Session 2 / Séance plénière 2
Policy and Practice in Early Years Services and Child Protection
Services à la petite enfance et protection de l'enfance : cadre politique et bonnes pratiques
Intervention précoce dans les familles à risque dans les pays nordiques

*Prof. Henrik Andershed*

Université d'Örebro / Centre nordique pour le bien-être et les affaires sociales (NVC)

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Early Intervention for Families at Risk in the Nordic Countries

*Prof. Henrik Andershed*

Associate Professor at Örebro University / Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues (NVC)
Ongoing activities to summarize effective work with children – The Nordic countries

Henrik Andershed, PhD, Ass. Professor
Psychology and Criminology
Örebro University, Sweden

On behalf of the Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues
Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues

- Works on behalf of the Nordic governments
  - Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and the Faroe Islands, Greenland and Åland.
- Identifies and actualizes social policy challenges
- Contributes to improving the basis for political decision-making
Trends in the Nordic countries

- Increase of simplified access to services
  - For example family centres
- Increase of family support/education programmes
- Increase of standardized assessment tools
  - in child welfare investigations and in preventive work with children at risk
Ongoing project: Early interventions for families at risk

- **Four areas:**
  - Actual research on risk and protective factors
    - Research review of early risk- and protective factors
  - Best practices of early interventions
    - Will describe good examples from the Nordic countries
  - Simplified access to services
    - A vignette study will be conducted with focus on what role these activities play for families at risk
  - Let the voices of the children be heard!
    - Nordic voluntary organizations present how they work with participation from young service users. A film will be produced and a network of organizations will start.

- **Ongoing project – finalized during 2012**
What are risk and protective factors?

- **Risk factors**
  - “those characteristics, variables, or hazards that, if present for a given individual, make it more likely that this individual, rather than someone selected from the general population, will develop a disorder” (Mrazek & Haggerty, 1994).

- **Protective factors**
  - “those factors that mediate or moderate the effect of exposure to risk factors, resulting in reduced incidence of problem behavior.” (Pollard et al., 1999)
Examples of **risk factors** in childhood

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The child</th>
<th>The family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Defiant behavior, anger, or fearlessness</td>
<td>• Parents’ own difficulties</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Overactivity, impulsiveness, or concentration difficulties</td>
<td>• Difficulties in parent-youth relations</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Difficulties with empathy, feelings of guilt or remorse</td>
<td>• Parents’ difficulties with parenting strategies</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Insufficient verbal abilities</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Negative problem solving, interpretations or attitudes</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Depressive mood or self harming behavior</td>
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<td>• Conduct problems</td>
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</table>
Examples of **protective factors** in childhood

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The child</th>
<th>The family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Strong intellectual ability</td>
<td>• Parents’ energy, engagement and support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Positive preschool/kindergarten attachment and relations</td>
<td>• Parents’ positive attitudes and parenting strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Positive attitudes and problem solving strategies</td>
<td>• Parents’ awareness and motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Positive relations and activities</td>
<td></td>
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More on risk and protective factors...

- Risk factors have cumulative effects
  - For example:
    - A child exposed to six or more risk factors is 10 times as likely to commit a violent act by age 18 as a child exposed to only one risk factor (Herrenkohl et al., 2000)

- Many problems/disorders share the same fundamental risk factors
  - Risk factors for long lasting antisocial behavior are usually risk factors for psychosocial problems generally (Andershed & Andershed, 2009)

- There is a list of risk and protective factors but different factors apply for different children! (e.g., Andershed & Andershed, 2008)
Risk focused prevention
(e.g., Farrington & Welsh, 2006 – Saving children from a life of crime)

- Focus on children exhibiting or who are exposed to risk factors
- Focus the intervention on reducing the child's risks
- Can be done by:
  - A direct focus on reducing the behaviors, relations, etc, that constitutes the risks
  - A focus on enhancing protection and thereby reducing the risk for long lasting problems (Catalano & Hawkins, 1996)

- The risk-focused prevention paradigm has gained international recognition from governments in recent years
  - as an approach that is both plausible and practical in the light of current knowledge (see Farrington & Welsh, 2006)
Three useful guiding principles in assessments and the tailoring of suitable interventions
(e.g., Andrews & Bonta, 2006)

- **The Risk Principle**
  - Interventions more effective if intensive interventions are focused on children at high risk

- **The Need Principle**
  - Interventions more effective if they are tailored to focus on the specific child’s most relevant needs – the changeable risk factors explaining the problem behavior in the particular child at hand

- **The Responsivity Principle**
  - Interventions more effective if tailored after the specific child’s abilities and motivation
Risk focused prevention needs to be carried out with care by well informed professionals

- Needs to be conducted with knowledge about the limitations
  - Some children and their families with high risk will not develop long lasting problems – we do not know who they are
    - That is, we will identify and intervene with more children that what is “needed”
  - All children and families in need of help will not be detected

- Important to communicate risk to care-givers in a very nuanced way to avoid negative effects of the identification (stigmatization)
Challenges for the future in the Nordic countries

- Evidence-based work need to increase even more
- ”Practice-as-usual” need to be better evaluated
- Assessment tools and methods need to be better evaluated