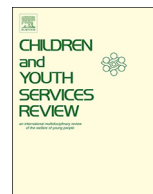




ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

# Children and Youth Services Review

journal homepage: [www.elsevier.com/locate/childyouth](http://www.elsevier.com/locate/childyouth)

## Precarious participation: Exploring ethnic minority youth's narratives about out-of-home placement in Norway

Marte Knag Fylkesnes<sup>a,\*</sup>, Julie Taylor<sup>b</sup>, Anette Christine Iversen<sup>a</sup><sup>a</sup> University of Bergen, Department of Health Promotion and Development, Christiesgate 13, 5020 Bergen, Norway<sup>b</sup> School of Nursing, University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham B15 2TT, United Kingdom

## ARTICLE INFO

## Keywords:

Child welfare services  
Youth  
Participation  
Ethnic minority  
Out-of-home placement

## ABSTRACT

Children's right to express their views and influence decisions that affect their lives is a strong legal and moral value in social work and beyond. What participation entails and how children's right to participate can be ensured in different contexts is, however, richly debated. In this study, we critically explore the narratives of six youth with ethnic minority backgrounds who had experienced out-of-home placements in Norway. We were interested in how youth narrated their agency (motives and strategies) as well as how structural arrangements enabled and limited their participation, before and during placement. Nancy Fraser's conceptualization of parity in participation and social justice directed our gaze towards the interplay between normative and economic structures in the child welfare service (CWS) context. We identified a pattern along three narrative themes: a) narrating participation, b) narrating ambiguous participation and c) narrating non-participation. The analysis unpacked how informants negotiated both normative and economic structures encountering CWS. Successful negotiation entailed constructing a credible story through striking a balance between maturity and vulnerability and thus performing as "a competent child". Subsequently, informants who did not succeed in articulating their experiences and wishes in a credible way risked being marginalized as participants. Participation in decision-making during placement was constructed as particularly precarious. Embedded cultural ideas of how "a competent child" should perform could be at odds with informants' identities. Ethnic minority youth might therefore struggle particularly hard to make themselves accountable within the normative structures of CWS. Youth participation also hinged on adults' ability and willingness to listen, and to take into account as well as act upon youths' concerns. However, case trajectories, bureaucratic characterizations and limited resources could hamper both the continuity and quality of such relationships. A key implication is an urgent need for theory and practice models that allow for how social categories such as ethnicity influence youth's participatory opportunities.

### 1. Introduction

In child welfare and child protection services, children's participation is often perceived as a challenging goal to achieve (ten Brummelaar, Harder, Kalverboer, Post, & Knorth, 2017; Vis, Strandbu, Holtan, & Thomas, 2011). On the one hand research has shown that social workers across Western countries acknowledge the importance of hearing children, building trust to ensure effective communication (Archard & Skivenes, 2009) as well as involving children in decision-making processes (Berrick, Dickens, Pösö, & Skivenes, 2015). On the other hand, a recent critical literature review by van Bijleveld, Dedding, and Bunders-Aelen (2015) indicates that participation does not happen often enough in practice, from the perspectives of both children and social workers. Research furthermore indicates that children involved

in out-of-home placements are the least likely to be involved in decision-making processes affecting them (van Bijleveld et al., 2015).

To our knowledge, very few studies have investigated ethnic minority youth's experiences of child welfare service (CWS) during out-of-home care (Graham, 2007). In this article, we therefore critically explore CWS in Norway as a context of children's participation from the perspective of ethnic minority youth who have experienced out-of-home placements.

#### 1.1. Children's participation in CWS

A myriad of studies have researched children's positions in social work institutions, including how professionals address their perspectives and wishes. Several facilitators and subsequent barriers to

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: [Marte.Fylkesnes@uni.no](mailto:Marte.Fylkesnes@uni.no) (M.K. Fylkesnes), [j.taylor.1@bham.ac.uk](mailto:j.taylor.1@bham.ac.uk) (J. Taylor), [Anette.Iversen@uib.no](mailto:Anette.Iversen@uib.no) (A.C. Iversen).

children's participation have been identified within CWS. First, participation has been found to hinge on trusting relationships with professionals and a climate promoting information sharing (Archard & Skivenes, 2009; McLeod, 2010). Such relationships are challenging to achieve within a CWS context, as scarce resources, case procedures, staff turnover as well as parents' negative attitudes are (some) factors that hamper building trust over time (Dillon, Greenop, & Hills, 2015; McLeod, 2007). Second, social workers have been found to differ in their perspectives on what participation entails and even might be ignorant as to how participation can be achieved (Archard & Skivenes, 2009; van Bijleveld et al., 2015). Third, as Holland (2001) pinpointed, social workers often struggle to decide what weight to put on children's views as well as children's ability to know what is in their best interest. A dilemma emerges as children also have a right to protection and social workers therefore must assess whether including children and weighing their views is in their best interest. Scholars have nonetheless argued that challenges stem from prevailing vulnerability discourses that silence children's experiences, rationalities and competencies (Lee, 1999; Leeson, 2007; Warming, 2013). In line with this, there is little evidence that children's views determine decision-making outcomes in CWS, unless these views coincide with the social worker's assessment and opinion (van Bijleveld et al., 2015; Vis et al., 2011).

In Norway, the welfare state has set ambitious goals when it comes to children's wellbeing and participation in society. Skivenes (2014) has characterized Norwegian CWS as family oriented and child-centred, as cooperation and children's rights are emphasized in legislation and practice regulations. We apply the concept *child welfare services* with reference to services coordinated by local municipalities, regulated through the Norwegian *Child Welfare Act (1992)*. Services entail both preventive in-home services to support vulnerable families (for example parent counselling, inter-agency teams) as well as out-of-home placement to protect children who are subject to neglect or maltreatment (for example foster homes, institutional care or independent living arrangements). The three main paths to out-of-home placement are a) voluntary placement based on parents' consent, b) a care order prepared by the agency and submitted to the county board and c) emergency placement issued by the agency when a child is in immediate risk of severe harm (Skivenes & Søvig, 2016). Concerning participation, the *Child Welfare Act* establishes that children must "be informed and given the opportunity to articulate a response before a decision impacting him or her is made" (*Child Welfare Act, 1992, §6-3*). A recent government regulation defines participation as a "process that must be carried out during the whole course of the child welfare case" (*Participation and Person of Trust Regulation, 2014, §5*). Facilitating children's participation should therefore be integral to decision-making processes, prior to and during placement. However, few standardized procedures have been put in place with regards to when and how children should participate. Archard and Skivenes (2009) found that Norwegian social workers acknowledge and value children's right to participate. Research nonetheless indicates that children struggle to be taken into account in out-of-home decision-making (see for example Magnussen & Skivenes, 2015; Paulsen, 2016).

We apply the concepts *children* and *youth* interchangeably as we draw on insights from a wide range of research investigating the participation of people defined as "not yet adult". Referring to our informants we use the term *youth* to stress that age is of relevance when discussing these issues (Berrick et al., 2015). Subsequently we do not aim to highlight the specific challenges that participation for very young children might encompass, but argue nonetheless that our analysis is of broad relevance.

## 1.2. Conceptualizing children's participation

Children's participation has been conceptualized in different ways; from Hart's (1992) ladder of participation, through Shier's (2001) pathways, to Archard and Skivenes (2009) deliberative model. We are

theoretically informed by Fraser (2009) who perceived equal opportunities (parity) in participation to hinge on institutional arrangements that ensure all participants' voice in social interaction. Imparity and subsequent social injustices stem from normative, economic and representative structures that deny some social actors opportunities in participation. Children's involvement in out-of-home placements must thus be evaluated in relation to how institutional arrangements and embedded power structures position children in social interaction. Fraser's (2009) term *normative injustices* refers to value patterns that position categories of people, and the traits associated with them, as of less value. Prevailing ideas about children's vulnerability and incompetence represents one normative structure that has been found to hamper children's participatory opportunities (Vis et al., 2011). Moreover, Graham (2007) argued that child welfare institutions do not take into account how racialized discourses influence children's opportunities in life and consequently black children voices are silenced. Fraser's (2009) term *economic injustices* refers to how the unequal distribution of resources in society affects citizens' opportunities in participation, typically along categories such as social class and ethnicity. As noted, scarce resources within social work institutions is one barrier for building trusting relationships thus limiting children's participatory opportunities. Ethnic minority children are more often socio-economically marginalized, challenging their participation in wider society as well as increasing the likelihood of CWS involvement (Stær & Bjørknes, 2015). Lastly, the term *representational injustices* refer to inequalities stemming from democratic arrangements that deny categories of people voice, for example in the tailoring or evaluation of child welfare services (Fraser, 2009). In Fraser's model, social injustice must be addressed by first evaluating how injustices are produced, namely within a complex interplay between normative, economic and/or representational structures. For the purpose of this study, we focus on normative and economic power structures reflected in youth's accounts.

In addition to perceiving participation as an effect of embedded power structures, we also view children as active agents involved in the very construction of their social worlds (Moosa-Mitha, 2005). Encountering welfare institutions and professionals, children draw on their diverse knowledge and experiences, convey their lived realities and wishes in ways that make sense to them and thus partake in the very processes that participation entails (Clandinin, Caine, Lessard, & Huber, 2016; Nybell, 2013). Even though most recent research investigating children's participation acknowledges children as active agents, we find that in-depth analyses of children's agency when encountering CWS are rare. Knowledge about how children experience their scope of action in these circumstances, how they are positioned as well as how they maneuver to position themselves as trustworthy participants is therefore critical. Their experiences can inform us about both their agency work and the particular contexts and power structures with which they engage.

Research points to a multitude of participatory obstacles ethnic minority families may face encountering CWS, in terms of language barriers, distrust, cultural gaps and discrimination (Fylkesnes, Iversen, Bjørknes, & Nygren, 2015; Skivenes, Barn, Kriz, & Pösö, 2014; Ylvisaker, Rugkåsa, & Eide, 2015). These factors may affect youth's participatory opportunities in placement processes, but we have little knowledge about how this particular group of children experiences their scope of action (Graham, 2007). How ethnic positioning effects children's opportunities in participation is also undertheorized (Graham, 2007; Moosa-Mitha, 2005).

## 1.3. Aims

The aim of this study was to explore how ethnic minority youth talked about their participation in out-of-home placements. We were interested in informants' motives and strategies (agency) as well as how structural arrangements enabled and limited their participation, before and during placement. Recruiting informants who were all positioned

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6833203>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6833203>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)