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Rethinking child protection: child participation and child welfare

This study argues for a shift of perspective in securing protection for vulnerable children. It examines the impact of vulnerable children's participation on the protection and provision offered to them by the social services in Sweden. It applies a theoretical framework for analyzing child welfare that is fully anchored in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. How child participation may affect child protection and provision is examined empirically using case documentation from 2 municipalities. The main finding is that when children are not given voice or opportunity to influence the framing of what "the problem" is, the design of protection and care tends to be poorly matched to the actual problems documented in the child investigation and vice versa; when children can influence framing, this is associated with well-matched protection and care. This suggests that traditional child welfare ethos, to the effect that protection should be of such overriding concern that children even should be protected from participation, is misguided. The study further illustrates the intrinsic problems with the family orientation of Swedish social services and its reliance on partnership with parents, which makes it difficult to live up to the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Prior to the incorporation of the Convention in Swedish legislation, the results of this study speaks for a shift of perspective to a child focused orientation with children's participatory rights in the forefront.

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