

Summary

Implementation and efficacy of the Delta Method for Family Supervision

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In 2002 the development and implementation of a new method for working with families with juveniles who are subject to a supervision order, the 'Delta Method for Family Supervision', started. The aim of the present study was to map the progress of the nationwide implementation of the Delta Method and to examine the effects of the Delta Method on the duration of supervision orders and the number and duration of out-of-home-placements during supervision order. All 15 youth welfare offices participated in this study. Data were obtained from 30 team managers, 58 family guardians and 224 case files of juveniles who were placed under supervision. Supervisions lasted on average 37.5 months. A total of 58% of the juveniles faced out-of-home-placement during supervision order, which lasted on average 17 months.

Within all youth welfare offices the Delta Method for Family Supervision is practiced now. The extent to which the various Delta-tools are used varies between the offices. Of the surveyed team managers, 69% indicated that the 'action agenda' was not used by family guardians, and 31% of them did not consistently fill out a child safety checklist. A number of youth welfare offices employ adapted versions of the instruments and tools of the Delta Method, which endangers the uniform application of the method. Further development of the Delta Method should therefore be centralized and monitored by a national authority.

The initial reduction of the caseload of family guardians during the introduction of the Delta Method in each youth welfare office is currently under pressure. In 57% of the teams of guardians it is no longer possible to preserve a caseload of 17 cases or less. The caseload increased to 18 to 20 cases. The workload of the team managers and professional staff also increased. This is partly due to the expansion of their teams and the fact that guiding the family guardians to carry out the new Delta Method as intended requires a more intensive way of coaching.

The present study shows that 13 to 21 percent of the differences in the duration of supervision orders can be attributed to characteristics of the family guardian, including his or her working method. This means that the duration of the supervision order is determined primarily by client characteristics, or in other words, by the severity of family problems and the need to

react to these problems from the perspective of child protection. The possibilities for the family guardian to influence the duration of the supervision order are therefore limited. Nevertheless, this study shows important effects of the Delta Method on the research outcomes.

The Delta Method has a positive effect on the duration of supervision orders and the number and duration of out-of-home-placements during supervision order. For example, if the family guardian formulates concrete goals in collaboration with the juvenile and his or her caregiver(s) in a Supervision Plan, the duration of the supervision can be reduced by 8 months. While an increase in the work experience of the family guardian with one year is associated with an increase in the duration of supervision order with half a month, each additional year of experience with the Delta Method is associated with a shortening of the duration of the supervision order by 3 months. A Supervision Plan that is based on the Delta Method reduces the chance of out-of-home placement by 50%. If the Supervision Plan also includes concrete goals for the parents or other caregivers, the duration of out-of-home-placement can be shortened by 14 months. Whereas using a Supervision Plan and other tools of the Delta Method is experienced as an 'administrative burden' by some family guardians, this study clearly shows the importance of these methods.

In this study, no positive effects of the Delta Method were found on family guardians' attitudes. These attitudes include the way the family guardian communicates with the juvenile or the extent to which family guardians motivate and activate the parents and other caregivers in order to eliminate developmental threats. Positive effects of the Delta Method on guardians' attitudes may be achieved, however, by providing team managers with sufficient time to train and coach family guardians in the Delta Method. According to the team managers, the Delta Method has increased feelings of safety and confidence in family guardians. The team managers themselves benefit from the structured approach provided by the Delta Method, since it gives them the opportunity to help family guardians focus on the key objectives of family supervision. This may shorten the length of supervision orders.