

Ways of Seeing Children

Perspectives of Social Workers in Chile and
Norway

by

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Summary

The overall aim of this project was to gain extended insights into social workers' perspectives of children in child protection work in Chile and Norway. Q methodology was applied to meet this aim, as it is suitable for exploring and comparing subjective perspectives. The findings are based on the perspectives of 38 social workers (21 in Chile and 17 in Norway). This project adopts an exploratory design, and during the research process, I discovered that a review of previous research on social workers' perspectives of children in child protection work was lacking from the literature. Hence, the second aim of this project was to fill a research gap in the literature by providing a comprehensive portrayal of child protection social workers' constructions of children through an integrative review.

The body of this dissertation contains three research papers. Paper 1 explores child protection social workers' practices and ideas about children and childhood in existing research. Findings are based on an analysis and synthesis of 35 empirical articles. Papers 2 and 3 present findings from the Q methodological study. While Paper 2 focuses on the perspectives of children among social workers in Chile ($n=21$), Paper 3 has a comparative approach to study the perspectives of children among social workers in Norway and Chile ($n=38$).

The findings show that social workers in Norway are inclined to see children's independence, while social workers in Chile tend to see children as relationally and structurally conditioned. Conducting an analysis and synthesis of previous research enabled a juxtaposition of findings from Chile and Norway against what was found in the integrative review. A key finding of the review is that children generally were understood in light of psychological knowledge such as developmental psychology, attachment theories and individualistic psychology. Less focus was directed towards contextual knowledge of children such as children's neighbourhoods, friends and teachers and variation among children. A predominance of studies in the review were from U.K. or other Northern European countries. Hence, a key question that transpired from looking at findings across the three papers is whether the independent child is a predominant understanding of children among child protection workers in

Northern European countries. There is still a lack of research, particularly in English, on social worker perspectives in Latin America. An important focus for future research should be to explore whether the perspective emphasising the relational and structural child that was reflected among the social workers in Chile transcends to a more general level among social workers in Chile and possibly to other Latin American countries. If these findings are identified in more large-scale studies, they may contribute to the building blocks of empirical and theoretical understandings, for example, regarding current knowledge on child protection systems. Moreover, such findings may extend the knowledge of how children's rights are *balanced* among social workers internationally.

This project contributes to extending previous knowledge by illuminating perspectives of children in child protection work among social workers in different welfare contexts. The perspectives identified in this study indicate different ways of seeing children which may orient social workers' attention towards some aspects and away from others, particularly regarding the independent versus relational child. These orientations may have significant implications for interpretations and decisions made in child protection work.

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Part I – Foundation

1 Introduction

The point of departure for this project is in acknowledging that our ways of seeing children and childhood are neither neutral nor fixed; they are shaped by the particular cultural, social and historical contexts we are situated in (James et al., 1998). Historian Philippe Ariès (1962) was, to my knowledge, the first to draw attention to “childhood” as a social phenomenon that has evolved in meaning throughout history – a notion that today has been embraced by interdisciplinary childhood studies. Proponents within this orientation argue that understandings of childhood are socially constructed and that dichotomies like child versus adult and mature versus immature delimit children from being seen and treated as significant individuals (e.g. James et al., 1998; Qvortrup, 1994; Sommer et al., 2010). The field of childhood studies places special attention on children as competent and significant actors in speaking up about their own realities (Morrison et al., 2019; Raithelhuber, 2016; Tisdall & Punch, 2012).

Actualising children as actors with intrinsic value is one of the cornerstones of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989), which has been agreed upon by all UN nations except the United States. The CRC can therefore be understood as a harmonising factor for a socially conditioned understanding of childhood through its outline of universal standards for children’s welfare and position in society (Hämäläinen et al., 2012). The CRC defines children as all citizens below the age of 18 and consists of 54 articles. While 42 of these articles are “articulated rights”, articles 43–54 are about how adults and governments should work together to realise children’s rights. The CRC encompasses articles related to aspects like protecting children from discrimination, abuse and neglect; provisions for family support, education, health care, shelter and food; and letting children participate and voice their opinion on issues concerning themselves.

While the CRC has been extensively endorsed, it is generally formulised, and countries have the autonomy to decide how to implement it into national legislation and operationalise state obligations. For example, countries are asked to undertake measures “to the maximum extent of their available

resources” (CRC, 1989, art. 4). This highlights different international starting points for realising children’s rights in practice.

1.1 Exploring social workers’ perspectives of children in child protection work

Thinking and talking about children and what a good or decent childhood entails are fundamental to child protection work and part of social work educational curricula (Collings & Davies, 2008; Graham, 2011; Hennem, 2014). Internationally, social workers are prominent practitioners in child protection work (Gilbert et al., 2011). This makes their perspectives of children significant for multiple reasons. First, while various ideas of children and childhood are articulated in policies, literature and legislation, social workers cannot do their job according to ideal conceptions because of the limitations in their work structures (Lipsky, 2010). Social workers must therefore adapt ideals into achievable measures that are realisable in practice. Hence, at the street level, social workers define children and what a good or decent childhood entails and act upon these constructions in practice.

Moreover, as Burke has argued, “A way of seeing is a way of not seeing, a focus on object A involves a neglect of object B” (Burke, 1965, p. 49). This means that social workers may orient attention towards some aspects and away from other aspects, which consequently may influence interpretations and decisions made in child protection work. These views are affected by what is known or believed, and the relation between what we see and what we know is never settled (Berger, [1972] 2008, p. 7–8). Hence, investigating social workers’ perspectives may illuminate and raise awareness of the underlying assumptions of children that inform social workers’ practices.

Some research has specifically explored social workers’ constructions or perspectives of children in child protection work (e.g. Bjerre, 2018; Fern, 2014). Nevertheless, much of the existing research targets how social workers think about specific issues related to children, such as child participation (e.g. Archard & Skivenes, 2009; Berrick et al., 2015; Toros, 2017; van Bijleveld et al., 2014; Vis et al., 2012; Vis & Thomas, 2009) or factors informing risk assessments (e.g. Haug, 2018; Skivenes & Stenberg, 2015; Stanley, 2013). Less research has focused on the more overarching systems of meanings and the

multivalence of ideas that may produce various perspectives of children. Moreover, much of the existing research published in English on this topic has been conducted within Northern European and Anglo-American countries (Jensen et al., 2019).

In this PhD dissertation, I direct attention towards social workers in Chile and Norway and their perspectives of children in child protection work. By so doing, I seek to fill contextual and thematic research gaps, specifically regarding the lack of research on social worker perspectives in Latin American contexts and comparisons of these with the European social worker perspectives that presently dominate the literature (Tønnessen et al., 2019). This PhD project relates to a larger NORFACE, Welfare State Futures funded research project on Family Complexity in Social Work (FACSK). The FACSK project investigated how social work with complex families is embodied across eight countries (Bulgaria, Chile, Ireland, Lithuania, Mexico, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom).¹ These countries were strategically selected due to, for example, assumed differences in welfare regime types. In the case of Norway and Chile, they were assumed to represent exemplars of familialised (Chile) and defamilialised (Norway) welfare regimes (Nygren et al., 2018). Among other characteristics, this means that the state takes extensively more responsibility for welfare service provisions in Norway than in Chile. This PhD project extends the scope of the FACKS project by specifically focusing on social workers' perspectives of children in Chile and Norway by means of Q methodology. Findings from this project are based on separate data collection and analyses of the perspectives among 38 social workers (21 in Chile and 17 in Norway). While many research approaches are suitable for exploring perspectives within and across groups of participants, Q methodology is particularly suitable because the methodology in itself has its rationale in exploring and comparing differences and similarities in subjective perspectives (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

¹ For additional information of the FACSK project, see <https://welfarestatefutures.wordpress.com/research-network/facsk-family-complexity-and-social-work-a-comparative-study-of-family-based-welfare-work-in-different-welfare-regimes/>

1.2 Research aims and contributions

The *overall aim* of this dissertation is to produce extended knowledge about social workers' perspectives of children in child protection work in Norway and Chile by using Q methodology. As such, I seek to obtain a "meta-perspective", or a perspective of the perspectives among social workers. This project is exploratory in its design, and during the research process, I discovered that a review of previous research on social workers' perspectives of children in child protection work was lacking in the literature. Hence, the *second aim* is to contribute to the literature by providing a comprehensive portrayal of child protection social workers' constructions of children. To achieve this aim, an integrative review (IR) design following Whitemore and Knarfl (2005) was adopted. The IR was chosen because it can bring together findings from studies with different research questions and methodologies, which may enable a more inclusive understanding.

Through these research aims, this project seeks to contribute with knowledge to three areas:

1. social work education and child protection practice (in terms of conceptualisation of the child);
2. the application of Q methodology in cross-national comparative studies across diverse country contexts; and
3. connecting academic literature concerned with the conceptualisation of "the child" in theory (e.g. within contemporary childhood studies) and in practice (through policy and professional work with children and young people).

The body of this dissertation comprises three research papers. Paper 1 relies on the secondary data and presents findings from the IR of previous research. Papers 2 and 3 rely on the original primary data of this project and present findings from the Q studies conducted in Chile and Norway. Table 1 provides an overview of the three research papers.

Introduction

Table 1. Overview of the three research papers of this dissertation

	<i>Paper 1</i>	<i>Paper 2</i>	<i>Paper 3</i>
<i>Title</i>	“Child Protection Social Workers’ Constructions of Children and Childhood: An Integrative Review”	“Children and Childhood in Chile: Social Worker Perspectives”	“What Are the Perspectives of Children in Child Protection Work among Social Workers in Norway and Chile?”
<i>Journal</i>	<i>Child & Family Social Work</i>	<i>Journal of Comparative Social Work</i>	<i>Children and Youth Services Review</i>
<i>Status</i>	Published 2019	Published 2019	Published 2020
<i>Author(s)</i>	Ida Bruheim Jensen, Ingunn Studsrød & Ingunn T. Ellingsen	Ida Bruheim Jensen, Ingunn T. Ellingsen, Ingunn Studsrød & Manuela Garcia Quiroga	Ida Bruheim Jensen
<i>Methodology</i>	Integrative review	Q methodology	Q methodology
<i>Research question</i>	1	2	3

The papers included in this dissertation seek to answer the following research questions:

1. How have children and childhood been constructed by social workers within the child protection domain in previous research? (Paper 1)
2. How does a sample of child protection social workers in Chile perceive children and childhood, and what are the characteristics of their perspectives? (Paper 2)
3. What are the perspectives of children in child protection work among a sample of social workers in Norway and Chile? (Paper 3)

In sum, these questions enable an overarching, international exploration of social workers’ perspectives of children, as found in previous research

(Question 1). They also zoom in on the variety of perspectives among social workers in Chile (Question 2) and zoom out again to look at the perspectives of children in samples of social workers in Chile and Norway (Question 3).

1.3 Clarification of concepts

The term *child protection* is used throughout this dissertation to refer to a broad array of child and family services aimed at preventing or addressing child harm. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that using this term may cause confusion as to which services are being referenced. In some countries, such as Norway and other Nordic countries, “child welfare” is commonly used to abbreviate a dual mandate: protecting children from abuse and neglect and enhancing child and family welfare. Yet, the term *child welfare* may insufficiently reflect the nature of services (Pösö, 2014) whose provisions are built on a “four-sided” pattern of relationships (agency, judge, parents and child) (Lipsky, 2010, p. 75). Gilbert et al. (2011) described three orientations to child protection: child protection, family service and child-focused. These orientations illustrate the differences in how child abuse is framed and responded to, the social worker’s function and the amount of state services aimed to prevent child abuse. Nevertheless, these orientations describe overarching tendencies or typologies rather than the nature of child protection services for single countries, as orientations may blend and coexist within countries (Gilbert et al., 2011). Hence, while none of the abovementioned terms may be comprehensive, I acknowledge that, by using “child protection”, the services in Norway (*barnevernet*) and Chile (*protección de la infancia*) may look more similar than they actually are.

The term *social worker* is used in a broad sense to refer to frontline workers in child protection services. Although an inclusion criterion for this study was “educated social workers”, social work is a challenging occupation to frame because it is located within and greatly affected by diverse cultural, educational, economic and policy contexts in different countries (Banks, 2012). To illustrate, child welfare pedagogues (*barneverspedagoger*) and social workers (*sosionomer*) are the two main professions involved in child protection work in Norway. While these professions have different educational pathways, they are both defined as “social workers” (Messel, 2013) from an international perspective. In contrast to Norway, Chile requires a social worker license, and

all participants from Chile were educated social workers (*trabajadores/as sociales*). A common feature among all study participants was that they hold bachelor's degrees.

1.4 Structure of the dissertation

This doctoral dissertation contains two parts. Part I provides a foundation for my research and is organised into seven chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the research aims, while Chapter 2 provides a contextual frame. Chapter 3 presents the theoretical foundation used to discuss the findings of this research, and Chapter 4 describes my scientific position. Chapter 5 outlines the methodology and research design of this project, and Chapter 6 provides a summary of the research findings. Chapter 7 discusses the findings of this research project and highlights the study's contributions and implications. Part II provides the full-text versions of the three research papers.

2 Contexts

This chapter provides the contextual framework for this project. I will focus on two overarching areas: (1) child protection and welfare systems and (2) previous research relevant to this project.

2.1 *Child protection and welfare systems*

Child protection systems originate from an overarching welfare system (Hämäläinen et al., 2012; Pösö et al., 2014). An understanding of various welfare systems and their characteristics is therefore relevant to this dissertation, as the nature and comprehensiveness of a welfare system influence how and to what degree children's and families' needs are provided for by the state. Moreover, divergences in welfare characteristics may say something about what responsibilities social workers are mandated to have in relation to families and children. As described by James et al. (1998), children's needs and rights are variously ascribed and restricted along dominant ideologies within a society. Stainton-Rogers (1989) pushed this argument further by arguing that different ideologies may elevate different social realities, for example, in the sense that Marxists and capitalists have different ways of seeing the world. Transferred to this project, welfare regimes with various ideological underpinnings may promote different ways of seeing children.

Welfare typologies can be understood as a classification system whereby countries are defined based on their systematic differences and similarities along specific welfare characteristics. While many forms of welfare typologies exist, a distinction can be made between ideal-typical and real-typical forms of classifications (Aspalter, 2011). While the former focuses on the larger picture and employs a wider international and long-term perspective, the latter conveys a more detailed picture that focuses on fewer countries and greater sensitivity to short-term and local changes (Aspalter, 2011). The most prominent among the ideal-typical forms of welfare classification may be Esping-Andersen's (1990) "three worlds of welfare capitalism". These three "worlds", or welfare clusters, are the social democratic, the liberal and the corporatist and are described along three dimensions: stratification, decommodification and familialism. In liberal welfare states, social benefits are provided only to the

poor, usually through means testing. In conservative welfare states, hierarchies created in working life remain, as social benefits typically are based on an insurance model. Social democratic welfare states are characterised by universal benefits that cover the entire population, regardless of previous earnings and with limited elements of needs testing. While Esping-Andersen's work has been important in research on welfare states, his work has also been criticised, for example, for his limited focus on the role of family (O'Connor, 1993).

Esping-Andersen's work forms a starting point for Hantrais's (2004) analysis of family policy across 25 EU countries. Her analysis arranged countries into four different welfare regimes: the defamilialised, partially defamilialised, familialised and refamilialised. These four regimes reflect different ways of balancing state and family responsibility. The defamilialised welfare regime is characterised by explicit governmental effort to minimise individuals' reliance on family support. State intervention into family life is largely legitimised and supported by the general public. Hantrais arranged countries like France, Luxembourg and Belgium together with Nordic countries under the defamilialised welfare regime. In the partially defamilialised welfare regime, the government rhetoric is supportive of families but with a reluctance towards family intervention. Welfare services are primarily oriented towards children and families "at risk". Ireland, the United Kingdom, Austria, Germany and the Netherlands are examples of partially defamilialised countries. In the familialised welfare regime, family policy may be characterised as fragmented and mainly uncoordinated. In such regimes, child and family support is not administered by a core public organisation. Instead, the welfare responsibility rests more on families themselves. Those welfare institutions that do exist are primarily nongovernmental and non-profit. Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Cyprus and Malta are examples of countries with familialised welfare regimes. The refamilialised welfare regime is characterised by a political shift from universal public welfare services to a market-driven family policy approach. As a consequence, responsibility for family welfare is transferred from the state back to the family. Formal public institutions are underfinanced, which makes delivering qualitatively good and reliable welfare services challenging. According to Hantrais (2004), examples of countries in this category include former socialist countries like Poland, Lithuania and Estonia.

Child protection social workers have a twofold responsibility in the state–family relationship in the sense that they are asked to direct attention to both children and families (e.g. by addressing the question of what “good enough” child-rearing entails) (Oltedal & Nygren, 2019). The four welfare regimes provided by Hantrais (2004) may hence be linked to divergent child protection orientations, specifically whether family matters primarily are understood as private or public, that is, depending on “the degree to which families are treated as public properties” (Riggs et al., 2016, p. 1) (defamilialisation oriented) or, conversely, whether family affairs and custody of children primarily are seen as private matters whereby the state should hesitate to interfere and exercise authority (Oltedal & Nygren, 2019) (familialisation orientation). For example, the threshold for interventions may likely be higher in familialised and refamilialised welfare regimes, and the pool of child welfare assistance measures may be broader in defamilialised welfare regimes.

There is at least some evidence supporting this last assumption, for example, in research by Gilbert et al. (2011) and Gilbert (1997, 2012), who have made distinctions among the child protection, family service and child-centred orientations to child protection. They found that the outcomes in family service orientations (comprising Continental European and Nordic countries) are much more likely to involve voluntary arrangements with parents than in child protection systems (comprising Anglo-American countries), where the majority of placements are compelled (Gilbert, 2012; Gilbert et al., 2011). Other characteristics include that, while child abuse is framed as a problem of the individual in the child protection orientation, it is perceived as a result of family dysfunction or conflict in the family service orientation. Moreover, while the response to child abuse in the family service orientation is primarily therapeutic, with a focus on the assessment of needs, legal investigations of deviance represent the leading response in the child protection orientation. Moreover, while the relationship between the state and family primarily is built upon partnership in the family service orientation, relationships are more adversarial in the child protection orientation (Gilbert et al., 2011).

The child-centred orientation is concerned with children’s rights and welfare (Gilbert et al., 2011). The main characteristic of this orientation may be that children are seen as individuals with significant perspectives and interests that should be taken into account (Skivenes, 2011). This orientation emerged later,

and one significant influencing factor for its rise is the increased emphasis on children's rights (Gilbert, 2012); through the CRC, children have an independent relation to the state. Relative to the other two child protection orientations, it has been argued that this orientation may challenge family protections and the least intrusiveness principles of the family service orientation (Pösö et al., 2014). This is because the state may advance paternalistic policies (defamilialisation) by reducing children's dependence on kinship (Gilbert, 2012). In fact, Wyness (2014, pp. 65–66) has argued that children increasingly come in as “third parties” whereby “the bipartite relationship between family and state” insufficiently describes recent developments in the state–family relationship to also include the state–child relationship. It is still unclear how and if the child-centric orientation may be in conflict with the other, traditional orientations (Skivenes, 2011; Pösö et al., 2014). As argued by Gilbert et al. (2011), the child-centred orientation is not exclusive but rather may coexist and blend with the family service and child protection orientation.

2.1.1 Welfare characteristics in Chile and Norway

Norway and Chile are not included in Hantrais's (2004) analysis. Nevertheless, some characteristics of the Chilean and Norwegian welfare systems suggest that Norway and Chile reflect exemplars of the defamilialised and familialised welfare regimes, respectively (Nygren et al., 2018).

From an ideal-typical point of view, Norway and the other Scandinavian countries have created their own social democratic welfare regime in which the government takes care of the individual “from the cradle to death” (Aspalter, 2011, p. 736). Overarching characteristics are equality within the population through comprehensive public service provisions (e.g. education, health and social services) and principles of universal social rights, which are achieved through high taxation (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Hence, a high degree of defamilialisation exists in the Norwegian welfare system, as the state takes a vast responsibility for its citizens, which leans in favour of characterising Norway as a defamilialised welfare regime.

Latin American countries have been left out of all previously described analyses of child protection and welfare characteristics (i.e. Esping-Andersen, 1990;

Gilbert et al., 2011; Hantrais, 2004). Neoliberalism was implemented in Chile through coercion during the Pinochet dictatorship (1973–1990) (Muñoz Arce, 2019). During the dictatorship, tens of thousands of people who were linked to the political left were detained, tortured or “disappeared” (Amnesty International, 2013). The neoliberal turn adopted under the dictatorship has resulted in a reduction in the state’s functions and social expenditures, in universal social programmes being targeted and in welfare services (e.g. education, pensions and health) becoming primarily privatised (Muñoz Arce, 2019). Such characteristics may speak in favour of characterising Chile as familialised, as the family has a broader responsibility for welfare provisions relative to the state. However, Latin American countries have also been claimed to stand out from other ideal-typical welfare regimes through high degrees of stratification (Aspalter, 2011). Extending the number of countries in Esping-Andersen’s (1990) analysis, Aspalter (2011) called Latin America the anti-welfare conservative welfare regime. A common measure of stratification is the Gini index of family income distribution, where 0 means absolute equality and 100 means absolute inequality. Chile has a Gini coefficient of 54.9%, while Norway has a Gini coefficient of 28.3% (Tønnessen, 2019). High levels of inequality reflect “poorer-than-average social welfare” for significant proportions of the population (Tønnessen, 2019, p. 23).

As previously mentioned, a distinction can be made between ideal-typical and real-typical forms of welfare classification (Aspalter, 2011). In his analysis of human development, inequality and social risk in Latin American and Nordic countries, Tønnessen (2019) found that, although all the Nordic countries are significantly more equal in income distribution than any Latin American country, several country-specific differences can be found. Moreover, by analysing available data from 18 Latin American countries, Franzoni (2008) suggested that different welfare regimes exist in Latin America. Such research illustrates that it may be an overgeneralisation to pair Latin American and Nordic countries into purely homogenous groups (Studsørød et al., 2018). I will therefore conclude this section with some more specific welfare characteristics of Chile and Norway.

Geographically speaking, Norway and Chile are each other’s opposites in the sense that they “border” the North Pole and South Pole, respectively. While the total population in Chile is 18.8 million, Norway has a population of

5.4 million. Chile was the first Latin American country to join the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and has been one of Latin America's fastest-growing economies in recent decades (World Bank, 2020). Nevertheless, the country is among the bottom OECD performers. This is in contrast to Norway, which has among the highest standards of living in the world and is a top OECD performer (OECD, 2019). In 2018, the unemployment rate was 7.4% in Chile and 3.9% in Norway. These numbers can be compared against a mean of 5.5% among OECD countries. While the unemployment rate has decreased in Norway since 2015, it is steadily increasing in Chile (OECD, 2020a). Such socioeconomic situations may affect the welfare of children and their families.

The percentage of children living in households with an income below 60% of the national median per capita income in 2014 was 27.2% in Chile and 13.2% in Norway (UNICEF, 2020a). Such divergent poverty measures can be due in part to the level and content of public spending on families with children (i.e. level of defamiliarization). Public spending (% of gross domestic product) on cash transfers, services and tax breaks for families in 2015 (2.4% average among 38 OECD countries) was just below 3.5% in Norway and just above 1.5% in Chile (UNICEF, 2020a). When looking at overarching child well-being outcomes (mental well-being, physical health and academic and social skills) among 38 OECD/EU countries, a recent report ranked Norway at number 3, while Chile was ranked at the bottom at number 38 (UNICEF, 2020a). The conditions for children and their families are, in other words, disproportionately worse in Chile than in Norway across an array of measures.

According to Tønnessen (2019), the main challenges for human development in Latin American countries involve working towards universal coverage of essential social services and reducing inequality. On this note, Muñoz Arce (2019) has argued that welfare states have never existed in most Latin American countries. This argument may depend on what is understood by the term *welfare state*. The complexity in definition is highlighted here in Esping-Andersen's (1990) question of it as a "state responsibility for securing some basic modicum of welfare for its citizens [...] and what, indeed, is meant by 'basic'? Would it be more appropriate to require of a welfare state that it satisfies more than our basic or minimal welfare needs?" (p. 19). Although the dictatorship ended in 1990, its constitution still remains, which was one of the antecedents to the

violent demonstrations between the police, military forces and the general public in Chile during the fall of 2019. The largest demonstration was attended by more than one million people in Santiago, which highlights the people's wish to break from the "Pinochet-era constitution" and long-standing forms of economic inequality and political exclusion (Bartlett, 2019). While there should have been a referendum in April 2020, it was postponed to October 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The referendum asked Chileans *if* they wanted a new constitution and what kind of body they wanted to draw it up. More than 78% of Chileans voted in favour of a new constitution (BBC News, 2020).

Drawing on the abovementioned statistics for Norway, it could be argued that Norway is one of the best places in the world to grow up for children (UNICEF, 2020b). Nevertheless, no society is without flaw, and current national and international concerns have been raised regarding the Norwegian child protection system.

2.1.2 Child protection characteristics in Chile and Norway

Both the Chilean and Norwegian child protection systems have recently been in stormy weather in the media, nevertheless, on quite different grounds. In Norway, child protection services have been accused of "stealing children" from innocent parents in international discourses (Skoglund, 2017), and 8000 people in 11 countries demonstrated against the Norwegian child protection service in the spring of 2016 (Bragdø-Ellenes & Torjesen, 2020). Norway has also been convicted in several child protection cases brought before the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). These cases have mainly been based on violations of article 8 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948) regarding respect for family life. In Chile, the key antecedent for the media critique was a report revealing that more than 850 children and youth had died under state custody since 2005 (United Nations Organization, 2018). Of these children and youth, 210 died in residential care centres (UNICEF, 2018). Moreover, observations from the CRC (2015) point to multiple concerns regarding child protection, such as gender- and ethnicity-based discrimination, high levels of in-home violence against children and youth, uneven quality in public and private welfare services and insufficient formal structures to secure children's rights to be heard.

Foreign reactions to Norwegian child protection cases may give the impression that Norwegian child protection services have a lower threshold for intervention than other countries (Bragdø-Ellenes & Torjesen, 2020). Nevertheless, regarding the number of children placed outside their homes, Norway is at about the same level as Germany, Switzerland and Finland, but higher than England, Ireland and the United States (Burns et al., 2016).

Norway was the first country to have its own ombudsman for children in 1981 and was also among the first to ratify the CRC. The CRC was incorporated into Norwegian law in 2003, and in 2014, it was also incorporated into the country's constitution. Norwegian child protection services are regulated by the Child Welfare Act (1992), which emphasises a dual mandate: family support to prevent neglect and abuse (a welfare mandate) and necessary compulsory actions in cases of child maltreatment (a protection mandate). The state and municipalities have a shared responsibility for child protection services. Social workers who hold a bachelor's degree in child welfare pedagogy (*barnevernspedagog*) and social work (*sosionom*) are the dominant professionals in municipal child protection services in Norway. It is the municipality's responsibility to conduct assessments and provide in-home and preventive measures and family supervision. The municipalities' tasks are also to follow up on children placed outside the home, approve of and supervise foster homes and so forth. Placement of children outside the home is done either by the municipality itself in cases of voluntary placements or by the municipality promoting a case for the county welfare board in cases of coercive placements. The Norwegian child protection system is classified as both family service-oriented *and* child-focused (Skivenes, 2011). Nevertheless, on the basis of the ECHR convictions against Norway and the child protection services' negligent focus on "respect for family life", the question arises whether the focus on the individual child's needs (or the child's best interest) has gone too far in Norway and at the expense of *family* interests.

Child protection in Chile is, as in most other welfare services, partly privatised, but the National Service of Minors (SENAME) provides financial support for and supervision of child protection services. However, the financial support is insufficient to cover all costs, and child protection services have to rely on other sources, such as from the voluntary sector. SENAME is part of the Ministry of Justice and is responsible for three service areas: child protection, adoption and

youth in conflict with the law. Questions have been raised regarding whether SENAME has adequate control of the large number of institutions and programmes in these different areas (Garcia Quiroga & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2014) (e.g. due to the large number of child deaths under state custody). In Chile, the responsibilities in the partially privatised child protection services are commonly shared between social workers and psychologists. These professions work parallel (or what is described in Chile as “*dupla*”), and the idea is that responsibilities should be divided based on specific professional expertise. While several legislations are relevant to child protection work,² multiple changes in legislation are currently under discussion. For example, in regard to separating the responsibilities for children in need of protection and youth in conflict with the law (UNICEF, 2018). While the CRC has been ratified in Chile, certain statistics suggest that provision measures are lacking, for example because poverty is a common cause for children entering residential care centres (UNICEF, 2018). Hence, a key argument is that more proactive familial financial and social support is needed (Garcia Quiroga & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2014; UNICEF, 2018).

Comparing more specific child protection characteristics and statistics yields challenges, as measures and service provisions vary. Nevertheless, most social workers participating in this project worked in child protection services that were structured along a specialist model, in the sense that there are different teams of workers doing reception work (managing notes of concerns), assessments, interventions, follow-up work, foster care-related work and so forth. This is a common model for structuring child protection work in municipal child protection offices in Norway, though some offices (usually in smaller municipalities) have adopted a generalist model whereby workers perform tasks that transcend team divisions. In a similar vein, the larger child protection organisations in Chile commonly provide multiple child protection services along a specialist model.

² Such as Legislation 19.968 (*tribunales de familia*), legislation for minors (16.618) and SENAME legislation (20.084).

2.2 Previous research

Common discourses on children and childhood that have circulated in the literature are constructions of childhood as a time of innocence, incompleteness, vulnerability and irrationality. Such constructions have been challenged by more empowering understandings of children as resilient, capable, active subjects in their own lives (e.g. James et al., 1998; Sommer et al., 2010). Currently, more integrational ways of thinking have arisen in which such understandings are seen as coexisting rather than as polarised opposites (e.g. Morrison et al., 2019; Hanson, 2017; Uprichard, 2008). Children are understood as vulnerable and agentic at the same time (Morrison et al., 2019). They are seen as beings with important perspectives on their own lives in the present, but at the same time, they are in development, cognitively, emotionally and physically (Uprichard, 2008). In the next section, I will go more in depth into previous research on social workers' perspectives of children in child protection work. Moreover, as this project deals with social workers' perspectives in different child protection contexts, I will end this section by focusing specifically on previous research that has compared perspectives of children across child protection contexts.

2.2.1 Social workers' perspectives of children in child protection work

A growing body of research has explored social workers' perspectives of children in child protection work. For example, previous research has explored what social workers believe to be significant risk factors and needs for children's well-being and identity development (e.g. Keddell, 2017; Skivenes & Stenberg, 2015; Stanley, 2013; Thomas & Holland, 2010; Toros, 2017; Toros et al., 2017). In their vignette study of how child welfare workers in three countries assessed and substantiated the risk level of a 5-year-old girl, Skivenes and Stenberg (2015) found that domestic violence in the home was perceived as a significant risk factor for children's well-being. Moreover, negative parenting capacities, such as lack of resources, the mother's insufficiency to protect the child, the mother's age, an absent father and the father's possible drug abuse were also underscored. In terms of contextual factors, the mother's history was most frequently emphasised. Similarly, Stanley (2013) found that

past risks were used as indicators of future risk. Moreover, risk was frequently judged in quantitative rather than qualitative terms, specifically in terms of “how many” risk factors were present rather than the quality or character of these risks. Analysis of risk was often conducted before the social workers had met the family because risk of harm was perceived to follow fixed standards (frequently informed by individualistic psychology) to which working with the family took second place. As argued by Stanley (2013), “the child was seen as the passive victim who could not control events” (p. 78). Hence, children were seen as objects rather than subjects of interventions.

In their exploration of how social workers assessed and reported children’s identity in written documents, Thomas and Holland (2010) found that social workers seemed to focus on family relationships and self-esteem. In more recent studies, the importance of attachment and affection between the child and other family members has also been found to be an important need for children (Keddell, 2017; Toros et al., 2017). Nevertheless, through their analysis, Thomas and Holland (2010) found that this was perceived as a standardised need of any child and not so much influenced by how the children themselves viewed these relationships. Descriptions of children’s identity were even replicated across siblings. The authors concluded that social workers have a standardised and narrow perspective on children’s identity. Other aspects of identity, such as cultural identity, religion, friends, interests and children’s own perspectives of their identity, were less emphasised. Hence, a similar feature across these studies is that contextual factors and children’s and parents’ own perspectives have been less emphasised by social workers.

The body of research on social workers’ views on child participation in child protection work is steadily growing (e.g. Alfandari, 2017; Arbeiter & Toros, 2017; Archard & Skivenes, 2009; Berrick et al., 2015; Healy & Darlington, 2009; Hultman et al., 2020; Oppenheim-Weller et al., 2017; Roose et al., 2009; Sanders & Mace, 2006; Shemmings, 2000; van Bijleveld et al., 2014; Vis & Fossum, 2015; Vis et al., 2012). For example, research includes studies on children’s participation in child protection in court proceedings (e.g. Hultman et al., 2020), care order decision-making (Berrick et al., 2015), child protection assessments (e.g. Arbeiter & Toros, 2017; Oppenheim-Weller et al., 2017), residential care and foster care (e.g. Vis & Fossum, 2015) and report writing (Roose et al., 2009). Most of this research has explored how social workers

themselves understand child participation or how social workers facilitate participation in practice, either as a question of frequency (how often) or quality (how). Researchers have operationalised participation in different ways, for example, as hearing the child (Alfandari, 2017; Archard & Skivenes, 2009), giving information to the child (Alfandari, 2017; Oppenheim-Weller et al., 2017), children's opportunity to impact decisions (Alfandari, 2017; Holland, 2001; Oppenheim-Weller et al., 2017) and spending time alone with the child (Alfandari, 2017; Ferguson, 2016). Moreover, the term *child involvement* has been used (Berrick et al., 2015; Oppenheim-Weller et al., 2017). At an overall level, studies have found that social workers commonly give child participation high importance in child protection work. Nevertheless, the "what" and "how" vary. Specifically, social workers' definitions of child participation and how to facilitate child participation in practice have varied within and across studies. Definitions of child participation have included, for example, "informing, involving, explaining, asking children but also thinking about children's needs" (van Bijleveld et al., 2014, p. 255). Nevertheless, the examples of child participation in practice have differed from the definitions provided. Actual examples of participation have described situations in which the workers informed the child of decisions that had already been made (Archard & Skivenes, 2009; van Bijleveld et al., 2014). Moreover, it has also been found that social workers are unclear about the information children should provide and whether children should be pushed to talk about personal issues (Alfandari, 2017; Ferguson, 2016; van Nijnatten & Jongen, 2011). Furthermore, workers have frequently mentioned barriers to child participation in practice. Prominent barriers include the child's age, capacities and maturity together with time constraints and organisational barriers (Alfandari, 2017; Berrick et al., 2015; Healy & Darlington, 2009; Hultman et al., 2020; Sanders & Mace, 2006; van Bijleveld et al., 2014; Vis & Thomas, 2009). A link between child protection and child participation has also been identified. Social workers frequently emphasise children's need for protection and that child participation may sometimes be harmful (Arbeiter & Toros, 2017; Archard & Skivenes, 2009). Although Shemmings's (2000) article was published 20 years ago, his conclusion on the "participation-protection link" may still be salient to summarise a large strain of research, specifically that social workers seem to be informed by a dichotomic perspective. Children are seen as either competent or incompetent, and positions of rights or rescue are taken accordingly (Fern,

2014; Shemmings, 2000). Less research has focused on social workers' perspectives on the provision of services to children (e.g. mental and physical space, play, money, knowledge, friendship and love). Nevertheless, one of the few interesting examples of this is Cousins and Milner's (2006) study. By operationalising children's rights as the three P's of protection, participation and provision, they explored how these rights are perceived in Irish residential care among young people and professionals. Among professionals, the findings showed that providing adequate education and mental health services to young people is an area of concern and that there should be a "right mix" of young people in the residence (Cousins & Milner, 2006, p. 91).

Less research has explored social workers' understandings of children more generally. However, examples do exist of research exploring the understandings of "the neglected child" (Horwarth & Tarr, 2014; Scourfield, 2000), child sexual exploitation (Reisel, 2017), children's visibility in child protection practice (Ferguson, 2017; Nybom, 2005), children's rights (Cousins & Milner, 2006), childhood discourses (Collings & Davies, 2008), constructions of children in child protection social work practices (Alberth & Bühler-Niederberger, 2015; Fern, 2014), portrayals of children in assessments (Holland, 2001), children's agency (Morrison et al., 2019) and professional conversations with children in divorce-related child welfare inquiries (van Nijnatten & Jongen, 2011). A broad array of constructions of children were found across these studies. To mention some, children were seen as problems, incompetent, actively involved (Fern, 2014), resilient (Keddell, 2014) and invisible (Alberth & Bühler-Niederberger, 2015). Moreover, as was also found in previously mentioned studies (e.g. Stanley, 2013; Thomas & Holland, 2010), children are commonly understood based on narrow and specific characteristics (e.g. Alberth & Bühler-Niederberger, 2015; Horwarth & Tarr, 2014). A key argument of Alberth and Bühler-Niederberger (2015) is that this "does not lead to a comprehensive consideration of the child's situation" (p. 149). At an overall level, children are frequently understood through the lens of individual psychology wherein knowledge on child development and attachment patterns and risks are considered standardised or "truths" about the child and the child's situation.

When looking at other research characteristics of the abovementioned literature, we have more knowledge on social workers' perspectives on children

as a group than, for example, children in specific age groups, ethnic minority children, children with disabilities or specific children. Those studies that do distinguishing between different age groups have found that young children are understood as more vulnerable (e.g. Gorin & Jobe, 2013; Reisel, 2017), while youth for example are perceived as troublemakers (Fern, 2014). Moreover, in the case of youth, it has been found that social workers perceive finding “solutions” to be more challenging, as youth’s needs could be multifaceted and/or linked to situations outside the family (Gorin & Jobe, 2013). Hultman et al. (2020) also found that different ages and maturity are required in different parts of the process of child protection court proceedings. When it comes to ethnic minority children, Križ and Skivenes (2012) found that social workers perceive many risks and problems for minority children (e.g. racism and language skills).

The most prominent data materials of previous research seem to be interviews with social workers or social workers’ written documents. Fewer studies have used observational methods. This means that we have more knowledge on understandings of children and childhood and social workers’ practice rationalities but less access to social workers’ actual “doings” (Bartels, 2013) in child protection work. Moreover, of the above studies, most were conducted within Northern European contexts.

There are, however, research contributions and publications in Spanish and Scandinavian languages of relevance to this project (e.g. Bjerre, 2018; Gallegos Fuentes et al., 2018; Haug, 2018; Hennem, 2016; Vagli, 2009). In her study of narratives and constructions of children in child protection social work practices in Denmark, Bjerre (2018) found that social workers rely extensively on psychological knowledge, particularly attachment theories, in their constructions of children. Moreover, children were found to be cast in their parents’ shadows in child protection work. Social workers’ reliance on attachment theories has also been found in Norway (Hennem, 2016). In Gallegos Fuentes et al.’s (2018) study of social workers’ perspectives of children’s rights in residential care in Chile, they found two key representations that, at times, were in tension with each other: children as rights-holding subjects together with children as objects of protection.

2.2.2 *Research comparing perspectives of children across child protection contexts*

Previous research has compared social workers' perspectives of children across countries (e.g. Berrick et al., 2015; Nybom, 2005; Križ & Skivenes; 2012; Ellingsen et al., 2019; Oltedal & Nygren, 2019; Studrød et al., 2018). Research has also compared social workers' perspectives in the same countries but in different child protection services (e.g. Healy & Darlington, 2009; Vis & Fossum, 2014) or across welfare services (e.g. Ellingsen, Studsrød & Ursin, 2019). Of this literature, I will focus on the research that has been conducted in Norway and Chile in particular.

Most of the identified research comparing social worker perspectives of children in Chile and Norway (implicitly or explicitly) is from the FACSK project (Ellingsen et al., 2019; Oltedal & Nygren, 2019; Studrød et al., 2018). In their comparison of Chilean and Norwegian social worker perspectives on children's position in the family and in child protection work, Ellingsen et al. (2019) found that Chilean social workers seem more family- and adult-oriented than Norwegian social workers, who hold an individualised child-oriented view. These findings converge with those of Studsrød et al. (2018). Moreover, as these researchers have argued, a difference in Norway and Chile seems to be that, while a policy "push" to realise children's rights appears to be present in Norwegian child protection services, Chile appears to experience a political "pull" wherein infrastructures are insufficient to facilitate children's rights in practice (Studsrød et al., 2018).

Whether research reviews have been conducted is also of relevance when addressing research comparing perspectives of children across child protection contexts. Some review efforts have been made, for example regarding *child participation* in child protection work (Toros, 2020; van Bijleveld et al., 2015). Moreover, Reynaert et al. (2009) provided a relevant review of children's rights literature since the adoption of the CRC in 1989. Still, rather than focusing on the views of social workers, they mapped the academic discourse on children's rights. Lastly, although not peer-reviewed, Schrader-McMillan and Barlow's (2017) extensive review of 28 research reviews tapped into issues related to social workers' perspectives of children in child protection, for example, through their exploration of factors that inform the engagement of children in

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assessment work. Yet, the overarching focus of their review was on systems and practices shown to improve outcomes for children who are at risk or have experienced abuse and neglect.

3 Theoretical foundation

To discuss the perspectives of children and childhood among social workers in Norway and Chile, I draw on theory from childhood studies and Lipsky's ([1980] 2010) perspective on the street-level bureaucrat. These perspectives serve complementary functions for this dissertation. The multidisciplinary field of childhood studies provides perspectives on children and childhood that seek to capture the complexities and multidimensional aspects of childhood in different ways (Graham, 2011). Hence, childhood studies offers a set of contemporary *ideals* for how children should be understood and a canvas for child-related practices. Yet, this dissertation deals with social workers and their views of children and childhood, and Lipsky (2010) provides a bottom-up perspective where reality is seen from the social worker's point of view. The reality of the "street-level bureaucrat" is characterised by ambiguous and contradictory goals, inadequate resources and a large volume of cases. Upon this constrained background, the social worker translates policy into practice through relative degrees of professional discretion, which makes diffusion between political and theoretical ideals and reality likely.

3.1 Social workers as "street-level bureaucrats"

As argued by Nygren et al. (2018), how policy comes into action is best studied close up through specific levels of practice. When seen through this lens, it is possible to identify how welfare delivery at the street level aligns with welfare typologies, such as Hantrais's (2004) family policy typology.

In this dissertation, I adopt Lipsky's street-level perspective on the social worker. Lipsky (2010) defined street-level bureaucracy as

public service employment of a certain sort, performed under certain conditions. [...] street-level bureaucrats interact with citizens in the course of the job and have discretion in exercising authority; in addition, they cannot do the job according to ideal conceptions of the practice because of the limitations of the work structure. (p. xvii)

Lipsky's work originates from American contexts, and he designates multiple occupational groups as *street-level bureaucrats* (e.g. police officers, teachers,

nurses and social workers). While the sample of social workers in my project work in Norway and Chile, Lipsky (2010) adeptly captured the intermediate – and constrained – position occupied by social workers in child protection services. Moreover, while the social workers in this study work in public and partially private child protection services, Chilean child protection services are partially funded and, hence, controlled by government sources. Accordingly, regardless of whether public or private, all of the social workers conduct work on behalf of the state performed under certain conditions.

The street-level bureaucracy perspective has been variously adopted within social work research (Nothdurfter & Hermans, 2018). I use Lipsky (2010) in this dissertation specifically to irradiate (1) the dilemmas and complexity of child protection work, (2) the impact of managerialism and (3) the view of social workers as policymakers.³

3.1.1 The dilemmas and complexity of child protection work

Social workers face contradictory demands and legal ambiguities in their work (Lipsky, 2010). This can be seen, for example, through core activities for social work: care, cure and control (Howe, 1994), which may be contradictory in their own right. Social workers are simultaneously expected to contribute to societal altruism (care) and enforce societal norms (control). This may lead to an image of social workers “as whips (caring for those who do not deserve it) and as bullies (wielding too much power over individuals and families)” (Banks, 2012, p. 30). Hence, social workers are expected to perform multivalent activities and roles that may be conflicting and hard to balance.

Lipsky (2010) described child protection workers as “the ultimate street-level bureaucrats” (p. 233) for whom choices are rarely clear cut and different principles may conflict with each other. Social workers should adhere to the respect for family life and implement necessary interventions into the sphere of privacy to protect children. They have a mandate to remove endangered children from their homes, but in the name of supporting families, they are

³ See Nothdurfter and Hermans (2018) for a research overview of how Lipsky (2010) has been used in social work, public management and social policy research.

expected to exercise this authority as rarely as possible. While their presence in a family suggests that they *may* decide to separate children from their families, child protection social workers are nevertheless expected to care for these families and help them cope in a crisis (Lipsky, 2010). Hence, child protection social workers are expected to adhere to a “four-sided” pattern of relationships (agency, judge, parents and child) (Lipsky, 2010, p. 75), in which the child’s best interest functions as a core principle according to article 3 of the CRC (1989):

1. In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.
2. States Parties undertake to ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being, taking into account the rights and duties of his or her parents, legal guardians, or other individuals legally responsible for him or her, and, to this end, shall take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures.

Here, the best interest of the child is the superior principle, though what is considered the child’s best interest is contested and may be in conflict with the rights and wishes of the parents (which should also be considered). The needs of children and parents can hence be contradictory and fuzzy (Magnussen & Svendsen, 2018). These contemplations may cause dilemmas between seeing the *various* individuals’ needs and simultaneously developing the *best possible solutions* within restricted organisational frameworks. In fact, as Lipsky (2010) argued, “Resources are chronically inadequate relative to the tasks workers are expected to perform” (p. 27). The tools that social workers have to act upon these dilemmas and complexities are their discretionary power and professional judgement. Here, I use Davis’s (1969) definition of discretion as being “whenever the effective limits on his [the social workers’] power leave him free to make a choice among possible courses of action or inaction” (p. 4). Social workers’ discretion to understand children and families and act in a concrete situation can be both necessary and problematic — necessary in order to deal with complex cases and achieve better precision in each specific case, and problematic because professionals also exercise discretion beyond the formal mandate of the services, as political goals are concurrently ambitious and

conflicting (Kjørstad, 2019). Moreover, street-level bureaucrats may adjust their practices away from perceived inexpedient legislations and regulations as a form of *modus operandi* that may be clandestine from superiors and politicians (Kjørstad, 2019). Hence, social workers balance and prioritise conflicting goals, which makes a discrepancy between political ideals and reality predictable. Consequently, street-level workers, such as social workers, translate policy into practice and thus create *the real policy* (Lipsky, 2010).

Yet, the level of discretionary power may be more or less restrained in child protection work, for example, through managerial reforms and standardisation processes.

3.1.2 The impact of managerialism

Although the pace and nature of this development vary among countries and contexts, an international trend in child protection systems is the growth of managerial reforms and neoliberal ideas (Gilbert et al., 2011). New forms of public management that emphasise quantifiable performance measures, evidence-based practices and standardised assessment and decision-making tools are on the march. These may include performance indicators that prescribe the duration of a task, caseload activity, assessment frameworks mandating what information should be gathered, and evidence-based practices which may prioritise methods and interventions that have demonstrated good results in randomised controlled trials (Munro & Hardie, 2019; Ponnert & Svensson, 2016).

Beyond being informed by efficiency considerations, there are several arguments and explanations for the influx of these trends. One explanation is that social workers should be more formally accountable for their practices and the underlying rationalities for the work they do (Gilbert et al., 2011). A related argument is that social work based on standardised formats may reduce randomness and increase efficiency, transparency and equality in service provision to individuals. However, concerns have been raised about this development. One significant argument is that it permits less room for professional autonomy and discretion in social work (Munro & Hardie, 2019; Muñoz Arce, 2019; Ponnert & Svensson, 2016), which is pivotal to acting upon the complexity of the issues regularly encountered in social work. One

prominent example of standardised formats in child protection includes assessment measures that are, by large, focused on standardised risks and needs (Gilbert et al., 2011). Child protection social workers have a responsibility to promote children's well-being *and* protect them from harm. *Risk* and *needs* are significant focal points for responding to this dual responsibility; if a child's needs are not met, there is a risk of harm. If a child is at risk of harm, he or she is in danger of having some needs uncovered. A risk assessment involves making a prediction based on a set of prescribed risk factors about what *might* happen to the child if the situation continues unaltered (Munro, 2019). Concerns are that evaluating a child's situation based on standardised risk factors and needs neglects the fact that one size *does not* fit all. When moving towards universal standards, there is a danger of simplifying the complexities of human existence and consequently losing sight of the individual child's and parents' needs (Munro & Hardie, 2018; Sletten & Ellingsen, 2020). Lipsky (2010, p. 142) described how street-level bureaucrats simplify or take mental shortcuts, for example, through the use of stereotypes or heuristics as "coping mechanisms" to manage the complexity and work stressors regularly encountered in practice. A concrete example can be priming assessments based on specific information instead of conducting a more thorough investigation (Magnussen & Svendsen, 2018). The route to such simplifications may be shorter through standardised practices, as many of the standardised tools, in essence, build on generalised knowledge of human existence.

In sum, these developments may result in more rigid and unresponsive patterns of practice (Lipsky, 2010) by restricting social workers' discretionary space and autonomy. These developments may contribute to new challenges for street-level bureaucrats and alterations in how social workers understand children and families and frame their needs and struggles.

3.1.3 The view of social workers as policymakers

The last notion provided by Lipsky (2010) used in this dissertation is that of understanding social workers as *policymakers*. More specifically, social workers perform policymaking on the ground in the sense that they translate and implement policies that affect children's and families' everyday lives. Freeman and Sturdy (2014) wrote, "In the absence of action, knowledge

remains latent: thoughts unspoken, skills not exercised, texts unread and instruments unused” (p. 10). I believe their point captures something essential about the notion of social workers as policymakers. It illustrates that, while legislations, policies and management instruments provide resources for social workers’ understandings and actions and may constrain what action is possible, they do not determine the *form* these actions take. Hence, how these regulations are translated and enacted by social workers reveals how policy actually looks in practice. To exemplify, while standardised assessment tools may restrict social workers’ potential courses of action and may steer their ways of seeing specific cases, there is unavoidably room for interpretation and judgement in this equation. Few or no manuals can tell social workers exactly what to do in each single case (Ponnert & Svensson, 2016). This means that social workers necessarily create something new or different from what is inscribed in these regulations (Freeman & Sturdy, 2014), as their interpretations and actions are based on their own unique experiences and knowledge.

3.2 *Childhood studies*

Social work is shaped by different understandings of children and childhood. This may possibly be due to the recognition that childhood cannot be adequately addressed by a single discipline or profession. Alongside various understandings of children and childhood, new policy concerns have emerged in favour of children’s rights (Graham, 2011). The body of literature about children and childhood, international conventions and practice methods presents competing understandings of children and childhood. These various understandings may be more or less promoted through different welfare typologies and guidelines that regulate social workers’ practice. Yet, there are some overarching developments in how children and childhood have come to be understood in the literature and through the CRC as a global document for how children should be understood in society.

The multidisciplinary field of childhood studies transpired in the 1980s and 1990s in response to some of the dominant understandings of children and childhood at that time. Childhood studies seeks to capture the complexities and multidimensional aspects of childhood in different ways (Graham, 2011). I am aware that the scope of this section can only cover some of the features of this

vast and complex subject area. Therefore, when exploring social workers' perspectives of children, I will navigate my attention towards five interrelated commitments within childhood studies: (1) child perspectives, (2) childhood as socially constructed, (3) the importance of time and ties, (4) children's agency and (5) challenges of colonial constructions of childhood.

3.2.1 Child perspectives

The *first commitment* argues that children and adults occupy different positions in society and have *different* perspectives and experiences (Hammersley, 2017). Rather than considering the perspectives of adults as hierarchically more significant than those of children, this commitment argues that these perspectives give different, equally important insights. Moreover, the rationale is that a *combination* of both of these perspectives is a prerequisite to a comprehensive understanding of children's and youth's situations. These distinctions, it has been argued, have not previously received the attention they deserve, as the focus has been more on adults' perspectives of children, leaving children's own perspectives in the shadow of research and societal concerns (James et al., 1998; Sommer et al., 2010).

To accentuate these different perspectives, Sommer et al. (2010) made a distinction between a *child perspective* and *children's perspective*. Child perspectives "are created by adults who are seeking, deliberately and as realistically as possible, to reconstruct children's perspectives" (Sommer et al., 2010, p. vi). According to Sommer et al. (2010), this can be achieved by having the child in focus, making an effort to understand the children's perspective of experiences and considering children's views and opinions when making decisions on their behalf. Children's perspectives, then, "refer to the perceptions of the non-adult subjects themselves. [...] Children's perspectives represent children's experiences, perceptions, and understanding in their life world" (Sommer et al., 2010, pp. 22–23). Children's perspectives are hence only held by children themselves, and an adult's attempt to obtain the children's perspective will always be a mediated gaze into the child's world.

Warming (2011, pp. 13–14) supplemented these perspectives by suggesting that child perspectives can be divided into two types: an *outside perspective* (*et udefra-perspektiv*), which is based on the general knowledge of children, and

an *endeavoured inside perspective* (*et tilstræbt indefra-perspektiv*), which resembles the child perspective suggested by Sommer et al. (2010) in that it entails adults' attempts to see the world from a child's perspective.

These child perspectives provide different directions for child protection work. An outside perspective involves a generalised understanding of what it means to be a child. Such a perspective is based on the notion of universality and equality between children. Consequently, this perspective may give social workers in child protection work a superior position to assess what is best for a child (Warming, 2011). Traditional developmental psychology and attachment theories are regarded as particularly significant for professionals, as they provide standards of normal and abnormal development and attachment patterns (Holland, 2001). These models have been – and still are – used in assessing children's development, family relationships, parenting styles and attachment in child protection work (Hennum, 2014). In fact, many current assessment frameworks used in child protection work are based on standardised (i.e. generalised) notions of needs and risks (Gilbert et al., 2011) that are informed, for example, by traditional developmental psychology (Hennum, 2014). Yet, these forms of knowledge do not exclude the importance of trying to see the world from the child's perspective. The art is how to adapt and select the general knowledge through professional discretion so that it becomes salient in the case of specific children and families. This can only be achieved if the social worker becomes familiarised with their unique life experiences, possibilities and challenges. This, however, presupposes that social workers see the *necessity* of the child's perspective (Warming, 2011) and that they relate to children as actors who have something important to say about their situation. This is in contrast to “adultism” (Flasher, 1978), which assumes that children have restricted capabilities and a lower status than adults. A consequence of such a view may be that assumptions and priorities about what children need are formed by social workers through an outside child perspective.

The relevance of seeking the child's perspective in child protection work may shine most notably through the child-centred orientation as an internationally emerging child protection orientation (Gilbert et al., 2011) (see Chapter 2). While many conceptualisations of “child centeredness” exist (e.g. Križ & Skivenes, 2012; Rasmusson et al., 2010; Skivenes & Strandbu, 2006), Skivenes (2011) pointed to three aspects: (1) children's legal rights and organisational

procedures (to secure child rights), (2) adults' recognition of children as individuals with particular interests and needs in interactions with adults and (3) the use of an individual child's viewpoint as a way of interpreting what the world means to children (Skivenes, 2011, p. 171). This definition has strong resemblances to the child perspectives illustrated above (Sommer et al., 2010; Warming, 2011). In fact, Rasmussen et al. (2010) argued that "the 'child centered' concept is also positioned in relation to other kindred concepts, including children's participation, child perspective, children's needs in focus and partnership" (p. 452). As such, adhering to the child's perspective is an orientation that is advocated for in child protection work. It is also one of the cornerstones of the CRC (especially articles 11 and 12) as a document outlining universal standards for children's welfare and position in society.

3.2.2 Childhood as socially constructed

The *second commitment* involves the notion of understanding childhood as socially constructed. One core element of this notion is that childhood is seen as a sociocultural variable rather than globally, naturally, universally or biologically fixed (Abebe, 2019; Bordonaro & Payne, 2012; Hammersley, 2017). A key rationale is that the assumption of a universal childhood overlooks the structurally conditioned nature of childhoods (Bordonaro & Payne, 2012). Transferred to this project, children's needs and rights may be variously ascribed and restricted in Norway and Chile along dominant ideologies (James et al., 1998), a country's available resources (CRC, art. 4) and so forth.

French historian Philippe Ariès (1962) is often credited with stimulating the understanding of childhood as socially constructed. He proposed that childhood did not exist in European medieval societies. Then, children were perceived and treated as miniature adults (Graham, 2011). He showed that modern conceptions of childhood, viewed as a distinct life phase, have developed over a particular time in history in modern Western societies (Kjørholt, 2013). His descriptions of childhood raised questions about the historical, social and culturally specific nature of childhood, which is shaped more generally by shifting formations of family and welfare institutions (Graham, 2011).

While it is usually acknowledged that children are, to a certain degree, different from adults in their psychological and physical development, the field of

childhood studies has been particularly critical of developmental psychology's attempt to identify universal patterns of development (Hammersley, 2017). Traditional developmental psychology has its origin in Darwin's evolutionary theory and often embraces a universal rationalist approach, which assumes that children's psychological development is parallel to their physical development (Walkerline, 1993). As with physical development, children's psychological development is assumed to be universal and progress in set stages. The influence of Freud and Piaget on developmental psychology has reinforced the correlation of "age" and "stages". In contrast, childhood studies claims that childhood is always socially and historically constructed (James et al., 1998; Qvortrup, 1994; Sommer et al., 2010). This is not to say, however, that research and understandings of children and childhood within psychology have remained unchanged since Piaget and Freud. Developmental psychology holds various competing and diverse perspectives (Tudge & Winterhoff, 1993), and there are examples of psychological theories which are attentive to children as subjects and acknowledge the transaction between the child and their environments (e.g. Bandura, 1986; Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Sameroff, 2009; Vygotsky, 1978).

3.2.3 The importance of time and ties

The *third commitment* regards the importance of time and ties, that is, the notion of development as a temporal concept and involving the child's ties to other individuals and communities. Taken together, what will be presented here are notions of the been-being-becoming and belonging child.

One of the major drivers of childhood studies has been a critique of the previous approaches to children and childhood that focus on the adults that children will *become* while overlooking children's important present-day contributions as *beings* (Hanson, 2017; James, 2009). It has been argued that previous notions of childhood presented "incompetent" and "incomplete" children while neglecting that children are also competent *beings* in their own right. The *being* child is seen as an actor in the present tense. As described by Peers and Fler (2014), "Being is the unmoving, intuitive state (presence) that seems inherently outside time: being is the 'there-ness' to which the 'self' refers when it unifies past, present and future selves. But being is also the activity of unifying the

disparate motion of time” (p. 916). Here, Peers and Fler also point to the past and future as relevant to individuals’ (children and adults alike) navigation through the world as beings. Several scholars within childhood studies have incorporated the relevance of children’s past and future. Uprichard (2009), for example, argued that the being and becoming ideas should be viewed together rather than as conflicting opposites, as “the ‘being’ child who — ideally — also ‘becomes’ adult” (p. 303). Children and adults alike are in development and motion. While this is not to say that we return to the notion of an “incomplete” child, a focus on qualifying children into adulthood and on what will become is as salient as focusing on the present lived experiences and wishes of the *being* child (Uprichard, 2009). The CRC is similarly oriented towards children as becomings, for example, in the sense that adults should support children with necessary resources so that children can develop into their full potential (art. 6), and towards children as beings, for example, through the child’s right to participate (art. 12) and engage in play and recreational activities (art. 31).

Hanson (2017) expanded this notion by claiming that this binary understanding (being–becoming) ignores that children also have a past and therefore argued for a trielectical understanding of children by acknowledging that they are simultaneously beings, becomings and *beens*. As he argued, “To understand what children are, we do need to understand not only their past, present and future but also the mutable relations and shifting sequences between these temporal orders” (p. 282). This argument is an important one for child protection work because an understanding of children’s pasts, or the background for their present situations, is important for improving children’s present “there-ness” and future life situations. Emphasis on children’s pasts can also be identified in the CRC, for example, through children’s rights to preserve their “identity, including nationality, name and family relations” (art. 8).

What is absent from the picture thus far is children’s ties or *belonging*. Belonging is a concept that has been variously defined and criticised, for example, for navigating attention away from the concurrent importance of seeing the *being* child as an individual actor (Peers & Fler, 2014). While these discussions are beyond the scope of this section, I use the concept of belonging here to direct attention towards the importance of children’s relationships with other people and contexts to their well-being. A sense of belonging has been conceptualised as a fundamental human need (Baumeister & Leary 1995).

According to Maslow (1987), “belongingness” includes ideas like togetherness, acceptance, family, friends, home and territory. The importance of belonging in child protection work has been greatly influenced by Bowlby’s (1969) and other more recent attachment theories. Bowlby’s work has provided important insights into individuals’ inability to be understood independently from their social environment. Attachment theories are influential in child protection assessments (Hennum, 2014). Yet, the use of attachment theories in assessment work has been criticised for following a checklist approach in assessing parent–child relationships and hence assuming universality in “normal” and “abnormal” attachment patterns (Hennum, 2014; Holland, 2001). Moreover, attachment theories do not incorporate socioeconomic factors, such as poverty and unemployment, into the equation and how these impact child–parent relationships (Hennum, 2016). Regardless of these critiques, knowing with whom and where you belong is essential to human existence. The question is rather who has the defining power to say something about the importance, causes and nature of these relationships, for example, whether social workers should solely adhere to an external perspective of the child–parent attachment or if the child’s perspective of relationships and socioeconomic factors are also be considered.

Thus, in relation to children, belonging can be linked to their evolving sense of identity regarding who they are, where they belong and how they perceive and respond to others (Stratigos et al., 2014). Understandings of children as part of a family and as relational and contextual beings are underscored in the CRC. The preamble of the CRC (1989) states, for example, that the family is a “fundamental group of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of all its members and particularly children” and that the family “should be afforded the necessary protection and assistance so that it can fully assume its responsibilities within the community”. Hence, the notion of seeing the child as a belonging individual means that social workers should take children’s ties to parents, grandparents, friends, local communities and so forth into consideration when assessing a child’s situation. This is also in line with the person-in-environment ideal of social work whereby the person and environment should be understood as inseparable units (Cornell, 2006; Levin, 2004).

3.2.4 Children's agency

In social science, agency is commonly defined as the capacity of individuals to act independently and make their own free choices. Hence, agency is a concept that applies to all individuals.

In childhood studies, this concept is introduced to, for example, emphasise that children are not just passive subjects of social structures and processes but also are – and should – be viewed as competent actors with a capacity to act individually (Esser et al., 2016; James et al., 1998). That children should be given the agency to act on issues regarding themselves (Morrison et al., 2019) is a logic that sits well with the previously outlined commitments within childhood studies and article 12 of the CRC, which states,

1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

At the same time, the CRC limits children's agency by emphasising that children's views should be given due weight according to age and maturity. Evaluation of what maturity entails in child protection work rests upon adults. By having a relational understanding of agency (Raithehuber, 2016), social workers can be understood as significant "gatekeepers" in facilitating children's agency in child protection work. However, agency does not only have a relational dimension; structures and contexts may also act as "thinners" and "thickeners" of children's agency (Klocker, 2007). Moreover, just as children's agency is conditional, so is the agency of adults. Rather than arguing that children or adults *have* or *possess* agency, a salient understanding of agency may be that the ability to act independently is realised in relation to other subjects, institutions, resources, legal regulations and so forth (Esser, 2016; Raithehuber, 2016).

This latter point makes agency a concept capable of integrating the theoretical foundation of this dissertation. I see clear links between agency and the definition of professional discretion previously described (i.e. whenever the effective limits on the social workers' power leave them free to make choices among possible courses of action or inaction). There are multiple "thinners" of

social workers' action spaces, and according to Lipsky (2010), they "cannot do the job according to ideal conceptions of the practice because of the limitations of the work structure" (p. xvii). The social worker's mandate is many faceted, including not just to give children arenas to express their perspectives but also to protect children from harm, as illustrated by article 19 of the CRC:

1. States Parties shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child.

Children can hence be understood as vulnerable and agentic at the same time, which illustrates a potential clash of CRC discourses (Morrison et al., 2019). Yet, such discourses are *multivalent*, and as Abebe (2019) has argued, "dichotomous and oppositional terms (i.e., children as active, independent, competent, capable, rational versus children as passive, dependent, vulnerable, incapable, irrational) are not helpful analytically. Children's lives are better explained by and/and/and, than by either/or" (p. 12). Nevertheless, that children are vulnerable and in need of protection may be evident in child protection work. According to Morrison et al. (2019), "This sets the context for the nature, type and form of agency that is expected, and indeed permitted" (p. 110). As argued by Abebe (2019, p. 5), any discussion of "agency" should be situated in the wider context that shapes, enables or restricts it.

3.2.5 Challenges of colonial constructions of childhood

Ideas regarding agency serve as an introduction to the last commitment addressed in this dissertation. Although children are commonly understood within childhood studies as social actors with agency, "the structural contexts shaping child agency and the everyday practices that manifest in children's social relationships with other generations" (Abebe, 2019, p. 1) cannot be understated. As previously described, childhood can be understood as sociocultural variables rather than naturally and universally fixed (Abebe, 2019; Bordonaro & Payne, 2012; Hammersley, 2017). Yet, children's rights, for example, to exercise their agency, are emphasised as *universal* (Abebe,

2019). In this last section, I will highlight recent literature on the relationality of childhood and challenges of colonial constructions of “childhood” within childhood studies and in the CRC.

An aim of international conventions is to move towards a better society, and while the CRC has been celebrated for its universal acceptance, questions remain regarding its representativity and whether it “adequately represents the world’s children” (Faulkner & Nyamutata, 2020, p. 71). For example, the convention has been criticised by many as an instrument for globally imposing Western ideals and values of children and childhood (Abebe, 2019; de Castro, 2020; Faulkner & Nyamutata, 2020; Hanson et al., 2018), suggesting a drive towards a global child/global childhood (de Castro, 2020). Such notions may imply that the CRC includes “colonial contours” of domination and conquest (Faulkner & Nyamutata, 2020, p. 68).

The CRC is not culturally neutral (Faulkner & Nyamutata, 2020). Theories of childhood have been dominated by Western scholars (de Castro, 2020; Faulkner & Nyamutata, 2020; Hanson et al., 2018), and some have suggested that ratification of the convention was part of a package that developing countries had to accept to stay part of the international community and possibly because it was assumed to be a legitimised path to access aid (Adu-Gyamfi & Keating, 2013; Faulkner & Nyamutata, 2020; Reynolds et al., 2006). What has been most notably problematised with the CRC may be that neoliberal notions of individualism take precedence over relational or collective concerns (Abebe, 2019; Faulkner & Nyamutata, 2020; Hanson et al., 2018). While some articles in the convention do highlight children’s interdependence (e.g. articles 5 and 30), the CRC signals that children have an independent relation towards the state. Children are primarily seen as single individuals and only secondarily as members of families and communities (Abebe, 2019).

As argued by Hanson and Peleg (2020), children’s rights tend to “pathologize Southern families for not complying with Western views of parenthood. In other words, the focus on the individual child is in and of itself an inherent bias of the Convention, in addition to all of its other conceptual biases” (pp. 16–17). As a response to such a bias, several scholars have argued for a need to “re-appraise difference and diversity in childhoods” (de Castro, 2020, p. 52; see also Abebe, 2019; Faulkner & Nyamutata, 2020; Hanson et al., 2018) and

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scrutinise which aspects of human rights should be universal and which should be re-examined (Badaru, 2008). Spyrou (2018), for example, urged scholars to decentre the child in order to facilitate a relational understanding of childhood. He argued that the “discovery” of the independent child may be a conceptual trap in childhood studies and an obstacle to theoretical imagination (Spyrou, 2018) and possibly to theoretical advancement. By “bringing back” a relational ontology of childhood, more fruitful understandings of childhood can possibly be achieved. This entails acknowledging that “*any* practice of agency takes place within the context of intergenerational relationships and the social structures that produce these relationships” (Abebe, 2019, p. 12, emphasis added). Therefore, sensitivity to variances in conditions and logics across cultural contexts is important.

4 Scientific position

As this project is interested in social workers' perspectives of children, a natural scientific position is social constructivism. Social constructivism is a wide-ranging philosophical stance with varying degrees of radicality (Nortvedt & Grimen, 2004). The basis of social constructivism can be traced back to Kant's (1724–1804) epistemology and the distinction between the world – or thing – as it is and the way it appears to us. Hermeneutics and phenomenology can also be said to have influenced social constructivism, for example, through the notion that there is a circularity in our understandings, as understanding is based on what is already understood. The immediate *meaning* of a phenomenon is often central to social constructivism (Nortvedt & Grimen, 2004). This perspective is commonly linked to Berger and Luckman and their acclaimed book *The Social Constructions of Reality* ([1966]1991), which concerns social phenomena and everyday knowledge and how society and the individual are products of each other. In their book, Berger and Luckman indicated that the knowledge we have about reality contributes to constructions of reality through a continuous process.

According to Collin (1997), a characteristic understanding within social constructivism is that social reality is generated by how we think and talk about it. Through this perspective, the meaning of children and childhood can be seen as social constructions which stem from how we think and refer to children in everyday life. Yet, an important clarification is that, while children and childhood are undoubtedly real and lived experiences, the *ideas* or ways of seeing children are constructed (Ursin, 2019).

The importance of these social constructions of children in child protection work can be illustrated through the Thomas (1928) theorem: “If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.” Transferred to this project, social workers construct meanings of children and their situations through their engagement and interpretations of them, and these constructions might steer specific actions and child–social worker relations. Berger and Luckmann (1991) similarly argued that it is “knowledge that guides conduct in everyday life” (p. 33). These constructions are not fixed entities, as Putnam (1994) argued: “we endlessly renegotiate—and are forced to renegotiate—our

notion of reality as our language and our life develops” (p. 452). Using the example of child abuse, James et al. (1998) contended that historical interpretations of the development of childhood (e.g. Ariès, 1962) do not give accounts of child abuse in modern Western society. The authors suggested that the phenomenon of child abuse has emerged as an idea, not due to any significant change in our behaviour towards children, but through changing patterns of political and moral control in social life more generally (James et al., 1998). These changes, in turn, have affected our ideas of children and childhood.

Berger and Luckmann (1991) further explained that there are differences between societies regarding what knowledge we have about reality and, hence, our ways of constructing taken-for-granted truths. This means that the ways of seeing children may differ (or not) among social workers in Norway and Chile due to, for example, differences in history, ideologies and so forth. While these constructions may be fluid rather than fixed, they might still be experienced as true realities by the individual at a specific point in time (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). A relevant question here is whether social workers are considered free in their interpretations and constructions of children and children’s situations. As described in the theoretical section of this dissertation, I adopt Lipsky’s (2010) street-level bureaucracy perspective of the social worker. Through this, I postulate that the possible courses of actions for a social worker are more or less restrained, for example, through an instruction to comply with standardised formats in assessment work. I perceive this as neatly in line with Berger and Luckmann’s (1991) descriptions of “standards of role performance” (p. 91), whereby the role of a social worker represents “an entire institutional nexus of conduct” (p. 92). Hence, the social worker, to a certain extent, will feel obliged to follow the institutional standards, wherein the courses of actions are not completely free (Langsrud et al., 2019). Individuals may nevertheless experience cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1962) in binding the various representations together (e.g. the nexus of conduct as a social worker, a mother/father, etc.) into a cohesive whole that will make sense (Berger & Luckmann, 1991) for their ways of seeing themselves and what they stand for.

A key critique of social constructivism has been that it does not privilege a specific image of reality as more or less valid (Marshall et al., 2005). I see this point as important for this project. However, while there may be various

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understandings of children and childhood in the complex social worlds we inhabit, I have presented a theoretical framework that privileges some coexisting ideas above others. Specifically, from the outset, I have framed an idealised way of seeing children through four commitments within childhood studies. However, as Denzin (1977) argued, “children as they are known in current social and psychological theory may in fact be historical and cultural products of the 19th and 20th centuries” (p. 72). As an extension of this argument, the exploration of anomalies or breaks with existing knowledge (Vassenden, 2018) may cultivate new ideas about children and childhood. Berger and Luckmann (1991) argued, “The validity of my knowledge of everyday life is taken for granted by myself and by others until further notice, that is, until a problem arises that cannot be solved in terms of it” (p. 58). In this project, the rationale is that the theories that manage to capture the multivalences and complexities of childhood are the ones that are the most functional (Putnam, 1994) in approaching an image of reality or what should be.

5 Methodology

This doctoral project has been designed to explore social workers' perspectives of children in child protection work in Chile and Norway. A common argument for undertaking explorative research is that not much has been written about the phenomenon being studied and, thus, the researcher seeks to build a deeper and broader understanding (Creswell, 2014). Moreover, exploratory research is commonly designed to elucidate the various ways in which a phenomenon is manifested (Polit & Beck, 2008, p. 21). While there is a relatively large body of research on social workers' views of *child participation* (see previous research section), less research has taken a broader approach to understanding social workers' perspectives of children. Specifically, as outlined in the theory chapter of this dissertation, many understandings of children coexist. Whether and how these multitudes of understandings may take form among social workers has been relatively unexplored.

Q methodology is the main methodological approach of this project and was selected because of its suitability for exploring perspectives, viewpoints and beliefs about a phenomenon or research topic. It is one of the few methods that can produce holistic data and identify the multivalence and relationship among ideas (Watts & Stenner, 2012). This yields the potential to capture how patterns of subjective perspectives surrounding children and childhood manifest among participants. Additionally, the method allows for the exploration of similarities and differences in perspectives within and across groups of participants (Ellingsen et al., 2010) and has been proven suitable in cross-cultural comparative research (e.g. Franz et al., 2016; Jeffares & Skelcher, 2011; Stenner et al., 2006). Furthermore, despite extensive literature searches, no studies using Q method have been identified that explore how social workers view children and childhood in relation to child protection work. Hence, using a Q methodological approach could potentially bring forth new and extended knowledge not identified by other research methods.

Figure 1 provides an overview of the research process of this doctoral project. Papers 2 and 3 present findings from the Q methodological studies (Q study) in Chile and Norway, while Paper 1 presents findings from the IR. The aspiration for carrying out an IR transpired from Step 1 in the research process of a Q

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study. More specifically, the first step in any Q study is to identify the “concourse”, which means identifying a wide range of ideas or statements surrounding a topic (Brown, 1980; Stephenson, 1953). To identify the concourse in this project (ideas regarding children among child protection social workers), I relied on six different data materials (see Table 2). One of the data materials included ideas about children found in previous research. Through the process of studying the literature for potential statements, I did not find a literature review on this subject. Hence, the IR was conducted (1) to fill a gap in the literature by providing a comprehensive portrayal of child protection workers’ constructions of children and childhood and (2) to identify the concourse in this project.

Step 2 (Q sample) involved identifying a representative set of statements for the Q studies based on these six data materials. A final set of 39 statements representative of the six data materials was chosen for this study. In Steps 3 and 4, the 39 statements were distributed to social workers in Chile ($n=21$) and Norway ($n=17$). The social workers were asked to sort the statements according to their own perspectives and experiences. In Step 5, the participants’ ways of sorting the statements were subjected to correlation and by-person factor analysis, which discloses how participants are grouped with other participants who share their views on the subject, as determined by their similar ways of sorting the statements (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

The next subsections present the research design in more detail, focusing successively on (1) the IR, (2) the Q study, (3) methodological considerations and (4) ethical considerations.

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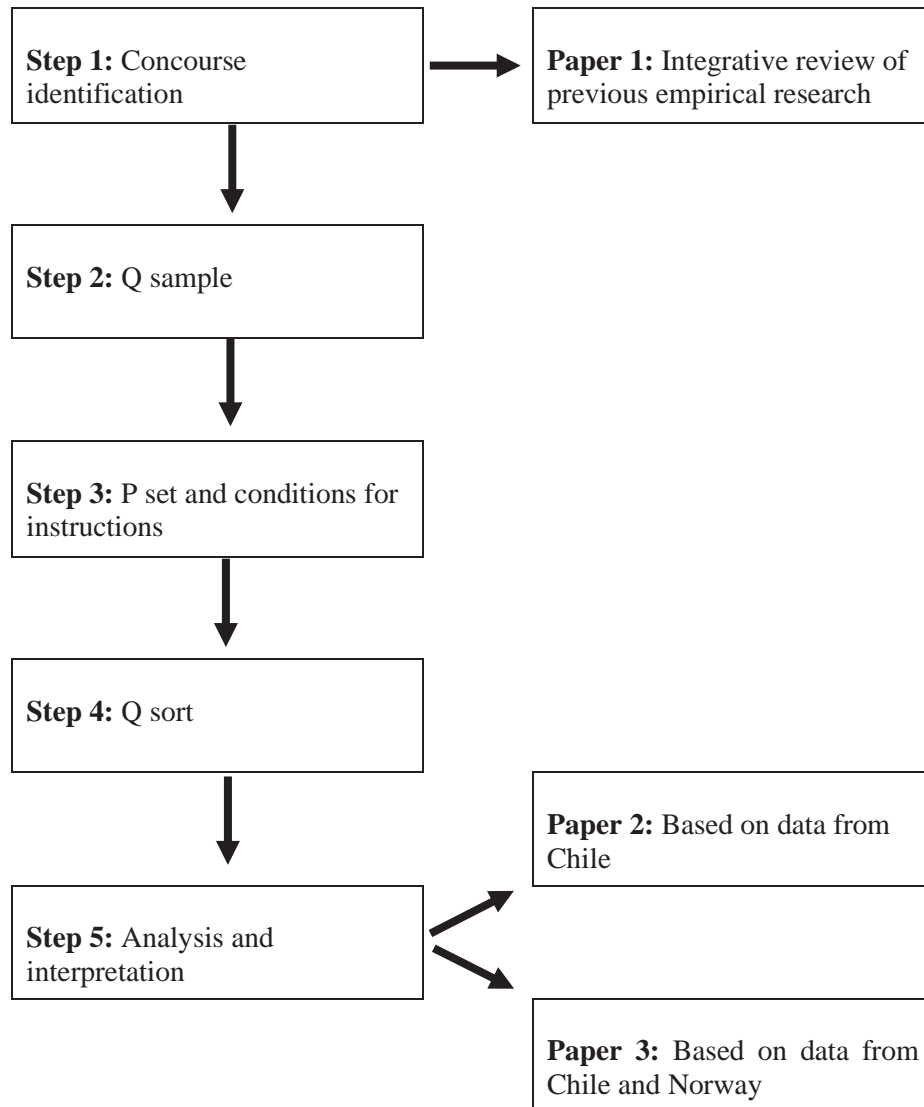


Figure 1. Overview of the research process in this doctoral project

5.1 *The integrative review*

A literature review serves several purposes in any research project (Creswell, 2014). It shares with the reader the results of studies related to the one being undertaken. It provides a framework for establishing the importance of a study

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and for comparing the results with other findings (Creswell, 2014). It also connects a study to the larger ongoing debate in the literature and is the apparatus for identifying and filling in research gaps and extending prior research knowledge (Cooper, 2010; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). In addition to these purposes, the literature review in this doctoral dissertation forms part of the data material.

The aim of the IR was to provide a comprehensive portrayal of child protection social workers' constructions of children and childhood in previous research. While some associative review efforts have been made (e.g. van Bijleveld et al., 2015), a thorough review of social workers' views or constructions of children and childhood was not identified in the literature. I thus decided to conduct a separate IR study due to the detection of a research gap.

While initially designed to review nursing studies (Broome, 1993; Whittemore & Knarfl, 2005), the IR has also been proven suitable for analysis and synthesis of previous research in social work. Benzies and Mychasiuk (2009), for example, used the IR to identify protective factors that contribute to family resilience. A more recent example is that of Tembo and Studsrød (2018), who explored parents' experiences of contact with child welfare services.

I chose to do an IR because it can include a variety of studies with different methodologies *and* research questions. The IR is the broadest among the review methods and can compose different empirical and theoretical sources to understand a research phenomenon in depth and breadth (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). This is unique for the IR because, while other review methods (e.g. systematic reviews, meta-analysis and qualitative reviews) view experimental and non-experimental research as mutually exclusive, the IR allows for the inclusion of studies with diverse methodologies to capture the contexts, processes and subjective elements of a phenomenon (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). This ability was suitable for the research aim of this review because empirical studies with different methodologies were relevant. Survey and interview data can, for example, give insights into social workers' understandings of children and childhood and practice rationales, while observations and document analysis may reveal actual child- and youth-related practices. The forms of knowledge yielded from these different methodologies can also provide complementary knowledge and hence build a more inclusive

body of knowledge on social workers' constructions of children in child protection work.

Moreover, some review methods, such as the systematic review and the meta-analysis, demand that the research questions/hypotheses/clinical problems of primary studies should be very similar, if not identical (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). The IR, in contrast, allows for the inclusion of primary studies with different research questions to more fully understand the phenomenon under investigation (Soares et al., 2014).

The scope of this review was broad in that studies with various research questions were relevant to illuminating how children and childhood were constructed by social workers in child protection work. The idea was that various research questions formed pieces of the puzzle regarding this same phenomenon. Studies with a "general" focus, such as social workers' views, perspectives, understandings or constructions of children, were as relevant as studies with a more specific focus on issues, such as social workers' views on children's participation, risks, needs, child-family relationships and so forth. Furthermore, the rationale was that *the sum of knowledge* provided through different research questions enabled a more comprehensive understanding than merely exploring knowledge obtained through specific research questions.

There are several approaches for carrying out an IR (Soares et al., 2014). I used Whittemore and Knafl's (2005) approach, which is the most used IR approach (Soares et al., 2014). This approach contains five review stages: (1) problem identification, (2) literature search, (3) data evaluation, (4) data analysis and (5) presentation. While Paper 1 describes multiple design decisions in connection to these steps, an extensive account of methodological aspects was incompatible with the journal's mandated manuscript size of 7000 words. Therefore, the remainder of this section will address some additional issues coupled with the stages of the literature search, data evaluation and data analysis. I conclude this section with a discussion of the study's rigour.

5.1.1 The literature search strategy

As suggested by Soares et al. (2014), the IR can take three different forms: methodological (review of designs and methodologies of relevant studies),

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theoretical (review of theories) and empirical (review of quantitative and/or qualitative empirical studies). This review takes the latter form through the inclusion of peer-reviewed qualitative and quantitative empirical research articles.⁴

Grey literature could also have been included in this IR but was left out for several reasons. First, grey literature can be understood as printed or electronic literature that is produced by governments, academia, business and industry and is not controlled by commercial publishers (Auger, 1998). This literature can comprise unpublished studies, conference abstracts, book chapters, government and agency reports and so forth (Bellefontaine & Lee, 2014). While Whitemore and Knafel (2005) have argued that several search strategies (e.g. electronic database searches, screenings of reference lists, etc.) should be adopted to reach the maximum number of eligible studies, locating and accessing grey literature is difficult (Hopewell et al., 2008). Moreover, grey literature may or may not have gone through rigorous review processes, and the quality of this literature *might* be more variable than that of peer-reviewed articles (Bellefontaine & Lee, 2014). Hence, the decision to exclude grey literature rested upon the accessibility of these sources and quality appraisal considerations.

Using a database search strategy with specific keywords is not without limitations. A lack of uniformity may exist in terms used to describe this field (van Bijleveld et al., 2015), and a combination of other search words might have contributed differently to this review. To establish eligible search words, the population, phenomena of interest and context (PICO) framework (Lockwood, Munn & Porritt, 2015) was used. The PICO mnemonic was useful in establishing search words for the sample/population (social workers) and context (child welfare, safeguarding and child protection). Nevertheless, a challenge of using PICO was establishing sufficient search words to identify the maximum number of eligible studies related to the *phenomena of interest* (constructions of children and childhood). The scope of this review was broad in that social workers' constructions of children and children's situations could be identified through social workers' ideas and practices surrounding multiple

⁴ The remainder of the inclusion criteria for the IR were (1) articles published in English from January 2000 to October 2017, (2) studies with samples of child protection social workers in direct contact with children and youth in their work and (3) studies where issues regarding the child or the child's situation were the study focus.

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issues in child protection work. The search words used for the phenomena of interest were child view, child visibility, children's rights, protection, provision, child perception, child perspective, hearing the child, participation, attitude, CRC and child-centred. This combination yielded a total of 1,491 articles after the removal of duplicates. There are, however, potential drawbacks with this literature search.

One question is whether the framing of search words related to the phenomena of interest might have missed works which centres on a more relational framing of the child. Such works may have arisen if we had included search terms like "family", "kinship" and "network" with "child*". To identify relational understandings of children, search terms associated with the CRC were included (e.g. CRC, children's rights, participation, protection and provision). Several articles of the convention highlight children as relational and underscore children's family belonging and their social and cultural needs (e.g., arts. 5, 9, 16, 18, 26, 30, 31). Yet, a critique of the convention is that it underemphasises children's interdependence (see Chapter 3). In hindsight, this could possibly be a critique of the review as well, and incorporation of more (explicitly) relational search words might have resulted in more studies that visualise the relational child.

Nevertheless, the list of search words specifying the phenomena of interest might never really be complete. To tackle this limitation, the question was whether a more open combination of search terms, without specifying the phenomena of interest, could grant more relevant articles. The combination "child protection OR safeguarding OR child welfare AND social worker*" yielded 3,839 hits in the databases Academic Search Premier, ERIC and SocIndex after removal of duplicates. This search was performed on 14 May 2019 (after the search shown in Paper 1). Through a review of these 3,839 hits, 30 of the included 35 articles in Paper 1 were identified. The question was also how specific the *inclusion criteria* for this more open search should be and whether additional eligible articles would be identified through this strategy versus specifying the phenomena of interest with search words. Having a more open search may also have both benefits and challenges. However, the open strategy illustrated above may be a point of departure for future research efforts to see whether additional articles can be identified through this strategy to build upon the results already presented in Paper 1. Moreover, future research could

extend our review by including additional databases and explore research published after October 2017 to review the current research status and body of knowledge.

5.1.2 Data evaluation

According to Whitemore and Knafl (2005), there is no gold standard for evaluating quality in research reviews, as this evaluation depends on the aim and sampling frame. Grove et al.'s (2012) guidelines for quality appraisal of qualitative and quantitative research suggest, for example, in-depth examination of all study aspects. Another tool is the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme's (CASP, 2018) checklists for different forms of studies (e.g. for qualitative studies or randomised controlled trials). The CASP checklist for qualitative studies, for example, contains 10 questions covering three categories: (1) Are the results of the study valid? (2) What are the results? (3) Will the results help locally? While these guidelines provide directions for quality appraisal, it is not clear-cut what the threshold for exclusion of studies based on quality appraisal should be or whether studies with "low rigour" should be included, though with a form of indexing in the text regarding the study's quality (e.g. on a 2-point scale [high or low]). Moreover, if the latter decision is made, should studies with low rigour contribute less to the analytic process, and if so, what does "less" mean? The bottom line is that how these studies should be incorporated into the data analysis is somewhat debated (Whitemore, 2005).

Quality appraisal in reviews including empirical studies with various designs (i.e. qualitative and quantitative) amplifies the complexity. Should broader quality standards that embrace different research designs be used? Or should multiple design-specific quality evaluations be undertaken? (Whitemore & Knafl, 2005). While all studies in our review were examined according to research focus, country of inquiry, method, data material, sample, context, target population, results and conclusion, only one study was excluded based on quality appraisal. This quantitative study was excluded because it was challenging to trust the validity of the findings, chiefly because of the small sample size, measurement criteria and conclusions being drawn. The remaining 35 studies included in the review were allowed on the basis of Whitemore and

Knafl's (2005) suggestion of quality appraisal in reviews with diverse empirical sources, whereby quality should only be evaluated in sources that represent discrepant findings. That is, exclusion would depend on whether methodological quality is a viable reason for the discrepant findings. Beyond the one study that was excluded, the remaining studies did not demonstrate discrepant findings due to methodological quality but rather due to the methods used and countries of inquiry. These discrepancies are highlighted in the findings section of Paper 1.

5.1.3 Data analysis

The aim of our review was in line with Torraco's (2005) definition of the IR: "The integrative literature review is a form of research that reviews, critiques, and synthesizes representative literature on a topic in an integrated way such that new frameworks and perspectives on the topic are generated" (p. 356). While there are different analytical approaches to IRs (Soares et al., 2014), our aim was to move beyond merely describing and summarising the data by also elevating the interpretative effort to a higher level of abstraction by creating new models and organisational structures through synthesis. Whittemore and Knafl (2005) recommended constant comparative analysis due to its compatibility to analysing data from various methodologies. The constant comparative method was originally developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) for analysing data with an end goal of generating theory. While the findings of Paper 1 cannot be considered a new theory, they may nonetheless be contributory to theory development because, by abstracting a broad range of data, a new model of understanding was provided. This was done by treating the data material as if it were "raw material", and data units were systematically compared.

5.1.4 The reviews' overall rigour

Bias and error can occur at any stage of the review process, and attention to quality is essential at all review stages (Whittemore, 2005). For example, the literature search may not be comprehensive enough to identify eligible studies. Data from primary studies can be incorrectly harvested or interpreted, and the data analysis may not completely embrace primary study findings (Whittemore,

2005). For systematic reviews and meta-analyses, various systems exist to secure rigorous review procedures, including several versions of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA). One example is the PRISMA-P checklist, which contains 17 overarching checklist items (see Moher et al., 2015). While not specifically constructed for IRs of studies with different methodologies, there are many commonalities between the PRISMA-P items and the specific guidelines within the five review stages depicted by Whitemore and Knafl (2005) (see e.g. Soares et al., 2014, pp. 336–337).

To secure the rigour of this review, it was carefully constructed in line with the steps outlined by Whitemore and Knafl (2005). The three authors of Paper 1 discussed and together decided the choice of research question, search words and inclusion criteria. Moreover, literature searches were performed in close cooperation with a librarian at the University of Stavanger. Two of the authors read the full text of the final 35 articles and analysed the data. We performed two rounds of literature searches in the electronic databases. A potential limitation of the review's rigour is that the first author was the only one to systematically check all titles and abstracts on the first literature search (a total of 430 articles after duplicates were excluded). The first author was also the only one to assess the quality of the one article excluded due to methodological concerns. Nevertheless, all three authors systematically checked all titles and abstracts on the second literature search (a total of 1061 articles after duplicates were excluded). Hence, proportionally more articles were assessed by all three authors.

5.2 *Q methodology*

Q methodology aims to explore patterns of *subjectivity*, such as the communication of feelings, wishes or perspectives, surrounding a topic among participants (Brown, 1991/1992; Stephenson, 1993). William Stephenson introduced Q method in the 1930s as an alternative or supplement to traditional research methods for revealing the subjectivity involved in any situation (Brown, 1996; Brown, 1991/1992).

In a Q study, participants are commonly asked to sort a sample of statements according to how they themselves relate to the statements (Ellingsen, 2011).

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This statement sorting is a means of capturing the subjective perspectives surrounding a topic (Watts & Stenner, 2012). The sample of statements is derived from the *concourse*, which regards communication of all possible aspects that may be said about a specific topic (Brown, 1980). In the analysis, correlation and by-person factor analysis disclose how *participants* are grouped together with other participants who share subjective views on the topic by sorting the statements in similar ways (McKeown & Thomas, 2013). Interpretation of these shared views commonly follows the logic of abduction by looking for plausible explanations of the perspectives (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Stephenson (1961) maintained that the logic of abduction in Q methodology is that explanations can only be given *after de facto*. Hence, abduction can be understood as a sort of retrospective reasoning (or *retroduction*, as postulated by Charles S. Peirce) used to find the best plausible explanations (Wolf, 2004) for the emergent perspectives.

Stephenson spent much of his career publishing conceptual and theoretical work (Watts & Stenner, 2012). While the body of this literature is too vast to be covered in this section, I will briefly highlight two key concepts in Q methodology: *subjectivity* and *self-reference*.

The notion of subjectivity may have a myriad of associations. However, for Stephenson, subjectivity was not considered “some isolated *mind-stuff* that exists inside us” (Watts & Stenner, 2012, p. 26); subjectivity was out there in the open as communication available for direct exploration (Stephenson, 1993). Subjectivity can be defined as “individuals’ personal vantage points as they make judgements about the world around them” (McKeown & Thomas, 2013, p.65). Stephenson (1953, 1993) wished to challenge the separation of subject and object or mind and matter because, according to him, these structures could never be decomposed and seen as dual opposites. Even so, a distinction *can* be made between objective facts and subjective thoughts and feelings related to a topic:

“It is raining”, as a statement of fact, is singular; the information can be tested by observing the rain outside. Subjectively, however, it may involve innumerable possibilities of thought and feeling – that one hates the rain, that it will spoil the picnic, that it will break the dough, and so on “ad infinitum”. (Stephenson, 1978, p. 23)

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To bridge this to the scientific position of social constructionism previously outlined in this dissertation, children and childhood are undoubtedly real and have lived experiences; children's presence is factual. Yet, a social worker's subjective perspectives and feelings surrounding children may be "ad infinitum". Q method can identify the various subjective views from a first-person perspective and also the main social viewpoints and knowledge constructions (Watts & Stenner, 2012) among social workers related to children and childhood.

Q methodology is interested in recognising the subjective first-person perspectives of any topic (Stephenson, 1993). As such, statements in a Q study must be *self-referent* to reveal the subjective significance that participants assign to the statements. Ultimately, the main concern is not the statements themselves but the subjective likes and dislikes, interpretations and overall understandings that inform participants' engagement with the statements (Watts & Stenner, 2005). This engagement is informed by participants' experiences and knowledge from the outside world, and the exact appearance of these views is thus always subject to change (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

The remainder of this section presents the research design of the current Q studies. The research design will be described along the five steps described in Figure 1 in the methodology introduction. These steps stem from Ellingsen et al. (2010; implicitly drawn by Brown, 1980) and include (1) identifying the concourse on the research topic of interest, (2) developing a representative set of statements (Q sample), (3) specifying the participants for the study (P set) and conditions for instructions, (4) administering the Q sort (rank order of statements) and (5) performing factor analysis and interpretation.

5.2.1 Step 1: Concourse identification

Concourse theory is central to Q methodology, as the sample of statements in a Q study derive from the *concourse*. Brown (1991/1992) defined concourse as "the flow of communicability surrounding any topic" (p. 3). Communicability refers to perspectives that can be revealed or expressed about a topic through communication. The concourse (not to be confused with discourse) is ideally supposed to contain *all* aspects of those discourses related to the topic (Van Exel & De Graaf, 2005). Yet, the concourse can never really be complete, as

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there is always something else that might be said about a topic (Sæbjørnsen et al., 2016; Watts & Stenner, 2005). Nevertheless, the key matter is that the discourse reflects a multitude of viewpoints about the topic of interest (Brown, 1991/1992). Hence, the researcher will seek to identify a wide range of ideas, perspectives and experiences concerning the topic. This range of ideas will constitute the identified discourse of the study.

The discourse may be identified through different sources, such as interviews with people familiar with the topic, relevant literature and everyday talk (Brown, 1996). However, the use of interviews is common, and only a few interviews may be sufficient (Ellingsen et al., 2010; Shemmings & Ellingsen, 2012). In this study, the “child visibility” concept was used to identify the discourse. Inspiration for using this concept stemmed from Nybom’s (2005) study where she explored to what extent and in what way the child was visible in statements of child protection social workers in six countries. The aim of using this concept was to reach a broad array of perspectives on children and childhood. The visibility concept was introduced in this project as a response to the call for more flexible conceptual research understandings of children and childhood (e.g. Hanson, 2017; Uprichard, 2008). Other frequently used concepts in research (i.e. children’s participation, children’s voice, etc.) may delimit the possibility of capturing more of the complexity related to childhood. What intrigued me about the visibility concept was the seemingly open and exploratory nature of the concept. In Nybom’s (2005) study, the child visibility concept was explored through the frequency and content of child-focused statements.

The discourse in this project was identified from six materials: (1) the CRC, (2) review of empirical research articles and (3) three individual interviews with social workers in Norway. Moreover, to prevent the dominance of Western views of children and childhood, data from (4) two dialogue seminars with multinational master’s students in social work (representing more than 15 nationalities) and (5) focus group interviews with social workers in Mexico ($n=7$), Chile ($n=4$) and Norway ($n=15$) were also included. The focus group material stems from the FACSK project. Finally, I also had (6) consultative conversations with research experts on child welfare/protection.

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A large number of statements surrounding the topic of interest may be identified in the concourse, and will need to be reduced to a smaller number in Step 2 (Q sample) (Ellingsen et al., 2010) to be applicable for a Q study. Table 2 shows the number of statements identified in the various data materials representing the concourse. In total, 1,215 statements were identified from the concourse.

Table 2. Number of statements in the identified concourse

#	Material	Number of statements
1	UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)	42
2	Review of empirical research	192
3	Dialogue seminars with international master's students in social work (n =approx. 30)	136
4	Individual interviews with social workers in Norway (n =3)	553
5	Focus group interviews with social workers in:	
	Mexico (n =7)	52
	Chile (n =4)	64
	Norway (n =15)	174
6	Conversations with experts on child protection in Norway (n =2) and Chile (n =2)	2*
	Total number of statements	1,215

*Statements added after consulting experts on child protection in Norway and Chile about the applicability of the selected statements.

The main reason for including an array of materials was to ascertain that statements were mutually relevant to social workers in Chile and Norway. Moreover, given the coexistence of multiple understandings of children and childhood (see Chapter 3), it was important that statements covered a broad range of facets on the topic to enable different perspectives to emerge.

Material 1 was included because, since Norway and Chile have both ratified the CRC, the convention could serve as a common frame of reference among social workers in both national contexts. Articles 1–42 were included (the 42 “articulated rights”), with each article counting as one statement. Yet, the CRC has been criticised for its colonial contours (Faulkner & Nyamutata, 2020, p. 68; see Chapter 3.2.5), and cannot necessarily be said to represent global views of children and childhood (de Castro, 2020). For example, by undermining the importance of children’s interdependence (Abebe, 2019). Additionally, the CRC is generally formulised, and the aim was to grasp ideas

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surrounding childhood as well as ideas linked to the CRC that are relevant in child protection settings. Therefore, Materials 2–6 were included to approach a broader and more relevant discourse for child protection work in Chile and Norway.

A total of 192 statements were identified by reviewing the relevant research literature (Material 2). Statements were identified from the findings section of research articles. An overview of the included literature can be found in the appendix of Paper 1.

The first dialogue seminar (Material 3) was held in May 2016, and the second was held in February 2017. Both dialogues lasted approximately one hour. The rationale for including this material was that the master's students were from many different countries (over 15 nationalities), which might open a breadth of perspectives. Several of the master's students were also educated social workers. The three social worker interviews (Material 4) were conducted in October and November 2016 and lasted 1–1.5 hours. Materials 3 and 4 were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by me. The master deliberations yielded a total of 136 statements, and the individual interviews yielded 553 statements.

Similar semi-structured interview guides with open questions were used for the dialogue seminars and the three interviews with social workers in Norway. Using open questions is recommended in the Q method literature (Ellingsen et al., 2010), therefore, the interview guides were structured along three broad topics: (1) views of children's visibility in general, (2) views of children's visibility in the family and (3) views of children's visibility in child protection work. To harvest in-depth reflections on these topics, a modified Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) format was used to structure the follow-up questions. The SWOT format was originally established as an analytical tool for strategic planning processes (Gürel & Tat, 2017) but has also been used as a tool for research purposes, for example, as an analytical lens (e.g. Schmidt & Hansson, 2018) and to construct interview guides (e.g. Hoff et al., 2009). The SWOT format is three dimensional and addresses positive–negative, past–future and internal–external strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (Gürel & Tat, 2017).

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The focus group interviews (material 5) were conducted by the research team in the FACSK project. In the focus groups, social workers in Mexico ($n=7$), Chile ($n=4$) and Norway ($n=15$) deliberated over a constructed vignette presenting a complex family situation (see e.g. Ellingsen et al., 2019; Studsrød et al., 2018). Participants were asked to reflect on the concept of child visibility at the end of the focus group, which contributed to deeper reflections on children and childhood, both in general and for children in contact with child protection services in particular. The rationale for including potential statements from this material was that it included accounts from Latin American social workers, which could supplement the materials illustrated above. The number of statements for this material can be found in Table 2.

By the time I had the conversations with experts on child protection in Norway and Chile (material 6), the analysis of the abovementioned materials had been performed. In these conversations, I presented the topics and illustrative statements that had transpired to that point and consulted them regarding their viewpoints on the relevance of these statements to child protection work. I was further interested in whether they considered prominent topics to be missing regarding children and childhood with relevance to child protection work. Two particular issues from a Norwegian expert related to ethical aspects surrounding child participation and children's voice in written documents were supplemented through this process.

5.2.2 Step 2: Q sample

A subset of statements called the “Q sample” is drawn from the larger identified concourse and is subsequently presented to participants in a Q study (Van Exel & De Graaf, 2005). As with sampling persons in survey research, the main goal in selecting a Q sample is to provide a miniature version of the concourse that contains the generality of the larger process (concourse) being modelled. Thus, the Q sample should represent the variation within concourse. The aim is to capture the heterogeneity of the concourse rather than a majority viewpoint (Shemmings & Ellingsen, 2012). A second important issue is that statements should be *self-referent* and scalable to trigger the participants' subjective viewpoints (McKeown & Thomas, 2013). This means that statements need to be scalable along some sort of face-value dimension (e.g. “to what degree” or

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“to what extent”). Therefore, statements of fact with dichotomous answers (“yes/no”, “true/false”) are not applicable in Q studies.

The most common device for systematically sorting the discourse into a representative sample of statements is “balanced blocks” (Stephenson, 1993, p. 7), particularly Fisher’s experimental design procedures (Stephenson, 1953, 1993). The primary rationale of Fisher’s (1935) balanced block design involves a combination of causes and their “effects” (Stephenson, 1993). To illustrate, there may be multiple causes for how children are constructed, such as history, knowledge and economy. These causes may in effect generate different views of children, such as children as a future investment, children as a trophy of the family and children as competent beings. Within a Fisher’s *balanced block* design, the second rationale is that all combinations of causes and effects should be equally included (Stephenson, 1993) through cross-matching themes (Ellingsen, 2011).

In this Q study, the total set of statements (1,215) were analysed, looking for patterns of similarities, differences and nuances across the entire dataset. Hence, I did not analyse each of the materials separately. This was done to adhere to the heterogeneity of the discourse, considering each material as part of a larger whole (the identified discourse). Given the abundant sample of statements, I used several approaches to retain an overview of the material, including adding and categorising statements in NVivo, creating tables in Microsoft Word, and printing out the statements and placing them on a wall to gain a visual overview. Familiarising myself with the material and identifying different topics within the discourse was a challenging phase of the research process. After identifying different topics, a modified version of the Fisher’s Block balance design (Brown, 1980 as used in Ellingsen 2011) was applied (see Table 3) to help develop a balanced selection of statements to represent the identified discourse.

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Table 3. Illustration of the Fisher's balanced block design

	A Children	B Children in family contexts	C First- or third-person plural views of children	D Children in the child protection system/society
E Views from first-person singular (miscellaneous)	A x E = 3 statements Example: Children are not sufficiently independent to make their own decisions.	B x E = 3 statements Example: As a social worker, I think that it is more difficult to work with children in families from higher social classes than lower social classes.	C x E = 3 statements Example: Frequently the social worker defines the interests and needs of the child (and not the children themselves).	D x E = 3 statements Example: Generally speaking, I think we have a good way to raise children in Chile/Norway.
F Relationship, trust and interaction	A x F = 3 statements Example: I always give the child the opportunity to contribute, independent of age and maturity.	B x F = 3 statements Example: It's important for me to hear the parents' story before I hear the children's story.	C x F = 3 statements Example: Many social workers think it's difficult to know what to talk to the children about and how to do it.	D x F = 3 statements Example: Children have a strong position in the child protection sector in comparison to the parents.
G Knowledge and responsibility	A x G = 3 statements Example: I feel less responsibility for children when they are approaching age of majority.	B x G = 3 statements Example: The worst that can happen to a child is that we separate him/her from his/her family.	C x G = 3 statements Example: We have knowledge that makes us best capable of evaluating what's in the child's best interest.	D x G = 3 statements Example: Our responsibility is first and foremost to make sure that children's basic needs are covered.

The first set of topics identified in the concourse regarded various people, contexts and structures through which perspectives of children were constructed. More specifically, the views of (A) children (in their own right),

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(B) children in family contexts, (C) first- or third-person plural views of children and (D) children in the child protection system/society. The appearance of these topics may be logical given, for example, the three broad topic areas in the interview guides (materials 3 and 4). Yet, topic C was not specifically asked for, but was a linguistic distinction identified in the data materials. Specifically, in the personal pronouns assigned to the views of children; whether it was spoken from a first-person singular (“my” or “I”), a first-person plural (“we” or “us”) or a third-person plural point of view (“they” or “them”). Topic C, then, refers to those reflections stemming from a first- or third-person plural point of view (we/us or they/them).

The second set of identified topics were the consequential views of children that were linked to the abovementioned topics. More specifically (E) views from first-person singular; (F) relationship, trust and interaction; and (G) knowledge and responsibility. All statements could potentially be a perspective from a social workers’ first-person singular point of view (topic E; I think/my perspective is). This because the discourse in itself regards social workers’ perspectives of children in child protection work. Therefore, topic E was included as a miscellaneous topic in this project, where multiple intertwined “causes” could be embedded in statements aligned to this topic. Topics F and G, in contrast, included more clear-cut causes attributed to relational aspects, interaction and trust, or knowledge and responsibility. Table 3 illustrates how the Fisher’s balanced block design was applied in this project, with an example statement for each of the cross-matched topics. The table also shows that three statements were extracted from each cross-matched theme to retain the heterogeneity of the discourse.

Some statements could naturally fall within more than one topic. For example, “Many social workers think it’s difficult to know what to talk to the children about and how to do it” could be seen as a statement about knowledge as well as about aspects embedded in child–social worker relationships. The decision of assigning a statement to a particular topic was sometimes based on weighting what to emphasise in the statement (Ellingsen, 2011). Similarly, there were more statements from a first-person plural point of view of children than those assigned to topic C, for example, “Generally speaking, I think *we* have a good way to raise children in Chile/Norway.” The point of having a distinct topic on this was to make sure that the first- or third-person plural views of children were

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covered in the final set of statements. Lastly, from a linguistic point of view, it may seem strange to correlate (E) first-person singular and (C) first- or third-person plural point of views. Nevertheless, the vantage point for the interviews, focus groups, and for the Q study itself *is* from a first-person (self-referent) point of view. Some of the statements in the data materials regarded how participants believed social workers as a group or other individuals viewed children (we/us or they/them), which may make the idea of matching these two topics more logical.

There is no gold standard for the final number of statements/items included in a Q sample; for instance, the number may depend on the research topic (Ellingsen et al., 2010). However, generally speaking, a Q sample of somewhere between 40 and 80 statements is considered satisfactory. Fewer statements than this may be problematic for covering the subject matter at hand; more statements than this may make the sorting process unnecessarily exhausting for participants (Watts & Stenner, 2005).

In this study, a final set of 39 statements representative of the concourse were selected (see Appendix 2). Several steps were taken to ensure the relevance of statements to social workers in Chile and Norway and to avoid ambiguity in content or wording.

I strategically selected to conduct the Q study in Chile before Norway. As a Native Norwegian, it was easier to adjust the content and wording of statements from Spanish to Norwegian. Thus, the room for uncertainty of the study's applicability was larger in Chile. I was in Chile from March to June 2017 and used the first period to refine the statements, for example, by meeting relevant people and organisations to gain a better understanding of the child protection system and current situations in Chile (e.g. the Norwegian Embassy in Santiago, staff at the National Institute of Human Rights in Chile [Instituto de Derechos Humanos, INDH], researchers at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile). Statements were piloted with social workers in Chile ($n=2$) and Norway ($n=2$).

In this Q study, the concourse was identified from more than one language, and translation between languages was performed in multiple stages before arriving at the final Norwegian and Spanish Q sample. While having Spanish-speaking

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competencies, I engaged multiple translators to ensure the quality of the translations. Nonetheless, several translation dilemmas occurred. Some words could be directly translated from one language to the other, while if done so in other cases, the content of the word changed. Even when involving translators, it was important that I understood what made one word, gender system (Boroditsky & Schmidt, 2003) or grammatical form different from another and what the strengths or weaknesses of using one form versus another were. This was to safeguard the essence and the deeper meaning of what was conveyed so that it was contextually and linguistically equivalent (Maneesriwongul & Dixon, 2004).

To reduce translation-related problems in this study, four techniques were used, including back-and-forth translation and consultation and collaboration with diverse people during the translation process (Birbili, 2000). Lastly, the statements contained easy everyday language with no context-dependent terms. Retaining “easy” everyday language that is familiar to participants is in line with general Q methodological literature, as this may enable participants to more immediately respond to the statements when doing the Q sort (Sæbjørnsen et al., 2016). In terms of translation issues in cross-contextual research, one advantage of using Q method is that different words/phrases may mean various things to various people depending on the combination of statements in which they appear. Some words or phrases may mean various things to different people at specific periods and may be related to the context in which they occur thus allowing for ambiguity independent of context (Stephenson, 1953). As stated by Stephenson (1953), “All use of language, surely, takes place on concrete ‘fields’ of action; the significance of any meaning is a dependent function, not of definitions in general terms, but in psychological-situational terms” (p. 269). Hence, as previously mentioned, the significant matter is not the statements themselves but how participants *relate* to the statements.

5.2.3 Step 3: P set and conditions for instructions

The P set refers to the participants in a Q study. By its nature and in contrast to survey research, Q method relies upon relatively small purposive participant samples conducting a large number of “tests” (i.e. ranking multiple statements) (Brown, 1991/1992; Van Exel & De Graaf, 2005). Q method ordinarily adopts

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a multiple-participant format to explore and make sense of socially contested concepts and subjective matters from the point of view of the *group* of participants involved. Suggestions about sample size vary in the Q literature; however, 40–60 participants can be seen as a rule of thumb measure (Brown, 1991/1992). Yet, highly effective studies can be carried out with fewer participants than this, and significant viewpoints can be revealed by referencing only one participant (Watts & Stenner, 2012). However, if the aim is to explore whether a viewpoint is shared by several participants and to make sense of such uniformity, which was the aim in this project, it is necessary to have more than one case (Watts & Stenner, 2005).

Twenty-one social workers participated in Chile and 19 in Norway, yielding a total sample of 40 social workers. However, only 17 of the participants in Norway were part of the actual analysis, as two of the Norwegian social workers preferred to reflect upon statements without placing all statements into the Q sorting grid.

Participant recruitment in this study was done in each of the countries' capitals (Santiago and Oslo). The rationale for this was an assumption of more heterogeneity of children and families in contact with the child protection services and hence a broader variability in the issues encountered and in the experiences of social workers in cities with larger populations. Moreover, participants were recruited from multiple child protection services to enable different viewpoints and experiences to emerge (the letter of invitation is provided in Appendix 3).

In Norway, recruitment was done through my professional network and by contacting the directors of several municipal child protection offices directly by phone and e-mail, with the latter strategy yielding more participants. In Chile, recruitment was done through my professional network, through consulting our partner in the FACKS project in Chile about potential social workers who might be interested in participating, and through contacting several child protection organisations and services directly by phone and e-mail. The first two strategies yielded approximately 60% of the participants and the latter yielded approximately 40%.

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Table 4. Demographic description of the 38 participants

Participant	Gender	Age	Tenure	Position
C1	Female	26	3 Y	Social worker
C2	Female	34	7 Y	Social worker
C3	Female	30	7 Y	Director
C4	Female	27	4 Y	Coordinator
C5	Female	27	3 Y	Social worker
C6	Female	25	2 Y	Social worker
C7	Female	31	7 Y	Coordinator
C8	Female	47	21 Y	Director
C9	Female	34	7 Y	Social worker
C10	Male	30	5 Y	Social worker
C11	Female	37	12 Y	Social worker
C12	Female	30	7 Y	Social worker
C13	Female	48	24 Y	Director
C14	Female	30	8 Y	Social worker
C15	Female	42	16 Y	Social worker
C16	Female	42	14 Y	Director
C17	Female	28	4 Y	Social worker
C18	Male	35	10 Y	Social worker
C19	Female	25	1 Y	Social worker
C20	Female	28	5 Y	Social worker
C21	Female	33	10 Y	Coordinator
N1	Female	53	29 Y	Consultant
N2	Female	33	9 Y	Social worker
N3	Male	24	6 M	Social worker
N4	Male	36	12 Y	Social worker
N5	Male	26	1 Y	Social worker
N6	Female	38	4 M	Social worker
N7	Female	35	11 Y	Social worker
N8	Male	61	20 Y	Director
N9	Male	33	8 Y	Director
N10	Female	38	1 Y	Social worker
N11	Female	26	4 Y	Social worker
N12	Male	38	4 Y	Social worker
N13	Female	42	12 Y	Social worker
N14	Female	30	4 Y 5 M	Social worker
N15	Female	30	1 Y	Social worker
N16	Female	36	11 Y	Social worker
N17	Female	41	2 Y	Social worker

Abbreviations: Y = years, M = months, C = Chile, N = Norway.

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Overall, workers in both national contexts work along a specialist model, which involves different teams of workers with specific responsibilities along a child protection “chain of services” (e.g. assessment, intervention, rehabilitation, etc.). More specifically, the participants in Chile work in partly privatised child protection organisations and provide four different child protection services: residential care, rehabilitation, interventions and diagnostic/assessment work.⁵ While one of the participants in Norway works in residential care, the remaining participants work in municipal child protection offices. More specifically, the participants in Norway provide the following child protection services: reception work (managing notes of concerns), assessments, interventions, follow-up work, foster care-related work and work with unaccompanied minor asylum seekers. Most of the participants in Chile and Norway work with diagnostics/assessments ($n=13$) and interventions ($n=10$).

Table 4 provides additional demographic descriptions of the participants in Chile and Norway. The mean tenure (years of experience as a social worker) was approximately 8.4 years among the Chilean workers and 7.7 years among the Norwegian workers. The approximate mean age among the Chilean participants was 33 years and 36.5 years among the Norwegian participants. While questions related to age and tenure were included in the demographic questionnaire provided to participants before sorting statements, the actual relevance of age and tenure to their perspectives was not identified. Yet, the sample of participants in different age and tenure groups was small, and a larger comparable sample of participants with a strategic analysis based on these estimates might have yielded different findings. The majority of the participants in this project were female ($n=30$) and there were more male participants in the Norwegian ($n=6$) than Chilean ($n=2$) sample. Whether this reflects the distribution of male/female populations of social workers in the child protection

⁵ Equating child protection services in Norway and Chile and translating them into English proved challenging. At a more specific level, the services provided in Chile are rehabilitation programmes for child victims of sexual abuse (Programas de Reparación en Maltrato [PRM]); rehabilitation programmes for child victims of sexual exploitation or trafficking (Programas de Protección en Explotación Sexual Comercial Infantil [PEE]); intervention programmes with children and youth under 18 years who are victims of human rights violations (Programas de Intervención Integral Especializada [PIE]); diagnostic programmes in relation to the family courts (Programas de Diagnóstico [DAM]); and residential care.

domain in Chile and Norway is unknown. That said, social work is often described as a female-dominated profession, with men disproportionately occupying senior roles (Hicks, 2015). In the Norwegian sample, both directors were male, whereas all directors in Chile were female. Nevertheless, this may solely be a product of the small sample size. Most of the social workers had a bachelor's degree in social work or child welfare work and some had a master's degree. Ten of the social workers held a director/coordinator/consultant position.

The instructions given to participants in the Q sorting (often referred to as “conditions for instructions”) were also defined in this third step (Ellingsen et al., 2010). These instructions guide the actual Q sorting process and must be in line with the research question. It is important that the research question (and instructions given to participants) is straightforward and clearly stated. Furthermore, the Q sample should enable participants to respond to the question in an effective way (Watts & Stenner, 2005). Before participants sorted the statements in this Q study, all participants were informed that there was no right or wrong way to sort the statements and to sort statements according to their individual perspectives and/or experiences of children in child protection work.

5.2.4 Step 4: Q sort

The Q sorting procedure is the main tool through which participants can convey their subjective views (Stenner et al., 2006). The Q sorts were collected in May and June 2017 in Chile and December 2017 and February 2018 in Norway. The 39 statements were presented to participants on separate randomly numbered cards, and the social workers were instructed to sort the cards into a predefined quasi-normal distribution grid (see Figure 2). The grid ranged from +4 (most like) to -4 (most unlike) their perspectives/experience, with a centre (0) signifying statements that were neutral, irrelevant or triggered ambivalence. Another way to describe this ranking continuum is that it ranges from “most descriptive” to “most undescriptive” and it is assumed that statements placed under +/-4 or +/-3 hold greater psychological significance to a particular participant (McKeown & Thomas, 2013).

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Figure 2. Illustration of a completed Q sort and the Q sorting grid

Grids with a predefined quasi-normal distribution are common in Q studies (Ellingsen et al., 2010). Figure 2 demonstrates that the grid decides the number of items that can be assigned to each ranking position (three items at the +4 position, four items at the +3 position, etc.). For this reason, it is also known as a “forced” distribution. However, it is possible to employ completely free distributions, which allows participants to assign any number of items to any of the available ranking positions (Watts & Stenner, 2005). Brown (1980) found that the chosen distribution made no noticeable contribution to the emerging perspectives. Moreover, using a forced distribution that asks participants to rank-order statements into a predefined grid may reveal more fine-tuned and nuanced perspectives (McKeown & Thomas, 2013). That is, asking participants to rank-order statements into a predefined grid may make differentiating the psychological significance of statements easier for participants (e.g. “when I first have to make a decision on this, this statement is more important for me than the other”) (Ellingsen et al., 2010). This is significant information that could be lost by using free distribution grids (McKeown & Thomas, 2013).

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The quasi-normality can be seen in Figure 2, as the grid has the same number of spaces and shape on each side of the grid, with an increasing number of spaces in the middle. According to van Exel and Graaf (2005), the grid's form depends on the controversy of the research topic and participants' level of knowledge. Van Exel and Graaf suggested a flatter distribution in cases where participants are expected to have extensive knowledge on the topic to provide more room for (dis)agreement and a steeper grid in cases where lowed knowledge is expected or if a small part of statements may be salient.

Open-ended participant comments during/after the Q sort provides valuable insights, for example, to interpret the perspectives (Watts & Stenner, 2005). For instance, open-ended participant comments can be obtained via a brief post-sorting interview that invites participants to share their reflections upon the statements and their particular way of sorting them (Shemmings & Ellingsen, 2012). In this study, all Q sorts were treated as individual "interviews". Participants were instructed to read each of the 39 statements aloud and share their immediate reflections on the statements, also called "the thinking aloud technique" (Ericsson & Simon, 1984). This technique can be understood as a metacognitive strategy of reflecting on the tasks you are undertaking (Ward & Traweek, 1993) by "asking people to verbalize their thinking while performing tasks or solving problems" (Lundgrén-Laine & Salanterä, 2010, p. 568). This technique is claimed to access information stored in the working memory at a present moment (Lundgrén-Laine & Salanterä, 2010). Working memory can include the ability to process visual and verbal representations and operates when information has to be obtained, digested and reviewed for an immediate response (Linden, 2007).

Below, a transcribed extract from a social worker performing the Q sort in Norway is provided to illustrate how the think-aloud technique functioned in practice:

Participant: [Statement 13] *Some children receive help more easily because they appeal more to the social worker.* Yes, I believe that. Especially seen in relation to that of seeing the child a little separated from the family, [seeing it] as an individual. I actually think that the social worker can..., that one should have these methodical child conversations, that one can lose some perspective as well, lose the

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holistic perspective. And that you can get emotional by meeting parents and children separately. If you have a child who appeals very emotionally, then you can lose the whole a bit, because you do not get to see enough of the interaction and the family, as a whole. [...] I think that is a big challenge. But I do not work so much with those young people. Where should I place it [the statement]?... I place it on +2.

Participant: [Statement 14] *It's important for me to hear the parents' story before I hear the children's story.* No. It's very much like [a] mismatch with how we think in family therapy, where you think you start by meeting the family, everyone first, precisely to be able to be neutral in a way and take sides with everyone – be multi-partial. So, I completely disagree with that. But then that's me, right? It's kind of, there's a little difference between me and, yes, other [social workers] in my context.

Researcher: That's why it's so valuable to get your reflections on these cards.

Asking participants to “think out loud” about the statements provided a more in-depth reasoning behind the “psychological significance” (Brown, 1980) that participants assigned to the statements. Such reflections were shared by all participants for each of the 39 statements, which yielded extensive qualitative material for this study. The specific reflections depicted above show how the social worker is explicit that this is *her* subjective, self-referent interpretations on the statements, based on her experiences, values, knowledge, etc. As argued by Watts and Stenner (2005), the same statement can elicit different responses from different participants, which is a key insight into the interpretation process. As participants were asked to read each statement aloud, it made it easier to go back to participants' reflections on specific statements in the interpretation process. A further description of how the qualitative data informed the analysis is provided in Section 5.2.5.

The decision to use the think-aloud technique during the Q sorts was made after one of the pilot tests of statements with a social worker in Norway. This social worker naturally started talking and reflecting when reading each of the 39 statements. These reflections were valuable, as they gave the placement of statements a body of meaning through both the metacognitive sense-making

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process of engaging with each of the statements and the reason(s) for why the worker placed a statement where she did. Reflections obtained through the think-aloud technique could potentially be lost by merely carrying out a brief post-sorting interview, as this potentially refers to information stored in the long-term memory by asking participants to retrospectively share their thoughts about the statements and exercise undertaken (Lundgrén-Laine & Salanterä, 2010). Yet, the knowledge obtained through the think-aloud technique and the retrospective think-aloud techniques can yield different forms of information. For example, the latter technique can give participants the opportunity to reflect on the overarching Q sort process and the comprehensive set of statements, which might enable higher-level reflections (Van den Haak et al., 2003).

Hence, upon completing the Q sorting, participants were asked whether they considered that any prominent topics of relevance were missing and if they briefly could explain why they identified the following statements as “most like” and “most unlike” their perspectives/experiences. While most participants expressed that they had no topics to add, some said there could have been statements on additional topics, such as children with disabilities, the role of social workers’ preconceptions for their views of children and work with transgendered children.

I was present during all Q sorts. For the Q sorts in Chile, a research assistant who spoke Spanish fluently was also present to avoid language misunderstandings and safeguard the validity and prevent ethical issues. The Q sort grid was placed on a table, and the 39 statement cards were handed to the participant. Participants were informed that I/we would not interfere while participants sorted the statements, but that I/we were available if the participant had questions. The Q sort interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. I transcribed the Q sort interviews with social workers in Norway, and a native Chilean transcribed the Q sort interviews in Chile.

Most of the Q sort sessions were held at the participant’s workplace. The remaining Q sorts were carried out at my office in Chile or at a meeting room at my workplace in Oslo. Most participants carried out the Q sort during working hours. The mean duration of the 21 completed Q sorts in Chile was approximately 52 minutes, with the longest being 1 hour and 18 minutes and the shortest 22 minutes. In Norway, the mean duration of the 17 completed Q

sorts was approximately 61 minutes, with the longest being 1 hour and 31 minutes and the shortest 43 minutes. The divergence in time spent on the Q sorts does not necessarily reflect a lack of reflection or that the participants needed less time to complete the Q sorts in Chile. Rather, the time schedule was one hour per participant for most Q sorts in Chile. Some participants were prevented from showing up on time due to work tasks, which gave them less time to perform the Q sort. Based on these experiences, the time schedule was more flexible for all participants in Norway. While all participants in Norway and Chile managed to complete the Q sorts, issues related to divergent time spent on the Q sorts can be a threat to the rigour of findings.

5.2.5 Step 5: Analysis and interpretation

Q methodology has often been associated with quantitative analysis due to the use of factor analysis (Brown, 1996). However, Stephenson (1936) was critical of the dominance of hypothetical-deductive methods and the focus on “testing” participants and confirming predictions, for example, of individual differences (usually called R methodology). He argued that these methods overlook what he considered important: *subjectivity*. To study subjectivity scientifically, Stephenson (1936) argued that the traditional factor analysis could be “inverted”. A Q study neither tests its participants nor imposes deductive reasoning. Instead, the focus is on what is subjectively meaningful to participants, what does and what does not have value and significance from their perspective (Watts & Stenner, 2005). To achieve this, a *by-person* factor analysis is employed, where persons instead of items are subject to factor analysis (Ellingsen et al., 2010). The results of a Q study can hence describe a specific population of perspectives and not a population of people (Brown et al., 2015).

More specifically, the Q sorts made by each participant are subject to correlation analysis, under the assumption that a correlation between individuals’ ranking of statements indicates similarity in viewpoints. By-person factor analysis is used to identify significant *clusters* of correlations, which are interpreted as shared perspectives, commonly described as “factors” (Stephenson, 1936). Different factor solutions can be explored in the search for the most informative factor solution. For example, by exploring factor solutions

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that capture the perspectives of as many participants as possible, the strength of factor loadings, factors that resonate from a deductive point of view and factor(s) representing a view shared by several participants (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

In this study, the Q sorts from the participants in Chile ($n=21$) and Norway ($n=17$) were entered into the software program PQMethod (Schmolck, 2002), which allows for different solutions. The default solutions of principal components analysis (PCA) followed by Varimax rotation were used, a procedure that is most commonly used in Q studies (Watts & Stenner, 2005). Nevertheless, different types of factor analysis (and factor extraction) exist, including hand rotation, which offers potentially innumerable number of factor solutions. The reason for selecting varimax rotation was that it is sensible to the pursuit of a factor solution that maximises the amount of variance explained by the extracted factors. Moreover, the varimax procedure emphasises the input of the participant group and not *a priori* assumptions held by the researcher (Watts & Stenner, 2005). I do acknowledge, however, that the varimax rotation has been criticised. For example, the importance of theoretical discretion has led some researcher being critical to factor rotation techniques (typically varimax rotation) because they are perceived to simply reveal the most *mathematically* informative solution and not necessarily what is most theoretically informative. However, the varimax procedure is in line with my aim of *exploring* the range of perspectives that are favoured and shared by social workers without being led by deductive reasoning. Moreover, the varimax procedure offers simplicity and reliability in factor analysis and extraction (Watts & Stenner, 2005).

The next step is to decide which factors/perspectives should be selected for interpretation (Watts & Stenner, 2005). This decision may rest on various considerations, such as the number of Q sorts with significant factor loading, an examination of the correlation between factors as well as the explained variance of factors, although the latter is less important in Q methodology than in R methodology. In this project, the aim was to identify *shared* perspectives, in which a factor needed to have at least two significant loadings (Brown, 1980). Furthermore, the correlations between factors should be assessed. This is important because a high correlation between factors may sow doubt as to whether the factors/perspectives are distinct (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

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Correlations between factors can be assessed in the table “Correlations between factor scores” in the PQMethod program.

Some correlation between perspectives is expected, and in R methodology, a low correlation can be said to be when the Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient lies between $\pm .30$ and $\pm .50$, moderate when a value lies between $\pm .50$ and $\pm .70$, and high when the coefficient value lies between $\pm .70$ and $\pm .90$ (Mukaka, 2012). Nevertheless, there are also researches operating with stricter values.

Several Q studies report the correlation between factors, and claim that the correlations are considered low or moderate or high. By reviewing published Q studies, such claims (of factor correlations being low/moderate/high) often seem to be based on the researcher’s analytical judgement (frequently without reference to literature, for example from R methodology). The reason for this may be that two factors with a relatively high correlation may reveal interesting perspectives. This can for example be assessed by looking at distinguishing statements (significantly unique ways of sorting statements for each perspective) and consensus statements (statements that participants tend to sort similarly across perspectives). Distinguishing statements may reveal important nuances in the emerging/existing perspectives, despite quite many consensus statements. Hence, although it is important to have knowledge on the statistics on these matters, a careful inspection of perspectives can identify important nuances even among highly similar factors.

In this Q study, a three-factor solution was chosen for both Paper 2 and Paper 3. Paper 2 comprises the Q sorts of the social workers in Chile ($n=21$), and a three-factor solution demonstrated a significant factor loading for 18 of the 21 social workers. Correlation between factors were 0.52 between A and B, 0.44 between B and C and 0.59 between A and C. The three factors accounted for 54% of the explained variance in social workers’ perspectives. For Paper 3, which comprises the Q sorts of the social workers in Chile ($n=21$) and Norway ($n=17$), a three-factor solution demonstrated a significant loading for 36 of the 38 participants. Correlations between factors were .525 between 1 and 2, .507 between 1 and 3 and .344 between 2 and 3. The three perspectives accounted for 50% of the explained variance. As can be seen, the correlations between factors in both papers were low to moderate (if using measures from R

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methodology). Moreover, by inspecting the various perspectives, there were important aspects distinguishing them (as have been presented in Paper 2 and Paper 3).

For Paper 3, a second-order factor analysis (Kline, 1994) was also considered. This meant conducting a by-person factor analysis on the Q sorts among the social workers in Norway, similar to the analysis done on the Q sorts of the social workers in Chile in Paper 2. Subsequent to this, the perspectives/factors from the social worker sample in Chile and Norway would have been included as data in a new, third Q study (Watts & Stenner, 2012). However, the logic for conducting this type of analysis is that the social workers in Norway and Chile are considered two *different* groups. It could be argued that this is the case due to, for example, diverging welfare characteristics and organisation of child protection services in Norway and Chile. Nevertheless, they may also have convergent perspectives on children, for example, due to the ratification of the CRC in both countries or a shared professional ethos as social workers (Lyngstad, 2015). Hence, to avoid *a priori* assumptions about cultural commonalities, the Q sorts of social workers in Norway and Chile were entered into the software program, through which I ran a by-person principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation comprising this larger sample ($n=38$).

As previously mentioned, participants who sort statements in similar ways are likely to be associated with the same factor. However, this does not mean that participants that load on the same factor sort the statements *identically* to that specific factor (Ellingsen, 2011). Rather, it means that participants' Q sorts load significantly on a factor and that factor explains more than half of the common variance of a participant's Q sort. Hence, the perspectives obtained can be viewed as generalised perspectives. Figure 3 illustrates this point by providing an excerpt of the Q sorts of two social workers in Chile (Participants 7 and 21) who loaded significantly on Factor 1 ($p<0.05$) in Paper 2. While nine participants loaded significantly on Factor 1 in Paper 2, Participant 21 had the *highest* common variance with Factor 1 (0.8652), while Participant 7 had the *lowest* common variance with Factor 1 (0.5751). As Figure 3 illustrates, these participants sorted the statements slightly differently from each other *and* from Factor 1. Still, there were *patterns* of commonalities in the ways of sorting the

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statements between these participants, which made them load significantly on Factor 1.

The vertical axis in Figure 3 represents the scale used in the Q sort grid (-4 to +4). The horizontal axis represents the statement numbers of the Q sample. For illustration purposes, the horizontal axis in this figure only contains 15 of the 39 statements.

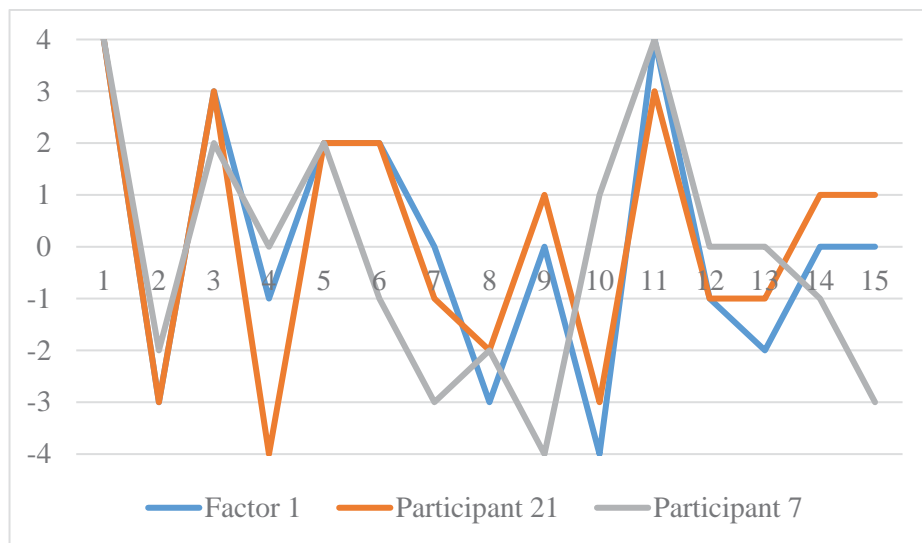


Figure 3. Illustration of two participants' Q sorts and Factor 1 in Paper 2

To interpret the perspectives/factors, the Q sorts of all participants who loaded significantly on a given factor were merged together to yield a distinct (factor-exemplifying) Q sort. This Q sort served as a “best estimate” of the pattern configuration that characterised that factor. The interpretative task involved trying to make sense of the factors by continually shifting the focus between an individual statement's ranking and then immediately to its place and significance in the overall perspective. The various statement rankings *and* participant comments were combined to achieve a clear “gestalt” account of the emerging factors (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

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When interpreting the factors, it is common to look at statements with high psychological significance (in this case, statements ranked at +4 and -4), together with distinguishing statements and consensus statements.

In addition to looking at these focus areas, I chose to apply the crib sheet system suggested by Watts and Stenner (2012) to interpret the factors. This approach aims to facilitate a holistic factor interpretation and includes four basic focus areas: (1) statements given the highest ranking on each factor array (+4); (2) statements given the lowest ranking on each factor array (-4); and statements ranked (3) higher or (4) lower by a factor than by any of the other study factors. While the crib sheet system systematically included more statements in the interpretation effort, it is important to note that the statements identified using this system are not necessarily *statistically significant*. That is, the additional statements identified through the crib sheet system may not be ranked differently to other factors in a statistical sense, and I did not follow these focus areas rigorously. Nevertheless, I concur with Watts and Stenner (2012) in that this is of little concern as long as you do not claim otherwise and as long as your interest in the statements remains tied to their meaning, significance and function within the factors.

Another advantage of the crib sheet system is its ability to attend to statements in the middle of the distribution. A zero or near-zero ranking in a distribution is not necessarily indicative of neutrality or lack of significance (Watts & Stenner, 2012). An example of the importance of statements ranked close to zero can be seen in Perspective 3 in Paper 3, where statement 1 (“In the child protection sector, it is first and foremost important to view the child as part of the family and not as a single individual”) received a -1 placement. This could indicate that it is important to see children both as single individuals and as part of the family. However, this statement received a +4 placement on the other two perspectives in Paper 3. Cast in this new light, the -1 suddenly seemed important. Further investigation of this initial hunch, abduction through reference to other statement placements in Perspective 3 and by exploring the comments of participants significantly loading on Perspective 3 served to clarify the situation.

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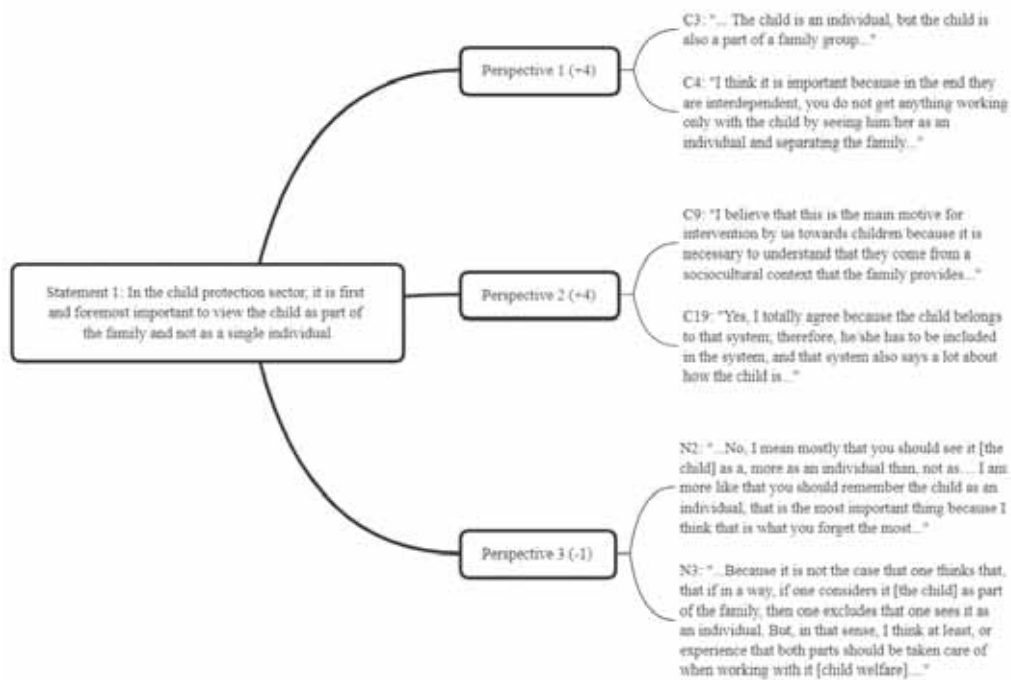


Figure 4. Excerpt of participant reflections for Statement 1

The qualitative materials obtained through the think-aloud technique and follow-up questions were helpful for the interpretation of factors. The qualitative data and Q sort data were managed analytically through an integrated analysis. Figure 4 illustrates this logic by providing an excerpt of reflections obtained through the think-aloud technique for Statement 1 for two of the participants defining Perspectives 1, 2 and 3 in Paper 3.

The qualitative material in this study is abundant. I directed my attention specifically towards participant reflections on the statements identified through the crib sheet system, together with distinguishing statements and consensus statements. I searched for patterns in this qualitative material that could help offer a more in-depth understanding of the factors/perspectives. I looked for similarities, differences and additional nuances in participants' viewpoints regarding these statements. Attempts have been made to accentuate the qualitative reflections surrounding statements in the individual papers.

5.3 Methodological considerations

In this section, I address the strengths and limitations of the study. I will focus on (1) trustworthiness, (2) positionality and (3) application of Q methodology in cross-national comparative studies.

5.3.1 Trustworthiness

When assessing research quality or trustworthiness, reliability and validity are relevant terms. In quantitative research traditions, *validity* may refer to whether a scale or other measurements measure the intended variable, while *reliability* often relates to whether results of a study are repeatable, stable and consistent (Bryman, 2016). In Q methodology, however, these quality criteria may be inadequate, as the key focus of Q methodology is to explore subjectivity rather than measure a variable (Størksen & Thorsen, 2011). Moreover, any concepts of validity and reliability that refer to stability and the “real world” may be incompatible with a social constructivist approach (Maxwell, 2013), as it may presuppose a single account of social reality (Bryman, 2016).

There are, however, alternative ways to assess reliability and validity in Q studies. Reliability can be looked at from two levels: the reliability of each participant’s Q sort and the reliability of the factors (Ellingsen, 2011; Størksen & Thorsen, 2011). Stability is assumed in a participant’s Q sort at two different points in time if they receive the same sample of statements and instructions (Brown, 1980). I did not have the opportunity to conduct such “test-retest” Q sorts because of time and practical constraints. While this might have provided stronger certainty of the identified perspectives, the aim of this study was not to explore the stability of perspectives over time. As with much other research, this study provides insight into the perspectives of children among a group of social workers at a specific point in time. I consider this “snapshot” insight into participants’ perspectives interesting in its own right. Moreover, like other qualitative findings, the results of a Q study may be generalised to social workers from which the perspectives were sampled but not to a larger population of social workers, as in survey research (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Generalisations can be drawn about the nature of the shared perspectives within this group of social workers at a specific point in time.

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According to Brown (1980), the reliability of the factors is greater than for individual Q sorts, as “[t]he more persons defining a factor, the higher the reliability – i.e., the more persons who render a viewpoint, the more confidence we have in the scores of the items composing it” (p. 245). In Paper 3 (comprising the perspectives of social workers in Norway and Chile), the majority of participants significantly loaded on Perspectives 1 ($n=16$) and 3 ($n=17$). This means that the reliability of these perspectives is stronger than for Perspective 2 ($n=3$). Moreover, findings from Paper 3 converge with those found among social workers in Chile and Norway by means of other research methods (Ellingsen et al., 2019; Studsrød et al., 2018). This might strengthen the reliability of findings by assuming that these perspectives exist. While Q methodology is not concerned with the generalisation of prevalence (Ellingsen, 2011), it may be interesting to conduct more large-scale quantitative research to explore whether the convergent/divergent tendencies identified in this study may be found among social workers in Norway and Chile in general.

As a starting point to address validity issues, I use Maxwell’s (2013) definition: “the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sorts of account” (p. 122). In terms of a participants’ Q sorts, it is commonly argued that there is no external criterion for evaluating the correctness or credibility of a person’s point of view (Brown, 1980). That is, the validity of a person’s own perspective cannot be judged by an investigator’s external frame of reference (McKeown & Thomas, 2013). A general opinion in Q methodology is that individuals are the experts on their own subjectivity (Brown, 1980), and therefore, there is no “right or wrong” (Størksen & Thorsen, 2011).

A key question in a Q study, however, is what is measured or explored. While Q methodology is interested in a participant’s subjective perspective on a topic, it is pivotal that the identified discourse and statements (Q sample) capture relevant issues concerning this topic (Størksen & Thorsen, 2011). Transferred to this project, if important understandings of children relevant to child protection work are missing, the validity of the study may weaken (Ellingsen, 2011). As previously described, efforts were made in this study to capture important aspects relevant to this topic by including multiple data materials to identify the discourse, and in general terms, participants felt they were able to express their perspectives through the statements provided. This is not to say,

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however, that the identified discourse and statements capture all aspects relevant to this topic. As pointed out by Stephenson (1978), it is impossible to grasp a discourse in its entirety. That is, it is naïve to think that the discourse embraces all possible aspects surrounding a topic. As suggested by Sæbjørnsen et al. (2016), it is important to balance between identifying the discourse “in its entirety” and obtaining some common knowledge surrounding the topic. This means that what is measured or explored in this study is a specific set of social workers’ perspectives on 39 statements regarding issues specifically related to the understandings of children in child protection work. As a consequence, conclusions from this study cannot be drawn about social workers’ all-embracing perspectives of children; rather, conclusions can be drawn about how these participants relate themselves to these statements in particular. Moreover, this study gains insight into social workers’ perspectives and reflections *on* practice rather than actual practice. While these insights are important, there may be a gap between stated perspectives and actual practice, as how people say they are likely to think, feel and behave and how they actually behave may be inconsistent (Bryman, 2016).

Also relevant to the question “what is measured” is whether social workers’ authentic perspectives are obtained. In this regard, it is salient to ask whether and how it is at all possible to decide which participant reflections and perspectives are honest versus which are desirable. The social desirability effect involves the idea that participants’ “answers to questions are related to their perception of the social desirability of those answers” (Bryman, 2016, pp. 227–228). Although all participants in this study were informed that there was no right or wrong way to sort the statements, they may have conceived some perspectives of children to be more socially desirable than others. Moreover, it has been shown that participants are more likely to respond in a socially desirable manner when a researcher is present (Bryman, 2016), which was the case in this study. Some of the statements might even have appeared intimidating to participants, resulting in an unwillingness to provide an authentic reply. In this study, participants’ subjective thoughts and reflections on the statements were communicated through the think-aloud technique. This means that participants’ thoughts and feelings on statements went from being something private and silent to something public and social. In this process of converting the “inner dialogue” to something available for direct scrutiny,

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social workers may have felt the urge to censor their responses. Thus, the question is raised of whether more honest Q sorts would have been identified if participants were not asked to express their thoughts on statements aloud. That said, whether authentic and/or ideal self-references were obtained, I do not perceive this as a significant problem for what is measured and interpreted as subjectivity. This position rests on my understanding of a perspective as the merging of a person's many experiences through what the individual sees and understands of the world (an understanding that has transpired from Berger and Luckmann's (1991) writings). If social workers preferred to portray perspectives that were considered socially desirable, this may also say something about dominant societal discourses surrounding children that may contribute to forming a person's subjectivity. Irrespective of whether social workers' responses were mostly authentic, socially desirable or – most likely – a blend, different perspectives emerged in this study, indicating various ways of seeing children.

Størksen and Thorsen (2011) have argued that validity in Q methodology chiefly relates to the researcher's ability to grasp participants' perspectives, in other words, the credibility of my descriptions, interpretations and conclusions (Maxwell, 2013) of the perspectives. An advantage of Q method in this regard is that the data (the factor loadings and factor scores in particular) are included in the research papers (McKeown & Thomas, 2013). That these data are available to an outside audience elicits transparency, whereby the credibility of the factor interpretations can be assessed. Hence, my interpretations and conclusions can be affirmed or challenged by competing interpretations (McKeown & Thomas, 2013).

5.3.2 Positionality

Reflecting on my own position may give other researchers a platform for assessing the trustworthiness of this research contribution (Picot, 2016). Clarifying a researcher's position may be especially important when conducting research across national contexts. Indeed, researchers unavoidably have their own culturally, linguistically and disciplinary assumptions and mindsets (Hantrais & Mangen, 2007). Moreover, fully detaching ourselves from our context is difficult, and researchers may be better acquainted with one

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of the countries under study (Picot, 2016). For these reasons, I will use this section to be explicit on some of my starting points for conducting this research.

As a native Norwegian, I am undoubtedly more familiar with the Norwegian language, culture, research settings and institutional logics. In contrast, the child protection system in Chile was unfamiliar to me when I started working on this PhD project. Nevertheless, I have studied Spanish and lived in different parts of Latin America, which served as a strength in carrying out this research project. It is now a common assumption that researchers occupy a fuzzy space between the dichotomy of insider versus outsider status rather than being either/or (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009; Merriam et al., 2001; Temple & Young, 2004). Human beings are complex, and there is not merely *one* variable that may decide which position a researcher occupies. This may be reflected by the term “halfie” (Zulfikar, 2014), which suggests that researchers may simultaneously be insiders and outsiders, depending on which variables or human attributes are emphasised.

Nevertheless, being more like one’s participants in terms of language, culture, profession, gender and so on has been seen as a quality criterion (Merriam et al., 2001). One fallacy of being an insider, however, can be that the researcher gets too close to the phenomenon being studied to differentiate the familiar from new perspectives (Kanuha, 2000; Hantrais & Mangen, 2007). The strength of being more of an outsider is that *different* understandings of the phenomenon can be gained, and the outsider can pose questions that for an insider are common sense (Merriam et al., 2001).

During my stay in Chile (March to June 2017), the Chilean child protection system (SENAME in particular) was in stormy weather in the media, for example, due to revelations of state neglect in more than 850 deaths of children and youth under state custody since 2005 (United Nations Organization, 2018). When in Chile, I received frequent questions of where I was from and what led me to Chile, suggesting an “outsider” status. I experienced that describing my child protection-related research yielded a relatedness to many Chileans in that the cases revealed in media triggered emotional reactions and touched upon many Chileans. Moreover, to do research in Chile, it seemed significant to gain a better understanding of the era during and after the Pinochet dictatorship, not merely by reading literature but also by gaining an understanding from the lived

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experiences of Chileans. My experiences were that the Chileans I met willingly and elaborately explained the “how’s and why’s” of Chilean society. Here, my outsider position possibly let me get away with questions related to a sensitive period in Chilean history which might have been perceived as uninformed or ignorant if posed by an insider. Moreover, the people I met in Chile might have felt an urge and responsibility to explain more to a guest (Wærdahl, 2010).

These experiences are transferrable to research settings in Chile, as participants unsolicitedly highlighted the comparative element of this project and made hypothetical distinctions between child protection in Norway and Chile. Exemplifying statements included “I don’t know how it is in Norway, but here in Chile, we ...” This and similar statements indicate a drive among participants to be explicit on issues that might be unknown to a stranger or guest. Furthermore, during the interviews, several participants in both countries expressed curiosity about how child protection was structured in another country. Some social workers also stated that they assumed different practices in Chile and Norway. In the case of analysis and paper writing, I invited a Chilean child protection researcher to be a co-author (Paper 2) to secure current and eligible information regarding the Chilean situation in the child protection system and to retain an “insider’s” look at the findings.

In terms of my academic background, I may be considered an outsider in both countries (Picot, 2016). I am not a social worker; my academic background is psychology. Part of this PhD process has therefore been to become acquainted with the social work profession and to understand the dominant discourses and ideological underpinnings of social work. In Paper 1, we identified that social workers relied on an array of *psychological* understandings in their constructions of children. Here, my academic background and previous knowledge may have been contributory. If I had a different academic background, such as social work, other aspects might have been identified. Nevertheless, my outsider perspective potentially enabled a different understanding.

I end this section with a quote by Dwyer and Buckle (2009): “[T]he core ingredient is not insider or outsider status but an ability to be open, authentic, honest, deeply interested in the experience of one’s research participants, and committed to accurately and adequately representing their experience” (p. 59).

I will – with humbleness – say that I have tried to use this as a research ethos throughout this project.

5.3.3 Application of Q methodology in cross-national comparative studies

Norway and Chile present differences in language, culture, history, politics and welfare systems. Consequently, a central issue in the research process was how to design a cross-national comparative Q study that would be applicable for social workers in such different country contexts. While cross-national comparative research using Q methodology exists (see next paragraph), I have not identified a uniform corpus of literature on “how to” design Q studies to be applicable across various national contexts. Therefore, design decisions were based on general Q methodological literature in combination with qualitative research literature on translation and various forms of comparative research. In this section, I discuss the application of Q methodology in cross-national comparative studies by focusing on three interwoven themes: (1) the decision to use one Q sample, (2) drawing borders for the concourse and (3) translation issues.

In this Q study, I used a single set of statements translated for each country rather than developing country-specific Q samples. A review of previous comparative Q studies revealed examples of using different Q samples for different countries and/or performing separate analyses (Dryzek & Holmes, 2002; Van Eijk et al., 2017). There are also examples of using the same Q sample across countries and conducting one analysis for all the data (Bryant et al., 2011; Franz et al., 2016; Jeffares & Skelcher, 2011; Robyn, 2005; Stenner et al., 2006).

Unarguably, there are strengths and limitations with both strategies. Salient issues when using the same statements for each country might be whether you are limiting the concourse for each country and, consequently, how you then can make sure that a breadth of perspectives can emerge (Franz et al., 2017). Moreover, although Van Eijk et al. (2017) have argued that two different sets of statements are comparable, it might be more challenging to explore similarities and differences across participants for different countries when they have engaged with different sets of statements (Franz et al., 2017). Moreover,

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interpretations of similarities and dissimilarities in perspectives across countries could possibly be more imposed by researchers' assumptions when participants have engaged with different Q samples. For the latter strategy, it has been argued that, for example, using one set of statements requires statements "at a more abstract level and therefore implies an important loss of information" (Van Eijk et al., 2017, p. 330). Moreover, "the conditions" in the countries under investigation should be sufficiently similar to enable the use of one set of statements (Jeffares & Skelcher, 2011, p. 1260). Yet, there are examples of Q studies where this latter point is not the case. Stenner et al. (2006), for example, used a single set of statements to investigate the views of young people from England, Catalonia (Spain) and Slovakia regarding sexual relationships and their health implications. By looking at Hantrais's (2005) family-policy typology (which might be relevant when exploring sexual relationship preferences), these countries might reflect exemplars of partially defamilialised, familialised and refamilialised welfare regimes, respectively. Understood from such a framework, it can be hypothesised that sexual relationship preferences differ among young people in these countries.

Challenges arising from data collected for empirical comparability are not restricted to Q methodological cross-national comparative research. Similar discussions occur when using case vignettes for qualitative cross-national comparative purposes (Nygren & Oltedal, 2015; Nygren et al., 2018). While country-specific vignettes may be more context sensitive, using the same vignette across contexts may more easily allow for comparison of similar or competing perspectives (Nygren & Oltedal, 2015). That said, retaining an appropriate level of equivalence and applicability is key when using the same "measurement instrument" across contexts.

Choosing to use a single set of statements in this study rested upon both methodological and theoretical judgements. First, similarities and differences in perspectives could be more readily explored when participants engage with the same Q sample. Second, using country-specific Q samples might imply *a priori* and researcher-imposed judgements about assumed country-specific commonalities and differences. The point of departure for this project is in acknowledging that our ways of seeing children are shaped by the particular cultural, social and historical contexts in which we are situated (James et al., 1998), hence assuming variability in ways of seeing. Nevertheless, assuming

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that social workers in Norway and Chile are too different in their viewpoints to engage with the same set of statements can also be questioned. While a growing body of research has suggested differing social worker perspectives (Ellingsen et al., 2019; Studsrød et al., 2018), other researchers have suggested that various neutralising factors may exist regarding apparent diversities in historical, cultural and policy contexts (Hämäläinen et al., 2012; Lyngstad, 2015; Nygren et al., 2018). For example, increased international mobility, travelling ideas and knowledge traditions as well as children's rights may function as harmonising factors with divergences in welfare and child welfare policies (Hämäläinen et al., 2012). Lyngstad (2015) suggested that variation within and across countries may be neutralised by a seemingly global moral orientation among social workers, suggesting a professional ethos that transcends contextual variations. Hence, assumptions of commonalities and variances in perspectives draw in various directions and still raise an empirical question that this project seeks to explore.

As previously mentioned, a critique of using one Q sample has been that it requires more abstract statements, which may imply a loss of information (Van Eijk et al., 2017). Moreover, Ellingsen (2010) argued that statements at an abstract level can make it difficult to bring out different perspectives, as “the consensus about an issue will increase in accordance with the level of abstraction” (p. 147). This project includes not just a variance in country but also in social workers' function in the child protection system. Hence, to assure applicability for all social workers, a degree of abstraction of the statements' content was necessary. However, different perspectives emerged in this study, which might suggest a decent balance between the abstract and concrete levels of statements. Participants reported that statements were applicable to their work, but still, social workers expressed that some statements (e.g. “Children are not sufficiently independent to make their own decisions”) were somewhat abstract. Nevertheless, in these cases, the think-aloud technique allowed participants to specify what informed their perspective, for example, that it depended on the child's age or which decisions the child could make independently. As previously mentioned, such qualitative accounts informed the interpretation of the identified perspectives.

When deciding to use one set of statements, a fundamental challenge was to draw boundaries for the concourse. While the ideal is that the concourse should

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contain all relevant aspects of a topic (Van Exel & De Graaf, 2005), obtaining the “full” discourse on a topic may be illusory, as there is always something else that might be said (Sæbjørnsen et al., 2016; Watts & Stenner, 2005). Nevertheless, where the *border* is drawn for discourse identification may be fuzzier when using a single Q sample in cross-national comparative studies, for example, because there may be more variation across national borders than within (Kohn, 1987).

In this study, the discourse was identified from multiple materials (see Table 2) to approach a broad array of perspectives. Nevertheless, the identified discourse is not without limitations. The discourse comprises more materials from northern European/Anglophone countries than Latin American countries. This might possibly have caused an imbalance of perspectives and sources. While focus group materials from Chile and Norway are included, individual interviews were only conducted with social workers in Norway ($n=3$). The reason for not conducting individual interviews in Chile was due to time constraints. Nevertheless, in hindsight, interviews could have been conducted on digital platforms before arriving in Chile. There has been a rise in the use of digital platforms for research purposes during the Covid-19 pandemic, and the lessons learnt from the pandemic can create new opportunities for future comparative research. The dialogue seminars with master’s students could possibly reduce some of the imbalance in sources from northern European/Anglophone countries. The master’s students were from many non-European/Anglophone countries, which might allow a greater breadth in perspectives. Moreover, as mentioned in the description of the literature search strategy of the IR (Chapter 5.1.1), the choice of search words might have omitted empirical works visualising the relational child. Previous research was one of the discourse materials. Yet, as can be seen in the final set of statements (Appendix 2), a multitude of statements highlight relational dimensions of childhood, for example, Statement 1, “In the child protection sector, it is first and foremost important to view the child as part of the family and not as a single individual”; Statement 4, “I think children inherit their parents’ problems”; and Statement 10, “There exists the danger that children’s needs are not covered in certain forms, dependent on the family compositions.”

The reason for conducting the study in Chile prior to Norway was because I wanted to ascertain that statements were applicable to social workers in Chile.

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Being more familiar with the Norwegian context than the Chilean, I found it easier to revise the study to be applicable in Norway than revising it to be applicable in Chile. While a “prototype” of statements was constructed upon arriving in Chile, I used the first period to refine the statements, for example, by piloting statements with social workers in Chile ($n=2$) and meeting relevant people and organisations to receive feedback on statements and gain a better understanding of the child protection system and current situation in Chile.

Quality in translation is a fundamental issue when engaging in cross-national comparative research. It plays a significant role in ensuring that the findings obtained are not due to errors in translation but rather are due to real differences or similarities in the phenomena being explored (Maneesriwongul & Dixon, 2004). Even though this dissertation is written in English, the original data materials are from two non-English-speaking countries. Using a third language may position the two countries at the same level, thus reducing potential imbalances (Picot, 2016). Nevertheless, writing in English will naturally lead to some meanings being “lost in translation”.

In this project, efforts were made to approach a set of statements that were linguistically equivalent and retained the same meaning in Norwegian and Spanish. Nevertheless, language is contextually constructed, and as suggested by several researchers, the notion of *one correct* translation of a text may be an illusion, as language is not solely a matter of synonym and syntax (Larkin et al., 2007; Nikander, 2008; Pösö, 2014; Temple & Young, 2004; Wilson, 2001). In constructing the final set of statements in Norwegian and Spanish, I played a significant role along with the translators. My Norwegian- and Spanish-speaking competencies made me understand the implications of choosing specific words and grammatical forms in Spanish and Norwegian. An example of this is that the Norwegian and Spanish languages have different grammatical gender systems. Unlike English, many languages have a grammatical gender system whereby all nouns are assigned a gender (Boroditsky & Schmidt, 2003). Spanish has masculine and feminine genders, with the grammatical masculine gender being dominant. Norwegian has three genders: masculine, feminine and neutral. These differing grammatical gender systems affected the translation of most statements in the Q sample. One example was the word *child*. In

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Norwegian, “the child” is neutral (*barnet*), while in Spanish, it is masculine.⁶ It would be grammatically correct to use the masculine form (*el niño*) in Spanish; however, I decided to use both masculine and feminine genders when relevant in all statements because I concur with Boroditsky and Schmidt (2003) that grammatical gender is not only arbitrary and a purely grammatical issue but it may also affect our ways of seeing.

A strength of using Q methodology in a study comprising two different languages is that the focus is on the subjective *meaning* that social workers assign to the statements. These meanings may also be *ad infinitum* (Stephenson, 1978) and variable for participants speaking the same language. Using the think-aloud technique enabled a profound understanding of what connotations social workers assigned to the statements. These reflections were key to the interpretation process. The qualitative dimension of Q methodology might possibly be more important in cross-national comparative research, particularly when the researcher is better acquainted with one of the countries under study. Making sense of participants’ Q sorts and the resulting perspectives would have been challenging without having participants’ understandings of the statements. Consequently, I argue that using the think-aloud technique in this study contributed to the trustworthiness of the identified perspectives and reduced some of the plausible challenges by using one set of statements rather than developing country-specific statements.

5.4 Ethical considerations

Considering ethical issues is integral to all forms of scientific activities (Maxwell, 2008). Research ethics can be understood as “a wide variety of values, norms, and institutional arrangements that help constitute and regulate scientific activities” (National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities [NESH], 2016, p. 5). I use this section to reflect on some ethical issues significant to this project.

⁶ The masculine form is used when referring to children in the indefinite form (singular: *el niño*; plural: *los niños*). Nevertheless, the feminine grammatical forms are used in definite forms when referring to a specific girl/girls (singular: *la niña*; plural: *las niñas*).

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This project was evaluated and approved by the Norwegian Data Protection Official for Research (NSD) (see Appendix 1). In Chile, a researcher at Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile was involved in securing ethical requirements as part of the FACSK project. The NSD navigated my attention towards not collecting identifiable information regarding third parties, and I was careful not to collect data regarding specific children or cases. It is not possible to identify third parties through the examples provided by the social workers, as they were anonymised.

Written and verbal information about the research project was given to all participants prior to participation, and written consent was obtained before the Q sorting procedure. Most participants were recruited by their managers. Hence, a possible question is whether they felt completely free to oppose participation (Picot, 2016). Still, the participants did not imply that participation was not voluntary. Moreover, participants expressed positive experiences of participating in the study and that the Q sorting exercise gave them time and an arena to reflect on issues that they did not necessarily have regularly, as expressed by this social worker:

This was very exciting. You become more conscious of yourself and how you work, in a way. You can sometimes become a bit blind, and often things go very fast and there is a lot at once. So, this was a lot of fun.

Such participant experiences suggest that this study has the potential to contribute not only to new research knowledge but also to child protection work in that participants may gain a more profound awareness of their perspectives and logics that may steer specific courses of action. Such insights may have a reflective effect and stimulate critical reflection among social workers in future child protection work scenarios.

Which forms of information participants should consent to may not always be clear. For example, it is not always possible to know beforehand what will be found in a study (Eisner, 1991). This study was explorative, and I could merely offer general information regarding the research prior to participation. One way to provide additional information on research findings can be to forward findings to participants so that they can provide comments. The level of English skills is uneven in Chile, which made it less fruitful to forward English paper

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drafts. I received a grant to go back to Chile during the fall of 2019 or spring of 2020 to make findings from the study available in Spanish. The idea was to write a report and/or article and present findings from the study at relevant arenas to reach out to and receive feedback on findings from participants, researchers and decision-makers in child protection in Chile. However, I was prevented from traveling because of the unstable situation in Chile due to the political demonstrations during the fall of 2019 and the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Participants in this study were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. While none of the participants expressed a wish to withdraw, two participants in Norway preferred to reflect on statements without placing them into the Q sorting grid. They felt it would not reflect their perspective if they ranked statements in level of agreement or disagreement. While this may illustrate that a “forced” distribution grid may not be preferable for all participants undertaking a Q sort, this was not an issue expressed by the remaining participants.

Participants in Chile received 10,000 Chilean pesos (approximately 13 EUR) as compensation for time spent in the Q study. The rationale for only compensating participants in Chile was that the time frame for data collection in Chile was tight, and compensation could possibly be an additional incentive in the recruitment process. That said, some warn against payment because it may induce participants (Stones & McMillian, 2010). It is therefore important to consider the level of payment, and consent must always be given the highest priority (Ellingsen, 2011). Some participants in Chile did not want the compensation, and it did seem to be an insignificant incentive.

An issue that may be ethically and methodologically relevant is that a research assistant who spoke Spanish fluently was present along with me during all Q sorts in Chile. The primary reason for this was to avoid potential language misunderstandings and safeguard ethical issues. Nevertheless, this made the research settings for the Q sorts different for participants in Norway and Chile. While this might have generated possible imbalances, for example, in power, as there were two researchers and one participant, I considered it more important to prevent possible linguistic misunderstandings.

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All the participants in this project were promised confidentiality. The transcriptions did not contain names of persons or detailed places, and in the research papers, I did not mention more specific locations for the child protection offices than “Oslo” and “Santiago”. In addition, I used letters and numbers (e.g. C12 for Chilean Participant 12) to designate participants while minimising the possibility of participants being recognised. While participants might still be able to identify their own comments in the papers, it is impossible to trace exactly how each participant sorted statements, as the resulting factors/perspectives only reveal weighted averages of those loading on a given factor (Ellingsen, 2011). Moreover, it was not possible for me as a researcher to know how transparent the conditions in the specific child protection services were (Aase & Fossåskaret, 2014). I therefore avoided being too specific regarding the number of participants who work in each child protection service in case participants could be recognised by co-workers or managers.

While most research aims to produce useful knowledge, the risk of harm is always present (Eisner, 1991; NESH, 2016). For example, participants may feel that they are being judged based on their practices, may feel embarrassed about specific viewpoints or may feel pushed to talk about issues they are uncomfortable with. Before the Q sorting exercises, I attempted to prevent such potential feelings and experiences. For example, by informing participants that there was no right or wrong way of sorting the statements. Based on my psychological background and professional experiences, I am trained at being aware of emotional signals, and I was attentive to participants throughout the Q sorting sessions to determine if they needed support or confirmation. This was the case in multiple Q sort sessions, where participants explicitly expressed things like “I have been honest at least” or “It’s nice that it’s anonymous”. Participants in this study were asked to share their immediate reflections on the statements. I was, however, explicit that they were not expected to do so if it made them uncomfortable. This was important because the 39 statements in this Q study might cover aspects that participants have not reflected on previously and/or that may be uncomfortable to speak about. When working with the data materials of this project, I tried to have an open, non-judgemental and non-hierarchical approach, in which various participant experiences/perspectives are explored and considered equally valid ways of seeing children.

6 Summary of findings

This dissertation explores social workers' perspectives of children in child protection work, and the three research papers address this in different ways. The papers shed light on child protection social workers' perspectives of children, as found in previous research (Paper 1). They also zoom in on the perspectives among the social workers in Chile (Paper 2) and zoom out again to examine the perspectives held about children in a sample of social workers in Chile and Norway (Paper 3). This section provides a brief description of the three papers and a summary of the research findings.

6.1 *Paper 1: Child protection social workers' constructions of children and childhood: An integrative review*

Paper 1 was published online in *Child & Family Social Work* in 2019. This journal was selected because it encourages submission of review papers. Moreover, multiple empirical studies identified through the literature search process, including a related review (van Bijleveld et al., 2015), were published in this journal. Hence, the focus of the review has close connections to ongoing debates in this journal, which may make the article visible in a research community with related research interests.

This IR paper aimed to provide a comprehensive picture of child protection social workers' constructions of children and childhood by asking how children and childhood have been constructed by social workers within the child protection domain in previous research. The data included 35 empirical research articles (qualitative and quantitative) with samples of child protection social workers. Research focusing on social workers' practices in relation to children and ideas surrounding children and childhood were analysed and synthesised. The majority of studies were from the United Kingdom or other Northern European countries. The remaining countries were Canada, the United States, New Zealand, Australia, Israel and Estonia.

Four constructions of children and childhood were identified: (1) children in light of parents, (2) the generalised child, (3) the participating child and (4) the child in need of protection. We saw fragmented and context-free children without neighbourhoods, friends, teachers, individuality, desires and variation. Children are seen as objective beings predetermined by categories such as age and ethnicity. Nevertheless, more often, children are viewed in light of their parents' problems and needs. Social workers focus on changing parenting behaviours, frequently without specified child-focused outcomes. This view is produced by causal shortcuts strongly informed by simplified and biased psychological knowledge. Moreover, we identified constructions of the child in need of protection through which children are positioned as objects rather than subjects for intervention. Although the participatory child is visible in the data material, the overall message is that the practice of involving children in child protection work seems random.

6.2 Paper 2: Children and childhood in Chile: Social worker perspectives

Paper 2 was published online in the *Journal of Comparative Social Work* in 2019. The paper was part of a special issue on welfare in Latin America and the Nordic countries. This special issue was conceived during a research seminar on welfare issues held at the University of Havana (Cuba) in 2018, which I attended. The motivation for creating a special issue was, for example, the lack of research on social worker perspectives in Latin America (Tønnessen et al., 2019).

In this paper, attention is oriented towards the 21 participating social workers in Chile and their perspectives of children in child protection work. By means of Q methodology, we explored the perspectives held about children among these social workers and the characteristics of these perspectives. The results showed three perspectives. Based on the characteristics of these, the workers associated with them are conceptualised as activists, buffers and experts. While the *activists* advocate for acknowledging children's perspective in child protection work, the buffers and the experts typically define children's needs from their own perspectives. Nevertheless, through differing logics, *experts* focus on children's vulnerability and protection needs, while the *buffers* are

more inclined to view children in terms of contextual risk and on the margins in an underfunded child protection context. Despite differences in perspectives, a shared view among participants was that they understand children as relational and that children are part of something larger than themselves.

6.3 Paper 3: What are the perspectives of children in child protection work among social workers in Norway and Chile?

Paper 3 was published online in *Children and Youth Services Review* in 2020. This journal was selected due to its inclusion of research articles using Q method (e.g. Hu et al., 2016). Moreover, the journal has a long merit list of comparative research articles and has published articles specifically from Chilean and Norwegian research contexts (e.g. Garcia Quiroga & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2014; Helland et al., 2018).

This paper explores the perspectives of children in child protection work among social workers in Norway ($n=17$) and Chile ($n=21$). The analysis revealed three distinct perspectives, with Perspectives 1 and 2 predominately held by Chilean participants and Perspective 3 by Norwegian participants. The social workers holding Perspectives 1 and 2 understand children through relational and structural lenses and converge by emphasising that children primarily should be understood as part of a family. At the same time, they believe children's needs are insufficiently met in family practices and at policy levels. Nevertheless, while Perspective 1 workers try to compensate for these inadequacies by giving children agency in local child protection work through child–social worker interactions, participants holding Perspective 2 see limited space for children's agency due to structural restraints. Workers holding Perspective 3 see children's independence and believe children have agency in child protection work and family practices. The overarching message among the participants holding Perspective 3, which were predominantly Norwegian participants, is that they focused more consistently on the individual child and tended to make a distinction between “the parent(s)” and “the child(ren)” in qualitative comments.

7 Discussion

While the individual papers of this dissertation have their own logics, there are some recurring themes and orientations. Two overarching orientations or ways of seeing children seem to shine through, notably a relational orientation, which was predominantly held by the Chilean participants, and an individual orientation, which was identified among the Norwegian participants and in the IR. The concepts “relational” and “individual” are broad and may seem fairly empty unless they are ascribed a body of meaning. In this final section, I will build on the findings of the individual research papers to illustrate and discuss these overarching orientations and their potential implications for child protection work. When interpreting findings, I was inspired by abductive reasoning by looking for plausible explanations (Wolf, 2005) of findings, and therefore, I will address some of these. Finally, I highlight the dissertation’s contributions to the research field and child protection work.

7.1 Relational and individual orientations

In this study, the relational orientation was prominent among the Chilean participants. Although the social workers in Chile differ in their perspectives across various topics (as shown in Papers 2 and 3), they have an overall tendency to construct a specific kind of relational child resembling a “network” of relationships (Esser, 2016). That is, they paint a picture whereby “everything connects with everything”, and children are given a body of meaning within this network. Through social workers’ accounts, children become visible through and are embedded within a whole network of different things, people, structures and practices. Hence, children are part of a network that is larger than themselves. This logic is clearly actualised through this quote (obtained from Paper 3): “Children are [in a way] inserted into a family group, into a community, into an environment. Therefore, all their characteristics, whether positive or negative, have an origin or an explanation in their environment and in their family group...” When viewed in light of the literature on children’s agency, social workers holding a relational orientation resemble Esser’s (2016) description of relational theory, specifically in the sense that

children [...] only gain agency [or a body of meaning] through interaction with a whole range of other entities or “actants”, which can take a variety of forms, such as material objects, institutions and legal regulations, subjects or documents. (p. 52)

Hence, among these social workers, children’s position, specific properties and opportunities (Esser, 2016) are viewed in relation to other entities; “children are defined in *relation* to members of family and community” (Abebe, 2019, p. 3). Beyond seeing children as part of a family, these social workers also have a systemic perspective on the family which, according to them, needs to be understood in light of other societal structures, such as politics, legislations, welfare institutions, poverty, power and so forth. As Abebe (2019) argues:

If childhood is a relational category, other generations such as youth, adulthood, elderly have to be the object of research and theorisation as well. Childhood and ‘other generations’ co-determine each other, and relationships between them are not just oppositional but also productive of one another. (p. 12)

By analysing Chilean social workers’ perspectives, this argument is both embodied in and essential to understanding their perspectives. These workers describe how structural characteristics delimit families *and* social workers to bring about change. Specifically, social workers believe children’s needs are insufficiently met in family practices in Chile. Importantly, rather than “blaming” parents for shortcomings, these workers highlight the existence of social differences in Chile along with a lack of political push to alter the status quo. They also think the child protection system insufficiently meets children’s and family’s needs, for example, due to the lack of resources, adequate structures to secure children’s perspectives to be heard, standardised formats, reactivity and so forth.

Key variations in perspectives among the social workers (as shown in Papers 2 and 3) seem to relate to what social workers think they can do at the street level. For some workers, their key function in child protection work seems to be to protect children and alleviate risk. Other social workers seem to describe greater discretionary room for action (Lipsky, 2010), wherein they also seek to compensate for structural shortcomings by giving children agency in social worker–child relational work. These workers can be understood as activists

who perform silent “acts of resistance” (Muñoz Arce, 2019, p. 297) in face-to-face encounters in child protection work to counterbalance some of the structural shortcomings.

The individual orientation was prominent among the Norwegian participants (see Paper 3) and in the IR (see Paper 1). Having an individual orientation means that, in contrast to the relational orientation where “everything connects”, the focus lies more on individual characteristics or individual agents in child protection work. Less focus is oriented towards how individual characteristics or agents are linked with other entities or “actants” (Esser, 2016, p. 52). This orientation implies a different starting point for child protection work.

The social workers participating in the Q study in Norway seem to focus on the individual child. They underscore children’s independence and make a distinction between working with the child and working with the parents or the family. As such, the social workers seem to approach the family by treating the child and the parents as separate entities, particularly when it comes to their individual narratives, as illustrated by this quote: “We are very occupied with that the child’s voice should come forward, and that is almost the most important thing. Because the family can voice their experience of it [their situation], but it is the child we are here for.” Moreover, a common belief seems to be that children have the capacity to voice their opinions in child protection work, and social workers have the responsibility of laying the grounds for children’s voices to be heard. Hence, children do not only have a right to be heard. They also have the ability to articulate their views and experiences if social workers prepare the grounds for making them visible, as this quote shows: “The child has the right to be heard. Of course, parents can try to sabotage [...] But it is not really the parents; it is we who have the main responsibility for deciding if they [the children] become visible.” In addition, these quotes may suggest that children “have” or “possess” agency in their own right (which social workers should seek to obtain), assuming individualistic or naturalistic conceptions of agency (Raithelhuber, 2016, p. 91).

Norway has been argued to be one of the best places in the world for children (UNICEF, 2020a, 2020b). Seeing children’s agency or capacity to act independently as “a given” may possibly be understood in light of the social

workers' societal assumptions. Most workers in Norway believe children's needs are met in society, and they regard upbringing practices as good in general terms because, for example, the child is the focus of the family.

This leads me to how the individual child is displayed in the IR (Paper 1). The study shows that focusing on the child is not necessarily synonymous with an endeavoured inside perspective (Warming, 2011) wherein the child's individual perspective is sought. Rather, an outside perspective seems to shine through. In Paper 1, we conclude by saying, "We see a context-free child – children without neighbourhoods, friends, teachers, individuality, desires, and variation" (Jensen et al., 2019, p. 89). Although the importance of attachment and affection between the child and family members is emphasised as significant for children's well-being, we find that socioeconomical factors are less visible in the ways of seeing children. When the focus is on the individual child without taking a broader context into account, there is a risk of "standardising" the child through specific traits or characteristics rather than seeing the child as unique. More specifically, we get to know children most notably through an outside perspective (Warming, 2011) whereby social workers rely on specific forms of psychological knowledge.

7.1.1 Child orientation versus family orientation

An orientation towards the individual child is not a phenomenon restricted to Norwegian child protection policy and practice. In fact, child protection policy across an array of countries has demonstrated developments in the direction of a child-centric orientation (Gilbert et al., 2011) together with family policies that focus on the individual within the family (Hantrais, 2004). While ratification of the CRC means that the child has individual rights in relation to the state and serves as an individual stakeholder, the CRC does not construct children as entirely independent. Children's rights are manifold, circumstantial, inextricably linked and enabled within the context of relationships, especially those with adults.

A potential implication of having a child orientation in child protection work is that it may cause tensions between seeing the family in its entirety and addressing the individual child directly. It has been argued that the child-centric orientation may challenge the family preservation principle and biological

presuppositions of the family-centred approach (Pösö et al., 2014; Skivenes, 2011). That the child's best interest has obtained a stronger position in Norway can be seen in recent convictions made by the ECHR in Strasbourg. The convictions against the Norwegian child protection services primarily involve violations of UDHR article 8 regarding the right to family life. One example of litigation is when children and parents are separated due to out-of-home care orders. While the child has a right to access the parents if it is in the best interest of the child, the parents cannot require access in their own right (Pösö et al., 2014). Such decision-making logics indicate individualised orientations towards children's and parents' rights and needs, whereby the family needs may be less visible. This tendency manifests in this data material in Norwegian workers' inclination to view "children" and "parents" as separate units or actors in child protection work. Such practice may nevertheless delimit practitioners from seeing the dynamic interplay between children and their relationships to other significant people and contexts.

Similar individualising tendencies can be found in Paper 1, which comprises previous research from a broad spectrum of northern European countries. An enquiry could hence be whether children across a broad spectrum of contexts get too little recognition of their relationships. Moreover, a question that arises is whether a child-centred orientation may provoke unintended consequences by downsizing the value of children's belonging (Maslow, 1987), where not just parents but also togetherness, family, friends and home are some significant keywords.

7.1.2 Psychological knowledge and social knowledge

The individual and relational orientations seem to be informed by different "stocks of knowledge" (Berger & Luckmann, 1966, p. 56). The dominant knowledge characterising the individual orientation in Paper 1 seems to be psychological. Social workers seem to rely on traditional knowledge on children's development (resembling Piaget) and attachment perspectives wherein causal conclusions about children's well-being and development are drawn on the basis of difficulties in the child-caregiver interaction. Such stocks of knowledge have been criticised for being informed by standardised and narrow assumptions of commonalities among children regardless of context,

socioeconomic and cultural differences (James et al., 1998). Today, there are many new perspectives on children and children's development in psychology (e.g. Bandura, 1986; Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Sameroff, 2009; Vygotsky, 1978) and in childhood studies wherein the roles of context and culture have garnered more attention in the understanding of children's development and situation.

Social workers' reliance on standardised psychological knowledge in their constructions of children and families has also been found in other Scandinavian studies (e.g. Bjerre, 2018; Hennem, 2016; Picot, 2016). Moreover, there has been an increase in evidence-based initiatives in child protection work internationally (Featherstone et al., 2018; Gilbert et al., 2011; Sletten & Ellingsen, 2020), such as standardised assessment checklists of risks and needs. As argued by Featherstone et al. (2018), "an individualised risk-focused practice culture reinforces rather than ameliorates the struggles families face" (p. 7). Moreover, as Hennem (2016) postulated, if social workers have general knowledge of how children develop and what they need to develop, they may believe that they "know the child". Overreliance on such generalised knowledge may also be in contrast with the very essence of a child-centred orientation, which emphasises child participation and seeking the individual child's perspective. Hence, a potential fallacy of relying too extensively on general group-level knowledge about risks and needs is that the child becomes a scientifically created rather than real child (Hennem, 2016). As a consequence, social workers may not be able to see and address the very real-life challenges of these children and their families.

While such group-level generalisations of children's identities and needs are not explicitly found among the Norwegian social workers participating in the Q study, social workers still tend to focus on the emotional dimension of children's care situations. They draw a distinction between physical and emotional needs, whereby they underline that most children in Norway have their physical needs met. Furthermore, a distinction is made between "child protection services" and "the Norwegian Labour and Welfare administration" (NAV) and that parents primarily should resort to NAV for monetary help. However, research has shown that lower social classes are overrepresented in child protection services in Norway (Kojan, 2011), which should lead to more concerns over how socioeconomic factors impact family life situations in child protection work. Moreover, while problems related to the child are the main

cause for contact between child protection and families of higher social classes, aspects of the parents are the most common cause for contacts with families from the lower classes (Marthinsen & Lichtwarck, 2013).

By having a standardised and individualised focus on emotional needs and child–parent attachment patterns, problems that are in reality material may be turned into psychological problems (Hennum, 2016). Such an orientation may not be able to approach a comprehensive problem identification. Historically, Nordic states have a strong ideological commitment to guaranteeing people a relatively high standard of living (Hantrais, 2004; Lorentz, 1994). In Norway, the poverty rate is significantly lower than in Chile (.084 and .165, respectively; OECD, 2020b). That said, the proportion of children living in low-income families is increasing in Norway (SSB, 2018). A prominent question is whether higher living standards may contribute to hiding structural factors and undermining how socioeconomic factors impact family life. In turn, this may lead to a more individualised and perhaps moral understanding of social problems. In Chile, narrowing the scope to the individual child may be more difficult because structural and socioeconomic factors are more apparent, also when it comes to how it impacts family life situations. As such, a contextual and relational orientation seems essential for Chilean workers, while an individual psychological orientation with an emphasis on attachment and development seems more evident among Norwegian workers. However, traditional attachment theories are unable to explain the effect of environmental factors, such as poverty (Hennum, 2016). Moreover, with an orientation towards the individual, the social component involved in the person-in-situation perspective may remain in the shadows (Cornell, 2006). Or, perhaps more accurate, by applying attachment theories, social workers could possibly be able to see the social in the individual but not the individual in the social, specifically how (social) interpersonal interactions (e.g. child caregiver) may impact individual functioning but not how socioeconomic phenomena, such as poverty, unemployment and high housing costs influence human functioning (Featherstone et al., 2018).

While the relational orientation identified among the Chilean social workers illustrates how children are seen in relation to a range of other people, structures and contexts, a key emphasis is on power and structural imbalances. While the curricula in social work education in Chile have been said to be diversified

(Muñoz Arce, 2019), prominent in this study is an emphasis on and contest of politics, class conflicts and ideological hegemonies. The perspectives expressed by many Chilean social workers resemble critical and radical social work and highlight “structural inequalities inherent in a capitalist society” (Cornell, 2006, p. 54). Knowledge of social phenomena is prominent. As mentioned in Chapter 2, social workers and psychologists commonly work together in child protection services in Chile. This can, in part, illuminate why these social workers focus on the social dimensions of children and family situations. Traditionally, social work in Chile was inspired by radical perspectives, for example, Marxism, to promote social change and hence a critique against individualist social work (Muñoz Arce, 2018, 2019). One risk of such an approach may be that it attributes individual difficulties to structural inequities (Cornell, 2006). A question is whether such an orientation manages to have a balanced focus on socio-political and individual choice and action. Nevertheless, given the very real socio-political situation in Chile (see Chapter 2), the social workers may have a limited toolbox for child protection work. While some social workers seem to focus on protecting children and helping them adapt to the status quo (Morrison et al., 2019), other social workers seem to manage a balance between seeing the individual and the social (Paper 3). These results coincide with those of Muñoz Arce (2019), who described social workers in Chile as “activists” who manage to find alternative strategies to resist neoliberal ideological hegemonies in subtle ways.

An emphasis on “how everything connects” may also be understood as a way to reduce the fragmentation of welfare services. Common for familialised welfare regimes is a fragmentation of welfare services (Hantrais, 2004). It may be that social workers’ response to this fragmentation is that they seek to fill a gap by becoming a form of an “all-purpose box” despite the underfunded nature of child protection services. Specifically, they address issues of poverty, child abuse, neglect, etc. As previously described, poverty is a common cause for children entering residential care centres in Chile (UNICEF, 2018). It may be plausible that the child protection workers in practice deal with – and feel obliged to deal with – broader social and welfare issues in their work, especially if social workers fear that issues related to children and their families will fall between the cracks if their cases are transferred to other welfare services. In Paper 3, I present statistics that seem to show that Chile and Norway are fairly

similar in numbers of children receiving child protection services. Nevertheless, such statistics may portray an erroneous picture of similarity. Given the abovementioned assumptions, these statistics may be interpreted in the following way: that there are more clear-cut divides between various welfare services in Norway than in Chile and hence a more homogenous landscape of issues addressed by the Norwegian than the Chilean child protection services.

7.2 *Final remarks*

As Lipsky (2010) has argued, frontline workers, such as social workers, translate political decisions into practice, thus producing “real” policy. This makes divergencies between overarching policies and practice plausible. Nevertheless, to understand priorities and actions in practice, welfare policies can add knowledge by revealing the underlying causes of social workers’ actions (Nygren et al., 2018). Hence, when comparing social worker perspectives in previous research and across welfare contexts, diversities in contextual conditions are significant.

Rush and Keenan (2013), for example, suggested that “professional identities” are embedded in the regime types but that social workers have a possible role in challenging welfare ideologies. On an alternative note, in his study of social work educators in Argentina, Chile and Norway, Lyngstad (2015) found that professional attitudes were surprisingly equal in spite of different system contexts. He concluded that variation within countries and between cases in the same regime cluster may be neutralised by a seemingly global professional ethos (Lyngstad, 2015). Such findings may suggest that, while welfare typologies have the potential to illuminate some aspects of social worker perspectives or practices at micro or practice levels, there may also be potential pitfalls to using these lenses. Ideal models are not designed to capture the multi-layered complexities that exist in the “real world” (Nygren et al., 2018).

The findings from this dissertation show tendencies among child protection social workers in their ways of seeing children. Yet, what emerges from research may also depend on what researchers focus on. There is a danger that reality will be simplified in research because the research may fail to embrace the complexity that is present in reality – this applies not least to child

protection work, which is a complex field. Hence, although findings from this study show that there are differences in the perspectives of children among social workers in Norway and Chile, these differences should not be overstated. There are both individualised and relational elements in how social workers in Norway and Chile view children. Nevertheless, when social workers' perspectives in Chile and Norway are compared, the diverging elements become more manifest. Rather than being conceived as radically different understandings, they should be viewed as differences in emphasis and orientation. Moreover, the identified understandings of children are not perceived as static; rather, new ideas of children and childhood may be cultivated as knowledge develops (Berger & Luckmann, 1991).

That said, the emphasis on the relational and individual child has practical implications for child protection work with children and their families. The findings suggest that, while an individual orientation may see “the social in the individual” (see above), the relational orientation may see “the individual in the social”, wherein individual difficulties may be attributed to structural inequities. Nevertheless, none of these orientations may approach a comprehensive understanding of children and their situations. As Featherstone et al. (2017) argued, “We would suggest that ways of thinking and practising that can see the social in the individual and the individual in the social are required if we seek to repair and truly transform relationships and societies marked by inequality, violence and abuse” (p. 194). Therefore, a key contribution of this study is that it has unveiled some of the existing understandings of children and childhood that are often implicit in practice and research (Fern, 2014). By unravelling these ways of seeing children, this dissertation has enhanced knowledge on what is and what is not as visible for these social workers. Such knowledge can be a contributory point of departure to critical reflection-in-action and critical reflection-on-action (Schön, 1991) among social workers in child protection work. Nevertheless, social work does not exist in a vacuum; social work is neither context free nor performed within unregulated frameworks. *Everything connects*. Therefore, research- and educational institutions and its actors should also reflect on what is researched and learned to social work students about children and childhood. Furthermore, a successful push for a more comprehensive problem understanding from social

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workers is challenging if political initiatives implemented into child protection practices pull in an opposite direction.

8 References

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Part II - Research papers

Part II

Paper 1

Jensen, I. B., Studsrød, I., & Ellingsen, I. T. (2019). Child protection social workers' constructions of children and childhood: An integrative review. *Child & Family Social Work*, 25(S1), 83-96.

Part II

Child protection social workers' constructions of children and childhood: An integrative review

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Abstract

Social workers' constructions of children and childhood are central to how professionals interact with children and support their needs. The aim of this integrative review was to provide a comprehensive portrayal of child protection social workers' constructions of children and childhood. We analysed and synthesized 35 empirical studies with samples of social workers in the child protection domain where issues regarding the child or the child's situation were the study focus. The findings show that children and youth are constructed as a generalized group viewed in light of their parents. We see a fragmented and context-free child produced by causal shortcuts strongly informed by specific and, at times, simplified and biased psychological knowledge. Moreover, we identify constructions of the child in need of protection and thereby position children as objects for intervention, separating that from children as subjects in their own rights. Although the participatory child is visible in the data material, the actual practice of involving children seems arbitrary.

KEYWORDS

child protection, children and childhood, children's rights, construction, integrative review, social worker

1 | INTRODUCTION

The scholarly literature provides a diverse picture of children and childhood, with general emphasis on a transition from viewing children as becoming adults to competent actors in the present (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998; Sommer, Samuelsson, & Hundeide, 2010). In recent years, this dichotomy has been further challenged, as children are unavoidably both becomings and beings at the same time. The problem with former understandings lies in the view of children and childhood as fixed and universal as opposed to diverse and fluid categories (e.g., Uprichard, 2008). Furthermore, dominant ideas of children and childhood are constructed through policies, legislation, and professional ideologies and thus vary across contexts (Ellingsen, Studsrød, & Muñoz-Guzmán, 2019).

Over the last 30 years, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC; 1989) has played a significant role in how children and

childhood should be understood globally. The convention was a milestone not only for securing children's protection and provision needs but also for recognizing children as active participants in their everyday life. That said, the CRC does not guarantee children rights in themselves, as these rights by large rest upon adults' interpretations of the convention informed by their understandings of children and childhood. Hence, seeing children and childhood as social constructions (e.g., James et al., 1998) may reveal different answers to what a child and childhood are.

Thinking and talking about children and childhood are integral parts of child protection work, as ideas about what constitutes a healthy childhood versus a risky childhood are central to needs assessments and service provisions (Collings & Davies, 2008). Social work exercises the primary responsibility within the child protection domain (Gilbert, Parton, & Skivenes, 2011), and as street-level bureaucrats, social workers translate current child protection policies into practice (Lipsky, 2010). Hence, social workers' understandings of

children and childhood are essential, as social workers take an active part in implementing policies and service provisions that affect children's everyday lives (Graham, 2011). For instance, if children are viewed as beings who act with intention and agency in their own lives, social workers are more inclined to explore how children understand, interpret, negotiate, and feel about their daily lives, as well as what promotes and prevents a good life for the individual child (Warming, 2011). If social workers view children as vulnerable persons who need to be protected, a generalized and "adult" understanding of children and childhood is more likely to influence their work (Warming, 2011).

The aim of this integrative review was to fill a research gap by providing a comprehensive portrayal of social workers' constructions of children and childhood within the child protection domain. Inspired by interdisciplinary childhood studies, we understand children and childhood as social constructions positioned in specific social, historical, and cultural contexts (James et al., 1998). Studying prevailing ideas about children and childhood, which have roots in practice, may reveal dominant constructions among social workers. To achieve our study aim, we synthesize and analyse previous empirical research with samples of social workers conducted within the child protection domain where issues regarding the child or child's situation are the study focus. The study will answer the research question: How are children and childhood constructed by social workers within the child protection domain?

Although important efforts have been made to review reliable literature within the child protection domain, for example, the study of Van Bijleveld, Dedding, and Bunders-Aelen (2015) on children's and social workers' perspectives of barriers and facilitators for *child participation*, there is a lack of research reviewing social workers' constructions of children. Although it is difficult to provide a single definition of "child protection" due to international variations (Gilbert et al., 2011; Pösö, 2014), we refer to a broad spectrum of child and family services aimed to prevent or address child harm.

2 | METHOD

To produce a comprehensive portrayal of child protection social workers' constructions of children and childhood, Whittemore and Knaff's (2005) integrative review approach was adopted. The method is suitable for building bridges between related areas of work, identifying central issues in an area, and representing the state of the current literature (Russell, 2005). It was chosen because, in contrast to other review methods (e.g., meta-analyses, systematic reviews, and qualitative reviews), the integrative review can bring together findings from different methodologies and study designs (Whittemore & Knaff, 2005). To meet our review aim, empirical studies with different research questions and designs were relevant. For instance, surveys and interview data give insights into social workers' understandings of practice, whereas observations and document analysis may reveal actual practice. Such designs can provide complementary insights to more fully understand social

workers' constructions of children and childhood. As a result, our sampling strategy included a variety of studies with samples of social workers within the child protection domain where issues regarding the child or the child's situation were the study focus.

Although diversity is a major strength of an integrative review, it makes quality appraisal challenging. Whittemore and Knaff (2005) suggest that, in integrative reviews with diverse empirical sources, it may be reasonable to only evaluate quality in sources that represent discrepant findings. To capture informative value, only one study was excluded based on quality appraisal. Nevertheless, outliers are highlighted in Section 3.

2.1 | Literature search strategy

Whittemore and Knaff (2005) advise having at least two search strategies to identify the maximum number of eligible primary sources. Our search strategies were as follows: (a) a literature search of the electronic databases such as Academic Search Premier, ERIC, and SocIndex performed in collaboration with a specialized librarian and (b) a manual scanning of reference lists.

After an initial pilot search in the databases, we identified few studies convergent with our research question. We therefore decided to use general search words, such as "child view," together with more focused search terms associated with the CRC, as the CRC is a shared framework for working with and for children internationally. To obtain studies from the child protection domain, we used the search terms *child protection*, *child welfare*, and *safeguarding*. The term *child welfare* can have a broad and narrow meaning, and in some countries, it is difficult to make any salient distinction between child welfare and child protection (Pösö, 2014). In other countries, however, these terms may have distinct meanings (Gilbert et al., 2011). Hence, both terms were used to avoid terminology challenges and to include research from various welfare regimes and contexts.

We performed two rounds of literature searches in the electronic databases. Initially, we used the following combination of search terms: *social worker*, *child welfare*, *child protection*, *child view*, *child visibility*, *children's rights*, *child perception*, *child perspective*, *hearing the child*, *participation*, *attitude*, *UNCRC*, and *child-centred*. The Boolean operators AND and OR were used to connect search terms. We also used truncation (e.g., *child-centred**) to identify the maximum number of relevant sources and controlled search terms (e.g., "child protection") to focus our searches. With this first combination of keywords, a predominance of studies focused on children's participation. We therefore performed a second literature search, where *protection*, *provision*, *social worker*, *child welfare*, *safeguarding*, and *child protection* were used in combination.

To be included, studies had to comply with four inclusion criteria: (a) peer-reviewed articles published in English from January 2000 to October 2017; (b) empirical studies (qualitative and quantitative designs); (c) samples of social workers within the child protection domain in direct contact with children and youth in their practice; and (d) studies where issues regarding the child or the child's situation

were the study focus. To build a comprehensive body of knowledge in line with our aim, studies needed either a general focus, such as social workers' views/understandings/constructions of children, or a more specified focus on issues, such as social workers' views on children's participation/risks/needs.

2.2 | Search outcomes

Our first database search generated 691 articles. After removing duplicates, 430 articles remained. The titles and abstracts were reviewed, resulting in exclusion of 395 articles that did not fulfil our inclusion criteria. After a full-text review of the 35 remaining articles, 22 were removed, leaving 13 empirical studies for inclusion from our first database search. When reference lists of relevant articles were scanned manually, eight articles were added to the sample. Our second database search generated 1,655 articles, of which 594 were excluded due to duplication. In this second search, titles and abstracts of the remaining 1,061 articles were reviewed in two rounds according to inclusion criteria, and 1,018 were excluded. A full-text review of the remaining 43 articles resulted in inclusion of 14 empirical studies from our second search. Together, our search strategy yielded 35 empirical studies for analysis and synthesis (see Figure 1).

2.3 | Study characteristics

Some of the studies were conducted with the specific purpose of ascertaining social workers' constructions/views/understandings of children. The remaining studies had a more specified focus on social workers' understandings of and/or facilitation for children's participation, identities, needs, or factors informing risk assessment. One study focused on child protection, participation, and protection rights. We also examined the 35 studies according to target population, meaning whether the child populations of inquiry were specified (see Appendix A). Most studies had a general focus on children and youth in child protection, whereas some studies had a more specified focus (e.g., specific age groups, children with disabilities, ethnic minority children, or specific children).

A predominance of studies was from a U.K. context or other Northern European countries. The remaining countries of inquiry were Estonia, the United States, New Zealand, Israel, Australia, and Canada. Twenty-five studies applied qualitative research designs, seven studies were quantitative, and three studies combined qualitative and quantitative methods. Five studies were comparative.

Although we merely explored the social worker perspective, some studies also included other samples (marked with superscript "a" in the Appendix A). We refer to *social workers* in this review, although several studies did not explicitly state whether practitioners were educated social workers and different terms (e.g., social work practitioner or child welfare worker) were used across the 35 studies. All studies were conducted within the child protection domain (child protection offices, residential care, and/or foster care contexts), and some specified if the context was governmental or nongovernmental. Some

studies outlined the social workers' responsibility (e.g., assessment or family support). See Appendix A for supplementary details of study characteristics.

2.4 | Analytical approach

There are different approaches to presenting findings in an integrative review (Soares et al., 2014). Our aim was not only to describe and summarize but also to elevate the interpretative effort to a higher level of abstraction by creating new models and organizational structures through a synthesis (Soares et al., 2014). Following Whittemore and Knaff's (2005) suggestion, the 35 studies were analysed and synthesized in line with the constant comparison method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This approach is suitable when analysing data from diverse methodologies (Whittemore & Knaff, 2005) and involves looking for similarities and differences by systematically comparing data units. After several readings of the articles, we abstracted and classified relevant primary sources to identify themes and patterns across studies. Subsequently, significant higher order themes were identified. Finally, important features from primary sources were synthesized into an integrative summary of themes. As data were conceptualized at higher levels of abstraction, the primary sources were reviewed to verify congruence between the new conceptualizations and primary sources (Whittemore & Knaff, 2005).

3 | FINDINGS

Through the analysis and synthesis of social workers' practices and ideas about children and childhood in existing research, four constructions of children and childhood were identified: (a) children in light of parents, (b) the generalized child, (c) the participating child, and (d) the child in need of protection.

3.1 | Children in light of parents

Most studies showed, more or less explicitly, that social workers focused on parents. Parents' needs, problems, or motivation were the main concern, whereas children's needs, problems, and views were less visible (Alberth & Bühler-Niederberger, 2015; Alfandari, 2017; Nybom, 2005; Skivenes & Stenberg, 2015; Stanley, 2013; Toros, 2017). Social workers typically transformed knowledge into "parent-centredness" or "mother-centredness" (Alberth & Bühler-Niederberger, 2015). Even though social workers explored positive parenting abilities and strengths, an orientation towards deficits, failures, and negative parenting was overrepresented (Skivenes & Stensberg, 2015; Toros, 2017; Toros, Tiko, & Saia, 2013). When looking for solutions to improve the child's situation, social workers focused on changing parenting behaviours, frequently without specified child-focused outcomes (Horwath & Tarr, 2014; Nybom, 2005; Scourfield, 2000). Children were considered victims of parental flaws, and as suggested by Horwath and Tarr (2014), it was believed that solving parents' problems naturally would lead to better outcomes for children. Even under "the children" headings, assessment

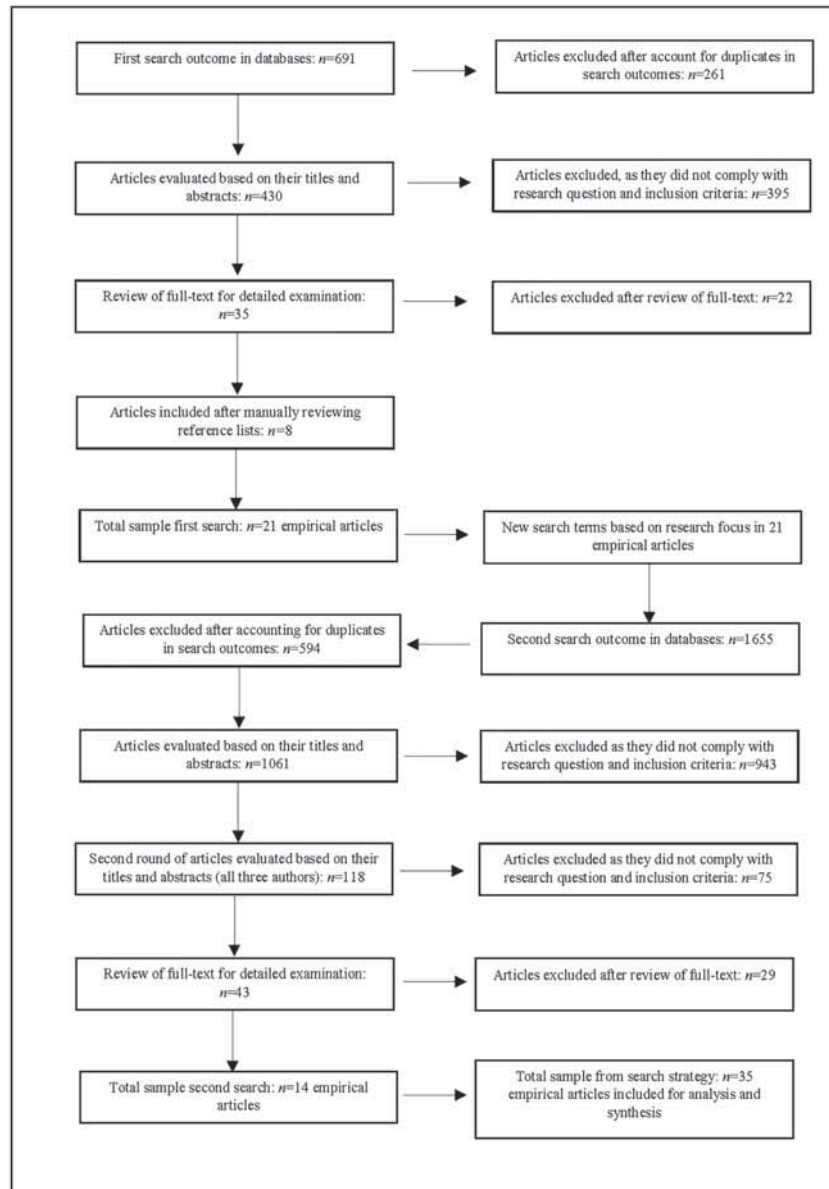


FIGURE 1 Flowchart of search outcomes and selection process

reports contained descriptions of parents, and the descriptions of parents were more lively and fuller than those of children (Holland, 2001). Serious decisions were made without social workers clearly understanding the individual experience of the child within the family (Alfandari, 2017).

An orientation towards parents was also noticeable when social workers reflected upon their role in child protection. Some workers stated that their primary responsibility was to represent the parents' wishes (Alberth & Bühler-Niederberger, 2015; Toros et al., 2013; Van Bijleveld, Dedding, & Bunders-Aelen, 2014) and to preserve the family

(Alberth & Bühler-Niederberger, 2015; Keddell, 2017). Consequently, child protection work was interpreted as "family work," not "child work" (Ferguson, 2016). Typical patterns also reflected that, for in-home visits, most time was spent with parents and children together, whereas children were rarely seen alone (Ferguson, 2016). Research comparing social worker perspectives across countries revealed differences in visibility of children and that variation in methods influenced social workers' responses (Nybom, 2005). Nybom (2005) showed that, when asked openly, the child was clearly visible, but when responding to the vignette information, the child was less visible in all countries (Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Britain, and the United States [specifically Texas]), and the majority focused on parents instead. Kriz and Skivenes' (2012) cross-national study (Norway and England) revealed similar patterns. Although embracing a child-centric focus, Norwegian participants still issued a spectrum of parenting deficiencies, thereby constructing children largely as a product of parental behaviours or flaws (Kriz & Skivenes, 2012). Hence, children were mainly viewed in light of their parents, as parents' situation became the lens through which children were seen. Consequently, children were left in the shadow or background. Although less frequent in the articles, children were described as invisible and omitted (Alberth & Bühler-Niederberger, 2015; Ferguson, 2017). As argued by Alberth and Bühler-Niederberger (2015, p. 154), the "omission of the child is so impressive that we interpret it to be a real rejection of any specific knowledge of the child." This view of children is related to the knowledge applied by social workers visualizing a particular type of generalized child.

3.2 | The generalized child

The generalized child was highly visible in the studies examined, wherein children and youth were constructed by the social worker without ascribing children a role in defining their own feelings, wishes, and sense of self. Children and youth were visible through a narrow lens, as merely certain generalized characteristics of the child or the child's situation were made relevant (Fern, 2014; Holland, 2001; Horwath & Tarr, 2014; Kriz & Skivenes, 2012; Sanders & Mace, 2006; Stanley, 2013; Thomas & Holland, 2010; Toros, 2017; Toros et al., 2013).

First, with the exception of one study (Skivenes & Stenberg, 2015) that found significant cross-country differences in the relevance given to environmental factors in risk assessments, children were generally constructed on the basis of psychological knowledge. Social workers applied specific and, at times, simplified and biased psychological knowledge, or what we denote as *psy-knowledge*, across studies. We acknowledge that the *psy* term may have several meanings (e.g., see Rose, 1999). When we refer to *psy-knowledge* in this review, it includes social workers' application of psychological knowledge, which produced generalized images of children. Social workers reported high reliance on psychological "expert knowledge" in their constructions of children, their development, needs, or abilities to participate. *Psy-knowledge* was perceived as an objective rather than

socially constructed reality (Arbeiter & Toros, 2017; Stanley, 2013), and constructions of social realities were therefore perceived as evidence. In addition, social workers treated *psy-knowledge* and reports from psychologists with particular respect; that is, they felt it was easier to make a case in court if risk could be presented as psychological "proof" (Stanley, 2013).

The specific *psy-knowledge* applied was informed through individualistic psychology by constructing children as introverted, avoidant, and whimsical (Alfandari, 2017; Holland, 2001) and by considering children's development of self-esteem (Thomas & Holland, 2010). Moreover, children's needs were commonly established based on attachment theory, both implicitly and explicitly (Holland, 2001; Keddell, 2017; Thomas & Holland, 2010; Toros et al., 2013; Toros, LaSala, & Tiko, 2017). For example, social workers considered children's emotional bonds to their parents to be the most important aspect in assessing children's safety (Toros et al., 2017) and underscored the relevance of family relationships to the children's identities (Thomas & Holland, 2010).

Additionally, various *moral, simplified, and biased psy-labels* and psychological understandings were found (Keddell, 2017; Roose, Mottart, Dejonckheere, Van Nijnatten, & De Bie, 2009), such as "damaged" attachments and "emotional damage" (Keddell, 2017), along with other value-laden and culturally specific labels (Holland, 2001). Perceptions of family relationships were commonly related to how parents could influence the child's sense of identity, safety, needs, and so forth rather than how the individual child viewed these relationships (Thomas & Holland, 2010). Psychological themes were not merely empty boxes; there were causal interpretations attached to them, as exemplified in the following: "It is likely that Stephanie is developing a fragile self-esteem, because of the inconsistency and at times chaotic care she has been afforded by her mother" (Thomas & Holland, 2010, p. 2624, our italics). In addition, when making causal links between older children's behaviour and their early relationships with parents, concepts of attachment were often incorporated (Keddell, 2017). As such, application of *psy-knowledge* resulted in causal shortcuts in social workers' constructions of children or children's situation. In the absence of "objective" and comprehensive data, social workers used intuition and practice wisdom (Toros et al., 2017).

Second, social workers' grouping of children was also based on age and development. In fact, age functioned as a roadmap for children's visibility in all studies, except Roose et al. (2009). Even when the social worker had not met the child, generalized knowledge on age was used as fixed thresholds. When social workers gave detailed descriptions of children's development, they used general prestructured developmental norms and assumptions (Holland, 2001). Age had the discursive power to limit the importance of other considerations (Reisel, 2017). In line with age, social workers made causal links of children's sense of self, development, abilities, needs, and how much they should be involved (Archard & Skivenes, 2009; Reisel, 2017; Thomas & Holland, 2010; Toros et al., 2013; van Bijleveld et al., 2014). Although some acknowledged that age does not always correspond with abilities (Gorin & Jobe, 2013; Reisel, 2017), most associated age with vulnerability and/or resilience, assuming that older children were less vulnerable and more resilient.

The tendency towards group-level generalization also affected “problem youth” (Fern, 2014; Nybom, 2005). Social workers tended to describe youth behaviour problems and “getting into trouble” (Fern, 2014, p. 10); limited focus was on underlying and contrasting explanations for behaviour, social factors, or strengths. Working with youth was also considered problematic because they did not always have the same family-situated problems, as was more commonly the case with younger children (Gorin & Jobe, 2013). Consequently, traditional family work did not always fit when working with youth, as their needs could be more complex and relatable to factors outside the family. Hence, youth could run the risk of falling between the cracks (Gorin & Jobe, 2013).

The last type of group-level generalization was for ethnic minority children and siblings. Križ and Skivenes (2012) found generalizations about minority children more prominent among Norwegian than British workers. Nonetheless, social workers perceived many risks and problems for minority children related to their ethnicity, such as children's biculturalism, language skills, and racism (Križ & Skivenes, 2012). Horwath and Tarr (2014, p. 7) found that social workers interpreted the child's identity primarily by focusing on nationality, “whether the child was Welsh or English and whether they spoke English or were bilingual.” For children in sibling groups, siblings' needs were moulded into one in case files (Horwath & Tarr, 2014).

3.3 | The participating child

Social workers held the common opinion that child participation was important (Archard & Skivenes, 2009; Berrick, Dickens, Pösö, & Skivenes, 2015; Toros, 2017; van Bijleveld et al., 2014; Vis, Holtan, & Thomas, 2012; Vis & Thomas, 2009). However, definitions of participation and how participation became relevant to practice varied greatly across and within studies (Archard & Skivenes, 2009; Barnes, 2012; Berrick et al., 2015; Ferguson, 2017; Healy & Darlington, 2009; Križ & Skivenes, 2012; Nybom, 2005; Oppenheim-Weller, Schwartz, & Ben-Arieh, 2017; Sanders & Mace, 2006; Shemmings, 2000; Toros, 2017; Toros et al., 2017). Healy and Darlington (2009, p. 425), for instance, showed that some social workers “highlighted the value of respecting children's voices for adding more depth to the assessment than would be possible through a focus on ‘parents' perspectives’ alone.” Nonetheless, the message across studies was that children's opportunities to participate in decision making were generally poor. We found rich descriptions of children's and youth's own sense of self and what they wanted in only three studies (Cousins & Milner, 2005; Fern, 2014; Horwath & Tarr, 2014).

Age and severity especially guided children's participation. For example, children were less likely to participate in cases classified as “abuse and neglect” (Archard & Skivenes, 2009; Vis & Thomas, 2009). We saw links between participation and protection; children perceived to be “at risk” were less likely to participate when, for example, social workers evaluated a case as “high risk” and the child was viewed as a passive victim who could not control events (Stanley, 2013). Exactly what constituted the critical age for involvement, participation and

impact on decisions varied across studies. Generally, the younger the child, the less likely they were to be informed, listened to, and granted influence on their case (Alberth & Bühler-Niederberger, 2015; Alfandari, 2017; Barnes, 2012; Berrick et al., 2015; Healy & Darlington, 2009; Oppenheim-Weller et al., 2017; Sanders & Mace, 2006; Shemmings, 2000; Vis & Thomas, 2009). Age also affected the type of decision-making possibilities, for instance, at what age they might decide for themselves when to go to bed (Shemmings, 2000).

Moreover, social workers showed a rather ambivalent attitude towards the worth of children's opinions in assessment and decision making (Holland, 2001; Vis et al., 2012). Social workers routinely asked children about their wishes and feelings, but the encounter was superficial and information was general. For example, “X would like mother to stop drinking” (Horwath & Tarr, 2014, p. 7). There was little evidence of social workers going beyond such stated wishes and feelings. A number of studies showed that social workers tended to neither introduce themselves nor explain their role to the children (Alfandari, 2017; Ferguson, 2016; van Nijntzen & Jongen, 2011). They merely had short encounters with children, often in after-school programmes, at school, at in-home visits (Alfandari, 2017), or in the child's bedroom if talking with children alone in their home (Ferguson, 2016). Social workers tended to interview children in front of parents and other professionals (Alfandari, 2017; Ferguson, 2016). Moreover, they were often unclear about the information children were supposed to give, and social workers did not provide sufficient information, or the information was oversimplified (Alfandari, 2017). Social workers hardly explained the goal of the encounter, what they expected from children, and if they had free choice to speak or keep silent (van Nijntzen & Jongen, 2011). In addition, children were sometimes pushed to talk about personal issues (Ferguson, 2016). Some social workers also viewed participation as harmful altogether (Arbeiter & Toros, 2017): “a 7 year old does not know what is in his or her best interest” (Archard & Skivenes, 2009, p. 396). Finally, one study suggested that children were more likely to be involved if social workers established a relationship with the parents first (Oppenheim-Weller et al., 2017). Overall, these findings suggest a rather arbitrary practice regarding child participation.

A child-oriented approach seems more evident in some child protection services than others. Specifically, Healy and Darlington (2009) found that social workers in nongovernmental services had an inductive approach to problem identification and solutions with children and families, whereas social workers in governmental services were more likely to involve users in conversations about predefined problems. Moreover, social workers in foster care services were more positive towards children's participation than were social workers in residence care services (Vis & Fossum, 2015). Furthermore, the opportunity to hear the individual child's point of view and establish a relationship was more common in “long-term” child protection work than “short-term” assessment work (Ferguson, 2016).

Finally, social workers are concerned that their work culture, organization, and legislation (negatively) impact their work with children and youths (Nybom, 2005). The lack of child-friendly systems explains the lack of child participation (Sanders & Mace,

2006). Moreover, the authors show that the lack of skills and time is due to environmental structures, heavy workloads, and burnout (e.g., Goring & Jobe, 2013; Horwath & Tarr, 2014; Thomas & Holland, 2010; Toros, 2017).

3.4 | The child in need of protection

Not surprisingly, given the child protection context, social workers, by large, visualize children as being in need of protection. Still, given the variation of countries in this review and the different philosophical and legal platforms on which child protection work is conducted across the globe (Gilbert et al., 2011), it is remarkable that social workers largely visualize children's protection needs, even issuing a rescue position (Collings & Davies, 2008). Children tended to be constructed as the problem, for example, "the (chronic) neglected child," not as the child "who is living with parental/carer neglect and is experiencing this in a unique way" (Horwath & Tarr, 2014, p. 12). That said, cross-country analysis reveals variations. Nybom (2005), for instance, showed that children, in the eyes of the Swedish and Danish participants, are more visible through well-being and other needs, whereas to the Texans, they are more visible through protection needs. As also shown above, social workers' constructions of the abused and neglected child relied heavily on psy-knowledge (Collings & Davies, 2008). Social workers included few specific aspects of children in their considerations, and even when several professionals assessed the case, none took a comprehensive approach to the problem of child abuse and neglect (Alberth & Bühler-Niederberger, 2015). For example, the focus was oriented towards the child's body in cases of parental neglect or suspicions of neglect to look for external signs of neglect, whereas the individual child's own experiences of the neglect were left unexplored (Ferguson, 2016; Horwath & Tarr, 2014; Scourfield, 2000). Although variations were found in social workers' understandings of children, including a reference to children's resilience (Keddell, 2017), a common tendency was that social workers were influenced by deficit-based approaches (Alberth & Bühler-Niederberger, 2015; Fern, 2014; Stanley, 2013; Toros, 2017). In addition, the vulnerability and need for protection increased for younger children (Gorin & Jobe, 2013; Reisel, 2017). Nonetheless, variations were found across contexts in the relevance given to children's age in risk assessment (Skivenes & Stenberg, 2015). A variation within this theme was also the discourses of children as vulnerable, innocent, incomplete, immature, dependent, and incompetent (Barnes, 2012; Collings & Davies, 2008; Fern, 2014; Toros, 2017).

4 | DISCUSSION

This review shows that children and youth are constructed as a generalized group, viewed in light of their parents. Moreover, we have shown how children are visible to be protected or to participate. First, these findings indicate a fragmented view of children informed by polarized thinking across dichotomous positions rather than a

comprehensive view acknowledging the complexity and multivalence of variables (Shemmings, 2000). Second, the construction of the generalized child resembles a *becoming* child viewed through a narrow and adult-centric lens (Warming, 2011). The generalized image is produced by causal shortcuts heavily informed by psy-knowledge. We see a context-free child—children without neighbourhoods, friends, teachers, individuality, desires, and variation. Within this view, children are seen as objective beings predetermined by age, ethnicity, their own and, more often, their parents' problems. Although much of the psychological terminology used by social workers may imply a rational scientific understanding, this review shows that much can also be seen as value-laden and morally and culturally specific views of children and childhood.

The rationale for producing this fragmented child can, paradoxically, be due to the complexity in child protection work. In their work with children and families, social workers must consider a range of often conflicting but, at the same time, *multivalent* variables. In a context characterized by time pressure and heavy workload, psy-knowledge may enrich social workers with a language to reduce complexity. The findings reveal, for example, that psy-knowledge makes it possible to grasp conflicting ideas, draw connections about cause and effects, and predict future outcomes for children and their families, although often based on few past observations. Social workers' use of stereotypes and other generalizations to draw causal shortcuts in assessment and decision making is also suggested elsewhere (Magnussen & Svendsen, 2018). Moreover, as we have shown, using generalized and "scientific" psy-knowledge makes it easier for social workers to be heard by other professionals, such as in court hearings (Stanley, 2013). This implies that practice and structural dimensions advance these views of children. In fact, an increase of evidence-based initiatives is observable in child protection internationally, such as standardized assessment measures that, by large, focus on standardized risks or needs. These tools have partly been introduced to make social workers "more formally accountable both for what they do and how they do it" (Gilbert et al., 2011, p. 249). Nevertheless, approaching needs and risks as fixed and universal rather than socially determined concepts may push forward a bureaucratic view of children and childhood through "more restrictive patterns of practice" (Lipsky, 2010, p. 182). We believe that the widespread demand for procedural standards can be one explanatory factor for the construction of the generalized child. However, these patterns undeniably challenge seeing variation among children and a broad realization of children's rights that acknowledge children as participating beings with important perspectives on what promotes and prevents a good life for the individual child.

As street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 2010), social workers are at an intersecting position between following bureaucratic demands and serving the individuals' needs. In this terrain, some types of knowledge are privileged over others, and when translated by social workers into child protection practices, fragmented constructions of children and childhood become visible. However, child protection work is complex and demands a broad knowledge base. On the basis of findings from

this review, we argue that the lens through which children and childhood are seen needs to be critically re-examined to secure a satisfactory level of quality in the services provided.

4.1 | Limitations and directions for future research

The aim of this review was to provide a comprehensive portrayal of child protection social workers' constructions of children and childhood. However, obtaining all possible studies for review is challenging (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005), and relevant studies may have been undetected due to our search strategy. For example, the predominance of studies from Northern European and Anglo-American countries may be due to our exclusion of studies published in languages other than English. Moreover, van Bijleveld et al. (2015) argue that there is a lack of uniformity in terms used to describe this specific field, implying the limitations of using a database search strategy with specific keywords. Furthermore, many studies examined here were designed to address questions other than the one posed in this review, and it is always important to use caution when drawing data from studies designed for a different purpose.

Although we searched several databases with a broad range of search terms, a majority of the reviewed studies focused on social workers' constructions and practice experiences of child participation, typically by means of semistructured interviews or document analysis. Hence, we have more knowledge on what social workers say about child participation than what social workers actually do in practice. Moreover, few studies focus on provision of health, education, family relations, and so forth. Whether this implies that social workers are not concerned with such service provisions or if this is a result of our search strategy or an absent research focus is unclear. For these reasons, more research is needed on the practice of bridging the multitude of children's rights into practice (see Cousins & Milner, 2006).

In addition, more comparative studies at several levels are needed to explore potential differences in social workers' constructions across groups of children, measures, services, and ways of organizing child protection work. Many of the reviewed studies targeted a general population of children (see Appendix A), which may have reinforced the visualization of children as a uniform group, with equal needs, interests, and so forth. Future research should include the range of childhoods and be attentive to differences within and across social categories (e.g., ethnicity/gender/disability) and severity of the case (e.g., abuse/neglect/other concerns). Moreover, the impact of organizational contexts on how social workers construct children and childhood seems relatively unexplored. Among other issues, future research should build a more comprehensive body of knowledge on social workers' views of children in foster care versus residential care (Vis & Fossum, 2015), assessment versus more long-term child protection work (Ferguson, 2016), and governmental versus nongovernmental services (Healy & Darlington, 2009). Lastly, future research should explore what implications the uses of standardized assessments may have for social workers' constructions of children

and childhood. Despite its limitations, this review has started the effort of outlining child protection social workers' constructions of children and childhood that future research and practice initiatives can build on.

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APPENDIX A.

TABLE A1 Profile of the 35 empirical studies included in the review

Study	Country	Focus	Method	Data material	SW sample	Context	Target population	Limitations	Ethical considerations
1. <i>Alberth and Bühler-Niederberger</i> (2015)	Germany	Routines, coordination, professional programmes (child maltreatment)	Qualitative	Interviews and conference observations	62 SW ^a	CW/CP	Children 0-6 years	Outlined	No
2. <i>Alfandari</i> (2017)	Israel	Mandatory commitment to listen to and consider children's views	Qualitative	Interviews, field observations, and document reviews	22 SW	Formal committees	Children 1-17 years	Outlined	Yes
3. <i>Arbeiter and Toros et al.</i> (2017)	Estonia	Experiences and perceptions of engagement with children	Qualitative	Interviews	11 SW	Assessment	Children 7-15 years	Outlined	Yes
4. <i>Archarad and Skivenes</i> (2009)	Norway, England	Requirements for making the child's authentic voice heard	Qualitative	Interviews (open-ended)	53 SW	CW/CP	General	Not outlined	No
5. <i>Barnes</i> (2012)	UK	Attitudes towards and relationships with young people	Qualitative	Semistructured interviews	12 SW ^a	Looked after children	Children 12-20 years (mainly residential/foster care)	Not outlined	Yes
6. <i>Berrick et al.</i> (2015)	Finland, Norway, England, USA	Involvement of children in decision-making (involuntary child removal)	Quantitative	Survey based on vignette	772 SW	Preparations for care order proceedings	Boy 5 years	Outlined	Yes
7. <i>Collings and Davies</i> (2008)	Canada	Childhood discourses	Qualitative	Interviews	14 SW	CW/CP	Critical incidents	Not outlined	No
8. <i>Cousins and Milner</i> (2006)	North and South Ireland	Children's rights	Qualitative	Semistructured interviews and focus groups	21 SW ^a	Government and nongovernment residence care	Youth in residential care	Outlined	Yes

(Continues)

TABLE A1 (Continued)

Study	Country	Focus	Method	Data material	SW sample	Context	Target population	Limitations	Ethical considerations
9. Ferguson (2016)	England	Place and time spent with children	Qualitative	Observations	24 SW	Assessment and long-term CW/CP work	General	Not outlined	Yes
10. Ferguson (2017)	UK	Children's visibility in CP practise	Qualitative	Observations and interviews	24 SW	CW/CP	Three case examples: Children 3, 5, 10, and 14 years	Not outlined	Yes
11. Fern (2014)	Iceland	Conceptualization of children and childhood	Qualitative	Semistructured interviews and group discussions	13 SW ^a	Children's service centres and CW/CP	General	Outlined	Yes
12. Gorin and Jobe (2013)	England	Opinions on engaging and safeguarding youth (referrals and decision-making)	Qualitative	Interviews	22 SW	Duty and assessment teams	Children 11–17 years	Outlined	Yes
13. Healy and Darlington (2009)	Australia (Queensland)	Understandings of child participation	Qualitative	Semistructured interviews	28 SW	Nongovernment services and government agencies (covering five CW/CP domains)	Children 0–8 years	Not outlined	Yes
14. Holland (2001)	England and Wales	Portrayal of children in assessments	Qualitative	Semistructured interviews, documents, and participant observation	16 SW	Nongovernment service and government department	Children 0–12 years (physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect cases)	Not outlined	No
15. Horwath and Tarr (2014)	England and Wales	Understandings of "the neglected child"	Qualitative and quantitative	Case files, semistructured interviews, focus group, and survey	Qual.: 34 SW Quant.: 162 SW	Local safeguarding children's board	Children 3–16 years (neglect, disability, or special learning needs)	Outlined	Yes
16. Keddel (2017)	New Zealand (Aotearoa)	Decision reasoning discourses	Qualitative	37 interviews, observations, and document reviews	22 SW ^a	CW/CP	Critical incidents and critical best practice ideas	Outlined	Yes

(Continues)

TABLE A1 (Continued)

Study	Country	Focus	Method	Data material	SW sample	Context	Target population	Limitations	Ethical considerations
17. Kriz and Skiveres (2012)	England and Norway	Perceptions of ethnic minority children	Qualitative	Interviews	52 SW	CW/CP	Ethnic minority children	Outlined	Yes
18. Nybom (2005)	Denmark, Germany, Sweden, UK & USA (Texas)	Child focus as it appears in SW views	Quantitative	Case vignettes with open-ended response	700 SW	CW/CP	Boy 4 years (suspected abuse) Boy 12 years (drug abuse and juvenile crime)	Not outlined	No
19. Oppenheim-Weller et al. (2017)	Israel	At-risk children's involvement in treatment planning and assessment	Quantitative	Survey	80 SW	Treatment planning and assessment committees	General	Outlined	Yes
20. Reisel (2017)	England	Perceptions and professional decision-making (child sexual exploitation)	Qualitative	Case vignettes and interviews	10 SW	Children and young people's services	Youth	Outlined	Yes
21. Roose, Mottart, Dejonckheere, van Nijpatten, and De Bie (2009)	Belgium (Flanders)	View of the child in progress reports	Qualitative	Case files/reports	20 case files providing 56 reports	Residential, non-residential, and semiresidential care	General	Not outlined	No
22. Sanders and Mace (2006)	Wales	Children's wishes and feelings and involvement in CP processes	Qualitative and quantitative	Policy documents and interviews	19 SW ^a	Social service departments	General	Not outlined	No
23. Scourfield (2000)	UK	Conceptualization of child neglect	Qualitative	Case files, interviews, and observations	SW team (size not reported)	Child and family social work team	The "neglected child"	Not outlined	No
24. Schemmings (2000)	UK	Attitudes to children's participation and involvement in decision-making	Qualitative and quantitative	Survey and SW discussions	Quantitative: 42 SW ^a Qualitative: 25 SW	Family support and child protection	General	Outlined	No

(Continues)

TABLE A1 (Continued)

Study	Country	Focus	Method	Data material	SW sample	Context	Target population	Limitations	Ethical considerations
25. Skivenes and Stenberg (2015)	Norway, England, USA (California)	Assessment of risk levels and justifications of assessments	Quantitative	Survey based on vignette	301 CW workers	CW/CP	Girl 5 years	Outlined	Yes
26. Stanley (2013)	New Zealand (Auckland)	Decision-making about reported risk for children	Qualitative	Detailed interviews and observations	70 SW	Child youth and family services	Critical incidents	Not outlined	Yes
27. Thomas and Holland (2010)	Wales	Analysis of children's needs and strengths in decision-making	Qualitative	Assessment reports and interviews	13 SW	Generic child-care social work team	Children 0-15+ years	Outlined	Yes
28. Toros et al. (2017)	Estonia	Principles underpinning assessment activities	Qualitative	In-depth, semistructured interviews	20 SW	CW/CP	General	Not outlined	Yes
29. Toros et al. (2017)	Estonia	Assessments of developmental needs of children	Qualitative	In-depth, semistructured interviews	20 SW	CW/CP	General	Outlined	Yes
30. Toros et al. (2013)	Estonia	Understandings and application of child-centred approach	Qualitative	Semistructured interviews	20 SW	Local government (assessment)	General	Outlined	Yes
31. Van Bijsterveld et al. (2014)	The Netherlands	Perspectives and experiences of child participation	Qualitative	Semistructured interviews	16 SW ^a	The Bureau of Youth Care in Amsterdam	General	Outlined	Yes
32. Van Nijmegen and Jongen (2011)	The Netherlands	Conversational position of children (divorce)	Qualitative	Videoaped interactions of SW and children, interviews	4 SW ^a	The Dutch CP Board in cases of divorce	Children 18 months-12 years	Not outlined	Yes
33. Vis and Fossum (2015)	Norway	Perceptions of child participation and service quality	Quantitative	Survey	87 SW	Residential and foster care	Children in residence/foster care	Outlined	Yes

(Continues)

TABLE A1 (Continued)

Study	Country	Focus	Method	Data material	SW sample	Context	Target population	Limitations	Ethical considerations
34. <i>Y/s et al. (2012)</i>	Norway	Reasons for not including children in decision-making	Quantitative	Survey	53 SW ^a	SW attending a child participation training programme	Children 7–12 years	Outlined	No
35. <i>Y/s and Thomas (2009)</i>	Norway	Child participation in decision-making	Quantitative	Survey	16 SW reporting on 43 cases	SW attending a child participation training programme	Children 7–12 years	Outlined	No

Abbreviations: CP, child protection; CW, child welfare; SW, social worker.

^aArticles containing additional samples other than SW (e.g., children and non-social workers).

Paper 2

Jensen, I. B., Ellingsen, I. T., Studsrød, I., & Quiroga, M. G. (2019). Children and childhood in Chile: Social worker perspectives. *Journal of Comparative Social Work, 14*(1), 141-164.

Article

Children and childhood in Chile: Social worker perspectives

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child protection, Chile, social workers, understandings of children and childhood, Q methodology

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Abstract

English

This study explores understandings of children and childhood among 21 social workers from five child protection services in Chile. To help grasp multiple ideas about children and childhood, we use Q methodology and the 'child visibility' concept. The object is to explore dissimilar and/or similar views on child visibility among social workers and the characteristics of these viewpoints. The results reveal three distinct views on child visibility. Based on the characteristics of these perspectives, we have conceptualized the workers associated with them as: activists, buffers and experts. The *activists* vigorously seek children's own perspectives, and produce an image of capable children with unique perspectives. The *buffers* and the *experts*, however, typically define children's needs from their own perspectives. Nevertheless, through differing logics, the *experts* focus on children's vulnerability and protection needs, while the *buffers* are more inclined to view children in terms of their contextual risk and on the margins in an underfunded child protection context. Despite these differences, there are shared viewpoints among the social workers, for example, by understanding children as relational. The results are discussed in light of current theory within childhood studies.

Keywords: child protection, Chile, social workers, understandings of children and childhood, Q methodology

Spanish

Niños e infancia en Chile: Perspectivas de los trabajadores sociales.

Este estudio explora las concepciones que sobre los niños y la infancia desarrollan 21 trabajadores sociales de cinco servicios de protección infantil en Chile. Para comprender estas múltiples ideas, utilizamos la Metodología Q y el concepto de "visibilidad del niño". El objeto es explorar perspectivas similares o diferentes respecto a la visión que tienen los trabajadores sociales sobre este grupo social, así como las características de esos puntos de vista. Los resultados revelan tres tipos de visión distintivos sobre los niños. Con base a las características de estas tres perspectivas, hemos conceptualizado a los trabajadores sociales asociados con ellas como: activistas, baluartes, y expertos. Los activistas buscan vigorosamente las

perspectivas de los propios infantes y producen una imagen de que los niños poseen capacidades y perspectivas únicas. Los otros dos grupos, sin embargo, típicamente definen las necesidades de los niños desde sus propias representaciones. A través de lógicas distintas, los expertos se enfocan en la vulnerabilidad de los infantes y sus necesidades de protección; mientras los baluartes están más inclinados a ver a los niños en términos de sus propios riesgos contextuales, y en los márgenes de un contexto de protección infantil con financiación insuficiente. A pesar de estas diferencias, existen puntos de vista comunes entre los trabajadores sociales, por ejemplo, al entender a los niños en términos relacionales. Estos resultados son discutidos a la luz de las teorías actuales dentro de los estudios de la infancia.

Palabras clave: protección infantil, Chile, trabajadores sociales, concepciones sobre los niños y la infancia, metodología Q

Introduction

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989) constitutes one of the most powerful childhood discourses globally. The convention emphasizes that children have the right to be *protected* from discrimination, abuse and neglect, and to be ensured the *provision* of family support, adequate education, health care, shelter and food. In addition, the convention encourages *participation* on issues relating to children and youth.

All United Nations member countries, with the exception of the United States, have ratified the CRC. Even so, child welfare and protection systems vary internationally (Gilbert, Parton, & Skivenes, 2011), and social workers' understandings of children and childhood are constructed and reconstructed socially (James, Jenks, & Prout, 1998). The understanding and execution of the CRC probably varies accordingly, as social workers are important translators of current political ideologies into practical measures (Lipsky, 2010). As such, their understandings of children and childhood are relevant to explore. Findings from a recent integrative review of previous child welfare and protection research (Jensen, Studsrød, & Ellingsen, 2018) suggest that efforts remain in realizing the broad commitment of children's rights in practice. Children and youth are primarily constructed by the social worker's own child perspective without employing the children's perspectives (Sommer, Samuelsson, & Hundeide, 2010). In the latter, children themselves have a role in defining their own sense of self and what they need. Moreover, children and youth are typically visible through a narrow lens, as only certain generalized characteristics of the child's situation or the child are made relevant. In sum, this review showed that children are primarily viewed as vulnerable beings in need of protection, with less attention given to children's participation and provision needs. Although the review demonstrated that there is emerging research on how children are understood by social workers, most research published in English journals has been from European or US contexts (Jensen et al., 2018). Limited research exists from Latin American contexts, with the exception of some studies indirectly exploring social workers' understandings of children and childhood (Studsrød, Ellingsen, Guzmán, & Espinoza, 2018; Ursin, Oltedal, & Muñoz, 2016).

In this study, we explore social workers' understandings of children and childhood in child protection services (CPS) in Chile, and seek to fill a contextual knowledge gap in current research. Furthermore, as a response to a call for more flexible conceptual research understandings on children and childhood (e.g. Hanson, 2017; Uprichard, 2008), we apply the 'child visibility' concept to help facilitate the exploration of multiple ideas about children and childhood. To explore social workers' perspectives on child visibility, we use Q methodology (QM), which aims to reveal patterns of subjective viewpoints on a research topic among participants (Brown, 1993). QM is one of the few methods that can produce holistic data and identify the multivalence and relationship among ideas (Watts & Stenner, 2012). This enables us to explore what social workers give significance to, and how they link their ideas of children and childhood. The overall focus of this study is to explore dissimilar and/or similar views on child visibility among social workers and the characteristics of these viewpoints.

Background

Chile ratified the CRC in 1990, the same year democracy was reinstated after 17 years of dictatorship. Chile has embraced a neo-liberal economy and, since the 1990s, the country has experienced high economic growth. Yet, economic growth does not necessarily alleviate poverty, and with the second-highest Gini coefficient among OECD countries, Chile's income inequality is high (UNICEF, 2017). Because access to good welfare services primarily rests on income (Maclure, 2014), the family is an important welfare provider vis-a-vis the state. Social security for children is mostly based on the family unit and the social benefits the household may or may not have (Fernández, 2016). A high number of children are in alternative care in Chile due to socio-economic reasons, with Garcia Quiroga and Hamilton-Giachritsis (2014) arguing that proactive financial and social interventions are needed to support families in socio-economical constraints.

The child protection system in Chile is primarily privatized, although the National Service of Minors (SENAME) provides supervision and partial financial support to organizations (30–50% of what is needed) (Hogar de Cristo, 2017). In most cases, organizations have limited additional resources, and they depend on charity for funding, which is likely to impact service quality (Garcia Quiroga, & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2014). Several reports have stressed poor conditions in alternative care.

For example, in 2013 an initial investigation denounced neglect and abuse within residential care settings (Cámara de Diputados, 2013), and a recent report revealed state neglect in more than 850 deaths of children and youth under state custody since 2005 (United Nations Organization, 2018). Similarly, the last concluding observations from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (2015) and the Instituto Nacional de Derechos Humanos (2017) pointed to several child welfare and protection concerns, such as high levels of violence against children and youth in the home, and persistent discriminatory attitudes and actions against indigenous children. They also raised concerns about the absence of formal structures for children's participation, and how their opinions are taken into account. Even though the CRC is incorporated into domestic laws, it has been argued that 'the best interest of the child' has been narrowly interpreted in Latin America as an assurance of protection, with a negligent focus on children's provision and participation rights (Maclure, 2014).

Theoretical framework

A point of departure in this study is the distinction between a 'child perspective' and 'children's perspective' (Sommer et al., 2010). The latter emphasizes children's own perspectives, held only by the children themselves, while a child perspective is an adult's attempt to deliberately and as realistically as possible achieve an understanding of children's perspectives (Sommer et al., 2010). This study seeks an understanding of how children are made visible by social workers in CPS in Chile. Thus, a third distinction arises: the adult perspective revealing children's visibility in everyday practice. Through this, we can gain knowledge of the potentialities and barriers for a child perspective in Chilean CPS.

Moreover, we draw on current theory within childhood studies on time and temporality (e.g. Hanson, 2017; Uprichard, 2008). Ideas of 'being' and 'becoming' are central to childhood studies. While the *being* child is seen as a competent actor in the present tense, the *becoming* child is seen as an adult in formation. Currently, the understanding of children as either becomings or beings is questioned (Uprichard, 2008). For example, Hanson (2017) claims that this binary understanding ignores that children also have a past, and therefore argues for a trielectical understanding of children, acknowledging that they are simultaneously 'beings, becomings and beens'.

Hence, this suggests a relationship between the past, present and the future (Hanson, 2017). We argue that this threefold understanding is significant for practice in CPS, as children's past and present are significant for improving children's present and future life situations.

Method

In this QM study, participants were presented with a set of statements covering different ideas of children and childhood, and asked to rank these along a dimension from 'most like' to 'most unlike' their viewpoints/experiences. The participants' sorting of statements was then by-person factor analysed. The resulting factors disclose how *participants* are grouped with other participants who share subjective views by similarly sorting the statements (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

Materials

The generation of statements for a QM study builds on concourse theory, which involves the universe of statements surrounding a topic (Brown, 1980; Stephenson, 1953). Statements can stem from different materials, such as interviews, literature and/or art (Brown, 1993). In this study, statements were developed from a review of scientific articles and the CRC, as well as interviews and focus group interviews with social workers. To prevent the dominance of Western views of children and childhood, two dialogue seminars with multinational master's students in social work were held, in which students shared their views of how children and youth are visible in their national contexts. Finally, experts on child welfare/protection were consulted (see Table 1). It was crucial that statements covered a broad range of facets on the topic to allow different perspectives to emerge. Moreover, it was important that statements were mutually relevant for social workers in Chile and Norway, as this study is part of a larger comparative PhD project.

Table 1: The six materials used to develop statements on 'child visibility'

Material 1	The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child
Material 2	Scientific articles
Material 3	Semi-structured interviews on 'child visibility' with social workers (n=3) in Norway familiar with child welfare/protection
Material 4*	Focus group interviews with social workers in child protection services: Mexico (n=7), Chile (n=4) and Norway (n=15)
Material 5	Conversations with child welfare/protection experts in Chile and Norway
Material 6	Two dialogue seminars with international social work master's students (more than 10 different nationalities)

*Note: Material 4 was collected by the research team in the Welfare State Futures-funded project 'Family Complexity and Social Work' (<https://welfarestatefutures.org/research-network/facsk-family-complexity-and-social-work-a-comparative-study-of-family-based-welfare-work-in-different-welfare-regimes/>).

This procedure generated a large number of possible statements, referred to as the identified concourse in QM (Stephenson, 1953). Inspired by Fisher's balanced block design (see Stephenson, 1953), we reduced the materials into a manageable and representative set of 39 statements (see statements in Table 3 in the Results section). These statements contain easy, self-referent language with no context-dependent terms. The first author collaborated with multiple translators to achieve comparable statements in Norwegian and Spanish (by back-and-forth translation). Finally, after statements were piloted with social workers in Norway and Chile, the wording of statements was further adjusted for clarity.

Participants

Various organizations and services were contacted with a strategic aim of obtaining social worker viewpoints from multiple CPS in Chile, thereby resulting in a purposive sample of 21 participants with social work licences and current positions in CPS. The final sample (19 females and two males) covered work in five different CPS, including diagnostic programmes in relation to family court (n=7), intervention (n=6), rehabilitation and/or therapeutic programmes for child victims of sexual abuse or sexual exploitation/trafficking (n=4) and residential care (n=4). All except for one participant work in a private child protection organization supervised and partially financed by SENAME. Fourteen participants described their occupational position as 'social worker', while seven hold a director or coordinator position.

explain why they identified some statements as 'most like' and 'most unlike' their viewpoints/experiences. The individual Q-sortings were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by a native Chilean. The first author and a research assistant, who spoke Spanish fluently, participated during all Q-sorts to safeguard the validity of the results and ethical aspects.

The research project was ethically evaluated and approved by the Data Protection Official for Research (NSD) (project no. 49334). Participants did not give identifiable information about specific children or cases. A researcher at Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile was involved in securing ethical requirements in Chile, and the study was part of the Welfare State Futures-funded project Family Complexity and Social Work.

Analysis and interpretation

The Q-sorts from the 21 participants were entered into the software programme PQ Method (Schmolck, 2002). The way participants sorted the statements was then subject to a by-person factor analysis. Different factor solutions based on principal component analysis with Varimax rotation were explored in the search for the most informative factor solution for interpretation. A three-factor solution yielded the clearest perspectives, with a significant factor loading for 18 of the 21 social workers.

Table 2 shows participants' factor loadings for each of the three factors. Q-sorts marked with an X have significant loading on a factor that also explains more than half of the common variance (Watts & Stenner, 2012). While *factor loadings* indicate the degree to which the participants' Q-sorts correlate with a factor, the *factor* represents the typical way of sorting the statements by the participants loading significantly on that factor. Table 3 in the Results section shows the configuration of the statements for each of the three factors. Participant 11 had a significant *negative* loading on Factor B, revealing an opposite view of what that factor actually represents. Therefore, we chose to exclude this participant from further analysis so the remaining Q-sorts could define Factor B. Furthermore, two participants (3 and 4) revealed a perspective partially associated with Factors A and C, but neither factors explained more than half of the common variance for these participants.

Table 2: Factor matrix, with X indicating those participants' Q-sorts that load significantly ($p < 0.05$) on a factor, and that explains more than half of the common variance

Q-Sort	Factor A	Factor B	Factor C
Participant 1	0.3046	-0.0565	0.6472X
Participant 2	0.4180	0.0356	0.4799X
Participant 3	0.4630	0.3064	0.4430
Participant 4	0.4314	0.2444	0.4476
Participant 5	0.2964	-0.1216	0.7721X
Participant 6	0.5781X	0.2604	0.4656
Participant 7	0.5751X	0.3815	0.2592
Participant 8	0.4120	0.6181X	0.0090
Participant 9	0.1368	0.5167X	0.4085
Participant 10	0.6348X	-0.1276	0.2250
Participant 11	0.3109	-0.6125	0.1785
Participant 12	0.0100	0.1373	0.7516X
Participant 13	0.3333	0.2536	0.4513X
Participant 14	0.6851X	0.1113	0.0910
Participant 15	0.7679X	0.1440	0.2201
Participant 16	0.6701X	0.3548	0.2159
Participant 17	0.6037X	0.1434	0.0910
Participant 18	0.6225X	0.0441	0.4134
Participant 19	0.2924	0.5179X	0.2614
Participant 20	0.1412	0.4154	0.6338X
Participant 21	0.8652X	0.0758	0.1611
Total	9	3	6
significant Q-sorts			

Taken together, the three factors accounted for 54% of the explained variance in social workers' viewpoints/experiences (Factor A=25%, Factor B=10% and Factor C=19%). The correlations between the factors were moderate, ranging from 0.44 to 0.59, which implies that the three factors have features in common, but also include themes that distinguish one perspective from another. To interpret all factor configurations, the crib sheet approach was used (Watts & Stenner, 2012). This involved identifying the statements given the highest (+4) and lowest (-4) rankings, together with statements ranked higher or lower by one factor than by any of the other factors. We also examined distinguishing statements (underlined factor scores in Table 3), which are significantly unique statements for each specific factor. In addition, participants' qualitative reflections upon statements provided important insights for the interpretation of factors.

Strengths and limitations

QM aims to reveal subjective viewpoints among participants; however, this study cannot be generalized beyond this sample due to the small sample size. Moreover, when identifying the discourse, more data were collected in Norway than Chile. As

argued in QM literature, this is of less importance, as the main concern is not the statements themselves but the relative interpretations and overall understandings that inform the participants' engagement with the statements (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Additionally, during the Q-sorts, participants expressed that the statements were relevant to their work contexts. Doing research in another country certainly also raises some potential limitations, for example, language barriers and assistance from Spanish speakers and native Chileans was necessary to carry out this study. That said, although the first author is Norwegian, she has Spanish-speaking competencies and experience from living in Latin America, which adds strength to the study.

Results

Our analysis reveals three different perspectives (factors) on child visibility among the social workers. Based on the characteristics of these perspectives, we have conceptualized the workers associated with them as *activists*, *buffers* and *experts*, along with a characteristic feature of how children are seen within these perspectives. This section provides a summary of what characterizes the three factors. Reference is made to the placement of individual statements regarding each of the three factors (see Table 3), together with reflections made by participants during the Q-sorts (in *italics*).

Table 3: Factor scores for each of the 39 statements

No.	Statement	Factor		
		A	B	C
1*	In the child protection sector, it is first and foremost important to view the child as part of the family, and not as a single individual.	4	4	4
2	It's often difficult to trust what teenagers are saying because I'm not always sure they are telling me the truth.	-3	<u>1</u>	-3
3	Children with other ethnical-cultural backgrounds are less seen and heard in child protection practice than other children.	<u>3</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>-4</u>
4	I think children inherit their parents' problems.	-1	-1	<u>2</u>
5	Children who, on their own initiative, express their personal opinions get to participate to a greater extent than children who don't.	2	2	<u>0</u>
6	The worst thing that can happen to a child is that we separate him/her from his/her family.	2	3	<u>-3</u>
7	I never trust second-hand information about how the child is doing; therefore, I always talk to the child myself.	0	<u>-2</u>	<u>1</u>
8	Children are not sufficiently independent to make their own decisions.	<u>-3</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>
9	Frequently, the social worker (and not the children themselves) defines the interests and needs of the child.	<u>0</u>	<u>-4</u>	<u>3</u>
10	Depending on the family composition, there exists the danger that children's needs are not covered in certain forms.	<u>-4</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>1</u>
11	I always give the child an opportunity to contribute, independent of age and maturity.	4	4	<u>2</u>
12*	As a social worker, I think that it is more difficult to work with children in families from higher social classes than lower social classes.	-1	-2	-1
13*	Some children receive help more easily because they appeal more to the social worker.	-2	-3	-3
14*	It's important for me to hear the parents' story before I hear the children's story.	0	-2	-2
15*	Many social workers think it's difficult to know what to talk to the children about and how to do it.	0	-1	1
16	It's important for me to communicate in written documents the child's point of view regarding the case.	4	<u>1</u>	4
17	It's difficult to trust what children are saying because they are manipulated by their parents.	<u>-3</u>	0	0
18	The child's gender plays a role in how they are talked to and involved in their own case.	<u>-2</u>	0	0
19	I feel less responsibility for children when they are approaching the age of majority.	-4	-3	-1
20*	I think physical punishment can be fine so that the child will learn.	-4	-4	-4
21	Many social workers talk to children because it is mandatory, and not because it is important for the child.	-2	<u>3</u>	-2
22	Parents decide if the child becomes visible in their own case.	<u>0</u>	-3	-2
23	Children's challenging behaviour easily becomes dominant and prevents me from seeing other aspects of the child.	0	-1	<u>-4</u>
24*	It is unethical for the child to reveal parents' problems.	-2	-1	-1
25	It is important for me that the child gets to read through what I write about them in written documents.	0	<u>-3</u>	0
26	Our responsibility is first and foremost to make sure that children's basic needs are covered.	3	<u>1</u>	4
27*	We quickly create an image of the child, even though we don't know the child that well.	1	0	1
28	It is expected that we evaluate children's needs based on standardized formats.	<u>2</u>	0	0
29*	It is important that we write down all details in the case so that the child, with time, can get to know his/her own history.	1	1	1
30	We have knowledge that makes us most capable of evaluating what's in the child's best interest.	1	3	3

31	Children don't tell because they are afraid of possible negative consequences.	2	0	<u>3</u>
32*	You shouldn't involve the child at all costs; the protection aspect is the most important in the end.	<u>3</u>	2	2
33	Children have a strong position in the child protection sector in comparison to the parents.	<u>-1</u>	1	2
34*	There is too much focus on talking with the child in today's child protection sector.	-1	-2	-1
35	It is problematic if the parents get to know what we have discussed with the child.	<u>1</u>	-1	-1
36*	The framework we work within makes it difficult to make sure that children receive sufficient help/what they need.	3	<u>4</u>	3
37	Adults can contribute to informing about children's situation better than the child can.	-3	<u>2</u>	-2
38	Generally speaking, I think we have a good way of raising children in Chile.	-1	<u>-4</u>	0
39	Often, children do not want to talk to us, but we need to talk to the children even if they don't want to.	1	0	<u>-3</u>
Explained variance		25%	10%	19%

Note: Underlining values signifies distinguishing statement values for the specific factor at a significance level $p < 0.05$. Statements marked * signify consensus statements.

Factor A: The activists – 'children are capable and unique' (n=9)

The perspective represented by Factor A is conceptualized as being that of *activists* advocating for children and youth, and acknowledging their perspective as important for child protection practice. To these social workers, children are viewed as capable and unique. More specifically, it is important to give children the opportunity to contribute, independent of age and maturity (11: +4 [statement number: factor ranking]), and to communicate the child's point of view in written documents (16: +4). They also disagree that children are not independent enough to make their own decisions (8: -3). They see every child as unique, and they do not feel less responsibility for children approaching the age of maturity, and that children are not treated differently because of gender (19: -4; 18: -2). The activists view children as trustworthy, although they recognize that manipulation by parents occurs (17: -3). Overall, these workers disagree that some children receive help more easily because they appeal more to the social worker (13: -2).

The activists stressed that all voices are important in a child protection case. Although they highlight their competence as social workers, they do not see themselves as the most capable of judging what is in the child's best interest (30: +1). They talk about different discourses and constructions of reality, with one worker expressing, *'I think we have knowledge, but that knowledge has a limitation, and that*

limitation is that it is our own knowledge' (P10). The activists do not believe adults can inform the case *better* than children can (37: -3). Rather than being a question of either/or (e.g. hearing the parents' story before the child's story) (14: 0), these workers value multiple perspectives as jointly important for successful child protection work.

Despite considering children to be important contributors with their own perspectives, the activists do not think children have a strong position in the child protection system (33: -1), as emphasized by this quote: *'I think they [children/youth] don't have the position they should have...because the adults' opinion is more valued, basically'* (P21). These workers view children with other ethnic-cultural backgrounds to be especially vulnerable in the child protection system (3: +3). In the qualitative comments given by workers, 'other ethnic-cultural background' was frequently associated with children with indigenous Mapuche backgrounds, and one worker stated that children with indigenous backgrounds *'...are completely invisible because we have a political constitution that does not recognize the native peoples'* (P10). Moreover, even though the activists do not feel less responsibility for children approaching age of maturity (19: -4), they problematize inadequate service provision for older children. As one worker states, *'There is a saying here [...] that with small children, small problems, with big children, big problems'* (P16). According to these workers, the child protection system prioritizes provision needs, and workers link the material provision orientation to broader societal values: *'I think the topic of basic needs, at least for us, in our country, probably has centred on super-material aspects more than emotional'* (P21). To these workers, emotional needs are pivotal, and the family dynamic is more important to children's well-being than the family composition itself (10: -4). Nevertheless, social workers experience expectations of evaluating children's needs based on standards, and their main responsibility is to make sure children's basic needs are covered (28: +2; 26: +3).

Factor B: The buffers – 'children are at risk' (n=3)

While Factor A is formed by the views of workers from multiple child protection services, participants associated with Factor B are from residential care (n=2) and a diagnostic programme (n=1). Overall, this perspective reveals a distrust in the child protection system, with severe consequences for children. Children are viewed in

light of-, and these workers are concerned with, the 'real life' regarding the services and what these children and young people are entering into. Participants associated with Factor B are conceptualized as *buffers* because they attempt to compensate for system inadequacies, though with apparent limitations.

Similar to the activists, the buffers stress the importance of the child's opportunity to contribute (11: +4). Still, these workers are more reluctant towards children making their own *decisions* (8: +2). One social worker expressed that a child making his/her own decisions depends on the issue: *'They are not independent to choose which school they should go to or about homework or therapy they have to take, but [the child] can say if they do not want to be close to the family'* (P9). The buffers do not strongly value the child's viewpoints in written documents (16: +1), and do not think the child should read these documents (25: -3). One worker explained, *'If a child takes out his or her folder, it is taken away immediately because there are analyses that they do not understand, and if they see it quickly, they could misinterpret it'* (P9). Although these workers see hindrances in involving children in their work, they do not think social workers define children's interests and needs (9: -4). Even so, they believe adults can inform the case better than children (37: +2), and they disagree that they never trust second-hand information about how the child is doing (7: -2). Although these workers are confident they have knowledge that makes them most capable of judging what is in the child's best interest (30: +3), they suspect that many social workers talk with children out of obligation, and not because it is important to the child (21: +3).

The buffers are negative regarding Chilean upbringing (38: -4), and one worker explained that it neglects the children's present well-being:

In Chile, it is all aimed at the professional goal, that the child, when he or she leaves the residence, is successful, but there is no talk of the child being happy or being able to build a loving relationship with a partner that is healthy. There is no talk of that. No, all the hopes are that they enter into university, get a degree, that they will be successful and have a salary that allows [the children] to live. But we do not raise them for happiness. That is why we have children who are frustrated and who repeat patterns later on. (P9)

These workers agree that the family composition can jeopardize the child's needs (10: +3). Nonetheless, they translate 'family composition' as socio-economic factors: *'The composition of the family has an effect, but it depends on the area. If it is*

economic, it clearly will affect a single mother with five children' (P8). That said, they believe family separation is the worst thing that can happen to a child (6: +3), which can be seen in relation to limitations of, and within, the Chilean child protection system:

In Chile, SENAME is an institution that does not function [...] it is one of the institutions that violate the rights of the children the most. But it is an institutional violation – there is sexual abuse, there are professionals who do not have experience, there are educators who are like the children's mothers, who abuse. So, sometimes the system itself violates even more than the families. (P9)

The buffers emphasized that the system they work in is poor (36: +4). For example, one working in residential care explained that there is a ratio of one social worker per 15 children at the residence where she works. She continued, *'Here you do not work until 6 pm. It is Monday to Sunday and 24/7 [...] and nobody asks you if you have rested'* (P9). The worker described the absence of safety measures for staff, poor physical conditions and going home from work crying because she is tired. Another residence worker has experienced the child protection system as increasingly reactive, resulting in children with severe problems entering into residential care.

Factor C: The experts – 'children are vulnerable' (n=6)

The perspective revealed by Factor C is conceptualized as those of *experts*, and emphasizes the importance of protecting children and providing for their basic needs, which may challenge children's participation. The six participants associated with Factor C work in different areas of child protection.

First, these workers centre their attention on children's basic needs (26: +4). Yet, they underscore that the notion of basic needs not only involves physical needs, such as food, clothes and health, but also recreation, participation and emotional needs. Though these workers see the importance of children's participation rights, for example, by involving them and communicating their viewpoints in written documents (11: 2; 16: +4), they express that practice has not yet arrived at a stage in which children's participation rights are incorporated. To some extent, they think other social workers lack the competence to talk with children, and therefore find this difficult (15: +1). Furthermore, in the comments provided by the participants, they expressed a reluctance towards child participation due to the child's age, the topic and the potential damage participation may inflict on the child. Although these

workers partially agree that they do not trust second-hand information about how the child is doing (7: +1), they believe it is better to rely on information the child has told someone they trust than to go straight to the child for information. They strongly disagree that children should talk if they do not want to, and they believe an important reason for children not wanting to talk is that they are afraid of the potential negative consequences (39: -3; 31: +3), such as being separated from their family. These workers believe in the superior knowledge of professionals and adults in deciding what is best for children (9: +3; 30: +3). One worker said, *'We will always look for adults who explain what the interests or needs of children are, and we also define them from our own experience, thinking that we have the expertise to do so'* (P12).

For these workers, family separation is not the worst thing that can happen to a child (6: -3), as their uppermost priority is to protect children from harm (32: +2). For this reason, they think the child has a stronger position in the child protection system than parents (33: +2). The experts do not think children with other ethnical-cultural backgrounds are treated differently than others (3: -4), and they do not see children's challenging behaviour as a hindrance to seeing other aspects of the child (23: -4). Although these workers do not necessarily feel less responsibility for children approaching the age of majority (19: -1), they believe older children are more resilient: *'...one feels or expects [older children] to have the tools to survive in very adverse contexts, and we see that every day in relation to a teenager versus an infant'* (P12).

Consensus ideas

Even though the perspectives presented above illustrate significantly different viewpoints, there are also converging ideas among workers irrespective of factor loadings (12 statements marked with * in Table 3). These statements concern the following themes: (i) understanding children as relational, (ii) the child protection system, (iii) class, and (iv) the relationship between protection and participation. In the presentation below, statement numbers are provided in parentheses.

First, the social workers find it important to view the child in a collective and systemic perspective – as part of the family, rather than a single individual (1). One worker stated:

Yes, in every sense, I think it is important to not consider them [children] as a single [...] because working with one or considering that the problems focus on one person is to point out that the problem is in that person, and that there is no context that could propitiate the conflictive element. (P21)

These workers do not think it is unethical for children to reveal parents' problems (24), as parents' problems *are* children's problems in terms of their systemic understanding.

Second, all social workers reported that the framework they work within fails to ensure that children receive sufficient help or support for their needs (36). Although some workers referred to the specific child protection service where they work, most pointed to the broader child protection system. In the additional comments provided by the participants, poor cooperation among services (e.g. health, school and mental health), an adult-centric court system and the limited quality of services provided were described.

Third, class is not considered relevant for how children are treated (12). However, workers have little actual practice experience working with children and families of a higher socio-economic class. Some workers emphasized that child protection in Chile is restricted to lower-class families, and that child protection offices in upper-class districts barely exist.

The last theme concerns the relationship between protection and participation. Protection is viewed as the most important mandate in child protection work and that, at all costs, children should not be involved (32). Moreover, written reports are not seen as considerably important, in a future perspective, for children to know their history (29). However, the rationalities for this differ. Whereas some workers expressed that children know their story, and that the social worker's version of the story always will be a construction, other workers underscored that some details should be left out: *'We work with life books, for example, where the family and the ones taking care of the child write the most beautiful details or the most important in*

relation to the children' (P12). This quote implies conserving the good stories and concealing the bad.

The workers are also fairly neutral concerning social workers' competence in talking with children, and they do not think some children receive help more easily because they appeal to the social worker (15; 13). In Chile, some social workers work in pairs (duplas) with psychologists, and talking with children is seen as the psychologists' domain, which may explain this fairly neutral position. Even though the workers emphasized the importance of protection, they do not think there is too much focus on talking with children (34).

Discussion

This study shows differing perspectives on children and childhood among social workers. A key difference relates to the value and relevance given to children's own perspectives and the opportunities and hindrances regarding a child perspective in CPS.

More specifically, the activist perspective reveals a belief in children as capable actors with unique perspectives. This belief aligns with the child perspective seeking to grasp children's perspectives and value children's knowledge derived from their own experiences (Sommer et al., 2010). Such a perspective promotes children's participation and focuses on children's everyday life. However, the results reveal that the buffers and experts are more reluctant towards children participating in child protection work. Both have a view of the superior knowledge of adults in constructing children's needs and, hence, strongly rely on an *external* child perspective in their work (Warming, 2011). In so doing, the workers incorporate and rely on their own knowledge and past work experience as a generalized palette of knowledge to form their viewpoints of what children need in the present and when becoming adults. Nevertheless, their logics for this adult-centric orientation differ. While the experts produce an image of a vulnerable child with shortcomings who needs provision and protection by adults, the buffers are more inclined to view children in a *contextual* risk and on the margins. Dependent on an underfunded and constrained child protection system, children are vulnerable without family support and with few viable alternatives for future life-supporting prospects. When resources are limited, social

workers may feel restricted in their practice (Lipsky, 2010); alleviating risk and provision needs may therefore be experienced as more critical than actively seeking children's perspectives.

Blending into these perspectives is a dynamic interplay of children's past, present and future (Hanson, 2017). For instance, written reports were not seen as considerably important in a future perspective for the child to know his/her history. The activists also consider indigenous children to be particularly vulnerable in the child protection system, with strong associations to what has been, bonding the child to their roots and a cultural heritage inclined towards discrimination. Workers in our study criticized the Chilean upbringing for being too concerned about qualifications for future adulthood, rather than focusing on children's current everyday life situations. The focus lies on how the adult can support, qualify and build children's futures, for example, through education to create successful citizens of tomorrow. The same critique was raised regarding the child protection system, as workers experience an orientation towards material provision lacking a focus on children's current well-being.

These results suggest that there are challenges in seeing and valuing children as been, beings and becomings in Chilean child protection practice. In general, parents and families are significant persons in children's past, present and future. This make these children vulnerable without family support, as the family naturally represents a continuity for the child and, thereby, an important link between these discourses.

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Paper 3

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Part II



What are the perspectives of children in child protection work among social workers in Norway and Chile?



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ABSTRACT

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child outlines universal standards for children's welfare and position in society. Among other aspects, the convention advocates for a balance between seeing children as part of a family and as competent individuals in their own right. Nonetheless, countries have different conditions for meeting the rights outlined in the convention. This study explores social workers' perspectives of children in child protection work in Norway and Chile. Q methodology was applied, as it is suitable for exploring and comparing perspectives. Thirty-eight social workers participated in the study (21 in Chile and 17 in Norway). Analysis revealed three distinct perspectives, with perspectives 1 and 2 predominately held by Chilean participants and perspective 3 by Norwegian participants. Perspectives 1 and 2 understand children through relational and structural lenses. Workers with these perspectives believe children's needs are insufficiently met in family practices and at policy levels. Nevertheless, while perspective 1 tries to compensate for these inadequacies by giving children agency in local child protection work through child–social worker interactions, perspective 2 sees limited space for children's agency in child protection work due to structural restraints. Perspective 3 sees children's independence and believes children have agency in child protection work and family practices. Results are discussed in light of ideas regarding agency and child protection and welfare characteristics of Chile and Norway.

1. Introduction

As argued by James, Jenks, and Prout (1998), children are structurally differentiated within societies, and their needs and rights are variously ascribed and restricted along dominant ideologies. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC, 1989) can be understood as a harmonising factor for this variability, as it outlines universal standards for children's welfare and position in society (Hämäläinen, LITTLECHILD, Chytil, Šramatá, & Jovelin, 2012). The CRC requires governments to commit to these standards and contribute to reducing potential variance in political and policy decision-making practices for children across societies. The CRC encompasses a broad array of rights and balances aspects like children's vulnerability and agency, welfare and participation and acknowledging them as part of a family and as single individuals.

While individual countries collaborate to promote children's rights worldwide, countries have different resources to meet these rights and are asked to undertake measures "to the maximum extent of their available resources" (CRC, art. 4). This makes international variation in how the CRC is enforced in practice plausible. Comparative research is relevant in this regard, as it can function as a springboard for reflecting on divergent perspectives (Bryman, 2016) of children and children's rights. Engaging in this type of research may uncover similarities, differences and taken-for-granted meanings that could otherwise remain

unattended. For example, Rasmussen, Hyvönen, Nygren, and Khoo (2010) found substantial differences in how "child-centred" social work was conveyed in the training materials and guidelines relevant to child protection work in Australia, Canada, and Sweden. Moreover, how policy comes into action may be best studied close-up through specific levels of practice (Nygren, White, & Ellingsen, 2018). This makes social workers' perspectives of children central because, as "street-level bureaucrats", social workers translate policy and other guiding documents into practice, thus producing *real* policies (Lipsky, 2010) that affect children and families in contact with child protection services.

This article uses Q methodology (QM) to explore social workers' subjective perspectives of children in child protection work in Chile and Norway. It is informed by childhood studies and specifically acknowledges childhood as a sociocultural rather than universally or biologically determined variable (Bordonaro & Payne, 2012). The starting point is that multiple competing perspectives of children may coexist (Graham, 2011) and ultimately affect how children are perceived and treated in child protection work. To understand social workers' perspectives of children, ideas regarding *agency* are useful. Agency orients attention to social workers' perceptions of their capacity to act according to their ideal perspectives of children and how these perspectives relate to understandings of children as competent social actors, which is a cornerstone of the CRC.

This study relates to a larger NORFACE funded research project on

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Family Complexity in Social Work (FACSK) that explores and compares social workers' understandings of family and family policy across eight countries. Norway and Chile were two of the countries strategically selected due to, for example, assumed differences in welfare regime types (Nygren et al., 2018). In the FACSK project, social workers from four service areas, including child protection, participated in focus group interviews, where they deliberated on a vignette describing a complex family situation (see, e.g. Ellingsen, Studsrød, & Muñoz-Guzmán, 2019; Oltedal & Nygren, 2019; Studsrød, Ellingsen, Muñoz-Guzmán, & Espinoza, 2018).

This article extends the scope of the FACSK project by drawing on data from a distinct QM study which explicitly explores social workers' perspectives of children in child protection work in Norway and Chile. QM can be understood as a qualitative method which uses quantitative techniques to reveal some of the main perspectives of a group of participants about a subject (Watts & Stenner, 2012). QM is suitable for comparative research because it explores and compares differences and similarities in subjective perspectives both within and across groups of participants (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

With the exception of Nybom (2005), limited comparative research has explored social workers' views or perspectives of children in child protection work. Most comparative research published in English has targeted social workers' reflections about specific issues related to children, such as child participation (e.g. Archard & Skivenes, 2009; Berrick, Dickens, Pösö, & Skivenes, 2015; Križ & Skivenes, 2017). Moreover, the aforementioned comparative research was conducted within Northern European and Anglo-American countries, illustrating "regional" research gaps. Some research contributions in the FACSK project, however, have compared child protection workers' perspectives of family and children in Chile, Norway, and additional countries (Ellingsen et al., 2019; Oltedal & Nygren, 2019; Studsrød et al., 2018). Similar tendencies are identified across these three research articles, notably that social workers in Chile are more inclined to be oriented towards the family as a unit of analysis, while social workers in Norway are more oriented towards the individual child.

This article extends this limited but growing body of comparative research on social workers' perspectives of children in child protection work in Latin American and European contexts by exploring the perspectives of 38 social workers in Chile and Norway. Before presenting the methodology and study findings, the contexts and theoretical framework will be provided to help better understand the findings in a larger context.

2. Background

2.1. Contexts and child protection systems

Child protection services can be understood as structures and interventions that have a state mandate to intervene in children's and families' lives when children's well-being is at risk (Waterhouse & McGhee, 2015; Wilson, Hean, Abebe, & Heaslip, 2020). Child protection characteristics are however found to vary across countries (Gilbert, Parton, & Skivenes, 2011). Gilbert et al. (2011) suggested three orientations—child protection, family service, and child-focused—but argued that these orientations insufficiently describe country-specific child protection characteristics, as orientations may blend, coexist, and shift (Gilbert et al., 2011).

Although Latin American countries are not part of Gilbert et al. (2011) analysis, Chilean child protection services have been described as child protection oriented, with recently adopted practices that are more family service orientated by focusing on family dysfunction and therapeutic interventions (Studsrød et al., 2018; Ursin, Oltedal, and Muñoz-Guzmán, 2017). Norwegian child protection services have been identified as shifting from a family service to a child-focused orientation (Gilbert et al., 2011), where the child is positioned to have an independent relation to the state. This may, in turn, lead to

defamilialisation, reducing family and parental responsibility for raising children (Studsrød et al., 2018). These orientations are important when exploring perspectives of children in child protection work because, although Norway and Chile have ratified the CRC, different child protection orientations may promote differences in how children's rights are balanced and, consequently, how children are viewed (e.g. a child at risk, in need of family belonging, a child's need to be heard).

Chile adopted a neoliberal market-driven economy enforced during the Pinochet dictatorship (1973–1990) (Muñoz Arce, 2019). While the country has experienced economic growth, Chile's income inequality is among the highest of the OECD countries (OECD, 2020). Social programmes are targeted, and education, pensions, health, and other welfare services are primarily privatised (Muñoz Arce, 2019). Such characteristics have associated Chile with a familialised welfare regime (Nygren et al., 2018), with the state taking a liberal and noninterventionist approach towards family life, whereby the responsibility for well-being rests more on family resources and income (Hantrais, 2004).

Child protection services in Chile are mainly managed by private institutions, partly financed and supervised by the state (the National Service of Minors [SENAME]). However, statutory subsidies are insufficient, and child protection services depend on charity for funding, which likely impacts service quality (García Quiroga & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2014). Services are regulated by various legislation, and there are discussions about creating an integral legislative framework to protect children's rights. In 2017, the population of children under 18 years of age was approximately 24.2% in Chile (4,259,155) (UNICEF, 2020). About 4.5% (195,099) of the child population (0–18 years) received services from the Chilean child protection services in 2019 (SENAME, 2020).

Norway is characterised by democratic values and a redistributive policy through high taxation, which enables the state to provide a wide array of public welfare services, such as education, health, pensions and other social services. In contrast to Chile, Norway's income inequality is among the lowest of the OECD countries (OECD, 2020). Norway has been associated with a defamilialised welfare regime (Nygren et al., 2018) due to, for example, the broad array of tax-funded social services and a shared responsibility between state and families on family-policy issues. Moreover, the Nordic countries have shifted away from the family unit to the promotion of more individualistic values (Hantrais, 2004).

In Norway, the state and municipalities have a joint responsibility for child protection services. Child protection services are regulated by the Child Welfare Act and have a dual mandate to support families in preventing neglect and abuse and taking necessary compulsory actions in cases of child maltreatment. On 1 January 2019, the population of children under 18 years old was 21.1% in Norway (1,122,508) (Statistisk sentralbyrå [SSB], 2020a). In Norway, about 4.3% (47,899) of children (0–18 years) received child protection services in 2018 (SSB, 2020b). While a more interventionist approach could be expected in a defamilialised welfare state exemplified by Norway, Chile and Norway do not differ significantly in terms of the proportion of children receiving child protection services. That said, caution must be taken when comparing statistics across countries, and there may be multiple reasons for these seeming equalities in the number of children in the child protection system. For example, variations can be found in the reasons for entering the system. While the most common reason in Norway is lack of parental skills (22%) (Bufdir, 2020), in Chile, it was maltreatment or abuse (57.2%) (SENAME, as cited in García Quiroga & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2014). Lack of parental skills is a rather vague label that may or may not suggest a lower threshold for child protection intervention in Norway. Hence, drawing conclusions can be difficult regarding whether the thresholds for child protection interventions into family life differ between Norway and Chile based on these statistics. Every country has country-specific challenges in terms of social and psychosocial problems connected to the needs of child protection

(Hämäläinen et al., 2012). Moreover, while the various welfare and child protection characteristics for Norway and Chile may illustrate overarching structures and policy logics, their links to social workers' perspectives of children in child protection work are less clear.

2.2. Theoretical framework

Ideas regarding *agency* are used to discuss social workers' perspectives of children in child protection work in Norway and Chile. Agency is a key concept in childhood studies and can be understood as "the capacity of individuals to act independently" (James & James, 2012, p. 3). A key notion in childhood studies is seeing children and youth as *competent* social actors and advocating for their agency in constructing their own worlds (James et al., 1998). The rise of agency has been linked to a shift from a Marxist notion of structural dominance to a belief in the independent capable responsible individual, which is characteristic of today's neoliberalism and modes of governance (Asad, 2000). However, today, there are more anti-individualistic understandings of agency pointing towards "agency as socially produced and culturally constructed activities" (Raitelhuber, 2016, p. 97).

Correspondingly, Klocker (2007) claimed that structures, contexts, and relationships may act as "thinners" and "thickeners" of children's agency and suggested a continuum of agency along which all people are placed. While *thick agency* involves "having the latitude to act within a broad range of options", *thin agency* involves "decisions and everyday actions that are carried out in highly restrictive contexts, characterized by few viable alternatives" (Klocker, 2007, p. 85). Some argue that agency is relational and best understood as a product of interdependence rather than independence (e.g. Raitelhuber, 2016). Social workers may, for example, enable or restrict children's choices based on their perspectives of children. As Norway and Chile are marked by different welfare and child protection characteristics, there may also be dissimilar structural and contextual "thinners" and "thickeners" for children's agency in child protection work.

Just as children's agency is shaped by structures, so is the agency of adults (Tisdall & Punch, 2012). Lipsky (2010) "street-level bureaucrat" perspective may illustrate the limits of social workers' agency in the sense that child protection work is performed within a context of constrained resources and contested roles, interests, and functions (Lipsky, 2010). Hence, there are a range of structural thinners of social workers' range of viable choices for actions, and as argued by Morrison et al. (2019),

Child protection social work throws into sharp relief some of the challenges that arise when applying the concept of agency in practice. It brings to the fore the idea that children may be both vulnerable and agentic and the collision between the discourses of children's rights to protection and participation. (p. 109)

This argument points to the entanglement of vulnerability and agency and how different CRC principles may conflict with each other in child protection work. In fact, Morrison et al. (2019) argued that children's agency in child protection work may be best understood as thin due to these entangled considerations. A related term is *ambiguous agency*, which refers to situations where children's agency is contested or when it may threaten social and moral order (Bordonaro & Payne, 2012).

3. Method

This study uses QM to explore social workers' subjective perspectives about children in child protection work. QM has increased in popularity across an array of research disciplines, including social work (see Ellingsen, Størksen, & Stephens, 2010, for an overview of QM in social work research) and child protection research specifically (e.g. Steenbakkers, Ellingsen, Van der Steen, & Grietens, 2018; Wilkins, 2017). QM has also been proven suitable for cross-national comparative

research, for example because shared views are based on statistical similarities between participants' ways of sorting statements and not on researchers' a-priori assumptions about cultural commonalities (Stenner et al., 2006). Specifically, QM aims to reveal clusters of shared subjective feelings, views, perspectives, or experiences among participants. QM studies commonly ask participants to express their perspectives by sorting a set of statements along a dimension (e.g. from "most agree" to "most disagree"). How participants sort these statements is then subjected to correlation and by-person factor analysis, which discloses participants' shared and divergent perspectives (McKeown & Thomas, 2013; Watts & Stenner, 2012).

3.1. Developing statements for the Q study

Statements in a QM study are derived from an identified "concourse", which can be explained as "the flow of communicability surrounding any topic" (Brown, 1991/1992, p. 3). The concourse may be identified through different sources, such as interviews, relevant literature, and everyday talk. The significant matter is that the concourse reflects various views on the topic to enable different perspectives to emerge (Brown, 1991/1992).

To grasp various perspectives of children and childhood, the concourse in this study was identified through six types of data materials: (i) focus group interview data with child protection social workers in Mexico ($n = 7$), Chile ($n = 4$), and Norway ($n = 15$), all collected by researchers in the FACKS project; (ii) semi-structured interviews with child protection social workers in Norway ($n = 3$); (iii) two dialogue seminars with international social work master's students and; (iv) reflections from child protection experts in Chile and Norway, (v) previous research, and (vi) the CRC. The rationales for including multiple data materials to identify the concourse was to ensure statements were mutually relevant to social workers in Chile and Norway. Moreover, multiple perspectives on children and childhood coexist, for example, in the literature, the CRC, and legislation (Graham, 2011). To enable different perspectives to emerge, it was important that statements covered a broad range of understandings of children.

These data materials comprised a large pool of potential statements. A modified version of the Fisher's balanced block design (Stephenson, 1953) was used to preserve the variation of statements in the identified concourse and to reduce it to a suitable number of statements for QM studies (which is recommended to be somewhere between 40 and 80) (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Statements were grouped into cross-matched themes, and a final set of 39 representative statements were selected (see Table 2). Translations into Norwegian and Spanish were produced by a thorough consultative process with experts on child protection, fluent Spanish speakers, and native Chileans. Additionally, pilots were performed with social workers in Norway ($n = 2$) and Chile ($n = 2$) to ensure relevance and to avoid ambiguity in content or wording.

3.2. Participants

Large numbers of participants are not required in QM studies because QM is more interested in exploring which subjective perspectives exist within a group of participants rather than the prevalence of these perspectives (Brown, 1980). An important consequence is that the results of this study may be generalised to the social workers from which the perspectives were sampled but not to a larger population of social workers, as in survey research (Watts & Stenner, 2012).

The data for this study were collected from May 2017 to February 2018. Participants were recruited from the countries' capitals (Santiago and Oslo), and 21 Chilean (19 females, 2 males)¹ and 17 Norwegian (11

¹ For an analysis of the Chilean data material only, see: Jensen, I. B., Ellingsen, I. T., Studsrød, I., & Garcia Quiroga, M. (2019). Children and childhood in Chile: Social worker perspectives. *Journal of Comparative Social Work*,



Fig. 1. Illustration of a completed Q sort and the Q sorting grid used in this study.

females, 6 males) social workers participated. The 38 participants have different functions in the child protection system; a strategic choice made to explore whether shared and divergent perspectives exist among social workers across services. As definitions and mandates of child protection systems vary across countries, equating these services and translating them into English yields challenges (Gilbert et al., 2011; Pösö, 2014). Nevertheless, the work conducted by the participants can be characterised as reception work, assessment, intervention, rehabilitation, residential care, foster care, and work with young unaccompanied minors. The majority work with assessment and intervention ($n = 23$). Seven Chilean and three Norwegian participants hold leader/coordinator/consultant positions.

3.3. Q sorting procedure

After filling out a questionnaire regarding age, gender, tenure, work tasks, and so forth, participants were asked to sort the 39 statements, which were randomly numbered and printed onto separate cards into a predefined grid (Fig. 1). The grid ranged from + 4 (most like) to -4 (most unlike) their perspectives or experiences, with a centre (0) signifying statements that were neutral, irrelevant, or triggered ambivalence. Fig. 1 shows that the grid decided the number of statements participants could assign to each ranking position (three statements at the + 4 position, four statements at the + 3 position, etc.). The grid had 39 spaces, one for each of the 39 statements. Asking participants to rank-order statements into a predefined grid may help participants differentiate nuances across statements and hence reveal more fine-tuned perspectives (Ellingsen et al., 2010; McKeown & Thomas, 2013).

Participants were informed that there was no correct/incorrect way to sort the statements, as the guiding instruction was to sort them according to their individual perspectives and/or experiences. In QM studies, the same statement may elicit different responses from different participants (Watts & Stenner, 2012). To retain a deep and detailed understanding of participants' reflections on the statements and the reason(s) they placed a statement where they did in the grid, the "think-

aloud technique" (Ericsson & Simon, 1984) was deployed. In this study, this involved instructing all participants to read the statements aloud and share their immediate reflection on each of the 39 statements, which elicited a great amount of qualitative data material. Upon completing the Q sorting, participants were asked to elaborate on why some statements were ranked "most like" or "most unlike" their perspective/experience. They were also given the opportunity to add information if they felt aspects were missing because, although efforts were made to develop a representative set of statements covering different perspectives of children, other aspects relevant to this study may not have been included. In general terms, however, participants felt they were able to express their perspectives through the statements provided. The think-aloud reflections and additional participant comments on Q sorts were audio recorded, transcribed verbatim, and included as data used in the interpretation process.

3.4. Analysis and interpretation

In the analysis, participants' ways of sorting the statements (the Q sorts) were entered into the PQ Method software (Schmolck, 2002) to perform the correlation and by-person factor analysis. High correlations between participants' Q sorts indicate that statements are sorted similarly, while by-person factor analysis identifies significant clusters of shared perspectives among participants (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Clusters of correlations between two or more Q sorts are considered shared perspectives. Different factor solutions (based on principal component factor analysis with Varimax rotation) were examined to search for the most informative factor solution for interpretation. A three-factor solution was ultimately selected, with 36 of the 38 participants loading significantly on a factor/perspective. Table 1 illustrates the factor loadings for each participant's Q sort. Two participants, N8 and C20, had a perspective that was split between different factors.

The interpretation process followed the logic of abduction by looking for plausible explanations for the identified perspectives. Attention continually moved between gaining a panoramic overview of the perspectives and how individual statements were ranked for each perspective. Distinguishing statements (underlined factor scores in Table 2) were examined, meaning significantly unique ways of placing

(footnote continued)

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Table 1
Factor matrix with X indicating that the participants' Q sort loads significantly ($p < 0.05$) on the respective perspective and that it explains more than half of the common variance.

Participants' Q Sort	Perspective 1	Perspective 2	Perspective 3
C1	0.5014	-0.0313	0.5059X
C2	0.5479X	0.0106	0.3690
C3	0.7196X	0.2387	-0.0496
C4	0.6348X	0.1023	0.2182
C5	0.5886X	-0.0459	0.3958
C6	0.8161X	0.0598	0.1868
C7	0.6452X	0.3166	0.0697
C8	0.3451	0.5802X	-0.0142
C9	0.1972	0.7220X	0.1676
C10	0.6202X	-0.0262	0.0686
C11	0.0065	-0.0001	0.3767X
C12	0.4823X	0.0341	0.1735
C13	0.5080X	0.2045	0.2050
C14	0.4660X	0.3827	0.1949
C15	0.6046X	0.3846	0.2531
C16	0.7030X	0.3376	-0.0093
C17	0.8050X	0.1278	0.0709
C18	0.6052X	0.3266	0.1540
C19	0.3283	0.5181X	0.1213
C20	0.4284	0.3016	0.4751
C21	0.6527X	0.3907	0.1434
N1	0.1286	-0.0204	0.5182X
N2	0.0980	0.1083	0.5396X
N3	0.4213	-0.0547	0.5383X
N4	0.3562	-0.0824	0.5722X
N5	0.4469	-0.0990	0.6487X
N6	0.1361	0.2901	0.6745X
N7	0.0446	0.1494	0.7303X
N8	0.5240	-0.3952	0.5782
N9	0.3979	-0.0952	0.5815X
N10	0.0298	0.4225	0.4633X
N11	-0.0073	0.3177	0.7381X
N12	-0.1031	0.3097	0.7353X
N13	0.4996X	0.2223	0.2286
N14	0.2212	0.0742	0.7011X
N15	0.3259	0.1171	0.6664X
N16	0.1109	0.2112	0.6185X
N17	0.5156	-0.0519	0.6418X
Total significant Q sorts	16	3	17

C = Chilean participant and
N = Norwegian participant.

statements for each perspective. In addition, the "crib sheet system" was used, which allows statements with a particular position within a perspective to be identified (Watts & Stenner, 2012). This system entailed identifying four categories of statements for each perspective: (1) statements ranked higher or (2) lower by one factor than by any of the other factors, and statements given the (3) highest and (4) lowest rankings on each factor. This system makes sure all perspectives are attended to in similar ways in the interpretation process (Watts & Stenner, 2012). Lastly, participants' qualitative reflections on statements during and after the Q sorting procedure were pivotal to interpreting the perspectives.

3.5. Ethics

Research ethics were secured in both countries. The QM study was declared to the Norwegian Data Protection Official of Research and it received the necessary approval (project number 49334). In Chile, a researcher at Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile was involved in securing ethical requirements as part of the FACSCK project. All participants were given written and verbal information about the project prior to participation, and all gave their written consent. Participants did not provide identifiable information about children or cases. The author was present during all Q sorts, and in Chile, a research assistant who spoke Spanish fluently was also present to safeguard ethical issues

and to prevent potential language-related misunderstandings.

4. Results

Three perspectives of children were identified in this study (Table 2). Perspective 1 was defined by the views of 15 Chilean and one Norwegian social worker, perspective 2 was defined by the views of three Chilean social workers, and perspective 3 was defined by the views of 15 Norwegian and two Chilean social workers. Correlations between perspectives are moderate, highest between perspectives 1 and 2 (0.525) and lowest between perspectives 2 and 3 (0.344), indicating some shared characteristics across perspectives. A shared characteristic is that social workers across all perspectives have an ideal of giving children the opportunity to contribute (for a complete list of consensus statements, see statements marked with * in Table 2). Notwithstanding, there are distinctive characteristics for each of the three perspectives. A description of the perspectives is presented below, with inclusion of participant quotes on the statements to add richness. The letters and numbers following the quotes are used to designate participants (e.g. C12 for Chilean participant number 12 and N11 for Norwegian participant number 11). See also how participants' Q sorts loaded on the three perspectives in Table 1.

4.1. Perspective 1: Children as relational agents

Prominent characteristics for the perspective held of children among the workers (15 Chileans and 1 Norwegian) associated with perspective 1 are that children are seen through relational and structural lenses. These workers believe children's needs are insufficiently met in family practices and at policy levels, and try to compensate for these inadequacies by giving children agency in relational child protection work.

They see children as part of a larger context, including the family, above seeing them as single individuals (1, +4 [statement number and perspective ranking in Table 2]):

Children are [in a way] inserted into a family group, into a community, into an environment. Therefore, all their characteristics, whether positive or negative, have an origin or an explanation in their environment and in their family group. Considering the child isolated, only as an individual, will not allow an effective intervention process in the long run. (C16).

This account emphasises the importance of seeing children in relation to the family, community, and environment, not only to understand children but also to perform effective child protection work

This, however, does not exclude these workers from seeing children's competence in their own right and advocating for children's agency in child protection work. They disagree with the statement that children are not sufficiently independent to make their own decisions (8, -1), and they do not think it is difficult to trust what children and youth are saying (2, -4; 17, -3). Moreover, these workers strongly disagree that many social workers talk with children out of obligation (21, -3). One worker stated,

I love what I do. [...] That is, for me it is not an obligation to talk to a child. It is part of my job, and I feel that, in addition, it allows me to improve the living conditions of the child as much as possible. The issue of contact with the child, of talking with the child, is vital. (C2)

Perspective 1 participants also place importance on communicating the child's viewpoint in *written documents* (16, +3) and letting children read what social workers write about them (25, +1). Moreover, these workers believe it is important to document all details in the case so that children, with time, get to know their own history (29, +2).

While these workers advocate for children's agency in child protection work, they do not believe children's needs are sufficiently met in family practices and at policy levels. For example, these Chilean

Table 2
Statement rankings for the three perspectives.

No.	Statements	Perspectives		
		1	2	3
1	In the child protection sector, it is first and foremost important to view the child as part of the family and not as a single individual	+4	+4	<u>-1</u>
2	It's often difficult to trust what teenagers are saying, because I'm not always sure they are telling me the truth	<u>-4</u>	<u>+2</u>	<u>-3</u>
3	Children with other ethnical-cultural backgrounds are less seen and heard in child protection practice than other children	<u>+2</u>	0	<u>-4</u>
4	I think children inherit their parents' problems	<u>+1</u>	<u>-1</u>	<u>+2</u>
5*	Children that on own initiative express their personal opinions get to participate to a greater extent than children that don't do it	+2	+1	+3
6	The worst that can happen to a child is that we separate him/her from his/her family	0	<u>+2</u>	0
7	I never trust second-hand information about how the child is doing, therefore I always talk to the child myself	0	-2	-1
8	Children are not sufficiently independent to make their own decisions	<u>-1</u>	<u>+2</u>	0
9	Frequently the social worker defines the interests and needs of the child (and not the children themselves)	0	<u>-4</u>	+1
10	There exists the danger that children's needs are not covered in certain forms dependent on the family compositions	<u>-2</u>	<u>+3</u>	<u>+1</u>
11*	I always give the child opportunity to contribute, independent of age and maturity	+4	+4	+4
12	As a social worker I think that it is more difficult to work with children in families from higher social classes than lower social classes	<u>-2</u>	0	<u>+2</u>
13	Some children receive help more easily because they appeal more to the social worker	-3	-2	<u>+2</u>
14*	It's important for me to hear the parents' story before I hear the children's story	-2	-3	-3
15*	Many social workers think it's difficult to know what to talk to the children about and how to do it	+1	-1	+1
16	It's important for me to communicate the child's point of view of the case in written documents	+3	<u>+1</u>	+4
17	It's difficult to trust what children are saying because they are manipulated by their parents	-3	-1	0
18	The child's gender plays a role for how they are talked to and involved in their own case	-1	+1	<u>-3</u>
19*	I feel less responsibility for children when they are approaching age of majority	-4	-3	-3
20*	I think physical punishment can be fine, so that the child will learn	-4	-4	-4
21	Many social workers talk to children because it is mandatory and not because it is important for the child	<u>-3</u>	<u>+3</u>	<u>-1</u>
22*	Parents decide if the child becomes visible in their own case	-1	<u>-3</u>	-2
23*	Children's challenging behaviour easily becomes dominant and prevent that I see other aspects of the child	-1	-1	-2
24	It is unethical that the child should reveal parents' problems	-3	-2	-1
25	It is important for me that the child gets to read through what I write about them in written documents	<u>+1</u>	<u>-3</u>	0
26	Our responsibility is first and foremost to make sure that children's basic needs are covered	<u>+4</u>	+1	+1
27	We quickly create an image of the child, even though we don't know the child that well	0	0	<u>+3</u>
28	It is expected that we evaluate children's needs based on standardised formats	+2	0	-1
29	It is important that we write down all details in the case so that the child with time get to know his/her own history	+2	+1	+1
30*	We have knowledge that makes us best capable of evaluating what's in the child's best interest	+1	+3	+2
31	Children don't tell because they are afraid of possible negative consequences	<u>+3</u>	0	<u>+4</u>
32	You shouldn't involve the child at all costs, the protection aspect is the most important in the end	+3	+3	0
33*	Children have a strong position in the child protection sector in comparison to the parents	0	+2	0
34	It's too much focus on talking with the child in today's child protection sector	0	<u>-2</u>	<u>-4</u>
35*	It is problematic if the parents get to know what we have talked with the child about	+1	0	0
36	The framework we work within makes it difficult to make sure that children receive good enough help/what they need	+3	<u>+4</u>	+3
37	Adults can contribute to inform about children's situation better than what the child can	-2	0	-2
38	Generally speaking, I think we have a good way to raise children in Chile/Norway	<u>-1</u>	<u>-4</u>	<u>+3</u>
39*	Often children do not want to talk to us, but we need to talk to the children even though they don't want to	0	-1	-2
	Explained variance	22%	8%	20%

Note: Underlining values signify distinguishing statement values for the specific factor at significance level $p < 0.05$. Statements marked * signify consensus statements.

workers do not see upbringing as sufficiently good (38, -1), and several societal reasons are emphasised, including the lack of focus on children's emotional needs, rigidity in gender roles, and parental absence in upbringing (for example due to long working hours), as addressed by this participant:

In general, children spend more time with their grandparents or [other] family members who are willing to give a hand, or with the nanny and other people who help the mothers, or in front of a television. But they [the children] don't spend [time] with their mother or father. (C16)

Moreover, these workers described a negligent focus on the child's point of view in upbringing, emphasised in this quote:

[...] because the child's opinion is not taken. I think we still think of the child as an adult in formation [...] I feel that even from public policy, to parenting styles, we are thinking from the adult to the child, not from the child's viewpoint]. (C3)

These examples suggest a concern for whether children's needs are sufficiently met in Chilean families and for not giving children's perspectives sufficient attention. They also address a lack of push for changes at the policy level.

Perspective 1 workers view children with other ethnic-cultural backgrounds as especially vulnerable in society. They expressed that

these children are less seen and heard relative to their native peers (3, +2). As part of this picture, participants described restrictive immigration policy and discriminative attitudes and actions as reasons for this invisibility of minority children. An example given by one worker was that school personnel close their eyes to the abuse of immigrant children.

These workers do not think the child protection system sufficiently meets children's needs (36, +3), and they lack confidence that the situation for children and youth will improve due to inadequate political initiatives:

At the integral level, SENAME, for example, is for the photo. I don't think it's real. That's what I mean. I think that from the speech, "we will integrate our children", for me it is for the speech of May 21st [the Navy Day] [...] but it does not translate into reality. (C3)

The baseline in this argument is a disbelief in that political rhetoric regarding children's rights will have an impact at the street-level, such as in child protection work.

An additional layer of concern expressed by these participants involved the expectation that they should evaluate a child's needs through standardised formats (28, +2): "Because of SENAME, all the models are standardised in the programmes, and I believe that the child is lost there. Because in the end, one child is not equal to another" (C2). These workers described incongruity between their views of children,

denoting that children are unique, and the “view” of children that is embedded in the standardised formats, denoting that children are alike.

While perspective 1 participants see their main responsibility as covering children’s *basic needs* and protecting children from harm (26, +4; 32, +3), they tend to define “basic needs” broadly. For these workers, basic needs not only include food, clothes, and housing but also the need for healthy relationships, a secure attachment, and other psychosocial needs. For example, these workers do not necessarily believe that different family forms or compositions (e.g. the “nuclear family”, a single mom or dad) play a significant role in whether children’s needs are met (10, -2):

I believe it is linked to the dynamic, to the style of parenting, to the bond, and other things than the composition. For instance, here we sometimes state that grandparents are like saviours, because at times there are no alternatives or anyone to resort to for help, and the grandparents jump into the task and meet the needs just the same. Or sometimes, a single father or a single mother meet those needs. So, it’s not about the composition. (C17)

This account underlines two important points: first, that these social workers may depend on assistance from the child’s extended family, such as grandparents, to meet children’s needs; second, that the ability to cover children’s needs is rooted deeper than the family composition and/or the number of caregivers. What seems to be highlighted here is the *quality* of parenting and the emotional bonds between children and their caregivers. As an extension to this point, these workers do not believe it is more difficult to work with children in families from higher social classes than lower social classes (12, -2). One worker explained, “The issue of violence has nothing to do with the economic condition of people. It is a transversal theme. It is a topic that has to do with the people themselves, with the subjects” (C10). This quote implies that wealth cannot buy family functioning. Yet, an interesting observation was that several workers explained that the child protection system in Chile is for “*niños de segunda categoría*” (C2) (children in poverty), with few child protection offices in the affluent regions of Santiago.

4.2. Perspective 2: Children as structurally constrained

Perspective 2 workers shares some characteristics with perspective 1 workers, particularly in that the participants understand children through relational and structural lenses. Nevertheless, this perspective sees limited space for children’s agency in child protection work due to structural restraints and a child at risk. Two of the three Chilean participants defining perspective 2 work in residential care, which may impact their perspective, as they work with children who are associated with higher levels of risk.

These participants hold a perspective emphasising the strong value of family in society and in people’s lives (1, +4); consequently, they believe family separation is the worst that can happen to a child (6, +2):

The family is the main system that we have as a person, and to be separated from it, obviously that will generate a lot of impact in the life of a child, both as a child and as an adult. (C19)

This account suggests that family separation produces a missing piece in a child that will perpetrate a child’s present and future well-being. Notwithstanding, these workers strongly disagree that Chilean upbringing is good (38, -4), and they believe that different family forms or compositions play a significant role in whether children’s needs are met (10, +3). These viewpoints may stem from experiences they have had working with children and families in residential care. At the same time, they do not think the child protection system sufficiently covers children’s needs (36, +4). One worker explained this through a lack of preventive intervention measures for children before they enter residential care and a lack of resources in the care homes to provide for children’s needs:

SENAME, which is like the base, they tell you what to do in residential care, but for example, what I see now is that they are intervening more in the reparation and treatment, and they have left something very important, which is prevention, which has to do with participation, with listening to children [...] and then the system has few resources, there is little money, people move a lot, the teams change and rotate, and that does not give much [resources] to facilities. (C8)

These views reflect a critical perspective of that children’s needs are not met in the child protective system. They raise a concern for children’s risk, which the workers argue that the child protection system is unequipped to prevent and handle adequately. The argument is that the child protection system lacks resources and preventive measures but also that frequent shifts characterise the system.

Moreover, these workers are more reluctant to let children make their own decisions (8, +2). Although they think it is important to communicate the child’s point of view in documents (16, +1), they strongly disagree that children should read what is written about them (25, -3):

Because many times they have misinterpreted the information or they tend to be ashamed of themselves—“Auntie knows that my mother was beaten” or “Auntie knows that I am the product of a violation”—and that produces shame and pain. (C9)

This quote highlights the complex act of balancing protection and agency considerations. Furthermore, a distinguishing view for these participants is that some children conceal the truth about their situation (2, +2), which may impact the workers’ reluctance to involve children in child protection work.

These participants see their primary task as protecting children, and that protection is superior to participation (32, +3). This can be understood in different ways, either that children should not be involved in child protection work because they are children or that inadequate resources lead to a need for tightly ranked priorities in child protection work, with limited space for children’s participation and involvement.

4.3. Perspective 3: Children as independent agents

The 17 workers defining perspective 3 (2 Chileans and 15 Norwegians) have characteristics in common with perspective 1 regarding giving children agency in child protection work. Nevertheless, there are contrasting characteristics among these two perspectives. In general, workers defining this perspective believe children’s needs are met in society, and they regard upbringing practices as good in general terms. Moreover, these participants underscore children’s independence, whereby children’s relations to their family and the community are less emphasised. Lastly, when these workers point to aspects that make it challenging to strengthen children’s agency, they highlight local barriers in the child protection services.

These workers strongly disagree that there is too much focus on talking with children in child protection work (34, -4), and they give high relevance to communicating the child’s viewpoint in written documents (16, +4). As one worker explained,

We have a basic idea that it is the children who should be at the centre of what we do. Indeed, because it is the child and the child’s voice and the child’s experience that is important for the way we work. (N11)

Although these participants are ambivalent or neutral (zero score) about how to balance children’s protection and participation rights (32, 0), these rights are not necessarily seen as contradictory, as this same worker argued:

I do not necessarily think it will harm a child to talk to the child welfare services. I think that it is indeed “a right” they have, by law,

that they should be able to express themselves about themselves and say something about what they need. (N11)

Here, the worker embraces the image of a *right-bearing* child and the perspective that children should be talked to because it is their legal right.

These workers believe children are given agency in society, and, as mentioned, the Norwegian workers defining this perspective generally perceive upbringing in Norway as good (38, +3): “It is about the child being the focus of the family” (N4). This type of logic was common among the Norwegian participants, and having “the child in focus” was typically translated as being in dialogue with the children, listening to their perspectives, and giving them arenas to express their opinions. Hence, having the child in focus is an ideal for these workers, which they believe is reflected in upbringing practices and child protection work. Furthermore, perspective 3 workers do not see covering children’s basic needs as their foremost task (26, +1). They underscored that most children in Norway have their physical needs met (e.g. housing, clothes, food) and that responsibility for covering these (physical) needs rests primarily on the parents. Yet, if parents are unable to cover children’s physical needs, participants said that they will help parents or connect them with other services that can. However, these workers experience that it is more challenging to work with children from families of higher social classes than with those from lower social classes (12, +2). One worker explained, “Some experience it as a bit more challenging, [particularly] when it becomes a lot of lawyers and “domination techniques” and that people try to put you out of play” (N12). They emphasised that some of these families struggle emotionally, which leads to difficulties for the children. More prominent for workers representing this view is focusing on children’s emotional needs: “it is more about the care situation” (N14). As such, perspective 3 participants tend to focus on the emotional dimension of children’s care situations.

Although workers defining this perspective may find it more difficult working with families from higher socio-economic classes, they do not experience that children are treated differently because of gender or social or ethnic-cultural background (18, -3; 3, -4). Nevertheless, unlike the views represented by perspectives 1 and 2, perspective 3 participants have experienced that they quickly create an image of who the child is, even though they do not know the child that well (27, +3). This image of the child is created, for example, “through the parent’s story, through the note of concern, through what the teachers are saying” (N7). Moreover, these workers agree with the statements that some children might receive help more readily because they *appeal* more to the social worker (13, +2). These tendencies were linked to a lack of time and resources in the child protection system to get a profound understanding of children and their situation.

Finally, these workers underscore children’s independence and think that viewing children as individuals should come before seeing them as part of the family (1, -1). This is not to say that the family is not important, as one worker described: “It is primarily important to see the child, and then see [the child] in relation to the family afterwards” (N9). Yet, one worker problematises the practice of viewing children and parents as separate, suggesting that it is more useful to view children and parents collectively:

I feel that it is a big challenge to nuance, in the child welfare context, that of thinking about the child as part of the family and this with looking together [...] to introduce the concept of “family conversation” in the child welfare context because it is absent as a term. It is “the parent conversation” and “the child conversation” that have been the concepts, before only “the parent conversation”, and now in recent years, “the child conversation”. (N1)

However, the overarching message is that perspective 3 participants, dominated by Norwegian workers, focus more consistently on the individual child and tended to make a distinction between “the

parent(s)” and “the child(ren)” in the qualitative comments. For example, several workers linked the challenges of working with families from higher socio-economic classes to the *parents* and not the *children*. This logic sits well with primarily seeing children’s independence.

There was congruity across all three perspectives in the belief that the child protection system fails to sufficiently meet children’s needs (36, +3). Notwithstanding, it became clear throughout the qualitative comments that perspective 3 participants were more inclined to translate “the child protection system” to local regulations within the child protection services that were detrimental to their work (e.g. tight deadlines, caseload, and documentation/paperwork). Perspective 1 and 2 participants, in contrast, tended to concentrate on more overarching incongruities, such as between political principles and regulations and the situation in front-line child protection work.

5. Discussion

This article has explored the perspectives of children in child protection work among social workers in Norway and Chile. Results show that, while there are similarities in how participants view children, three perspectives were identified, each representing distinct views of children. While perspectives 1 and 2 are dominated by Chilean social workers, perspective 3 is dominated by Norwegian social workers.

An overall tendency was that the Chilean social workers defining perspectives 1 and 2 are more oriented towards seeing children’s interdependence to various structures, contexts, and relationships, while the Norwegian social workers defining perspective 3 are more inclined to see children’s independence. These results resemble that of reliable research in Chile and Norway (Ellingsen et al., 2019; Oltedal & Nygren, 2019; Studsrød et al., 2018). Among other aspects, the CRC advocates for a balance between seeing the child as part of the family and as a single individual. Results from this study suggest different orientations towards these considerations among participants.

Several factors may illuminate these tendencies, such as differing cultural value systems and/or professional ideologies in Norway and Chile. Nevertheless, a likely factor is differences in welfare contexts, with divergent degrees of defamilialisation of welfare arrangements in Chile and Norway (Nygren et al., 2018). Specifically, Chile, with its extensive neoliberalism, privatisation of welfare services, and underfunded child protection system (Hogar de Cristo, 2017), makes the family a likely cooperative partner with the child protection services. This is in contrast to the comprehensiveness of the Norwegian welfare state. A broad range of service provisions for the parent(s) and child(ren) may lay grounds for a more individualistic focus on the child.

It is clear that these tendencies give children’s agency “different faces” in child protection work. Specifically, while perspective 1 and 2 workers understand children as relational and contextual beings, they contrast in terms of believing in the realism of facilitating for children’s agency in child protection work.

Perspective 1 participants seem to describe that children’s room for agency is relationship-based (Raithelhuber, 2016), made possible in local child protection work through child–social worker interactions (Morrison et al., 2019). At the same time, they describe a lack of top-down political initiative and resources being granted, for example in realising children’s rights in child protection work and family practices. This may reflect what Tisdall and Punch (2012, p. 256) call “the spatial limits on the ‘reach’ of children’s action spaces”, specifically a “thickness” for children to influence and be involved in local situations but a “thinness” at more macro levels. Given the structural barriers described by these workers, it is salient to ask whether there is adequate space for children’s feelings and wishes to lead to changes in actions and decisions being made within these child protection contexts (Morrison et al., 2019). That is, while these workers seem to work towards thickening children’s agency through child–social worker interactions at the street-level, it is difficult to know how far social workers’ discretionary powers extend (Lipsky, 2010) in terms of going beyond

children's perspectives being heard to actually having an impact on the decisions being made. The agency described by these workers may therefore be thin (Klocker, 2007) due to the lack of resources and top-down efforts to realise children's agency in practice.

Perspective 2 workers are more inclined to underscore how structures restrict their room for actions at the street-level and a reluctance towards letting children make their own decisions. According to perspective 2 workers, children are at risk due to the reactive nature of the child protection system and the underfunding of the services provided. This makes children's need for protection a primary concern for social workers. Perspective 2 workers raised several concerns regarding the ambiguities of agency (Bordonaro & Payne, 2012). Based on their accounts, vulnerability and agency are deeply entwined, and in these contexts, there are few viable options for action (Klocker, 2007). What the child thinks, feels, or wants seems to be secondary in these contexts, as neither the child nor the social worker can interpret themselves away from shortages of resources and opportunities. Here, the social worker's task may be not only to work towards alleviating risk or thickening children's agency but also to help them understand the constrained situation in which they live (Morrison et al., 2019).

Perspective 3 participants, dominated by Norwegian workers, are oriented towards seeing the independent child. These workers portray children's wishes and feelings as the primary concern in child protection work. This is not to say that they do not focus on the child's interrelationship with various contexts and individuals. Rather, these workers seem to describe a "synthesis approach" in which children and parents are seen separately and subsequently synthesised into a whole. This may point towards a humanist, individualist, and unconditioned image of children's agency (Raitelhuber, 2016), which generates a different starting point for understanding children in child protection work relative to that portrayed by perspectives 1 and 2. Concerns have been raised that Western views of children's participation undervalue inhabitants' interdependence (Raby, 2014), and it is salient to ask whether this synthesis approach enables these social workers to examine the dynamic connections and relations between the child and other significant individuals, contexts, and structures.

5.1. Conclusion and directions for future research

This study draws on data from a small sample of participants, and caution is advised when drawing conclusions. However, it is interesting that perspectives 1 and 2 predominantly are held by Chilean participants, while perspective 3 predominantly is held by Norwegian participants. Moreover, for the social workers in this study, their function in the system do not seem to be of particular relevance for their perspectives of children. The only indication that function in the system seems to matter is for residential care workers in Chile, as two of the three workers defining perspective 2 are residential care workers. While this may solely be a product of the small sample, studies have pointed towards the underfunded nature of residential care in Chile (e.g. Garcia Quiroga & Hamilton-Giachritsis, 2014).

Findings from this study may suggest two directions for future research in particular. First, whether a perspective emphasising a relational and structural child, which was reflected among Chilean social workers, and a perspective emphasising children's independence, which was reflected among Norwegian social workers, is found at more general levels. As Latin American countries are not included in research on child protection systems (e.g. Gilbert et al., 2011), such research may also extend knowledge regarding child protection orientations and how children's rights are balanced among social workers in different systems. Second, this study does not have a sufficient empirical basis for exploring the relevance of demographic variables on the perspectives, except that two of the three workers defining perspective 2 are residential care workers. A suggestion for future research is hence to include various variables (e.g. social workers' function in the child protection system, gender, age, experience level, ethnic background, and

their satisfaction with various aspects of the child protection system) to explore if and how these may be linked to social workers' perspectives of children in child protection work.

Declaration of competing interest

This work was supported by the University of Stavanger. The author reports no conflicts of interest.

Appendix A. Supplementary material

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105410>.

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Ida Bruheim Jensen is a research fellow at the University of Stavanger, Department of Social Studies. Her research is within social work and child welfare.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Ethical approval (NSD)



Ida Bruheim Jensen
Institutt for sosialfag Universitetet i Stavanger
Ullandhaug
4036 STAVANGER

Vår dato: 23.08.2016

Vår ref: 49334 / 3 / AGL

Deres dato:

Deres ref:

TILBAKEMELDING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 01.08.2016. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

49334 *Child visibility in families and child protective practices: a comparative study of social worker perspectives in Norway and Chile*
Behandlingsansvarlig *Universitetet i Stavanger, ved institusjonens øverste leder*
Daglig ansvarlig *Ida Bruheim Jensen*

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger er meldepliktig i henhold til personopplysningsloven § 31. Behandlingen tilfredsstiller kravene i personopplysningsloven.

Personvernombudets vurdering forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, ombudets kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven og helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, <http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/meldeplikt/skjema.html>. Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database, <http://pvo.nsd.no/prosjekt>.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 29.02.2020, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen

Kjersti Haugstvedt

Audun Løvlie

Kontaktperson: Audun Løvlie tlf: 55 58 23 07

Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering

Dokumentet er elektronisk produsert og godkjent ved NSDs rutiner for elektronisk godkjenning.

Personvernombudet for forskning



Prosjektvurdering - Kommentar

Prosjektnr: 49334

Utvalget informeres skriftlig om prosjektet og samtykker til deltakelse. Informasjonsskrivet er godt utformet, men vi vil anbefale at du også minner utvalget på at de selv har taushetsplikt.

Data innhentes ved personlig intervju. Vi minner om at det av hensyn til barnevernansattes taushetsplikt ikke kan fremkomme identifiserbare opplysninger om enkeltbarn eller enkeltsaker. Vi anbefaler at forsker minner informanten om dette ifm. intervjuet.

Personvernombudet legger til grunn at forsker etterfølger Universitetet i Stavanger sine regler for datasikkerhet. Dersom personopplysninger skal lagres på mobile enheter, bør opplysningene krypteres tilstrekkelig.

Om NORFACE-forskningspartnere vil ha funksjon som databehandler for prosjektet, skal Universitetet i Stavanger inngå skriftlig avtale med NORFACE-forskningspartnere om hvordan personopplysninger skal behandles, jf. personopplysningsloven § 15. For råd om hva databehandleravtalen bør inneholde, se Datatilsynets veileder: <http://www.datatilsynet.no/Sikkerhet-internkontroll/Databehandleravtale/>.

Forventet prosjektslutt er 29.02.2020. Ifølge prosjektmeldingen skal innsamlede opplysninger da anonymiseres. Anonymisering innebærer å bearbeide datamaterialet slik at ingen enkeltpersoner kan gjenkjennes. Det gjøres ved å:

- slette direkte personopplysninger (som navn/koblingsnøkkel)
- slette/omskrive indirekte personopplysninger (identifiserende sammenstilling av bakgrunnsopplysninger som f.eks. bosted/arbeidssted, alder og kjønn)
- slette lydopptak

Vi gjør oppmerksom på at også databehandler (NORFACE) må slette personopplysninger tilknyttet prosjektet i sine systemer. Dette inkluderer eventuelle logger og koblinger mellom IP-/epostadresser og besvarelser.

Appendix 2 – Q Sample

No.	Norwegian	Spanish	English
1	I barnevernssektoren er det først og fremst viktig å se barnet som en del av familien og ikke som et enkeltindivid	En el sector de protección de la infancia es ante todo importante considerar el niño/la niña como parte de la familia, y no como un solo individuo	In the child protection sector, it is first and foremost important to view the child as part of the family and not as a single individual
2	Det er ofte vanskelig å stole på det ungdom sier, fordi jeg ikke alltid er sikker på at de snakker sant	Muchas veces es difícil confiar en lo que dicen los jóvenes, porque no estoy seguro/a si me dicen la verdad	It's often difficult to trust what teenagers are saying, because I'm not always sure they are telling me the truth
3	Barn med annen etnisk-kulturell bakgrunn blir i mindre grad sett og hørt i det barnevernsfaglige arbeidet enn andre barn	Niños/as de un origen diferente étnico-cultural llegan a ser menos vistos y escuchados en el trabajo de protección de la infancia que otros/as niños/as	Children with other ethnical-cultural backgrounds are less seen and heard in child protection practice than other children
4	Jeg tenker barnet arver foreldrenes problemer	Yo pienso que el niño/la niña hereda los problemas de sus padres	I think children inherit their parents' problems
5	Barn som på eget initiativ uttrykker sine personlige meninger får delta i større grad enn barn som ikke gjør det	Los niños /las niñas que por propia iniciativa expresan sus opiniones personales, pueden participar aun más que los niños/las niñas que no lo hacen	Children that on own initiative express their personal opinions get to participate to a greater extent than children that don't do it
6	Det verste som kan skje med et barn er at vi skiller barnet fra sin familie	Lo peor que le puede pasar a un niño/una niña es que lo/la apartemos de su familia	The worst that can happen to a child is that we separate him/her from his/her family
7	Jeg stoler aldri på andrehåndsinformasjon om hvordan barnet har det, derfor vil jeg snakke med barnet selv	Nunca confío en la información de segunda mano cuando se trata del bienestar del niño/la niña, por eso quiero hablarle yo mismo	I never trust second-hand information about how the child is doing, therefore I always talk to the child myself
8	Barn er ikke selvstendige nok til å ta egne beslutninger	Los niños/las niñas no son lo suficientemente independientes para tomar sus propias decisiones	Children are not sufficiently independent to make their own decisions
9	Ofte er det sosialarbeideren som definerer barnets interesser og behov (og ikke barna selv)	Frecuentemente el trabajador/a social define los intereses y las necesidades del niño/de la niña (en lugar del niño/de la niña)	Frequently the social worker defines the interests and needs of the child (and not the children themselves)
10	Det er fare for at barns behov ikke blir dekket på visse måter avhengig av familiesammensetningen	Existe el peligro de que las necesidades de los niños/las niñas no se cubren en ciertas formas dependiendo de la composición de la familia	There exists the danger that children's needs are not covered in certain forms dependent on the family compositions
11	Jeg gir alltid barn mulighet til å bidra, uavhengig av alder og modenhet	Siempre les doy a los niños/las niñas la oportunidad de contribuir, independientemente de su edad y madurez	I always give the child opportunity to contribute, independent of age and maturity
12	Sosialarbeider synes jeg det er vanskeligere å jobbe med barn i familier fra høyere sosiale klasser enn lavere sosiale klasser	Como trabajador/a social opino que es más difícil trabajar con niños/niñas de familias de clase social más alta que clase social más baja	As a social worker I think that it is more difficult to work with children in families from higher social classes than lower social classes
13	Noen barn motlar lettere hjelp fordi de appellerer mer til sosialarbeideren	Algunos/as niños/niñas reciben ayuda más fácil porque apelan más al trabajador/a la trabajadora social	Some children receive help more easily because they appeal more to the social worker

No.	Norwegian	Spanish	English
14	Det er viktig for meg å høre foreldrene sin historie for jeg hører barnas historie	Es importante para mí escuchar la historia de los padres antes que la historia de los niños/las niñas	It's important for me to hear the parents' story before I hear the children's story
15	Mange sosialarbeidere synes det er vanskelig å vite hva de skal snakke med barn om og hvordan de skal gjøre det	Muchos/as trabajadores/as sociales opinan que es difícil saber de qué hablar con los niños/las niñas y saber cómo hacerlo	Many social workers think it's difficult to know what to talk to the children about and how to do it
16	Det er viktig for meg å få frem barnets syn på saken i skriftlige dokumenter	Es importante para mí fomentar el punto de vista del niño/la niña en los documentos escritos	It's important for me to communicate the child's point of view of the case in written documents
17	Det er vanskelig å stole på det barn sier fordi de blir manipulert av foreldrene sine	Es difícil confiar en lo que dicen los niños/las niñas porque son manipulados por sus padres	It's difficult to trust what children are saying because they are manipulated by their parents
18	Barnets kjønn spiller en rolle for hvordan de blir snakket med og involvert i egen sak	El género del niño/la niña tiene algo que ver en cuestiones de cómo se le habla y como se le involucra en su propio caso	The child's gender plays a role for how they are talked to and involved in their own case
19	Jeg føler mindre ansvar for barn etter hvert som de nærmer seg myndighetsalder	Siento menos responsabilidad de los niños/las niñas cuando se acercan a la mayoría de edad	I feel less responsibility for children when they are approaching age of majority
20	Jeg synes det kan være greit med fysisk avstraffelse av barn, da vil barnet lære	Opino que el uso del castigo corporal de los niños/las niñas puede ser bueno, así el niño/la niña aprenderá	I think physical punishment can be fine, so that the child will learn
21	Mange sosialarbeidere snakker med barn fordi det er påkrevd, og ikke fordi det er viktig for barnet	Muchos/as trabajadores/as sociales hablan con los niños/las niñas porque es obligatorio, y no porque sea importante para el niño/la niña	Many social workers talk to children because it is mandatory and not because it is important for the child
22	Foreldrene avgjør om barnet blir synlig i egen sak	Los padres deciden si su hijo/a es visible en su propio caso	Parents decide if the child becomes visible in their own case
23	Ulfordrende atferd hos barn blir lett dominerende og hindrer at jeg ser andre aspekter ved barnet	La conducta desafiante de los niños/las niñas fácilmente llega a ser dominante, y evita que vea otros aspectos del niño/la niña	Children's challenging behavior easily becomes dominant and prevent that I see other aspects of the child
24	Det er uetisk at barna skal utlevere foreldrenes problemer	No es ético que los niños/las niñas tengan que revelar los problemas de sus padres	It is unethical that the child should extradite parents' problems
25	Det er viktig for meg at barnet får lese gjennom det jeg skriver om dem i skriftlige dokumenter	Es importante para mí que el niño/la niña puedan leer lo que escribo sobre él/ella en los documentos escritos	It is important for me that the child gets to read through what I write about them in written documents
26	Vårt ansvar er først og fremst å sørge for at barns primære behov blir dekket	Nuestra responsabilidad ante todo es asegurar que se cubran las necesidades básicas de los niños/las niñas	Our responsibility is first and foremost to make sure that children's basic needs are covered
27	Vi danner oss fort et bilde av barnet, selv om vi ikke nødvendigvis kjenner barnet så godt	Creamos rápidamente una imagen del niño/la niña, aunque no necesariamente lo/la conocemos tan bien	We quickly create an image of the child, even though we don't know the child that well
28	Det er forventet at vi vurderer barns behov ut fra standardiserte formater	Esta previsto que consideramos las necesidades de los niños/las niñas a través de formatos estandarizados	It is expected that we evaluate children's needs based on standardized formats

No.	Norwegian	Spanish	English
29	Det er viktig at vi skriver ned alle detaljer i saken slik at barnet på sikt kan få kjennskap til sin historie	Es importante que anotemos todos los detalles del caso para que el niño/la niña con tiempo pueda llegar a conocer su propia historia	It is important that we write down all details in the case so that the child with time can get to know his/her own history
30	Vi har kunnskap som gjør oss best i stand til å vurdere hva som er til det beste for barnet	Tenemos conocimiento de que nos hace más capaces de evaluar lo que será mejor para el niño/la niña	We have knowledge that makes us best capable of evaluating what's in the child's best interest
31	Barn utelater å fortelle fordi de er redde for mulige negative konsekvenser	Los niños/las niñas evitan contar porque tienen miedo de posibles consecuencias negativas	Children don't tell because they are afraid of possible negative consequences
32	En skal ikke involvere barnet for enhver pris, beskyttelsesaspektet er det viktigste når alt kommer til alt	No se debe involucrar al niño/la niña a cualquier costo, el aspecto de protección es lo más importante al final	You shouldn't involve the child at all costs, the protection aspect is the most important in the end
33	Barnet har en sterk posisjon i barnevernssektoren sammenlignet med foreldre	El niño/la niña tiene una posición fuerte en el sector de protección de la infancia, en comparación de los padres	Children have a strong position in the child protection sector in comparison to the parents
34	Det er for mye fokus på å snakke med barnet i dagens barnevernssektor	Hay demasiado enfoque en hablar con el niño/la niña en el sector de la protección de la infancia de hoy	It's too much focus on talking with the child in today's child protection sector
35	Det er problematisk dersom foreldre får vite hva vi har snakket med barnet om	Es problemático si los padres llegan a saber de lo que hemos hablado con el niño/la niña	It is problematic if the parents get to know what we have talked with the child about
36	Rammene vi jobber innenfor gjør det vanskelig å sørge for at barn mottar god nok hjelp/det de har behov for	Trabajamos dentro de estructuras que dificultan la aseguración que los niños/las niñas reciben la ayuda adecuada/ que necesitan	The framework we work within makes it difficult to make sure that children receive good enough help/what they need
37	Voksne kan bidra med å informere om barnets situasjon bedre enn hva barn kan	Los adultos/las adultas pueden contribuir a informar sobre la situación del niño/de la niña mejor que el/ella mismo/a	Adults can contribute to inform about children's situation better than what the child can
38	Generelt sett tenker jeg at vi i Norge har en god måte å oppdra barn på	Hablando en general, pienso que nosotros/as en Chile tenemos una buena manera de criar a los niños/las niñas	Generally speaking, I think we have a good way to raise children in Norway/Chile
39	Ofte er det slik at barn ikke ønsker å snakke med oss, men vi må snakke med barnet selv om de ikke vil	Muchas veces los niños/las niñas no quieren hablar con nosotros/as, pero tenemos que hablarle, aunque no quiera	Often children do not want to talk to us, but we need to talk to the children even though they don't want to

Appendix 3 – Letter of invitation

Vil du delta et i forskningsprosjekt om barns synlighet i barnevernsfeltet?

Barns rettigheter har fått økt fokus de siste tiårene og FNs barnekonvensjon fra 1989 veklegger barns rett til deltakelse, beskyttelse og ressurser. I dag har de aller fleste land i verden godkjent barnekonvensjonen. Likevel kan konvensjonen praktiseres og forstås ulikt i ulike land.

I dette forskningsprosjektet undersøker jeg hvordan sosialarbeidere i Chile og Norge opplever at barn er synlige i barnevernsfeltet. Fra mars til juni 2017 gjennomførte jeg studien i Chile, hvor jeg var tilknyttet Pontificia Universidad Católica i Santiago. Fra desember 2017 gjennomføres samme studie i Norge, og sosialarbeidere i barnevernsfeltet i Oslo-området er valgt ut for prosjektet. Din deltakelse er viktig, fordi dine refleksjoner kan gi kunnskap om barns synlighet i den barnevernsmiljøet du jobber.

Hva ønsker jeg at du skal gjøre?

Basert på refleksjoner fra sosialarbeidere i Norge og Chile har jeg utarbeidet 39 kort med setninger som sier noe om barns synlighet i barnevernsfeltet. Det er denne delen av studien jeg vil invitere deg med på. Jeg ønsker at du sorterer disse kortene inn i et skjema ut fra hvordan utsagnene samsvarer med ditt synspunkt og erfaringer som sosialarbeider i barnevernsfeltet.

Et kort kan se slik ut:

I barnevernsfeltet er det først og fremst viktig å se barnet som en del av familien og ikke som et enkeltindivid

Et annet kort kan se slik ut:

Det verste som kan skje med et barn er at vi skiller barnet fra sin familie

Noen av setningene vil du være enig i, og andre setninger vil ikke stemme overens med hvordan du opplever det. Du vil bli bedt om å sortere hver setning ut fra hva som stemmer veldig godt, mindre godt og hva som ikke stemmer med din opplevelse/erfaring i det hele tatt. Jeg vil være tilgjengelig når du sorterer kortene, slik at du kan spørre dersom noe er uklart.

I tillegg vil jeg be deg om å gi noen korte bakgrunnsopplysninger om hva dine ansvarsområder er i nåværende jobb, utdanning, alder osv. Det vil ta ca. en time å delta og du bestemmer selv om du vil møte meg på din arbeidsplass eller på et møterom ved Norsk institutt for forskning om oppvekst, velferd og aldring (NOVA). Møtet med deg vil bli tatt opp med båndopptaker, da jeg er interessert i å høre dine refleksjoner, og hvorfor du har plassert kortene slik du har. Etter at båndopptakene er skrevet ned ord for ord og anonymisert, vil lydfilene bli slettet.

Hva skjer med informasjonen om deg?

Det er frivillig å delta, og du kan når som helst trekke

deg uten å oppgi grunn. Prosjektet avsluttes 29.02.2020, og da vil alt innsamlet datamateriale være anonymisert. Jeg har **taushetsplikt**, og vil behandle alle opplysninger konfidensielt. Prosjektet vil resultere i en doktorgradsavhandling ved Universitetet i Stavanger og artikler, samt at jeg vil fortelle om resultatene på aktuelle konferanser og seminarer.

Jeg har fått tilråding fra Norsk senter for forskningsdata (NSD) til behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Jeg håper du synes dette kan være et spennende forskningsprosjekt å være med på. Dersom du ønsker å delta, kan du svare meg direkte på e-mail eller telefon så tar jeg kontakt med deg (e-mail: ida.b.jensen@uis.no, tlf. +47 959 94 743).

Hvem er jeg som forsker på dette?

Jeg jobber til daglig ved Universitetet i Stavanger. Der skriver jeg en doktorgrad på temaet «barns synlighet i barnevernsfeltet». Jeg brenner for å sikre gode velferdstjenester for utsatte barn, unge og deres familier. Fra tidligere har jeg master i psykologi. Jeg har jobbet på barnehjem i Bolivia og har flere års arbeids erfaring innenfor psykiatri. Jeg har også studert et semester Spansk i Buenos Aires.

Har du spørsmål, eller ønsker å bli informert om resultatene fra studien når de foreligger, ta gjerne kontakt med meg.



Dette forskningsprosjektet er tilknyttet det
internasjonale 'Welfare State Future' prosjektet-
Family Complexity and Social Work (FACSK)

Kontaktinformasjon:

Ida Bruheim Jensen



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¿Quiere usted participar en un proyecto de investigación sobre cómo se hace visible el niño/la niña en el sector de protección de la infancia?

El enfoque de los derechos del niño ha crecido los últimos diez años, y a través de la Convención sobre el Derecho del Niño, de 1989, se enfatiza que el niño/la niña tiene derecho de participación, protección y recursos. Hoy la mayoría de los países han ratificado la Convención sobre el Derecho del Niño, sin embargo, podría ser practicada de formas diferentes dependiendo del país.

En este proyecto investigaré como trabajadores sociales en Chile y Noruega perciben la visibilidad de los niños/las niñas en el sector de protección de la infancia. De marzo a junio 2017 realizaré el estudio en Chile, donde estoy afiliada a Pontificia Universidad Católica (UC). El otoño de este año, el mismo estudio será realizado en Noruega, con trabajadores/as sociales noruegos. Su participación es importante ya que sus reflexiones podrían dar conocimiento sobre la visibilidad de los niños/las niñas en el contexto profesional donde usted trabaja.

¿Qué tendría que hacer usted?

Basado en explicaciones y pensamientos sobre la visibilidad de los niños/las niñas de trabajadores/as sociales chilenos/as y noruegos/as, he elaborado varias afirmaciones que formarán la parte del estudio donde me gustaría invitarle a participar. Le daré 39 cartas que dicen algo sobre la visibilidad de los niños/las niñas en el sector de protección de la infancia. Usted tendría que ordenar

estas cartas en un esquema, de acuerdo con su opinión y experiencias como trabajadora social en el sector de protección de la infancia.

Una carta puede ser así:

Siempre les doy a los niños/las niñas la oportunidad de contribuir, independientemente de su edad y madurez.

Otra carta puede ser así:

Lo peor que le puede pasar a un niño/una niña es que lo/la apartemos de su familia

Usted estará de acuerdo con algunas de las frases, y algunas no corresponderán con sus experiencias y su opinión. Le pediré que usted ordene cada frase dependiendo de lo que es exacto, menos exacto y lo que no es exacto con sus experiencias/opinión. Yo estaré presente cuando usted organice las cartas para que me pueda preguntar si algo no le quede claro.

Adicionalmente le pediré información sobre el área de responsabilidad que usted tiene en su trabajo actual, educación, edad etc. La participación durará alrededor de una hora, y usted mismo decide si quiere que nos veamos en su oficina de trabajo o en mi oficina en la UC. El encuentro será grabado. Será interesante para mí conocer sus reflexiones sobre las afirmaciones y también y la forma de cómo usted ha llegado a ordenar las cartas. La grabación será borrada después de haber sido utilizada para su transcripción.

¿Qué pasará con su información?

Participar es voluntario, y si usted gusta, puede retirarse sin dar explicaciones. Se finalizará el proyecto el 29.02.2020, y por lo tanto toda la recopilación de datos será anónima. Toda la información recopilada será confidencial resguardando el secreto profesional de esta práctica. El proyecto resultará en una tesis doctoral por parte de la Universidad de Stavanger (Noruega) y artículos, además el resultado será parte de pláticas que daré en conferencias y seminarios. El estudio está éticamente aprobado por Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) [responsable de la gestión de datos para el sector de la investigación en Noruega].

Espero que le interese participar en este proyecto de investigación. Por su participación, usted recibirá **10.000 CLP** en gratitud. Si usted quiere participar, puede mandar su respuesta directamente a mi correo electrónico, teléfono o mandarme un SMS/WhatsApp, y así nos pondremos en contacto (la información de contacto está atrás).

¿Quién soy yo?

Yo trabajo en la Universidad de Stavanger en Noruega donde estoy haciendo una tesis doctoral con el tema de "la visibilidad de niños en el sector de la protección de la infancia". Mi pasión es asegurar servicios de bienestar para los niños, niñas, adolescentes y familias enfrentando situaciones complejas. Tengo una maestría en psicología, y también he estudiado español un semestre en Buenos Aires. He trabajado en un hogar de niñas en Bolivia y tengo varios años de experiencia laboral en el área de psiquiatría.



Este proyecto de investigación forma parte del
proyecto de investigación internacional
"Complejidad familiar y Trabajo Social"
(FACSK)

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