UNIVERSITY OF GOTHENBURG
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

Exploring minority social worker's interactions with minority families in the Norwegian child welfare system.

Master's Program in Social Work and Human Rights

Degree report 30 higher education credits Winter 2025

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Abstract

This research investigates the experiences of social workers with ethnic minority backgrounds working within the Norwegian child welfare system (CWS) concerning their interactions with children and families from ethnic minority backgrounds. The study aims to understand how these social workers perceive and navigate working within the CWS in relation to certain values and understanding of minority families.

Qualitative interviews were conducted with social workers from minority backgrounds, employed in the CWS in Oslo, Norway. The research employed thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, sections, and subsections in the data, drawing on theoretical frameworks considering intersectionality, organizational theory, and finally, professional knowledge and identity, which are not necessary learned from a person's culture, but from their experiences.

The findings reveal a diverse range of motivations, suggestions, perspectives, and approaches among social workers in the CWS. This research sheds light on the complex dynamics involved in the interactions between social workers from minority backgrounds and minority families in the Norwegian CWS. It highlights the importance of cultural awareness and professional identity in terms of the social work professions and identifying as minorities. In shaping these interactions, it is essential for social workers to navigate and consider the unique cultural backgrounds of the children and families they serve.

Keywords: Cultural knowledge, professional identity, intersectionality, minority social workers, minority families, Human rights.

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Acknowledgement

I want to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Tobias, for his guidance and support throughout the entire writing process. His expertise and encouragement have been inspiring in shaping this work.

I extend my heartfelt appreciation to the individuals who generously shared their experiences and insights for this study. Their willingness to spend their valuable time providing the necessary information has been the backbone in shaping the depth and richness of this research. Without their contributions, this work would not have been possible. I am sincerely grateful for their time, honesty, and trust in me.

I am also deeply thankful to my family and close ones who, in their own unique way, provided inspiration and motivation. Their occasional inquiries of “er du ferdig snart” (are you soon done) served as a reminder that the journey was challenging, but I successfully reached the finish line.

This accomplishment is not only a personal conquest but a shared one, made possible by the encouragement and understanding of those around me. Thank you all for being a crucial part of this journey.

1.0 Introduction

Growing up in Oslo in a minority family household, I was surrounded by a rich diversity of cultures and traditions that shaped my worldview and influenced my identity. From a young age, I became acutely aware of the unique challenges and strengths within minority communities as they navigated life in a society where their customs and values sometimes differed from the mainstream. This exposure fostered a deep empathy and understanding of the cultural nuances that minority families experience, especially within institutional structures.

This foundation has been instrumental in shaping my perspective as a social worker. Through my professional background working with families and children, I have encountered families and family friends from minority communities who often express fear towards the child welfare system. As in 2021, 26% of the children in the system are of minority backgrounds, with an additional 15% of children having parents who migrated to Norway (Bufetat, 2023).

Bergjordet, Dyrhaug, and Haugen (2011), along with a 2011 report from Statistics Norway, underscore a significant finding. A substantial majority of children placed under the care of the Norwegian Child Welfare Services (CWS) belong to minority communities. This statistic sparked my curiosity and formed the basis of my interest in exploring the experiences of social workers from similar backgrounds.

Given the overrepresentation of minority children in child welfare cases, it becomes crucial to understand the perspectives of minority social workers who often have a unique, culturally informed understanding of the challenges faced by these communities. Researching this group offers valuable insights that could lead to more culturally sensitive and effective child welfare practices. Minority social workers bring not only professional expertise but also a lived experience that may resonate with the families they work with, enabling them to bridge cultural divides and establish trust more effectively.

Furthermore, minority social workers may encounter unique challenges and biases in their roles, impacting both their professional experiences and the support they provide to minority families. By focusing on their insights and perspectives, this research aims to contribute to a broader understanding of how cultural competence and empathy can improve outcomes in child welfare. Ultimately, this study seeks to highlight the value of diversity within the social work profession and its potential impact on fostering more inclusive and equitable practices.

This study examines the experiences of Norwegian social workers with minority backgrounds in the Child Welfare System. The social workers are individuals who either immigrated to Norway as children with their families or were born and raised in Norway, with at least one parent migrating from another country. The study focuses on the experiences and insights of social workers within the Norwegian Child Welfare System, particularly regarding children with minority backgrounds. The intention behind this study is to shed light on the voices of social workers with minority backgrounds, as their experiences and viewpoints can have an impact, especially to families from similar backgrounds in the CWS. The introduction presents the background, aims, purpose, and research question.

1.1 Background of the study

1.1.1 Overview of the Norwegian Child Welfare System

Child welfare services hold an essential responsibility in protecting the welfare and security of children, especially those placed in vulnerable circumstances. Within the context of a multicultural society, it becomes vital for child welfare services to not only uphold the safety and well-being of all children but also address the needs of the rising diverse population. This will embrace families from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, who often encounter challenges while navigating the difficulties of the child welfare system. By drawing insights from the personal experiences of this group of social workers in their interactions with these families, a vital connection can be created between communities and the system. Enhance the system's credibility and build trust among minority families who may feel misunderstood.

In Norway, child and family policies are often viewed as child-centered, focusing on children as individuals with their own rights within the family (Hestbæk, Höjer, Pösö, & Skivenes, 2020). However, some international organizations, such as the Council of Europe and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, have raised concerns about how minority families are treated. They have questioned the use of forced removals by Norwegian Child Welfare Services, which has led to several cases going to the European Court of Human Right(Ghiletchi, 2018).

1.1.2 Cultural Competence in Social Work

Križ and Skivenes (2011) explain that most parents see family as a private and sacred space. However, CWS often operate based on rules and protocols set by people in positions of power. These decision-makers may lack personal experience with child welfare interventions, which can make it difficult for them to understand the impact that CWS involvement has on vulnerable families (Križ & Skivenes, 2011). The perspective of minority social workers is also valuable in this context. As members of marginalized communities, they may have unique insights and experiences while holding influential roles within the child welfare system.

This dual position highlights the importance of understanding the professional identity of social workers, especially those from minority backgrounds. Professional identity refers to how social workers define and perceive themselves within their professional roles, including how their personal experiences, cultural background, and professional training shape their practice. Minority social workers frequently navigate the challenging intersection between their cultural and community affiliations and the formal expectations and protocols of the child welfare system, which has often been criticized for its insufficient cultural competence (Beddoe, 2013).

Historically, marginalized groups have faced racism, oppression, and discrimination. For these communities, interactions with CWS can be particularly challenging, as child welfare decisions are often based on judgments about parenting, which come from people outside the family, like teachers or legal professionals (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2013). According to Health and Services (2013), vulnerable populations, who have historically experienced marginalization, racism, and various forms of oppression, may bear

the brunt of CWS. CWS inherently may carry a critical aspect, as they are frequently instructed, based on judgments about parenting efforts and practices. According to the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (Health & Services, 2013), these judgments are typically made by authorities external to the family system, including educational personnel and legal professionals.

1.1.3 Challenges Faced by Minority Families in Child Welfare

Minority parents who encounter the Norwegian child welfare services often face unique challenges. Due to their cultural backgrounds, they may feel misunderstood by child welfare professionals (Fylkesnes, Taylor, & Iversen, 2018). These challenges include cultural misunderstandings, language barriers, fear and distrust, stigma, systemic biases, and lack of information and resources. Understanding these issues is essential because it can help bridge the gap between minority families and child welfare workers. This highlights the need to look more closely at how social workers interact with minority families in the Norwegian child welfare system.

1.1.4 Research Gaps and the Need for This Study

Another motivation for this research stems from a noticeable gap in the existing literature. While conducting an extensive review of the available literature on the viewpoints of Scopus, a gap was noticed in this field of research. Remarkably, the literature concerning the views of social workers with minority backgrounds is limited. Although a few studies, such as those by Felt Križ and Skivenes (2011), arose from countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, and Norway, their primary focus is on general social work practices with minority families.

This research can also contribute to filling this gap and to a more comprehensive understanding of the minority social workers' experiences in the context of the child welfare system. It is also important to highlight that understanding the perspectives of social workers from minority backgrounds can contribute to promoting social justice and equity. Strengthening the voices of minority social workers can help prevent potential challenges

faced in their profession and advocate for a more inclusive and culturally competent welfare system.

Baylor University (2022) has examined this topic in their article by saying “social work has evolved since its inception and understanding the importance of diversity in social work, including what we can do to promote it in today’s landscape, requires a deeper dive into the past.” Integrating the firsthand experiences of social workers with minority backgrounds will provide valuable insights into their experiences and perspectives within the context of the Norwegian CWS. Prior studies have shown that embracing diversity may involve working through differences rather than across them, which can also foster an honest appreciation for the implications of these differences in the client’s life (Baylor University, 2022). Exploring and addressing these cultural differences, power dynamics, and oppressive relationships can help both the client, and the social worker move to a common space where a new understanding results in a positive outcome (Baylor University, 2022).

Against the background as previously mentioned, the reported research motivates my curiosity as I am interested in understanding how social workers with similar backgrounds to mine navigate the child welfare system in Norway. With these professional experiences, I seek to gain insight into their experiences and how they may influence their interactions with the minority families they work with. These experiences of social workers can contribute to reducing differences and ensuring inclusive representation, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of all children and families.
The findings of this research aim to inform policymakers and social workers on how to improve the child welfare system better to meet the needs of families from minority cultural backgrounds.

1.2 The Study’s Aim, Purpose, and Research Question

The primary ambition of this study is to enhance social workers’ understanding of cultural differences and their integration into the Norwegian child welfare system. The study addresses the challenges such as cultural bias, fear, and distrust of CWS, structural power imbalances, and miscommunication in child and family welfare, aligning with the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations, 1948b).

More concretely, this study aims to explore and understand the experiences of minority social workers in Norway who work with children in the child welfare system, particularly their interactions with children from ethnic minority backgrounds. The study seeks to understand how these social workers perceive and navigate the values and practices of minority families, and how their experiences shape their interactions and relationships with the families they work with.

With this background, the following research questions form the basis of the investigations:

- What are the experiences of minority social workers in the Norwegian child welfare system regarding their interactions with minority families?

- How are social workers' professional identities influenced by these experiences and interactions with minority families in the Norwegian child welfare system?

- What perspectives did the interviewed social workers ascribe to their minority background in relation to their interactions with these families?

To address these questions, a qualitative research approach is selected, emphasizing the importance of capturing the personal experiences and perspectives of minority social workers. Semi-structured interviews are conducted to allow participants to share their narratives in a detailed and flexible manner. This approach will provide a rich understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by minority social workers in their practice.

1.3 Clarification of terms

1.3.1 Norwegian Child Welfare System (Barnevernet)

According to Statsforvalteren (2023), the primary mission of the child protection agency is to ensure the well-being and healthy development of children and adolescents residing in

conditions that could potentially jeopardize their health and growth. Child protection services aim to establish secure and nurturing environments for all children and youth. In cases where individuals express dissatisfaction with the child protection system, it is possible to file a complaint with the State Administrator (Statsforvalteren, 2023).

Municipalities are entrusted with specific responsibilities within this framework. Every municipality is required to maintain a child protection service, which is responsible for day-to-day operations in compliance with the Child Protection Act (Statsforvalteren, 2023). The Children's Protection Act is a legislation in Norway, governing the organization, objectives, and exercise of authority within the field of child protection. It places a primary emphasis on child protection as a supportive service, while also granting the legal framework for using relatively measures within family contexts. However, it is clearly required that any measures implemented to secure a child's care, protection, and safe upbringing should not exceed what is necessary.

In alignment with the law's fundamental purpose, the principal consideration is to safeguard the child's best interests. This guiding principle must carry substantial weight in the decision-making process of the child protection agency. Additionally, the Children's Protection Act contains provisions concerning the participation of children and their right to be heard. Furthermore, the law allows for exceptions to be made to the parents' right to access documents, as deemed appropriate within the child protection system (Statsforvalteren, 2023).

The child protection service's role involves implementing interventions to support the child and family. This support can take various forms, such as offering advice and guidance, potentially in conjunction with other assistance programs. Standard support measures embrace services like nursery placement, support contacts, advice, and guidance, as well as in-home relief measures (Statsforvalteren, 2023).

When the measures conducted within the family home are insufficient to address the child's requirements, the child protection service assumes the responsibility of intervening. In such cases, and following consultations with the parents, the child protection service may arrange for temporary placements in foster homes, institutions, or parent and child centers. However, if it becomes necessary to place a child outside their home without parental consent, this

decision must be formally made by the Child Protection and Health Board (Statsforvalteren, 2023).

According to the Norwegian government, these services are designed to provide necessary assistance to children and young people in need, and to create safe and healthy conditions for their growth and development. The primary focus of the child welfare services is to protect the best interests of the child, and to ensure that their rights are respected and upheld in accordance with national laws and international conventions of children's rights (Government.no).

1.3.2 Minority Families

Minority families can be defined in various ways depending on the context. The United Nations Minorities Declaration defines minorities as based on national or ethnic, cultural, religious, and linguistic identity. All states have one or more minority groups within their national territories (United Nations, 1948a). This study will focus on the psychological, emotional, and developmental experiences of individuals and families from minority backgrounds. Minority backgrounds, such as people with a different heritage than Norwegian. It is also essential to be aware that a group considered a minority in one country can be a majority in another country (United Nations, 2010).

1.3.3 Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Appurtenant Minority Rights

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) serves as a universal standard of achievements for all peoples and nations. Its primary aim is to ensure the protection of fundamental Human Rights universally. The UDHR has inspired and paved the way for the adoption of over seventy human rights treaties, which are currently applied permanently at both global and regional levels (United Nations, 2010).

According to the United Nations (1948a), minorities are entitled to enjoy all human rights equally, as outlined in the nine core human rights treaties. The UN frameworks on the rights of minorities emphasize key elements such as the protection of their existence, non-

discrimination, and the freedom to practice their culture, religion, and language. They also highlight effective participation in various aspects of life, including decision-making, maintenance of their own associations, and cross-border relations. However, minorities often face multiple forms of discrimination that result in marginalization and exclusion. Achieving effective participation and ending exclusion of minorities requires embracing diversity and promoting and implementing international Human Rights standards (United Nations, 1948a).

Minority rights are protected in international human rights treaties, including Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and Article 30 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious, and Linguistic Minorities sets essential standards and guides states on adopting legislative measures to secure the rights of minorities. States, as well as minorities and their representatives, can influence human rights monitoring and implementation processes to ensure effective participation and inclusion.

The principles of non-discrimination and equality are fundamental pillars of human rights and minority legal protection, applying to everyone in relation to all human rights and freedoms. These principles prohibit discrimination based on various categories such as race, color, religion, language, nationality, ethnicity, or working descent. Respect for these principles can secure the enjoyment of many human rights, including the right to effective participation in decision-making by minorities, including minority women. (United Nations, 2010).

1.3.4 Cultural Competence

Cultural competency is the ability of individuals and systems to interact with and respond appropriately to individuals of different cultures, ethnic backgrounds, classes, races, sexual orientations, and faiths in a way that recognizes and values the inherent worth of each individual and affirms their dignity (Johnson & Munch, 2009). This concept is essential in child welfare, where the safety and well-being of children are of importance, particularly in the child protection services that often work with children in vulnerable life situations. As an increasingly culturally and ethnically diverse group of children interacts with child welfare systems, it becomes critical to address cultural differences and ensure that cultural competence is embedded in all aspects of child welfare (Johnson & Munch, 2009).

2.0 Research Approach and Thematic Literature Review

In this section, a thematic review of literature contextualizes the study within the broader field of child welfare services, particularly focusing on the experiences of minority social workers and their interactions with minority families in Norway. This review does not aim to serve as a comprehensive study of previous research but rather to establish the thematic and theoretical foundation for the study. By synthesizing relevant research, I aim to highlight key concepts, challenges, and perspectives that inform the research questions. This approach aligns with the qualitative nature of this study, which relies on interviews with minority social workers to explore their experiences, professional identities, and the role of their minority background in shaping their interactions with families. The review situates these findings within existing scholarship, providing a framework for understanding and interpreting the empirical data presented later in this thesis.

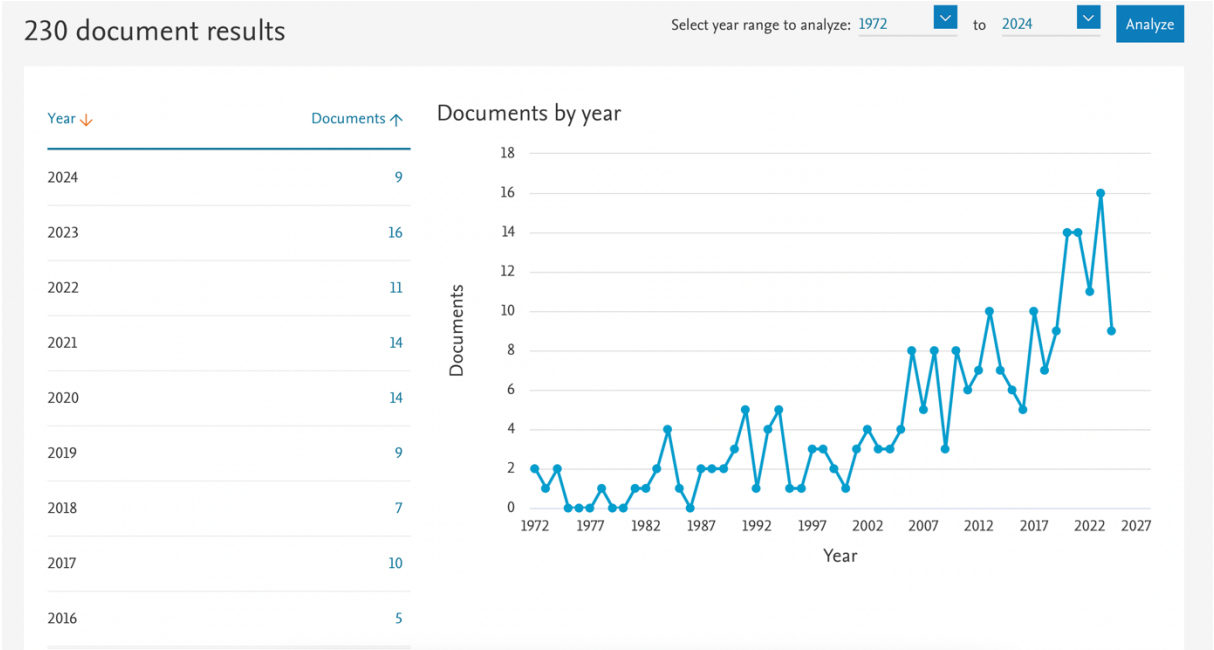
2.1 Search strategy

This section focuses on the tools, resources, and techniques used to find relevant literature. Utilizing the resources available at Gothenburg University, such as the university library and its database search system, provided me with scholarly resources to enhance my research. The ability to use phrase search and databases like Scopus and Sociology Collection enabled me to find specific and relevant data related to social issues. Using a database search system allows efficient access to most documents, as the university has made them accessible to all students. The documents are stable as they have been reviewed and accurately reflect the names, references, and details of the research process.

For the search process, I primarily utilized Scopus, a resource available through the university library. Scopus was chosen for its advanced search capabilities, allowing for specific searches within articles, abstracts, and keywords. It also permitted simultaneous searches using multiple keywords. I conducted word searches using terms such as “minority families,”

"minority children," "minority social workers," and "social workers." With the combination of these four terms, two hundred and thirty (230) documents in total were found.

See below:



As the study has a contemporary focus and considering the scope of the thesis, I chose to focus on studies written within the past 10.5 years, from 2013 to 2024. This search resulted in a hundred and eighteen (118) studies, of which seven (7) were mainly focused on Norway. After reviewing the studies, I identified twenty that were clearly relevant to this study and its research questions. Although these studies were appropriate as they centred on challenges of the child welfare system and social workers in working with minority families, there were minimal sources on minority social workers in my search.

2.2 Research on Child Welfare and Minority Social Workers

Below is research that draws valuable insights from key sources that have significantly influenced the formulation of my research question.

2.2.1 Intersectionality in Social Work Practice with Minority Families

"How do families experience and interact with CPS?" by Darcey H. Merritt (2020)

During my research, I encountered two pivotal articles that greatly inspired the formulation of my study and the design of my research questions. The first article, "How Do Families Experience and Interact with CPS" by Darcey H. Merritt (2020), provides profound insights into the lived experiences of families navigating the child protection system. Merritt's research highlighted the systemic challenges and emotional burdens faced by these families, particularly those from marginalized communities. The study is based on qualitative data collected through interviews and surveys of families who have had direct contact with CPS. It includes both firsthand accounts of their experiences and interactions with CPS workers.

This exploration into the complex dynamics between families and child protective services underscored the need for a more empathetic and culturally aware approach in social work, inspiring me to delve deeper into understanding these interactions and their impact on minority families.

Another point made by the author, Merritt (2020), is the need to take into account a family's historical experiences of oppression, particularly those rooted in racism and discrimination, when working with families where child safety is a concern. Merritt's insights focus on the impact of systemic prejudices on families and individuals, especially those who object to racism and discrimination, emphasizing that the child welfare system should not operate in isolation from the broader context of societal inequities.

This understanding prompted me to consider the theoretical framework for my research carefully. Recognizing the involved interaction of multiple dimensions of identity and systemic influences on individuals and families, I was drawn to the concept of intersectionality. Intersectionality, as a theoretical perspective, acknowledges that various aspects of one's identity, such as race, ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic status, intersect to shape experiences and outcomes. It is a lens through which I intend to examine the complex interaction of factors within the child welfare system.

Merritt's emphasis on the need for sensitivity and understanding at the agency level also resonated with my research goals. Her call for recognizing the historical and systemic factors that shape families' interactions with child welfare agencies aligns with the Agency-Level concept. This concept highlights the importance of acknowledging the broader organizational and systemic contexts that influence the work of social workers, particularly those who belong to minority backgrounds.

Merritt's research not only informed my understanding of the challenges faced by families involved with the child welfare system but also guided my selection of intersectionality and the Agency-Level concept as the theoretical frameworks that will support my exploration of social workers' experiences in the Norwegian child welfare system.

2.2.2 Organizational Dynamics and Minority Social Workers

"Addressing Barriers to the Progression of Black and Minority Ethnic Social Workers to Senior Leadership Roles" by Goldsmiths (2020)

The second article, "Addressing Barriers to the Progression of Black and Minority Ethnic Social Workers to Senior Leadership Roles" by (Goldsmiths, 2020), provides valuable insights into the structural barriers that minority social workers face in advancing their careers. By examining systemic racism, sexism, and other organizational challenges encountered by Black and minority ethnic social workers in the United States, this study highlights the broader organizational dynamics that can influence professional development and identity. While the context of this article is focused on the U.S., it offers a lens through which to examine similar structural challenges within the Norwegian Child Welfare System.

The findings from this article align closely with Lipsky's organizational theory, which explains how street-level bureaucrats, such as social workers, operate within constrained organizational systems. These systems often create tensions between professional autonomy and the bureaucratic rules that shape their work. Similarly, the challenges outlined in Goldsmith's article resonate with the experiences of minority social workers in Norway, particularly in their interactions with minority families. The systemic barriers and limited representation in leadership roles contribute to shaping both the professional identities of these social workers and their ability to advocate effectively for minority families.

By incorporating Lipsky's organizational theory alongside Crenshaw's intersectionality concept, my research seeks to explore how organizational structures and cultural dynamics within the Norwegian Child Welfare System impact minority social workers. This theoretical framework allows for an analysis of how organizational constraints, power dynamics, and intersecting identities influence the practices and perceptions of social workers, ultimately affecting their interactions with minority families. Goldsmith's study provides an important comparative foundation for understanding how these challenges manifest across different cultural and national contexts.

"How Child Welfare Workers View Their Work with Racial and Ethnic Minority Families"

Building on this foundation, the article by Križ and Skivenes (2011), "How Child Welfare Workers View Their Work with Racial and Ethnic Minority Families," presents empirical data based on semi-structured interviews with child welfare workers in Norway and California. The article delves into the perspectives of social workers who are directly engaged with minority families. This study provides an in-depth look at the attitudes, beliefs, and practices of child welfare workers, shedding light on how they perceive their roles and the specific challenges they face when working with racial and ethnic minority families. The insights gained from this article are beneficial for minority social workers, as they offer a reflection of their own experiences and challenges in the field.

Together, these two articles complement my own findings from interviews with minority social workers. They provide a broader context for understanding the systemic and personal challenges that minority social workers face with their clients. The research by Križ and Skivenes highlights the importance of addressing cultural sensitivity and systemic barriers, which are critical components in the practice of minority social workers. By integrating these insights, my study can offer a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities minority social workers face in supporting minority families and children, ultimately contributing to the development of more inclusive and effective child welfare practices.

While my research journey has led me to numerous thought-provoking articles concerning child welfare, minority families, and the challenges they encounter, there remains a noticeable gap in the literature. This gap relates to the limited research dedicated to the experiences of minority social workers in Scandinavia's Child Welfare Services, as mentioned above.

As emphasized by Merritt (2020), in the discussion above, most Child Protective Services (CPS) professionals come from privileged backgrounds. They may lack a deep understanding of the communities they serve, especially those from marginalized backgrounds. However, within the field of professional social work, there exist several individuals who belong to two or more cultural communities. These social workers hold a unique point, characterized by rich cultural understanding and profound self-recognition. Their experiences and insights are vital yet often underrepresented in research.

By including the voices and experiences of social work professionals with diverse backgrounds, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of how to serve every child and family best, irrespective of their cultural context. This research seeks to bridge the existing knowledge gap and explore how social work professionals from diverse backgrounds can contribute to the welfare and well-being of children and families involved with CWS.

Goldsmith's findings on the systemic barriers and the underrepresentation of minority social workers in leadership positions emphasized the importance of diversity and inclusion within social work institutions. This article reinforced the importance of addressing systemic inequities both within the workforce and in the services provided to families.

2.2.3 Importance of Culturally Informed Social Workers

"Challenges for Marginalized Minority Parents in Different Welfare Systems"

The research by Križ and Skivenes (2012) in "Challenges for Marginalized Minority Parents in Different Welfare Systems" provides a critical examination of the specific difficulties faced by minority families within the child welfare systems of England, Norway, and the United States. This study explores the systemic barriers and cultural misunderstandings that minority families often encounter, offering valuable insights into the real-world challenges these families face. The study is based on qualitative data collected from interviews with social workers and minority parents in three countries, providing comparative insights into the different welfare systems.

Understanding these challenges is crucial for social workers, as it equips them with the knowledge needed to empathize with and effectively support their clients. This research highlights the importance of cultural competence and the need for social workers to be aware

of the unique obstacles that minority families may experience within different welfare contexts. It highlights the common challenges across countries, such as cultural misunderstandings and systemic biases. The research also provides some recommendations for improving support for minority families and highlights the importance of culturally informed social work practices.

"The Rights of the Child and Ethnic Minority Families in Sweden" by Johansson (2013)

This article has enriched my understanding of child rights within the context of ethnic minority families, offering a comparative perspective that extends beyond national borders. The study is based on empirical data gathered from various sources, including interviews and case studies. These practical examples provide social workers with illustrations of how child rights are upheld or challenged in different contexts, enhancing their understanding and application of theoretical knowledge in practice. The research provides valuable insights into how different welfare systems approach the rights of children from minority backgrounds, highlighting both the successes and challenges faced in Sweden. By examining these dynamics, Johansson's study underscores the importance of culturally sensitive practices and the need for robust policies that support the rights and well-being of minority children. Social workers can use this knowledge to advocate for policies that are inclusive and equitable, addressing specific needs and barriers faced by their clients.

The study highlights the impact of cultural differences on the implementation of child rights. By offering a comparative perspective that extends beyond national borders, Johansson's work allows social workers to learn from international practices and experiences. This focus is critical for social workers, who need to navigate the intersection of child rights and cultural practices when working with children and families from diverse backgrounds.

In shaping effective child welfare practices, the importance of family engagement cannot be overstated. Research from the 2019 article "The Importance of Family Engagement" highlights that involving families in their children's early education and welfare processes leads to better outcomes for children. However, as Johansson's (2013) work on "The Rights of the Child and Ethnic Minority Families in Sweden" highlights, minority families often face unique challenges that can hinder their involvement. By combining the emphasis on active family engagement with a deep understanding of the cultural and legal rights of minority

families, social workers can better support these families in navigating the child welfare system. This approach is crucial for social workers, who play a key role in bridging the gap between families and the welfare system, ensuring that all families are fully engaged, and their rights are respected.

"Right to protection" by Falch-Eriksen and Skivenes (2019)

The study "Right to Protection" examines the concept of children's rights to protection within the context of child welfare systems. The authors explore how the principle of protection is interpreted and implemented in practice, particularly in cases involving vulnerable children. They discuss the balance between respecting family independence and ensuring the best interests of the child, highlighting the challenges social workers face in navigating complex cases.

The authors' emphasis on the relationship between the legal framework, institutional practices, and the lived realities of vulnerable children offers crucial insights into the structural and cultural factors that impact how social workers provide support. Moreover, their analysis of protection rights highlights the importance of understanding diverse family backgrounds and how systemic barriers can undermine equitable service delivery. The study also provides a critical lens on how policies may be interpreted and implemented differently, further underlining the challenges of ensuring inclusivity in child welfare systems.

Betancourt, Green, Carrillo, and Owusu Ananeh-Firempong (2016) "Defining cultural competence: A practical framework for addressing racial/ethnic disparities in health and health care"

The study by Betancourt, Green, Carrillo, and Owusu Ananeh-Firempong (2016) highlights cultural competence as a key strategy for addressing racial and ethnic disparities in healthcare. Cultural competence, as defined in the study, involves integrating knowledge about diverse cultures into professional practices, effective communication, and developing organizational policies that promote equity. Similarly, minority social workers in the child welfare system must navigate cultural differences, challenge biases, and advocate for culturally responsive approaches when working with minority families. The need for cultural competence aligns with the research focus on how minority social workers' experiences and interactions with families influence their professional identities.

The framework outlined in the article underscores the importance of self-awareness in recognizing cultural assumptions and biases. For minority social workers, their dual role as professionals and members of minority communities provides a unique perspective. However, they may face challenges in balancing their cultural background with the dominant norms of the child welfare system. By exploring the dynamics of cultural competence, this study provides valuable insights into how minority social workers navigate and reconcile these influences in their daily practices.

The research question focuses on understanding these experiences and how they shape professional identity. The cultural competence framework offers a theoretical lens for analyzing how minority social workers address systemic barriers, advocate for equity, and engage with minority families in culturally responsive ways. It also highlights the role of organizational and institutional factors in supporting or hindering social workers' ability to practice cultural competence effectively.

In terms of data use, it relies on prior studies and theoretical insights to highlight how cultural competence can impact healthcare delivery, focusing on the disparity in health outcomes for racial/ethnic minority populations. It uses qualitative insights from past research and professional experiences to define and support the proposed framework.

"Hensyn til kultur" - til barnets beste by Hofman (2010) (Consideration of culture – for the best intention of the child)

The article **"**Hensyn til kultur - til barnets beste?" analyzes 17 child welfare cases in Norway involving the care removal and placement of children from minority backgrounds. The article draws on qualitative interviews and case studies involving child welfare workers, focusing on their experiences and decision-making processes when working with culturally diverse families.

The study's objective is to assess how cultural considerations are integrated into decisions concerning the children's welfare, especially in cases of care orders and foster placements. The analysis reveals that cultural sensitivity and ethnic background are often considered secondary to the focus on the child's safety and well-being. The author highlights a tension

between maintaining a child's cultural heritage and ensuring their best interests, as defined by child welfare authorities.

While cultural aspects such as language, traditions, and religious practices are sometimes considered, they do not always play a significant role in decision-making processes. Instead, the dominant welfare system's framework, which is based on the majority population's norms, often guides the outcomes of these cases.

The article concludes by advocating for better integration of cultural competence in child welfare practices. It emphasizes that understanding the cultural backgrounds of minority families is crucial for making decisions that truly serve the child's best interest while respecting their cultural identity.

2.2.4 Systematic challenges for minority families in CWS

(Gray & Cosgrove, 1985) on "Ethnocentric Perception of Childrearing Practices in Protective Services"

The article "Ethnocentric Perception of Childrearing Practices in Protective Services" explores how child protective services (CPS) in the United States often operate based on ethnocentric perceptions, particularly regarding child-rearing practices. The study draws on case reviews and interviews with child welfare professionals to understand how cultural differences in child-rearing are perceived.

The central theme of the article is that CPS workers tend to use the dominant culture's norms and values to judge and assess parenting practices in minority communities, which can lead to biased decisions.

The article discusses how cultural differences in child-rearing—such as discipline, family structure, and parenting roles—are frequently misunderstood or misinterpreted by social workers who may have limited cultural competence. These ethnocentric perceptions can result in unfair assessments of minority families, leading to higher rates of child removal or intervention in these communities.

The study advocates for greater cultural competence and sensitivity among CPS workers. It suggests that protective services need to develop better training and awareness of diverse cultural practices to avoid imposing majority-culture standards on families from different backgrounds.

2.2.5 Parents involvement

Symonds (2017) on "Engaging Parents with Parenting Programs: Relationship Building in Initial Conversations"

The article "Engaging Parents with Parenting Programs: Relationship Building in Initial Conversations" explores how professionals in parenting programs establish and maintain relationships with parents during the initial stages of engagement. The focus is on how practitioners build trust and rapport with parents, which is critical for the success of parenting programs, particularly for those who might be reluctant or skeptical about participating.

The article emphasizes that building strong relationships between parents and program facilitators is crucial for encouraging participation and ensuring that parents feel supported throughout the process. It also highlights various strategies that professionals use to engage parents effectively. This includes active listening, empathetic communication, and creating a non-judgmental environment that encourages open dialogue. The research focuses on the need for culturally competent approaches, as parents from diverse backgrounds might have different expectations and perceptions of parenting programs. Building trust with these groups requires understanding their cultural contexts.

The study relies on qualitative methods to analyze the communication techniques and relationship-building strategies used by professionals, highlighting how trust is developed between parents and facilitators. This data helps identify effective practices that can be applied in similar settings, such as social work with minority families.

2.2.6 Summary of previous research

The selected articles provide critical insights into the experiences of interviewed minority social workers in their social work practice. These articles inform the research by providing theoretical and practical perspectives on systemic inequities, cultural awareness, and organizational structures within the Norwegian child welfare system.

Together, these sources inspired my research focus on the intersection of cultural competence, systemic barriers, and the professional development of minority social workers. They guided the formulation of my research questions, aiming to explore how these professionals navigate their roles and advocate for minority families within the child welfare system.

These sources have significantly contributed to my knowledge base by offering a comprehensive view of social work challenges, particularly those faced by minority social workers, and the diverse perspectives of social workers in these contexts. The integration of Johansson's comparative perspective with the findings from Križ and Skivenes (2011, 2012) enhances the depth of my analysis, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of how child welfare systems can better serve minority communities. This holistic view is crucial for developing effective strategies and interventions that respect and uphold the rights of minority children and their families across different cultural and national contexts.

3.0 Theoretical Framework

Organizational theory, along with agency level concept, professional identity, and intersectionality, serves as the main theoretical framework and key ideas guiding the research in understanding the experiences of minority social workers within the Norwegian child welfare system.

3.1 The concept of Intersectionality

Intersectionality, as conceptualized by Crenshaw, offers a valuable lens through which to understand the complexities of power dynamics and social identities. According to Crenshaw (n.d.), intersectionality allows us to see how power intersects and interlocks in various ways, beyond isolated issues of race, gender, class, or LGBTQ+ status. It recognizes that individuals can experience multiple forms of oppression simultaneously, and that these intersecting systems of oppression often intersect and reinforce each other. By using an intersectional perspective, we can better understand how marginalized individuals may face combined forms of discrimination and elimination, as their experiences may be overlooked or dismissed within frameworks. This understanding highlights the importance of recognizing and addressing the intersecting and overlapping nature of social identities and power dynamics in social, political, and policy contexts (Baylor University, 2022).

Intersectionality is a conceptual framework that serves as a convenient and inclusive term, highlighting the various ways in which different aspects of identity and social categorizations intersect and mutually influence each other in shaping individuals' lived experiences. It emphasizes the complexity and interconnectedness of multiple dimensions of such as race, gender, class, sexual orientation, disability, and others, and how they intersect to create unique forms of oppression and privilege. Intersectionality acknowledges that individuals may experience oppression or privilege differently depending on the combination of their identities and social contexts. By recognizing and examining the interaction of these intersecting identities, intersectionality seeks to make visible the power dynamics and social inequalities that are inherent in everyday life (Phoenix & Pattynama, 2006).

3.2 Professional Identity and Knowledge in Social Work

To explore the specific experiences of minority social workers, this study uses theories regarding professional identity and professional knowledge. These theories contribute to the analysis by enabling a better understanding of this group of social workers' interactions with minority families within the Norwegian CWS.

Adams, Hean, Sturgis, and Clark (2006) define professional identity as a multifaceted construct surrounding a spectrum of attributes. These attributes include attitudes, values, knowledge, beliefs, and skills that are collectively held within a specific professional field. They are intimately intertwined with the professional responsibilities undertaken by individuals within that group. The concept of professional identity operates as a subsection of social identity, influencing how individuals situate themselves in relation to other professional groups and how they distinguish themselves within their chosen profession (Adams et al., 2006).

By exploring the concept of professional identity, we gain valuable insights into how social workers navigate their roles, particularly concerning the nuances of cultural competence. This exploration reflects on how their identity as professionals informs their approach to working with minority families and influences the quality of care they provide. Furthermore, the term professional identity complements the concept of intersectionality, wherein various factors of an individual's identity intersect and intertwine.

This concept can help offer a comprehensive understanding of how the combination of professional identity, cultural backgrounds, and the practice of cultural competence shapes the experiences of social workers. Professional identity is an advancing theory that develops with time, involving the combination of attributes, values, knowledge, beliefs, and skills that are shared among individuals within the same profession (Beddoe, 2013).

To further explore the knowledge base that minority social workers utilize in their interactions with minority families, it is helpful to understand different dimensions of professional knowledge. Professional knowledge, as explained by Trevithick (2012), explores the

relationship between different perceptions of knowledge and their impact on how social work is approached. It highlights how diverse perspectives shape the concept of knowledge and theory in the social work field, integrating these experiences into the skills and interventions practiced in everyday social work. Professional knowledge in social work practice involves a multifaceted process of recognizing, acknowledging, and enhancing individual knowledge, which includes establishing connections between personal experiences and theoretical contexts. This combination enables social workers to develop their capacity to effect positive change and empower the individuals and societies they serve (Trevithick, 2012).

This concept of professional knowledge is clarified through the exploration of three forms of knowledge: theoretical knowledge, faculty knowledge, and practice knowledge. These forms of the idea offer a deeper understanding of how knowledge is acquired and applied within the field of social work (Trevithick, 2012).

- Theoretical knowledge covers the academic and conceptual foundations that social work gains through formal education and training, equipping social workers with a deeper understanding of the structural and systemic factors involved in their practice (Trevithick, 2012).
- Faculty knowledge reflects the expertise and insights of experienced social work professionals. It originates from the years of practice, research, and reflective understanding of the unique experiences that individuals and communities face. This form of knowledge captures the wisdom and practical insights encountered through supervision and experiences (Trevithick, 2012).
- Practice knowledge is the most active and specific form of knowledge, grounded in the experiences and interactions of social workers. It conceives of direct experiences, client interactions, and the ability to adapt and apply theoretical and faculty knowledge to meet the needs of their clients (Trevithick, 2012).

3.3 Organization Theory: Street-level Bureaucrats, Advocacy, and the Practice of Agency-level

Organization theory provides an understanding of how organizational structures and processes can influence street-level bureaucrats. Issues such as accountability, communication,

coordination, and the relationship between frontline workers and supervisors. This theory helps understand how street-level bureaucrats navigate the organizational hierarchy, interpret policies, and make decisions in real-world situations. Factors that influence their behaviors, such as organizational culture, resource constraints, and the pressure from the public and superiors, are examined.

Lipsky (2010) describes street-level bureaucracy as a concept where public service workers, such as teachers, police officers, and social workers, who directly interact with the public, significantly impact the implementation and interpretation of government policies and programs. Workers in this frontline often exercise discretion and make decisions that affect individuals daily. These workers contribute to the shaping of outcomes of public policies and even change from formal rules and procedures to adapt to the unique needs and circumstances of the people they serve (Lipsky, 2010).

One vital aspect of the role of street-level bureaucrats is to serve as advocates for their clients. This duty is outlined in professional training, yet the structure of their work environment and the fragmented nature of their relationships with clients often hinder their ability to advocate effectively (Lipsky, 2010). However, some define advocacy as a mission to serve the best interests of clients, attempting to overcome all obstacles (Segesten & Fagring, 1996, cited in Finlay & Sandall, 2009).

However, Lipsky adopts a broader perspective, indicating that advocacy involves utilizing one's knowledge, skills, and position to secure the most favorable treatment or standing for clients while operating within the confines of the service's constraints (Lipsky, 2010). According to Lipsky, the core of advocacy lies in the ability to exercise discretion, which minority social workers can demonstrate by utilizing their knowledge, skills, and professional position to support and advocate for families.

There is a relationship between Lipsky's organization theory and the practice of agency-level. This connection is relevant to social work practice, as it highlights the importance of addressing cultural awareness not only at an individual level but also within organizational structures. Brach and Fraserirector (2000) introduced the concept of Agency-Level Cultural Competence, which involves various techniques for organizations to improve their cultural awareness. These techniques include interpreter services, diversity-focused recruitment and

retaining policies, cultural competence training, involvement of community health workers, culturally relevant health promotion, engagement of family and community members in decision-making, provider engagement in other cultures, and administrative accommodations (Brach & Fraserirector, 2000).

The forthcoming chapter will explore the comprehensive ethical considerations that have guided this research throughout the entire process, including the interviews conducted with my informants. As a researcher, it is my moral obligation to protect the rights and privacy of the participants/informants involved in my research, in line with basic principles such as respect for individuals, the right to make informed decisions, and recognition of vulnerable groups. This commitment entails the strict protection of their information, ensuring that no details or comments are shared that could potentially identify them. Just as all individuals deserve protection, these principles of confidentiality and respect are extended to the participants of this study (World Medical, 2013).

4.0 Methodology

In this chapter, I shall clarify and demonstrate the methodological choices made during this research, which follows the selection of research methods, the identification of informants, and the thorough data collection process. The fundamental objective of this task is to capture and comprehend the multi-layered experiences of social workers possessing ethnic minority backgrounds in their interactions with children and families from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

This chapter outlines the rationale behind selecting the approach used and details the specific methods used. It also clarifies the process of participant selection, data collection, and subsequent thematic analysis. By following this methodology, the aim is to uncover valuable insights that contribute to a deeper understanding of the experiences of minority social workers in their work with families and children with minority backgrounds in child welfare.

4.1 Research approach

According to Bryman (2016), research conducted is determined by the question one is trying to answer; specifically, the choice of research orientation, design, or method needs to match the research question.

In cases where the research topic is relatively unexplored and makes it challenging to employ a quantitative strategy due to a shortage of prior literature, a qualitative exploratory approach is often preferable for providing insights into possible causes. This type of investigation is typically associated with theory generation rather than theory testing, and it entails a more flexible and less structured approach to the research process (Bryman, 2016).
Due to time constraints and limited access to the intended group, this study is based in Oslo and focuses on social workers with ethnic minority backgrounds.

It is important to note that the ethnic minority population in Norway is significant, comprising 16% of the country's population, with 3.9% being Norwegians with migrated parents (Dyrhaug & Sky, 2014). To ensure a diverse understanding of the experiences of social workers with minority backgrounds, this study specifically sought out participants with

African and Asian heritage from countries such as Ethiopia, Burundi, Uganda, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Sudan, Norway, and India.

4.1.1 Epistemological Approach

In social research, the foundations of inquiry rest upon epistemological assumptions that dictate what can be known and how knowledge is acquired. Central to this discussion is the question of defining acceptable knowledge and its boundaries within the research landscape (Bryman, 2016). This study adopts an interpretive stance, which plays an essential role in framing the research approach. Interpretivism offers a valuable perspective as it provides the framework necessary for comprehending experiences within the broader context of history, politics, and the global landscape. By embracing interpretivism, this research aims to unravel the details of human experiences, acknowledging their rich historical, political, and global underpinning.

This methodological orientation is applied to explore the subjective experiences, insights, and emotions that these social workers harbor in relation to the research topic. This qualitative approach not only aligns with the research's overarching objective but also facilitates an in-depth examination of the social workers' personal experiences. The data collection process is designed to maintain a natural and reflexive discourse, recognizing the influence of both the researcher and participants in constructing meaning.

Considering the nature of this inquiry, it is fundamentally logical and appropriate to adopt a qualitative research approach with an inductive orientation (Bryman, 2016). The inductive approach is selected to explore the relationship between theories and the research process. In the inductive method, data are not collected to test a pre-existing theory but instead to generate the necessary information for theory development. The research question is formulated as the initial step, and the interview guide is then developed in alignment with it (see Appendix A). The process of conceptualizing and theorizing emerged from the findings as an inductive approach (Bryman, 2016).

4.1.2 Unstructured interviews – reasons and limitations as an "insider"

Following a qualitative approach, unstructured interviews are conducted to gather data from individuals with experience in the Norwegian child welfare system. Qualitative interviews are often considered a cost-effective approach compared to other methods of qualitative research, despite being time-consuming (Bryman, 2016).

The choice of unstructured interviews offers a flexible and insightful approach to exploring participants' experiences, allowing them the freedom to respond naturally and foster a conversation-like atmosphere. However, this method requires careful consideration of the researcher's role, notably when the researcher shares a close relationship or background with participants. This "insider" role can introduce potential biases (Kanuha, 2000).
Social scientists from marginalized social backgrounds are increasingly focusing their research on their own communities and social identity groups, a trend that has the potential to generate highly engaging and prolific literature (Kanuha, 2000).

While unstructured interviews are inherently subjective, this subjectivity is a valuable part of the research process, offering depth and context to the data. To navigate the balance between subjectivity and objectivity, I, the researcher, must engage in reflexivity—an ongoing self-examination of how my own position and biases influence the research. This reflexivity is especially crucial when the researcher is an insider, as it helps mitigate the risks of bias and enhances the credibility of the findings.

In principle, the choice of unstructured interviews allows for a flexible and deep exploration of participants' experiences. However, it necessitates a rigorous approach to reflexivity, ensuring that the research remains transparent, credible, and critically aware of the researcher's potential influence on the data.

4.2 Sampling, limitations, and challenges in participant selection

The participants are selected through purposive sampling, based on their experience with the Norwegian child welfare system. Social workers with minority backgrounds working/worked

with families and children from minority family backgrounds were the target for this research. The interviews were conducted primarily in English, with Norwegian used at times, depending on the individual's language preference. The responses were all recorded and transcribed in English by the researcher for analysis.

However, it is essential to acknowledge that the gender distribution in the sample could be seen as a limitation of this study. Out of the eight social workers interviewed, only one was male, while the remaining seven were female. This gender distribution aligns with the broader perception of social work as a female-dominated profession, with men often occupying senior roles (Hicks, 2015). While it is true that there are more women than men in the field overall, it is essential to recognize that the small number of men in the profession may still hold significant institutional power (Hicks, 2015).

This gender imbalance in the sample could potentially influence the perspectives and experiences shared by the interviewees. It may not fully represent the diversity of social workers with minority backgrounds in the Norwegian Child Welfare System.

A total of eight (8) adult participants, aged between 29 and 34 years, are included in this study. These participants are recruited voluntarily through social media channels. A call for social workers currently living in Oslo, Norway, was posted on social media. The call was open to those, irrespective of their cultural background, who have worked with or are working with the Norwegian child welfare service and have identified themselves as part of a minority group. Out of the initial respondents, ten individuals expressed interest. However, one of them did not ultimately participate, and one did not respond to follow-up communication efforts after receiving the information consent form.

4.3 Conducting the interviews

Initially, my research question was centered on interviewing minority families to explore their experiences within the child welfare system. To recruit participants, I utilized social media platforms to reach a broader audience. I crafted a post detailing the purpose of my study and shared it on Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat. This post was subsequently shared by others within their networks, helping to reach individuals who might be interested in participating

(see Appendix B for the Facebook post). Since Instagram and Snapchat stories are ephemeral, lasting only 24 hours, the appendix contains a record of the Facebook post for reference.

Upon reviewing the responses and selecting participants, I noticed that all those who expressed interest shared a common professional background in social work. This observation prompted me to reconsider and ultimately refine my research focus. I decided to shift the direction of my study to concentrate on the experiences of social workers within the child welfare field, rather than solely on the experiences of minority families. This adjustment allowed for a more targeted exploration of the professional insights and challenges faced by social workers in their practice.

Each participant was provided with written information consent detailing the study's purpose, interview process, and participant expectations (see Appendix C). Contact information was also provided in case of any questions or concerns. The participants were given the option to choose between a virtual interview via Zoom, a phone call, or an in-person interview to ensure accessibility and accommodate their preferences. The interviews are conducted in various settings to accommodate the preferences and convenience of the participants, and all are recorded. Three interviews took place at a nearby cafe downtown, chosen by the participants for its conducive and private atmosphere. Two interviews are conducted via Zoom video conferencing, and two are carried out in the participants' homes. In one instance, a participant kindly offered to come to the researcher's home, as they had young children and believed it would be more convenient—this flexibility in interview locations allowed for a comfortable and private environment for each participant.

4.3 Transcription process

4.4.1 An interpretive decision

When recontextualizing a transcript, it's essential to recognize that changes may naturally occur during this process, as observed by researchers. This phenomenon is not uncommon in published texts and academic works (Bucholtz, 2007). The objective during transcription is to maintain fidelity to the source material when quoting, as accuracy is a fundamental goal, although achieving absolute precision can sometimes be challenging. Transcribers are often

faced with the ongoing decision of what to include and exclude within the transcriptions (Bucholtz, 2000).

Transcribing in an interpretive decision style emphasizes selecting elements essential for understanding the text while omitting what is deemed non-essential for the intended audience throughout the process. It is imperative to consider ethical concerns related to respecting the participants involved (Bucholtz, 2000).

As (Bucholtz, 2000) elaborates, the concentrated subjectivity in transcribing makes it challenging to agree on one version being definitively "correct". An excessive preoccupation with accuracy can sometimes prevent transcribers from delving into the core questions at the heart of a specific transcription (Slembrouck, 1992, as cited in Bucholtz (2000).

4.4.2 Denaturalized transcription practices

In the state of transcription, two primary practices exist: the naturalized and denaturalized practices. This study will adopt a denaturalized practice in the transcription process, unlike naturalized practices, which prioritize the written representation of spoken language and may overlook linguistic details. Denaturalized practice emphasizes capturing the essence of the informants' speech and the meanings they convey. To achieve this, elements such as stutters, pauses, nonverbal cues, and involuntary vocalizations will be intentionally absent from the transcripts. This approach allows for a more focused and nuanced analysis of the participants' narratives, enabling a deeper understanding of their lived experiences and the construction of their reality.

Each narrative is structured into diverse scenes, with scenes methodically selected and organized to align with the relevant thematic topics. Throughout the transcription process, particular care was taken to rectify any language-related issues, as none of the informants are native English speakers. When informants encountered difficulty articulating their thoughts in English, they were addressed by providing suitable English vocabulary or translations when necessary. This linguistic modification ensures the narratives are accurately represented and comprehensible within the context of the research.

4.5 Analytical process - Thematic analysis

The data collected from the interviews are analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis constitutes a method of exploration and recognition of recurring themes woven throughout a collection of interviews (Burton, 1996). It is a qualitative research method used to uncover and interpret patterns within and across datasets, particularly concerning the lived experiences, viewpoints, perspectives, behaviors, and practices of research participants. Thematic analysis is ideally suited for experiential research, aiming to investigate the complex web of participants' thoughts, emotions, and actions, focusing on the details of their subjective experiences (Clarke & Braun, 2017).

The analysis began with a thorough review of the interview transcripts. Each transcript was read multiple times to gain familiarity with the data and identify initial ideas. Open coding was employed, where segments of the text were labeled with descriptive codes to capture their meaning. These codes represented key phrases, ideas, or recurring topics mentioned by participants. For instance, phrases related to "challenges in cultural competence" or "systemic barriers in practice" were noted as potential codes.

Once the initial coding was complete, similar codes were grouped together to identify subthemes. Codes such as "navigating sensitive social work with minority families" were clustered under the subtheme The bridge of professional identity. This iterative process involved constant comparison and refinement to ensure that subthemes accurately reflected the participants' perspectives.

The subthemes were then examined to identify broader, overarching themes. This step involved asking questions such as: "What do these subthemes collectively reveal about the participants' experiences?" "How do they connect to the research question?" For example, the subtheme "Ethnocentrism and intersectionality in social work practice" was grouped with other subthemes, such as "Intersection of children's rights and minority protections" and "Intersectionality in child welfare", to form the overarching theme Cultural identity and intersectionality in child welfare practice.

Throughout the process, the analysis was conducted with constant reference to the research question. This helped ensure that the themes and subthemes were relevant to the study's focus on social workers' experiences. Additionally, I used memos to document my thoughts and

decisions during the analysis, which added transparency to the process and helped refine the themes further. The thematic analysis resulted in several key themes, including:

1. Professional knowledge and identity
2. Cultural knowledge in practice: Addressing challenges and navigating power dynamics
3. Cultural identity and intersectionality in child welfare practice

These themes were organized into categories and subcategories to ensure a coherent structure for presenting the findings. They also served as the foundation for answering the research question and drawing conclusions for the study.

Thematic analysis, as applied in this study, goes beyond merely summarizing the data. Instead, it identifies and interprets meaningful patterns that offer a comprehensive understanding of the research subject (Clarke & Braun, 2017).

4.6 Ethical Considerations

When conducting interviews or creating questionnaire questions for research involving human participants, it is essential to prioritize ethical considerations to ensure the morality of the study and create a safe space for participants (World Medical, 2013).

This section delves into the ethical principles that guide the research, following the well-established framework proposed by (Bryman, 2016). These principles cover concerns related to potential harm to participants, the importance of obtaining informed consent, issues regarding privacy interruption, and the avoidance of deception. Furthermore, guidelines are integrated from sources such as the Norwegian National Committee for Research Ethics in Social Science and the Humanities (NESH), in alignment with the ethical standards emphasized within Norway.

These principles include essential aspects such as consent, maintaining participant anonymity, fostering transparency regarding roles and responsibilities, upholding confidentiality, and addressing potential risks of harm and disadvantages (Committees, 2022).

4.6.1 Informed Consent

Before beginning the interview process, precise written consent was thoroughly sought from all prospective participants, in strict accordance with the ethical principles protected in the Nuremberg Code (1947). These written consent documents, which can be found in (appendix C), were thoughtfully prepared in a language that ensures accessibility and comprehensibility to each participant, carefully considering their language preferences. In cases where required, thorough provisions were made for translations and comprehensive explanations.

Participants were provided with comprehensive information about the research's overarching purpose, the interview methodology, and their inviolate right to terminate participation at any moment, without any consequences. Throughout the research process, a firm commitment was upheld to the principles of human dignity, protection, safety, and unyielding respect. These commitments were closely aligned with and guided by the exacting standards set forth by the National Research Ethics Committees (Committees, 2022).

During this research, an emphasis on effective communication and understanding with the participants is considered. As interviews are conducted in Norway with Norwegian participants, it is essential to acknowledge the potential language barriers that may arise. To ensure participants' comfort and clarity in their responses, interviews are conducted primarily in English, with Norwegian sometimes used. In cases where participants faced challenges with the English language, a flexible approach is adopted. This includes providing translations, explanations, and guidance by the researcher as necessary throughout the interview process. By prioritizing participants' linguistic accessibility, this research aims to create an inclusive and supportive environment that allows for rich and insightful data collection.

4.6.2 Upholding confidentiality and anonymity

Confidentiality of participant information is ensured. Participants are asked about the information they have provided and if they wish to share it. Anonymity is maintained for all

participants, and efforts are made to protect their identities. While the research topic is not sensitive in nature, considerations are taken depending on the information collected. While Oslo is a relatively large city, its size does not always guarantee anonymity, especially when specific details are provided. To maintain the confidentiality of my informants, I have taken the precaution of changing information such as names, workplaces, and two of the countries mentioned. This ensures that the informants remain unidentifiable, and their privacy is safeguarded.

The purpose of the research and the potential benefits of the findings were shared with participants through written documents and oral discussions. The results of the study are expected to enhance awareness of child protection services in Norway, and potentially in Scandinavia, regarding their work with minority families and children. The experiences of participants who have experience working in the child protection system and have firsthand experiences, both positive and negative, will provide valuable insights for social work practice. The research findings are expected to benefit social workers and educators working with diverse children from different backgrounds and households.

Ethical considerations are of most significant importance when conducting research involving human participants, including interviewing and questionnaire design. Informed consent, accessibility of information, confidentiality, and potential benefits are key ethical principles that were upheld throughout the research process.

4.6.3 Harm to participants

While it may be challenging to foresee and identify all potential risks of physical, mental, and social harm, it is mandatory for all researchers to thoroughly attempt to predict and relieve them, as emphasized by (Bryman, 2016). My practice of offering participants the option to stop recording if they become emotional demonstrates my consideration for their well-being and comfort. This approach acknowledges the potential emotional impact of discussing sensitive topics and empowers participants to control the pace and depth of their sharing.

Moreover, valuing and respecting participants' voices and experiences is fundamental to conducting ethical research. By doing so, I create a space where participants feel heard and understood, which fosters trust and openness during the interview process.

4.7 Potential Researcher Bias

As the researcher for this study, I must acknowledge the potential for biases that may arise during the research process. Several factors contribute to this awareness, beginning with my role as a social worker with a minority background. My professional experience includes extensive work with children within the child welfare system, particularly those with minority backgrounds. This shared background and experience could introduce bias into the research process, as I may have preconceived notions or perspectives shaped by my own experiences. I also have professional relationships with some of the informants, either through previous work interactions or acquaintanceships. These pre-existing relationships may influence the dynamics of the interviews and participants' responses.

To ease these potential biases, several steps have been taken. Throughout the research process, I have engaged in continuous reflexivity. This involves self-awareness and critical reflection on my own perspectives, experiences, and potential biases that could affect the research. These reflections help ensure that my personal background does not excessively influence the interpretation of the participants' narratives. Conscious effort has been made to approach the research with an open mind and a commitment to objectivity. All interactions with informants are conducted in a neutral and non-directive manner, allowing their voices and experiences to take preference.

4.7.1 Transparency and Accountability

By openly acknowledging these potential biases, I aim to maintain transparency and accountability in the research process. This transparency extends to reporting findings, ensuring that readers and stakeholders are aware of the researcher's background and potential influences on the study. While the presence of these potential biases is acknowledged, they do not diminish the value of the research. Instead, they serve as a reminder of the need for thorough methodology, reflexive practice, and ethical conduct to ensure the validity and reliability of the study's outcomes.
The choice of unstructured interviews offers a flexible and insightful approach to exploring participants' experiences. However, it also requires careful consideration of the researcher's role and potential biases to ensure that the collected data remains as objective as possible.

5.0 Findings and Analyses of the Study

In this first part of the chapter, the focus will revolve around introducing individual social workers and exploring their connections to the Norwegian child welfare system. Though all the social workers in this study share a common background as Norwegians, they are distinguished by having at least one parent who migrated to the country, categorizing them as first or second-generational minorities within Norway. These social workers' unique journeys into the child welfare system are noteworthy.

The chapter will further investigate the valuable insights drawn from in-depth interviews with eight social workers, each from a diverse minority background. Through their narratives, we explore their distinct perceptions and experiences as they navigate the background of the Norwegian child welfare system. It will extend into their interactions with youths from similar minority backgrounds and uncover the complex strategies employed to navigate cultural awareness within the context of the child welfare system. Additionally, unravel how these interactions have a profound impact, shaping the path of their relationships with the individuals they serve.

The themes mentioned below provide a comprehensive exploration of the research findings, aiming to clarify the experiences of minority social workers within the Norwegian child welfare system. The primary focus of this investigation is on understanding the dynamics of their interactions with families and children from ethnic minority backgrounds.

To illuminate the complex background of their experiences, this chapter is divided into three themes: Professional Knowledge & Identity, Cultural Knowledge in Practice, and Intersectionality, with the following subsections. Each theme is organized from the stories, insights, and reflections of these dedicated social workers. These themes stand as pillars, supporting the overarching aims and objectives of the research questions. However, before moving to these themes and exploring the interlocutors' experiences of interacting with minority families within the CWS, a brief description of the social workers participating in this study will be given, together with their backgrounds:

Angela

Angela's background and experiences provide a compelling insight into her connection with the Norwegian child welfare system. Born and raised in Norway to Ghanaian parents, she grew up in a town outside Oslo before recently residing in the city.
From the tender age of five until she reached 21, Angela's life was closely intertwined with the child welfare system. During these crucial years of her life, she spent her formative years within a foster family, becoming intimately acquainted with the system. This prolonged interaction exposed her to a remarkable journey, during which she encountered the guidance of nine different case workers over the span of 14 years.

Maryam

Maryam was born and raised in Oslo to parents of Indian descent. Throughout her upbringing, Maryam maintained a facade of quietness and obedience while excelling academically with straight A grades. Her manner gave her teachers no cause for concern regarding her well-being at home.

During her formative years, direct intervention by the Child Welfare Services (CWS) was not a noticeable feature of her upbringing. However, at the age of 18, a pivotal moment occurred when Maryam moved out of her family home and took the courageous step of reporting one of her parents' actions to the police. This brave act marked the beginning of the CWS's involvement in her life, driven by concerns for the well-being of a younger sibling who still resided in the same household afflicted by violence.

Tenneh

Tenneh's background and upbringing in Oslo provide a heartbreaking perspective on the complexities of the Norwegian child welfare system. As a native of Oslo, she grew up in a household shaped by the traumatic aftermath of the war in Sierra Leone, where both of her parents had experienced the loss of family members and endured harrowing experiences. These post-war challenges weighed heavily on her family, creating a difficult environment in which to grow up.

Deepening the difficulties, one of Tenneh's siblings had special needs and occasionally exhibited aggressive behavior. This complex family dynamic led to the involvement of the child protection system in Tenneh's life when she was just 7 years old. Throughout her formative years, Tenneh dealt with the mental health challenges of her parents and the unique needs of her sister, all while feeling overlooked by both her family and the child protection system.

Aisha

Aisha's background and experiences offer an interesting perspective on her connection to the Norwegian child welfare system. She arrived in Norway at a young age, alongside her parents and siblings, after migrating from Uganda. During her childhood, Aisha was not directly involved with the Child Welfare Services (CWS). However, her awareness of the CWS was not entirely absent, as it was a system that was mentioned and acknowledged within her household. It was only later, after her enrolment in the social work program, that Aisha's direct interaction with the CWS began.

Gloria

Gloria's background and journey parallel that of Aisha, offering another interesting perspective on the relationship between individuals from minority backgrounds and the Norwegian child welfare system. Like Aisha, Gloria moved to Norway with her parents and siblings when she was an adolescent, hailing from Burundi. During her childhood, Gloria did not have direct interactions with the Child Welfare Services (CWS). However, she was aware of the CWS's existence and role, as it was a system that was recognized within her family.

Kristian

Kristian's upbringing and personal journey add a unique dimension to the exploration of the Norwegian child welfare system. Born and raised in a small village, Kristian is the child of an ethnic Norwegian mother and a Sudanese father who immigrated to Norway as a refugee. As an individual of both heritage, Kristian embodies qualities from both cultural backgrounds, offering him a multifaceted perspective that enables him to relate to diverse experiences.

Growing up in a community where his background set him apart from the majority, Kristian developed an early interest in social work. His personal experiences and observations nurtured this interest, as he witnessed unattended minors migrating to his hometown. Seeing a reflection of himself in these newcomers, Kristian was inspired to explore the field of social work and engage with the issues faced by minority populations in Norway.

Bilen

Bilen's background and experiences as a social worker provide a valuable perspective on the interaction between individuals with immigrant backgrounds and the Norwegian child protection service.

Bilen migrated to Norway from Ethiopia at a young age, embarking on a journey that would eventually lead her to a career in social work. Her personal experiences with the child protection service were twofold. Firstly, she became involved with the service as an adult when she intervened to protect one of her siblings who was experiencing physical abuse at home. This experience likely offered her a firsthand understanding of the complexities and challenges that families face when interacting with child protection services. Secondly, Bilen's professional path led her to become a social worker.

Mary

Mary's journey from Tanzania to Norway and her successful career path with an organization dedicated to empowering families with minority backgrounds provide a rich perspective on the intersection of immigration, education, and social work. Mary's initial interaction with the child welfare system occurred during her professional career as a social worker. This firsthand experience likely afforded her insights into the challenges and complexities that social workers face when engaging with individuals and families within the Norwegian child welfare system.

5.1. Professional Knowledge & Identity

Among the eight social workers included in this study, four have had prior encounters with the child welfare system before pursuing a career in social work, as mentioned above. While they share the commonality of currently practicing as social workers in Oslo, their individual motivations for entering the field of social work vary, as do their diverse perceptions of the profession.

This section will further highlight how the experiences of social workers offer valuable insights into understanding and addressing challenges faced by minority families, covering cultural sensitivity, knowledge, and the impact of ethnocentric perspectives. Working with minority families through the CWS, the social workers offer thoughtful reflections on the essential role of cultural and practical knowledge and the challenges they face.

5.1.1 The Role of Representation in Social Work

As Kristian mentioned below, his background influenced his decision to become a social worker and reflects his strong belief in the importance of cultural or experiential similarities between himself and the teens he worked with. His desire to be a role model for the group of children he worked with and help them integrate into society is evident. It demonstrates a sense of responsibility and a desire to make a positive impact on the lives of the teens.

> "I believe I started working as a social worker in general because of my background. I lived in a small village where unattended minors were placed. Since I was the same age as them, I thought it would be a nice place to work during the summer holidays. That is how it started. With my background, I believed I could interact with the teenagers, even though I was young myself, making me a perfect fit for the job. I grew up in that same village, looking different from all the kids I grew up with while being Norwegian as well. Some experiences in that society are familiar, and I wanted to be a role model for the children. And I believe I was right on being a good fit. I could help them integrate into society and understand them better. Not saying more than my ethnic Norwegian friends, but in a different way."

- Kristian

Kristian further describes his awareness of the value of diverse perspectives and backgrounds in social work. He believes that his unique perspective and experiences can contribute to a better understanding of the unaccompanied children's (mainly from Afghanistan) needs, than some of his ethnic Norwegian colleagues.

> "But it was about building the connection. E.g., a boy was living in this accommodation for refugees, and the other social workers struggled to build a relationship with him. My background with having a Sudanese dad was the reason for connecting with him. That made it possible for me to be able to guide him, and it was important for him to have someone to relate to and open to…."

- Kristian

Kristian was inspired to pursue social work at a young age when he first began working with unattended minor kids. He recognized from an early age the implications of providing refugee children with someone they could identify with and connect to. Gloria also acknowledged the same significance in her role as a social worker, noting that children and adolescents formed stronger connections with social workers who shared their ethnic background.

This highlights the importance of representation in social work. When children and youths from minority backgrounds see social workers who resemble them in terms of ethnicity or cultural background, it can reveal a sense of trust and comfort. It shows that there are professionals who understand their unique experiences and challenges. A shared cultural or ethnic background may make it easier for children and youths to relate to the social workers. This relatability can enable communication and build rapport in the social work field.

Social workers with minority backgrounds have an essential role to play in promoting cultural sensitivity and ensuring that children from diverse backgrounds are accurately represented and understood. Davis (1998) highlights the importance of employing instinctive techniques to gain insights into the experiences and perspectives of children. This involves acknowledging and embracing the cultural challenge between their own cultural backgrounds, including their research ethics, roles, and tools, and those of the children they work with.

Social workers from minority backgrounds can actively engage in this process by facilitating a deeper understanding of the diversity in children's lives. They can encourage their colleagues to question whether their reports and recommendations truly account for the aspirations and needs of children from various cultural backgrounds. By bridging these cultural gaps and promoting cultural awareness within the field, social workers with minority backgrounds can help ensure that the voices of all children are recognized and respected (Davis, 1998).

Kristian's background was used as a tool for building a relationship with one of the youths. This can be analyzed through the lens of street-level bureaucracy, which focuses on the decision-making and actions of frontline workers, such as social workers (Lipsky, 2010). Street-level bureaucracy emphasizes the critical role of frontline workers, such as social workers, in making discretionary decisions and adapting services to meet the unique needs of their clients.

Kristian's Sudanese heritage played a pivotal role in establishing rapport and trust with the youth at the accommodation, demonstrating how social workers leverage their personal experiences and cultural competencies to address the specific circumstances of those they serve. This highlights Lipsky's assertion that frontline workers often rely on their own judgment and creative approaches to navigate the complexities of their roles while tailoring interventions to individual clients.

The importance of representation in the field of social work is demonstrated by the experience shared by one of the informants, Bilen. She discussed the valuable role of a social worker from a similar cultural background. The informants highlighted how a Somali social worker made an extensive difference within the CWS. Her Somali background led her to undertake an initiative to bridge the gap between the Somali community and the CWS.

> "I have recently written an article for a local newspaper about a social worker with a Somali background, who started working with the CWS. She realized a huge number of Somali parents are afraid of the system because they have experienced seeing children taken away from their homes. So, this social worker and the head of the department decided to have a meeting with the Somali community in town. The

> Somali social worker was the only one who got their attention because they felt she could understand them, as she shared the same language and culture. They trusted her more about what she said about CWS than they did before.
> So, representation does have a considerable impact to play. Using this social worker to reach the Somali community was a good move, and she was the right resource. I believe using techniques like this to reach groups that fear the system is a smart move."

- Bilen

This statement highlights the importance of cultural representation among social workers and the positive impact it can have on building trust and understanding within minority communities. It also highlights the need for more social workers with diverse cultural backgrounds to address the fear and distrust that some minority groups may have towards the child welfare system. This experience can be related to practice knowledge, which originates from social workers and their day-to-day settings and cultural experiences (Trevithick, 2012). Some of the social workers correspondingly discussed the same impression of diversity among social workers, being a tremendous resource, as mentioned below:

> "Being allowed to be on the front-line, like it's easier for people from my community to listen to what I have to say about the system, than coming from someone else as an outsider, who does not understand the culture. Having diversity among social workers is a significant resource for reaching most families and attending to their needs. A better level of trust is then being built, and they also feel less judged for opening, and less threatened if it comes from a familiar person."

- Bilen

Bilen emphasizes the significance of having frontline social workers who share similar cultural or community backgrounds with the families they serve. She notes that familiarity with the community's cultural context fosters better communication and trust, as families are more likely to feel understood and less judged when interacting with someone who shares their cultural experiences. This highlights the importance of diversity within the social work profession as a critical resource for effectively addressing the unique needs of minority families. Bilen argues that the presence of culturally representative social workers not only

reduces feelings of threat but also encourages families to be open about their challenges, thereby enabling more effective and empathetic service delivery. It can be argued that Bilen's reasoning highlights the significance of agency-level and organizational theory in fostering trust, breaking down barriers, and improving communication between social workers and clients from diverse cultural backgrounds. It also emphasizes the importance of professional knowledge, which includes theoretical understanding, practical skills, and reflexive awareness developed through education, training, and lived experiences. When combined with the diverse cultural backgrounds of social workers, this professional knowledge enables them to draw on both formal expertise and cultural insights cultivated through daily practice. Together, these elements shape their perspectives and enhance their ability to provide culturally responsive and practical support to clients (Trevithick, 2012).

Below, Mary highlights the value of knowledge in the practical domain when working with individuals from similar backgrounds, as it simplifies more meaningful communication and a deeper understanding of their needs and perspectives. Overall, Mary's statement emphasizes the importance of cultural experiences and the unique insights they bring to social work practice.

> "I have more knowledge about the culture, you know. I know how it works. I need to do this because I understand how things might work for them, and the good thing is that you might be able to communicate with the people you interact with positively. Trying to see things that maybe other people don't see because you try to read between the lines. So, I think having a minority background and interacting with people with a minority background can make the communication easier."
>
> - Mary

5.1.2 The role of Factual, Cultural, and Practical Knowledge

Below is a quote provided by Maryam, suggesting that social workers should approach each case with an awareness of the specific cultural context and values of the individuals involved. They should also reflect on the legal and ethical standards in social work practice, which emphasize the role of frontline workers in implementing policies. This perspective aligns with

Trevithick's legal and ethical standards in social work practice, which guide frontline workers in implementing policies effectively (Trevithick, 2012).

Trevithick emphasizes the importance of cultural awareness, sensitivity, and understanding in interactions with individuals and communities. Cultural knowledge refers to an awareness and appreciation of the cultural norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and social practices of the individuals and families social workers serve (Trevithick, 2012).

> "The thing is, minority backgrounds, what is there to consider? They do have a different background. Their parents might be from another country, but you can't put so many different countries and cultures in the same box. And what is Norwegian upbringing, right? The thing is, I look at the law and what the law says, and I take it from there."
>
> - Maryam

However, Maryam holds a distinct perspective on factual knowledge as she does not perceive any significant distinction in the cultural backgrounds of the children and youth she works with when compared to ethnic Norwegian children. In her view, the concept of "minority backgrounds" covers a wide range of diverse experiences, with each child having their unique family and cultural context. Maryam emphasizes the importance of adhering to laws and regulations as the primary framework for her professional practice, aiming to provide unbiased services to all children and families, regardless of their cultural backgrounds.

> "The law says that you don't hit children. I know that in some cultures, they do this to discipline their children. They don't mean anything bad by it. They want to discipline the children. But all the parents that I've met know the law in Norway. They know what they can and cannot do. But then again, I've just started, I don't have a lot of experience with different families, but the families that I have worked with, they know the law, they know what's not allowed or allowed."
>
> - Maryam

Maryam firmly supports the legal framework for preventing the physical discipline of children. She acknowledges that cultural differences may influence parents' disciplinary

approaches, with some cultures traditionally practicing physical discipline. However, Maryam has observed that the parents she has interacted with through her work are well-informed about Norwegian law and its standpoint on child discipline. In her limited experience, she has encountered parents who are aware of the boundaries and regulations, demonstrating an understanding of what is accepted and what is not within the Norwegian legal context.

While Maryam hasn't encountered any parents who use physical discipline as a form of punishment, it is important to acknowledge that cultural norms and practices evolve over time (Rugkåsa M., 2020). Norwegian laws and societal values regarding child-rearing have undergone significant changes over the past two generations. For example, Loona (2012), cited in (Rugkåsa M., 2020) notes that a few decades ago, certain physical methods of discipline were considered acceptable in Norway.

Research indicates that individuals who come from cultures where physical discipline is normalized may need time to adapt to alternative methods that align with the laws and values of their new society. This highlights the importance of understanding both cultural continuity and change when working with diverse families (Rugkåsa M., 2020).

Maryam further holds the perspective that it's essential to approach each child as an individual, regardless of their cultural background. She suggests that children may feel more comfortable and connected when they perceive similarities between themselves and their social workers. She mentions the idea that such commonalities can foster a sense of understanding and identification, potentially enriching the working relationship between the child and their social worker.

> "… I used my experience in a situation where I told a child that I was working with, about what happened after my parents got divorced. We talked about the culture because Indian and Pakistani cultures were once part of one country, so they are quite similar. So, we talked a little bit about that and what other people kind of expected from me, what other Indians expect from me just because we share a culture."
>
> - Maryam

The informant verifies a specific instance where she drew upon her own cultural background to connect with a child who shared a similar heritage. In this case, she leveraged her personal experiences to establish a deeper level of understanding and demonstrate common ground with the child. By sharing her own story, Maryam aims to create a sense of rapport and empathy, highlighting both the challenges and expectations that come with their shared cultural background. This approach reflects her commitment to building connections with children based on shared experiences and cultural connections.

The quote below emphasizes the importance of experiential knowledge and personal experiences in the context of cultural awareness and community involvement. The statement originates from personal experiences of social workers who have effective community outreach.

> "I think it's important to go to the schools and the kindergartens and talk to the parents about what we do. And I think that my organization can also do that. We have done it once. We can do that every year, every six months, to go to where the children are, to talk to them, to visit the schools where the kids are, to attend every youth club, and to kind of talk to them about what we do and why we do what we do. Yeah. I think that it's important to meet people where they are."

> "The thing is, many of us (colleagues) have a different background, and many of us are from that same area (in Oslo). The municipality I now work for is the one I grew up in. I know the schools; I know what kind of society it is. And the others do as well because they are raised in the same municipality. They've been there, they live there. So, we do know what kind of pressure, what kind of drugs are out there because we are a part of that community. Many of us live there. I have family; my mom lives there. I'm there all the time. So, I think that strengthens the organization because we have a lot of knowledge about the "culture". For instance, my coworker is from the same place and used to be involved in criminal activities. And now he is working for the municipality. He knows about the drugs and the guns and the ladies and the cars because he was there. And I think that that's something that strengthens us. And he's now working together with us in this organization. I mean, that proves how experience strengthens cultural competency within an organization or even a municipality. I don't think you can just read a book or some texts and gain knowledge. You might

encounter some, but I think you also need to live in those conditions and understand what the kids are going through to relate to their experiences. Yeah, experiences do matter."

- Maryam

The statement emphasizes that these shared backgrounds provide valuable insights and knowledge about the local environment, including schools, social settings, environments, and shared dynamics within the community. This familiarity with the community's characteristics, including potential pressures and challenges, contributes to the strength of the organization. This form of knowledge goes beyond theoretical understanding and emphasizes the value of practical experience.

The example of a coworker with a history of involvement in criminal activities is cited to demonstrate the team's strength in experience and understanding. Their past experiences enable them to relate to the circumstances and realities faced by children in the community, including issues related to crimes. Maryam's perception highlights that, although theoretical and faculty knowledge have their place in social work, they can be balanced by the "street level" knowledge gained from being part of the community and experiencing the same challenges and circumstances (Trevithick, 2012).

The insight from Horevitz, Lawson, and Chow (2013) aligns with Kristian's personal experiences, highlighting how cultural background and lived experiences can serve as valuable tools in building connections with unaccompanied minors. Kristian's ability to relate to these children, even before receiving formal training as a social worker, underscores the significance of shared cultural understanding and personal background in fostering trust and rapport. (Horevitz et al., 2013) emphasizes that cultural competence and professional identity are interconnected, suggesting that social workers' personal experiences and cultural awareness can complement their professional training, enabling them to navigate cross-cultural interactions more effectively.

"… Another factor is the language barrier. Being partly Kenyan, but still don't speak the language. I have spent some time with that part of my family, till my aunt and cousins moved to England. Though we struggled to communicate then, we still learn to

communicate with people who don't share the same language. In some cases, you can say some simple words, and it becomes kind of a way to communicate without sharing the language, and that's something that I had growing up."

- Kristian

Kristian's ability to relate to the unattended minors despite his young age at the time aligns with the notion of cultural experience. His background, which likely shared some common elements with the children's experiences, allowed him to bridge cultural gaps and establish rapport. This aspect mirrors the essence of practice knowledge, which encourages Kristian to embrace and uphold cultural sensitivity and understanding as important components of his professional conduct. Kristian's experience illustrates the real-world complexities associated with experiences.

5.1.3 The Bridge of Professional Identity:

Navigating sensitive social work with minority families

Tenneh highlights the importance of being open-minded and meeting minority families where they are, emphasizing the need to approach these families with humility and empathy.

"You need to be very open-minded. You need to see their perspective, and you need to be humble because sometimes when you are sitting with the authority, parents, and children, they can be terrified."

- Tenneh

This perspective can be analyzed through the lens of organizational theory, particularly regarding the dynamics of power, authority, and trust within professional-client relationships. Organizational theory stresses the significance of adaptive practices within institutions, where professionals are encouraged to adopt flexible approaches that cater to the specific needs of diverse populations. By being open-minded and understanding the fears and anxieties that minority families may face in interactions with authoritative systems, social workers can help mitigate the natural power imbalances present in these encounters. This aligns with the

principles of organizational theory, which advocate for the integration of cultural competence, relational dynamics, and institutional flexibility to foster trust and collaboration between professionals and service users. Tenneh's emphasis on balancing professionalism with compassion and understanding underscores the importance of creating a supportive organizational culture that prioritizes client-centered practices.

Below, Aisha discusses potential challenges within the CWS, such as a gap in organizational culture and diversity, particularly concerning the representation of minority social workers. The quote reflects on the lack of minority representation among social workers and the need for more diversity and an inclusive organizational society.

> *"*The system itself could be a bit better, I feel, because when it comes to interacting with minority families, I feel something is lacking. There are not enough workers or social workers with a minority background who are working within the child protective services, compared to the level of minority families that are in the system. I feel like the system can do better. I think it should be mandatory for everyone to at least be like, "let's talk about racism or discrimination," basically, like have those types of discussions in our programs. When students are becoming social workers, they say, "let's talk about racism and let's talk about discrimination." "How does it look?" "How can you, as a social worker, do discriminatory activities, and how does that look like, and what type of impact does it have?" Just having those types of discussions will make people who don't have a minority background a bit more aware."
>
> - Aisha

This quote highlights potential challenges in the system. It implies that there is room for improvement within the CWS regarding including the idea of racism and discrimination in the education of future social workers. The statement provides insights within the CWS regarding better ways to identify areas for potential improvement.

As mentioned in Fylkesnes et al. (2018)'s study, welfare institutions often fail to consider the significant impact of racialized discourses on the life opportunities of children. The unequal distribution of societal resources further aggravates this issue, particularly concerning

opportunities for participation in society, where factors like social class and ethnicity play essential roles (Staer & Bjørknes, 2015).

Schools of social work in the United States are recognizing the importance of cultural knowledge and are incorporating it into their educational curricula (Horevitz et al., 2013). This weight on cultural competence is essential for providing the best possible services and achieving positive outcomes, especially when working with diverse clients across various settings, including healthcare (NASW, 2001, cited in (Horevitz et al., 2013). The growing number of legislative proposals at the federal level advocating for cultural awareness in healthcare education and practice is a significant step forward. This aligns with broader efforts to address and reduce racial and ethnic health disparities.

> "When I was studying social work, my university was the only one with a program for students who came as immigrants into the country or had parents who came as immigrants. I applied through this program myself, and it helped many social workers with minority backgrounds enter the field. But this program is no longer funded, which I think is sad. It should have been kept and implemented in other universities. So, the purpose of this program was to get at least 30% immigrants or immigrant children into the program, and the entrance for the application was easier, which encouraged many to enroll in the program."
>
> - Kristian

Kristian's experience shows the importance of addressing this oversight. He highlighted how a program aimed at increasing the representation of students with immigrant backgrounds in social work education had proven beneficial. This initiative, designed to ensure at least 30% enrolment from immigrant or immigrant children, facilitated easier application processes for individuals from minority groups, encouraging their participation in the program. Such initiatives are fundamental steps toward resolving disparities in access and representation within social work education and practice. However, this program was shortly shut down.

> "… Understanding other cultures and not seeing them as a deviation. It could be useful to have it as a part of the social work program, as our country is more culturally rich now, and having the knowledge of other cultures comes in handy."

- Bilen

5.1.4 Conclusion

This section of the chapter highlights the presence of diverse motivations, perspectives, and approaches among the social work informants. Their diverse experiences and viewpoints reflect on the complex role of professional identity and knowledge within the field of social work. Professional knowledge embodies a combination of theoretical frameworks, practical skills, ethical principles, and experiential learning that guides social workers in their practice. It is informed by a combination of formal education, ongoing professional development, and lived experiences within the field. In this context, the application of professional knowledge is deeply intertwined with cultural competence, as social workers draw on their understanding of systemic inequalities, cultural norms, and individual client needs to navigate complex situations.

The implication of these elements — professional identity, cultural experiences, and representation — becomes central to how these social workers navigate the systems they encounter. Professional identity and knowledge act as both a foundation and a dynamic tool, enabling social workers to balance institutional requirements with the needs of the families they serve. For instance, the social workers' ability to interpret and apply child welfare policies is informed by their professional knowledge, which enables them to advocate for families while obeying legal and organizational rules. This highlights the practice of expertise as a continual process of integrating formal training with the realities of practice.

The multi-layered dimension of professional identity and knowledge serves as both a guide and a reflection of their practice, shaping their interactions and decision-making processes as they strive to provide culturally sensitive care. This sensitivity requires a nuanced understanding of the cultural and structural barriers that families may face, as well as an ability to adapt one's approach to meet the unique needs of each family. In this way, professional knowledge acts as a bridge, connecting social workers with the families they are

assigned to support and serve. This connection extends beyond technical expertise to include empathy, relatability, and trust-building, particularly when social workers share similar cultural backgrounds or lived experiences with the families they serve (Adams et al., 2006).

Social workers who possess both professional knowledge and cultural competence are better equipped to establish trust and build rapport with minority families in the Child Welfare System. This trust is foundational to effective social work practice, as it encourages open communication and collaboration between social workers and families. By fostering relationships grounded in respect, understanding, and mutual support, social workers can create an inclusive approach to their practice. This inclusivity not only enhances the quality of support provided but also strengthens the foundation of trust, respect, and assistance between social workers and their clients. In doing so, social workers contribute to the overarching goal of promoting the development and well-being of children in the Child Welfare System, while ensuring that their practice reflects a commitment to equity and cultural responsiveness (Trevithick, 2012).

5.2 Cultural Knowledge in Practice: Addressing Challenges and Navigating Power Dynamics

Some of the informants have shared a common experience in their work with kids and youths from minority backgrounds. Some of the youths often have certain expectations from their social workers due to their shared minority background. They may perceive social workers as "friends" rather than professionals, which can sometimes lead to disappointment when social workers maintain their professional roles and apply the rules.

5.2.1 Professional and Personal Identity

Kristian mentioned that some youths from unattended minors expected him to be both a friend and a professional, and when he couldn't fulfill those dual roles, they were disappointed. This highlights the challenges and complexities he has encountered in managing expectations for youth with similar backgrounds.

> "… They sometimes had certain expectations when they see a young brown person like them, and when I don't meet their expectations, they tend to freeze me out, and I would have to build the relationship and trust again. Many of them thought I would set different rules for them, like boundaries, and that I would let them do things and not follow the house rules because I look like them. So that was challenging at times when I didn't meet their expectations."
>
> - Kristian

This relates to the intersection of personal identity and professional identity. Kristian's background becomes a factor that shapes expectations of the youths he worked with, reflecting on how individual identity can influence the dynamics of relationships in the CWS (Adams et al., 2006).

Bilen mentioned a similar experience, where the unattended minors had higher financial expectations of the CWS and hoped that, as a minority social worker, she would be their friend and better understand their situation. This put pressure on her, and she felt that her own background was sometimes used against her, making her feel guilty for upholding the rules and restrictions.

> "They had more expectations from the CWS, financially, and they hoped that since I am a minority as well, I was "their friend" and understood their situation better, and had the expectation that I would do more as they expect I have also gone through the same problem they are going through. That was more of a challenge […] my own background has been used against me, saying "you are a minority yourself, why can't You understand us," and made me feel bad or guilty for standing by the restrictions."
>
> - Bilen

The informants have encountered a significant challenge in balancing the expectations of minority youths who perceive them not only as social workers but also as friends, expecting special treatment due to their shared cultural background. This complex dynamic can occasionally blur the boundaries of professional identity, complicating the maintenance of Bilen's reliability in roles and relationships with these youths. Professional identity, as (Beddoe, 2013) explains, not only defines the roles and responsibilities of social workers but

also shapes how they interact with others, carry out their practices, and contribute to their work environment. This dual influence underscores the importance of maintaining professionalism while navigating culturally sensitive situations.

Mary talks about how having a different cultural background can present both challenges and opportunities in social work. The unique cultural background of a social worker can pose both challenges and opportunities in their practice. On one hand, there may be a need to navigate differences in disciplinary methods and expectations, which can sometimes lead to misunderstandings or disagreements. However, a social worker can leverage their cultural background as a valuable tool for building rapport and establishing connections with the individuals they work with. This background can create a bridge of understanding and trust, ultimately enhancing the quality of their work and allowing them to serve diverse populations.

Mary describes that one of the positive aspects of her work is the ability to connect with children and youths from minority backgrounds through shared cultural experiences and humor. There are moments when she and the youths can laugh about certain things that may not be readily understood by individuals from different cultural backgrounds, especially regarding parenting styles. For instance, when her mom used to playfully say, *"If you don't come here, I will kill you*." Of course, she didn't mean it literally, but it was a way of sending urgency.

However, it is essential to realize that when such expressions are used with Norwegian individuals, they may interpret them differently, sometimes quite literally. These shared cultural similarities can create a sense of closeness, and it is uplifting to remember the positive aspects of these experiences.

Though there is also a challenging side to her role as a minority social worker, when working with young people, there are instances where they may assume she shares the same mindset as their parents due to their common cultural background. Some of these youths aspire to assimilate into Norwegian culture to fit in, especially since they already stand out due to their ethnicity. The informant believes that these differences should be celebrated as unique strengths rather than seen as burdens.

As a social worker positioned in the middle of these dynamics, it can be challenging to navigate and encourage these youths to embrace their individuality and cultural heritage while integrating into the majority society.

This theme further delves into the complex influence of power dynamics and connections between the educational system and the CWS, emphasizing their impact on marginalized families. The research findings by Merritt (2020) highlight the intricate influence these systems exert, illuminating the power imbalances within them.

5.2.2 Cultural Misunderstandings and Power Dynamics

Merritt (2020) explains that the child welfare and education systems are interconnected structures that significantly influence children's outcomes. It is essential for child welfare practitioners, policymakers, and researchers to recognize their overlapping influence. This recognition is particularly critical when considering the power dynamics within these systems, which can pose challenges for historically marginalized families and communities. Families who lack socioeconomic privilege and resources, or who are less empowered and not socialized to advocate for their rights, often find themselves under inquiry by multiple institutional systems (Merritt, 2020). Child welfare agencies typically become involved with families when concerns arise regarding parenting, neglect, or abuse (Merritt, 2020). This inspection can be aggravated by cultural misunderstandings and systemic biases, which can disproportionately affect families from minority backgrounds.

Tenneh, a qualified social worker with a minority background, shares her personal experience navigating these interconnected systems as both a professional and a parent. She recalls a distressing incident in which CWS became involved during her child's diagnosis. She highlights how communication between her child's kindergarten and CWS added a layer of stress during an already challenging time.

> ¨I think that sometimes the kindergarten, at times, does not need to call child services. Sometimes you need to have a conversation with the parents. This is why people fear CWS. They are terrified because sometimes, for small things, an emergency message

> will be sent. They did that with me. To call me when my child was diagnosed. I couldn't eat, I couldn't shower…
> I was crying for an extended period, but you know, when you get that kind of message (the diagnosis), the first thing you think is "my child is going to die". You don't think about going to fix your hair or take a shower. The next thing you know, their (the child's) hair starts falling out […]. It's frustrating. You are already in a crisis, and these people are giving you more crises."
>
> \- Tenneh

Tenneh's narrative highlights the fear and stigma that many families from marginalized communities associate with CWS interventions. Her experiences reflect broader systemic issues where minor concerns or cultural misunderstandings can escalate into formal reports to child welfare services. As a social worker, Tenneh underscores the importance of initiating informal, empathetic conversations with families before resorting to formal interventions. This approach aligns with best practices that prioritize cultural sensitivity and collaborative problem-solving.

Furthermore, Tenneh's dual role as a parent and professional reveals the intersectionality of her experiences. Her background as a minority social worker offers a unique perspective on how cultural misunderstandings and power dynamics within institutional systems can disproportionately impact families from marginalized communities. Her personal account underscores the need for culturally competent interventions that recognize and address the emotional and psychological toll of systemic interactions on families.

This discussion highlights the interconnectedness of child welfare and education systems and the need for a holistic approach to supporting marginalized families. A culturally sensitive approach can help bridge the gap between institutional systems and minority communities, ensuring that interventions are empowering rather than commending. Tenneh's perspective illustrates the critical role social workers, particularly those from minority backgrounds, can play in fostering trust, reducing stigma, and advocating for more equitable practices within the child welfare system.

5.2.3 Conclusion

The reflections shared by the informants vividly illustrate the challenges and complexities of navigating cultural expectations, professional boundaries, and power dynamics in child welfare services. Minority social workers often find themselves in dual roles, shaped both by their professional responsibilities and their personal identities. While their shared cultural background can be a powerful tool for building rapport and trust with minority children and youths, it also brings heightened expectations and unique pressures.

Kristian and Bilen's experiences demonstrate how shared cultural identity can blur the boundaries between professional and personal roles, as youths may perceive them more as allies or friends rather than authority figures. This misalignment in expectations often results in disappointment, mistrust, and even strained relationships when social workers maintain their professional standards and uphold rules. These accounts emphasize the emotional labor involved in rebuilding trust and navigating relationships where cultural identity becomes both a bridge and a potential point of tension.

Mary's narrative highlights how shared cultural experiences can foster moments of connection and understanding, offering opportunities to create meaningful relationships with youths from similar backgrounds. However, her experience also reveals the challenges of encouraging minority youths to celebrate their cultural heritage while integrating into the Norwegian society. It is a delicate balancing act for social workers who themselves must navigate dual cultural realities. Mary's reflections serve as a reminder of the potential for social workers to act as cultural mediators, helping minority youths find strength in their unique identities.

At the same time, Tenneh's account highlights the broader systemic challenges that arise from cultural misunderstandings and power dynamics within institutional frameworks. Her experience as both a social worker and a parent underscores the importance of culturally competent practices that prioritize empathy and dialogue over immediate formal interventions. These narratives collectively point to the critical need for structural change in CWS and educational systems to ensure that families from marginalized communities are met with respect, understanding, and appropriate support.

Ultimately, this subsection demonstrates that while cultural knowledge can be a powerful tool in practice, it also requires social workers to navigate complex dynamics with care. As Beddoe (2013) and Merritt (2020) highlight, professional identity is deeply intertwined with how practitioners carry out their responsibilities and interact with others. This highlights the importance of cultivating a balance between personal and professional roles, fostering trust, and advocating for systemic change. In doing so, minority social workers can act not only as practitioners but as agents of empowerment, bridging gaps between institutional systems and marginalized communities. Through these efforts, they help to address the deeply rooted power imbalances within child welfare and education systems, creating a more inclusive and culturally sensitive approach to social work practice.

5.3. Cultural Identity and Intersectionality in Child Welfare Practice

The preservation of cultural identity can be a crucial aspect of ensuring the well-being of children in the child welfare system, particularly for those from minority backgrounds. Cultural identity plays a significant role in fostering a sense of belonging and self-worth, yet it can be overlooked in placement decisions. This subsection explores the challenges minority children face in maintaining their cultural and racial identity, as illustrated by Angela's personal experiences growing up in a foster home that did not reflect her ethnic or cultural background. Drawing on theoretical perspectives, such as Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality, this section emphasizes the need for inclusive and culturally sensitive practices in child welfare services to promote the best interests of children while upholding their human rights.

Angela discusses personal experiences that highlight the importance of children in the child welfare system in maintaining their cultural identity and sense of self. She discusses that being in the system can sometimes result in the fading of one's identity. Angela shared her childhood experience when placed in a foster home that didn't share her ethnic or cultural background. According to Hofman (2010), the child's right to their own culture, religion, and language is strongly considered in assessing the child's best interests under Norwegian law. Culture is given great weight in a child's identity development, and it is therefore essential to

consider the child's cultural background when assuming care to prevent the feeling of insecurity that Angela experienced growing up.

> "The children also need to maintain their culture, their faith, beliefs, you know, so they feel like they are still themselves, because that is another topic. That is another topic because when you are in the system, some of your identity would fade away. When you are placed in another family that doesn't look like you, I feel like I'm speaking from a place of felt lack of love. I felt different because I grew up in a biracial family."
>
> - Angela

There are some challenges in placing minority children in foster homes, and Hofman (2010) believes that culture is not taken into consideration enough. Children of minority backgrounds are often placed with families of different backgrounds, and preferably with a Norwegian family, Hofman (2010). Bunkholdt (2021) believes this is because the CWS finds it challenging to recruit families with minority backgrounds.

Social workers need to adopt a perspective that acknowledges the dynamics of power, as stated by Kimberlé Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality, where various forms of power come together, collide, and intersect (Columbia Law School, 2017). This connection highlights the need for the child welfare system to go beyond its primary mission of ensuring children's safety and well-being. As Angela mentioned, her personal experiences above led her to feelings of insecurity and a lower sense of self-worth, feeling like an outsider due to growing up in a family that looked different from hers. It calls for a broader consideration of the significance of cultural and racial identity in a child's life.

Cooperating with minority families will result in inclusivity and broader understanding; moreover, it will create more security for the minority children being placed from home. There are children from minority families in the system, who will require the proper placements to secure their identity development and the right to their own culture, religion, and language (Hofman, 2010).

Integrating the intersectionality framework within the field of social work offers a profound lens through which to gain fresh insights into the complex web of intersecting systems of oppression. This framework allows us to explore deeper into the multifaceted lived

experiences of diverse groups of service users, shedding light on the profound impact of the merging of various identity factors. By recognizing and exploring how these intersecting identities intersect and overlap, social workers can better understand the nuanced challenges and needs of individuals within these marginalized communities, ultimately facilitating more inclusive, culturally sensitive, and effective practice within the field of social work (Bernard, 2022).

The intersectionality of identities, such as ethnicity, race, gender, and socioeconomic status, highlights the importance of human rights in social work practice. It is essential that social workers recognize and address the unique vulnerabilities and disadvantages that some families and children face due to the intersections of multiple forms of discrimination. Upholding human rights means ensuring that no one is left behind and that the dignity and worth of every individual are respected (United Nations, 1948b).

5.3.1 Ethnocentrism and Intersectionality in Social Work Practice

Tenneh's experiences highlight how intersectionality can shed light on the overlapping dynamics of culture, ethnicity, and systemic biases within the child welfare system. Intersectionality, as conceptualized by Kimberlé Crenshaw, examines how various aspects of an individual's identity, such as race, ethnicity, and cultural practices, intersect with systems of power, leading to unique experiences of discrimination or disadvantage (Kimberle, 1999). Tenneh's accounts illustrate how these dynamics can manifest in social work practice through ethnocentric attitudes that dismiss or devalue cultural practices.

For example, Tenneh recalled an incident where a colleague reacted negatively to a child's use of shea butter as a body cream, suggesting that the parent switch to a more "appropriate" lotion because of the scent's nature. Shea butter, Tenneh explained, is deeply rooted in the cultural traditions of many African families and is valued for its effectiveness in preventing skin dryness, particularly during colder seasons. Similarly, in another case, a child's hair care routine involving shea butter was criticized as being "too greasy," prompting a colleague to recommend changes to the routine. These instances reflect a broader pattern where cultural practices, often linked to the identities of minority families, are judged against the norms of the majority population.

Such experiences highlight how ethnocentric attitudes can perpetuate systemic inequalities in social work. By failing to recognize and value the cultural identities of minority families, professionals risk reinforcing power imbalances that marginalize those who do not conform to majority cultural norms. Intersectionality provides a lens to understand these interactions: the child's experience is shaped not just by their cultural practices but by how those practices intersect with broader systems of bias, including racial and ethnic stereotypes.

Ethnocentrism, as described by Symonds (2017), can be understood as a worldview rooted in majority cultural biases, which positions dominant cultural norms as superior while dismissing or devaluing those of minority groups. Sue (2004) further explains that such biases can result in cultural blindness, where professionals fail to acknowledge or understand the importance of cultural diversity in their work. In Tenneh's experiences, her colleagues' discomfort with shea butter practices was not merely an individual bias but a reflection of broader systemic dynamics where minority cultural practices are often misinterpreted, invalidated, or marginalized.

The impacts of these biases are far-reaching. For families of minority backgrounds, the dismissal of culturally significant practices can lead to feelings of exclusion, mistrust, and alienation within the child welfare system. Gray and Cosgrove (1985) caution that a lack of cultural awareness can lead to unintentional harm, as professionals may impose majority norms and values rather than engage with families in a way that respects and uplifts their unique cultural identities. These power dynamics, as revealed through Tenneh's stories, underscore the importance of integrating intersectionality into social work practice to address the overlapping and compounded effects of cultural and racial bias.

Furthermore, intersectionality draws attention to the role of power in shaping interactions between social workers and families. As Tenneh described, the criticisms of shea butter usage were not simply misunderstandings but acts that reinforced existing power structures. The families involved were placed in a position where their cultural practices were scrutinized and delegitimized, perpetuating a hierarchy where majority norms are privileged. Recognizing these dynamics requires social workers to move beyond cultural sensitivity as a mere skill and adopt an intersectional perspective that critically examines how cultural, racial, and systemic factors interact to affect service users.

The importance of respecting cultural identity is enshrined in Article 30 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which affirms every child's right to enjoy their own culture, practice their religion, and use their language (United Nations, 1989). This aligns with the principles of intersectionality by emphasizing the need to consider cultural identity as an integral part of a child's overall well-being. Tenneh's experiences serve as a reminder that when cultural practices are dismissed or undervalued, it is not just a violation of individual rights but also a perpetuation of systemic inequalities that disproportionately impact minority families.

By applying an intersectional lens, social workers can better understand how ethnocentrism operates within the broader context of overlapping systems of oppression. This approach encourages professionals to critically reflect on their own biases and assumptions, ensuring that their practice is inclusive, equitable, and culturally responsive. For Tenneh, these efforts represent a critical step toward dismantling the power dynamics that marginalize minority families and ensuring that cultural diversity is celebrated rather than dismissed.

5.3.2 Intersection of Children's Rights and Minority Protections

Child protection services play an essential role in supporting the rights and best interests of children within the field of social work. Social work practice navigates sensitive and challenging situations by relying on personal knowledge (Johansson, 2013). In this circumstance, the context of minority social workers and minority families. The findings demonstrate the importance of individual expertise, especially when sensitivity and cultural awareness are needed. An example is Gloria's experience below, where her ability to read between the lines revealed the hidden struggles faced by children from a similar background, even though they seemed happy. This experience shows the importance of personal knowledge in bridging cultural gaps.

> "… Every time I took the kids out for a drive, they would tell me sad stories about their lives. Because they know, I can see behind their smiles. I can see behind the happiness because I mean, I used to wear it myself. I used to be the happy girl that everybody expected me to be. I saw that it was much harder for the kids with African heritage to

express their feelings, to express the sadness, to express this feeling that I needed to analyze as their social worker while helping them …"

- Gloria

This experience highlights the significance of both symbolic practice knowledge and personal cultural knowledge. Gloria's personal knowledge allowed her to see beyond the symbolic expressions of the joy that masks deeper emotions. On the other hand, this experienced knowledge guided her to understand the challenges faced by children of African descent in expressing their feelings. Therefore, essential for social work professionals to possess accurate information and a deep understanding of their clients. This fosters the capacity to effectively meet their client's needs (Trevithick, 2012).

International frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNHCR) and the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) describe Western values as individualism. Scholars and social workers argue that these values may not always align with the values of non-Western countries (Johansson, 2013). As previously mentioned by Bilen and Gloria, limited information is available within minority communities, which can cause some challenges.

Chand (2008) supports this observation, highlighting that minority families often struggle to access relevant information due to cultural and language barriers, as well as systemic limitations in the provision of culturally appropriate services. This lack of accessible information contributes to misunderstandings between minority families and child welfare services.

The informants recommend open dialogue and increased representation of social workers with backgrounds like the target group to fill the gaps in trust and understanding. As mentioned by Johansson (2013), with child welfare legislation and child protection policies adapted to UNHCR principles, managing social work practice involving minority families and families of migrant background is a challenge within the CWS. These challenges need to not only align with international standards but also be implemented in a way that respects and meets the needs of all families (Johansson, 2013).

Immigrant communities introduce new norms of rearing children into a system of individualistic values. This will require allowing for variety within the CWS and supporting the fundamental right to liberty, which highlights Human Rights and is essential for the CWS (Falch-Eriksen & Skivenes, 2019).

Gray and Cosgrove (1985) suggest that protective services should proactively learn about the cultural attitudes surrounding dominance and submission in any subculture they work with. They also recommend a thorough examination of their own values and attitudes. The authors contend that issues related to the responsibility of children and dynamics of dominance and submission represent just a fraction of the differences between subcultures and the dominant culture or among subcultures. These issues, while often unnoticed by members of the majority culture, should be explored and addressed within the protective service system to foster a more comprehensive understanding of the communities served (Gray & Cosgrove, 1985).

5.3.3 Intersectionality in Child Welfare: Minority Parents and Cultural Challenges

The findings from Symonds (2017) and Merritt (2020) in the context of child welfare work offer valuable insights that resonate with the challenges and dynamics Gloria (one of the informants) encountered within the CWS. Symonds (2017) highlights the pivotal role of engaging with parents in the child welfare process. This emphasis aligns with Gloria's statement below, which underlines the importance of providing parents with educational tools and information. Symonds suggests that active engagement with parents is essential for them to benefit from interventions and improve outcomes for their children fully. Gloria's statement resonates with this idea, emphasizing to parents that child protection measures are often temporary and intended to help improve their situation.

Merritt (2020) research brings a critical layer to the discussion. It emphasizes that experiences within the child welfare system are not uniform, but rather deeply intertwined with variables such as race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. These disparities in experiences become prominent, and social determinants influence them. In essence, Merritt's findings highlight that parents and children from marginalized communities often have unique experiences and face different challenges within the child welfare system.

> "Parents of children within the spectrum, for example, or any other reasons, whereas child protection has to be in the picture, we have to give parents some educational tools, some information that can help them to understand that this is not necessary for a long time, but temporary until they have a better understanding […]".

- Gloria

Gloria's statement aligns with Merritt's research, which suggests that providing educational tools and information to parents must be approached with an understanding of the diverse experiences and challenges they may encounter. Gloria's focus on parents with children within the spectrum or other specific needs aligns with Merritt's emphasis on the intersectionality of social justice within the child welfare field. It calls for a critical examination of policies, procedures, and interventions within the child welfare system that acknowledge and address the unique experiences of parents and children, particularly those from marginalized communities (Merritt, 2020).

Gloria speaks on cases involving minority parents of children with special needs or situations requiring child protection, stating that it is crucial to provide these parents with educational tools and information. These resources help them understand that child protection involvement is not a permanent arrangement but rather a temporary measure. It aims to bridge the gap until they can gain a better understanding of the situation and work towards more sustainable solutions. By offering such support, social workers empower parents to navigate challenging circumstances with the knowledge and confidence necessary to ensure the well-being of their children.

Križ and Skivenes (2012) conducted a study on challenges faced by marginalized minority parents in various welfare systems, focusing on Norway, the UK, and the US. Their research findings highlighted three common challenges across these diverse countries, with cultural differences being the common challenge. One of the prominent aspects of cultural difference identified in all three countries was the parenting methods. Minority parents often brought unique artistic practices and approaches to child-rearing, which sometimes clashed with the dominant norms in the host country. This led to challenges in understanding and reconciling these differences (Križ & Skivenes, 2011).

Another critical challenge identified was parents' lack of knowledge about the welfare systems in place. Navigating these systems, understanding their rights and responsibilities, and accessing the available resources were often hindered by a lack of system knowledge, particularly among marginalized minority parents. One of the social workers, Gloria, discusses an episode she had at work, which she perceives as a form of shame from one of the youth's parents.

> "The ethnic Norwegian received a better psychological help, and their parents or caretaker or whoever, wanted them to be there (institutions) and knew the concept of the CWS, knew the concept of why they were there. They knew the reasons for it, and the biggest difference you could see was that with the minority kids, the parents did not understand the reason why their children had to be in institutions. So, the support system towards them was complicated. The ones who worked with these youths didn't understand the differences between Norwegian and certain African cultures in this case. How do we help these African families realize that we are here to support them in taking care of their children in the best way possible? These are the things that didn't have to be discussed with most Norwegian families […].
>
> - Gloria

The issue of language barriers, as highlighted by these research findings and Gloria's account, is a substantial obstacle for minority parents within the child welfare system. The inability to effectively communicate with welfare authorities can hinder parents' ability to access the support they need and actively participate in decisions about their children's well-being. Additionally, Križ and Skivenes (2012) mentioned that the use of children as translators can lead to a significant shift in the dynamics of parent-child relationships, potentially placing an undue burden on children. The authors provide insights into this dynamic, highlighting how children may gain knowledge and potentially authority in these situations, which can be both complex and challenging. Below is a quote from Gloria to illustrate a point.

> "We give the children the responsibility to be the parents, to be the grown-ups in their lives when they're so vulnerable from before. So, what I understood was that, for example, in this one case, he was fourteen when I was there. He had to be the one

> calling his dad and making appointments on when they can meet. When he figured that out, he had to come to us and be like, "yeah, now I've talked to my dad," so he was the one doing most of the work when it comes to communication with his family."
>
> - Gloria

Gloria's personal experience underscores the real-world implications of language barriers in the child welfare system. In her account, she describes a situation where a child took on the role of maintaining communication with their parent due to language difficulties. This case illustrates how such barriers can inadvertently shift familial roles, placing undue responsibility on vulnerable children. It highlights the importance of providing adequate support to both parents and children to ensure that their voices are heard and their needs are addressed within the child welfare system (Križ & Skivenes, 2012).

For social workers with minority backgrounds, experiences like Gloria's might resonate deeply due to their own familiarity with navigating similar dynamics within their communities. These social workers bring unique perspectives and cultural competencies that enable them to identify and address such challenges more effectively. Their ability to understand the cultural nuances, language barriers, and the emotional weight borne by children in such circumstances equips them to advocate for more equitable support and communication strategies. By bridging cultural gaps and fostering understanding, these professionals contribute to a more inclusive and supportive child welfare practice.

5.3.4 Conclusion

This section highlights some of the common challenges encountered by social workers in their interactions with children and youths from similar backgrounds. Their challenges highlight the importance of cultural experiences, professional knowledge, and understanding in their roles. They also emphasize the need for greater support and resources to address the unique dynamics they encounter, as these aspects bridge the gap between their personal identity and their personal backgrounds in their practice within the CWS.

In conclusion, the challenges of shame and language barriers highlighted in the research findings and Gloria's experiences underscore the critical importance of culturally sensitive approaches, education, and effective communication strategies within the child welfare system. These considerations are essential for addressing the unique needs and experiences of minority parents and children within the child welfare context.

The section also covers the informants' perspectives regarding the interconnection between education systems and the CWS, with a focus on its impact on marginalized families. The research of Merritt (2020) highlights the overlapping influence of these systems and the power imbalance within. Tenneh's personal experience illustrates the emotional and psychological weight of this interconnectedness. Her experience shows how a minor issue can escalate to emergency reports to the CWS, which can lead to fear and uneasiness within minority communities. This section highlights the importance of adapting a general and culturally sensitive method to support families and communities in navigating challenges in both systems.

The informants require an understanding and recognition of diverse cultural perspectives and experiences. Their narratives and experiences, as mentioned above, show the need for a more inclusive, culturally sensitive approach that supports the rights, values, and cultural identities of the minority families.

5.4 Conclusion of Findings

The key findings across the presented themes shed light on the perceptions and experiences of social workers with minority backgrounds in the Norwegian Child Welfare system. The findings offer insights into how the informants perceive and navigate the cultural knowledge of the CWS regarding the unique values and child-rearing practices of minority families. These experiences shape their interactions and relationships with these youths and families.

Through the various sections, there was a consistent highlight on the significance of cultural awareness in social work. The informants recognized the need to understand and respect the diverse cultural backgrounds of the children and families they work with. This involves navigating cultural differences in discipline, communication, and values.

The challenge of managing the expectations of children and youth from minority backgrounds was a repeated topic. Informants discussed how unaccompanied minors sometimes expected social workers to be both friends and professionals, which could lead to disappointment when professional boundaries were maintained, as well as professional identity.

The role of representation and personal knowledge was a common concern. Social workers with diverse backgrounds were seen as essential advocates for cultural sensitivity and bridging gaps between the child welfare system and minority communities. Their shared cultural background comes as an advantage in building trust and understanding. Personal knowledge and backgrounds are viewed as valuable assets in social work because they often relate to their experiences, help understand local dynamics, and build trust.

Another common ground is community engagement, communication, and understanding. The importance of social workers being involved in schools, kindergartens, parents, and community organizations is mentioned by several informants. They believe reaching out to these entities and educating them on the role of social workers can help dispel misunderstandings and build support networks for families. The need for open dialogue, active listening, and a willingness to understand different perspectives, especially in relation to cultural differences, is crucial.

These findings align with the research questions by providing insights into how social workers with minority backgrounds navigate their experiences in practice in the child welfare system. The findings also highlight how these experiences shape their interactions and relationships with minority families. They highlight the importance of cultural awareness, effective communication, representation, and community engagement in providing support to minority families and children within the Norwegian CWS.

6.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, this research highlights the experiences of interviewed social workers with minority backgrounds in the Norwegian child welfare system, focusing on their interactions with families and children from diverse minority communities. The study delved into the complex dynamics of cultural knowledge, intersectionality, organizational theory, agency-level practice, and the implementation of human rights. It aimed to develop a deeper understanding of how these theoretical frameworks intersect with the lived experiences of minority social workers.

In particular, the study engaged with Lipsky's theory of street-level bureaucracy, which emphasizes the role of front-line workers in implementing policies and making decisions within the constraints of limited resources, organizational structures, and societal expectations. This perspective illuminated the specific challenges faced by minority social workers in addressing the needs of minority families, including navigating language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and the systemic biases that may arise within child welfare institutions. These challenges underscore the significance of street-level discretion in shaping outcomes for vulnerable families.

Moreover, the findings revealed that social workers' own minority backgrounds often play a pivotal role in their ability to address these challenges effectively. Their lived experiences and cultural competence can bridge gaps in understanding and communication, allowing them to build trust with families and challenge ethnocentric assumptions within the system. At the same time, these social workers may also experience additional burdens, such as managing expectations from both their minority communities and the broader child welfare system. The intersection of their professional roles and personal identities illustrates the dual responsibility of navigating organizational demands while advocating for culturally sensitive and equitable practices.

6.1 Importance of Representation

Throughout the research, it became evident that social workers from minority backgrounds play an important role in building trust and understanding for families within minority communities. These social workers represent and advocate for the rights of the individuals they serve and contribute to a more inclusive CWS. Reflecting on the research question and the findings gathered, the CWS in Norway can benefit from a human rights-based approach. Personal knowledge emerges as an important topic in this study, highlighting the significance of individuals' engagement in the communities where they work, especially as social workers. Being involved allows for awareness and understanding of the community and its values.

Incorporating human rights into social work practice is another important step in addressing the complexities faced by both social workers and the marginalized groups they serve. It emphasizes the duty of care, protection, and empowerment that social workers have as they serve societies. This group of social workers not only faces the challenges of navigating the cultural knowledge of the child welfare system, but also bears the responsibility of upholding the human rights of all families and children they serve. Essential in the principles of human rights are values such as dignity, equality, non-discrimination, and the right to family life. These values must guide every interaction and decision within the child welfare system.

6.2 Principle of Practical Knowledge

Featuring insights from the informants, a recurring theme emerges about the essential role of involvement and engagement within the communities where social workers operate. The findings show that personal knowledge and experience significantly enhance their effectiveness in the field. However, it is worth mentioning that being part of a community is not necessarily the only way to understand it. Instead, showing interests and active engagement can generate substantial benefits in achieving its dynamics.

Tenneh, for instance, mentioned a case of a coworker with an ethnic Norwegian background who is married to a Tunisian. The individual's connection to another culture enabled them to have a deep understanding of the minority children they worked with. Though none of the

children had a Tunisian heritage, the coworker was still able to relate to the children of West and East African heritage through common understandings and values.

This proves the importance of not only acknowledging the diversity within communities but also actively participating in other cultures. Engaging in communities will better prepare social workers to advocate for the rights and well-being of all individuals they serve and contribute to a more inclusive CWS.

This research has contributed valuable insights into the experiences of social workers with minority backgrounds in the Norwegian child welfare system, within the broader context of human rights. It calls for a review of current practices and the implementation of strategies that promote cultural sensitivity, inclusivity, and an intersectional and human rights-based perspective. By doing so, we can move toward a child welfare system that not only respects cultural diversity but also upholds the fundamental human rights of all families and children, nurturing more unbiased outcomes and a stronger sense of justice.

6.3 Potential research limitation

As mentioned earlier, it is essential to recognize the potential influence of my personal background as a Norwegian with a minority background and a career working as a social worker. Despite limitless efforts to maintain objectivity, the nature of this study means that my background and experiences could introduce subjectivity into certain aspects of the research, especially when examining findings related to my personal experiences.

Moreover, it is vital to acknowledge the limitation that the experiences highlighted within this study may not provide a comprehensive representation of all minority social workers or the countless minority communities in the country. As of 2017, Norway is home to a diverse range of migrant groups, with the seven largest migrant groups originating from Poland, Lithuania, Sweden, Somalia, Germany, Iraq, and Syria, according to Statistics Norway (Falch-Eriksen & Skivenes, 2019). It is worth mentioning that none of the informants involved in this study represented these specific countries of origin. Emphasizing the importance of recognizing the boundaries of representation.

Therefore, essential to encourage more research focusing on minority social workers' experiences working with minority communities in the country. The results can contribute to having a better understanding of cultural values, and we might learn a thing or two from each other's rich cultures.

6.4 Suggestions for Further Research

The findings suggest some areas for further research that could contribute to the enrichment of the CWS and support provided to minority families and children. Some of these include studies on cultural sensitivity training or interventions by the CWS in their work with minority families and children. By conducting studies across different countries, CWS could provide insightful information on cultural norms and the challenges they face. Finally, to research how to better support social workers in handling cases involving minority families. These suggestions can provide a deeper understanding of the nuances and challenges of working within the CWS and with marginalized groups.

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Appendix

Appendix A Survey Questionnaire

Conducting interview questions guide.

1. Can you share your experiences as a minority social worker working within the Norwegian child welfare system with children and families with minority backgrounds? What are some of the specific roles and responsibilities you have in your interactions with these youths?

2. How do you perceive the cultural, ethnic, or other minority backgrounds of the group you work with?

3. Have you encountered any challenges or barriers in your interactions with this group within the child welfare system? How have these challenges affected your work and your relationships with them?

4.
5. Can you describe any positive or negative aspects of your interactions with families and children of minority backgrounds within the child welfare system? What strategies or approaches do you find effective in building trust and rapport with them?

6. How do you experience the cultural sensitivity of the child welfare system towards this group? Is there anywhere you think the system could improve in, in the CWS?

7. What resources, support, or training do you feel would be helpful for you as a minority social worker in your interactions with children and families with minority background within the child welfare system?

8. Have you encountered any systemic or structural issues within the child welfare system that may excessively affect youths? If so, can you provide examples and share your experiences on how these issues can be addressed?

9. Based on your experiences, what recommendations or suggestions do you have for improving the interactions between minority social workers and families with minority background within the Norwegian child welfare system?

10. Do you have anything you would like to add?

Appendix B Social media post

Translation from Norwegian:

"Hello!
I am taking a master's in social work and human rights, and am writing my master's thesis on minority families' views/experiences with child welfare. I want to interview women/men with a minority background. Both those who have been in contact with child protection and those who have not been in contact, but who want to share their views/opinions. The assignment focuses on cultural sensitivity and cooperation with minority families.

Feel free to send me a PM if you are interested 😊 The interviews will be anonymized and can be taken via telephone, in person or on Zoom."

Appendix C Information and consent

Information and consent

The purpose of the study

This research investigates the experiences of social workers with minority backgrounds working within the Norwegian child welfare system (CWS) concerning their interactions with children and families from ethnic minority backgrounds. The study aims to understand how these social workers perceive and navigate working within the CWS considering the unique values and understanding of minority families.

> *What are the experiences of social workers with minority backgrounds in the Norwegian child welfare system regarding their interactions with minority families?*

Participant Information Sheet

Experiences with the child protection service

I invite you to take part in my research study. Before you decide whether to participate, you should understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take your time to read the following information carefully and feel free to ask if you need more information or if there is anything that you do not understand. Please also feel free to discuss this with your friends, relatives, and anyone else you wish.

How is the interview designed?

Unstructured interview will be conducted, meaning the interview process will allow flexibility and strength in exploring participants' experiences with some open and end questions by the researcher. You will be free to share your experiences with the guidance of the researcher.

Why have I been considered to take part?

You have voluntary been asked to take part because you identify with or have a parent who identifies belonging in the minority group in Norway, and as an experienced social worker, working with families with minority backgrounds.

Do I have to take part?

It is completely up to you whether you agree to take part in the study. If you do decide to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form. You are free to change your mind at any time without giving a reason.

What will happen if I take part?

You will be asked to take part in an interview with a master's student Fatoumata Kuyateh (me) about your experiences and views on working with minorities in Norway within the child welfare system. The interviews will last approximately about 45 minutes or as long as you would like to talk about your experiences. With your permission, the interview will be audio-recorded. You can stop the interview at any time, and you do not have to answer a particular question if you do not want to.

Where will the interview take place?

The interview will take place in person at a specific location, over the phone or on zoom, according to your convenient, as well as dates and times.

Are there any risks in taking part?

No risks or discomforts are expected in associated with this research study. However, if you feel uncomfortable, you can stop the interview at any time, without giving a reason. After the interview, the recording will be transcribed and de-identified so it will not be traced back to you. I will be working actively to promote full confidentiality in this presentation.

Are there any benefits in taking part?

You will be helping develop my understanding of interactions with minority families, and ideas of how a better relationship can be formed.

Will my participation be kept confidential?

As mentioned above, all the information you give will be kept strictly confidential. The procedures for handling, processing, storing, and destroying the data will comply with the Data Protection Act of 1998.

This means that only the researchers will see what you have said. The audio-recording of your interview will be identified by a code number only. These audio-recordings will be transcribed, and identifying details such as place names and people's names will be removed from the transcripts. I will use quotes from the interviews in the write-up of the study but will ensure that no one can be identified from these quotes.

At the end of the study, the research data, including consent forms, anonymised interview transcripts, field notes and your contact details, will be deleted and destroyed.

What will happen if I want to stop taking part?

If you decide at any point that you no longer wish to be part of the study, then you can withdraw without giving a reason. You can also ask for your data to be removed from the study and destroyed.

Who is doing this research?

The research and interviews will be conducted by Fatoumata Kuyateh, a master student at the Department of Social Science, Gothenburg University, Sweden.

Thank you for taking the time to read this document. This information sheet is for you to keep.

Participant consent form

Researcher: Fatoumata Kuyateh

1. I confirm that I have read and have understood the information sheet dated

[ ] for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason, without my rights being affected.
3. I understand that, under the Data Protection Act 1998, I can at any time ask for access to the information I provide, and I can also request the destruction of that information if I wish.

5. I agree to take part in the above study.

_____ _____ Participant name Date

_____ _____ Researcher Date

_____ Signature

_____ Signature

I understand that confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained, and it will not be possible to identify me in any publications.

I understand and agree that my participation will be audio recorded and I am aware of and consent to your use of these recordings for the following purposes:

> *What are the experiences of social workers with minority backgrounds in the Norwegian child welfare system regarding their interactions with minority families?*

I understand that my responses will be kept strictly confidential. I give permission for the researcher to have access to my anonymised responses. I understand that my name will not be linked with the research materials, and I will not be identified or identifiable in the report or reports that result from the research.