Child protection through an abuse-focused lens
Adolescent victimization and Swedish social services responses

Hanna Linell

Academic dissertation for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Social Work at Stockholm University to be publicly defended on Friday 13 October 2017 at 10.00 in Aula Svea, Socialhögskolan, Sveavägen 160.

Abstract
Knowledge concerning the social services’ use of the Care of Young Persons (Special Provisions) Act 1990:52 (CYPA) is relatively scarce, especially when it comes to the protection of adolescents victimized by abuse. The overall aim of this thesis is to investigate and discuss different conceptualisations of abuse, adolescents’ agency regarding abuse, victimization and social intervention, and how abuse and adolescent victimization are responded to, primarily by the social services. This is done from a stance influenced by critical realism as well as victim- and child-centred responses. The dissertation consists of four papers and examines these themes in two samples of judgments and related documents concerning applications for care of adolescents aged 13-17 under the CYPA. The findings from the total study of all judgments in the selected year clearly confirm § 2 CYPA as a rare intervention to protect adolescents. In only 85 of Sweden’s 290 municipalities was a CYPA application made, but a main finding is that such care to a large extent was used to protect adolescents from various forms of abuse. In the total study, the applications of § 2 CYPA concerned 196 adolescents, for 70 per cent of whom abuse was described, and where more girls (96) than boys (41) were being considered for care based on abuse. Of the all girls, 79 per cent were described as subjected to abuse and of the boys 35 per cent. Also in the smaller sample consisting of judgments for 37 girls in care under § 2 CYPA and §§ 2 and 3 CYPA, abuse was described for many. For several adolescents in both samples abuse was described as having been exerted to maintain standards of honour, shame and virginity, and/or to enable a forced marriage. The initiative and agency of the adolescents themselves in both the disclosure of abuse as well as the decision on alternative care is one of the most striking findings in the thesis. The majority of the adolescents, 71 per cent, were categorized as having intentionally disclosed the abuse. The aftermath of the disclosure was for many of the adolescents described as intensely challenging. For the majority the abuse was denied during the investigation, not only by the alleged abusers but also by non-abusing parents and other relatives. The findings relating to the social services responses suggest that the initial response to a high degree could be understood as parent-oriented. For 33 per cent, the judgment also revealed that the abuse had been disclosed to authorities once or several times prior to the investigation leading to the application for care under the CYPA. That the abuse in those cases had been known to the social services for on average 5 years can from a child-centred position be seen as a major failure regarding the system’s ability to reach children and stop abuse. A central conclusion is that the various forms of abuse described seem more connected to domination, fear, power and control than to conflict, to some extent mirroring the kind of systematic oppression described for victimized adults seeking the protection of NGOs and public authorities. The findings imply that interventions under the CYPA may enable more child-centred, safe and stable protection of children subjected to this kind of abuse. Given the findings in the present thesis it is argued that it may be important to differentiate the concept of abuse as well as to acknowledge the agency of children in both research and in practice.

Keywords: child abuse, adolescent victimization, child protection, honour-related violence, compulsory care, disclosure.

Stockholm 2017
http://urn.kb.se/resolve?urn=urn:nbn:se:su:diva-146550

ISBN 978-91-7669-903-0
ISBN 978-91-7669-904-7
ISSN 0281-2851

Department of Social Work

Stockholm University, 106 91 Stockholm
CHILD PROTECTION THROUGH AN ABUSE-FOCUSED LENS

Hanna Linell
Child protection through an abuse-focused lens

Adolescent victimization and Swedish social services responses

Hanna Linell
Contents

Förord ........................................................................................................... 1

List of original publications ..................................................................... 2

Introduction .............................................................................................. 3
  Child abuse and child protection ......................................................... 3
  The neglect of the adolescent victim position in child protection ...... 4
  An approach influenced by critical realism with a focus on adolescents’ agency ................................................................. 6
  Aim ........................................................................................................... 7

Theoretical positions, concepts and context .......................................... 9
  A position influenced by critical realism .............................................. 9
    Adolescents’ position from a critical realist and child-centred stance ... 9

Concepts regarding abuse ...................................................................... 10
  Child abuse and the under-communication of power and control ...... 11
  Abuse connected to domination or to conflict as different phenomena ... 12
  Child abuse connected to domination and control .............................. 13
  Adolescents’ agency, processes of disclosure and leaving the abuse ..... 15

Responses to abuse .............................................................................. 16
  Victim and child-centred responses ................................................... 17
  The context surrounding interventions under CYPAs ................. 19
  Contradictions between prevalent ideals of family preservation and children’s rights .................................................. 20
  Discussions on abuse and responses within the legal framework .... 21
  The dynamic in child abuse investigations ....................................... 22
  To conclude in regard to my approach .............................................. 23

Prior research on child abuse, children’s agency and child protection
with a focus on adolescents ................................................................... 25
  Abuse and victimization in relation to adolescents ......................... 25
  Swedish studies on prevalence ......................................................... 27
  Studies on reported abuse and compulsory care .............................. 28
  The context of disclosure .................................................................. 30
  Children’s participation in reports, assessments and interventions .... 33
  The influence of children’s agency in the child protection process .... 35
  Other influential factors in social services responses to abuse ......... 36
Children’s and adolescents’ experiences of help-seeking and social interventions .............................................................. 39
Criticism against the lack of focus on power dynamics ........................................ 41
The contribution of this thesis in light of previous research .............................. 42

Methods ........................................................................................................... 44
The study of documents ................................................................................. 44
My approach to the documents ...................................................................... 45
Sample and data ........................................................................................... 45
Paper I ........................................................................................................... 46
Papers II, III and IV ....................................................................................... 46
The documents studied ................................................................................. 47
Analysing the data ......................................................................................... 48
Strengths, limitations and ethical reflections ............................................... 50

Summary of papers ....................................................................................... 53
Paper I: Girls with honour-related problems in a comparative perspective 53
Aims ............................................................................................................. 53
Findings ....................................................................................................... 53
Conclusions ................................................................................................. 55
Paper II: The characteristics and extent of child abuse: Findings from a study
of the Swedish social services child protection ........................................ 55
Aims ............................................................................................................. 56
Findings ....................................................................................................... 56
Conclusions ................................................................................................. 57
Paper III: The process of disclosing child abuse: a study of Swedish social
services protection in child abuse cases .................................................... 58
Aims ............................................................................................................. 58
Findings ....................................................................................................... 58
Conclusions ................................................................................................. 59
Paper IV: Social services responses to adolescent children reported as abused
..................................................................................................................... 60
Aims ............................................................................................................. 60
Findings ....................................................................................................... 60
Conclusions ................................................................................................. 61

Discussion ..................................................................................................... 62
Characteristics of the abuse .......................................................................... 62
The alleged abusers ..................................................................................... 63
A gendered pattern ....................................................................................... 64
Conceptualisations of neglect and abuse ..................................................... 65
Adolescents’ agency ...................................................................................... 66
The disclosure of abuse .............................................................................. 66
The aftermath of the disclosure .................................................................. 67
Child protection as a means to oppose experiences of powerlessness? 69
Förord


Under hela doktorandtiden har jag också haft ynnesten att i olika utsträckning få arbeta med Länsstyrelsen Östergötlands nationella regeringsuppdrag att motverka hendersrelaterat våld och förtryck. Juno Blom, tusen tack för allt! Din energi och kraft kan förflytta berg och också stötta ett avhandlingsarbete på alla tänkbbara sätt. Oerhört många tack också till Iman Hussein, Lotta Nilsson, Mikael Thörn, Christina Malmqvist, Bo Lagerkvist, Leif Rundqvist, Bayan Nasib och alla andra fantastiska kollegor och samverkanspartners jag mött genom dessa uppdrag. Att få ta del av er kunskap och erfarenhet av att arbeta med våldsutsatta barn, unga och vuxna har varit otroligt värdefullt.

Tack också till alla fina vänner, hela tjocka släkten, min egen familj och den jag är ingift i – ni är underbara, roliga, stötande och bara bäjare! Min närmsta familj Sonnie, Dolores och Laura - ni är världens bästa och jag är evigt tacksam.

Avslutningsvis vill jag tacka alla de fantastiska ungdomar jag har fått möta, både i mitt yrkesliv som socionom och på olika sätt genom arbetet med avhandlingen.
List of original publications

The thesis is based on the following studies referred to in the text by their respective Roman numerals.


IV. Linell, H. Social services responses to adolescent children reported as abused. (Submitted).

The published papers are reprinted with the permission of the publishers.
Introduction

Child abuse and child protection

This thesis addresses the research fields of child abuse and child protection with focus on a somewhat neglected area within these fields; adolescents victimized by abuse by their parents and other close relatives.

When it comes to early prevention of child abuse Sweden is often described as a pioneer country in light of broad child welfare reforms as well as being the first nation to prohibit all forms of corporal punishment of children. However, less attention has been paid both in social work practice and in research to interventions to protect children in cases where different forms of abuse are reported and substantiated. Hence, drawing on prior Swedish studies, knowledge is scarce of how to support child and adolescent victims of abuse and how to prevent further abuse (Kaldaal, 2010; Kaldaal et al., 2010; Broberg et al., 2011, 2015; Leviner, 2011; Svedin et al., 2015).

Child protection in general can be seen as resting on an uncertain base of knowledge when it comes to interventions and their effects (Lagerberg & Sundelin, 2000; Sundell et al., 2007; Kaldaal, 2010). This has been pointed out also in relation to child abuse. A systematic review of social interventions to prevent initial or further child abuse suggests an extensive lack of evidence for effective interventions in the area compared with other paediatric public-health problems (Macmillan et al., 2009). Knowledge on child protection interventions regarding victimized adolescents has been suggested as even more limited (Rees et al., 2010; Gorin & Jobe, 2012).

That many children and adolescents describe experiences of emotional, physical and sexual abuse, violence linked to honour and forced marriage, and exposure to intimate partner violence has been seen in numerous Swedish studies conducted in the 2000s (National Board of Health and Welfare, 2007; Priebe & Svedin, 2009; Schlytter et al., 2009; Annerbäck et al., 2010; Jansson et al., 2011). Within the social services responsible for child protection, however, abuse against children and adolescents is regarded as a rare cause of reporting (Wiklund, 2006; Cocozza, 2007; Östberg, 2010). This extensive gap between the rates reported by children in large-scale questionnaire studies and abuse reported to and substantiated by child protection agencies has been seen in studies from a diversity of countries with different systems for the protection of children. It is suggested that abuse can be seen as largely under-reported. Few children who are maltreated receive official attention and few
children are reached by interventions (Gilbert et al., 2009a, 2009b). Research has also shown that children reported as abused may continue to be abused and repeatedly re-enter the child protection system (Gelles, 1996, 2000; Terling, 1999; Stanley & Goddard, 2002; Lindell, 2005).

A critical dilemma raised in prior research is that child welfare agencies have to balance the contradictory mission of both protecting children and preserving families. There are strong legal as well as public demands for children’s right to be protected from harm. At the same time, the overarching family preservation perspective is strongly emphasized, that of safeguarding children within the home by reasonable efforts directed to the parents and working to reunite children who have been removed from home with their families (Gelles 1996, 2000; Munro, 1999; Mudaly & Goddard, 2006).

The Swedish model can be described as focused on child welfare with substantial universal services directed to parents and children (Khoo et al., 2002; Ponnert, 2007; Cocozza & Hort, 2011; Gilbert, 2012; Leviner & Lundström, 2017). The family preservation perspective is strongly accentuated within the legal framework guiding the social services, and voluntary interventions through the Social Services Act (SSA) 2001:453) with the consent of the child and his/her parents can be seen as a clear starting point. Child protection regardless of consent – as is of interest in the present thesis – through the Care of Young Persons (Special Provisions) Act 1990:52 (CYPA) is stated as a clear exception with strict conditions needing to be fulfilled to be applicable.

The neglect of the adolescent victim position in child protection

It has been stressed that adolescents as victims of abuse can be seen as an area generally less explored within the social sciences than harm against both adults and younger children (Rossman & Rosenberg, 1998; Finkelhor & Hashima, 2001; Rees et al., 2010; Radford et al., 2011). The neglect of the adolescent victim position can be seen as especially evident given the highly empirically and theoretically developed topic of juvenile delinquency and societies’ interventions as regards this domain (Finkelhor & Hashima, 2001). It is suggested that adolescents may receive a less sympathetic response from authorities given their age. They are more likely to be blamed (Kelley et al., 1997; Hicks & Tite, 1998; Tucker, 2011) and less likely to be seen as at risk than younger children (Ponnert, 2007; Rees et al., 2010; Gorin & Jobe, 2012), especially in cases when having externalized the impact of the abuse (Straus, 1988; Garbarino et al., 1997; Tucker, 2011). Externalizations or internalizations of the effect of victimization may also be confused and overlooked by professionals in light of a common view of conflict and turmoil as a normal part of adolescence (Garbarino, 1989).
The neglect of the adolescent victim position is apparent also in the Swedish context. Historically, juvenile delinquency can be seen as clear grounds for state intervention (Lundström, 1993; Lundström & Sallnäs, 2003; Lundström, 2017). Contemporary studies also suggest that interventions more often are a result of adolescents’ own behaviour and far less following reported neglect or abuse (Vinnerljung et al., 2001; Franzen et al., 2008; Vinnerljung & Sallnäs, 2008; National Board of Health and Welfare, 2013). This may be understood, given the responsibility for adolescent offenders in Swedish child welfare. Following this responsibility, the Swedish child welfare system is suggested as being one with a strong focus on ‘policing teenagers’ rather than Donzelot’s (1979) classic concept of ‘the policing of families’ found in traditional child welfare (Vinnerljung & Sallnäs, 2008).

Prior research suggests that most interventions in cases of child abuse are given with the consent of the parents under the SSA and may often be the same as interventions targeting other phenomena, such as a contact person, contact family or in-home parental training (Lindell, 2005; Kaldal et al., 2010; Leviner, 2011; Svedin et al., 2015). The clear family orientation in interventions has been suggested both in relation to young children (Lindell, 2005; Leviner, 2011) and to adolescents (Sjöblom, 2002, 2006; Schlytter, 2004) reported as abused. Also in cases where children are placed in alternative care this is most often done through the SSA in line with the family orientation of the Swedish model. Prior research suggests that in cases were abuse has been reported, the social services only very occasionally place a child in care outside of the home (Kaldal et al., 2010; Leviner, 2011; Landberg & Svedin, 2013). Applications for care under the CYPA in cases of abuse are rare (Kaldal et al., 2010; Leviner, 2011).

Knowledge of state interventions in cases where adolescents have been victimized by their parents and other close relatives can be seen as very limited, especially coercive interventions under § 2 CYPA, where physical or psychological violence, undue exploitation, neglect or some other debilitating condition in the home is seen as a substantial risk to the child’s health and development. Although it is shown that most interventions for children under the CYPA concern § 2 CYPA, knowledge of compulsory interventions to protect adolescents under this paragraph appears to be little. The vast majority of interventions through the CYPA for adolescents concern § 3 although there has been a decreasing trend in recent years (Alexius & Hollander, 2017). To be taken into care under § 3 is more common for boys than for girls (National Board of Health and Welfare, 2013). It is suggested that external evidence of the risks for the adolescent often may be apparent and that the parents also may support the social services argumentation on risks in cases concerning adolescents’ own behavior (Clæzon, 1987; Mattsson, 2002; Ponnert, 2007, 2017). Hence, the compulsory intervention may in these cases be seen as a shared adult coercive decision against adolescents. In cases of § 2 CYPA, on
the other hand, it has been suggested that there may be limited external evidence and that the child or adolescent might be the only informant to substantiate abuse and the need of protection (Mattsson, 2002; Kaldal, 2010). Drawing on this context, it has been highlighted as remarkable that so little attention has been directed toward the situation of the child and the handling of the child’s statements during this process (Kaldal, 2010). In these cases, the conflict of interests between the parents and the child regarding compulsory protection may be more apparent, and the social services decision to intervene may be a clearer act of power against other adults than in cases concerning § 3 CYPA.

An approach influenced by critical realism with a focus on adolescents’ agency

The various systems for state intervention – either more oriented to child welfare or to child protection – can be seen as developed from an understanding of children as having limited physical and legal power to care for and protect themselves. Hence, in welfare states different systems have been called for to prevent victimization, equal the imbalance of power within the family and protect children who are victimized (Dingwall et al., 2014). Much of prior research concerning child protection reflects this understanding of lack of voice and agency in children and that there are adult actors who are responsible for reading signs of abuse, danger and risk. In the positivistic paradigm, this can be seen in the strong focus on risk factors, clinical evidence, structured assessments and manuals in line with an evidence-based practice (Houston & Griffiths, 2000). In the social constructionist paradigm, on the other hand, there has been a focus on addressing the complexity – for the (adult) observers responsible for children’s protection – of defining what constitutes abuse, how to evaluate risk and how to prevent harm (Parton et al., 1997; Lindsey, 2004; Dingwall et al., 2014). In this research there is often an interest in power relations from the perspective of how they are fixed in institutions rather than from the point of view of those subject to power. The lack of ‘objective’ definitions of child abuse, danger and risk are put forward. Instead, there is focus on how these concepts can be seen as constructions that reflect values and discourses of policy-makers and practitioners that are historically and culturally bound (Parton, 1996; Parton et al., 1997; Houston & Griffiths, 2000; Houston, 2001b; Lindsey, 2004).

From a critical realist stance, both the narrow focus within the positivistic paradigm and the lack of interest within research influenced by social constructionism on ‘real’ harms, subjective experiences of abuse and the agency of the child have been highlighted as inadequate (Houston, 2001b). Relevant in relation to this critique is the increased interest in recent years in adolescent
victimization. Within this research emphasis has been laid on the need for an altered response from child protection authorities acknowledging adolescents’ agency (Sanders & Mace, 2006; Rees et al., 2010; Woolfson et al., 2010; Gorin & Jobe, 2012; Jobe & Gorin, 2013).

The present thesis can be seen as situated within this field of research. More specifically the thesis addresses adolescents victimized by their parents and other close relatives and social services responses in cases leading to an application for protection under the CYPA. Guided by the critique on the limited focus on the role of the child in the child protection process as well as the neglect of the adolescent victim position, I attempt to focus on these themes. The main title of the thesis - Child protection through an abuse-focused lens - alludes to my attempt to also address fields that I see as rarely combined and to discuss child protection interventions through findings from research on abuse against both children, adolescents and adults.

The thesis builds upon analysis of two samples of judgments and related documents concerning applications for care under the CYPA for adolescents aged 13-17.

Aim

The overall aim of the thesis is to investigate and discuss different conceptualisations of abuse; adolescents’ agency regarding abuse, victimization and social intervention, and how abuse and adolescent victimization are responded to, primarily by the social services. The thesis consists of four papers that in different ways address these themes. More specifically the objectives in the four papers are as follows;

- To learn to perceive indicators of honour-related experiences and to compare girls considered for care under § 2 or §§ 2 and 3 CYPA who met the honour-related criteria with girls who did not regarding characteristics of their situation as well as the social services responses (Paper I)

- To explore to what extent adolescents reported as subjected to abuse were being protected by the social services under § 2 CYPA during one year and what characterized the violence they were being subjected to (Paper II).

- To investigate the importance of adolescents’ agency and participation in the disclosure of abuse in social services decisions regarding alternative care as well as to explore adolescents’ disclosure as an ongoing process with a focus on the process preceding and following the abuse being disclosed to public authorities (Paper III).

- To investigate the social services responses to child abuse seen for adolescent children, aged 13-17, considered for care under § 2 CYPA. (Paper IV).
The aim of the following chapters in this compilation dissertation is to offer a broader frame of reference for a discussion of the papers included. An attempt is made to discuss different conceptualisations of abuse as primarily connected to conflict or to domination and control, as well as adolescents’ agency regarding abuse, victimization and social intervention. Further, the social services responses are discussed with a focus on victim- and child-centred responses, along with the context surrounding these responses, such as contradictions between prevalent ideas of family preservation and children’s rights, and the dynamic in investigations of abuse.
Theoretical positions, concepts and context

A position influenced by critical realism

The aim of the following chapter is to address my own position as well as to make theoretical concepts explicit and discuss how they have influenced my approach. In the present thesis, I argue for an understanding of abuse, victimization and social services responses from a position influenced by critical realism. This position has been suggested as a way out both from the lack of interest in subjective interpretation and meaning in the positivist paradigm and from the inherent relativism in social constructionism (Houston, 2001a, 2001b; Andersen, 2007; Alderson, 2013). From a critical realist position, a lack of interest in the influences of embodied factors and a sole focus on discourse and language has been criticised. It is seen as especially relativistic and unfulfilling when it comes to experiences of abuse and power in intimate relationships (Cromby & Nightingale, 1999). From a critical realist position reality can be understood as both subjective and objective (Andersen, 2007; Alderson, 2013). When it comes to social problems, structural and material as well as subjective and embodied factors are recognized (Houston, 2001a; Andersen, 2007; Alderson, 2013). That the notion of power is situated in a context that acknowledges these factors is highlighted as important, since power relations otherwise may be ignored or inadequately understood (Cromby & Nightingale, 1999; Andersen, 2007; Houston, 2009; Alderson, 2013). It is emphasized that social science should not be value-free; instead, an aim of critical realism is to challenge the existence of mechanisms that lead to human oppression (Houston, 2001a).

Adolescents’ position from a critical realist and child-centred stance

From a critical realist stance, children and adolescents are seen as active agents with an inherent ability to reflect, react and overcome external sufferings as well as being harmed by ‘real’ risks (Houston, 2001b; Alderson, 2013). In the thesis, my approach is guided by this broad understanding of adolescents as both competent actors yet with potentially limited agency and power, given experiences of victimization and lack of control over state intervention.

A relevant analytical tool for me in the understanding of adolescents’ position is the relational concepts of adult and child (Alanen, 1992). This can be
seen in my interest in differences in understandings of adult and adolescent positions when it comes to abuse, victimization and need of support, as well as my use of concepts and discussions derived from research addressing adult victimization.

My understanding is not that adolescents given their position as children are vulnerable or in need of adult protection per se. I understand adolescents as active agents with potentially more power and choice over their situation than younger children. However, they may still be deprived of autonomy, agency and rights following abuse and enduring effects of victimization (Garbarino, 1989; Rossman & Rosenberg, 1998; Finkelhor & Hashima, 2001). My understanding is also that children and adolescents as well as adults are entitled to legal and social interventions following abuse and victimization. However, given children’s and adolescents’ position, the degree of control over social intervention is clearly limited, since to a high degree they are legally bound to their parents. This dependence will be further explored when it comes to ideals, concepts and legislation relevant to social services responses.

The lack of attention paid in child protection research to the ones considered to be in need of protection – children and adolescents – within child protection research from a positivistic or social constructionist stance can be compared with the strong focus on the child within the paradigm of childhood sociology. In line with this paradigm, there has been a rise in recent decades in research focusing on child and adolescent experiences and agency when it comes to abuse and state intervention. Within the field of children’s exposure to intimate partner violence these perspectives have steadily been in focus (see for example Cater, 2004; Eriksson & Näslund, 2008; Eriksson, 2009; Överlien & Hydén, 2009; Överlien, 2012; Åkerlund, 2017). Also within the field of child welfare and child protection added attention has been paid to child-centred research and social work practice (see for example Littlechild, 1999; Munro, 2001, 2011; Bell, 2011; Holland & Scourfield, 2004; Bessant & Broadley, 2014). These fields of research can also be seen as having had an important influence on my approach to the themes investigated.

Concepts regarding abuse

My approach to the concept of abuse is on the agency of adolescents, the processes surrounding the relationship between abusers and victims, and the impact of others’ responses. In this, prior research emanating from the clear positioning of the one victimized in intimate partner violence has greatly influenced my understanding of abuse. Abuse is often seen as a hidden phenomenon. However, there has been an increased focus on the influence of social responses from family and friends as well as authorities in the complex processes encircling the relationship between the abuser and the one being victimized (Hydén, 2015). In line with this I am influenced by an understanding
of interpersonal violence as a social action embedded in a social context including responses from various actors (see for example Anderson, 2006; Anderson & Danis, 2006; Hydén et al., 2016).

Child abuse and the under-communication of power and control

Prior research emphasizes many similarities between child abuse and men’s violence against women in intimate relationships. The parallels that can be drawn may be, e.g., several interacting forms of abuse, the risk of both physical and emotional harm, the unequal power balance, the abuser’s exploitation of the victim’s emotions and that the abuse may be actively hidden within the family (Straka & Montminy, 2008; Messing, 2011). The position of the adolescent victimized by abuse has been especially equated to that of adult women subjected to intimate partner violence (Garbarino, 1989). The potential increase in power that can be seen during adolescence such as ability to judge parents’ behaviour, compare one’s situation with others, retaliate, help others and to leave has been suggested as a destabilizing force that may escalate the risk of abuse. Particularly when parents who are authoritarian, controlling or abusive feel that their position is being challenged (Garbarino, 1989).

However, although there may be similarities between child abuse and intimate partner violence, it has been suggested that the comparable abuse dynamics regarding power and control often are under-communicated when it comes to parents’ abuse of their children (Straka & Montminy, 2008; Messing, 2011). For me this potential under-communication of the power dynamics between abuser and victim when addressing child abuse has been a theme throughout the study of prior research and the collected data. An important reflection here is that some definitions of child abuse in both prior research and in social policy may include any act or context that in some way may harm a child, reflecting a conceptualisation of children’s position as vulnerable and in need of adults protection per se. Intentional and criminalized acts such as physical or sexual abuse may be merged together with child neglect (Corcoran, 2000; Lindsey, 2004) and be addressed within such categorisations as ‘vulnerable children’ or ‘children at risk’ (Lundberg, 2005; Sundell et al., 2007). These kinds of broad definition may also include adolescents seen as at risk on account of their own behaviour, such as substance abuse or criminality.

Causes, consequences and children’s experiences of victimization following parents’ neglect or abuse may be dissimilar, however (Gough, 1996; Lindsey, 2004; Gilbert et al., 2009a). Following this, my understanding of abuse includes a focus on whether acts are experienced as expressive, purposeful, intentional, and sometimes instrumental and systematic, as opposed to omissions in care by parents such as neglect. Omissions in care by parents can, however, be seen as equally damaging to children and adolescents, and may
often co-occur with abuse (Ney et al., 1994; Gilbert et al., 2009a; Radford et al., 2011).

More narrow definitions of child abuse often concentrate on physical assault and physical injury (Gelles & Edfeldt, 1986; Swedish Government Official Report, 2001:18, 2001:72; Lundberg, 2005). Physical violence inflicted by parents may often be understood as a consequence of perceived helplessness or stress in the context of conflict (Annerbäck, et al., 2010; Jansson et al., 2011), and survey studies targeting child abuse often build upon the conflict tactics scale (CTS). The CTS measures different conflict tactics such as reasoning, verbal aggression and physical aggression. Hence, physical assault is seen as one of several tactics resulting from the perpetrator’s individual difficulty in handling aggression, stress or frustration (Gelles & Edfeldt, 1986; Johnson, 1995, 2006; Straus, 1999, 2005; Kimmel, 2002; Stark, 2007). This gender-neutral and conflict-based understanding of violence is common within sociological family violence research focusing on both children and adults (Kimmel, 2002; Allen, 2011).

Abuse connected to domination or to conflict as different phenomena

Abuse in adult intimate relationships is often met with an acknowledgement of its own potential causes, contextual factors, consequences, and how it is experienced. There have long been struggles to embrace the position of the one victimized and not to merge abuse with other potential harms experienced. In the legislation this positioning can be seen as recurrent (Johnson, 1995; Smith et al., 1995; Stanley, 1997; Government bill, 1997/98:55; Stark, 2007), and the narrow understanding of abuse as conflict-based physical assault has also been strongly questioned (Kimmel, 2002, 2004; Stark, 2007; Kelly & Johnson, 2008). From feminist oriented theorists, when trying to distinguish between different patterns of violence, there has been strong emphasis on the need to visualize how patriarchal norms within the family as well as the society form the power relations, the abuse, and the ability to leave the abuse. To focus on the meaning of abusive acts, if they are performed with the intention to dominate another individual, and factors concerning tradition, gender, power and control have been stressed as important (Heise, 1998; Lundgren et al., 2001; Eldén & Westerstrand, 2004; Straka & Montminy, 2008; Messing, 2011). As well as to highlight how various forms of abuse may affect the victim’s cognition, emotions, health and agency (Smith et al., 1995; Kimmel, 2002; Stark, 2007; Anitha & Gill, 2009). From this stance, the CTS framing of abuse in the context of the abuser being tired or in a bad mood has been criticized, since it under-communicates the factors of gender, power and control, the consequences of abuse, and subjective experiences of victimization (Kimmel, 2002; Stark, 2007).
A development within the field of intimate partner violence in recent decades has been to see abuse as primarily connected either to conflict or to domination and control as mostly different and non-overlapping phenomena (Johnson, 1995; Straus, 1999; Kimmel, 2002; Johnson & Leone, 2005; Stark, 2007). Survey studies – often using the CTS – may uncover one kind of violence, that is characterized by physical assault perpetrated by both women and men in the context of conflict. Studies that rely on clinical samples, on the other hand, tend to uncover another form of violence. These studies demonstrate that it is often the experience of violence with clear elements of power and control that are common in those individuals – most often women – who are seeking the protection of authorities or NGOs (Stark 2007; Kelly & Johnson, 2008). This type of violence is rarely described as conflict based, but rather as systematic oppression resulting in serious consequences for the victim’s health (Kimmel, 2002; Stark, 2007; Kelly & Johnson, 2008). It has been shown that there is not always a high degree of physical violence in this more instrumentally executed abuse complex, the other power and control strategies being well effective in themselves (Pence & Paymar, 1993; Kelly & Johnson, 2008). The perpetrator’s various tactics of emotional abuse, such as coercion, threats, intimidation, isolation, blaming and minimizing lead the victim to experience fear, captivity, and loss of power and control (Smith et al., 1995; Kimmel, 2002). Physical violence may escalate, however, if the perpetrator perceives that power over the partner is being lost, such as when the victim tries to resist the oppression (Stark, 2007; Kelly & Johnson, 2008).

Child abuse connected to domination and control

The development described within the field of intimate partner violence can be understood in the light of struggles to apply various feminist perspectives on abuse. However, with the exception of sexual abuse, parents’ abuse and the child as the primary victim has not often been discussed within feminist theory (Stark & Flitcraft, 1988; Ashe & Cahn, 1993; Featherstone, 1997; Featherstone & Trinder, 1997). This may be understood in the light of an oppositional stance to holding mothers responsible for child abuse (Gordon, 1988; Ashe & Cahn, 1993; Featherstone, 1997), given unequal power relations between men and women and the potential co-occurrence of intimate partner violence. Traditionally, women’s and children’s interests have also been seen as largely inseparable from each other (Alanen, 1992), while conflicts of interest between mothers and children have been less addressed (Gordon, 1988; Featherstone & Trinder, 1997).

Although the different typologies of abuse as primarily connected either to domination and control or to conflict are not as clearly accentuated within the field of child abuse, parents’ instrumental use of various tactics to evoke a state of domination and fear can be seen as an apparent element (Straus, 1994).

In recent years, parents’ use of various power and control tactics, such as physical abuse, coercive control, shaming, intimidation and isolation has in
the Swedish context also been made visible in studies on honour-related violence and forced marriages (Jemtborn, 2005; Ghadimi, 2007; Högdin, 2007; Swedish National Board for Youth Affairs, 2009; Rexvïd & Schlytter, 2012; Schlytter & Rexvid, 2016). Honour-related violence may be prevalent for both adults and adolescents, often involves the parent-child relationship, strong focus on notions of gender, reputation and virginity, and responses from the victims’ social network. Men’s power and control over girls’ and women’s sexuality and strict rules on the relations between the sexes can be seen as all-encompassing principles that regulate the parallel concepts of honour and shame. An essential characteristic is that the chastity of unmarried girls and women as well as the sexuality and child bearing of the ones married are the concern of the entire group. Since girls’ and women’s sexuality is so strongly connected to the honour code, it is in everyone’s interest to control girls and women to protect the family’s honor and monitor others’ (Wikan, 2003; Sen, 2005; Jensen et al., 2006; Khan, 2006; Gill, 2014). Forced and early marriages as well as female genital mutilation are apparent parts of this control over female sexuality. If a girl’s or woman’s behavior brings dishonor upon the group, the family members’ reputation and standing in the eyes of others may be regained by punishing her (Eisner & Ghuneim, 2013; Hague et al., 2013; Payton, 2014). Although victims often are female, the dual role of boys and young men can place them as victims as well as potential perpetrators (Schlytter et al., 2009; Rexvïd & Schlytter, 2012; Schlytter & Rexvid, 2016).

The development within the field of intimate partner violence to see abuse as primarily connected either to conflict or to domination and control, and to see these as potentially different phenomena has been important to me in the analysis of the characteristics of abuse as seen in the studied data. Relevant in relation to this aim is a certain focus in the thesis on honour-related violence and notions of virginity and marriage. With this in focus, I am influenced by prior research emphasizing the value of exploring cultural perceptions concerning gender, power and sexuality for the understanding of violence in all contexts (Heise, 1998; Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2010; Bredal, 2014), as well as research stressing that culture changes and transforms, and also intersects with other factors in relation to violence (Heise, 1998; Gill, 2014).

In the thesis, distinctions between abuse and neglect as well as abuse primarily connected to power and control or to conflict are also seen as important, following an understanding that these conceptualisations are highly relevant in relation to social interventions (Gelles, 1996, 2000; Lindsey, 2004; Stark, 2007; Kelly & Johnson, 2008).
Adolescents’ agency, processes of disclosure and leaving the abuse

Individuals often use a variety of strategies to prevent, withstand and end oppression, abuse and consequences thereof (Wade, 1997; Anderson, 2006; Anderson & Danis, 2006; Bonnah, 2016). Acknowledging strategies of both adaption and resistance is vital to any understanding of the individual suffering violence as an active subject who relates to the situation he or she is in rather than being a passive victim (Hydén, 2005; Enander & Holmberg, 2008; Överlien & Hydén, 2009; Överlien, 2012). When it comes to child abuse, adolescents’ own narratives of experiences of victimization, adaption and resistance are areas that are relatively unexplored in comparison to adults. Also such themes as adolescents’ processes of leaving abusive parents, what takes place in the aftermath of a disclosure of abuse to authorities, and responses from others in their social network before and after a disclosure can be seen as relatively unknown. In an understanding of interpersonal violence as a social action embedded in a social context and in responses from various actors these themes are highly relevant, however.

Within prior research on intimate partner violence an extensive research base can be found on adult women’s experiences of leaving an abusive relationship. The processes preceding and following a physical break up are often described as complex and ambivalent, taking place over a long period and often beginning with changes at the emotional and cognitive levels before a decision to physically separate (Anderson & Saunders, 2003). The catalysts that affect this emotional and cognitive shift may be increased levels of fear and violence, loss of hope that the situation will ever change, loss of feelings of affection/love for the abuser, fear for the health of others, finally coming to see the abuse as unjust, or with external influences such as help from others. Several studies also show that the period after the physical break-up often is followed by an increase in violence, heightened levels of stress, and trauma symptoms (Anderson & Saunders, 2003). Enander and Holmberg (2008) see three overlapping processes for women: the cognitive process of perceiving themselves as subjected to violence, the physical break up, and the emotional break up. These processes involve several stages of both emotional and physical ‘going back and forth’ because of intertwined and complex feelings of attachment, fear, hate, compassion, guilt, hope, dependency and understanding.

Similarities to the complex processes described for adult women in the research base on hinderers and enablers can be seen for children’s disclosure of abuse, especially sexual abuse; research that suggests several resistance strategies for children. Adolescents’ disclosure of abuse to authorities, their participation in the child protection process as well as their experiences of social services responses are themes that will be further explored in the next chapter.
Responses to abuse

In line with my understanding of interpersonal violence as a social action embedded in a social context and in responses from various actors there is a focus on how abuse and the disclosure of abuse to authorities is responded to, especially the social services responses and the process leading to a decision to apply for care under the CYPAct. A key influence in the thesis has been prior research on victim- and child-centred responses that acknowledge abuse, oppression and unequal power relations within families and aim to empower the one victimized; responses that can be seen as in line with the critical realist acknowledgement that a normative stance in social work against oppressive mechanisms may be needed as well as being potentially emancipatory (Houston, 2001a; Andersen, 2007). Given this stance, I argue against the conception of social intervention as a top down exercise of normative power common in research of social constructionist approach, as this understanding may neglect potential conflicts of interest within families and disregard the agency of weaker members of family power structures. Prior research suggests that individuals – both adults and children – with a shortage of personal power may actively seek social support and state intervention to stop abuse, equalize injustices of power, retaliate and take control over their own lives (Gordon, 1988; Dalrymple, 2002; Neale, 2002; Finkelhor, 2005; Tucker, 2011).

The critical realist influence can be seen in my interest in areas such as the scope of applications under § 2 CYPAct on both a national and a municipal level as well as the re-occurrence of reports of abuse of adolescents who intermittently re-enter the child protection system. The critical realist influence can also be seen in my attempt to move beyond the understanding of social intervention as a top down exercise of normative power. Instead, I try to open up the ‘black box’ (Blom & Morén, 2010; Houston, 2010) of the social services use of the CYPAct and to investigate what characterizes the social services process when deviating from the family preservation perspective to reach a decision to apply for care under the CYPAct so as to keep victimized adolescents ‘out of the family’. In this, I focus on the potential influence of adolescents’ agency in the child protection process when it comes to the disclosure of abuse and its aftermath.

How the social services respond to abuse, adolescents’ victimization and the alleged abusers, and how they enable adolescents to participate in the child protection process may be influenced by multiple factors. Although the documents studied for the present thesis are judgments on applications for care under the CYPAct, I have not had a juridical perspective in the analysis. However, the legal framework has an obvious impact on the social services responses and some relevant themes relating to the legal context are explored in the following sections. Important to me for understanding the social services responses is research that acknowledges the strong contradictions between prevalent ideals of family preservation and children’s rights to be protected from abuse in the legislation and in practice (see for example, MacLeod &
Saraga, 1988; Gelles, 1996, 2000; Stanley & Goddard, 2002; Lindsey, 2004; Mudaly & Goddard, 2006). Also of great importance has been research exploring how the dynamic in investigations of abuse may affect the social services ability to see the abuse, investigate the need of protection and reach the adolescents (see for example Gelles, 1996, 2000; Stanley & Goddard, 2002; Bentovim, 2004; Mudaly & Goddard, 2006; Ferguson, 2009).

My interest in the alleged abusers and other family members’ possible resistance to state intervention and that the social services may lack power to intervene given contradictory ideals within the legislative framework, along with the abuse dynamic can be seen as reflecting a critical realist take on power. To focus on these potential hinders is important also to prevent the risk of ‘worker-blaming’ (Humphrey & Absler, 2011) when investigating the child protection process.

Victim and child-centred responses

How observers respond to abuse has been seen to have a great influence on the process of recovery for the one victimized, both in a short- and a long-term perspective. From a victim-centred perspective, it has been emphasized as important that professionals validate the abuse and the unequal power dynamics at play (Palmer et al., 1999; Herman, 2001, 2005; Leira, 2003; Bentovim, 2004). Also underlined is the value of emotional support and safe relations; making the abuser accountable for the harm inflicted, relieving victims of shame and addressing coping strategies and feelings (Mudaly & Goddard, 2006; Harper et al., 2008; Elvegård et al., 2011; Finn, 2011; Riebschleger et al., 2015). To help the one abused to see their active strategies of resistance so as to counteract potential feelings of powerlessness and blame in the victimization process has also been highlighted (Anderson, 2006; Anderson & Danis, 2006; Bonnah, 2016).

To misinterpret or disregard the context and consequences of abuse and the need for safety may, on the other hand, put the victim at risk of further harm and negatively impact their ability to recover and heal (Palmer et al., 1999; Bentovim, 2004; Straka & Montminy, 2008; Doyle, 2012), potentially resulting in severe and prolonged symptoms, re-traumatization and a perceived sense of betrayal also by the community alongside the fundamental betrayal by the abusers (Bryer et al., 1987; Herman, 2001, 2005; Mudaly & Goddard, 2006).

Relevant in relation to victim-centred responses is prior research suggesting that the child protection process is a potential means of opposing experiences of powerlessness and an important part of the healing process for victimized children (Schofield & Thoburn, 1996; Holland & Scourfield, 2004). Prior studies propose several potential health benefits to be had from children’s participation in social services investigations and interventions (Bell, 2002, 2011; Vis et al., 2011). The participation procedure itself may be therapeutic, participation may lead to better decisions and interventions, and it may
help to keep children safe by discovering and substantiating cases of abuse and neglect (Vis et al., 2011). The potential for the child protection process to be a part of the healing process for adolescents victimized by abuse should, however, be understood as connected to the way in which they are represented, engaged and offered choice by the professionals with whom they are in contact (Bell, 2002, 2011).

As stated in the introduction, there has been an increase in research stressing the importance of acknowledging adolescents’ agency when it comes to state intervention. Adolescents may have years of experiences of abuse as well as prior negative experiences of child protection interventions (Mudaly & Goddard, 2006; Brandon et al., 2008). Non-engagement of adolescents has been suggested as an active strategy to take control over the situation when having had previous experiences of lacking control (Gorin & Jobe, 2012). In cases where children have tried to disclose and reach out for help outside of the family but experienced inadequate interventions they may have lost hope of change and resist further interventions (Doyle, 2012). Difficulties in verbalising abuse experiences can also be understood in that adolescents may have developed the survival strategy of attributing blame to themselves (Bell, 2002; Tucker, 2011; Katz & Barnetz, 2014). From this field of research adolescents’ need of more autonomy and control over what happens to them following a disclosure of abuse and during investigations and interventions is highlighted (Sanders & Mace, 2006; Woolfson et al., 2010; Jobe & Gorin, 2013). Conditions such as not to be questioned when describing abuse experiences, along with confidentiality, trust, safety and continuity have been suggested as crucial for adolescents in relation to social interventions (Bhardwaj, 2001; Peled & Cohavi, 2009; Ungar et al., 2009; Cossar et al., 2011; Foster & Hagedorn, 2014).

From a protectionist stance (Lorraine & Harding, 1996; Littlechild, 2000) it has been argued that children, given their victimization as well as their subordinate position within the family and in society, may require special consideration and protection during the child protection process. Littlechild suggests that the social services use ‘projective identification’, that is, attempt to understand the abuse as well as the child protection process from the child’s position in order to obtain a better understanding of children’s fears, ambivalence or motivations in relation to participation (Littlechild, 1999). Cossar et al. (2011) saw in their study that the relationship between the child and the social worker was essential to how disparities between children’s and social worker views of risk and decisions on interventions were handled. For the social workers to shift towards the children’s view they needed to spend time coming to understand children’s priorities. For children to shift towards the professionals’ view there was also the need for an amount of time to have passed for children to be able to look back and recognise that in hindsight the professionals had been right to be concerned about them. In cases where a difference remained it was important that the difference was a topic for discussion, that the social worker should offer the child a clear explanation of their position
and that the child might need the help of an advocate to ensure the representation of their voice (Cossar et al., 2011).

Throughout the thesis, the research on victim- and child-centred responses has guided me in the interest to look at how the social services reach out to adolescents, how they understand the abuse, the power relations at play, and the enablers and hinders for adolescents’ participation as well as in the aftermath of abuse being disclosed to authorities.

The context surrounding interventions under CYPA

Sweden’s 290 municipalities are all autonomous and their social services differ to some extent regarding terms of organization and policies, but they all share the same legal framework. The social services have a responsibility to provide protection and assistance to children and adults who are victims of crime by relatives (Chapter 5, § 11 first paragraph, SSA). They also have a responsibility regarding all children in the community who are at risk of suffering harm (Chapter 5, § 1, SSA). As soon as a child’s situation is reported to the social services an immediate assessment of the child’s need of protection is supposed to be made (Chapter 11, § 1a SSA). In this assessment there is a valuation of whether the child needs to be protected through the SSA with the consent of the child and his/her parents or acutely and regardless of consent through § 6 CYPA. Through the CYPA the social services may be able to remove the child from home, investigate the child’s situation, regulate or stop the parent’s communication and visitation rights, and hide the address were the child is being placed (National Board of Health and Welfare, 1997:15).

No other authorities or individuals can apply for care under the CYPA than the social services, the prerequisite being substantial risk to the child’s health and development (§§ 1-3 CYPA) either because of the home environment (§ 2) or as a result of the adolescent’s own behaviour, such as substance abuse or criminality (§ 3). The social services shall make their own individual assessment of substantial risk to the child regardless of whether there is a parallel criminal investigation connected to the case (Government bill, 1989/90:28). If the social services finds that there is substantial risk of harm due to one or several of the factors listed in §§ 2-3 CYPA, this is brought to the attention of the Social Welfare Board — a politically appointed municipal authority — which decides whether to apply to the administrative court for a care order. The administrative court then makes a decision based on the social services investigation and the written opinions of the parents and the child or their legal representative. Most often, there is also a hearing where the parties may present their case.
Contradictions between prevalent ideals of family preservation and children’s rights

Social interventions in cases of abuse differ depending on positional stance and how abuse is understood (Riches, 1986; Cowan & Schwartz, 2004; Loeke et al., 2005; Gilbert, 2012). It is put forward that interventions targeting child abuse often are handled in the social services system with orientation to keeping the family intact (Gordon, 1988; MacLeod & Saraga, 1988; Finkelhor & Hashima, 2001; Smart, 2002). It is also suggested that interventions may neglect the power dynamics (Straka & Montminy, 2008; Messing, 2011) described as important to address when it comes to adult victims of abuse.

Prior research suggests that in child welfare systems more oriented to family service than child protection, such as the Swedish one, adolescents’ situation may be seen as a manifestation of dysfunctional family relationships sprung from structural factors such as social and economic exclusion or substance abuse that are possible to prevent and treat (Lindsey, 2004; Coccozza, 2007; Gilbert, 2012). From this stance the social services interventions should therefore focus on removing structural injustices and support parents rather than holding parents accountable for the harm inflicted (Swedish Government Official Report, 2001:72, 2009:68; Lindsey, 2004; Lundberg, 2005; Coccozza, 2007).

The legislation framing the SSA, which was introduced in the 1980s, reflects this understanding, promoting a family oriented practice based on neutrality, free will, participation and cooperation (Leviner & Lundström, 2017). However, in recent years there have been discussions and changes suggesting an increased child protection orientation in the legislation (Swedish Government Official Report, 2009:68; Lundström & Salhöäs, 2014; Leviner & Lundström, 2017). The understanding of children as subjects and bearers of their own rights seen in the paradigm of childhood sociology and stressed in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child is incorporated in the Swedish legal framework. It is emphasized that authorities are responsible for investigating and putting forward children’s own voice and opinion regarding their situation and the planned interventions. In recent years several changes have been made to the legal framework to increase children’s right to participate in investigations as well as further enable their access to interventions (Government bill, 2009/10:192, 2012/13:10). The need for the social services to be able to establish a safe relationship directly with the child instead of through the parents has been recognized, and it is also acknowledged that children may not want their parents to be informed about their contact with the social services until a plan of protection has been decided upon together with the authorities (Government bill, 2012/13:10).

Adolescents’ rights to autonomy and inclusion in the decision-making process can, however, be seen as clearly limited, given parental rights and state paternalism emphasizing adult assessments of children’s needs and stressing
children’s right to care and protection. Contrary to adults, children’s and adolescents’ victimization is under mandated reporting by authorities in contact with them and the social services have an obligation to initiate an investigation when there is information about a need of support or protection. They also have the right to intervene regardless of the adolescents’ opinion through the CYPAs.

There is no possibility for adolescents themselves to initiate an application for CYPAs although adolescents’ right to initiate legal processes have been discussed (Swedish Government Official Report, 1979:63, 1987:7; Mattsson, 2002). For coercive interventions under the CYPAs to be applicable, there are strict conditions that need to be fulfilled. There must be a palpable and serious risk for the child’s health following the situations exemplified in the §§ 2 or 3 CYPAs. Another necessary requisite is that voluntary actions in consent with the parents are considered as insufficient or not possible to perform. The general principles of the least interventionist order and that interventions should primarily be decided with parental consent are outspoken in the legislative framework, (Mattsson, 2002) and the principle that voluntariness is better than coercion in regard to social interventions is strongly accentuated (Leviner, 2017). Given this context, adolescents can be seen as having limited power over authorities’ decisions on when, how and whether to intervene following abuse and victimization.

Discussions on abuse and responses within the legal framework
The framework surrounding the SSA can be seen as a clear reaction against the historically strong discourse on society’s need of protection against juvenile delinquency (Lundström, 2017), while concepts regarding child abuse are less addressed. Hence, the neglect of the adolescent victim position in child protection as described in the introduction can be seen also in the legislative framework surrounding the SSA. The concept of child abuse and how to intervene in cases of strong conflicts of interest between parents and children is primarily elaborated upon in the legislative history of the CYPAs. Within this framework there is focus on the parents’ or guardian’s actions and shortcomings in relation to the child, such as physical abuse, psychological abuse, lack of proper care, undue exploitation and other negative conditions in the home. There is also an outspoken understanding of violence as a process that affects the relationship between the child and the parent within the CYPAs framework (Government bill, 2002/03:53).

According to the CYPAs, physical abuse means that the child is caused bodily harm, illness, pain or is reduced to helplessness, or some similar state, by some other person. This can mean being beaten with or without some form of implement, being pinched, kicked, roughed about, thrown, shaken, scratched, bitten, had their hair pulled, been stomped upon or had objects forced into their mouths. Every form of bodily punishment is counted as physical violence (Government bill, 2002/03:53).
Psychological abuse, on the other hand, is not so much about an individual event as about a relationship and an attitude that prevents the child from developing a positive self-image. This category includes systematic violations, threats, degradation, humiliation or terrorization along with unduly severe punishment, ridicule, taunts, disparagement, rejection, freezing out, unreasonable demands, forced isolation from social contacts and age-appropriate pursuits or constant refusal to hear the child’s points of view (Government bill, 1989/90:28). That a child is forced to witness violence in his or her closest environment or to live in an environment where violence or the threat of violence often occurs puts the child’s mental health at risk (Government bill, 2002/03:53). There is also an acknowledgement in the legislative framework of children’s risk of sexual abuse, genital mutilation and violence linked to honour, virginity and forced marriage (Government bill, 1989/90:28, 1998/99:70, 2002/03:53, 2013/14:208; National Board of Health and Welfare, 1997:15).

Important in relation to the topic of interest in the present thesis is that care under § 2 CYPAct has been suggested as a response more suitable than voluntary interventions through the SSA in cases of child abuse (Claezon, 1987). Also in the legislative history of the CYAct, it is stated that to intervene regardless of consent is particularly motivated in cases of child abuse, as well as in cases where the child is described as scared or if there are strong conflicts of interest between the parents and the child (Government bill, 1989/90:28, 2002/03:53; National Board of Health and Welfare, 1997:15). It is emphasized that already a minor degree of violence may pose a substantial risk to the child and if the violence is of a more serious nature, the starting point should always be to place the child in care outside of the home (Government bill, 1989/90:28).

However, the aforementioned principles, such as the least interventionist order, family preservation and reunification in cases where children have been placed in alternative care, can be seen as very strongly acknowledged in the framework surrounding both the SSA and the CYAct. From this standpoint, the compulsory interventions of interest in the present thesis may be seen as clear exceptions.

The dynamic in child abuse investigations

It is put forward that also the dynamic in the abuse investigation itself may affect authorities’ responses and add to the general difficulties to reach children and investigate and assess their needs. Previous research has highlighted the negotiating nature of child protection work with social workers at large dependent on the parent’s co-operation to gain access to the family (Ponner, 2007; Christiansen & Andersen, 2010; Östberg, 2010; Magnuson et al., 2012; Trotter, 2015). Social work practice rests to a high degree upon the ideology of the client being motivated to change and participate in interventions...
(Leviner, 2011). In cases of child abuse it has been found, however, that parents seldom themselves actively seek assistance or admit abuse when it is reported (Gelles, 1996, 2000; Annerbäck et al., 2007; Munro, 2008; Ferguson, 2009). Prior research on child abuse investigations in social work suggests that parents who actively harm their children may have strong incentives to hide the abuse and may lack motivation to recognize, talk about and change their behavior (Gelles, 1996, 2000; Munro, 1999, 2008; Stanley & Goddard, 2002; Bentovim, 2004; Brandon et al., 2008). Victimized children and non-abusing relatives may also be unable to talk about the abuse during the investigation. They may be actively hindered to participate by the abuser or there may be other contextual, emotional or cognitive barriers that deter them from disclosure or cause them to recant a previous statement (Ferguson, 2009; Svedin & Back, 2011; Jobe & Gorin, 2013; Bessant & Broadley, 2014; Howell et al., 2015). Given this dynamic, for the social services to determine whether abuse has occurred and who the likely perpetrator is will always be proven difficult (Stanley & Goddard, 2002; Kaldal, 2010), especially since the abuse often takes place in private and external evidence may be insufficient (Gelles, 1996, 2000; Munro, 2008; Ferguson, 2009).

It is not uncommon that abusers also actively hinder the investigation by exercising pressure, manipulation, threats or violence against the investigating social workers (Davidson-Arad et al., 2003; Littlechild, 2005, 2008; Fusco, 2013; Hunt et al., 2016; Littlechild et al., 2016). How abusers may direct the investigation and affect the social worker is given less attention, however, compared with how social workers influence parents (Goddard & Carew, 1993; Ponnert, 2007). The social services parent orientation and how the abuse dynamic may influence investigations and interventions are themes that will be further explored in the following chapter.

To conclude in regard to my approach

The response-based understanding of abuse has influenced me to focus on adolescents’ agency. The development within the field of intimate partner violence to see abuse as primarily either connected to conflict or to domination and control and to view these as potentially different phenomena has been important to me in the analysis of the characteristics of abuse seen in the studied data. Relevant in relation to this is a certain focus on honour-related violence and notions of virginity and marriage. In my understanding of adolescents’ position, the potential effects of victimization as well as the complex emotional bonds to other family members who may also be perpetrators are of importance. Further, the interest on enablers or hinders for them to seek and participate in social interventions can be seen as reflecting this approach. In the thesis, my child-centred critical realist position can be seen in my attempt
to investigate how adolescents’ ‘real’ agency can be seen as having consequences for authorities’ ‘real’ decisions on care under the CYPA. Hence, I try to go beyond a sole focus on narratives and discourses in the studied data by investigating the influence of adolescents’ agency in the child protection process when it comes to disclosing abuse to authorities. Also adolescents’ agency in the aftermath of abuse being disclosed to authorities is of interest, such as how they assess their situation and their statements about the need for interventions.

I try to go beyond a sole focus on narrative and discourse also with regard to social services responses. The critical realist influence can be seen in my interest in the scope of applications under § 2 CYPA as well as the occurrence of new reports of abuse seen for adolescents who re-enter the child protection system. It can also be seen in my attempt to move beyond the understanding of social intervention as a top down exercise of normative power. Instead, I try to investigate what characterizes the social services process when deviating from the family preservation perspective to reach a decision to apply for care under the CYPA and keep victimized adolescents ‘out of the family’. In this, I focus on the potential influence of adolescents’ agency in the child protection process. Further, my interest in the alleged abuser’s and other family members’ possible resistance to state intervention, and that the social services may lack power to intervene given contradictory ideals within the legislative framework, along with the abuse dynamic, can be seen as reflecting a critical realist take on power.
Prior research on child abuse, children’s agency and child protection with a focus on adolescents

In this chapter, an attempt is made to further explore and describe the themes previously outlined through an overview of prior research. The critical realist and child-centred position can be seen in the focus on prevalence and reporting, the context of abuse and the potential consequences for adolescents of victimization. Also explored are adolescents’ own perceived sense of risk and enablers and hindrances for children’s disclosure and participation in social services interventions. Prior research on social services responses and influential factors regarding their responses are presented as well.

Abuse and victimization in relation to adolescents

As described in the introduction, adolescents may be less likely to be seen by the authorities as at risk than younger children. This can be understood given an upheld assumption that adolescents may be more resilient to abuse than younger children. However, it has been suggested that experiences of maltreatment may accumulate over childhood and not decline with age (Radford et al., 2011). Furthermore, it has been shown that persistent abuse during a life span as well as experiences of maltreatment only during adolescence have stronger negative impact than maltreatment only during childhood (Thornberry et al., 2001; Ireland et al., 2002; Smith et al., 2005). Adolescents who experience abuse from a caregiver also face increased risk of being abused or victimized by others inside and outside of the family (Finkelhor et al., 2009; Rees et al., 2010; Radford et al., 2011; Gorin & Jobe, 2012).

Prior research on various forms of abuse and maltreatment during childhood and adolescence highlights the association of such experiences with adverse psychological, physical and social outcomes both in a short-term perspective as well as in adulthood. Consequences such as damaged attachment, self-concept and social competence, negative effects on education, employment and social relationships as well as mental and physical health have been suggested (Finkelhor, 1987; Briere & Elliott, 1994; Briere, 2002; Anda et al.,
Various forms of abuse and maltreatment experiences may also overlap and the consequences can be seen as more severe at higher levels of exposure (Finkelhor et al., 2009; Herrenkohl & Herrenkohl, 2009; Hultmann, 2015; Jernbro, 2015). Polyvictimized adolescents have been found to have the highest trauma related symptoms and levels of delinquency (Radford et al., 2011).

The impact of various forms of abuse may be externalized – as when the maltreatment affects the child’s behaviour and the child acts out – as well as internalized, when the maltreatment affects the child in such ways as becoming depressed, withdrawn or isolated (Elliott et al., 2005; Bentovim et al., 2009). Prior studies suggest associations between physical and sexual abuse and depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (Gilbert et al., 2009a). Self-harm and suicidal ideation have been suggested as significantly related to various forms of abuse perpetrated by a parent or guardian (Radford et al., 2011) as well as being linked to conflicts regarding arranged marriages (Bhui et al., 2007).

Gender differences in victimization have been suggested, with females generally reporting more abuse by adults in the family while males report more victimization outside the family (Radford et al., 2011). Girls are especially affected by violence driven by gender inequality, such as intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual assault, forced and early marriage, sex trafficking, female genital mutilation, and other harmful practices such as honour-related violence (Heise, 1998; Sen, 2005; Gill, 2014; Ellsberg et al., 2015; Garcia-Moreno et al., 2015). Honour-related violence and forced marriages are forms of abuse for which the risk increases during adolescence (Jensen et al., 2006; Hester et al., 2007).

Although psychological abuse can be seen as a less explored research topic (Gilbert et al., 2009a; Trickett et al., 2009), qualitative studies suggest that psychological abuse may be experienced as worse than physical violence by adolescents (Weinshall, 1997; Sedem, 2012; Jernbro, 2015). This has also been highlighted in research on adults subjected to intimate partner violence (Smith et al., 1995; Straus, 2005; Stark, 2007).

Mothers and fathers have been suggested as perpetrating abuse at almost equal levels (Annerbäck et al., 2010; Jansson et al., 2011; Radford et al., 2011; Nilsson et al., 2017) with the exceptions of sexual abuse and exposure to intimate partner violence, which is more often reported as perpetrated by fathers (Radford et al., 2011). In relation to exposure to intimate partner violence it has been suggested that the more severe the abuse and its consequences, the more likely it is that it will be gender asymmetrical (Johnson, 1995; Straus, 1999, 2005; Kimmel, 2002).

Prior research on child abuse has also shown that the perpetrator may change over time between father, mother and both parents (Sternberg et al., 2005). If both parents are perceived as abusive and less caring then there may
be higher risk of negative impact on functioning (Sunday et al., 2008). Families at high risk for maltreatment in adolescence are also suggested as more likely to contain step-parents (Garbarino, 1989). In cases of honour-related violence a clearly gendered pattern can be seen with the victims often female and perpetrators often the victim’s male blood relatives or in-laws. The collective aspect of abuse is suggested as apparent with several family members tacitly or explicitly involved in preserving or restoring family honour (Rexvid & Schlytter, 2012; Eisner & Ghuneim, 2013; Hague et al., 2013; Payton, 2014).

From a social network perspective it is important to note that prior research primarily focuses on individual children reported as victimized. Less is known about the risk of abuse, harm, agency and the need of interventions for siblings to victimized children (Wilson, 2004; Gilbert et al., 2009a; Åkerlund, 2017). It is suggested that a positive relationship with a sibling can have a protective effect (Caffaro, 2014) and that siblings can be seen as crucial allies and confidants as well as passive bystanders or themselves potential abusers (Anderson & Danis, 2006; Rexvid & Schlytter, 2012; Caffaro, 2014).

Swedish studies on prevalence

Since the ban on corporal punishment in 1979 there have been recurrent survey studies concerning physical violence, directed to adolescents and parents in Sweden. It is shown that exposure to what in the studies is defined as less severe physical violence has been reported for about 13-15 per cent of the adolescents in the surveys conducted during the 2000s. The surveys conducted in the 1990s showed exposure at about 30 per cent and in the 1980s at about 50 per cent (Gelles & Edfeldt, 1986; Swedish Government Official Report, 2001:18; Annerbäck et al., 2010; Jansson et al., 2011). Physical violence defined as repeated and severe – such as being scalded, burned, choked or beaten with some implement – has been reported for 3-4 per cent of adolescents in several studies conducted since the 1980s and has not been shown to decrease to the same extent as violence described as less severe (Annerbäck et al., 2010; Jansson et al., 2011).

Also adolescents’ exposure to intimate partner violence has been investigated and the relationship between experiencing violence against a parent and getting physically abused oneself has been shown to be strong. A study found that 10.8 per cent of the adolescents who participated reported witnessing intimate partner violence in the home and of those, 58 per cent reported that they themselves had been physically abused (Annerbäck et al., 2010). Other risk factors associated with physical violence include if the child has a disease or disability, insufficient social network, socio-economic factors or if the parent is foreign-born (Annerbäck et al., 2010; Jansson et al., 2011).
Two survey studies directed to adolescents have been conducted in the 2000s in order to identify exposure to honour-related violence or forced marriage (National Board of Health and Welfare, 2007; Schlytter et al., 2009). One of the studies showed that between 25 to 30 per cent of all the girls and nearly 25 per cent of all the boys reported physical or psychological abuse by parents or other close relatives since they began in high school (National Board of Health and Welfare, 2007). About 10 per cent of the children subjected to violence answered that it was because the parents felt they had in some way brought shame on the family. Of all the participating adolescents 5 per cent of the girls and 3 per cent of the boys answered that they were worried that their family would decide who they were to marry (National Board of Health and Welfare, 2007). The second survey found that 7 per cent of all the girls and 3 per cent of all the boys who answered the questionnaire had been subjected to psychological or physical violence in an honour-related context, as defined in the study (Schlytter et al., 2009). Of all the participating adolescents 13 per cent of the girls and 9 per cent of the boys answered that they were expected to follow the will of others regarding marriage (Schlytter et al., 2009).

Also experiences of sexual abuse among adolescents have been studied in the 2000s. One study showed that 13.5 per cent of the girls and 5.5 per cent of the boys reported that they had experienced penetrating sexual abuse as defined in the study. Of the adolescents who said that they had been abused 7.4 per cent were abused by a family member or other relative (Priebe & Svedin, 2009).

Studies on reported abuse and compulsory care

A lack of knowledge can be seen on the national level regarding how many children and adolescents exposed to various forms of abuse by parents or other caretakers that are reported, who reports their situation and how many of them that receive support, protection and rehabilitation from authorities following abuse. There are no national statistics on reports to the social services regarding various forms of child maltreatment. In the studies where reports have been mapped it is not always clear how many of them that concern abuse by parents or other relatives given broad concepts such as ‘child maltreatment’ and ‘children at risk’.

In a national study the estimated number of reports regarding children at risk during one year, 2010, were about 140,000 (National Board of Health and Welfare, 2012a). Of these reports, 52 per cent were estimated to be about circumstances in the child’s environment, 42 per cent about the child’s own behaviour and 6 per cent involved other circumstances. There were more reports concerning boys (58 per cent) than girls (42 per cent). Almost half of the reports concerned children aged 13-17 (National Board of Health and Welfare,
The 2010 reports led to an estimated 30,000 investigations. How many of those that resulted in some kind of intervention under the SSA or the CYPA was not studied (National Board of Health and Welfare, 2012a).

In line with the family orientation of the Swedish model, most children are placed in alternative care under the SSA, although an increase of interventions under the CYPA has been suggested in recent years (Leviner & Lundström, 2017). On November 1st, 2012, 15,300 children were placed in alternative care under SSA, 5,200 under CYPA (§§ 2 and/or 3) and 300 were in interim protection under § 6 CYPA (National Board of Health and Welfare, 2013). Of all the children aged 0-17 who began treatment under the CYPA in 2012, the home environment (§ 2) was the reason for 59 per cent. Their own behavior (§ 3), such as substance abuse or criminal acts, was the reason for 35 per cent and about 9 per cent were protected under both §§ 2 and 3 (National Board of Health and Welfare, 2013).

Unlike the social services, the police authorities have national statistics regarding reports of alleged child abuse. In 2011, a total of 19,100 cases of assault against children aged 0-17 were reported to the police (National Board of Health and Welfare, 2012b). Reported sexual offenses against children aged 0-17 in 2011 were 2,990 cases (National Board of Health and Welfare, 2012b). In cases concerning adolescents it is common that the alleged perpetrator is a peer or an acquaintance of the same age, while for younger children it is more common that the suspect is a related adult (Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, 2011; National Board of Health and Welfare, 2012b).

The police reports on alleged child abuse are said to have tripled over the past 30 years, although probably more because of a greater tendency to report abuse than an actual increase in abuse (Jansson et al., 2011). The same tendency has not been highlighted within the social services and abuse against children and adolescents is in general seen as a rare cause of reporting to the social services (Wiklund, 2006; Cocozza, 2007; Östberg, 2010). There are, however, more recent studies that suggest higher rates and that various forms of abuse against children can be seen as common in the social services reports of the studied municipalities (Leviner, 2011; Svendsen, 2016).

A relevant change in recent years is that since 2014, abuse of children reported to the social services shall always lead to a decision to initiate an investigation (National Board of Health and Welfare, 2014:4). Research performed before these reinforced regulations suggest that reported abuse often was investigated by the social services but that interventions did not always reach the children (Lindell, 2005; Cocozza, 2007; Östberg, 2010). As previously stated, the social services only very occasionally place a child in care outside of the home in cases of abuse has been reported (Kaldal et al., 2010; Leviner, 2011; Landberg & Svedin, 2013) and to apply for care under the CYPA in cases of abuse can be seen as rare. One study of social services investigations in cases involving alleged child abuse in two Swedish municipalities showed that the CYPA only was raised in 4 per cent of the cases (Leviner,
Another study on child abuse reported to the police in 12 municipalities showed that in the municipality with the highest rate the CYPA was raised in 6 per cent of the ongoing investigations of abuse (Kaldal et al., 2010).

In later years there have also been several Children’s Centres established across the country to increase the authorities’ ability to collaborate in investigations and interventions on child abuse. These centres have, however, been suggested as primarily to reach younger children and only to a low degree have contact with and interventions directed to adolescents (Åström & Rejmer, 2008; Kaldal et al., 2010) and seldom handle CYPA interventions (Kaldal et al., 2010). In recent years there has also been a development of different interventions targeting children’s experiences of sexual or physical abuse (Kjellgren et al., 2013; Svedin et al., 2015) as well as honour-related violence (County Administrative Board of Östergötland, 2011, 2017; National Board of Health and Welfare, 2014).

However, both international (DePanfilis & Zuravin, 2002; Lindsey, 2004; Munro, 2011) and Swedish studies (Lindell, 2005; Cocozza, 2007; Östberg, 2010) have highlighted the child welfare system’s emphasis on reporting and investigation, in contrast to developing specialized interventions, and seeing to it that they reach children and families. The aforementioned gap between abuse reported by children in large-scale questionnaire studies and abuse reported and responded to by authorities is clearly indicated in the Swedish context. One way of exploring this gap is to look into the potential barriers and enablers for adolescents to disclose abuse to authorities and to participate in interventions.

The context of disclosure

Disclosure of abuse is often described as an ongoing, complex and ambivalent process. Most studies on children’s disclosure address sexual abuse, while knowledge of children’s disclosure of other forms of victimization is more scarce (Ungar et al., 2009; Jobe & Gorin, 2013; Katz & Barnetz, 2014; Howell et al., 2015; Jembro, 2015).

The barriers against children’s intentional disclosure relate to different cognitive, emotional and contextual factors. These can be lack of hope and knowledge that the situation can be different, not comprehending the abuse as wrong or unjust, and fear of the abuser (Alaggia, 2004; Staller & Nelson-Gardell, 2005; Foster & Hagedorn, 2014; McElvaney et al., 2014). Furthermore, fear of not being believed and protected, and fear of the consequences of a disclosure both for themselves, for their relatives and for the abuser, especially if the abuser is a parent, may deter a disclosure (Jensen et al., 2005; Ungar et al., 2009; Radford et al., 2011; Schönbucher et al., 2014; Howell et al., 2015). Also traditional, cultural and religious norms concerning virginity,
chastity, family honour and fear of community ostracization have been suggested as barriers to disclosure (Paine & Hansen, 2002; Ullman, 2002; Gilligan & Akhtar, 2006; Fontes & Plummer, 2010; Katz, 2014). Children with disabilities have been suggested as having hinders to disclosure (Bell, 2011; Lindblad & Lainepo, 2011) and children’s fear of being met with prejudice or racism has also been suggested as a barrier (Mullender et al., 2002; Fontes & Plummer, 2010; Bell, 2011).

Prior research suggests that factors that make an active disclosure of abuse more likely may be that children know the abuse to be wrong, want the abuse to stop, and want to feel safe and to heal (Svedin & Back, 2011; Jobe & Gorin, 2013; McElvaney et al., 2014; Rush et al., 2014). Furthermore, fear of oneself becoming an abuser if staying silent has been suggested as a motivation to disclose (Softestad et al., 2013). When looking at children’s disclosure of abuse it is suggested that children may intentionally choose to disclose to someone that they perceive as capable of understanding their situation as well as of ending the abuse (Petronio et al., 1997). In addition, being prompted to tell by feelings or symptoms, anger at the perpetrator or having found someone to trust may enable a disclosure (Ullman, 2002; Mudaly & Goddard, 2006; Schaeffer et al., 2011; Foster & Hagedorn, 2014). Anger as an impetus to disclosure has been suggested as especially evident in adolescents (Sorensen & Snow, 1991; Paine & Hansen, 2002). A gendered pattern can also be seen, with girls being suggested to disclose abuse to a higher extent while boys might be less likely to disclose and ask for help (Banyard et al., 2004; Howell et al., 2015; Jembro, 2015).

Alongside the aforementioned assumption that adolescents may be more resilient to abuse there is also an upheld assumption that adolescents may be more able to disclose and leave an abusive situation than younger children. However, prior studies suggest that this may not be the case. Younger children have been suggested to disclose abuse more accidentally, while adolescents may have a greater understanding of the consequences of disclosing intra-familial abuse and thus may actively withhold information (Sorensen & Snow, 1991; London et al., 2005; Gorin & Jobe, 2012; Jobe & Gorin, 2013). Prior studies suggest that adolescents’ lack of trust in the confidentiality of authorities in relation to their families can be a barrier to disclosure of abuse to the social services as well as to other professionals (Weinshall, 1997; Paine & Hansen, 2002; Crisma et al, 2004; Ungar et al., 2009). This can be seen as especially accentuated in relation to adolescents victimized by abuse linked to honour and virginity where a contact with authorities being publicly known in itself may escalate the risk of violence (Bhardwaj, 2001; Mullender et al., 2002; Sedem, 2012).

That abused adolescents seldom formally disclose abuse can be seen in prior studies. A recent Swedish study on different forms of victimization such as physical, verbal or sexual violence, neglect and property crime showed that property crime was the victimization most frequently reported, while other
kinds of victimization to a higher degree were not reported (Cater et al., 2016). One questionnaire study on children reported as abused by parents or other caregivers showed that 11 per cent of the children answered that they had told a professional at school, the police or the social services about their abuse experiences (Jernbro, 2015). Another study showed that 7 per cent of the children had disclosed abuse to a professional (Annerbäck et al., 2010). In a questionnaire study on sexual abuse 9 per cent of the girls and 3 per cent of the boys stated that they had talked to a professional about the abuse. Adolescents who did not disclose to a higher extent described being abused by a family member (Priebe & Svedin, 2008). In a questionnaire study on honour-related violence, adolescents that described themselves as anxious in relation to marriage to a high degree answered that they wanted professional support, but many of them stated that they had not dared to tell anyone (National Board of Health and Welfare, 2007).

It is acknowledged that adolescents may use other conscious or unconscious strategies to cope with ongoing abuse or victimization than to verbally disclose to authorities (Mudaly & Goddard, 2006; Belknap et al., 2010; Gorin & Jobe, 2012). To cope through relationships outside of the home can be seen as essential and to disclose and talk about the abuse to a friend, boyfriend or girlfriend (Howell et al., 2015) as well as to siblings (Jernbro, 2015) has been suggested as more common than to disclose to authorities. Behavioural manifestations or avoidance strategies such as eating disorders, substance abuse, self-harm, sexual exploitation or running away from home have been described by adolescents as coping mechanisms to handle ongoing abuse and complex trauma (Briere & Elliott, 1994; Bhardwa, 2001; Peled & Cohavi, 2009; Cossar et al., 2011; Lawson & Quinn, 2013) as well as to means to get observers to notice their plight without having to verbally disclose themselves (Alaggia, 2004; Hunter, 2011). Also for young offenders to have experiences of victimization has been shown in prior studies, and experiences of sexual abuse have been seen as particularly prevalent for girls (Gilbert et al., 2009b). These findings can be seen as relevant to address in relation to prior research suggesting that adolescents externalizing the impact of abuse are less likely to be seen as at risk by authorities (Straus, 1988; Garbarino et al., 1997; Kelley et al., 1997; Tucker, 2011), and that externalizations or internalizations of the effect of victimization also may be overlooked by professionals in light of an understanding of conflict and turmoil as a normal part of adolescence (Garbarino, 1989).

Prior Swedish studies have also highlighted the occurrence of abuse experiences of adolescents placed in care following their own behaviour (Schlyter, 1999; Overlien, 2004; Andersson Vogel, 2012, 2017). Adolescents placed in national secure unit care, often based on a placement under § 3 CYPA, have been asked about their experiences of abuse in relation to the Adolescent Drug Abuse Diagnostic Interview, ADAD. In the latest yearly compilation of ADAD interviews, 47 per cent of the girls and 25 per cent of the boys stated
experiences of physical abuse by a parent or a caretaker at some time during their childhood. Psychological abuse was stated by 53 per cent of the girls and 25 per cent of the boys. Sexual abuse by someone that they were dependent upon was stated by 13 per cent of the girls and 1 per cent of the boys. Experiences of violence subjected to someone close to them were stated by 54 per cent of the girls and 31 per cent of the boys (Swedish National Board of Institutional Care, 2015).

When it comes to the aftermath of a disclosure, prior research on children subjected to sexual abuse suggests that self-perception, psychological adjustment, physical health, relationships as well as memory of abuse experiences may be affected by social reactions following a disclosure (Ullman, 2002). From a response based understanding of abuse with a focus on reactions from the social network such as family members as well as authorities, these findings can be seen as highly relevant. To disclose may be beneficial if positive reactions from others follow the disclosure, while the situation may be worse for those who tell others and receive negative reactions potentially leading to adverse outcomes such as increased risk of PTSD (Ullman, 2002). Qualitative studies on sexual abuse as well as children’s exposure to intimate partner violence and honour-related violence has suggested experiences of protection and efforts from family members, especially mothers and siblings, as crucial (Briere & Elliott, 1994; Petronio et al., 1997; Weinheil, 1997; Mullender et al., 2002; Lovett, 2004). On the other hand, when adolescents are met with disbelief or rejection by family members or denial from the alleged perpetrator following a disclosure, this can be experienced as severely distressing (Staller & Nelson-Gardell, 2005; Mossige et al., 2005; Mudaly & Goddard, 2006; Hunter, 2011). Negative reactions and pressure from relatives have also been associated with children recanting disclosures of intra-familial abuse (Summit, 1983; Sorensen & Snow, 1991; Bradley & Wood, 1996; Paine & Hansen, 2002; Katz, 2014).

In the next sections I will elaborate upon prior research on the organisation primarily responsible for children’s protection, the social services, and their responses to abuse, children’s disclosures and how children are enabled to participate.

Children’s participation in reports, assessments and interventions

As stated in the theory section, it has been emphasized as important from a victim-centred perspective that professionals validate abuse and victimization, enable emotional support, make the abuser accountable for the harm inflicted, relieve victims of shame and help them to see their active strategies of resistance. Further, the child protection process has been suggested as a potential
means of empowering children through participation and enabling them to heal from victimization. Children’s participation is promoted both within international and national legal frameworks. Nonetheless, children’s actual participation in social work practice has been suggested as low in both the international (Bell, 2002; Sanders & Mace, 2006; Woolfson et al., 2010; Bessant & Broadley, 2014) as well as in the Swedish research on interventions (Eriksson & Näsman, 2008; Eriksson, 2009; Röbäck & Höjer, 2009; Östberg, 2010; Münger, 2016). In a Swedish study of 220 cases of suspected child maltreatment, the majority of the children, 53 per cent, were never seen by the social worker, 36 per cent were seen together with the parent(s), and in only 5 per cent, children were seen individually (Cocozza et al., 2006). In 51 per cent of the cases the child was over 13 years old. These findings indicate that the parent oriented approach is prevalent also in cases where children, given their age, have an increased right to autonomy and participation. A study of Swedish social services investigations of child abuse revealed that it was unusual that the social services talked to the child without first talking to the legal guardian. Only in one of the 119 investigations did the social services talk with the child without first receiving parental consent (Leviner, 2011). Leviner suggests that this practice gives parents the opportunity to influence what children later will communicate to the social services.

There have been multiple attempts to look at factors related to the child, the parents and the type of maltreatment that the social services evaluate as potential risks and that may affect decisions on alternative care. Common risk factors may be severe prior maltreatment; lack of parental acknowledgement or cooperation; abuser proximity; younger children; parental mental disorder and/or substance abuse; young caregivers, and single parents (Hagell, 1998; Hindley et al., 2006; Munro, 2008; Bhatti-Sinclair & Sutcliffe, 2013). Although children’s own perception of risk and perceived sense of fear of their caretakers has been suggested as an important factor (Hagell, 1998; Mudaly & Goddard, 2006; Munro, 2008; Bell, 2011), this is seldom emphasized in risk assessments and decision-making on alternative placement (Goddard et al., 1999; Mudaly & Goddard, 2006; Arad-Davidzon & Benbenishty, 2008; Bessant & Broadley, 2014).

This can be contrasted with the common understanding within the field of intimate partner violence where the perception of risk by the one victimized is a paramount factor in structured risk assessments (Weisz et al., 2000; Campbell, 2004; Heckert & Gondolf, 2004). Women experiencing violence are suggested as able to assess risk in broader and more distinctive ways than can be captured in a structured risk assessment (Heckert & Gondolf, 2004) and are not likely to overestimate their risk; instead, it is more likely that they will underestimate the severity of the situation (Campbell, 2004). Prior research suggests similar findings for adolescents. Adolescents’ self-reports can reveal higher rates of abuse experiences than were previously known by social work-
ers (Everson et al., 2008) and adolescents report greater and more severe experiences (McGee et al., 1995). Prior studies also show that children’s own subjective definitions of experiences of victimization were better predictors of later consequences such as psychological adjustment (Everson et al., 2008) and behavioral problems (McGee et al., 1995) than were ratings from social workers, records, and parents.

In the following section, prior research on the influence of children’s statements of abuse and agency in the child protection process will be further explored.

The influence of children’s agency in the child protection process

Prior research suggests that how to value adolescents’ statements of abuse is a matter of much concern for social workers, especially when conflicting with parent’s statements or when the child is deemed as not credible (Munro, 1999, 2008; Sjöblom, 2006; Östberg, 2010; Goddard & Hunt, 2011; Tucker, 2011). Munro saw in her study of inquiry reports that children who said they were not abused and who corroborated their parents account of the situation often were believed while children who said they were abused and contested the social workers’ perception of the parents were not believed (Munro, 1999).

Leviner saw in her study that the child’s perspective seemed to be considered only when the child expressed not wanting further contact with the social services (2011). These results can be seen as mirroring Östbergs study, where the social services was suggested as having a problem with balancing the child's involvement in the investigation since it could interfere with the parents’ cooperation (Östberg, 2010). Also studies on family law proceedings of children exposed to intimate partner violence suggests a low degree of child participation. Children’s views – such as a child’s outspoken wish not to have contact with an abusive parent – were often invalidated by the social services or by the court (Eriksson & Näsman, 2008; Röbäck & Höjer, 2009; Sundhall, 2012; Forssell, 2016).

There are, however, findings to indicate that children’s opinion may have an influential effect on social worker decisions. Davidson-Arad et al., (2003) saw in their study that workers could adhere to children’s objections to remain at home as well as their objections to be removed from home also when this opposed the social worker’s own risk assessment. Workers were more inclined to implement decisions on removal when they met less opposition from parents or children (Davidson-Arad et al., 2003).

Studies that have looked at alternative care in cases of sexual abuse suggest that a decision to remove the child from the family into alternative care may
be a more common intervention in these cases than in other types of victimizations, ranging from 50 to 73 per cent (Hunter et al., 1990), 42 per cent (Pellegrin & Wagner, 1990), 40 per cent (Jaudes & Morris, 1990) and 17 per cent (Finkelhor, 1983). In light of a critique that authorities removed children too hastily following public pressure ‘to do something’ in these cases, Finkelhor looked at several factors and found that the most important predictor of whether a child was removed from home was if he or she had brought in the initial report of abuse. In these cases, 49 per cent were placed in alternative care. Finkelhor suggests that this finding points to the social services primarily responding to the wishes of the child when deciding on alternative care and that decisions in cases of child abuse may be less biased by other anticipated factors (Finkelhor, 1983). Similar findings were found in another study suggesting that an initial outcry by the victimized child could be seen as the strongest predicting factor, while other factors such as age, sex or the perpetrator’s access to the child appeared to have no effect on the decision of alternative placement (Jaudes & Morris, 1990).

In the Swedish context there is a lack of knowledge with regard to children’s own initiation of a report to the social services. In a study of one Swedish municipality, children’s own applications stood for 1 per cent of all reports and an investigation was started in 75 per cent of these applications (Coccozza et al., 2007). That it is rare that children reach out and themselves directly initiate a report to the social services is also indicated in other studies of reports on municipal level (Östberg, 2010; Münger, 2016). In cases of child abuse the agency of the child in the reporting of the abuse may be more pertinent, however. In a recent Swedish study on interventions in cases of physical abuse the report to the social services was made by the children themselves in 21 per cent of the studied cases (Svedin et al., 2015).

In the following section I will further explore research on the context of responses from the social services – at large responsible for adolescents victimization and safety – and investigate their readiness to see the abuse, reach victimized adolescents and to decide on care under the CYPA.

Other influential factors in social services responses to abuse

Child protection is a demanding task often characterized by uncertainty, both in terms of resources and ability to investigate the children’s situation, as well as the impact of interventions (Goddard et al., 1999; Munro, 2008, 2011; Östberg, 2010). Individual social workers have to balance the aforementioned tensions between parents’ rights, children’s rights and state intervention set against the private integrity of the family when deciding on interventions, of-
ten of an urgent nature (Ponnert, 2007; Munro, 2008, 2011; Tham, 2008; Cos-
sar et al., 2011; Leviner, 2011). Previous research shows that this challenging
work also often takes place in organizations characterized by high staff turn-
over with a large proportion of inexperienced social workers (Goddard et al.,
1999; Tham, 2008, 2014). The highly stressful and emotionally charged work-
load, as well as lack of power, resources and organisational support have been
suggested as potentially leading to burnout and secondary traumatic stress
(Munro, 2008; Jankoski, 2010; Handran, 2015; Dagan et al., 2016).

Relevant in relation to the cases studied for the present thesis is that there
may be a disinclination within the social services to working with coercive
actions under the CYPAs (Claezon, 1987; Ponnert, 2007, 2017). The criticism
of social control and compulsory interventions in social work may stem from
concern for the individualizing of structural injustices and from ideals con-
cerning individual autonomy and family preservation, as well as experiences
of social interventions being inadequate or harmful (Finkelhor & Hashima,
2001; Smart, 2002; Lindsey, 2004; Wexler, 2005; Gilbert et al., 2009b).

Prior Swedish studies refer to an ambiguity concerning interventions also resulting
from the limited power over their outcomes (Claezon, 1987; National Board
of Health and Welfare, 1995; Ponnert, 2007; Kaldal, 2010; Leviner, 2011). In
cases of coercive intervention under the CYPAs it is the administrative court
that decides on the application. Social workers describe the dilemma of either
acting too soon and risking having their applications turned down, then being
unable to reach the child through the parents, or waiting to act and risking the
child being more harmed (National Board of Health and Welfare, 1995).

That decisions on social interventions can be value-laden and biased by
personal attitudes and perceptions of alternative care, morals and family life
are suggested by prior research (Arad-Davidzon & Benbenishty, 2008). As
previously stated, the Swedish legislation as well as practice is clearly oriented
towards the parents. To form an alliance with the parents by avoiding blaming
and instead focusing on strengths are ideals promoted in several models within
the social services such as Children’s Needs in Focus (BBIC) and Signs of
Safety. That parents have a great impact on social worker decisions has been
seen in research from systems oriented both towards child protection and child
welfare (Brandon et al., 2008; Magnuson et al., 2012; Fusco, 2013; Trotter,
2015; Hunt et al., 2016). Relevant in relation to the parent orientation is that
social work practice can be seen as clearly situated in a gendered context with
a strong focus on mothers, while fathers tend to be more peripheral
(Lundström & Sallnäs, 2003; Ponnert, 2007; Christiansen & Anderssen, 2010;
Östberg, 2010; Andersson, 2013). Studies on social services interventions as
well as court cases concerning custody in situations of exposure to intimate
partner violence show that also in these cases there may be a lack of focus on
the abuse and on holding the abuser accountable. Instead, the focus may be
strong on the mothers’ own responsibility for protecting her children from
abuse (Eriksson & Hester, 2001; Eriksson & Näsman, 2008; Eriksson, 2009;
Hester, 2011; Münger, 2016). A similar criticism has been raised in the field of sexual abuse (MacLeod & Saraga, 1988; Smart, 2002). However, there is also research suggesting that maternal abuse often may be overlooked by the social services (Sunday et al., 2008).

Moreover, the notion of cultural relativism has been acknowledged, where child abuse can be overseen or handled more leniently when affecting children from certain social, cultural or ethnic minority groups (Buckley, 2000; Schlytter, 2004; Dingwall et al., 2014). On the other hand, criticism has been raised over children being too hastily removed in light of biased values on culture, ethnicity or poverty (Lindsey, 2004). A recent study of court cases on contact orders, relevant to this, showed that children of fathers with non-Nordic names had a decision for no contact at all with the alleged perpetrator to a larger extent than children of fathers with Nordic names (Bruno, 2015). The differing conceptualisations of the responses from authorities in the Swedish context also been emphasized in relation to adolescents subjected to honour-related violence and criticism has been raised both about inadequate protection (Schlytter, 2004) and about the children’s situation being overestimated and exaggerated by authorities (National Board of Health & Welfare, 2010).

Given the strong parent orientation of Swedish social work practice, research on how abusers may both influence children and non-abusing family members as well as individual social workers during investigations can be seen as highly relevant. In a recent survey on social worker experiences of intimidating parents and organizational responses conducted in the UK, half of the participants answered that they worked with intimidating parents at least once a week (Hunt et al., 2016; Littlechild et al., 2016), and many responded that they lacked organizational procedures and guidelines on how to deal with hostile parental behaviour. Of the respondents, 42 per cent said that they saw the lack of organizational support as constituting a risk for children’s right to protection. In the study, the authors argue that parental treatment of workers should be taken into account when considering alternative placement for the child (Hunt et al., 2016; Littlechild et al., 2016).

Prior research suggests that if the dynamics during investigations such as minimization, aggression, threats, fear, denial, guilt and ambivalence are not being secured for by the organization, it is almost impossible for an individual social worker not to be affected in some way (Valentine, 1994; Littlechild, 2005; Ferguson, 2009; Turney & Ruch, 2015; Hunt et al., 2016). There is then a high risk that the social worker is drawn into a hostage like situation and then consciously or unconsciously implements strategies such as identifying with the aggressive parent or downplaying the abuse (Stanley & Goddard, 1993, 2002; Goddard & Stanley, 1994). Supportive management and supervision have been emphasized as important to counterbalance the individual social worker’s stressful situation during investigations (Munro 2008, 2011; Ferguson, 2011; Turney & Ruch, 2015) as well as to implement trauma-informed casework practices (Handran, 2015).
Prior Swedish research also suggests several of the aforementioned factors as potentially influencing the individual social worker’s ability to investigate children’s situations (Claezon, 1987; Ponnert, 2007; Kaldal, 2010; Östberg, 2010; Leviher, 2011). The social services downplaying children’s need of protection following serious cases of threats against them from aggressive parents is described in an older study of cases under the CYP (National Board of Health and Welfare, 1995). Some of the interviewed social workers also described these cases as often leading to strong conflicts both within their own organisations as well as with other collaboration partners.

There is, however, limited acknowledgement within the legal framework and in policy descriptions of this potential dynamic in cases of abuse. Guidelines on when and how to handle deviation from the family oriented practice characterising CYP cases are also limited, both in the legislation and in relevant models for social services procedure such as BBIC (Ponnert, 2017). An earlier study of CYP interventions in two municipalities suggests that the ‘average social worker’ would within a six-year period be responsible for only one such investigation (Claezon, 1987). Although these figures are old, they indicate that the ability within the social services to gain experience and specialization in these complex investigations diverging from the norm that are focused on in the present thesis may be very limited indeed. Also more recent studies suggest restricted opportunities for social workers to gain experience of coercive interventions especially in cases of abuse (Kaldal et al., 2010; Leviher, 2011).

In this section, I have tried to address contextual factors that potentially may influence social services responses to abuse. In the following section, I will return to a victim- and child-centred perspective and try to address social interventions from that standpoint.

Children’s and adolescents’ experiences of help-seeking and social interventions

As previously mentioned, there is a lack of knowledge concerning adolescents’ experiences of CYP interventions in cases of abuse. Hence, in the following section, prior research on children’s and adolescents’ experiences of help-seeking and social interventions in a wider sample is elaborated upon. There has been an increase in research focusing on children’s and adolescents’ own experiences of help-seeking, disclosure of abuse to authorities, and social interventions. In a recent study by Cater et al. (2016) on different forms of victimization experienced by adolescents, a report to the social services could be seen as rare and only 22.4 per cent of the individuals that reported victimization to a professional stated that they had received support to deal with their experiences. Another Swedish study focusing on exposure to intimate partner
violence showed that over 60 per cent of the respondents felt that the problem continued although the situation was formally reported to authorities and 40 per cent perceived that the consequences of a formal report were not at all what they had hoped for (Howell et al., 2015).

Prior qualitative studies indicate that children and adolescents often suggested experiences in line with the aforementioned victim-centred responses. Positive experiences could be to have time to establish a trusted and continued relationship with a professional, to be believed, to be invited to participate or to gain access to counselling; also to be empowered in relation to parents or a decision made not to live with the family and to be provided safety could be described as important (Munro, 2001; Bell, 2002, 2011; Dalrymple, 2002; Mudaly & Goddard, 2006; Holland & O’Neill, 2006). Negative experiences could be inadequate or non-existent social support and that the social services as well as other professionals lacked motivation to act against the abuse (Weinehall, 1997; Sedem, 2012; Jobe & Gorin, 2013; Jernbro, 2015). Experiences of feeling questioned, disbelieved and rejected and that professionals ignored or minimized the abuse was described as negative. Also described as negative were experiences that professionals blamed them for the situation, or excused the parent’s abuse, or breached confidentiality and told parents or other professionals private information given by the children (Crisma et al., 2004; Mudaly & Goddard, 2006; Peled & Cohavi, 2009; Tucker, 2011; Andersson Vogel, 2017).

A lack of control of the process following a disclosure, with adolescents experiencing such consequences as legal action against the abuser and alternative placement as traumatic has also been suggested (Ungar et al., 2009), as well as having to talk about the abuse when wanting to distance themselves from the experiences (Sigad et al., 2015). Social interventions may be experienced as especially intrusive and out of the children’s control in cases where children to a low degree themselves initiated the report (Mudaly & Goddard, 2006; Rees et al., 2010; Woolfson et al., 2010; Cossar et al., 2011). Children could state that instead of creating safety the interventions could increase tension within the family and that abuse could escalate (Rees et al., 2010; Cossar et al., 2011; Jobe & Gorin, 2013).

Children could also state that they experienced interventions as effective in the long term, even though they may not initially have been perceived that way (Mudaly & Goddard, 2006; Woolfson et al., 2010; Cossar et al., 2011). In retrospect, children could express that what they said initially about wanting to have contact with the abuser or rejecting interventions such as legal actions or alternative care came out of conflicting feelings of guilt, loyalty, sadness and fear (Mudaly & Goddard, 2006), mirroring the complex emotional bonds previously described for victimized adults (Herman, 2001; Mullender et al., 2002; Anderson & Saunders, 2003; Stark, 2007; Enander & Holmberg, 2008).
It has also been suggested that some children may want adults to take the responsibility to intervene and end the abuse, and take away from them the weight of this decision (Mullender et al., 2002; Mudaly & Goddard, 2006).

Prior studies also suggest that a lack of trust in professionals and experiences of continued abuse after seeking help may lead to adolescents deciding to recant or be reticent about their situation (Rees et al., 2010; Jobe & Gorin, 2013). That adolescents might escalate the risk to themselves through self-harm (Rees et al., 2010; Jobe & Gorin, 2013) or by running away (Peled & Cohavi, 2009) have been suggested as active strategies to awaken concern and get further help from the authorities.

Criticism against the lack of focus on power dynamics

In this chapter, I have tried to put forward adolescents’ experience of abuse, known consequences of victimization and prevalence as seen in Swedish survey studies, as well as enablers and hinders to disclosure of abuse by adolescents and to participation in the child protection process. Drawing on this overview of prior research, the lack of acknowledgement of family power dynamics in cases of child abuse suggested in the theory section is indicated also in the Swedish social work context.

When it comes to adults victimized by abuse, effective programs and policies are emphasized as dependent on having a clear understanding of the nature of women's and men's experiences of abuse, the underlying causes of the problem, and the consequences of the abuse for those affected. Interventions are suggested to be handled to a high degree with a clear focus on the power dynamics in the relationship (Ansara & Hindin, 2010; Messing, 2011). Interventions directed to adults primarily aim to provide safety, support and empowerment of the one victimized and to cease the abuse, where for the abusers to be held responsible for their violence is an integral part of the interventions (Kelly & Johnson, 2008). Relevant findings from within this field are that there is limited evidence of effective interventions directed to abusers and that for interventions to be relevant it is essential that the abuser acknowledges the abuse and is motivated to change (Kelly & Johnson, 2008). It is also put forward as important that the distinctions between abuse connected to conflict or connected to control are assessed when deciding on an intervention (Stark, 2007; Kelly & Johnson, 2008; Ansara & Hindin, 2010). Family oriented interventions such as joint counselling and family mediation have been criticized since women subjected to violence may be unable to speak in their own interests out of fear and intimidation (Kelly & Johnson, 2008). In cases of coercive controlling violence these interventions may not only be inadequate but also dangerous, given the risk of increased violence and retaliation from the perpetrator after disclosure of the abuse (Johnson & Leone, 2005).
In line with the emphasis on acknowledging unequal power relations within the field of intimate partner violence, criticism has also been raised against the somewhat broad conceptualisations of children’s situations within child protection. The blurring of the etiology of abuse and neglect has been suggested as potentially leading to an inability to deal effectively with either, leaving children subjected to intentional criminal abuse unprotected (Lindsey, 2004).

Also the upheld notion of family preservation and the social services main concern of establishing alliances with the parents has been questioned in cases of child abuse (MacLeod & Saraga, 1988; Gelles, 1996, 2000; Stanley & Goddard, 2002; Lindsey, 2004; Mudaly & Goddard, 2006). It is suggested that abused children’s need for safety and protection may be underestimated and that the parent’s ability or motivation to change may be overestimated (Lindsey, 2004; Gardner, 2008; Munro, 2008, 2011; DSCF, 2009; Dingwall et al., 2014).

Furthermore, the notion of family preservation has been criticized in relation to adolescents in conflict with or lacking support from their parents (Sjöblom, 2002; Rees et al., 2010; Gorin & Jobe, 2012) as well as in cases concerning honour-related violence (Fielding, 2001; Schlytter, 2004; Jensen et al., 2006; Danna & Cavenagh, 2011). In cases where children lack support from their family it has been emphasized that child protection agencies could work more directly with adolescents towards independence and empowerment rather than through the parents (Gorin & Jobe, 2012).

Relevant in relation to the criticism of family preservation and parent oriented interventions is prior research emphasizing that all-encompassing conceptions of compulsory social interventions for children such as ‘deviations’, ‘failures’ or ‘the last resort’ can be seen as misleading and inadequate (Packman, 1986; Claezon, 1987). Instead, the focus should be on how to prevent unnecessary interventions and to specify in which situations compulsory care may be beneficial and why (Packman, 1986; Claezon, 1987). It has also been acknowledged that from a child-centred perspective care under the CYPAct may enable more safety and continuity than interventions through the SSA (Leviner, 2017).

The contribution of this thesis in light of previous research

In the Swedish context in recent years there has been a steady development both in research and in practice when it comes to the field of children’s exposure to intimate partner violence. Children as the primary victim of parents’ abuse has been much less addressed, however (National Board of Health and Welfare, 2012b; Svedin et al., 2015; Forssell, 2016; Mattsson, 2017).
The different typologies on violence as primarily connected to domination or to conflict found within the field of intimate partner violence have been highlighted as important to acknowledge also in the understanding of children’s experiences (Överlien, 2013; Cater & Sjögren, 2016; Forssell, 2016) as well as in cases of child custody (Kelly & Johnson, 2008). However, this discussion of distinctions is still uncommon, especially on the policy level (Forssell, 2016), and when it comes to children as the primary victims of abuse, discussions of abuse as primarily connected to domination or to conflict is even more uncommon. On the contrary, as seen in this overview of prior research, different potential harms against children are often merged together on the social work policy level, although the development of different interventions targeting children experiencing honour-related violence and also physical and sexual abuse may be seen as exceptions both in research and in practice in recent years.

This chapter has shown that disclosure of intra-familial abuse as a complex process for children and adolescents has been extensively researched, especially regarding sexual abuse. However, there has been much less focus within prior research on abuse disclosed to authorities, and on adolescents’ as well as their social networks’ agency preceding and following intentional or unintentional disclosures. Research on social services responses presented in this chapter suggests several hinders from a victim- and child-centred perspective when it comes to how children and adolescents are enabled to participate and how their disclosures of abuse are valued.

As stated in the introduction, a clear objective of the present thesis is to address both the field of child abuse and the field of child protection with a focus on adolescents’ agency. To gain more knowledge of conceptualisations of abuse and adolescents’ agency in disclosing, defining and assessing abuse and the need for social interventions are important both in the Swedish and in an international perspective. The investigation of CYPA cases may unearth new knowledge of how adolescents describe experiences of abuse and victimization, of different conceptualisations of abuse, of the process of disclosing abuse to authorities and of their experiences of leaving violent parents, research areas that appear to be relatively unexplored. It may also give new insights into the aftermath of abuse being disclosed to authorities and the responses of family members, areas that also have been less addressed in prior research. Moreover, it may give an added understanding as to what factors and situations lead to deviations from the family oriented approach characterizing the Swedish child welfare model, especially regarding adolescents’ agency in the matters of disclosure and participation in social interventions. Finally, more knowledge on the context of social services responses may also be found concerning hinders and enablers for them to reach victimized adolescents.
Methods

The thesis contains four papers that in different ways investigate and discuss conceptualisations of abuse, adolescents’ agency regarding abuse, victimization and social interventions, as well as how abuse and victimization of adolescents are responded to, primarily by the social services. In all the papers this is done through documents analysis.

The study of documents

To look at documents raises several ontological and epistemological issues. An important common factor is that the material is not created for research purposes (Scott, 1990; Prior, 2003, 2008; Silverman, 2005; Lundström, 2008; Bowen, 2009). Hence, the context surrounding the documents are important to address, such as: Who is behind the information described in the documents? In what context were they constructed? What is the aim and who the intended recipient? (Holme & Solvang, 1997; Mik-Meyer, 2005; Lundström, 2008).

Documents can be used as research objects in themselves, often exploring discourses and narratives evident within them (Prior, 2003, 2008; Ponnert, 2007; Hennum, 2011, 2014; Sundhall, 2012), or they are useful as sources of information about certain phenomena (Scott, 1990). The use of documents as a source of information has been debated within the social sciences (Sundell & Egelund, 2001; Vinnerljung et al., 2001; Billquist & Johnsson, 2007; Lundström, 2008). Prior studies, primarily based on social services case files, suggest that there may be an extensive lack of relevant data (Billquist & Johnsson, 2007). The social services case files are also seen as social constructions affected by the investigating social workers’ as well as other professionals’ own values and assumptions, while the clients’ participation and voice may be less apparent (Hennum, 2014; Ponnert, 2017).

However, when the purpose of the research is to understand how maltreatment is addressed in the child welfare system, the use of documents similar to those explored in the present thesis may be appropriate, since they often include the authorities’ own conceptualizations of the alleged maltreatment as well as their responses and interventions (Dubowitz et al., 2005). Nonetheless, it is important to recognize that decisions in the documents studied may be based on data other than those found in the records (Dubowitz et al., 2005).
The representation of different sources such as other professionals, children, parents and other informants may also be incomplete, and statements on the abuse, its context and its consequences may be contradictory (McGee et al., 1995; Everson et al., 2008; Sunday et al., 2008; Gilbert et al., 2009a; Trickett et al., 2009).

My approach to the documents

The documents studied for the thesis are judgments on applications for care under the CYPA as well as documents included in a selection of the classified case files at the administrative court. In line with the critical realist approach I see the documents as a valuable source of knowledge on my topics of interest, such as the extent of adolescents protected through a CYPA application during the years studied; characteristics of the abuse; children’s agency, participation and argumentation; the dynamic in the child protection process, and how abuse is responded to. In this approach I am guided by Olsen’s and Morgan’s (2005) pragmatic manner of seeing data as ‘ficts’ that can enable meaningful and potentially ‘true enough’ representations of reality rather than concretely true social ‘facts’. I have also investigated adolescents’ as well as family members’ and professionals’ statements on abuse, victimization, and social intervention. However, bringing forward adolescents’ statements should not be understood as an attempt to adopt a traditional standpoint approach often used in childhood studies (Mason & Falloon, 2001; Mullender et al., 2002; Mudaly & Goddard, 2006) and in feminist theory (Smith, 1988, 1990; Harding, 1991, 2004), with a claim to speaking for children or trying to reach their actual experiences.

I see the descriptions of adolescents’ statements in the judgments, the social services investigations and in other documents within the case files as contextually produced and co-constructed between the children and the other actors in the given context. In line with this, I see the adolescents’ statements as well as those of family members and professionals as meaningful and argumentative statements in relation to their perspective on abuse, victimization and the child protection process. Furthermore, I have paid special attention to changes in the statements of the actors involved during the child protection process, since I see these changes as meaningful in light of the aftermath of the disclosure to the authorities.

Sample and data

The thesis builds upon two different data sets, collected on two different occasions and with different samples and research questions under investigation. The documents and their context can be seen as similar, however. In Paper I, the data set collected was of a sample including judgments on applications for
care under the CYPA (§ 2 and §§ 2 and 3) for adolescent girls, aged 13-17, made during one year at one administrative court. In this paper there is special focus on honour-related violence and the interest was in attempting to categorize this kind of abuse and compare conditions described for this category to that of other adolescent girls for whom applications for CYPA § 2 or §§ 2 and 3 were made. A decision was then taken to expand the aim and widen the abuse focus and to look at different aspects of abuse and social service responses for all adolescents protected by the Swedish social services through an application for care under § 2 CYPA during one year, seen in Papers II-IV. These papers build upon a data set including both boys and girls, aged 13-17. However, only judgments concerning § 2 were collected and judgments on CYPA §§ 2 and 3 were not included. Hence, the sample investigated in these papers enabled a wider focus on descriptions of abuse and social service responses, while the focus on adolescents’ own behaviour was excluded. The age limit in both data sets was 13-17.

Paper I

All the administrative court cases in Stockholm County in 2006 concerning girls, aged 13-17, for whom the Social Welfare Board decided to apply for care under § 2 CYPA (19 cases) and §§ 2 and 3 CYPA (18 cases) were collected. The 37 judgments analysed were each 11 pages on average. If the judgment in the administrative court was taken to a court of appeal, this later judgment was also collected. The judgments are public documents and were collected manually with assistance from the administrative court in Stockholm. In the 13 cases involving honour-related criteria as defined in the study the social services investigation was also collected. The investigations vary in length, some were about 20 pages long and others were fewer than 10 pages with the average length 13 pages. I studied the social services investigations and the other documents included in the case files at the administrative court after an application to review the classified files.

Papers II, III and IV

The data set studied for these papers were judgments from a whole year, 2009, from all the 12 administrative courts, enabling a total study of situations described for all adolescents for whom an application for care under § 2 CYPA was made. Excel files on all case numbers on judgments concerning social services applications for care under the CYPA in 2009 were requested from the 12 administrative courts. At the smaller administrative courts I requested all the CYPA judgments in pdf format and manually reviewed them myself, selecting those that concerned an application of § 2 CYPA for children aged 13-17. The judgments are public documents, which are possible to access electronically. At the larger administrative courts this process was done with the
assistance of the administrative courts who helped me to electronically select the judgments concerning children, aged 13-17, and I manually reviewed and collected the pdf files concerning § 2 CYPA. I manually reviewed around 1000 pdf files on judgments concerning CYPA for various ages and on various grounds. The collection process may well have led to some judgments being missed, especially in the cases where a part of the selection was made electronically through the data system at the administrative courts. Due to a reorganization of the administrative courts there was also a known loss at one of the courts, estimated at about five judgments concerning the selected ages and § 2 CYPA. Since these judgments were archived and not possible to access electronically, a decision was made not to collect them.

Finally, altogether 171 judgments concerning an application for care under § 2 CYPA for adolescents, aged 13-17, were collected. In 29 of the 171 judgments the application was for more than one child (siblings) and the number of children, aged 13-17, protected through an application under the studied year was 196. In a sample of judgments, I also studied all the documents included in the case files at the administrative court after an application to review the classified files.

The documents studied

The judgments display a summary of each child’s situation on the basis of the documents considered by the court, such as the social services memo regarding § 6 CYPA, the investigation and treatment plan, the individual parties’ opinions, and documents from other authorities and witnesses. In the judgments there is also a summary of the hearing before the court and the court's reasoning regarding its decision.

The descriptions presented in the judgments build upon rewritten descriptions from various informants. As previously mentioned, the legal framework surrounding the SSA and the CYPA underlines the substantial risk to the child that different forms of abuse may pose. In addition, the responsibility of the authorities to investigate and put forward the children’s own voice and opinion regarding their situation and the planned interventions is emphasized. There is an explicit requirement that this be done either by the children themselves, if over 15 years old, or by their legal representative if under that age (Government bill, 1989/90:28, 2002/03:53, 2012/13:10; National Board of Health and Welfare, 1997:15). The children’s statements are given by them in person at the court hearing or by their legal representative if the child is not present at court or is under 15. The statements are written down and presented in third person in the judgment. The social services, the parents and the children or their legal representative are also given an opportunity to present their opinions about the investigation, the current situation and the application for care under the CYPA on at least two separate occasions, during the social services investigation and at the court hearing.
In a selection of cases, also the documents included in the classified case files at the administrative court such as police reports, medical reports and the social services investigations were investigated at the courts.

**Analysing the data**

The basic analytic strategy in all papers was directed content analysis where the collection, reading, coding and categorization of the data were guided by prior research and defining concepts, thus making it more theory driven than inductive (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Braun & Clarke, 2006). The documents were reread multiple times during the collection process as well as throughout the coding and analysing processes and the order of the papers can be seen as mirroring these processes. The analyses, which have evolved throughout the research project, are presented both through quantified measures and through descriptions of themes, as well as citations from the judgments. The focus in Paper I was to categorize honour-related violence as described for adolescent girls. The 37 judgments were read and reread, guided by prior research on honour-related violence. The coding in this data set was done manually and focused on descriptions and examples within the judgments of coercive control, intimidation and/or punishment connected to association with males, virginity, marriage, honour and shame. Following the categorization, a comparative approach was used to bring out similarities as well as differences between the categories regarding descriptions of parental behaviour, abuse and social services protection. The analysis showed control, domination, instrumentality and fear in the dynamic described for the girls in the honour-related category, with the common factor of the social services having had restricted access to the girls' situation until the risk had escalated to the point where the girls reached out and themselves disclosed their situation. These findings evoked an interest in the different phenomena of abuse and neglect and the importance of the adolescents' agency for the disclosure of abuse in relation to social intervention.

A decision was made to further investigate the prevalence and characteristics of abuse and social intervention described in all applications on §2 CYP Act during one year. This further categorization and analysis of abuse was guided by prior research on the different typologies of violence (as connected to domination and control or to conflict) along with a broad analysis of abuse and disclosure from a child-centred position.

The 171 selected judgments were read and reread multiple times. An enquiry form was created with around 40 categories on factors such as age, sex, sentencing, statements from the informants and conditions and context regarding the abuse and other factors relating to the decision to apply for care. All of the judgments were reread and an individual enquiry form was created for
each of the 196 children where data on each of the categories were summarized and recorded if prevalent. For the 137 children for whom the abuse was described in the judgment, a copy of the judgment was also entered into NVivo 10 and more thoroughly coded, guided by prior research. Excerpts from the investigated case files were also entered into NVivo. There were several advantages to working with the data set using NVivo. Although each judgment was read and coded multiple times, NVivo also enabled quick text searches throughout the entire data set of themes developing during the analysis process and through the reading of prior research, which could be dismissed or further investigated. The possibility of going back and forth and investigating new themes in a very large data set through NVivo was a great asset. This would have been very time consuming if done manually. The anonymized enquiry forms as well as codes through NVivo were used to enter relevant variables into SPSS 21. In the data set of the 137 adolescents for whom abuse was described, a total of around 60 variables on factors relating to the children and the parents, the abuse, disclosure and interventions were coded and entered into SPSS. Throughout the coding process using NVivo new themes were found and then investigated in the entire dataset, then coded and entered into SPSS.

Contextual factors explored in the documents studied were descriptions of the abuser; their relationship to the adolescents; motivation; power relationship; gender, and notions of honour, shame, marriage and virginity. Also where the abuse took place, e.g., whether it was hidden from outsiders, and examples of coercive control tactics such as threats or isolating the victim from family, friends and professionals were of interest. Considering the responses from the adolescents' social networks there was a focus on their agency preceding the disclosure as well as descriptions of abuse against other family members. The aftermath of the disclosure to authorities was also in focus, such as recognition or denial of the abuse, re-assault, pressure, blame or support from the social network and experiences of fear, anger, guilt and ambivalence described by/for the adolescents.

In Paper II the analysis of the abuse was built upon the applications for the 123 children who were granted care by the court. The analyses were both quantitative and qualitative and were guided by prior research and theory on abuse, with focus on context, abusing and non-abusing parents, gender and the occurrence of power, control, intimidation and fear in the child.

In Paper III, the analysis primarily builds upon the descriptions in the judgments of children's own statements during the social services investigation and at court for the 137 children for whom abuse was described. The thematic coding using NVivo was guided by prior research on barriers and enablers regarding children's disclosure of abuse and the emotional and cognitive processes preceding and following a physical breakup from an abusive relationship.
In Paper IV the 137 judgments were coded using NVivo and the analysis was guided by prior research and defining concepts of abuse, participation and social services responses to abuse. For a more thorough description of the coding and analysis of the documents, I refer to the respective papers.

**Strengths, limitations and ethical reflections**

As stated in the introduction, it is important to gain more information about the situation of adolescents protected through the CYPA along with the social services processes leading up to this decision. The choice to look at the social services use of § 2 CYPA for adolescents in all of Sweden during a whole year can be seen as a way of preventing potential local variations between municipal applications.

The choice to look at judgments on applications under § 2 CYPA – being as previously described clear exceptions in a family oriented social work practice – can be seen as purposeful extreme case sampling (Patton, 1990; Coyne, 1997). As previously mentioned, abuse reported to authorities may unravel different characteristics of the abuse dynamic (Dubowitz et al., 2005; Loseke, 2005) and cannot be generalized to all victimized adolescents. Research samples that rely on descriptions of child abuse reported to the social services may reflect more severe forms, since less severe experiences are not as likely to be reported, investigated, or substantiated (Dubowitz et al., 2005; Loseke, 2005). The same has been suggested for research samples that rely on descriptions of abuse reported to authorities or NGOs for adult women subjected to intimate partner violence. In these kinds of research samples the agency and help-seeking from the one victimized are often apparent (Johnson & Leone, 2005). Furthermore, factors such as power, control, gender, systematic and collaborative forms of violence and perceived fear and ambivalence in the victim are seen as relevant and prevalent in the abuse dynamic (Johnson, 1995; Straus, 1999; Loseke, 2005; Stark, 2007; Kelly & Johnson, 2008). Other research samples may give different descriptions of the abuse dynamic, such as less apparent power imbalance and emotional consequences (Johnson, 1995; Straus, 1999; Kimmel, 2002; Stark, 2007; Kelly & Johnson, 2008).

In the documents studied for the present thesis not only abuse is reported to the authorities, but also it is cases leading to the unusual decision to apply for alternative care through the CYPA, potentially uncovering characteristics relating to the abuse, the agency of adolescents, characteristics of alleged abusers and the aftermath of the disclosure in social interventions. Hence, the studied data may primarily uncover findings relevant to the minority of adolescents who are protected through this intervention and say less about the situation of adolescents protected through the SSA or who are not known to the social services.
The bias within the data sources – judgments and case files of CYPAR applications – is important to acknowledge, given the aforementioned limits on the generalizability of the findings. However, in the approach of looking at extreme cases (Patton, 1990; Coyne, 1997), these are seen as potentially describing unusual conditions or extreme outcomes that can be relevant also for the understanding of more typical cases (Patton, 1990). In line with this, I see the themes investigated in the judgments, such as the characteristics of the abuse and enablers and hinders for disclosure and social intervention, as relevant also when looking at abuse and social interventions in a wider context.

The analysis can always be seen as narrowed from interpretations of the data. The choice in the dissertation to have a theory driven approach and to categorize the descriptions of abuse and social interventions in the entire data set and present it through quantified measures leads to loss of depth and complexity. There are several other limitations relative to the documents that need to be addressed. I see the facts and analyses in the judgments as present since the different actors have had the ability and the interest to state them. The social services argue in court for the child to be protected under the CYPAR and the circumstances described are presented by them in hindsight after landing in a decision to apply for care. Factors that may be working on a more structural or unaware level may not be as clearly articulated. There is a lack of description in some of the judgments regarding some of the investigated themes, such as prior interventions, whether the abuse was reported and investigated by the police, as well as factors relating to the parents and other informants. In the Paper I study consisting of a smaller sample a decision was made not to include the girls’ or the parents’ place of birth. In the second study with a larger sample, however, background factors related to the adolescents and the parents such as socio-economic situation, education and place of birth were of interest, but since there was a lack of information on these factors they were not included in the analysis.

In Paper II the quantitative descriptions of the characteristics of abuse build upon the applications that were granted by the administrative courts to enable a more thorough coding of the abuse dynamic. This was done in light of the less well described circumstances surrounding the violence in the rejected judgments. However, in Papers I, III and IV, both approved and rejected applications were included, since circumstances often apparent in the rejected applications such as reticent adolescents or retractions of statements of abuse in the process leading up to the application of the CYPAR could be seen as highly relevant topics.

Noteworthy is that unlike prior research on the social services case files (Billquist & Johnsson, 2007; Hennum, 2014) the children’s own descriptions of their situation were very prominent in most of the judgments. This may be understood in light of the context of the documents with the strong requirement to put forward the adolescents’ own voice and opinion in the CYPAR process. Notable in relation to prior research suggesting that children’s statements
emerge in a context where professionals control conversations made with children (Hennun, 2014) is that the adolescents to a high degree had a ‘harder’ argumentation against the parents than the social services and other professionals. Several of the adolescents also argued in court that the social services as well as other professionals’ prior interventions had been inadequate, suggesting that the CYPA process enabled statements from children that were potentially less controlled by both parents and professionals.

Throughout the collection of the data and the presentation of the analysis there have been different ethical considerations. Both studies presented in the papers were approved by the Ethical Review Board in Stockholm. When investigating the classified case files at the administrative court, this was done following an application and with only anonymized information being recorded. Efforts have been made throughout to anonymize the descriptions presented to limit possible harm.
Summary of papers

Paper I: Girls with honour-related problems in a comparative perspective

The paper draws on previous research suggesting a lack of knowledge of honour-related violence within the social services as well as inadequacies in approaches and methods in relation to adolescents at risk of honour-related violence.

Aims

The aim of the article was to learn to perceive indicators of honour-related experiences and to compare girls considered for care under § 2 or §§ 2 and 3 CYPA who met the honour-related criteria with girls who did not, regarding characteristics of their situation as well as social services responses.

Findings

All the administrative court cases in 2006 in Stockholm County were collected concerning girls, aged 13-17, for whom the Social Welfare Board decided to apply for care under § 2 or §§ 2 and 3 CYPA. In total, 37 girls were considered for care, 19 cases concerned § 2 CYPA and 18 cases §§ 2 and 3 CYPA. For 13 of the 37 girls considered for care the characteristics presented in the written documents met at least four of the six criteria set up in the study for honour-related experiences. For the other 24 girls, the situation described did not meet the criteria.

The main difference between the two groups was that of the collective and invasive upbringing within the honour-related category contra the absent or insufficient parenting described within the other category. The behaviour of the parents in the honour-related category was described as authoritarian and controlling, with systematic physical and/or emotional abuse upheld in a collective manner. Emotional abuse was described for all of the 13 girls and physical abuse for 11 of the girls. The girls were in several of the cases described as abused both by their father, mother and brothers. The physical abuse was in many cases described as having been exerted since childhood but was diminished somewhat and replaced with emotional abuse during adolescence.
The more severe and systematic forms of physical abuse were more often described as perpetrated by fathers and brothers. The fathers' violence was also primarily described as exerted as a punishment for transgressions of the honour rules, while the mothers' abuse was of a more common occurrence and described as a means to force the girls to comply with the rules. In all cases the mothers played a very active role in the control of the girls and in none of the cases were they described as a source of support or as an ally. In four of the cases in this category also the mother was described as subjected to violence. Some of the girls were described as burdened with the feeling that they had to protect their mother and siblings against the father. The emotional abuse was systematically exerted and upheld in a collective matter. Threats could involve being sent abroad, being forced into marriage, female genital mutilation and death threats. Seven of the girls were described as having been ostracized and told that they were no longer a member of the family after seeking outside help.

In the other 24 cases, the majority of the parents' were described as passive or absent. Six of the girls lived with a single parent who was described as unable to care for the girl because of mental illness. For four of the girls the parents' substance abuse was described as a reason for the girls being considered for care. The largest group consisted of 12 girls who were considered for care because they themselves fared badly and the parents were described as unable to handle the situation. For these girls substance abuse, mental illness, abusive behaviour against family members as well as suspicions of sexual abuse from someone out of the family could be described.

However, for six of the girls in this group physical abuse was described and for eight emotional abuse. In these cases the abuse was primarily perpetrated by the girl's mother in a described context of mental illness and substance abuse. For two of the girls the abuse described could be seen as systematically exerted in a described context of a strict authoritarian upbringing with high-set demands on the girls from their parents.

Another central difference between the two groups was the authorities' ability to investigate and assess the situation. The situation described for the girls in the honour-related category was often of an acute report marked by strong fear, a lack of cooperation from the parents and in some cases retraction of statements by the girls. The girls described that they had been abused and victimized for many years without anyone being aware of their situation. In six of the 13 cases, the social services had no prior knowledge of the girls until their outcry. Most often the social services report was made by the school with the girls refusing to go home to the family. In the cases where there was prior knowledge of the family there had been no focus on the abuse, instead the contacts regarded school problems or the parents' economy.

The situation described for the girls in the other category was of the authorities often having had an ongoing insight into the families. Of the 24 girls, the
social services had had previous contact with 20 of them, with continuous interventions that the parents, mostly single mothers, and the children participated in. Another difference between the two groups was that of the girls' participation in the CYPA process. Among the 24 girls for whom there were no honour criteria described, half of the girls chose to meet their parents at the verbal negotiation in court. In the honour category, none of the girls dared to meet their parents at the court hearing.

Conclusions
The findings suggest that the life conditions of the girls in the honour category often were not recognized by the social services until the situation was described as acute and extremely harmful. Given that the girls within the honour-related category could be seen as controlled and fenced in, this could result in their being alone to deal with their situation, in the studied cases often for several years, whereas the girls in the other category often had others around them, either professionals or adults in their non-professional social networks. The social services' difficulties of investigating their situation because of the child's fear, contradictory opinions of the situation and retraction of statements of abuse might lead to several hindiers for the girls' access to protection also after their situation was reported.

Paper II: The characteristics and extent of child abuse: Findings from a study of the Swedish social services child protection
Exploring violence related to gender and the exertion of power and control, and how the violence is perceived by the one victimized is vital. Prior studies have suggested that cases involving systematic violence with elements of power and control are very challenging for authorities to handle, both to detect and to protect the victim from. Within previous research there has been an ongoing discussion about whether the dynamic characterizing abuse – as primarily connected to control and domination or to conflict – may be different depending on the setting that is explored. This discussion is touched upon in the paper seeking to explore child abuse as described by adolescents protected by the Swedish social services through an application for care under § 2 CYPA.
Aims

The aim of the article was to explore to what extent adolescent children, aged 13-17, reported as subjected to violence were being protected by the social services and what characterized the violence they were being subjected to.

Findings

The study showed that applications for care under § 2 CYPA were made by 85 of Sweden's 290 municipalities during 2009, indicating that 205 municipalities made no § 2 CYPA application for adolescents in the chosen year. Five of the 20 municipalities largest in population made no applications and four made only one application each. The applications of § 2 CYPA concerned 196 adolescents. For 70 per cent (137 adolescents) abuse was described. For 30 per cent (59 adolescents) the main basis for care in the application was other deficiencies in the home, the circumstances mostly described as linked to the parents, such as long-term substance abuse, mental illness, homelessness and custody disputes. Also for 14 of the 59 adolescents in this group previous violence was pointed out, but only as a background factor. In the current situation the adolescent was no longer exposed to violence although still suffering the consequences of previous violence. More girls (96) than boys (41) were being considered for care based on abuse. Of the girls considered for care, 79 per cent were described as subjected to abuse and of the boys 55 per cent. For 90 per cent of the children reported as abused the application for care was approved. This was slightly higher than for applications related to other home deficiencies where 78 per cent of the applications were approved.

The analysis of the characteristics of violence in the paper build upon the 123 adolescents (89 girls and 34 boys) reported as victimized by abuse and granted care by the court. The description of the abuse in the judgments was based largely on the child's own testimony; 90 per cent of the adolescents told the authorities about the violence they were being subjected to. For 52 per cent it was highlighted in the judgment that crimes against them had been reported to the police in the current investigation. For 15 per cent it was highlighted that crimes had been reported to the police prior to the current investigation.

For 59 per cent of the children the abuse had been exerted by two or even more relatives. The majority of the children, 86 per cent, were reported as having been abused primarily by their father and/or their mother, 66 per cent were said to have been subjected to violence by their father and 54 per cent by their mother. Other alleged perpetrators were step-parents, adult siblings or other related adults who had a guardian responsibility for the child. For those of the adolescents who were reported as having been subjected to abuse by one relative, it was common that the non-violent relative took the side of the alleged perpetrator and said that the child was lying or exaggerating. Only four
of the 123 adolescents had the support of a non-violent adult relative in relation to statements of abuse and the need of protection throughout the CYPA process.

All the children were reported as having been subjected to some form of psychological violence, threats being the most common. For 73 per cent of the girls three or more forms of psychological violence were presented, with the equivalent for boys 47 per cent. Control, humiliation and coercion were psychological violence described to a greater extent for girls. For 18 per cent of the adolescents there were reports of them having been subjected to verbal death threats. Fifty-eight per cent of the children had experienced various forms of violence against a relative, in most cases against siblings and/or against their mother. For seven adolescents the mother was said to have been murdered or been subjected to attempted murder or to death threats. The majority of the adolescents, 78 per cent, were stated to have been subjected to physical violence besides the psychological violence. The physical violence was for 30 per cent of the 123 adolescents described as potentially dangerous and several of them had perceived it as a death threat. For 10 per cent of the children, all girls, there were reports of sexual abuse by a relative. For 90 per cent the abuse was described as systematically exerted over a long time, for some as long as they could remember. Also for the remaining 10 per cent there were descriptions of having been exposed to multiple forms of violence, but with no clear description of how long the abuse had been exerted. Panic and fear was a common description of the experience of the violence among the children, described for 75 per cent. For 44 per cent of the girls and 12 per cent of the boys the various forms of violence were described as having been exerted to maintain standards of honour, shame and virginity, and/or to enable a forced marriage.

Conclusions

The paper can be seen as confirming prior research suggesting that § 2 CYPA is a rare protection intervention often used to protect already harmed children from serious abuse. The findings can be said to endorse the value of a broad definition of violence in research and in practice regarding individuals being protected by authorities because of abuse. In the studied cases leading to an application of the CYPA a conflict-based understanding of the abuse could be seen as inadequate. Instead, the violence to some extent mirrored the kind of systematic oppression described for adults seeking the protection of NGOs and public authorities. The paper concludes that it is crucial for professionals to evaluate the abuse dynamics and the possible consequences of the abuse since these factors may impact children’s ability to speak in their own interests regarding how authorities should intervene.
Paper III: The process of disclosing child abuse: a study of Swedish social services protection in child abuse cases

Although the concept of disclosure of abuse as an ongoing process has been previously highlighted in relation to abused children, there has been less focus on abuse disclosed to authorities and the process preceding and following such disclosure.

Aims
The aim of the paper was to investigate the importance of children’s, aged 13-17, agency and participation in the disclosure of abuse in social services decisions regarding alternative care. As well as to explore children’s disclosure as an ongoing process, with focus on the process preceding and following the abuse being disclosed to the public authorities.

Findings
The study focused on the 137 adolescents for whom an application for care under the CYPA was made and abuse was described in the judgment in the chosen year. Of these the majority, 56 per cent, were over 15 years of age and therefore with increased rights to be heard and to participate in the investigation and the CYPA process. The majority, 71 per cent, of the 137 adolescents’ were categorized as having intentionally disclosed the abuse (71 girls and 26 boys). There was an initial and often detailed statement of abuse and in most cases also an outspoken request for help from the child to be physically protected. Some of the children had disclosed their situation and sought help numerous times. The majority of the children had disclosed directly to a public authority such as the school, the police or the social services. Also for the 40 children in the sample whose disclosure was categorized as unintentional or unclear, another child’s intentional disclosure could be seen as important. These children were often protected because a sibling had disclosed the abuse and sought help from authorities.

The process leading up to the disclosure for the intentional disclosure category resembled the catalysts described for adult women subjected to abuse. Feelings of fear and lack of safety was a vital theme in the description of their situation given by 80 per cent of the children in this category (n=97). For 85 per cent there were descriptions of social, emotional or physical consequences of the abusive situation.

The process following the disclosure was for many of the children described as intensely challenging. For the majority of the children the abuse was denied not only by the alleged abusers but also by non-abusing parents, siblings and other relatives during the investigation and at the administrative court hearing. Many of the children were also described as subjected to active
pressure and threats from relatives following the disclosure. For the children in the intentional disclosure category (n=97) there were descriptions of blame and pressure after the disclosure for 87 per cent and for half of the children in the other category (n=40). There were descriptions of the parents and other relatives blaming the child for the situation, that they tried to pressure the child to retract the statements of abuse. A few of the children were abducted by relatives during the investigation and had to be brought back into protection by the police.

Despite descriptions of blame and pressure from relatives and feelings of fear, guilt, anger, sadness, disappointment and ambivalence following the disclosure, the majority, 85 per cent of the children in the category with an intentional disclosure, either confirmed or added a statement about abuse and the need of protection at the hearing. In the other group, however, only 30 per cent of the children actively stated that they were abused or in need of protection at the time of the hearing. The CYPA was for the children seen as an important intervention to remove the parents’ power over their right to protection and they made distinct risk assessments of what would happen to them if they were not protected. The children could also describe active strategies of resistance in case the application for protection was denied by the court, that they would make sure of alternative protection under § 3 CYPA because of drinking or taking drugs or that they would run away. For the children that were reticent or retracted their statement of abuse or their need of protection there were children who at court either were quiet, who said that the situation had been exaggerated or who said that they believed that the situation had changed after the disclosure. Some of them also stated that they had active strategies of resistance in case they should be abused again.

Conclusions

The findings suggest that many of the children had come a long way in an emotional and cognitive process before the decision to disclose and that disclosure often was made in conjunction with a decision to leave the alleged abusers. The findings support previous research suggesting children's intentional disclosure as an important predictor of decisions regarding alternative care. The social services to a much lesser extent applied for protection under the CYPA for children who did not themselves seek protection from authorities, were reticent about their situation or retracted a previous statement. That active pressure and threats from relatives and feelings of fear, guilt and ambivalence were such prominent factors both before and after the disclosure can be seen as crucial for authorities to acknowledge. Besides these factors being potentially harmful and traumatizing for children they may also obstruct the authorities’ investigation and decisions concerning alternative care.
Paper IV: Social services responses to adolescent children reported as abused

Prior research has suggested that investigations and interventions targeting children subjected to abuse do not always reach the children and that it is not uncommon for children reported as abused to continue to be abused and again re-enter the child protection system. This paper argues that this may be understood from possible hindrances to participation given the abuse dynamic as well as ideals of family preservation within the social services.

Aims

The aim of the paper was to investigate social services responses to child abuse of adolescent children, aged 13-17, considered for care under § 2 CYPA.

Findings

The study focused on the 137 adolescents for whom an application for care under the CYPA was made in the chosen year and for whom abuse was described in the judgment. For 33 per cent (46 of the 137 children) there were descriptions in the judgment that abuse had been previously reported and that the child had re-entered the protection system following continued abuse. For these children the abuse had been known to the social services in average for five years, drawing from the information in the judgments. For another 15 per cent (21 of the 137 children) there were descriptions in the judgment concerning prior knowledge about the child within the social services but with no description of abuse being known. For 60 per cent (83 of the 137 adolescents) the social services response was categorized as hesitant. There was no clear focus in the described interventions offered to the parents by the social services prior to their decision to apply for care under the CYPA on the abuse or the fact that the parents had denied or minimized it. There was also a lack of descriptions on how the safety of the child was secured during these interventions and whether the abuser had shown motivation or ability to change.

For 19 per cent (26 of the 137 adolescents) the social services response was categorized as abuse focused, while for 20 per cent (28 of the 137 adolescents) it was categorized as unclear. In the abuse-focused category, adolescents’ experiences of abuse were immediately validated and there was an initial assessment that interventions under the SSA would not protect the child from abuse. The social services to a high degree also referred to assessments by specialized shelters, mental health services or the police. In these cases the CYPA could function as a means for the social services to secure the investigation and the child’s need of safety as well as a way to lessen the burden on the children to
protect themselves after the disclosure by actively sharing or taking full responsibility for this decision. The majority of the adolescents in this category (17 out of 26) were described as subjected to abuse linked to standards regarding honour, virginity or a forced marriage.

For the children in the hesitant category the barriers to participation mentioned in previous research – for themselves as well as for non-abusing relatives – were highly present, as well as parents actively rejecting participation or manipulating the investigations. The social services’ previous efforts as well as future goals to try and mediate between the parent(s) and the child and to reunite children with parents was often apparent regardless of whether the child clearly stated that they did not want a dialog or described that they were very frightened of their parents. There were descriptions for the majority of the children in the hesitant category that they had continued to be abused, threatened, and persuaded to recant their statements of abuse and in some cases abducted.

The analysis suggests that for the majority of children the social services were able to validate the abuse and their need for protection through the CYPA first after they themselves had witnessed the abuse continuing and the child being further harmed. For some of the children the CYPA could be understood as a means of emancipation, not only from abusive parents but also from family oriented ideals within the social services. Empowered by the focus in the CYPA on adolescent children’s rights, they could be seen as entitled to protection even when this decision was not shared by the social services.

Conclusions
To acknowledge that the children’s as well as non-abusing relatives’ ability to participate and describe their situation may be hindered by the abuse dynamic seems crucial in an organization that to a large degree is built upon voluntary participation in investigations and interventions. The findings confirm the need for the social services to form a partnership directly with abused children instead of reaching the child through their allegedly abusive parents. Adoption of an abuse-focused approach and the securing of safe participation for children must be seen as crucial for social work organizations.
Discussion

At the time of completing this final chapter several relevant discussions are taking place at the Swedish national policy level. The Government intends to make the Convention on the Rights of the Child part of Swedish law, and there are several suggestions pending to increase children's rights under the CYPRA. As previously mentioned, the studied data primarily reveal findings relevant to the minority of adolescents who were protected through the rare intervention of care under the CYPRA. However, I see the processes uncovered in the judgments leading up to abuse being disclosed and authorities intervening as valuable findings also in a wider discussion on child abuse, children's rights and social intervention. As outlined in the introduction, the neglect of the adolescent victim position is apparent in contemporary social work. A clear objective of the present thesis has been to address this gap by analysing aspects of the characteristics of the abuse, adolescents' agency and social services responses. In the following, the main findings are discussed with a focus on these themes. Furthermore, I highlight some implications for practice and further research.

Characteristics of the abuse

One of the main findings in the thesis is that the rare and relatively unexplored intervention of care under § 2 CYPRA to such a large extent was used to protect adolescents from various forms of abuse from parents and other relatives. In the total study presented in Paper II the findings show that the majority of the applications, 70 per cent, concerned abuse, while for 30 per cent the main basis for care in the application was other deficiencies in the home. Also in Paper I with a smaller sample of adolescent girls considered for care under § 2 or §§ 2 and 3 CYPRA, parents' abuse was highlighted for many.

Of the 123 adolescents in Paper II, all were reported as having been subjected to some form of psychological violence, threats being the most common. The majority of the adolescents, 78 per cent, were stated to have been subjected to physical violence besides the psychological violence. Fifty-eight per cent had also experienced various forms of violence against a relative, in most cases against siblings and/or against their mother. For 10 per cent of the adolescents, all girls, there were reports of sexual abuse by a relative. These
findings mirror prior research indicating that various forms of abuse may overlap (Herrenkohl & Herrenkohl, 2009; Radford et al., 2011; Hultmann, 2015; Jernbro, 2015).

As seen in Paper II, for 90 per cent of the adolescents the abuse was described as systematically exerted over a long time, for some as long as they could remember. Also for the remaining 10 per cent there were descriptions of them having been exposed to multiple forms of violence but with no clear description of how long the abuse had been exerted. Important in relation to the cases studied is that this kind of persistent abuse during a life span may have a stronger negative impact than maltreatment only during childhood (Thornberry et al., 2001; Ireland et al., 2002; Smith et al., 2005). The systematically exerted abuse described for adolescents seen in the judgments support prior research showing that experiences of maltreatment may accumulate over childhood and not decline with age (Radford et al., 2011). A pattern that emerged for the girls categorized as subjected to honour violence in Paper I was that the physical abuse in many cases was described as having been exerted since childhood but was diminished somewhat and replaced with emotional abuse during adolescence.

A relevant finding in the present thesis, that has not been as clearly accentuated when it comes to prior research on child abuse, is the transnational dimension of abuse. In both samples adolescents described systematic threats of being sent abroad as well as traumatic experiences of having been sent abroad against their will by parents or other relatives as a serious form of abuse.

The alleged abusers

For the majority, 59 per cent, the abuse was described as exerted by two or even more relatives, 66 per cent were said to have been subjected to violence by their father and 54 per cent by their mother (Paper II). These findings mirror prior research suggesting that mothers and fathers perpetrate abuse at almost equal levels (Annerbäck et al., 2010; Jansson et al., 2011; Radford et al., 2011). Other alleged perpetrators were step-parents, adult siblings or other related adults who had a guardian responsibility for the child. Important in relation to that so many of the adolescents had been abused by both their parents is prior research showing that if both parents are perceived as abusive and less caring then there may be higher risk of a negative impact on functioning (Sunday et al., 2008).

A limitation concerning what can be said about the abusers, drawing on my data, is that I did not in Paper II differentiate between parents’ use of various forms of emotional, physical and sexual abuse, the severity of the violence or the occurrence of intimate partner violence. Prior research suggests that sexual abuse and exposure to intimate partner violence can be seen as more often reported as perpetrated by fathers (Radford et al., 2011). In relation to exposure to intimate partner violence it has been suggested that the more severe
the abuse and its consequences, the more likely it is that it will be gender asymmetrical (Johnson, 1995; Straus, 1999, 2005; Kimmel, 2002). This prior research can be seen as relevant in light of the findings in Paper I suggesting that the more severe and systematic forms of physical abuse seen in the judgments more often were described as perpetrated by fathers and brothers. However, there were several examples of adolescents, both boys and girls, also being severely abused by their mothers as well as other relatives as seen in Papers I, III and IV.

A gendered pattern

The findings in Paper II present a clearly gendered pattern. More girls (96) than boys (41) were being considered for care based on abuse. Of all the girls considered for care under § 2 CYP, 79 per cent were described as subjected to abuse and of the boys 55 per cent. For 73 per cent of the girls three or more forms of psychological violence were presented, with the equivalent for boys 47 per cent. Control, humiliation and coercion were psychological violence described to a greater extent for girls. This gendered pattern may be understood from several perspectives such as girls being more likely to report abuse committed on them (Banyard et al., 2004; Howell et al., 2015; Jernbro, 2015) or perhaps more likely to be seen as ‘victims’ and ‘at risk’ by professionals. The findings can also be seen as supporting prior research on girls as especially affected by violence driven by gender inequality, such as sexual abuse, forced marriage and honour-related violence (Heise, 1998; Sen, 2005; Gill, 2014; Ellsberg et al., 2015; Garcia-Moreno et al., 2015). As seen in Paper II, all the cases of sexual abuse concerned girls. For 44 per cent of the girls the various forms of violence were described as having been exerted to maintain standards of honour, shame and virginity, and/or to enable a forced marriage. In Paper I with a smaller sample of adolescent girls considered for care under § 2 or §§ 2 and 3 CYP, 35 per cent were categorized as subjected to honour-related violence.

Although the gendered pattern seen in applications for care in the studied samples may be biased by adolescents’ as well as professionals’ gendered perceptions of ‘victims’ and ‘victimization’, it is important to acknowledge that many of the protected adolescents also were boys who clearly described themselves as victimized by parents’ and other relatives’ abuse (Paper III). As seen in Paper II, for 12 per cent of the boys the violence was described as having been exerted to maintain standards of honour, shame and virginity, and/or to enable a forced marriage. These findings support prior research suggesting that although victims often are female, boys may also be subjected to honour violence (Schlytter et al., 2009; Rexvid & Schlytter, 2012; Schlytter & Rexvid, 2016).
Conceptualisations of neglect and abuse

Given the broad understanding of abuse, how the adolescents described experiences of abuse and victimization was a prime interest. In Paper II it is shown that panic and fear was a common description by the adolescents in their statements, seen for 75 per cent of the adolescents. That the abuse could be seen as severe and in many instances experienced as acutely dangerous was also seen. The physical violence was for 30 per cent described as potentially dangerous and that several perceived as a death threat. For 18 per cent of the adolescents there were reports of having been subjected to verbal death threats. For seven adolescents the mother was said to have been murdered or been subjected to attempted murder or to death threats. As seen in Paper III, there were also clear descriptions of social, emotional or physical consequences of the abuse for 85 per cent of the adolescents.

The meaning of the abusive acts and the consequences for relations both with abusing and with non-abusing relatives could be seen as of great importance in adolescents’ statements in the studied documents in both samples. The abusers’ intentionality was clearly emphasized in many of the adolescents own descriptions on why they disclosed, and in their risk assessments when stating how they valued the abusing and non-abusing parents’ ability to change or provide protection (Papers III and IV). Also the fear, disempowerment, self-blame, betrayal, ambivalence, sadness and anger that the abuse had rendered were clearly articulated in the statements (Paper III).

As seen in Paper II, for 30 per cent the main basis for care in the application was other deficiencies in the home, the circumstances described mostly linked to the parents, such as long-term substance abuse, mental illness, homelessness and custody disputes. In Paper I the main difference between the two groups was that of the invasive and fenced in upbringing within the honour-related category contra the insufficient parenting described within the other category. The behaviour of the parents in the honour-related category was described as authoritarian and controlling with systematic physical and/or emotional abuse upheld in a collective manner. While the majority of the parents in the other category were described as passive or absent. Another difference between the two categories was that in the honour category, none of the girls dared to meet their parents at the court hearing while half of the girls in the other category chose to meet their parents at the verbal negotiation in court. These findings are important to address in any discussion of potential differences in conceptualisations of abuse and neglect.

Several advantages can be seen with a broad focus on children and adolescents victimization that acknowledges the potential overlap between abuse and neglect and victimization both within and outside the family. These advantages can be seen as thoroughly presented in relation to the concept of poly-victimization described in the overview of prior research. However, I ar-
gues that from a child-centred position also potential differences in victimization are important to address. As seen in the overview of prior research, to be subjected to systematic abusive acts of commission by parents may be a process of disempowerment, betrayal and stigmatization that will affect these children in multiple both conscious and unconscious ways. The findings in the present thesis, especially highlighted in Paper III can be seen as clearly confirming these prior findings.

A central conclusion in this thesis on abuse in the studied CYPA cases is that the various forms of abuse described seem more connected to domination, fear, power and control than to conflict, to some extent mirroring the kind of systematic oppression described for adults seeking the protection of NGOs and public authorities. For several adolescents abuse was described as having been exerted to maintain standards of honour, shame and virginity, and/or to enable a forced marriage. Given the findings in the present thesis I argue that it is important to differentiate the concept of abuse when relevant, a theme that I will elaborate more upon in the next sections.

Adolescents’ agency

The initiative and agency of the adolescents in both the disclosure of abuse as well as the decision on alternative care is one of the most striking findings in the studied documents. Of the adolescents in the total study, the majority, 56 per cent, were over 15 years of age and therefore with increased rights to be heard and to participate in the investigation and the CYPA process. As seen in Paper II, the description of abuse in the judgments was largely based on the child’s own testimony; 90 per cent of the adolescents told the authorities about the violence they were being subjected to. That so many of the adolescents were able to verbalise their experiences of abuse during the protection process must be set against the numerous hinders seen in prior research for adolescents to disclose intra-familial abuse, especially to the authorities.

The disclosure of abuse

As seen in Paper III, the majority of the adolescents, 71 per cent, were categorized as having intentionally disclosed the abuse. This mirrors prior research showing that some individuals subjected to abuse may actively seek social support and state intervention to end abuse and take control over their own lives (Dalrymple, 2002; Neale, 2002; Finkelhor, 2005; Mudaly & Goddard, 2006; Tucker, 2011). There was an initial and often detailed statement of different forms of abuse and in most cases also an outspoken request for help by the adolescent to be physically protected at the disclosure. The most common place of disclosure was to school staff (Paper III), also mirrored by the findings in Paper I for girls subjected to honour violence. In this category
most often an acute report was made by the school with the girls actively refusing to go home to the family because of fear.

In Paper III, the process leading up to the disclosure uncovered themes resembling the catalysts described for adult women’s decision to leave the abuse. Such as increased levels of fear for themselves or others and cognitive and emotional shifts like loss of hope that the situation will ever change, coming to see the abuse as unbearable and unjust or experiences of increased agency. For several adolescents the descriptions contained elements of both fear, disappointment against those around them and a feeling of not being able to stand the situation any longer, leading up to the decision to disclose and request help.

The findings in Paper III on adolescents’ strategies for coping with the consequences of victimization and the aftermath of the disclosure such as eating disorders, substance abuse and self-harm are in line with prior research (Mudaly & Goddard, 2006; Peled & Cohavi, 2009; Rees et al., 2010; Cossar et al., 2011; Lawson & Quinn, 2013). That these strategies may be understood as conscious and intentional could also be seen in some of them stating that they intended to run away or escalate the risk to themselves to get further help from authorities if necessary (Paper III), also mirroring prior research (Peled & Cohavi, 2009; Rees et al., 2010; Jobe & Gorin, 2013).

The agency of adolescents could be seen as important also for the minority whose disclosure was categorized as unintentional or unclear. These adolescents often were protected because a sibling had disclosed abuse and sought help from the authorities (Paper III). Several of the adolescents had sought protection together with a sibling and some described it as harder to endure a sibling being subjected to increasing violence than it had been to be subjected themselves. They could also describe that they had been beaten themselves because they had refused to help parents beat siblings (Paper III). However, there were also adolescents burdened with the feeling that they had to protect their siblings and in some cases their mother from abuse (Papers I and II). The findings in the present thesis can be seen as mirroring prior research suggesting that siblings can be seen as crucial allies and confidants as well as passive bystanders and potential abusers (Anderson & Danis, 2006; Rexvid & Schlytter, 2012; Caffaro, 2014).

The aftermath of the disclosure
That factors such as power, control, gender, systematic and collaborative forms of violence and perceived fear were so prevalent in the abuse dynamic described in the judgments are important to address. Earlier studies have shown that cases involving systematic violence with elements of power and control are especially difficult for victims to experience, disclose and escape from (Herman, 2001; Mudaly & Goddard, 2006; Doyle, 2012) since the abuser goes to great lengths to prevent resistance and disclosure of the violence.
Given this context, it is also difficult for authorities to handle, both to detect the situation and to protect the victim from it.

Relevant from a response-based understanding of abuse is that for the majority of the adolescents the abuse was denied, not only by the alleged abusers but also by non-abusing parents, siblings and other relatives during the investigation and at the administrative court hearing (Paper III). For those of the adolescents who were reported to have been subjected to abuse by one relative, it was common that the non-violent relative took the side of the alleged perpetrator and said that the child was lying or exaggerating (Papers II, III and IV). Only four of the adolescents had the support of a non-violent adult relative in relation to statements of abuse and the need of protection throughout the CYPA process (Paper II). As seen in Paper I there was a clear lack of support from the social network following abuse being disclosed also for the girls in the honour violence category. Some of the girls were described as having been ostracized and told that they were no longer a member of the family after seeking outside help. These findings are relevant in light of prior research indicating that norms on virginity, chastity, family honour and fear of community ostracization have been suggested as strong barriers to disclosure for adolescents (Paine & Hansen, 2002; Ullman, 2002; Gilligan & Akhtar, 2006; Fontes & Plummer, 2010; Katz, 2014).

For children to actively take on shame, guilt and responsibility for abuse and its aftermath is underlined by Katz (2014). Hence, it is important for professionals to understand and foresee the consequences in children’s lives of a disclosure of abuse since children may recant and go to great lengths to undo a statement of abuse, especially when being pressured or threatened following the disclosure (Katz, 2014). The descriptions in the documents indicated that the consequences in children’s lives of the disclosure of abuse were very severe and seldom foreseen by the authorities. For the children categorized as intentional disclosure there were descriptions in the verdict of blame and pressure for 87 per cent following their disclosure and in the other group for half of the children (Paper III). Apart from this there were also statements from adolescents at the court hearing of experiencing the offered interventions as not being protective enough and the abuse as continuing.

Although lack of support, family pressure and continued abuse also after seeking help have been suggested as leading to retractions (Finkelhor, 1983; Peled & Cohavi, 2009; Rees et al., 2010; Jobe & Gorin, 2013; Katz, 2014) and also to be potentially traumatizing (Ullman, 2002; Mudaly & Goddard, 2006; Hunter, 2011; Katz, 2014), the majority of the adolescents nevertheless held on to their statements.

Another prominent finding in the thesis is that many of the adolescents were described as having had contacts with authorities over many years and as having disclosed abuse several times. As seen in Paper IV, for 33 per cent of the 137 adolescents there were descriptions in the judgment that abuse had been previously reported and that the child had re-entered the child protection
system following continued abuse. For these children the abuse had been known to the social services for on average five years drawing from the information in the judgments. As seen in the overview of prior research it is stressed that those who had tried to disclose and reach out for help but experienced inadequate interventions might lose their hope of change and resist interventions. Set against this prior research, the finding in the present thesis that such a large part of the adolescents stuck to their statement of abuse and need of protection can be seen as remarkable.

Child protection as a means to oppose experiences of powerlessness?
From a child-centred position the burden put on adolescents to protect themselves both before and after abuse being disclosed to authorities can be seen as very heavy. These findings also point to the potential inability of the social services to reach children and adolescents silenced by abuse. Mudaly & Goddard (2006) stress that listening to anyone who has been abused is a more complex matter than listening only to what they say. Prior research stresses that professionals need to take this into account when children’s right to be consulted on matters regarding their need of interventions and protection are promoted, such as a decision on alternative care (Littlechild, 2000; Mudaly & Goddard, 2006; Bell, 2011; Cossar et al., 2011; Bessant & Bradley, 2014).

It is clear from the overview of prior research that some children may strongly object to social intervention such as a decision on alternative care and see it as traumatic or as a punishment against them (Smart, 2002; Mudaly & Goddard, 2006; Rees et al., 2010; Woolfson et al., 2010; Cossar et al., 2011). Others may actively express that they do not want to be responsible for such emotionally charged decisions as legal action against parents or alternative care (Mudaly & Goddard, 2006; Bell, 2011).

The findings in the present thesis are in line with these prior findings. Although the majority of the adolescents in the studied cases stated that they had been abused and were motivated to protection, there were also adolescents who rejected interventions or who clearly specified that they did not want to state anything both during the investigation and at the court hearing. There were also descriptions by adolescents of coming to the conclusion that they wanted protection although they initially had rejected it (Paper III), quite in line with the findings of Cossar et al. (2011) indicating that there was a need for some time to pass for children to look back and recognise that in hindsight the professionals had been right to be concerned about them.

An important finding is how the adolescents in the studied samples in many cases all by themselves had gone through the process of weighing pros and cons of a disclosure and calculated the risks and loss they faced in choosing to remain with or leave their family. Although the adolescents in this kind of
extreme sample must be seen as a clear minority, it is imperative to acknowledge that there are children who want to make use of authorities’ power to end their relations with abusive families. The data also suggest that there are adolescents described by others as abused who are silent or clearly reject interventions.

Relevant in relation to these findings are the victim- and child-centred responses described in prior chapters. Bell (2002) emphasizes that children who have been abused have been dominated and humiliated. In light of this it is essential that the relationship between professionals and children during investigations and interventions do not reflect or repeat a dynamic that entails dominance and submission. The apparent element of power in social interventions should be framed in a supportive, not a dominant, mode (Bell, 2002). It is suggested that the social services consider how to develop safety and establish rapport so that children over time are able to build a trusted relationship with professionals (Littlechild, 1999; Bell, 2002, 2011; Mudaly & Goddard, 2006; Jobe & Gorin, 2013). In some cases authorities’ clear responsibility for emotionally charged decisions may unburden children conflicted by fear, loyalty, ambivalence and guilt (Mudaly & Goddard, 2006; Bell, 2011).

Another important finding in relation to this prior research comes from the descriptions of children who had told more about the abuse after having had time to experience safety during the CYPA placement (Paper IV). In those cases, the CYPA could be seen as used by the social services both to secure the investigation as well as the child’s right to intervention regardless of the parents’ will. The use of the CYPA could in these cases also be understood as a way for the social services to lessen the burden on the children to protect themselves after the disclosure and instead actively share or take the whole responsibility for this decision.

Responses to abuse

The last findings I will discuss relate to social services responses to adolescents victimized by abuse. As previously stated, abuse is suggested as largely under-reported, given the difficulty to see signs of abuse, lack of motivation to report suspected abuse to authorities and that there are several hindlers for children as well as others to formally disclose and talk about abuse experiences (Gilbert et al., 2009b). Although the present thesis can say less about the Swedish child welfare system for adolescents victimized by abuse in a wider context, these suggested difficulties can be seen as highly relevant in relation to the ‘extreme’ cases studied.

As seen in Paper II, applications for care under § 2 CYPA were made by 85 of Sweden’s 290 municipalities during 2009, indicating that 205 municipalities made no such application for adolescents in the chosen year. Five of the 20 municipalities largest in population made no applications and four
made only one application each. These findings can be seen as clearly confirming the § 2 CYPAs as a rare intervention to protect adolescents. It also raises questions on the ability to gain experience on a municipal level to handle these complex cases so clearly deviating from the norm.

To reach adolescents victimized by abuse

The common picture is that initiatives from parents and children in social interventions are rare, while reports from sources outside of the family, mostly authorities with mandatory reporting, are more common (Wiklund, 2006; Cozzoza et al., 2007; Östberg, 2010). Hence, the picture gained from many of the studied documents, with the adolescent as the central client disclosing abuse and asking authorities to intervene, is very different from child welfare as a whole. Drawing on a larger discussion on mandated reporting, a noteworthy finding is that the cases reported by professionals with such a responsibility without the initiative and agency of the victimized adolescent or another child described were few.

The findings clearly support earlier studies suggesting an initial outcry by the victimized child as an important factor in cases where the authorities decide on alternative placement (Finkelhor, 1983; Jauhes & Morris, 1990). The adolescents’ statements of abuse were also often the major evidence, supporting prior research (Kaldal, 2010). Relevant in relation to these findings is prior research suggesting that in cases where the authorities primarily respond to the wishes of the child (Finkelhor, 1983) decisions may be less biased by other anticipated factors such as culture, ethnicity or poverty (Lindsey, 2004).

Another finding indicating that abuse was not seen nor responded to until the child reached out concerned physical abuse. The prevalence of physical abuse in the studied judgments was high and in many cases described as severe. Drawing on the discussion on abuse understood as physical violence leading to bodily injury common within both child abuse studies (Gelles & Edfeldt, 1986) and within the field of intimate partner violence (Stark, 2007; Kelly & Johnson, 2008), it is notable that almost no cases in the present samples were the result of a mandatory report of physical abuse from the health sector.

Even though there were also social, emotional or physical consequences of the abuse clearly described for 85 per cent of the adolescents, nor had these consequences led to the child’s situation being reported by professionals to any greater extent.

Further, social services responses to siblings in the studied cases indicate that abuse were not seen or responded to until an outcry from the child. There were descriptions for several adolescents of older siblings having been placed in care by the social services under the CYPAs some years earlier because of abuse. In these judgments there was a lack of description as to why the child
had not been assessed as equally in need of protection against the abusive parents and instead left with them with no further social services contact (Paper IV).

To address the different etiology of abuse and neglect has been stressed as important in relation to social interventions (Lindsey, 2004). Prior research emphasizes social services difficulties to investigate and intervene in cases of child abuse (Gelles, 1996, 2000; Stanley & Goddard, 2002; Munro, 2008; Ferguson, 2009; Kaldal, 2010) contrary to in cases of neglect, were parents and children may be motivated to participate in interventions and may welcome external support (Lindsey, 2004).

This research can be seen as highly relevant in relation to the cases in the studied data. In Paper I, the difference between abuse and neglect could be seen in that the authorities often had had ongoing insight into the families with no known abuse, with continuous interventions that the parents, mostly single mothers, and the children had participated in. The interventions provided in these cases eventually were evaluated as insufficient by the professionals and in some cases also by the parents and the adolescents. Adolescents described as abused on the other hand were in many cases unknown to authorities until the abuse – often of a severe and acute nature – was disclosed.

This was especially evident for adolescents described as subjected to honour-related violence and forced marriage as seen in Papers I and IV. Contrary to the families with no known abuse, the parents in the families with abuse to a high degree denied maltreatment and rejected insight into family affairs (Paper I).

From a child-centred position the limitations regarding professionals’ interaction with adolescents both before and after a disclosure of abuse can be seen as challenging. In the Swedish legal context there are clear limitations for professionals, for example in school, to over time build rapport and establish trust with adolescents victimized by intra-familial abuse following mandatory reporting to the social services and given parental rights. The social services also encounter multiple hinders regarding confidentiality, time, continuity and control of the process after the disclosure, following parental rights. These limitations are important to address in light of the findings in the present thesis.

As previously mentioned, for 33 per cent there were descriptions in the judgments that the abuse had been disclosed to authorities one or several times prior to the investigation leading to the application for 2 § CYPA (Paper IV). Another finding indicating re-reports was that for 15 per cent it was highlighted that crimes had been reported to the police prior to the current investigation (Paper II). These findings support previous research showing how children might repeatedly pass in and out of the child protection system following reports of continued abuse (Gelles 1996, 2000; Terling 1999; Stanley & Goddard, 2002; Lindell, 2005). The finding that the abuse in these cases had been known to the social services for an average of 5 years is from a victim- and
child-centred position to be seen as a major failure regarding the system's ability to reach the children and stop the abuse.

Relevant in relation to this is the lack of evidence of methods effective in preventing the recurrence of maltreatment when a caregiver living with the child is the identified perpetrator (Gelles, 1996, 2000; Macmillan et al., 2009). Gelles (1996, 2000) suggests that the strongest risk factor when evaluating the risk that the parents pose if the child remains in the home are the parent's previous abuse and their actions regarding the child's right to protection. It is highlighted that a parent who does not recognize or admit to the abuse and the harm they have inflicted on the child is not likely to respond to such interventions as parenting class, additional social resources or psychotherapy (Gelles 1996, 2000; Bentovim, 2004). It is also stressed that in situations when parents reject the child, fail to take responsibility for the abuse and maintain a combative stance against professionals, neither does family work have a place (Bentovim, 2004).

Who holds the power?

There was no obvious pattern to how abuse was responded to by the social services. Initial statements by the adolescents about the abuse, their fear of the alleged abuser(s) and that they wanted to be protected were recorded both for adolescents who were immediately taken into care and for adolescents who remained at home (Paper IV). Physical violence described as hazardous as well as abuse reported to the police, verbal death threats, honour-related violence and sexual abuse, were also described both for adolescents who had been placed in alternative care and who had been left in the home. Among the adolescents who had been immediately protected following disclosure of abuse there were also cases with no mention of physical abuse in the description of violence.

Although some adolescents were met with a clear focus on the abuse and their need of safety, the majority of the interventions described were clearly initially parent oriented, mirroring prior research. To assist and motivate the parents so the children would remain in the family could be seen as a goal in prior decisions and adolescents statements of fear could be invalidated (Paper IV). Given these findings, the uncertainty also seen in prior research about how to value adolescents' statements of abuse (Munro, 1999, 2008; Sjöblom, 2006; Östberg, 2010; Goddard & Hunt, 2011; Tucker, 2011) is deeply worrying. From a child-centred position, that adolescents' own assessment of risk is such an unexplored research area and seldom emphasized in risk assessments and decision-making is a serious flaw.

That both the alleged abusers as well as non-abusing relatives deny the abuse, blame as well as pressure the child and try to prohibit insight into the family is an evident finding in both samples. In a few cases there were also descriptions in the judgments that the parents, besides threatening the child,
also had directly threatened the family where the child was placed or the investigating social worker (Paper IV). These findings are highly relevant in light of prior research stressing the risk that social workers are drawn into a hostage like situation and consciously or unconsciously implement strategies such as identifying with the aggressive parent or downplaying the abuse (Stanley & Goddard, 1993, 2002; Goddard & Stanley, 1994).

The dynamic involving minimization, manipulation, denial, fear, ambivalence and aggression was also reflected upon in a few cases as something that had affected the social services prior assessments (Paper IV) – supporting the hostage metaphor.

That only a small minority of the adolescents in the total study were protected without them intentionally reaching out suggests that adolescents’ agency in the studied CYPA cases at large was something of a prerequisite. Set against the complex processes for children and adolescents of experiencing and disclosing intra-familial abuse and holding on to their statements in the aftermath of the disclosure, this practice may potentially disqualify many victimized adolescents from protection through the CYPA. That the role of the adolescents was such a prominent factor in the studied cases might also be understood in light of the hostage metaphor. If the adolescent is the one demanding protection then the social services can avoid the full responsibility for a decision that may be difficult to validate through external evidence and that may provoke the alleged abusers as well as challenge family preservation ideals within their own organization.

Are adolescents ‘allowed’ to leave an abusive family?

When starting to write this compilation dissertation I read Linda Gordons classic Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence (1988). In this book she discusses family violence as seen in case records from three social welfare agencies in Boston between 1870 and 1980. What did strike me was the similarity in the descriptions of the responses from child welfare professionals to adolescents victimized by intra-familial abuse in her samples with the data I studied. Although my data was collected in a different context, several decades and a childhood sociology paradigm later, the responses can be seen as far from child-centred.

Within the field of intimate partner violence there has been on-going discussion on the need to understand the complex process of disclosing abuse and victimization from the position of the one victimized. That these processes may be ambivalent, ongoing over many years and also potentially dangerous are clearly acknowledged in both research, policy and practice as previously described. When it comes to children and adolescents, discussions on their adaption or resistance to abuse, enablers and hinders for a disclosure and their agency in leaving the family are more neglected.
With the exception of the ADAD interviews directed to adolescents who are placed in national secure unit care, children are seldom screened for abuse experiences or trauma symptoms (Hultmann, 2015). It is also suggested that social interventions seldom have a trauma-informed approach (Jansson & Björck, 2012; Health and Social Care Inspectorate, 2013) indicating a potential lack of ability to address adolescents’ victimization by the Swedish social services and in alternative care.

One way to interpret the silence on children’s agency and experiences of leaving their family following abuse may be the understanding sketched in the introduction that there are professionals who are responsible for decisions on whether and how children may leave their family. Another reason for the silence may be the lack of organizations for young people equivalent to the NGOs offering shelter and support to adult women subjected to intimate partner violence. When it comes to adults, these organizations can be seen as enabling a ‘collective memory’ of the complex experiences, used both in research and in practice. For children and adolescents placed in alternative care the absence of such a ‘collective memory’ of their experiences within this fragmented field of practice is apparent.

Within the field of intimate partner violence, problematisation on the agency of the one victimized has been common, such as to question: why doesn’t she just leave? Given children’s position and the findings in the present thesis the question in the heading of this section seems more relevant. The picture drawn in the overview of prior research and in the studied CYPa cases suggests that all the adolescents in the samples in CYPa care eventually were ‘allowed’ by the social services to leave the abuse. However, it is important to acknowledge that many of them could be seen as previously hindered to leave given manipulation, denial, threats, fear, loyalty, hope and disillusion, as well as to recognize that many of those conquering the abuse dynamic and who tried to leave initially were met by an organization more focused on keeping them in the family.

Implications

The findings appear to endorse the value of a broad concept of abuse with focus on the agency of the child, the processes encircling the relationship between abusers and children, and the impact of responses from others both in research and in practice. How experiences of emotional, physical and sexual abuse may potentially differ from children’s and adolescents’ experiences of neglect by absent or passive parents is not possible to answer drawing on the data in the present thesis. It is, however, an important topic to address both in practice and in future research. The present study further accentuates what often has been stressed in prior research: the importance of understanding
abuse, of affirming children’s disclosures and of viewing the consequences within the family of authorities’ involvement from the child’s position. As seen in the overview of prior research as well as in the papers presented there are several hinders for adolescents to themselves disclose experiences of abuse and victimization to authorities as well as to hold on to statements made. This theme can be seen as important to further address in both research and in practice, along with another less illuminated one: experiences of abuse and social interventions with focus on siblings.

A central conclusion in this thesis on abuse in the studied CYPAs cases is that the various forms of abuse described are more connected to domination, power and control than to conflict. Given these findings and referring to discussions within the field of intimate partner violence I argue that it is important to differentiate the concept of abuse when relevant. As previously mentioned, there are clear limitations on generalizations from the findings regarding responses to abuse in the studied ‘extreme’ cases. However, it is important to acknowledge that some abusers may lack motivation to participate in investigations and interventions, that some adolescents and non-abusing relatives may be hindered from participation, and that some adolescents may assess their parents as dangerous and unable to change. The general principles of the least interventionist order, that interventions primarily are decided with parental consent, and that voluntariness is better than coercion in regard to social interventions are important to address in relation to these findings. The findings in the present thesis also suggest that in some cases of abuse, interventions under the CYPAs are clearly more enabling of child-centred, safe and stable protection for children.

The recent development in Sweden of treatment for families where physical child abuse has occurred such as CPC-CBT (Kjellgren et al., 2013; Svedin et al., 2015) seems promising. However, in light of the findings in the present thesis it can be seen as essential that the social services develop more knowledge on the complex dynamic set in motion when abuse is disclosed and learn to comprehend the indicators for and against involving the family in the different stages. Another important area to explore, therefore, both in research and in practice, is children’s and adolescents’ own assessment of risk and need of intervention in cases of abuse. Finally, from a child-centred perspective the potential lack of abuse focus within Swedish alternative care may also need to be addressed. The need of individually tailored services for adolescents extending into adulthood that can address root causes of distress instead of merely treating symptoms has been emphasized in prior research (Brandon et al., 2008; Riebschleger et al., 2015). A trauma-informed approach has further been underlined, where ongoing work on PTSD and complex trauma is an area that might be applied to interventions targeting the effects of various victimizations (Finkelhor & Hashima, 2001; Bentovim, 2004; Cohen et al., 2012; Riebschleger et al., 2015). Given the traumatizing experiences of victimization and the complex processes involved in the disclosure of abuse, it must be
stressed that the cases that do come to light should be handled as safely and thoroughly as possible.
Svensk sammanfattning

Kunskapen om socialtjänstens insatser enligt lag (1990:52) med särskilda bestämmelser om vård av unga (LVU) kan ses som relativt begränsad, särskilt då det gäller 2 § LVU för att skydda unga som utsätts för våld av sina föräldrar eller andra närstående. Det övergripande syftet med avhandlingen är att undersöka och diskutera olika vålsförståelser, ungdomars agens i förhållande till våld, utsattthet och insatser och respons på våld med fokus på socialtjänstens bemötande och insatser. Detta görs med en ansats inspirerad av kritisk realism och respons utifrån brottsoffer- och barnperspektiv. I avhandlingen ingår fyra artiklar som fokuserar på dessa teman i två studier av domar rörande socialnämndens ansökningar om vård enligt 2 § LVU för unga mellan 13-17 år. Totalstudien bekräftar att en ansökan om vård enligt 2 § LVU kan ses som en ovanlig åtgärd från socialnämnden för att skydda ungdomar. Endast i 85 av Sveriges 290 kommuner gjordes en ansökan under det studerade året. Ett huvudresultat i avhandlingen är att av de ansökningar som gjordes var vård från närstående, främst föräldrar, en vanlig grund för skydd. Av de 196 unga som var aktuella för en ansökan, var det 137, 70 procent, som uppgavs ha utsatts för våld. Våldet beskrevs i majoriteten av ärendena som olika former av psykiskt och fysiskt våld som utövats systematiskt under lång tid, över hälften av ungdomarna hade utsatts för vård av fler än en närstående. Det var fler flickor (96) än pojkar (41) som beskrevs som våldsutsatta. Flickor beskrevs också i högre utsträckning som utsatta för sexuella övergrepp och våld kopplat till oskuldsnormer, heder och äktenskap. Också i den mindre studien som bestod av domar rörande både 2 § LVU och 2 och 3 §§ LVU var våld en vanlig grund beskrevna i ansökan. Ett ytterligare centralt resultat i studien är att ungas egna aktiva avslöjande av våldsutsatthet och behov av skydd i hög grad kan ses som avgörande för att de skulle aktualiseras för vård enligt 2 § LVU. Av de 137 unga som beskrevs som våldsutsatta i ansökan kategoriserades 71 procent som att de själva tagit initiativet att berätta om sin våldsutsatthet och söka skydd. Processen efter att våldet avslöjats för myndigheter beskrevs i majoriteten av ärendena som mycket svår för de unga med hög grad av press, hot, förnekande och skuldbeläggande från närstående. Resultatet som rör socialtjänstens respons visar att de initia mono insatserna i hög utsträckning var föräldraorienterade. För 33 procent av ungdomarna framkom också att våldet avslöjats en eller flera gånger innan den aktuella ansökan om LVU. Att våldet i dessa fall varit känt för myndigheter i genomsnitt i fem år kan ur ett barnperspektiv ses som ett misslyckande vad gäller den svenska sociala barnavårdens möjligheter att
nå barn och skydda dem från våld. Våldet i de studerade ärendena kunde ses som mer kopplat till underordning, makt, kontroll och rädsla snarare än som kopplat till konflikter. Till viss del speglade den systematiska våldsutövning som beskrivs i tidigare forskning om vuxna våldsutsatta kvinnor som sökt stöd hos myndigheter och kvinnojourer. En slutsats är att för ungdomar som utsätts för våld med denna karaktäristik kan LVU möjliggöra en större trygghet och stabilitet och ett starkare barnperspektiv i insatserna. Utifrån avhandlingens resultat betonas vikten av att differentiera olika former av våldsutövande, likväl som att tydligare uppmärksamma barns agens i förhållande till våldsutsatthet och hjälpsökande i både praktik och forskning.
References


Government bill 2002/03: 53. Stärkt skydd för barn i utsatta situationer m. m.


Herman, J. L. (2001). *Trauma and recovery*. London: Pandora


Holland, S., & O’Neill, S. (2006). ‘We had to be there to make sure it was what we wanted’ Enabling children’s participation in family decision-making through the family group conference. *Childhood*, 13(1), 91-111.


Hydén, M. (2005). ‘I must have been an idiot to let it go on’: Agency and positioning in battered women’s narratives of leaving. *Feminism & Psychology*, 15(2), 169-188.


