

Article

The child, the parents, the family and the state – Chile and Norway compared

by

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Keywords:

Children's position, Child welfare work, Complex families, Family understanding, Welfare policies

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31265/jcsw.v14.i1.234>



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Abstract

English

There is a lack of research comparing Latin American and European countries alongside how family policy relates to social work practices. This study fills in the research gap, and compares Chilean and Norwegian social workers' conceptions of children's position in the family, in family work in a complex family case, and how their understandings impact on CWS practices when working with families with complex needs in each context. A total of 19 social workers participated in the study. The participants took part in four focus groups, discussing a complex family case (vignette). The results of the analysis reveal similarities and difference across contexts, according to children's position in CWS work, social worker's understandings of the responsibilities of parents and the type of family interventions they were inclined to offer. The Chilean social workers seem more family-, and adult-oriented than their Norwegian counterparts, which holds an individualized child oriented view when discussing the case. Moreover, when issues interventions, the Norwegian social workers seems to relay more on the state, whereas the Chilean workers place more trust on the family network. Practical implications of the findings are discussed in light of family welfare policy and child welfare discourses.

Keywords: Children's position, Child welfare work, Complex families, Family understanding, Welfare policies.

Spanish

Los niños, sus padres, las familias y el Estado. Chile y Noruega comparados.

Hay una escasez de investigaciones que comparen América Latina y los países europeos, en términos de cómo las políticas de familia se relacionan con las prácticas de los trabajadores sociales. Este estudio se posiciona en este vacío investigativo, y compara la concepción de trabajadores sociales noruegos y chilenos respecto la posición de los niños en las familias, en el trabajo con familias en casos de familias complejas, y cómo sus interpretaciones impactan en las prácticas del sistema de protección infantil cuando trabajan con familias con necesidades complejas en cada contexto. Un total de 19 trabajadores sociales participaron en el estudio. Los participantes tomaron parte de cuatro grupos focales donde discutieron un caso de familia compleja (viñeta). Los resultados del análisis revelan similitudes y

diferencias entre los dos contextos, de acuerdo a la posición de los niños en el trabajo del sistema de protección infantil, la concepción de los trabajadores sociales sobre la responsabilidad de los padres; y el tipo de intervención en familias que son más propensos a ofrecer. Los trabajadores sociales chilenos parecen más orientados hacia la familia (y a los adultos), que sus pares noruegos, quienes sostienen una visión más orientada hacia la individualización de los niños en la discusión del caso. Por otra parte, cuando se trata de las intervenciones, los trabajadores sociales noruegos parecen apoyarse más en el Estado, mientras que los chilenos ponen más la confianza en las redes familiares. Las implicaciones prácticas de estos hallazgos son discutidas a la luz de las políticas de bienestar familiar y los discursos sobre bienestar infantil.

Palabras clave: posición de los niños, Trabajo de bienestar infantil, familias complejas, comprensión de las familias, políticas de bienestar.

Introduction

Family is considered a fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being for children and other members of the family (UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). Over the last decades, the understanding of family has become more and more complex, and new family forms and ways of living have replaced the idea of the nuclear family (Kapella et al., 2009; Kuronen, 2010; Nygren et al., 2018; Studsrød et al., 2018). That said, 'the family' continues to play an important role in society and for its members, particularly children, who traditionally have been conceptualized as belonging to the family and thus their parents (Lewis, 2006). This study offers a comparative analysis of social work with families in Chile and Norway and the positioning of children.

The family's capacity to provide for and protect children, as well as grant them the opportunity to participate in decision-making, are perceived as important factors for a good and healthy childhood. According to the UNCRC, both the family and the state have responsibilities for children's well-being. The family 'should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that the family can fully assume the responsibility within the community' (UNCRC, 1989, p. 1). However, if families face complex difficulties considered harmful for the children's well-being and development, actions are to be made by the state to protect and safeguard children. Therefore, a prominent question is when and how states should take such actions to ensure that children grow up in safe surroundings with opportunities for healthy development.

Family policy and child welfare services (CWS) in different national contexts aim to ensure the protection and well-being of families and children. Nevertheless, the relationship between the child, parent and the state, in addition to the level of state support, varies across countries (Lewis, 2006; Hantrais, 2004). How social workers translate policy into action may depend on several factors such as political and public support, the legitimacy of family interventions and available resources and established practices, but also their own values and theoretical understandings. Morris et al. (2017) argue that critical reflections about social workers' understanding and intervention into family life are important, as family constitutes a premise for the purpose and arrangement of familial control and support.

The study presented in this article is part of the international comparative research project 'Family Complexity in Social work' (FACSK), a NORFACE-funded project launched in 2015. The FACSK project seeks to explore the relationship between family policy and practice, and how social workers' understandings of family and family policy impact actual social work practice with families (Nygren et al., 2018). In this paper, we draw on data collected among CWS workers in Chile and Norway, as they represent two very different family policy contexts. In the FACSK project, Chile is characterized within a familialized welfare cluster, in which the family plays an important role in relation to family welfare (Franzoni, 2008). Norway is characterized within a de-familialized welfare cluster, in which over time, an explicit and coherent family policy has minimized the family's responsibility for its members (Hantrais, 2004; Nygren et al., 2018). Little research exist comparing Latin American and European countries alongside how family policy relates to social work practices. Yet, the different family policy strategies make these two contexts particularly interesting for comparison. The research question we seek to answer is therefore: *How do CWS social workers perceive children's position in the family and in family work in a complex family case, and how do their understandings impact on CWS practices when working with families with complex needs?* The practical implications of the findings are discussed in light of family welfare policy and child welfare discourses.

Welfare contexts and theoretical framework

The relationship between the state and family life is complex. Because of various developments in welfare states, some have gained a more prominent role in facilitating children's upbringing through public systems of family support, whereas others show more reluctance to state interventions. As a social democratic welfare state, Norway has strong egalitarian values and a redistributive policy that by and large are accepted by the Norwegian people (Forsberg & Kröger, 2010). Moreover, Norway has moved towards a 'child-centric perspective' in child welfare policy and practice, while at the same time embracing a traditional family-centred approach (Skivenes, 2011). Chile has adopted neoliberal economics, which according to Marcus (2004) has increased long-standing social and economic stratification, thereby affecting the perception of the economic and social security, equity and trust among the Chilean people. Moreover, the child welfare system in Chile is largely

privatized with governmental supervision and partial financial support. It has also been criticized as lacking formal structures to safeguard children's rights, including participation (UNCRC, 2015).

Hantrais' (2004) welfare cluster typology reflects different ways of balancing state and family responsibility. Within this framework, states characterized as 'defamilialized', such as Norway, have achieved a higher legitimacy for state interference and more extensive support measures than states characterized as 'familialized' states. Family welfare in familialized welfare states have a more familialistic and collectivistic approach, delegating the responsibility for the family well-being to the families themselves. Conversely, defamilialized contexts hold a more individualistic approach towards family members (Hantrais, 2004; Nygren et al., 2018). Consequently, when in need, individuals and families in defamilialized contexts have higher expectations of the state compared with those in familialized contexts, in which reliance rests more on other family members' support.

Given the importance of family in the UNCRC (1989), parents (or others responsible for the child) 'have the primary responsibility to secure, within their abilities and financial capabilities, the condition of living necessary for the child's development' (article 27). Much contemporary research on children's psychological and social development focuses on parents' responsiveness to children's needs and the significance of a positive bonding relationship with the child (Bowlby, 1988; Drugli, 2014; Størksen, 2014). Yet, different welfare policies and CWS contexts also influence interpretations of the UNCRC, thus leading to different ways of operationalizing rights in the everyday lives of children. Social workers translate and understand current political ideologies and commitment differently, and how the relationship among the child, parent, family and state is practised may vary accordingly (Jensen et al., n.d.; Lipsky, 2010).

Today, the UNCRC is embraced and implemented in nearly all countries regardless of welfare regime type. Looking back, we see that the children's position has changed from a position of being subordinated adults, to increasingly being seen as individual persons with independent rights, also when it comes to being heard (article 12). Therefore, scholars have made an important distinction between the children's

perspective and a child perspective (Sommer et al., 2010), the first denoting adults deliberately seeking children's own perspective, and the latter denoting an adult perspective on what is in the child's best interest. Hence, the UNCRC has played an important role in proactively encouraging states to take practical steps to protect the rights of children, not only to safeguard children, but also when it comes to provision and participation (Musinguzi & Ellingsen, 2017).

Method

The overall FACSK project seeks to compare family-based social work on the policy, organizational and social work practice level in four family policy clusters (Nygren et al., 2018). In the project, we conducted focus group interviews with social workers from eight countries and different service areas. In this study, focus group discussions from two countries and one service area (CWS) are explored.

Researchers from across the participating countries developed a vignette presenting a complex family case depicted in three stages, and efforts were made to create a complex, yet credible case for discussion (see Nygren et al., 2018). The case described a complex family situation consisting of Maria, a mother with substance misuse problems, Maria's partner David, who has an unsettled immigrant status and is the father of the two youngest children in the case, Beth age 5 and Jon age 8, as well as Thomas (age 20), the eldest son, who struggles with mental health problems. There are indications of violence in the family. As the family situation escalates, the two youngest children move to live with Maria's brother and his wife Hannah, who have four children from a previous relationship. In the focus groups, participants deliberated on the family case, and discussed their understandings of the case along with suggesting interventions and actions from their respective welfare contexts.

The study presented here draws on four focus group interviews with CWS social workers in Chile and Norway, with two interviews in each country. In Chile, two participants took part in each interview, and in Norway seven and eight social workers participated. Participants were recruited from local CWS services at the municipal level, and two of the authors were present in each interview. Interviews were digitally recorded, anonymized and transcribed into a full text in the original language, before being translated into English. Standard ethical procedures were

followed throughout the research process (The National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities, 2016), and researchers gained written informed consent from all participants.

When analysing the data, we applied an inductive approach inspired by thematic analysis (Brown & Clark, 2006). This entails a systematic and profound search for themes emerging from the data relating to the research question concerning children's position within the family and in family work in the two CWS contexts. We searched for how children were approached, how family responsibility was embedded in the responses and, furthermore, how and which interventions came into play.

Focus groups are valued for their potential to offer rich descriptions as participants reflect and respond to each other's reflections (Polit & Beck, 2004; Redalen et al., 2013). Despite the risk of obtaining ideal responses based on the phenomenon of social desirability, vignette studies are acknowledged for their potential to lessen such influenced responses (Wilks, 2004). Nevertheless, the vignette needs to be realistic in order to produce real responses, and a close collaboration with researchers from the different countries was crucial in order to create a context-sensitive vignette (Nygren et al., 2018).

The study has some limitations. The vignette ascribed specific characteristics to the mother and father, which may have triggered some gendered responses in the discussions of the case. That said, all participants perceived the case as familiar and representative, which may suggest that the responses are likely to be prominent in their daily practices. Secondly, the sample size is small, therefore we need to be cautious in drawing generalized conclusions. Yet, the findings reveal how participating social workers responded to complex family situations in light of their CWS context. Thirdly, when interviews are translated into another language, important information can get lost. To help reduce this risk, we had the transcripts professionally translated, and researchers from both national contexts were actively involved in analysing the data.

Findings - the child, the parent and the state

In analysing how children were approached, how family responsibility was embedded and how and which interventions came into play, the thematic analysis revealed three themes relevant to the research questions of this article: Theme 1) children's position in CWS work, theme 2) social worker's understandings of parenthood; and theme 3) family interventions presented by the social workers. We will now further elaborate on these findings, and provide empirical data to support the findings.

Children's position in CWS work – obtaining the children's story

In both Chile (SW-C) and Norway (SW-N), the departure for social workers was a concern for the younger children in the case, with an urge to acquire an overview of their situation. The first immediate response to the vignette in both countries was how violence and substance abuse issues affect the children's well-being:

SW-C: I mean, the first thing I do is focus on the fact that there are children in the family. Well, it is a recomposed family, but there are children, they are young, there is consumption of alcohol, of drugs and there is domestic violence.

SW-N: After all, this is about protecting some children who are being beaten, as the mother says [...] I think we would look at the children pretty quickly [...] It's a bit like, first you ensure that the children are okay, then...

SW-N: In the CWS, we are most concerned with the two youngest children. It is they we are most concerned about – like, how are they, you know – and then we depart from the parents.

Despite these similarities, their approaches to getting a handle of the children's situation, and particularly the role of the children's own perspectives, differ between the two contexts. The Chilean social workers' information sources are primarily professional services and the adult family network, in order to assess the children's conditions and analyse the family situation. That said, one focus group also addressed supplementing the adult view with the child's (own) perspective:

SW-C: Like here, [...] we talk about going deeper into the diagnosis. Acknowledging the children's story, too, because in fact, here we are talking about it from the adults' position, the uncle and aunt's position, but we also have to dig deeper into how the children feel. [...]

SW-C: We have an interview [with the child], and we triangulate the information mainly with the schools. Somehow, we gather different information regarding the situation of the child and extended family, too, and that is where we generate this [story].

As the above quotes show, gathering the children's story is first and foremost about consolidating information from several adult sources, in order to evaluate the 'correct picture' of the perception of the child. According to this social worker, understandings of children's situation are based on a reconstruction of second-hand information, combined with how the children themselves feel about the situation. Nonetheless, talking with children was not emphasized at first in the interviews conducted in Chile, but rather at the end of the interview, when one social worker brought it up:

SW-C: I would like to clear something up. The stories, the participation of the children, the little ones, are very fundamental in everything that is happening. And we, as a programme, also have to account for the stories, the expectations, the children's motivation [...] I wouldn't put aside interviewing the children.

The other focus group in Chile did not mention talking with children of their own initiative, but did respond to it when the moderator asked directly:

SW-C: Well, it could be that the children are paid attention to by [...] talking with them very carefully, asking them how they are.

This response shows that talking with children is a cautious exercise, suggesting a view of the child as vulnerable. Among Chilean participants, the age of the child seems to matter when it comes to talking with children. Involving the children was only suggested in the third stage of the vignette, when the children have gotten older. Even so, when talking with children they are concerned with observing the children's non-verbal responses and their interactions with caregivers:

SW-C: They are old; they have a right to be listened to. I mean, why aren't they asked in a more direct manner when we do the follow-up? It is not like 'Has your mom beaten you?' No, you ask them how they have been. You watch the interaction and if they share some kind of codes. How do they react if they're wrong about something; do they look at their mom? These are the things you evaluate to see how the child's situation is. Now, clearly, you can ask in the school [...] I mean, the school is the first place that should detect [the situation]...

Among the Norwegian social workers, talking with children was a key theme throughout all three stages of the vignette, showing an attentiveness to the children's own perspectives in their work and assessments:

SW-N: Well, they [children] play a large and important role. We always talk with them, listen to what they think and what they need, how they are doing. Well, we do that the whole way through, in the entire process, to put it that way, from start to finish.

The social workers also talked about a major shift in the role and understanding of children in their practice:

SW-N: Yes, and that is how it has developed, I mean, the children receive more and more focus. But clearly, it is also important that they do not start to feel that they can

decide everything. The idea is that they should be heard, but not decide. That is a pretty big and important distinction to explain to them: 'Of course, we want to hear your opinion, but that doesn't mean that you can decide, or that things will necessarily be exactly as you want.'

Despite advocating for informing and talking with children, the social workers suggested some limitations when it comes to children's partaking, and drew a line in how much impact children should have on decisions. The main argument was that children should not carry the responsibility of the decisions made, accentuating social workers' responsibility to make decisions in CWS cases. They also suggested that children could be under pressure when addressing their wishes:

SW-N: It is precisely that thing about responsibility, because they may want, they could say that they want, to spend lots of time with the mother, and we could actually be a little uncertain about whether or not they mean it [...] Adults should make the difficult and important decisions so that they [the children] don't feel that it is they who have made them.

Still, among the Norwegian social workers, when talking with children it was important to have an open approach, and to let even very young children participate:

SW-N: You should not lead. They are to speak freely, more than answering questions, and you talk about their worries. That you can do even when they are quite small, even under the age of five.

Overall, these findings show that in both contexts the children's well-being is the first and foremost concern. However, the social workers approached children differently in the two contexts, thus suggesting different views of children and their competences. The Norwegian participants highlighted the role of the children's participation as being embedded into social workers' everyday practice, whereas the Chilean social workers were concerned with grasping the children's story through a consolidation of information from different sources. Accordingly, including children's own perspectives was only occasional or arbitrary among the Chilean participants. In sum, the findings suggest that the Norwegian participants were more inclined to view children as, at least, relatively competent actors in CWS decision-making, while the Chilean participants highlighted their vulnerability with a subordinated role to adults.

Parenthood and the caregiving responsibility

The second theme concerns how social workers in the study perceive parenthood. Many contemporary family policies encourage both parents to be present in children's lives, emphasizing the family as the core unit for children. A Chilean social

worker expressed that a family is 'definitely composed of the responsible adults – the children's caretakers', thereby implying that adult family members hold a key caregiving right and responsibility for children. In the general discussions, they emphasized that the caretaker is not necessarily only the mother; other adults in the family are responsible for the child (e.g. the father, older children and grandparents). However, when discussing the specific vignette, social workers from both contexts were inclined to highlight the caregiving role of the mother; hence, helping the mother was seen as crucial:

SW-N: A lot of it is about thinking about the shape the mother is in, and it's assessing whether she is able to care for the children there and then. So the next alternative, father out, or mother and children in the crisis centre? If not, bring in Paul and the wife.

SW-C: If it turns out that Maria does not want to do anything about it [her situation], well, then you have to consider placing a protective measure, because the children are suffering from violence. Make a display of the situation, concentrating on factors that in some way affect the mother, and the father... the mother, as to whether she is capable of taking care of the children.

Notably, among the social workers from Chile, when discussing the involvement of extended family, there was also a focus on maternal figures:

SW-C: We could make inquiries in the network; for example, if there is a relationship with the mother, maybe we can talk with Maria's mom. Her sister has a somewhat damaged relationship. Maybe start to 'save the network' and see what happens.

A similar focus on the mother was also noticeable among the Norwegian participants:

SW-N: How can I help the mother? If she falls now, then there is no one holding the family together.

SW-N: Does the mother need someone to take care of her health?

SW-N: A lot is about the shape the mother, and assessing whether she is able to care for the children there and then.

Yet, the Norwegian participants also questioned their own immediate attention on the mother as the caregiver:

SW-N: The father says that the mother is not capable of having the children around her, and we need to bear that in mind; it is not as if we straight away can conclude that the mother is the solution and the root to everything good.

Nevertheless, the findings suggest that social workers ascribe the primary caring responsibility for the children to the mother, and she came to the forefront of CWS assessments, measures and care in both contexts. However, these findings could be triggered by the vignette design. The mother is the one initiating the contact, and the

indications of violence may dismiss the father as a good father figure due to a widened awareness of the impact domestic violence has on children. Consequently, such factors may trigger a greater sympathy with the mother compared to the father, as demonstrated by this quote from a Norwegian social worker: 'The poor mother, this is a crisis for the mother.'

In the Norwegian focus group, the social workers also talked about a change in parenthood, and problematized the current situation in many families in which parents, in general, engage in their own self-realization:

SW-N: Parents today are very concerned with self-realization. They get an education, [participate in] bicycle races, they exercise ... and the children should be good at playing the piano and violin, and handball and football. In that sense, the children are not visible; it is all about the parents' needs.

Moreover, self-realization is also seen in relation to the parenting role:

SW-N: Parents realize themselves through their children, having the 'perfect child' as part of their self-realization. That said, some get an education at an older age, and when they first have children, they go all in for it [being a parent].

SW-N: That also means, if you show how good you are through your children, then it is quite a crash when you enter our system – 'look how good I am', and then suddenly, a referral to the CWS. Then, you are a bad parent, and it is a bigger shame.

The Norwegian participants expressed that parents are not only parents, but also individuals with the right to realize themselves by engaging in their own independent activities. They were concerned with the trend of showing others that you 'succeed' as a parent by displaying the 'perfect child', and how this, combined with an individualized society, might have led to a new kind of abandonment that affects the emotional bond between parents and children:

SW-N: You know, they have 100-dollar shoes and a Calvin Klein cloak [...] everything seems perfect, but they don't connect, and then the children cut themselves in the evenings. They don't connect emotionally, only materialistically. I think we will see much more of this in the future.

Such perspectives stand in stark contrast with the Chilean social workers, who talked about working with high-risk families from poor areas, and how the system fails to intervene at an early stage:

SW-C: I mean, we get terrible cases, babies that should have been placed in the system immediately, but they were left at home. And today, they have a health condition and a horrible violation. Abandoned babies found in dirty houses, children with torticollis because they were left in the crib, and they never took them...

It is prominent that social workers in Norway see an increase of children coming from seemingly 'good homes', in which there is struggle to connect with the children emotionally. Although there are also incidents of severe cases of maltreatment and poverty in Norwegian data, the Chilean social workers described an everyday CWS practice characterized by more perturbing family situations compared with their Norwegian counterparts. Despite these contrasting portrayals, CWS workers in both contexts work with a variety of cases with different levels of severity. In spite of emphasizing the importance of both parents in children's lives when talking about families in general, when discussing the vignette, participants tended to construct children and their development and well-being in light of the mother: her self-realization, her child care, her abandonment, etc. This was the case in both CWS contexts.

Family interventions proposed by the social workers

The findings show that the social workers across the four focus groups are concerned, though in different ways, with safeguarding the children. Firstly, indications of violence appeared as a key concern that needed prompt CWS actions. In Norway, such action was addressed to the father:

SW-N: In such cases, we, of course, often ask the person who is beating the wife or children to move out for a while until we've gotten control over the situation and we know that the children's situation is stable.

SW-N: I would like to have made demands of the father, that he would have to move out for a period [...] but it depends on what information comes out.

Among the Chilean social workers, a similar suggestion was addressed to the mother:

SW-C: [...] and also, maybe look at what possibility there is for Maria to get out of the house, help her with that [...], first of all, get Maria to the women's centre so they can help her [...] And she can go with her two kids and get away from the person who is exercising the violence.

Secondly, it seems evident that the Chilean social workers were concerned with approaching the concrete issues causing problems for the children, such as substance misuse, mental health issues and domestic violence in itself. Compared with the Norwegian social workers, the Chilean participants were more willing to approach the parents' problems, for example, helping the mother with her substance misuse issues:

SW-C: [...] and when I am sure that the children are well, why not continue more with Maria, because the topic of rehabilitation is fundamental.

The Norwegian social workers paid considerably less attention to whether or how they should help with the concrete problems of the parents. For example, little attention was placed on the mother's substance misuse problems per se, and to its negative effect on her parental abilities. Throughout the case, the children were their main concern, particularly the children's relationship with their caregivers and the children's emotional state. Yet, how to help the parents deal with their social problems was, to a limited extent, discussed:

SW-N: How has it [the situation] affected their [the children's] relationship with mom and dad?

SW-N: I am thinking, if you see it from the children's perspective, that is where I am [...] they have a father who is violent, and now their mother is breaking into pieces. What are their [the children's] emotions?

Apparently, the focus groups in Chile and Norway suggested different scopes of attention that, in turn, influenced how they would approach the case with CWS measures. Among the Chilean social workers, findings suggest an interventionist approach that is more parent-, or mother-oriented, whereas among the Norwegian social workers, the child-centric approach was more prominent.

Thirdly, combined with the parent orientation among Chilean participants, the findings also suggest a greater readiness to identify positive changes as the case developed:

SW-C: She has achieved separation, the ending of a violent relationship, and empowerment too, because, if she has a place to rent, it is possible that she found employment.

SW-C: Because ultimately, she is facing autonomy instead of being dependent on the person who is violent, very interesting.

SW-C: She has proven a lot of progress [...] She has proven her interest in keeping a connection with her children; I think she has a lot of possibilities to reclaim custody of her children.

The quotes suggest several positive factors, such as being empowered, achieving autonomy and an interest of staying connected with the children. This is in contrast with the discussion among the Norwegian social workers, who solely interpreted the case as a negative escalation:

SW-N: The situation for those children is still very unpredictable, making them frustrated [...] Perhaps the aunt and uncle cannot take care of them then.

SW-N: We might have thought that the mother should be given the six months for treatment and things like that, while the children are living with their aunt and uncle ... until the mother has a grip on herself. [...]The mother has not changed, or her situation has not gotten any better.

The Norwegian participants also discussed the well-being of the children living with their aunt and uncle, and whether the placement was good enough for the children. This stands in contrast with this quote from a Chilean social worker: 'I am super positive about the fact that, in this case, there is an extended family that exists, especially in this time of crisis.' Moreover, whereas the Chilean social workers saw the importance of intensely working with the mother's substance misuse as a means to help her regain custody, the social workers in Norway had a long-term placement in mind, and were concerned with formalizing the placement in order to keep the situation under their control.

Discussion

This article explores how social workers from CWS in Chile and Norway relate to a complex family case, in terms of which position children are given in CWS work, parental responsibility and family interventions. Overall, the findings suggest both differences and similarities in how participants responded to the case. Despite a common concern for the children's well-being, the social workers described divergent perspectives and practices in the explored areas. In the following, we will discuss some implications of these findings in light of family policy and child welfare discourses.

In the FACSK project, Chile and Norway are characterized within different welfare regimes. As a defamilialized welfare state, Norway offers a broad range of welfare arrangements that have legitimacy, are coordinated and well-functioning (Hantrais, 2003; Forsberg & Kröger, 2010). People have rather high expectations of the state as a welfare provider, and consequently, the state also has the power and legitimacy to exercise its power when the situations faced by children are severe (Hennum, 2015). In turn, social workers can largely rely on other services to help the parents with their difficulties, which may allow them to narrow their scope of attention – to the child. Welfare services in familialized regimes, such as Chile, tend to be more fragmented and less legitimized (Nygren et al., 2018). This may help explain why social workers in Chile expressed a lack of trust in other welfare services, accepting that if someone

is to help the mother, they themselves are the one to do it. When it comes to the children's need for care and support, they place expectations toward maternal figures in the extended family. This aligns with other studies which suggest that extended family is ascribed a significant role as welfare providers in Chile (Fernandez, 2016; Studsrød et al., 2018). The findings also suggest that in equal family situations, as described in the vignette, social workers' perceptions are different in the different contexts. In Chile, welfare support is largely based on income due to the incorporation of a neo-liberal economy (Maclure, 2014). In our study, social workers from Chile perceived the family described in the vignette as a low-income and poor family, as neither of the parents have regular employment and income. Despite the fact that low-income families are also overrepresented in Norwegian CWS (Kojan, 2011), social workers in our study talked about a significant increase in high-income family cases, which is reflected in the workers discussion about children, who become a status symbol for their parents.

Gilbert et al. (2011) recognize three orientations of CWS work: 'child-protection-oriented', 'family-service-oriented' and 'child-focused-oriented' services. Norway has traditionally been characterized as family-service-oriented services with extensive family-oriented welfare arrangements, but has since moved towards a more child-focused orientation (Skivenes, 2011). Chile has more recently adopted practices that can be described as family-oriented, with a particular focus on therapeutic orientations aimed at dysfunctional families (Ursin et al., 2016). Among the Norwegian social workers, much attention has been placed on the children's situation and on the possible consequences the adults' problems have on the children in terms of (negative) attachment, relations and emotions. Moreover, talking with children to get their perspectives was emphasized and perceived as good CWS work. In more child-focused-oriented contexts, CWS arrangements are typically adjusted to meet the children's needs, competences and maturity by viewing situations from the children's perspectives (Gilbert et al., 2011). Chilean social workers were also concerned with grasping the children's story, but seemed to denote the children's story from a wide-angled perspective. These approaches resemble the distinction between a 'child's perspective', derived from an adult point of view with the best interest of the child in mind, and a 'children's perspective', which is when adults deliberately seek the children's own views and understandings (Sommer et al.,

2010). Within the first approach, children are not recognized as competent actors with important perspectives, whereas the latter acknowledges the 'being child' as an important contributor to society and a provider of insights for CWS work.

Nonetheless, when exploring these perspectives, the focus seems to be present-oriented, with limited (or at least an implicit) focus on the children in a past and future perspective.

Although the findings reveal differences in how social workers position children with regard to participation, social workers from both contexts were prone to see children and their development and welfare in light of (possibly also in the shadow) of their parents, especially the mother. When children are seen in light of their parents, children become visible as victims of the parents' problems. When children are placed in the shadow of their parents, they become less visible, as the social workers' attention is on the parents' problems, leaving children in the shade (Bruheim-Jensen et al., n.d.). The findings suggest that Chilean social workers are more parent-oriented, and efforts to solve the parents' problems were more prominent. They presented parental problems in a more concrete and direct manner, and suggested parent-oriented interventions, such as parental classes and substance abuse programmes, among others. The Norwegian participants were more attentive on how risk factors affected the children in the family, and how to protect children from these, with less focus on how to solve the parents' social problems.

Social work is a problem-solving activity that aims at increasing the opportunities and maximizing the capacities for people using services (Gray et al., 2012). However, when exclusively approaching a family case from a child-centric orientation, it can be questioned whether social work in its essence is performed, particularly if the attention is primarily on how problems impact on the children's emotional and developmental state. Consequently, problems are transformed into risk factors that must be dealt with by removing or reducing the risk factors (e.g. the father moving out, supporting the mother emotionally and putting the children in placement), rather than dealing with the problems per se (e.g. rehabilitation from substance misuse). On the contrary, when CWS solely focuses on the parents' situation with the assumption that it naturally will lead to a better outcome for the children, decisions are taken

without a clear understanding of how the children experience the situation (Horwarth & Tarr, 2014).

In conclusion, the findings suggest a complex relationship between the family and the state, in which family policy, state resources and state legitimacy impact professional practices in CWS work. Despite both countries having ratified the CRC, significant differences exist when it comes to how children are involved in CWS work.

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