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Child poverty in Denmark

recent developments and how to adress it as a social work problem

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Child poverty in Denmark; Recent developments and how to address it as a social work problem

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Background

Founded on universal and social democratic welfare state principles, Denmark has been one of the most equal of high income countries. During the 1980s and 1990s poverty, and especially child poverty, was almost nonexistent. Presumably for this reason, child poverty has been almost absent as an independent risk factor among frontline-workers in Denmark.

In international comparison, Denmark is still an equal society, but the structure of the Danish welfare state has changed. Neoliberal policies have led to increased inequality in general as well as for children. In 2002, the share of children living in relative poverty was 27.000. In 2016 the numbers had increased to 48.000 and it is estimated that 63.000 children lived in relative poverty in 2017. The combination of an increasing share of children growing up in poverty and the absence of addressing poverty as a risk factor among frontline-workers propose a blind spot in preventive social work. Furthermore, the narrative of Denmark as a country where everyone has opportunities to live in wealth could aggravate the stigma connected to poverty.

Purpose and main points

The purpose of this project is to generate tools to address and alleviate for child poverty in Denmark in research, education, policy, and practice. The project content is three-fold:

- 1) The first part is explorative and empirically based as we investigate frontline-workers' and leaders' practice in identifying child poverty as a social work problem; if they address it and how. We gather data using surveys and focus group interviews in three municipalities.
- 2) The second and most comprehensive part is theory-based as we draw on the poverty aware paradigm approach – PAP (see the field: references) while contextualizing it into the context of preventive social work in Denmark. The poverty aware paradigm presents a new social work paradigm centered on a human rights approach. The ontological basis is an extension of the structural paradigm, hence in opposition to current neoliberal trends. However, its epistemology and axiology adds a human right approach, concepts for relation-based work and ethical guidelines and tools for practice. In doing so, the paradigm is able to translate its structural oriented ontology into practical tools when working with families in poverty.
- 3) The third part is didactic. Based on the results from part 1 and 2 as well as existing PAP teaching material, we develop and test teaching material at a master-education in vulnerable children and young people in Denmark. It is a continued education targeting social frontline-workers.

Relationship to the conference themes

Current neoliberal policies has led to an increase in child poverty, which has until recently been almost non-existent in the Danish welfare state. Due to this development, Danish researchers, politicians, social workers and other frontline-workers need a paradigmatic comprehension of poverty, its reasons, and tools to alleviate for it in practice. Accordingly, the cause of this process relates to the theme of changing welfare states and the content relates to the themes of human rights in social work research, education, practice and polity.

Key references

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