

Evaluation of a national reform in Israeli child protection practice designed to improve children's participation in decision making

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A national reform of child protection practice in Israel includes the ambition of strengthening children's participation in intervention decisions carried out in formal committees, called Planning, Intervention and Evaluation Committees. A qualitative study was conducted of how well this was being achieved by following 21 case studies of families referred to the committees over six months. Data was collected from interviews with social workers, field observations of the committees and a document review. A systems approach was undertaken as a conceptual framework in order to allow a whole-organisational understanding of what is happening in the field, and why. The key finding was a very limited realisation of the reform's aim. Only seven children attended the committees, and they had little influence on decisions, which appears to have made them less co-operative in implementing them. Those who did not attend rarely had their views conveyed to the committee by their social workers. The reform's lack of success is explained by being ill-suited to the organisational working environment and culture. The analysis identified a number of systemic factors influencing the failure to give greater priority to children's views, including: lack of skill and time, organisational messages about practice priorities and paternalistic ideology.

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