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## **Ruling relations of Christian social work in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Finland**

Christian social work, which is called diaconia work, has no official role in the Finnish welfare state model. Rather, it has been considered as a local and casual actor, despite its very large scale action. According to recent studies, it seems that Christian social work has become a more significant role in social sector than earlier. Christian social work has been studied quite little from the standpoint of a client. Thus, my main research question is: what is the meaning of the diaconia work for the clients. I am investigating this question with two sub-questions: what kind of practices exists in Christian social work and in what kind of social processes there are present in social welfare system. My intention is to visualise Christian social work and locate its situation in Finland, especially by mirroring clients' experiences. At the same time it is possible to see what the place of diaconia work is in the changing welfare state.

As a theoretical-methodological approach I use an institutional ethnography created by Dorothy E. Smith. The investigation of diaconia work starts from the standpoint of clients and their experiences of their everyday world related to managing in the life. However, it is possible to understand those immanent social relations and institutional practices which penetrate and organise the experience of an individual. These kind of social relations are called ruling relations, as well.

My data collection consisted of two phases. First, by using a questionnaire I asked diaconia workers in a certain area how a client process goes; for what kind of problems the clients come to the diaconia office and what kind of help they receive. The results of the questionnaire gave me background knowledge of client work process in Christian social work. Secondly, I used ethnographic methods in conducting field research in a local parish. This period provided me with additional data about the process of the client work in diaconia. Experiences of clients showed me the social relations which become true through clients' experience.

One level of my analysis is to look at diaconia work in relation to the welfare state. It seems that Christian social work is continuing ruling relations of the Finnish welfare system. Working

models and practices of Christian social work follow practices of the social sector. Christian social work is also filling gaps of welfare state and so enabling cuts in social sector. In relation to an individual client Christian social work is able to help him or her and promote his or her case also with social officers very successfully. However, pressure to repairing welfare system's gaps is marginal.