

Socionomkarriärer

Om vägar genom yrkeslivet i en av välfärdsstatens nya professioner

av
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Akademisk avhandling

som med tillstånd av samhällsvetenskaplig fakultet vid Göteborgs universitet för vinnande av doktorsexamen framläggs till offentlig granskning fredagen den 10 juni 2011, kl. 10.00, hörsal Sappören, Institutionen för Socialt Arbete, Sprängkullsgatan 25, Göteborg

Fakultetsopponent är professor Christian Kullberg, Akademi Hälsa och Samhälle, Högskolan Dalarna, Falun

Avhandlingen baseras på följande delarbeten:

1. *Man hittar sin nisch. Om män i socionomyrket – karriär, minoritet och maskulinitet.* Licentiatavhandling framlagd vid Institutionen för vårdvetenskap och socialt arbete, Växjö universitet i september 2006. Växjö universitet, Rapportserie i socialt arbete nummer 006 2006.
2. *Spiraler, proteaner och experter – om kvinnliga socionomers horisontella karriärvägar.* Inskickad till Socionomens forskningssupplement.
3. *From glass escalator to glass travelator. On the proportion of men in managerial positions in social services and other areas of the municipality sector in Sweden.* Inskickad till British Journal of Social Work



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Abstract

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The dissertation is about career in working life – not career solely in the sense of climbing upwards in the organizational hierarchy to management level, but career as the movement that individuals or groups make over time through working life. The focus is on social workers and their professional field. The overall aim is to describe and analyse social workers' career patterns and careers at the individual level and the motives behind them, and thus to shed light on conditions in the social workers' field today. Another aim is to describe and analyse how the individual social worker careers interact with gender, with efforts at professionalization at both collective and individual level, and with changes in the organizational conditions for exercising the profession.

The empirical material is based on questionnaires distributed to male and female social workers who qualified from the School of Social Work in Lund during the last two decades of the twentieth century and the first years of the twenty-first century. The questionnaires for the male social workers were distributed in 2004. Responses came from 61 men, or 67 per cent of all the men who qualified in 1980–1985, and from 191 men, or 74 per cent of those who qualified in 1993–2003. Questionnaires for all female social workers who qualified from the School of Social Work in Lund in 1983, 1988, 1993, 1998, and 2003 were distributed in 2009. The 352 completed questionnaires meant a response frequency of 70 per cent. The questionnaires elicit career paths by getting the respondents to describe through different variables what they have worked with since obtaining their degree as social worker. Interviews with 18 of the men who answered the questionnaire (11 who qualified about 10 years previously and 7 who qualified 5 years previously) provided a deeper understanding of the male social worker career, of men's career motives, and of what it is like to be a man in the profession of social worker. The women's career motives have been studied through a questionnaire extended in relation to the one completed by the male social workers. Besides questionnaires and interviews, official statistics are used in the empirical foundation of the dissertation.

The studies show that social workers have a broad field of work with flexible career paths, and that both male and female social workers take advantage of this. What characterizes social workers' career is thus mobility. The many career opportunities also mean that men, who are a sought-after minority in the social worker profession, can refrain from the traditional management career that men who are a minority in professional life are expected to pursue, and can instead choose a horizontal career in attractive parts of the social worker profession that enjoy high status. Furthermore, the studies show that there is an informal career path in the social worker profession that both men and women follow. This means that the largest field of work for social workers – the social services, chiefly the parts that involve the exercise of authority – are an entrance and transit area.

The women's most prominent career motives are the content of the work; autonomy, independence and discretion; opportunities for personal development and the potential to influence and change. The interviewed male social workers' career motives resemble the women's. They want a job with freedom, independence, and personal development, where they themselves can steer without too much influence from managers and politicians, and where they also have scope to have a job and simultaneously look after their children. The motive forces in social workers' careers are thus not those of the traditional career with externally visible attributes.

