Learning from social outreach workers

A study of crime prevention among children in the county of Stockholm

Abstract

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Currently, there is an increased societal focus on youth criminality and also a growing popularity of municipal social outreach work as a countermeasure of it. The purpose of this study is therefore to elucidate social outreach workers' experience of their work with children through a crime preventative perspective, to expound upon their role in crime prevention and to highlight the emotional aspects and challenges in their work. Nine interviews with 14 different social outreach workers within the county of Stockholm have been conducted. Through incorporating the researcher´s own inside experience from working as a social outreach worker, the study also aims to provide a greater phenomenological understanding of social outreach work. By drawing upon a theoretical framework of street-level bureaucracy and empowerment, this study concludes that social outreach workers experience themselves as relationship making actors who conduct covert crime prevention, mainly through the use of social crime prevention. In doing so, they also fulfill different important functions in societal crime prevention. However, there is a discrepancy between how social outreach workers experience their work and outside actors´ expectations on how social outreach workers should work. Although there has been an emphasis on social outreach work and investments made in implementing social outreach workers, this study finds a mutual experience among the participants that they are not being heard. This study therefore contributes to raising the voice of social outreach workers and to share their experiences.

Key words: social outreach work, social work, crime prevention, youth criminality, cultural criminology, phenomenology, street-level bureaucracy.

Popular Science Summary

As of today, there is an increasing focus on youth criminality and on the more frequent gun violence displayed in young generations. At the same time, different countermeasures are being discussed to battle these societal problems. On the one hand, different countermeasures of harder punishments are being raised as a solution to the increasing gun violence. On the other hand, there is also part of the debate which concerns municipal countermeasures in forms of local crime prevention. Social outreach work is one example of such crime prevention which is based on local problems and needs. Social outreach workers are working outreaching and preventative with children and youths within each municipality or city district.

Considering the increased focus on youth criminality, the growing popularity of municipal social outreach work and the lack of research on the subject of social outreach work in relation to crime prevention, this study aims to show social outreach workers' points of views and to let them talk openly about their experiences. The purpose of this study is therefore to elucidate social outreach workers' experience of their work with children through a crime preventative perspective, to expound upon their role in crime prevention and to highlight the emotional aspects and challenges in their work. To achieve the aim and purpose of this study, I have interviewed 14 different social outreach workers within the county of Stockholm in Sweden.

The findings of this study show that social outreach workers see themselves as important actors in building relationships with children. Such relationship making processes can also be seen as one way of preventing criminal behavior in children. In creating relationships and trust with children in the municipality, social outreach workers fulfill many important functions in the overall societal crime prevention with children. Therefore, they also cover different parts in crime prevention with children which other prevention agencies (such as police, schools and the social services) cannot. However, the findings of this study also show a mismatch between how social outreach workers see their own work in contrast to how others think they should be working. Many of the social outreach workers participating in this study also say that they feel like they are not being listened to nor heard. This study therefore also hopes to contribute to give social outreach workers a voice and to help them share it.

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1. Introduction

During the last decade, the subject of gangs, criminality and shootings have dominated debates in Sweden. Deadly violence as a phenomenon has continually been brought up in media, political discussions, and law proposals. Acts of deadly violence have nearly become an everyday occurrence. The trend of increasing gun violence is also reflected among younger generations (DN 2023; Falkirk 2023). Children have become a tool within gang culture and according to the Swedish police, gangs are recruiting children as young as 10 years of age (motion 2020/21:3294). In this sense children are progressively being "socialized" into criminality (Enström 2023). While police statistics (2022) show that general youth criminality in Sweden has remained at the same level during the last three decades, other statistics show an increase of 40% of suspected children under the age of 15 during the years 2016 to 2019 (motion 2020/21:3294).

While the phenomenon of deadly gun violence is being raised for debate, so is the discussion of countermeasures. The political discussion mainly refers to tougher penalties for criminals in order to defeat the gangs and their criminal networks. For example, the regulation regarding penalty discounts for young adults who commit severe crimes was removed in 2022 (Justitiedepartementet 2021). There is currently also a political discussion to lower the age of criminal responsibility and to implement coercive measures to prevent early criminal development among children (Stadsrådsberedningen 2023). At the same time the national government is also proposing a new legislation where crime prevention becomes decentralized and under the control of local governments (Justitiedepartementet 2022a). Since cities and districts vary from one another when it comes to crime rates, local crime prevention measures become essential in facing the local crime situations. In other words, while the national legal consequences are being enforced for this criminal target group, the local crime prevention work is also becoming all the more important. In order to decrease severe youth criminality, such as gun violence, general youth criminality at a local level must also be emphasized. The proposition of this legislation (Justitiedepartementet 2022b, proposition 2022/23:43), defines crime prevention to "reduce the risk of crime to be committed in the first place by influencing the causes of or the conditions for criminality." (Ibid:7). The prospect of the implementation of such legislation, is that the local

municipalities will be able to work more effectively to decrease local crime rates, including youth criminality, and thereby assure collective security.

Since there is an increased focus on local crime prevention, it is relevant to underline the current situation. All municipalities already have, according to The Law of Social Work (2001:453), the responsibility to work with outreaching prevention among children at a local level to prevent "children and youths getting harmed"[1]. Municipalities can therefore, in various ways plan, organize, and conduct such work. One way is by implementing social outreach workers. Since, municipal social outreach work is adapted based on the local contexts and prioritized on community issues, the framework of social outreach work varies between municipalities. The main missions of social outreach work are to early on identify at risk children early on, to intervene in current harmful developments, to detect children and youths in the need of help and support, to promote good conditions for the upbringing of children and to reach children who have not been detected by other municipal services and governmental agencies (Socialstyrelsen 2022a:36).

Municipal social outreach work has mainly been located in the larger cities and municipalities in Sweden. However, more municipalities have lately shown an interest in social outreach work as a way of battling different multidimensional local issues (Andersson 2014:20-21). The need for an increase in municipal social outreach work has been emphasized by the governmental investigation leading up to the law proposal of municipal responsibility for local crime prevention (SOU 2021:49). An increase of outreach workers would, according to the investigation, be an effective countermeasure to prevent gang recruitment of children, youth criminality and to provide a better awareness of problematic areas and different networks of children. There have been investments done in increasing the number of social outreach workers. Such investment can for example be found in the 2023 budget for the city of Stockholm (Stockholms Stad 2022a). The political management in the municipality of Stockholm, who took office in January, has decided to cut down on resources for security guards and instead prioritize more resources to implement prevention services, such as social outreach workers. The reason behind such budget distribution is to increase the safety around the city (ibid). The growing interest and popularity of implementing social outreach workers can also be found nationally (see Bjerstedt 2023; Turdén 2021; Larsson 2021).

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[1] All quotes from laws, governmental definitions and regulatories have been translated from Swedish to English by the author of this thesis. For the authentic quote, see each original source referenced to.

Despite the importance of social outreach work constantly being raised and the fact that social outreach work is being implemented in a growing number of municipalities and cities, there is still a limited amount of research on the subject. A lot of the Swedish research has been conducted by the same researcher who also emphasizes the lack of research on the topic of social outreach work (Andersson 2013:184-185). The existing research mainly focuses on investigating the framework of social outreach work and social outreach work as a method as well as social outreach services function of working with general prevention of children being harmed. The latest report from the Swedish Social Welfare Board (Socialstyrelsen 2022a), also underlies the importance to further raise awareness and knowledge of social outreach work and its importance for the younger generation.

1.1 Aim and research questions

Considering the increased focus on youth criminality and gang involvement among children, the increased popularity of municipal social outreach work and the outspoken need for research on the subject, this study aims to shed light on social outreach workers' points of views and their lived experiences. The purpose of this study is thus to elucidate social outreach workers' experience of their work with children through a crime preventative perspective, to expound upon their role in crime prevention and to highlight the emotional aspects and challenges in their work. Based on the purpose of this study, this thesis will emanate from the following research questions:

1. How do social outreach workers experience their work as crime preventative?

2. In what ways do social outreach workers perceive their role in societal crime prevention?

3. What challenges and emotional dilemmas do social outreach workers encounter in their work?

1.2 Defining social outreach work

The 1 § of The Law of Social Work (2001:453)[2] establishes that the work of The Swedish Welfare Board is to be based on the foundation of democracy to promote peoples´ "economical and social security", "equality in living conditions" and "active participation in

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[2] As previously mentioned, these objectives have been translated by the researcher from Swedish. See the original source for the authentic description.

civil society.". In 3 chapter. 1 § of the law it is established that social outreach work is one way to promote these objectives. Social outreach work is further established in 5 chapter. 3 §, as a method to prevent children and youths from being harmed. The law for social work and services does not specify a concrete definition of "children and youths"[3] nor what is meant by "children and youths getting harmed". As the law does not establish how outreach work should be specifically conducted, it is up to each municipality to outline their outreach work with children and youths. Social outreach work is an example of how the municipalities chose to achieve those objectives. Every municipality has implemented administrations to achieve the objectives stated in The Law of Social Work, 2001:453 (SOU 2021:84). Therefore, municipal social outreach services can be placed under different administrations, for example under the administration of culture and leisure or under the administration of prevention.

Social outreach work is a broad term which is used in many different areas and by many different organizations or authorities. Therefore, it has been difficult for research to map out social outreach in Sweden (Socialstyrelsen 2022a). One of the reasons for the difficulties in defining outreach work is that it is directed towards different target groups, thus also constituting different aims and settings. For example, outreach work is a method used for a variety of societal groups and issues, such as homelessness, prostitution, drug-and alcohol addiction (Andersson 2013:172-173, see also Rosengren 2003; Kryda & Compton 2009; Svensson 2003). By comparing different research circles in Sweden and by comparing both international and national research, Andersson (2010) has proposed a general definition of social outreach work, irrespective of the setting, context or target group: "Outreach work is a contact-creating and resource mediating social service, aimed for groups which are hard to reach in other ways and that need appropriate support in different settings and contexts in which the outreach worker does not control or organize" (Andersson 2010:68).

In the report by the Swedish Social Welfare Board, their research is based on social outreach work as: "social outreach services working as part of the municipal management, which conduct outreaching and prevention work with children and youths according to the law of social work and services." (Socialstyrelsen 2022a:7). Social outreach workers have different titles depending on the social outreach service they work in. Some of the most common titles are field secretary, field assistants and youth coaches (ibid). In the year 2021, the

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[3] As for this thesis, "children" refer to individuals up to the age of 18. Thus, the concept of "children" throughout this thesis includes both children and youths.

municipality of Stockholm created a foundation of guidelines for social outreach workers in the city of Stockholm (called Stockholm standarden). These guidelines define social outreach work as being based on: "the profession of social work and being a prevention agency, and by using an outreaching and relationship making approach they conduct a social change management, targeting groups of children and youths." (Stockholms Stad 2021:7).

According to the Swedish Confederation of Outreach Work, Rif (Riksförbundet för fältarbete), it is necessary to define the environment and settings where children meet. Children meet in different arenas away from adult sight and supervision, thus they also create an independent identity and sense of self. Their public life is becoming a part of the children's self-reflection and in their process to becoming adults. The time during adolescence is a crucial part of a child's life and in creating values, facing norms and cultures. Social outreach workers are therefore directed towards arenas where children spend their time (for example in school, out in public or in youth centers[4]) (Rif 2016:2). Based on these objectives Rif (ibid:6) has concluded that outreach work with children should be on:

- Outreach and preventive work in public, youthful environments
- voluntarism, confidence, and respect of the youths´ integrity
- children's needs and focus on empowering their own resources
- professional social outreach work conducted continuously and with a long-term perspective.

1.3 Disposition

This thesis is divided into six chapters. The introduction, aim, research questions and definition of social outreach work have been stated above. Further on, a literature review consisting of two subsections will be presented. Following the literature review, chapter three accounts for the theoretical framework of this study. Firstly, the overall phenomenological approach of this study is presented, followed by the concepts of street-level bureaucracy and empowerment. In chapter four the methodological choices will be discussed, including the researcher´s pre-understanding, the qualitative aspects, the data collection, selection of participants, process of analyzing data and lastly a discussion of the ethical considerations. Chapter five constitutes the study´s analysis which has been divided into the following three

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[4] A youth center, in Swedish "ungdomsgård/fritidsgård", is a concept implemented in municipalities. It is a place where children can go to make use of their leisure activities in a safe environment surrounded by staff (Stockholms Stad 2022b).

main themes; "Crime prevention through the lens of social outreach work", "Covering the gap in societal crime prevention" and "Fulfilling personal demands and challenging outsider´s expectations". Following the analysis, chapter six will summarize the findings and conclusions of this study in a final discussion.

2. Literature review

In this section the existing national and international research of crime prevention and social outreach work will be presented and discussed. First of all, I will introduce research which aims at defining general prevention and crime prevention and then discuss how crime prevention relates to risk and protective factors. In addition, an overview of research of social outreach work will be presented. Outreach work can be found all over the world. However, since outreach work in the world varies a lot, looking into outreach work outside Sweden should be done with caution (Fagerblom 2005:203). Considering this, I have restricted the previous research to countries which have a similar regulatory system and outline of outreach work as well as a similar societal context as Sweden. Therefore the literature on social outreach work will derive from a Scandinavian context. This study will complement previous research by phenomenologically studying how crime prevention comes into play in social outreach work.

2.1 Crime prevention, risk factors and protective factors

Previous research has found that the definition of prevention is built upon two different factors, to avoid something and that the problem is thought to be possible to resolve (Sahlin 1992:1). Therefore Sahlin (ibid) says that prevention can also be defined as stopping occurrences which are not desirable. When talking about prevention the discourse mainly refers to avoiding certain behaviors which can lead to problems. Ander (2005:14) refers to Sahlin (1992), and exemplifies such behavior as criminality or drug use. In the discourse of crime prevention, Lab (2010) states that the definition of crime prevention, what it is and how it is conducted, varies between programs, authorities, and studies. Most definitions of crime prevention, however, incorporate the idea of reducing crime levels and of preventing further development and rise in crime rates. However, Lab (2010), stresses that very few definitions of crime prevention actually take into account the problem of perceived victimization and fear of crime. Drawing upon that notion he formulates his own definition of crime: "crime

prevention entails any action designed to reduce the actual level of crime and/or the perceived fear of crime" (Lab 2019:26).

Similarly to the definition of prevention and crime prevention above, there is a wide range of research on the topic of underlying factors that lead to criminal activity and early crime prevention. Foster (2003:5) writes that research on prevention mainly strives to investigate risk factors among children which increase the development of certain problems later in life. Thus, by identifying risk factors early, focused interventions can be implemented to prevent such problems. Research by Hawkins et. al (1998) have found various predictors for youth violence and criminality to exist in five different domains: individual, family, school, peer related, and community and neighborhood. According to Andershed and Andershed (2015:55), a risk factor can be an individual trait, a relationship, a process, or an event, which increases the risk of a specific outcome, for example criminality. Thus, risk factors interplay and develop in different contexts, for example in school, among friendship groups, within family and so on.

Research by Hawkins et.al (1998), finds some of the risk factors (what they call predictors) for violent and criminal behavior among children to be: socio economic issues, failed school performance or low connection to school, family conflicts, antisocial networks of friends, antisocial individual behavior, and positive attitudes towards drugs or criminality. In contrast to risk factors, research of protective factors in adolescents problem behavior (Jessor et.al 1995), found that protective factors are for example positive school orientation, positive adult relationships, prosocial activities and intolerance of deviance. Moreover, Andershed and Andershed (2015:55), concludes that a combination of multiple risk factors at the same, or different levels, expands the risk of a norm breaking or criminal behavior. Previous research above shows that early risk factors amongst children are significant factors for potential norm breaking and criminal development. Therefore, early prevention interventions in relation to norm breaking behavior amongst children have been shown to be effectful. The earlier interventions can be implemented, the better impact they achieve. However, according to Tham (2022), in order for such interventions to become successful they have to work against more than one risk factor of the child. In the same manner as Tham (2022), Brå (2001) also stresses the notion of early intervention to help reduce risk factors and increase protective factors to avert long term effects of criminal matter. Furthermore, Tham (2022) argues that

crime prevention efforts and interventions have to be emphasized and prioritized politically in order to be granted sufficient resources to achieve greater impact on societal criminality.

In the field of crime prevention, there is usually a division between situational crime prevention and social crime prevention (Brå 2001:13). According to Brå (ibid) situational prevention refers to direct actions or interventions which stops a crime from being conducted or restraining the situational possibilities for criminal activity. For example surveillance cameras or patrolling security guards. In contrast to situational prevention, social prevention rather concerns the individual's tendency to criminal behavior (ibid). Similarly to Brå (2001), Clevesköld et.al (2019:39) describe social prevention as being based on the idea that people's propensity to crime, norm breaking behavior and deviance is predicated in early stages of their life. Furthermore, individuals´ criminal inclination are a result of both social affiliation and individual qualities (ibid). Therefore, social prevention aims to increase and strengthen individuals' social affiliation and sense of self.

2.2 Characterizing social outreach work

It is difficult to generate a definition of social outreach work as a method, however there is various research on the framework and outline of social outreach work. National research by Andersson (2013:175) declares three main tasks in general outreaching work; to seek contact, to initiate processes which promote social and behavioral development or change, and to provide social support to maintain the process of change. However, other research (Socialstyrelsen 2022a), shows that there are also difficulties in mapping out the exact framework of municipal social outreach work. Due to local differences and contextual variations between municipalities, social outreach work is adapted to local needs, demands and community issues. Therefore, the research field on social field work mainly consists of research carried out locally, in a specific city or municipality (see Liss 2019; Andersson 2014 and Forkby & Johansson 2016).

Besides working in direct contact with the target groups in social outreach work, the importance of cooperation between different authorities and agencies is also underlined in previous research. According to Andersson (2013:180-181), outreach workers also have a mission to work as a "linkage". Outreach workers aim to build fundamental relationships with their target groups in order to make assessments of their needs. When such assessments are conducted outreach workers can guide people to the correct help. However, Andersson

(2013:181) finds in his research that the cooperation between agencies have to be built upon trust and that the outreach workers must be able to "rely on the competence of the professionals and the services that they linked to". In cases where the outreach workers do link people from their target groups, and they do not achieve support, the outreach workers felt as if they had "cheated" the people to failed assistance. Thus creating a strong sense of responsibility in the outreach workers (ibid).

According to previous research (Socialstyrelsen 2022; Puuronen 2014; Strømfors et.al 2006), social outreach workers are not bound to specific spaces and are therefore able to meet children in other situations and places than other youth workers do. For example, teachers and social secretaries are also youth workers but are rather bound to interact with children during daytime and in specific contexts. Meeting children in their own arenas, such as in school, at the social services, on social media or on the field, on their own terms and conditions provides for a unique insight into the children's lives (Henningsen & Gootas 2008). Such contact is important for all the work tasks in social outreach work. Outreach workers are able to gain information about problems and needs amongst children in their city district or municipality which other authorities and organizations cannot. Their contact also allows for outreach workers to detect problems or harmful developments early on. The research by Henningsen and Gotaas (2008), also finds that children tend to turn to social outreach workers they already know when faced with difficult and menacing situations.By maintaining a high presence in a variety of the children's arenas, the outreach workers are more easily acknowledged and recognized by children and this makes it easier to build longterm relationships.

Besides meeting children in their own arenas, research shows the importance of individual professional qualities when building relationships with children. By investigating a cohesive and national spectrum of all existing municipal social outreaching services in Sweden, the Swedish Social Welfare board (2022:54) has found personal qualities to be highly valued in the work. Even though some structured methods and programs are used in the daily work with children there is an emphasis on the individual employee as the actual working tool. Therefore, personal commitment amongst social outreach workers is important in order for them to conduct their work successfully. The respondents also stressed the use of experience based knowledge in their daily work through using themselves as tools. In other words,

informal knowledge seems to be more highly valued than formal, educational knowledge amongst social outreach workers.

Various characteristics of social outreach workers are presented in a Norwegian manual for outreach work with children. When writing the manual for the Norwegian equivalent of outreach workers (Utekontakten)[5], Pettersen (2020) conducted 30 interviews with children about their thoughts on social outreach workers and their professional qualities. The participants expressed that a good social outreach worker is characterized by being respectful of the child, empathic, trustworthy, flexible, and patient by not giving up on the child. Another study by Oldeide et.al (2020) investigated the relationship between outreach services and children at risk, as well as children's experience of outreach services compared to other municipal services. They found that the relationship between outreach service workers and children are described as trustworthy. The interviews´ results also demonstrate that outreach services stand out because they promote empowerment in children, which other municipal services fail to accomplish. Both children and social outreach workers being interviewed say that outreach service, in contrast to other services, applies a resource perspective on children that awakens opportunities in children to take actions for their own lives. Since outreach workers provide both a sense of safety for children and help children through bureaucratic barriers when they are in need of other services, the researchers, Oldeide et.al (2020:6) argue for outreach services becoming a social "safety net" children at risk that have fallen in between the cracks of the system.

3. Theoretical framework

The purpose of this study is to elucidate social outreach workers' experience of their work with children through a crime preventative perspective, to expound upon their role in crime prevention and to highlight the emotional aspects and challenges in their work. In order to reach its purpose, this study is based upon a phenomenological approach. Additionally, two concepts will be applied. Deriving from a phenomenological approach, the use of street-level bureaucracy will add a practical perspective to understand social outreach workers´ experiences. By also applying the concept of empowerment the results in this study can be analyzed through a narrower, relational perspective of social outreach workers´ experiences.

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[5] Utekontakten is the Norwegian equivalent to the Swedish concept of social outreach workers. In the city districts of Oslo, outreach and prevention work is targeting children of the ages 10 to 23 (Oslo kommune).

3.1 A phenomenological approach

The approach of phenomenology was developed by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). Phenomenology according to Husserl is that "we must go back to the things themselves" (1970:252). This principle of phenomenology means seeing objects as phenomena which are all interpreted subjectively rather than solely observing different objects' characteristics through a metaphysical lens. In similarity to Husserl, Patton (2002) stresses that the foundation of phenomenological research is to investigate: "how humans make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness, both individually and as shared meaning". However, Husserl (1962) argues that although it might sound easy to describe a phenomenon as oneself has experienced it, it is very difficult to achieve this since we already have an understanding, knowledge and preconceptions of different objects and phenomenon. In order to subjectively view things in their essence, Husserl stresses that we have to put our already subjective associations in parentheses, what Husserl defines as epoché. In a research context, the researcher has to put their previous knowledge and understanding of the subject in parentheses as well. In so doing, research has found that the researcher´s prior understanding will not affect the interviewees or investigation which is of great importance (Thomassen 2007; Bjurwill 1995; Szlarski 2009).

Phenomenology is a key to cultural criminology. It is a tradition that seeks to understand the way humans experience and make sense of crime and crime control. This phenomenological aspect of cultural criminology is evident in the work of Tutenges (2023), Hayward (2002) and can also be traced back to the work of Katz (1988). Since the aim of this study is to research social outreach workers´ experiences of working with crime prevention against youth criminality, a phenomenological approach enables a greater understanding of each outreach worker´s point of view. Thus, a phenomenological approach allows me as a researcher to investigate their perspective from the inside and to elucidate social outreach workers´ lived experiences through the lived realities of their work in a crime prevention perspective.

3.2 The concept of street-level bureaucracy

The concept of street-level bureaucracy has been frequently used in many different studies regarding various research objectives (May and Winter 2009; Frank and Bjerge 2011; Piore 2016). It has also been applied in research of social work (Evans and Harris 2004).

Considering this, the concept is also applicable to the group of social outreach workers. However, the concept is rarely used by cultural criminologists. Firstly, I argue to use the concept in this study to elucidate social outreach workers experiences. Secondly, the concept can help understand how social outreach workers become a bridge between the governmental authorities (such as social services and police) and different cultures and groups of the children. Since social outreach work is governed by the municipalities, these workers do not have the same authority and mandate as for example the governmentally driven social services. Social outreach workers thus become a link between social services, police, schools and children's worlds, including what some call "street culture" (Bourgeois 2003; Anderson 1999; Ilan 2015). However, "street-culture" in this study will not be used in other ways than within the framework of Lipsky´s concept of street-level bureaucrats. According to Bourgeois (2003:8) street-culture is defined as: "a complex and conflictual web of beliefs, symbols, modes of interaction, values and ideologies that have emerged in opposition to exclusion from mainstream society". Street culture is often spoken of as one general culture, however since social outreach work is locally adapted and based on the local culture, each municipality has their own street culture among groups of children. The local culture can for example depend on the level of youth criminality in the municipality, what trends influence groups of children or the socioeconomic situations in different areas in the municipalities.

The concept of street-level bureaucrats was constructed by Lipsky in 1980 and derived from studying societal conditions in the United States. Lipsky's early definition (1980) of the concept of street-level bureaucracy regards welfare employees within the public service who work in direct contact with civil citizens. Street-level bureaucrats can therefore be defined as police officers, teachers, health care workers, social workers, and in this study social outreach workers. Street-level bureaucrats, also sometimes called street-level workers (Brodkin 2011), are policy makers. Policies are therefore developed by the people at the bottom of the organizational hierarchy and by having distance to organizational authority, the street-level bureaucrats obtain freedom of action in their work.

According to Lipsky (2010) it is necessary for public service employees to have a large freedom of action in their work. Allowing freedom of action enables them to conduct their work tasks. Since street-level workers work with different individuals with different needs and problems, there is not one solution or intervention which fits everyone. Therefore, they also need freedom and flexibility in their work to be able to provide for a suitable

intervention to meet the needs of every individual. Although street-level bureaucrats have plenty of freedom in their work, Lipsky (2010) means that they also do have rules, guidelines, and routines to abide by. They are governed by political decisions, regulations, and policies. Therefore, the street-level bureaucrats must also consider these regulations when adapting individual solutions in their work. However, since these regulations are often unclear and vague, street-level bureaucrats will interpret these regulations on the basis of their professional, personal, and organizational motives (Lipsky 2010:159). Although street-level workers have to consider such policies, the considerable amount of independence and autonomy in their work allows them a great amount of deciding power in their daily interactions with citizens. Although such freedom may seem like a power, it also ascribes pressure to the worker since citizens´ needs can be greater than what the workers are able to meet.

Lipsky (2010) concludes that the complexity of the expectations to provide individually adapted help in combination with applying organizational regulations and policies, is a never ending dilemma which may also have consequences. Street-level bureaucrats often work with a limited amount of time, lack of information, and a heavy caseload (Lipsky 2010:29). While trying to fulfill the expectations of effectiveness in their work and at the same time meet the needs of their clients, street-level bureaucrats may experience high levels of uncertainty and disempowerment. In order to balance the complexities of their work, street-level bureaucrats develop coping strategies, techniques, routines and standardized assessments to make their work tasks more manageable and relieve work-related stress (Lipsky 2010:83). However, considering the heavy workload for street-level bureaucrats and limited available resources, there is a risk that they will not succeed with their work tasks.

3.3 The concept of empowerment

As stated in the background, social outreach work is based upon building relationships with children in order to promote social change and prevent harmful development. The importance of such factors in social outreach work is also attested in the interviews. In this study the concept of empowerment will therefore be used to understand how social outreach workers experience their work as crime preventative. It also helps to investigate how social outreach workers perceive emotional dilemmas and challenges in their work with children and how they cope with these challenges.

In 1997 Jo Rowlands conducted a study on successful factors in empowering women in Honduras. She drew upon the notion of empowerment from the theoretical framework of development theory, as well as upon the theory of gender and women in a developmental context (Rowlands 1997:3). Rowlands (ibid:13) defines empowerment as "bringing people who are outside the decision making process into it". Further on she also describes the context in which people feel empowered:" individuals are empowered when they are able to maximize the opportunities available to them without constraints." (ibid). Rowlands takes on a feminist empowerment approach and argues that empowerment is more than being part of the decision making, but also "include the processes that lead people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to make decisions" (ibid:14). Therefore, the process of empowerment can be divided into three different dimensions; the personal-, the relational- and the collective dimension.

The first dimension regards the process within the individual to increase confidence, a sense of agency and self esteem. However, Rowlands (1997) points out that self confidence and self esteem are not equivalent to empowerment but rather the result of such a process. Dignity and respect are a big part of empowerment since it develops a feeling of being worthy of respect from others and being able to expect and demand such respect (ibid:111-112). These internal psychosocial and psychological processes are according to Rowlands (1997:111) the core of personal empowerment. The relational dimension is dependent on the personal dimension. This dimension rather regards the person's ability to communicate and negotiate, but also to accept help and support. The last dimension, the collective, accounts for collective agency and a shared sense of dignity as a team (ibid:117). However, this dimension is also affected by the personal dimension. Rowlands stresses that the collective dimension increases every team member´s personal empowerment. Thus lacking personal empowerment can also restrict collective empowerment. All dimensions are intertwined with each other and direct one another to either positive development or failure. Rowlands underlines that empowerment processes are subjective, meaning everyone experiences them differently and in their own way.

The concept of empowerment is used in many different projects and interventions, by various services and organizations over the world. It is for example used in social work, health care and politics, and by activists and lobby groups (Askheim & Starrin 2007). Askheim and Starrin (2007) assert that empowerment is often associated with positive appearances such as

vigour, control and action (ibid). Askheim and Starrin refer to Randall Collins theory of emotional energy which we experience through positive and successful events. Our emotional power increases our self esteem and is shown through self confidence, enthusiasm, energy, and pride. When experiencing emotional energy people tend to feel important and powerful, which leads them to action (ibid:65). However, emotional energy can also have the opposite effect. In contrast to pride, shame is a product of emotional energy derived from alienation or events of failure and may lead to feelings of powerlessness and inaction. In practice, Askheim and Starrin (2007), mean that such empowerment processes must take place on different societal levels and areas, for example in schools, youth centers, local associations etc.

4. Methodological framework

In order to elucidate social outreach workers' experience of their work with children through a crime preventative perspective, their role in crime prevention and to highlight the emotional aspects and challenges in their work, qualitative methods have been used. The interview material has been collected from interviews with social outreach workers within the county of Stockholm. To provide a greater phenomenological touch to the study, my own experiences of social outreach work will also be included in the data. First of all, I will start by discussing my own prior understanding of social outreach work as well as the qualitative methodological framework of this study. Followed by how I selected participants, conducted the data collection, analyzed the data and lastly I will account for the ethical considerations made.

4.1 The researcher´s prior understanding of social outreach work

According to Patton (2015), the process of research is based upon the researcher's own experiences, pre-understanding, worldview, and interests. Therefore, it is also important for the researcher to be aware of his or her own point of view on the research subject and as to how such aspects may affect the results. That being said, I will start this section to discuss my own pre-understanding of the subject of social outreach work. During the semester fall of 2022, I conducted my internship within a municipality administration office at their department of family therapy. During my internship within the department I also had the opportunity to take part in the municipality´s social outreach service. My insight into the social outreach work of the city administration, also inspired the interest for this study. I gained access to the field of social outreach work by establishing connections which were of use for this study, of whom I received information, material and insight in the subject. During

the spring of 2023, the social outreach work group at the administration office where I did my internship, encouraged me to apply for the work position as their colleague. I acquired the work position as an hourly employed social outreach worker during the spring and summer of 2023. Since this opportunity occurred in the middle of conducting this study, I also saw a great phenomenological advantage in working as a social outreach worker myself, experiencing their world from the inside. Later on I will discuss the ethical considerations regarding my position.

4.2 A qualitative methodological framework

Based on the purpose of this study and to answer the research questions, interviews constitute the main part of data collection in this study. Qualitative phenomenological interviews are suitable in this study because it allows me as a researcher to gain insight into social outreach workers´ feelings, thoughts, and experiences in order to understand the respondents´ subjective perceptions of their lived experiences (Van Manen 1990:67). My own experience of working with social outreach work is used in this thesis to gain a deeper understanding of the interviewees as well as increasing the study's validity. Tutenges (2023:32) writes that conversation and observation with people in the field of ethnographic work enable understanding about their experiences. However, he means that their experiences are not isolated and bound but fluid. Therefore, by being present in social outreach workers' work, doing their work and putting myself in similar positions as they do, it allowed me to share their experiences and feelings.

Jackson (1989:4) discusses the lack of the researcher´s own experiences of what was being observed in the field in research. Thus, he stresses the method to instead incorporate "the experience of the observer and defines the experimental field as one of interactions and intersubjectivity. Accordingly, we make ourselves experimental subjects and treat our experiences as primary data" (Jackson 1989:4). Following Jackson (1989), other studies (see Tutenges 2023), have therefore chosen to include their own experiences as primary data in the study and use themselves in order to emphasize the experiences of the other participants. Drawing upon Jackson (1989) and following the methodological choices of Tutenges (2023), my own personal experiences from the field of social outreach work, adds to the data of interview material. Tutenges (2023:32) defines his observation on the field as: "a kind of attention that involves all of the senses and is directed at those I study and at myself". Due to

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ethical considerations and out of respect for my workplace, I will, in contrast to Tutenges (2023), focus on my own experiences and emotions rather than my colleagues or the people we work with.

4.3 Selection of participants

The data material for this study is collected from semi structured interviews with social outreach workers employed within different municipalities within the county of Stockholm. The aim of this study is not to compare social outreach services work on a national level but rather to investigate social outreach workers´ experiences irrespective of the local context. In order to investigate shared experiences, similarities and ambiguous aspects among social outreach workers, the study is limited to the county of Stockholm. The county of Stockholm provides a great deal of variation in social outreach work since it consists of a wide range of different municipal social outreach services targeting children, both in regards to local contexts, crime levels and thus social outreach workers´ experiences. Stockholm consists of 26 municipalities (Länsstyrelsen Stockholm n.d.), whereas 25 have incorporated social outreach services (Socialstyrelsen 2022a). I reached out to by phone and email the municipalities that, at the time of data collection, had implemented municipal social outreach services aimed for children.

The selection of interviewees for this study was based on their knowledge regarding the study's research purpose, thus they have a direct connection to the research questions. Such sampling is called purposeful sampling strategy and is according to Patton (2002:234) useful in order to gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon rather than provide generalization. Conducting this study in the context of Stockholm county, I aim to include a variation in the sampling of the interviewees. Doing so allows the research to yield both high quality description and uniqueness of the cases as well as shared patterns of experience (Patton 2002:235). Due to my own position in social outreach work, a wide sample of participants also stresses an ethical advantage. Hannerz and Tutenges (2022:1271) emphasize the risks of selection bias in relation to close proximity in ethnographic research. When conducting research in which the researcher self identifies with the study participants, there is a risk of neglecting participants who "are not part of the researcher´s network or whose appearances does not conform to the researcher´s preconceptions" (Hannerz & Tutenges 2022:1272, see also Shildrick & MacDonald 2006). Through using a purposeful sampling

strategy, which includes a wide range of participants, outside my own network, local work context and with different appearances, I have strived to minimize sample biases related to my own preconceptions and position.

The collected data for this study consists of a total of nine interviews with 14 different social outreach workers from eight different outreach services. The sample of interviewees consists of both male and female participants. Their work experiences range from a couple of months to several years within outreach with children. Some of the interviewees worked in municipalities which contained areas classified as "vulnerable areas" (Polisen n.d.) or in areas with a more extended youth criminality, while other social outreach workers worked in municipalities with a significantly lower crime rate.

4.4 Data collection

Qualitative phenomenological interviews "involve an informal, interactive process… aimed at evoking a comprehensive account of the person's experience of the phenomenon" (Moustakas 1994:114). Therefore semi structured interviews were conducted by using a thematic interview guide, which allowed the interviewees to describe lived experience and personal descriptions (Van Manen 1990:66-67). Although this study strives to sample a wide range of participants, group interviews also allow for the phenomenological notion to investigate how people make sense of experience through shared meaning in the same social outreach group (Patton 2002:104). In contact with the social outreach services, I underlined my interest in interviewing one or more of the employees of each social outreach group. I also left it up to them to decide whether they wanted to participate in a group interview or individual interviews. However, the group interviews never consisted of more than two participants. In total, four individual interviews and five group interviews were conducted.

My intention with providing the option of group interviews was to create discussion and to research similarities and differences among people working in the same social outreach group. Additionally, allowing the option for group interviews also aided participants when discussing their experiences by having the support of their colleagues. This advantage of group interviews with already existing groups of people can also be found in previous research (see for example Parameswaran 2001). On the contrary, group interviews can also obstruct one's ability to open up about their subjective experiences. According to Trost (2005)

group interviews can cause uniformity among the interviewees due to the social peer pressure which occurs in social situations. However, during the group interviews conducted in this study I experienced the interviewees being more comfortable talking about their individual and shared experiences with their colleague.

The distance to some of the social outreach services made it difficult for me to conduct these interviews in person. Therefore I also chose to provide the option of having the interview via video link. Regardless of the distance to each social outreach group , many preferred to conduct the interview by using the video platform, Zoom. Three of the interviews were conducted in person and six of them were conducted on Zoom. Zoom is a platform used by Lund university and was introduced during the pandemic of Covid-19. Therefore, I had great prior knowledge of the platform and the functions available. Previous research (Archibald et. al 2019) has also found Zoom, compared to other virtual conferencing platforms, to be a highly rated option when conducting interviews and conferences. In order to minimize the risk of technical problems during the interview, it was important to make preparations before the interview (Oliffe et.al 2021:5). Prior to each interview, I made sure that the application of Zoom was updated, that the sound and video worked, as well as that the surroundings in which I conducted the interview were neutralized in order to decrease the risk of any background distraction. Even though preparations were made, there were interruptions such as unforeseen updates, flickering video and delays in sound. However, due to my previous experience of the platform technical mishaps could quickly be managed

4.5 Process of analyzing data

The analysis of this thesis draws upon a thematic analysis which seeks to focus on results of lived experiences and perceived emotions of social outreach workers. Thematic analysis has been frequently used in qualitative research, as well as in phenomenological research (see for example Chang & Wang 2021; Ho, Chiang & Leung 2017). Although the combination of phenomenology and thematic analysis has to some extent been accounted for in previous research, there is a greater need for research related guidelines when applying thematic analysis in phenomenology (Sundler et.al 2019:733). Through combining thematic analysis in phenomenological research, I aim to attain a deeper understanding of experiences and drawing essential conclusions of the phenomenon. In thematic analysis, Boyatzis (1998:4) declares two different ways of execution. Themes can be formed inductively based on the

original data or they can be produced deductively from previous research and theory. The aim for applying a thematic analysis in this phenomenological research is to reach an understanding of social outreach worker´s lived experiences and the meanings embedded in it through inductively generated themes. By letting the original data generate the results, the phenomenological stance of this thesis is also emphasized.

Following the process in previous research (Sundler et.al 2019), the first step of the analysis for this thesis was to go through all data several times with an open mind. When reading the data, I started to gain an understanding of the experiences voiced in the material. The second step in the phenomenological thematic analysis in this study was to elucidate different parts of the data to improve the identification of patterns and themes. At this stage, I also aimed to see different parts "in terms of the whole and the whole in terms of its parts" (ibid:736). I marked meanings, described parts of meanings, compared similarities and differences in meanings and structured different meanings into patterns of which themes began to appear. The last step of conducting a thematic analysis in terms of phenomenology is, according to Sundler et. al (ibid), to structure the emerged themes into a valuable totality. During this last step it is important for the researcher to maintain reflectiveness. Therefore, I continuously went back to the original data and compared the themes to the tentative meanings.

4.6 Ethical considerations

As with all research there is a great extent of ethical considerations to be made when conducting social scientific research. According to the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet 2002) there are four main requirements to consider regarding social scientific research: information, consent, confidentiality, and utilization. In this section, I will discuss how these requirements have been applied in this study as well as the complexities and advantages of me as a social outreach worker studying social outreach workers. During initial contact with the interviewees, I sent out an information letter as well as a consent form which was signed by the interviewees. I started each interview by repeating the information and participatory rights as well. At the beginning of each interview I asked for permission to record the interview. All interviewees approved of the recording and the audio files were later transcribed to aid further analysis of the material and to ensure correct quotations. As for my own experiences in social outreach work, I wrote field notes of my feelings and experiences

while working. Since all interviews were conducted in Swedish the quotes used in the analysis have been translated to English, my field notes as well.

Anonymity in this study is two dimensional. Anonymity had to be ensured both in regard to the interviewees´ individual selves and to their specific outreach work group. In order to provide the interviewees anonymity but at the same time personalize them in the thesis, I have chosen to use fictional names for each interviewee as well as numbered the social outreach groups without respective order. However, according to Gubrium et.al (2012:458) there are certain confidentiality considerations that need to be taken into account when researching specific social groups. Groups often have different characteristics which are identifiable both by outsiders as well as by members within the group (ibid). As for social outreach work groups, the different groups can be identified by certain projects which only their work group conducts, local characteristics and by their specific municipal political management. Therefore, I have excluded information in the thesis which could identify either individuals or which municipal social outreach group they work in. To assure that my experiences cannot be traced back to a specific outreach work group, I will not entail the social outreach work group I work in or in which municipality I conducted my internship. In order to further secure anonymity for civilians and other people I interacted with and situations I took part in, my field notes only contained my feelings and experiences.

I had not started working as a social outreach worker when conducting the interviews. My only experience of social outreach work was from my internship which was limited since I was assigned to a different department of the municipal administration. Although I had some prior understanding of what was being researched, the distance to the subject became apparent during the interviews. The interviews brought forth a lot of knowledge which I did not have prior knowledge of. However, much of what elucidated from the interviews I also experienced when I started working as a social outreach worker. According to Gubrium et. al (2012:103) there has been a "professional ideal" for a researcher to achieve objectivity and detachment towards their research subjects. They point out a new approach in research (see Reiman 1979) where the researcher studies phenomenon which they have prior knowledge and experience of. Lofland and Lofland (1995) also stress the researcher´s advantage of prior access and understanding when studying a social phenomena or object which they already know about. Taking this into account, it is essential to consider reflexivity as it involves the

researcher´s comprehension of how the research process forms its results (Hardy et.al 2001:532).

Researching phenomenon and subjects which I already have prior knowledge and experience of has been an advantage in accessing the field and gaining material. However, my aim has been to elucidate my research participants´ experiences without influencing the interviewees and their answers with my prior understanding. During the interviews I therefore tried to "bracket" my own knowledge, understanding and experience of social outreach work according to Husserl´s notion of "epoché" (see section 3.1). I aimed to let my interviewees speak openly about their experiences without risking their answers to be interpreted on the basis of my prior understanding. There are also reflexivity aspects to consider in regard to the analyzing process and when coding the material. On the one hand, my own experiences of my work are included as empirical data for this study to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomena of social outreach work in relation to crime prevention. On the other hand, I did not want my own interpretations to be projected upon the other participants' experiences.

The risk of projection in thematic analysis, increases due to the researcher´s familiarity to the phenomenon being studied (Boyatzis 1998:13). During the analyzing process I had started working as a social outreach worker, which increased my familiarity with social outreach work which could have led to a tendency to fill "in the blanks" in ambiguous moments (ibid). In order to let the raw information speak for itself during the analyzing process, I had to continually reflect upon my own experiences and feelings separately from each of my interviewees´. I am also aware that there is a risk that my values and experiences have influenced the results beyond my intention. Since I am part of the subject I am researching, I am balancing between the role of the researcher and the role of a participant. Throughout this study I have therefore critically viewed and reflected upon my own position in relation to the research subject by writing notes and being transparent to the greatest extent possible.

5. Analysis

The purpose of this study is thus to elucidate social outreach workers' experience of their work with children through a crime preventative perspective, to expound upon their role in crime prevention and to highlight the emotional aspects and challenges in their work. This section of the thesis will present, discuss and analyze the collected empirical data. Based on

the analyzing process, this section will be divided into the findings of three main themes: "crime prevention through the lens of social outreach work", "Covering the gap in societal crime prevention" and lastly, "Fulfilling personal demands and challenging outsiders´ expectations".

5.1. Crime prevention through the lens of social outreach work

This theme regards how social outreach workers experience their work as crime preventative and what aspects come into play when discussing crime prevention through the lens of social outreach work. Such crime prevention perspective also leads on to how social outreach workers work with covert crime prevention through a relational manner. There are also various challenges experienced by the participants in this study which also accounts for emotional dilemmas within the social outreach work.

5.1.1 Covert crime prevention

The interviewees in this study do not experience crime prevention as their main mission. Eva (group 4) makes a clear differentiation between crime prevention work and their prevention work: "well, our job is far from being primarily crime preventative, it's more like working with general prevention to promote children's well being and security rather than working with criminal behavior." Since it is not specified in law or regulations that social outreach workers should work specifically with crime prevention, it might not be surprising that many of the social outreach workers do not see themselves working directly with criminal behavior. However, when discussing the matter of crime prevention further, they do find their work to be crime preventative in some aspects of their general prevention work although it is not their primary aim. Emma (group 7) expressess the possibility of her work as being crime preventative through different aspects:

> Youth criminality… It's not the focus of our job but yes I could say that we work crime preventative. /…/ We work different times of the day and evenings and also based on this work of relationship making, which is the core of social outreach work. By having a relationship with many kids we are able to identify risk- and protective factors in their family, in leisure time, among friends, school and so on. /…/ but also with the aim to promote [protective factors] (Emma, group 7).

The different areas in a child's life which are exemplified by Emma, are also the areas that according to previous research (Andershed 2015: Hawkins et.al 1998) generates common risk factors for criminal behavior but are also related to protective factors (Jessor et.al 1995). According to research by Andershed and Andershed (2015) multiple risk factors provide a greater risk for criminal and norm breaking behavior. Successful crime prevention through working with risk- and protective factors, are therefore achieved by working with more than one risk factor at the time (Tham 2022). That being said, social outreach workers are working in many of the children´s arenas and can assess risk factors in different contexts in order to see which protective factors have to be strengthened. How Emma sees her work as crime preventative also associated with what previous research by Brå (2001) and Clevesköld et.al (2019) defines as social crime prevention. Social crime prevention, according to these research studies, works to prevent early individual norm breaking behavior which can lead to criminal behavior. Social prevention of individuals' inclination to commit criminal behavior can thus be seen through Emma's work of identifying risk factors in children. How such work is actually done will be discussed later in the thesis. The aspect of social outreach work that works crime prevention by minimizing different risk factors and social problems is something that also recurs in the interview with Leila (group 8):

> Working crime preventatively is so different based on how you look at it, but according to myself I think that no matter what preventative job you have, either with adults or children, everyone that commits crime has some sort of social problem complex of problems in their baggage. Our [social outreach workers] job is to prevent anything that could lead to or increase the risk to commit crime to get into the baggage. Then on the other hand it happens that we perhaps prevent crime by our presence when someone is for example smoking cannabis or something but that is not our mission (Leila, group 8).

Leila says that the definition of crime prevention varies depending on who is defining it which also aligns with the statement by Lab (2019) who writes that crime prevention varies in definition and execution between programs, authorities and studies. Although many social outreach workers in this study say that their work is not directly focused on preventing crime among children, they all work with the risk and protective factors of criminal behavior in their general prevention work. Sahlin (1992) describes prevention work as two things: to avoid something unwanted (for example undesirable behavior) and to assure that the problem

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can be solved. By avoiding social behavior problems among children by working against risk factors, they also resolve the problem of harmful developments among children. Social outreach workers do in this sense, work with both aspects of the prevention definition. In similarity to Emma, Leila also emphasizes their work as first and foremost being based on social prevention. However, Leila also points to their work as also being directly preventative when they prevent criminal actions from happening because of their presence. This kind of crime prevention can be seen as what Brå (2001) defines as situational prevention being actions or interventions that for example restrain situational possibilities to commit crime. In other words, social outreach workers would through situational prevention, become actors of crime control (for example like security guards). Situational crime prevention is instead something that happens unintentionally because their main focus is to work with social prevention.

5.1.2 Building relationships as crime prevention

Relationship making with children is expressed in the interviews to be essential in order to succeed in decreasing risk factors and strengthening protective factors, through social prevention work. Relationship making is therefore the core of social outreach work. Initiating and maintaining relationships with children is of the utmost importance in every aspect of social outreach work. Ruben stresses the importance of building trustworthy relationships since it allows children to safely open up to the social outreach workers. To achieve such relationships he means that the social outreach worker must dare to "stay put". By "staying put", he means that social outreach workers' need to have patience, which can also signal to the child that the social workers are reliable no matter the situation. Being tolerant and patient is something recurring in the interview with Eva as well (group 4). According to her it is difficult to know beforehand if the child is going to let the social outreach workers in or not. Therefore, Eva also stresses that social outreach workers must not give up after getting rejected from children but rather continue showing up:

> Sometimes we receive a cold shoulder and sometimes more than what you´d expected. It's hard to know if you're gonna be let in or not and that's why it's important to work on our relationship and to win their trust and to feel that 20 cold shoulders doesn't mean that it's not gonna happen on the 21st time you try. It can take time but we´re here for the long run (Eva, group 4).

As the quote by Eva reflects, children sometimes need time to gain trust, thus also it takes time for the social outreach workers to gain access to them. In accordance with Lipsky´s (2010) theory of street-level bureaucrats, social outreach workers can, by having a flexible framework and freedom of action in their work, arrange their work time to spend a lot of time on gaining access to children's worlds. Gaining access to children is crucial in order for the social outreach workers to initiate relationship-making processes with children. Allowing processes of gaining access to the children to take its time could also have an impact on strengthening the child´s trust towards the social outreach worker. Previous research by Pettersen (2020) says that children find social outreach workers patience important when building relationships. By being persistent with the relationship it can show the child that the social outreach worker does not give up and is trustworthy. Thus when access eventually is gained so is their trust.

According to Marcus (group 2), the effects of social outreach work are long-term, therefore they are difficult to measure. Klara (group 8) says that working with long term effects can also be a personal challenge. She means that working with crime prevention with children does not result in short-term effects and since the long-term effects are difficult to measure it is hard to know if their work with children has been successful. However, she adds that receiving children's trust during a tough time in their life makes it worth the challenge of not knowing the long-term effects. Other interviewees underline that they see the effects of their work in their direct contact with children. Both Marcus (group 2) and Ruben (group 6) say that succeeding to gain a child's trust in opening up to the social outreach workers is evidence of the successful impact of social outreach work. Adding to the understanding of social outreach workers' lived experience, I also have written in an excerpt of my field notes that: "I´ve now received two hugs from kids and it makes me even more realize the importance of our job". A hug in this sense also symbolizes an achievement of building trust with children. One of the hugs I received was after I gave a child a paper to draw on instead of continuing to draw on the table. When I received the hug it made me realize how small actions can become grand gestures for some children. When children show trust in us, it thus shows us the importance of our work.

5.1.3 Strengthening children

A common theme in the interviews is that all work of social outreach workers is based on focusing on the children. Besides working on the basis of children 's willingness, social

outreach workers strive to strengthen children in different ways. In such work, the social outreach worker´s view of the child becomes important as well. In the interview with Molly (group 8), the significance of the individual social outreach worker´s ability to believe in children is highlighted. She says that social outreach workers should never show disbelief towards children no matter what the situation and should always display faith in children's ability to change. Therefore Molly expresses that social outreach workers never work to "bust" children but rather to strive to promote hopefulness in them. The importance for social outreach workers to show hopefulness rather than disbelief towards children can be understood by the concept of Askheim and Starrin (2007) discussion of emotional energy. Emotional energy is experienced in positive and successful events which then leads to an increase of emotional power, shown in higher enthusiasm, self esteem, and pride. If children feel "busted" there would be a risk of them thinking they have failed and thus also awakening feelings of shame. According to Askheim and Starrin (2007) such events could lead to powerlessness and inaction which is the opposite of what empowerment processes are trying to achieve. In continuing to believe in children, social outreach workers strive to increase children's emotional power by avoiding making them feel "busted".

Previous research by Oldeide el.al (2020) says that social outreach worker´s empowerment-work with children also sets them aside from other agencies. The researcher means that social outreach workers, contrary to other agencies, see children from a resource perspective. These findings are also discovered in this thesis. The consequences of disbelieving children, thus when they are not seen from a resource perspective, is clearly shown in the interview with Erik (group 1). He says that: "if we do not believe in children we take away their future". Erik expressed worry that lack of faith in the future would make them more prone to criminal behavior and drawn to networks of criminal people. He adds the importance of being aware of the children's individual difficulties in achieving attendance and good grades in school. Even though some children have difficulties in school, which can affect their future work possibilities, social outreach workers have not only to encourage children in school as well as help them see other solutions to their situation, thus awakening opportunities in children (Oldeide et.al 2020).

In similarity to Molly (see above), Erik expresses the importance of understanding that "there are no hopeless cases" and that there is always a way forward which social outreach workers must help children find. Through helping children find their own way around individual

difficulties and finding solutions, social outreach workers do what Rowlands (1997:13) defines as empowering by "bringing people who are outside the decision making process into it. /…/ individuals are empowered when they are able to maximize the opportunities available to them without constraints". By inspiring hope in children even though they might not have the same advantages or prerequisites as others, they feel empowered to maximize the opportunities available to them. Rowlands (1997) also underlines that empowerment is subjective and that everyone experiences it differently. The quote by Erik shows how every child has different needs for empowerment due to their different life situations. When empowering children it is therefore crucial to not take for granted that every child has the same prerequisites in life in order to succeed in empowering every individual. This also goes hand in hand with the concept of street-level bureaucrats by Lipsky (2010) who underlines the street-level workers´ abilities to make individual assessments in order to meet the needs of their clients. Seeing every child's individual life situation in empowerment work and assessing individual solutions to find other ways forward, is therefore important to prevent criminal behavior and to meet the children's needs.

Empowering work can be seen in different aspects of social outreach work. To boost children's self esteem recurs in the interviews. According to Klara (group 8) it is important to work to strengthen children's perception of themselves and to help children figure out what their own values and desires are. Thus, they can define their own boundaries in different situations and to, as Eva puts it: "set their own value systems". Therefore social outreach workers talk a lot about different types of violence (material, physical, sexual, and psychological) and consent. Besides strengthening children in themselves and their individual boundaries, the interviewees also highlight the importance of working against peer pressure. According to Askheim and Starrin (2007) empowerment processes must take place in different contexts in order to be successful. Besides that social outreach workers work to empower children in relation to different situations, they also work to empower children in different arenas. For example, some of the interviewees bring up that they incorporate such themes in their school visits to spread awareness and to create discussions about self worth with children. Klara (group 8) points out that strengthening children in themselves also results in strengthening them in their relation to others and to different areas of their lives. Molly (group, 8) continues by drawing a clear connection between a strong self esteem and context leading to resistance towards group pressure:

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Everything we do is to strengthen kids and youths and to create and give them a context and sense of belonging. Everything is based on self esteem and by strengthening this we give them [children] the opportunity to resist group pressure. Then we can draw on that to teach them how they can resist alcohol or drugs etc (Molly, group 8).

Drawing from the personal dimension in Rowlands´ (1997) concept of empowerment, self confidence and self esteem can be seen as the result of empowerment processes. Through discussing the individual´s own boundaries in different situations, the social outreach workers in this study try to strengthen children's self-awareness and self-esteem. The personal dimension also refers to gaining a feeling of being worthy of others´ respect. By helping children to figure out what they are okay with, it also becomes clear for children what they do not want or are not okay with. Therefore, social outreach workers strengthen children's sense of self worth and that they can demand respect from others, as well as resisting group pressure. By helping children set their own value systems, social outreach workers help to promote internal psychosocial and psychological processes, which is according to Rowlands´ (1997:11) the core of personal empowerment.

Additionally, the second dimension in Rowlands concept of empowerment processes, can also help to understand the prevention work of social outreach employees. Molly (group 8) points out that strong self esteem leads to an increase in resistance towards group pressure, which can be understood through the relational dimension being dependent on the personal dimension. By working on the personal dimension, social outreach workers strengthen self esteem among children. Thus, helping them define their values and promote bravery in communicating these to others. The interviewees also experience that empowering children in helping them realize their own self worth is also empowering them on a personal level. Katja (group 5) says that she has now become the person she wishes her younger self could have met. In other words, she would have needed someone like herself to strengthen her when she was a teenager with low self worth and self esteem. Thus it is rewarding and empowering to be able to give other children the support they need which the social outreach worker themselves did not have at the same age. Empowering others can therefore be seen to also empower the social outreach worker´s in their personal dimension. Which also strengthens them in the relational dimension in their work with others.

5.1.4 Balancing relationship making and the obligation to report

Although no municipal social outreach services are authorized to make government decisions regarding children and are established to solely operate on the basis of willingness, municipal outreach workers have an obligation to report if they feel worried about the wellbeing of a child. Such a report is called a "report of concern"[6]. In the interviews, such an obligation to report appears to affect the relationship making processes with children in different ways. Many of the interviewees pinpoint this conflict as leading to the child's feeling betrayed by the social outreach worker which then may lead to a decrease of trust between the social outreach worker and the child. Therefore, it is a balancing act between reporting concerns and risking losing relationships with children. Marcus (group 2) explains this kind of situation as: "we´ve burnt our bridges with a lot of kids when having to do reports of concern." In the interview with Emma, she also stresses the broader consequences when reporting:

> If it [reporting] is perceived as a betrayal and if the youth doesn't understand why we do it, the youths' negative image of social outreach workers may spread to other youths. That's a challenge for every social outreach worker because the line between us and the social services is weakened and so trust is lost (Emma, group 7).

The quotes above by Emma and Marcus show the challenges in conflicting work tasks for social outreach workers. On the one hand, they have to abide by the law to report concerns, but on the other hand, they have to preserve relationships with children. Proceeding from the concept of street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky 2010), social outreach workers are faced with a challenge to achieve their work tasks in meeting the needs of their clients and their clients´ will. The risk of reporting can however lead to them failing other work tasks, such as maintaining relationships with children. Since social outreach workers, as street-level bureaucrats, have to abide by law they risk failing some work tasks in the process of achieving other work tasks. This shows an internal organizational conflict where social outreach workers have to weigh different work tasks against each other but at the same time abide by the law.

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[6] In Swedish such a report is called "orosanmälan". According to the Swedish Social Welfare Board writes: "Employees within certain governmental authorities and businesses which relate to children and youths /…/ are obliged by law to immediately press a report if they suspect maltreatment of a child" (Socialstyrelsen 2022b).

Social outreach workers are obliged to uphold both these conflicting tasks. As street-level bureaucrats find strategies and routines around the complexities of their work (Lipsky 2010), so do social outreach workers. In order to achieve the work task of building relationships with children while abiding by regulations, they have to find strategies to make children understand their reasons for reporting. In these situations the interviewees underline communication and transparency as the key. They have to be clear with the children about their obligation to report from the beginning. They also inform children that although social outreach workers do have professional secrecy and confidentiality regarding the children, they have an obligation to report certain kinds of problematic information. Hence, social outreach workers give the children an opportunity to decide whether they want to share certain information or not. Previous research by Pettersen (2020) has shown that respect is a professional quality which is appreciated by children. By being transparent with children, the social outreach workers also show respect towards the child. By also informing the child beforehand that the social outreach worker is writing a report about them and that the social services might be in contact with their family, it minimizes the risk of the child feeling that the social outreach workers have gone behind their back and increases a sense of trust.

Another coping strategy social outreach workers seem to use to achieve their work tasks is to include the child in the report process. Rowlands (1997) refers to empowerment as bringing people who feel like they are outside the decision making processes into it. By doing so people can also, as Rowlands (1997:14) says: "perceive themselves as able and entitled to make decisions". Drawing upon such empowerment processes, social outreach workers achieve empowerment by using these strategies to include children in their own process. Ruben (group 6) says that if possible they offer the child insight when writing the report. He says that such actions show the child that they are participating in their own process. Askheim and Starrin (2007) refer the concept of empowerment to positive features such as control. Through incorporating children in their own processes, also in such difficult situations as reporting a concern, children are empowered by feeling in control of their own lives. Through ascribing children agency in such a process, it empowers them and increases their emotional power and thus also their self confidence. If children feel in control and powerful it can, according to Askheim and Starrin (2007:65), lead them to taking action and making changes.

5.2 Covering the gap in societal crime prevention

Another general theme which is manifested in the data material for this study is how social outreach work fulfills another kind of function in contrast to other prevention services, authorities, agencies and actors. The interviewees describe different ways of how they complement other services and general crime prevention in society when it comes to children. It also becomes clear what the interviewees underline as important characteristics in social outreach work when they cover gaps in the field of societal crime prevention.

5.2.1 Being "Safe adults" in children's worlds and in other agencies´ arenas

The interviewees in this study emphasize their experienced role as being "safe adults" in the children's worlds where secure adults and good role models are lacking. Since social outreach workers act on different arenas in their worlds, they are always within reach for children. Being trustworthy and secure adults in the children's worlds is also found in previous research (Oldeide, et al. 2020; Pettersen 2020; Socialstyrelsen 2022a) to be an appreciated and important aspect of social outreach work by children. When being present in various aspects, social outreach workers become a natural part of the children's surroundings. Thus, they also become secure adults which children can turn to. Being a "safe adult" is something that Hugo (Group 1) explains as a function which fills a void in a child´s a world:

> The function [of being a safe adult] is to be an adult in their [children] world. That's the most important part because many of them don't have adults in their presence. They have teachers but sometimes they´re not receptive to them because they feel like they're against them and sometimes we don't know their home situations either. We become another type of safe and trusting connection because we're visible in different arenas, we become an establishment in their world (Hugo, group 1).

Since social outreach workers have a direct contact with children and work to meet their needs, while they at the same time have the freedom of action to work in different areas of a child's life (for example in school, youth centers and on during their leisure time), they can been compared to what Lipsky (1980;2010) calls street-level bureaucrats. According to Lipsky (2010), street-level workers or bureaucrats, are employees within the public or private sector who have a distance from the organizational authorities and who work in direct contact with citizens. However, deriving from this definition, social outreach workers work partly in

arenas where other street-level bureaucrats already operate, such as in schools where there are teachers. Yet, Hugo means that social outreach workers sometimes fill the function of being a safe adult when teachers fail to fulfill such a function in their own arena (in schools). Social outreach workers therefore differ from other street-level bureaucrats because they do not have their own arena, solely intended for their type of work. However, that means that they also fulfill a function of being a safe adult in other street-level bureaucrats´ arenas.

Although it is part of the work for a social outreach worker to constantly be present in the different arenas in children's lives, the interviewees also experience it as a challenge. Being available and visible to all children in every arena is, according to the interviewees, a great challenge which seems almost impossible with the resources the social outreach workers have. Felicia (group 4) expresses the frustration when feeling insufficient: "we´re trying to be enough. It´s a challenge to feel like you're enough for everyone but also of course because you care for everyone. We who work with this, we´re really passionate about this and failing to reach them hurts". The interviewees, however, attest that they do all they can with the resources and the possibilities that are available even though they wish they would be able to reach all children everywhere. A solution which some of the interviewees suggested was to have their own arena within social outreach work where children can meet. Some social outreach workers in this study have already initiated a space for children to gather some times, while others express a wish for creating such a space. However, such possibilities are also restricted due to the municipality´s available resources. Creating a safe space for children would also, according to the interviewees, aid them in meeting more children at the same time, thus reaching more children at one time and decreasing the social outreach worker´s stress related feeling of insufficiency.

The interviewees also point out the personal challenges of solely working in others´ arenas (such as school, public areas or youth centers). Klara (group 8) says that social outreach workers challenge the social norms and rules when entering someone else's arena, as well as the children's personal space. Drawing from the concept of street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky 2010), social outreach workers have to work in other street-level bureaucrats' arenas. Street-level bureaucrats have both formal rules to abide by and create informal routines (ibid). Therefore other street-level workers beside social outreach workers (teachers, youth center staff, police or social service staff) also have regulations and rules to abide by. However these rules and regulations differ from social outreach workers´. This can become

challenging when social outreach workers, such as street-level bureaucrats, have to abide both by their own rules and other street-level workers´ rules when entering their arenas. An example of such a situation is explained in one of the interviews when their social outreach group put up posters in schools to inform and warn children about the risks of rough strangulation sex. These posters were highly appreciated by students who found them to be very important and informative but were taken down shortly afterward by school staff. This shows a complexity in social outreach workers work as they have to work according to their own rules and at the same time be respectful when working in other arenas and also meeting the needs of their target groups.

However, if social outreach workers were to have their own arena, other vital functions of social outreach work would be lost. Being in various arenas and in different contexts is also attested in the interviews as a great advantage in attaining a unique insight into children's lives. Previous research (henningsen & Gootas 2008; Socialstyselsen 2022; Puuronen 2014; Strømfors, Erdal & Rammer 2006) have also found that because social outreach workers are not bound to a specific arena, they can meet children in situations which other youth workers cannot. This enhances the important function of flexibility which would be restrained if social outreach workers were to have a specific arena. Henningsen and Gootas (2008) also points to the significance of being recognized by children because children are more likely to turn to social outreach workers who they already know when faced with difficult situations. Being in different arenas increases social outreach workers´ visibility to children, thus increasing familiarity with them. Therefore, if social outreach workers were to have their own arena they would not be within the same reach for children to what they are today when working in various arenas.

5.2.2 Being first in place

As has been discussed previously in the thesis, social outreach workers´ work is, among other things, to identify risk factors, promote protective factors and be "safe adults" in children's worlds. To intervene early in a child´s harmful development or prevent such development is another theme manifested in several of the interviews. It is also one thing that differentiates social outreach work from other prevention working agencies. As Klara from social outreach group 8 puts it:

We intervene before things screw up. Our prevention work lies earlier on the scale than others [other services]. They are all as important and we need the entire scale when working with kids. Police for example intervene later on the scale when things have actually screwed up. We´re 12 steps ahead of them [the police] (Klara, group 8).

As shown in the quote above, the pattern shown in the interviews is that social outreach workers work to prevent harmful developments among the broader spectrum of children so that intervention from other services, such as the social services or the police will not be necessary. Ruben (group 6) means that since social outreach workers work in children's arenas and have a closer insight into their worlds, they know what signs to look for and what questions to ask to prevent something serious from happening and to discover norm breaking behavior early on. In contrast to authorities such as the police and the social services, Ruben means that social outreach workers do not wait for something to happen before they take action. As both Klara and Ruben describe, social outreach workers seem to be working ahead of other authorities. Previous research by Tham (2022) and Brå (2001) shows that the most successful crime prevention strategy is to start as early as possible to minimize risk factors and promote protective factors. Early actions of intervention and prevention reduce the risk of long term effects of criminal actions as well as promote the further wellbeing among children. Therefore, social outreach workers have a unique role in societal crime prevention because they have the optimal prerequisites to work with children earlier than other agencies. However, as Klara discussed in her interview, all other prevention authorities are also needed when working with children. Social outreach workers also meet children who already are in contact with the police or social services. In such cases the social outreach workers work to decrease the risk of further harmful development through building relationships, motivate processes of change and maintain development processes.

The social outreach groups´ target group and age-span differ from one another. In the interviews the reason for choosing a specific age span of children varies as well. Some interviewees say that they have had to prioritize because of the local context, however the majority say that it is because they were given such directions from higher municipal management. Molly says: "[there] is a picture of us being available for children in high school and not middle school, they [municipal management] want us to work like that. Maybe that's because of a lack of resources." When drawing upon Lipsky´s (2010) concept of street-level bureaucrats, social outreach workers have extensive freedom of action, flexibility

and independence in their work. However, street-level bureaucrats are, according to Lipsky, obliged to follow specific regulations. Social outreach workers are governed by the political management in each municipality. Since social outreach workers are practitioners within the municipality, they can also be seen to be at the bottom of the organizational hierarchy. Therefore they are obliged to form their work on the basis of higher directions, in this case a specific age span as their target group. Although some social outreach workers in this study have got directions of what target groups to work with and others have had to decide themselves what age-span to focus on, they all have a greater focus on children in the upper classes of elementary school (from 7th to 9th grade).

However, there is a common desire among the interviewees to work with younger individuals than what they do. Some of the interviewees also experience an increase in requests from schools to have social outreach workers conducting presentations for lower middle school. The reason the interviewees desire to work with younger children is because they find that an earlier contact with children would be more fruitful in a long term preventative perspective. Sophia (group 5) discusses the importance of an early connection and the differences it can make in the relationships with children: "If we could intervene earlier it would give the best effects and if you look from a long term perspective the best effects come from creating relationships with children as early as possible. Then we carry those relationships throughout their youth".

These findings present a conflict between given directions, available resources and the social outreach workers´ own wishes. This kind of conflict can be understood through the street-level bureaucrats´ complexity to applying organizational policies but at the same time meet the needs of the citizens (Lipsky 2010). The social outreach workers see the need and benefits of working with younger target groups but are not able to do so due to other factors. In contrast to what Lipsky (2010) says about street-level bureaucrats' regulations often being vague, a given age span is a clear guideline for social outreach workers to follow in order for the resources to suffice for that specific target group and for them to fulfill their work tasks. However, such directions do not always match what the social outreach workers experience to be the most efficient way of working with prevention. My own experience of working as a social outreach worker is that we do spend time on reaching out to younger children when we are able to do so even though we have a different age span to focus on. What has become evident in my work experience however, is that children outside the target group have to be

deprioritized in the presence of individuals in our target group because of the directions given by the municipal management.

Street-level bureaucrats according to Lipsky (2010), in this case social outreach workers, develop techniques to make their work more manageable. Even though there is a set age span on paper to follow, using available time to talk to younger children can also be seen as a coping strategy when feeling powerless in not being able to reach all children. According to the interviewees above, younger children are easier to make contact with. therefore they also show more interest in social outreach workers rather than rejecting them which creates a feeling of being appreciated. However, Erik (group 1), points out that appreciation can also be "a trap". He says: "it's a challenge to not fall for the temptation. We´re not there to be rockstars or popular. We´re on another mission and that's why you have to be careful of feeling appreciated by the younger kids". Lipsky (2010) also states that when trying to meet all complexities in their work there is a risk for street-level bureaucrats to fail. If one were to focus on younger children because it gives more appreciation, there is a risk of failing to reach all children within the target group instead. Putting more focus on people outside the target groups than what there is room for or resources for, could then lead to the social outreach workers not being able to fulfill their work tasks with the given target group.

5.2.3 Downplaying authority

As has been discussed previously in this thesis, in order to discover children's harmful developments early on and before other authorities come into play, social outreach workers have to get close to the children. Thus, they also have to become a natural part of their context. To achieve such a mission the social outreach workers in this study experience that they have to distinguish themselves from other authorities which the child might already has negative preconceptions of or is trying to avoid contact with. Therefore the interviewees also state the importance of working as an undemanding service operating on the children´s willingness (these objectives of social outreach work are also explained in section 1.3). Among many of the interviewees, Hanna (group, 2), also defines social outreach workers unique role of operating on the children´s willingness compared to other authorities working with the same target group:

Children have to comply with rules and regulations in school, at the social services, at home with their parents or at BUP[7]. We´re on their ground on their terms to see to their needs. All services have a mission to investigate, take tests, initiate a treatment process but we´re just here, you don't have to have contact with us if you don't want to. We don't have that kind of specific mission and therefore we´re also very undemanding which makes it easier to turn to us (Hanna, group 2)

As has been discussed previously in this theses, all these actors (i.a. police, teachers and social secretaries) are what could be defined as street-level bureaucrats according to Lipsky (2010) because they all work in close contact with citizens on a daily basis. According to Lipsky (2010) street- level workers obtain a freedom of action in their work since they have a distance from the organizational authorities. Since they often receive vague directions they personally interpret these regulations in order to exercise deciding power in their daily interactions with citizens. However, social outreach workers, as street-level bureaucrats, do not have the same authoritarian decision-making power as the other street-level workers. Although this on the one hand can be interpreted as providing them with less freedom of action in their work since they are not allowed to make government decisions, it does on the other hand provide them with greater flexibility to achieve their work tasks in reaching children because they can use it to get close to children. In practice they use the lack of authority as a tool in their work with children to gain alliance with their target groups. Hanna (group 2) continues: "even though we cooperate a lot with the social services which the child maybe do not understand, we can take the children's alliance against the social services in discussions with the child."

Due to the social outreach workers' unique insight into the children's lives, they are able to gain access to their trust in other ways than other authorities and agencies can. Therefore other authorities and agencies also ask the social outreach services for help in reaching certain children which they themselves cannot reach because of their governmental affiliation. Hanna (group 2) says that: "the police call us and say that they will not reach these kids and that they need us to do so. And then it becomes clear that our relationship building can be crucial". Deriving from the concept of street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky 2010), social outreach workers therefore become a bridge between children and their culture to the governmental authorities. However, in order to become such a link they have to distinguish

[7] BUP is an abbreviation of the Swedish organization "Barn- och ungdomspsykiatrin", which stands for the children's and youths´ psychiatry (Bup 2022).

themselves from authority to win the children's trust and gain access to them. Thus, social outreach workers also become a tool for authorities to use to reach children, especially those who are hard to reach (for example children who already have a negative impression of the social services or police). These findings align with previous research by Oldeide et.al (2020:6) who argues for social outreach services being a "safety net". The social outreach workers in this study show that since other services call them in for help in reaching certain children, this points to the fact that social outreach workers can reach children which other services fail to, thus becoming a "safety net" for children that fall between the cracks of the system.

Although the interviewees in this study express many advantages of not having a mandate to make authoritarian decisions in regards to children, some interviewees also express a frustration of solely relying on willingness to gain contact with children. According to the interviewees, operating based on children´s willingness for contact also leads to social outreach workers not being able to reach everyone in their target group. Children´s receptivity towards social outreach workers is based on their willingness. Thus, if children do not want to have contact with the social outreach workers, it is difficult for the social outreach workers to help these children. Street-level bureaucrats are working according to Lipsky (2010) in close contact with their clients in order to find suitable individual intervention to meet the clients´ needs. Drawing upon social outreach workers as street-level bureaucrats, they cannot meet their clients' needs if they cannot reach their clients. This reveals a conflict in social outreach workers having to work to fulfill their work tasks to meet the children's needs even though they do not want the help, with no availability to use other actions than motivation. However, in occurrences of difficult situations, the interviewees underline their possibilities to call other agencies for help, for example police or security guards.

My own experiences of working as a social outreach worker is that it is hard trying to reach out to children who do not want to have contact with us social outreach workers. Situations in which the child tries to disregard or walk away from the social outreach worker occurs in any of the children´s arenas. In such instances, it is frustrating to not have the authoritarian power to do more than what we actually can, which is to motivate the child to let us help them or to motivate them to seek help themselves. However, it is important to remember that such work guidelines (working on willingness) is what makes social outreach workers such an

appreciated service according to the interviewees in this study, which is also supported by previous research (Pettersen 2020; Oldeie et.al 2020). If given government decision-making power, social outreach workers risk being associated with other government-driven agencies which they have tried to distinguish themselves from. Therefore, if social outreach workers were given more authority there is also a risk of affecting children's perception of social outreach workers negatively. From such a perspective, social outreach workers also make use of seeking help from other authorities, in the same way as they call social outreach workers for help.

5.2.4 Being the spider in the web

Since social outreach workers do not have the same authoritarian power as other services or a certain mission to treat, teach, work cases etc, as other authorities and services do, they also become, as many interviewees describe it: "a spider in the net". This means navigating children to relevant services when needed. As Ruben (group 6) describes this link:

> We work with all kinds of problems, we´re good at everything but we´re not experts in anything specific. We know a lot but only on an overall level. Therefore we´re trying to safely navigate children on to the experts or even parents. That means either informing the kids where to find the right help or literally holding their hand and following along to the social services, youth centers, home to their parents etc (Ruben, group 6)

The importance of cooperating with other authorities in order to navigate children has been expressed in previous research (see Oldeide et.al 2020; Pettersen 2020; Andersson 2013). As has been discussed previously in this thesis, the study by Oldeide et.al (2020) points out social outreach services as being a "safety net". They become such a function because they help children through bureaucratic barriers when they are in need of other services. The research by Pettersen (2020) finds children´s appreciation towards social outreach workers in providing information about other services. Such tasks can also be seen as navigating children through the system in order to provide the right help for the child. However, the quote by Ruben (group 6), adds to the previous research since it sheds light on the social outreach workers also being a safety net in parental barriers.

Street-level bureaucrats (Lispky 2010) have to make individual assessments of their clients´ needs in order to provide the correct help. When navigating children, social outreach workers

also have to do an individual evaluation of the children's needs, which can also be demanding. Due to the flexibility in social outreach workers´ work, Klara (group 8) expresses the challenge in knowing when to actually let go of a child and refer them to another service. Additionally, she says that every case differs which is why it sometimes is difficult to make such assessments. In similarity to Ruben (group 6), she does at the same time describe the feeling of being at ease when having navigated children because social outreach workers are not qualified in certain matters. Previous research by Andersson (2013) finds that the cooperation between agencies have to be built upon trust. If social outreach workers were to link children onwards but the next service then fails to provide correct support, it can lead to feelings of "cheating people ". These findings cannot be found in the interviewees for this study nor in my own experience of working as a social outreach worker. Seeing to the children's needs in the sense of guiding them onwards is rather experienced as an empowering perspective.

Guiding children onwards is portrayed in the interviews as an obligatory routine when the child's needs are greater than the support the social outreach workers can provide. Such navigation also eases their own feeling of being powerless in not being able to meet the child's needs. Although navigating children is part of the social outreach workers work tasks, it therefore also becomes, what Lipsky (2010) refers to as coping strategies. Street-level bureaucrats develop such strategies in order to balance the complexities of their work by abiding regulations and at the same time meeting the needs of their clients. Knowing that a child has been provided with the correct support by other street-level bureaucrats (for example police or social services), the social outreach workers can feel secure that they have done what they could for the child which relieves work-related stress.

Besides navigating children to other agencies, social outreach workers also cooperate with other authorities and services in the sense of sharing information with other authorities. By having flexibility in their work, in contrast to the police, schools or social services, social outreach workers obtain a closer picture of the children in the municipality. Bourgeois (2008:3) defines street-culture as: "a complex and conflictual web of beliefs, symbols, modes of interaction, values and ideologies that have emerged in opposition to exclusion from mainstream society". Although children´s spheres are not excluded from society as for example other subcultures, they are a difficult group of people to gain access to. Therefore social outreach workers gain a different insight into the street culture of children, their

beliefs, trends and values which other agencies do not have access to. Since children's street cultures may also differ between municipalities due to local contexts, social outreach workers become infiltrators into each street culture of each group of children. These findings align with previous research by Henningsen and Gootas (2008) who says that social outreach workers can also gain information about problems in the municipality which other agencies cannot. By collecting and sharing information about the street-cultures, their trends, patterns, hot spots or activities taking place, to other authorities, social outreach workers become, according to Emma (group 7): "a key function in the municipality when working with children". In other words, social outreach workers' unique position of being a neutral agency makes them both a spider in the web when navigating children in need but also a tool for other authorities and services in navigating them around children´s worlds.

5.3 Fulfilling personal demands and challenging outsiders´ expectations

The interviewees underlines the flexibility in their work as a great advantage for reaching children, gaining access to their worlds and achieving trusting relationships. They emphasize the possibilities to work outside office hours, unlike many other authorities. These findings align with the previous research (Socialstyrelsen 2022a; Puuronen 2014; Strømfors et.al 2006; Henningsen & Gootas 2008), which state that such flexibility provides for other availabilities in gaining insight in the children's lives and such insight also enables early discovery of risk behavior among children. Flexibility in social outreach workers´ work is therefore also important in order to achieve the prospects of identifying children in risk of harmful developments according to the law of social work (2001:453). Although there are great advantages in having a flexible regulation in order to reach children, there are also challenging aspects of how flexibility also creates individual-and outside expectations on social outreach workers.

5.3.1 Personal qualities makes the professional employee

Since social outreach workers´s work consist of a great deal of flexibility, their personal qualities become of even greater importance. The interviewees underline how personal qualities are used in a professional manner and that the most important qualities of social outreach workers are to be trustworthy, patient and secure in one self. The abilities to be adaptable and flexible are also described as crucial in the work of social outreach work. According to Sophia (group 5) if one does not have the ability to adjust to fast changes they

would not be able to manage the job. Since they have to apply a great deal of personal qualities in order to be professional in their work, social outreach workers are described in the interviews as becoming their own "working tool". Social outreach workers as their own "working tool" has also been emphasized in previous research by Socialstyrelsen (2022a). However, in contrast to this study, Socialstyrelsen (ibid:54) finds social outreach workers becoming their own "tool" because they prefer to make use of their own lived experiences and prior informal knowledge rather than formal knowledge or structured programs. The findings in this thesis instead find the concept of social outreach workers as their "working tool" to be based on their use of personal qualities.

However, using personal qualities in a professional manner also runs the risk of becoming too private. Social outreach work is described in the interviews as very emotional work. As has been shown throughout this thesis, social outreach workers are emotionally affected both when succeeding in their work tasks to meet children's needs but also when failing to achieve the work objectives. When using personal qualities one becomes more receptive to emotional expressions which according to Hugo (group 1) can lead to "losing the orientation in what is good and bad work". When getting an emotional overload Hugo says there is a risk of shutting down all emotions but that would make bad social outreach work since, as Hugo (group 1) says: "children and youths need our heart and love". Although it is difficult to maintain an emotional presence in their daily work, it is important to continue with it. Erik (group 1) follows up on Hugo by saying that it is important to show and talk about feelings with children. In that way, he means that social outreach workers also become "emotional role models for young men in a hardcore macho culture".

Since social outreach workers use themselves as their working tool it also creates pressure, like Felicia (group 4) puts it: " it's a challenge that we ourselves become our greatest working tool because it all depends on yourself. Of course there are other factors that come into play as well but you are always the working tool and that means you always have to be trustworthy and on top". As has been discussed previously in this thesis, social outreach workers attain great flexibility in their work in order to meet the needs of both their cooperation partners´needs and also their clients´ needs. Drawing upon the concept of street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky 2010), social outreach workers can be seen as street-level workers because they have to attain certain qualities in order to fulfill these work tasks, thus leading to a great amount of pressure on one self. By not having any fixed framework and

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having to rely on yourself as the "working tool", failing work tasks also reflects back on the individual social outreach worker. As street-level bureaucrats, social outreach workers therefore do not only have to deal with the complexity of fulfilling their work tasks while meeting others´ demands, but also their own demands on themselves to fit the job requirements.

Although different personal and professional qualities are highlighted by the interviewees as important in social outreach workers, there is also a mutual understanding that one individual social outreach worker cannot attain all qualities needed for the work. Thus, it is important to be part of a work group where the social outreach workers complement each other. This can be discussed through the last dimension in Rowlands´ (1997) notion of empowerment, the collective dimension. This dimension increases every team member´s personal empowerment which leads to collective agency and a shared sense of dignity as a team. Emma (group 7) describes it: "some of the qualities you must have but everyone can´t have all [qualities] but together we fulfill all of them. So you don't have to be the best at everything, that's the advantage of having a work group. We complement and relieve each other". Although social outreach workers have to rely on themselves as a tool in their work, they are working in a team which empowers them in their work and at a personal level of feeling enough.

5.3.2 Challenging outsiders´ expectations on social outreach workers

One general theme which has surfaced in the interviews is other services´, agencies´, authorities´ and civil society's expectations of how social outreach workers should be working. However, many of the expectations from various outside actors contradict one another, thus making it difficult for social outreach workers to live up to them. The interviewees experience that schools might for example want social outreach workers to organize more events for children while the municipal political management want them to prioritize outreach work during night time. Another example is that the police expect social outreach workers to stand by in dangerous situations and not put themselves at risk but at the same time civil society calls for social outreach workers to take action when such situations occur. Social outreach workers are not equipped to intervene in criminal or dangerous situations since they do not have the same education or authority as for example police or security guards. There is also a third example of contradictory expectation of social outreach work in which they are expected to do less. For example, Sophia (group 5), explains how parents sometimes do not understand the social outreach workers who write a report of

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concern about their child. According to them it is not a social outreach workers place to do so, because they are not the social services. At the same time, social outreach workers´ are obliged by law to report concerns. All these examples are according to the interviewees in this study based on a general lack of knowledge of the social outreach workers actual mission and of their work. Lipsky's (2010) concept of street-level bureaucrats only accounts for the complexities of street-level workers having to balance their work demands and their clients' needs. However, social outreach workers do not only have to meet the children's needs but also need to deal with other actors´ needs and expectations of their work. A loose regulatory and framework of how social outreach workers actually work, contribute with different expectations on how they should work. However, they cannot meet everyone's needs as well as their actual work tasks because they all contradict one another. Adding to this complexity is the demands the social outreach workers have on themselves, which has been discussed above.

Regardless of what politics influence the municipalities, some of the interviews in this study experience a conflict between the directions given by the management and their expectations on how the local social outreach workers should work crime preventative in contrast to social outreach workers' own view of their work. Ruben (group 6) underlines that there has been a political organizational emphasis on working against gun violence and explosions. Such a political agenda influences his work in deciding what kind groups of children to focus on. Felicia expresses the same shift in focus but also its consequences:

> /…/ there's an expectation on us social outreach workers to work with one kind of target group now, which is the group of high-risk youths. But we always have to confront that expectation because our work as social outreach workers is rather to work with all youths at an early stage because we don´t know who will become high-risk youths. If we were to work solely based on such expectations we risk failing to detect the others (Felicia, group 4).

As stated in the introduction of this thesis, municipal social outreach work is adapted to the local context and municipal problems. If the crime level rises among children in the municipality, social outreach workers have to adjust their work to the current situations. Applying the concept of street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky 2010) on social outreach workers, the large amount of freedom of action can also become problematic. If social outreach workers have to use their freedom of action to comply with the local situation of, for example

gun violence, they risk failing to detect harmful developments in other non-risk children. Therefore, focusing on already high risk or criminal children could in the long run lead to an increase in them. Social outreach workers' function of becoming a "safety net" has been discussed in relation to prior research previously in this thesis. However, the dilemma experienced by Felicia in the quote above, also indicates how social outreach workers fail the function when having to abide by both given direction and work objectives. On the one hand, they do become a safety net for children who have already fallen through the cracks of the system. On the other hand, such focus could lead to the social outreach workers inability to prevent other children from falling through the same cracks.

Another aspect of the conflict can be found in political management's expectations on how the social outreach workers should prioritize their work time. While some of the interviewees describe a conflict in management's wishes to outline the municipal outreach work among children, others do not experience the same pressure from their municipal management. However, they do point out that it can happen along with an increase of gun violence or youth criminality in their municipality. Molly (group 8) points out that her social outreach group has received directions on prioritizing outreaching work during evenings and nights. Molly finds this problematic since there are not many children in their target groups out at night time in their municipality and therefore they would rather prioritize to work daytime in schools since they would meet more children in their target groups there than out on the field. Along with some of the other interviewees, she also points out that children are easier to connect with in school environments. Thus making contact with children in such arenas also enables them to connect with them in other arenas later on. Thus the management's directions do not match how they would like to prioritize their own work and what they see as the most successful way of working with prevention. Leila from the same group (group 8) also enhance the fact that it can be difficult to make the decision making politicians understand social outreach workers way of working with crime prevention:

> We do work with different risk factors of both criminality but also other aspects like addiction, psychological well being, alcohol and so on. But we do so through working on strengthening kids' self-esteem and resistance but nowadays it's very hard to make the politicians understand that kind of prevention work and how it's all connected to prevention. Maybe they think our way is too slow in showing clear results but in this

job we work with long-term effects. It's very frustrating that they can't see that (Leila, group 8).

How social outreach workers work with social prevention to prevent risk factors and strengthen protective factors in order to reach long-term effects, has been discussed previously in this study. However, Leila also pinpoints the difficulties in making others understand how such prevention work is more beneficial in the current crime context than the prevention work stressed by political management and societal debates. The beneficial aspect of social outreach work can be understood through Rowlands (1997) concept of empowerment. She means that the third dimension in empowerment, the collective dimension, is based on every group member´s individual empowerment which contributes to a shared agency. The collective dimension is therefore dependent on the individual dimension. Through social prevention, for example strengthening children's self-esteem, agency and affiliation, social outreach workers can create collective agency and identity among children in their municipality and therefore also decrease municipal criminal problems. By strengthening individual resources and strengthening resources in an individual's proximity, empowerment work can also motivate developmental processes on a collective level. Such collective societal processes can affect social situations and local difficulties to the better and decrease criminality.

When local political management increases their focus on severe criminal behavior and activity among children, there is also a problematic aspect regarding the social outreach workers' capability to deal with such situations. When being out in the field, some interviewees feel like they are directed by political directions to conduct situational crime prevention in high risk situations or even to intervene if criminal activity actually occurs. Ruben (group 6), Emma (group 7) and Klara (group 8), point out that working with situational crime prevention in such a way, is not something they are trained to do. On the one hand, Emma says that they are educated in how to motivate children but not how to actually prevent criminal activity as it happens because they have never had the authority to do so. On the other hand, Klara (group 8) also says that social outreach workers´ mission is not to be stationed in situations where they risk their own life and health. Klara continues by saying: "because of this it becomes even more clear that politicians don't know what our mission is and because of this misconception our job can become pretty unsafe, especially if we´re commanded to do certain unsafe things.".

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Since social outreach workers not only have to meet their client needs, their own expectations of their work, outside actors' demands, as well as following management´s directions, social outreach workers are positioned in an unsolvable dilemma. In such a complex situation, social outreach workers first and foremost have to follow the law and directions given by the political management in the municipality and other heads of the department. However, these directions sometimes contradict social outreach workers' own interpretation of their work tasks. In such situations, social outreach workers have to abide by the given regulations but that also leads to consequences in both overseeing children in need and also their own security on the field. In that sense, they risk not to, according to the concept of street-level bureaucracy, meet their clients' needs, thus also their work tasks.

5.3.3 Raising the voice of social outreach work

Aside from the interviewees stating that there are different expectations on social outreach workers and a lack of understanding for their actual mission, they also imply that there is a misconception of the current situation among children. The interviewees describe that the societal emphasis on gang criminality, gun violence and explosives has contributed to a general fear of falling victim to it. According to Erik (group 1), the situation portrayed in the media and what is also enhanced by politicians is not always a truthful representation of the actual criminality situation among children. In contrast to other definitions of crime prevention, Lab´s definition of crime prevention also includes preventing the fear of crime: "crime prevention entails any action designed to reduce the actual level of crime and/or the perceived fear of crime" (Lab 2019:26). Emanating from this definition social outreach workers can be interpreted as easing the harsh debate on youth criminality and providing correct contextual information, thus also preventing fear of crime.

According to the concept of street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky 2010), street-level workers, such as social outreach workers, are on the bottom of the organizational hierarchy and create their own policies. Drawing upon this aspect of the concept, social outreach workers are also on the bottom of the municipal hierarchy. They have developed their own policies to achieve their work tasks. That being said, social outreach workers are the municipal practitioners and due to their freedom of action they attain a broader picture than other authorities who only work with one specific target group. Therefore their mission also becomes to represent information from their lived experiences from the field. This can be found in the interview with Hanna (group 4) who says: "youths in general have always been seen as a disturbing

generation who sabotage, litter and steer up things". She means that because children have always been seen as a very provoking group it also increases the fear of criminal children. Therefore, Hanna (group 2) enhanced the importance of social outreach workers' role in "putting the brake on politicians and rumors of children being a problematic group, which say that society today is very unsafe and the fear of children being dangerous criminals".

The interviewees say it is a tough mission to promote social outreach workers' perception of the current situation among children and about children, as well as receiving an understanding of their work. Previous research by Tham (2022) underlines that crime prevention efforts have to be even more politically prioritized. When crime prevention is emphasized it also provides better resources which affect societal criminality. In similarity to Tham (2022), some of the social outreach workers in this study explain how they have to work hard to raise their voice in order for politicians and others to understand their way of working with crime prevention but also to disconfirm the wrongful picture of children being problematic and dangerous. This is expressed by Ida (group 3): "we´re working uphill. We´re always discussing, explaining and writing and it's frustrating being questioned, often in relation to political elections. We present statistics and knowledge straight from the field to be heard". A similar frustration is also expressed by Erik (group 1): "we have information and knowledge but it's not always that they want to listen. Therefore it's important for us to talk about our job and our experiences and maybe someone reads this study and listens to you writing about us". To summarize, the experiences of not being heard, expressed by the social outreach workers in this study, shows the relevance of this study as well as the need for further research of social outreach workers´ perspectives and lived experiences.

6. Discussion

The purpose of this study is to elucidate social outreach workers' experience of their work with children through a crime preventative perspective, to expound upon their role in crime prevention and to highlight the emotional aspects and challenges in their work with children. Social outreach workers´ work is based on experiences and knowledge straight from the field. Such on-the ground learning is not something that can be solely understood through reading textbooks, education or when looking through policies. If we want to understand social outreach workers´ work, the impact of their work and to take part of their knowledge from primary sources, we have to consult them directly and observe their work. By drawing upon a

phenomenological approach, this study complements the previous research of social outreach workers´ general prevention by investigating their experiences through a crime prevention perspective.

By interviewing social outreach workers, as well as accounting for my own lived experience as a social outreach worker, this study has found that although social outreach workers do not experience their work as crime preventative in the sense of working directly with criminal behavior, crime prevention is being conducted through their general prevention work. Crime prevention in social outreach work is experienced through working to prevent risk factors of harmful developments among children and strengthening protective factors. Moreover, such work is mainly done through social crime prevention rather than situational crime prevention. The social prevention work experiences in this study aligns with previous research on social crime prevention (Brå 2001; Clevesköld et.al 2019) and is conducted through relationship making to strengthen children's self esteem, increase agency and emphasize resistance to group pressure. Since relationship building is a long term process, it is important for the social outreach workers to be patient and keep up their own belief in children. The effects of social outreach work are not immediate but rather shown in the children's future. However, this study shows that the significance of social outreach work can be seen in social outreach workers´ direct contract with children.

The findings of this study also places social outreach work in a societal context and in relation to other prevention agencies which also work with children. Due to the great freedom of action in their work, social outreach workers are flexible in reaching out to children, thus becoming "safe adults" in various areas of the child's life. These arenas are however belonging to other agencies, for example schools or youth centers. Although this is an important part of social outreach work in order to for example reach children, it is also a challenge. The social outreach workers have to both comply with their own regulations, as well as the other agencies´ regulations when being in their arenas, and at the same time meeting children's needs. Another finding of this study is that social outreach workers fill an important role in societal crime prevention since they often work before other agencies come into play. Their aim is to work towards all children but due to given directions from municipal management or to lacking resources, most of the interviewees focus on a specific age span. However, the respondents expressed a desire to work with younger children than

what they currently do. The reason for such a wish is because it would be more beneficial in the long run.

Social outreach workers have a unique role in children's worlds because they do not have the same authority as other governmental authorities, such as social services, police or school. Instead they work based on children´s willingness. On the one hand, such a neutral position allows them to gain alliance with the child which is also beneficial for other authorities. On the other hand it creates a feeling of frustration since it sometimes becomes harder to fulfill their work tasks of meeting the children's needs. Furthermore, social outreach workers also fulfill the function of being the spider in the net. Social outreach workers´ unique insight into children's worlds also leads to them being a link to navigate authorities in the children's worlds and providing other authorities with essential information about trends, patterns or harmful developments.

Although there are many advantages with social outreach workers´ great amount of freedom of action, this study also finds that due to the high level of flexibility, they become their own "working tool". Therefore they have to rely on their own personal qualities to manage their work. This also creates an emotional balancing act in providing emotions but at the same time managing them. Social outreach workers have found that working in a team eases the demands on themselves since the team members complement and support each other. Besides fulfilling personal demands, social outreach workers experience various expectations from outsiders. Previous research (Socialstyrelsen 2022a) has found social outreach work to be difficult to outline due to the flexibility and variations of local contexts. This also contributes to how other agencies and civil society expect social outreach workers to conduct their work without really knowing how they actually work. These expectations on social outreach workers also contradict one another, making it impossible for social outreach workers to meet all expectations and at the same time fulfilling their work tasks.

What is of even greater importance in this study's findings is that some of the participants experience an increased focus on gun violence and youth criminality in the directions given by the political management. Such directions can for example be to increase outreaching work during night time or in criminal situations. In other words, such directions regard situational crime prevention rather than social crime prevention. This indicates a dilemma since social outreach workers have to adapt their work to the local context but at the same time a shifting focus leads to risks such as overseeing children in need. Another aspect of this

dilemma is how such directions also risk the health and wellbeing of social outreach workers since they are neither educated nor equipped to handle criminal or dangerous situations.

As stated in the introduction, the main missions of social outreach work are to identify at risk children early on, to intervene in current harmful developments, to detect children in the need of help and support, to promote good conditions for the upbringing of children and to reach children who other municipal services and governmental agencies have failed to identify (Socialstyrelsen 2022a). At the same time an increase of social outreach workers is underlined as a potential countermeasure to prevent gang recruitment of youth, youth criminality and to provide for a better awareness of certain problematic areas and networks of youths (SOU 2021:49). This study has found a discrepancy in social outreach workers not experiencing their current work mission and task to align with other expectations on how they should work. At the same time, the interviewees attest that the increased focus on gun violence portrayed in the media, as well as shown in the directions given by the political municipal management, does not always match the current situation. Some participants experience an excessive and faulty picture being drawn of children as well as the criminality context. By obtaining first hand information from the field and working to share it with other actors, social outreach workers not only work with crime prevention among children but also to prevent and decrease the fear of crime in a societal context (Lab 2010).

This study has found that social outreach workers fill an important role in societal crime prevention. However, that role is based upon the notion of social outreach workers being social-and emotional relationship makers with children. A shifting focus and other expectations of social outreach workers could lead to them instead becoming actors of situational crime prevention to reach short term effects. Two main questions are being raised: Is the increased popularity and investment of social outreach workers influenced by the political debate of harsher countermeasures against youth criminality? and are social outreach workers being implemented for the role of actors of social crime control, rather than emotional actors working to build long term relationships with youths? It is evident that there is a need for further understanding of the reason for the implementation of social outreach work in the county of Stockholm. Therefore more research is needed in order to answer these questions. Since the popularity of social outreach work can also be found elsewhere in Sweden, further research is needed not only in the context of Stockholm county but also on a national level. National research on the topic of social outreach work has been conducted (see

Socialstyrelsen 2022), however in order to see if the findings of this study are consistent throughout the context of Sweden we need to focus the research on social outreach workers´ experiences and feelings rather than mapping out the framework of social outreach work.

In conclusion, although there has been increased popularity in social outreach work, the interviewees in this study experience working "up-hill" in order to gain attention and notice. They are trying to reach their voice about their work, as well as their needs in order to meet children's needs. At the same time social outreach workers do not feel like they are being heard by political management or other outside actors. This study has shown that much can be learnt from social outreach workers and that they are a great source of knowledge about crime prevention work with children. In order to achieve better prevention strategies and policies to decrease youth criminality and gun violence, we have to account for their experiences and lived realities working with children. By understanding their perspectives of situations, listening to their stories and seeing things from their point of view, we can thus also understand children better. Social outreach workers can therefore teach us how to work crime preventative with children rather than against them, and we need to listen.

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