

Collaborating Against Child Abuse: Exploring the Nordic Barnahus Model: Book Review

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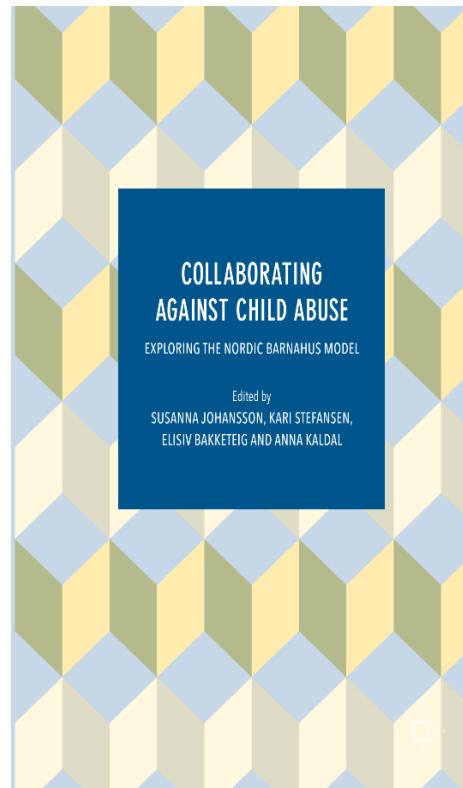
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Collaborating Against Child Abuse: Exploring the Nordic Barnahus Model, Susanna Johansson, Kari Stefansen, Elisiv Bakkeig, Anna Kaldal, Palgrave Macmillan, Switzerland, 2017, 377, ISBN. 9783319583877, link of the book: <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-319-58388-4#overview>

“Collaborating Against Child Abuse: Exploring the Nordic Barnahus Model” by Susanna Johansson et al. in 2017, The genesis of this book stems from the inaugural meeting of the Nordic network for Barnahus research in 2014, spearheaded by Norwegian Social Research (NOVA). The formation of this network aimed to spark scholarly discourse and research efforts around the Nordic Barnahus model. Covering a wide range of disciplines such as law, criminology, sociology, and psychology, this book is a collaborative effort to describe and encourage the development of research areas related to the application of the Barnahus model. The book is a significant contribution, incorporating insights and perspectives from various Nordic countries, encouraging interdisciplinary and comparative exploration of the various dimensions of the model. In acknowledging the support received, various agencies including the Norwegian Ministry of Justice, Children’s Welfare Foundation Sweden, and Stockholm’s Barnahus played pivotal roles. Their contributions facilitated not only the network’s activities but also the eventual publication of this book by Palgrave Macmillan as an open access resource. Alongside financial assistance, the editorial guidance provided by Palgrave Macmillan’s Commissioning Editors, Julia Willan and Josephine Taylor, alongside administrative support from Stephanie Carey, proved invaluable in bringing this project to fruition. Moreover, the constructive feedback from anonymous reviewers and the engagement of contributors enriched the quality and depth of the book, ensuring its scholarly rigor and practical relevance.

Furthermore, the book’s contents reflect a meticulous process of collaboration and consultation, with special mention to individuals such as Bragi Guðbrandsson, Hrefna Friðriksdóttir, and Anja Bredal, who contributed significantly to the early drafts and



introductory parts. Additionally, the appendix, detailing different country models, owes its completeness to the insights provided by Bragi Guðbrandsson, Minna Sinkkonen, Oddbjørg Balle, Lene Mosegaard Søbjerg, Arnajaraq Poulsen, and the Danish National Board of Social Services. Through these collective efforts, this book not only advances scholarly discourse but also serves as a practical resource for policymakers and practitioners engaged with the Barnahus model across the Nordic region. "The book is organized around four thematic pillars: Child-Friendliness, Support and Treatment (Part I), The Forensic Child Investigative Interview (Part II), Children's Rights Perspectives (Part III), and finally, Interagency Collaboration and Professional Autonomy (Part IV)."

Part 1, the Barnahus model in the Nordic Countries demonstrates a shift from a family service-oriented child welfare system towards one that focuses more on child protection and child-friendly justice. In Norway, Barnahus facilitates investigative interviews of children in a supportive environment. The variation in Barnahus models across the Nordic countries reflects differences in how cases of suspected child abuse are handled, particularly in relation to support to families and treatment offered. The Nordic implementation of Barnahus also shows convergence towards a more child-centered child welfare system, although structural differences, such as affiliation with the police system, influence priorities between criminal and child welfare cases. This part highlights differences in the implementation of the Barnahus model across different national policy contexts, which impact on interagency collaboration and investigative processes. This research highlights the significant transformation in child welfare systems in the Nordic countries through the implementation of the Barnahus model. A more child protection-focused approach and child-friendly justice are positive steps in ensuring vulnerable children get the support they need. Variations in the implementation of the Barnahus model reflect flexibility in adapting to local conditions and needs, although this can also pose challenges in achieving consistent standards across the region. The emphasis on child participation and child-friendly environments in the Barnahus model are important aspects that strengthen children's rights. However, structural differences in affiliation with the police system suggest that the balance between criminal interests and child welfare needs to be continually evaluated. Overall, this research provides valuable insights into how the Barnahus model can inspire a more child-centered and equitable child welfare system.

Barnahus in Norway is designed to support child victims of sexual violence and abuse throughout the legal process, as well as ensuring psycho-social support needs are met. Child-friendliness at Barnahus is achieved through design that creates a safe and supportive atmosphere for children. This includes building quality, color schemes and layout. Children and their caregivers report a friendly and caring environment. Barnahus can be placed in a variety of office buildings, not just in residential areas. Good decoration and layout reflect concern for children, enhance their self-esteem, and demonstrate the community's sensitivity to their needs. The importance of the aesthetic environment also affects staff, creating a space that supports children's well-being. Barnahus demonstrates the Norwegian state's commitment to providing the necessary resources to create a high-quality child-friendly environment, reflecting cultural norms related to material standards in Norway. High material standards in public institutions such as Barnahus demonstrate the importance of allocating resources to achieve child-friendliness. This part provides an in-depth analysis of the importance of material aspects in creating a child-friendly environment at Barnahus. The author outlines how elements of design, layout and décor play an important role in supporting the well-being of child victims of violence and sexual abuse. The importance of child-friendliness that goes beyond the mere provision of toys, but encompasses the physical

and aesthetic qualities of the environment, demonstrates the holistic approach adopted by Barnahus. This not only benefits the children but influences the staff working there as well, ensuring that they are constantly reminded of Barnahus' main objectives. However, the authors also highlight that achieving these high standards requires the allocation of significant resources, reflecting the state's commitment to supporting children in vulnerable situations. This analysis is relevant and useful, providing insight into how material and design aspects can contribute to the well-being of children and staff in the context of public institutions.

This part also explores how children summoned to Barnahus in Sweden can be prepared and accompanied by parents or special representatives if parents cannot be involved. Special representatives, who are often lawyers, protect the rights of the child in legal procedures. The use of special representatives increased from 26% to 50% of cases, indicating that many children come to Barnahus without parental involvement. The research also highlights the approach of non-involvement of information to children before police interviews, with the aim that children are not influenced in disclosing information. However, this approach can cause anxiety and discomfort in children. There is a view that the child-friendly environment at Barnahus helps reduce stress, but children still have to undergo challenging investigative interviews. This research shows that children's rights to information and support are often not met, and proposes further research to understand the impact of current procedures and possible improvements. This research provides an in-depth look at the challenges children face when dealing with legal procedures in Barnahus. The approach of using specialized representatives to protect children's rights is a positive step, but the research points to shortcomings in providing adequate information to children. The emphasis on a child-friendly environment in Barnahus is an important aspect that is appreciated, but this research underlines that a supportive physical environment is not enough. Children need emotional support and clear information to reduce their fears. Further research is needed to evaluate the effectiveness of current procedures and ensure that children's rights to information and support are met. Overall, this research offers valuable insights into how the legal system can be more responsive to children's needs. While Barnahus has done a lot of good in creating a child-friendly environment, there is still room for improvement in terms of engagement and information for children.

In other side, the application of CPC-CBT (Cognitive Processing and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy) in Sweden for physically abused children and their families has shown positive results. A team of ten from Barnahus Sweden reported that the method is effective as an early intervention in cases of child physical abuse. This study confirms previous research regarding traumatic stress due to physical violence and shows that it is important for institutions like Barnahus to have the right tools to deal with abused children and provide appropriate interventions. The positive results of this study need to be further evaluated to ensure the sustainability of good parenting strategies and improved child well-being in the follow-up period. The research successfully articulates the significant "Nordic convergence" toward a child-centered system. It is encouraging to read how the Barnahus model facilitates interagency collaboration, bringing justice and welfare together under one roof. The text provides a nuanced understanding of how different nations adapt the model such as the variation in police affiliation while maintaining a unified goal: ensuring vulnerable children receive the support they need without being re-traumatized by the process.

Part 2 has been successful in serving the youngest and most vulnerable child witnesses. However, there are still concerns about older children and adolescents being interviewed by the police in non-child-friendly settings and may not be directed to the

necessary care. The Barnahus project in Finland aims to ensure that all children are interviewed in a child-friendly environment, including adolescents, and to assess their need for further support. The system emphasizes the use of psychological (forensic) expertise in pre-trial investigations and hypothesis testing approaches. Young children and children with special needs, such as those with ADHD or autism spectrum disorders, require special skills from interviewers. Collaboration between the police and expert units helps deal with complex cases and provides re-education for police officers. Expert units have the right to access all information about children, which is important for assessing the risk of long-term abuse. The hypothesis testing approach reduces the risk of confirmation bias and leads interviews, helping investigators find the truth behind suspicions. Evidence-based practices in criminal investigations are in the best interest of the child, ensuring investigations are fair and sensitive to the special needs of child witnesses and victims. This material discusses the importance of adapting interview and inquiry systems for children in forensic contexts, focusing on the Barnahus project in Finland. This system, which serves child witnesses with a friendly and supportive approach, highlights some key points that can be applied in other countries: Child Friendly Environment: The Barnahus project in Finland aims to ensure that all children are interviewed in a child-friendly setting. This is important for older children and adolescents, who are usually interviewed in police stations, which are not always child-friendly. Psychological (Forensic) Expertise: The use of psychological expertise in pre-trial investigations is helpful in dealing with child witnesses. This includes an understanding of neuropsychological elements, especially for children with special needs such as ADHD or autism spectrum disorders. Interdisciplinary Collaboration: Collaboration between the police and forensic expert units allows for more comprehensive handling of complex cases and provides re-education for police officers. Access to Full Information: The expert unit has access to all information related to children, including child welfare service reports, health service documentation, and information from school or daycare personnel. This is important for assessing the risk of long-term abuse. Hypothesis Testing Approach: This approach reduces the risk of confirmation bias and lead interviews, ensuring that the hypothesis is tested.

Part 3 introduces an interdisciplinary method of analysis for child rights justice systems, particularly in dealing with cases of child sexual abuse. Many countries have committed to implementing children's rights and creating justice systems that support them. This method of analysis offers a systematic approach to understanding and examining processes and procedures in justice systems, using process diagrams to illustrate the roles of different agencies. The second objective of this part is to examine Barnahus in Iceland, which has improved the juvenile justice system by strengthening the child's perspective, increasing safety, efficiency, and collaboration. The research shows that Barnahus in Iceland and other Nordic countries has yielded positive results, although challenges remain in implementing key child rights principles. The research also emphasizes the importance of focusing on investigative interviews to gather evidence without neglecting the child's well-being, ensuring the child's active participation in the process, and developing multi-agency training to enhance child-centered collaboration. This part provides an in-depth insight into the importance of an interdisciplinary approach in analyzing and improving child rights justice systems. The approach used, which involves a diagram of key processes and principles, provides a strong framework for understanding how different agencies can work together effectively in addressing child sexual abuse cases. The Barnahus case study in Iceland is highly relevant and demonstrates significant improvements in the juvenile justice system. Barnahus

was successful in strengthening the child's perspective, improving safety, efficiency and inter-agency collaboration. However, the part also highlights the challenges that remain, such as ensuring the welfare of the child is not overlooked during investigative interviews and the importance of the child's active participation in all processes. The study suggests the need for multi-agency training to facilitate mutual understanding and dynamic child-centered collaboration. It is important to fully realize the Barnahus ideology and ensure that all agencies involved can work in harmony for the best interests of the child. Overall, this part offers strong critical analysis and practical guidance to improve the child rights justice system, focusing on effective implementation of key principles and cross-agency collaboration. This research can serve as a valuable reference for other countries seeking to develop a more child-friendly and effective justice system in dealing with cases of child sexual abuse.

Part 4 analyzes the role of Barnahus coordinators in Sweden and how they exercise power in two and three dimensions. Coordinators have the authority to organize collaborative activities in Barnahus and influence child protection officers in conducting child protection investigations. However, the coordinators themselves are influenced by the institutional interests of the police and prosecutor's office, and favor criminal law over the logic of care. This suggests that the coordinator is governed by the logic of criminal law and influences child protection officers based on this logic. Judicialization is understood as a transition to a new institutional order of power that prioritizes justice over welfare. That is, the main focus is on the alleged crime rather than on how to improve the situation of the child and their family through support and treatment interventions. Judicialization is seen as a continuous process of institutionalization, where Barnahus and the various institutions and actors involved in this cooperation are increasingly moving towards shared ownership. This process can be seen as a three-way effect of power increasingly being seen as "natural" or institutionalized. However, as cooperation is a process that is constantly being negotiated and revised, this balance of power should not be seen as fixed and can evolve towards a new institutional order of justice and happiness. This part offers a comprehensive analysis of the power dynamics within Barnahus in Sweden. The author successfully demonstrates how coordinators play an important role in directing child welfare collaborations and investigations, while also showing the tension between the logic of criminal law and the logic of care. The concept of juridification is well explained, providing insight into how the institutional focus can shift from welfare to justice. The emphasis on the dynamic nature of collaboration and power highlights the potential for change and renegotiation in future institutional arrangements. This part is particularly relevant for those interested in the study of child policy, criminal law, and power dynamics in social institutions. This part also explores how juridification manifests in the Barnahus model in Norway, using results from the Barnahus model in Sweden as a reference. Factors that may encourage or inhibit the prioritization of a criminal perspective are discussed, including role clarity and the low formal involvement of child welfare services in Norway compared to Sweden. These factors may indicate a greater potential for Barnahus professionals in Norway to maintain their autonomy and inhibit juridification. However, there are also indications that criminal cases affect the sequencing of tasks, mainly due to the affiliation of Barnahus organizations with the police and changes in criminal procedure laws. Further research is needed to understand the impact of juridification in Norwegian Barnahus, especially in the context of comparison with other countries such as Sweden and Denmark. This part emphasizes the importance of maintaining a balance between criminal justice objectives and the welfare of the child. Although the official objectives of criminal cases are based on the public interest, ensuring the necessary care for children and their families is an

important independent objective. Tensions between different perspectives in Barnahus are inevitable, and competence, good communication, mutual understanding and clarity of roles are required to maintain this balance.

This part provides an in-depth analysis of how juridification may affect the Barnahus model in Norway, highlighting the important role of role clarity and professional autonomy in inhibiting the prioritization of the criminal perspective. The author successfully demonstrates that despite indications of juridification, factors such as role clarity and low formal involvement of child welfare services in Norway can be barriers to the process. This provides valuable insight into the power dynamics in inter-agency collaboration and how this balance can be negotiated and changed. The emphasis on the importance of further research to understand the impact of juridification in Barnahus Norway is particularly relevant, especially in the context of international comparisons. This part highlights that the balance between criminal justice and child welfare objectives is essential to ensure quality services for children and their families. The tensions that exist between different perspectives in Barnahus are considered part and parcel of this model, and the authors suggest that professional competence, good communication and mutual understanding are key to overcoming these challenges. This part is particularly relevant for policymakers and practitioners involved in the implementation of the Barnahus model in different countries.

CONCLUSION

Analysis of child rights justice systems through interdisciplinary methods highlights the importance of a systematic approach to addressing cases of child sexual abuse. Many countries are committed to implementing children's rights and creating supportive justice systems. This method uses process diagrams to illustrate the roles of different agencies, providing an important tool to effectively analyze and critique the justice process.

The Barnahus case study in Iceland demonstrates significant improvements in the juvenile justice system, by strengthening the child's perspective, improving safety, efficiency and collaboration between agencies. However, challenges remain, such as safeguarding children's welfare during investigative interviews and ensuring children's active participation in all processes. The research emphasizes the need for multi-agency training to enhance child-centered collaboration and mutual understanding between agencies. Overall, this research shows that a child-centered approach and cross-agency collaboration can result in a more child-friendly and effective justice system in dealing with child sexual abuse cases. The Barnahus ideology, if implemented well, can be a strong model for other countries in developing better justice systems that support children's rights.

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