



The police, social services and psychiatry cooperation in Denmark—A new model of working practice between governmental sectors. A description of the concept, process, practice and experience



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ABSTRACT

In 2004 a new model of working practice between three public sectors, the local Police Department, Social Services and Psychiatry/Mental Health Services (PSP) was introduced in the municipality of Frederiksberg, Denmark. The aim of this cooperation was to enhance support to vulnerable citizens, who do not belong solely to one of the three sectors and thereby often get lost in the system. The PSP cooperation was introduced to ensure that relevant information concerning vulnerable citizens was shared between the three sectors and to improve collaboration between the sectors involved in order to provide the needed support to the individual citizen. Due to the success of the PSP cooperation in Frederiksberg, the PSP model was implemented by law in Denmark in 2009.

In order to evaluate the model, a qualitative study based on structured interviews, focus group discussions and observations, was performed in four selected municipalities in Denmark: Frederiksberg, Odense, Amager and Esbjerg. The evaluation was undertaken by the Danish National Centre for Social Research.

It is concluded that the PSP cooperation draws attention to marginalized groups of citizens and helps to prevent social downfall and crime. Participants of the PSP cooperations further highlight positive changes in the cooperation between the involved sectors, which is thought to further improve the support to vulnerable citizens and thereby enhance both prevention and follow up of cases. Furthermore, the recommendations drawn from the evaluation are to adapt PSP cooperations to local conditions, avoid unnecessary red-tape, keep a constant focus on citizens' ethics, as well as involve the frontline workers in the individual sectors, i.e. those who are actually in contact with marginalized citizens.

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1. Introduction

Cooperation between the police, social services and psychiatry is an important part of the daily work of these sectors in most countries, but usually the cooperation is only between two of the sectors at a time. For instance, the cooperation between psychiatry and social services covers social psychiatry, patients' children, rehabilitation of patients and social welfare pensions, whereas the cooperation between psychiatry and police covers involuntary commitments, forensic patients, searches for missing patients and help in handling dangerous situations in the hospital wards. Finally, the cooperation between police and social service has

the main purpose to ensure that the police pass relevant information about marginalized citizens, adults as well as children at risk, to the social authorities.

Traditionally, in Denmark, no formal cooperation has existed between the three sectors, until the onset of the PSP cooperation. In 2004 the three sectors in the municipality of Frederiksberg, in the greater Copenhagen area with 90,000 inhabitants, decided to intensify their cooperation in order to ensure that relevant information concerning citizens at risk was shared and to enhance the cooperation between the three sectors with the purpose of enhancing support to citizens at risk. A new cooperation model was developed, namely the PSP cooperation, which is a working practice between the local Police Department, Social Services, and Psychiatry/Mental Health Services.

The PSP cooperation was scaled up by the Danish authorities to a national level as it was implemented by law throughout Denmark on 1 April 2009 (Anonymous, 2009a).

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In order to evaluate the PSP model a study was conducted by the Danish National Centre for Social Research, with the aim of collecting and disseminating experiences from the implementation of the PSP model in four Danish municipalities. A further aim of the evaluation was to define a number of recommendations for future implementation of the PSP model in other Danish municipalities (Vitus & Kjær, 2011).

This paper contains a description of the new model of working practice between the local Police Department, Social Services, and Psychiatry/Mental Health Services (PSP), a presentation of the results of the evaluation of the model and recommendations for future PSP cooperations.

2. Material and methods

The material and methods section contains a description of the PSP model as well as a description of the evaluation of the model.

2.1. The PSP model—aims and setup

The PSP cooperation was primarily initiated by the police force in the municipality of Frederiksberg in 2004, which had identified the need of a specific tool to handle citizens in particularly vulnerable situations. The aim of the PSP model was to prevent citizens, who due to substance abuse, psychiatric disorders or other social problems are in a situation whereby they do not get the needed assistance because they do not solely belong to one of the three sectors and thereby get lost in the system. The expected outcome of the cooperation was related to both the citizens and the internal collaboration between the involved sectors. The expected outcomes for the citizens were prevention of social disruption and crime, as well as better assistance for vulnerable citizens from all three sectors, whereas the expected outcomes for the internal collaboration between the sectors were better coordination, feedback and multidisciplinary exchange of experience. In addition, these outcomes were expected to be interrelated in such way that internal workflow improvements within the sectors was expected also to improve interventions and thereby improve prevention as well as assistance for citizens (Kongsrud, Sestoft, & Rasmussen, 2008).

The PSP cooperation is formally organized on two levels; a managerial level and an operational level as shown in Fig. 1.

The managerial level is composed of one representative at management level from each of the three sectors and the operational level is composed of one representative at mid-level from each of the three sectors as well as a coordinator, who is also a member of the managerial group. The tasks of the managerial group are primarily to define the

overall framework for the PSP cooperation. In addition, the managerial group is also responsible for skill development of the members of the operational group by arranging seminars and training sessions. The managerial group meets once every quarter, or more if it is found necessary. The tasks of the operational group are to initiate the actual casework and coordinate the actions between the involved sectors. The operational group meets once every month and in order to ensure continuity and commitment; attendance is compulsory at these meetings. Minutes are taken at every operational group meeting with the aim of ensuring follow-up on cases and responsibilities from previous meetings. All casework is placed at the relevant sector and treated within their normal procedures.

The coordinator ensures communication between the two levels of organization. Execution of the cooperation has a third level, namely the frontline workers, who play a significant role in the cooperation; they identify and follow up on PSP cases and contribute crucial information from their direct contact with citizens.

In order to maintain a flexible organization, the cooperation operates as a cross-sector entity which can coordinate interventions and act on existing interventions within the three sectors, rather than as a separate bureaucratic body with its own registration system.

The most important task for the PSP cooperation is to coordinate the information about vulnerable citizens and their situation in order to designate the most appropriate sector to deal with the citizen's issues. PSP casework is thereafter to place action responsibility with one sector, which will then complete the actions and activities within the general legislative and operational frameworks. The PSP casework is through the operational group meeting and through cross-sector co-operative activities external to the operational group meeting carried out by frontline employees.

The change of culture towards stronger collaboration across the sectors facilitates a broader circle of involved sectors with preventative actions for the citizens on one side, and a greater need for continued ethical considerations on how to protect the citizen's privacy in practice on the other. Practice regarding professional confidentiality has been subject to great debate. The amendments to the Judicial Code (Anonymous, 2009a) and to the Administration of Justice Act and the Processing of Personal data Act (Anonymous, 2009b) in 2009 have eased the exchange of information between sectors.

2.2. Evaluation of the PSP model

The evaluation of the PSP model consisted of two qualitative studies undertaken in the period from 2008 to 2010. The first study, which was

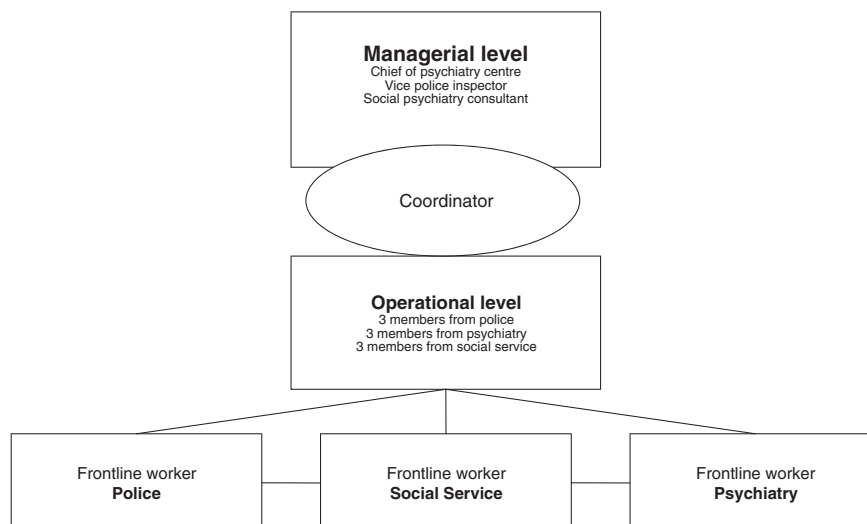


Fig. 1. Organization of the PSP cooperation in Frederiksberg.

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