

Pascal Bastian

Institute of Social Work and Social Welfare
University of Kassel

pascal.bastian@uni-kassel.de

THE USUABILITY OF PSYCHOLOGICAL-CLASSIFICATORY DIAGNOSTIC IN SOCIAL WORK

Particularly with the media presentation of tragic child killings, the debate about child welfare and child protection in Germany has gained high public attention. In 2005 the German legislative body passed the new protection order for children at risk (8a SGB VIII „Schutzauftrag bei Kindeswohlgefährdung“). In this act the actions of the General Social Services were specified particularly in respect to risk assessment. The result is an increased use of classificatory diagnostic tools in practice. You can find evidences in various Anglo-American studies about the improved accuracy of such statistical diagnostics. But the usability of these tools is rarely investigated and there are only a few studies that take the self-assessment of the families into account.

In my presentation I will describe the method and results of a research project in which I compare the results of the risk-assessments by professional social workers with the self-assessment of the target group of social work activities. I will show that there is a significant divergence between these assessments. Furthermore, correlation analysis shows, that the results of the screening has no significance and only minor coherence to the later granted assistance. This is a rather surprising and scandalous finding, since these diagnostic tools were not possible to capture the self-expressed needs of users. Moreover, the results of the assessment did not affect the professional decisions. It seems, that the classificatory assessments are not the starting point for future decisions. Thus, there must be other relevant contexts and mechanisms that influence professional decision and case constitution.

On the basis of these results I will discuss the usability of risk-assessment in child protection and explore some possible organisational conditions and political discourses that influence professional decisions in Social Work.