An international research project on child protection policy and practice
In January 2015, researchers from the University of York, the German Youth Institute and the University of Groningen launched Hestia: an international research project examining child protection policy and practice in Europe. The project, called Hestia after the Greek goddess of the home and family, is funded by the European NORFACE programme, ‘Welfare State Futures’ (7th Framework Programme). Hestia consists of three parts: a policy analysis in relation to child protection, a detailed analysis of case files from child maltreatment cases, and interviews with parents involved in child protection investigations. This project therefore encompasses both policy level and case level analyses. The three parts of the project will inform one another, and comparisons will be made between the three countries.

**Objectives**

Child protection has become an important aspect of child welfare policy in most European countries. Through a comparative analysis, Hestia will generate new insights into child protection policy and practice and so have a significant impact on future developments in child welfare in Europe. This in turn may benefit a large number of children and families. This unique project will also form the basis for future comparative research on child protection policy and practice.

National statistics on child maltreatment will also be compared, including the prevalence of child maltreatment and the numbers of reports and investigations. This project will deliver individual country reports, and a report on the comparative analysis of the three child protection systems.

**Case file analysis**

In each country, 400 case files of children and families involved in investigations of child maltreatment will be analysed. The relationships between the characteristics of a report, the aspects of an investigation and the decisions made will be explored. In addition to these national analyses, the similarities and differences between countries will be examined in relation to the policy analyses.

**Policy analysis**

The policy analysis will compare the child protection systems in the three countries. This will provide an indication of the different ways in which European countries construct child abuse and neglect as social problems, and their assumptions about the nature of these problems and the appropriate response.
Experiences of parents

All parents have the right to be heard; feeling heard may help to avoid escalating conflicts between parents and child protection workers. Additionally, it may strengthen parents’ positions and encourage them to engage with, or even ask for, services. In each country, parents will be interviewed about their experiences in relation to reports of suspected maltreatment concerning their children. Interviews will include questions about whether parents felt that the case worker listened to them and tried to understand their situation and perspective, whether they felt informed about the procedure, their rights and available services, and whether they needed help at the time of the investigation. The findings from these interviews will be examined in relation to the policy analysis and the case file analysis, and international comparisons will be made.

Confidentiality

As this research project explores a sensitive topic, an extensive ethical protocol has been approved by the Ethical Committee at the University of Groningen. The data collected for this project will remain strictly confidential. The researchers involved are obliged to sign a confidentiality agreement and research participants will remain anonymous in any publications that arise from the research.

Stakeholders’ community

Within this project, a stakeholders’ community has been set up to connect research, policy and practice, and to stimulate communication between these groups. This is an important aspect of the project which aims to increase its impact in these areas. The stakeholders’ community includes European, national and regional stakeholders working at both policy level and case level, as well as researchers working in the field of child maltreatment and child protection policy. Stakeholders will receive a Hestia newsletter informing them about the project’s progress and outputs, and they will be invited to attend the final international conference.

www.projecthestia.com

Visit our website for more information and to register as a stakeholder. Here you can also subscribe to the Hestia newsletter.
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