

SUMMARY OF REPORT 2017:13

The meeting between the citizen and the state

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Summary

The meeting between the citizen and the state: Case work at Swedish Social insurance Agency

The Swedish Social Insurance Inspectorate (Inspektionen för socialförsäkringen, ISF) is an independent supervisory agency for the Swedish social insurance system. The objectives of the agency are to strengthen compliance with legislation and other statutes, and to improve the efficiency of the social insurance system through system supervision and efficiency analysis and evaluation.

The ISF's work is mainly conducted on a project basis and is commissioned by the Government or initiated autonomously by the agency. This report has been initiated by the agency.

Background

In this report, Swedish Social insurance Agency's (Försäkringskassan) caseworkers describe their work – handling clients who have a psychiatric diagnosis – as a balance between various requirements and tasks.

The caseworkers have to resolve the dilemma that may arise when a regulation is designed to achieve both a uniform application and an individual adaptation. In order to adapt a regulation to individual situations, caseworkers have discretion within the framework of the law where they can make a decisions and act in the individual case. They also need to prioritize between different goals when meeting them all is not possible. This balance, which the caseworkers must manage, is central to a sickness insurance that must both take individual considerations into account and manage regulations correctly and uniformly. It is here, at the end of the chain of all decisions, that citizens meet politics. This balance entails both providing support and simultaneously investigating the right to compensation, creating trust and still keep a distance to the client.

The caseworkers describe having to manage demands from their clients, goals from the government agency, and insufficient resources. This may make them feel inadequate, and that they must give less priority to one thing in order to manage another. The caseworkers say that one way of successfully dealing with the balance is providing information and being direct to the client. In this way, they try to get the client to understand why they are taking a certain action in the case work.

One person has different client roles in different organizations. The caseworkers are trying to work based on their regulations and their perspective on the client. But they also encounter other entities in the

sickness insurance process who have other assignments and other goals in their operations. The caseworkers describe the differences when, for example, it is an issue of whose interests the various entities represent and the priorities they have.

One theme that emerges in the analysis of the interviews is the relationship between various actors in the sickness insurance process. The conflicts and dilemmas built into the work of the street-level bureaucrat seem to become more difficult in cases where contact among the various actors does not work properly. Relationships among various actors that do not work are taken up as a limitation in the caseworkers' job, and a strength when they work properly.

Objectives and questions

The purpose of this report is to increase the understanding of caseworkers' work with sickness insurance and clients who have a psychiatric diagnosis.

The questions answered in the report are:

- How can caseworkers' work be understood based on earlier research?
- What do the caseworkers themselves perceive as limiting and governing in their work in cases where the sick-listed person has a psychiatric diagnosis?

Case management can be understood based on a number of different central dimensions in the specific situation where caseworker and client meet. By studying case management in such a way, it becomes possible to acquire more systematic knowledge of case management where various problems or organizations are studied based on starting points in common. The report uses these different dimensions to study case management at Swedish Social insurance Agency.

Method

The report analyzes 14 group interviews with caseworkers. The first ten interviews were conducted in March 2014. In March 2017, an additional four interviews were conducted with the same questions as in 2014. In the material, there is a spread both geographically and as regards point in time (2014 and 2017), time in employment (long and short), and experience of both employed and unemployed clients. The intent of selecting caseworkers who have different experiences and backgrounds is to collect various perspectives on caseworker professionalism.

For example, the geographic spread can capture perspectives based on different ways of relating to case management in different parts of the country. Experience can capture different perspectives based on the effect of how time in the occupation impacts caseworkers' attitudes. The time aspect contributes by capturing different perspectives as regards changes to the framework over time, and how caseworkers describe their work at different points in time.

The intent of the selection is therefore not to compare caseworker

professionalism as regards length of employment, geography, caseworkers who work with unemployed or employed clients, or year. Rather, it deals with capturing different experiences of case work.

The material is first divided up based on the dimensions presented in the report. After that, the respective dimensions are analyzed using content analysis to systematize the text, in order to provide an in-depth description of how caseworkers' space is limited and governed in various ways.