Children's participation in decision-making: Perspectives from Social Workers in Gothenburg

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Dedication
This paper is dedicated to my family, friends, academics and policy makers.

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Abstract

This study sought to explore the participation of children in decision-making from the point of view of social work practitioners in Gothenburg - Sweden. It drew from article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and tries to situate participation of children within the context of social policy. The systems, socialization, reflective reproduction and structural perspectives as well as the competent-incompetent discourses are incorporated as epistemological strands of analysis.

The study used both qualitative and quantitative research methods to collect and analyse both primary and secondary data. Self-administered questionnaires to the social work practitioners and young people respectively as well as semi-structured interviews to parents and young people were used to collect primary data. Secondary data was collected by way of reviewing documents from previous studies. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for quantitative data while meaning condensation and meaning categorisation were used for qualitative data analysis.

Practitioners agreed almost unanimously that children need to be listened to, competency and lack of sex favouritism on children regarding participation. However, they were quiet divided as to the appropriate age of starting to participate as well as on who should determine the best interest of the child. I argue herein that there is a neat connection between the social policy system and the participation or non-participation of children in decision-making. In spite of the small sample, the author concludes that Sweden has gone strides ahead in implementing the UNCRC going by the responses from practitioners, institutions and activities set up to implement it. However, it still remains progressively challenging to evaluate whether or not these institutions are not just a matter of good intent.

Key words: Child, Participation, decision-making, social policy.

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ACRONYMS

BRIS – Barnens Ratt I Samhallet

CYPU - Children and Young People's Unit

EU – European Union

LVU – Lagen om Vard av Unga

SOL – Socialtjänstlagen

SPSS – Statistical Package for Social Sciences

UN – United Nations

UNICEF – United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

UNCRC – United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

UK – United Kingdom

USA – United States of America

Chapter 1

1.0 Introduction

The UNCRC, UN Convention on Environment and Development (United Nations, 1989, 1992), the European Convention on the exercise of Children's rights (Council of Europe 1996) are all but some of the global treaties that advocate for the welfare of the child. These treaties contain some contentious or misunderstood provisions one of which is, 'the best interest of the child'. Among the modes of determining this is to let children express their views in matters that affect their lives by way of participating in decision-making. Participation is one of the three principles (protection, provision and participation) in the UNCRC but perhaps one that suits the egalitarian and solidaristic doctrine of the social democratic (inexplicably Swedish) welfare policy system. It is not only a democratic tenet but also a modern way of taking care of children. Decision-making is a day-to-day activity, happening at home, work places and indeed in the governance of states. This paper reports on the study carried out by the author in the city of Gothenburg in Sweden although from time-to-time, reference will be made to other countries in order to allow for international comparisons. The study sought to solicit views from social work practitioners regarding children's participation in decision-making. Parents as well as young people also participated in the study.

1.1 Structure of the report

This thesis is divided into six chapters. In chapter one, the author discusses the background of the study, Sweden's social policy, overview of the situation of children in Sweden, as well as Sweden's implementation of the UNCRC. The problem area, aim and objectives of the study, research questions and the significance of the study (and implicitly its relevance to the social work field) as well as concepts are also dealt with. Chapter two is a presentation of literature from previous studies. Chapter three is the presentation and discussion of theoretical perspectives and discourses relating to childhood. I also present a summary and some reflections. The methods used in the study are outlined and discussed in chapter four as well as the study areas, the population and sample, data collection processes, setting and methods. The data analysis process, type and software as well as ethical considerations and limitations of the study are explained

to the extent possible. Issues of validity, reliability and generalizability are also addresses in this chapter. In chapter five analysis and presentation of findings and conclusions while chapter six deals with discussion, implications of the findings/results and suggestions for future research.

1.2 Background

[Social Work] Practitioners have important roles as ' social investigators' (Sinfield, 1969) to reveal the harmful effects of structures and policies such that some people live in fear in their own homes and neighbourhoods without the means [and opportunity] to participate as full members of our society and without hope for the future (Adams, et al 2002:118). Participation in this context is not only democratic but also a necessary structural aspect of development. It has been hailed as a key factor in ensuring project or programme success (Hall & Midgley 2004:91; Midgley 1995:34; Trevithick 2005:46). Children are especially a section of the population the world over who are mostly excluded from participation. Reasons for the exclusion of their views in public decisions are generating great public interest. 'Across the UK (and internationally), there is a fast growing commitment to involve young people in public decision making' (Kirby and Bryson 2002:9). At the centre of the debate is responsibility and rights and the interpretation (and therefore responsibility to determine) of what is in the 'best interest of the child' which according to Eekelaar (1994), 'is suspect without a framework of children's rights' (Thomas, 2000:64).

That parents are responsible for ensuring the protection and care of their children and that children have rights and responsible for their actions (as individuals) cannot be overemphasised. Suffice to say, these are, but somewhat two often contradictory tenets. Crucial though, is the extent and mode of involving young people in public decision making – invariably (social) policies. Social policy means 'measures that affect peoples'[decisions] wellbeing, whether through the provision of welfare services or by means of policies that impact upon livelihoods more generally (Hall and Midgley 2004: xiv). While the bottom line in the definition is essentially 'welfare', I prefer to prefix it with 'social'. We can therefore conceive of a condition of welfare to exist based on three

premises thus; 'the degree to which social problems are managed, second, the extent to which needs are met and finally, the degree to which opportunities for advancement are provided' (Midgley, 2005:14). He further argues that these three elements can be applied at individual, family, group, community as well as whole society. The concept is used here in special reference to children – their participation in solving social problems, meeting needs and articulating opportunities for development.

Two conflicting perspectives on childhood are worth reflecting on. On one hand the view held by Philippe Aries (1979) that childhood is a 'social construct' that never existed in medieval society (Thomas, 200:5). And on the other, Lloyd de Mause's view that 'childhood is a nightmare from which we have only recently begun to awaken' (de Mause cited in Thomas 2000:6). Although the later is a direct counter argument to the former, they both are important in explaining the current study and indeed status of children in our modern society. The former would logically entail that in modern society childhood exists and therefore an area worthy exploring. The later perspective goes further by implying that it is actually an important area previously unknown and therefore worthy knowing. It can therefore be argued that children participation existed in medieval society but the mode of participation is different from the modern one. As Makkonen (in Brembeck et al, 2004:113) observes, 'today, children participation is a question of democratic influence in home, school and society, but also of participation in consumer society'. If childhood never existed in medieval age, it exists now, and if we have just waken up to it, what is the way forward?

This study was partly motivated by article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), a general popularity of 'participation' in decision/policy making, as a democratic principle and a general interest in child welfare and social policy by the author. The author therefore sought to explore this issue in the city of Gothenburg – Sweden. Part 1 of Article 12 states,

> "*States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child*".

And part 2 of the same article,

"For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law" (United Nations,1989).

The article introduces 'a radical and profound challenge to traditional attitudes which assume that children should be seen and not heard' (Lansdown, 2001:2). It is therefore substantive (entitles) as well as procedural (providing a platform to children to challenge and participate in decisions). And as Stephens (1995) notes, the UNCRC is legally binding to ratifying states - it is not just a general statement of good intent. Related to UNCRC is agenda 21 of the UN Convention on Environment and Development in Rio De Jenairo in 1992. Agenda 21 recommends local communities all over the world to involve different groups [children and young people inclusive] as participants in local decision-making processes creating sustainable development (Kjorholt, 2002:67).

Undoubtedly, social policy is but one of those decisions or according to the article, 'matters affecting the child'. The process of decision (policy) making in most if not all countries exclude views of the children which as the article aptly puts it, 'given due weight'.

1.3 The Swedish social policy
The Swedish social policy would be categorised as institutional and social democratic respectively (Wilensky and Lebeaux, 1958, Titmuss, 1974, Esping-Andersson, 1990). Wilensky and Lebeaux, (1958) coined a dyad of conceptualising social policy namely; residual and institutional. By residual, they meant a form of state intervention when both the family and market have failed to provide for the individual. And by institutional, they referred to a form of state intervention in the lives of its citizens as a matter of right and without any stigma, abnormalcy. Titmuss (1974) added another model to this dyad - the industrial achievement model which he argued lies in between these two. However, the author chose to focus on Esping-Andersson's categorisation not because it is better than the other two and those that followed latter, but because of his emphasis on 'regime

types'. As Esping-Andersen (1987) noted, the term 'regime' is significant in that it reflects an understanding of the welfare state as part of an integrated system that articulates a particular policy logic (Daly and Rake, 2004:26). This perhaps makes it stand-out from other scholars in the social policy (welfare state) debate. Additionally, his model is the emblem within which the Swedish child welfare policy (which nourishes or inhibits children's participation) is typified, although he did not have a particular focus on child welfare.

1.4 Esping-Andersen's model elaborated

Esping-Andersen (1990), argues that what delineates his typology edifice is 'regimes'. By this, he refers to, 'the ways in which welfare production is allocated between state, market and households (Esping-Andersen, 1999:73). His triad analysis axis (liberal, conservative and social democratic) was based on the private-public blend; degree of de-commodification and modes of stratification or solidarity. According to him de-commodification occurs when a service is rendered as a matter of right, and when a person can maintain a livelihood without reliance on the market (Pierson and Castles, (2000:157). He argues that his model derive from classical European political economy. However it has been criticised for being child welfare and gender blind and I would say focusing only on developed countries. However, I would suppose that these variables were outside his research area, hence the omission.

The *Liberal* regime is characterised by minimum state intervention and therefore individual and market solutions. Citizen entitlements are not favoured in this regime type. It has three core characteristics: it is residual in that the state intervention only comes in when the family and market fail, 'bad risks'; the benefits thereof are modest, income or means tested and invariably, it is liberal, that is, needs-based as opposed to rights-based approach to social assistance. The third is the leading role played by the market. De-commodification in this regime type is minimized and an element of dualism manifests – self reliance as well as welfare dependence when the former fails. According to him, the UK, USA, Canada, Australia approximate this model. However, there are differences even among states that approximate this regime. For instance Canada and Britain have

universal national health insurance while private health care dominates in USA (Esping-Andersen, 1999:76).

The *Conservative* regime has a background in social insurance reforms in Germany during the time of Bismack whose intentions were far removed from creation of an egalitarian society but a segmented society that would easily be managed. This regime is more like a slight adjustment from the first and can be said to mediate between the liberal and social democratic regimes. It is epitomised by segmentation, subsidiarity and familialism. The principle of subsidiarity entails that the family should support its members and the state can only intervene when the family has failed, with focus on the male breadwinner. Benefits are focused on the family as opposed to the individual in the first instance. It therefore harbours some elements of residualism like the liberal regime. Germany, Italy, France are examples of this regime.

The *Social-democratic* regime type is fundamentally synonymous with the Scandinavian countries. According to Esping-Andersen, it is 'an international late comer' (Esping-Andersen, 1999:78). Universalism is the cornerstone of social democratic risk pooling. Besides universalism, the social democratic welfare state is particularly, committed to comprehensive risk coverage, generous benefit levels and egalitarianism (Korpi, 1983; Esping Andersen, 1990; Hicks et al, 1989; Stephens 1996). In this regime, full employment, training and retraining are stressed. It is a product of the labour movement and can be said to be 'more child-oriented' (Bak and Kabasinskaite, 2006), hence its relevance to the current study.

1.5 Overview of the children's situation in Sweden

Child welfare policy in Sweden is based on the Social Services Act of 1980 (Sol) and the Care of Young Persons Act (LVU) from the same year (Hessle & Vinnerljung (2000). Four main activities make up this policy thus: prevention, investigation, social support and in-home treatment and care (Ibid). Preventive activities [primary and secondary] include but not limited to, foster care, pre and post-natal maternal care, subsidised child care, social support in schools. The law states in part that, 'children should be treated

with respect for their individuality ... they shall not be subjected to physical punishment or other degrading treatment' (Hessle & Vinnerljung (2000:15).

By giving children these "legal rights", they argue, the law also defines the responsibilities of parents (or other caretakers). From this argument, it would appear that the law regards children as 'beings' with rights. Interestingly, the same law makes no mention of responsibilities that are (or should be) incumbent upon these *subjects*. They have rights but no responsibilities. This is also true in Rousseau's *1972, social contract* – 'man [a human] is born free'...... (James et al 1998:13). This, i would argue, demeans the very status of 'beings' that is accorded to these humans. Additionally, the (LVU) regulates taking children and youths into care without the parents' or children's consent (Ibid) – presumably in the 'best interest of the child' but at the expense of children's rights to participate in matters affecting their lives. However, 'one problem with promoting children's involvement in decisions when they are in state care may be that it represents a challenge to conventional power relationships in families; and this is something the state is generally reluctant to do' (Thomas 2002:53).

It is interesting to note that child welfare in Sweden never experienced any cut-backs even at the acme of economic slump. It therefore merits Sweden's second position in the league table headed by Netherlands for child well-being among the twenty-one (21) industrialised nations (UNICEF, 2007:2). However, Sweden was ranked first in material well-being, health and safety as well as behaviours and risks. The report was based on six (6) categories namely: material well-being, family and peer relationships, health and safety, behaviour and risks, own sense of well-being (educational) and own sense of well-being (subjective). Again participation not included.

1.6 Sweden's implementation on the UNCRC

Sweden ratified the UNCRC in 1990 and has put in place a number of measures to implement it. For instance, an Ombudsman (for children and young people up to the age of 18 years) was formed under the 1992/93:173 bill (http://www.bo.se/Adfinity.aspx?pageid=89). The first Ombudsman (Louise Sylwander)

was therefore appointed on 1 July 1993 (Ibid). Its main duty was/is to safeguard and promote in the community the rights, needs and interests of children and young people as stipulated in the UNCRC. Working in collaboration with municipalities and government agencies, it maintains regular contacts with children and young people and submits an annual report to the government on opportunities and problems experienced by young people. The Ombudsman is appointed by the Government and has a tenure of six (6) years. In addition, the youth parliament (which formed part of the sample for this study) was also formed in 2005 alongside youth councils in all schools. Similarly, in England, the Children and Young People's Unit (CYPU)'s *Learning to Listen* document states: 'promoting early engagement in public and community life is crucial to sustaining and building a healthy society' and ' good participation opportunities produce more confident and resilient young people (CYPU, 2001b:6, cited in Cockburn 2005:114).

1.7 Problem Area

Most countries (Sweden inclusive as well as Zambia where the author comes from) are signatories to the UN convention on the rights of the child. Children aged 0 – 19 years form 36% of the worlds' population (http://www.census.gov/cgi-bin/ipc/idbagg). Most of the social problems in the world affect children more than any other age group. And these social problems are addressed by decisions (social policies) which exclude the victims or users of the services they address. Eydal & Satka (2006:306) note that ....children have remained relatively invisible in the Nordic welfare model and discourse. They further note that they are invisible in welfare policy research, theories as well as vocabulary. The authors conclude that children's participation has not been fully examined in the Nordic Countries. In their view, this is the right which is least developed and most questioned right of Nordic children. It is therefore important to understand why the aforesaid category cannot be included in decision-making especially in relation to article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. As Thomas (2002:67) puts it, 'it is arguable that the task of professionals in planning and decision-making is to support this process [of participation] in the families where it happens naturally and to model it where it does not'.

1.8 Aim of the study

The aim of this study was to understand how participation of children in decision-making is perceived among social work practitioners in Gothenburg and how participation is situated in the obtaining social policy.

1.9 Objectives

- To explore factors that hinder or facilitate children's involvement in making decisions.
- To discuss how involving children at home or work places affect decisions made.
- To explore how much or how far children can be involved in decision-making.
- To find out whether gender is a factor in children's participation.

1.10 Research Questions

- What are the factors that hinder or facilitate children's participation in social policy decisions?
- How does involving children in decision-making at home and work places affect the decisions made?
- To what extent should children participate in social policy decisions?
- How is children's exclusion or inclusion from participation reflected in gender terms?

1.11 Significance of the study

A social worker's laboratory is society – social problems and victims thereof and the method of data collection is interaction (or participation of) with service users. The study would therefore inform the social work fraternity of a close relationship between perceptions (of children) and practices (of involving or not involving them) and that the two are to a larger extent influenced by bureaucratic (policy) systems. It is also hoped that it will contribute to the current ongoing debate on the often overlooked but equally important of the three rights of the child – participation as well as contribute to literature on child welfare.

1.12 Definitions of concepts used

The concept of *child* will be used in this paper to refer to a young person between 6 and 18 years of age though the aforesaid article just says below 18 years. 'For the purposes of the present Convention, a child means every human being below the age of eighteen (18) years unless, under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier' (Article 1 of the UNCRC, 1989). This age-group is chosen because mostly it is the school going age that would be able to fill-in the questionnaire.

Am using *decision-making* in this paper to mean a course of action, a process (cognitive) where parties identify and select a course of action from among alternatives. It is related and precursory to, but not problem-solving.

Participation can be said to be a democratic and management tenet. It is 'a process during which individuals, groups and organizations are consulted about or have the opportunity to become actively involved in a project or programme of activity' (http://www.google.com/search?hl=en&lr=&defl=en&q=define:participation) .According to Bryson and Kirby (2002:10), participation means taking part in making public decisions. 'Participation is a process through which stakeholders influence and share control over development initiatives and the decisions and resources which affect them' (http://www.worldbank.org/wbi/sourcebook) .For the purpose of this paper, the word will be used to mean three things: taking part, involvement and sharing.

Social policy means 'measures that affect peoples' wellbeing, whether through the provision of welfare services or by means of policies that impact upon livelihoods more generally (Hall & Midgley 2004:xiv). It is therefore those decision made by the sate that are intended to improve the wellbeing of people. For the purpose of this study, the term will be used interchangeably with 'decisions' but without any deliberate intention to alter the meaning.

Chapter 2

2.0 Literature review

A number of studies have been done in this subject area but without specific focus on the current topic, more so in reference to social policy - because the welfare of children is undoubtedly a social policy matter. Alison and June (2005), explored a mosaic approach, a methodology for listening to young children that brings together verbal and visual tools to reveal young children's' perspectives. In this multi-method approach, children's own photographs, tours and maps were combined with discussions and observations to gain deeper insight of their perspectives in early childhood.

 Bryson and Kirby (2002) for instance carried out an evaluation study on why and how to involve young people in public decision making. They found that while young people are increasingly being involved in participatory projects, they are still having little impact on public decision-making although this had both a contextual and organisational variation. They also found substantial evidence that good participatory work benefits the young people but that token involvement may not. The authors identified what issues needed to be examined further (among which is the current one) as well as future challenges for evaluation and research in this field.

Sinclair (2004) studied on how to make young people's participation meaningful, effective and sustainable. Her work is grounded on putting young people's participation in decision making into practice. She argues that children's participation in decision-making is complex. Sinclair concludes by suggesting that if participation is to be more meaningful to children and effective in influencing change, it is necessary to move beyond one-off or isolated participation and consider how participation becomes embedded as an integral part of our relationship with children.

Another study by Thomas (2002) focused on children, family and the state as they influence children's participation in decision-making. He sadly notes in his study that it is still common practice not to invite these children and young people to decision-making meetings. In his findings, where invitations are made, they are done so to adult children

who most times would not attend because of being bored, embarrassed or mystified by the meetings. However, the author cautions against misinterpreting the mere attendance of meetings vis-avis participation and notes that the former does not warrant the later. In his view, participation is multi-dimensional thus: *choice, information, voice, control, support and autonomy*. He further found out that children's views were mediated by either social workers or adults. His study found a mutually supportive relationship between carers who encouraged children's involvement and children who expected to play an active part in decisions about their lives.

Similary, Runeson et al (2001) studied professionals' perceptions of children's participation in decision making in health care. The purpose of their study was to identify factors of importance for children's participation in medical and nursing care. Using a method close to the *critical incident* (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Critical_Incident_Technique), they analysed 92 stories told by staff and containing different levels of children's participation in decision making. Their sample composed of 350 staff (doctors, nurses, assistant nurses, play therapists and psychologists) from four hospitals in southern Sweden. They divided factors affecting children's participation in six (6) categories thus; the child's protest, child's age and maturity, the role of parents, attitudes of staff, the time factor and alternative solutions to the problem. Their study showed that in certain cases, children can affect their situation, but also that violating actions were/are performed on children.

2.1 Summary and reflections

The previous studies presented above point to the need and modes of involving young people in decision-making. The studies agree almost unanimously that the mode of involving children in decision-making is complex, contextual and influenced by factors such as age, cultural, political, legal and administrative structures among others. According to Giddens (1997:24) a human child cannot survive unaided for at least the first four or five years of life. Indeed, socialisation he argues, is a process whereby the *helpless infant* [sic] gradually becomes a self aware, knowledgeable person, skilled in the ways of the culture into which she or he is born (Ibid). This research indeed did not

include this age group (but not because of Giddens). However, Giddens' arguement seem to suggest that beyond the aforesaid age a child would be knowledgeable, skilled and therefore able to make an informed decision or opinion. The current study carried the subject further by not only linking it to social policy but also investigating it from the probable root.

Chapter 3

3.0 Theoretical perspectives

While there are several theoretical perspectives used in social work on this subject, I decided to use the four contrasting but often complementary ones and these are; social systems theory, socialization, interpretive reproduction and the social structural perspectives.

3.1 The social systems perspective

Social systems theory was founded by biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy who was concerned about the growing compartmentalization of science. He argued that certain general ideas could have relevance across a broad spectrum of disciplines. Payne (2005:148) argues that systems theory was an aspect of the reaction against psychodynamic theory in the 1970s. That it was meant to deal with the 'social' aspect of social work. According to Preton-Shoot & Aquass, systems theory is a framework that analyses the complex reciprocal connections and interrelationship that exists between or among elements [children, adults] that make up the whole system [society] and other mutually influencing factors in the mutual setting and wider environment, known as the subsystems (Treveithick, 2005:278). In this respect, children are among those elements that make up the *whole system* (society). Systems theory is basically concerned with problems, relationships, structures, and interdependence of various parts of the system. The main concept in this theory is 'system' which essentially means regularly interacting yet interdependent group of items forming a whole. This theory has a comprehensive view of phenomenon. It incorporates social and psychological elements of practice. It is

therefore applicable to the participation of children (viewed as part of the whole) in the decision (social policy) making process.

3.2 The traditional theories – Socialization perspective

Ritchie and Koller (1964) argue that,

> *"the central concept in the sociological approach to childhood is socialization. A synonym for this process may well be acculturation because this term implies that children acquire the culture of the human groupings in which they find themselves. Children are not to be viewed as individuals fully equipped to participate in a complex adult world, but as beings who have the potentials for being slowly brought into contact with human beings"* (cited in James et al 1998:24).

Corsaro (1997:8) argued that much of sociology's thinking about children and childhood derives from theoretical work on socialization, the process by which children adapt to and internalize society. According to him, the child is seen as something apart from society that must be shaped and guided by external forces in order to become a fully functioning member. In this vein then, i would argue that children's participation in decision-making would not be a welcome idea – due to their presupposed incompetence or *becoming* status among other factors. He proposes two models of socialization thus *deterministic* and *constructivist*. In the former, the child plays a basically passive role and is therefore a "novice" with potential to contribute to the maintenance of society and an "untamed threat" [sic] who must be controlled through careful training.

Corsaro uses the term *appropriation,* to mean that the child is taken over by society; s/he is trained to become eventually a competent and contributing member. According to him, within this model, two further subsidiary approaches arose thus: the *functionalist* and *reproductive* models respectively. The former sees order and balance in society and stresses the importance of training and preparing children to fit into and contribute to that order. The later focuses on conflicts and inequalities in society and holds that some children have differential access to certain types of training and other societal resources, therefore suggesting their competence.

In the *constructivist* model, the child is seen as an active agent and eager learner. In this view Corsaro argues, the child actively constructs her/ [his] social world and her/ [his] place in it. He argues that Piaget's theory of intellectual development can be regarded as the best representative of this model. According to him, Piaget believed that children from the first days of infancy interpret, organize and use information from the environment and that they come to construct conceptions (known as mental structures) of their physical and social worlds. However, the distinctive features of Piaget's theory are the four stages of development which are: the sensorimotor (0 – 2 years), preoperational thought (2 – 7 years), concrete operations (7 – 12 years), and formal operations (12 upwards) stages respectively. These stages entail that a child has or acquires particular skills at every level of development. This theory therefore views children as dependants (objects who cannot participate) on one hand and independent (therefore able to participate) on the other.

3.3 Interpretive Reproduction perspective

This perspective begins with a call for departure from individualistic notions of socialization where a child is perceived to internalize adult skills and knowledge. Corsaro (1997:19) argues that from a sociological perspective, socialization is not only a matter of adaptation and internalization but also a process of appropriation, reinvention and reproduction. He offers the notion of *interpretive reproduction* and argues that interpretive captures the innovative and creative aspects of children's participation in society (Ibid). According to him, the term reproduction captures the idea that children are not simply internalizing society and culture, but are actively contributing to cultural production and change. He further argues that the term also implies that children are, by their very participation in society, constrained by the existing social structure [policy and value systems] and societal reproduction. He provides two elements within this notion of interpretive reproduction thus: *language* and *cultural routines*.

Ochs (1988) argued that language is central to children's participation in their culture both as a "symbolic system that encodes local, social and cultural structure" and as a "tool for establishing (that is creating, maintaining) social and psychological realities"

(Corsaro, 1997:19). Corsaro further argues that children's participation in cultural routines (which according to him, begins very early, almost from the minute the child is born) is a key element of interpretive reproduction. Infants are treated as socially competent, he argues, ("as if" they are capable of social exchanges). With time due to this *"as if"* attitude, children move from limited to full participation in cultural routines. This therefore implies that children start to participate in decision making right from infancy but that their participation is minimal, progressing as they grow up.

3.4 The social structural child perspective

This approach considers a child as a component of all societies that is characteristic, corporeal, importunate and ordinary albeit with variations in each society. The crucial concept in this approach is 'structure' which, ' appears as a set of objective and external conditions which determines the conduct of societal members as they enter into different relationships or groups' (James et al (1998:201). According to them, 'this approach begins from such an assumption: children are not pathological or incomplete; they form a group, a body of social actors and as citizens, they have needs and rights' (Ibid: 32). Going by this view and in relation to the current study, I would argue that among the rights is that of participation even when this would merely be in articulating needs – a position taken by most (81%) of the young people as well as 29% of social work practitioners in the sample. They further argue that within this approach, the constancy of the child is acknowledged, as is also its essentiality. In this vein then, children are subjects (and not objects), but their subjectivity, James et al argue, is neither willful nor capricious. If children are subjects, then it follows that they have certain competencies like any other subjects in society. These competencies, it can be argued, should follow individual and/or structural differences obtaining in society. Arguably, these variations include but by no means limited to the following: age, maturity, intellect, up-bringing among others. As one interviewee (parent) put it,

'... *their age and maturity should be taken into account but not their sex*'.

3.5 Some selected discourses

There are a number of discourses on childhood but I have chosen the most germane and for that matter narrowed down for this study to two broad strands namely: Competent (subjects) and incompetent (objects). Aside from the foregoing argument, the two allows for parsimony to argue for or against children's' participation in decision-making.

The *competent child* is depicted in Kjorholt, (2002:63)'s four related discourses from her study on children's participation in Norway. They are: Children as bearers of rights; children as future citizens; children as resources and children as endangered people. The first one is especially grounded in the UNCRC in which 'participation' forms the triad of 'Ps' that is participation, prevention and protection. In the competent child, (Kjorholt, 2002:63) argues that, the child is given the right to participate to a certain degree. As such, a child is considered a *being* or *subject* under this discourse – "small is powerful". This also goes well with a Tonga (Zambian language) traditional proverb that, '*Maanu alazwa a mukasuumbwa'*. This can be translated in English as *knowledge can come out of a small anthill*. Similarly, as James et al (1998:14) put it, '... children are not bundles of negative attributes or incompletely formed persons waiting to become adults; they are who they are'. They must therefore be *heard* (participate) not just *seen*.

In the *incompetent child* discourse, a child is perceived as *becoming* or *object* and John Locke's concept of *tabula rasa* which entails that a child is born as a blank sheet fits well here. This is because by referring to them as future citizens (Kjorholt above), the discourse implies that presently, they are not citizens [they will become]. From a sociological perspective (above), children are considered inadequate to participate and hence made adequate through the socialisation process. According to (King, 1997) in Hemrica and Heyting (2004) childhood is a construction rather than an object. They analyse pragmatic presuppositions -'those pertaining to the communicative functions of text'. They argue that both in Netherlands and England, courts are not involved in most cases in making arrangements for children when parents divorce. However, if parents cannot come to an agreement and the matter is taken to court, children in both countries have the right to be heard (Hemrica and Heyting, 2004:453). Children in this case are

perceived to be competent. In Talcott Parsons' view, 'the child is [not only incompetent but also] a threat to society' [Sic] (Corsaro, 1997:9). Other discourses that can be categorised under the incompetent child are; the *vulnerable* and *dependent* child. Interestingly, both 'protection and provision' two of the three principles of the UNCRC fall in this discourse – hence children need protection as well as provision.

3.6 Summary

In summary, the above theoretical perspectives and discourses are by no means exhaustive but remain critical frameworks within which the participation of children in decision-making can be analysed within the wider social policy and societal structure. They are embodiments from which cause-effect relationships on child welfare and social policy can be grounded. It is this theoretical-discursive nexus together with the findings of the study that can help to reflect on the ambitious and at worst vague outlook of the UNCRC. As Khoo (2004:31) observes, 'epistemologically, a critical approach to research takes the position that facts cannot exist independently of their theoretical context and thus methodologically, the researcher must go beyond taken-for-granted assumptions about abstract concepts such as ……….and endeavour to extricate the concept from underlying relations of knowledge production'. Popper as well believed that 'we cannot observe without theories (Seale, 2004:9). However, I would argue that observation and therefore analysis can be made to generate or test theories – inductive reasoning.

Chapter 4

4.0 Methods

This study used an exploratory social survey method though there are some elements of **theory-testing.** An important contribution that exploratory research can make to our understanding is helping us to identify patterns and enabling us to give names to social phenomena (Thomas, 2000:170).

4.1. Research design

The study used both qualitative and quantitative methods (sequentially) to collect primary data. The reason for doing so was to get in-depth understanding of the responses from the

quantitative method with the qualitative interviews (through close to but not exactly random probes) as well as triangulation of responses. 'Random probes provide a check on the validity of questions and yield a representative sample of verbatim comments which can be used as illustrative quotations when writing-up the research' (Gilbert, 1993:42). He further argues that, 'they are useful ...... they provide illustrative material about what underlies respondents views'. However, the opposite (qualitative followed by quantitative) was the proposal which could not materialise due to late access of interviewees as well as the benefit the reverse provided by acquiring detailed explanations of responses that emerged from the quantitative method.

I opted to combine methods (qualitative and quantitative) in order to compensate for the inadequacies and benefit from the advantages of both of them. As Philip (1998) argues, 'employing a range of methodological strategies means that the researcher does not necessarily privilege a particular way of looking at the social world ... I would suggest that such diversity encompasses methodological plurality as well as postmodernism encouraging different voices to be heard and facilitating the exploration of different truths' (Seale, 2004:296). And according to Bryman (1992), '... they each have distinctive characteristics that make the possibility of combining them especially attractive' (Ibid). Additionally, the language barrier also necessitated the combination of methods to avoid possible misinterpretation of responses.

4.2 Study areas
The study was carried out in three social and/or child welfare organisations within the city of Gothenburg and a fourth one which is about 25 kilometres west of the city (BRIS, Swedish Church family counselling, Majorna and Öckerö Kommun). The BRIS children's rights in society is a voluntary organization which offers support services to children in distress as well as strengthening their rights thereby improving their living conditions. It has a child's helpline and email facility through which children communicate their needs and/or problems concerning love, abuse, sexuality, family problems. It also has a helpline for adults in order to assist them in dealing with problems relating to children

The Swedish Church family counseling organization specializes in working with couples and families. The clients often experience a variety of problems, among which are relationship problems between adults, teenagers and siblings; inadequate coping strategies, communication problems to infidelity to mention but a few. The support rendered is mainly therapeutic with a focus on family preservation. Majorna is a child welfare unit within the municipality which specializes in foster care. It also offers support to families and contact families. The former means another family supporting the child as well as its family without removing the child from its biological parents. The later entails a volunteer family taking care of another family's child for instance for one weekend in a month.

Öckerö Kommun is a municipality (a galaxy of ten islands on the western part of the city) in which all social services such as child care, elderly care, income support, disability among others are offered. The islands are, Öckerö, Hono, Hälsö, Hyppeln, Rörö, Fotö, Grötö, Björkö, Kalvsund and Källö Knippla.

The youth parliament is a governmental organisation which was established in 2005 by politicians and is found in 21 Districts of Gothenburg with a membership of 40,000 youths aged between 12 - 18 years. It has 100 elected members in parliament whose tenure of office is one year. It was from these parliamentarians as well as a similar youth council in Öckerö that the sample for young people was drawn.

4.3 Sampling methodology

Child welfare organisations/departments in the city of Gothenburg were purposefully sampled from which respondents (social workers) were systematically sampled. Systematic random sampling was used to select thirty (30) respondents from the youth organisation, Majorna (10) as well as Öckerö Kommun (30). This was because of the availability of complete listing of all subjects (sampling frame) from these organisations as well as the vastness of the populations (100 and 363 respectively). Due to the small number of staff at BRIS and the Swedish church family counselling, the questionnaires were sent to everyone (though not everyone responded). The interviewees were accessed

through the same sampling methodology (two parents) as well as referrals (the other two) based on willingness to participate in the study. The two (2) children were accessed through the same sampling process, but of those not sampled for the survey. However, their willingness to take part in the study took precedence.

4.4 The research process

This study was supposed to start with qualitative and end with quantitative data collection methods. This was in order to gain some conceptions and possible responses for the quantitative questionnaire. However, the opposite occurred and this meant using the quantitative questions for random probes. There was no disadvantage though as regards the reverse. The response rate was quite low and I only interviewed two children against the planned four. The other two could not be accessed. Two of the respondents (parents) were interviewed as couples and this added to the diverse of responses. The interviews lasted approximately 12 – 18 minutes. Midway through data collection, I began to suspect that language (English) may be the reason for the low response rate for questionnaires. I therefore had both questionnaires translated (with the help of my supervisor) in which case the questions appeared both in English and Swedish. This seemed to have improved the response rate, but not any better. If I were to redo this study, I would ensure personal delivery of all questionnaires although this would require a lot of time, but it is more likely to improve the response rate.

4.5 Data collection

Both qualitative and quantitative primary data were collected using the questionnaire and interview guide respectively. This was to allow for triangulation of results. Fifty (50) structured self-completion questionnaires (with pre-coded responses as well closed and open ended questions) were sent to BRIS (5), Swedish family Church (5), Majorna (10) and Öckerö Kommun (30) for social work practitioners. The response rate was quiet poor especially from Öckerö Kommun (12), BRIS (1), Swedish Church family counselling (5) and Majorna (9). In all, this represents 28 out of 50 or 56% response rate. Similarly, of the 45 questionnaires that were sent to the youth parliamentarians and the youth council

respectively, only 21 were received back representing a response rate of 47%. Partly, the number of questionnaires was increased in anticipation of this low response rate. The questionnaires were distributed by the researcher through email, post as well as hand delivery depending on which method was convenient for specific respondents. In either case, the researcher explained the purpose and use of the study and sought the consent as well as availability of the respondents for the study. The questionnaires were in both English and Swedish.

Four (4) structured interviews were also conducted on the parents in three (3) of the same child institutions' except BRIS. This is because parents make day-to-day decisions regarding child welfare. Additionally, semi-structured interviews (basically random probes) were conducted on two (2) children from the young parliamentarian group. The research focused on *children's participation* - it could not therefore go against its very subject matter by excluding children. These interviews were used in order to 'probe beyond the answers and thus enter into dialogue with the interviewee' (May 2001:123). Additionally, these types of interviews 'allow[ed] people to answer more on their own terms than the standardised interview permits, but still provide[d] a greater structure for comparability...'(Ibid). It therefore helped to not only elicit children's perspectives but also allow for triangulation to those of parents and practitioners.

Secondary data (previous researches) as well as theoretical perspectives and discourses relating to the subject were also used to gain in-depth analysis and therefore understanding of the findings.

4.6 Data analysis methods

Lofland and Lofland, Glaser and Strauss, and others argue for the importance of combining data collection and analysis as much as possible (Thomas, 2000:113). I tried this approach and it is fair to say that it worked well mainly due to the combination of data collection methods. Additionally, questionnaires were being received slowly in few numbers which allowed for checking them thoroughly as well as making comparisons to the responses from the interviews which were being done concurrently. However, it is and indeed was impossible to do full data analysis at this stage. According to de Vaus

(2002:203), there are four broad factors that affect how data is analysed. They are: the number of variables being examined; the level of measurement of variables; whether we want to use our data for descriptive or inferential purposes and ethical responsibilities. This research incorporated these four factors except there was little focus on inferential purposes. I used both *univariate* (single variable) for frequency counts and *bivariate* (two variables) cross tabulations analysis because I was interested in patterns and relationships between one or two variables. The chi-square test of significance was applied to determine the extent to which the findings could be generalized. I also took for the most part presentation of the findings as they are as well as ensuring the replicability of the findings if another person was to do the analysis.

The questionnaire had both open-ended and closed questions with pre-coded responses. The possible answers for pre-coded questions were obtained through a pre-test of the questionnaire as well as a few mock interviews. However, additional and different responses came up during the survey which necessitated recoding and/or post-coding. Data from self-completion questionnaires were analysed using SPSS for both uni-variate and Bi-variate analysis. This was in order to generate frequencies of responses as well as relationships between them. Two methods of analysing meaning were used thus; meaning condensation - 'an abridgement of the meanings expressed by the interviewees into shorter formulations' and narrative restructuring – 'the temporal and social organisation of a text to bring out its meaning (Kvale, 1996:192). Analysis (partial) of discourses relating to childhood and child welfare were as well used.

4.7 Validity, reliability and generalisability

Validity- the truthfulness or correctness of the measurement as planned or intended. Seale (2004:74) gives seven (7) threats to (internal) validity thus: history, maturation, instability and regression, testing, instrumentation, selection and experimental mortality. The study was designed and conducted within a short time (three weeks, but adequate for respondents to answer the questions) in which the threat of history as well as maturation would not have influence. The questionnaire was pre-tested to both professionals (specialists in the field) as well as would be respondents. This was to guards against the

threat of instrumentation as well as testing. Experimental mortality would have little if any effect since the study was not 'experimental' but a survey.

Reliability concerns the consistency with which research procedures deliver their results (Seale 2004:72). It also relates to the repeatability of the findings under similar conditions. Apart from statistical variations (number of respondents increasing or decreasing), it is doubtful whether a similar study would yield very different findings. Additionally, the same questions were asked to all respondents and the questionnaire can be used elsewhere – hence the study is repeatable. I also applied chi-square test of significance to determine generalizability of findings. It would be inaccurate though, to claim hundred percent reliability and validity due to the limitations outlined below. Nonetheless, to the extent that limitations in one method were compensated for (at least assumed to do so), the results can be generalized. Additionally, to the extent that the samples (procedurally) were representative, i would claim not only the validity and therefore generalizability but also the possible reliability thereof.

4.8 Ethical considerations

According to Finnis (1983), ethics is a branch of philosophy, said to have been initiated by Aristotle, which takes human action as its subject matter (Seale et al, 2004:116). A central issue in ethics, Ali and Kelly argue, is the relationship between the individual and the social world (Ibid: 117). They further argue that, in research, we need to consider how the imposition of the research on individuals (with their consent or otherwise) can be balanced with the benefit of making the world a better place to live in. Indeed a number of ethical considerations were taken into account throughout this study. A letter of consent (appended) was sent through email to the socialchef at Öckerö Kommun to request for participation of both staff and clients in the research. When permission was granted, the research topic was introduced at a staff meeting (while on field practice) and invited people to participate on voluntary basis. I also requested for the staff list from which respondents were selected through the systematic random sampling method. The questionnaire (appended) also was very clear that participation was voluntary, the research was purely for academic purposes and that confidentiality of participants was

assured. The clarity of this aspect may have as well contributed to the low response rate. In a similar study (Addington-Hall and McCarthy, 1995), …. where a preliminary letter was sent, the response rate dropped by 10% (Seale et al, 2004:467). Respondents are as different from each other as researchers and therefore capable of responding differently to different information.

However, in the other organisations, the 'heads' said they did not require a formal letter as I had collected similar information (with permission) for the other course. Therefore, I would suppose that the low response rate was as a result of some subjects not willing to participate and partly the clarity of ethical cautions. Interviewees (parents) were recommended by the same agencies based on those that were willing to participate in the research and the same applied to young people. However, before the interview, i explained the purpose of the study to the research subjects as well as assuring their confidentiality and while at the same time soliciting their consent after their agreement. I only proceeded with the interview after their confirmation of willingness to participate. Therefore, this research tried as much as was possible to respect persons that provided information and on whom information was collected; respect the knowledge gained and indeed respect for social work research.

4.9 Limitations of the study

There were a number of limitations in this study but the key ones are: the broadness of the topic for it was not specific to one type of decision (and neither are they in the UNCRC where the topic was derived), but perhaps this is motivation for further studies in this area; the data collection setting – some respondents were not only less conversant with English language but also apprehensive about it; instrumentation – the questionnaire has been described by many researchers to yield low response rates and this manifested in this study. The other limitation was the combination of methods itself. Bryman (2001) has argued that research methods are ineluctably rooted in epistemological and ontological commitments ... the epistemological positions in which the two methods [quantitative and qualitative] are grounded constitute irreconcilable views about how social reality should be studied (Seale, 2004:294). Philip (1998) echoes this distinction

and notes, 'recognizing this destabilizes the distinction between the two approaches and therefore their apparent incompatibility' (Ibid: 295). I tried to reconcile this dichotomy by conforming to the institutional setting in which the study was carried out. That is, the language factor militated against the use of pure qualitative research (especially interviews) while the nature of the topic would not yield much using pure quantitative method.

Chapter 5

5.0 Analysis and presentation of results

The analysis has been divided thematically according to the four research questions namely: factors that hinder or facilitate children's participation in decision-making, how involving children in decision-making at home and work places affect decisions made, extent to which children can participate in decision-making and the gender aspect in involving children in decision-making. Both qualitative and quantitative data are presented side-by-side in the themes. Conclusions are therefore derived from and presented in this section. But I begin with a presentation of the demographic characteristics of the sample.

The majority or 82% of the sample for social work practitioners were females. This however does not represent a biased sample, rather the dominance of females in this profession in Sweden. From the population, it was found that 343 out of 363 staff in Öckerö, 5 out of 7 staff at the Swedish Church family counselling, 53 of the 69 Staff at Majorna (excluding purely administrative staff) and all of the 3 staff at BRIS were females. Sampling of any kind would therefore have come up with almost the same sex distribution/composition. However, there was almost an equal distribution of sex among the young people both in the population and sample (52% and 48% of respondents were males and females respectively). This is because the establishments for the youth organisations are 50% male and 50% female representation respectively. Their average age was 14 years while that of practitioners was 47 years. The range was 12 to 18 years old and 76% of them had basic education and were in school at the time of the survey. Only 10% of children or 2 of them had no education at all and were not in school at the time of the survey. The age range for practitioners was 25 – 65 years.

Figure i: Demographic characteristics of respondents

Social work practitioners	Male	Female
Population	38	404
% population	9%	91%
Sample	10	40
% Sample	18%	82%
Average age	47 years	
Occupation	Social worker	
Young people		
Population	62	63
% population	50%	50%
Sample	23	22
% sample	18%	18%
Average age	14 years	
Occupation	Pupil	

5.1 Theme 1: Factors that hinder or facilitate children's participation in decision making

Hemrica and Heyting, (2004:454) argued that there are two perspectives that support the child's having a say in case of the divorce of parents. They are the child welfare and the judicial or rights perspectives respectively. The former views the child as an *object* (human-to-be) and therefore require a *guardian ad litem* while the later presupposes a child as a *subject* with rights like any other human and therefore competent. They further argue that the required ability to judge for oneself will develop with age. According to de Bruijn-Luckers and Van der Linden (2001), only at the age of twelve (12) will children have acquired an understanding of the situation that is required to be able to participate in decision-making (cited in Hemrica and Heyting, (2004:458). Going by this view, children are '*becoming'* not '*being'* and therefore their right to participate must be postponed until they reach that age. This indeed goes well with *social structural child* and *socialization* theories presented above – that children are born blank and are written on by society. The age variable also goes well with the *incompetent child* discourse presented above.

Age therefore seems to be a factor in hindering or facilitating children's participation in decision-making although there were variations as regards the appropriate age. As the results indicate, the majority or 48% of the children said the appropriate age is 12 – 15 years. This is against 24% who said it should be 6 – 10 years, only 1 said it should be 0 – 5 years. Most or 86% of the children said they participated in decision-making at home mainly on education related matters. They also said it was because it is their right (81%) to do so. However, the majority (42%) of social work practitioners said 6 – 10, 25% said 0 – 5 while 18% said 12 – 15 years was the appropriate age. Notwithstanding the foregoing, age is more or less encompassed in *evolving capacities*, that is, 'the recognition of the individuality of child development, which necessarily has to correspond to the age of the child' (Hodgkin & Petren, 2000, in Bak &Kabasinskaite, 2006).

Figure ii: Appropriate age for starting to participate

	Young people		Social Work Practitioners	
Age	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
0 - 5 years	1	5	7	25
6 - 10 years	5	24	12	43
12 - 15 years	10	48	5	18
15 - 18 years	2	10	1	4
All children	1	5	1	4
9 - 13 years	1	5	0	0
Depending on type of decision	1	5	0	0
No opinion	0	0	2	7
Total	**21**	**100**	**28**	**100**

Related to age is maturity and the type of decision involved, although the interviewees would not elaborate fully what constitutes maturity. It therefore remains as vague as in the UNCRC.

The existence of a policy (although this was acknowledged only by 64% of the respondents) to facilitate children's participation in decision-making is also a factor for the involvement of young people by practitioners both at home (89%) and their work places (82%). These policies in Sweden are the Social services legislation and the Care of young Persons' Act of 1980 respectively as well as the EU and UNCRC which are international and global policies respectively. Going by systems theory above, I would argue that these policies form or are part of the system/structure (social democratic in this case) which facilitates the participation of children like any other element (human) in society. As Lister argues, more generous social citizenship rights produce a more egalitarian society and vice versa (Lister, 2007:23). It is therefore profound to claim a neat connection between a universal social policy system and the participation of citizens (children inclusive). For instance the Swedish social services act states in part;

'….. *social services shall be provided on the basis of democracy and solidarity and for the purposes of promoting economic and social security, equality of living conditions and active participation [of children] in society'* (Khoo, Nygren and Hyvönen, 2003:5).

*Figure iii (a):Do you involve children in making decisions about their lives/welfare at your work place * is there any policy in your organization that aim to promote*

		Any policy in your organization that aim to promote children's participation			Total
		yes	no	do not know	
Do you involve children in making decisions about their lives/welfare at your work place	yes	17	6	0	23
	no	1	3	0	4
	not applicable	0	0	1	1
Total		**18**	**9**	**1**	**28**

The existence of a policy in the organisation and the actual practice of involving children in decision-making *(figure iii a above)* shows that, there is not only a perfect positive association at 1.066 in *(figure iii b below)* but also a significant relationship (0.00) -

p<0.05 between the two even when the sample size is held constant. *See also Figure i in appendix 7*. Welsby (1999b) would call this the *bureaucratic* approach (Thomas, 2000: 171). However, even those who indicated the none-existence of a policy (perhaps due to ignorance) indicated involving children in making decisions, which perhaps may be due to the value system.

Figure iii (b): Symmetric Measures

		Value	Asymp. Std. Error(a)	Approx. T(b)	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	*1.066*			*.000*
	Cramer's V	.754			.000
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	.608	.182	3.907	.001(c)
Ordinal by Ordinal	Spearman Correlation	.483	.179	2.816	.009(c)
N of Valid Cases		28			

a Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

c Based on normal approximation.

Culture is another factor that hinders or facilitates the participation of children in decision-making. The functionalist view postulated by Corsaro in the socialization theory in chapter three sees order and balance in society and stresses the importance of training and preparing children (teaching them the culture) to fit into and contribute to that order. The study revealed that, 50% of respondents involve children due to family values (culture) although they are also guided by the UNCRC 18%. In Welsby (1996b)'s typology, this is a *value-based* approach (Thomas, 2000:171). This hypothetically would mean that those that do not involve children in decision-making do so partly because of family and/ cultural values. This also goes well with the perception of children as being incompetent outlined in the discourse above. Children are therefore socialized (to participate in decision-making) through/in these family values.

Figure iv: Major reason for involving children in decision-making – Social work practitioners

Reason	Frequency	Percentage
UN convention	5	18
family values	14	50
government legislation	1	4
children demand to be consulted	2	7
personal belief to involve everyone	1	4
Both UN convention and family values	2	7
UN convention, family values and government legislation	2	7
social and psychological reasons	1	4
Total	**28**	**100**

I would also contend that (human/children's) rights are part of the value system. In the social structural child perspective above, children 'form a group, a body of social actors and as citizens, they have needs and rights'. As results indicate *(figure v below),* 81% of children said they needed to be involved in decision-making because it is their 'right'. Thomas refers to this as the *assertive* position (Thomas 2000:170). Although only one respondent *(Fig iv above)* said they involved children in making decisions due to government legislation, the existence (procedural requirement) or lack of it would militate for or against children's involvement.

Figure v: Reasons for involving young people in decision-making - Children

	Young people		Social work practitioners	
Responses	**Frequency**	**Percentage**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
It is their right	17	81	8	29
It would give them greater sense of self worth	0	0	11	39
It would improve service delivery	2	10	4	14
It would give them a sense of self worth and improve service delivery	1	5	0	0
All the above	1	5	5	18
Total	**21**	**100**	**28**	**100**

From her work in Sweden, Ann-Li Lingren (2002) suggested that there are two perspectives on children [which hinder or facilitate their participation in decision-making]. 'One has them as competent while another creates them as dependent'. The former, implies that children need to be involved while the later suggests that they should not. It is however, a bit thorny to understand how she used these two terms explicitly in antithesis when their meanings are not. For instance, being competent at something does not necessarily mean or make someone independent as Lingren seem to suggest. I would argue that the opposite of competence is incompetence and not dependence as Ann-Li Lingren seems to epitomize. Nonetheless, her two factors are culturally based and are useful at explaining why or not children should be involved in decision-making.

Figure vi (a) : Children are perceived to be incompetent in matters affecting their lives * children should be involved in decision making

		children should be involved in decision making				Total
		strongly agree	agree	no opinion	do not know	
children are perceived to be incompetent in matters affecting their lives	partly agree	1	0	0	0	1
	disagree	3	7	0	0	10
	strongly disagree	9	6	1	0	16
	no opinion	0	0	0	1	1
Total		**13**	**13**	**1**	**1**	**28**

There is also both a perfect positive association at 1.071 and a significant relationship at 0.00 *(Figure vi b below)* between perceiving children as incompetent and involving them in decision-making *(figure vi a)* above. *See also figure ii in appendix 7.*Therefore depending on which discourse (presented in chapter three) one adopts, they would more likely either involve or not involve children in making decisions. This also holds true for the above presented theories.

Figure vi (b): Symmetric Measures

		Value	Asymp. Std. Error(a)	Approx. T(b)	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	*1.071*			*.000*
	Cramer's V	.619			.000
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	.335	.201	1.816	.081(c)
Ordinal by Ordinal	Spearman Correlation	.032	.215	.162	.873(c)
N of Valid Cases		28			

a Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

c Based on normal approximation.

5.2 Theme 2: How involving children in decision-making at home and work place affect the decisions/policies made

Singer (2001) considers participation rights beneficial to the affective developmental prospect of children (cited in Hemrica and Heyting, 2004:455). Smith (1997) takes the view that denying participation will eventually damage the emotional and social development of children (opcit).

> *"They give you honest answers or views as they see things. If they say no, it is not merely to please you but that they don't like what you are telling them, therefore even if their views would not be the final decision, you can win their confidence and you get another way of looking at issues. They will not blame you if something goes wrong. It is also good for their self esteem because they feel valued",* one parent enthused.

While the majority (33%) of young people said there was no disadvantage in involving them, and a substantial number (24%) said it would be a long process, the majority (46%) of social work practitioners said they had no opinion about it. Practitioners also said adults would lose control of outcomes (18%) – *figure vii below*.

> *'There are more advantages than disadvantages' (Male young parliamentarian).*

They can make regrettable decisions although everyone can make such mistakes not just the

young (Female young parliamentarian).

Figure vii: Disadvantages of involving young people in decision-making

	Young people		Social work practitioners	
Responses	**Frequency**	**Percentage**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
They would lose respect for adults	4	19	2	7
None	7	33	3	11
It would be a long process	5	24	0	0
Adults would lose control of outcomes	2	10	5	18
No opinion	3	14	13	46
They would not understand the consequences of their decision	0	0	2	7
Not mature enough	0	0	2	7
Wrong to put responsibility on kids	0	0	1	4
Total	**21**	**100**	**28**	**100**

Additionally, as *fig viii* below shows, the majority for both the young people (33%) and practitioners (57%) strongly rejected the notion that 'young people are incompetent in matters affecting their lives. This being the case, it would be safe to make a claim that involving young people in decision-making would have no negative consequences to the decisions made. If anything,

'*It makes them see value in the decision[s], they can learn to take responsibility and learn the*

consequences' (Male young parliamentarian, 18 years).

As the interpretive reproduction perspective above stresses, children are innovative and creative participants in society. They are therefore competent – not incompetent.

Figure viii : Children are perceived to be incompetent in matters affecting their lives

Responses	Young people		Social work practitioners	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
strongly agree	1	5	0	0
agree	1	5	0	0
partly agree	4	19	1	4
disagree	5	24	10	36
strongly disagree	7	33	16	57
no opinion	3	14	1	4
Total	**21**	**100**	**28**	**100**

5.3 Theme 3: Extent to which children can participate in decision-making

Cockburn (2005:112) argues that children become involved in what opinions are to be considered but it is adults that make the final decision of what is in a child's best interest. This view seems to make a distinction between being consulted (opinion) and being involved (make the final decision). As one interviewee (a parent) aptly put it:

> *"Yes, they should be allowed to express their points and feelings but not provide the last word [sic]. Their age should be taken into account and perhaps the type of decision".*

Going by the socialization perspective above (especially Piaget's stages of development), children are in the process of development. Therefore their participation in decision-making would and should be cumulative – increasing as they grow-up.

Figure ix (a): How best children can be involved in decision-making - Children's views

Mode of involving children	Frequency	Percentage
Through consultation on issues that affect me	11	52
Asking me what my needs are	5	24
Through representatives	2	10
As an individual	3	14
Total	**21**	**100**

As *Fig ix(a) above* shows, most (52%) of the young people said the best way to involve them in decision-making is through consultation on issues that affect them. The social

work professionals *(Figure ix b below)* as well were agreeable on this factor (64%). The mode of consultation would be perhaps a challenge for future research.

Figure ix (b): How best children can be involved in decision-making – Practitioners' views

Mode of involving children	Frequency	Percentage
Through consultations on issues that affect them	18	64
Through representatives	2	7
As individuals	4	14
Through consultation as well as representatives	2	7
Through consultation as well as an individual	1	4
All the above	1	4
Total	**28**	**100**

The results in *(fig x below)* are consistent with those in *(fig. ix b above)*. This is because as the respondents agreed that children should be consulted on issues that affect their lives, 79% *(in fig x below)* indicated that some of the areas on which children need to be consulted are education, family welfare as well as leisure. Moxnes argues that children are not necessarily casualties of divorce, but can be helped by parents involving them and giving them a say over decisions, in areas such as money matters and residential moves (Jensen & Mckee, 2003:4)

Figure x: Areas of children's lives where they should be consulted

Areas of children's lives	Frequency	Percentage
Education	1	4
Family welfare	0	0
Leisure	0	0
Education and leisure	5	18
All the above	22	79
Total	**28**	**100**

It is interesting to find that 48% of the young people and 39% of social work practitioners said that children should be involved from identifying problem or need, suggesting

alternatives and choosing the final alternative *(Figure xi below).* This goes against the socialization theoretical perception of them (children) as needing to learn from adults.

Figure xi: Levels of decision-making at which children should be involved

Level of decision-making	Young people		Social Work practitioners	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Identifying the problem or need	2	10	4	14
Suggesting alternatives	4	19	3	11
Choosing final alternative	1	5	0	0
Both identifying a problem/need and suggesting alternatives	2	10	7	25
Identifying problem/need and choosing final alternative	1	5	0	0
Suggesting alternatives and choosing final alternative	1	5	3	11
Identifying problem/need, suggesting and choosing final alternative	10	48	11	39
Total	**21**	**100**	**28**	**100**

The best interest of the Child

As indicated above, the, 'best interest of the child' is a centre of controversy in child welfare. The controversies are mainly how to define as well as who should define and/or determine the 'best interest of the child' among the key stakeholders namely; the child, parents and the state. The carer/practitioner is also a factor but this relates specifically to children under/in care which is not what the article under review prescribes. Thomas (2000:63) argues that the notion of 'best interests' has inherent problems, which may be described as the *problem of indeterminacy* and the *problem of culture*. By the former, he argues that we cannot know incontrovertibly what is in the best interests, nor always agree on what values are important. In the later, he argues that standards of best interests only exist in a cultural framework, and one cultures' version may simply not be accepted by another and that children have an interest in being an accepted part of their inherited culture which may have to be balanced against their other interests. Arguing from the former, Mnookin (1983) contends that, 'what is best for any child or even children in

general is often indeterminate and speculative and requires a highly individualised choice between [or among] alternatives (ibid). It is however interesting, how elsewhere Mnookin (1976) proposes that difficult and complex decisions about state intervention in family life should be governed by 'determinate rules' rather than 'indeterminate standards' (Thomas, 2000:63).

Most (43%) of the social work practitioners in the sample indicated that it is supposed to be the child together with parents, 36% said it should be all the three while 18% said it should be the child and the government/state to determine 'the best interest of child'. Interestingly, 52% of the children said it should be the child, 24% child and parents while 14% said all the three (figure xiii below). In this paper best interest of the child has been conceived of as any decision(s), measures or acts where the *welfare* (problems, needs and opportunities) of the child takes precedence. As such its determination should include all the three stakeholders on a purely contextual basis. Cohen (1980) observes that a child's ignorance of his or her own self interest does not improve the adult's knowledge of that child's 'best interest' (Thomas, 2002:66). Yamamoto et al (1987) rounds it all by arguing that ' in fact there is some evidence that children may be better and more consistent judges [Sic] of what is important in their lives than are adults (ibid). I would therefore argue that this principle can either facilitate of hinder a child's participation depending on how it is defined.

Figure xii: Who should determine the best interest of the child?

	Young people		Social Work Practitioners	
Responses	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
The child	11	52	0	0
Parents	1	5	1	4
Child and parents	5	24	12	43
Child and Government	0	0	5	18
All the three	3	14	10	36
No opinion	1	5	0	0
Total	**21**	**100**	**28**	**100**

Just as an example, on 29th January 2007, the British Prime Minister Tonny Blair said that *'there will be no exemption from anti-discrimination laws for Catholic adoption agencies* (http://www.bbc.co.uk/go/homepage/int/ne/nhdr/h1/t/-/news/1/hi/uk_politics). This was said in special reference to the ambivalence the Catholic Church had about applications for adoption of children by homosexuals. The main emphasis of the law which was passed in April 2006 is that the concept of equality needed to be applied equally. It means even the same sex couples needed to have equal considerations for their application to adopt children. Laws are generally intended for administration of justice and it is certainly justice to apply a just law justly or rather equally. At the same time the Church (as in freedom of worship) has the right to follow the doctrine. The child as well has the right to decide as per article 12 of the UNCRC. Whether it in the best interest of the child for it to be adopted to the type of couple (homo or heterosexual) they would otherwise abhor is debatable. There is a greater likelihood that a child would resemble the carers (due to the influence of the environment on child development), a situation they would otherwise not like. It would appear that the state catered for the homosexuals without due consideration of the other parties (children and the church) who are equally important. Indirectly, one would argue that, the child has been fated to the same sex type of life because it is unlikely that a couple that dislike heterosexual marriages can encourage a child to be involved in it (using the nature-nurture nexus and giving privilege to the later). According to the socialization theory presented in this paper, there are more chances of the child being socialized into homosexuality. In this case the best interest of the child was determined by the state.

5.4 Theme 4: Gender and children's participation in decision making

While echoing that age and maturity are important factors for a child to participate in decision-making, the majority (93%) social work practitioners as well as 86% of children (young people) themselves, said sex was not *(figure xiii below).* And neither of the theories and discourses presented above indicated sex to be a factor in participation in decision-making among young people.

Figure xiii: Is gender a factor in children's participation in decision-making?

Responses	Social work practitioners		Young people	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	0	0	3	14
No	26	93	18	86
No opinion	2	7	0	0
Total	**28**	**100**	**21**	**100**

As the statistical test in *figure xiv* below shows, there is a significantly (0.866) very low positive association (0.162) between sex and opinion on involving children in decision-making. *See also figure iii (a), and iii (b) in appendix 6.* It is however interesting how this understanding (of equality between sexes) takes a turn-around later in life where the decision-making ladder takes a pyramidal shape on the female side. That is to say, as decision-making goes up or gets complicated, the number of females in those roles decline. For instance, while there are currently 50% females and 50% males in the youth parliament, there are 47% females and 53% males in the Swedish parliament (Riksdag). This however, represents an astronomical rise from only 5 women in 1921, 13% in 1970, 38% in 1988 and 43% in 1994 (http://www.riksdagen.se). It is also the highest compared to many other countries, in Australia only 25% of members of parliament in 2003 were females (http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/women). In Zambia, out of 150 members of parliament after the 2006 general elections only 15 (or 10%) were/are females. In 1997, women averaged only 12% of the membership of national parliaments world-wide (Inter-parliamentary Union, 1997, cited in Caul, 1999).

Figure xiv: Symmetric Measures

		Value	Asymp. Std. Error(a)	Approx. T(b)	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	*.162*			*.866*
	Cramer's V	.162			.866
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	.157	.094	.811	.425(c)
Ordinal by Ordinal	Spearman Correlation	.148	.171	.765	.451(c)
N of Valid Cases		28			

a Not assuming the null hypothesis.
b Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.
c Based on normal approximation.

5.5 Conclusions

Children's participation in decision-making is no longer just a chimera in Sweden. This was evidenced by the existing institutions that relate to children's participation like the young parliamentarians, children's ombudsman, youth councils among others. The UNCRC and the social policy milieu can be said to be a factor in this development. Notwithstanding the foregoing, a number of variations were found as regards the availability/unavailability and application of policies relating to children's participation (or the lack of) in decision-making among social work practitioners. The author takes a position that children are active participants in society, but like any other member in society; they may not be competent in everything. Even by merely making people laugh, they participate and contribute to a stress free, humorous and therefore happy society. But like many socially disadvantaged groups in society, sometimes they are regarded as pawns. Children should therefore not be treated merely as objects of important decisions (guised in their best interests) but should actually be regarded as subjects of their own, as reformers in society. As Thomas (2002:20) notes, 'childhood is like – and what children can do – is contingent on social structures, cultures and values and therefore subject to variation'. Therefore, we need to ask ourselves not just how and what society can do in the lives of children but also how and what they can do in society. Children therefore do not only need protection and provision, they can and need participation as well especially in determining what is in their best interest.

Chapter 6

6.0 Discussion, implications and suggestions for future research

6.1 Discussion

This study sought to get perspectives from social work practitioners in Gothenburg – Sweden as regards children's participation in decision-making. The study was motivated

by article twelve (12) of the UNCRC, a general popularity of 'participation' in decision/policy making, as a democratic principle and the author's general interest in child welfare and social policy. As such, reference was made to Sweden's (the country where the research was carried out) social policy as this is an ambit within which child welfare legislations in Sweden are enshrined, the overview of the state of children in Sweden and how, as a signatory to the UNCRC Sweden has implemented the intentions of this global indenture. With participation being the main concept, the author felt duty-bound to apply it by involving children in the study that sought to legitimize their involvement in issues that affect their lives. Parents' views were as well sought. The research revolved around four major questions thus: what factors hinder or facilitate children's participation in decision-making; how involving children in decision-making at home and work place affect the decisions made; to what extent can children participate in decision-making and whether or not there should be differences in male and female children's involvement in decision making.

A total of twenty-eight (28) and twenty-one (21) self-administered questionnaires were filled-in by social work practitioners and young people respectively. Additionally, four (4) parents as well as two (young people) were interviewed to get mainly random probes to the above questions. Both literature review and review of discourses formed secondary data.

The majority of the sample for social work practitioners were females. This was more to the population composition rather than sampling bias. However, there was almost an equal distribution of sex among the young people both in the population and sample (52% and 48% of respondents were males and females respectively). This is because the establishments for the youth organisations are 50% male and 50% female representation respectively. The average age was 14 years for young people and 47 years for social work practitioners. What then were the perspectives that came forth?

There are several factors that came out from the research as regarding hindering or facilitating children's participation in decision-making. Among these were age, maturity, type of decision, culture, legislation and of course the international treaty – UNCRC.

However, age seems to be the most prominent of all. It remains challenging however as to which the appropriate age is given that maturity intervenes in this. The responsibility – rights nexus is rarely mentioned but an aspect if critically thought out that work both for and against children's participation. That parents have responsibility for children creates a dependence syndrome among children. Similarly, by assuming that children have rights, it is indirectly giving them responsibilities. Further the type of state social policy (the welfare state) is an independent variable that determines participation. The high participation of children in decision-making in Sweden is nothing but a reflection of the social democratic welfare state system which is based on equality and solidarity which the British liberal form or the Germany conservative system does not. This however, is not to say there is no children participation in the other two.

As the results show, there is a close relationship between areas where children are thought to be involved in decision-making and extent or levels of participation. And as both literature and empirical information has shown, involving children in decision-making does not only make decisions relevant to their needs but also important for the emotional development of the children. It also gives the platform, context to parents and practitioners as regards the welfare of children and guards against taken for granted misconceptions of childhood. According to the interpretive reproduction perspective, they are innovative and creative hence decisions made through their involvement would more likely reflect these characteristics.

The perennial controversy, vagueness regarding 'the best interest of the child,' the responsibility rights dichotomy remain as ever unresolved. This being the case, child involvement remains contextual. I have argued from Midgley's conception above that child welfare revolves around managing problems, meeting needs and creating opportunities for advancement. I would argue that this welfare trinity can be situated on a continuum or a pyramid with a strong base. Starting with managing social problems (more involvement of the user - child), meeting needs (also user involvement critical) and creating opportunities for advancement (I would argue that this requires less involvement and I would situate parental and state responsibility here).

While age has been cited several times as a factor in hindering or facilitating children's involvement in decision-making, sex has not. However, there seems to be more gender equality in childhood than in adulthood. The parliamentary composition in most countries is a case in point. Additionally gender is a cultural concept and therefore the involvement of children would be situated and reflected in the value system. Some value systems are patriarchal; others are matriarchal while others are balanced.

6.2 Implications

It was implicit in the choice of methods (qualitative and quantitative) that the two should complement each other. It was learnt though through this study that they may not always do so. It still remains unclear as to which one would be best for the subject although I would still go for a combination. It is evident from the results that age is especially a major factor in facilitating or hindering children's participation in decision-making. It still remains a challenge as to the appropriate age as it has been sometimes been confused with maturity. The other factors include type of decision, policy, culture as well as the setting while sex is by no means a factor. The best interest of the child still remains a contentious issue not necessarily by definition but by the onus of determination, hence, it remains to be explored. The ignorance expressed by some respondents as regards the existence or non-existence of the policy on participation of children in decision-making indicates to a larger extent the variations in handling children's issues. Nonetheless, an attempt was made to elicit views from social work practitioners, parents as well as children regarding the involvement of the later in decision-making.

6.3 Suggestions for future research

In suggesting future research on this subject, I would focus more on the findings and limitations encountered in this study. For instance issues like the type of decision, health, education, adoption among others. The study may have been adequate in combining methods but I would suggest other qualitative methods as well like vignettes, participatory observations not just interviews - these were avoided on the basis of time and language barrier.

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Appendix 1: Interview guide for children/Young people

1. Do you believe that young people should be involved in decision making on matters affecting their lives?
…………………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………………

2. How do you think young people can be involved in decision-making?
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3. Which areas of your life do you think you should be consulted about?
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4. In your view, who should determine the 'child's best interest'?
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5. In your view do you think there should be different ages for starting to participate in decision making between male and female children?
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…………………………………………………………………………………………………

6. What factors do you think prevent or facilitate children's participation in decision making?
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7. At which age do you think children should start participating in decision making in issues that affect their lives?
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…………………………………………………………………………………………………

8. What do you think are some of the advantages of involving children in decision making?
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…………………………………………………………………………………………………

9. What do you think are some of the disadvantages in involving them?
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Appendix 2: Interview guide for parents

1. Do you believe that young people should be involved in decision making on matters affecting their lives?

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…………………………………………………………………………………………………

2. How do you think children can be involved in decision making?

…………………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………………

3. Which areas of children's lives do you think they should be consulted about?

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…………………………………………………………………………………………………

4. In your view, who should determine the 'child's best interest'?

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5. In your view do you think there should be different ages for starting to participate in decision making between male and female children?

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6. What factors do you think prevent or facilitate children's participation in decision making?

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7. At which age do you think children should start participating in decision making on issues that affect their lives?

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8. What are some of the advantages of involving children in decision making?

…………………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………………

9. What are some of the disadvantages in involving them?

…………………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………………

Appendix 3: Questionnaire for children/Young people

Dear Respondent,

My name is Fred Moonga and I am a student at Goteborg University, Department of Social Work. I am conducting a research on **Children's participation in decision making: perspectives from Social work Practitioners in Gothenburg**, as part of fulfillment for the Maters programme in Social work. The information I would like to collect from you is purely for academic purposes and will therefore not be used for any other purpose. You're therefore kindly requested to participate in this research by answering all the questions as sincerely and fully as possible. Your confidentiality is assured.

During analysis, some data may be changed so that no respondent will be recognized. After finishing the project, the data will be destroyed. Participation in the project is voluntary and therefore you have the right to decline answering any questions.

Enkätundersökning avseende ungdomar

Bäste respondent,

Mitt namn är Fred Moonga och jag är studerande vid Göteborgs universitet, Institutionen för socialt arbete. Jag genomför en studie om **Barns delaktighet i beslutsfattande: sett från socialarbetarnas i Göteborg perspektiv**, som ett led i mina master programstudier. Den information som jag önskar få från Dig kommer enbart att användas för min studie, och jag vore därför tacksam om du så uppriktigt och utförligt som möjligt ville svara på frågorna i formuläret nedan. Du garanteras konfidialitet genom att svaren redovisas så att de inte kan härledas till någon namngiven person. Att delta i studien genom att svar på frågorna är förstås frivilligt.

Please answer by ticking (√).

A. Background information

1. Age (Ålder) ………..

2. Sex (Kön)
     1. Male (Man)   □
     2. Female (Kvinna)   □

3. Highest level of education attained
(Högsta utbildningingsnivå)
     1. None (Ingen)   □
     2. Basic education (1 – 9) (Enbart grundskola)   □
     3. High School (Gymnasium)   □
     4. Other (specify) (Annan, ange vilken)   ………………....................................

4. Current occupation (Nuvarande sysselsättning)
    1. Pupil (Gymnasia or high school)   □
    (Studerande, gymnasium)
    2. Other (Specify) (annat, ange vad...

5. Nationality (Nationalitet) ....

6. Religion (Religion)
    1. Christianity (Kristen)   □
    2. Muslim   (Muslim)   □
    3. Hindu   (Hinduist)   □
    4. Other (specify) (Annat, ange vad..

B. Factors that hinder or facilitate young people's participation in decision making (Faktorer som hindrar eller möjliggör unga människors deltagande i beslutsfattande)

7. "Young people should be involved in decision-making on matters affecting their lives". ("Unga människor borde involveras i beslutsfattande i frågor som påverkar deras egna liv")
    1. Strongly agree (Håller helt och hållet med)   □
    2. Agree (Håller med)   □
    3. Disagree (Tar avstånd)   □
    4. Strongly disagree (Tar helt och hållet avstånd)   □
    5. No opinion (Ingen åsikt)   □

8. Do you participate in making decisions about your life/welfare (e.g care, treatment, education, leisure) at home? (Deltar du till vardags i beslut som rör ditt liv och din välfärd (t.ex. omsorg, hur du behandlas och bemöts, utbildning, fritid)?
    1. Yes (Ja)   □
    2. No (Nej)   □

9. If yes, how often do you participate in decision making? (Om ja hur ofta deltar du sådant beslutsfattande?)
    1. Often (Ofta)   □
    2. On every issue (I varje fråga som uppstår)   □
    3. In some issues   (I vissa frågor)   □
    4. Not often   (Inte särskilt ofta)   □
    5. Not at all (Inte alls)   □
    6. No opinion   (Ingen åsikt)   □
10. If no, what do you think is the reason for not involving you? (Om nej, varför tror du att du inte blir involverad/tillfrågad?)
    1. Not competent (Anses ej kompetent)   □
    2. Too young (Anses för ung)   □
    3. Am not ready (Anses ej förberedd)   □
    4. Would not understand issues at hand (Anses ej förstå vad det gäller)   □

5. Would make regrettable decisions (Kommer att ångra sig sedan) ☐
6. Other (specify) (Annat, specificera………………………….........................

11. Would you remember any time that you were involved in making a decision (s) about your life? (Kommer du ihåg något tillfälle då du blev involverad i beslut som rörde ditt liv?)
    1. Yes (Ja) ☐
    2. No   (Nej) ☐

12. If yes to question (11) above, what type of decision (s) was it or were they? (Om ja på fråga 11 ovan, vilken sorts beslut rörde det sig om?)

....

13. Why do you think children should participate in decisions about their welfare?(Av vilken anledning anser du att barn borde delta i beslut angående deras egen välfärd?)
    1. It is their right (Det är deras rättighet) ☐
    2. It would give them a greater sense of self-worth
      (De känner sig mer värdefulla) ☐
    3. It would improve service delivery (Det skulle bli bättre för alla) ☐
    4. No opinion (Ingen åsikt) ☐
    5. Other (Specify) Annat, specificera…………………………………………………

14. In your opinion how best do you think you can be involved in decision-making? (Vilket är det bästa sättet att bli involverad i beslutsfattande som du ser det?)
    1. Through consultation on issues that affect me (Genom att bli tillfrågad i frågor som rör mig själv) ☐
    2. Asking me what my needs are (Genom att bli tillfrågad om mina behov) ☐
    3. Through representatives (Genom att någon för min talan) ☐
    4. As an individual (Som individ) ☐
    5. Other (specify) Annat, ange vad..

15. What do you think is the appropriate age for a child to start participating in making decisions about issues that affect his or her life? (Vid vilken ålder anser du att barn kan börja delta i beslut som påverkar deras liv?)
    1. 0 -5 years ☐
    2. 6 - 10 years ☐
    3. 12 – 15 years ☐
    4. 15 – 18 years ☐
    5. Above 18 years ☐
    6. All children ☐
    7. No opinion (ingen åsikt) ☐
    8. Other (specify) Annat, ange vad..

C. Impact of involving children in decisions making

16. What do you think are some of the disadvantages in involving young people in decision-making? (Vilka nackdelar ser du med att involvera unga människor i beslutsfattande om deras egen välfärd?)

     1. They would lose respect for adults

     (De tappar respekt för de vuxna)   □

     2. Adults would lose control of outcomes

     (Vuxna kommer inte att kunna ha kontroll över konsekvenserna)   □

     3. It would be a long process (processen kommer att ta lång tid)   □

     4. Other (specify) Annat ange vad …………………………

17. "Children are perceived to be incompetent in matters affecting their lives".("Barn får anses vara inkompetenta när det gäller frågor som påverkar deras liv")

     1. Strongly agree (Håller helt och hållet med)   □

     2. Agree (Håller med)   □

     3. Partly agree (Håller delvis med)   □

     4. Disagree (Tar avstånd)   □

     5. Strongly disagree   (Tar helt och hållet avstånd)   □

     6. No opinion   (Ingen åsikt)   □

D. Extent to which children can participate in decision making (Omfattning av barns deltagande i beslutsfattande)

18. In which of these areas do you think you should be consulted? (På vilka av dessa områden anser du att du bör tillfrågas)

     1. Education (Utbildning)   □

     2. Family welfare (Familjens välfärd)   □

     3. Leisure provision (Fritidsaktiviteter)   □

     4. All the above (Alla ovanstånde områden)   □

     5. None of the above (Inget av ovanstående)   □

     6. No opinion (Ingen åsikt)   □

     7. Other (specify)Annat ange vad..

19. At which of the following levels of decision making do you think children should be involved? (I vilka skeden av beslutsfattandet anser du att barn borde bli involverade).

     1. Identifying the problem or need (Identifiera problem eller behov)   □

     2. Suggesting alternatives (Föreslå alternativ)   □

     3. Choosing the final alternative (Välja det slutliga alternativet)   □

     4. Only 1 and 2   (Bara 1 och 2)   □

     5. Only 1 and 3 (Bara 1 och 3)   □

     6. Only 2 and 3   (Bara 2 och 3)   □

     7. All the three   (Alla tre)   □

     8. None of the above (Inget av ovanstående)   □

     9. Other (specify)Annat, ange vad..

20. In your view, who should determine the 'child's best interest'? (Vem ska enligt din åsikt bestämma vad som är I barnets intresse?)

1. The child   (Barnet själv)   □
2. Parents   (Föräldrarna)   □
3. Government (Regeringen)   □
4. The child together with parents (Barnet tillsammans med föräldrarna)   □
5. Parents and government   (Föräldrarna och regeringen)   □
6. All the three (Alla tre)   □
7. No opinion (Ingen åsikt)   □
8. Other (specify) Annat, ange vad ....

E. Gender and children participation in decision making (Kön och barns deltagande i beslutsfattande)

21. In your view do you think there should be different times for starting to participate in decision-making between male and female children? (Anser du att pojkar och flickor skall börja delta i beslut vid olika tidpunkter?)
1. Yes   □
2. No   □

22. If yes, which category should start early? (Om ja vilka skall börja tidigt?)
1. Male   (Pojkar)   □
2. Female (Flickor)   □
3. Both (Båda)   □
4. one of the above   (Varken pojkar eller flickor)   □

23. What is your reason to question (22) above? (Motivera gärna svaret på fråga 22 ovan!)
....
....

24. Do you have any additional comments? (Något du vill tillägga?)
……………………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………………
……………………………………………………………………………………………………

Thank you! (Tack du!)

Appendix 4: Questionnaire for social work practitioners

Dear Respondent,
My name is Fred Moonga and I am a student at Goteborg University, Department of Social Work. Iam conducting a research on **Children's participation in decision making: perspectives from Social work Practitioners in Gothenburg**, as part of fulfillment for the Maters programme in Social work. The information I would like to collect from you is purely for academic purposes and will therefore not be used for any other purpose. You're therefore kindly requested to participate in this research by answering all the questions as sincerely and fully as possible. Your confidentiality is assured.

During analysis, some data may be changed so that no respondent will be recognized. After finishing the project, the data will be destroyed. Participation in the project is voluntary and therefore you have the right to decline answering any questions, or terminate the interview without giving an explanation.

Enkätundersökning

Bäste respondent,

Mitt namn är Fred Moonga och jag är studerande vid Göteborgs universitet, Institutionen för socialt arbete. Jag genomför en studie om **Barns delaktighet i beslutsfattande: sett från socialarbetarnas i Göteborg perspektiv**, som ett led i mina master programstudier. Den information som jag önskar få från Dig kommer enbart att användas för min studie, och jag vore därför tacksam om du så uppriktigt och utförligt som möjligt ville svara på frågorna i formuläret nedan. Du garanteras konfidentialitet genom att svaren redovisas så att de inte kan härledas till någon namngiven person. Att delta i studien genom att svara på frågorna är förstås frivilligt. Du kan också avbryta ditt deltagande utan att ge någon motivering.

Please answer by ticking (√).

A. Background information

1. Age (Ålder) ………………………………………………………………………………...

2. Sex (Kön)
     1. Male (Man)   □
     2. Female (Kvinna)   □

3. Marital status (Civilstånd)
     1. Single – never married (Ensamstående – ogift)   □
     2. Married (Gift)   □
     3. Divorced (Frånskild)   □
     4. Widowed (Änka/änkling)   □
     5. Sambo   □

4. Number of children (Antal barn)

1. □ 2. □ 3. □ 4. none □   5. Other (specify) Annat, ange vad...

5. Highest level of education attained
       1. Gymnasiam (Gymnasium)   □
       2. High School (Grundskola)   □
       3. University degree (Universitetsexamen)   □
       4. Masters degree (Masterexamen)   □
       5. Doctorate (Doktorsexamen)   □
       6. Other (specify) Annat, ange vad……………………..

6. Professional background (Yrkesbakgrund)
       1. Economist (Ekonom)   □
       2. Social worker (Socialarbetare)   □
       3. Psychologist (Psykolog)   □
       4. Sociologist (Sociolog)   □
       5. Political scientist (Statskunskap/förvaltningsutb.)   □
       6. Demographer (Demograf)   □
       7. Other (specify) Annat, ange vad...

7. Current occupation (Nuvarande yrke)
       1. Social worker (Socialarbetare)   □
       2. Other (Specify) Annat, ange vad ....

8. What is the main type of work that you do? (Vilka är dina huvudsakliga arbvetsuppgifter?)
       1. Health related (Hälso- o sjukvård)   □
       2. Child care (Barnomsorg)   □
       3. School social work (Skolkurativt arbete)   □
       4. Mental health (Psykiska funktionshinder) □
       5. Youth work (Arbete med ungdomar)   □
       6. Administrative (Administrativt arbete)   □
       7. Other (specify) Annat, ange vad ………………...................................

9. Nationality (Nationalitet) ....

10. Religion (Religion)
       1. Christianity (Kristen)   □
       2. Muslim (Muslim)   □
       3. Hindu (Hinduist)   □
       4. Other (specify) Annat, ange vad ....

B. Factors that hinder or facilitate children's participation in decision making (Faktorer som hindrar eller möjliggör unga människors deltagande i beslutsfattande)

11. "Children should be involved in decision making on matters affecting their lives" ("Unga människor borde involveras i beslutsfattande i frågor som påverkar deras egna liv").

    1. Strongly agree (Håller helt och hållet med)   ☐
    2. Agree (Håller med)   ☐
    3. Disagree (Tar avstånd)   ☐
    4. Strongly disagree (Tar helt och hållet avstånd)   ☐
    5. No opinion   ☐
    6. Do not know   ☐

12. Do you involve children in making decisions about their lives/welfare (e.g care, treatment, education, leisure) at home? (Låter du barn delta till vardags i beslut som rör deras liv och välfärd (t.ex. omsorg, hur de behandlas och bemöts, utbildning, fritid)?

    1. Yes (Ja)   ☐
    2. No (Nej)   ☐
    3. Not applicable (Ej tillämpligt)   ☐

13. If yes, how often do you involve them in decision making? (Om ja hur ofta involverar du dem i sådant beslutsfattande?)

    1. Very often (Mycket ofta)   ☐
    2. Often (Ofta)   ☐
    3. Not often (Inte särskilt ofta)   ☐
    4. Not at all (Inte alls)   ☐
    5. No opinion (Ingen åsikt)   ☐
    6. Not applicable (Ej tillämpligt)   ☐
    7. Other (specify) Annat, ange vad ……………………………….........................

14. If no, why don't you involve them? (Om nej, varför?)

    1. Not competent (Anses ej kompetent)   ☐
    2. Too young (Anses vara för ung)   ☐
    3. They are not ready (Anses ej förberedd)   ☐
    4. Would not understand issues at hand (Anses ej förstå vad det gäller)   ☐
    5. Would make regrettable decisions (Kommer att ångra sig sedan)   ☐
    6. Other (specify) Annat, ange vad …………………………………..........................

15. Do you involve children in making decisions about their lives/welfare (e.g care, treatment, education, leisure) in your work? (Låter du barn delta i beslut som rör deras liv och välfärd (t.ex. omsorg, hur de behandlas och bemöts, utbildning, fritid) i din yrkesverksamhet?)

    1. Yes (Ja)   ☐
    2. No (Nej)   ☐
    3. Not applicable (Ej tillämpligt)   ☐

16. Is there any policy (ies) in your organisation that aim to promote children and young peoples' participation in decision making? (Finns det några riktlinjer i den organisation du arbetar som syftar till att främja barns och ungdomars deltagande i beslutsfattande?)

1. Yes (Ja)   □
   (please name the policy (ies) (vad heter dessa riktlinjer)……………………….
2. No   □

17. If No, do you think there should be such policy (ies)? (Om nej, anser du att det behövs sådana riktlinjer?)
       1. Yes (Ja)   □
       2. No (Nej)   □
       3. No opinion (Ingen åsikt)   □

18. How important do you think it is to have such policies? Hur viktigt är det att sådana riktlinjer finns, enligt din åsikt?)
   1. Very important (Mycket viktigt)   □
   2. Important (Viktigt)   □
   3. Less important (Mindre viktigt)   □
   4. Not important (Inte alls viktigt)   □
   5. No opinion (Ingen åsikt)   □

19. Would you remember any time that you involved a child to make a decision (s) about his/her life? (Kommer du ihåg något tillfälle då du involverade ett barn i beslut som rörde ditt liv?)
       1. Yes (Ja)   □
       2. No (Nej)   □

20. If yes to 19 above, what type of decision (s) was it or were they? (Om ja på fråga 19 ovan, vilken typ av beslut gällde det?)

....

21. Please tick the major reason why you involve children in making decisions! (Ange det huvudsakliga skälet till att du involverar barn i beslutsfattande!)
       1. UN convention on the rights of the child (FNs barnkonvention)   □
       2. Family values (Familjevärderingar)   □
       3. Government legislation (Nationell lagstiftning)   □
       4. Children demand to be consulted (Barn vill själva bli tillfrågade)   □
       5. Other (specify) Annat, ange vad ....

22. What do you think is the appropriate age for a child to start participating in making decisions about issues that affect his or her life? (Vid vilken ålder anser du att barn kan börja delta i beslut som påverkar deras liv?)
       1. 0 -5 years   □
       2. 6 - 10 years   □
       3. 12 – 15 years   □
       4. 15 – 18 years   □
       5. Above 18 years   □
       6. All children   □

7. No opinion (Ingen åsikt) □
8. Other (specify) Annat, ange vad..

23. Why do you think children should participate in decisions about their welfare?
(Varför bör barn delta i beslut om deras egen välfärd, enligt din åsikt?)
1. It is their right (Det är deras rättighet) □
2. It would give them a greater sense of self-worth (De känner sig mer värdefulla) □
3. It would improve service delivery (Det skulle bli bättre för alla) □
4. No opinion (Ingen åsikt) □
5. Other (Specify) Annat, ange vad …………………………………….....................

24. What are some of the disadvantages in involving them? (Vilka nackdelar ser du med att involvera unga människor i beslutsfattande om deras egen välfärd?)

1. They would lose respect for adults (De tappar respekt för de vuxna) □
2. Adults would lose control of outcomes (Vuxna kommer inte att kunna ha kontroll över konsekvenserna) □
3. No opinion (Ingen åsikt) □
4. Other (specify) Annat, ange vad …………………………………….....................................

25. How do you think children can be involved in decision making? (Hur kan barn involveras i beslutsfattande, enligt din åsikt?)
6. Through consultation on issues that affect them
(Genom att bli tillfrågad i frågor som berör dem) □
7. Through representatives
(Genom någon som för deras talan) □
8. As individuals (Som individ) □
9. Other (specify)Annat, ange vad..

C. Impact of involving children in decisions making (Betydelsen av att involvera barn I beslutsfattande)

26. What are some of the advantages in involving them? *Tick all that you think apply.*
(Vilka fördelar ser du med att involvera unga människor i beslutsfattande om deras egen välfärd?)
1. It would improver service provision for them
(De tappar respekt för de vuxna) □
2. They would become better adults
(De blir bättre som vuxna) □
3. They understand their needs better
(De förstår sina egna behov bättre) □
4. Other (specify) Annat ange vad…………………………………………….........

27. "Children are perceived to be incompetent in matters affecting their lives". ("Barn får anses vara inkompetenta när det gäller frågor som påverkar deras liv")

7. Strongly agree (Håller helt och hållet med) □
8. Agree (Håller med) □
9. Partly agree (Håller med) □
10. Disagree (Tar avstånd) □
11. Strongly disagree (Tar helt och hållet avstånd) □
12. No opinion (Ingen åsikt) □

D. Extent to which children can participate in decision making (Omfattning av barns deltagande i beslutsfattande)

28. In which of these areas do you think children should be consulted? (På vilka av dessa områden anser du att du bör tillfrågas)
8. Education (Utbildning) □
9. Family welfare (Familjens välfärd) □
10. Leisure provision (Fritidsaktiviteter) □
11. All the above (Alla ovanstånde områden) □
12. None of the above (Inget av ovanstående) □
13. No opinion (Ingen åsikt) □
14. Other (Specify) Annat, ange vad………………………….............................

29. At which of the following levels of decision-making do you think children should be involved? (I vilka skeden av beslutsfattandet anser du att barn borde bli involverade).
10. Identifying the problem or need (Identifiera problem eller behov) □
11. Suggesting alternatives (Föreslå alternativ) □
12. Choosing the final alternative (Välja det slutliga alternativet) □
13. Only 1 and 2 (Bara 1 och 2) □
14. Only 1 and 3 (Bara 1 och 3) □
15. Only 2 and 3 (Bara 2 och 3) □
16. All the three (Alla tre) □
17. None of the above (Inget av ovanstående) □
18. Other (specify) Annat, ange vad...

30. In your view, who should determine the 'child's best interest'?
9. The child (Barnet själv) □
10. Parents (Föräldrarna) □
11. Government/state (Regeringen) □
12. The child together with parents (Barnet tillsammans med föräldrarna) □
13. Parents and government (Föräldrarna och regeringen) □
14. All the three (Alla tre) □
15. No opinion (Ingen åsikt) □
16. Other (specify)Annat ange vad..

E. Gender and children participation in decision making (Kön och barns deltagande i beslutsfattande)

31. In your view do you think there should be different ages for starting to participate in decision making between male and female children? (Vem ska enligt din åsikt bestämma vad som är i barnets intresse?)
        3. Yes (Ja)   □
        4. No (Nej)   □

32. If yes, which category should start early?
        2. Male (Poljkar)   □
        3. Female (Flickor)   □
        4. Both (Båda)   □
        5. None of the above (Inget dera)   □

33. What is your reason to question (32) above? (Av vilken anledning. Motivera avaret på fråga 32?)
          a. Males mature faster than females
          (Pojkar mognar fortare än flickor)   □
          b. Females mature faster than males
          (Flickor mognar fortare än pojkar)   □
          c. There should be no difference
          (Det bör inte vara någon skillnad)   □
          d. Other (specify) (Annat, ange vad

....
....

34. Do you have any additional comments? (Något du vill tillägga?)
…………………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………………
…………………………………………………………………………………………………

Thank you! (Tack du!)

Appendix 5: Letter of consent

C/o Gothenburg University
Department of Social Work
Sprängkullsgatan 23
Box 720
SE 405 30 Göteborg
SWEDEN

2007-03-09

To Whom It May Concern:

Öckerö Kommun,
Box 1035,
430 90 Öckerö.

Dear Madam/Sir,

Ref: Research in Öckero

My name is Fred Moonga and iam conducting a research on **Children's participation in decision making: perspectives from Social work Practitioners in Gothenburg**. The research project is part of my education in the international Masters Program in Social Work at the University of Gothenburg, Sweden. In order to ensure that my project meets the ethical requirements for good research i promise to adhere to the following principles:

- Interviewees/respondents in the project will be given information about the purpose of the project.
- Interviewees/respondents have the right to decide whether s/he will participate in the project even after the interview has been concluded.
- The collected data will be handled confidentially and will be kept in such a way that no unauthorized person can view or access it.

The interview may be recorded as this would make it easier for me to document what is said during the interview and also help in the continuing work with the project. During analysis, some data may be changed so that no interviewee/respondent will be recognized. After finishing the project, the data will be destroyed. The data I intend to collect will only be used in this project. Participation in the project is voluntary and therefore you have the right to decline answering any questions, or terminate the interview without giving an explanation.

You are welcome to contact me or my supervisor in case you have any questions.

Fred Moonga   Rafael Lindqvist

Fredmonga1@yahoo.co.uk   Rafael.lindqvist@socwork.gu.se

Appendix 6: Chi-square tests tables

*Figure i: Do you involve children in making decisions about their lives/welfare at your work place * is there any policy if your organization that aim to promote (Chi-Square Tests)*

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	31.804(a)	4	***.000***
Likelihood Ratio	12.099	4	.017
Linear-by-Linear Association	9.988	1	.002
N of Valid Cases	28		

a 7 cells (77.8%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .04.

Figure ii: *Children are perceived to be incompetent in matters affecting their lives * children should be involved in decision making (***Chi-Square Tests***)*

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	32.146(a)	9	.000
Likelihood Ratio	13.337	9	.148
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.039	1	.081
N of Valid Cases	28		

a 14 cells (87.5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .04.

Figure iii (a): Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.730	3	.866
Likelihood Ratio	1.069	3	.785
Linear-by-Linear Association	.666	1	.414
N of Valid Cases	28		

a 6 cells (75.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .18.

Figure iii (b): sex * children should be involved in decision making

			children should be involved in decision making				Total
			strongly agree	agree	no opinion	do not know	
sex	male	Count	3	2			5
		% within sex	60	40			100
		% within children should be involved in decision making	23	15			18
		% of Total	11	7			18
	female	Count	10	11	1	1	23
		% within sex	43	48	4	4	100
		% within children should be involved in decision making	77	85	100	100	82
		% of Total	36	39	4	4	82
Total		Count	13	13	1	1	28
		% within sex	46	46	4	4	100
		% within children should be involved in decision making	100	100	100	100	100
		% of Total	46	46	4	4	100