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Equality and quality for all? - Young people in child protection

Safe and supporting childhood has a significant impact on individual's wellbeing in the future. In Finland, an ongoing national reform on social and health services is targeted especially on strengthening the capacity of services to provide timely and evidence-based support for families with children. This orientation towards preventive measures is warmly welcomed. Despite these efforts, there continues to be a substantial need for child protection in the Finnish society. The amount of children receiving child protection has increased for the past two decades, and the growth has been particularly high among the young people.

Reasons for the need of child welfare are diverse, but usually these children face various simultaneous challenges in their every-day life. Difficult family circumstances are interlinked with the child's disruptive behavior. Compared with peers, children placed in out-of-home care are more likely to enter adverse life trajectories, and these risks are highest for those who were taken into care as teenagers.

The experiences of young people on child protection services indicate that the service system is often incapable to meet their needs. These negative experiences accumulate with childhood neglect, and cause insecurity and mistrust on others. The stigma associated with the background in child protection deepens the marginal position of these young people. Some of them take an active stance in resisting these victimizing outcomes and positions.

In this presentation, research results from both quantitative and qualitative national and international research projects are presented in order to discuss, how we could improve the quality of child protection with young people.

Dr. Elina Pekkarinen works as a research manager in Finnish Youth Research Network. She is a social worker in her background, and her research interests include child welfare, youth crime, and issues of marginalization. She serves as a child welfare expert in the Administrative Court of Helsinki, and she is the president of the Finnish Society for Childhood Studies.