



Adoption in the child welfare system – A cross-country analysis of child welfare workers' recommendations for or against adoption [☆]

Marit Skivenes ^{*}, Øyvind Samnøy Tefre

Bergen University College, Faculty of Health and Social Sciences, Haugeveien 28, 5005 Bergen, Norway

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 19 May 2012

Received in revised form 20 July 2012

Accepted 30 July 2012

Available online 11 August 2012

Keywords:

Adoption

Child welfare system/worker

Cross-country

Decision-making

Justifications

Permanency

ABSTRACT

This paper, through the vignette of a three-year old boy's case, examines how child welfare workers in three countries, Norway, England and the United States (California), decide whether to recommend forced adoption. Legislation and policy recommendations for the termination of parental rights and adoption vary among these three countries, but they all regard permanency for the child as the overarching goal for children in care. We find that a majority of the workers suggest forced adoption, and their main justifications were related to parental behaviour and their failure to fulfil visitation arrangements, followed by arguments about how adoption would provide both permanency and solid attachment for the child. It was Norwegian workers (41%) that decided against forced adoption, and their main objections were the lack of parental consent and the fact that forced adoption is uncommon in Norway. The findings of this study show that the reasoning of child welfare workers clearly reflects the policies and guidelines of their respective countries, which demonstrates the impact of each country's policy instruments. The workers' reasoning also reflects their knowledge of the basic premises for promoting adoption and permanency for children in care. As such, the state power that child welfare workers exercise rests on a rationale that is evidence oriented and extends beyond a mere reflection of policy guidelines and instructions.

© 2012 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

This paper examines how 299 child welfare workers in three countries, England, the U.S. (CA), and Norway, justify their decisions about forced adoption when presented with the same vignette about foster parents wishing to adopt their foster child. All three countries regard permanency for the child as an overarching goal when a child is looked after. However, the Nordic child welfare systems and the Anglo-American child welfare systems have different approaches to the use of forced adoption (Garrett & Sinkkonen, 2003; Gilbert, Parton, & Skivenes, 2011). In England and the U.S., policy programmes and legislation clearly state that if reunification with the biological parents is not possible, then permanency through adoption is the preferred solution

(Bartholet, 2009; Berrick, 2011). In Norway, adoption is rare (Grinde, 2005; Skivenes, 2010, 2011). These differences are reflected in the adoption rates in each of the respective countries: seven per 10000 children in USA, four per 10000 in England and one per 100000 children in Norway (Gilbert et al., 2011). This paper examines how child welfare workers mandated to pursue permanency for children but operating within different systems make decisions about forced adoption.

The data consists of the decisions and the reasons why 299 workers in the US (97), England (99) and Norway (103) either support adoption or continued foster care with respect to a vignette of a three-year-old boy, Benjamin. The abridged version of the vignette is that Benjamin has lived with his foster parents since he was five months old. His biological parents were substance abusers and have visitation rights but have never visited the boy. Benjamin's foster parents wish to adopt him, but Benjamin's mother opposes the adoption, whereas his father supports it. Presented with the same case scenario, almost all workers in England (98%) and the US (96%) suggest an adoption, whereas six out of ten workers in Norway recommend adoption. This finding was expected for the English and American workers, but was unexpectedly high for the Norwegian workers.

This paper seeks to explore how workers justify their decisions. We examine their reasoning and evaluate if there are differences between workers and between countries. For example, do workers have different

[☆] Many, many thanks to all child welfare workers that have participated in the project, and we very much appreciate all help and assistance that we have received from researchers, project assistants, child welfare agencies, municipalities and city councils, in facilitating the cross-country data collection.

^{*} Corresponding author. Tel.: +47 959 24 979, +47 555 87151.

E-mail addresses: mski@hib.no, skivenes@me.com (M. Skivenes),

Oyvind.Samnøy.Tefre@hib.no (Ø.S. Tefre).

URL: http://www.hib.no/avd_ahs/fou/childwelfare.asp (M. Skivenes).

opinions regarding permanency or the child's welfare/best interest, and can we identify varying perceptions about the roles of public and private responsibility for children and the state's role in such situations?

Our study is unique in that we have a large number of respondents from three countries that make decisions based on a vignette and give open-ended explanations for those decisions. We have found no studies on decision-making in the child welfare system with respect to forced adoption with a similar design. Thus, this study gives us important insight and knowledge about how child welfare workers within different child welfare systems think about and act on important issues such as forced adoption.

The paper is organised in the following way: we begin with a presentation of what we know about the decision-making rationale of child welfare workers, followed by an outline of the welfare systems of each of the three countries and the basic premises for forced adoption. Thereafter, we describe our method and data, followed by our findings. In the discussion, we address the differences between the countries studied and how workers' justifications for their decisions may shed light on these differences.

2. Theoretical platform and research on the reasoning of child welfare workers

Decision-making in the child welfare system is complex and marked by a high degree of uncertainty (cf. Elster, 1989; Mnookin, 1973; Munro, 2008). In child welfare practice, decisions involve multifaceted normative issues, many types of research knowledge, conflicting legal rights and policy instructions, the unique needs and interests of children and their parents, and the prioritisation of scarce resources, to name a few of the issues that must be considered. Each issue is weighed against the others, evaluated and finalised during the decision-making process. The regulative ideal is, therefore, that the process, not the outcome, defines the quality of a decision. Deliberative theory, as formulated by Habermas (1996) and others, suggests how normative questions and dilemmas can find legitimate solutions through rational discourse when the procedural and content rules of such discourse are fulfilled. The procedural rules refer to the fact that all parties concerned by a decision should be allowed to participate so that all relevant arguments are presented and discussed in an open and free debate (see Alexy, 1989; Eriksen & Weigård, 2003). It follows that the focal points of examination are the arguments and accounts in the decision-making process. The importance of examining how child welfare workers make decisions to further our knowledge of how to improve the quality of decisions is stated in the research (see, for example, Benbenishty, Osmo, & Gold, 2003; Gambriil, 2008; Munro, 2008; Osmo & Rosen, 2002). In this paper, we focus on one important aspect of understanding decision-making, that is, the reasons and justifications workers give for their choices.

Analyses of the rationale for policies (Duffy & Collins, 2010) and examinations of the decisions made by professionals and the courts in child welfare cases are few in Norway (Backe-Hansen, 2001; Grinde, 2003) and internationally. We have found two studies that are of particular interest for our paper. In a paper from 1994, a study of 73 child welfare workers in Israel (Rosen, 1994) analyses workers' use of knowledge in decision-making. A distinction between different categories of knowledge is established. The main conclusion is that this sample of workers underused research-based knowledge and relied on normative assertions (p. 574). In the wake of this study, and the most relevant study for the purposes of this paper, is the comparison of Israeli and Canadian child welfare workers (Benbenishty et al., 2003). A sample of 119 workers gives the rationale behind their risk assessments and decisions in a vignette case. The analysis focuses on the argumentation structure and content of workers' rationales, and shows that workers report that they base their decisions on theory, general knowledge and experience but workers fail to mention values, policy and empirical knowledge. Workers rarely expressed their degree of confidence in their judgements or the reasons why they were valid (p. 144f.). The

major difference between the countries was that Israeli workers mentioned 'general knowledge' more often than "theory" and "experience", compared to their Canadian peers. Our aim is to add to this research. In the following section, we outline the country specific policies and legislation regarding adoption in the child welfare system.

3. Policy and system context

Adoption is considered the most effective way of obtaining the security of a stable and permanent family for children who cannot live with their biological parents (see Hollinger, 2002, for a thorough overview of different types of adoption practices). A wealth of research demonstrates the importance of permanency for children (Goldstein, Freud, & Solnit, 1973, cf. Grinde, 2005). Among the Northern European countries, the United States and Canada, the child welfare systems in England and the U.S. most actively use adoption (Gilbert et al., 2011; Thoburn, 2007). Research on the outcome for adopted children in the child welfare system versus children that are in foster care or residential units or reunited with their biological parents, show solidly and convincingly, that adoption gives children the best outcome (Christoffersen, Hammen, Andersen, & Jeldtoft, 2007; Triseliotis, 2002; Vinnerljung & Hjern, 2011). In the Danish meta study published in 2007, examination of available research on adoptions covering a period from 1977 till 2006 from 11 countries, the findings form a strikingly uniform picture. Regardless of whether the focus is on the child's physical or cognitive development, the child's self-esteem or behavioural and emotional problems, adoptive children are managing better compared to their peers who were either reunified with their biological parents, or grew up in residential care or in foster care (Christoffersen et al., 2007, p. 155). Adoptions are also associated with greater stability and continuity in care compared with long-term fostering, particularly if the child is adopted at an early age. Triseliotis (2002) examines the research literature and compares the reported effects of long-term fostering with adoption on six factors (Stability of long-term foster care and adoption, Adjustment, Sense of security and belonging, Personal and social functioning, Subjects' retrospective perceptions, Substitute parents' perspective). He concludes that there are signs that breakdown rates may be diminishing and evening out between foster care and adoptees in some age groups, but maintains in his conclusion that: "compared with long-term fostering, adoption still provides higher levels of emotional security, a stronger sense of belonging, and a more enduring psychosocial base in life for those who cannot live with their birth families. The main limitation of long-term fostering is its unpredictability and the uncertain and ambiguous position in which the children find themselves." (Triseliotis, 2002, p. 31). And, of particular interest for our cross-country study is the Swedish study published in 2011 by Vinnerljung and Hjern, which uses national register data to compare a wide range of long term outcomes for 3951 children who entered the welfare system before age 7 and were either adopted or grew up in long term foster care. After adjusting for birth parental related selection factors and age of entry to out-of-home care they found that adoptees had more favourable outcomes on all factors tested (primary school performance, cognitive tests at military conscription (boys only), educational achievement, and reliance on public welfare at age 25) compared to long-term foster children: "The results from our study indicate that adoption does have stronger compensatory traits over time compared to long term foster care" (p. 1908). It is worth noting that these adoptions are voluntary as Sweden does not allow forced adoptions and that there are no data to explain why some of these children were given up for adoption while others grew up in foster care (Vinnerljung & Hjern, 2011, p. 1908).

This paper compares child welfare practices in societies with different child welfare systems and policies about adoption (cf. Gilbert, 1997; Gilbert et al., 2011). Gilbert (1997) categorised England and the U.S. as 'child protection' systems, which focus on protecting children from risk

and harm. The Nordic countries, including Norway, are 'family service' systems, which focus on needs and therapeutic approaches to helping parents provide for their children. In a later comparative book about child welfare systems (Gilbert et al., 2011), Parton and Berridge (2011) argue that England has been transforming its child welfare system towards a needs-based system, but there are indications that this is being reversed (Parton, 2011).

In both types of child welfare systems, permanency is an overarching goal for children that cannot live with their birth parents. In England and the U.S., adoption is a measure to provide a permanent home for children that cannot be reunited with their birth parents. The United States has explicit guidelines that define how long the child welfare agency should work for reunification and at what time permanent placement should be pursued. If reunification is not possible, then adoption is the next best alternative (Berrick, 2009, p. 53). The child should remain outside of the home for no more than 15 of the preceding 22 months (Bartholet, 1999). Thereafter, adoption is the paramount goal. In this period, the biological parents are entitled to receive help that will enable them to reunite with the child. The main criterion that must be fulfilled is that the child welfare agency must have provided reasonable efforts to help the parents. American legal scholars are critical of the legislation because it contains too many exceptions and gaps that make it possible to circumvent the time limits with the goal of adoption (cf. Bartholet, 1999, 2009).

England also has a policy that involves deadlines, but they are less conclusive. In a case of care order, the case is reviewed one month after the child is moved from the biological parents, and a second assessment is done three months later. After four months, there must be a plan in place to ensure the child's stability and a plan for the parents to regain custody of their child. For example, parents may become part of a binding detoxification programme or participate in anger management therapy. The plans incorporate clear objectives and deadlines. The child welfare agency is required to work intensively with the family before a final decision on placement can be made, but if they do not succeed, then they will put the child up for adoption or foster care. According to the English Public Law Outline 2008 (PLO), adoption processes will begin after 40 weeks, at which point there is a full legal review of the case. At this stage, it will usually be clear how the parents are coping and if services (e.g., rehabilitation or other remedial action) have been effective. In England, it is also possible for foster parents who have had custody of the child for 12 months to require the adoption of the child (Isaacs & Shepherd, 2008, pp. 201).

The Norwegian legislation on adoptions in the child welfare system does not set particular strict restrictions and high thresholds, for the use of adoptions (The Norwegian Child Welfare Act of 1992, 1992 Section § 4–20; Innst. O. No. 80, 1991–92, p. 27, cf. Skivenes, 2009). The law establishes four conditions: (1) there must be a likelihood that the parents will permanently be unable to care for the child properly, or that it would be detrimental to the child to be moved because of attachments formed with foster parents and the environment in which the child resides; (2) adoption must be in the child's best interests; (3) the foster parents must have proven themselves capable of bringing up the child; and (4) the conditions for granting adoption in accordance with the Adoption Act of 1986 must be in place. The legislator was of the opinion that adoption had to be consented to 'in cases where it is better for the child to be adopted than to grow up as a foster child' (Ot. Prp. No. 44, 1991–92, p. 54). It is not evident from the preliminary legislative deliberations that any particular issues beyond those given in the legal text (§ 4–20, points 1–4) ought to be considered, and a unanimous Parliament supported the provision without debate or criticism (Innst. O. No. 80, 1991–92, p. 27). However, although the relevant criteria do not seem to be comparatively strict, adoption with or without parental consent is very rare in Norway (Grinde, 2005), as it is in all of the Nordic countries. In 2007, the Norwegian child welfare service only presented seven cases to the County Social Welfare board (a tribunal) concerning adoption, and, in 2006, they presented 11 cases. Altogether, two-thirds of these cases resulted in adoption (N = 12).

4. Methods and data

This study, which was funded by the Norwegian Research Council, is part of a larger comparative mixed-methods research project on child welfare systems in the United States, England and Norway. We conducted a survey of 304 child welfare workers in public agencies to explore their perceptions of risk, decision-making and knowledge. In Norway, we had 103 respondents, 100 respondents in England and 101 respondents in the U.S. In the survey, we had six vignettes, and we have chosen to report on an adoption vignette in this paper. The online survey was answered from January to May 2008 in Norway, from March to August 2008 in England, and between March and September 2010 in California. The survey took approximately one hour to answer. We recruited study participants by first inviting city councils and/or the head of a child welfare agency to participate. The child welfare agency sent an invitation letter to all workers and supervisors in the defined unit(s) on our behalf. This letter contained detailed information about the research project and stated that participation in this study was voluntary. The letter also discussed the implications for those consenting to participate and stated that participation would occur during non-work hours. Those who wished to participate contacted the principal investigator by email or phone. Workers received an honorarium based on a research reimbursement model that proposes reimbursing participants for their time (Grady, Dickert, Jawetz, Gensler, & Emanuel, 2005). We also followed justice considerations; we wanted all participants in the project to receive the same relative amount, regardless of their country of residence. Workers received NOK 1000 in Norway, GBP 75 in England and USD 150 in California. The honorarium may not only have motivated a broader set of workers to participate, but it may also have skewed the sample towards those who were attracted by the honorarium. However, the samples were representative for their units at the time of data collection.

Many of the participants were experienced caseworkers. Our California sample had the longest mean experience of 12 years, a variance of 40 years and a median of 11 years. In England, the mean was 8 years, with a variance of 35 years and a median of 6 years. In Norway, the mean was 9 years, with a variance of 38 years and median of 8 years. The participants from California were also more highly educated than caseworkers in Norway and England. Eighty-nine percent of the Californian caseworkers in our sample had earned a master's degree, and the remaining 11% held a bachelor's degree. In both England and Norway, fewer than half of the caseworkers sampled held a master's degree (40% in England and 37% in Norway), and the remaining workers held bachelor's degrees or an equivalent college degree. In all three countries, the vast majority of caseworkers sampled were female; England stands out with 21% of the caseworkers being male. In California and Norway, the proportion of male to female workers was only seven and five percent, respectively.

This study has been peer-reviewed as part of the application process for funding from the Norwegian Research Council. It was also reviewed by the office of the Norwegian Privacy Ombudsman for Research, which assesses privacy-related and ethical dimensions of a research project, and by the Research Ethics Committee of the English city where we conducted interviews. In California, our study did not fall within the scope of the rules that the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects of the Californian Health and Human Services Agency is obligated to review under the Federalwide Assurance (CPHS, 2010 p. 6).

The vignette of Benjamin's adoption is presented as a snapshot in time in which Benjamin, aged three, is wanted for adoption by his foster parents, with whom he has lived since he was five months old. The vignette gives a short description of the case specifics and the background for Benjamin's placement in foster care, his relationship with his biological parents, his development during foster care, and details about his current situation, his biological parents and his foster parents. Benjamin's biological mother refuses adoption, while his

biological father is positive as long as he can retain visitation rights. The workers are asked a series of questions, such as what course of action they would recommend, why they would choose this specific course of action, and what would have had to be different in the case for another course of action to be recommended.

A total of 301 child welfare workers responded to the vignette about Benjamin. Of the participants, 239 stated that they would start preparing for an adoption whereas 30 said they would leave Benjamin with his foster parents but not start preparations for adoption at this time. Eight participants said they would do nothing. For further analysis, the respondents who said they would do nothing were grouped together with those who said they would leave Benjamin in foster care, as these alternatives both result in the same outcome. Twenty-three participants chose “another decision”. These participants were then asked an open-ended question to provide an explanation of what this decision would be. Based on an analysis of the answers to this question, 21 of the respondents were assigned to either the group who would prepare for adoption or the group that would leave Benjamin in foster care. The remaining 2 respondents who could not be assigned to either group were then excluded from further analysis. Both respondents who could not be placed were from the American sample. The total number of participants included in the study after the initial round of categorisations and exclusions was $N = 299$ (Norway $N = 103$, England $N = 99$, and the U.S. $N = 97$).

The case of Benjamin's adoption follows a common type of vignette technique in which fixed-choice responses are combined with open-ended questions (Finch, 1987). A benefit of this approach is that while the fixed-choice responses make it easier to compare the responses in different countries, the open-ended questions leave room for the respondent to define the meaning of the situation and point to the elements that lead to a specific decision (Finch, 1987, p.106).

After providing their recommendations, the respondents were provided with an open-ended question to explain the specifics of the case that led to the decision. Of the 299 respondents, 274 provided an answer. Table 1 shows the distribution of those who answered the open-ended explanatory question. The final question in the vignette asked the workers an additional open-ended question about what would have had to be different about the case for them to have made another decision, and 278 workers provided an answer to this question. Table 2 shows the distribution of the responses.

A limitation of our data relates to the differences in samples across countries, which are due to the specific hiring patterns of the public authorities we sampled and the economic recession, which seemed to affect our Californian study sites most. The groups of workers invited to participate in this study differed in England, Norway and California. This is partly due not only to the organisation of the agencies in the respective countries, but also the fact that in California we only recruited workers from the Emergency Response unit. These differences in cross-country samples may affect how workers answered our questions. However, the Californian workers were not completely different from the English and Norwegian workers because most of them had ample experience working in other roles in other child welfare units, especially as on-going caseworkers. We are aware that the relatively small sample sizes in each country mean that our samples cannot be taken as representative of the general population of child welfare workers in these countries.

Table 1
Distribution, by country, of those who explained their decision.

Recommendation	Norway	England	USA	Total
Stay in foster care	36 38.3%	2 2.2%	4 4.5%	42 15.3%
Start adoption	58 61.7%	90 97.8%	84 95.5%	232 84.7%
Total	94 100%	92 100%	88 100%	274 100%

Table 2
Distribution, by country, of those who explained what factors may have changed their decision.

Recommendation	Norway	England	USA	Total
Stay in foster care	40 40.8%	2 2.2%	4 4.5%	46 16.5%
Start adoption	58 59.2%	90 97.8%	84 95.5%	232 83.5%
Total	98 100%	92 100%	88 100%	278 100%

The case vignettes are based on real cases and have been tested and reviewed by child welfare workers in all three countries. To determine if the vignette cases in the survey were realistic, if they were sufficiently complex, and if the respondents' answers reflected their opinions rather than those of their managers, we asked about 25% of the sample to respond to these issues. The results show that almost all confirmed that they had answered as they themselves would have done, and approximately nine out of ten respondents thought the vignettes were realistic (the rest answered 'I don't know' (5), 'in between' (3) and 'no' (2)). Regarding complexity, one-fifth of the respondents found them less complex than real cases, about three-fifths said they had the same complexity level as real cases and less than one-fifth found them more complex than real cases.

Although the vignette contains only limited information, it was designed to be recognisable to workers in different countries as an approximation of a real-life situation (Barter & Renold, 1999, 2000; Finch, 1987; Soydan, 1996). The survey was translated from back and forth from Norwegian to English to Norwegian again to make sure we had the same version of the questions and vignettes. The aim of the vignettes was to capture the workers' professional assessments of cases. We asked the same questions in each country, and we made an effort to give participants an option to choose open categories, as an alternative to fixed categories, and to allow them to explain their choice. This was to make sure that if they experience the survey form to be rigid, they had an alternative. Although we aimed for a survey that was similar in each country, we are aware that this type of comparison involves challenges regarding conceptual differences, legislative framework and cultural factors that have implications for child welfare. Therefore, the vignette itself does not include any references to national legislations or other specifics that could make it specific to any one country. The vignette contains limited information about the case and allows the child welfare workers to interpret the case according to their own setting. The open-ended questions are therefore of central importance, and it is through these questions that we seek to understand just how the case is interpreted and positioned within the respondents' respective contexts (Barter & Renold, 2000; Finch, 1987; Grinde, 2004). The questions allow the participants in each country room to provide details that relate to the different policies, laws, social norms and institutional practices that may be influential to their decisions. Finally, although one of the strengths of the vignette technique is the reduction of 'social desirability factors' and the avoidance of observer effects (Soydan, 1996; Wilks, 2004), we are aware that what is expressed in the respondents' answers may not necessarily reflect how they would act in a real situation. Respondents may have several reasons for answering in ways that may seem more socially acceptable or more acceptable to the researchers (Barter & Renold, 2000; Finch, 1987; Wilks, 2004). An important caveat is that this study analyses a case of foster parents wishing to adopt their foster child, and as such its results may be of less value for adoption issues in general.

Data files were entered into SPSS. The open answers were entered into Atlas.ti qualitative software. Open coding was used to analyse data for predominant themes. For data analysis, we approached the interview material with an analytical and conceptual strategy (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996) by (1) identifying what accounts child welfare workers gave for their decisions; (2) identifying common themes and patterns in each country, and (3) comparing the themes across countries. Where the

quotations of child welfare workers are presented, they reflect responses that are typical of other workers. We present only themes that are representative of at least 20% of the sample.

5. Findings

Child welfare workers in the three countries examined were asked to give justifications for their recommendation for or against adoption. A majority of workers, 251 out of 299, suggested adoption in this case. However, as expected, there were country differences, and 41% of the Norwegian workers did not suggest adoption. We explore the justifications workers gave for their decision and examine if workers differ in their considerations cross-country. A total of 274 workers gave an explanation for their decision, and 278 explained what factors would have to be present in the case for them to change their decision. Interestingly, workers in these three child welfare systems present rather similar reasons for suggesting an adoption for Benjamin.

5.1. Reasons for adoption

There are eight main justifications that child welfare workers give for suggesting adoption, and we have labelled them as follows: “parental behaviour”, “permanency for Benjamin”, “Benjamin’s attachment to his foster parents”, “parents lack of visitation”, “Benjamin’s needs”; “early placement and young age”, “Time, the duration Benjamin has been in foster care”, and “Benjamin is wanted by his foster parents”. In Table 3, an overview of the major justifications given regarding Benjamin’s adoption is provided.

5.1.1. Parental behaviour

Clearly, parental behaviour, as described in the vignette, is the most common justification (68%) for suggesting Benjamin’s adoption, and a short explanation from an American worker is illustrative: “*parents inflicting great physical abuse, still using drugs and no visitation*” (P3: 128:128). There are three aspects to the ‘parental behaviour’ account. First, the biological parents continued substance abuse is a major concern that workers mention, and by this they mean that biological parents have not rehabilitated, have not been able to change their lives, have not used the opportunity and time to access services and have a lifestyle that is detrimental to Benjamin’s well being. A second factor is the low probability that the parents will be able to stop misusing substances. A third factor is the abuse that the biological parents inflicted on Benjamin as a baby. For some workers, this factor tells them how the parents might treat the child, and others point to the fact that Benjamin is a vulnerable boy with special needs due to the abuse his parents inflicted on him.

Table 3

Major justifications for deciding to initiate an adoption, cross-country differences marked with yellow (N = 232).

Code	Norway	England	USA (CA)	Total
Parental behaviour	37 63.8 %	55 61.1 %	65 77.4 %	157 67.7 %
Permanency	30 51.7 %	56 62.2 %	43 51.2 %	129 55.6 %
Attachment	33 56.9 %	28 31.1 %	31 36.9 %	92 39.7 %
Visitation	24 41.4 %	36 40.0 %	30 35.7 %	90 38.8 %
Needs	22 37.9 %	33 36.7 %	23 27.4 %	78 33.6 %
Early placement /young age	15 25.9 %	22 24.4 %	29 34.5 %	66 28.4 %
Time	7 12.1 %	24 26.7 %	24 28.6 %	55 23.7 %
Wanted	10 17.2 %	12 13.3 %	27 32.1 %	49 21.1 %

We identify that the majority of American workers (77%) use parental behaviour as a justification versus 64% in Norway and 61% in England.

5.1.2. Permanency

Permanency is the second most common justification. About 56% of the workers gave this reason and included direct statements about permanency and the certainty with which Benjamin can predict his future within this family.

“*Adoption would achieve permanency, which is in the child’s best interests.*” (English worker P2: (82:82))

Sixty-two percent of English workers mentioned permanence, versus about 51% of the Norwegian and American workers.

5.1.3. Attachment

‘Attachment’ is mentioned by 40% of workers as a justification for adoption, and they emphasise Benjamin’s attachment to his foster parents and the emotional bonds that they have established. Some workers also contrast this attachment with the lack of attachment between Benjamin and his biological parents. The following quote from a Norwegian worker illustrates this justification:

“*The child’s attachment to the foster home and his need for predictability, stability and continuity.*” (P1: (10:10))

The Norwegian workers emphasise this reason to a higher degree (57%) than either the English (31%) or American workers (37%).

5.1.4. Visitation

Visitation is mentioned almost as often as attachment, and 39% of workers mention this justification. Visitation includes statements about the biological parents’ lack of contact with Benjamin after he was placed in a foster home, and workers find this indicative of their lack of interest in and poor attachment to Benjamin.

“*Because the parents have not participated in any services to reunify with the child, nor have they exercised their rights to visitation, it appears that the most beneficial scenario for the child would be a permanent, loving home with the foster parents, who have already expressed a willingness to adopt.*” (P3: (136:136))

5.1.5. Needs

Many workers (34%) also mentioned reasons that we have categorised as ‘needs’, which includes the child’s present and future needs and his foster parents’ ability to meet them. Also present is the sentiment that Benjamin has special needs because of the harm inflicted on him as a baby.

“*Benjamin is doing well in his placement, and it appears to meet all of his needs.*” (English worker P2: (170:170))

“*The child is special needs.*” (P3: (16:16))

The cross-country difference for “needs” is that 27% of the American workers mention this versus 38% of the Norwegians and 37% of the English.

5.1.6. Time

About 24% of the workers mention ‘time’ as a reason for suggesting adoption, and refer to either the eventual rehabilitation of the parents or years that Benjamin has lived with his foster parents. English and American workers note that Benjamin should have been in the process of being adopted long ago, whereas only 12% of the Norwegian workers

mention “time” as a consideration. The following quote from an English worker captures the main sentiments expressed:

“Carers who have cared for a child for this length of time can approach the courts for an adoption order.” (P2: (180:180))

5.1.7. Early placement

Considerations regarding Benjamin's placement in foster care at an early age and his status as a young child are gathered in the category “early placement/young child”. Twenty-eight percent of workers provide this as an argument for adoption, and the American workers stress this point more often, 35% compared to 26% and 24% in Norway and England, respectively.

5.1.8. Wanted

Finally, one-fifth of the workers who suggested adoption mention the importance of Benjamin being ‘wanted’. In particular, American workers mention that it is important that Benjamin's foster parents wish to adopt him. Thirty-two percent use this argument, a fact that may reflect a higher awareness of the difficulties finding adoptive parents in the U.S.

Overall, the picture that we see emerge is that about half of the sample identifies ‘parental behaviour’ and ‘permanency’ as their main reasons for suggesting adoption for Benjamin. Additionally, Norwegian workers regard ‘Benjamin's attachment to his foster parents’ as a third reason. When we examine co-occurrences of the reasons that workers use to justify their decision, we find that ‘parental behaviour’ in combination with either permanency (37%) or visitation (36%) exceeds more than a third of all workers. The share of workers who mention both permanency and attachment is 27%, and the co-occurrence is 34% among Norwegian workers. One-fifth of the workers gave three different reasons for their decision. Twenty one percent provided ‘parental behaviour’, ‘visitation’ and ‘permanency’ as the justifications for adoption, while 20% provided ‘parental behaviour’, ‘permanency’ and ‘attachment’. These triple co-occurrences are strikingly similar in all of the countries studied, and there is a variance of between 19 and 22% in both combinations. To gain a more complete picture of the workers' justifications, we also asked them what elements of the case could have been different to convince them to make an alternate decision.

5.1.9. What could have been different?

When asked about what factors in the case could have been different to convince the workers to choose another decision, the focus shifts to the parents. There are two main justifications that workers in all three countries emphasise, and we have labelled them ‘change’ and ‘visitation’. In addition, one-fifth of the workers mention ‘time’ as a factor.

First, the code ‘change’ reflects the parents' willingness and capacity to change their behaviour, and their ability to demonstrate their capacity and desire to be parents to the three-year old. Sixty percent of workers provide ‘change’ as a condition for considering another decision. Second, and closely related to the change dimension, is the code ‘visitation’. Approximately 38% of the workers mention that the parent's fulfilment of the visitation agreement would have been an indication of their interest in Benjamin. The co-occurrence of ‘change’ and ‘visitation’ is 32%, which means that over half of the workers who indicated that change is necessary also require that visitations needed to take place. American workers more often stress this combination (38%) than Norwegian and English workers at 28% and 30%, respectively.

A third justification stressed by 22% of the workers is “time”, which is indicated by two factors. First, the parents should have made changes at an earlier stage by either entering a drug rehabilitation programme or maintaining a significant period of sobriety. Second, many workers point to the length of time that Benjamin has already spent in foster care and indicate that given this lengthy period, there is little that can be done even if the parents did show signs of change.

An interesting difference between the countries is evident, as 27% of the American workers versus 14% of the Norwegian workers stress time as an important factor for making an alternate decision. The following quote from an American worker illustrates what could have been different and confirms the importance of time:

“If the parents had been clean and very involved with the child, then maybe they would have a standing to get their child back. However, because so much time has passed, it is by law that the child be given permanency. Thus, he should have already been adopted.” (P3: (167:167))

A quarter of the workers who stress change also indicated that this change would have had to happen at an earlier point in time. Several workers from the U.S. (17%) and England (20%) state that there is nothing in this case that would have made them change their decision regarding Benjamin's adoption, while only 3% of Norwegian workers indicate this. This point is closely related to those workers who stress that the time that has passed makes it difficult, if not impossible, to consider another decision, and is also related to those that stress that the parents must have shown signs of change at an earlier stage.

What is clear from the above is that given the time frame the vignette describes, the parents' substance abuse and lack of ability and/or will to rehabilitate, together with the lack of visitation and bonding with Benjamin, constitute the main justifications that the sample of workers give for suggesting adoption.

5.2. Why would (Norwegian) workers not recommend an adoption for Benjamin?

Of all the workers surveyed for the study, it is primarily the Norwegian workers that do not recommend Benjamin's adoption (N=42, 41%). Thus, the following discussion will concentrate on the Norwegian workers and their justifications for keeping Benjamin in foster care. Thirty-six workers explained their decision. There are two primary reasons provided for continuing Benjamin's foster care placement. First, 64% of workers state that the mother's lack of ‘consent’ is decisive. Second, 44% state that there are policy issues that make initiating an adoption difficult, which include the lack of political support, legal feasibility, and precedent for forced adoptions in Norway. The following quote demonstrated these sentiments:

“In Norway, it's not common that children in foster homes are adopted by their foster parents, as, for example, in England. I would not have started proceedings for adoption without consent from the biological mother.” (P1: (42:42))

Another dimension that we touched upon above is the time factor, as workers worry that parents are not given sufficient time to get back on their feet. Several workers (31%) stated that they would spend time talking to the mother, either to gain her consent for an adoption or to give her another chance at ‘becoming a mother’ to Benjamin. The following quote illustrates aspects of the need for consent in combination with both policy concerns and a strategy for gaining the mother's consent:

“It's important that the mother is heard. One cannot start proceedings for an adoption without the mother after only 2.5 years.” (P1: (130:130))

5.2.1. What factors may have convinced the workers to support adoption?

Of the 40 workers that provided factors that may have convinced them to support rather than oppose adoption, approximately half of them stated that the mother's consent would have altered their decision. The rest of the workers provided varying accounts of what factors would have to be different. Many did not refer to the option of

adoption but instead gave accounts, similar to those given by workers that supported adoption, for what would have to be different for them to reunify Benjamin with his parents.

6. Discussion

The findings from this vignette study show us that there are many cross-country similarities and some differences in how child welfare workers justify their decisions. In this section, we will discuss some factors that may shed light on the similarities and differences in decision-making processes. Although the majority of workers would suggest adoption in this case about foster parents wishing to adopt their foster child, 41% of workers from Norway would decide against adoption. We believe that the policy differences between the countries examined are the most important factors for understanding this difference. In Norway, there are no timelines or guidelines that “instruct” or direct workers to take steps towards adoption proceedings. Thus, the more surprising finding is that 60% of the Norwegian workers recommended adoption. To better understand this phenomenon, we need to examine the accounts that workers give for and against adoption.

The analysis shows that most workers in the three countries evaluated point to several conditions in the case that defined their decision. The most important factor is the ‘parents’ behaviour’, and we see that workers also state that if the parents’ behaviour was to change, then their decision might also change. The second and third most mentioned justifications for adoption are child focused and are about ‘permanency’ and ‘attachment’ relations for the three-year-old. The fourth justification for adoption is parents’ failure to visit the boy, and if the parents had visited the child, then decision regarding adoption may have been different. The following two reasons workers give for adoption recommendations are clearly child focused: Benjamin’s ‘needs’ and his ‘early placement and age’. The two last accounts relate to the time factor, and the fact that the foster parents ‘want’ to adopt the boy. There are studies about the decision-making processes of child welfare workers, but there are few cross-country studies and none about forced adoption. We see a balance between child-focused and adult focused factoring in the reasoning that we believe reflect the developing child-centrism in modern child welfare systems (Gilbert et al., 2011). The traditional parent-focused approach that these workers displayed also appears in a study by DeRoma, Kessler, McDaniel, and Soto (2006). A sample of 51 American child welfare workers identified the significant factors in placing a child outside of the home. The study asked workers to assess 35 risk/well-being factors and identified two primary factors: parents’ boundary settings towards an abuser and parental motives (cf. Christiansen & Anderssen, 2010).

Although there are clear similarities in how the countries view this case, there are also some differences that require examination. The American workers distinguished themselves by putting more emphasis on three factors: ‘parental behaviour’, the fact that the child is ‘wanted’ and his ‘early placement and young age’. Less emphasis was placed on the child’s ‘needs’. The English workers distinguished themselves with the issue of ‘permanency’, and the Norwegian workers put more emphasis on ‘attachment’, but less on ‘time’. We believe that most of these differences are related to system differences, although there are similarities between England and Norway that require additional explanation.

The ‘child protection’ system, represented by the USA and England (Gilbert et al., 2011), is a system designed to protect children from risk and harm rather than to promote childhood development. As such, it makes sense that American workers are more concerned with parental behaviour than with the child’s needs. Further, the strict timelines that the American system uses for children placed outside of the home make the comparatively bigger role of ‘early placement and age’ more understandable. Finally, the emphasis on the three-year-old being wanted by his foster parents may be due to challenges in recruiting good and stable foster parents in the American foster and adoption system (Berrick & Skivenes, 2012).

The English workers’ emphasis on permanency and their agreement with the Norwegian workers regarding ‘needs’ indicates the turn the English child welfare system has taken from a pure child protection system (cf. Parton, 2009; Parton & Berridge, 2011) to a family service or child-focused orientation (Gilbert et al., 2011). The English Public Law Outline 2008 (PLO) is also explicitly concerned with permanency considerations, and, as such, the English workers are in line with existing guidelines.

The particular focus on ‘attachment’ among Norwegian workers may be a reflection of the child-centric orientation that characterises the Norwegian child welfare system (Kriz & Skivenes, in press; Skivenes, 2011). The child’s attachments are given a lot of weight in questions of removal and reunification, and attachment is an important factor when the child’s attachment is to his or her foster parents. The comparatively lower emphasis Norwegian workers put on time may best be understood by the lack of guidelines and policy attention this theme has had in the Norwegian child welfare system.

We believe that the orientation of the Norwegian child welfare system, traditionally focused on family services, sheds light on the finding that 41% of workers do not suggest adoption for Benjamin. The system is set up to provide services to families and is intended to help parents become sustainable again. This is also reflected in the workers’ statements suggesting that Norwegian policy does not promote adoption. At the same time, we believe that an emerging child-centric orientation, in combination with professional knowledge about the benefits for adopted children, explains the high number of workers that suggest adoption.

For those that do not recommend adoption, more than half say that their decisions are due to a lack of consent from the biological mother. If the mother had changed her position and given consent, most workers would have considered adoption. In a Norwegian study published in 1998, Christiansen, Havnen and Havik examined 90 child welfare referral case files from four agencies and interviews with 27 case workers and found that when parental cooperation and consent were lacking, even in serious cases, workers showed a strong reluctance to forward the cases to the courts. Bunkholdt and Grinde (2004) found that child welfare workers would use strategic means, and sometimes threats, to gain consent and cooperation from parents when trying to determine whether to place a child in out-of-home care. Bunkholdt (2006) relates this finding to the insecurities workers face when considering whether their decision will stand up in court and their desire to avoid the feeling of defeat after failing to receive the court’s approval. Such tactical considerations could also be seen as pragmatic because the court has been very restrictive regarding forced adoption (Skivenes, 2010). Another Norwegian study examined the forced commitment of substance abusers to treatment centres (Lundeberg, Mjåland, Søvig, Nilssen, & Ravneberg, 2010) and generally showed little use of force but nevertheless a marked increase between 2001 and 2009. Our findings agree with the major findings described above. The lack of consent is similar to the general lack of clarity about what constitutes sufficient grounds for a given child protection measure, in our case, the use of forced adoption. The fact that workers are split 60/40 on whether to initiate adoption may be a strong indicator of this lack of clarity. Furthermore, we also find that there is uncertainty regarding the interpretation of the law, and a sense that application of the law is strict, therefore making it difficult to gain court approval for adoption. This strict interpretation may also create strong incentives for workers to attempt to gain parental consent before making a final decision, as indicated by the fact that 31% of Norwegian workers who did not recommend an adoption stated that they would have further conversations with the parents before making a final decision.

7. Conclusion

Forced adoption is one of the most serious interventions the state can enact with respect to a parent and a child. A decisive component for the legitimacy of state power is measured in the quality of justifications

given for an intervention. Our analysis of child welfare workers accounts for recommendations for and against adoption and shows us that the type of child welfare system and its policy guidelines play a major role in the recommendations of frontline child welfare workers. This finding indicates that workers follow the democratically legitimized instructions for interventions, and more so in England and the U.S. However, we also notice that workers have elaborate rationales for their decisions and demonstrate their in-depth knowledge of the reasons for adoption policies and permanency considerations for children that are looked after. The findings indicate that American and English workers have a clearer perception of the role of public and private responsibility for children and the state's role in a long-term placement situation, than their Norwegian peers. However, the political climate in Norway in the last three years suggests a turn towards increased use of adoptions in the child welfare system. In 2009, this was formulated as a political aim (Ot.prp. No. 69, 2008–2009, p. 33–35). While not wanting to change the law guiding adoptions in the child welfare act the government pledged to provide more precise guidelines to aid child welfare workers in making best-interests considerations on adoptions, in order to make it easier to forward cases for individual workers (Ot.prp. No. 69, 2008–2009, p. 34). In addition the government introduced a higher legal threshold for parents to demand reunification (Ot.prp. No. 69, 2008–2009, p. 25). Also, in 2010 Norway introduced open adoptions in child welfare cases (Prop. 7 L, 2009–2010), which is intended to make best interests decisions easier for the courts when the dilemma is between the need for permanency and the child's need for some contact with birth parents. However, in light of the government's previously stated goal of increasing the use of adoptions it should also be seen as a way of making adoptions a more attractive and less severe solution in difficult cases. In addition the two latest reports ordered by the Norwegian Ministry of children, equality and social inclusion, the 2011 "Report of the Child Protection Panel" (p. 47) and the more extensive 2012 Official Norwegian Report – 'NOU, 2012:5' "Better protection of children's development" (p. 133), both recommend that in cases where children are placed at a young age and the placement is expected to be long-term adoption must be considered within specified time-frames and it must be clarified whether or not the foster parents are willing to adopt at time of placement. What will become of these recommendations remains to be seen.

References

- Alexy, R. (1989). *A theory of legal argumentation. The theory of rational discourse as theory of legal justification*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Backe-Hansen, E. (2001). *Justification of care orders*. (Rettferdiggjøring av omsorgsovertagelse.). Oslo: NOVA: Norwegian Social Research, NOVA Report 2/01. PhD Thesis (dr. Psychol). (In Norwegian).
- Barter, C., & Renold, E. (1999). The use of vignettes in qualitative research. *Social Research Update*, 25.
- Barter, C., & Renold, E. (2000). 'I wanna tell you a story': Exploring the application of vignettes in qualitative research with children and young people. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 3(4), 307–323.
- Bartholet, E. (1999). *Nobody's children – Abuse and neglect, foster drift, and the adoption alternative*. Boston (MA): Beacon Press.
- Bartholet, E. (2009). The racial disproportionality movement in child welfare: false facts and dangerous directions. *Arizona Law Review*, 51, 871–932.
- Benbenishty, R., Osmo, R., & Gold, N. (2003). Rationales provided for risk assessments and for recommended interventions in child protection: A comparison between Canadian and Israeli professionals. *British Journal of Social Work*, 33, 137–155.
- Berrick, J. D. (2009). *Take me home: Protecting America's vulnerable children and families*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Berrick, J. D. (2011). Trends and issues in the U.S. child welfare system. In N. Gilbert, N. Parton, & M. Skivenes (Eds.), *Child protection systems: International trends and orientations*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Berrick, J., & Skivenes, M. (September). Dimensions of high quality foster care: Parenting plus. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 34(9), 1956–1965.
- Bunkholdt, V. (2006). Thresholds for child protection measures [Terskler for barneverntiltak]. *Norges Barnevern*(1), 23–31 (in Norwegian).
- Bunkholdt, V., & Grinde, T. V. (2004). Norwegian case workers' thresholds for child protection measures [Norske saksbehandlers terskler for barneverntiltak]. In T. V. Grinde (Ed.), *Nordic child protection: The threshold for child protection measures and the decision-making process in the use of forceNordisk barnevern: Terskelen for barneverntiltak og beslutningsprosessen ved bruk av tvang*. Oslo: NOVA: Norwegian Social Research NOVA Report 18/04. (In Norwegian).
- Christiansen, Ø., & Anderssen, N. (2010). From concerned to convinced: Reaching decisions about out-of-home care in Norwegian child welfare services. *Child & Family Social Work*, 15(2), 31–40.
- Christiansen, Ø., Havnen, K., & Havik, T. (1998). *Between protection of children and support of parents: What do child welfare workers emphasize in decisions following an investigation? [Mellom vern av barn og støtte til foreldre: Hva vektlegger barnevernsarbeidere ved beslutninger i undersøkelsessaker?]* Bergen: Barnevernets utviklingscenter på Vestlandet No. 1. (In Norwegian).
- Christoffersen, M. N., Hammen, I., Andersen, K. R., & Jeldtoft, N. (2007). *Adoption as a child protection measure: Systematic review of foreign experience [Adoption som innsats: En systematisk gjennomgang af udenlandske erfaringer]*. Copenhagen: SFI - The Danish National Centre for Social Research 07:32. (In Danish).
- Coffey, A., & Atkinson, P. (1996). *Making sense of qualitative data: Complementary research strategies*. Thousand Oaks (CA): Sage Publications, Inc.
- DeRoma, V. M., Kessler, M. L., McDaniel, R., & Soto, C. M. (2006). Important risk factors in home-removed decisions: Social caseworker perceptions. *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal*, 23(3), 263–277.
- Duffy, J., & Collins, E. (2010). Macro impacts on caseworker decision-making in child welfare: A cross-national comparison. *European Journal of Social Work*, 13(1), 35–54.
- Elster, J. (1989). *Solomonic judgements – Studies in the limitations of rationality*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Eriksen, E. O., & Weigård, J. (2003). *Understanding Habermas: Communicative action and deliberative democracy*. New York: Continuum.
- Finch, J. (1987). The vignette technique in survey research. *Sociology*, 21(1), 105–114.
- Gambrill, E. (2008). Decision making in child welfare: Constraints and potentials. In D. Lindsey, & A. Shlonsky (Eds.), *Child welfare research: Advances for practice and policy*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Garrett, P. M., & Sinkkonen, J. (2003). Putting children first? A comparison of child adoption policy and practice in Britain and Finland. *European Journal of Social Work*, 6(1), 19–32.
- Gilbert, N. (1997). *Combating child abuse: International perspectives and trends*. New York: Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gilbert, N., Parton, N., & Skivenes, M. (Eds.). (2011). *Child protection systems: International trends and orientations*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Goldstein, J., Freud, A., & Solnit, A. J. (1973). *Beyond the best interests of the child*. New York: Free Press.
- Grady, C., Dickert, N., Jawetz, T., Gensler, G., & Emanuel, E. (2005). An analysis of U.S. practices of paying research participants. *Contemporary Clinical Trials*, 26(3), 365–375.
- Grinde, T. V. (2003). County social welfare boards – Some developments [Fylkesnemndene – noen trekk ved utviklingen]. In J. Veland (Ed.), *The child welfare book 2003* (pp. 151–159). *Barnvern boka 2003. Årbok for barnevernet* (pp. 151–159). Stavanger: Senter for atferdsforskning, Høgskolen i Stavanger (in Norwegian).
- Grinde, T. V. (Ed.). (2004). *Nordic child protection: The threshold for child protection measures and the decision-making process in the use of forceNordisk barnevern: Terskelen for barneverntiltak og beslutningsprosessen ved bruk av tvang*. Oslo: NOVA: Norwegian Social Research NOVA Report 18/04. (In Norwegian).
- Grinde, T. V. (2005). *Child welfare policies: Adoption in cases of early risk of neglect*. Childhoods 2005 Oslo: International conference. Oslo: Univeritetet i Oslo (29. juni – 03. juli).
- Habermas, J. (1996). *Between facts and norms: Contributions to a discourse theory of law and democracy*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Hollinger, J. (2002). *Adoption law and practice*. Newark, NJ and San Francisco, CA: LexisNexis.
- Innst. O. No. 80 1991–92 'Recommendations of the parliament to the Government's suggestion for the Child Welfare Act of 1992' [Innstilling fra forbruker- og administrasjonskomiteen om lov om barneverntjenester (barnevernloven)] (in Norwegian).
- Isaacs, E., & Shepherd, C. (2008). *Social work decision-making – A guide to childcare lawyers*. Briston: Jordan Publishing.
- Kriz, K., & Skivenes, M. (in press). Child-centric or family focused? A study of child welfare workers' perceptions of ethnic minority children in England and Norway. *Child & Family Social Work*. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1365-2206.2011.00802.x>.
- Lundeberg, I. R., Mjåland, K., Søvig, K. H., Nilssen, E., & Ravneberg, B. (2010). *The use of coercion towards substance abusers. An evaluation of the Social Services Act section 6–2, 6–2a, and 6–3 [Tvang overfor rusmiddelavhengige. Evaluering av Lov om sosiale tjenester §§ 6–2, 6–2a og 6–3]*. Bergen: Uni Rokkan Centre Report 2. (in Norwegian).
- Mnookin, R. H. (1973). Foster care: In whose best interest? *Harvard Education Review*, 43(4), 599–638.
- Munro, E. (2008). *Effective child protection*. LA, London: Sage Publications.
- Official Norwegian Report – 'NOU 2012:5 Better protection of children's development' [Bedre beskyttelse av barns utvikling - Ekspertutvalgets utredning om det biologiske prinsipp i barnevernet] (in Norwegian).
- Osmo, R., & Rosen, A. (2002). Social workers' strategies for treatment hypothesis testing. *Social Work Research*, 26(1), 9–18.
- Ot. Prp. No. 44, 1991–1992 'Government proposition for the Child Welfare Act of 1992' [Om lov om barneverntjenester (barnevernloven)] (in Norwegian).
- Ot.prp. No. 69, 2008–2009 'Government proposition on Changes to the Child Welfare Act of 1992' [Om lov om endringer i barnevernloven] (in Norwegian).
- Parton, N. (2009). Challenges to practice and knowledge in child welfare social work: From the 'social' to the 'informational'? *Children and Youth Services Review*, 31(7), 715–721.
- Parton, N. (2011). Child protection and safeguarding in England: Changing and competing conceptions of risk and their implications for social work. *British Journal of Social Work*, 41, 854–875.

- Parton, N., & Berridge, D. (2011). Child Protection in England. In N. Gilbert, N. Parton, & M. Skivenes (Eds.), *Child protection systems: International trends and emerging orientations*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Prop. 7 L, 2009–2010 'Government proposition on changes to the adoption act and the child welfare act' [Endringer i adopsjonsloven og barnevernloven] (in Norwegian). Report of the Child Protection Panel, submitted to the Norwegian Ministry of children, equality and social inclusion 2011. [Barnevernpanelets rapport] (in Norwegian).
- Rosen, A. (1994). Knowledge use in direct practice. *The Social Service Review*, 68(4), 561–577.
- Skivenes, M. (2009). Post-adoption contact in child welfare cases – In the child's best interests? [Kontakt med biologisk familie etter adopsjon i barnevernet – til barnets beste?] *Tidsskrift for Arverett, Familierett og Barnevernrettslige Spørsmål*(3), 134–155 (Written in Norwegian).
- Skivenes, M. (2010). Judging the child's best interests: Rational reasoning or subjective presumptions? *Acta Sociologica*, 53(4), 339–353. <http://doi.org/10.1177/0001699310379142>.
- Skivenes, M. (2011). Norway – Toward a child centric perspective. In N. Gilbert, N. Parton, & M. Skivenes (Eds.), *Child protection systems: International trends and emerging orientations*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Soydan, H. (1996). Using the vignette method in cross-cultural comparisons. In L. Hantrais, & S. Mangen (Eds.), *Cross-national research methods in the social sciences*. London: Pinter.
- The Norwegian Child Welfare Act of 1992 [Lov om barneverntjenester av 17. juli 1992 nr. 100 (barnevernloven)] (in Norwegian).
- The Public Law Outline – Guide to Case Management in Public Law Proceedings (2008).
- Thoburn, J. (2007). *Globalisation and child welfare: Some lessons from a cross-national study of children in out-of-home care*. Norwich: University of East Anglia.
- Triseliotis, J. P. (2002). Long-term foster care or adoption? The evidence examined. *Child & Family Social Work*, 7, 23–33.
- Vinnerljung, B., & Hjern, A. (2011). Cognitive, educational and self-support outcomes of long-term foster care versus adoption. A Swedish national cohort study. *Children & Youth Services Review*, 33, 1902–1910.
- Wilks, T. (2004). The use of vignettes in qualitative research into social work values. *Qualitative Social Work*, 3(1), 78–87.