

Social Workers' Perceptions of the Causes of Poverty in Nordic Countries

[Abstract submitted to Stream 5 "Social Work and Social Policy: Control or Empowerment?"]

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It is surprising how little we know about social workers' attitudes towards social welfare policy and their perceptions concerning causes of social problems. Earlier research has concentrated mainly on Israel, US and Great-Britain and most of the studies have used only small surveys which restrict the number of applicable methods. International comparisons are rare. There is no earlier research on Nordic social workers' attitudes towards causal attributions for poverty in comparative perspective. There are at least two reasons why social workers' perceptions of the causes of poverty should be studied. First, the attitudes of social workers might influence their professional work where they have to use the principle of means testing. Social workers have a position to make decisions, select service users, and use means testing in positive and negative manner. It is possible that the perceptions of poverty influence their professional behaviour and how they respond to the needs of the service users. The second reason refers to the social worker's position as an expert. They have knowledge about mechanism of economic surviving through their work experience. This paper concentrated social workers perceptions of the causes of poverty in four Nordic countries. Study uses survey from Sweden (N=2809), Norway (N=703), Denmark (N=743), and Finland (N=1299). Survey has been collected in 2007 and 2008. Focus of the study is in three theoretical causes of poverty which are individual, structural and fatalistic. The explanatory variables used are sociodemographic factors as well as indicators which deal with social workers' occupational situation and work history.