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INSTITUTIONEN FÖR SOCIALT ARBETE

# “We are more hands-on, we are more practical”

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- A case study on institutional frames of social work, and their possible consequences on the relationship between the professional and client.

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# Abstract

**Title** “We are more hands-on, we are more practical”  
-A case study on institutional frames of social work and their possible consequences for the relationship between the professional and the client.

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**Keyword** Institutional frames, Formal frames, Relation-based social work, Professional-client relationship.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the institutional frames of social work in Uganda and to discuss their possible consequences for the professional-client relationship. Theoretically our analysis draws on two different perspectives, which we have chosen to call “*promoting formal frames in social work*” and “*promoting relation-based social work*”. Empirically the analysis is based on a case study of an NGO in Kampala, Uganda, which works with helping abandoned pregnant teenagers.

In this study, a qualitative approach is employed which makes use of method triangulation by combining interviews, participant observations and document analysis. The results indicate that our professional informants experience relation-based social work with weak formal frames. These settings seem to promote flexibility and to allow for the adoption of an individual perspective for each client. On the other hand legal rights for clients seem to be nonexistent and decisions apparently have a risk to be made out of arbitrariness. The conclusion of this study is that social work in Uganda is regulated by other frames than formal ones. It seems impossible to execute social work without any institutional frames. With less formal regulation there is more room for informal norms to affect social work. In the Ugandan context certain religious and cultural norms seem to have a major influence.

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# Preface

First of all we would like to thank the organization *The Shelter*, for the warm welcoming, your hospitality and inspiring work. You let us take part of your daily work, without limiting our study, and for that we are thankful. Your flexible and “hands-on” social work made this study unique in a Swedish context. Thank you, “the Manager Caroline”, for fruitful information and interesting insight in your work and passion. Thank you “the Employee” who gave us your perspective and knowledge of social work at The Shelter. We would also like to say thanks to the clients that we interviewed for being brave and letting us take part of their life-stories. Big thanks to the rest of the staff-members and girls at The Shelter who contributed to the study through the observations, and finally Jack, the dog, for not eating us.

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# 1. Introduction

*We are students from Sweden, sitting on a narrow wooden-bench, in a small maternity-clinic in one of the slum areas in Kampala, Uganda. We are doing our internship here, at a home for pregnant teenagers. On this particular day we are together with our supervisor, visiting a possible client and her friend. The reason we are here is to receive more information about the girl in question and her situation. If our supervisor decides to let her stay at the home, we need someone to sign a paper that states that she comes with us voluntarily. The girl is under 18 years old and we have not been able to contact her parents as she will not allow us to do so. While we are sitting here we are wondering who this friend is, what is her responsibility for the girl and why does she have the authority to sign a paper regarding the girls free will?*

During our internship, situations similar to this made us understand that the rules of social work are very different in Uganda from those in which we are accustomed. We had a meeting with our supervisor to follow-up this case and discussed with her why the organization needed this document signed by someone else other than the girl or her parents. This friend had earlier been referred to as sister, cousin and friend, which made her part confusing to us. We considered it natural that someone, for example the girls' parents or guardians, should provide the approval for the girl to move to the home. Our supervisor explained that the police could come and accuse the organization of keeping the girl hostage. The organization had developed their own policy as a form of precaution this was not a governmental requirement.

## 1.1 Background and Topic

Last semester we completed our internship at an organization in Kampala, Uganda called *The Shelter*, which is a temporary safe home for pregnant teenagers. As the example described above, we noticed that social work can have another structure and be carried out in a different way than we are used to in our society. In Sweden and other welfare states, social work in a high degree, is dependent on central or local legally-binding regulations. In addition, each workplace often develops its own policies and guidelines.

In Uganda, on the other hand, we noticed a lack of regulations and follow-up work from the government. Because of this, we became interested in how these differences impact social work. We did a case study and used *The Shelter* as an example to illustrate how different institutional settings can affect the execution of social work. In a case-study you focus on a specific environment or a situation (Bryman, 2011). With this case-study we aim to focus on the question; how the existence or non-existence of certain types of institutional frames can affect the relationship between the professional and the client.

As we have been in Uganda before, our pre-understanding was already shaped by our earlier experiences. The first time we went, we did not know what to expect, but this time we had better knowledge about the country, social work and the organization we were going to visit. Coming from a western welfare state, we have been strongly exposed to the idea that legally binding regulations are a necessity for social work. This background has most certainly affected our view on social work in non-Western societies. In light of this, we are aware that there might be points of view that we will highlight that are influenced by our background and pre-understanding.

*Institutional frames* are a concept we will use in this paper. Our definition of institutional frames, comprise of legally- binding regulations, policy documents, professional norms, cultural norms and internal organizational norms. We will describe this concept in more detail in section 2.2 *Institutional frames*. The institutional frames are often created on purpose with the intention to promote the core idea behind social work; to seek people's wellbeing. The International Federation of Social Workers defines social work in the following terms;

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing.

(The International Federation of Social Workers, 2014-12-16)

In different parts of the world, there are diverse ways of implementing these ideals of social work in practice. This is depending on the variety of social structures in different countries. However, social work executed in different societies can still have the same fundamental intention. Without a government that regulates social work in a society, there might be other frames that regulate social work, such as traditions and cultural norms.

## **1.2 Purpose**

We want to discuss the existence or absence of certain institutional frames for social work in Uganda and possible consequences and impacts regarding the relationship between social worker and client. We will do this by conducting a case study of the organization *The Shelter*, based in Kampala, Uganda. We will focus on the following research questions.

### 1.3 Research questions

- What kind of institutional frames exist for social work in Uganda and at *The Shelter*?
- How is social work executed at *The Shelter*?
- What effect do the institutional frames have on the relationship between professional and client?

In particular we will look at following dimensions in the relationship between client and professional: 1) *Power relations and client's rights*, 2) *Equal treatment or arbitrariness?*, 3) *Flexibility* and 4) *Empathy and personal relationships*. These will be described under 4.3 *Consequences for the professional and client*.

### 1.4 Relevance

With this paper we aim to highlight institutional frames in the context of a Non-Government Organization (NGO) in Uganda. The way of executing social work in a more informal way, as a form of welfare, is a topic that, from our understanding, has little prior research.

In the western world, we often consider legally binding regulations as a very important precondition to execute social work. At the same time, these frames can be a barrier between the help that is being offered and the clients' needs. It is interesting to see a different way of executing social work and discuss possible consequences. There can be positive effects of social work carried out with other kinds of institutional frames, which are dependent on the very context in which the particular social work is executed. Theories of social work are often developed in the western world and obstacles can occur when trying to implement these in a very different culture (Payne, 2008). We are also interested to see if there might be negative effects when there is an absence of legally binding frames. For example, is there a risk for the social worker to abuse their position? Does absence of legally binding regulations imply arbitrariness?

A lot of social work is being undertaken in Uganda. Uganda has about 10.000 NGO's (Article 19, 2013). We believe this can be seen as their kind of welfare-system, but maybe a disorganized and, underfunded one, based on voluntary work. According to Yadama (1997) NGO's claimed that since they were based and worked in the communities, they developed good knowledge and close relationships with the people there, which in turn, enabled them to offer unique help based on the individual's needs. Furthermore they claimed that without governmental restrictions or demands, NGO's could be more flexible when designing appropriate interventions. Despite this Yadama (1997) presented previous research which showed, that NGO's achievements in social development were far below expectations regarding effectiveness in helping the poor because of the complexity of this area. The social work actions were criticized for being narrow-minded, increasing dependency and not being effective in promoting



institutional development (Yadama, 1997). Partly based on these findings, we have found it interesting and relevant to investigate how social work can be performed by an NGO, without legally binding frames.

## 1.5 Institutional frames

The word institution in the term *institutional frames* is based on Douglas C. North's definition, where institutions are humanly devised constraints or simply put, "the rules of the game". These can be formal; including laws or other written policies. Or they can be informal; including conventions, sanctions, customs and traditions (North, 1990).

Institutional frames	
Formal regulations	Informal norms
1) Legally binding regulations 2) Policy documents	3) Professional norms 4) Cultural norms 5) Informal organisational norms

Table 1.1

### *Formal regulations*

- 1) Legally binding regulations include laws from the state and written policies from public agencies. These agencies have the authority to develop binding regulations, such as a precedent which is a principle or rule established in a legal case.
- 2) Policy documents include all kinds of written documents from the organization regarding the employees (descriptions of working tasks, professional approach and basic principles or values) and the clients (rules and approach).

### *Informal norms*

- 3) Professional norms comprise standards and professional approaches, created during education and professional career related to the professional and personal identity. These are often unwritten and thereby informal.
- 4) Cultural norms reflect a wider societal context based on for example traditions, social customs and religion.
- 5) Informal organizational norms can be related to the term *doxa* (Bourdieu, 1977) and include the specific organizations' approach and professional attitude. They are developed in the organization, built on common understandings that are not necessarily discussed.

In most Western welfare-states, formal regulations in the form of laws and other public stipulations, are the primary regulating frame for social work, but this can be different in other societies. Our initial thought, from our internship, regarding social work in Uganda, was that it was executed without any frames. We discovered that institutional frames do exist, but they do not come from the government. One example is cultural

norms, which have a strong influence on social work in Uganda. All of these institutions, frame and influence how social work is being executed both on a structural and organizational level.

## 1.6 Definition of terms

- NGO is an abbreviation for *Non-Governmental Organizations* which simply means an organization without connection to the government. They are non-profit and often work across borders.
- We use the term *staff* when we refer to all staff members at *The Shelter*, including the Manager.
- We use the term *staff members* when we refer to all staff members except the Manager.
- When we wish to refer to the Manager, the Employee and the Researcher as a group, we use the term; *Professional informants*. We wish to stress that we do not mean educated professional social workers, but the point will be to emphasize that they have a university degree and a profession.

## 1.7 Disposition of the study

Chapter 1 includes introduction, background, topic, purpose, major questions and relevance. This is followed by chapter 2 with general information about Uganda as a country, information about teenage pregnancy, the concept institutional frames and description about the organization, *The Shelter*. In chapter 3, we present previous research regarding Non- Governmental Organizations, the social security systems in developing countries and research about the role of social work in Uganda. Chapter 4 describes our theoretical background, where we divide our theory in three different categories; *Promoting formal frames in social work*, *Promoting relation-based social work* and *Consequences for the professional and client*. In chapter 5, we present our methodological approach and how the case study was carried out. Chapter 6 will involve our findings and analysis of this study. In our last chapter (7), we present a discussion and final conclusion.

## **2. Overall context**

### **2.1 Social work and social problems in Uganda**

The republic of Uganda is a country located in eastern Africa bordering to Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda and Congo, with a population of about 36 million people. There are about 40 different languages used in Uganda, whereby English and Luganda are the main ones. Uganda's history is a mix of colonization, war and dictatorship. Uganda became recognized as an independent country in 1962, after several years of being a colony under Great Britain. During the 1970's, dictator Idi Amin, known for persecutions and mass-murdering hundreds of thousands of people, took the power of Uganda. He was overthrown in 1979, and in 2006, Uganda had their first democratic-selection (Sida, 2014). Uganda has one of the world's youngest populations, which is increasing rapidly, with an average age of 15 years (World Health Organization, 2002). Religion is an important part of the everyday life and most of the citizens (8 of 10) are Christian, but other religions are also practiced (Landguiden, 2011).

#### **2.1.1 Social work in Uganda**

Social work in Uganda is not regulated by the government. Over 70 % of the educated social workers are employed by Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) and only 15 % by the government. Social work is not a protected profession, and many practitioners are not qualified social workers (Lombard & Twikirize, 2014). NGO's involvement in social development has increased in Africa, as well as in other third world regions. Along with this increase, they also got more and more responsibility regarding social development while the government's responsibilities were reducing (Yadama, 1997).

#### **2.1.2 The challenges of teenage pregnancies**

In Uganda unwanted pregnancies are common and the average Ugandan woman claims that she gives birth to more children than she actually wants to. Abortion is a sensitive subject given it is illegal. It is only accepted under special circumstances and the legal regulations relating to abortion are difficult to interpret for many hospital staff.

Nevertheless, it is usual that abortions are performed using risky methods without hospital care, and it is estimated 26 % of all maternal mortality in Uganda are related to poorly conducted abortions. This statistic is much higher than in the rest of East Africa, where it is approximately 18%. Fears of being morally condemned and abused prevent women from seeking help for complications after abortions (Guttmacher, 2013).

In Kampala and Uganda, teenage pregnancy is a common social problem. 43.3% of all seventeen year olds and 70.8% of all nineteen year olds have been pregnant (UNICEF, 2000). The girls are often forced to quit school and a common outcome is that the family abandons the girl during her pregnancy because of the shame this leads to and the financial strain another child would pose for an already poor family. This leaves the

girl vulnerable and exposed. To prevent this from happening and to help girls in this situation, social work and how it is performed is most likely a very relevant question.

## **2.2 Case study, *The Shelter***

*The Shelter* is a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) for pregnant girls between the ages 13-20. The organization's purpose is to be a safe home and environment for teenagers during their pregnancy and labor. It is a temporary home and the goal is to resettle every girl back with their families or relatives'. The girls that come to the home have families that cannot provide for them during their pregnancies and they are often abandoned. Most of the girls come from different slum- areas around Kampala. During their stay at *The Shelter*, they get clothes, food, help to maternity care and social support. They are offered counselling, life-skill lessons, career guidance and help to plan long-term solutions for themselves and their babies. The girls are taught skills such as handcraft, that later can become a source of income. Through sponsors, *The Shelter* offers to provide the finances for each girl to attend school, when her baby is a bit older, so as to give her the opportunity to receive an education and later on, a secure income. *The Shelter's* vision is to help the girls through their pregnancy, and take them from being vulnerable and abandoned, to being independent and self- sufficient the rest of their lives. The organization was founded by the manager Caroline, who is an educated midwife and professional counsellor. This was done in cooperation with Swedish students and part of the organization is based in Sweden. The Swedish organization help to sell handcrafts, recruit sponsors and raise money to cover *The Shelter's* expenses. In addition to Caroline, there are three employees and some volunteers working there. Two of the staff-members live at *The Shelter* with the girls. One of them is what they call a "Shelter-graduate", which means she used to live there as one of the girls, during her pregnancy. These three women are not qualified social workers. One of them has done a course in counselling, another has experienced being a pregnant teenager and all of them have previously worked as volunteers in the organization.

### 3. Previous research

While looking for previous research, we found two articles describing the social security system in Africa and research about NGO's in developing countries. These articles have elements that are relevant for us since they highlight the positive and negative implications of NGO's and the social work they perform. These are also relevant for our case study given our interest in looking at how social work is performed in this context. We have found one report which describes the current role of social work and social development in Uganda and discusses some implications of the absence of governmental regulations and influence.

In the article "*Tales from the field: observations on the impact of nongovernmental organizations*" (Yadama, 1997), Yadama-, questioned the effectiveness and actual impact NGO's have in fighting poverty. The study was conducted in India, and compared social development programs by NGO's to those by the government. He stated that the number of NGO's had increased in the last couple of years in Asia, Africa and Latin America. NGO's were increasingly entrusted with a great amount of responsibility to design development programs, while the governmental involvement was decreased. Yadama wrote that NGO's claimed that their advantages were the close relationship with, and knowledge of, the population, given that they worked within the communities. NGO's argued that this enabled them to adjust and adapt their social development and to identify people's real needs. NGO's criticized governmental programs for not being aware of who was participating and who was benefitting. However, according to Yadama NGO's did not understand the complexity of poverty, and their achievements fell often well below expectations. Yadama cited Mahajan (1994) who stated that there was a risk that NGO's fostered dependency, had a narrow-minded focus and did not accomplish structural change. The study concluded with highlighting the importance of involving the community in the whole process, during both planning and decision-making and not only implementation. The purpose of this was to enable the local community to be innovative and adjust to changes instead of being dependent on the NGO. Full trust, confidence and participation from the community were necessary according to Yadama to achieve social and economic change (Yadama, 1997).

In the article "*Nongovernmental Organizations: The Strengths Perspective at Work*", Sherri Roff states that NGO's today provide social change to millions of people throughout the (Roff, 2004). The article states that NGO's are value-based and major players in international development. Social work aims to help people in need and to highlight social problems in society. The work of NGO's and the mission of social work is based on ideals, values and principles, which in turn influence policies. The work of NGO's is often characterized by a strong connection to communities and the expertise in development is based on hands-on experience. The work of NGO's can be illustrated by Saleebey's (1996) strengths perspective, which emphasizes, among other things,

possibility-focused work where the individual, family and community are considered experts, unique and a resource. The relationship between “help-provider” and “help-receiver” is considered to be very important for development and the help is focused on how to continue life, development and commitment in the community. With this strengths perspective, the social workers get the opportunity to combine clinic work with social action as a framework towards social development. According to Roff, it is important that NGO’s avoid paternalism and not be controlled by their funders, to ensure that cultural differences are protected. It is also important that the NGO avoids creating dependency and preserve self-management in the community (Roff, 2004).

The report “*The Role of Social Work in Poverty Reduction and the Realisation of Millennium Development Goals in Uganda*” (Twikirize, et al., 2013), paints a detailed picture of the current status and role of social work in Uganda and the promotion of social development. It states that social workers in Uganda are employed in many sectors, but the main employers are the NGO’s. 70% of social work practitioners are employed by NGO’s, while only 15% are employed in governmental departments. Qualified social workers constitute between 1-20% of the workforce in most agencies dealing with social work and social development. According to The National Association of Social Workers in Uganda, one of the biggest challenges of the development of professional social work practice in Uganda is the absence of a legal framework which regulates social work as a profession. Furthermore, this professional association claims that social work, as a profession, has not been sufficiently organized. They argue that in order to increase the professionalism, there is a need to strengthen legal and regulatory frameworks. One consequence of the absence of governmental influence has been that parts of the population have developed strategies themselves to handle everyday challenges, through small associations or turning to friends or family. In addition to this, it is presented in the report that spiritual solutions such as going to church, praying and spiritual counselling are used as methods to cope with social challenges. The understanding of social work among clients is diverse, which is related to the eclectic nature of the occupation. One popular perspective is to look at social work as a helping force, where the assignments of the professional are dominated by education, counselling or advising. Culture and tradition are considered important in Uganda and most practitioners think this has a strong impact on social development. Local knowledge based on values, beliefs, cultural practices and traditional structures, is considered vital to the success of social work interventions. In the report, one social worker is quoted as saying; “*in Africa our culture is our religion and our religion is our culture*”, which shows the significance of culture and religion in that society (Twikirize et al., 2013:137). This indicates a strong argument for that social work training includes not only theoretical knowledge, but also development of positive attitudes and awareness of ethical considerations, and that social work practice should adjust to local conditions (Twikirize et al., 2013).

## 4. Theoretical background

We have chosen to divide our theoretical background into three different perspectives which we call: (1) *Promoting formal regulations in social work*, (2) *Promoting relation-based social work* and (3) *Consequences for the professional and client*. These are based on different theoretical points of view. The first two perspectives can partly be understood by two contrary terms; professional and amateur, where amateur is the Latin word for love and professional is related to factual knowledge (Topor & Borg, 2008). According to Topor and Borg (2008), several theorists who write about professionalism, argue that social workers risk becoming emotionally engaged with their clients and claim that work should not be combined with love. From a professional, you can demand knowledge and experience, while from an amateur, this is optional (Topor & Borg, 2008). These two terms are meant to simply explain two different points of view of social work. Weber (1979) amongst other theorists claim the importance of social work built on structural and formal regulations where professional knowledge is fundamental. Other researchers (Skau, 2007; Parton & O'Byrne, 2000) promote the importance of personal relations and individual treatment which, taken to the extreme, can be related to the term amateur. We wish to stress that the term amateur, is still to be considered a qualified social worker. In the final section, we will present Lipsky (2010) who we claim can be positioned in between the other two opposite perspectives. To summarize and clarify, we will present a table of the key-aspects of formal regulated social work and relation-based social work.

### 4.1 Promoting formal regulations in social work

One of the major theoretical approaches that describes the organization of public services has been developed by Max Weber, in his theory on rational bureaucracies (Weber, 1979). This theory is also applicable to models for the organization of social work. Weber claims that the most effective way to organize a large number of people is through rational bureaucracies (Weber, 1979). An ideal rational bureaucracy has special characteristics, such as employees with highly specialized competencies, a distinct hierarchy and written rules that strictly regulate the work of the staff. Weber states that it is important to separate between private and professional, and not to act upon personal opinions, but instead, follow the regulations and guidelines, in order to rule out arbitrariness. Another point he highlights, is that staff members need to have the right competencies for the work they perform. For bureaucratic organizations to secure the individual's legal rights, he states that the professional need to put his feelings of empathy aside and only follow the law. Weber stresses the importance of limiting the discretion of workers (Weber, 1971, 1976). The unique thing about rational bureaucracies is that, even though humans run them, these humans will restrain their feeling of empathy while they work. The purpose of this rational theory is among other things, to secure the rule of law and equal treatment of all citizens (Weber, 1979).

In a similar way, Neil Thompson (2010) stresses the importance of a theoretical base when executing social work because of the complexity of the field. Social workers' evaluations should be based on a basic and detailed understanding, which according to Thompson, presupposes familiarity with different theoretical perspectives. Work practices that are built on different ideas, which then form a framework; is the meaning of a theory. Thompson goes as far as to say that it can be dangerous, and can make the situation worse, to practice without a theoretical base, because it means you act without understanding. Furthermore he argues that practice and theory are dependent upon one another, and not two opposite terms. When a social worker analyses a situation in order to make a decision in practice, he or she theorizes. Theory informs us about how to execute practice, while practice makes it possible to test the validity of the theory, and inform us about aspects where current theory is insufficient (Thompson, 2010).

## **4.2 Promoting relation-based social work**

By contrast, other theorists (Skau, 2007; Parton & O'Byrne, 2000; Topor & Borg, 2008) claim that in all social professions, our personality is the most important tool but some practitioners have a tendency to separate their emotions from their work when it involves human-beings. Skau (2007) refers, to Andersson who argues, that if having a professional attitude means having an impersonal relationship, then strict professionalism is in conflict with the ethics of humanity. Skau claims that a person's mind, body and emotions should be seen as a resource in interactions with others. By combining these factors, we achieve the ability to be skilful and competent help providers. According to Skau, Schmidbauer (Skau, 2007), claims that when we professionalize the acts of social work, which really are acts of help, they become a part of paid tasks. The human being who needs help, risks becoming a broken "item", that needs to be "fixed". A part of becoming a client is going from a subject to an object, depending on other people's judgements. For the professional, this transformation can play a role in helping to maintain a professional approach (Skau, 2007).

The concept *Constructive social work* (Parton & O'Byrne, 2000), is based on the vision of social work as an art, more than a science, where practice is grounded in moral choices and responsibilities rather than on rationality and objectifying. The main focus is face-to-face interaction and integrating the client in the practice work by working *with* them. Problems in real-life are not structured and simple. One problem is often the cause of another one. The dialog with the client enables the social worker to understand what is unique and what needs to be addressed, which means that the practitioner must be able to reflect in action. According to Parton and O'Byrne (2000), social workers are primarily practitioners, rather than theorists in action, when merging language or dialog, intuition and reasoning. Service users themselves point out the importance of conversation when going through difficult times. It is through talking with someone, who they perceive as trustworthy and empathic, that enables them to change. Conversation enables them to make sense of the situation and take control. When arguing that social work is more an art than science, according to Parton and O'Byrne,



the conversation/dialogue is central. When using the language to make the client understand, find meaning and strength in the situation, they call it being “creative wordsmiths”, the practitioner helps the service user to see what is positive and discover opportunities. In order to execute constructive work you need to improvise based on skills and discipline (Parton & O’Byrne, 2000).

Topor and Borg (2008) argue the importance to recognize the client’s own knowledge of their experiences and needs, and describe how we in the western culture have a tendency to trust only highly professionalized initiatives, like medication and therapy, in order for someone to recover. Several former patients stress the importance of being acknowledged as a person, listened to and having someone act as a friend. Topor emphasizes that clients in their everyday context are in need of social workers who are able to be present and bear the process, an ability which is not necessarily related to any educational knowledge. Social work that focuses on simple, everyday-actions departs from traditional methods in social work, which might be the reason why it has such great value for the client. Topor argues that the social environment and interpersonal relations are significant, including for example professionals, family members, friends and even pets, are very important for meaningful social work. Spirituality, religion and a belief in God are also mentioned as being meaningful (Topor, 2008).

### **4.3 Consequences for the professional and client**

The theorists described in section 4.1 and 4.2 explain social work from two opposite perspectives. One perspective argues that institutional frames in the form of legal regulations, professional standards and theoretical frameworks, are crucial for social work, and the other claims that social work should be based primarily on the relationship between professional and client. In this section, we want to present a third perspective which is positioned in between the other two. This perspective discusses possible dilemmas and paradoxes with both formally framed and relation-based social work.

According to Lipsky (2010) social work in the West is mostly based on services from the government whereby social workers are the deliverers of this service. He stresses that a paradoxical reality in public social service delivery is that on the one hand, the public servants have to live up to certain prescribed regulations to fulfil policy objectives and equal treatment of all clients. On the other hand, the social worker should be flexible and handle each case individually. Social workers are overloaded and do not have enough time or resources to handle each case individually. Instead, they develop standardized methods to increase efficiency, which in turn affects the quality of treatment and service. Furthermore, social workers have a personal and immediate impact on people’s lives given that they are the ones who provide the services. The professionals perception of the individual human being (the client), will affect his or her self-evaluation and influence the person’s own identity, as a self-fulfilling prophecy. The power-relation between help-giver and receiver is often complicated given that the

help-giver possesses a greater level of power in the relationship. The receiver automatically acts in accordance to the organizational structure to become a client entitled to services (Lipsky, 2010).

To illustrate our theoretical approaches and to get an overall understanding we will present a table of four dimensions of the key-aspects of 4.1 (formal regulated social work) and 4.2 (relation-based social work). The key-aspects consist of hypothetical consequences of the relationship between the professional and client based on level of institutional frames. We identified the four dimensions based on our theoretical material, before gathering our empirical results. These were used to create our guides, to delimit the empirical information in our study. The four hypothetical dimensions of possible consequences of the client - social worker relationship are called: 1) *Power relations and client's rights*, 2) *Equal treatment or arbitrariness*, 3) *Flexibility* and 4) *Empathy and personal relationships*. These hypotheses are briefly presented in table 1.2 (below) and will later be used to structure the presentation of our findings in chapter 6. As will be noted, some key-aspects (standardized treatment and individual treatment) overlap in different dimensions, because different dimensions can have similar effects.

Consequences of the relationship between professional & client based on: Level of institutional frames	
Promoting formal regulations in social work	Promoting relation-based social work
<b>1) Power relations and client's rights</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Independency for clients</li> <li>- Strong legal rights for clients</li> <li>- Structural power</li> </ul>	<b>1) Power relations and client's rights</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Dependency for clients</li> <li>- No legal rights for clients</li> <li>- Individual power for the professional</li> </ul>
<b>2) Equal treatment or arbitrariness</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Equal treatment</li> <li>- Standardized treatment</li> <li>- Efficient work</li> </ul>	<b>2) Equal treatment or arbitrariness</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Decisions based on arbitrariness</li> <li>- Individual treatment</li> </ul>
<b>3) Flexibility</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Controlled/restrained work</li> <li>- Standardized treatment</li> <li>- Clear frames for the execution</li> </ul>	<b>3) Flexibility</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Flexible working methods</li> <li>- Individual treatment</li> <li>- Loose frames for the execution</li> </ul>
<b>4) Empathy and personal relationships</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No personal relations</li> <li>- No emotional engagement</li> <li>- More focus on the client than the human</li> <li>- Obvious division between professional and client</li> </ul>	<b>4) Empathy and personal relationships</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Personal relations</li> <li>- Increasing network for clients</li> <li>- More focus on the human than the client</li> <li>- No obvious division between professional and client</li> </ul>

Table 1.2

### *1) Power relations and client's rights*

From the “formal regulations” perspective, where social work is formally regulated, we would expect that clients would gain stronger legal rights and stronger independency. In this perspective relation-based social work would pose a risk for the client to become dependent on the offered services and the relationship to the help-giver. In this kind of social work, the power is at an individual level, where the client is dependent upon the professional's discretion. However, it might be argued that formal regulated social work also creates certain power relations. In this perspective, personal power could be said to be replaced by structural power, which is expressed in legal frames.

### *2) Equal treatment or arbitrariness*

According to Weber, regulatory frames are necessary to secure efficiency and equal treatment. A possible consequence of this is that a high standardization of services will be attained, which from an equal treatment perspective might be regarded as desirable. In addition, the level of arbitrariness in such a system can be expected to be reduced. On the other hand, possible negative impacts might arise for social work dealing with complex social problems. Promoters of “relation-based” social work stress that it is of vital importance that each client is approached and treated in a unique way.

### *3) Flexibility*

The “formal regulations” and the “relation-based” perspectives both assume that strongly regulated service provision will imply a strongly reduced degree of flexibility as compared to relation-based service provision. In the “formal regulations” perspective, this is regarded for the most part, as a good thing, whereas the “relation-based” perspective stresses the importance of flexibility.

### *4) Empathy and personal relationships*

When social work is strongly based on formal regulations there is no room for personal relations, emotional engagement and discretion. The help-receiver becomes more client than human-being and the division between client and professional is obvious. In the “formal regulations” perspective this is desirable in order to secure the rule of law and equal treatment for all citizens. The other opposite perspective, however, presupposes that the personal relationship is crucial in order to achieve development. The help-receiver here becomes more of a human being and the division between professional and client is more vague. The relationship with professionals can also be helpful in increasing the clients' social network and practicing social skills.

Based on our theoretical background, these perspectives will guide our interpretation of our empirical data. They will also be the foundation for our results and analysis.

## 5. Methods

### 5.1 Research methods and model of data collection

We have conducted this study by using qualitative methods. Qualitative method describes how the informants in a certain environment interpret their reality (Bryman, 2011). Qualitative methods represent the character or the quality in a certain subject. Its purpose is to clarify a phenomenon or problem and to capture the meaning and the sense of that subject, while the aim of quantitative methods is to search the presence and the frequency of a problem. Qualitative approaches strive to use different methods and techniques and to adapt them to the research purpose (Widerberg, 2002). Therefore, we found it best to combine interviews, observations and document review, to collect our empirical material. Using more than one source or method in a social study in order to investigate a problem from different perspectives is called *triangulation*. Triangulation increases the validity of the paper, which is the purpose of the concept. Doing both interviews and observations makes it possible to check that your results correspond, are valid and relevant (Bryman, 2011).

### 5.2 Selection of informants

With our selection of informants we wanted to grasp a nuanced image of the organization, background information about social work in Uganda and information about the execution of social work from different levels and perspectives. We decided to interview a researcher from Makerere University to get a professional opinion about the laws and regulation of social work in Uganda. At *The Shelter*, we interviewed the manager of the organization who became a key-informant, because of her knowledge as the founder and leader of *The Shelter*. We were interested in hearing her point of view regarding institutional frames, and how these affect the organization and the execution of social work. We selected a staff member primarily because we wanted to capture possible other perceptions. This particular staff member was selected for practical reasons. One of the other two staff members were absent during our time there and the third one did not speak English fluently, which means we would have been dependent on an interpreter. We also wanted to understand how clients perceive their stay at the organization, so we decided to interview three girls who have experienced being residents of *The Shelter*. Two of these girls stayed at the organization during the time we were there and where in a late process of their stay which means they had good knowledge and experience of *The Shelter*, and therefore we found them suitable for participating as informants. The third girl was a former client, who had moved out earlier this year. We thought it would be interesting to interview her, to see if her experiences were different from the others, and view her stay from another perspective.

This kind of selection of informants is called *targeted selection*, and is a strategic way to choose the informants so that they are relevant for the study and research questions. The goal is to have a wide variety of informants that differ by way of qualities and

characteristic features (Bryman, 2011). This process is important because it affects the empirical material and research. It will ease one's work if one finds informants that want to talk, who are able to do so and understand the purpose and the questions (Bernard, 2006). Since we chose to do the study at the organization where we did our internship, we already knew *the Manager*, *the Employee* and had met *the Researcher*. This made it easier for us to plan our research from Sweden before we went to Uganda to collect our material.

#### *Presentation of informants*

- *The Manager/Caroline* is the woman who founded the organization *The Shelter*. She is an educated midwife and a professional counsellor. We have chosen to give this informant a fictitious name as both the girls and the staff refer to her often in the quotes presented in this paper.
- *The Researcher* works as a lecturer in the department of Social Work and Social Administration at Makerere University in Kampala. She is a trained social scientist, majoring in Social Administration with a Master in Social Work and Human Rights.
- *The Employee* started working at *The Shelter* as a volunteer and is now an employed staff-member. She has a degree in business and administration and has also studied a course in counselling.
- Client 1, client 2 and client 3 are girls who live /used to live at *The Shelter*. We do not wish to express details about the clients who stay at *The Shelter*. This is because of the importance of allowing these girls to remain anonymous and respecting their integrity.

### **5.3 Implementation**

The research for this paper was carried out in both Sweden and Uganda, during the period September 2014 - March 2015. In September and early October 2014 we familiarized ourselves with relevant theoretical approaches and earlier research on the topic. In this period we also designed a plan for how we should collect our empirical material in Uganda. Upon arrival to Uganda in October 2014, we knew what kind of information we wanted and had our interview- and observation guides ready. We spent three weeks in Uganda collecting our empirical material at the organization, through interviews, observations and reading documents. When we came back to Sweden we compiled our results, carried out our analysis and completed our paper.

#### *Case study*

We have been interested in understand how social work can be conducted in a country with very weak or non-existent governmental frames and how this would influence the relationship between the professional and client. We have chosen to do a case study in order to show what consequences there might be with this type of structure. The purpose of a case study is to focus on a small part of a bigger picture and let this indicate a possible reality (Evsjögård, 2009).

### *Interviews*

Bryman (2003) asserts that in social science interviews the aim is to obtain data from the informant about which norms, behaviors and opinions they have. Our interview method has been semi-structured, with interview guides, which is in line with our choice of method. We separated our questions into different themes, which were the same in all our guides. During the interviews, we followed our guide, but asked follow-up questions that were not part of the guide, based on the answers we received (Bryman, 2003). We conducted six interviews in total, which lasted between 20-50 minutes each and we used a dictaphone to record them. Following the recommendation of Kvale and Brinkmann, our informants could choose where they wanted to be interviewed, in order to make them feel as comfortable as possible during the interview situation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

### *Observations*

We conducted *participant observations*, which mean that, as researchers, we have taken part in daily life activities at the same time as we observed it. Our purpose was to capture the behavior of individuals and the meaning of certain settings for this behavior (Bryman, 2011). Observation clarifies how a phenomenon can take place in its natural context. The actions of people are studied in terms of what they say they do, to see if they actually do what they say they do, or if in practice their actual behavior is different (Halvorsen, 1992). Halvorsen states that structured observations are bound to predetermine situations whereas unstructured observations are not bound to any specific criteria (Halvorsen, 1992). In a sense, we believe our observations have been simultaneously unstructured and structured since we had themes to follow, but were not bound to specific situations.

The observations have been a supplement to our interviews. We have performed our observations at the organization *The Shelter*, observing the staff and the girls in the working environment and in different activities. We have taken part in lessons, bible studies and daily life. The observations have helped us to examine if any informal norms exist and how these affect the execution of social work.

### *Documents*

*The Shelter* has one document that outlines the rules for the girls during their stay. This document represents the only written policies and includes requirements and expectations of the girls, which in this study is part of formal regulations.

## **5.4 Method of analysis**

In the research process, we developed several hypotheses about possible research outcomes (see section 4.3). This affected our analysis. In our interview guide, we divided the questions in different themes and concepts that have been influenced by the above- mentioned hypotheses (Appendix 1). In the end, this helped us to structure our analysis.

Our method can be related to the hypothetical-deductive approach, which means that our research derives from certain hypotheses that are tested and compared with certain theories (Thomassen, 2007). This approach presupposes, among other things, that before the empirical analysis is carried out, the research questions are clearly defined and theoretical knowledge is acquired (Halvorsen, 1992). Before executing our interviews and observations, we studied different theories claiming different outcomes for social work in situations similar to the context we wanted to investigate. On the one hand, we have been drawn to Max Weber who argues the importance of bureaucratic and governmental control of social work, and on the other hand, we have been inspired by the claims of other social scientists who stress the importance of a personal relationship between professional and clients in order to achieve development.

Our approach has similarities also to the abductive method of reasoning. In this perspective, theories can help to discover patterns in empirical results that otherwise would have been lost. This method is characterized by an exchange of theory and empirical data (Larsson, Lilja & Mannheimer, 2005). When we compiled our results we used theories that matched our assumptions to understand our empirical data, and through our data, we could find more theories to interpret our results.

## **5.5 Division of work**

During the working process of this thesis we have separated the work between us in the following way: Before we went to Uganda we together started to write the chapters, 1. *Introduction* and 2. *Overall context*. We also gathered some of our theoretical background and previous research. Both of us were engaged in this, using databases to find relevant information. We also wrote our interview-, observation- and document-guides together. In Uganda we together, conducted all our interviews and observations. During this time we also transcribed the interviews, which we separated equally between us. Back in Sweden we started working with our results and analysis. From the beginning we had these two chapters in one united chapter. This united chapter was separated in two parts, where one part existed of *Presence of institutional frames* and the other part of *Consequences of social work*. When we decided to separate the analysis from the results, Sofia did this separation and simultaneously adjusted the language and the fluency of these chapters. At the same time Antonia wrote chapter 5. *Methods*. We separately finished equal parts of the chapters, 3. *Previous research* and 4. *Theoretical background*. Together we have been working with adjusting the language and the fluency. Antonia has worked with the overall structure, such as *Table of Contents*, while Sofia created the two tables.

## 5.6 Validity and reliability

### 5.6.1 Validity

The concept of validity is about the question; do you measure what you think you measure? (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009) The purpose of our study has been to examine what kind of institutional frames exist in an organization in Uganda and which consequences these have on the social work executed. Validity can be divided in two categories; internal and external validity. Internal validity is about the degree to which conclusions drawn in a study can be regarded as being trustworthy (Bryman, 2011). Through our choice of various methods, we believe it enabled us to capture the institutional frames and the effect of these in a valid way. To achieve external validity, a study should be transfer able to different social environments and situations (Bryman, 2011). With qualitative methods, it is hard to ensure external validity since these are often based on case studies and limited samples.

One thing that was difficult for us to control and to prevent was the extent to which our presence as researchers affected the informants individually and the interaction between them. The human interaction between researcher and informant affects the informant and how he or she chooses to respond, which in turn affects the researcher's understanding and knowledge of the informants' situation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). In interviews, the informants can have a tendency to answer the questions based on how they wish to behave in reality, not how they actually behave in everyday life (Bryman, 2011). Neither we as researchers, nor our informants, have English as our maternal language, although it is one of the main languages in Uganda. This affected the communication and therefore we cannot be certain that all the information between both parts were accurately understood at all time.

The relationships we had with some of the informants and the organization prior to the case study, may have influenced the way they responded and therefore, affected the results. Based on our previous experiences, we believe *The Shelter* has a significant impact on the girls' opportunities in life. Because of this pre-understanding there will be situations which we will not notice or question which could be relevant for our result. From our time as interns, we did not have an established relationship with the clients, except the girl who had already moved out. She was selected because of the short timeframe; we knew she was available, staying in Kampala and she speaks almost fluently English. Regarding the professional informants, we more or less had an established relationship with all of them. Once again this was necessary because of the short timeframe; to be able to concentrate on gathering information, we needed to have certain knowledge about the context we would work within. Even though our previous experience might have influenced our result, our choice of using method triangulation helps us as researchers to interpret the material from different angles. With this method, you can utilize different sources of data and increase the overall validity of the study (Bryman, 2011).



### **5.6.2 Reliability**

The concept reliability refers to whether a study can be reproduced by another researcher, or by the same researcher, but at a different time (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Qualitative studies are hard to reproduce, since they are conducted in a social environment that is in constant movement (Bryman, 2011). This means that if we were to conduct this study again at a later time, some of the contextual circumstances would be different. Widerberg (2002) raises the question as to whether reliability is a fruitful concept for all kinds of research. She states that qualitative studies often have a subjective starting point where the specific researcher is important for the study and another one might not obtain the same results (Widerberg, 2002). This is also true for our study, where we have a specific relation to this organization. After having lived in Uganda and working at the organization for five months, we have acquired certain knowledge and an understanding of the situation at hand that is hard for another researcher to replicate.

### **5.7 Ethical considerations and methodical reflections**

In the process of conducting research, ethical issues may arise that need to be carefully addressed (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). One of the first things we decided was that we wanted to write this thesis in English to preserve the original quotes as much as possible, to keep the contextual meaning and to make it possible for our informants to take part of our results and conclusions. While doing a qualitative study, there are also ethical considerations to take into account regarding the participating informants. Larsson highlights the importance of evaluating whether protecting the anonymity of your informants, is of more value than the possible new knowledge gained from the study (Larsson, 1994).

In our research process, we have reflected on the fact that we had established a personal relation with the organization *The Shelter* and with some of our informants. Starrin and Svensson claim that it is common in qualitative research to become personal with the informants, which is an ethical consideration a researcher has to consider (Larsson, 1994). Furthermore, we come from a different culture, which can be expected to have influenced our behavior and how our informants chose to respond and interact in our presence. Another fact to consider is that the staff members and girls often speak Luganda to each other, which sometimes created a barrier during observations. On the other hand, the fact that we could recognize many expressions and understand their linguistic- culture is a possible positive consequence of our relations and knowledge about the country and culture. Without this pre-understanding, we might have received other results and might have come up with different interpretations and conclusions. Our knowledge made it easier for us to adapt our questions during our interviews, in order to grasp the information we wanted. Not having this knowledge when interviewing people from different cultures is something Kvale and Brinkmann mention as a typical problem (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

### *Research ethical questions*

There are some ethical guidelines that are important for all researchers to follow (Halvorsen, 1992). In our discussion of ethical considerations we have chosen to draw on Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), who stresses that all research activities should comply to the following four ethical demands: *Informed consent*, *Confidentiality*, *Consequences* and *Researchers role*.

*Informed consent* means that all research participants should be properly informed about the study and research process, and that it is important to ensure all informants are participating voluntarily and on their own conditions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Before we went to Uganda, we had email correspondence with both *the Researcher* at the University and *the Manager* at the organization. We informed them about our purpose of the study and they agreed to be a part of it. We also discussed with *the Manager* that we wanted to do interviews with some of the clients and observations at the organization. With regards to the girls and the staff members, given that some of them cannot read or write, we verbally clarified our purpose and asked if they wanted to participate. The informants were given the opportunity to choose where and when the interviews were performed. We were unable to contact the parents of the girls who were under-age. *The Manager* is their guardian while they stay at *The Shelter* and she gave the once who wanted, permission to participate in our study.

To ensure that the informants answered as freely as possible and to secure their integrity, we have kept everyone anonymous according to the *confidentiality requirement* (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). We have used aliases, both for the name of the organization where the study is conducted and for the informants' names. Since the girls are in a vulnerable situation, we have been extra careful with their identities.

The concept *Consequences* is about protecting informants from possible negative consequences of their research participation. Our empirical data will only be used for this study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). We asked the informants if we could record the interviews, and informed them that the recordings would only be used in this study and then be deleted.

The *Researchers role* should be, according to Kvale and Brinkman (2009) characterized by a high degree of moral integrity during the whole research process. This implies, among other things, that the researcher should strive for high scientific quality in order to make sure the results are as accurate as possible (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Being aware of these ethical considerations and following them during the research process, as described above, is one way of securing moral integrity. During the work with our results, we have been very careful with how we present the quotes and how we interpret our material. We have done this in order to protect the integrity of our informants, but also to achieve high scientific quality.

## 6. Results

The results presented in this study are based on our empirical data about the organization *The Shelter*. We have chosen to divide our results in two sections where we start with mapping institutional frames in social work in Uganda and specifically at *The Shelter*. In the second part, we discuss possible consequences of these institutional frames for social work. This part is separated into four sub-sections that are based on our four dimensions of the social worker-client-relationship mentioned in 4.3; *Power relations and client's rights, Equal treatment or arbitrariness, Flexibility and Empathy and Personal relationships*.

### 6.1 Presence of institutional frames

#### 6.1.1 Formal regulations

##### *Legally binding regulations*

Uganda is a developing country without a modern welfare system. The government only plays a minor role as welfare provider for the citizens; virtually it is the market and family that are the prime welfare providers. According to *the Researcher*, the government can occasionally provide support when all other channels have failed. They can “provide on a minimum basis”, for example in form of free medicine and some hospital care, but these benefits give rise to stigma and are only used by the ones in worst need. Universal Primary Education is supposed to be free but associated costs make it inaccessible for the poorest part of the population (Twikirize et al., 2013). Without public social services or support from family, people are left alone. In these cases some of them can turn to different NGO's to get help, but the services provided by these organizations have not the character of individual rights. Thus they cannot be required by anyone.

Everyone is for themselves, so it is the family and market. [---] The government plays a very limited role in the provision of social services. [---] If your family cannot provide for you, there is no one to run to.

The Researcher

According to *the Researcher*, there are no policies or laws from the government in Uganda, which directly circumscribe the execution of social work. From our understanding governmental stipulations only regulate the permissions to start an NGO.

...NGO's come; they seek permission from that ministry, which is how the government regulates. [---] I am supposing not even our Government knows the rules of social work. [---] There is no driving force; this is social work.

The Researcher

There are several requirements you have to fulfil, in order to be allowed to start an NGO in Uganda. You have to register, write down an organizational vision, have board members and safe facilities. *The Manager* expresses that she does not think it is easy to start an organization and that it is a challenge to go through with it;

They have like critical areas they have to look at, I can tell you that it is not easy to open up one, but if you have the right cause, you can open it.

According to *the Manager* you have to renew the permission after one year, three years and five years. When you do, a representative from the government might come to monitor the facilities where the organization is based. The NGO's do not get any financial support from the government and *the Manager* does not feel that the government takes part of the daily work at *The Shelter* even though she does feel that it does have a general impact because of the possible monitoring. All our professional informants' highlight the possible monitoring of facilities when we talk about governmental influence and from our understanding, the main purpose with governmental control has been to secure a higher standard of the physical environment for the clients. *The Employee* also agrees that there are some regulations but that they do not have any impact on the actual execution of social work;

There is a structure, the rules are there, but they are not so implemented. The government does not follow-up a lot to find out what is happening. [---] But there is not much monitoring really, because since I have been here, I have not seen any governmental official coming by...

### *Policy documents*

Regarding policy documents at *The Shelter*, only one document was presented to us, which contains rules for the clients. According to our informants, when a girl moves to *The Shelter* she is required to learn the different rules and policies that are in place at the organization. *The Manager* stresses that these rules' purpose is to create order for the organization and the girls;

We have a form of regulations and guidelines. Because you cannot keep up a place like this if you do not have...

These rules contain privileges, responsibilities and guidelines that the girls have to follow during their stay at *The Shelter*. The staff goes through the rules with each girl when they arrive to the home.

...they tell you when you come, to be able to stay here you sign or if you do not want to stay you can go and what, leave. So they tell you the rules and then you can decide if you want to stay or leave.

Client 3

In the written policy documents we could read that all activities (bible studies, lessons and counselling) are compulsory as well as daily chores, such as cooking and cleaning. *The Shelter* motivates the girls to attend these activities with a good attitude. The document states that the tasks are part of the program, for the girls' wellbeing and recovery. *The Manager* express that they are "put in place with reason", for the girls to develop through talking about their situation, to have someone to share their concerns with, to learn how to take care of themselves and their child and to empower them through skills and knowledge.

Whatever we do, most programs are focused on some kind of improvement for these girls.

The Manager

### 6.1.2 Informal norms

#### *Professional norms*

*The Manager at The Shelter* is a qualified- and registered midwife and professional counsellor with a university degree in guidance and counselling. Her educational background is relevant for the work she does at *The Shelter*. According to *the Manager*, her education in counselling and her professional norms are quite similar to those of qualified social workers. None of the staff members have a professional degree in social work. One of them has a general degree in Business and Administration and a course in counselling. The other two went to primary and secondary school, but have no further education.

*The Researcher* expresses that there is no "national code for ethics" regarding social work. The students at Social Work and Social Administration at Makerere University attend a number of courses related to ethics, but since many practitioners do not have this education, social work in Uganda is often carried out with little awareness of ethical issues. Confidentiality and documentation are not regulated by law in Uganda. Instead, this is a professional norm for social workers and counsellors. *The Manager of The Shelter* has started to implement confidentiality and documentation practices and, according to *the Employee*, this has had a positive influence on the work environment;

But now it's a policy, that every girl you counsel, you fill it in immediately. It's a positive policy. So now we have better records actually.

Another professional norm *the Manager* mentions in her interview is the importance of dressing properly, as a professional. At *The Shelter* we noted that all the staff members wore trousers, knee-length skirts or dresses and their shirts covered their shoulders. This

choice of clothing gives a conservative and professional impression and is different from the more casual clothing style of the girls.

### *Cultural norms*

An important part of the Ugandan culture is Christianity and this also affects the social work that is executed at *The Shelter*. Christianity is practiced at *The Shelter* as part of the daily social work. They have compulsory bible studies each morning and evening, and they also go to church together every Sunday. *The Shelter* accepts girls from any religion, but during their stay, they have to participate in Christian activities.

We are a Christian-based organization, so whether you are Christian or not you have to be for bible study, you have to go to church on Sunday, as long as you are at The Shelter. That is another policy that we have.

The Employee

It is not only during bible study that the Christian perspective is noticeable. Even in life-skills classes, counselling and everyday work with the girls, the importance of a Christian life and point of view is emphasized. The girls are often encouraged to pray to God for both forgiveness and the strength to move on. In relation to their families and relatives, they are encouraged to forgive in order to improve these relations, and they are taught that it is through God that this forgiveness can be found. Staff members often refer to God, being thankful for the skills he has given them and for the ability to run *The Shelter*, and for having enough room, money and food for all their clients. We feel that it is important to stress that this is not an unusual way of working in Uganda. The Christian religion takes a big part in society and is considered important in everyday life, both in professional settings and privacy. All the girls we talked to expressed that Christianity has been significant for their development during their stay at *The Shelter* and that it has been of great importance in their lives.

Me staying at The Shelter changed my life a lot. Because its where I got my Christ from. First of all I felt good. At The Shelter they really take good care of us.

Client 1

But when I came into The Shelter I learnt that the bible is something so good, that if you get to realize that the bible is good, you can get more enlightened and if you believe in it, things will be big. So that change, I think it brings about development in me...

Client 2

I came to The Shelter, here they teach me about the bible and I started to pick up something, many things; loving children and loving people.

Client 3

The significance of religious norms for social work at *The Shelter* cannot be underestimated, since it strongly influences everyday life there and presumably also long-term development of the girls. All of the girls express that the religious orientation of *The Shelter* has caused a big change in their life and that they, with the help of Christ, have become “better people”. One of the girls refers to God as a second friend or family, to whom she can always turn. This is quite important considering that most of these girls were abandoned and had no one to turn to, no one who would care for them or help them.

...cause I know that if there is no person to talk to, I can talk to my God.  
That is a change that I received at The Shelter.

Client 2

As a traditional conservative society, Uganda is not only influenced by religiosity, but by traditional family ideals that are also an important cornerstone of the Ugandan culture. Thus, it is not surprising that *The Shelter* regards itself as a family. Both staff and girls often refer to *The Shelter* as a family and it is one of the points that is also highlighted to each girl when they move into *The Shelter* and go through the rules. The staff emphasizes the importance of showing the girls’ love, as an important part of their developmental work in order to strengthen their self-image.

We have to be patient with you, teach you, love you through it...

The Manager

We are one, what, one family. You have to share.

Client 3

### *Informal organizational norms*

As an organization, *The Shelter* has developed its own informal policies in different areas in addition to the ones mentioned above. These policies are a general understanding between the staff members and, according to *the Manager*, they are still under development, which she argues is because *The Shelter* is still a young organization.

When *the Manager* started *The Shelter*, she was the only employee and therefore had the possibility to determine the rules and policies herself, based on her professional knowledge, experiences and personal values. Now there are four staff members and some volunteers, and the rules and policies are verbally communicated. *The Employee* explains that *the Manager* is the one who decides about her work tasks as an administrator and has told her what she is supposed to do and not do. These instructions

include structural elements, such as work hours and practical tasks, as well as instructions concerning professional and cultural norms mentioned earlier in section 6.1.2 Informal norms.

Caroline has told me some of the things like, it is kind of a job-description. What I am supposed to do, when I am supposed to be here, when I am supposed to leave... [---] Cause for documentation, I document [...] because now we have forms where every, after a counselling you have to fill a form and report...

The Employee

### **6.1.3 Analysis and conclusions about the institutional framing**

The government does not provide social services for the citizens of Uganda on a regular basis. Instead it is the family and the market who are the main welfare providers, implying that those without economical funding or relatives are left alone. Social security in Eastern Africa is influenced by the residual model of social welfare, where the family and the market are the main channels for providing the needs of the citizens (Kaseke, 1997). According to Weber, the only way to organize a large number of people in an effective way is through public bureaucracies. However, bureaucracies are only possible in a political community and a modern society, based on an equal, social and economic organization (Weber, 1979). The structure of the Ugandan society, from our understanding, is not in accordance with this, which makes it difficult to supply general social services and promote structural change. Social work in developing countries focuses on community development where a common problem in an area is addressed in order to support and create change, while social work in industrialized countries often primarily seeks to promote individual development. Different social policy contexts produce different types of social work (Thompson, 2010). A consequence of the residual Ugandan social policy is that many NGO's have been founded as an alternative to governmental social services for those with the greatest need.

According to Yadama, the responsibility of governmental support in social development were reduced whilst the number of NGO's providing those services were increased (Yadama, 1997). Governmental influence in social work only exists indirectly through the NGO permit regulations. The regulations for NGO's are more concerned about the organizational structure itself and not the social work that is executed. Our informants state that some monitoring occurs in the form of visits, but we got the impression that these visits are rare. Nevertheless, the "threat" of a visit might, to some extent, influence social work practices in NGO's in Uganda. Foucault states that if one knows there is a possibility of being seen by the controlling unit, this knowledge can be enough to keep one from doing wrong (Foucault, 2003).

In the definition of social work by The International Federation of Social Workers, we read that "Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect



for diversities are central to social work.” (2014-12-16). These are fundamental principles of social work. When there are no legally binding regulations or policies that effectively determine how an organization is to operate, it is completely up to the management of the organization to decide upon this. At *The Shelter* the professional norms are developed and shaped by *the Manager*, which suggests considerable leeway for individualized and flexible regulations. *The Shelter's* internal policy document contains rules about compulsory activities like bible studies, lessons and counselling, as well as expectations in relation to the clients' attitude and behavior. Both *Policy documents* and *Informal organizational norms*, are dependent on the morals, values and ethics of *the Manager*, which implies that the code of ethics in the organization can become arbitrary. Weber stresses the importance of not acting upon personal opinions, and that regulations and guidelines are crucial to rule out arbitrariness and secure equal treatment (Weber, 1971, 1976). On the contrary, Skau claims that compassion for humanity is part of social work and human ethics are necessary to develop an ethically defensible professionalism when working with human beings (Skau, 2007).

Since many practitioners of social work in Uganda are not qualified social workers, the professional norms may vary a lot between different NGO's. In most social work agencies, the workforce constitutes of few qualified social workers and in NGO's only 19,4% have this education (Twikirize et al., 2013). To have a professional background with a professional language, can simplify the work. A common professional language also makes it easier for different professionals to communicate and gain a common understanding. A code of ethics, norms and common values enables the help-giver to see a problem or phenomenon from a different point of view and to acknowledge and adopt new solutions. The professional role contains both experience and knowledge (Skau, 2007). *The Manager at The Shelter* has an educational background related to the work she performs, but she is not a qualified social worker. Her professional norms are, according to her, similar to the ones of a professional social worker. *The Employee* who has a degree in Business and Administration works as the administrator, but she also has tasks that are not related to her degree. The other staff members, and most of the volunteers, do not have a professional degree in social work. Researchers in this area disagree as to whether theories are crucial when executing social work. According to Parton and O'Byrne, social workers are primarily practitioners rather than academics, where it is personal communication, trust and empathy that are crucial when trying to help the clients to develop (Parton & O'Byrne, 2000). On the other hand, Thompson argues that social work is very complex, consisting of different levels and involving people in distressed situations. The analytic ability of the social worker is therefore crucial. Analyzing a social situation means theorizing about it, thus theory and practice are not in conflict, but rather they are dependent on each other (Thompson, 2012).

Some of the professional norms at *The Shelter* contain limitations that in other countries are regulated by law, and some of them do not have the same value in other countries, as for example the dress code. The dress code fills the function of a uniform, helping the workers to enter their professional role and for others to recognize them as members of

staff. The experience of professional belonging is important for professional identity and credibility in relation to the client (Skau, 2007). When there are less formal frames to regulate social work and informal frames become the primary regulator, we believe it becomes more important to stress a professional role towards the client in other ways.

One coping strategy that was pointed out by clients of social work in Uganda, was spiritual practices such as prayers, counselling by pastors and going to church (Twikirize et al., 2013). Former patients in a study by Topor and Borg, also mention that personal belief, religion and God's presence were important for the recovery process. In this study, some patients expressed confidence that God had been present in their process of recovery, which in turn had made them able to manage their difficulties. Despite great loss, God was there through the whole process, as a spiritual support, no matter what (Borg, 2008). The clients at *The Shelter* all express the importance of religious belief for their personal development and state that together with Christ they have become "better persons". Most of the girls have experiences of abandonment and exclusion from society. When they come to *The Shelter* and are taught about Christ, they become a part of something bigger, a support that stands above humanity that will always be there as long as they believe in it. The acceptance of Christ as their savior will also provide them a place in society because of the importance this has in Uganda, as well as a place in *The Shelter*-family. Culture and traditions have a great impact on the Ugandan society and knowledge about local values, beliefs and norms is considered crucial for accomplishing relevant social work interventions (Twikirize et al., 2013).

## 6.2 Consequences for social work

### 6.2.1 Power relations and client's rights

Based on the findings in the preceding section, power at *The Shelter* rests mainly on an individual instead of the structural level. *The Manager at The Shelter* describes how during her work in the community, she saw a need for a home for young mothers who often are abandoned by their families when they get pregnant. Furthermore she describes the purpose of the organization as being a safe home where these mothers get the opportunity to develop;

...can come out and be a better person in future, developing them beyond their odds in life [...] Reaching out to them, for them to step up to their potential despite their odds or the challenges they have faced.

*The Manager at The Shelter* has individual power to execute social work at the organization however she pleases. Both *the Manager* and *the Employee* state that work assignments are handed out by *the Manager* and she is responsible for overseeing the staff and the work they do.

Yes, I oversee the few staff that we have. To see that they are developing and yes, so it is getting in shape with things.

### The Manager

So far, Caroline does, for me, she gives me what I am supposed to do.  
[---] What I find out, I report to Caroline when she comes.

### The Employee

Furthermore *the Employee* describes how she has received increasingly more power and she can now be a part of the decision-making at *The Shelter*. She is trusted to make decisions regarding the organization, whenever *the Manager* is not around and *the Employee* expresses that she now knows the right procedures for running the organization.

Internal rules or policies regarding the girls at *The Shelter* are explained to them at the time they move in. These rules and policies are sometimes not followed or are broken, and when this occurs, the clients say that the person is in need of more counselling, which will be given by *the Manager*.

If a girl doesn't follow a rule she is made to meet Caroline and they talk about it. What happened, what brought about that and why, what made her break that rule. Then they advise her, and then the thing is settled.  
That's what I think, that is what I usually see.

### Client 2

*The Manager* explains that the girls are allowed to break some of the rules and are given sanctions, but in certain serious cases they have had to ask the girl in question to move out. She states that these cases have been concerned situations where she has had to prioritize the safety of the other clients. When we ask about decision-making and level of participation, clients report differing experiences. One of them claims that on one level she could participate in decisions. She states that the staff are the ones who decide what is important for the girls in lessons and bible-study, and that every girl has to participate in these activities. On the other hand she says that it is up to every girl to decide how much she wishes to take active part in these activities. Client 3 claims that all the activities are compulsory and that the girls have to attend these. Client 2 claims that there are no rules regarding what you have to participate in, but at the same time, she states that all the activities are compulsory.

#### **6.2.2 Equal treatment or arbitrariness?**

As mentioned earlier, Uganda lacks a developed welfare system and the few public services that do exist are formed poorly. According to *the Researcher*, public services are not trusted among the people and associated with stigma. In the situations where NGO's step in and provide for basic needs, the services offered are not available to everyone, and it is up to the NGO to decide the kinds of people they will help. Thus, there are no individual rights for the services offered by NGO's. Since these represent

the majority of existing social services, individual social rights basically do not exist. If clients are unhappy with the services offered, they have no one to turn to with their concerns, other than the organization itself.

Initially, the rules, requirements and expectations at *The Shelter* apply equally for all clients, as stated by client 2;

There are no different rules for different girls, we are all treated the same.

Contrary to this initial impression, we have seen how rules and requirements can be adjusted in different situations at *The Shelter*. According to the Manager, a girls individual situation and needs, can make them see pass their requirements, when she is in question to move in. *The Manager* is the one who assesses the individual needs, there are no documented eligibility criteria. This opens up their practices for arbitrariness. *The manager* also expresses they wish to keep the girls for as long as possible, until they are no longer in need of the organization's help and support. *The Researcher* and *the Employee* stress the importance of recognizing the individuals' needs and of opportunities to make individual adjustments in certain situations.

Yes, you handle each case; you handle each client the way they come.  
The problems are different and you have to meet them differently.

The Researcher

So it depends really on each girl. And then also on the resettlement plan,  
for some girls, they take a longer time here...

The Employee

One of the clients expresses gratitude towards *the Manager* for the help she gets at *The Shelter* and is thankful for the time and effort *the Manager* puts in so as to help the girls change their lives. According to the clients, she is very important for the organization and they are all grateful for the help they get. One of the girls also argues that if you do not want to stay at *The Shelter*, or do not want to follow their rules, you can leave. None of the clients criticize the organization.

### **6.2.3 Flexibility**

All the professional informants claim that the rather low degree of public regulation implies a high degree of flexibility for the individual social worker or practitioner. This setting allows social workers a lot of discretion and NGO's are given plenty of space to develop their own guidelines.

I am thinking that social work in Uganda is flexible, we do not have a lot of restrictions and rules [...] if I go and work in an NGO, they might have their own code of ethics.

#### The Researcher

Your social work in Sweden is more like, done by the government by only professional people, so they are more rigid on different things. But for us, being more contemporary work, there is more room for flexibility.

#### The Manager

So I find the freedom to do whatever I want to do as long as it is helpful for the girls.

#### The Employee

*The Manager* states that without regulations from a higher authority like the government, it is easier for them to see the individuals' needs and to respond to those properly. In addition she calls their way of working as being "hands-on" and states that this is more fruitful since they visit and help clients in their homes, not just from an office. She also indicates that, because of the complex social problems they have in Uganda, the focus on the individual and being flexible is important. *The Employee* and *the Manager* express a sense of freedom and consider flexibility as a big part of their work. *The Manager* explains that they have to develop their own guidelines and policies, so if for example someone breaks a rule, they have to find a way to teach this person right from wrong.

When a new girl is being considered for a place at *The Shelter*, *the Manager* use certain criteria, for example age, social situation and challenges in life, in order to decide whether the girl is qualified for help or not. Despite this, *the Manager* shares that she sometimes stretches these rules;

But once in a while when we have certain emergencies, if someone is over twenty and are in the worst need. So I do not break the rule but I try to be flexible.

Another example of flexibility is given by *the Employee* and concerns resettlement decisions;

...it depends on each girl, the situation they are in. So we look at the girl, see how ready she is... [---] And also, the girl herself, some girls ask to leave, and of course we can't force them to stay...

#### 6.2.4 Empathy and personal relationships

*The Employee* points out the importance of developing trustful relationships with the clients in order to be able to help them. She stresses that it is through interacting with the girls in their everyday life that she connects with them. All the clients expressed difficulties with adjusting to *The Shelter* in the beginning of their stay, when they had to

get used to a home full of people that are used to sharing everything such as meals, working tasks and rooms.

At the first time when I was at The Shelter, it was not really good, but with time I got to know them and they got to know me.

Client 1

When I came here, I did not like to talk to people; I just wanted to stay alone.

Client 3

One of the clients expresses that she felt insecure in relation to the staff at the beginning of her stay. After a while, when she got to know them better, she developed a relationship with them and felt more comfortable in their presence.

The Auntie (staff), it was really hard to unite with her. And I used to fear Mama Caroline. But with time I got to know her and I could talk to her.

Client 1

The girls that come to *The Shelter* have had various traumatizing experiences, for example, being abandoned in a very vulnerable situation, sexual abuse, domestic violence and living in extreme poverty. *The Employee* stresses the importance of support and a safe environment, with trustworthy people surrounding the girls, for them to recover from their experiences and to be able to continue a life with a child;

Most of them are devastated, they have really lots of problem and they come when they are heartbroken. We give them emotional support, spiritual support, we encourage them and also we give them counselling. So we work with them to recover from whatever happened to them.

When talking about rule-breaking and sanctions, the personal relationships seem to have an equally large impact on keeping the girls from breaking rules as the fear of sanctions. The personal relationships become a guide and controlling force for the girls' behavior.

...if you don't follow the rules you know [...] it is like, disrespectful, someone misleading you, so I think it hurts her.  
- It hurts Caroline if you break the rules? [Interviewer]  
Yes.

Client 1

In the written policy-documents regarding rules for the girls, we could see that *The Shelter* is referred to as a loving family for the girls, in which they can always trust. At *The Shelter*, as well as many other NGO's in Uganda, some of the staff members live at

the organization full time. At *The Shelter* they can sometimes even share rooms with clients in special situations, for example if someone is ill. Since many of the girls have been abandoned by their own family, *The Shelter* does not only become their second family, but in some cases their only family. This home plays a significant role in these girls' lives. The inadequate social service system in Uganda means that this organization is, in many cases, their only hope for a better future. The organization and the people working there thus become very important and they develop close relationships to these people.

The most important person. Of course, Mama Caroline.

Client 1

We are one, what? One family. [---] Auntie and Matron [members of staff], those people you can tell about your problem...

Client 3

### **6.2.5 Analysis and conclusion of consequences for social work**

It is up to *the Manager* to make decisions about rules and requirements. At *The Shelter*, power mainly rests at the individual level, where subjective values are the governing factor, and not at the structural level, because of a lack of external formal regulations. When the staff is given more responsibility for determining work tasks, they are also given more power. *The Manager* still has indirect power, since she is the one to allow her staff-members to make decisions. *The Manager* can control that the decisions are made in accordance to her wishes. According to Weber; "Power is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests" (Weber, 1947:152). An example of the individual level of power, which indicates who is entitled to decide what is "right and wrong", is the shared understanding amongst the staff, that girls who break rules are in need of more counselling. Decisions and actions from the professional will delimit and control the individual's lives (Lipsky, 2010). Even Skau raises this dilemma of power in the professional role, where the help-giver has more power in the relationship with the help-receiver, and thus has a higher chance of getting his or her will through (Skau, 2007).

The rules at *The Shelter* are there to shape the clients' behavior. The girls can choose to follow the rules or not, that is to say, that they have the power to decide how they will act. The activities are compulsory, but as one of the clients point out, there is a level of discretion, they can choose to contribute or not. For example, in one of the lessons we notice how some clients are passive and do not answer or comment on the subject. It is easy to consider these clients as victims without own agendas, but we believe this statement by the client and the example of what we observed, show that the girls do have an experience of power. According to Lipsky, clients are not completely helpless;

they have personal resources which the social workers are depending on to be able to execute their work (Lipsky, 2010).

The large degree of individual power that professionals have can generate dependency because clients cannot refer to their legal rights (Weber, 1979). When a person becomes a client, a dependency on the social worker develops because the professional has an advantage in terms of knowledge and power in this situation. This dependency promotes adaptation to this knowledge and compliance. There is no room for criticism or struggle for your own will (Skau, 2007). If clients have no rights as citizens or service-receivers, they have no room to express criticism and there is no one to turn to if they are not satisfied with the help they receive. Client 3 claims that if you do not like the rules you can leave, which indicates that, as clients, the girls do not have any rights to demand how they want to get help. Lipsky states that many of the services a client receives, are services they are dependent on, which make them non-voluntary since they cannot get this help elsewhere (Lipsky, 2010). In this case, the only option is to walk away from the offered help. For people who have nothing; no place to live, food to eat, family or friends to turn to, walking away is not an option. Clients are often aware of the superior position the social worker is in, being the one who provides the help. This force clients to adapt to the wishes of the social worker in order to receive the services they need (Lipsky, 2010). In the situation where clients have no legal rights, all the services provided from NGO's are given out of benevolence, which in turn creates an expectation of gratefulness. Roff stresses the importance of avoiding dependency and maintaining self-management in a community (Roff, 2004). Without legally binding frames, the professional can determine the conditions for services. This leaves the client in a very exposed situation, without legal rights, and dependent on the caregivers' goodwill, morals and conscience. According to Weber, this increases the risk of arbitrariness (Weber, 1971, 1976).

When we discussed the level of flexibility of social work at *The Shelter* with our professional informants, we noticed that they strongly related to the idea of how social work is executed under circumstances that are more restricted. The view on flexibility seems to be dependent on a fear of how social work that is based on legally binding regulations will have the effect of limiting discretion, and becoming strict and distanced from the clients. Lipsky stresses a paradox; a social worker has to be able to handle each case and person individually, and simultaneously secure equal rights for all clients. The former can suffer in bureaucracies, where the workload can be overwhelming, thereby making services standardized and simplified (Lipsky, 2010). According to Skau, Schmidbauer claims that humanity becomes a product when the help is professionalized and paid (Skau, 2007). This view is, according to the professional informants in our study, a contrast to how social work is executed without legally binding regulations. *The Manager* and *the Employee* state that they can oversee rules and policies whenever they find it necessary to ensure addressing the individual client's needs. Both the social worker and the clients are human beings, and cannot be regarded as objects. If the professional approach becomes impersonal, the ethics of humanity disappear (Skau,



2007). On the other hand, Weber claimed that to be able to secure equal treatment for all clients, it is crucial to limit the discretion and act impersonally (Weber, 1979).

Topor stresses the importance of a trustful relationship between the help-giver and receiver, and claims that we, in western culture, have a high level of trust in medical treatment and highly educated professionals. People who have been patients highlight the importance of being “noticed” and having someone who acts as “a friend” during the recovery process. Furthermore, Topor highlights the importance of everyday support and personal chemistry in building personal relationships (Topor, 2008). A quote written by Torgny Lindgren in his novel *Bat Seba* illustrates this point;

I delaktigheten uppstår vår tillvaro.  
Genom att göra oss delaktiga av varandras liv skapar vi oss själva.  
Utan delaktigheten finns vi inte till.

In the participation our existence arises.  
By taking part in each other’s lives we come to existence.  
Without participation we do not exist. [Our translation]

(Torgny Lindgren, *Bat Seba*, 1984)

When working with people we get to take part in their life, and *the Employee at The Shelter* stresses the value of everyday interaction in order to develop personal and trustful relationships with the clients. She considers these relationships necessary for the personal development process. Parton and O’Byrne claim that the professionals’ moral choices and unique understanding of the clients’ situation is necessary to develop a trustworthy relationship, and this is the very nature of social work (Parton and O’Byrne, 2000).

Skau insists that a personal relationship between client and professional needs to be established where the help-provider must be able to identify emotionally with the client to perform a good job (Skau, 2007). On the other hand Weber stresses that only a rational rules-based bureaucracy ensures that the professionals do not act upon arbitrariness because according to him only this form of service provision rules out personal relationships and irrational decisions. He claims that rational bureaucracy is necessary to secure equality among clients and to protect their legal rights (Weber, 1979). When client 1 states that *the Manager* can feel hurt if the girls break a rule, this indicates that the client is following the rules for someone else’s sake rather than her own. The close relationship to the staff can stand in the way of the personal development of the client. Skau admits that there is a risk with very close relationships between professional and client. She claims that the professionals in this situation have the opportunity to take advantage of and steer the client in a particular direction. Skau emphasizes the importance of helping the client to maintain a perception of self as an entity in order to be in control of their own decisions, to be able to develop and not to become dependent on the help of others (Skau, 2007).

The clients at *The Shelter* have been abandoned by their own families or relatives, but the organization and the staff have accepted them in their devastating situation. In this way, *The Shelter* becomes very important in clients' lives and without other significant people to trust and relate to, the relationship with staff-members can replace important relationships to close relatives or friends. Family-members are highlighted as specifically important for many former patients in the process of recovery. This is motivated by the arguments that the family has known the person for a very long time, even before he or she became a patient or client. This relation is characterized by continuity and safety (Borg, 2008). As Uganda is a traditional conservative society, the family is considered an ideal in terms of how social life should be organized. Here family- and friend- based safety-nets are of indispensable value in order to help cope with social challenges (Twikirize et al., 2013). Since many of the clients at *The Shelter* have lost their family-relations they lack this form of security. Furthermore, trustful relations and the ability to feel safe are significant promoters of a successful recovery for clients in a state of despair (Topor & Borg, 2008). In this sense *The Shelter*, which in many ways can be regarded as a second family and is characterized by tight personal relationships between social workers and clients, might be exactly what the girls in question need.

## 7. Discussion

To conclude this study we wish to reconnect to our research questions and summarize the answers we have found. Regarding our first question: “*What kind of institutional frames exist for social work in Uganda and at The Shelter?*” we found that institutional frames, first of all, are made up by informal norms. At The Shelter, informal norms include professional norms, cultural norms and informal organizational norms but since social work in Uganda is not formal regulated this may vary a lot at different organizations. Our second question was: “*How is social work executed at The Shelter?*” This question can be perceived as wide and therefore difficult to answer. Based on our purpose we answered this question in a general, instead of detailed way, and found that social work at *The Shelter* is on a higher level promoting relation-based social work instead of formal regulations. The effect of this way of working is linked to our third question, which is: “*What effect do the institutional frames have on the relationship between professional and client?*” Relation-based social work is promoting an individual focus with loose frames, where the work is categorized as flexible. This way of working also includes more room for arbitrariness and a higher risk of dependency for clients. Social work with formal regulations is on the contrary promoting equal treatment with strong legal rights for clients. This can also result in standardized treatment and no personal relationships. In the following sections we wish to highlight some parts of our results that we found interesting to discuss further. Some of these parts are directly related to our purpose and research questions, while others are our reflections about differences regarding social work in western societies and social work in developing societies. We also raise a question about the very purpose of social work and the means to reach this purpose.

Our pre-understanding before we went to Uganda to do our empirical research was that legally binding regulations of social work would not exist there. We understood that other institutional frames would be based on the personal values of the management at the organization. Our impression of an absence of legally binding regulations was confirmed by our interviews with *the Researcher*. However *the Manager* explained, certain governmental demands do exist with regards to obtaining the permit to run an NGO. To some degree these two statements indicate different views on the influence from the government on social work in Uganda. *The Researcher* claimed that there are no governmental regulations for social work, while *the Manager* felt that the NGO-permit application process and the threat of being monitored, worked as a regulation or control. We believe these differences come from different perspectives and experiences, where *the Researcher* has the academic knowledge of governmental stipulations and *the Manager* has practical experience of starting an NGO. Furthermore we assume that *the Researcher* talks about this aspect with an overall view of social work comprising of more than just the social work executed by NGO's, while the Manager speaks about social work in the context of an NGO. We have come to understand that even though

the government does not directly regulate social work, the permit application process and “threat” of monitoring might work as a regulating factor.

In developed welfare states, the laws and regulations related to social work are established, from our understanding, to secure all citizens’ equal legal rights. In order to accomplish this, the relationship between the client and the social worker has to be kept on a professional level. Regulative institutional frames are not only there to support the clients but also to help the social workers to know his or her obligations as a professional, and to make them adhere to a generally accepted ethical approach and to prevent them from getting overly involved in a case. Another purpose of legally binding frames is to make service provision effective (Weber, 1979). On the other hand, a social worker might also feel that strict institutional frames are obstacles to carrying out good social work. For example, there might be cases where the social worker has the knowledge about what will help the client, but is unable to help accordingly because of institutional constraints. This is often an argument in the criticism against strongly regulated social work. Regulated frames are there as a means to reach a goal, but sometimes when the means are too many and detailed, the focus alters and it is easy to forget the purpose (Månsson, 2000).

In our presentation of results, we have divided the effects of institutional frames in to four different dimensions. On many occasions this separation has been complex. For example, our informants often describe their way of working as flexible, while we, from Sweden, sometimes can consider it as somewhat arbitrary. Even if we acknowledge arbitrariness as a result of the way they execute social work, we wish to stress that the outcomes of their way of doing things can still be good, if it is based on personal values that are considered “right” by the society. In Uganda, we have seen personal and professional norms related to social work, that sometimes remind us of the theories and professional norms we have learned, but with one major difference. Their norms are not named or generally applied in society. When we in western society talk about theories in social work, these are often based on moral values which have been defined and categorized and later accepted as conventional truths. According to Payne (2008), social work is a social construction based on theories from the west. Ideas from industrial countries regarding social work have been applied in cultures that are very different. When a society has a culture with values that are incompatible with the ones coming from the west, Payne argues that we need to be cautious about transferring these general social theories on social problems in different contexts (Payne, 2008). The structural and cultural systems in Uganda, impacted by the country’s history, have resulted in unique social problems that make it impossible to transfer theories successfully from the west.

One difference we found interesting and wish to highlight in this conclusion is related to our different opinions as to which knowledge has highest value. From our understanding, *the Manager at The Shelter* values her religion and belief in God above theoretical knowledge. Decisions are primarily based on religious values while we, in

the west base them on our legal regulations. This is a general phenomenon in the society of Uganda where legal authorities often are associated with corruption and untrustworthiness whereas values from the religion are considered more trustworthy and “good”. According to Twikirize et al. (2013) practitioners of social work should not only focus on theoretical knowledge but should also consider and embrace local values, norms and methods in order to be able to achieve influence and change. In western countries, we often have a higher trust in official agencies and the government. Especially in Sweden where religion often is absent in the professional context, belief in theoretical knowledge is what dominates. We believe Sweden is considered to be very secularized, where religion is separated from the state and almost invisible in society. This is different from many other countries, even western ones, where religion has a huge influence. From our understanding, we often reject this type of influence and consider it irrational, without reflecting over the fact that our own laws, restrictions and societal norms often have their roots in Christianity.

Based on the International Federation of Social Work (2014), social work is defined by principles regarding human rights, social justice, collective responsibility and respect for the individual. Human dignity is central for social work. Simultaneously, in western countries, we have developed a strict, defined system to control social work, with the intention to create distance from human characteristics such as emotions (Weber, 1979). To accomplish this, we assume some professionals do not wish to be affected by qualities such as empathy, relations or unique knowledge about the individual, since they believe this will make them incapable of making correct and fair decisions. Based on this we find a paradox and raise the question; do the regulations surrounding the practice of social work contradict the very fundamental intentions of the profession? This is an area we find interesting for further research.

As a conclusion of this study, we wish to highlight that we believe that institutional frames, in one way or the other, need to be present in social work. Social work without formal frames creates a larger discretion for informal frames to evolve as the controlling factor. Taken to the extreme, social work can be driven by relation-based practices and be flexible for the individual social worker. On the other hand, it can be based on legally binding regulations that can result in higher legal rights for the individual client. It is easy for us to argue for client rights as being central for social work. However, now that we have studied social work carried out by a Ugandan NGO, we also want to acknowledge, that social work in the western world might be in need of a higher level of flexibility. This flexibility would improve the professionals’ ability to accommodate the individual clients’ unique needs properly. To be able to help the client on a deeper level, we believe that a personal and trustful relationship is just as important as reliable clients’ rights.

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# Appendix 1

## Interview guide

### Caroline at The Shelter

#### Introduction questions:

Can you tell us about the organization?

- What was/is the purpose with the organization?
- How was it founded?
- When was it founded?
- What education do you have?

#### Institutional frames

What requirements did you have to fulfill (laws, rules, policies etc.) when you started the organization?

Are there any governmental policies you have to fulfill?

Is the government a part of the work at The Shelter? How?

Is it a part of the daily work? How?

We define institutional frames from a Swedish perspective. By that we mean, we have frames decided by the government, community and professional frames, which is often based on norms and values (about how to treat clients, their integrity and our influence).

Can you relate this to your work here at The Shelter? How?

Do you have any organizational policies here?

Are those written down?

How do you as manager work with these with your employees?

Are these policies a part of your daily work?

Do you consider that your work is affected by professional norms? Can you describe them and how?

#### Power

Can you describe your role as manager?

What are your responsibilities?

How do you select your employees?

How do you want them to develop during their stay?

Do you have any requirements of the girls that stay here? And the graduates?

Are there any consequences if they don't follow this?

Have you experienced that?

#### Flexibility

Who is in charge of how The Shelter is managed and administrated?

Is flexibility a part of your work? How?

How is your work affected by not having many restrictions to follow?

Can you describe the positive and the negative effects with that?

Which effect do you think the absence of institutional frames have on the social work here at The Shelter?

How do you think it affects your professional role?

#### Equality

How do you select girls that can stay at The Shelter? (Guidelines or guts?)

How do you cope with not being able to help everyone?

How is it decided when a girl is ready to move?  
How are the girls prepared for this?  
Do you have any specific criteria?

### **Empathy (Personal relationship)**

(The Shelter as a family)

How do you value the personal relation with the girls?  
How do you work with this?  
How do you think these effects the girls?  
What kind of expectations do you have on the girls that move to The Shelter?

### **Researcher at Makerere University**

#### **Introduction questions**

What kind of education do you have?  
What is your research area?  
How long has you worked as a teacher/ researcher?  
What kind of earlier experiences do you have?

### **Government**

How is the society of Uganda built? Are there different laws in different communities, states, kingdoms or is it considered as one state? (Sweden vs USA)  
Can you describe how the law and frames regarded social service look like in Uganda?  
What kind of responsibility does the government have for social service? (In Sweden/ western world we have welfare systems)  
How is the government working with social service to the people of Uganda?  
What kind of responsibility does the government have for social work?  
Do the clients have any legal rights? How does this look?  
In Sweden social work is restricted by laws, framework and professional guidelines, often decided at the organizations but also as a part of the education. Are there any restrictions regarding how to carry out social work in Uganda?

### **NGO**

What is the most common way to carry out social work in Uganda?  
Is there other ways to carry out social work in Uganda?  
Are there any restrictions from the government for the NGO's?  
Do you know if these restrictions are followed up?  
What do you consider about the work of the NGO's, advantages and disadvantages?  
Do you know about any research regarding this type of social work?

### **Professional frames/norms**

Are there any professional norms in social work in Uganda? And if which they?  
What kind of value do they have?  
Do you think they impact the executed social work?  
Do you consider that there exist some general professional norms that the students acquire through their education? Which are those?

### **Staff at Young Mothers Home**

#### **Introduction questions**

How long have you worked at The Shelter?  
What are your work assignments?

What kind of education do you have?  
What is your passion about working here?  
What do you consider to be most important in your work?

### **Institutional frames**

What kind of frames/ rules do you have to execute your work?  
Are there any policies from the government that affect your work?  
Do some governmental rules affect your work? How?  
Are there any policies here at The Shelter that you have to follow? Can you describe them?  
What do you think of them?

### **Power**

Who design your working tasks? Can you be a part of that?  
Who is in charge of making decisions?  
Can you make decisions about your working tasks?  
How would you describe your power to change things at The Shelter?

### **Flexibility**

Can you describe how you help the girls at The Shelter?  
How do the policies at The Shelter affect your work?  
Can you describe the advantages and disadvantages with this?  
Do you sometime feel you can't help a girl? Why is that so?

### **Equality**

How is the girls selected? (Bound by any regulations)  
How do you cope with not being able to help everyone?  
What kind of expectations do you have on the girls when they move in to The Shelter?  
Do you have any requirements of the girls that stay here? The graduates?  
How is it decided when a girl is ready to move?  
How is she prepared?

### **Empathy (Personal relationship)**

What do you think is most important for the girls?  
Can you describe how the work you are meant to perform influence the relationship between you and the girls?  
Do the relationship between you and the girls have any impact on the work you perform? In what way?  
How do you want them to develop during their stay?  
How do you value the personal relationship with the girls?  
How do you work with this?  
How do you think these effects the girls?

### **Girls that live or used to live at The Shelter**

#### **Introduction questions**

How long have you stayed at The Shelter/How long did you stay at The Shelter?  
How do you feel about staying here?  
What do you like the most about The Shelter?  
Is there anything you do not like about The Shelter?

### **Institutional frames**

Are there any policies you have to follow while staying here?

What will happen if you don't follow them?

Did you get to read or sign contract with The Shelter when you moved here?

### **Power**

What do you feel is most important in the help you get here?

How do you feel The Shelter has helped you?

Do you feel you have possibility to decide what you want to be part of here at The Shelter?

Do you feel that you are listening to? That your voice can be heard?

### **Flexibility**

Can you describe the help you get from The Shelter?

Does it fulfill your needs?

If you experience a problem at The Shelter, how can you handle this?

Do you feel that the staff can adapt to your needs?

### **Equality**

Does The Shelter require anything from you to be able to stay here? What is it?

How do you think The Shelter want you to develop during your time here?

Do you feel you get treated as a unique person? Or are all treated the same?

Do you feel that you get the recognition you need?

### **Empathy (Personal relationship)**

How is the relationship between you and the staff?

Do you trust the staff and why do you think it is so?

Who is most important to you at The Shelter? Why?

Have you recognized any changes in yourself during your time here? Can you describe the change\changes?

What do you think The Shelter want you to learn?

In what way do you think The Shelter want to change your life from how it was before you came here?

What is the most important thing you have learnt since you moved here?

## **Observations guide**

### **Participating observations/ unstructured observations**

The relationship between the staff and the clients.

- Power (Staffs power/girls power)
- Flexibility (Staffs ability to be flexible)
- Equality (Equal treatment)
- Empathy (Personal relationship, increasing ability to feel empathy without profession/frames)

Power/dependency: Requirements on the clients from the staff.

Institutional frames at the organization. (Christianity, policies both regulations and norms)

How the staff and the clients react/relate to/are affected by institutional frames.

## **Document guide**

Policies/regulations regarding:

- Education of staff
- Rules for girls living at The Shelter
- Expectations on behavior
- Rules for the staff at The Shelter
- Relationship between client and the professional
- Governmental policies regarding how the work is supposed to be executed
- Documentation on the clients
- Client rights