Paper presentation

Abstract title: Domestic violence, family law proceedings, and children’s vulnerability at school

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Abstract:
While there has been considerable discussion of issues about child protection and the cooperation between school and social services in that context, studies on the intersection between school and family law proceedings seem virtually non-existent. This is also the case when it comes to family law proceedings, school and different forms of childhood adversity. An on-going study aims to fill this gap in knowledge and explores how family law proceedings in cases involving domestic violence impact on school and how school staff tackle the issue of domestic violence and family law. The paper discusses what the practices of family law professionals (social workers investigating the child’s situation) as well as school staff mean for children’s vulnerability and victimization at school. The analysis both concerns the children exposed to violence who are the objects of family law disputes, and the vulnerability of other children at school. The empirical material consists of qualitative interviews with school staff, individually or in groups (22 interviewees). The analysis shows that children’s vulnerability and victimization can be due both to actions by family law social workers and by school staff. The material includes examples such as children in a class becoming witnesses to one of their peers being collected by social services staff for contact visits with a previously violent parent, in spite of the child trying to resist this; or a previously violent father without right to contact turning up at school and the staff phone the mother (rather than the police), ask her to come to school and deal with the situation, and send the mother and the father – together with the child - from the
school premises to resolve the situation. In cases with previous violence, these are quite problematic and dangerous practices. The paper discusses what implications practices like these have not just for the child concerned but also for the children at school more broadly when it comes to children’s sense of security and well-being. Finally, these practices are linked to dominating discourses in the domain of family law and school respectively.