

Children's help-seeking in relation to adverse childhood experiences (Abstract)

In this presentation we will discuss the participatory design and preliminary results from an ongoing research project about children's help-seeking in relation to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE). Exposure to ACE is a significant concern with potential long-term consequences. In a Swedish context, children's rights to support and protection from harm is clearly defined in national policy and legislation (including the UN Convention on the rights of the child, which was incorporated in Swedish law in 2020). In both school and social services, there are guidelines for promoting and ensuring these rights and both have a clear mandate to engage in early detection of children in need of support or protection. However, despite a strong emphasis on children's rights for support and protection in policy and legislation, research shows that children's exposure to ACE often remain unrecognised and unreported.

The objectives of the research project are to gain knowledge about children's preconditions and pathways for help-seeking when exposed to ACE and to explore how this knowledge can be implemented in social work practice through participatory methods. The focus is on children and young people's own experiences of help-seeking and their views on need for help and support. However, to be able to include a broader perspective on the preconditions for help-seeking, children's general perceptions of rights and support in relation to ACE are also examined, as well as professionals' perceptions of children's help-seeking and their experiences of supporting children in their help-seeking process.

The project draws on various types of data, including a survey of school children, interviews with young people and professionals, and collaborative workshops with stakeholders. During spring 2025 we are conducting the survey of school children, focusing on their knowledge about help-seeking possibilities and perceptions of social services. Additionally, the first interviews with young people will be carried out, focusing on their own experiences of ACE and help-seeking. Our presentation will include preliminary results from these first empirical studies. Collaborative workshops are held throughout the project and this participatory approach will also be a topic of our presentation.

The project has the potential to contribute much needed knowledge about children's help-seeking, considering different perspectives on the matter. Furthermore, through collaboration with stakeholders, the project aims to transfer knowledge on children's help-seeking to relevant organisations. By integrating these insights into practice, the project seeks to improve early identification and support strategies, ultimately enhancing the preconditions for children to seek and access help.

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Project website: [Children's help-seeking in relation to adverse childhood experiences - Södertörns högskola](#) (in English), blogg.sh.se/barnshjalpsokande (in Swedish)

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