Child protection in Germany in dynamic development

Child protection practice has been the focus of much attention in recent years and subject to significant legal, political and professional developments. After the public furor about tragic cases of abuse and child endangerment, some with fatal outcomes, the German child protection system is now more focused on preventive strategies and concepts, on strengthening intersectoral cooperation (particularly medicine and child welfare) and on the development of formal procedures in cases of child abuse and neglect (see WOLF/BIEL/HEINITZ 2011).

Despite the political debate, the professional and academic discourse has often neglected the specific characteristics of rural areas, such as demographic and socioeconomic changes and their consequences for child protection practice (see DEBIEL, S. et al 2012)².

Findings and impulses for further development

Besides the process of seeking, accessing and receiving help we have found a number of conducive factors that influence the process of help in cases of (potential) child endangerment. The data showed, that clients face significant difficulties in finding and accessing adequate help.

Special characteristics of rural areas influence the process of accessing help

There appear to be various barriers to accessing counselling and other social services. They include long distances to the service centres, a negative reputation of professional institutions and a lack of information about services. However, clients in rural areas also creatively cope with these difficulties. Conducive factors, among other things, are long-term conditions in rural areas, such as demographic and socioeconomic changes and their consequences for child protection practice (see DEBIEL, S. et al 2012)².

Implementation and quality development

The results will help to further develop the offers of the Child Protection Centres in the five model regions, particularly in the Oldenburg region in the Northwest of Germany.

Conclusions and further challenges

Child protection work in rural areas often faces a multi-factor problem dynamic composed of isolation, violence and problems in accessing social services and counselling. Hence, the changes and the current conditions in rural areas can produce new forms of endangerment for children and families.

Child protection in rural areas in Germany has been neglected as a specific topic in politics and research.