

Abstract

Title How help comes into being - about help processes in social work
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This thesis is about *how* and *whether* help is brought about within the individual and family care of The Social Services. The study is based on in-depth interviews with 26 actors, 14 social workers and 12 clients. The interviews focused on what happens in the bilateral processes between the helper and the helped. Through interviews with social workers and clients about the same events at the same time, parallel images of each process were created. These dual "recollections" were then compared and interpreted.

It is shown that the clients' original intentions influence their attitude to the Social Services, not only initially, but also by affecting the continued course of events. Clients who take initiatives themselves or have room for manoeuvre also influence the process more than other clients. When the initiative is taken by external actors, the social worker's possibilities of influencing the process are reduced, which also affects the client. An emphasis on negotiation enhances the client's opportunities to get help. If the social worker acts on the basis of the client's intentions, this strengthens the reciprocity between the parties. The presence of coercion (reporting to the authorities) does not necessarily constitute an obstacle to help. Other factors, in particular, the establishment of relationships and dignity, are more important for help to be brought about. A common belief is that voluntary initiatives facilitate the provision of help. In this study the contrary is also shown to be true - an initial phase characterised by conflict and initiated by a report can initially have a negative influence but is not a definite obstacle to help.

Furthermore, a voluntary application for help does not automatically lead to help being given. In some cases the process starts disharmoniously but balance is attained later on in the process. The factors of importance here are the social worker's positive attitude, ability to listen and show respect. However, in most cases the interaction at the first meeting is of decisive importance for the client's position in the continued relationship. This position is influenced by factors such as treatment, room for manoeuvre and the client's possibility of having his/her intentions and proposals approved. Clients who are met with support, good treatment and sympathy for what they want establish a *position of dignity*, whereas clients who encounter negative treatment find themselves in a *position of indignity*. Clients who are treated with sympathy initially are more cooperative than those treated in a less favourable manner. Clients in a position of dignity pursue their intentions more successfully in the negotiations. When the "no-dignity" clients end up in unfavourable situations, this is primarily a reflection of the difficulty of establishing a working relationship with the social worker but may also be an expression of their inability to understand and follow the rules of the game of the organisation.

One of the conclusions of the study is that the 'parties' negotiation about the definition of the problems is a crucial factor in the process, which influences whether help will be brought about or not. When the parties reach a common view of the problems, a basis for constructive cooperation and for the development of help is established. When the actors have conflicting interpretations these constitute obstacles to cooperation and lead to stagnation of the process. If this conflict is not resolved, the client usually ends up subordinating him/herself to the social worker's view of the problem, apparently adapts him/herself and assumes the role of hostage in the continued interplay between the parties. The process continues to run, but is only driven by one of the parties - the social worker - without the consent or active participation of the client.

The study shows that factors such as *concordance* and *bilateralism* are important to the development of the process, but also for the possibility of mediating help. Both concordance, when the parties agree about which events in the process are significant, and bilateralism, which means that the actual course of events is influenced by both actors, lead to a more productive process. These factors are reflected in the reciprocity in the work to bring about help as well as in the kind of help that results. When the process stops, one of the parties may call for *intermediate negotiations* about the continued course of events, with possible favourable effects.

Minimalistic help - simple resource contributions - has been given in practically all cases. When it comes to *qualified* help, in particular what the presumptive recipient perceives as help, the results show that *the way in which the help was provided* plays a crucial role. It is clear that help is mediated through a combination of several favourable factors. Among these are *open negotiations between the parties*, processes characterised by *reciprocity* and *consensus* and possibilities of *renegotiation*. In summary, the results show that a *dialogic* attitude has a facilitating effect while a *monologic* attitude has an inhibitory effect on help processes. Help comes into being in the interaction between the actors, in the process enacted between the parties.