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Type of work:

- ☐ Educational development and innovation
- ☐ Practice development
- ■ Research

Presentation format:

- ■ Paper session
- ☐ Poster
- ☐ Symposium
- ☐ Workshop

Abstract (500 max words)

Background
Thorough assessments and legally sound decisions are a central part of the welfare state's efforts to ensure that service users receive the necessary municipal health and social services in a fair and responsible manner. The question, however, is how extensive these assessments should be and whether they may involve an unnecessary intrusion into users' private lives.

Method
The study is based on observations of 17 assessment interviews between caseworkers and service users at Norwegian allocation office. We also collected and analysed the decisions made based on these interviews. The material consists of transcribed conversations and decisions, analysed using text analysis. The overarching research question is:
To what extent do service users' descriptions of their own situation correspond with the caseworkers' reasoning in the decisions? And how does amount of information gathered in the assessment process relate to the quality of the decisions?

Preliminary Findings
The analyses show that both the assessment interviews and the decisions appear highly thorough and comprehensive. The conversations include holistic descriptions of service users' health and life situations, often with details that may be perceived as intrusive. This raises questions about whether requiring service users to share sensitive information, including details that are not clearly relevant to the application and decision, is necessary for sound assessments, and whether this represents an appropriate use of skilled municipal health and social workers.

Theoretical Framework
The material is interpreted in light of theories of holistic views of the individual, which legitimise extensive assessments by arguing that all aspects of a person's life should be considered. Such an understanding could imply a need for even more structured and detailed assessments than those observed in the material. In contrast, we apply theories of efficiency and de-bureaucratisation in municipal decision-making to discuss whether current practice is sustainable and appropriate.

Discussion
The decisions generally appear well written, legally robust and respectful, and most users are granted the services they apply for. However, some case-processing sequences seem highly resource-intensive and expose users' private lives in ways that may feel excessive, while other cases involving complex life situations appear to require even more thorough assessments. Caseworkers describe the interviews as a way to get to know the user and prepare for future needs, yet the conversations rarely address the future. At the same time, caseworkers emphasise that their role does not involve building relationships beyond the case-processing context. It remains unclear whether relationship and trust-building should be considered part of the work, which could have justified the resource use.

Conclusion
The study challenges current practice and raises questions about the balance between legal safeguards, privacy and efficiency in municipal case processing. Where should the line be drawn between the information necessary for sound decisions and a practice that may be perceived as excessive and intrusive? This discussion has implications for resource use, privacy and the understanding of a holistic view of the individual in municipal governance.

Only for symposium

An abstract (maximum 250 words) for each of the papers included in the proposed symposium

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