

# Vulnerable Children/children in vulnerable families and Child Welfare Services In Norway Under the Corona

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# Outline of the presentation



- Background information
- The current situation with regard to the corona
- The situation of vulnerable children

**NB! Based on feedback from some local authorities:**

- Challenges in the Child Welfares Services
- Unanticipated results

# Background information

- Norway; 5,3 million people
- 356 local authorities and five geographical regions
- 39 local authorities (LA) have less than five social workers
- Each local authority has their own child welfare service/ child protection service (CWS), 200 of the LA run intermunicipal services, some regional services
- In 2019 55.000 children and young people received help from CWS (4 % of children 0-22 yrs), 60 % while living at home and 40 % out-of-home care
- The main causes for interventions are related to parental challenges and high conflicts in families

# The current situation regarding corona

- 8158 confirmed cases, 229 have died (14.5.20)
- Average age 46 years, 50% male
- Covid-19 associated deaths average age 82, 55% male
- Many infections but few deaths; deaths per 100.000 in Norway 4,1 compared with Belgium 73, Spain 53. Very low mortality rate compared with other countries.
- Far-reaching measures and early lock down on 12 March with ban on public events and activities, closed kindergardens, schools and educational institutions, but allowed certain groups to continue attending schools and day care facilities
- 20 April reopening of kindergardens and schools 1- 4 grade, the rest on 11 May, getting prepared back to normal from June 15 – from fighting the virus to controlling it. 200 can gather in public places, and 20 privately

# Who are the vulnerable children?

- Children in need a number of services, children with disabilities, children in families with psychiatric/addictions problems, exposed to violence, children with psychiatric health problems ie depression, children living in families with constant low income. These are more dependent on services than other children.
- Many families are dependent on kindergarden and schools providing daily routines and support. This type of services have been lacking, and vulnerable families have had problems in providing care and follow-up of children.
- Some children are exposed to social isolation due to disabilities, language problems, over-crowding, high conflict among parents
- Children in families exposed to layoffs, redundancies, lack of income can cause stress, mental problems (depression, frustration, aggression), increased intake of drugs/alcohol

# Consequences of closed kindergardens and schools

- Kindergardens and schools usually prevent negative development among children. What happens to children when the provision of care, play and learning, ie language skills etc are downsized?
- Kindergardens: One the most important services to children in CWS, send most of the notifications of children at risk, and vulnerable children are not being identified
- Schools: Reduced learning among pupils, especially those who do not receive enough support at home, falling behind, but also lack of social arenas, such as schools and leisure activities is tiresom for children and young people. Can cause loneliness
- Children from families with low socioeconomic backgrounds are more exposed to a decrease in academic skills faced with closed schools and holidays

- For some children it can be challenging to spend more time with parents

# Challenges for the Child Welfare Services



- The capacity of the CWS has not been changed, and opening hours have been the same
- A decrease in the number of notifications of children at risk
- The staff have been available and working from home
- More difficult to follow-up families, but an increased use of video communication. Lack of physical meetings, but increase in telephone contact. The total amount of contact may not be less than usual
- Some services have contacted all the children they provide services for, and therefore they have reached more children than usual
- Meetings have been postponed, but critical cases have been taken care of
- Less coordination of cases and decrease in the provision of in-home services

# Challenges for the Child Welfare Services



- Many worried social workers due to lack of physical meetings with children. Are the most vulnerable children looked after?
- Decrease in the number of new cases due to the lock down of kindergardens and schools
- Challenges for the institutions since they are not staffed for teaching the residents at home
- Anticipate an increase of referrals when returning to normal



# Experiences from Child Welfare Services



- Services have been reorganize in different teams where one could be in the office and others working from home to avoid serious setbacks in case of contamination
- From physical meetings to talks with children and familiens on the phone, on video, going for walks, meeting in parking lots, playgrounds, gardens etc
- To prevent transmission using gloves and masks when homevisits have been necessary, however uncertainty and different practices in using transmission control equipment
- Have been able to provide most of the services as usual but in a different way, ie dealing with notifications, making assessments, provide in and outside house services.
- Visitting arrangements between parents and children in care were temporarily halted but has been opened up

# Some challenges in local the CWS

- Many of the services are dependent on physical presence, ie COS, Marte Meo etc. which cannot be used
- Difficulties using interpreters when using the speaker on the phone standing outside houses to avoid breach of confidentiality
- Difficult to access all of the families because they are afraid, some in quarantene and some pretend being in quarantene
- Not possible to start off with network meetings to find alternatives to child care assessments
- Homevisits at distance make it difficult to assess family problems and the atmosphere
- Use of masks scares some of the families and prevent nonverbal communication
- More difficult to establish working relationships when communicating on the phone and video
- Are the most vulnerable families left on their own?

— • The authorities have been very late in providing guidelines for CWS under the corona

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# Unanticipated results

- Many of the children struggling with truancy and social anxiety have enjoyed school at home. Many are pleased with schooling at home
- The use of the phone and video have facilitated improved contact with young people, easier to meet digitally than in the office, less time consuming and more adapted to young peoples way of communicating and daily life
- Facilitated closer contact with some of the families
- Developed new meeting spots and use more creative methods of communication and assessment, more play and activity based approaches
- Less and more efficient meetings, more accessible to the public and more time for documentation
- The situation seems to facilitate emotional openness among the families
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- New and increased routines create more predictability and common approaches

# Further challenges

- Expect an increase in notifications about children at risk when lockup
- Place a greater demand on the work force during the summer and in the autumn
- Important to evaluate the effect of the closeup of kindergardens and schools – the gov't choosed to overlook the advice from professional bodies/Institute of Public Health
- To what extent have the corona strategies represented a threat to the childrens rights to a life and health, education and development, care and protection and participation and especially children in the most vulnerable families?
- To what extent has the coronacrisis mobilized resources and coping strategies among people in vulnerable situations?

# Reference

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