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“It Gets a Bit Messy”: Norwegian Social Workers’ Perspectives on Collaboration with Police and Security Service on Cases of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism

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ABSTRACT

Social workers are a part of the prevention efforts against radicalisation and violent extremism in the Nordic countries. While multi-agency cooperation is not new in Norway, municipal cooperation with the police security service is. This cooperation, particularly its unintended consequences with a specific focus on the securitisation of “soft professionals” in the public sector, has been scarcely researched. We address this gap with findings from a qualitative study based on 17 individual in-depth interviews and two focus-group interviews with experienced social workers in Norway. Abbott’s theory of jurisdiction serves as our theoretical framework. Our findings suggest that social workers in some cases appear subordinate to law enforcement personnel. Further, the lack of clarity of roles and responsibilities raises ethical and professional dilemmas, especially regarding work transparency and client confidentiality, indicating an outside influence of security onto prevention work. An unintended consequence of this is the risk of lower levels of trust between prevention workers and their target group and a reduced ability to support at-risk individuals. Clarification of the roles and responsibilities of all partners involved in multi-agency PVE should be given attention from both policymakers and practitioners.

KEYWORDS

Violent extremism; PVE; social work; multi-agency; security

Introduction

Different strategies to prevent or counter terrorism have been developed around the world, particularly since the 9/11 attacks in the United States. These strategies vary from de-radicalisation efforts in prisons in Saudi Arabia¹ and Singapore,² where Islamic scholars counsel detainees, to psychosocial interventions in the Nordic countries.³ However, few professionals work on such cases alone, as complex issues are commonly assumed to benefit from multi-agency work⁴ or interorganisational cooperation.⁵ The various mandates and logics of professionals working together may differ or even be contradictory,⁶ causing difficult working relationships.⁷

In the Nordic countries, especially in Denmark and Norway, different professionals are closely engaged in multi-agency cooperation to prevent radicalisation and violent extremism (PVE).^{8,9} Among others, police officers, social workers and teachers are currently involved in this work.¹⁰ This kind of cooperation is not new;¹¹ for instance, social workers were engaged in efforts to prevent right-wing extremism in the late 1990s and early 2000s.¹² However, the task of preventing Islamic extremism is new for Norwegian municipalities, as this emerged as a problem mainly after 2010.¹³ Moreover, an additional element in the cooperation constellation most present in Norway is the partial inclusion of the security workers from the police security service (PST) in some cases.¹⁴ To social workers as professionals, some aspects of the multi-agency PVE cooperation might be challenging, as

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research from the Belgian and British context has reported.¹⁵ Some researchers have labelled this as the securitisation of social work and social policy, and have raised concerns for both the profession and its target group.¹⁶ Similar opposition was found among British teacher unions at the onset of the Prevent Strategy.¹⁷ This debate is also connected to the issues and disagreements around the term radicalisation itself,¹⁸ especially because a large part of municipal PVE work is carried out in the pre-crime space before something illegal has been committed.¹⁹ While the Nordic countries have a long tradition of working in the pre-crime space through various preventive strategies targeting at-risk groups and individuals, such strategies mainly address social, behavioural and mental problems, not political or ideological standpoints.²⁰ If not properly legally framed and professionally supervised, this evolution of contemporary prevention work might cause unintended consequences beyond loss of trust between prevention workers and clients.

Threat assessments related to violent extremism or other serious crimes are increasingly being conducted by both law enforcement personnel and social workers, among other groups.²¹ Arguably, the complex task of establishing what should be considered a threat should not be performed by one professional group alone, including security or intelligence analysts.²² This highlights the need for different perspectives and assessment strategies from social workers, psychologists and law enforcement professionals.

However, even if social workers and similar professional groups complement law enforcement personnel, they are traditionally not trained to conduct terrorism-related risk assessments, which require trained personnel possibly from the security services. If the perspectives and assessments of law enforcement personnel are not sufficiently included, in some cases, the consequences can be fatal. The prevention of terrorist acts can require the involvement of security personnel even when it may harm the relationship between the welfare professional and the client. However, a systematic review of multi-agency cooperation with police finds no clear evidence for whether these approaches are effective in reducing radicalisation and violent extremism.²³ Rather, PVE efforts appear to blur the lines between supportive and security efforts,²⁴ indicating a securitisation of prevention work.

Securitisation as a concept can be understood as a construction of threats and, subsequently, policies that permit actions that violate binding rules and agreements that would usually apply to actors,²⁵ such as law enforcement professionals, security service workers or even social workers. Such overstepping of otherwise binding policies possibly weakens social workers' ethical and professional foundations and, possibly, the welfare state served by these and other professionals. Given this possible outcome, a securitisation of contemporary multi-agency prevention work may come with a cost: the loss of trust in the welfare state and a decrease in the welfare state's ability to provide follow-up services to at-risk or already radicalised populations.

We raise the following overall question based on this background: Does preventing or countering violent extremism or terrorism supersede the concerns and needs of the traditional mandate given to social workers and other professionals at the forefront of the welfare state?²⁶ This question implies there may be tension between welfare state professionals' interest in professional autonomy and the need for security personnel to intervene early in radicalisation processes. The professional tensions arguably inherent in the preventive efforts against radicalisation and violent extremism may represent a real dilemma, which we find worthy of closer examination.

Social work and PVE

Social workers typically execute the dual role of supporting and empowering clients, on the one hand, and controlling them on behalf of the political authorities, on the other.²⁷ Accordingly, some scholars, notwithstanding the debate on the adequacy of this concept, have referred to the social work profession as the prototype of a *semi*-profession.^{28,29} Semi-professions do not possess the privileges of full professions, such as a unique knowledge base, and their professional autonomy is constantly at risk of being cut by the authorities.³⁰ In Lipsky's striking conceptualisation, social workers are typical street-level bureaucrats to whom conflicting expectations are constitutive.³¹

When social workers work in tandem with the police, and PST, the tensions inherent in their dual role might be pushed to the edge, as police and social workers represent different institutional logics.³² How conflicting aspects in these institutional logics become settled might determine whether social workers can meet the requirements in their ethical code descriptions.³³ Accordingly, whether social workers end up *sharing* jurisdiction of, in Abbott's terms,³⁴ preventing and countering violent extremism or they de facto play second violin (become *subordinated*) can influence the balance in their dual role and presumably impact their self-understandings and practice. In a similar vein, concerns have been raised about whether the education sector in the UK is becoming subordinate to security matters in PVE.³⁵ Abbott's³⁶ jurisdiction concept, which serves as the theoretical framework for this paper, will be discussed further in subsequent sections and applied in our analysis of multi-agency collaboration.

There have been a number of international studies on professionals performing prevention work.³⁷ However, none, to our knowledge, have explored social workers' experiences of engaging directly in multi-agency cooperation with police officers and security service staff in Nordic countries. Research on Norwegian social workers' experiences offers insights into multi-agency PVE work. While their experiences may not represent those of the many other actors, their perspectives may be similar to those of health care workers and educators. As such, we seek to look beyond the experiences of members of a single profession. Rather, we aim to explore, through the social workers' experiences, a possible indicator of a larger securitisation of soft professionals. Thus, our research aims to answer the following research question:

How do Norwegian social workers perceive and reflect upon their role and responsibilities in cooperation with police and security service to prevent violent extremism?

We answer this question by utilising data from 17 in-depth interviews and two focus-group interviews with highly experienced social workers involved in preventing radicalisation and violent extremism in Norway.

Before presenting our findings, we briefly present scholarly literature on experiences from multi-agency PVE cooperation and in multi-agency cooperation in general. Moreover, we contextualise the specific multi-agency cooperation theoretically as a jurisdiction (though *which* type of jurisdiction constellation it is, is contested) and specifically as a politically constituted domain within the Norwegian welfare state. We return to the latter question about the nature of the jurisdiction in the discussion. In that part, we also address some of the ethical challenges for social workers, as demonstrated in the findings.

Review of literature on multi-agency prevention work

Researchers at the University of Gothenburg identified two distinct institutional logics at play in PVE efforts in the Nordic countries: societal security logic and social care logic.³⁸ The security logic was identified within police staff, security managers and police security or intelligence services. In contrast, social care logic was found to guide the work of social workers, teachers, youth workers, etc. The two main sets of logics have different goals, strategies, grounds for attention, and authority. Similar discrepancies in logics and understanding were previously identified; in the absence of a common understanding of radicalisation, practitioners frame and target cases of radicalisation through their own professional perspectives.³⁹ Social workers and psychologists may therefore perceive radicalisation as a social or psychological problem, whereas a police officer may look upon it as "simply" crime. This suggests that the workers who manage this prevention work through networked approaches both frame and target the issues in a very different manner.

In the United Kingdom, where the Prevent duty has been implemented for years, scholars have raised concerns that this cooperation may push social workers to further control their client groups, indicating a growing securitisation of social work.⁴⁰ Similar findings have been reported from

Molenbeek in Belgium, where social workers who engaged in multi-agency work were met with critical attitudes from the youth they were there to help, who confronted them with claims that social workers were working “for them [police] and against us [youth].”⁴¹ The consequence of this multi-agency cooperation may therefore be the risk of impaired trust between support services and their clients.⁴²

While multi-agency work is an approach to bridge silos and providing universal prevention services,⁴³ evidence is lacking on how the multi-agency work actually helps service users,⁴⁴ or whether it is effective in PVE.⁴⁵ Furthermore, researchers have identified factors that both hinder and promote this collaboration between social workers and the police. Factors that hinder may be “territorial” disputes, constant reorganising, confidentiality issues and lack of understanding of different ideologies and working cultures.⁴⁶ Ideological differences and lack of trust between social workers and police officers have also been identified.^{47,48}

Altogether, this literature review demonstrates that PVE work entails challenges for social workers and the welfare state, largely due to an external influence of securitisation of social policy and practice. As a result of the long history of cooperation between social workers and law enforcement in the Nordic countries, in particular Norway, the perspectives of Norwegian social workers performing PVE offer valuable insights into the nature of multi-agency prevention work. This is particularly interesting with regards to potential securitisation processes.

Theoretical framework and political context

Andrew Abbot belong to the second generation of researchers in the study of professions. His research has included investigating “professional projects” in a critical perspective by identifying professions’ strategies to improve their positions.⁴⁹ In his influential 1988 work *The System of Professions*, Abbott launched jurisdictions as a concept to describe the interplay and possibly conflicting interests between various professions and between the professions and the authorities. We make use of this concept and theory to describe the constitution of PVE as a multi-agency professional field and to analyse our findings. Abbott argued that, while any occupation, like beauticians, can obtain licenses, professions are distinguished from these because they have developed both knowledge systems and specialised skills. Based on its particular knowledge system, a profession defines the problems and solutions in a professional field, and in doing so, this becomes a crucial part of surviving as a profession as well as maintaining jurisdiction over a domain.⁵⁰

According to Abbot, the process of establishing jurisdictions contains two parts. First, professions in their professional projects address the public domain to gain legitimacy for claims on professional tasks. The second area of jurisdictional claims, the legal area, demands more specific claims in terms of content. These can be summarised into three points: monopoly of activities, monopoly of certain kinds of payments and control of certain work settings. Abbott maintained that, while the road to legal jurisdiction may be very long for a profession, the public jurisdiction may be won much sooner. However, the run for jurisdiction is not necessarily straight forward and may be a case of uncertain and temporary settlements—not of full and final control over a jurisdiction. Settlements in disputes over jurisdictions might have various outcomes. One outcome implies a profession might be subordinate to another. Furthermore, professions can split the jurisdiction into two interdependent parts. A third option is that one profession assumes intellectual jurisdiction over a specific area by providing guidance and advising other professions. This gives one profession a claim to control how a particular area is served by other professions.⁵¹ An example of this is how medical doctors in several European countries have fought nurses to remain in control of prescribing medicine, basing this argument on a knowledge (intellectual) claim.⁵² Lastly, the professions can divide the work according to the nature of the clients.⁵³

Semi-professionals, like within social work and teaching, typically possess less authority of knowledge and, as a result, have less autonomy in relation to other professions.⁵⁴ Classical dominant professions, like medicine or law,⁵⁵ may therefore delegate tasks and responsibility, such as routine work or “dirty work,”⁵⁶ tasks they do not want, while keeping what they find more desirable for themselves.⁵⁷ However, not only social workers but also the police typically do not fulfil the standard

criteria of full professions, as they, for instance, lack a separate knowledge base to abstract from. Moreover, Lipsky lists police as typical street level bureaucrats along with social workers.⁵⁸ Based on this background, which profession should be subordinate to the other is not obvious.

How distribution of jurisdictions comes about is not only a matter of the interplay between professions. The authorities also play an important role, both in constituting professional tasks and in distributing them.⁵⁹ Consequently, no profession will always get what it wants. Having responsibilities for something other than “what you signed up for” apparently causes role strain in police officers who have to fill the less desirable roles of social workers, peacekeepers and educators.⁶⁰ Moreover, counsellors generally avoid being assigned “police work” or reporting clients’ criminal behaviour and would rather stick to their traditional role of treating and supporting them.⁶¹ Later in the discussion, we will utilise Abbott’s framework to analyse our empirical findings. However, Abbott’s theoretical perspective can also shed light on the establishment of PVE as professional tasks in the Norwegian context. By using various action plans, political authorities have included social workers in the multi-agency cooperation to prevent and counter violent extremism.

PVE as a politically constituted jurisdiction

To the best of our knowledge, Norwegian social workers’ role in PVE became explicitly known through the Norwegian Ministry of Justice’s action plans and guidelines from 2010 to 2020.⁶² The following review of these documents examines how the tasks and responsibilities of social workers and other municipal employees in PVE work have evolved from typical social work tasks to a role that includes more “soft policing.” Soft policing is described as the noncoercive elements of law enforcement that are carried out through community engagement but still have elements of control.⁶³ Adding elements of this practice through PVE, to social workers’ already dual role of support and control, may therefore be troublesome.

First, the 2010 document acknowledged that social matters and health factors may influence a radicalisation process and that municipalities, as the municipalities organise involved professions, thereby play an indirect role. The task described at this point is mainly to reduce social exclusion and marginalisation, identify those at risk (of marginalisation) and execute interventions to support those at risk. Later, in the 2014 document, the authorities gave social workers and other municipal workers the task and responsibility of addressing concerns of radicalisation among children and youth as well as providing follow-up services to these and their families. The 2015 document involved another change. Now, the plan included an explicit duty to contribute to averting serious crime. The change possibly implied a movement towards the operational level of countering and not just working to prevent radicalisation and violent extremism. While the duty to avert crime, which also applies to social workers, has been a part of the Norwegian penal code for many years,⁶⁴ this must be weighed against the parallel duty of confidentiality.⁶⁵ In light of our theoretical framework, one question that emerges is whether the apparent move towards stronger attention on control tasks implies disputes or negotiations “on the ground” over how to settle, in Abbott’s terms, demarcation lines in this jurisdiction, when seeing PVE as a jurisdiction.

Methodology

This paper is a part of a research project about Norwegian social workers’ experiences of participating in multi-agency work to prevent radicalisation and violent extremism. We utilised a qualitative in-depth study to explore these practitioners’ experiences through thematic analysis⁶⁶ with an abductive approach. The steps in this analytical process are presented below.

Recruitment and sampling

The work to prevent violent extremism in Norway is organised neither in a standardised way nor with fixed participants in multi-agency cooperation. However, the multi-agency model is often based on the already existing model for cooperation in prevention of drug abuse and crime among youth in Norway (SLT), which was implemented in the early 1990s.⁶⁷ We sought to recruit social work practitioners through purposeful sampling to obtain information rich cases⁶⁸ from a variety of services. The participants had to have experience in providing assessment and follow-up services to youth and adults at risk of (further) radicalisation. The first step in recruiting participants was from the first author’s professional network, which led to local coordinators in several cities and municipalities and later to practitioners “on the ground.” To branch out further, the snowball method⁶⁹ was used to reach additional participants in informants’ professional networks through their referral. We strived to recruit participants in both larger cities and smaller municipalities, as long as they had relevant experience. Information about participants can be found in [Table 1](#).

Data collection

We carried out data collection through two main steps: first, through 17 semi structured in-depth interviews, and second, through two focus-group interviews with five participants in each session. The in-depth interviews provided insight into those particular participant’s lived experience,⁷⁰ while the focus groups facilitated discussion and reflections among the participants.⁷¹ The focus groups were moderated by the first author, and the interviews had a mean length of 101 minutes.

Analysis

Braun and Clark⁷² described six steps of thematic analysis that add rigour and transparency to the analytical process in qualitative research. We applied these steps when undertaking this research process. The first step is transcribing the data and becoming familiar with its content. Both interviewing the participants and transcribing the interviews were done by the first author, and during that process, some initial insights about different understandings and ways of conducting prevention work emerged. The second and third steps are the initial coding of content and the search for themes within the data. This was followed by a process of going back and forth between the transcripts, the codes, and the themes to check for consistency and meaning. In this process, some themes were merged. In the following section, themes are presented and excerpts are provided to bring insight and clarity.

Ethical considerations

This research project was approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data on February 1, 2018 (project no. 58477). Information regarding the project’s aim and methodology as well as confidentiality and consent forms were provided to potential participants. The same information was provided again and consent forms were collected prior to interviews. To assure the participants’ discretion, all

Table 1. Participant information.

Female	6
Male	11
Age (mean years)	39
Bachelor’s degree	9
Master’s degree	8
Experience in social work (mean years)	12.5
Experience with radicalisation and violent extremism (mean years)	3.5

data were anonymised. This research brought forth stories where our participants were deemed at risk of being recognised. As such, some situations where social workers have cooperated with PST in non-traditional ways for social workers have been left out or referred to only indirectly.

Findings

The thematic analysis revealed two main themes from our data about the cooperation between social workers, police and police security staff, both indicating some level of securitisation: *troubled transparency* and *blurred roles of policing and support*.

Troubled transparency

The first theme we identified regards transparency, especially related to information sharing and strategies used in the prevention work. Social workers in our study experienced that a different logic exists between themselves and their security partners when it comes to being outspoken and transparent about what they are doing.

Social workers, in principle, have a well-established strategy of being transparent about what they are doing to their clients that is grounded in professional guidelines⁷³ and scholarly research.⁷⁴ Police, especially security service staff, appear to deal with this in a more discrete manner. The transcripts below, from two interviews, give insight into how two social workers handle challenges linked to transparency in different ways:

Participant: I am totally transparent about the cooperation with the police, and I try to get their [clients'] consent [to cooperate and share information with the police] early on. We do that as a routine actually, to go through which services I can and cannot share information with. But there's also the part about averting serious incidents. Then, we have to contact the police or security service, of course. I think it's very important that we are transparent on that as well, from the very beginning.

The above citation reflects a common way in which social workers deal with cooperation with the police in this field and others, by seeking clients' consent and involving them in the matters of information sharing. While the statement represented a dominant perspective in our data, other ways of dealing with information existed as well.

Interviewer: This client you were talking about, how does he react to your cooperation with the police or security service?

Participant: No, that has been out of the question [to reveal that cooperation]. As far as I know, I am not obliged to share that information with him [the client], if I have informed the police of my concern for him or provided them with some information.

In our research, we found that security service staff want social workers to provide them sensitive information that social workers understand as being regulated by client confidentiality legislation.

Participant: Those working with security and that stuff, they want as much information as possible, but I have my confidentiality legislation. So, we have this conflict of interest there. And they want [information] from me, but they never give anything back. We get no information at all from the police security service.

This sort of tension appears as a conflict of interest. Below, another participant shares his/her experience and reflections on being pressured to give out information:

Participant: The power imbalance in this cooperation is pretty off. So, when the police and security service enter the playing field, it's like, "Everything we do now is secret. We can't give you any information, but we want information from you." And that can be pretty massive to go up against.

Interviewer: Right, and you have experience on how this cooperation is perceived [by the clients], when they get ear of it?

Participant: Yes, and that did not go well. Because these services want things to go “under the radar.” So, the clients sense that I am doing something that they don’t exactly know what it is. And suddenly, when they hear about it later on, they want to know why I spoke to these guys [in secrecy].

The passages cited from social workers demonstrate how they experience it as challenging to work in secrecy and have clients find out about it. The conflicting understanding of what kind of information can be shared is something that we found to cause strains on the working relationship between social workers and security staff. While there is an understanding of why security service staff, in particular, need to work differently than social workers, when they are set to cooperate on specific cases, these conflicting strategies and logics represent barriers for cooperation. Next, the second theme, *blurred roles of policing and support*, is presented. This theme is connected to the first theme, as the troubled transparency reflects the blurred roles.

Blurred roles of policing and support

Blurred roles are used to characterise multi-agency cooperation to prevent violent extremism in Norway, as seen from the perspectives of the social workers. This revolves around the experience of similarities and differences in the roles and mandates of social workers, police and the PST. When social workers cooperate closely, especially with the security service, their traditional role of providing support services to emancipate and bolster clients with their issues becomes challenged as social workers become influenced by and associated with the work of the security service. One experienced social worker put it as follows:

Yes, it’s a bit like, “Oh, who are you really? Are you a police officer? Who are you really working for?” And because they [clients] have that knee jerk reaction [to issues with police], it creates an uncertainty. And since I actually cannot draw a clear line between the municipality’s work, with follow-up and care, and those controlling and monitoring the groups, it gets a bit messy. I understand very well that the confidence in us gets weakened by this.

Another participant expressed his experience in the following way:

I think that what is challenging is that their [police and security service’s] mandate is very much at the other end of the spectrum; to get an overview, map out, avert stuff, what’s on the inside or outside of the law. And it can be very difficult to combine that with what I am trying to do, to listen and understand, to gain trust from them [the clients]. I have seen examples that it can be done; it really can. But there is that risk of us getting into our traditional trenches.

As we understood it, the remark “our traditional trenches” referred to different professional logics and strategies. These experiences of diverging strategies are tightly connected to the uncertainty in how individual radicalisation processes will evolve and, if possibly reversed, to the idea that no one really knows what causes or “cures” the problem.

Earlier research has revealed that some prevention workers fear they might do something wrong when the topic of radicalisation emerges.⁷⁵ This might happen because the stakes are experienced as higher in this work compared to in other forms of prevention work. Below, one participant reflects upon an experience of cooperation with police and security service and about how far they should go in their preventive effort:

How much freedom should we give the authorities to act, compared to human rights and citizens’ rights to their own integrity? It’s that discussion, where we gradually create and push the boundaries for what’s okay to do, in the service of the good, to prevent something that might or might not really happen, right? [...] “If this [a preventive effort] might possibly stop terror, then it’s okay, right?” That argument is something I hear from the police and security service, and it’s so hard to debate or discuss because that trumps everything, in a way.

The participant above reflected upon how he/she gets entangled into a security logic where “better safe than sorry” might trump concern for privacy or client confidentiality. In addition to the transcripts presented here, we have knowledge of specific situations where social workers have been expected to

perform tasks of surveillance and control outside of their traditional responsibilities. However, due to concern for our participants' confidentiality, we must refrain from mentioning these incidents in detail. In these cases, social workers have, according to themselves, both resisted and given in to outside pressure from the security service.

The participant cited above and the other referenced cases bear witness to ongoing negotiations between the social workers and the police, indicating that where to draw the demarcation lines in the jurisdiction, as we characterised it, is an ongoing process. This influence from security work logic is connected to the first theme, troubled transparency.

To some extent, our findings are in accordance with earlier scholarly work on cooperation between social workers and the police. "Territorial" disputes (in our case, under the term jurisdiction), confidentiality issues and different ideologies and working cultures have been found in earlier research.⁷⁶ Our findings are also, to some extent, in line with what others have identified as barriers to multi-agency work: unclear roles, responsibilities, objectives and trust between agencies.⁷⁷

Discussion: the connection between the nature of the jurisdiction and the management of ethical challenges

Based on these findings, in our analysis and discussion, we will mainly address two questions. The first question is analytical and motivated by our theoretical framework and concerns the nature of the jurisdiction. The second addresses ethical challenges. As we understand, there is a connection between these two questions, as a response to the second would depend on the type of jurisdiction in which PVE is located in terms of power relations and the division of labour among the professions involved.

The nature of the jurisdiction

In light of our theoretical framework, the findings signal that PVE manifests an unsettled jurisdiction where negotiations are made on a case-by-case basis. However, PVE work in Norway appears to resemble that of intellectual jurisdiction, found midway between subordination and shared jurisdiction. It is also evident that, in other cases, the jurisdictional settlement is characterised by social workers' subordination to the police as well as what resembles shared or split jurisdiction.

Intellectual jurisdiction is known as an unstable settlement, where one profession might remain in control of knowledge but must allow other professions to practice in more or less unrestricted ways.⁷⁸ As we presented in our findings, social workers are under pressure to carry out tasks advised by the security service, which our participants have both resisted and complied with. These practices, especially with respect to those who have complied with more security-related tasks, indicate some level of securitisation of social work and of multi-agency PVE. This implies that traditional boundaries are overstepped in order to prevent potential security threats.

Regarding the nature of PVE as a jurisdiction, this question may be of greater importance than of merely academic interest. If it turns out to be close to what Abbott characterised as subordination, apparently some hard ethical dilemmas arise for social workers. However, if it seems to work as a split jurisdiction, like Abbott described, arguably the ethical challenges might be easier to handle for social workers (see below).

In the second theme's very first excerpt from the interview data, the participant shared an experience regarding the unclear distinction between the municipality's work to provide support services and security workers' tasks, including controlling and monitoring target groups and individuals. The participant labelled this jurisdictional settlement as "messy" since he could not draw the line between what he does and what security workers do. However, other participants more firmly held their ground, talking about the confidentiality legislation governing their work. They separated their work to support clients from that of the security workers, while they treated

potential acts of crime as special incidences. Later, we presented what another participant discussed regarding the security service, in particular, entering the playing field and effectively claiming a dominant position within the multi-agency cooperation. This is a clear example of social workers ending up as subordinated to security workers. Altogether, our data does not lay the ground for a clear conclusion on which sort of jurisdiction unfolds but leans in the direction of intellectual jurisdiction claimed by the PST. Importantly, we also found indications of social workers' resistance to a securitisation of their practice that promote control measures through the logic of "better safe than sorry." Accordingly, jurisdiction in multi-agency PVE work appears to be an ongoing negotiation process.

Ethical challenges

Professionals like social workers typically work to achieve changes in clients' behaviour.⁷⁹ To respect clients' integrity manifests a fundamental side of the professions' work.⁸⁰ The nature of social work within PVE implies imminent risk of violating the profession's ethical code of conduct and possibly legal obligations of client confidentiality.

Theoretically, we can imagine social workers face two sorts of ethical challenges when they cooperate with, among others, the PST to prevent and counter violent extremism. First, while working to achieve influence and change with youth at risk of radicalisation, social workers must still respect the clients' *ethical autonomy*.⁸¹ Second, respect for integrity arguably demands *the protection of the interpersonal communicative process* as well.⁸² Regarding the particular client group involved in our case, social workers, for instance, need to protect client confidentiality from harder measures, such as surveillance.

Respecting ethical autonomy and protecting the interpersonal communication process are among what the IFSW and the Norwegian social workers' association (FO) address in their accounts of the profession's ethical guidance.⁸³ IFSW's ethical codes, in chapter 6, contain statutes concerning respect for confidentiality and privacy. In 6.1, the statute holds that social workers respect people's rights to confidentiality and privacy "unless there is risk of harm to the self or to others or other statutory restrictions." The next paragraph, 6.2, requires social workers to inform clients about limits to confidentiality and privacy. FO has similar statements in its ethical code.⁸⁴ In chapter two, the FO statutes address ethical autonomy, maintaining that measures should be taken to enable clients' involvement and that they can live in accordance with their own set of values. Social workers must be able to distinguish between various preferences and lifestyles, which are to be recognised, and conduct that violates basic human rights. The latter assumedly includes planning acts of violence, so the ethical challenge for the social worker is to sort these instances out and address them while respecting the basic right to ethical autonomy. Chapter three addresses the right to confidentiality and privacy.⁸⁵ Clients have self-determination regarding information about themselves, the statutes hold, while social workers may forward information if clients consent. If clients do not consent, the statute holds that clients must be informed if social workers share information.

In light of the background of our findings and analysis of the nature of the jurisdiction, questions are raised as to what extent social workers face the challenges described above and how they handle them. The blurred roles within multi-agency work involve disputes over what should count as target issues and what should be outside social workers' scope. As one of our participants stated, it is challenging to draw a clear line between what should or should not be done for the sake of the greater good (referring to preventing potential acts of terrorism). The uncertainty of where the line between agencies' responsibilities should be drawn and who should do what in multi-agency work involves risk for an unintended oppressive practice that targets opinions and lifestyles and, thereby, violates the ethical conduct codes.⁸⁶

Overall, social workers have a basic task of enabling individuals to live in accordance with their life plans; that is, they contribute to promoting ethical and personal autonomy.⁸⁷ Naturally, political authorities must protect communities against threats. Consequently, the dilemma is that, without societal control measures,

some people may do harm to others, while too much control may violate basic rights. This dilemma entails both social support and security logics, and the act of navigating through and between them is challenging. However, if soft professionals, such as social workers, do not manage to handle this dilemma, their professional roles may be redefined to be more aligned with security logic and practices.

The same applies to the second ethical challenge we introduced. A constituting element in social work involves establishing a relationship of trust between the social worker and the client.⁸⁸ Trust does not develop by itself, but rather through acts in line with social norms and professional values⁸⁹ that present the professional as committed and trustworthy over time.⁹⁰ Development of securitized practices and strategies that go vastly outside of the traditional role of the social work profession risks propelling a negative boomerang effect and a resulting vicious circle that reduces trust from the clients and communities.

We do not maintain that social workers in PVE, despite single instances, are generally subordinated to the PST and that they consequently need to perform tasks in the borderland of what their ethical codes allows them to do. However, notwithstanding the legitimate aims of PVE, this study clearly demonstrates that there are costs involved for soft prevention workers and possibly the larger welfare state if similar findings are found regarding other professionals, like teachers, medical doctors and nurses. This is, and probably will be, a dilemma that causes strain and uncertainty for professionals until a more formal jurisdictional settlement is established. However, as risk assessments of potentially serious security threats are outside the knowledge domain of social workers and other soft professionals,⁹¹ suggestions or strategies from law enforcement and security services should not merely be understood by municipal workers as acts of authority. Rather, within multi-agency cooperation networks, if there are sufficient levels of trust between collaborating agencies, suggestions on the understanding and handling of cases can help soft professionals navigate new terrains with more complex sets of tools at their disposal.

Limitations

It is important to note that the findings in this paper are based on the perspectives of social workers only. This is however within the scope of this article, as we utilise their experiences as a lens to examine multi-agency prevention work in Norway. Additionally, our findings are based on a fairly low number of participants. Notwithstanding, the paper provides evidence on a scarcely researched topic within which various professions and professional perspectives interact in what appears to be, to some extent, *securitised* multi-agency cooperation.

Conclusion

As revealed by previous research, the interplay between police and social workers has led to concerns about securitisation of social work and social policy⁹² as well as securitising education.⁹³ Building on these earlier works, this paper adds insights into how social workers themselves reflect on and describe their experiences when engaging closely with the police and with PST in particular.

Our findings have demonstrated that the jurisdictional settlements between social workers and security workers are far from clear in Norwegian multi-agency PVE work, and that following a securitisation of prevention work, traditional boundaries are sometimes overstepped. Confidentiality issues are at the centre of their concerns, as are questions about how transparent their work in this field should be. A possible consequence of a securitisation of social work appears to be the risk of lower levels of trust between social workers and the target group. Moreover, we have found that social workers question whether their involvement in PVE work puts their ability to serve and support their target group at risk.

How social workers handle ethical dilemmas like those referred to in this paper arguably depends on the nature of the jurisdiction. We found evidence of settlements—or practices that indicate settlements—of both shared, intellectual and subordinated jurisdiction, with the latter settlement apparently not being favourable to the social workers. As a semi-profession, social work lacks

authority of knowledge and typically has less autonomy than classical dominant professions, like medicine or law. However, in multi-agency PVE work alongside police and security workers, no typical dominant profession is present. Consequently, what direction PVE will evolve in terms of public and legal jurisdiction remains an open question.

As the ethical dilemmas involved touch upon basic traits in the social worker's professional role, these issues arguably deserve more debate. The outcome of the negotiations over jurisdictional authority might affect what it means to be a social worker and how such practitioners are able to carry out their societal-given mandate.

The object of this study was social workers. However, in our understanding, the experiences we have described and the subsequent discussion may apply to other professions as well. This securitisation of social work may indicate that PVE can result in similar challenges to other professionals, such as educators. However, following public criticism of Prevent duty, British teachers found ways to work in and around this new obligation, incorporating de-prioritised teaching topics, such as democracy, citizenship and anti-racism.⁹⁴

In a still unsettled jurisdictional domain, one possible solution is closer engagement between personnel within security services and social workers at the systemic level to build a firmer understanding of each other's strengths and limitations. Also, strengthening the knowledge base of social workers and other "soft" professions and raising awareness of the knowledge these professions already possess might contribute to bolstering them in tough situations, both in and outside of client meetings and in multi-agency cooperation. Such strengthening can involve providing workshops and training courses, which reflect what is encountered in practice, to police and security workers. Initiatives such as these may facilitate learning from each other's strengths and perspectives and possibly build trust and understanding across institutions. While this article has focused on emerging security perspectives, common training courses, such as those outlined above, may also stimulate insight into and understand of social care perspectives if knowledge and perspectives indeed flow both ways.

Also, as we see it, social workers, professional partners and target groups would profit from a firmer clarification of the lines between the different professional actors. If there actually is a subordination of social workers to security workers within multi-agency PVE work, clients and other partners should become aware of this through a transparent statement of who, how and to what end social workers in PVE carry out their duties.

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