



UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

“Are you one of those who take children?”

Child protection professionals views on the disinformation campaign -
implications on the practice and for children's rights

Master's Programme in Social Work and Human Rights

Degree report, 30 higher education credits, Spring 2023

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Abstract

Title: “Are you one of those who take children?” Child protection professionals views on the disinformation campaign - implications on the practice and for children’s rights

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Key words (eng): Child protection services, disinformation campaign, children’s rights, Sweden, professional identity

Nyckelord (swe): Socialtjänsten, desinformationskampanj, barns rättigheter, Sverige, professionell identitet

The aim of this thesis was to analyse how professionals at the Child protection services (CPS) perceive the disinformation campaign, how they related it to their work and how they cope with the potential effects related to the campaign. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with professionals at assessment units at CPS, and thereafter analysed through thematic analysis. This resulted in five themes; Negative attitudes towards CPS, Implications on the practice, Strategies to cope with the effects, Consequences for children’s rights and A feeling of how it “should” be. This was analysed in relation to previous research and the following theoretical concepts; Discretionary space, Professional identity and A child rights perspective. The main findings indicate that the disinformation campaign has affected the professionals and the practice in adverse ways, mainly shown by fear and distrust towards CPS, affecting both their professional and private life. The professionals cope with the implications using a variety of strategies and there are indications that there is a lack of organisational guidance on how to deal with the implications. The professional’s seem to have a strong sense of professional identity, despite facing several issues in establishing such. The adversity and ambiguous role seems to entail a reinforced sense of the collective. The lack of trust towards CPS results in issues ensuring participatory rights for children, the findings indicate issues of CPS not accessing families, children not being heard, children not getting support and parents making sudden moves with their children out of fear for CPS. Moreover, the duality of children's roles in society is highlighted, as they are framed as both actors and objects. Lastly, there are indications of parental rights taking precedence over children’s rights. In conclusion, the findings indicate that the disinformation campaign has had adverse effects on the practice, the individual social worker and ultimately affects children’s rights in a negative way. Thus, there is a need to shift focus on the implications on merely a state level, and include the implications that can be seen on a street bureaucracy level whilst having a child’s rights perspective throughout.

Table of contents

Acknowledgements	4
Abbreviations	5
1.Introduction	6
1.1 Purpose of the study	7
1.2 Research questions	8
1.3 Relevance for Social Work and Human Rights	8
1.4 Contextual background	11
1.5 Terminology	12
1.6 Disclaimer	13
1.7 Disposition of the thesis	13
2. Literature review	14
2.1 The public's perception of social work	15
2.2 Professional's coping strategies and other mitigating factors	16
2.3 The individual social worker and discretion	19
2.4 Participation and children's rights in a Swedish context	19
2.5 Summary of previous research	20
3.Theoretical framework	22
3.1 Discretion and street level bureaucrats	23
3.2 Professional identity	24
3.3 A child's rights perspective	25
3.3.1 Article 12 - Right to be heard	26
3.4 Discussion of the theoretical framework	27
4.Methodology	28
4.1 Epistemological approach	28
4.2 Research Design	28
4.3 Methodological considerations	29
4.3.1 Choice of interviewees	29
4.3.2 Choice of the geographical scope	31
4.4 Choice of method	31
4.4.1 Pilot interview	32
4.4.2 Collection of data	33
4.4.3 The participants	34
4.4.4 Conducting the interviews	35
4.5 Method of analysis	35
4.5.1 Transcription	36
4.5.2 Thematic analysis	36
4.6 Pre-understanding	38
4.7 Ethical considerations	40
4.7.1 Confidentiality and Anonymity	40

4.7.2 Informed consent	41
4.7.3 Consistency and Truth value	41
4.7.4 Applicability	42
4.7.5 Being an insider	43
4.7.6 Translation of interviews	43
5. Findings and analysis	45
5.1 Negative attitudes towards CPS	45
5.1.1 Fear towards CPS is not a new phenomenon	45
5.1.2 Distrust towards CPS has increased	47
5.2 Implications for the practice	49
5.2.1 Difficulties carrying out the "desired" social work	50
5.2.2 Psychosocial effects for the professional	53
5.2.3 CPS does not get access to families	55
5.3 Strategies to cope with the effects	58
5.3.1 Strategies when faced with the effects	59
5.3.2 Talking to colleagues	61
5.4 Consequences for children's rights	62
5.4.1 Children are not heard	62
5.4.2 Parents make decisions for children	63
5.4.3 Children do not get proper support	64
5.5 A feeling of how it "should" be	66
5.5.1 Acknowledgement	66
5.5.2 CPS should be visible in the debate	67
6. Discussion and conclusion	71
6.1 Summary and conclusion of findings	71
6.2 Suggestions for further research	73
6.3 Limitations of the study	74
Appendix 1 - Information letter [Swedish]	87
Appendix 2 - Informed consent [Swedish]	91
Appendix 3 - Interview guide [Swedish]	92

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to thank the professionals who have participated in this study. I know that most of you took time to participate even though you had a lot on your plate, and for that I am very thankful. This thesis would not have been possible without your valuable thoughts and contributions.

I also want to give a special thank you to my supervisor Kajsa Nolbeck for the indispensable guidance, enthusiasm and critical view. You have contributed to the writing process being fun and exciting. The exchange of ideas, thoughts and perspectives has been really rewarding, and you have truly contributed to my academic development! Last but not least, I would like to acknowledge all the support I have received from family, classmates and friends - you are all amazing!

Abbreviations

CPS - Child protection services

LVU - Swedish Care of Young Persons (Special Provisions) Act (SFS 1990:52)

CRC - Convention on the Rights of the Child

UNCRC - UN Committee of the Rights of the Child

SoL - The Social Service Act (SFS 2001:452)

1.Introduction

There are several factors that drive the public's opinion of social work, one being mass media and its reports regarding governmental organisations. These reports can have multiple effects; they can scandalise social work as a profession and build opinion amongst the public whilst also contributing to change within the social work arena. Some issues that are highlighted can contribute to change at both a meso and macro level. Thus, the representation of social work in mass media has an impact on how the profession is perceived and has an impact on the status of the profession (Brunnberg, 2001). Like mass media, social media has a powerful influence and can both affirm and establish people's attitudes (Davison, 2022). However, different forms of media entail different dynamics between the actors. Whilst mass media offers a wide variety of material and provides citizens with information, previous research has indicated that social media functions as a forum where the public can engage in conversation, while gaining access to an abundance of information. The forum also allows participants to collectively, or individually, take action (Shirky, 2011).

A phenomenon referred to as “the disinformation campaign against social services” by mass media and the Swedish government has been ongoing for the last one and a half years. This phenomenon entails information circling on social media platforms, nationally and internationally, regarding Child protection services (CPS) in Sweden. The information revolves around how CPS allegedly targets muslim families and kidnap their children through putting them in mandatory care for minors in accordance with Swedish Care of Young Persons (Special Provisions) Act (SFS 1990:52) (SVT, 2022a), also referred to as LVU. Moreover, information states that these interferences are done without following current legislation (Regeringskansliet, 2023). A recent study emphasises the need to review the campaign as something existing in both a Swedish and an international context. Furthermore, the study finds that distrust towards CPS is not new and highlights that there has been a lack of force to counteract the information (Ranstorp and Ahlerup, 2023). Mikael Östlund, the director of communication at the Psychological Defence Agency in Sweden, says that a factor behind the campaign is “islamic interests” and a desire to disrupt and portray a wrongful image of how Sweden as a state cares for children. Moreover, Östlund suggests that similar disinformation campaigns can recur, since Sweden has a “lgbti-perspective” which challenges islamic ideas (Mikael Östlund cited in Dagens samhälle, 2022).

Recent reports suggest that there has been an escalation regarding the content portrayed in the campaign (SVT, 2022b); among other things there have been reports regarding parents, whose children are in out-of-home care, who have been encouraged to commit terror crimes towards the welfare department and become martyrs (SVT, 2022c). Social workers are receiving threats, and ultimately this can lead to children in Sweden not receiving the support they are entitled to (Regeringskansliet, 2023). In 2022 the Swedish government assigned the National Board of Health and Welfare to initiate collaboration with civil society, with the purpose to inform the public and counteract the information regarding CPS and their work with children and their families (Regeringskansliet, 2022). Additionally, the National board of Health and Welfare were assigned to counteract the spreading of rumours and the disinformation campaign, this will now be done in close collaboration with the Swedish Institute, the Psychological Defence Agency in Sweden and the Swedish agency for Support for Faith Communities (Regeringskansliet, 2023).

In conclusion, the phenomenon of the disinformation campaign is fairly new, thus research on the topic has not been conducted. However, previous research indicates that the media's portrayal of social work can have a substantial impact on the practice. There are several measures taken by the Swedish government to counteract the disinformation campaign, these efforts are mainly focused on a state level. Hence, the importance of focusing on street level social work.

1.1 Purpose of the study

The purpose of this thesis is reflected in the ongoing phenomena that is the disinformation campaign, with focus on the experiences of professional social workers. The aim is to analyse how professionals at the CPS perceive the disinformation campaign, how they related it to their work and how they cope with the potential effects related to the campaign. Moreover, this will be analysed through a child's rights perspective, with the intent to discuss how both the campaign and the professionals, through their coping strategies, can affect children's rights. By doing so, I hope to contribute to expanding the knowledge basis in several ways. For this master thesis I aim to produce a paper that is relevant for other scholars but foremost professional social workers. Thereby, with the focus on potential effects on the practice, a focal point will consequently be on street level bureaucrats, meaning "public service workers who interact directly with citizens in the course of their jobs, and who have substantial

discretion in the execution of their work” (Lipsky, 2010:3), and their experiences. Moreover, professional’s coping strategies will be central in the present master thesis, with a pre-understanding that this can have an impact on the practice. This is an underexplored matter, and additionally it may help to shed light on difficulties that street level bureaucrats can face and furthermore, how this could be understood from a child’s rights perspective, i.e their clients. Furthermore, this can offer an insight into potential shortcomings and how to better understand the perceived effects of the disinformation campaign. Additionally, it may add insight in how to better support the professionals and in elongation the children, successively ensuring a good quality of service by CPS.

1.2 Research questions

The aim of this study has been formulated into three research questions:

- How do child protection professionals perceive the disinformation campaign and how do they relate it to their work with children and their families?
- How do professionals cope with potential effects related to the disinformation campaign?
- How can the professional’s potential experiences and coping strategies related to the disinformation campaign be understood from a child’s rights perspective?

1.3 Relevance for Social Work and Human Rights

Children constitute a vulnerable group, and childhood is referred to as the most vulnerable time in a person's life. Children are generally lacking autonomy and are relying on others to fulfil their needs. Moreover, “children are dependent on decisions that others make for them right from the start” (Bagattini, 2019:211), increasing their vulnerability further. Historically children have been seen as the property of their parents, thus there has been a conviction that the state, or social workers acting on the state’s behalf, should have little interference with the child in the sphere of the home. Whilst some would argue that this is not the generally held opinion in present time, there are still difficulties in the competing rights of children and the rights of parents (Ife, 2012). When there are competing rights, it is the job of the professional to make a judgement on which rights are to take precedence, while considering that the best interest of the child shall take lead according to the United Nations Committee of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (The Ombudsman for Children, 2020).

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was ratified by Sweden in 1990, and was thereafter enshrined as Swedish law in 2020. This doesn't entail an addition or change to children's rights, but rather an increased status for children's rights as the law is equivalent to current legislation (UNICEF, 2020). In Sweden's fifth periodic report to UNCRC several shortcomings are presented in relation to protecting children's rights. With the background of UNCRC's recommendations to strengthen the awareness about the meaning and practical application of the principle of the best interest of the child, the Swedish government emphasises that the best interest of the child is incorporated in current legislation. However, this has not ensured fulfilment of the right nor has it had a sufficient impact in practice. Several measures then followed, e.g by including the best interest of the child in several legal acts (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 2015). Moreover, UNCRC has lifted several concerns in relation to children's rights in the Swedish context. One being that some children are still facing discrimination, based on ethnicity and sexual orientation (UNCRC, 2015). Another aspect is that there is "insufficient training for relevant professionals on best interest determination" (UNCRC, 2015:4), moreover there is a lack of mandatory child rights impact assessment regarding all measures that have an impact for children (UNCRC, 2015). In Sweden's most recent periodic report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child several shortcomings are presented in relation to protecting children's rights. The best interest of the child has not gained full impact in some legal fields. Moreover, violence towards children is at "very low level by international standards" (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 2021:7), however a child's right to be protected from violence is still not met. Furthermore, the amount of children who have been subjected to sexual abuse have increased, a recent study indicates that one in four children were subjected to sexual abuse during their childhood. Furthermore, there is a need to strengthen the safety and security for children in alternative care (CWFS, 2021 cited by Ministry of Employment, 2021).

Within the Swedish context the CPS is one of the governmental organisations that works first hand with children and their families. The municipality, which the CPS is a part of, has the ultimate responsibility to ensure that children get the support they need if they are subjected to harm or risk being harmed (Ministry of Employment, 2021). They are obliged to work for the best interest of the child (The National Board of Health and welfare, 2022) and strive for every child's right to grow up under safe conditions (The National Board of Health and welfare, 2019). The principle of the best interest of the child is influencing applicable law and

shall for e.g be decisive in decisions according to LVU (Ministry of Health and social affairs, 2015), and should be a deciding factor in actions or decisions relating to care or treatment for children by the welfare department (Ministry of Employment, 2021). However, social workers need to make morally difficult judgements regarding the rights of children - judgements that often lead to decisions which have serious consequences (Clark 2000, cited in Ife, 2012). Furthermore, the individual social worker possesses some level of discretion, and thereby have the capacity to impact the practice, as they are the professionals practising social work (Sjögren, 2018).

The disinformation campaign is a relatively new phenomenon, hence little research has been conducted in direct relation to the campaign. The public's opinion on social work is rarely the focus scope of research (Legood et al, 2015). Yet, the public's trust towards the CPS is of essence, as it affects the legitimacy of the organisation and thereby the public's tendency to seek help (Nilsson and Landstedt, 2022). Moreover, the public's perception also affects the professional at an individual level. Studies have shown that a negative perception amongst the public can have an impact on the "effectiveness of the profession" (Reid and Misener, 2001 cited in Legood et al, 2015:1873), lead to a decrease in professional self-esteem (Legood et al, 2015; Keini et al., 2022), which in turn can lead to lowered morale amongst the professionals (Zugazaga et al., 2006)

In conclusion, there are several shortcomings in relation to fulfilling children's rights within the Swedish context. The municipality, and thereby the CPS, have the ultimate responsibility for caring for children who are subjected to harm or run the risk of being harmed. Influences by the public can have a negative impact on both the professional and the one's in need of support. Hence, influences by the public that may have an impact on CPS and the professionals need to be investigated further, as such influences can have an impact on the practice and thereby potentially also for children's rights. Thus, exploring this phenomenon is relevant for social work and human rights. Furthermore, this scope may help organisations to limit the possible damage that public perception can have on the profession (cf. Legood et al., 2015), and additionally children's rights.

1.4 Contextual background

Social work as a profession is built on relationships. Therefore trustworthiness is essential, as trust between the professional and the other is central for successful social work, especially since “the other” is often highly vulnerable. Social work has, like many other human service professions, emerged from insufficient quality practices. Social work is still carried out in similar institutions, something that gives origin to distrust (Healy, 2017)¹. Social work is not necessarily responsible for misconduct or human rights violations, but rather bystanders to them. In the light of this, it really should not come as a surprise that there is an issue with trust towards social work by the people of whom professionals work with. Trust is a fleeting thing, it has to be earned and trustworthiness can be built by actions rather than words. There is a need to be clear and transparent in social work and with the professional’s purpose, in order to do so there is a need to review the way professionals position their profession (Ibid). Professionals tend to arrange their work in a binary way but there is a need to adapt and respect the breadth of social work and professional authority in order to increase trust (Taylor et al., 2015 cited in Healy, 2017).

The Swedish child protection system has gone through several reforms in the last decades, these reforms have been targeted towards the fulfilment of children’s right to participation according to article 12 in CRC. These reforms have had a positive impact on children’s involvement, where children are most often heard, but there are still indications that children are not given the possibility for participation to its full extent and moreover, they are not listened to (Leviner, 2018). This is especially shown in cases where children are in out-of-home care (The Ombudsman for Children, 2011 cited in Leviner, 2018). There are several challenges in regards to child participation and especially to put emphasis on children’s wants and wishes in decision-making processes by the state (Leviner, 2018; Eriksson and Näsman 2009). An identified underlying factor for these challenges in parental rights in relation to children’s rights (Leviner, 2018). As previously stated; children have been seen as the property of their parents (Ife, 2012) and Leviner (2018) argues that an issue in the fulfilment of article 12 is that parental rights “trumps” children’s rights. Even though Sweden prides themselves of being child-friendly, parental rights are very strong. Moreover, Leviner

¹ Whilst this is in an Australian context, it is also true in a Swedish one, hundreds of cases of misconduct which have led to children being harmed have been reported the last couple of years (SVT, 2019).

(2018) identifies an issue connected to the understanding of *why* children's participation is important, suggesting that there is a significant risk of "tokenistic participation".

1.5 Terminology

In this section I will account for some of the phrases used in this thesis. Some phrases and terms written in the introduction, as well as in the upcoming thesis, are not value neutral in regards to the research area of interest nor are they self-explanatory. Thus, I will disclose how I will use this specific terminology and how it is applied in the present master thesis.

Disinformation campaign [Desinformationskampanj] - This is the most commonly used term in mass media and the Swedish government to describe the phenomenon where information regarding the CPS have circled on social media platforms. I made a conscious decision to use this terminology as this is the established term of the phenomenon, whilst I am sure the ones who are posting information would disagree about the term "disinformation", as they convey the information to be true.

Islamic interests - The term "islamic interest" is used as this is quoted by Mikael Östlund, the director of communication at the Psychological Defence Agency in Sweden. The agency has been highly visible in the media discussion on the topic, thus it is the agency's terminology that is often heard. This terminology is by no means value neutral or non-problematic, but it is essential to provide background on the topic that is reflected in how the campaign has been, and still is, discussed in Sweden

Child protection services (CPS) - "Child protection services" as a term is used to describe social childcare services, carried out by the municipality. I make use of the term in a similar way, however I make a distinction, and refer to a specific section within the child protection services - the so called "assessment unit". This differs from the media's terminology, as the child protection services [Socialtjänst], is referred to as a whole organisation, rather than consisting of several different units.

Assessment unit - As stated in the above section, I make a distinction regarding CPS where I actually refer to an assessment unit. An assessment unit, is the unit at the CPS who carries out assessments regarding children and their families. The assessments are initiated on either a

submitted report of concern for a child or an application for support by the child or their custodians. The organisation of CPS works differently depending on the area and county, but in bigger cities the department is organised in a similar way.

1.6 Disclaimer

I am currently an employee at the municipality of Gothenburg at a so-called assessment unit. I have been working there for approximately four years, hence I have experience of the “disinformation campaign” and would account as a member of the same group I sought to interview. I will further account for the ethical considerations I have done in relation to my role as a professional at CPS in section 4.7.5 and furthermore I will account for my pre-understanding of the topic in section 4.6.

1.7 Disposition of the thesis

This thesis is organised in the following way: firstly, the introduction chapter is presented, which includes background, purpose of study, research question, a motivation for the thesis relevance for social work and human rights as well as contextual background. Furthermore, a section of terminology is provided as well as a disclaimer of my professional role. The second chapter is a literature review, which includes a description on how the literature review was carried out and then a presentation of relevant research on the topic. Following the review is a presentation of the chosen theoretical framework, where the following theories and concepts are outlined for the reader; Discretion and street level bureaucrats, Professional identity and A child’s rights perspective. Thereafter, the fourth chapter; methodology, is presented. This includes a description of my epistemological approach and research design, a presentation of the chosen method, method of analysis and the identified codes and themes are presented by a figure to describe the process of thematic analysis. Additionally, a discussion of methodological consideration and ethical considerations is presented. Furthermore, I account for the result and analysis in the fifth chapter. The result and analysis is presented in a way that follows the identified themes. Lastly, the sixth chapter accounts for conclusions, where a further discussion related to the result is carried out. This is followed by presenting several recommendations for further research are presented. In addition limitations of the study is presented.

2. Literature review

The purpose of a literature review is to provide a comprehensive overview of the current knowledge on a particular issue (Green et al., 2006; Pautasso, 2019). Moreover, it provides a theoretical framework which in addition, disclose potential gaps in current research on the topic (Baker, 2016). When conducting the literature review I employed a narrative approach. This entails conducting an overview of the current literature of a field whilst employing a critical perspective (Bryman, 2016). Moreover, a narrative review is characterised by providing qualitative summaries of the current literature, summaries that can consist of studies that may have widely different research questions and methodologies (Baumeister, 2013, cited in Pautasso, 2019). Throughout the review I retained a critical perspective which entailed me evaluating the current literature for both its weaknesses and strengths (cf. Pautasso, 2019)

I conducted a literature search, using a combination of keywords. Thereafter I carried out similar literature searches but used synonyms, the aim was to access literature on the topic that might contain different keywords (cf. Bryman, 2016). When conducting the review, I used two databases; Google scholar and Scopus. I utilised the following keywords in various combinations: social work, coping, media, coping strategies, manage, public, socialtjänst [welfare department/social services], coping strategier [coping strategies], allmänheten [the public], “public perception”, “public opinion”, “child protection”, discretion, “individual practice”, children’s rights, barns rättigheter [children’s rights] and consequences.

I also looked for references that were cited in those papers I reviewed (cf. Pautasso, 2019) with the aim of getting an overview of more related articles than were shown in my previous searches. This proved to be a successful strategy and some of the material in the review emerged in that manner. In addition, I also reviewed papers that had referenced some of the key literature I found when conducting the review, this also contributed to a broadend review on the various topics. I was highly influenced by Pautasso’s (2019) model for conducting a literature review. The model contains 10 steps, e.g defining a topic, taking notes while reading and being critical and consistent. Furthermore, the process of the review was dynamic, this entailed going back and forth in the process (Pautasso, 2019). This enabled me to find a structure for the review, whilst being able to revise a large quantity of literature.

When conducting the literature review it became evident that the vast majority of scholarly articles related to coping strategies utilised by professionals was in relation to work related stress. This differs from the focus scope of this thesis, however I believe it to still be highly relevant. At an initial stage the belief that the disinformation campaign is likely to have an impact on internal and external stress was guiding this choice. At a later stage this was underbuilt with the empirical data, hence my choice to include these articles in the presented literature review. Moreover, the literature presented is often research conducted in other contexts; such as the UK and the U.S. Whilst the context of where the research was conducted differs from this thesis, and to each other, it's relevant to give a more general overview of how social work and media interplay, as well as coping strategies, discretion, reasoning and additionally children's rights. Below I will present the literature on the various topics related to the thesis at hand. I have thematised previous research in four overarching topics, this is presented in the four sections below.

2.1 The public's perception of social work

Social workers are seen as a professional group who are affected by public perception to a large extent (Legood et al., 2015). Studies show that how a profession is perceived is of grave importance, as it can have an impact on the professional, but moreover also have a negative impact on the "effectiveness of the profession" (Reid and Misener, 2001 cited in Legood et al., 2015:1873). A negative perception of social work amongst the public can affect the professional, by for example affecting their professional self-esteem (Legood et al., 2015; Keini et al., 2022). Negative attitudes towards social services challenges the legitimacy of the practice but also the trustworthiness of the professionals. Moreover, a negative opinion amongst the public forces the professionals to have a double view of their profession. They view themselves through a perspective where they take pride in their work and have a feeling of them doing a good job, simultaneously they are faced with disapproval from the public. Ultimately this can result in cognitive dissonance for the professional (Jessen, 2010).

However, it is not only the public's perception that is of essence, but also how the professional understands and interprets it (Legood et al., 2015). In a survey-study conducted in New Zealand social work professionals tend to have a poorer impression of the public opinion of their profession compared to the actual opinion amongst the public. Social workers continuously believed that the public's perception of social work was more negative than what

previous studies, examining the public's opinion of social work, had shown (Staniforth et al., 2016).

Thomlison and Blome's (2012) study which focuses on media coverage of social work in connection to child fatalities in CPS states that media coverage often highlights insufficiencies and inadequacies within the child welfare system. Moreover, professionals from CPS who engage with the media to give statements such as "no comment" are seen as hiding something, which in turn can deepen the mistrust seen between CPS and the media (Thomlison and Blome, 2012). Negative coverage in media can cause difficulties engaging with families and assessing the risk for children (Rehehr et al., 2010 cited in Thomlison and Blome, 2012). Moreover, when individuals who are in need of assistance have a negative perception of social work it brings difficulties for the professionals to engage and provide proper support (Zugazaga et al., 2006).

2.2 Professional's coping strategies and other mitigating factors

A study conducted by Astvik, Melin and Allvin (2014) in Sweden focused on identifying strategies utilised by social workers to cope with the lack of resources while simultaneously having a job with high demands. In addition, focus lied on exploring the outcome the coping strategies had on the professional's health, service quality and professional development. Through individual and focus group interviews five coping strategies were identified; Compensatory, Demand-reducing, Disengagement, Voice and Exit. These strategies were used simultaneously and often one strategy led to another, sometimes without the professional being conscious about it. Compensatory strategies entails the professional making efforts "to deal with the imbalance between work demand and available resources in an attempt to maintain quality and performance levels" (Astvik, Melin and Allvin., 2014:56). This includes working overtime, working at home and not taking breaks. These strategies were commonly used by the professionals and when these strategies were used to a large extent it negatively impacted the professional's health. Motives for using these types of strategies were to relieve stress of having work undone and a sense of having personal responsibility to have completed your work tasks. Those who had previously used compensatory strategies tended to lower their expectations for their own work, which entailed them settling for "good enough". This is referred to as demand-reducing strategies. To settle for "good enough" was something that inflicted a moral conflict for the professionals, and it was described as a choice between

service quality and their own wellbeing (Astvik et al., 2014). To cope with this conflict, several professionals describe a process of rationalisation. They utilise strategies to rationalise and legitimise their choices, in order to make the demand-reducing strategies more acceptable. The strategy of disengagement is generally seen in relation to the professional's workplace, and the professional's emphasis the need for collegial support in the team, as colleagues are distinguished as one of the foremost reasons for staying at a unit despite a high workload. Moreover, the strategies of voice and exit are presented. The strategy of voice takes its form in protesting, which contributed to relief for the individual professional. It was emphasised that this strategy allowed focus to be put on organisational aspects and thus detach focus from individual aspects. Lastly, the strategy of exit is considered to be the most extreme measure as this ultimately entails the professional removing themselves from the workplace by resigning or going on long-term sick leave. In conclusion these coping strategies affect professional health and moreover, service quality (Astvik et al., 2014).

A study conducted in the United Kingdom by Legood et al. (2015), revolved around social workers' experience of public perception of their profession and their attempts to cope with it. 16 social workers were interviewed and the author distinguished four major themes; the experience of public perception, the drivers of public perception, coping with public perception and mechanism to raise the profession's profile. The theme of experience of public perception revealed predominantly negative or inaccurate perceptions. The interviewees emphasise that they experience a stigma of their profession, concurrent with a mistrust and a generally low status of the profession. They highlight their profession being regarded as lower rank than that of other professions. Additionally, a feeling of being "villain-ised" were presented, with the suggestion that there is currently a lack of awareness and moreover, an overestimation of the power an individual social worker possess. Two categories related to "coping with public perception" are presented; corrective behaviours and sense-making cognitions. Corrective behaviour entails the professionals wanting to change the public image. If change in the perception of their profession occurred it could provide a sense of achievement for the professionals (Legood et al., 2015). Furthermore, some of the interviewees disclosed a strategy, which was a form of identity protection (Petriglieri, 2011 cited in Legood et al., 2015), where the professionals hid their work identity. In regards to sense-making cognitions the professionals had a strategy where they focused on maintaining their professional image. A core factor was to not allow the public's perception to reduce their worth. This meant ensuring that the professionals did not allow a negative perception amongst

the public to impact their own sense of purpose and value. Which entailed an embodied “toughness”, and resilience, to prevent negative opinions impacting them in a harmful way (Legood et al., 2015).

A quantitative study, conducted in Israel, had the aim of examining how different media coverage affects a professional's self-esteem and if family and social support can have an impact on those effects. A higher level of perceived family and social support were connected to a higher level of professional self-esteem. Moreover, negative media coverage affected the professionals self-esteem in a negative way. Family and social support had a moderating effect on the association between negative media coverage and professional self-esteem for the professionals who perceived a lower level of family and social support. It was not a significant factor for those professionals who perceived their social and family support as average or high (Keini et al., 2022). Previous research has shown that a decrease in professional self-esteem is demonstrated by lowered morale and decreased sense of competence and effectiveness (Zugazaga et al., 2006). Furthermore, studies have emphasised the importance of professional relationships, and especially peer support, for professionals working within child and family welfare. Peer support works as a forum where professionals can find “support, mentorship and comic relief”, moreover it can function as a collaborative relationship on difficult cases (Engstrom, 2019).

Several studies have suggested that characteristics that the individual professional possesses, e.g believing in one’s work is making a difference and finding profits in helping others, ultimately contributes to satisfaction for that individual social worker despite high workload or/and emotional exhaustion. Moreover, coping strategies can mitigate the predicted negative effects of emotional exhaustion (Stalker et al., 2007). Anderson (2000) conducted a quantitative study with the aim of understanding how professionals at CPS cope with job-stress and examined the relationship between coping strategies and levels of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and sense of reduced personal accomplishment. The study showed that experienced professionals were more likely to use engaged coping strategies than those who were undergraduates. The professionals who used engaged coping strategies, which e.g entails problem solving, cognitive restructuring and communicating their emotions, were less likely to de-personalize their clients. Professionals who are using disengaged coping strategies, which e.g entails problem avoidance, being critical of yourself, social withdrawal

and wishful thinking, were more likely to have a higher level of emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation of clients (Anderson, 2000).

2.3 The individual social worker and discretion

In an English context there have been indications that CPS has become more concerned with organisational needs rather than the intended focus - children and families (Munro, 2011), there have been similar tendencies in the Swedish context (cf. Socionomen, 2021). This has resulted in a restriction of discretionary space and moreover, professionals choosing not to exercise discretion. Which ultimately leads to a rigorous system that has difficulties responding to individual needs and thereby an increased risk of children not getting proper support (Munro, 2011).

A qualitative study conducted in the UK which focused on the extent of, and continued barriers to, social worker discretion within contemporary English child protection. This was done in the light of Munro's (2011) study and the “Baby P effect”, which was a highlighted case in media where a child passed away and focus was put on the individual social worker’s who had the case. The study found that professionals had a fear of being blamed or shamed for mishaps by media and politicians, this aligned with an unwillingness to use discretion. Moreover the professionals said that there were unrealistic expectations for what social worker’s could achieve, and that there were tendencies of finger pointing within the organisation. In addition, the professionals felt that criticism of their work were to be expected but that reports often paint social worker’s in a bad light which they felt was unfair (Murphy, 2022). Furthermore, the professionals felt like only half the truth were being told and that it was stories that fit the narrative that were presented. This fear of being blamed ultimately led to a reluctance to use discretion to the extent where they didn’t want to use their discretion as a tool to avoid “individual accountability” (Murphy, 2022).

2.4 Participation and children’s rights in a Swedish context

A Swedish study conducted by Eriksson and Näsman (2009) revolves around interviews with children with experience of assessments carried out by family court. They point out that there is a duality in the view of children as they are viewed as both objects and actors (Eriksson and Näsman, 2009). Children as objects are seen as dependent on adults for both protection and control, which Eriksson and Näsman (2009) defines as a perspective of care. Children are

simultaneously regarded as actors with the ability to interact and take action, defined as a perspective of rights or participation. Eriksson and Näsman (2009) identifies several positions; children express a wish to participate in their cases, whilst some experience that they have been given the opportunity to participate, some emphasise a lack of participation. This is not necessarily perceived as something negative by the children, and that some children are “happy to be objects” (Eriksson and Näsman, 2009:29). The children also tried to utilise their discretion in order to increase their participation. There were several reasons for wanting to participate, the authors argue that it can be connected to custody and living arrangements, whilst it also can have its foundation in a deeper desire for showcasing autonomy in relation to their parents. Hence, the want to participate can be more general than what is shown in the specific situation (Eriksson and Näsman, 2009).

A Swedish qualitative study conducted by Heimer et al. (2017) in the context of CPS in Sweden found that children’s participation is key to delivering well-matched welfare services. The findings were that there is a tendency of services and care of children to not match the need nor problem areas identified when children are not given voice. However, when children are involved and can influence the process it is connected to well-matched protection and care. Moreover, the problems of interest for assessments done by CPS are often framed differently, which is defined as competing framings. This entails that a parent and a child can have widely different ways of framing an issue or situation, consequently there is a risk of getting an insufficient understanding of the issue as a whole if the child is not heard. In cases where parents and children frame an issue differently, children’s voices are often silenced. Therefore, it suggested that children shall be given priority to frame an issue and that parents shall not be engaged as early as possible in the process, as some scholars have previously suggested (Heimer et al., 2017). In conclusion, children are already a vulnerable group but when they do not receive participatory rights “children are left even more vulnerable and without protection” (Heimer et al., 2017:22).

2.5 Summary of previous research

The overview of previous research is constructed to highlight different areas of importance for professionals within CPS, the public’s perception on the topic and children's rights in a Swedish context, all of which is the focus scope for this thesis. Initially focus revolves around the media's potration of social work and the implications for the professionals and the

practice. The importance of media's coverage of social work is highlighted, as the current knowledge base shows that it can have adverse effects on the individual professional, challenge the legitimacy of the practice and negative coverage is connected to difficulties for CPS to engage with children and families. Hence, negative media coverage impacts professionals, clients and therefore the practice of social work. Moreover, coping strategies used by social workers are presented, with focus on the effects for the professionals and the practice. Research shows that professionals can utilise a variation of coping strategies, whilst some have a negative impact on the practice and client relationship, other strategies worked in mitigating the effects of a high workload and stress. In addition, the strategies used could differ depending on the level of experience among the professionals.

The third area of focus is the professional and the use of discretion. Previous studies conducted in the UK show that there is an unwillingness to use discretion amongst professionals due to a fear of being publicly blamed. Lastly, the area of children's rights in the Swedish context is brought into focus. Whilst there has been a positive trend at CPS where children are more involved, there are still issues with children's participation, especially in situations where children are in out-of-home care. Participation is important due to several factors but it is essential in order for CPS to deliver well matched support and care. Furthermore, previous studies emphasises that children are seen as both object and actor, with a variety of impacts on children's participation. In conclusion, the knowledge frame on topics related to this thesis is substantial. However, there is insufficient focus on the connection of public perception, the professional and children as clients within a Swedish context of CPS.

3. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework that will be utilised to analyse the findings of this thesis is heavily reflected in the choice to focus on the perspective of street level bureaucrats. My aim is to analyse the findings from a perspective that is closely related to the practice, to enable an analysis of the relationship between the public perception, the professional, the practice and children as client's. This led me to choose the theory of *street level bureaucrats* and the theoretical concepts of *discretion and professional identity*, as they are mainly connected to the individual social worker and the practice of social work. The first concept explains how, and in what way, professionals can operate, and focus lies on what can limit the ability to act. Moreover, *professional identity* provides a conceptualisation of important factors in identification with one's profession, and factors that can obstruct a strong professional identity. However, professional identity is a vague concept, as several theoretical perspectives have an understanding of the concept, there is not a definitive definition available (Webb, 2017). Therefore, I opted to utilise a definition which is made in connection to social work. As previously stated, the focus for this thesis is the perspective of professionals, thus it's essential to analyse their ability to act as street level bureaucrats and use discretion in their work. Tentatively, social phenomena such as the disinformation campaign could be reflected in both CPS workers' actual, as well as perceived, discretion and professional identity.

The theoretical framework also contains *a child's rights perspective*, this perspective is chosen to further analyse the professional's experiences from a sometimes forgotten perspective - the children as clients. Theoretically, in relation to the last research question of the thesis, it is reasonable to assume that phenomena, such as the disinformation campaign, could affect children's rights through the way professionals perceive and relate to the campaign. The perspective on children's rights is based on article 12 - the right to be heard, in combination with a child perspective and perspective on the child. Both of which are perspectives that are widely acknowledged by CPS as an organisation, and should be guiding for their work (Cederborg, 2014). Furthermore, adding a child's rights perspective to the theoretical framework further strengthens my aim to write a thesis that is closely related to practice and accessible to those on the field. Below I will account for the chosen theoretical framework.

3.1 Discretion and street level bureaucrats

Street level bureaucrats “interact with citizens in the course of the job and have discretion in exercising authority; in addition, they cannot do the job according to ideal conceptions of the practice because of the limitations of the work structure” (Lipsky, 2010:xvii). Street level bureaucrats often develop coping behaviours, it entails compromising with goals of the organisation and the individual's needs as a professional. These behaviours can have a mitigating effect but also widen the gap between “policy as written and policy as performed” (Ibid), thus having an effect on the practice.

Furthermore, Lipsky (2010) discusses the conditions of work for street level bureaucrats, and emphasises that the work carried out by street level bureaucrats is alienated work. Alienation as a concept captures the ambiguous role of street level bureaucrats, it includes the relationship professionals have to their work, worker's (lack of) influence on their work and the amount of control the individual professional possesses. Street level bureaucrats work in an environment where they often seek support from coworkers and they are often alienated from clients. Lipsky (2010) presents some aspects when alienation in relation to clients can be highlighted, e.g that street level bureaucrats do not control the outcome of their work nor do they control clients. Moreover, street level bureaucrat's work is often defined as only revolving around certain segments of the product of their labour. Hence, the professional's focus on one specific segment, e.g child welfare assessments, but have little to no control over certain aspects regarding that segment. Street level bureaucrats do not control the resources of the organisation of which they work for, and the solutions offered to clients with the aim to contribute to change are often inadequate. Thus, there are multiple factors that can contribute to what Lipsky refers to as alienated work, this can lead to dissatisfaction amongst the professionals which ultimately can lead to a decrease in commitment to clients and the workplace. Moreover, street level bureaucrats are said to have high levels of discretion whilst still having relative autonomy from authority, the level of discretion allows professionals to control quality and sanctions provided by their organisation (Lipsky, 2010).

Molander states that, in reference to Dworkin's understanding, discretion is “to have a freedom of choice delegated by an authority” (Molander, 2016:42), consequently it's an inherent part of social work (Svensson, Johnsson and Laanemets, 2008). Individuals who have discretion are accountable to this authority to some extent, thus the level of discretion

can change with time and be dependent on contextual factors (Molander, 2016). In all social work the professional engages with other people, e.g clients. In these interpersonal connections both parties affect each other to a certain degree, which consequently can affect behaviour and actions (Svensson et al., 2008). Therefore, it's necessary to review discretion. Molander (2016) discusses discretion and presents the term discretionary space, this refers to the space or area in which the professional can operate whilst having the opportunity to employ discretion (Molander, 2016). Discretionary space and how it is constructed can be reviewed from two different perspectives. Firstly it can be seen as constituted by negative liberties, meaning that the one with discretion can act as they want and that there is no need to justify one's actions. Moreover, others should not interfere with these actions. Secondly it can be seen as constituted by relations of entrustment. This entails that one can not solely act on what one wants, there is an obligation to justify one's actions and others can interfere with these actions (Molander, 2016). Professionals at organisations such as CPS have discretion based on delegated power, hence it's only sufficient to view their level of discretion as relationships of entrustment (cf. Molander, 2016).

3.2 Professional identity

Professional identity in social work can be reviewed as two parts, one being on a more individual level which entails "how social workers think of themselves as social workers" (Webb, 2017:33), this is determined by factors related to belief, attributes and experiences held by the professional (Ibarra, 1999 cited in Webb, 2017). Therefore, it's not only how one identifies, but also what the desired identity is. For example, "being professional" is embedded in the identity of social worker's and professionalism is highly valued. Moreover, the concept can be understood at a meso level, which entails reviewing it on a collective level of the profession as a group. Professional identity is an ongoing process shaped by factors related to the context of a professional workplace and setting. The formation of identity is therefore not something that is static, but rather formed through interaction with one's environment, other professionals (Webb, 2017) and clients (Svensson et al., 2008). Thus the professional identity is often aligned with pre-established objectives, which differs between different areas of social work (Webb, 2017). The context of CPS shapes the professional identity to a large extent, and it is a context where the identity can be contested. It entails an ambiguous role, thus professional's often experience a dissonance between the core values and the role of control (Keddel and Stanley, 2017; Svensson et al., 2008). Consequently this

limits the possibility of a strong professional identity which can contribute to an ambivalent sense of identity (Beddoe, 2013).

The level of one's professional capital can impact the professional identity. Professional capital can be described as a profession's value to other professions, e.g how it is recognised and appreciated by others (Chau, 2005 cited in Beddoe, 2010). Beddoe (2010) present factors that are especially crucial in relation to professional capital, some of them are:

- Being trusted by service users
- Being trusted by other professionals
- Professionals being able to perform well
- Members hold a sense of collective identity and "self-esteem"
- The profession is recognized for its contribution to social well-being

Consequently, a lack of these factors are troublesome in relation to professional capital (Beddoe, 2010) and many of these factors are not fulfilled in the context of social services (Keddel and Stanley, 2017).

3.3 A child's rights perspective

A child's rights perspective focuses on ensuring children's rights in all decisions and measures that affect children (Prop. 2009/10:332). For this thesis the child's rights perspective is based on article 12 - children's rights to participation, which I will further account for in section 3.3.1. Furthermore, this is combined with a child perspective and the perspective of the child, as these three perspectives are highly connected to each other (SOU 2017:112). When making decisions regarding the best interest of the child it's necessary to include all perspectives (SOU 2020:63). Thus, it would be insufficient to analyse the findings from merely one perspective. Hence, my choice to combine the three in an effort to have a more comprehensive perspective on children's rights.

A child perspective can be defined in different ways, but the common element is to put focus on children in a more general sense, where adults are the ones interpreting children's life situations. For this thesis I adopt a definition made by Cederborg (2014) which is that "analysis of children's life situations shall be based on how children, depending on their

conditions, *can* experience their situation and their surroundings" (Cederborg, 2014:7) [author's translation]. The perspective has its focal point on children's rights and the best interest of the child, but puts emphasis on that this is interpreted by adults. Thus, the perspective is actually formulated by adults, and not children themselves (Halldén, 2003). Cederborg (2014) presents several strategies to enable the professionals at CPS to increase a child perspective, e.g including children and youth at an early stage of the process and CPS always obtaining children's views on their situation. The latter is what could be referred to as *the perspective of the child*, which entails obtaining the actual thoughts, attitudes, wants and wishes from children themselves.

3.3.1 Article 12 - Right to be heard

Article 12 in CRC relates to children's right to participation and that their opinions should be given weight in matters that concern them. In CRC children are referred to as everyone below the age of 18 (CRC, 1989), which is also applicable to the Swedish context.

1. 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.

2. 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 (CRC, 1989)

To be heard can mean different things, in the Swedish legislation the right to be heard does not entail a need for a child to verbally express their opinions, this could be done through e.g writing or answering questions. In CRC, being heard is referred to when a child themselves expresses their opinions, or that their opinions are communicated through a representative or community body (SOU 2020:63). Moreover, the article states that the child shall be provided the opportunity to be heard, this entails communicating with the child, to inform about the process and possible measures. Furthermore, it is essential to make inquiries to obtain the child's views. And if the child's views are communicated by a representative, these need to be communicated in a correct manner (UNCRC, 2013). The child's view shall be given weight in

accordance with their age and maturity, however it is important to emphasise that judgements regarding the child's maturity shall not be made without sufficient knowledge and information. Thus, it is stated that the presumption shall be that all children can express their views, and they shall therefore be given the opportunity to do so (UNCRC, 2009).

3.4 Discussion of the theoretical framework

The chosen theoretical framework consists of a variety of perspectives, which will offer an analytical lens for this thesis. However, there are still limitations with the chosen concepts and perspectives. Due to the limitations of this thesis the focus is quite narrow, thus, there is empirical data that won't be subject for analysis. As explained in section 4.5.2 there are identified themes that have been discarded, with regards to what is relevant for the research questions. Moreover, the chosen framework is mainly focused on the professional and the children as clients, it could be valuable to add concepts which focus more on the public's opinion. Furthermore, a broader analytical lens could be beneficial to further analyse the data as a whole. If it was possible for the thesis at hand, I would have included concepts and theories such as; agency, recognition, social constructionism, moral panic and cognitive dissonance in the theoretical framework.

4. Methodology

4.1 Epistemological approach

Epistemology can be defined as the researcher's theory of knowledge (Bryman, 2016). The epistemological approach used for the thesis at hand mainly aligns with interpretivism, which is the belief that to understand reality the researcher needs to focus on the participant's subjective experience of reality. This also entails the assumption that social realities can form differently depending on e.g culture and circumstances (Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020). Moreover, interpretivism as an epistemological approach allows the researcher to focus on the specific topic, rather than leaning to ideas of generalisation which is common for positivism. Furthermore, it entails the researcher to explore the participants' experiences in depth. However, it is important to emphasise that interpretivism entails several stages of interpretation. It is not only the participants interpretation of a phenomenon, but also my interpretation of the data. At a later stage interpretation will also be present at a stage of analysing (Bryman, 2016). Thus, it is important to be attentive to the process of analysis, I will elaborate on this further in the upcoming sections. Moreover, there are some variations of interpretivism, one being phenomenology (Ibid). My epistemological approach is mainly founded in interpretivism but with strong influences of phenomenology. In the thesis at hand my epistemological position can be formulated as follows: data can be found within the perspective of professionals that are involved with CPS, thus I engage with professionals as participants when collecting data (cf. Groenewald, 2004).

In addition, my ontological approach is based in constructionism. Thus, I believe that the social world is accomplished by social actors. Social phenomena, such as the disinformation campaign, are therefore not merely produced through interaction but are constantly going through change (cf. Bryman, 2016). Hence, the present master thesis will present a specific version of social reality, the reality of those interviewed, and not a reality that can be seen as definitive (Ibid).

4.2 Research Design

Quantitative research's main focus is to test theory, often with a belief that the social reality is objective, whilst the focus scope of qualitative research often is to generate theory, while focusing on participants' understanding of their reality and their experiences (Bryman, 2016; Alharahsheh and Pius, 2020). In the upcoming research the focus lies on understanding the

experiences of the participants. Moreover, there are several research designs when conducting research (Bryman, 2016), this functions as “a framework for the generation of evidence that is chosen to answer the research question” (Bryman, 2016:39). Thus, as the “researcher” in the sense that I conduct the present thesis, I have to make a conscious decision in relation to my research design. One research design that is common for qualitative research is a phenomenological design. Phenomenology is focusing on understanding people’s perspective of certain social phenomena which concern them (Welman and Kruger, 1999 cited in Groenewald, 2004). My main interest for this study is to gain insight in the lived experiences of professionals, which aligns with phenomenology (cf. Groenewald, 2004). The choice of research design is strongly connected to the researcher’s epistemological approach, which is accounted for above in section 4.1. Furthermore, the research design influences methodology and choice of informants. Which for this thesis entailed interviewing those with experience of the phenomenon (cf. Kruger, 1988 cited in Groenewald, 2004), thus I choose to interview professionals at CPS.

4.3 Methodological considerations

There are several factors that interplay when conducting research. Some are factors that the researcher has the ability to effect, by for example introducing several choices in the study design (Price and Murnan, 2004), or making decisions of a narrowing nature. This results in delimitations of the study. Other factors that can only be considered to be out of the control of the researcher are referred to as limitations (Ibid). In the thesis at hand I have made several choices that have resulted in delimitations of the study. Choices have been made in regards of e.g, the geographical scope and the target group for whom I sought to interview. Below I will further explain my choices and explain my scope and delimitations, this is done with the aim to justify my activities and highlight the areas of which this thesis won’t undertake (cf. Pajares, 2007).

4.3.1 Choice of interviewees

After deliberating on whose perspective I want to examine, meaning the professionals at CPS, I concluded that it would be favourable to be more narrow in my selection. As stated in section 1.5, I refer to an “assessment unit” when referring to CPS. In the Swedish context, the CPS in bigger cities is typically consisting of several units. In general it is one reception unit, which has a gateway-function. They receive reports of concern for a child or applications for

support, the unit is obliged to assess the information at hand and make a decision on whether or not to initiate an assessment according to the Social service act (SoL). If an assessment is initiated, the child's case is typically assigned to another social worker working in a so-called assessment unit. An assessment is carried out according to the Social service act, it focuses on the child's needs and can maximum take 4 months (SFS 2001:452). The assessment entails a process where CPS gather and analyse information in order to decide if any support is needed (Ponnert, 2018a). Decisions can also be made throughout the process, e.g grant family therapy, youth therapy or placement in a family home. This also includes decisions according to LVU, which are involuntary decisions regarding the child (Ponnert, 2018b). After the assessment, given that the child or family has been granted support, contact between the family and the CPS will proceed (Ponnert, 2018a). If a child is given care outside of their own home, either voluntary or involuntary, the child will usually be given another social worker at another unit called a "family unit", this shift will be made after a longer period of care. Professionals working at a so-called family unit are exclusively working with children who are currently in care, and have the responsibility to follow up the given care and make assessment if the child is still in need of care, or if it can come to an end (Linderot, 2018).

Based on the characteristics of CPS as an organisation I decided on examining the views of professionals at an "assessment unit". This is based on the belief that professionals working at such a unit are likely to have contact with children and families who have never been in contact with the social services, as well as those who are familiar with the social services and CPS. Furthermore, I only wanted to interview professionals who had been working for more than 2 years. As it was necessary for the professionals to have worked previous to the campaign, it is unlikely that professionals working for a shorter time would be able to distinguish what is connected to the disinformation campaign and what is not. Moreover, the contact between client and the professional is ongoing for at least a couple of months at the assessment units, which entails a relationship emerging between them, in comparison to the one working at a reception unit. The professionals working at a family unit are more likely to have long lasting relationships, however they come in contact when a relationship, and consequently an opinion towards CPS, is already established. Hence, there are several positive aspects of limiting the focus to the experiences of the professionals who have a broader variety of work tasks. However, this entails a delimitation of whose perspective I will examine. There may not be any incentive to make a distinction between which professionals at CPS to interview, as they all have experienced the ongoing disinformation campaign.

4.3.2 Choice of the geographical scope

The scope of social research is to undertake research that is manageable and achievable (Akanle et al., 2020). This heavily reflected on my choice regarding *where* to conduct the study. Ultimately several different factors interplayed, one being the belief that a social worker working within a bigger city would have more experience of the disinformation campaign. As the phenomenon is relatively new there is weak scientific support to strengthen this hypothesis. However, there are indications that the campaign is more widely known in bigger cities. For example, there have been demonstrations regarding the campaign in the three biggest cities in Sweden: Gothenburg (SVT, 2022d), Stockholm (SVD, 2022) and Malmö (SVT, 2022e). Another factor which contributed to this choice was the feasibility of the study, and to ensure that it was achievable to conduct the research (cf. Akanle et al., 2020). Initially I wanted to solely conduct interviews in person, with the belief that this would generate more in-depth data. However, with some difficulties finding participants for an interview I explored the possibility to conduct the interviews in other forms. This resulted in a realisation that my beliefs were not grounded in facts, as there are not that many issues connected to conducting interviews through video calls or phone calls (cf. Bryman, 2016).

Therefore, I widened the geographical scope to include other areas as well, with focus on other big cities in Sweden. However, this choice also results in a delimitation of the study. It entails not being able to examine the experience of social workers in smaller cities, or broadening the selection of social workers to all over Sweden. Whilst both could be interesting and would surely offer an important perspective on the issue, the positive aspects of limiting the study to bigger cities carries more weight than the negative ones.

4.4 Choice of method

Interviewing is one of the most commonly used methods to collect data in qualitative research (Bryman, 2016), it is a suitable method when seeking insight in someone's experience of a phenomenon (Collingridge and Gnatt, 2008 cited in Majid et al., 2017). As this is a qualitative study with an interpretivistic and phenomenological approach, I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews with professionals at CPS. Semi-structured interviews is a method suitable when interest lies in gaining the interviewee's perspective and a deepened understanding for what they believe is important. Moreover, interviews shall not be seen as a forum where knowledge is transmitted, but an occasion of making meaning and constructing

reality (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995 cited in Järvinen, 2000). The focus lies on how the interviewee frames and understands a certain topic, which is the aim for this master thesis. A semi-structured interview allows the interviewer to be flexible and adapt whilst still having an interview guide as a framework. Hence, it is possible to rephrase the question in a manner that is suitable for that specific interview, or ask questions to follow-up on the interviewee's responses (Bryman, 2016).

The interview guide is used as a tool to conduct the interview. When formulating my interview guide I utilised the steps provided by Bryman (2016). This entailed creating an order on the topic areas, these topics were directly linked to my research questions. Thereafter, I phrased several questions in relation to each topic, I utilised both open-ended and closed-ended questions with connected follow-up questions (cf. Bryman, 2016). This entailed questions which gave the interviewee the chance to elaborate their answer, and the follow-up questions were phrased in order to get further explanation and give an even more elaborate answer (Ibid). The interview guide can be seen in Appendix 3.

4.4.1 Pilot interview

Previous research indicates the need to conduct pilot work before carrying out a study. To conduct a pilot interview has several benefits, e.g it can highlight potential practical issues and identify flaws. By identifying those factors it is possible to employ modifications, which can contribute to an increased level of quality (Majid et al., 2017). Thus, before conducting the interviews I decided to conduct a pilot interview, this was done with a colleague that works at CPS. This was with the aim of gaining insight if the interview questions were appropriate, understandable and also to give me as the interviewer the opportunity to practise interview technique (Ibid). After the pilot interview some minor alterations were made, e.g some of the questions were rephrased to improve clearness (cf. Bryman, 2016). This led to some changes in language, whilst still maintaining the same content. Moreover, one additional question was added to the interview guide as the "interviewee" felt compelled to elaborate on experiences of other colleagues. Even though the purpose is to gain insight in the professionals' personal experiences, it was clear that those experiences could be reflected in their colleagues' work. It would have been preferable to conduct further pilot interviews to have further indications of e.g possible flaws (cf. Majid et al., 2017). Due to time constraints of this master thesis it was not possible, but one pilot interview proved to be sufficient to improve the interview guide.

4.4.2 Collection of data

There is generally little said about how participants are recruited for interview studies (Potter and Hepburn, 2012), therefore I aim to be as transparent as possible of how I recruited the participants for this thesis. My aim was to interview professionals working at CPS, thus I had to reach them in order to inform them about the thesis at hand. I initially decided to not interview professionals at the welfare department in North East Gothenburg, as I am currently an employee there. I wrote an information letter, which would give the potential participants insight into what focus scope was, along with information about participating in the study (see Appendix 1). This was done to ensure that participants had an understanding of what I was inquiring from them and how the material would be used. This would counteract the issue of not being explicit during the interview setup, which is presented by Potter and Hepburn (2012). I sent emails with the information letter attached, to the addresses provided at Gothenburg municipality's website to the three remaining departments of social welfare (Southwest Gothenburg, Hisingen, central Gothenburg). These were general addresses to the different departments, and it was not clear who was to receive my email. After a week I had not gotten any responses, hence my choice to progress into other forms of establishing contact.

As an employee, I have access to a phonebook for people employed by the municipality in Gothenburg, I thereby went on by searching for the executives for the different units working with assessments in the chosen areas. The search resulted in me finding 17 different executives to whom I sent an email with the information letter attached. After a week I had not received any replies from the executives. Therefore, I decided that the next step would be to call all the executives. A strong majority of the executive did not take my call. However, one executive working in Southwest and one working at Hisingen took my call. This resulted in all the units in Southwest having the email forwarded to them and one unit at Hisingen. The executives made me aware of the high workload and emphasised that the professionals might not have time to participate in the study. Furthermore, I was made aware that two executives who received the email were not working at the assessments unit but units for outpatient care, thus the email did not concern them.

When a couple of days had passed and I did not gain informants in the way I expected, I decided to employ a snowball technique to gain informants, which typically entails informants telling others, that have relevant knowledge, about the study and thereby gaining

informants that the researcher might not come in contact with otherwise (Bryman, 2016). I decided to utilise the contacts I have in the social work arena. I asked colleagues, former classmates and friends to forward information about my study to their contacts. This resulted in social workers in the Stockholm area and Malmö getting information about the study.

I also choose to publish information about my study in the Facebook group “Socionom”, which is one of the biggest Facebook groups for Swedish social workers with approximately 22 thousands members. In conclusion, I estimate that a couple of hundred social workers at CPS got the email through their executives or colleagues, this does not include those who received information through Facebook as that includes social workers in different fields. I did not gain enough informants, and this drove me to rethink my previous decision of not including professionals working in Northeast Gothenburg, and whether or not that was a necessary methodological choice. This choice was mainly based on the presumption that it entails ethical difficulties conducting interviews with professionals working within the same organisation as myself. However, the department of Northeast Gothenburg consists of two former divisions of Gothenburg. One being Angered, which previously was Sweden’s biggest department of welfare (Arbetsvärlden, 2019) and the other is east Gothenburg, which also was a big division. Today, the department has 8 units working solely with assessments, where each unit consists of roughly 12 professionals, excluding supervisors and executives. Moreover, the department has been facing high turnover (GP, 2022), thus there is a large sum of social workers within the department I have not met. In conclusion, there were several reasons for opting in interviewing professionals in the Northeast Gothenburg, however, I still choose to exclude the unit I am employed at. By mid March my efforts had resulted in five social workers reaching out to show interest to participate in the study.

4.4.3 The participants

The five participants for this study had been working at CPS for numerous years, their experience of working at CPS varied between roughly four to six years. A majority of them had worked in different areas of social work previously and had experience from different welfare sectors. All of the participants currently worked at assessment units that carried out assessments regarding children of all ages. The participants were not asked about gender identity, nor ethnic background as this was not a focal point for the thesis at hand. Questions were not asked related to their educational background, as current legislation states that only those who are social workers [socionomer] or hold other relevant university degrees can work

at assessment units (SFS 2001:452). Therefore, all of the professionals shall have the appropriate educational background to conduct assessments at CPS with children and their families.

4.4.4 Conducting the interviews

The setting of an interview is highly important, it should take place in a private and quiet place, where the participants feel comfortable (Bryman, 2016). Therefore, I wanted the participants to decide where the interview would take place. The aim was to ensure them being comfortable with the setting, and thereby being able to share their opinions. All of the participants chose to conduct the interview in their office, one interview ended up taking place in a conference room due to a request from an informant. Whilst a familiar setting is positive for the interview, as it entails a level of comfortability for the participants it also had negative effects on some of the interviews. One interview was interrupted by a colleague to the participant and another participant received text messages related to work during the interview. These factors interplay when conducting interviews in the area of where the participants work, however my understanding was that these interruptions didn't rattle the participants to a large degree. This understanding is founded in the nature of the interviews, as the interviews instantly continued after the interruptions. Moreover, each interview lasted for approximately 30-40 minutes and was recorded with my mobile and computer. I choose to record with two devices to ensure a good quality of sound and to decrease the risk of having technical issues, which could result in poor audio recordings (cf. Bryman, 2016). To have two devices present could impact the setting of the interview, a negative aspect is that two items could possibly distract the participant during the interview. I choose to still have this approach, as I did not want to endanger the recording as it is essential for the collection of empirical material (Ibid).

4.5 Method of analysis

In the following section I account for the chosen method of analysis. This process can be described as a spiral where “the researcher engages in the process of moving in analytical circles rather than using a fixed linear approach” (Creswell and Poth, 2017:185). Creswell and Poth (2017) argues that the analytical process begins with collecting data, whilst some other scholars argue that it starts with transcription of the data (Henderson, 2018). My approach to the method of analysis is that it is initiated with collection data, as that step already includes a

level of analysis even though it is not written. The other steps in the spiral include transcription, reading the data, differentiating codes and themes, developing interpretations which include relating themes with each other and lastly representing the data and account for the findings (Creswell and Poth, 2017). In the following sections I will account for the process of transcription and thematic analysis.

4.5.1 Transcription

After I conducted the interviews there was a need to transcribe the interviews, as this would generate the actual data for analysis (cf. Nascimento and Steinbruch, 2019). The methodological stage of transcription is often overseen, as little attention is paid to describe the procedure of transcribing interviews (Ibid). However, this is troublesome as transcription entails some level of selectivity for the researcher, since it is not possible to include every element of an interview in writing (Henderson, 2018).

While there are several varieties of transcription styles, there are two that are more frequently mentioned; naturalised and denaturalised, which represent two extremes (Bucholtz, 2000 cited in Nascimento and Steinbruch, 2019). I choose to transcribe the interviews in a style which is more aligned with the naturalised style. This entails transcribing the spoken dialogue in a way that is in agreement with written formal language (Bucholtz, 2000 cited in Nascimento and Steinbruch, 2019). Moreover, I utilised the style “tidy transcript” presented by Henderson (2018). This focuses on the content of dialogue, and on recording words that were relevant for the content of the question, by e.g excluding words as “like” or “ehm”. This approach entails that written language takes precedence of oral features, this creates a more legible representation of data (Bucholtz, 2000 cited in Henderson, 2018). Thus, I have chosen to use commas, divide segments of monolog into several sentences and remove words that were deemed unnecessary in relation to the question (cf. Henderson, 2019). When presenting the data in this thesis, some of the quotes have been reworked to help with the readability.

4.5.2 Thematic analysis

A common method of analysis of qualitative data is thematic analysis, this entails extracting core themes within the data (Bryman, 2016) and is valued for its flexible nature (Braun and Clarke, 2006). However, thematic analysis as a method is sometimes criticised for lacking a clear procedure. Thus, I strived for an organised and structured approach and employed the steps provided by Bryman (2016) and Braun and Clarke (2006). Furthermore, I employed a

latent thematic analysis. This entails a level of interpretation, as underlying factors and assumptions are identified. This contributes to a deeper understanding of the data, with a focus on underlying reasons for why participants say what they say. This form of thematic analysis is closely related to a constructionist approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

This process entailed me reviewing the transcript multiple times, by rereading the transcripts I became more familiar with it. I then started coding the material by searching for repetitions of certain words and topics that were relevant for my research questions. I searched for common elements within the codes in order to distinguish themes. This process entails framing codes together making up several themes (cf. Bryman, 2016; Braun and Clarke, 2006), however some are closely related to each other (cf. Hammersly and Atkinson, 2007). A theme is distinguished by it capturing something important in relation to the research questions, rather than those things that are most frequently mentioned in the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In order to keep track of what the different components meant I wrote summaries about what was intended by the codes and themes. Moreover, I labelled the themes with names that indicated their focus. At this stage I also started to think of the relationship between the codes and themes (cf. Braun and Clarke, 2006), this resulted in an initial thematic map. When uncovering these themes and codes, some proved to be insignificant for the thesis at hand. To ensure that the themes related to the purpose of this research and the entire data set I reviewed the themes multiple times. This resulted in several codes and themes being discarded (Ibid). For example, some codes relating to how the professionals gain information related to the disinformation campaign were discarded. Moreover, some themes were merged together as one and a focal point was to ensure that the themes had enough data to support them being a separate theme and that the themes reflected the data as a whole. Thereafter I went over the themes and refined the specifics, this entailed identifying the essence of each theme and subtheme (Ibid).

Five major themes were identified from the data; *Negative feelings towards CPS, Implications on the practice, Strategies to cope with the effects, Consequences for children's rights and A feeling of how it "should" be.* The last step was to extract quotes from each theme that exemplified the nature of the themes and its definition (cf. Braun and Clarke, 2006) and thereafter analyse the data, which is done in chapter 5. In the figure below I present the themes and subthemes that will be analysed in the thesis at hand.

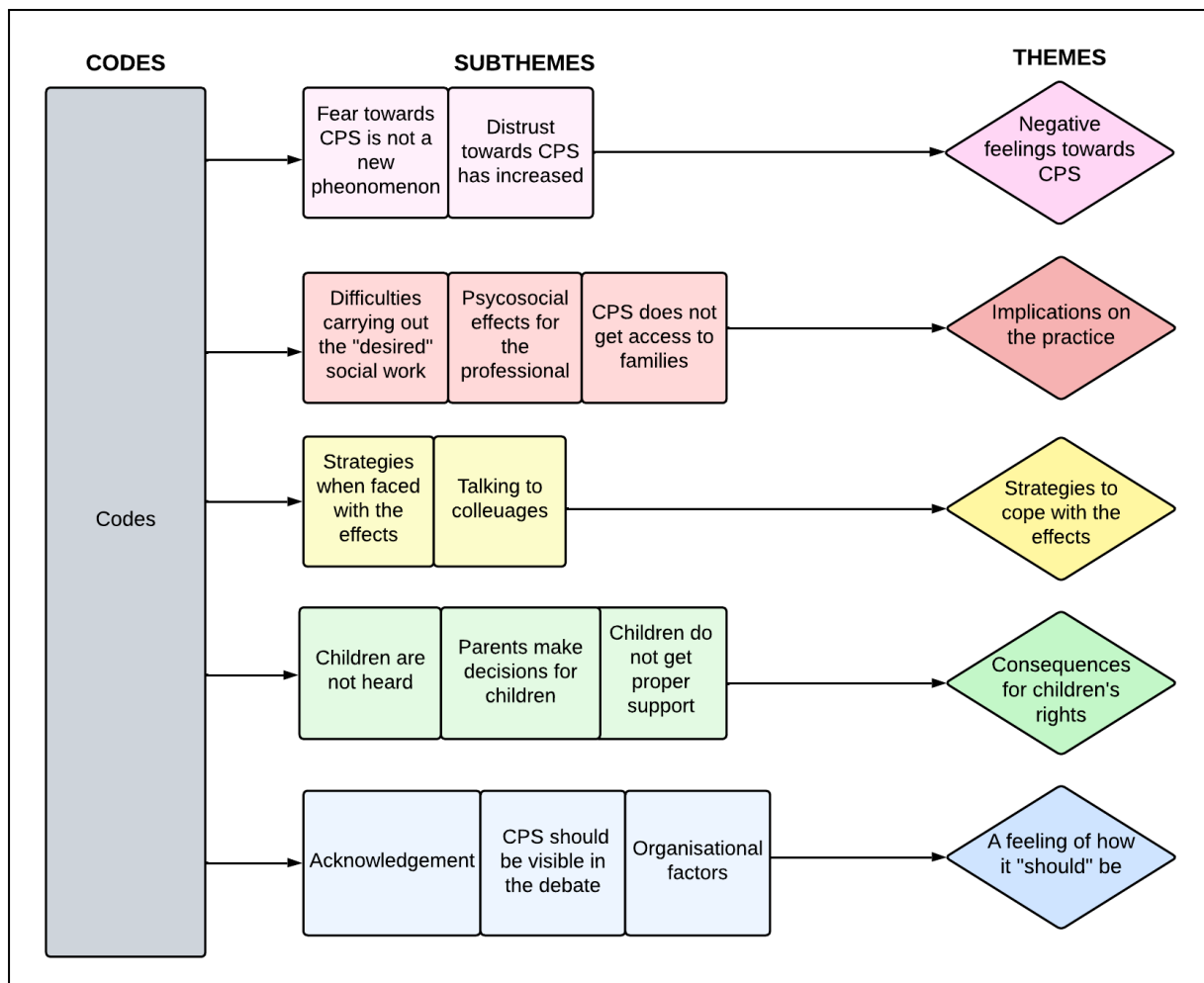


Figure 1

4.6 Pre-understanding

The role of the researcher is crucial in any research (Hiles and Čermák, 2007), and a researcher's pre-understanding is always present (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2022). Therefore, importance lies in the researcher being aware of their pre-understandings and acknowledging it in a transparent manner (Tuval-Mashiach, 2017). A demand in qualitative research is the principle of transparency, this entails being open and clear about methodological approach, pre-assumptions made and values (Hiles and Čermák, 2007). Thus, I will elaborate on my pre-understanding in this upcoming section. A pre-understanding of something is the equivalent to our presumptions about reality, which is of relevance in qualitative research (Alvesson and Sandberg, 2022). I share the understanding that research can be viewed as circular. This entails that research is based on a pre-understanding, this research can furthermore enrich the current field and therefore add to the pre-understanding of a topic. Consequently, knowledge development is continuing, which embodies the pre-understanding

we have. This pre-understanding is affected by our environment, including cultural and social aspects (Ibid.). Hence, my experience within the field of CPS has contributed to a pre-understanding of the topic at hand.

There are several reasons why it is important to reflect on one's pre-understanding, with that said it is unlikely that a researcher can be aware of all the personal pre-understanding as some of it is subconscious (Nyström and Dahlberg, 2001). One of the positive aspects of reflecting upon our pre-understanding is that it can increase our ability to remain open throughout the process of research, as the researcher is made more aware of their position to their upcoming research and how they inquire data. Moreover, it allows the reader to understand the researcher's position (Ibid). Furthermore, being transparent with my pre-understanding of the topic entails the possibility of openness. Maintaining an openness when conducting research enables us to see the otherness of the chosen topic, even if it is not currently incorporated in our pre-understanding (Gadamer, 1997/1960 cited in Nyström and Dahlberg, 2001).

I have, as stated above, been working with children and their families within the sphere of CPS for four years. This has altered my pre-understanding of both the field, the disinformation campaign and its effects on the practice. Furthermore, the cultural and social aspects have contributed to an understanding of social work with children in a Swedish context. My understanding is that the focus in mass media and by the government have been too narrow. The focal point has been on *who* initiated the disinformation campaign, followed by, in my opinion, a one dimensional consequence analysis of the subject. This has, in my understanding, led to a lack of nuance and consequently an incomprehensive analysis of the phenomenon as a whole and the underlying causes. Moreover, focus has not been on the effects on street level social work, which in my pre-understanding is essential to understand the full effect on children's rights and the profession. Hence, my choice to focus on this in the upcoming master thesis (cf. Alvesson and Sandberg, 2022). However, I will still strive to maintain an openness when conducting the interviews and when interpreting the material, as I am aware of how my presumption otherwise can influence my research (cf. Nyström and Dahlberg, 2001). By remaining open I will allow myself to better understand the professionals' experience of the phenomenon, while still drawing on my pre-understanding of why focus shall be on the professional's experiences.

4.7 Ethical considerations

“Research ethics” entails the relationship between research and ethics, it contains ethical standards, questions and rules. Whilst focus generally lies on how people, who participate in research, should be treated, focus can also be brought to *why* research is conducted (Swedish research council, 2017). Moreover, some ethical issues are more commonly reflected upon, e.g confidentiality, informed consent and to do no harm (Hammersly and Atkinson, 2007). For the present thesis I have made several ethical considerations, which will be accounted for in this section.

4.7.1 Confidentiality and Anonymity

It is essential that personal information shared by the participants during the interview are kept confidential, to ensure the privacy of participants (Bryman, 2016). Moreover, confidentiality is needed to decrease the impact of the study on the participant’s physical, mental and social integrity (Swedish research council, 2017). The principle of confidentiality is highly related to the principle of anonymity, which involves ensuring that there is no connection between what is said and the identity of the participants (Ibid).

For the thesis at hand, I believe it to be crucial to take every precaution possible to protect the participants. Therefore, I took several measures to ensure I took the possible precautions. The recordings from the interviews were kept on a separate USB-stick, which was kept in my private home. Furthermore, it came to my attention that several of the participants had expressed interest to participate in the study in front of colleagues. This made me aware of the potential issue of ensuring anonymity, therefore I informed all the participants of the issue. I could not ensure internal anonymity, as colleagues were already aware that they might participate. However, I could still ensure external anonymity, meaning that those who read the thesis won’t be able to identify the participants. Some of the quotes were reworked to exclude details that could compromise confidentiality, the aim was not to alter the meaning of what was said but rather to exclude details that were personal and therefore might comprise the interviewee. When including quotes from the interviews I gave the participants fictitious names, I decided not to include gender as a marker and I therefore only choose names that are coded as “gender neutral” names; Lo, Mika, Billie, Charlie and Juno. Whilst gender could be an interesting factor to include, it is not in the focus scope for this thesis.

4.7.2 Informed consent

The concept of informed consent is highly important when conducting interviews in qualitative research. It entails providing the participant with necessary information before the study, information revolving participation and how consent to participate can be revoked at any moment (Hammersly and Atkinson, 2007). The participants were given information through an information letter when agreeing to participate in the study. This consisted of information about the study, confidentiality, participation and how the information would be used. Furthermore, it is necessary that the participants have knowledge about the motives and purpose of the study (Homan, 1992), and I believe that includes them knowing that I am not only a master student but also a professional within CPS. Thus, I included information about my background in social work and that I am currently working at CPS in Northeast Gothenburg.

Whilst consent to participate in a study can be given verbally it is common for the participants to give written consent (Hammersly and Atkinson, 2007), which was done for this thesis. On the day for the interview the participants were given a physical copy of the informed consent, which contained a paragraph of which the participant acknowledged that they had understood the information stated in the letter of information. This was then signed by the participants before starting the interview.

4.7.3 Consistency and Truth value

It is essential to evaluate the quality of research, which can be done in different manners. Reliability and validity is often mentioned, however these concepts are connected to a more positivist perspective, thus it is commonly used in quantitative research (Golafshani, 2003; Noble and Smith, 2015). As Golafshani (2003) describes, different scholars argue that it is not possible to review reliability or validity in the same manner when conducting qualitative research. Instead of reliability, consistency as a concept can be reviewed in qualitative research. This entails that the researcher is transparent throughout the research process, and maintaining a “decision trail”. Lastly, this would imply the possibility to conduct the same research and arrive at similar findings (Noble and Smith, 2015). I have continuously been transparent with my methodological choices and ethical choices, which increases the level of consistency. The level of insight into the process is enabling similar studies to be conducted, likely with similar or comparable findings (Ibid).

Moreover, an alternative concept to validity can be “truth value”. Truth value recognises that different perceptions of realities exist, and that the researcher’s experiences may contribute to bias, thus this should be presented. In addition, it is of importance to present the participants’ perspectives in a clear and accurate manner (Noble and Smith, 2015). To fulfil the need for truth value, I have provided insight in my pre-understanding of the topic. In the writing process I have made a document in which I accounted for my own biases, this was done to increase awareness. Furthermore, I have strived to conduct the thematic analysis in a transparent way. I have presented the participants' views through quotes, with that said, some quotes have been rephrased to help with readability. This does not entail changes of the sentences as a whole, but some repetitions have been deleted. Moreover, the interviews are translated from Swedish to English, and are therefore equivalent meanings of what is said (cf. Poblete, 2009). I will further elaborate on the translation of the interviews in section 4.7.6.

4.7.4 Applicability

In quantitative research the term generalisability is often mentioned, this refers to the “transferability of the finding to other settings and applicability in other contexts” (Noble and Smith, 2015:34), however another alternative terminology for qualitative research can be applicability (Ibid). This shares the same focus as generalisability and emphasises the need for rich details of both the context and setting. In the thesis at hand I have accounted for the setting of CPS and the context of the disinformation campaign, I have not put emphasis on the different areas of where the participants work, even though this would help with determining the level of applicability. This choice is grounded in maintaining confidentiality and anonymity, as I want to ensure these two values and see difficulties doing so when disclosing in-depth information about their workplaces or area where they work.

The objective for this thesis is to explore the experiences of professionals at CPS, thus the objective is not to have generalisable results. Like in much qualitative research the aim is to gain an understanding of the phenomenon, rather than explaining it. Therefore, the findings for this thesis are to be seen in the light of subjective experiences, it presents a specific version of social reality, the reality of those interviewed, and not a reality that can be seen as definitive (cf. Bryman, 2016). However, it is likely that other professionals within CPS can recognize some of the findings, and perhaps relate to the professionals' experiences. Hence, there is a certain level of applicability to other settings or groups, but the findings shall be

seen as a specific version of social reality, rather than an accurate description of professional's experiences of the disinformation campaign as a whole.

4.7.5 Being an insider

There are some scholars that would argue that it is problematic to differentiate a researcher as an *insider* or *outsider* when conducting research (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007).

However, I believe it to be essential for the thesis at hand. For this thesis I would consider myself an insider. I am a native swede and more importantly, I am a professional working within CPS. This entails me being an insider in the present thesis, both from the start when I choose the research design and focus, when conducting interviews and at a later stage when I analysed the data. A strength of being an insider is that I have knowledge about the profession. Therefore, the interviews could solely revolve around the research questions, as I already have a good understanding of the profession. If I were an outsider, it is likely that some time would be devoted to talking about the mere profession, rather than the professional's experiences. This can however be a weakness, as the knowledge I possess also entails a pre-understanding of the profession. This pre-understanding can subconsciously reflect on how I interpret the interviewee's experiences, as it is possible that I review it from my own viewpoint (cf. Hammersly and Atkinson, 2007). To counteract this potential issue, me and my supervisor have spent time discussing my pre-understanding of the subject. My supervisor gave me a recommendation to write my presumptions in a document, a document I could review again when analysing the data. The aim was that this document would increase my ability to be aware of my own viewpoint, and for me to be able to remain open in the process of analysing the data. Additionally, I read the transcripts numerous times to ensure a good understanding of the material (cf. Bryman, 2016), thus increasing my ability to remain open when analysing the data. When conducting the thematic analysis I reviewed the document again, some of my presumptions were shown in the data whilst some were not.

4.7.6 Translation of interviews

The interviews were conducted in Swedish, as both me and the participants are fluent in the language. There are several positive aspects of conducting interviews in the interviewee's own language. Mainly, it allows them to express themselves in the best possible way, but also ensures that there is no information lost due to language confusion. The translation of interviews are generally presented as an uncomplicated part of research, the translated sentences are often presented as if they were said in the same language as the written text. The

part of translating interviews is often carried out by the researcher, thus the researcher becomes an intermediary (Poblete, 2009). This is however not a factor acknowledged, and it is presented as the “transfer from one language to another was an operation without consequence” (Poblete, 2009:632). All languages have their own vocabulary and nuances which are culturally and historically formed (Ricoeur, 2006 cited in Poblete, 2009). With that said, translation of interviews are still possible, but should be regarded as an operation that constructs equivalent meanings of what is said (Poblete, 2009). Moreover, I am not a licensed translator, and therefore the translations might not be fully accurate. However, I am fluent in both languages and have soon finished two years of studies conducted in english and moreover, I have previously lived in an english speaking country. Therefore, I consider myself well equipped to carry out the translations.

5. Findings and analysis

The findings of this thesis are represented in 5 overarching themes, with its connected subthemes. These themes were distinguished through thematic analysis, which I elaborated on in section 4.5.2. In the following chapter I will account for each theme and subtheme by giving a short explanation and thereafter analyse the findings through the chosen theoretical framework and previous research. The findings are presented in an order that embodies the nature of the empirical data. Thus, the first theme presented is *Negative attitudes towards CPS*, which contextualises how the participants experience the overall attitude towards CPS as an organisation. Thereafter, the theme of *Implications on the practice* is presented which is followed by the theme of *Strategies to cope with the effects*. Fourthly, the theme of *Consequences for children's rights* are presented and lastly, the theme of *A feeling of how it "should" be* is presented. There is no hierarchical order to the material, but the findings have been analysed from the viewpoint of them having a connection and being related to each other.

5.1 Negative attitudes towards CPS

All the participants discussed that the attitudes towards CPS to a large extent is negative, and a common theme was that this is not a new phenomenon but rather something that has been ongoing for a longer period of time. The participants frame the information portrayed in the disinformation campaign to be false, one sided and twisted, with the common notion among several of the participants that the negative attitudes towards CPS has increased due to the disinformation campaign. This is in conformity with Murphy's (2022) findings, where professional's felt that stories in media regarding CPS and their work only contained half of the truth. Moreover, some of the participants have experienced negative attitudes in private settings, whilst some mainly encounter it when in contact with parents or children. This topic led to the first created theme which is Negative attitudes towards CPS, with two subthemes: *Fear towards CPS is not a new phenomenon* and *Distrust towards CPS has increased*.

5.1.1 Fear towards CPS is not a new phenomenon

Fear towards CPS was mentioned throughout the interview by the participants. All of the participants acknowledged that some level of fear and distrust has been present since they started working there, which is framed as a form of "resistance". The negative attitude, or fear, can be seen as a lack of trust towards CPS. However, negative attitudes amongst the

public does not only challenge the trustworthiness of the practice but also the individual social worker (Jessen, 2010). This can be related to Healy's (2017) research, which emphasises the importance of trust to be able to carry out successful social work.

Juno states that "there has been a distrust towards CPS for a longer period of time and we have been working in some type of resistance and in head wind". This participant, Juno, frames the issue as resistance, in which the professional consistently works, rather than facing temporary resistance from e.g clients. This way of framing the issue entails the professional's finding themselves in a work environment where they are questioned and not trusted, this is already present at an initial stage, simply because they work at CPS. This is an example of how the street level bureaucrat is the one who interacts with clients, on the behalf of bigger organisations. This can be related to what Healy (2017) highlights, that trust has to be earned by actions. Thereby, it falls on the professional as the street level bureaucrat to not only create trust, but decrease distrust, as it is essential for the practice of social work. Another participant, Charlie, says that the fear for CPS can be referred to as a "barrier" and points to the information in the disinformation campaign to be false.

It's like a barrier between us social workers and the parents (...) some form of resistance is to be expected, but when it's because of something [the disinformation campaign] so completely unnecessary and false, then it's just sad. - Charlie

This statement is similar to Murphy's (2022) study, where professionals felt like some level of criticism towards their work is to be expected. Moreover, the negative attitudes towards CPS can impact the professional's identity. As Webb (2017) describes; professional identity is shaped in a dynamic process, where interaction with the environment and other professionals is crucial. The professional's work in an environment where they experience largely a negative attitude towards CPS, this can offer some difficulties in relation to building a strong professional identity. Beddoe (2010) points out some factors as especially essential in the building of professional capital, e.g being trusted by service users and professionals and having a collectively held identity and self-esteem. If this is discussed in relation to Keini et al. (2002) and Legood et al. (2016) findings, that a negative attitude among the public can affect the professional's self-esteem, it may suggest various difficulties in gaining professional capital, and therefore it may result in difficulties in establishing a strong professional identity.

5.1.2 Distrust towards CPS has increased

Some of the participants did not see an increase in distrust or fear towards CPS, but rather saw it being in alignment with how the attitudes have been prior to the campaign. A majority of the professionals did however emphasise that distrust and fear towards CPS had increased since the disinformation campaign started. Several of the participants underlined that the distrust is now based on CPS having a racist agenda, which they did not experience before. Information regarding this has been circling in the campaign, thus it would be in line with what Davison (2022) states, regarding that media can affirm and establish people's beliefs and attitudes. The participants that did feel an increase in the level of distrust did not only experience it when meeting clients, but some also experienced it in their private life. Juno discusses how they experience a distrust, or a pre-established idea of their work, in private settings; "You also notice it [distrust] in private settings, when people hear where I work, I am met with "yeah but you take children", it's like it's incorporated in everyday speech (...)".

Juno describes a feeling of their work being belittled to one thing - taking children, and that it is now incorporated into everyday speech. This is especially interesting to discuss in relation to professional identity, as this is not only the attitude shown by those who are in contact with CPS, but people who can be referred to as the "general public". Beddoe (2010) points out some factors as especially essential in the building of professional capital, one being that the profession is recognized for its contribution to social well-being. Juno's experience of being told that they take children is indicating a loss of recognition of their profession. Another participant, Charlie, says that their experience is that the fear towards CPS has escalated because of the disinformation campaign.

If there is a fear towards CPS in society, which there has been for a long time, and it gets escalated by a disinformation campaign like it has been for the last couple of years, then the chances for society to intervene with children and families decreases. - Charlie

Charlie's experience also includes a level of reflection on how this has impacted the chances to intervene with children and families. This concurs with previous research, Zugazaga et al. (2006) highlights that it can bring difficulties for professionals to engage with individuals who have negative perceptions of social work. Moreover, it can lead to difficulties for the

professional to assess risk for children (Rehehr et al., 2010 cited in Thomlison and Blome, 2012). This can also be discussed in relation to the professional's discretion. Molander (2016) states that individuals who have discretion are accountable to an authority to some extent. In the professional's case it is their job, as street level bureaucrats, to carry out the assignment of CPS. This entails interaction with clients and other professionals, in these interpersonal connections both parties affect each other to a certain degree, which consequently can affect behaviour and actions (Svensson et al., 2008). As the level of discretion can change with time and be dependent on contextual factors (Molander, 2016), the level of distrust and fear that the professionals experience may indicate such contextual factors that can decrease the discretionary space. Previous research has indicated that there can be an unwillingness to use discretion amongst professionals at CPS, as they want to avoid individual accountability (Murphy, 2022). The findings of this thesis does not support that, but rather indicates difficulties for the professionals to act within their discretion due to difficulties intervening with children and their families.

Another participant, Lo, discusses an updated portrayal of CPS, where the organisation has racist motives. Whilst they have experiences of adolescents having both negative and positive attitudes towards CPS, negative attitudes seem to be more frequently occurring in present time. Several of the others highlighted a similar experience, whilst one of the participants did not feel an increase in negative attitudes from adolescents but referred to it as the same as previous to the campaign: negative with a level of fear and distrust.

The core attitude to CPS is negative (...) and I feel like it has gotten worse now (...) The difference is that CPS, in the new updated negative portrayal of CPS, only has racist motives (...) They [children and youth] have more negative feelings towards CPS (...) there are also those teenagers that say that CPS is there to help children and families, so both sides exist but the negative feelings are taking over (...) - Lo

Lo is the only participant who highlights positive attitudes amongst the public. Staniforth et al. (2016) finds that professionals tend to have a poorer impression of the public opinion of their profession compared to the actual opinion amongst the public. The participants' experiences of negative attitudes towards CPS, could be an indication of similar tendencies, however, the

questions asked during the interview were mainly focused on the disinformation campaign (see appendix 3). Thus, it is possible that the participants did not elaborate on other attitudes they might have experienced in relation to their work. Moreover, Lo highlights that CPS is said to have racist motives. As Jessen (2010) describes, professionals can experience cognitive dissonance when they face disapproval from the public whilst having a feeling of doing a good job. In relation to Keddel and Stanley (2017) and Svensson (2008) findings, CPS is described as a social work arena where professionals are especially prone to experience dissonance in relation to their work and their values. In conclusion, the findings of this thesis, in relation to a higher level of fear and distrust amongst the public, could indicate a high level of cognitive dissonance for the professionals. Furthermore, their profession and their work is questioned, which could indicate difficulties developing a strong professional identity. In relation to the lack of trust for CPS that the professional's experience, previous research highlights the importance for professionals to not arrange their work in a binary way. There is a need to adapt and respect the breadth of social work and professional authority in order to increase trust (Taylor et al., 2015 cited in Healy, 2017). A majority of participants in this thesis all arranged their work in a binary way in relation to the perceived image of CPS. The common notion was that the information was false, one sided or twisted. However, if professionals were to be more nuanced, it could potentially lead to increased trust amongst the public (cf. Taylor et al., 2015 cited in Healy, 2017). Thereby, there may be indications that the professional's way of comprehending and talking about the public perception actually can increase the negative perception amongst the public.

5.2 Implications for the practice

During the interviews all the participants said that the disinformation campaign had impacted their work, they were therefore asked to disclose more information and give examples. This led the participants to elaborate on different effects they had experienced. This entailed implications on their work, and some participants highlighted difficulties to do the social work they would have wanted to do. This was brought up as difficulties living up to the image in their head, of what they should be doing or what they could have done if they had the opportunity. Moreover, all of the participants highlighted effects on an individual level. These effects varied, one experienced a higher degree of critique from other professionals, several participants experienced questioning and distrust by acquaintances and friends. Moreover, some of the participants mainly experienced this behaviour when coming in contact with

parents or children, who were not necessarily in contact with CPS. These discussions revolved around being faced with critique and fear, and feeling a need to explain or defend the profession and enlighten people. Furthermore, an effect on the individual level that was highlighted by all the participants was feeling fear. This fear was present for the professionals to a varying degree, one of the participants said that they are not afraid for their own safety, but that they can have thoughts about what could happen in a “worst case scenario”. In comparison, one participant said they are very scared and that people know their home address. The fear was always in relation to what clients, or other people, could do towards them as an individual. However, some participants emphasised a fear of being crucified in the media whilst some had a fear for their own safety.

The third topic that was discussed by the participants is the issue of accessing families. This was highlighted by the participants in a way that indicated that the negative attitude people have towards CPS consists of a fear, which ultimately leads to parents and children keeping away from the CPS. This was highlighted by the participants in different ways, some discussed that families are afraid of CPS and therefore do not seek help. One said it was at an initial stage of the assessment and explained difficulties arranging a meeting with clients. Moreover, it was also highlighted by some of the participants at a later stage in the assessment, that they feel like parents and children are withholding information. Lastly, the participants highlighted that there are difficulties to motivate families to accept help after finishing the assessment.

These implications on the practice were divided into three subthemes: *Difficulties carrying out the "desired" social work*, *Psychosocial effects for the professional* and *CPS does not get access to families*.

5.2.1 Difficulties carrying out the "desired" social work

Several of the participants discussed difficulties with carrying out their job according to their own standards. Charlie discusses how they have been affected by the distrust, and how it has impacted their way of working with clients.

You lose the strength to keep trying, eventually you get tired, you give up when it feels like you can't get through because of it [distrust] and then people end up in the middle. (...) I lose the ambition and hope to

actually get through to parents (...) I go into the mode of being “just” a case worker, that does what is necessary to work in accordance with the law and just try to focus on the child (...) - Charlie

Charlie experiences a level of hopelessness, where they lose ambition of getting through to parents. Charlie discusses a will to do something differently than to what they are doing now, they want to be more than “just” a case worker. Thus, they have an image of how they would like to work, compared to what they are able to do now. This can be discussed in relation to Lipsky’s (2010) perspective of alienation. Charlie’s experience may indicate that they feel a lack of control in relation to clients. They can not control whether or not the clients engage in conversation, listen to the professional or want to create a change. Thus, the lack of control in relation to the client in this example indicates alienation, thus also a higher risk for decreased commitment to clients (cf. Lipsky, 2010). Furthermore, it can be discussed in relation to professional identity. Charlie’s discussion of their work can be indications of them being in conflict with their professional identity. Webb (2017) explains that professional identity on an individual level entails “how social workers think of themselves as social workers”. Moreover, Astvik et al. (2014) explains that demand reducing strategies is something used by professionals to settle for doing good enough. Charlie’s way of discussing them being “just a case worker” can be related to a demand reducing strategy, which can entail a conflict for the professional, as it is reducing the demands of one’s work. Charlie discussion entails them rationalising why they are settling for good enough. The reason lies with the parents and the distrust they possess, this makes them tired and they lose ambition to get through to them, thus that is the desired result. In relation to Andersson (2000) findings, where some professionals utilise disengaged coping strategies, which entails being critical of yourself, a demand reducing strategy could indicate a less likelihood of that. A demand reducing strategy includes a process of legitimisation and rationalising, it can protect the professional from being too self-critical, which thereby decreases the risk of emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation of clients (cf. Andersson, 2000).

Charlie also emphasises that they try to focus on the child, and by that remaining a child focus. In relation to a child’s rights perspective, this could indicate that Charlie maintains a child perspective, whilst it does not offer insight to the degree of children’s participatory rights being fulfilled. However, the issue presented by Heimer et al. (2017), that children’s voices are often silenced in cases where parents and children frame an issue differently, is likely to

not be present. Another participant, Mika, also discusses how they would have wanted more time to be able to carry out their desired work. Mika highlights that they see a need for taking extra measures to spread a more positive image of CPS but also emphasises that they think there is an increased need to do so since the disinformation campaign. Mika also describes that they, following the campaign, have taken it upon themselves to do informative work which is done outside of office-hours.

You wish for so much more sometimes than what you have the resources or time for. Sometimes I wish that we had so much more time than we do, then every case would be so much better. Perhaps you would have the time to take those extra measures to spread a more positive image of CPS. - Mika

Mika points to a lack of time as the reason why it is not possible for them to take measures to spread a more positive image of CPS. In conformity with Charlie, Mika utilises demand reducing strategies. They would want to devote more time and state that it would be beneficial for each case. They rationalise that it is out of their control, and therefore reduces the demands they have on themselves. Mika also utilises a disengaged strategy, in the form of wishful thinking as they wish for more time. This strategy, as described by Andersson (2000), can have negative effects, e.g emotional exhaustion for the professional. To wish for more time in an organisation such as the welfare department might not be successful, as it is an organisation categorised by high workload (see for example Andersson, 2000).

Moreover, it can be viewed as an example of alienation, where the professional experiences a lack of control of resources and inadequate measures to support clients (c.f Lipsky, 2010), or in this case spreading a positive image of CPS. The professionals can not control what the organisation focuses its resources on. Hence, the lack of focus on spreading a positive image of CPS is not something the street level bureaucrat can affect. The lack of time can also be seen as a limitation to their discretion. The limitation can be viewed as a limitation made by the organisation as the authority but also consisting of a contextual factor, as the high workload might not always be present. The professional's have certain work tasks that need to be carried out in a work-week, thus the professionals discretionary space is narrowed by a lack of time. However, Mika also discusses how they devote efforts to spreading a more positive image of CPS outside of working-hours. Even though this is not done through the

organisation of CPS, they would do it in alignment with their profession. Thus, they are acting within their discretion by engaging in these types of situations.

5.2.2 Psychosocial effects for the professional

All of the participants discussed effects on an individual level which they have experienced in relation to the disinformation campaign. Billie describes how they experience disapproval from acquaintances, which leads to a feeling of discomfort.

When they [distant acquaintances] look at you and they know you work at CPS, it gets... not unsafe, but a weird feeling that they think you're a bad person (...) It's not fun, everything we do for these parents and children, and for someone to come up and say "are you one of those who take children?"... It's not fun, you need to be strong and defend your profession but at the same time do not allow it to affect you. - Billie

Billie discusses the disapproval they face and how they shouldn't let it affect them. This is an example of what Legood et al. (2016) defines as sense-making cognitions. This is when professionals have a strategy for maintaining their professional image. A core factor is to not allow the public's perception to reduce their worth, which entailed an embodied "toughness", and resilience, to prevent negative opinions impacting them in a harmful way. Billie emphasised the importance of not allowing it to affect you and being strong, which indicated a toughness. Moreover, Billie's way of discussing the disapproval they are facing can also be reviewed as an example of corrective behaviour, described by Legood et al. (2016) as when the professionals want to change the public image. Throughout the interview Billie highlighted a need to "defend" their profession. This may indicate what Beddoe (2010) describes as a strongly held collective identity, which Billie feels the need to defend. Moreover, Billie's discussion may indicate a high level of professional identity despite lacking some of the important factors for professional capital. In Billie's case, and for the other participants as well, there are indications that the lack of professional capital has led to a stronger sense of professional identity, as outside forces challenge the legitimacy of their profession.

Moreover, this can be discussed in relation to cognitive dissonance which can occur when professionals take pride in their work whilst simultaneously being faced with disapproval from the public (Jessen, 2010). Billie emphasises that it's not fun to be questioned, or belittled for being one who "takes children", when they feel that they do so much for their clients. Another participant, Juno, describes that they mainly have experienced a difference in the level of distrust coming from other professionals, this is however not highlighted by the other professionals.

I have also noticed it when meeting other professionals, more questions are asked related to how we work, opinions about what decisions we have made, it has been this distrust, or more like critique, of how we can make such a decision (...) - Juno

This is closely related to Legood et al. (2016) study, where social work professionals experience their profession having a low status compared to other professions. Moreover, it can be discussed in relation to professional capital as one crucial factor is being trusted by other professions. Juno experiences a lack of trust from other professions, and highlights that it is not only distrust coming from other professionals, but also critique. This can be related to what Webb (2017) describes in forming a professional identity, that it is formed through interaction with one's environment and other professionals (Webb, 2017). Being questioned by other professionals challenges the formation of a professional identity, as critique entails someone else having ideas of *how* professionals at CPS should be doing their job.

In relation to fear, Charlie disclose a fear of being portrayed in media and becoming a public face in the campaign; "[I have] a fear of being the public face of something that is not true." In comparison, Mika's fear is related to a potential threat of their wellbeing and safety.

I search for my name in these Facebook groups (...) I've had cases that have been threatening in different ways and sometimes I wish that I had a different name. It's like I have become manic in my own head, I go into these websites and look up my name and when I see that 16 people have searched for my name this month I become so scared. - Mika

The findings of this thesis is that professionals have a fear of being the public face in the campaign, this can be linked to Murphy's (2022) study, which found that professionals at CPS had a fear of being blamed or shamed for mishaps by media and politicians. Murphy's study did however highlight that this fear led to an unwillingness to use discretion, which is not the findings for this thesis. Moreover, the participants' fear can be analysed in relation to the professional's discretion As previously mentioned, discretion is shaped through interaction with one's environment, other professionals (Webb, 2017) but also clients (Svensson et al., 2008). Thus, a fear of being villain-ised can contribute to difficulties exercising discretion. Legood et al. (2016) suggest that a fear of being villain-ised is connected to a lack of awareness and moreover, an overestimation of the power an individual social worker possesses. Hence, a fear of being the public face or being harmed can also be seen as a result of the public's overestimation of power that an individual social worker possesses. The professionals are street level bureaucrats with a level of authority (cf. Lipsky, 2010) but this authority is still delegated by the organisation (Molander, 2016).

5.2.3 CPS does not get access to families

Another implication on the practice that the professionals discussed was the issue of getting access to families. Billie describes how they have an experience of meeting two different groups of clients, one group which are very afraid and the other is empowered by the campaign.

(...) It's two different groups [of clients]. One being those who are really worried and scared (...) they are completely disconnected because they are just waiting for the end [of the meeting] and what I will say to them. Am I gonna take their children or not? (...) The other group, it's hard because it's those parents who feel strengthened by it [the campaign] (...) you can tell when you see them, that it's like the campaign can support them if we do anything wrong (...) it's like they have an attitude, questioning what we'll do, that we can't take their children because of the campaign (...) I feel like they have a sense of power, that they are not scared but that we should be scared of what is going on out there, if we do anything wrong then they'll go public. -
Billie

This can be related to Healy's (2017) research regarding trust, where social work is distinguished as a profession with a low level of trust from clients. Trust is a fleeting thing, it has to be earned and trustworthiness can be built by actions rather than words (Ibid). Thus, Billie's experience of low trust and fear from clients may be in alignment with what is typical for the profession. Further along in the contact between CPS and clients, it might be a possibility to establish trust. However, it falls on the professional, as the street level bureaucrat, to not only create trust, but decrease distrust. Moreover, the alienated work carried out by the professional's can be exemplified through the lack of control that the professional's can feel in relation to their clients (cf. Lipsky, 2010). The client's reaction is out of control for the professional, thus possibly contributing to the feeling of alienation.

Furthermore, the other category of clients, that Billie says are almost empowered by the campaign, can be discussed in relation to Murphy's (2022) study. Murphy finds that professionals can be unwilling to use discretion due to a fear of being blamed in the media or by politicians. This thesis findings relates to that, but the professionals do not disclose an unwillingness of using discretion. They are however faced with clients having the opportunity, and ability, to blame the professional's publicly. This can be seen as a form of threat, which could unknowingly impact the professional's willingness to utilise their discretion. Moreover, Billie discusses difficulties having clients come for a meeting. The other participants do not highlight this in the same manner, but emphasises a need to make efforts to talk about fear and distrust when having initial meetings with clients, which consequently takes focus away from other subjects.

Every time I tried to call them [the parents] and book a first visit they came up with different reasons to avoid coming. Two months went by and I did not manage to get the parents to come for a first meeting, the first meeting took place after 2 and half months (...) It was so much going on with this client, so it was like I panicked. It was so much information, and I had to come in contact with everyone [other professionals] and when I was done with that I just had a week to write the assessment document. - Billie

Zugazaga et al. (2006) describes that when individuals who are in need of assistance have a negative perception of social work it brings difficulties for the professionals to engage and

provide proper support. Moreover, a negative perception amongst the public can affect the public's tendency to seek help from the welfare department (Nilsson and Landstedt, 2022). Thereby, the experience Billie has concurs with previous research. Moreover, Billie says that this affected them mentally, they were forced to do their job in less time than what they would have needed. Hence, this affected their ability to act within their discretion and can be seen as an example of limitations of the work structure affecting their work (cf. Lipsky, 2010). They need to carry out their work in a certain amount of time, and with clients not responding, or avoiding them, clients actions can actually decrease their ability to act within their discretion. This can lead to stress that may ultimately lead to compensatory strategies and demand reducing strategies. E.g the professional working over time to finish their assignment, or reducing their standards of the work they perform (cf. Astvik et al., 2014).

Charlie discusses how clients are afraid to accept help and also describes how they feel that clients are withholding information.

They [clients] are afraid to accept help, or they [clients] get scared when help is offered [by CPS]. They are keeping away and try to hide, both children and parents hide how it really is. So CPS does not come in at the right time, or perhaps when it is too late. - Charlie

Firstly, Charlie discloses a distrust for clients. They believe that clients are withholding information, making it difficult to understand how it *really* is. Healy (2017) emphasises the importance of trust between professional and client in social work, and priorly I have discussed this in relation to clients lack of trust for CPS. There is, however, an indication that the lack of trust is not only confined to the clients. It may be indications of what I will refer to as the cycle of distrust; clients do not trust CPS, thus they do not disclose everything about their situation, professional's do not trust clients because they feel like they are withholding information, which brings difficulties in being transparent and clear. Hence, professional's can't engage in a way that would increase trust (cf. Healy, 2017) and thereby the cycle does not end. Moreover, this lack of trust may indicate issues gaining access to the perspective of the child. If the child does engage and presents their views on their life situation when being subject of an assessment, the view of the child has to be "given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child" in accordance to CRC (CRC, 1989). If the professionals mentality is that children are hiding how it really is, it may increase the risk of what Leviner

(2018) refers to as “tokenistic participation” for children. Which consequently, may increase a child's perspective, but decrease the perspective of the child. Thus, having a negative impact on children’s participatory rights. However, it would not be sufficient to only analyse this from a perspective of trust. Previous research has shown that there can be an unwillingness to seek support when having a negative perception of social work (see for example: Zugazaga et al., 2006), and negative media coverage can cause difficulties engaging with families and assessing the risk for children (Rehehr et al., 2010 cited in Thomlison and Blome, 2012). Thus, there might be indications of the need to be critical of the information given by families who are under assessment as CPS. This can also be discussed in relation to the professional’s work being alienated. The professional’s discuss a lack of control of their clients as well as inadequate resources of the organisation. The professional needs to carry out their work, or their segment, despite facing a lack of control in numerous aspects (cf. Lipsky, 2010).

5.3 Strategies to cope with the effects

The third theme consists of various ways to cope with the effects mentioned by the professionals, two topics were mentioned frequently. Firstly, all the professionals brought up different ways in which they coped with different implications or effects. These strategies varied from being an overall approach when coming in contact with clients, where the participants had different strategies, to talking to colleagues. Several of the participants mentioned a need to be factual, objective, clear and transparent. Some emphasised a need to be warm and empathic, as a way of establishing trust. This was referred to as successful strategies by the professionals. One participant explained how they got a good feeling from defending their profession and having people listen to them. The strategy of “defending” was however mentioned by several of the participants.

Moreover, all of the professionals said that they talk to colleagues about the effects and the negative attitudes towards CPS. The purpose of talking to colleagues was highlighted by the participants in different ways. Some emphasised that they talk about the campaign with colleagues and some said that they could talk with colleagues about their own experiences in relation to the campaign, whilst some emphasised that talking to colleagues was a way to learn about strategies or approaches to cope with these matters. These topics were formulated into two subthemes: *Strategies when faced with the effects* and *Talking to colleagues*.

5.3.1 Strategies when faced with the effects

A question that was asked throughout the interviews was how the professional dealt, or coped with the situations they described. This led to insight in how the professional cope with e.g distrust and fear from clients. Lo describes different strategies when meeting clients, the first is to be factual and the other is to be humble.

It is not true [the portrayal of CPS] and it is important to counteract disinformation with actual facts and objectivity (...) to start a conversation. (...) to show that we also are human, just try to be humble and say that sometimes things go wrong. We are humans, we are not robots, sometimes we act wrongly but if we do we learn from it (...) - Lo

Lo says that they can acknowledge that CPS are in the wrong sometimes, they are the only participant who approaches the duality of CPS in such a way. In relation to the concept of trust, it's highlighted that there is a need for professionals to not arrange their work in a binary way in order to create trust (Taylor et al., 2015 cited in Healy, 2017). Thus, acknowledging possible wrongdoings, or mistakes, done by CPS can increase trust. Moreover, this is an example of an engaged strategy in the form of cognitive restructuring as presented by Andersson (2000).

In conformity with Lo's strategy, Mika describes that there is a need for clarity from CPS, and states that their experience is that clarity has helped them when working with parents.

Clarity from the social services (...) I think that has been a part of it [parents not running away]. That the parents have been allowed to participate, but also that they have known about what we are worried about (...) - Mika

Furthermore, Mika indicates that parents participation is essential, especially in connection to transparency by CPS. This can be discussed in relation to what Healy (2017) states; that there is a need to be clear and transparent in social work. This is the strategy that several of the participants mentioned, it is highlighted as a way to increase trust as the assessment work gets more predictable for the parents. In connection to that, it is interesting how trust is only

highlighted in connection to parents, rather than to children. This can be due to the fact that participants highlight that they experience distrust mainly from parents and adults, however it can also be an indication of children being viewed as objects. This is when children are seen as dependent on adults for both protection and control Eriksson and Näsman (2009). The findings indicate that children are not viewed as the primary client in cases where fear towards CPS is present. Focus is put on the parents, as they act as gatekeepers when CPS needs access to children. Thus, there are indications that children are objects of their parents. This could lead to a lack of children's participation, as trust from children is not framed as essential by the participants.

Another participant, Juno, shares that they try to be receptive in a meeting, and listens to what the clients have to say in order to establish trust.

(...) to be extra warm [personality wise] and calm (...) to lower the guard, and confirm what they [clients] are saying (...) to make it feel safe, and give space to listen to what the parents have to say, because often it is about hearing their stories (...) - Juno

Juno showcases what can be related to corrective behaviour described by Legood et al. (2016). The behaviour that Juno discusses is a way of the professional wanting to change the public image. This approach can also be related to building a relationship, which is fundamental for successful social work (Healy, 2017). Moreover, Billie says that they defend the profession and that they get a sense of accomplishment if people listen to what they say.

It [defending the profession] feels really good, it gives me this nice feeling of having accomplished something, I have defended my profession and people take in the information I give and have trust in me, it makes me a little bit proud. - Billie

This is also a form of corrective behaviour, as presented by Legood et al. (2016). This entails the professionals wanting to change the public image. Alike Legood et al's. findings, a change in the perception of the profession could provide a sense of achievement for the professionals, as described by Billie. This can also be related to professional identity, and what Billie describes as "defending" the profession. The professional identity is often aligned with

pre-established objectives (Webb, 2017). Professionals view themselves through a perspective where they take pride in their work and have a feeling of them doing a good job, simultaneously they are faced with disapproval from the public. Ultimately this can result in cognitive dissonance for the professional (Jessen, 2010). Thus, it is possible that ideas that may challenge the professional identity can be discarded by the professional's in order to strengthen the positive feelings about the job, and consequently decreasing cognitive dissonance.

5.3.2 Talking to colleagues

All of the participants mentioned a strategy of talking to colleagues. The participants highlight two benefits to talking to colleagues; it is a way of sharing experiences and to gain knowledge in strategies used by colleagues. This is similar to Engstrom (2019) findings, where they emphasise the importance of professional relationships, and especially peer support, for professionals working within child and family welfare. Peer support works as a forum where professionals can find both support and mentorship, which the findings of this thesis can be linked to.

(...) To share the experiences we have of meeting families that are scared, to tell colleagues about it and they can tell you about strategies and how to deal with it [the fear shown by parents and children] (...) -
Juno

Juno highlights two things, firstly they receive some level of emotional support by their colleagues. This is in alignment with what Lipsky (2010) states regarding street level bureaucrats seeks support amongst peers. Furthermore, that is in similarity with Keini et al. (2022) findings, where social support is highlighted as having a mitigating effect in relation to a decreased professional self-esteem when exposed to negative media coverage. This can also be linked to professional identity, as gaining social support from colleagues can be viewed as a form of establishing professional identity, and it may strengthen the sense of the "collective". Moreover, Mika describes how they talk with colleagues about their experiences and like Juno, receives advice on how to approach the fear shown by parents.

[talking with colleagues] about the fear parents have, how you can approach it and the big effects it [the fear and the campaign] actually

has. But also about the demonstrations [regarding CPS] that are spread on TIKTOK (...) - Mika

Moreover, it can be discussed in relation to what Astvik et al. (2014) presents; the strategy of voice, which takes its form in protesting, and can contribute to relief for the individual professional. This strategy allows focus to be put on organisational aspects and thus detach focus from individual aspects. The findings of this thesis indicates that the strategy of voice is utilised in order to put focus on aspects outside of the organisation, rather than organisational issues. This may contribute to a relief of personal accountability, as other's share similar experiences. This may also influence the sense of the "collective", as discussed in the above section.

5.4 Consequences for children's rights

The fourth theme consists of the consequences the professionals have seen in relation to children. A topic discussed by the informants was children's right to be heard, this was not discussed by all the participants. Some participants brought up aspects that affected the child's right to heard. This was done in relation to parents avoiding CPS but also through having focus on parents, rather than children, in the assessment process. Moreover, several of the participants disclosed that they have an experience of parents making decisions for children. These decisions were life changing decisions, which could have a tremendous impact on the children's life.

Lastly, the topic of children getting the support they deserve was highlighted by the participants. This was not discussed by all the participants and the ones who brought it up did it in various ways. One participant emphasised it in relation to children being in out-of-home care and another mainly saw it as an effect of parents not seeking help from CPS. These topics are constructed into three subthemes: *Children are not heard*, *Parents make decisions for children* and *Children do not get proper support*.

5.4.1 Children are not heard

Charlie discusses how parents are the access point to children.

(...) Children are kept away from authorities by their parents because parents do not want them to talk with us [CPS], it confines their [children's] right to be heard and their right to get the support they might need. - Charlie

This can be related to Eriksson and Näsmans (2009) findings and the duality in the view of children, as both objects and actors. From the participants' discussions, children emerge as actors. The participants want to gain the perspective of the children they meet, hence accessing the perspective of the child. Simultaneously, all of the participants, knowingly or unknowingly, frame the children as objects, much in similarity with what Ife (2012) states was present in the past; children being seen as the property of their parents. Leviner (2018) argues that an issue in the fulfilment of article 12 is that parental rights “trumps” children’s rights, this in an issue identified by the participants, as they feel like they need to access children through their parents. Hence, there may be difficulties reaching children when parents have fear towards CPS. This can not only have effects for children’s participatory rights, but also lead to ill-matched services provided by CPS. As there is a tendency of services and care of children to not match the need nor problem areas identified when children are not given voice (Heimer et al., 2017).

5.4.2 Parents make decisions for children

Several of the participants highlighted issues with parents making life changing decisions for their children. These decisions revolved around moving abroad to avoid contact with CPS and children in out-of-home care being exposed in media by their parents, as a part of the disinformation campaign. Mika describes a situation where a parent was afraid of the social services and therefore wanted to leave Sweden.

The parent had plans of running away with their child because they were so scared when CPS opened an assessment (...) they were really scared and their friends had warned them and said that CPS are this and that, so they actually had plans to leave the country and were selling their home - Mika

Whilst the parent did not take their child abroad in this specific situation, another participant, Lo, says that there have been cases where parents have moved with their children abroad;

“Colleagues of mine have had cases where parents have taken their kids abroad due to the disinformation campaign (...)”. This subtheme can be related to trust. It seems to be an indication that the lack of trust towards CPS is a driving factor for parents making major decisions for their children. As Mika states, the parent was afraid because CPS had opened an assessment. In connection to the notion of children being seen as objects (Eriksson and Näsman, 2009), and the property of their parents (Ife, 2012), and issue in the fulfilment of article 12 as parental rights “trumps” children’s rights (Leviner, 2018) this finding exemplifies these issues combined. In these scenarios, parents are able to make these decisions for their children. Moreover, this hinders CPS in fulfilling a child perspective. They are not able to follow the steps provided by Cederborg (2014) in order to increase a child perspective, e.g including children and youth at an early stage of the process and obtaining children’s views on their situation. Furthermore, it’s not possible to ensure article 12, children’s right to be heard, as “*the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child*” is not exercised. This limitation is to be connected to parental rights, which ultimately limits the professional’s ability to act within their discretion. It may not be possible to ensure the fulfilment of article 12, when parents rights triumphs childrens (cf. Leviner, 2018). Thus, there are indications that there are contextual factors that limit their discretionary space, which can be linked to Molander’s (2016) research, that the level of discretion can change with time and be dependent on contextual factors.

5.4.3 Children do not get proper support

The last subtheme is connected to the participants discussing their experience of children not getting the support they are in need of. Charlie highlights this in relation to children who are in out-of-home care.

I have noticed the consequences of the disinformation campaign after the child has been put in to mandatory care, because that is when it gets flared up for the parents, maybe it's then they dare to say all of these things they have been thinking of and have been worried about (...) the things they were scared of [having their child taken] has now happened to them (...) The consequence [of distrust] is that you can't work with the parent and their parenting skills which in turn affects the children, because it's not possible to create a change [in the parental role]. - Charlie

Charlie emphasises difficulties working with the parents, which ultimately leads to children needing care outside of their own home for longer. The difficulties working with parents were emphasised in relation to a lack of trust. Charlie explained that they had experienced several parents believing that children were taken due to racist motives, thus they did not want to accept support from CPS. There is an immediate lack of trust, which may impact the professionals discretionary space. The professionals are supposed to work with parents, as the ambition shall be for children to move home when the care is no longer necessary (SFS 1990:52). Thus, parents refusing support limits the professionals ability to act. This can be linked to what Molander (2016) defines as “contextual factors”, which can impact the professionals discretionary space. From a child’s rights perspective, this may indicate that some children are in out-of-home care for a longer period of time compared to if the parents had accepted support.

Another participant, Lo, says that they think that parents do not seek help even though they are in need of it, which leads to children possibly growing up in harmful or inadequate environments. “(...) I think it is parents who choose to not seek support from CPS. And in turn that might lead to children somewhere being harmed, that there are children that do not get what they need (...)”. Lo’s experience is in alignment with previous research, as previously mentioned negative attitudes amongst the public can affect people’s tendencies of seeking help (Nilsson and Landstedt, 2022). It can also be linked to Eriksson and Näsman (2009) description of children as objects, and Ife’s (2012) statement that children have been viewed as the property of the parents. This statement, and the subtheme, indicates how the professionals at CPS are often relying on parents in order to access children. Thus, the parents are the gatekeepers and as previously described, the professionals' experience is that there is a sufficient lack of trust for CPS. This can be linked to what Healy (2017) describes; there is an issue with trust towards social work by the people of whom professionals work with. Even though the information in the disinformation campaign is said to be false, it seems to give origin to distrust and fear. Thus, it can impact parents, and childrens, willingness to seek support.

5.5 A feeling of how it “should” be

The fifth, and final, theme was established through the professionals highlighting a feeling of what needs to be done, and what they would like to see in the future. The first topic identified was through the professionals discussing a sense of pride they take in their work, and how that is in opposition to what people believe and say they do. This topic was not explicitly discussed by all the participants, but it was implicitly stated by how they referred to their work and the information that is spread through the disinformation campaign. Moreover, several of the participants felt that CPS is not visible in the media and thereby not the ongoing debate. They pointed to this as an aspect to why the disinformation campaign has gotten such a foothold, and wanted to see a change in the future.

Lastly, the professionals discussed issues related to the organisation. This was done to various degrees, but the common notion was that none of the participants said that the workplace talked about the disinformation campaign and its effects to a large extent. Several of the participants said that the disinformation campaign was talked about “all the time”, but only in informal settings such as the lunch room or external supervision. Thus, the conversation was not started by the organisation or executives, but the social workers themselves. These topics are constructed into three subthemes: *Acknowledgement*, *CPS should be visible in the debate* and *organisational factors*.

5.5.1 Acknowledgement

Juno describes a sense of pride they take in their work, and highlights that they want to give another image of their profession. “(...) it [to be questioned] does not feel good because I am proud of the work I do, and what we [CPS] do (...) I feel like I want to give another image of our profession”.

Moreover, Billie highlights an experience of ingratitude from society as a whole, they believe that CPS are doing a lot of work without getting recognition; “Because we [professionals at the CPS] do a lot, we support these parents, we do everything for the child and instead of getting a “thank you” we get to hear that we are evil people. That does not feel good”. This subtheme originates from a sense of discomfort for the professionals, where they highlighted a lack of acknowledgment for their work. This can be linked to cognitive dissonance described by Jessen (2010); professionals take pride in their work and have a feeling of doing a good

job, simultaneously they are faced with disapproval from the public. Ultimately this can result in cognitive dissonance for the professional. Much like Jessen's (2010) findings, the findings in this thesis is that the professionals take pride in their work. Moreover, a want of giving another image of the profession is highlighted. This can be linked to Legood et al. (2015) research regarding corrective behaviour, which entails the professionals wanting to change the public image. If change in the perception of their profession occurred it could provide a sense of achievement for the professionals.

Furthermore, this can be discussed in relation to professional identity. To take pride in their work can be connected to having a strong professional identity. On an individual level, professional identity can be referred to as "how social workers think of themselves as social workers" (Webb, 2017:33), but it is not only how one identifies, but also what the desired identity is that is of importance. Therefore, I would argue that the desired identity is what gives origin to the want of acknowledgement. On a collective level, the professional identity is highlighted by the participants referring to a "we" rather than themselves as individuals. That might be an indication that the collective is established, and thereby the factor presented by Beddoe (2010); members holding a sense of collective identity and "self-esteem", is fulfilled. This can be related to Murphy's (2022) findings, that there are tendencies of finger pointing within the organisation when there are stories in media of a negative nature regarding CPS. Whilst this might still be happening, the findings indicate that the negative portrayal of CPS works as a strengthening tool of the professional identity as a collective, rather than pointing out individual wrongs.

5.5.2 CPS should be visible in the debate

Lo discusses a need for CPS to be visible, and to counteract the ongoing disinformation campaign.

CPS have to be out there and be visible, we have to get out there and talk. So that you get an image that the ones working at CPS are not this malicious portrait of a CPS-lady (...) I think having a more visible presence in the public (...) that you're there to talk about it, for them to understand that we are here to help (...) Neutralise CPS, disarm CPS, and make it more understandable what it is that we do - Lo

Moreover, Lo highlights a need to “disarm” CPS, they talk about this in relation to making CPS more accessible in order to increase the chances of people applying for support. This can be linked to previous research, which finds that negative coverage in media can cause difficulties engaging with families and assessing the risk for children (Rehehr et al., 2010 cited in Thomlison and Blome, 2012). Furthermore, it can be related to Murphy’s (2022) findings, where professionals felt reports in media often painted social worker’s in a bad light. The professionals felt like only half the truth were being told and that it was stories that fit the narrative that were presented. Thus, the course of action that Lo suggested, to inform the public about CPS, could counteract the often negative reports. This is interesting to relate to the level of alienation, and the lack of control of resources held by the organisation. The professional’s can discuss what they feel needs to be done, but they are not in control over the resources (cf. Lipsky, 2010). This can contribute to what Lipsky (2010) describes as dissatisfaction amongst the professionals, which can ultimately lead to a decrease in commitment to the workplace and clients.

Juno points to a lack of presence of CPS in media, and feels like other professions are visible whilst CPS is quiet in the debate.

Social services are not visible in bigger forums, such as TV, in papers... to show that there are also good stories, or to have someone who is some kind of spokesperson, who talks about our work and what we do. Because schools are visible, the police are visible, health care services are visible - we are the only ones who are not visible [in media]. Maybe that's why this disinformation campaign has so much [influence], because we are not there to counteract [the disinformation] (...)- Juno

Juno does not only see an issue of CPS not being visible, but related this to other professions. This can be related to a feeling of social work having a lower status than other professions, which is highlighted in Legood et al. (2016) research. Moreover, Juno suggests that CPS not being visible can be viewed as a reason for why the disinformation campaign has gotten such a foothold, and that there is a lack of trust towards CPS. Thomlison and Blome (2012) finds that professionals from CPS who engage with the media to give statements such as “no comment” are seen as hiding something, which in turn can deepen the mistrust. Thus, presence

in the media does not necessarily indicate an increased level of trust. Hence, “counteracting” specific disinformation, might not be sufficient in relation to creating trust but informative work could be beneficial.

5.5.3 Organisational factors

As previously stated, none of the social workers said that the organisation talked about the campaign to a large extent. The conversations on the topic were initiated by the street level bureaucrats, rather than the executives. And the conversations mainly took place in informal settings. Billie says they have been told to not care about the campaign.

(...) at the workplace we [the unit] have not talked much about it [the campaign], maybe once at a staff meeting. We [interviewee and colleagues] brought it up and there was not much said, except that you should not care about it and that we do not need to work to defend it [their work] in private settings... yeah, that you shouldn't do too much. But it was a long time ago, probably a year ago and since then we [the unit] haven't talked about it. - Billie

This can be related to the professional’s discretionary space and Munro’s (2011) findings that the English CPS has become more concerned with organisational needs rather than the intended focus - children and families. The lack of focus on the disinformation campaign, the clients reaction and the overall implications by the campaign that the professional’s experience may indicate that the organisation focuses on other factors, that are not necessarily related to the current implications identified by the professionals. Munro (2011) further suggests that this can lead to a rigorous system that has difficulties responding to individual needs and thereby increasing the risk of children not getting proper support. Whilst Munro’s focus lies on New Public Management, this can also be seen in the light of Healy's (2017) research, regarding the need of creating trust and how that can be done. If the professionals, and the organisation, are not able to create trust, it can lead to difficulties in engaging with families (cf. Rehehr et al., 2010 cited in Thomlison and Blome, 2012) and families not seeking support (cf. Nilsson and Landstedt, 2022).

Another participant, Charlie, discusses a need for organisational clarity for how to deal with the accusations of having racist agendas.

(...) we have not received any training or information of how one should, or one could, respond to these types of statements... and that would be beneficial. What do you respond when a person claims that you have put their children into mandatory care to earn money and because they are muslim? - Charlie

The findings may indicate the individuals feeling alone in their work, and when dealing with the implications of the disinformation campaign. This can also contribute to a level of alienation, as they are likely to experience a lack of control of resources held by the organisation (cf. Lipsky, 2010). Whilst they review the campaign as having a major impact on the practice, the organisation does not talk about it. Thus, there are indications that the professionals are individually responsible for seeking support and most importantly - advice on how to handle the accusations they receive from clients. This can be linked to the strategy of talking to colleagues, as accounted for in section 5.3.2, one of the benefits identified by the participants was to receive advice on how to deal with situations related to the disinformation campaign. Thereby, a lack of focus by the organisation on the campaign and how to decrease the implications it has had on the practice might lead to impacts on discretionary space for the individual social worker. As they themselves decide on how to deal with the statements and implications, which can be understood as an individual practice. Simultaneously some have been told to “not care about it”, which can be seen as a decrease of discretion as the organisation states what the professional shall not care about. Thus, implicating that the campaign should not be talked about. That the professionals still talk about it with colleagues in informal settings at the workplace may indicate a strategy used by them to not only receive support, but also act within their discretion.

6. Discussion and conclusion

The purpose of this thesis is reflected in the ongoing phenomena that is the disinformation campaign, with focus on the experiences of professional social workers. The aim is to analyse how professionals at the CPS perceive the disinformation campaign, how they related it to their work and how they cope with the potential effects related to the campaign. Moreover, this will be analysed through a child's rights perspective, with the intent to discuss how both the campaign and the professionals, through their coping strategies, can affect children's rights. Below I will provide a summary of the findings in relation to each research question;

- How do child protection professionals perceive the disinformation campaign and how do they relate it to their work with children and their families?
- How do professionals cope with potential effects related to the disinformation campaign?
- How can the professional's potential experiences and coping strategies related to the disinformation campaign be understood from a child's rights perspective?

Thereafter I will discuss these findings in relation to each other. In addition, I will make suggestions for further research in connection to the topic of this thesis and lastly, present limitations of the study

6.1 Summary and conclusion of findings

The professionals all saw different implications that the disinformation campaign has on their work. They emphasised that a fear towards CPS has been present for a longer time, but a majority feels that the fear has escalated due to the campaign. The effects that were highlighted were mainly in relation to a lack of trust, which led to difficulties reaching families and difficulties carrying out the "desired" social work. There are indications that the professionals possess a strong sense of professional identity, especially in relation to the desired professional role; this gets contested when the professionals are faced with disapproval by the public. The professionals' experiences negative attitudes towards CPS by clients, parents, teenagers, other professionals, friends and acquaintances. Thus, it is not only in the professional setting the professionals face disapproval, but also in their private lives. This can possibly increase their professional identity, as their work is not separate from their private life, but rather seen as an identification marker. Compared to previous research, which

indicates that working at CPS entails an ambiguous role, where dissonance is often present due to the contested values and role of control (Keddel and Stanley, 2017; Svensson et al., 2008). And that this setting limits the possibility of a strong professional identity which can contribute to an ambivalent sense of identity (Beddoe, 2013). The findings of this thesis indicates that the professional's have a strong sense of professional identity, despite facing several issues in establishing such. The adversity and ambiguous role seems to entail a reinforced sense of collective, which seems to permeate on an individual level as well. However, there are indications that whilst the sense of collective has grown stronger there has been increased values of "us" (CPS) and "them" (clients). This can be seen in the presented cycle of distrust. Moreover, whilst there are indication for a strong collective, the findings also highlights a high level of individual accountability and a lack of organisational guidance in relation to the disinformation campaign.

A coping strategy utilised by the professionals to cope with the effects of the disinformation campaign was talking to colleagues, this was done both for peer support, emotional support and guidance. This can be understood as a way of coping with the implications of the disinformation campaign and the lack of organisational guidance, whilst also acting within their discretion and strengthening a sense of the "collective". To cope with the implications on the practice, the participants mainly employ demand-reducing strategies, when used the professionals rationalise and often relate it to difficulties carrying out the desired social work due to clients lack of trust for CPS. Moreover, they utilise corrective behaviour, with the intent to improve the public perception of CPS. This led to a positive feeling for the professionals, it was also related to building relationships with clients and thereby increasing trust. Professionals also employ engaged strategies and tried to be clear, factual and transparent when in contact with clients, with the aim of decreasing distrust, and establishing trust. The professionals refer to this as successful strategies when meeting clients. Another implication on the practice was a feeling of fear amongst the professionals, the fear was in relation to becoming a public face of the campaign or fear for their own safety. Previous research indicates that a fear of being exposed in the media can lead to an unwillingness to use discretion, the findings of this thesis does not support that. Moreover, the findings indicate, in similarity with Lipsky's (2010) research, that the street level bureaucrats do alienated work. This is mainly exemplified through the professional's experiencing a lack of control in relation to clients and the resources held by the organisation.

The common notion in the findings is that the professionals frame children as actors, whilst highlighting the issue reaching them because of their role as objects. Thus, the duality of children's roles are highlighted in the context of CPS. The lack of trust towards CPS is related to adults' distrust, and children's level of trust is not highlighted to the same extent. This could be because adults are more vocal in the campaign, and with their fear when coming to CPS. But it could also be an indication of children being forgotten in relation to trust, due to parents being more vocal. Moreover, the findings indicate that it seems to be an issue of parents rights trumping children's rights (cf. Leviner, 2018), this is seen in relation to children not coming in contact with CPS, parents making decisions for their children and children not getting the proper support from CPS. Overall, the parents' lack of trust towards CPS leads to several consequences, which all indicate a hindrance for CPS ability to carry out a child's perspective, which can be seen as a difficulty acting within their discretion. In relation to children's participatory rights there are several limiting factors discussed, and a conclusion is that there seems to be a child perspective present, but the perspective of the child is sometimes absent. Hence, the campaign seems to have had adverse effects on children's participatory rights in the context of CPS.

In relation to what the organisation can do to support the professional, the findings indicate a lack of public presence by CPS and a lack of guidance by the organisation on how the professional can deal with being accused of having racist agendas. Thus, a more comprehensive plan on state level on how to ensure CPS's presence in media is needed, and in addition, further organisational support for the individual social worker is needed on a meso level.

6.2 Suggestions for further research

The result for this thesis draws attention to the impact that the disinformation campaign has had for the professionals, and thereby the practice. Moreover it sheds light on coping strategies used by the professionals, and this is combined in relation to an analysis of implications for children's rights. My aspiration is that this will contribute to further research being conducted, as there are indications that there is a need to conduct further research in relation to a number of topics. First and foremost, it is advised to conduct a similar study but with a larger sample. This would be beneficial in order to gain a better understanding of implications on the practice (cf. Legood et al., 2016).

Furthermore, I would argue that the possible logical consequence that was of interest for this thesis; the connection of public perception, the professional and children as clients within a Swedish context of CPS, should be reviewed further. It would be favourable for the focus scope to be on children as clients when the perception of CPS amongst the public is negative. Thus, conducting a child-centred study, and thereby opting in on conducting research with children, as called for by Eldén (2013). Moreover, in light of the findings of this thesis, I would argue that there are indications that further research needs to be conducted in relation to contextual factors that can limit professionals discretion. This should also be related to what organisational factors could support the professional when exercising within their discretion.

6.3 Limitations of the study

I have made several choices for this thesis and decisions of a narrowing nature. This results in delimitations of the study. Other factors that can be considered to be out of my control are referred to as limitations (cf. Price and Murnan, 2004). As previously mentioned the empirical data consists of five semi-structured interviews, it would have been favourable to have conducted more interviews to get a more comprehensive understanding of the professional's experience of the phenomenon. However, the gathered data was deemed rich and therefore enough to gain an understanding of the professionals' experiences. It also needs to be emphasised that the objective for this thesis is to explore the experiences of professionals at CPS, thus the objective is not to have generalisable results. Like in much qualitative research the aim is to gain an understanding of the phenomenon, rather than explaining it. Therefore, the findings for this thesis are to be seen in the light of subjective experiences, it presents a specific version of social reality, the reality of those interviewed, and not a reality that can be seen as definitive (cf. Bryman, 2016). Moreover, another delimitation is that I did not account for the cities or areas of where the professionals work. This was done in relation to maintaining confidentiality but however, there may have been factors that could be related to the findings, and perhaps entail a deeper understanding in potential differences in experiences amongst professionals.

A limitation of the study is that there has not been sufficient focus on how the professional's construct the children and their parents. Or how the professionals more in depth relate to the

information shown in the campaign and how they cope with organisational demands while simultaneously being faced with the effects from the campaign. To include those perspectives would generate a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. Moreover, a finding of this thesis is the strongly held professional identity, which is often related to cognitive dissonance. A limitation is that “cognitive dissonance” was not in the focus scope for the interviews, thus it is unclear to which extent the professionals experience this. This would have been interesting to include, as it would deepen the understanding of the phenomenon that the disinformation campaign is and its implications on professional’s wellbeing.

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Appendix 1 - Information letter [Swedish]

Information before participation in interview study about professional experiences of the so called “disinformation campaign” against CPS [*Information inför deltagande i intervjustudie om socialsekreterares erfarenheter av den så kallade ‘desinformationskampanjen’ mot socialtjänsten*]

Hi!

My name is Kim Holmlund and I’m attending the master program with an international profile in Social work and Human rights at Gothenburg university. I am an employee at an assessment unit in the social welfare department of North east Gothenburg and I have been working there for approximately 4 years. I am writing to you because I am currently writing my thesis and I am looking for participants for an interview study. The people I am looking for shall currently be employed at an assessment unit and shall have worked there for a minimum of 2 years.

[Hej!

Mitt namn är Kim Holmlund och jag går ett masterprogram med internationell profil i socialt arbete och mänskliga rättigheter vid Göteborgs universitet. Jag är själv anställd på Barn och unga i Socialförvaltning Nordost i Göteborg och har jobbat där i ca 4 år. Jag skriver till er då jag för närvarande skriver min uppsats och söker deltagare till en intervjustudie. Personerna jag söker skall arbeta på en utredningsenhet på Barn och unga och ska ha jobbat inom Barn och unga i minst 2 år.]

Purpose [Syftet]

The purpose of the thesis is to explore if professionals at assessment units experience that the disinformation campaign has affected their work, and if so how. Moreover, the purpose is to explore what kind of coping strategies professionals employ to cope with potential effects of the disinformation campaign. This will thereafter be analysed through a child rights perspective.

[Syftet med uppsatsen är att undersöka om socialsekreterare på Barn och unga upplever att desinformationskampanjen har påverkat deras arbete, och i sådana fall hur det påverkat arbetet. Vidare är syftet att undersöka vad för coping-strategier socialsekreterare har för att

hantera eventuella effekter av desinformationskampanjen. Detta kommer sedan analyseras utifrån ett barnrättsperspektiv.]

What does it entail to participate in an interview? *[Vad innebär det att delta i en intervju?]*

To participate in an interview is completely voluntary. If you choose to participate the interview will be individually, it can take place in person in Gothenburg or close by or through video link.

The interview will take approximately 45 minutes and will be recorded, this is done so I can later transcribe what was said and thereafter analyse the material. You can at any point during the interview, or at a later stage, revoke your participation without giving a reason to why.

[Att delta i en intervju är helt frivilligt. Om du väljer att delta kommer intervjun ske enskilt, intervjun kan äga rum fysiskt i Göteborg med omnejd eller via videolänk.

Intervjun beräknas ta ca 45 minuter och kommer spelas in, för att jag sedan skall kunna skriva ut det som sagts och analysera materialet. Du kan när du vill under intervjun, eller vid senare tillfälle, avbryta din medverkan i studien utan att ange orsak.]

Handling of your details and the information you share *[Hantering av dina uppgifter och den information du delger]*

The information that is disclosed during the interview will not be shared with anyone unauthorised and your name will not be presented in the final work. The information that is related to the interview, such as notes or recordings, will be treated in a way so your identity won't be exposed. Furthermore, the information will be kept in such a way that unauthorised people can't access it.

The information you choose to share in the interview will be used in the master thesis, but will be anonymised. This entails that no one shall be able to recognise who said what or where that person works, and you'll be given a fictitious name.

The final version of the thesis will be public. When the thesis has been graded all the material will be destroyed.

[De uppgifter som framkommer under intervjun kommer inte komma någon obehörig till handa och ditt namn kommer inte presenteras i det slutgiltiga arbetet. De uppgifter som är kopplade till intervjun, exempelvis anteckningar eller inspelningar, kommer att behandlas på ett sådant sätt att din identitet inte röjs. Vidare kommer uppgifterna bevaras på ett sådant sätt att obehöriga inte kan ta del av dem.

Informationen som du väljer att dela med dig av under intervjun kommer användas i master-uppsatsen, men kommer att avidentifieras. Detta innebär att man inte kommer kunna känna igen vilken person som sagt vad eller var personen arbetar, samt att du ges ett fiktivt namn.

Slutversionen av uppsatsen kommer vara offentlig. När uppsatsen examinerats kommer allt material att raderas.]

What consequences and risks are associated with your participation in the interview?

[Vilka följder och risker finns kopplat till ditt medverkande i studien?]

There are no material benefits by participating in the study, in terms of financial compensation or the like. However, the interview is an opportunity for you to talk about your experience of the disinformation campaign. The information will thereafter be a part of the thesis that will be published, which can contribute to increased knowledge about your profession at CPS.

[Det finns inga materiella fördelar i att delta i studien, i mening av ekonomisk kompensation eller liknande. Dock utgör intervjun en möjlighet för dig att berätta om din upplevelse av desinformationskampanjen. Informationen kommer sedan vara en del av uppsatsen som sedan kommer publiceras, vilket kan bidra till ökad kunskap kring er profession inom barn och unga.]

Any potential questions? Please contact me! *[Vid eventuella frågor vänligen kontakta mig!]*

Student: *[Student]* Kim Holmlund

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Email: Gusholki@student.gu.se

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Appendix 2 - Informed consent *[Swedish]*

Consent to participation in interview *[Samtycke till medverkan i intervju]*

I hereby consent to participate in the study and know what the purpose of the study is. I have been informed about what my participation in the study entails, that participation is voluntary and I know that I, any time I want, can revoke my participation in the study without specifying the reason. I am informed that I can revoke my participation even after the interview has taken place.

[Jag samtycker härmed till att medverka i studien och vet vad syftet med studien är. Jag har informerats om vad mitt deltagande i studien innebär, att deltagandet är frivilligt och jag vet att jag, när jag vill, kan avbryta min medverkan i studien utan att ange orsak. Jag är informerad om att jag kan avbryta min medverkan även efter det att intervjun ägt rum].

Place and Date *[Ort och Datum:]* _____

Name: *[Namn:]* _____

Signature: *[Signatur:]* _____

Student: *[Student]* Kim Holmlund

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Appendix 3 - Interview guide [Swedish]

Interview guide [Intervjuguide]

Aim and focus [Mål och fokus]	Questions [Frågor]
<p>Introduction [Introduktion]</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For how long have you worked at CPS? <i>[Hur länge har du jobbat på BoU?]</i> - Have you worked in other departments before? <i>[Har du jobbat inom andra verksamheter tidigare?]</i>
<p>Explore if the professionals at CPS think the disinformation campaign affects their work, and if so how? <i>[Utforska om professionella på Barn och unga tycker att desinformationskampanjen påverkar deras arbete, och i sådana fall hur?]</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How would you describe your image of the disinformation campaign? <i>[Hur skulle du beskriva din bild av desinformationskampanjen?]</i> - What is your view on the information that has been spread in the disinformation campaign? <i>[Hur ser du på informationen som spridits i desinformationskampanjen?]</i> - Have you come in contact with the disinformation campaign through your work? In what way? Can you give any example? How did you handle it? <i>[Har du kommit i kontakt med desinformationskampanjen via ditt arbete? På vilket sätt? Kan du ge exempel? Hur hanterade du det då?]</i>

- Have you talked about the disinformation campaign at your workplace? Can you give an example? [*Har ni på arbetsplatsen pratat om desinformationskampanjen? Kan du ge ett exempel?*]

- In your experience, have the campaign had any specific effects, if so which effects? [*Upplever du att kampanjen fått några specifika effekter, i så fall vilka?*]

If the informant feels like it has affected
[Om informant upplever att det påverkat]

- In which way do you feel it has affected your work? [*På vilket sätt upplever du att det påverkat ditt arbete?*]

- Is there any difference to how you experience the contact with clients now compared to before the disinformation campaign? [*Är det någon skillnad på hur du upplever kontakten med klienter i nutid jämfört med innan desinformationskampanjen?*]

- Can you tell me about a specific situation when you experienced that

	<p>the disinformation campaign affected your work? <i>[Kan du berätta för mig om en specifik situation då du upplevde att desinformationskampanjen påverkade ditt arbete?]</i></p> <p><u>If the informant does not feel like it affected</u> <u><i>[Om informant upplever att det inte påverkat]</i></u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What's your view on that the campaign has not affected your work? <i>[Hur ser du på att kampanjen inte påverkat ditt arbete?]</i> - How do you experience the campaign in relation to colleagues or other partners work? <i>[Hur upplever du kampanjen kopplat till kollegors eller samarbetspartners arbete?]</i> - Do you think there is something that you have done that has prevented the campaign to affect your work? <i>[Tänker du att det finns något du gjort som förhindrat att kampanjen påverkat ditt arbete?]</i>
<p>Explore what coping strategies the professionals have to cope with the potential effects of the disinformation campaign</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Has the campaign affected your work situation, if so in which way? <i>[Har kampanjen påverkat din</i>

<p><i>[Utforska vad professionella har för coping-strategier för att hantera eventuella effekter av desinformationskampanjen]</i></p>	<p><i>arbetssituation, i så fall på vilket sätt?]</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do you have any conception of how your colleagues have experienced the campaign? Please give an example <i>[Har du någon uppfattning kring hur dina kollegor upplevt desinformationskampanjen? Ge gärna exempel.]</i> - Has the disinformation campaign affected how you carry out your work? Please give an example <i>[Har desinformationskampanjen påverkat hur du utför ditt arbete? Ge gärna exempel]</i> - Do you do anything differently in your work because of the disinformation campaign? Please give an example <i>[Gör du något annorlunda i ditt arbete pga desinformationskampanjen? Ge gärna exempel]</i>
<p><i>Concluding conversation [Avslutande samtal]</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is there something you think we have not talked about that you would like to say? <i>[Är det något som du tycker att vi inte har pratat om, som du vill säga?]</i> - How was it for you to talk about your experiences related to the disinformation campaign? <i>[Hur var det för dig att prata om dina upplevelser kopplat till</i>

	<p>desinformationskampanjen?]</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is there something that we have talked about that you would like to not include in the thesis? [Är det något vi pratat om som du inte vill tas med i uppsatsen?] - Do you have any questions? [Har du några frågor?] - Say thank you for the participation, repeat what is stated in the information letter. [Tacka för deltagande. Upprepa kring det som står i informationsbrevet]
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Follow up question, throughout the interview: [Uppföljande frågor, genomgående i intervjun:]

- How did you deal with it then? [Hur hanterade du det då?]
- How did you do then? [Hur gjorde du då?]
- Can you give an example? [Kan du ge ett exempel?]