

PERSECUTORY STRATEGIES IN CHILD PROTECTION INVESTIGATIONS 1)

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Abstract

In Sweden the decision to take a child into forced custody is made by a court, but it is preceded by a child protection investigation. In general, such investigations do not satisfy the requests for objectivity as defined by the Swedish constitution. Rather, they are constructed as persuasive documents. The concept of a persecutory strategy was proposed by Edvardsson (1989). It refers to patterns of thinking and acting applied by the social welfare offices towards parents and children. These strategies are not defensible from the point of view of fundamental values of objectivity, legal safety, democracy, humanity and self-determination.

Fourteen investigations from various areas in Sweden involving conflict between parents and social workers were carefully scrutinized and described in separate research reports.

Approximately 10-100 strategies were found in each case. Some strategies were recurrent in numerous or all cases. Some of them are prominent in hundreds of child protection investigations studied, such as ignoring the client's perspective and resources and to construct trivial signs as evidence.

Four groups of operative persecutory strategies were found.

- I. Evidence fabrication and intensification
- II. Pathology fabrication and intensification
- III. Not looking for or withholding information or discounting relevant information
- IV. Influencing persons or relationships

A group of underlying meta-strategies that seem to regulate, allow or facilitate the operative strategies was clarified.

1) The author wants to thank all those students who have written very valuable reports in this area under the supervision of the author. Their names are mentioned in the paper and in the references.

Introduction

Investigations within the Swedish social services should follow the Swedish constitutional requirement for objectivity and impartiality. They are also required to follow the special laws for the social services, where it, for instance, is prescribed that the client's perspective and the human resources of the client and his/her network should be considered.

In Sweden child protection investigations are conducted by social welfare offices before taking a child into forced custody, which is decided by a court. Child protection investigations, at least all samples we have seen, do not fill the requirements of objectivity stipulated in the Swedish constitution but are rather constructed as persuasive documents with typical characteristics such as biased selection, unreliability, repetition and vagueness of the information.

The concept of a persecutory strategy has been proposed by Edvardsson (1989) and refers to different patterns of thinking and acting used by the social service authorities in relation to parents and children. Persecutory strategies are not acceptable from the perspective of fundamental values of objectivity, legal rights, democracy, humanity, ethics and self-determination. These strategies can be perceived as persecutory by involved persons (adults or children) and by witnesses. Only a feeling of persecution is not sufficient - there should be objective characteristics indicating malpractice that can be confirmed by several external judges/analysts. This definition does not consider if there are any harmful effects or not. It is oriented towards characteristics of the process. The authorities may be more or less aware of their persecutory strategies and seem to prefer to look at them as justified in order to protect the interests of the child. In general the persecutory strategies seem to affect children more than adults and there are many examples of very cruel behaviour towards children by the authorities. Methods used on adults seem to be used on children. The persecutory strategies can often be seen as power strategies to reach a certain decision or state of control. It is of course possible for clients themselves to use a certain amount of persecutory, power- or counterstrategies. Cognitive biases, e.g. circular reasoning, confirmation bias, overconfidence, often seem to be involved in the persecutory behaviours.

There exist some earlier writings about persecutory or similar phenomena within psychotherapeutic work. Strupp (1960) claims that almost one third of the therapists in a study had anti-therapeutic attitudes. Bergin (1966, 1967) has suggested a "*deterioration effect*". Bergin (1971) shows and discusses data about durable deterioration effects in psychotherapy. He gives authentic examples of destructive and persecutory behaviours of therapists as a cause of the deteriorations. Yalom & Lieberman (1971) evaluated the outcome for 209 subjects in encounter groups. Of these participants 16 were clearly psychologically harmed by the experience. The damage was particularly evident when group leaders were intrusive, charismatic, authoritarian and sectarian - adhering more strongly to a particular system of therapeutic beliefs. Wolberg (1977, p 1007) suggests that "*counterattacking in retaliation*" can occur from therapists. Wolberg suggests that "*inexperience and improper conduct of treatment, as well as countertransference, account for a large percentage of unfortunate results although we are not certain how these take place*" (p 1008).

Meares & Hobson (1977) describe what they call "*the persecutory therapist*" and they discuss six main therapist behaviours that induce "*feelings of persecution in the patient*". Summarized, using words of the authors, these features are the following.

1. *Intrusion* into the patient's personal space can occur by crude interrogation, by premature intuitive understanding etc.
2. *Derogation* refers to various ways in which a therapist can make derogatory remarks about his patient, seriously damage his self-esteem etc.
3. *Invalidation of experience* occurs when the therapist does not respect everything the patient says, and responds by rejecting, categorizing etc.
4. *The opaque therapist* attempts to maintain an impersonal neutrality and denies his involvement in a two-person situation with its rhythm of intimacy and distance.
5. *The untenable situation* renders the patient helpless, confused, and unable to explore and learn. It is promoted by:
 - (a) lack of clarity about the structure of therapy;
 - (b) imposing impossible requirements;
 - (c) giving conflicting messages; and
 - (d) making conflicting demands
6. *The persecutory spiral* is an escalating destructive interaction in which both the therapist and the patient are, or feel, persecuted. Potent factors are all knowing, authoritarian, rigid, and sectarian attitudes and beliefs regarding psychotherapeutic theory and practice.

In Sweden there is a study by Tilander (1991) based on interviews with teenagers about treatment for drug problems with the so called "*Hassela*" method that shows persecution at work, for example verbal and physical harassments and assaults. Jansson (1997) studied audio-taped conversations from social welfare offices between social workers and their clients. She found 34 categories of phenomena that could be classified as unsuitable treatment in the conversation, for instance breaking laws, moralizing, interrupting etc. Biancofiore & Damm (1997) found in a study of 21 child protection investigations that only a small sample contained any information directly from the child. Helgesson & Olme (1998) in a study of 15 child protection investigations found that women are described more negatively than men. Agrell & Larsson (1997) in a study of 26 child protection investigations found differences in how boys and girls were described, for instance boys were described as aggressive and dangerous. Forsström & Skytt (1998) in a think aloud study of handling of social insurance cases found that 12 of 18 officials did not ask for the client's views in a presented case.

Larsson (1973) claims that reporting a family to the social services occurs as a result of a social conflict situation and that it can lead to manipulative measures from the social welfare office that uses the information without critical examination. Both the behaviour of the person reporting the family and that of the office can in this analysis be seen as persecution of the family or one of the family members. Theorin (1996) argues from empirical examples that different techniques of lying to the clients are used in the social services. International research about professional helpers, including social workers, shows that they give mostly negative descriptions about patients, clients etc. (Wills, 1978). Bjur & Gustafson (1994), Edvardsson (1984b, 1986ab), Gunnarsson, Johansson & Karlsson (1993) and Nykvist (1985) showed that information from clients was minimized or ignored and that the human resources of the client and/or his network were ignored. Bjur & Gustafson (1994) showed that one of the perspectives underlying child protection investigation was that social problems could be solved by control from

the social welfare office and transposition of the problem behaviour to another environment. Eriksson & Wiesel (1997) and Wiesel (1997) in detail described negative attribution patterns in child protection investigations. Ahr & Andersson (1997) found that a deficiency perspective dominated when social workers were interviewed about family vignettes. In a study of forced custody investigations of alcoholics Forsberg & Örtensmalm (1995) found that both the client's perspective and analyses of human resources were lacking in all cases. Historical information occupied 73 percent of the text. Research indicates that the quality of thinking and actions in social work in Sweden is reduced by stress (Dag, Rosell & Strandberg, 1995; Edvardsson, 1984a, 1986a). Karell (1977) shows interview data that points to the importance of emotions in child protection investigations. Nordmark & Nyholm (1995) in a study of audio tapes from meetings at a social welfare office found clear examples of groupthink, which can probably occur in all types of cases.

Gambrill (1997) refers to Margolin (1997) who argues that social workers mystify themselves about their motives and actions by continually emphasizing their essential goodness and services and that this mystification hides their power over clients and self-interest. Social workers routinely convert clients' expressed needs (what they say they want) to a minute examination of them (what they are like, what their homes are like). Margolin suggests that social workers use seductive and manipulative techniques to gain access to the privacy of homes. An example is "*the hostess technique*" - a friendly demeanour to hide underlying investigative and judgmental roles.

The purpose of this study is to clarify, define and classify persecutory strategies in Swedish child protection investigations as they appear in the documents.

Method

Fourteen child protection investigations in forced custody cases from different parts of Sweden with conflict between parents and social workers were carefully studied and reported in separate research reports (each comprising 25-100 pages, one 200 pages) by myself or under my supervision (Björk, 1995; Edvardsson 1989, 1991; Gauffin & Thored, 1996; Jansson & Rönnbäck, 1995; Juntilla, Rundström & Rätty, 1994; Jäderqvist, Lantz & Thelander, 1994; Karlsson & Nordin, 1994; Kransing & Svedberg, 1998; Ohlsson & Saba, 1994; Rönnbäck, 1996; Skog 1996; Stenberg 1995; Ärlig, 1996) during the period 1989-98. The case used by Stenberg (1995) was also analyzed by Edvardsson (1995). There were more conflicts in this sample than there should have been in a random sample and probably more varied and intense persecutory strategies. The investigation documents were given to the researchers by the clients or by their lawyers with the client's consent. In one case the researchers choose the investigation from the case-load of a social welfare office. A research advantage with this self-selected sample is that persecutory strategies can more easily be detected. It can be mentioned that in one of the cases the mother committed suicide, probably as a result of the social welfare office's actions toward her. In another case the child died because of medical maltreatment in the family home, where he had been taken into forced custody. There probably is much psychic damage in the sample cases. In one of these cases a court convicted a social worker for malpractice, which seldom happens in Sweden.

Mostly, textual analysis of documentary information has been used, but to some extent complementary interview information from the parent/s/ has been used. After the creation of the concept of persecutory strategies in the first report (Edvardsson, 1989)

the following researchers systematically went through the documents trying to detect clear instances of different persecutory phenomena.

Results

Approximately 10-100 apparent persecutory strategies could be found in each case. Most strategies were repeated in several or all of these cases, but there existed strategies that occurred in only one of the investigations and for some cases only once in the case. Due to lack of space it is not possible to discuss each child protection case separately. The findings in these cases are in agreement with the findings in an extensive amount of other cases, not as thoroughly studied, where I have written expert witness statements, read documents, discussed with clients, students and experienced social workers.

Most strategies can be classified into one of the following five main categories. For each category the most common types of strategies in this sample of cases will be described.

I. Evidence fabrication and intensification

This is the most basic group of persecutory strategies. Persecution requires maximizing of negative evidence which is created by fabrication of evidence and intensification of existing evidence or pseudo-evidence. Circumstances that are not evidence per se can be redefined as evidence when so is needed. Evidence can be created out of nothing, for instance just by using language or by describing irrelevant circumstances. Unreliable information is treated as reliable. Irrelevant information is treated as relevant. Cognitive operations on the information such as fallacies of thinking, distortions or fantasies are presented as relevant. Anything can be classified as evidence when critical thinking is weak.

1. Quantitative strategy: an extensive amount of negative information is documented, not only relevant but to a large extent irrelevant, trivial, peripheral and unreliable information (including rumours, gossip, speculations etc)
2. Repetition of negative information: according to a study of 20 child protection investigations by Ivemyr & Lindvall (1995) some information can be repeated 10, 20 or even up to 90 times.
3. Presenting information in a negative context: some everyday, trivial phenomena become interpreted negatively by the readers when they occur in a negative context
4. Provocative strategy: provocative behaviour, for instance aggression or intrusion, against the client, creates behaviour of the client that is referred to as evidence.
5. Criticism as psychic disturbance: criticism against authorities is often used as evidence of psychic disturbance and evidence of the parent's unsuitability as parent.
6. Association strategy: in reasoning there often is illogical passing on from one phenomena to another, from one group to another, from an individual to a group and vice versa, from suspicion to factual occurrence and so on. The association strategy is facilitated by lack of precision and lack of logic and critical thinking.
7. Higher demands-strategy: in reasoning there are higher demands on the parent and/or child under investigation than on other individuals.
8. Bolstering strategy: the importance of common occurrences, for instance that somebody does not open their door, is bolstered.
9. Dramaturgic strategy: in this strategy the authorities themselves produce a dramatic occurrence, for instance raiding the family's residence in the middle of the night with

the police and a physician, and using the immediate reactions as evidence to force both parent and child to go to the hospital.

10. Change of main area of fault-seeking: when there is no or little evidence within an area of a family's life, for instance use of alcohol, the agency can suddenly leave this area and open up another area to construct evidence. For instance psychiatric disturbance can be constructed with professional help of unscientific psychiatrists or psychologists.

11. Rumour-gossip strategy: information that has passed several statement generations is used and where sometimes the original source is unknown.

12. Strongly speculative and derogatory reasoning about the parent constructed by the investigator or other sources are used. Such insulting statements are often in the form of generalizations without shown factual ground.

13. Assumption strategy: if there is no evidence, an assumption can be made that the child is maltreated, that the mother is addicted to alcohol or that the father has committed incest. Any information can then be interpreted as evidence or even proof that the assumption is true. All alternative assumptions are discounted. This circular logic is frequently used in the Swedish social services.

14. Manipulation strategy: it is evident that Swedish child protection investigations are constructed from a persuasive purpose that is not mentioned in the text. They are constructed as propaganda documents against the family or child and pretend at the same time to be an objective investigation. The main point is to present a biased selection of collected data that seem to show that it is necessary to take the child into forced custody (in those cases where there is no voluntary agreement about custody).

15. Lying strategy: sometimes it can be proved that lying is used as a strategy in the investigations.

16. Confabulation strategy: sometimes it seems that the investigator is not aware or not fully aware that faulty information is created in accordance with the wish of the investigator. For instance the investigator can sharpen statements successively in the text without adding any further factual grounds. Confabulations can also be made as a result of taking information out of context.

17. Intensifying words strategy: it is very common to intensify information with words such as "*always*", "*every*", "*much*", "*big*", "*enormously*", "*strong*" and factual grounds are often not shown for these intensifying words. The intensification is in the direction of the underlying persuasive purpose.

18. Incomprehensibility strategy: incomprehensible, abstract and vague theoretical reasoning can occur. Factual grounds are not shown and some statements seem to emerge from the investigator's subjectivity.

19. Generalization strategy: generalizations are made without factual ground or with insufficient factual ground

20. Historical strategy: old historical information from a person's life, for example from investigations several years old, is presented and little information is sought about the situation here and now.

21. The fundamental attribution error or overattribution is used, that is situational factors are ignored in the investigations and individual factors are overemphasized.

22. Contradictory descriptions are not explained or resolved. The negative information is used.

23. The plus-minus phenomenon: data suggest that if there exists some positive information it must be contradicted in some way, sometimes immediately after in the text.

24. Looking for faults and deficiencies of the parents, for instance by home visits or leading questions.
25. Psychic maltreatment of a child till it shows symptoms, which are then attributed to the home environment or a parent, and never attributed to the authorities investigation methods, measures or treatment.
26. Hints and insinuations: for instance writing two different but possibly correct statements immediately after each other in the text to give the reader the impression that there is a connection.
27. Statements that go beyond the investigator's competence: for instance social workers sometimes make statements that require advanced medical, psychiatric or psychological competence.
28. Violations of integrity: a standard strategy is to make a friendly home visit in a friendly atmosphere and then write a number of negative remarks about the home environment and what happened during the visit - of course an agreement should have been made up front about an observation. Other examples are to listen to telephone conversations, eavesdrop or reading letters, cards, diaries etc without asking permission, look through rooms or not leaving a parent and a child alone and try to listen even to their whispers.
29. Convictions, accusations etc without factual ground and without investigation. These statements are often categorical and confident.
30. Adapted/biased interpretations without serious interpretation work: for instance when a child says that it does not want to live it is immediately seen as caused by an absent mother and not by the measures of the authorities.
31. Statements from persons involved or experts are distorted and cited or referred to in a distorted form.
32. Generalization from group data to an individual: this is often not correct because the individual is not a member of the group and even if he is he can be one of an often substantial proportion who does not follow the others. A text source for the statement is often not mentioned and faulty quotations, conclusions and interpretations of text in the source are common.
33. Use of language that implies things about the family or client: for instance talk about "*family in crisis*" and need for "*treatment*" or "*support*" or "*measures*" without shown factual grounds. There are many ways hinting things in the language used, take for instance the expression "*the child has earlier been exposed to suspected abuse*".
34. Argumentum ad hominem: irrelevant negative information is documented and used in the investigation, for instance the vague fact that several years ago the baby carriage of the investigated child's sister had overturned or minute details about the economic help the mother received years ago.
35. Blaming the parent for the investigator's mistakes: when it is evident that the investigators have made mistakes or used unethical methods they sometimes blame the parent.
36. Earlier measures as evidence: often earlier measures, justified or not, are used as evidence instead of specifying what the problem is.
37. Antidemocratic strategy: use of political, religious etc opinions as evidence, despite the right to freedom of speech in the Swedish constitution.
38. Three-generation strategy can be used to increase the number of negative information. For instance speculative generalizations can be made about how the grandparents acted towards a parent when he/she was a child.
39. Non-occurrence strategy: it is mentioned that the parent does not have some type of deficiency or has not shown certain behaviours. The text suggests that the client is or

has been suspected of having these deficiencies or behaviours. By this way of writing the suspicions or suggestions can be conveyed to the reader.

40. Number of votes strategy: reference is made to, often unspecified persons, to show that others support the investigator's observation, judgement of the situation, proposal for solution etc.

41. Accusations of lying: suggestions that the parent is lying are made with no or weak factual ground. Assumptions are often made that the client is lying. Sometimes the accusation of lying is based on careless documentation, memory errors, misunderstandings etc.

42. Attribution of an experience, feeling, attitude etc to the client without factual ground.

43. Accusations of drug addiction, psychic disturbance, sexual abuse etc without clarifying the evidence.

44. Information from anonymous sources is viewed as facts and referred to in the documents.

45. Perceptual distortions, i. e. things that do not exist or exist in another form are seen or heard. For instance black and blue marks that do not exist can be reported or they can be exaggerated.

46. Interpretations are reported as observations and these two kinds of information are often mixed indiscriminately in the text.

47. Constructing false documents as evidence or rewriting documents.

II. Pathology fabrication and intensification

This is an important special case of evidence fabrication and is therefore put into a separate category. Information is constructed to make the client (adult and/or child) seem as pathological as possible - a maximizing principle. A number of different sub-strategies can be used in cooperation with for instance a child psychiatric clinic or a consulting psychologist.

Most of the strategies seem to fall within the following categories.

1. Generalization from artificial situations: behavioural artefacts in constructed situations are taken as signs of pathology.
2. Misuse of psychological, especially projective, tests.
3. Invented rhetorical or poetical speech is used as arguments in factual matters.
4. Any behaviour and circumstance is interpreted pathologically and often in a far-fetched manner instead of considering more nearby and situational interpretations.
5. Labelling with psychiatric terminology without showing factual grounds or criteria.
6. Theoretical associations from for instance textbooks without showing factual grounds or criteria.
7. Categorical statements, for instance about diagnoses, risks and prognoses, without showing factual grounds.
8. Reference to the judge's competence, education, title etc as an argument that what is said should not be questioned or critically examined.
9. Statements without evidence or investigation that a parent or a child is in need of psychiatric care or therapy. If after persuasion care is accepted, this fact can then be used as evidence of psychic disturbance.
10. Attribution of hidden psychic problems to an adult or a child without factual grounds.
11. Emphasize and exaggerate a physical illness and its effects.
12. Emphasize the client's economical dependency.

13. Emphasize a bad temper and aggressiveness of the client - nearly always in vague expressions without showing factual grounds.
14. Emphasize the alleged difficulties in the client's relationships, for instance, that the client is a lonely person, that he has a conflict with his parents or others.
15. Emphasize allegedly defective everyday routines according to the values of the investigator and mostly without factual grounds.
16. Emphasize the parent's incompetence as parent in vague language and without shown factual ground, for instance a parent is often accused of lack of insight into the child's needs without specification.
17. Emphasize the child's alleged pathology or the alleged risks for pathology in the future without factual grounds
18. Creation of wanted answers by presupposing, leading and pressing questions to the child
19. Fantasizing about the client, about his feelings etc.
20. Frequent use of the "*I/we feel, believe, think, experience*"-technique without showing factual grounds. This technique of course can generate all kinds of alleged pathology in the parent or in the child.
21. Frequent use or misuse of Freudian or psychiatric terminology. For instance these scientifically controversial terminologies have been developed in clinical groups and cannot without factual grounds be generalized to non-clinical groups to which parents and children in child protection investigations often belong.
22. Use of trivial behaviour as evidence of pathology, for instance playing with a bunch of keys, having newspapers on the kitchen table, wiping clothes-lines etc.
23. The odd person strategy: a parent is described as "*peculiar*", "*odd*", "*extreme*" etc. For instance a mother who is a gifted musician and British citizen was described in this way.
24. Suddenness strategy: a parent's behaviour is described as sudden or unexpected in a negative way. This seems to be a complement to the odd person strategy.
25. Situational circumstances are transformed into pathological individual characteristics.
26. A parent's criticism towards the investigator, the social services or other authorities is interpreted as psychic disturbance, or as indicating dangerousness or psychic peculiarity.
27. Successive intensification of a statement without adding factual grounds: for instance trivial, vague and ambiguous observations can after some repetition lead to categorical statements about severe pathology.
28. Psychiatrists sometimes write statements without even having met the child or a parent he/she is writing statements about.

III. Withholding information, ignoring information or not seeking information

This group of strategies is together with evidence fabrication one of the two basic groups of persecutory strategies. Any information that does not fit the persecutory project can be ignored, suppressed, withheld or not looked for. Information can be seriously distorted by withholding or ignoring its origin and context. The lack of reliability can also be ignored or concealed.

1. Not reporting the source strategy: the source and/or time of the information is often not mentioned, sometimes not even the year.
2. Vagueness strategy: the information is often vague and taken out of context - it is often impossible to say what it means, for instance

"John is aggressive" (nothing else is said) is the most common statement for describing Swedish boys in child protection investigations (Agrell & Larsson, 1996).

3. Discount, minimize or withhold the client's (and the child's) perspective: the views of the parents and the child are often very little or not at all investigated when producing the decision documents.

4. Discount, minimize or withhold human resources: the human resources of the parents, the child and the informal network are often very little or not at all investigated. They are often consciously ignored, according to information from social workers, in order to win the case at the local board and in the courts.

5. Avoiding positive information strategy: persons, personnel, organizations etc that have something positive to say about the family or child are avoided or rejected.

6. Conceal acquired positive information strategy: known positive information can be completely concealed, minimized or discounted. For instance it can be mentioned that some statements exist but nothing is said about their positive content or nothing at all may be said that no drugs were found when the police searched the family's flat. An expert statement that does not agree with the agency's views can be mentioned but without referring to its content.

7. Conceal important aspects of the investigative method: for instance not writing how many times and how long the investigator has met the client or not writing that he has not met a certain adult or child at all.

8. Avoiding to investigate alternative causes or alternative explanations about the data in the case. The investigators do not use alternative hypotheses in the documents.

9. Partiality is not unusual at social welfare offices in conflicts between parents etc. It can often easily be revealed by the structure, the number of contacts, the selection of information and the reasoning in the investigation. One technique is to withhold negative information for one parent and withhold positive information for the other and at the same time emphasize positive information for the favoured parent and negative information for the disfavoured parent.

10. Avoiding to investigate reported suspicions of abuse etc against others than the parents, for instance against family homes or social service personnel.

11. Misuse of secrecy: classify documents so the client cannot see them in order to protect the social welfare office - such secrecy is as a rule not accepted by Swedish courts if the client appeals it.

12. Impersonal strategy: the text is written in such an impersonal way that the reader cannot see who has made an observation, a judgment etc. Sometimes the vague word "one" is used.

13. Abuse of official standing, for instance when a social worker or psychiatrist writes a statement without investigation or on old information when there is new information to consider.

14. Withholding that one has never met a parent or a child when writing about the parent or child or withholding the slight extent of the contact.

15. Falsifying of records: changing text in the client's record when the client requests the record, not correcting statements known to be false etc.

16. Partially withholding records: only showing part of the record to the client. For instance, there may be two files, one of which is not shown to the client. In Sweden clients have the right to read their records according to the social service law .

17. Not informing the client about basic information: for instance about his right to read his records or to appeal and how to appeal or not giving the client the paper containing the decision that he needs in order to appeal.

IV. Influencing people or relationships in a negative way

The limits between this group of strategies and those already accounted for are vague. I have included some propaganda techniques in this group, but they could possibly also be placed in group I. The basic principle is to influence the parent, the child or someone else. The degree of influence or force applied can vary from weak to strong.

1. Threats, hostile behaviour, screaming, outspoken accusations. Bullying and harassments, even sexual harassments, are sometimes used by personnel.
2. Demolishing parent-child relationship: for instance by sudden separations, isolation of the child, minimizing parent-child contact, prohibition of parental visits, moving the child far away to another part of the country, keeping the child's address secret etc.
3. Dramaturgic strategy: this strategy can also be used to create disturbances in adults and children that did not exist before the attacks from the authorities.
4. Cruelty: for instance not allowing presents from the parent, not allowing the child to meet a parent on the child's birthday, not allowing requested medical examination of the child, not allowing the child to visit its mother in the hospital, not showing postcards from a parent etc.
5. Ethnical discrimination: for instance trying to obliterate the child's cultural identity. In one case a Polish girl had her name changed to a Swedish name and the mother was prohibited to speak Polish with her.
6. Anti-democratic attacks, threats etc against clients who use their right to freedom of speech according to the Swedish constitution, for instance to criticize the social welfare office in public.
7. Extreme control of behaviour: for instance trying to hear every word that is said between a mother and the child during visits or letting an armed policeman sit beside the child sitting on her mother's lap (there was no evidence that the mother was dangerous).
8. Delaying tactics: for instance the arrangement of meetings between parent and child can be delayed or decisions can be delayed.
9. Lecturing towards the client, sometimes done by very inexperienced office personnel.
10. Abuse of power over the child: for instance not asking for the child's opinion or ignoring what he/she says, presupposing and leading questions to the child, negative suggestions to the child about the parents, counteracting of contact with the parents, prompting the child to say bad things about its parent etc.
11. Shock tactics: for instance in a sudden military-like raid on the family early in the morning (without any factual occurrence) with four policemen the mother is pressed physically against the wall and naked and screaming children are carried out with office personnel as supervisors - the office eventually lost the case in court - there was no factual ground. Such sudden attacks sometimes come when a parent has not shown what the agency judges as enough cooperation.
12. Control through care, therapy or so called home therapists: without shown factual grounds such care, help etc is often implemented. The office can then get reports from therapists and involved personnel. And everything in these selective and unreliable reports can be used against the parent or parents.
13. Not answering questions, letters etc.
14. Not giving factual grounds for measures. Dialogue is avoided. Sometimes it is evident that the agency cannot give any factual grounds.
15. A broad range of expressions in the language are used to influence the reader in a non-objective way, for instance the sentence "It is common knowledge that X does not at all have the ability to perceive her children's needs". No factual ground is mentioned

in this categorical statement and the words "It is common knowledge" and "at all" also influence the reader.

16. Counteracting or elimination of supporting persons who have other views about the family than the social welfare office.

17. Hammering strategy as in commercial advertising, for instance repeating many times in one page or several pages that the client is "*aggressive*", "*shows aggression*" etc.

18. Synonym strategy: a person, situation etc is described with several synonyms, where the added synonyms do not give extra information, but a persuasive effect.

19. Selective use of markers of uncertainty in the language: uncertainty is expressed concerning positive information about the client but not expressed concerning negative information.

20. Influence other authorities to take measures against the client. Sometimes this strategy includes disinformation to other authorities.

21. Irrational consensus formation, i. e. authorities tend to agree without sufficient factual ground or without critical evaluation of the information. In Sweden this phenomenon is sometimes called "*friendship corruption*" - a word introduced by the famous Swedish author and critic of the authorities Vilhelm Moberg.

22. Inquiry into the source of the information when the source is protected by constitutional law, for instance criticism of the social welfare office in a newspaper.

23. Telephone terror strategy: for instance every morning making a call to a mother in order to stop her taking her normal child to school.

24. Forming a coalition with one of the parents or with a family home parent, for instance in order to break the relationship between the child and the parent.

25. Not turning over the case when it is challengeable, for instance existence of a relationship or strong conflict.

26. Communication behind the parent's back with other involved persons about the parent or the child.

V. Inadequate meta-strategies

This group of strategies seem to be underlying and regulating the four operative groups of strategies. These strategies contain delusions and deficiencies in coping with information, in reasoning, in law-abidingness and in ethics. They are characterized by lack of sound judgement, lack of critical thinking and by anti-intellectualism and self-righteousness.

1. No confession-strategy: never admit mistakes, never apologize. At least in the documents admission of faults does not seem to exist.

2. Need no proof-strategy: as one social worker expresses this: "*The social welfare office acts with the best interest of the child in mind and needs no proof*". A parent can be accused by the agency of abuse of various kinds without the agency being able to show any evidence or even investigating if there are any factual grounds. For instance intelligent and educated clients have been accused of having a severe mental handicap. One of them, a journalist from Poland, even wrote a book about her own case (Nowacka, 1991).

3. Being above the law-strategy: a common attitude and behaviour is that the social welfare offices do not need to follow the Swedish constitution, the social service laws or the administrative law. For instance child protection investigations are freely and easily constructed as persuasive documents and large amounts of unreliable information is freely and easily used, which is not allowed by the Swedish constitution. Sometimes the

decisions in courts are not followed. There are many cases where a prosecutors decision to remove a case is ignored and the agency maintains without doubt that something for which there is no evidence or proof really has happened.

4. The resources of the authorities are emphasized strongly in the documents at the same time as the human resources of the client and his network are deemphasized or withheld.

5. Overconfidence in experts that share the office's viewpoint. Statements of experts are not critically examined.

6. Anything goes as evidence: any irrelevant, unreliable, trivial or speculative data or argument can be used. There are no or weak logical demands on the investigative process.

7. Biological parents are often assumed to be dangerous monsters from which the child should be protected.

8. Transgressing professional competence: for instance making advanced medical, psychiatric or psychological statements without professional competence to do so.

9. Implicit theories in the social services culture or the investigator's own theories are supposed (an aware assumption or not) to be true without scientific evidence. A simple example is an implicit theory of the form "*If behaviour X exists, then behaviour Y exists in the client*". For instance: "*If the father is verbally aggressive against social workers, then he abuses his children*". Such theories without factual ground are repeatedly applied in social work.

10. Reduction or elimination of expressed opinions: by argumentation that the parent is psychically disturbed etc the validity of the parents opinions can be reduced or the opinions can be ignored.

11. Not asking, not listening: the parent's and the child's perspective and information are considered to be of little value and are often not asked for.

12. The conformity principle: persons under investigation should conform with the investigator's own moral and social ideals. Often parents seem to have no right to deviate from what the social welfare office considers proper moral and correct behaviour. Behaviour such as allowing the child to eat potato chips in the sofa when viewing TV or to sleep in the parents bed have been used as arguments to take children into custody. A strong conformity principle is applied and the concept of normal variation often seems to be unknown to the office culture. Sometimes the investigators are young and inexperienced and do not have children of their own.

13. Justification of the investigator's behaviour by saying derogatory remarks about the client. This is complementary to the strategy to never confess mistakes.

14. Assuming or pretending that the social welfare office knows everything about the family.

15. Avoid to inform the parents about criteria, planning or decisions and letting them live in uncertainty.

16. The doctrine of zero influence: it is never admitted in the reasoning in the investigation texts that the investigator influences the persons under investigation.

17. The doctrine of secret evidence: it is accepted to make general statements, draw conclusions etc without open accounting for the factual grounds.

18. Information of many different kinds is uncritically accepted without critical evaluation.

19. Ignoring logic: an unproven premise can be supposed to be true and the premise can be used as true in the investigation. Circular reasoning is accepted.

20. Not paying attention to the base rates of human phenomena,

i. e. common occurrences that occur in many ordinary families are used as arguments.

21. The strength of the connections between phenomena is often overestimated. Trivial signs are easily interpreted as evidence of pathology, abuse etc. Connections between human phenomena are mostly weak.

22. Dualistic strategy: use of constructed contrasts, black and white thinking, in thinking and argumentation. For instance, the "*good*" social worker and the "*evil*", "*monstrous*" parent. See Eriksson & Wiesel (1997), Wiesel (1997).

23. Premature conclusions before there is enough information.

Conclusions and discussion

The long lists of strategies may seem massive and that is partly because they are focused on a negative area of social work, that is persecutory phenomena. It should be emphasized that the number of strategies used varies much from one investigation to another. All the child protection investigations used in court that I have studied the last 25 years have been constructed as persuasive documents (not as investigations in the objective sense of the word). They relied on some basic strategies, primarily manipulation (biased selection) of the content and not using any explicit questions to govern the investigation, withholding a number of sources and dates, vagueness, withholding human resources and intensification of amount and type of human deficiencies. Trivial negative information is common. To a large extent the perspectives of the parents and the child are not sought or accounted for.

A tentative theoretical framework about the persecutory strategies is formulated in figure 1.

Persecution always has a starting point. It can be a report from day-care personnel, from a teacher, from a policeman or from a neighbour. It can also be an observation, a reaction etc that involves one or more social workers. The existing ecology transforms the information and the important goal of protecting the child is used. This goal activates a number of meta-strategies which are general cognitive sets that allow and regulate a number of operative strategies. The persuasion and influence power increases when these operative strategies are combined.

The persecution is a function of the strategies and the factors behind the strategies. Furthermore persecution increases when tough operative strategies are allowed or tolerated. The social welfare offices and their workers of course differ with respect to which strategies they accept. More constructive strategies have not been investigated here. They differ in organizational cultures, in leadership, in ethics, in methods etc. Those who do not tolerate the meta-strategies and the operative strategies tend to leave the organizations. It is evident that if there are no meta-strategies that allow persecution, then no persecutory strategies should exist.

In persecution it seems that the two basic groups of strategies are Evidence fabrication (I) and Not looking for, ignoring or withholding evidence (III) in simultaneous use. It is evident that only evidence fabrication or only withholding of evidence will be less effective than simultaneous use. Only fabricating evidence and not withholding often means that different kinds of counterevidence appears. Only withholding and not fabricating evidence means that there can be no or little evidence to present in an investigation. Thus strategy groups I and III are used simultaneously as far as I have seen in varying degree in all cases presented in court. In order to achieve more persuasive power and influence, pathology fabrication (II) is often used in varying

degree to strengthen argumentation and control and strategy group IV is in varying degree used to influence individuals' opinions and behaviours. The use of persecutory strategies varies on a continuum from weak application of a few strategies to massive application of all the main groups of strategies.

Initial and continued information:
reports,
observations,
gossip etc

Organizational and psychological ecology:
implicit theories, prejudices, intuitions
experiences, fantasies, suspicions, beliefs,
the idea of the evil parent, knowledge etc

(arrow down)

Explicit goal: protect child
Hidden goals: e. g. wants to win power
struggle

(arrow down)

Inadequate meta-strategies: e.g. irrationality, grandiosity,
disrespect for law, unethical procedures.
These destructive strategies regulate and facilitate the
operative strategies.

(arrow up)

(arrow down)

Groups of operative strategies:
I. Evidence fabrication
II. Pathology fabrication
III. Not looking for, ignoring or withholding
information
IV. Influencing people and their
relationships

reaction
information

(arrow down and up)

(arrow up)

Reactions of the parents and the child
Counterstrategies
Emotional reactions
Damages

Figure 1. Persecutory strategies in child protection investigations.

The persecutory strategies generate reactions in parents and children. Correct or often distorted information about these reactions is reported, can create gossip and stimulates the organizational and psychological ecology to more persecutory thinking and actions. Thus the persecutory strategies can generate the information or pseudo-information that is needed to warrant their maintenance.

There are all kinds of cases: in some cases custody is necessary. In a substantial number of borderline cases other measures can be discussed and many of these cases do not result in forced custody, and some cases consist of ordinary families with no need for measures. There is no factual basis to estimate the proportion of the different kinds of cases. There seems to be a substantial number of cases that seem to be solved voluntarily without persecutory strategies.

Persecutory strategies are not allowed by the Swedish constitution and can never be defensible in any child protection case. It seems that a clarification of the meta-strategy level is very important when trying to handle and eliminate the persecutory strategies. This level is inextricably linked to the organizational and psychological ecology in the social welfare office. Hidden goals should be clarified and handled. Initial information and later information should be evaluated critically (see criteria and principles in Edvardsson, 1998) - most of the information seems to be unreliable. For instance, unreliable information can be used to justify meta-strategies such as unlawful behaviour.

To this day there is a considerable amount of specification of the persecutory strategies, but little is known about the ecology in which they arise. This should be the second step in research about the persecutory strategies. Only four studies (Dag et al, 1995; Holmgren, 1998; Karell, 1997; Kransing & Svedberg, 1998) have tried, by interviews with investigators, to clarify factors behind the persecutory strategies. Other interview and diary studies about social work in social welfare offices (Edvardsson, 1984b, 1986ab) have pointed to several ecological factors, for instance stress. The ecological situation in which persecutory strategies exist or are created seems to be complex with variations between cases. A third step in the research about persecutory strategies should be to make field experiments with alternative types of child protection investigations. Studies by Hedlund & Lovén (2008) and Edvardsson (2009) indicates that the so called BBIC-system in Sweden does not stop persecutory strategies. The BBIC theory is not interested in logic and objectivity. An obstructing factor seems to be that using reprehensible strategies leads to no serious consequences for the investigators.

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