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# International Comparisons of Child Protection systems

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# 2

Gilbert, N (ed.) (1997) *Combatting Child Abuse: International Perspectives and Trends*. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press

# 3

The study compared social policies and professional practices in nine countries examining the differences as well as common problems and policy orientations

# 4

A key finding was that there appeared to be important variations among countries concerning the way in which their child welfare systems responded to concerns about child abuse and how far they were characterised by a *child protection* or a *family service* orientation

# 5

## Characteristics of Child Protection and Family Service Orientations

	<i>Child Protection</i>	<i>Family service</i>
<b>Problem Frame</b>	Individual/Moralistic	Social/Psychological
<b>Intervention</b>	Legalistic/investigatory	Therapeutic/needs assessment
<b>State-parent Relationship</b>	Adversarial	Partnership
<b>Out of Home placement</b>	Involuntary	Voluntary

# 6

## *Child Protection*

United States, Canada, England  
(liberal)

## *Family Service – Mandatory Reporting*

Denmark, Sweden, Finland  
(social-democratic)

## *Family service – Non-mandatory Reporting*

Belgium, Netherlands, Germany  
(conservative)

# 7

Gilbert, N; Parton, N and Skivenes, M (eds.)  
(2011, forthcoming) *Child Protection  
Systems: International Trends and  
Orientations*; New York/Oxford: Oxford  
University Press

USA, Canada, England, Denmark, Sweden,  
Finland, Belgium, Netherlands, Germany plus  
Norway

# 8

Throughout it was a real challenge to understand the different linguistic and cultural terms, definitions, meanings and the measures used in different countries.

Even the terms child protection, child welfare, child abuse, out of home placements, residential settings sometimes varied in their meaning and implications between countries

# 9

- How have the changes over the intervening 15 years impacted on the structure and functioning of child welfare arrangements designed to guard against child maltreatment?
- Have the changes in particular countries meant that some countries previously characterised as following the *child protection orientation* have taken on many of the characteristics of the *family service orientation* – and vice a versa?
- Can we identify the emergence of any new orientations?

# 10

The changes in child welfare and child protection have taken place in a context of wider changes, which include:

- Increased economic globalization
- Growth in individualization amidst changing structure of family life
- Shifting political doctrines

# 11

## Some Common Themes and Developments

- The rapid and often dramatic pace of organizational, policy and legislative change evident everywhere
- In many countries child protection and child welfare has taken on a high political profile due in large measure to intense media coverage
- An expansion of child welfare systems – particularly community and home-based
- Growth in formal procedures and ‘evidenced based’ initiatives – whatever the orientation of the service
- Issues around race and ethnicity now much more significant

# 12

## Rates of children in Out-of-home Care per 1000

	<u>Before</u>	<u>Now</u>
USA	7 (1997)	6 (2007)
Canada	9.4 (1999)	16 (2007)
England	4.5 (1994)	5.5 (2009)
Sweden	6 (2000)	6.6 (2007)
Finland	8 (1994)	12 (2007)
Denmark	9.5 (1993)	10.2 (2007)
Norway	5.8 (1994)	8 (2008)
Germany	9.5 (1995)	9.9 (2005)
Belgium	7.9 (2004)	8.6 (2008)
Netherlands	5.2 (1993)	?

# 13

## Foster Homes and Kinship Care

- With the possible exception of Denmark, foster care has become the placement of choice with residential care taking a reduced role; partly because in Denmark and other Nordic countries residential care is used for a high number of teenagers with ‘challenging behaviour’
- Increasing use of ‘kinship care’ – particularly in the US and to a lesser extent in England and Canada
- The US and England have clear policies stating that ‘adoption’ is the second best option if reunification with biological parents is not possible; Finland and Belgium do not allow adoption and not often used in the other countries

# 14

The findings suggest that the current approaches to protecting children from maltreatment have become much more complex than those operating in the mid-1990s and described in *Combatting Child Abuse* (1997).

# 15

Countries previously associated with the *child protection* orientation have taken on some of the elements of the family service orientation. For example:

- A number of states in the US have developed 'differential response' systems so that not every report is responded to as a potential case of child abuse. Also numerous examples of the development of services which attempt to offer early support and which try to maximise cultural and community continuity.
- In England official policy has attempted to 'refocus' practice so that, wherever possible, family support is maximised

# 16

Those countries which had previously operated according to a clear *family service* orientation have tried to respond to increasing concerns about harm to children.

This seems to be the case in all the Nordic and Northern European countries studied, with the possible exception of Sweden

# 17

In addition to the various attempts to strike a new balance between the *child protection* and *family service* orientations we have also identified the emergence of a new orientation – a *child-focused* orientation

# 18

A *child-focussed* orientation is not restricted to narrow forensic concerns about harm and abuse – rather the object of concern is *the child's overall development and well-being*.

This is evident in many countries' policy programs that target children as important goals for developing and maintaining society. The programs have moved their ambition simply from protecting children from risk to promoting their welfare and well-being.

We see this in Finland and Norway and their aims for a child-friendly society and in the comprehensive child-focused policy programs in the US and England

# 19

With a *child-focused* orientation the state takes on a growing role for itself in providing a range of early intervention and preventive services.

By addressing the child as an individualized entity the state can be seen to promote policies that lead to de-familialization.

# 20

While a *child-centred* orientation can be seen to borrow elements from both the *child protection* and *family service* orientations, it has a qualitatively different character which is shaped by two major, and somewhat contrasting, lines of influence:

- Ideas informed by the ‘the social investment state’
- The growing recognition that children are individuals who should be allotted their own rights

# 21

The idea of the 'social investment state' is an ideal which has been promoted by the OECD and the EU and sees the role of state welfare moving away from compensating individuals for the dis-welfares suffered through the vagaries of the market to investing in human capital.

Investment in children takes on a strategic importance for a state to equip its citizens to adapt to global economic change and to enhance individual and national competitiveness.

# 22

Trying to ensure that all children maximise their developmental opportunities, educational attainment and overall health and well-being become key priorities for social and economic policy.

Policies in England 1997- 2008 are good examples of this.

# 23

In contrast is the rationale for policies which see children as individuals in the here and now, as different, but equally as valuable as adults and that they need to have *rights* bestowed upon them

These policies are concerned with the quality of children's childhoods , stating that it is a social justice issue to make sure that children are treated with respect and given a good upbringing.

Children are not seen so much as future workers as current citizens

Developments in Norway and Finland can be seen as good examples

All 10 countries – with the exception of the US – have ratified the UN Convention of Children's Rights

**Table: Child-Focus, Family Service and Child Protection Orientations**

	<b>Child Focus</b>	<b>Family Service</b>	<b>Child Protection</b>
Driver for Intervention	The Individual Child's needs in a present and future perspective/societies need healthy and contributing citizens	The family unit needs assistance	Parents being neglectful towards children (maltreatment)
Role of the State	Paternalistic/defamilialisation – state assumes parent role; but seeks to refamilialise child by foster home/kinship/adoption	Parental support – state seeks to strengthen family relations	Sanctioning – state functions as 'night-watchman' to ensure child's safety
Problem Frame	Child's development and unequal outcomes for children	Social/Psychological (family systems, poverty, inequality)	Individual/Moralistic
Mode of Intervention	Early Intervention and Regulatory/Need Assessment	Therapeutic/Needs Assessment	Legalistic/Investigative
Aim of Intervention	Promote well-being via social investment and/or Equal Opportunity	Prevention/Social Bonding	Protection/harm reduction
State-Parent Relationship	Substitutive/Partnership	Partnership	Adversarial
Balance of Rights	Children's Rights/Parental Responsibility	Parents' rights to family life mediated by professional social workers	Children's/Parents' Rights enforced with legal means

Source: Gilbert, Parton and Skivenes (2011b)

# 25

We are not suggesting these dimensions form discrete models, hence our preference for ‘orientations’.

Similarly all countries studied contain some mix of the orientations.

Thus rather than place countries somewhere along the line of a continuum (from child-focus to family service to child protection) we might think where they might fall within a 3 dimensional framework – closer to some planes than others.