.

I started this chapter asking, "Does the large proportion of women in CPS affect the protection of mothers' parental rights?" and my findings suggest that this may be the result of several effects: women are more comfortable with other women; women communicate in the same feminine way; angry men can be intimidating to women;

and women master an emotional language that is easily acknowledged in CPS. At the same time, it emerged that male case officers had the same perception of parents as their female colleagues, and that meeting a male case officer will not necessarily affect the outcome of the case. What do CPS workers think about fatherhood in general?

7.3. Child Protection Service perceptions on Fathers

In my study, I construed gender-related discourses within both focus groups that imply fathers are less fit and less important than mothers. Emotional care was presented as a domain in which mothers have a natural advantage over fathers.

While at the same time this ability was something that fathers could learn if the mothers allowed them to participate. The fact that the CPS workers contacted the mother first is explained by the perception that mothers are better at taking responsibility, organising, and following up on appointments. By relying on the discourse that fathers are not good at keeping track of appointments and meetings, fathers are not contacted. Fathers may be good at doing activities with their children, but this may be easily replaced by kindergartens, schools, or extracurricular activities. My findings suggest that fathers may refrain from taking responsibility through accepting the subject position of being a second-class parent, which helps to maintain the discourse that fathers are less responsible and less reliable parents.

The third shift

When a discourse becomes dominant within a group, it appears natural and true and thus has a high probability of becoming the interpretive framework on which the actors base their assessments (Annfelt 2008; Storhaug 2015, p.87). According to the current study and other studies such as Storhaug (2015), in Norway, it seems to

have become a persistent discourse in the CPS that the mother is the reliable parent in the family, and the mother is usually contacted first. This may be due to "The third shift", as described by Smeby (2017), which comprises the administration of everyday life and coordinating the child and the parents' activities, where the mothers are often responsible. The mothers set the standard, and in the focus group for female CPS Workers, an assumption was that fathers must receive a mandate from mothers who often assumed that fathers could not live up to their standards and therefore took most of the responsibility themselves.

My idea is that the CPS usually consists of many female CPS workers with high expectations for themselves and others. These are women who handle work, follow up on housework, and usually have overall responsibility for the home and family. In the CPS sector in Norway, there is also an expectation from the authorities of high professional qualifications among CPS workers. These highly educated, female CPS workers have the responsibility to guide and assess mothers, and both parties are uncertain whether the father will be able to take care of "The third shift" (Smeby 2017). On the other hand, it turned out that male CPS workers were also sceptical about the father's ability to organise and follow up on the agreement, so that it would not have made a big difference to meet a male CPS worker in relation to the expectations of mothers and fathers.

Mothers who accept this subject position as the primary parent may carry the responsibility on their shoulders, with all that this entails of pride and shame. Fathers will thus remain second-class parents if they accept a subject position as second-class parents. On the other hand, fathers are considered first-class parents when it comes to activities with their children in both focus groups in my project.

Fathers like activities

The emphasis from the CPS workers on fathers doing activities and having fun with children may indicate a recognition that rough play is important for children's development, and fathers may be better at this. One participant in the male focus group said that it is more outwardly visible if children are not followed up with packed lunch, clothes, and comfort. Maybe playing can go unnoticed and be easily replaced. I have spoken to mothers in work context who say that dad is good at more physical and loud activities, but sometimes it can be too much, and mum must slow down the game. Maybe women's preoccupation with structure and organising makes them more serious and less playful and impulsive. Maybe we underestimate the father's role and spontaneous rough play. Campell (2015) refers to the Connecticut Comprehensive Outcome Review (CCOR). The findings indicate that children with involved and engaged fathers tend to have more positive outcomes relative to physical, cognitive, and social-emotional health (Campell et.al 2015, p.1).

My findings suggest that fathers are considered important by CPS workers but as more easily replaceable and dependent on maternal mandates. It also occurred to me that none of the fathers in my interviews mentioned that play and fun were something they could contribute. They mentioned qualities like giving kids a safe base and teaching them empathy, skills that are more related to motherhood. Empathy is linked to the ability to mentalise, to understand one's own and other people's thoughts and feelings.

Fathers' ability to mentalise

In the focus group for male CPS workers in my project, fathers' inability to meet their children's emotional needs was partly explained by the fact that men do not have the

same vocabulary as women and could lack opportunities for developing the 'language of care' and the ability to mentalise. This is a childcare discourse, which suggests that it is important to be able to mentalise, to be able to understand others' thoughts and feelings and to be able to comfort (Hareide og Moe 2000, p.36.).

The participants in both focus groups have greater expectations that mothers should be high on this, and lower expectations of the fathers. I suggest this can lead to an overestimation of mothers or an underestimation of fathers when assessing care capacity. Both fathers and mothers may fare poorly in crises where their ability to mentalise may be impaired. The ability to mentalise is not a stable trait; threatening situations, crises, and strong affect reduce the ability of people who usually mentalise well (Kolseth 2009). I imagine that both mothers and fathers may perceive contact with CPS as a stressful and threatening situation, and fathers may have an extra challenge in relation to the fact that CPS have a lack of faith in fathers' ability to mentalise in the first place.

In both focus groups, there were assumptions that care capacity, like the ability to mentalise and have an emotional language, is something that can be developed. As mentioned before, learning opportunities are needed, and fathers may not have access to these. This dilemma can have consequences on the day the children and fathers need the father to be recognised as a primary caregiver.

Single mothers and lack of contact with fathers.

Single mothers are overrepresented among families who are in contact with child welfare services (Storhaug, Kojan, and Kvaran 2012). Fathers who are perceived as having 'given up the fight' may gain support among male CPS workers. This understanding characterises further contact with the family. Fathers who are

perceived as having opted out are probably rarely contacted. What about fathers who take up the fight? These can be perceived as bothersome and angry, as Oscar and Adam in my study mentioned.

How we understand a situation has consequences for further actions. Karl Tomm (2000) refers to the Milan Group, who point out that our language habits influence us to think in linear, possessive terms rather than circular, reciprocal terms. For example, the words 'have opted out' or 'have withdrawn' do different things to us and our actions. Expressions such as 'showing an inability' or 'showing a lack of support' in relation to contact between a father and his child can mobilise other measures from the CPS.

Ali described his application for respite care and mentioned that Child Protective Services (CPS) wanted to contact the mother, who was currently abroad. This raises the question: Would CPS also reach out to a father living abroad? Furthermore, would a male CPS worker be likely to make that contact? Sentio's (2018a) research shows that there is a larger proportion of male than female CPS workers believe that it is important to involve fathers in the child welfare case. At the same time If we consider the results of current study which may indicate that both female and male CPS workers consider the mother to be the most important parent, Oscar's reasoning—that male CPS workers are trained by female worker, and Storhaug's (2015) findings, which suggest there are no significant differences in how male and female CPS workers evaluate mothers and fathers. It is reasonable to assume that neither a male nor a female CPS worker would likely contact a father living abroad in this situation.

The care discourses in the child welfare office can lead to fathers being offered a subject position as second-class parents. Neumann (2021, p114) argues that a fundamental discursive insight is that who says something is often more important than what is said. If the management and other more experienced workers convey that it is not important to contact fathers, it will probably be difficult to contradict this - regardless of gender.

My constructions suggest that it is when meeting fathers who need emotional support and understanding that male CPS workers may have an important role. When they need to be understood as a man. The fathers I interviewed talked about important men they have met who have been supportive. It became clear that they were talking mainly about men outside the CPS, such as male prison officers, lawyers, psychologists, and family therapists. Male CPS workers may quickly become part of a feminine system. Jan Storø (Rød 2018) comment that the educational system had to adapt male students to a more theoretical approach before working in the CPS, may indicate an attempt to remove some of the typical characteristics of masculinity, my participant Oscar also says that when men are employed in CPS, they are trained by women and answer the same way on the phone.

Fathers' accessibility as contextual.

In the current project, one of the female CPS workers mentioned that in a small minority of cases, there was more contact with fathers than mothers. This could apply to single fathers, fathers in prison or fathers with substance abuse problems. Contact with the fathers also depended on who the fathers were. If they are active,

engaged or have received a mandate from the mothers, having more contact with these fathers is usual.

The fact that single fathers make more contact may be natural as they must take on a large part of the responsibility for childcare. Concerning mothers in prison and mothers with substance abuse, a negative aspect of not being considered as the primary responsible parent is the shame mothers feel when they fail. Frønes (2001; Ellingsen 2007) describes guilt as self-condemnation due to breaking with what is considered as morally acceptable.

In the focus group for female CPS workers in current study, statements were made about the fact that women and mothers have difficulty handing over responsibility for care to the fathers. As earlier mentioned, Storhaug (2015 p.21) referred to a study by Halså in 2008, which indicated that despite major challenges of their own and where the father had to take over the main care for a period, the mothers were uncertain whether the father could take care of the child. This finding suggests that fathers may not be seen as a resource either by the mothers or the CPS workers.

In Norway, single foster mothers are now being recruited. Would it be natural to recruit a single foster father? Would a male CPS worker be more likely to recruit a single foster father? According to current findings, probably not.

I have addressed the ideal of equality in Norway and compared this with markers of equality in the Norwegian CPS, with a particular focus on the position of fathers.

There seems to be a gap between ideals and reality. From the focus group interviews I have conducted with CPS workers, there seems to be a discourse that the father is perceived as a second-class parent in both the male and female Focus Groups. Mothers are mainly responsible for childcare, while fathers are more

expendable. Then, I spoke to five fathers to hear what effect these discourses might have, how fathers perceive themselves as fathers, and how they experience contact with CPS.

7.4. How do fathers perceive themselves and how do they experience contact with the CPS?

The fathers in current study in 2022 expressed that they believe they are just as competent and important as the mothers, but the CPS attitudes towards some fathers may threaten this experience. Some fathers in my sample have experienced being taken less seriously and have fought against CPS discourses about fathers as second-class parents. This may indicate that CPS discourses about fathers are "slow discourses" that seem difficult to change and evolve as described by Neumann (2021, p.131).

Safe haven

In Storhaug's (2015) project, fathers' understanding of fatherhood is partly influenced by a gender-specific understanding. They position themselves as fathers by distancing themselves from feminine characteristics regarded as "typical" for mothers. Fathers believe that they are competent at setting boundaries for their children as well as accompanying their children to activities (Storhaug 2015 p.82). This does not fit with my own participants' statements. None of the five fathers mentioned limit setting and taking children to activities as something they were particularly concerned about. They mentioned characteristics that are assumed to be more feminine, like seeing and hearing the children. This may also be because they were mature men, and that those who were alone with the children had to take on a

more extensive parental role. However, Ali believed that the child also needed a woman and a mother in the home.

The fathers' stories in current study may illustrate important values regarding parenting skills in Norway in 2020s. Adam talked about "strong attachment" and Johnny talked about being a "safe haven". Adam also talked about "Picking up from school, nursery school and sports training". Aarseth (2008, p.10) addresses how middle-class men view the need to be with their children. "The fathers aren't just involved by driving to sports training or other arrangements. They're the coach, the theatre instructor, and the team leader". The interviews with the fathers reflect a struggle to live up to the Norwegian ideology about parenting while at the same time facing public and institutional discourses and narratives that imply ignorance and distrust towards fathers. They have faced discourses about fathers as second-class parents, about ex-drug addicts as unreliable and about Middle Eastern people being untrustworthy.

Freeman (2010; Blix et.al.2013, p.272) said that the expectations about how to live and who to be, our possibilities and limits, imposed on us by history and culture can be paralysing, especially when unacknowledged. Four fathers in my interviews were 'offered' the role of second-class parents, an offer they did not accept. However, I perceived all my participants as mature fathers who have a certain self-belief and integrity at their core, and that may have given the necessary strength to challenge pre-conceptions by others.

Second-class Parents

All five fathers expressed that they view themselves as individuals who seek positive cooperation with the mothers of their children. They are also ready and willing to step

in and support their children if the mothers, for various reasons, are unable to fulfil their parenting responsibilities. In such situations, it is crucial for them to be trusted by those around them, including Child Protective Services. The distrust from the CPS mentioned by Johnny, Adam, Oscar, and Ali has added a significant burden to an already challenging situation. They discuss their struggles to be heard, taken seriously, and recognised as important. This has led to stress-related issues, including sick leaves and the need for contact with psychologists.

Furthermore, the fathers talk about CPS strategies for keeping fathers at a distance. This can be mediated for example by reading descriptions of themselves in official documents that they do not recognise, being talked to in condescending ways, or the CPS carrying out extensive background checks which seem unnecessary. Angel (2007, p.68) had similar findings. The CPS approached the case of the children nearly as if their fathers were non-existent. For instance, they did not provide information about the progress of the child welfare case, nor was there any information available on how the fathers could protect their interests.

In this context, it may be vital to have an overview over what is documented. Hårtveit and Jensen (1999, p.95) argue that reports reflect the author's emphasis on certain data while neglecting others. The language chosen by the author influences how we are expected to respond to the information we have heard and read.

My participant, Jim, expresses a belief that Child Protective Services (CPS) is there to help, support, and provide protection, and he generally feels they are competent in their duties. However, he has experienced situations where skilled CPS workers seemingly "disappeared" without any communication. Jim found this particularly disappointing because he felt he had established a good relationship with these

workers and believed his role as a father and collaborator in the case was acknowledged. This highlights the significance of the relationships that CPS workers form, as abruptly withdrawing can communicate a profound message: "You are not an important person".

The CPS in Norway is characterised by high staff turnover. What happens when new CPS workers constantly keep coming into a system? When people are constantly forced to enter new relationships, what happens to their sense of identity if identity is formed in relationships? Jim tells how demanding it is to have too constantly open to everybody. A more stable workforce may provide more experienced CPS workers and more continuity.

I had a sense that the father's commitment and their love for the children, their ability to reflect on what happened, and their close supporters were what carried them through tough times and allowed them to maintain their identity as competent and valuable fathers in Norway in 2022.

At the same time, the stories are told in context. The relation between the communicants is important. According to Phoenix (2013, p.73) narrative analysis can allow insight into the participants understandings of current consensus of what is acceptable to say and do in their local and national cultures, what Bruner (1990,1998 in Phoenix 2013,p.73) calls 'canonical narratives'. The participants in my study may have adapted responses to what it is accepted to say and mean in Norway in 2022. Ali seemed less concerned with this and how he was assessed in relation to the child's mother, or that the alternatives involve living with only one of the parents. He was primarily concerned about the well-being of his child. The fact that he wanted to find another family for his child came as a surprise; it did not align with my

preconceived notions, which changed my perspective on the other interviews. Ali's story centres on his role as a father, but it also highlights his experience as a member of a different culture. In Norway, Ali is a minority due to his appearance among a predominantly white population. He mentioned that he is accustomed to people being sceptical of individuals like himself, an experience that those in the majority rarely encounter.

According to Dominelli (1989, p. 391), social work is intended to be a caring profession that addresses the needs of its clients. However, this is not the case for black individuals. Whether they engage with social work as clients, employees, or students, black people often face negative treatment. They are underrepresented among users of welfare services but overrepresented in penal institutions. The subtle dynamics of personal, institutional, and cultural racism infiltrate the daily practices and policies of social work. Combined with the strategies employed by white social workers to avoid addressing racism in their work, this leads to the needs of black individuals being overlooked.

I am a white, mature, western middle-class woman and mother, conducting an interview with Ali, a male immigrant from the Middle East with a working-class background. How might our differing backgrounds affect the interview? In retrospect, I wonder why I asked Ali if his father had a new wife. Would I have posed the same question if it were a mother who was alone with her children? Do I subconsciously believe that children need a mother, and especially in the Middle East?

In her doctoral thesis, Vagli (2009, cited in Paulsen, Thorshaug, and Berg, 2014, p. 14) found that what she calls the middle-class norm in graduate studies represents the standard against which caseworkers assess families. Deviations from the middle-

class norm are often used to justify interventions in families. Kojan (2011, as cited in Paulsen, Thorshaug, and Berg, 2014, p. 14) highlights that child welfare workers' assumptions about a "good childhood" reflect middle-class values. Vagli (2009, as cited in Paulsen, Thorshaug, and Berg, 2014, p. 14) points out that this value system is often seen as a universal and self-evident perspective. However, it is rarely acknowledged that the child welfare service operates from a specific set of values. This poses a problem, as the values upheld by the Child Welfare Service not only differ from those of many minority families but are also often foreign to a significant portion of the families with which the Child Welfare Service interacts.

I realised that everything in my study is conveyed and understood from a Western Middleclass perspective. This reminded me of Pierre Bourdieu (1998, p. 66), who discussed the concept of "family" as a social construction of reality. I began to wonder how a researcher from a different culture might have posed the questions and how they would interpret the answers. Every observation and interpretation is influenced by the observer's perspective. Maturana (1988) emphasises that we, as observers, do not listen in isolation; we always apply certain distinctions. This idea reflects what can be termed "objectivity-in-parentheses." By adopting this viewpoint, we acknowledge our humanity as living systems, recognising that our cognitive abilities are biologically based phenomena, constrained by criteria of acceptability.

7.5. Closing reflections

In the analysis and discussion chapter, I have provided examples how discourses and narratives may serve as valuable tools for reflecting on the challenges in the relationship between fathers and Child Protective Services (CPS). Concepts from systemic psychotherapy, such as circularity and punctuation, help illuminate the

connection between the perceptions and experiences of both CPS and the fathers. When negative experiences are repeated between CPS workers and clients, it can create a challenging working relationship. Additionally, fathers' scepticism and distrust may be exacerbated when female caseworkers, who have been previously warned about these fathers, interact with them.

One example of circular understanding can be observed in Adam's experience: "It's not a good thing to interact only with female employees at CPS. It leaves me with the feeling of being mistrusted, as if they're indirectly saying, 'Yes, that's your experience, but that's not really how it is.'"

From the perspective of a female CPS worker: "We deal with very sensitive matters, working with some of the most vulnerable individuals. Additionally, being a women in this field could trigger a stronger reaction from a father who feels threatened" (Female CPS worker).

Johnny mentioned, "I interacted with these girls—20-year-olds who were quite young and inexperienced. They seemed almost like kids who wanted to understand what was going on."

This can lead to a self-reinforcing pattern based on a circular understanding, as described by Watzlawick et.al. (1967; Schødt and Egeland 1991, pp.37-39). We often punctuate differently, and thus look at what is happening differently.

I suggest that having a systemic and circular understanding of the relationship between CPS workers and fathers provides a good starting point for changing persistent discourses and avoiding difficult experiences. The focus in a systemic perspective is on relationships. This does not mean that we deny the importance of an inner world, but that in this context, the focus is on what happens between

people. Human systems can be characterised by circular interaction. Action A leads to action B leads to action C, which in turn can lead to A. (Johnsen and Torsteinson 2012, pp.29,30). For example, a father who is perceived as angry can lead to fear in child welfare workers who "hide" behind legislation, which in turn can create more anger in the father.

In relation to the power imbalance that may arise, it seems natural that it starts the CPS workers, and with a personal reflection about their own values and attitudes.

7.6. Implications for practice

This study is practice-oriented and opens implications for practice in the CPS in Norway. Equality between parents and gender is a highly valued ideology in Norway. According to my findings, the CPS workers assume that they have a greater focus on fathers nowadays, but at the same time, they convey discourses that indicate that there is still some way to go before fathers are considered as valuable as mothers. The fathers' stories suggest the same thing; they tell stories about feeling like a second-class parent. The stories can give CPS workers an insight into how fathers perceive themselves as parents, and how encounters with CPS can affect this perception.

As mentioned earlier, Krause (2012, p.13) suggests that it may be a challenge to become aware of how our ideas, attitudes, and knowledge about the world are socially constructed. I suggest that having focus group discussions among CPS workers, with a facilitator present who makes them aware of their personal assumptions and institutional and cultural discourses, is a good way to loosen up persistent discourses. A greater focus on the CPS worker's own values and assumptions already in the hiring process could provide a good starting point for

further work. Given that discourses tend to become entrenched, it would be beneficial to establish regular reflection groups for employees. I believe that this initiative should be implemented by management at the CPS and led by an external supervisor.

My interviews with the fathers highlighted the importance of taking time to listen without a predetermined agenda or biased attitude. In my experience, this approach provided me with deeper insights into their situations as well as an understanding of their histories and experiences. This reminded me of a quote by Harold Goolishian, as cited by Tom Anderson (1996, p. 48): "Listen to what they really say!" This emphasises that their words often serve as an invitation to discuss specific topics. I recommend practicing reflective techniques during conversations with parents and children in Child Protective Services (CPS). De Flon and Eliassen (Lorås and Ness 2019, p.97) point out that when we listen to what another person says, an inner conversation takes place that can contain different things. Parallel to the outer dialogue, we will have an inner dialogue that will often revolve around how to understand what is being said and what our response may be. Andersen downplayed the use of method and switched to calling it work or conversational form.

I would also recommend having gender as a theme in CPS. This can take place through conversations in groups, by participating in courses, and updating oneself on relevant literature and research on the topic. My study suggests that there exist gender discourses among CPS workers that may have some consequences for children and parents. It is important to learn about the similarities and differences between women and men from both biological and social perspectives. This background knowledge can enhance our understanding and reflection during interactions with families, contributing to better communication.

Foucault (1972 in Lorås and Ness 2019, p.80) argues that power is relational and shows itself in all types of realisations. Foucault further argues that power gains strength as more people accept beliefs associated with a belief system as common knowledge. I suggest that shared knowledge of the topic of gender may help to move persistent discourses within the CPS about fathers as second-class parents and evolve further towards more equality. It is a goal to create stability in the workforce, while there is also room for developing ideas, following up on research, and reflecting on which discourses prevail in the group at any given time.

8.0. CONCLUSION

This research project aims to gain insight into the Child Protection Service perceptions of fathers, fathers' experience from meeting the CPS, and how the disproportionate female dominance among CPS workers may influence the perceptions and experiences. Knowledge about this has been collected through two Focus Group interviews with male and female CPS workers, where they discuss how they perceive fatherhood and what consequences this may have for the service delivered. In addition, I have provided individual interviews with five fathers where they talk about how they have experienced contact with the CPS and how this has affected their relationship with the CPS and their identity as fathers. Such knowledge is important for the CPS to provide children with good parenting and development conditions. Studies show that interventions from the CPS have the most significant effect when fathers are involved and that the father's involvement is significant for the mother's care of the children (Guterman et al.2009; Lee et al. 2009;Storhaug 2015, p.92).

The findings from focus group interviews with CPS workers provide insight into their desire to include fathers versus a view of fathers as more dispensable than mothers. This is due to discourses like fathers may lack the ability to mentalize and comfort, and mothers are considered more reliable and better at keeping track of appointments. This leads to CPS workers relating to mothers first and foremost. Other discourses are that fathers are good at rough-playing and having fun with the kids; however, a role that may be more easily refunded. The CPS workers may seldom contact fathers who withdraw.

My findings suggest that gendered language may be a challenge, and emotions and anger are experienced differently between male and female CPS workers. Male CPS workers may appreciate angry fathers who are clear and use few words, and male CPS workers may be provoked by mothers who complain with many words and a whining voice. Female CPS workers in my study believe that fathers get provoked by female CPS workers and want to bring a male colleague with them when meeting fathers.

The fathers' stories are about mixed experiences from meeting with CPS, ranging from very good relationships to deep conflicts. One story is about being insulted for being met by inexperienced and ignorant CPS workers. One story is about being met by female CPS workers who seemed hostile and did not understand the main problem, which led to an exhausting battle with the CPS. Another story is about a father who is deeply grateful for the support from the CPS and is disappointed by clever CPS workers who disappear without explanations. One story is about a father who is ambivalent about CPS; he experienced good support from the CPS and, at the same time, was not taken seriously when wanting the child to live with him. One story is about a Middle Eastern immigrant in Norway who has mixed experiences with the CPS, from being met with suspicion to being met with a supportive attitude. His strategy was to keep calm and be patient through the process.

Age and experiences are themes in Focus Groups for CPS workers and interviews with fathers. This appears to be as important as gender for feeling respected and taken seriously both as a parent and as a CPS worker.

My findings suggest that The Child Protection front-line services in Norway relate mostly to the mother and, therefore, contribute to supporting the mother's position

and rights. There is a pervading discourse of mothers as the primary caregiver, the one who has the most responsibility, and the mother is the parent that CPS workers contact first and foremost in their daily work. The large proportion of female CPS workers means that they may more easily relate to mothers and more easily appreciate mothers' way of organising everyday life and communicating. They may also generally find communication with mothers less threatening. These factors will influence the fundamental discourses which are spreading within the organization.

Perceptions exist among CPS workers that fathers are good at 'rough and tumble' play and activities with children. However, this role may be more easily replaced. Children can play and develop in Nursery School, but even there, there is an overrepresentation of women who tend to play in more organised ways.

Fathers who need to be taken seriously may feel that their contact with the CPS threatens their identity as valuable fathers and that asserting themselves in the situation is necessary. Fathers who resign will rarely be contacted.

My findings suggest that the Child Protection Services in Norway do not reflect the Norwegian ideal of gender equality, and this is likely to be reinforced by the large proportion of women employed in the Child Protection Service. Male CPS workers will quickly become influenced by the prevailing discourses in the workplace. A constant awareness among CPS staff will be necessary to change "entrenched" discourses about fathers.

8.1. Questions for further research

The uniqueness of the current project is that it addresses the significance of the CPS workers' gender and how this can affect perceptions of fathers. In addition, I present accounts from five fathers' contact with the Norwegian Child Protection Service,

looking at their expectations, how fathers are offered different subject positions, their thoughts on the significance of the Child Protection workers' gender, and how challenging and complex it is. Challenging relationships can maintain inappropriate discourses.

The limited number of participants makes it difficult to say how widespread the discourses are and how representative the stories are. Furthermore, the voices of the children or mothers are not represented. The fathers interviewed were mature and resourceful men, and therefore represent a limited sample of respondents. At the same time, I have presented other research projects that have shown similar results from wider samples.

I have dealt with heterosexual parents in a western context. It would be interesting to study CPS workers' discourses around same-sex parents and these parents' stories from contact with CPS. It could also be valuable to delve deeper into cultural background as a variable when looking at the fathers' encounter with the Child Protection Service.

In future research, it would be interesting to explore the gender issue in CPS more thoroughly, looking at how fathers and mothers can both contribute to successful outcomes but in different ways.

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APPENDIX 1

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Table of Articles from Literature Review

APPENDIX 2

Title, year, Author.	Source	Theme	Methods	Findings
<p>“Gender biases in child welfare”. 2003, USA Christina Risley-Curtiss and Kristin Heffernan</p>	<p>Essex Digital Library</p>	<p>The CPS Perceptions of fathers and mothers in the CPS.</p>	<p>Review of research articles and documents in USA</p>	<p>The CPS worker brings gender biases to their work. Mothers' care is considered obligatory while caretaking by fathers is considered discretionary.</p>
<p>“Questionable fathers” 2003, Sweden. Maria Bangura Arvidsson Doctoral Thesis.</p>	<p>Website for Lund University</p>	<p>The CPS perceptions of fathers. Fathers experiences from meeting the CPS. Female dominance in CPS.</p>	<p>Review of 40 Child Welfare investigations, interviews with 23 CPS workers and 19 fathers. A social constructionist perspective.</p>	<p>CPS workers perceptions about fathers are marked by ambivalence. Fathers feels misunderstood and powerless. The female dominance may lead to more focus on mothers. Age, experience and ethnic origin may be equally important.</p>
<p>“What about the dads? Child welfare agencies efforts to identify, locate and involve non-resident fathers”, USA 2006. Young and Reiger.</p>	<p>Google Scholar, Department of Health and Human Service.</p>	<p>Involvement of fathers of children in foster care.</p>	<p>Interviews with 1222 Child Welfare employees in 4 states in the USA.</p>	<p>Non- residential fathers of children in foster care are seldom involved in case planning, and nearly half are never contacted by the CPS during their child's stay in foster care.</p>

The challenge of engaging fathers in the child protection process. USA 2006. Scourfield, J.	Sage Journal. Essex Digital Library.	About challenges in engaging fathers.	Discussion of research and empirical data.	We have to see men as both risk and resource for women and children, and avoid 'either or' approaches.
"The Difficult Parenthood" Norway, 2007. Bjørn Øystein Angel.	ORIA. The library system for VID Universities, in Norway.	Parents' own experience of their parenthood in their encounters with the CPS.	Interviews with 6 mothers and 3 fathers of children placed in foster care.	The CPD expects good care of mothers. Of fathers they expected nothing. Fathers feel excluded by the CPS.
Engaging fathers in child protection services: A review of factors and strategies across ecological systems. USA 2012. Gorden et.al.	National Library of Medicine. Essex Digital Library.	The ongoing challenges that fathers face in meeting the Child Protection System.	This comprehensive and systemic review synthesizes the available literature regarding factors and strategies that may foster paternal involvement in the child protection system and their services	The literature on engaging fathers sets forth several intervention strategies, which range from skills-building at the individual level to determining the types of assessments to be carried out at the service provider level.
Results of a training course for social workers on engaging fathers in child protection. USA 2012.	Children and Youth Service Review. Essex Digital Library.	This paper describes the findings of an evaluation of a training course for child protection social workers that aimed to	The study employed a mixed methods design, including qualitative observations and interviews and quantitative	The findings indicate that participation in the training intervention may change practitioner attitudes towards the engagement of fathers and

Scourfield, J. et al.		improve their engagement of fathers in child protection assessments and interventions	pre- and post-intervention measures of self-efficacy in engaging with fathers.	increase their engagement of non-abusive fathers.
"The child welfare services understanding of paternity", Norway 2015. Anita Skårstad Storhaug. Doctoral Thesis.	ORIA, NTNU open.	Child Welfare Discourses on Fathers. Fathers' experiences of contact with the CPS. The female over-representation in CPS.	Quantitative and Qualitative methods. Nationwide survey and 4 focus group interviews with 14 CPS workers. In-depth interviews with 15 fathers.	Mothers are portrayed as more responsible parents. Fathers are more or less involved. Fathers experienced not being heard, and not being taken seriously. There is no difference between female and male CPS workers about perceptions of motherhood and fatherhood.
"Fathers matter: Involving and engaging fathers in The Child Welfare system process". USA 2015. A.C. Campell et al.	Google Scholar. Yale University. School of Medicine.	The importance of Involving fathers, and the possible consequences of leaving fathers out of their children's upbringing.	Examining of reviews, interviews, and focus groups that included CPS workers and fathers in Connecticut.	Household without fathers are more likely to have high rates of poverty, and crime, more likely to use drugs and have educational needs, health, and behavioural problem. CPS workers had often an all-good or all-bad view of fathers.

<p>“Survey on Fathers in Child Welfare”</p> <p>Norway, 2018.</p> <p>Sentio Research Norway.</p>	<p>The website for The Norwegian Directorate for Children Youth and Family Affairs (Bufdir.)</p>	<p>The relationship between fathers and the CPS.</p>	<p>Web survey aimed at all employees in CPS in Norway. 1662 CPS workers responded in 232 municipalities.</p>	<p>There has been a change in CPS in a positive direction, with more focus on involving fathers and network.</p>
<p>“Fathers in Child Welfare. A qualitative study of fathers' experiences from Child Welfare”.</p> <p>Norway, 2018.</p> <p>Sentio Research Norway.</p>	<p>The website for The Norwegian Directorate for Children Youth and Family Affairs (Bufdir.)</p>	<p>The fathers' experience from the encounter with the CPS.</p>	<p>Interviews with 11 fathers in Norway who had been in contact with the CPS.</p>	<p>The fathers have various experiences with the CPS. From exclusively positive to more mixed and only negative experiences. They miss more male CPS workers, to feel understood.</p>
<p>The Trouble with Fathers: the impact of time and gendered thinking on working relationships between fathers and social workers in child protection practice in England. UK 2019 Philip</p>	<p>Journal of Family Issues.</p> <p>Essex Digital Library</p>	<p>This article illustrates challenges in building working relationships with men, including the challenge of avoiding binary thinking in the assessment of fathers as “risk” or “resource.”</p>	<p>A qualitative longitudinal study of men's experiences of child protection in England.</p>	<p>The findings highlight how both organizational (clashing time perspectives) and cultural (gendered-thinking) factors can trouble the potential relationship between social workers and fathers.</p>

Georgia; Clifton, John; Brandon, Marian.				
“Gendered Practices in Child Protection: Shifting Mother Accountability and Father Invisibility in Situations of Domestic Violence” Canada 2019 Beth Archer-Kuhn and Stefan de Villiers.	Social Inclusion. Open Access Journal. Essex Digital Library.	CPS workers practices in situations of domestic violence where inclusion and exclusion decisions are made for service provision.	This article reports on an exploratory, qualitative, multiple-methods study that included individual interviews and a focus group with child protection services (CPS) workers in a large city in Alberta, Canada	The findings suggest specific recommendations for practice including the need to engage men in child welfare practice, shift perspective about service delivery with families experiencing domestic violence, and account for gender norms and practices in service delivery.
“Vulnerable families experience from the encounter with the Norwegian Welfare Services”. Norway, 2021. Lena Cathrine Lossius Westby, Doctoral Thesis.	ORIA. The library system for VID Universities, in Norway.	Families' experiences from the encounter with the CPS.	A qualitative study, Narrative methods. 11 life-history interviews with 10 mothers and 1 father.	The father believes that CPS workers without life experience like age, lived life and having children themselves. He desired recognition for himself as a father and the value he has as a parent.

Toril Mjelde

APPENDIX 3

From Regional Ethical Committee in Norway

Region:REK vest Saksbehandler:Fredrik Kolstad Rongved Telefon:55978498

Vår dato: 20.09.2021 Vår referanse 330078

Fremleggingsvurdering: Barneverntjenesten og fedrene - Oppfattelser og opplevelser

Søknadsnummer: 330078

Forskningsansvarlig institusjon: VID vitenskapelige høgskole

Prosjektet vurderes som ikke fremleggingspliktig

(The project is not considered as a subject to notification)

Vi viser til fremleggingsvurdering mottatt den 26.08.2021.

REKs vurdering

Søknadsplikten:

Bare medisinsk og helsefaglig forskning på mennesker, humant biologisk materiale, eller

helseopplysninger skal søke REK om forhåndsgodkjenning, jf. helseforskningsloven § 2.

"Medisinsk og helsefaglig forskning" er definert i loven som en "virksomhet som utføres

med vitenskapelig metodikk for å skaffe til veie ny kunnskap om helse og sykdom", jf. § 4

bokstav a.

Vurdering:

Det er ikke lagt ved en intervjuguide i fremleggingsvurderingen. Det synes imidlertid som at det ikke skal være relevant å stille direkte spørsmål om helse i dette prosjektet. Dette prosjektet vil undersøke fedres erfaringer med møtet med kvinnelige og mannlige ansatte i barnevernet. I tillegg vil ansatte i barnevernet bli intervjuet om deres oppfattelse av farsrollen. Det er forholdet mellom barnevernet og fedrene som er fokus i dette prosjektet.

Denne typen forskning vurderer vi ikke som helseforskning slik det er definert i loven, jf. § 4 bokstav a. Formålet faller dermed utenfor REKs mandat å vurdere. Hvis

fokuset skulle endre seg, og du for eksempel ønsker å undersøke fedrenes helse på noen måte, da kan prosjektet bli søknadspliktig for REK. Jeg har imidlertid forstått prosjektet slik at deltakernes helse ikke er interessant på nåværende tidspunkt.

Konklusjon

Konklusjonen er at du ikke trenger å søke REK om forhåndsgodkjenning for dette prosjektet. Jeg gjør oppmerksom på at konklusjonen er å anse som veiledning, jf. forvaltningsloven § 11. Komiteen er ikke bundet av de råd som er gitt i dette brev. Du har fortsatt anledning til å søke REK, og du vil da motta et vedtak i saken.

Med vennlig hilsen

Fredrik Rongved

rådgiver

Kopi til:

VID vitenskapelige høgskole

APPENDIX 4



BERGEN
KOMMUNE

Administrasjon - Etat for barn og familie

Til
Barnvernvakten (Arbeidssted) v/Toril Mjelde

Fra
Administrasjon - Etat for barn og familie

Intern korrespondanse

Vår referanse: 21-21568
Saksbehandler: Sigrun-Iren Stokken
Dato: 2. november 2021

Bekreftelse på deltagelse i forskning, Phd

I hereby declare with this answer that the Agency for Children and Family, in the City of Bergen, give Toril Mjelde permission to carry out research in the Child Protection Service as described in the request.

Med hilsen
Administrasjon - Etat for barn og familie

Alette H. Knudsen - Etatsdirektør
Sigrun-Iren Stokken - Rådgiver

Dokumentet er godkjent elektronisk.

Kopi: Kunnskapssenter (Arbeidssted) - Nina Garmanslund Bolstad

APPENDIX 5

The Tavistock and Portman 
NHS Foundation Trust

Quality Assurance & Enhancement
Directorate of Education & Training
Tavistock Centre
120 Belsize Lane
London
NW3 5BA

Tel: 020 8938 2699
Fax: 020 7447 3837

Toril Mjelde
By Email

22 March 2022

Dear Toril,

Re: Trust Research Ethics Application

Title: The Child Protection 1st line service and the fathers; a qualitative study of perceptions and experiences.

I am pleased to inform you that subject to formal ratification by the Trust Research Ethics Committee your application has been approved. This means you can proceed with your research.

Please note that any changes to the project design including changes to methodology/data collection etc, must be referred to TREC as failure to do so, may result in a report of academic and/or research misconduct.

If you have any further questions or require any clarification do not hesitate to contact me.

I am copying this communication to your supervisor.

May I take this opportunity of wishing you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely,



Paru Jeram
Secretary to the Trust Research Degrees Subcommittee

APPENDIX 6

Date.....2022.

Version nr.1.0.

Request to participate in a research project.

As a doctoral student at Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust, I am carrying out a project that looks at fathers' histories after contact with the Child protection 1. line service. How do you as fathers experience being met by the CPS?

The project's title is "The Child CPS and the fathers; a qualitative study of perceptions and experiences".

Little research has been done on how gender affects contact between parents and the CPS. Most mothers are in contact with the CPS, and most CPS workers are female. I therefore want to bring out men's stories from the meeting with the CPS. How is it experienced from a male perspective? This knowledge is important for you as fathers to be included and met in the best possible way.

Approximately 6 fathers who have been in contact with male and female caseworkers at the Child Protection Service will be interviewed. You will be interviewed individually by me, in appropriate locations, or via the communication platforms Zoom or Teams, where this is more appropriate.

Any video or tape recordings will only be used by me in the data analysis. The recordings will be deleted as soon as the research is complete. The interviews are estimated to last for about 1 hour. The interviews can cause or reactivate negative emotions but are not expected to pose a greater strain or harm.

The size of the sample is small. This places additional demands on the maintenance of confidentiality and may have implications for anonymity.

Contact information of participants will be kept inaccessible to anyone other than me, and this information will be kept separate from the rest of the material, locked down, coded, and made unrecognisable before use in the analysis work. There is limitation in confidentiality where disclosure of imminent harm to self and/or others may occur.

In addition, I will interview female and male employees in the CPS about their assumptions about fatherhood and their experiences with meetings with fathers. The interviews with the CPS employees will not be connected to you fathers. If your case officer is interviewed, the person will not know that you have been interviewed, and no recognisable information from the interview with you will be known to anyone

other than me. The results of the study will be published, without the individual being recognisable.

Of course, it is completely voluntary to participate in the project, and you can withdraw at any time without having to justify this further. Whether or not you wish to participate in the project has no bearing on your further contact with the Child Protection Service, as the research takes place regardless of the contact you have with the CPS. Information from the interviews is subject to a duty of confidentiality and will be treated strictly confidentially.

My Doctoral project is expected to be completed in autumn 2023. After the project has been completed, all information will be protected by a process of de-identification, and audio/video recordings from interviews will be deleted.

The project is approved from Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee (TREC).

The data generated during the course of the research will be retained in accordance with the Trusts [HYPERLINK "https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/"](https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/)s Data Protection [HYPERLINK "https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/"](https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/)and handling [HYPERLINK "https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/"](https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/)Polic [HYPERLINK "https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/"](https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/)ies [HYPERLINK "https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/"](https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/).: <https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/>

If you have any concerns about the conduct of the investigator, researcher or any other aspect of this research project, you should contact Simon Carrington, Head of Academic Governance and Quality Assurance (academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk)

Sincerely,

Toril Mjelde

Doctoral student at The Tavistock and Portman NSD Trust

Tlf. 47 90 53 01 68

Email: torilmjelde@gmail.com

Research supervisor : Dr. Stephen Mills. (SMills@tavi-port.nhs.uk)

Date.....2022.

Versjon nr.1.0.

Forespørsel om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt. (Norwegian)

I forbindelse med mitt doktorgradsprosjekt ved Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust, gjennomfører jeg et prosjekt som ser på fedres erfaringer med kontakten med barnevernet. Hvordan opplever dere som fedre å bli møtt av barnevernet? Hvordan opplever dere å bli involvert?

Det er forsket lite på hvordan kjønn påvirker kontakten mellom foreldre og barneverntjenesten. Det er flest mødre som er i kontakt med barnevernet, og det er flest kvinnelige kontaktpersoner i barneverntjenesten. Jeg ønsker derfor å få frem menns historier fra møtet med mannlige, eller mannlige og kvinnelige kontaktpersoner i Barneverntjenesten. Hvordan oppleves det fra et mannsperspektiv? Denne kunnskapen er viktig for at dere som fedre skal kunne inkluderes og møtes på en best mulig måte.

Ca. 6 fedre som har vært i kontakt med Barneverntjenesten skal intervjues. Dere vil be intervjuet individuelt av meg, i egnede lokaler, eller via kommunikasjonsplattformene Zoom eller Teams, der dette er mer hensiktsmessig.

Det kan bli brukt video- og båndopptak, og dette skal brukes av meg i dataanalysen. Opptakene vil bli slettet så snart undersøkelsen er ferdig. Intervjuene er anslått å vare i 1 – 1,5 timer. Intervjuene kan forårsake eller reaktivere negative følelser, men er ikke forventet å utgjøre en større påkjenning eller skade.

Utvalgets størrelse er liten. Dette setter ekstra krav til opprettholdelsen av konfidensialitet og anonymitet. Kontaktopplysninger og andre gjenkjennbare opplysninger som gjelder deltagere vil bli holdt utilgjengelig for andre enn meg og blir holdt adskilt fra resten av materialet, kodet, og gjort ikke -kjennbare for før bruk i analysearbeidet. Det kan være begrensninger i konfidensialitet der det er overhengende fare for skade på deg selv og/eller andre.

I tillegg skal jeg intervjuer kvinnelige og mannlige ansatte i barnevernet om deres antagelser om farsrollen og deres erfaringer med møter med fedre. Intervjuene med de barnevernsansatte blir ikke koblet mot dere fedre. Dersom din saksbehandler blir intervjuet vil vedkommende ikke få vite at du er intervjuet, og ingen gjenkjennbare opplysninger fra intervjuet med deg blir kjent for andre enn meg. Resultatene av studien vil bli publisert, uten at den enkelte kan gjenkjennes.

Det er helt frivillig å delta i prosjektet, og du kan når som helst trekke deg uten å måtte begrunne dette nærmere. Hvorvidt du ønsker å delta i prosjektet eller ikke, har ingen betydning for din videre kontakt med barneverntjenesten, da forskningen

foregår uavhengig av den kontakten du har med barnevernet. Opplysninger fra intervjuene er underlagt taushetsplikt, og vil bli behandlet strengt konfidensielt

Doktorgradprosjektet er forventet å være avsluttet høsten 2023. Etter at prosjektet er avsluttet vil alle opplysningene bli gjort ugjenkjennelig, og lyd-/video opptak fra intervju slettet.

Prosjektet er godkjent fra Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee (TREC).

The data generated in the course of the research will be retained in accordance with the Trusts [HYPERLINK "https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/"](https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/)s Data Protection [HYPERLINK "https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/"](https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/)and handling [HYPERLINK "https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/"](https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/)Polic [HYPERLINK "https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/"](https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/)ies [HYPERLINK "https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/"](https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/).: <https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/>

Hvis du har noen bemerkninger vedrørende forskeren eller andre aspekter av dette forskningsprosjektet, bes du kontakte Simon Carrington, Head of Academic Governance and Quality Assurance (academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk)

Med vennlig hilsen

Toril Mjelde

Doktorgradsstudent ved Tavistock and Portman NSD Trust

Tlf. 47 90 53 01 68

Email: torilmjelde@gmail.com

Research supervisor : Dr. Stephen Mills. (SMills@tavi-port.nhs.uk)

Interview guide for fathers.**APPENDIX 7**

A little about background. Work, education.

A little about your family. Who do you live with now?

Can you tell me about your meeting with the CPS?

How long has it been since you got in touch with the CPS?

How did you get involved in the child welfare case?

How did you experience the contact with child welfare services?

What expectations did you find that child welfare services had for you as a father?

Do child welfare expectations match those you have for yourself?

Do you think that mothers and fathers have different stories from their encounters with the CPS?

Do you think female and male child welfare workers will have different perceptions of fathers?

For fathers who do not live with the children: How much contact do you have with your child/children?

What role would you like to play in your child's upbringing?

Intervjuguide for fathers. (Norwegian)

Litt om bakgrunn. Jobb, utdanning. Litt om familien din. Hvem bor du sammen med nå?

Kan du fortelle meg om ditt møte med barneverntjenesten?

Hvor lenge er det siden du kom i kontakt med barneverntjenesten?

Hvordan ble du involvert i barnevernssaken?

Hvordan opplevde du kontakten med barnevernet?

Hvilke forventninger opplevde du at barnevernet hadde til deg som far?

Stemmer barnevernets forventninger overens med de du har til deg selv?

Tror du at mødre og fedre har ulike historier fra møtet med barnevernet?

Tror du kvinnelige og mannlige barnevernsarbeidere vil ha ulike oppfatninger av fedre?

For fedre som ikke bor sammen med barna: Hvor mye kontakt har du med barnet/barna?

Hvilken rolle ønsker du å ha i barnets oppvekst?

Date.....2022,

Version 1.0.

Request to participate in a research project.

As a doctoral student at Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust, I am conducting a research project that deals with fathers' encounters with Child protection 1st line services, the CPS perception of fatherhood, and how gender affects the interaction.

The project's title is "The CPS and the fathers; a qualitative study of perceptions and experiences".

In addition to interviewing fathers, I want to conduct 3 Focus group interviews with female and male employees in the Child Protection 1st line service. The groups will consist of approx. 6 participants and the interview will last for about 1 hour.

I want to find out more about your experiences working with fathers and how you perceive fatherhood. The interview will take place in Norwegian and as a discussion between employees of the CPS.

There is a risk that the group interview may cause unpleasant feelings or demanding discussions but is not expected to pose a greater strain or harm.

It is of course completely voluntary to participate in the project, and you can withdraw at any time without having to justify this further. The information from the interview is subject to a duty of confidentiality and will be treated strictly confidentially. Only I have access to information that appears during the interviews. The Doctoral project is expected to be completed in September 2023. The data will then be protected by a process of de-identification, and eventual audio/video recordings will be deleted. The results of the survey will be published as group data, without the individual informant being recognized.

The project is approved by the Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee (TREC).

The size of the sample is small. This places additional demands on the maintenance of confidentiality and may have implications for anonymity. The contact information of participants will be kept unavailable to anyone other than me, and the contact information will be encoded and made not recognizable before use in the analysis work.

Data generated during the course of the research will be processed in accordance with the Trust's [HYPERLINK "https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/"](https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/)'s Data Protection [HYPERLINK](#)

"<https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/>"and handling HYPERLINK "<https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/>"Polic HYPERLINK "<https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/>"ies HYPERLINK "<https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/>".: <https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/>

If you have questions regarding the implementation of the investigator, researcher, or other aspects of this research project, you should contact Simon Carrington, head of academic management and quality assurance (academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk)

Sincerely,

Toril Mjelde

Doctoral student at The Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust,

Department of Systemic Psychotherapy

Phone: +47 47 90 53 01 68

Email: torilmjelde@gmail.com

Main supervisor: Dr.Stephen Mills (SMills@tavi-port.nhs.uk)

Date.....2022.

Versjon nr.1.0.

(Norwegian)

Forespørsel om å delta i et forskningsprosjekt.

Som doktorgradstudent ved Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust, gjennomfører jeg et forskningsprosjekt for omhandler fedres møte med barnevernet, barnevernets oppfattelse av farsrollen, og hvordan kjønn påvirker samhandlingen.

Prosjektets tittel er «Barnevernet og fedrene; en kvalitativ studie av oppfatninger og erfaringer».

I tillegg til at jeg skal intervju fedre, ønsker jeg å foreta 2 gruppeintervju med henholdsvis kvinnelige og mannlige ansatte i barneverntjenesten. Gruppene vil bestå av ca. 6 deltagere og intervjuet vil vare inntil ca.1 time.

Jeg ønsker å finne ut mer om deres erfaringer med å jobbe med fedre og hvordan dere oppfatter farsrollen. Intervjuet vil foregå på norsk og som en diskusjon mellom ansatte i barneverntjenesten.

Det er en risiko for at gruppeintervjuet kan forårsake ubehagelige følelser eller krevende diskusjoner, men er ikke forventet å medføre store påkjenninger eller skade.

Det er selvfølgelig helt frivillig å delta i prosjektet, og du kan på hvilket som helst tidspunkt trekke deg uten å måtte begrunne dette nærmere. Opplysningene fra intervjuet er underlagt taushetsplikt og vil bli behandlet strengt konfidensielt. Det er ingen andre enn meg og mine veiledere som har tilgang til opplysninger som kommer frem under intervjuene. Doktorgradsprosjektet forventes å være ferdig i september 2023. Da vil opplysningene være anonymisert og opptak av lyd/video opptak være slettet. Resultatene fra undersøkelsen vil bli publisert som gruppedata, uten at den enkelte informant kan gjenkjennes.

Etter at prosjektet er fullført, vil all informasjon bli beskyttet av en prosess der all data vil bli gjort ugjenkjennelig, og lyd- / videoopptak fra intervjuer vil bli slettet.

Prosjektet er godkjent av Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee (TREC).

Utvalgets størrelse er lite. Dette setter ekstra krav til opprettholdelsen av konfidensialitet og anonymitet. Kontaktopplysninger til deltagere vil bli holdt

utilgjengelig for andre enn meg og kontaktopplysningene blir kodet, og gjort ikke - kjennbare for før bruk i analysearbeidet.

Dataene som genereres i løpet av forskningen, vil bli behandlet i samsvar med Trusts [HYPERLINK "https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/"](https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/)s Data Protection [HYPERLINK "https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/"](https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/)and handling [HYPERLINK "https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/"](https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/)Polic [HYPERLINK "https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/"](https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/)ies [HYPERLINK "https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/"](https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/).: <https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/>

Hvis du har spørsmål eller bemerkninger vedrørende gjennomføringen forskningen, forskeren eller andre aspekter av dette forskningsprosjektet, bør du kontakte Simon Carrington, leder for akademisk styring og kvalitetssikring (academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk)

Dersom du ønsker å delta i undersøkelsen, kan du kontakte meg pr. e-post eller telefon, så organiserer jeg grupper på et sted og tidspunkt som passer best for dere.

Med vennlig hilsen

Toril Mjelde

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Department of Systemic Psychotherapy

Tlf. 47 90 53 01 68

Epost: torilmjelde@gmail.com

Hovedveileder: Dr.Stephen Mills (SMills@tavi-port.nhs.uk)

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E: academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk

cc. Course Lead, Supervisor, Course Administraton

APPENDIX 9

Focus group interview with child welfare workers. Interview guide.

Gather basic information from everyone: Education, age, how long have you worked in Child Protection service?

Are you in close contact with fathers in your work?

How do you talk about fathers and how to meet them in your office?

Some literature about fathers in child welfare claim the focus is mostly on the mother. How does this match your experiences?

If someone thinks that fathers don't get involved: What do you think is the reason for this'?

If someone disagrees: What have you done to involve fathers in your work?

Are there different expectations for motherhood and fatherhood?

Is it the child welfare service's job to try to involve the father?

What are the main arguments for involving dad?

Do you think that the perception of fatherhood, differs between female and male child welfare workers?

Fokusgruppeintervju med barnevernsarbeidere. (Norwegian)

En runde med alle: Utdanning, alder, hvor lenge har du arbeidet i barnevernet?

Er dere mye i kontakt med fedre i arbeidet deres?

Hvordan snakker dere om fedre og hvordan dere skal møte dem på kontoret deres?

Det er en del litteratur om fedre i barnevernet som handler om at hovedfokus er på mor. Hvordan stemmer dette overens med deres erfaringer?

Hvis noen mener at fedre ikke blir involvert: Hva tror dere er årsaken til dette`?

Hvis noen er uenige: Hva har dere gjort for å involvere fedre i arbeidet?

Er det ulike forventinger til mors og farsrollen?

Er det barnevernets oppgave å forsøke å involvere far?

Hva er de viktigste argumentene for å involvere far?

Tror dere at oppfattelsen av farsrollen og hvordan fedre blir møtt, er ulik mellom kvinnelige og mannlige barnevernsarbeidere?

Consent for participation in research projects.

The research project is part of a Doctoral degree in systemic psychotherapy at The Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust.

Project title: The CPS and the fathers; a qualitative study of perceptions and experiences.

Responsible: Toril Mjelde. Doctoral student.

Phone: +47 90 53 01 68

Email: torilmjelde@gmail.com

- I have read and understood the information leaflet related to the research project and have had the opportunity to ask questions in relation to this.
- My participation in the project is voluntary and confidential. I'm familiar with the fact that I can withdraw from the survey at any time, without having to give a reason for this.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw any unprocessed data previously provided.
- I understand that audio/video recordings will be deleted when the survey is completed.
- I understand that the results from this project that are published will not identify me.
- I consent to the publication of findings from this research project in anonymized form.
- I understand that due to the small sample size, this may have implications for anonymity.
- I understand that there are limitations in confidentiality where there is a risk of harm to myself or others.
- I agree to participate in the research project.

Name:

Date:

Signature:

Responsible: Toril Mjelde

Date:

Signature:

Dato 22.05.22.

Versjon nr.1.0.

Samtykke til deltagelse i forskningsprosjekt.

Forskningsprosjektet er en del av en doktorgrad i systemisk psykoterapi ved The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust.

Prosjekttittel: Barnevernet og fedrene; en kvalitativ studie av oppfattelser og opplevelser.

Ansvarlig: Toril Mjelde. Doktorgradsstudent.

Telefon: 47 90 53 01 68

Email: torilmjelde@gmail.com

- Jeg har lest og forstått informasjonsskrivet knyttet til forskningsprosjektet, og har hatt anledning til å stille spørsmål i forhold til dette.
- Min deltagelse i prosjektet er frivillig og konfidensiell. Jeg er kjent med at jeg når som helst kan trekke meg fra undersøkelsen, uten å måtte oppgi noen grunn for dette.
- Jeg forstår at jeg står fritt til å trekke tilbake ubehandlede data som tidligere ble levert.
- Jeg er innforstått med at lyd/video-opptak vil bli slettet når undersøkelsen er avsluttet.
- Jeg er innforstått med at resultater fra dette prosjektet som publiseres ikke vil identifisere meg .
- Jeg samtykker til at funn fra dette forskningsprosjektet publiseres i anonymisert form.
- Jeg forstår at på grunn av liten utvalgsstørrelse kan dette ha implikasjoner for anonymiteten.
- Jeg forstår at det er begrensninger i konfidensialitet der det er fare for skade på meg selv eller andre. .
- Jeg samtykker til å delta i forskningsprosjektet.

Navn:

Dato:

Signatur:

Ansvarlig: Toril Mjelde

Dato:

Signatur:

Example of transcription and translation.**APPENDIX 11**

In Norwegian:

Jim: for det er litt uheldig kan du si, fordi det er en sårbar situasjon. Ting er vanskelig og kan være og akkurat det har vært uheldig, fordi at ja ... Og jeg husker på en måte når vi fikk inn hun saksbehandleren som vi har nå, eller samtalepartner som er på skolen og snakker med (barn). Så har vi et oppsummeringsmøte nå hadde vi nå for noen uker siden, og vi har ikke hatt møte siden oktober i fjor, og hun ble ... da fikk vi velge hvem vi ville ha. For det var noen andre som skulle ta over når (barn) skulle få tilrettelagt opplegg. På grunn av utestengelsen som hun har vært usatt for, og på grunn av den gutten som har plaget (barn) på skolebussen.

Toril: Så dette skjer også.

Jim: ja det er der og da har. Hva var det jeg skulle si ...?

Toril: Jeg tror det handlet om stabilitet i personalet. Fordi det er sårt ...

Jim: Ja helt riktig, og da var det en saksbehandler som var navngitt, og da reagerte jeg på grunn av etternavnet, det var familiære koblinger som jeg var redd for at det blir sagt på jobb kan hende at det blir sagt i en bisetning,

T: Så saksbehandleren kunne være inhabil?

J: Ja og derfor så på en måte og da valgte vi å ta henne som vi har nå som er mer eller mindre nyutdannet, og det har jo fungert greit, det har ikke vært noe sånt, men det hadde jo vært greit da kanskje at det var noen andre.

T; Med litt mer erfaring?

J: ja det hadde jo vært greit, for hun som var med til (sted), hun eldste der, Hun var over 60 år mye erfaring, og det var jo litt uheldig for hva som skjedde der det vet vi ikke, og det var jo såpass alvorlig at hun advokaten til (sønnen) han sa det rett ut at hun der damen hun var det faen med tak i, hun finnes det ikke mange av i barneverntjenesten.

English:

Jim: Because it's a bit unfortunate you might say, because it's a vulnerable situation. Things are difficult and can be and exactly that has been unfortunate because that, yes... And I kind of remember when we brought in the CPS worker that we have now or the interlocutor who is at school talking to (children). So, we have a recap meeting now... we had that a few weeks ago and we haven't had a meeting since last October, and she was... Then we got to choose who we wanted. Because someone else was going to take over when (name) was going to get special arrangements. Because of the ban that (the child) has been subjected to, and because of the child who harassed (name) on the school bus.

Toril: So this happens as well.

Jim: Yes, there, and then there are... What was it I was supposed to say...?

Toril I think it was about stability in the staff. Because it's a vulnerable situation.....

Jim: Yes quite right, and then there was a CPS worker who was named, and then I reacted because of the last name, there were familial links,.. and I was afraid that what was being said at work might be said in other contexts.,

Toril: So (the CPS worker) might be incompetent?

Jim: Yes, and so in a way, and then we chose to take her that we have now who been a recent graduate, and it's worked out fine, it hasn't been anything like that... but it would have been okay then maybe that it was someone else.

Toril; With a little more experience?

Jim: Yes, that would have been fine because she was there (place)... the elder person. She was over 60 years old with a lot of experience. And it was kind of unfortunate for what happened there we don't know, and it was so serious that the lawyer said it bluntly that 'this lady is damn efficient, there are not many like her in the Child Welfare service'"

APPENDIX 12**Example of Field note:**

Tuesday 30th May, kl.15. Interview with Johnny.

Location: In one of Norway's largest cities, on a warm and sunny day, with a pleasant temperature – around 18 degrees. We met in a meeting room at a hotel. Nice big room with pleasant light and a stylish décor. Outside the room, there was good access to coffee, tea, and water. This set a good framework for the interview.

Setting and participants: This was one of my first interviews in connection with the project. We had expedited the interview as Johnny was due to attend the event in his neighbourhood later that day. Johnny had limited time because of this. I asked Johnny to tell his story from his meeting with the CPS where he found it natural.

The interview: I had my semi-structured interview guide ready, but I found that it was sometimes challenging to take notes, listen, try to understand the story, and the content, and focus on the guide at the same time. Johnny was much self-driven and engaged, and I found that the questions didn't always fit into the story. I had an idea that Johnny appreciated communicating his experience of his encounter with the CPS, to a researcher who does not speak up or try to analyse or judge his experience. I also got the impression that Johnny wanted to share his experience, to be able to give feedback to the CPS in important areas.

Critical reflections: I wondered along the way if I was off-topic and if the interview guide was a support or an obstacle. Was my lack of preoccupation with the interview guide and management of the interview make the interview inadequate?