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**“Criteria and parameters used by social workers facing dilemmas and critical events
in family and children services – a research project”**

In their daily work, social workers have to make decisions in many delicate and difficult questions that are tangled by different levels of judgement and evaluation. They face situations in which there is no clear evidence of which is the ‘right way’ to act and every decision has undesirable outcomes; often social workers ask for clear guidance but at the same time suffers being tighten in strict predefined role. Social work is represented as an agent of control and some of those who are trying to restore the aspects of support, sustain and proximity of social work, have criticized specialization and a looks for a processes of de – professionalism.

In the field of Child Protection and Family Services, this tension is amplified by radical changes in the Italia system occurred in the Judicial System and in the Welfare System, together with the modification of problems that affect children and family lives. Knowledge and criteria on which is based the practice of professionals involved in Children and Family Services are put under stress. Social workers tend to adopt a polarized attitude: retirement in a bureaucratic position or an ideological over involvement, detached from the institutional context and rules, in the name of the value of ‘protection of the child’. SW are physically or legally attacked by parents, are denounced at the Professional Board and their work is disregarded by managers.

The aim of my PhD research is to analyze criteria and values, which nowadays orients actions and decisions of professionals involved in child protection and family services. I will focus on situations defined as ‘critical’ because those situations present the features of dilemmas and conflict between duties, knowledge, and values. I am interested to know how professionals justify their choices in dilemmatic situations, the role that those different dimensions play in decision-making and the measure of satisfaction of professionals in those decisions.

In this paper, I will present theoretical background and methods choose for this research, which it is at a beginning stage.

My aim is to share with colleagues some open questions both on content (Are Children and family Social Worker in on other countries facing similar dilemmas? Which different dimension influences their decision-making?) and research methods (interviews and focus group)