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Mirja Satka

# Early intervention and the management of Finnish children and young people

## Abstract

The concept of early intervention emerged into everyday Finnish language of media and politics at the turn of the Millennium. The invasion of early intervention occurred through extensive political and organizational support, accompanied by vigorous media discussion. The rationale, shared by the key agents of early intervention, was formed according to this distinguished project and public discourse. At the turn of the Millennium, the idea of early intervention seemed compatible with many reformations of the public government relying on the New Public Management. Early intervention, and applying it, quickly spread to daycare, schools and child protection, among other things. This article aims at analyzing what early intervention was in this particular empirical case. It analyzes the Finnish practices of preventive child protection in social work with children and young people from the point of view of governing, and as practices that target children, young people and their parents suspected to belong to a risk group.

## Introduction

The concept of early intervention emerged unexpectedly into everyday Finnish language of media and politics at the turn of the Millennium only. At first, the problems of children and young people were conceptualized through thinking about risks. Very soon the public talk was modified; people began to talk about different concerns and the parents' lost responsibility of raising children. One interpretation of this change is that the word *risk* did not seem to fit with the ideological frame of the Nordic welfare discourse. Instead, the public talk repeated how parents were due to set clear limits and control their children more effectively (e.g. Jallinoja 2006, pp. 239–253; Harrikari 2008; Forsberg/Ritala-Koskinen 2010). This discussion became current, not least because the public services provided

by preventive child protection had become nearly non-existent during the 1990s' deep recession. Almost all that was left of the preventive child protection was an idea in the Child Welfare Act. In addition, the number of child protection clients had increased steeply, and it was argued that the children's problems had become ever more complex and that social welfare's resources had been targeted at crisis work with children and young people.

The invasion of early intervention discourse and practices occurred through extensive political and organizational support, accompanied by vigorous media discussion. At first, different sectors (NGOs, leading civil servants, church authorities, civil activists, etc.) discussed children's problems in many diverse concepts and mixed the new risk-related concepts with the old, well-known social problems of children. The National Early Intervention project (2001–2005), with almost all the sectors of the Finnish society represented in it, became an important forum that channeled public discussion and terminology in use on the topic. This project aimed at promoting early intervention with children and young people on all the levels of society. The rationale, shared by the key agents of early intervention, was formed according to this distinguished project and public discourse. In the end, the idea of early intervention became established quickly, and it became the leading intervention tactic aimed at preventing problems of children and young people. In addition, it was negotiated into a part of two policy programs of Finnish governments (Satka 2009).

At the turn of the Millennium, the idea of early intervention seemed compatible with many reformations of the public government relying on the New Public Management. Early intervention was considered a method which enables efficient management of children's and young people's questions, and offers new means of precision. This method, and applying it, quickly spread to daycare, schools and child protection, among other things. Nowadays early intervention is well established in the everyday practices of social welfare and child protection.

This article aims at analyzing what early intervention actually was, because research on this in practice popular topic has been scarce in the Nordic countries (see e.g. Pithouse 2007; Garret 2003; Parton 2006; Featherstone 2014; Harrikari 2008a). This article analyzes the Finnish practices of preventive child protection in social work with children and young people in the 2000s, from the point of view of governing, and as practices that target children, young people and their parents suspected to belong to a risk group.

## Early intervention practices and projects in Finland

Finnish practices and projects of early intervention consist of a heterogeneous group of actions organized from different points of departures. Typically, they cross administrative sectors and the borderlines of action between the public, the private and the civil society (Satka 2009). In this article, early intervention is examined as one form of preventive child protection, but this concept will also be used in its more extensive meaning. I understand early intervention as an idea and practice of governing, i.e. the production and governing of citizenship, applied to young generations, with particular principles and techniques and routines of execution that have begun to form in different professional fields and practices of networking civil societies (Foucault 1980; Miller/Rose 2008, pp. 14–16; Dean 1999). Applying new techniques has many consequences, which do not limit themselves only to professional practices, but also extend their impact also to self-understanding, expertise and people's understanding of their work. These techniques have an impact on the self-understanding and identities of the different parties of the execution thereof, namely children, young people and their parents (Foucault 1997, pp. 163–172; Helen 1997, pp. 15–21; Chambon 1999, pp. 52–53, 57; Kaisto 2010; Selin 2010).

According to the researchers, early interventions into the everyday lives of children at risk are marked by cultural assumptions about children and young people, which are much more control oriented in comparison to the era of the welfare state, for example concerning the appropriate behavior of children and young people and the suitable places for them to spend their leisure time in (e.g. Harrikari 2008). The dominating cultural assumptions are part of advanced liberalism's means of governing (Rose 1999) and they have an impact on all professional work with children and young people; the evaluation of the concern experienced by the parents and designated groups at risk as well as the techniques of governing individuals at risk have invaded the space of taking care of social problems. Instead of being considered social citizens, the targets of early intervention, children and young people, are understood as moral individuals with responsibilities and duties. Nevertheless, as is typical of emerging phases, the current practices of social work entail many tensions between the old and the new practices of governing (cf. Selin 2010, p. 216). This article asks what kinds of new professional practices, techniques or routines of child protection – and on the other hand subject positions – early intervention produces for social workers and children.



## Data and method

The data discussed in this article has been collected at the beginning of 2007 from a field of protective child care that could be described as the intersection of social and judicial interventions. It has been collected by interviewing social workers and social care workers in two different early intervention projects, i.e. workers who invented a new practice and executed it, about their views and experiences of this work in an urban environment.<sup>1</sup> One of the projects made interventions into shoplifting and misdemeanor by young people under the age of fifteen. This project was launched as a result of a request for executive assistance expressed by the police, who approached social welfare authorities wondering how to deal with under-age shoplifters. This project was formed during the first years of 2000. It was one of the first forms of early intervention practices in urban environments, and the idea of intervention was disseminated, among other things, by the Ministry of the Interior's security program, which progressed simultaneously. The other project focused on limiting and monitoring young people's substance abuse in public places in particular.

The workers were interviewed in groups of three to six people at their workplaces, taking advantage of the use of both focus group method and thematized interviews, depending on the theme under discussion. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed word by word by the research assistants who completed the interviews. All informants were informed in advance about the purpose of the research and all gave their written permission for the further utilization of the data in ethically sound social work research. When analyzing the data I have followed the best ethical practices in order to e.g. protect the privacy of the individual informants.

I first organized this combined data according to themes, and chose the workers' descriptions of the launching of the intervention practice, its goals and execution in practice, as well as their depictions of the process as my object of analysis. To analyze this combined data, I applied the method of adaptive theorizing (Layder 1998, pp. 53–65), i.e. I analyzed the data in a theory-bound manner by coding the important parts of the data and organizing the codes in relation to each other by making theoretical notes on them and drawing conceptual mind maps of them as advised by Derek Layder. The concepts of governing, risk, fear and the construction of subjects turned out to be central theoretical clues for the interpretation of the data, namely for carving out the professional practices and the agents in the early intervention. Basically, the results of the analysis tell us what

kinds of means of interpretation and distinction professionals use in early intervention (cf. Alasuutari 2001, pp. 120–123). It could be argued that the results of this work, at the intersection of social and judicial interventions carried out with children, young people and their parents, reflect the reality of our current time more broadly. At first, I will describe the launching of the project, as well as how the workers argue for their work and how they explain doing it. Secondly, the examination focuses on opening up the process and methods of early intervention work and thirdly, I will interpret the subject positions this work produces for the agents of intervention.

## Data analysis

### *Early intervention in greater Helsinki area child protection work*

The first early intervention projects emerged in the greater Helsinki area social work in the mid-1990s. The dissemination of early intervention practice was promoted by national crime prevention plans drawn up with the police. Preventing marginalization was one of the key issues in these plans, which led to focusing early intervention practices on young generations and forming multi-professional safety-nets for all municipalities. Simultaneously, it brought the representatives of different administrative sectors to the same table in search of means of improving local safety (Satka 2009, pp. 23–25; Koskela 2009, pp. 251–270; Harrikari 2008, pp. 192–204).

All the early intervention projects discussed here can be considered examples of progressive liberalism's (Rose 1999) aims of producing citizens who can act as free, self-regulating subjects, because *Näppäri* and the young people's substance abuse project are meant for children and young people who, assessed by the social welfare professionals, are assumed to be at risk either from the point of view of communal safety or their own welfare. What these early intervention projects have in common is a systematic practice which aims at watertight execution, as well as short and cost effective client relationships (Saari 2007; Palsanen 2007). These projects aim at a collaborative relationship, in which children and parents participate in the governing of their behavior (cf. Kaisto 2010, p. 58). On the one hand, early intervention's rationale and style of reasoning is (Kaisto/Pyykkönen 2010, p. 15; Rose 1999, pp. 24–28) based on creating a change in the children's or young people's behavior, and on the other hand it is based on maintaining and strengthening the parents' authority and self-management in relation to the children.

When the notice concerning the child's or young person's misdemeanor need of help reaches the social workers, they react to this notice

or contact as quickly and impressively as possible by sending the “facts” causing the intervention, i. e. a letter describing the child’s behavior, to the parents with an invitation to participate in a negotiation with the project workers (Palsanen 2007, pp. 62–64, 87–88; Saari 2007, p. 42). All the interviewed project workers emphasized openness and honesty in their action, and they explained that this meant the recognition of the facts. In practice, this means putting the family’s or the child’s situation openly into words to the clients and the collaborative parties and contextualizing it in relation to the moral, social and health care norms (cf. Saari 2007, pp. 47–51; Palsanen 2007, pp. 63–70). All these characteristics – rapidity, impressiveness and open honesty based on facts – underline early intervention as a means of assessing and shaping morality (cf. White 1999, p. 99).

Particularly in child protection, social workers use intervention to work out problematic situations and to evaluate children at risk with the help of local networks of different professionals put together for this purpose. It is of essential importance that there are no gaps or information breakdowns in this collaborative chain of network, and that everything will be intervened into and everything will be documented reliably (cf. Chambon 1999, pp. 59–62), according to the practices and principles agreed on within the professional community. The workers justify this approach with the equal treatment of young people and with the citizen’s rights, among other things. The client information systems are central in collaboration; if the information is up-to-date, social workers can quickly form an overall opinion on the family’s and children’s situation, based on the available data. With a few clicks they can find out information on possible previous shopliftings, substance abuse and whether the family or the child already is a client of one of the welfare information systems. The social workers stress that early intervention can not exist without the resources of multi-professional networks (e.g. Palsanen 2007, p. 71). These networks are the necessary prerequisite for effective normalization work.

### *Early intervention into shoplifting – the case of Näppäri*

In what follows, I will analyze the kinds of organizations social workers have for interaction with children and young people. All the selected examples of early intervention projects fall into the category at the intersection of police work and child protection. The networking of the police and child protection that has taken place due to early intervention has created new tasks for social workers and changed their professional reasoning. According to the workers, the idea of these projects is to prevent expensive

corrective child protection work, such as taking into custody, or lifelong marginalization and exclusion from education and working life. Marginalization is both a core question of OECD recommendations on child policy (e.g. OECD 1995, pp. 137–144) and a risk factor in the national program on communal safety (Arjen turvaa 2004). Eight social work professionals, who have executed early interventions with shoplifters under the age of fifteen or with young substance abusers, participated in the interviews analyzed in the following chapters. Half of the interviewees had a degree from a polytechnic, and half of them had an MA in Social work from universities. My next question is: What kinds of governing techniques and routines are used? What kind of rationale or reasoning is the style of action based on?

Except for acute situations, being accepted as a client of child protection usually takes quite a long time, but in the new projects focusing on preventive work speed is the key.

The process of early intervention begins as soon as the child's shoplifting has been noticed. Usually it happens when either the security camera or the security guard picks up the perpetrator among the clients.

*... for example, the girls may well visit many stores. The security guard catches them in third or the fourth store, in other words they've been followed through the security cameras to see if their action continues. Girls do it more than boys. When it comes down to it and the guard catches them, the stores have some kinda room, where the guard takes the child, writes down the child's personal information, and then calls the police. The police are asked to come, and they then interrogate the child and write down the parents' contact information, and call the child's home. It's very rare that the police don't reach the parents or that it hasn't been done. After that, the info goes to the crisis center and the crisis center sends a child protection report to us. (YH2)*

The project workers consider it important to react immediately, because it is important that children and young people are made responsible for their actions and do not start thinking that what they did was meaningless and therefore forgotten, among other things (e.g. Saari 2007, pp. 42–43). The reaction means sending a letter to the parents, with official information on the incident, as well as an invitation to come to the project office together with the child. These negotiations seem to have a pattern or a model which becomes repeated in all the interviewees' talk. These negotiations rely on reasoning, which has its own terminology and moral principles (cf. Rose 1999, pp. 26–27).

The “talking-to” with the child and the parents is constructed in the interviewees’ speech so that the child becomes the center of everything (cf. White 1999). This ensures that the child is heard during the discussion, but the workers say that this way they also aim at having an impact on the discussions at home, because in their opinion parents often do not listen to what their children have to say. On the other hand, the workers justify these discussions’ focus on children by saying that it highlights the child’s own responsibility regarding the incident:

*we wanna make children responsible for what they’ve done ... nobody does it for them like parents often do. It’s important that children take responsibility, according to their own resources and age level. (YH3)*

When this speech event is looked at as a practice of governing, the role social workers in such a determined manner construct for the child can be interpreted as the dramatization of the child’s deed (cf. Garland 2001; Lemert 1971): the setting of the stage – the policeman’s call home, the child protection notice to the authorities’ information system, the invitation to the event of talking-to, reading the notice to the child protection out loud, setting the child as the player of the key role for defense, detailed reminiscence of the incident, repeating the information fed into the authorities’ information system – has been constructed as a greater event than the actual incident, and the incident begins to gain the measures of a Major Crime, at least on the level of the parents’ and the children’s emotions. This method entails one of the “talking-to’s” most important goals, namely on the one hand, guiding the children’s thinking and action, and on the other hand, raising responsible parenthood and strengthening the parents’ self-control. The purpose of the “talking-to” is to make the parents think themselves about the support they need as parents, for raising their children in this kind of a situation, and to express it. The workers, on their behalf, are prepared to offer the necessary help to the parents, according to a plan agreed on together.

This same drama works well for the goals regarding the children. From the child’s point of view, the “talking-to” in Näppäri is constructed as a ladder *of five steps of fear*. The first step is being caught shoplifting. The security guard catches the child, takes him/her to the guards’ room and calls the police. The interviewees say that for many children this is a point of panic. The child gains an experience on how visual power (the eye of



power) works (see Koskela 2009, pp. 221–223) in the space of the store and how, by far, it exceeds his ability to detect the monitoring eye of power.

The second step on the ladder of fear is transmitting the information on the incident to the parents. The policeman calls the parents on the location, and the project worker sends home an invitation to a negotiation and the child protection notice.

*... nearly all, without exception, get scared when they are caught in the store. Because, at first there's the security guard, then the police and then they are taken home and then the call from the social welfare office. So many people become involved. Everybody is a bit anxious to come to the office, adults, too, of course. But like, when you get a letter from child protection, it always has the same ring to it, it makes you serious. (YH2)*

According to the interviewees, the authorities' announcements about the children's shoplifting and the third step, namely the invitation from the child protection mean shame and humiliation to many parents. The intense media debate on parents' responsibility and irresponsibility (e.g. Jallinoja 2006; Harrikari 2008, pp. 186–187) has no doubt made parents sensitive to the opinions of outsiders. Even lesser things than a child protection notice can feel like a proof of the weak quality of parenthood in this atmosphere of suspicion (cf. Koskela 2009, p. 147).

*... the parents' reactions speak volumes of the family's notion of justice or of reactions to other problematic situations. Of course, the child's getting caught for committing a crime is usually a terrible shock to the parents, and of course the reactions are stronger than they would be if something like, say, a controversy or something occurred. (YH3)*

For some children who have shoplifted the gravest worries on steps two and three are tied to the fear of being abused by their own parents. Based on their own experiences, social workers are well aware of the fact that some parents react strongly to these announcements, and release their anger by using physical or mental violence.

The fourth step on the ladder of fear is the “talking-to” organized for the child and the parents by the project worker. It takes place in the project office according to the script described above. All the interviewees stress that the general principle of the discussion on the incident is open-



ness and honesty, and the shared organization of the consequences. The incident is weighed from many angles along the lines of these principles.

*... like we have this principle, too, like if children commit crimes, they're not bad people, or like one incident in no way means that they're awful youth criminals or that this is the road to becoming a criminal, automatically. (YH3)*

None of the interviewees said they threatened the children with criminal careers. On the other hand, because the idea of this possibility that a caught child could become exposed to a criminal career came up repeatedly in the interviewees' speech, we could assume that it would be mentioned also in face-to-face situations with the children and the parents. What could be a more frightening vision?

Many interviewees stress that openness also applies to issues that the child has wanted to discuss confidentially and in private with the social worker.

*... there are no secrets, like all the texts that the child produces will end up in the eyes and ears of the parents, even when the children sometimes ask us not to tell this or that to their parents. Like, it's such honesty, directness, and also, like we produce information for child protection in the region with the evaluation we do. It's also about assessing the region's child protection clientele. (YH3)*

Traditional child protection has sometimes been accused of vagueness and unclear agendas (e.g. Heino 1997). Workers in early intervention in a way respond to this critique by underlining the honesty and "facts" in their work, which means, among other things, that if the "talking-to" indicates there is a need for judicial child protection action, the further child protection notice will be discussed openly with the child and the parents. Whether children and parents consider this a scary situation or a relief depends on the family's situation and the professional way of informing them about the notice. The deepest core of the "talking-to" is tied to making professionally qualified distinctions: on the one hand, between children who are "not at risk," and on the other hand, between children who need child protection, a situation which leads to authorities being asked to consider possible actions concerning these children.

The highest step on the ladder of fear, and in the workers' opinion the most difficult one, is the child protection client information system.

None of the children who have stepped on the ladder manage to escape this step. Being caught shoplifting leaves a mark in the client information system, first by the police, and next in the child protection client information system. The police record in the client information system will be erased eventually, but information fed into the classified child protection client information system remains. This information will not disappear from the information system's infinite memory.

*But this record, in my opinion, is ... the biggest thing ... for these 13–15-year-olds. ... The record scares them.* (YH2)

On a general level, these kinds of statements in the data indicate that the examined early intervention practice underlines a moral code based on the individual's own responsibility and choice in the governing of both the children and the parents. The systematic use of the ladder of fear no doubt creates new subject positions and new professional information for child protection work. What this information and these positions are and how fear functions as a means of control remain questions to be answered by further research. The next piece of contemplation offers some guidelines. When children are put in a key role on the stage of early intervention, it does not change the child's subjected position in relation to adults. In fact, the workers' reasoning in the interview data includes a pointed notion, according to which the act of shoplifting justifies children's subjection and the betrayal of children's trust.

The underlying force of the early intervention process is a determined use of fear, which is naturally nothing new in child protection, but what is new is the systematic use of it. Fear is primarily a state of mind, based on its ability to evoke strong images in people's minds (cf. Koskela 2009). Since children have fewer previous experiences in life than adults to relate the strong emotions evoked by early intervention to, it might be worthwhile to examine how children experience these interventions and what effects the politics of fear has on the children's everyday life. Does it change their experiences of being a child? Do children feel more or less safe after these kinds of intervention processes?

## **Subjects produced by early intervention**

### *Children and young people as objects of risk evaluation*

As pointed out above, the early intervention discourse and its practices of execution created their own kind of logic in the reasoning and organiza-

tion of preventive child protection work. The re-organizing effects of early intervention discourse and the power of governing reach, however, much further and deeper, all the way to the identities and self-understanding of the agents, because these new practices also reconstruct the subjectivities of the clients and the workers (e.g. Chambon 1999, pp. 57, 78; Juhila 2009, pp. 56–58). According to Foucault (e.g. 1998, pp. 132–136), human being's subjectivity is constructed at the intersections of external control and knowledge formation and that of self-control. I will analyze the social workers' discourse next, to see how and what kinds of subject positions early intervention practices would seem to produce for the children and young people in the context provided by legislation and institutional instructions, documentation practices and the described client work in the greater Helsinki area early intervention projects.

When the interviewer asks the employees how they work with the police, when they meet young substance abusers "on the field," the descriptions provided by the employees repeat friendly encounters, worry, listening, intervention into everything, honesty, openness, direct and open talk, the responsibility of the children, young people and parents, notice practices, taking home, recording into the client information systems (see Saari 2007, pp. 42–69). This kind of talk reveals that social workers apply quite similar routines, which function through images of fear and shame, with young substance abusers and their parents as they do with shoplifting incidents. Due to the conditions on the field, the task of intervention is more obscure, and not all illegal possessions of alcohol or other intoxicating substances by underage children lead to a talking-to in the office. Encounters with young people "on the field" can also be interpreted as the extension of public control to young people's "wild outlaw" space (Koskela 2009, p. 153; Korander/Törrönen 2004, pp. 146–168).

Thus, meeting in the office and the "talking-to" only occur with young people who end up being assessed as the ones potentially at risk, and who, in addition, are not already clients of child protection, because a child protection notice will be distributed to the young person's own social worker, who then takes the action considered necessary. The method applied by the substance abuse project is one application of social work on the streets, carried out together with the police patrolling the streets. The police have the right to check the young people's ID, and in addition they have the right to pour out any alcohol in the possession of underage children. When the patrolling team encounters young people under suspicion, all those present will be examined, but due to lack of resources the aim

is not to intervene in everything and in everybody's life; according to the interviews the ultimate goal is locating young people at risk.

*... if it's a half a bottle of beer or something more or less suspicious, we will intervene ... systematic intervention has of course the advantage that it brings to light those who are often intoxicated or who cause some concern. The ultimate goal is to find the risk groups ... the others will not be bothered. (YH4)*

Children or young people who have been caught both shoplifting and for substance abuse, and their life situations, will be objectified due to singling them out as the targets of risk evaluation. Finnish social workers do not use objective means of measurement or ready-made forms for carrying out this assessment, but list several indicators of individuals at risk. These include, among other things, poor success at school or missing school, deficient communication with parents, parents' refusal to participate in the talking-to, being repeatedly busted, substance abuse admitted by the child or the young person. The result of the risk evaluation determines the next interventions. If the child is not defined as one at risk in the assessment of the social field worker, preventive action will not be carried out with the scarce resources, even if the interviewees are bothered by another professional piece of information, they need to ignore in such a case: in the framework of social problems this kind of potential problem child would be defined as one belonging to the target group for regional or group specified preventive actions. In comparison, in the practices of early intervention only children and young people, who professionally defined can be considered as being "at risk," will continue as parties of this kind of interaction.

*... when we assess the need for further action or perhaps the need to direct the client to other services, it's not the single incident but the other issues that cause it. In other words, how big is the risk that it's a life style, like how big is the risk that a 15-year-old has a habit of getting drunk every weekend, or is it just that he has been unlucky, and has been caught every time those three times in his life that he's been drunk. It's completely different if the young person is actively engaged in some sports, for example ... (YH7)*

In the executed "talking-to" events, putting the children at risk in a position of being responsible for their actions that defy the norms is strongly presented. Both the children and the parents are positioned as the objects of moral control in this professional interaction, and their opinions are lis-

tened to, but simultaneously they are requested to take personal responsibility for the incident, and they are also requested to control their behavior, parenting and their offspring's self-control better in the future (cf. Törrönen 2004, pp. 25–27; Helen 1997, pp. 20–21). In early intervention, children or young people who have committed the act as well as their parents are objectified as moral agents, whose self-control is the target of guidance through official notice, “talking-to” that aims at forcing them to take responsibility, listening to their opinions, recording the violations of norms and drawing attention to the risks that constitute a threat to the children's and the young people's future. There is an inbuilt contradiction in this intervention practice: between respecting the autonomy of the subject and strengthening external control. It should not be interpreted as a concession to the discourse on children's rights. On the contrary, the combination of listening to and normalizing aims at ensuring the subjects' ability and will to collaborate (cf. Kaisto 2010, p. 58).

#### *Social workers as executors of governing power*

Researchers studying governing power stress the close connection between the techniques of governing and the ethical shaping which the participating subject directs at itself. This has been considered the prerequisite for the efficient execution of power (e.g. Kaisto 2010, pp. 55–67; Dean 1995, p. 562). Also, early intervention social field workers stress the workers' belief in the idea of early intervention and the justification of their own work as a prerequisite for successful intervention. One of the interviewees stated:

*This work requires that workers want to protect children from the dangers of substance abuse. (YH8)*

Personal “belief” in politically and programmatically defined goals is nothing new, because most social workers have always been committed to producing citizenship according to the conditions of their own times (e.g. Satka 1995). In addition, the workers strongly brought forth their own responsibility in both the development of intervention and the personal choices they make at work. Another interviewee summarized this concisely: “You cannot be a missionary and an atheist.” (YH7). A third interviewee underlined the equality and openness of client work as the moral goal: “... neutrality or equality or a kinda fairness are quite important. Also, putting your cards on the table, like what you're doing, you do it in the open, and explaining what you're about to do. And earning trust. Especially with



marginal groups you're quickly busted if you're not honest and straight, and your own safety may be at risk if you're not open about what you're going to do." (YH6)

Identifying children or young people at risk and working with them requires professional reflexivity, which means the work is not based on movies on children and young people, popular in public discussions (Törönen/Korander 2004, p. 169). In the urban culture of fear (Koskela 2009; Furedi 2007), social field workers often have to contemplate on their own professional ethics from the point of view of both the society and the value base of social work, and the interviewees do not want to work by neglecting any of them. The same moral principles of modifying oneself apply to the workers and the norm violators alike:

*I think it's extremely important that if you do something, you're also responsible for it. Like, I'm somehow old-fashioned, I don't turn a blind eye to everything.* (YH6)

Early intervention social field workers consider themselves a substitute for parents, someone who sets the limits to the children or young people, when parents for some reason are not able to control their offspring themselves:

*I think that it's still more important that the parents intervene, social worker is like the next step. Parents' part, like how they react and how serious they think it is, is more important to the child than me as a social worker intervening into it. On the other hand, then, if the parents don't care, then my situation is different. Then there's at least someone who cares.* (YH2)

However, social field workers do not consider their clients and themselves only as the object of their work; in addition they regard their own profession, members of their collaboration networks and Finnish culture of education as the object of their work.

The interviews included many indicators, which suggest that in addition to children, young people and parents, social field workers' moral guidance includes other child welfare units, professions of collaborative intervention and the whole culture of education, and the whole society with its ways of relating to the issue:

*Substance abuse projects challenge ... we need a change of attitude in general in this society ... and above all in the family crisis centers, like is it really*



*wise for us to interfere in all this, what if the child is a bit drunk, is that it now. Like, we do need a change of attitude, even among the professionals. (YH8)*

Particularly substance abuse project workers stress the change of attitude as a desirable goal of intervention work, so that in the future young people's drinking would not be considered normal behavior at any particular age. The interviewees were well aware of the long-term nature of this work, but they nevertheless believed that promoting this change is necessary in their work.

*Parents don't know the truth. The goal is to let the parents know, so that they would start talking about the problem at home, the ball of responsibility would be in the parents' hands, again. And on a higher level, the goal is, of course, that one of these actions would turn into a stream, and then a river, which would then shape the attitudes. (YH7)*

Intervention workers recognize and follow many moral codes that regulate their work and identity, particularly the ones concerning honesty, openness, responsibility and facts, i. e. relying on recorded facts. They position themselves as subjects in the moral order of early intervention, aimed at changing reality not only in the clients' lives but also in their own lives and profession, as well as in society in general. Intervention workers are objects of moral governing themselves, too (cf. Foucault 1998, p. 134). They present their role in changing the reality as a central one, compared to the other agents, whether it regards the execution of intervention or reaching significant social goals. The ethical goal or script, which the substance abuse project workers aim at following in their work with children and young people, is a culture of education, which does not approve of norm violations by children and young people, and in which parents take their responsibility without social field workers or the police having to interfere.

## Discussion

The examined early intervention projects turned out to be normalizing practices that shaped the objects and the agents, and their rationale turned out to be based on raising self-governing citizens and individuals, capable of working and consuming. They are examples of the redefined social attitudes in progressive liberalism and social work in risk society (e. g. Webb 2006). Practices of early intervention often use several flexibly overlapping techniques of governing: practices of recording refer to actu-

arial social work that underlines documentation and information (Parton 2008; Webb 2006, pp. 135–138), the ladder of fear can be interpreted as a means of biopolitics, a discourse educating children and parents, in particular, (Stenson 1997) and listening to the children and including them can be interpreted as persuasion to compliance.

However, governing is successful only if the objects of governing control themselves and their behavior according to the rationale of control (Kaisto 2010, p. 55). In early intervention projects this becomes realized, because the social field workers have embraced the required moral agency, the precondition for raising citizens, both in relation to the object of action and their community work and society. The intervention workers are courageous and strong moral entrepreneurs. One of the interviewees talks about the strong forces underneath the early intervention, such as the Ministry of the Interior's voluntary security work, which provides support and funding:

*Like, now we clearly have huge safety-nets in the background or huge back-up, it's really good to act here now, plus this has gained some publicity as well.* (YH1)

Yet, the data shows that even in intervention work the social workers' hands are not tied. They have room to negotiate the demands their work sets, to exercise ethical reflexivity. Two issues, in particular, emerged from the data, which I think call for contemplation.

Firstly, from the point of view of children's rights and child protection, early intervention meant as child protection can in fact produce illegal, punishing parenting, which calls for serious professional re-evaluation. Intervention which harms children cannot be accepted in any circumstances on any grounds. Secondly, what seems alarming is the fact that children's views and experiences are leaked to the parents, without questioning. Is telling everything to the parents, then, a firm stand from the point of view of professional ethics and children's rights? What consequences does it have for the children's trust towards social services and its personnel? Is not trust as the ethical basis of social work also the principle that applies to children and young people?

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## Annotation

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