

**Master's Thesis**

**Nordic Master's in Social Work and Welfare (NOSWEL) 2021-2023**

Topic:

**Understanding the Concept of Self-Determination in the Danish Welfare State.**

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**20221626**

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## **Abstract**

This research study explores the concept of self-determination and empowerment within the context of the Danish welfare state, with a focus on how this understanding has influenced social work practice in Svenstrupgård. Drawing upon the theoretical frameworks of empowerment theory, self-determination theory, and the strengths perspective which are used in social work practice to promote the agency and autonomy of service users, the study employs a qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews to collect data. The central research question is how social workers' understanding of self-determination and user empowerment has impacted social work practice in Svenstrupgård. The key findings of the study suggest that Svenstrupgård represents the bottom of Danish society, providing accommodation and care to service users with severe challenges related to homelessness, mental health, social exclusion, and substance abuse. The study argues that it is more effective for social workers to recognize that service users at this institution have gone past an expectation of change, and therefore recognition, toleration and care are a better way to guarantee service users autonomy and empowerment to live a more meaningful life. The study also suggests that some service users may not be able to fully reintegrate into society but can still live with some degree of dignity and achieve a sense of purpose and meaning in their lives. Overall, the study provides important insights into the relationship between the concept of self-determination in the Danish welfare state and social work practice in Svenstrupgård, highlighting the relevance and applicability of theoretical frameworks such as empowerment theory, self-determination theory, and the strengths perspective to give a wholistic support to service users.

## **Acknowledgement**

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Prof. Vibeke Nielsen, for her unwavering support and guidance throughout my thesis journey. Her expertise, insights, and feedback were instrumental in shaping my research and strengthening my methodology. Her commitment to my success has been truly invaluable, and I am deeply grateful for her guidance and mentorship. I would also like to thank Prof. Lars, the program coordinator, for his support and assistance in navigating the academic requirements of the program. His commitment to ensuring the success of all students in the program has been truly remarkable, and I am grateful for his unwavering support.

Furthermore, I would like to express my gratitude to all the lecturers who have taught and supported me throughout the program. Their knowledge, passion, and commitment have been truly inspiring, and their input has greatly enriched my learning experience. Finally, I would like to thank the staff at Svenstrupgård for their invaluable assistance in data collection. Their dedication and willingness to participate in this research have been crucial in providing valuable insights and perspectives. I am deeply grateful to all these individuals for their support, encouragement, and guidance, and I am honored to have had the opportunity to work with them.

# Chapter 1

## INTRODUCTION

Without a solid knowledge of what the welfare state stands for, self-determination cannot be fully articulated as the conduit through which the welfare services of the welfare state are dispersed. Any discussion and practice in the field of social work always revolves around the origins, traits, and development of the welfare state. It is pertinent to first comprehend the evolution that has taken place in the field of social work and why social work practice is faced with contemporary challenges, such as the application of the concept of self-determination and its complexity, before we attempt an in-depth empirical study into the subject of users and their expressions of self-determination in the welfare state of Denmark (Lathrope, 1979). The social welfare policies and mechanisms in existence in the Nordic nations of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden are referred to as the "Nordic welfare state." The welfare programs of these nations are among the most extensive and generous in the world. The late 19th and early 20th centuries, when these nations underwent a phase of industrialization and urbanization, are when the Nordic welfare state first emerged. The ruling classes in these nations' economies and politics started to acknowledge the necessity of a welfare system that would guarantee fundamental social protections. The Nordic welfare state progressively evolved and grew over the ensuing decades. The establishment of universal public education, the introduction of social insurance programs like old-age pensions and unemployment benefits, and the development of an extensive public health care system were significant policies and programs (European Commission, Joint Research Centre, 2020, pp. 1–18). The Nordic welfare state continued to develop and grow in the years following World War II with the introduction of numerous new social programs and policies meant to meet the needs of various societal groups, such as women, children, and the elderly. A high level of living and a comprehensive range of social protections are still offered to people of these nations today thanks to the Nordic welfare state (Esping-Andersen, 1990). The Nordic welfare state model is characterized by the following principal features:

1. Universal and comprehensive social welfare programs:

The central idea behind the Nordic welfare state is to ensure that all citizens have access to essential services and resources, regardless of their income or social status (Greve, 2019, pp. 124–136). This is achieved through a range of social welfare programs, such as:

- Every resident has access to free or inexpensive medical care, prescription medications.

People who are unemployed are eligible for financial assistance, which is meant to assist them in getting back on their feet and locating new employment.

- The Nordic nations provide basic, secondary, and higher education that is either free or inexpensive.
- The Nordic welfare state supplies a comprehensive pension system that ensures that all citizens have a secure income in their retirement years.
- The Nordic countries have strong policies aimed at promoting affordable housing and reducing homelessness.

Taxes, government grants, and other public funds are used to pay for these activities. The Nordic welfare system is regarded as a means of fostering social equality, eradicating poverty, and guaranteeing that all citizens have access to the facilities and services required to live a healthy and contented life (Martela et al., 2020).

## 2. Prominent level of income redistribution:

The Nordic welfare state, which attempts to lessen economic disparity and advance social equality, places a strong emphasis on income redistribution. Because of their extensive social welfare systems, the Nordic countries have among of the highest rates of income redistribution in the entire world. Progressive taxation, social security benefits, and public services like education and healthcare are just a few of the policies and programs that make up these welfare systems. They all work to redistribute income and wealth. This lessens income inequality and helps redistribute wealth. An illustration is the Danish flexicurity model, which combines a flexible labor market with strong social benefits. The concept encourages businesses to hire and dismiss employees as necessary, which can assist grow employment while also providing a safety net for individuals who lose their jobs. The Government Pension Fund Global, Norway's sovereign wealth fund, invests a portion of the nation's oil income for the benefit of future generations to help redistribute wealth. The Nordic welfare state stands for a dedication to income redistribution and social equality and has been proven to be successful in battling poverty and fostering economic development (Greve, 2019).

## 3. Strong emphasis on public services:

In the Nordic welfare state, the provision of public services, such as healthcare, education, and social security, is prioritized heavily because these are the responsibility of the state rather than the market. Comprehensive public services and a robust social safety net are hallmarks of the

Nordic welfare state paradigm. In the Nordic nations, the government has a big part to play in making sure that everyone has access to social security, healthcare, and other essential services. With the aim of guaranteeing access to high-quality healthcare for all citizens, regardless of income, healthcare is typically publicly funded and provided throughout the Nordic countries (Greve, 2019, pp. 124–136). Preventive care, diagnosis and treatment, rehabilitation, and long-term care are all included in the healthcare system's wide spectrum of services. The Nordic welfare state model places a strong emphasis on education, with public funding and provision of education available at all levels, from early childhood education to postsecondary education. Equal chances for all residents, regardless of origin or income, are the goal of the educational system. Social security systems are intended to act as a safety net for people who are elderly, disabled, or unable to support themselves. The programs often offer a variety of benefits, including access to healthcare and other services, pensions, and disability allowances in addition to unemployment payments. As a result, the Nordic welfare state model strongly emphasizes the role of the government in providing extensive public services and a robust social safety net, with the goal of assuring access to excellent services and equal opportunities for all residents, regardless of income or background.

#### 4. Strong labor protections:

Strong labor laws, such as the freedom to strike, engage in collective bargaining, and form unions, are part of the Nordic welfare state model, which helps to ensure that workers' rights are upheld. The protection of workers is a crucial component of social policy in the Nordic welfare state. According to T. M. Andersen (2007, pp. 45-72), the objective is to give workers robust rights and protections, including job stability, just salaries, and favorable working circumstances. Legislation and collective bargaining agreements between businesses and unions are used to achieve this. The Nordic countries have several important aspects of labor protection, including:

- Employees in the Nordic countries enjoy strong job security, with strict rules for layoffs and termination of employment. This helps to ensure that workers are not easily fired and provides them with stability in their employment.
- The Nordic welfare state prioritizes fair wages for workers, and collective bargaining agreements play a key role in setting minimum wages and working conditions.
- The Nordic countries have strict regulations and policies in place to ensure that workers are provided with safe and healthy working conditions. This includes regular health and safety inspections, and provisions for sick leave and rehabilitation in case of workplace accidents.

The goal of the Nordic welfare state is to create a balance between employees' rights and safeguards and economic competitiveness. The Nordic welfare state emphasizes social equality and a good standard of life for all its residents by offering workers strong labor protections and a comprehensive system of public services (Anttonen & Sipilä, 1996, pp. 87–100).

#### 5. Generous leave policies:

To promote a healthy work-life balance, the Nordic welfare state model also offers generous leave policies for parents, employees who are ill, and employees who require time off for other reasons (Pierson, 2001). The principle of self-determination, which refers to the idea that people should have the freedom to make their own decisions about their lives, to exercise control over those decisions, and to act on their own behalf, with the necessary support and resources from the state, is fundamental to these features of the welfare state (Banks, 2006). Self-determination, according to Banks, is a fundamental principle of social work since it is crucial for advancing the welfare and empowerment of people and communities. The social policies of the Nordic nations, particularly those pertaining to healthcare, education, and social services, are founded on this premise (Stryker et al., 2002). For instance, Denmark's social services system, which tries to give residents the tools and resources they need to live independent lives, is fundamentally based on the notion of self-determination (Ministry of Social Affairs and Integration, 2011). In Denmark, this method strongly emphasizes the need of giving citizens the knowledge and resources they need to make their own life decisions while still receiving the necessary support from the state. These services are designed to be flexible and attentive to the individual needs of residents and to empower them to make informed decisions about their own life. Social policies in Denmark place a high value on personal accountability, with residents being expected to actively participate in running their own lives. This focuses on supporting those in need financially as well as via education and training (J. G. Andersen, 2012).

Self-determination is a fundamental ethical principle in social work as well, which emphasizes the value of enabling service users to take charge of their own life. Based on the idea that people have a right to autonomy and self-direction and that social workers should assist them in exercising this right. The value of self-determination in social work practice is emphasized by Sarah Banks in her book "Ethics and Values in Social Work" (2012). She contends that social workers should uphold service users' autonomy and try to provide them with the tools they need to make their own life decisions. Banks further stress the need for social workers to work collaboratively with service users and to involve them in the decision-making process (Banks, 2012). Although service users' self-determination is still a foundational element of the



welfare state's guiding principles and a core ethical principle in social work practice, its ambiguous definition makes it more difficult to implement in practical terms than it is in theory (Heerings et al., 2020, pp. 283-295).

This study is based on observations I made during my academic fieldwork at Svenstrupgård, a shelter facility under the municipality of Aalborg and situated in Svenstrup (Institution: - Aalborg Municipality, n.d.). The purpose of the field study was to identify problematic practice in social work through problem-based learning and practice research, as well as to gain practical experience applying various theoretical concepts of social work. This facility supplies two forms of shelter for homeless people: temporary accommodation and permanent accommodation. Occupants of this facility are homeless people who have either temporarily or permanently lost their accommodation due to structural, systematic, and individual circumstances. These circumstances could be mental illness, drug and alcohol abuse or addiction, trauma or violence, or the inability to afford an accommodation. These factors, according to Benjaminsen (2018), are usually systematic, individual, or structural and require a broad system of support for these homeless people. The temporary accommodation has about sixty apartments, and users are expected to be accompanied by social workers and the commune in finding their new and permanent homes. While in permanent accommodation, homeless people are not expected to find a new home, but to live in the accommodation for the rest of their lives. The category of homeless people admitted into the permanent department of the institution is people dealing with prominent levels of addiction to drugs and alcohol or severe mental problems. They often go through a series of shelter institutions, and when it is established that they are not willing or able to improve, or cannot live independently, they are then referred to the permanent department by the Aalborg Commune. Through interactions and observation in this department, it was realized that occupants were allowed to either consume drugs or alcohol or do whatever they wanted within their rooms. When social workers were interrogated through simple questioning, their primary responses were that it was assumed that they were offered personal apartments, which were their homes, and that they had the right to privacy. Practitioners in this department were also tasked with helping these service users live their desired lives, which sometimes included accompanying or necessitating the availability of drugs, needles, alcohol, and money to acquire their desired substances. The primary justification was that if they did not recognize the reality of their addictions, service users would find alternative means to consume and even abuse these substances. Secondly, if they didn't have the resources to acquire these substances, they may resort to more radical methods such as stealing, which will be more problematic for society. But unlike the temporal department, where service users were expected to move into more independent lives, accommodation, and

further integration into society, this was not the case with the permanent department. The sum of expectations and aim of this department was to enable these service users to live their last days on earth with utmost fulfillment, as it was remarked that most of them died after a few years. Therefore, they were focused on a harm reduction approach. These preliminary findings will also contribute to the later empirical findings of this research. Therefore, this research is informed by prior knowledge of the institution which instigated the quest for more structured academic insight into the practice at this institution through theoretical perspectives.

### **1.1.Problem Statement**

From a deductive interpretation, one could wonder where the defining threshold is for the role of social workers and the welfare system to protect service users from harm and the extent to which the concept of service users' self-determination applies. Secondly, it became problematic to see that there were no expectations from these service users to reintegrate into society or live more independent lives. A dilemma arises when one begins to consider first the guardian responsibilities of the state, which include protecting citizens from what is considered harmful to society and to themselves. For example, the illegality of drugs for public consumption in Denmark goes beyond the ethics of self-determination, i.e., the welfare state considers drugs to be an illegal commodity because of their effects, a decision that outright citizens make to consume drugs. The logic here is therefore that the state can go beyond rights, to prevent access to certain products or services that are not good for public consumption, health, or safety, despite their right to self-determine what is good for them. With the growing call for a reduced influence of the welfare state in managing citizens' lives, social workers are usually plunged into a dilemma when their responsibilities are reduced from critical intervention to basically informing users of the available options and their effects. This dilemma between the welfare responsibilities of the welfare state and citizen autonomy seems to have very strong roots in the understanding of self-determination in the welfare state, which is closely tied to the idea of individual responsibility (Greve, 2017, pp. 97–111). It could therefore be a problem of defining what self-determination is and its borders. Secondly, it could do with an ambiguous understanding of the concept of user empowerment and what to look for in empowerment. Another unclarified notion attached to my observation of this problematic practice was how stretched social work practice and intervention could be to accommodate what one could almost interpret as an extreme form of practice where expectations are very minimal.

## **1.2. Objectives of Study**

- This study is aimed at investigating how practitioners at Svenstrupgård understand and implement the concept of self-determination and empowerment.
- This study further aims at studying practitioners' perspective on the impact of this understanding of self-determination and empowerment on social work.

## **1.3. Goal of Study**

The goal of this study is to situate contemporary notions and practice of user self-determination and empowerment within a broader scope of ethics in social work practice.

## **1.4. Significance of study**

This study acknowledges that significant research has been conducted on negotiating the expression of service users' self-determination in the welfare state, its relevance to contemporary social challenges, and criticisms with an outstanding perspective. Nevertheless, a focus on the concept of self-determination is of particular importance because it evaluates contemporary notions of self-determination in social work practice that deal with complex and what could be referred to as extreme uses of the concept. Furthermore, self-determination is a relevant concept to study in social work because of its ambiguous interpretation and use and the resulting impact it could have if not properly understood. There is also the peculiarity of practice context which could be influenced by the welfare system, social policies or economic situations, and the rule of law. These factors also greatly influence how social work is practiced and how the notion of self-determination is practiced. This is because if the concept of self-determination is not properly understood, a form of practice could be in play that exposes service users to an anarchic dimension of it.

User self-determination remains one of the areas of primary concern for social work practice as it forms the bedrock for the relationship between the welfare service and the service user. As an ethic of social work practice, social workers are required to empower service users with adequate support and resources to be at the center of decision-making concerning their lives (Banks, 2021). Understanding the effects of an ambiguous understanding of self-determination in the welfare state is significant for several reasons: The "welfare state" refers to a set of policies and programs designed to promote social and economic well-being, including healthcare, education, and social services. Self-determination, on the other hand, emphasizes individual choice, and limited government intervention in how service users live their lives. In the context of the welfare state, this form of self-determination can lead to policies and practices that prioritize efficiency and cost-cutting over the provision of social services that meet the needs and preferences of service users. While it advocates for more user autonomy, this can

have significant impacts on the autonomy of service users, both when this autonomy is limitless and for those who are marginalized or have limited resources.

This study has the potential to improve knowledge about the ways in which welfare policies and practices towards self-determination have affected the quality of care provided. This research also looks forward to providing insight on how practitioners at Svenstrupgård understand and implement the concept of self-determination. It will also shed light on how self-determination can affect the decision-making power and wellbeing of service users, particularly in instances where social workers are unable to negotiate user decisions that are harmful. To further the relevance of this study, knowledge will be generated on how the structure of the welfare state in offering welfare services to different classes of service users and what kind of response is expected from these service user classes. Additionally, this study is relevant in finding potential solutions or alternatives that prioritize the needs and rights of service users. This might include advocating for policies that prioritize social welfare as a public good, or promoting participatory decision-making processes that involve service users and their families in deciding their own care plans. Overall, this study is relevant in developing a more nuanced understanding of how political and economic systems shape the provision of social services and can inform efforts to promote social justice and human rights.

### **1.5. Research Question.**

1. How has social workers' understanding of self-determination and empowerment impacted social work practice at Svenstrupgård?

## Chapter 2

### 2.1. LITERATURE REVIEW

While extensive research has been done on addressing or creating a balance between promoting users' self-determination and the social obligation of the welfare state to its citizens, it is also critical to analyze the change in basic assumptions that has taken place in the overall understanding of the welfare responsibilities of the state. The literature discusses the fundamental arguments for the welfare state and the debates surrounding evolutionary concepts of self-determination and empowerment of service users. These debates will shed light on the evolution and dilemma around the concept of self-determination as an ethic in social work practice. Analyzing literature in this order will aid an understanding of the larger political impact of these evolving concepts on users' self-determination and social work practice.

Esping-Andersen (1990), in his seminal work "The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism," made the case that the welfare state should oversee providing a variety of social protections and benefits to citizens, such as healthcare, education, and income support. Esping-Andersen contends that regardless of social class or economic level, all people should have access to these fundamental goods and services and that this is exactly how the welfare state should and has been set up. He contends that a robust welfare state may foster social cohesion, lessen social inequality, and promote economic stability and progress. Esping-Andersen agrees that the precise duties of the welfare state might change based on the social, political, and economic circumstances of a country. He points out that diverse welfare systems may place differing degrees of emphasis on universalism versus means testing or on public versus private provision of social services, for instance. Other than Esping-Andersen's, reasons in favor of the welfare state have been made which include the need for social programs to provide fundamental human rights and freedoms, such as access to education, healthcare, and food security (Sen, 2000). According to Rawls (2005), government action is important to redistribute resources, guarantee that everyone has equal access to opportunities, and ensure that wealth is distributed more fairly through progressive taxation and social spending. The welfare state, according to Reich (2018), is crucial to advancing the public good and guaranteeing that all citizens have access to fundamental social and economic rights. To ensure that everyone had an equal opportunity for achievement and to avoid the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of a selected few, he thought that government action was essential.

The extent of state intervention as a guarantor of social and welfare services has been subject to thorough scrutiny by neoliberals, who argue for the importance of empowering the private sector by relieving the welfare state of some of its cooperative social responsibilities and the

need for individual accountability and responsibility. The neoliberal arguments against the welfare state have been articulated by many economists and policymakers and is based on the belief in free markets and individual responsibility. Hayek (1944) argued that the welfare state leads to a loss of individual freedom and a reliance on government intervention, which ultimately leads to totalitarianism. He contends that the foundations of economic growth are open markets and personal accountability (Hayek, 1994). In addition, Friedman (1982) asserts that government interference in the economy, like welfare programs, leads to inefficiency, and deters people from taking responsibility for their own actions. According to Friedman, the most effective approach to allocate resources and spur economic growth is through the free market (Friedman & Friedman, 1982). Neoliberals believe that the welfare state fosters a culture of dependency where people depend on handouts from the government rather than taking charge of their own life. Welfare programs discourage people from working and may lead to a situation known as a "poverty trap," in which people are better off not working since their government benefits outweigh the money they could get from employment (Buchanan & Buchanan, 2000). Another impact of the welfare state is its distorting effect on market signals, leading to inefficiencies and reducing economic growth. Hayek (1996) opines that government programs create a burden on taxpayers and that private sector solutions, such as charities and philanthropy, are more efficient and effective in helping those in need.

Scholars have conducted in-depth research on the neoliberal welfare state in recent years, examining its causes, effects, and social policy ramifications. Peck (2010) offers one influential analysis of the neoliberal welfare state, contending that it represents a fundamentally different way of seeing the function of the state in society. According to Peck, neoliberalism encourages people to follow their own self-interest and to compete with one another for resources and opportunities. Meanwhile the concept of self-determination is founded on market principles, market-based approach to social policy has come under criticism for allegedly contributing to the demise of welfare states and the rise in inequality (Jessop, 2017).

In a similar vein, Gray (2018) contends that the neoliberal welfare state is defined by a focus on individual responsibility and choice. Gray observes that rather than explicitly providing social safety or welfare, neoliberalism views the state's function as one of essentially assisting market processes. Irving (2013) adds that the expansion of punitive and stigmatizing policies aimed at excluded groups has been linked to the neoliberal welfare state. Although these policies are frequently justified on the grounds that they encourage personal responsibility and reduce reliance on the government, those who are already disadvantaged may suffer as a result. Some academics have, however, also highlighted the advantages of market-based strategies for

social provision. Neoliberalism has been linked to the establishment of new forms of governance and social provision, such as public-private partnerships and market-based systems for providing social services, according to Peck and Theodore (pp. 731–772, 2007). These innovations have been praised for improving responsiveness and efficiency in social provision, but they have also come under attack for having the potential to weaken social rights (Sandel, 2013).

More specifically, neoliberal conceptions of the welfare state are heavily contested, and scholars predict that this will lead to the welfare state's demise. The neoliberal welfare state, according to critics, has weakened social protections for employees, especially those in unstable and low-paying jobs. Standing (2011) demonstrates how neoliberal policies are directly responsible for the growth of the precariat, a group of workers with minimal job security or social safeguards. Additionally, the neoliberal welfare state has come under attack for escalating social and economic disparities. According to Stiglitz (2013), the growing income gap between the rich and the poor is a result of the emphasis on market solutions and reduced public provision of services and benefits. More crucially, it has been argued that the delivery of social services and benefits via market mechanisms places a higher priority on revenue than social welfare, resulting in decreased service quality and accessibility. According to Peck (2012), neoliberal governments' use of austerity measures has led to the privatization and marketization of public services, undermining their public and collaborative nature.

While some academics discuss the political idea of neoliberalism and how it manifests itself in social and welfare policies, the implications for social work practice are seen from a more complex perspective. The conflict between encouraging users' autonomy and protecting their well-being presents social workers with the user self-determination problem. On the one hand, social work ethics place a strong emphasis on the value of equipping people with the necessary tools and knowledge to make their own life decisions. The ethical concepts of autonomy, respect for human rights, and tolerance for diversity serve as the foundation for this notion of the user's self-determination. However, social workers also have a responsibility to protect vulnerable service users who are unable to live independently or make informed decisions from harm, which can happen in some circumstances.

The interaction between service users and social workers as well as the expression of user autonomy are frequently influenced by several factors in the practice of social work. (Banks, 2020) emphasize a few social and cultural variables that can affect a service user's self-determination, including gender, race, ethnicity, and religion. Due to cultural attitudes and norms, people from specific cultural origins may be less likely to state their preferences and

make decisions on their care. A service user's ability to determine their own fate may be impacted by cognitive impairments like dementia or intellectual disability. Cognitively impaired people may have trouble articulating their preferences, making decisions, and conveying their requirements, which might restrict their ability to make decisions for themselves (McCormack et al., 2016).

Power dynamics between service users and social workers can also have an impact on self-determination, as explained by Fook & Gardner (2007). If service users believe social workers have more authority and influence over their life, they may feel disempowered and unable to voice their preferences and make decisions. Furthermore, frameworks for law and policy can either support or obstruct self-determination. For instance, laws and regulations that mandate service consumers submit to procedures or services may restrict their capacity for self-determination (Davies et al., 1997). Self-determination may also be impacted by how well service consumers and social workers get along with one another. By fostering supportive environments that facilitate service users' participation in decision-making, healthy relationships built on mutual respect, trust, and empathy can help service users achieve self-determination (Banks 2020).

For social workers, this tough practice environment poses several ethical and practical problems, such as: the need for social workers to strike a balance between their dedication to user self-determination and their duty to safeguard service users from harm; The need for social workers to make sure that their interventions respect their clients' beliefs and aspirations and are sensitive to cultural differences; How may social workers assess the success of their efforts to advance the wellbeing and autonomy of their service users. By identifying the contextual implications of autonomy, these concerns produce a complexity in the practice of social work.

In her study of the concept of self-determination in social work, Banks (2012) places a strong emphasis on the value of giving service users the freedom to make their own decisions. According to Banks, social workers have an obligation to uphold and encourage service users' autonomy and should collaborate with them to support their right to self-determination. Banks contend that social and cultural variables like poverty, discrimination, and marginalization have an impact on a person's capacity for self-determination. More cautiously, Banks contend that the right to self-determination is not an absolute ideal and may need to be weighed against the need to safeguard vulnerable service users. She suggests that social workers adopt a collaborative approach to practice, which involves working with service users to find their goals and aspirations, while also assessing and managing risks.



The idea of self-determination is still a cornerstone of moral social work practice, although Braye et al. (2007) point out that it can also present difficult problems for professionals. They contend that social workers must strike a balance between a service user's right to make decisions about their own life and their obligation to make sure those choices don't hurt them or others. They contend that to do this, social workers must have a comprehensive awareness of both the specific requirements and circumstances of each user as well as the larger social, cultural, and political contexts in which those users' function. They go on to discuss the function of social workers in enabling service users to exercise their right to self-determination, contending that these professionals must empower service users with accurate and pertinent information, assist them in making decisions, and defend their rights when appropriate. To do this, social workers must be prepared to oppose restrictive societal and cultural conventions that might restrict service users' capacity for making free decisions. Overall, the focus is on the value of ethical practice in social work and the crucial part that users' self-determination plays in ensuring that they can live fulfilled lives. They highlight the need for ongoing reflection and dialogue among social workers to ensure that they are meeting the ethical standards of the profession and responding to the diverse needs and circumstances of service users (Braye et al., 2007). Levine (2016, p. 4) provides a concise summary of the significance of comprehending the intricacies of self-determination in social work practice and the requirement for social workers to handle these challenges with sensitivity, flexibility, and a dedication to continual learning and reflection. Social work practice appears to be the most affected by these discussions, even though there is a wide-ranging and continuous discussion between neoliberals' policies and the welfare state. This is because social work is frequently constrained by both societal welfare programs and its own ethical standards. However, social workers are expected to respect the autonomy and self-determination of their service users, allowing them to make decisions about their own lives and choices. Self-determination is still a fundamental ethical principle in social work practice. Social workers, on the other hand, also have a duty of care to protect service users from damage, which at times may require them to carefully intervene in a user's choices or actions to shield them from either themselves, others, or society. These discussions and perspectives provide a significant gap in the literature, which this study will attempt to fill in light of the setting of this study.

## Chapter 3

### 3.1. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In studying this new paradigm of challenges in the use and expression of users' self-determination, I use a practice research approach to social work in the view of Uggerhoj (2018). He emphasizes the integration of theory and practice, involving collaboration between research and practice, with the goal of producing research that is grounded in the real-world experience of practice and that can inform and improve both practice and research. According to Uggerhoj, practice research bridges the gap between theory and practice by generating research that is informed by the real-world experiences of practitioners and that can be applied in practice. It provides an opportunity for practitioners to reflect on their own practice and to identify areas for improvement, can lead to the development of new practices and interventions that are grounded in research and that have been tested in real-world settings, and can help to build a culture of evidence-based practice in education, where decisions are informed by research and data rather than intuition or tradition (Uggerhøj, 2011b, pp. 45–59).

Social welfare, as with most other domains in the social sciences, often deals with overly complex subjects that are subjective to various opinions and circumstances. It is often exceedingly difficult, though not impossible, to present adequate data on social issues in figures, although quantified data is always a useful sample to give an overview or frequency of the occurrence of a social phenomenon. The challenge with quantitative data in social science is that numerical data usually places emphasis on the proportion of one variable to another rather than the presence of one variable. Therefore, if data related to a particular phenomenon is underrepresented, it can easily be ignored, as subjects are not treated as separate variables but as whole cases. With the growing demand for more evidence-based research with attention to smaller issues that could give an in-depth understanding of broader phenomena, Uggerhøj (2011a) suggests research in social work should be closer to where practice is taking place, and pay very close attention to smaller, often neglected issues. Therefore, to empirically study practitioners' beliefs about the concept of self-determination and empowerment in Svenstrupgård, a qualitative research approach will be used. This approach is relevant to this study in that it allows for a deeper understanding of the subjective experiences and perspectives of social workers on self-determination and empowerment. By conducting in-depth interviews, it is possible to explore how individuals perceive and experience self-determination. While self-determination could be a complex and nuanced concept that may be difficult to capture through quantitative research methods, qualitative research allows for a more detailed

exploration of the various dimensions of self-determination, including cultural, social, and historical factors that shape the concept.

This method further allows for an examination of the social and power relations that shape the concept of self-determination by exploring the social worker-service user power structure, and how this understanding of self-determination is reflected in practice and its impact on service users. Lastly new knowledge can be generated about the evolution of the concept of self-determination through the experiences and perspectives of participants, researchers can identify new dimensions of the concept and contribute to the development of new theories and frameworks (Creswell, 2014, p. 16).

### **3.2. Research Design**

From the research question, it is implicit that the research method is going to be case study research. The case in point is practitioners' understanding and application of SD and empowerment at Svenstrupgård, which is a shelter facility located at Svenstrup under the Aalborg municipality. This is case study research because, after observations of a phenomenon in practice at this institution, the institution had distinctive features that were uncommon in other shelter facilities in Aalborg and Denmark at large. It is uncommon in the sense that it is the only shelter facility in Denmark that provides live-long accommodation to homeless citizens who are suffering from severe social issues and without very high expectations for rehabilitation or social reintegration. One other distinctive feature includes the tolerance policy, which allows service users suffering from drug and alcohol addiction to consume them within the facility with the informed consent of social workers without the involvement of security agencies. Therefore, the data that will be studied from this shelter institution may not be obtainable from other shelter facilities under the municipality or social system.

### **3.3. Sampling Method**

The sample participants in this study are practitioners working with homeless people in the permanent department of the shelter facility of the Aalborg Municipality. Although they fall under the general group of practitioners collaborating with homeless people in Denmark, this group will not represent the homeless population in Denmark. This is therefore a stratified sampling method because the selected sample possesses certain distinct characteristics (live-long accommodation, tolerance for substance abuse, no expectations for reintegration) that are not commonly found in the broader group of homeless people or shelter institutions in Denmark. Stratified sampling is a useful technique for improving the representativeness and precision of a sample, especially when there is variability within the population with respect to relevant characteristics. Research participants are going to be the researcher who will both

conduct and guide the research process and respondents who are social workers at the shelter institution. These participants, who are at the same time research respondents, were selected due to the peculiarity of their context of practice, which is not common or a regular shelter institution. This institution does not only provide shelter to homeless people, but it also provides empowerment programs as well as permanent shelter for people with severe social challenges such as mental illness, drug addiction, or alcoholism. Therefore, pedagogues working at these institutions will be central to providing relevant information regarding the mandate of this institution, its objectives, its vision, and its activities.

### **3.4. Method of Data Collection and Analysis**

Semi-structured interviews will be used in this study to gather data. Semi-structured interviews allow for some flexibility in the interview process, such as changing the interview to follow up on interesting responses or exploring unexpected topics. Silverman (2020) cites numerous benefits to employing them in qualitative research. Semi-structured interviews might offer in-depth details regarding a specific experience or topic. Interviewees are free to use their own words to convey their thoughts, emotions, and experiences, which can produce detailed, complex data. Additionally, it is simple to administer and may be done in a variety of locations, including face-to-face or over the phone. Additionally, interviewees frequently feel more invested in and involved in the study process because of its flexibility. Participants were recruited by issuing an interview request to the head of the accommodation department. The desired number of participants was four, and a date was proposed for the interview. After the date was confirmed, three participants were also confirmed for the interview: two males who are pedagogues at the department and a female who is the head of the institution. The interview was scheduled for at most 30 minutes for the main pedagogue at the department and for 15 minutes for the other respondents. This was because the main pedagogue was to provide more institutional information relating to the practice, and the other participants were to provide more subjective perspectives. To ensure that quality was maintained in the interviews, research questions were placed under themes that guided the conversation with participants. Thematic analysis will be used to identify patterns and themes within the data. It involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting themes within data. These themes will be drawn from the theoretical framework and will basically do a critical analysis of practitioners' understandings of empowerment, self-determination, strength perspective, etc. Thematic analysis is particularly useful in this research as it explores complex social phenomena such as self-determination and understands the perspectives and experiences of participants. It further identifies patterns in the data and an understanding of the participant's perspective, which increases the credibility of findings through rigorous analysis and allows for flexibility (Creswell, 2014).

### **3.5. Ethical Considerations**

In order to maintain academic standards for conducting research that involves participants and whose data could be relevant beyond the researcher or participants, several ethics were considered in this research, such as: Before conducting the interview, participants were informed that the study was a fulfillment of an academic requirement, that the results were to be stored in the student database, their right to withdraw at any time, and the confidentiality of their responses. Secondly, confidentiality was maintained to ensure that the responses of the participants were kept confidential. But nevertheless, participants stated that they were not vulnerable and were interested if more research was done on their practice, as it was a relatively new form of practice in Denmark. Further, the privacy of the participants was respected to ensure that they felt comfortable during the interview. This was done by conducting the interview in locations that were desired by the participants, such as their offices. Secondly, their permission was requested to record the interview sessions for transcription. The interviews were given more time than anticipated because all the respondents were Danish speakers and not very fluent in English, and therefore they had to take several pauses to find the right choice of words. Moreover, it was an open-ended interview, and therefore, follow-up questions were inevitable. Interviewees were also protected from harm by ensuring that the interview did not cause physical or emotional harm to the participants, by avoiding questions that could cause harm or distress. Lastly, after the interview, participants were debriefed and provided with the necessary information about the study. They were also assured that the findings from the study would be shared with them for their reviews and maybe necessitate the improvement of practice.

### **3.6. Limitations to Study.**

There are several limitations to this research on Understanding the Concept of Self-Determination in the Danish Welfare State. These limitations are not a disclaimer to the validity and knowledge contributed to the research, but of areas where the research has not covered or done a detailed study. These uncovered areas could significantly contribute to knowledge on the subject matter as well as impact the findings of this research. Some of the acknowledged limitations to this study include:

- The research is limited to the context of Svenstrupgård and may not represent the practice in other shelter institutions in Denmark or other countries. Nevertheless, finding is relevant for policy, inference and to explain the evolution in the domain of self-determination. This is due to the existence of different alternative care institutions operating under different policies and objectives.

- The use of a qualitative approach and semi-structured interviews means that the findings are subjective and may be influenced by the researchers' biases and interpretations. These biases could be from the narrative of respondents as well as from the interpretation of the researcher. Nevertheless, these biases are limited as much as possible by keeping the original transcripts and analysis within context.
- The sample size of the research may be too small to represent the entire population of shelter institutions and social workers in Svenstrupgård and Denmark respectively. Interviewing three practitioners could underrepresent the overall views of practitioners at the institution. This is nonetheless effective because the participants represent staff with supervisory roles and therefore have an overview of the entire system.
- The research focuses only on the concept of self-determination and empowerment in the Danish welfare state and its impact on social work practice in Svenstrupgård. Other factors that may affect social work practice, such as organizational culture and policies, are not explored in-depth.
- The research relies solely on qualitative data, which may limit the ability to make statistical generalizations and comparisons.
- It would be more interesting to have gotten a wholistic view of self-determination both from practitioner and service users' perspective. The lack of representation of the views and perspectives of service users in the research gives a bias perspective on their experiences of self-determination as service users. Nevertheless, the research was focused on the views of practitioners as their understanding of self-determination forms the premise of the service rendered and in turn, what service users might experience.

## Chapter 4

### 4.1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The concept of self-determination is an essential aspect of modern welfare states, including the Danish welfare state. The Danish welfare state is often cited as one of the most progressive and successful welfare states globally, emphasizing individual rights, social justice, and equality. However, achieving self-determination in the Danish welfare state could involve navigating complex social, cultural, economic, and political factors. This is so due to the varying application and understanding of the concept of self-determination in different social work practice context and understanding. Therefore, a theoretical framework for understanding the concept of self-determination in the Danish welfare state is necessary, if not to get a clarity of the concept, but also to understand its evolution and what it could mean in several contexts. This research is anchored on finding out the understanding and application of two crucial themes in social work which are self-determination and empowerment in the shelter institution at Svenstrupgård. A theoretical perspective of these concepts will offer a broader understanding of the many ways in which they are related, interpreted, and applied in practice. It could also shed clarity on practitioners' understanding of these concepts and how they express or apply them.

Two substantive theories will be used to shed clarity on the subject matter of self-determination and empowerment and will also be used in the analytical framework to investigate how practitioners in this institution understand and apply self-determination and user empowerment. Prominent authors of the Self Determination Theory (SDT) are (Ryan & Deci, 2000) who view SDT more as an approach that motivate the human and their personality through traditional empirical methods with emphasis on the evolution of inward personality development. According to Ryan and Deci (2000), self-determination is a psychological need that is essential for promoting intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. Self-determination theory (SDT) proposes that humans have three basic psychological needs. These three fundamental needs can be classified into autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

By autonomy, they refer to the need for service users to be in control of their own life, events, and all related processes of their daily experiences. This includes the ability to make informed choices and have a sense of agency, which refers to the ability to be and feel in charge of a process and volition, which refers to one's willingness to perform desired actions and their convenience. Autonomy further refers to the fundamental human need to experience a sense of volition, choice, and self-direction in one's actions and behaviors. In the context of SDT,

autonomy involves feeling free to act in accordance with one's own values, interests, and authentic sense of self, rather than feeling controlled or coerced by external influences. It emphasizes the importance of individuals' internal motivation and self-regulation. When individuals perceive a high level of autonomy, they feel a sense of ownership and personal agency over their choices and actions. They are more likely to engage in activities with a greater sense of intrinsic motivation, interest, and satisfaction. Autonomy also plays a role in promoting optimal functioning, well-being, and psychological growth. Ryan and Deci argue that supporting autonomy involves creating an environment that fosters choice, promotes meaningful participation, encourages the expression of personal values and preferences, and provides a sense of psychological safety and respect for individuals' autonomy. Empowering individuals' need for autonomy, in their personal contexts, enhances motivation, engagement, and overall well-being.

Competence is the need for users to feel effective and capable in their interactions with the environment and society in which they belong. This, however, includes the ability for users to master new skills and challenges and to feel a sense of accomplishment. Competence, as one of the fundamental psychological needs, is the need to feel effective and capable in one's activities and pursuits. It involves seeking opportunities for growth, mastering skills, and experiencing a sense of accomplishment. When individuals perceive themselves as competent, they are more likely to be motivated, engaged, and satisfied with their actions. According to SDT, competence can be fostered through various factors such as providing optimal challenges, offering constructive feedback, and promoting opportunities for skill development and learning. When individuals have opportunities to develop and demonstrate their competence, they are more likely to experience intrinsic motivation and engage in activities for the inherent satisfaction and personal growth they provide.

By relatedness, they refer to the need for service users to feel connected to others, or a broader society and to have a sense of belonging and receive necessary social support which includes the ability to form close relationships and feel a sense of community. When individuals experience a high level of relatedness, they feel supported, understood, and connected to others. They perceive themselves as part of a larger social context and engage in activities that promote collaboration, cooperation, and positive social interactions. Relatedness plays a significant role in satisfying individuals' psychological needs for connection and contributing to their overall psychological growth and well-being. Ryan and Deci propose that supporting relatedness involves creating environments that provide opportunities for positive social interactions,



fostering a sense of belongingness and inclusivity, and promoting empathy, understanding, and support among individuals.

According to SDT, when these basic psychological needs are satisfied, individuals are more likely to experience intrinsic motivation, engagement, and well-being. In contrast, when these needs are not satisfied, service users may experience feelings of frustration, disengagement, and dissatisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The central tenet of this theory stresses the need for service users to not only be at the center of decision-making processes concerning their lives, but also to feel effective and competent in the process while also feeling connected and integrated to the society. As an ethic in social work, (Kirzner & Miserandino, 2023) also recommends that the SDT must align with the code of ethics in social work (*Global Social Work Statement of Ethical Principles – International Federation of Social Workers*, n.d.), and the need for this theory to be adapted to specific context of practice to ensure that it suits the specific realities of service users.

Ryan and Deci's SDT is however criticized on several grounds such as its lack of a clear and precise definition for its key constructs, such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The theory often relies on subjective interpretations of these concepts, which can lead to inconsistency and difficulties in empirical research. Secondly, they place significant emphasis on intrinsic motivation as the most desirable form of motivation, while downplaying the complex interplay between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in real-world situations (Lepper et al., 2005, pp. 184–196). With the theory being developed in Western cultural contexts, it is argued that it may not fully account for cultural variations in motivation. The theory's focus on individual autonomy and self-determination may not align with cultural values that prioritize interdependence and collective goals (Chirkov et al., 2003, pp. 97–110). The SDT is further criticized for its emphasis on individual psychological needs and internal factors while underestimating the influence of external social and environmental, a combination which can give a more comprehensive understanding of motivation (Vallerand, R. J., & Ratelle, C. F. 2002, pp. 37-63).

Despite these enormous criticisms, the SDT stands relevant to this research in that it has been extensively researched and has been applied to a wide range of domains and contexts, including education, sports, healthcare, organizations, and personal relationships which allows for its adaptability to this study.

Secondly, the multidimensional perspective of the theory satisfies the basic human psychological needs (autonomy, competence, relatedness). This comprehensive framework allows for a nuanced understanding of motivation and behavior. The theory's emphasis on the practical implications of promoting optimal motivation, well-being, and performance opens up possibilities for research that can develop evidence-based interventions and strategies that enhance motivation and satisfaction of psychological needs in real-world settings. The SDT can be integrated with other theories and frameworks like the strength perspective, allowing for a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of motivation. Its compatibility with other psychological theories, such as self-efficacy theory or goal-setting theory, provides opportunities for theoretical integration and advancement. It further emphasizes the importance of supporting individuals' autonomy and psychological needs, which has positive implications for personal well-being, satisfaction, and quality of life. By utilizing SDT, it is possible to contribute to research that promotes individuals' optimal development and contributes to societal well-being which are very central to social work.

This theory is relevant to this research in that it emphasizes the importance of promoting autonomy, competence, and relatedness to service users. Practitioners can use this theory to develop interventions that support service users' sense of control over their lives, help them acquire new skills and knowledge, and foster a sense of belonging and social support. Secondly, it highlights the importance of intrinsic motivation which is important in promoting service users' well-being. Service providers can use this theory to promote service users' intrinsic motivation by supporting their interests and passions, creating opportunities for self-expression, and encouraging a sense of accomplishment. Further, this theory emphasizes that a supportive environment is crucial in promoting service users' psychological needs and well-being. Lastly, service users' cultural and social context are relevant in promoting psychological needs and well-being. Service providers can use this theory to understand the unique cultural and social factors that impact service users' psychological needs and motivation and develop interventions that are culturally responsive and appropriate.

Deeply incorporated in the self-determination theory, is the emphasis for service users to not only have the knowledge and control over their lives, but also to feel effective and capable in their interactions with the environment. Further, they need to be integrated into society and to receive necessary support (Ryan & Deci, 2000). These concepts are intricately linked to another theory in social work which is that of empowerment. An enlightening piece is done by Gutiérrez et al., (1995, pp. 534–542) who argues that empowerment involves both individual and collective processes. On an individual level, empowerment involves developing a critical

consciousness, which involves recognizing the social, economic, and political factors that contribute to oppression and inequality. It also involves developing skills and resources to act and make decisions that affect one's life. On a collective level, empowerment involves creating social and political networks and organizations that promote participation and decision-making of marginalized groups. They emphasize the importance of incorporating a strengths-based perspective in empowerment practice. Saleebey (1996, pp. 269–305) expands on the concept of the strength's perspective in social work practice, highlighting the importance of recognizing and building on the strengths and resources that service users possess to promote empowerment and positive change. This perspective seeks to empower service users through the recognition and mobilization of their strengths, skills, and resources, emphasizing the importance of self-determination and collaborative decision-making. Applying this perspective implies practitioners must keep a positive approach towards service users and their potential for growth and change, with a belief in their capacity to overcome challenges. The strength perspective prioritizes the goals, values, and preferences of service users, through collaboration to identify and utilize their strengths in setting and achieving meaningful objectives.

Saleebey (1996) argues that the strengths perspective goes beyond traditional problem-focused approaches to social work practice and emphasizes the importance of a collaborative and empowering approach. The strengths perspective recognizes that service users could shape their own lives and make positive changes, and social workers can support this process by identifying and building on their strengths and resources. Saleebey (1996) acknowledges that while focusing on strengths can be empowering and positive, it can also overlook the significant challenges and barriers that individuals and communities face. Additionally, the strengths perspective can be misunderstood or misapplied, leading to the potential for blame and stigmatization of individuals who are unable to overcome their challenges. He further emphasizes the importance of a balanced approach to social work practice that recognizes both the strengths and challenges that individuals and communities face. This involves building on strengths while also addressing the challenges and barriers that prevent individuals from achieving their goals.

On the other hand, Cree (2013) argues that the traditional understanding of empowerment as a process of gaining control and autonomy over one's life is limited and fails to address the power imbalances and structural inequalities that perpetuate social exclusion and marginalization. Cree sees empowerment to be beyond the individual level but focuses on collective and community-based approaches to promote social justice and equality. He places importance in acknowledging and addressing the power dynamics within the helping relationship. Cree

(2013) highlights the potential for power to be misused or abused within social work practice and emphasizes the need for social workers to engage in reflexive practice that recognizes the potential for power to be exercised in harmful ways. In examining the role of social work in promoting structural change and challenging social inequalities, Cree (2013) argues that social work must engage in critical analysis of the broader social and political contexts that shape the experiences of service users. This involves advocating for policy and legislative changes that promote social justice and equality, as well as engaging in community development and empowerment initiatives (Gray & Webb, 2013).

## Chapter 5

### 5.1. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

In this chapter, we are going to systematically analyze research data by finding themes and patterns that run across the responses. These themes will be generally assembled to tally with the research question and objectives. More importantly, identified themes shall be analyzed from the light of the SDT by Ryan & Deci (2000) which is an approach that places emphasis on the motivation of human personality through traditional empirical methods and the evolution of inward personality development. Themes will further be discussed from the strength's perspective theory (Saleebey, 1996) which argues that more focus should be placed on the abilities of the service user in their empowerment process. From the presented findings, it will also be possible to incorporate perspectives from other theories which could be relevant to understanding the data collected from this study. This theory is relevant in this result coding in that other than focusing on the services received by the service user mostly at the discretion of the service provider, the strength perspective places the service user at the center of the social work process where they steer their own empowerment process. Silverman (2020, Chapter 6) regards this data preparation process to involve organizing and coding the data to facilitate analysis, identifying initial codes and themes in the data, and organizing them into a coding framework and comparing the emerging codes and themes to refine and develop the coding framework. The last phase of data interpretation involves making sense of the data by developing overarching themes and patterns and drawing connections between the data and the research question and presenting the findings in a clear and coherent manner that is grounded in the data and the research question.

In this section of the results, we shall present a summary of the results in the form of major themes that tally with the research question and in the light of the strength perspective. We shall further analyze these results from the theoretical perspective of self-determination and empowerment theory.

### 5.2. Summary Presentation of Findings

- The Structure and objectives of the department.
- The roles and responsibilities of social workers towards service users and service users towards themselves.
- The institutions' understanding of self-determination and empowerment.
- Practitioners' perspective on the impact of service users Self Determination.
- Institutional expectations from service users.

The themes shall form the summary presentation of the research results and shall also constitute the material for research analysis.

### **1. The Structure and Objectives of the Department.**

Svenstrupgård is a homeless institution under the Aalborg commune and has both a temporal department and a permanent department which is referred to as the alternative care center. As noted by Nicolaj, an employee at the center and has a BA in political Science and a master's in philosophy and has been working in the department for one year. Nicolaj refers to the permanent department of the institution as "*final destination*" for people that are homeless, have an abuse or a diagnosis or even both are regulated by the social act by saying "*To stay here, you must be 1.) homeless 2.) have an abuse or a diagnosis or both*". He further refers to this institution as "*the last resort in the Danish social system*" by stating that "*this is not the first place you come as a homeless person on the edge of society. This is the end of the line when there is no reason you should keep on lying to yourself telling yourself that this person is going to be a citizen in this society and pay the taxes and get a work, get a family*". According to Nicolaj, the objective of the department is to generate positive emotional energy in service users that causes them to think of something else other than the drug, alcohol, their health, or other related diagnosis that might have brought them to the institution. This is achieved by providing all necessary and available resources to empower service users to gain mastery over their lives by way of using motivations and setting minor goals that helps service users gain a daily structure in their lives. Added to these services, their job as social workers are to provide "*some kind of meaning and dignity to life*". Sussi also shares a similar opinion that "*our focus is how can we help them to live a life with the problems they have?*".

### **2. The roles and responsibilities of social workers towards service users and service users towards themselves.**

Practitioners at the department have the objective to empower service users by providing them with all relevant support to master their own lives. They perform this task by providing service users with all available and necessary resources and support they can offer. Nicolaj remarks that they cannot coerce service users to gain this structure "*We don't push on to get them in education and jobs and stuff like that*". This, practitioners state is achieved by simply motivating them to be able to carry out some basic tasks "*we must support them, we don't push them, a little pushing, but that's not the main objective here. That is to motivate them*" (Nicolaj) such as coming out of the rooms for a walk, cleaning their rooms, going to dinner, or some activities such as music, games, or cleaning. The institution also provides a compensatory stipend for service users who engage in some activities such as cleaning and woodwork in the

workshop at the center. The center, besides accommodation provides psychological services and therapy through music and external professionals who visit once a month. They also provide safety needles for service users on drugs, a basic stipend that allows them to acquire the drugs. They also provide on-demand medical assistance to service users to enable them to regulate their drug consumption as recommended by their doctors. Service users on their end must be qualified to be admitted into the department by either being homeless or dealing with an addiction or a diagnosed medical condition. They also have an expectation to keep to basic regulations by the social system such as their appointment with the doctors or to work at the workshops to be eligible for social benefits. They are also expected to clean their own rooms and if they are on any substance, they are expected to consume them only in their rooms. When service users are uncontrollable, or violent, the police are often called to help regulate the situation.

### **3. The institutions' perspective on self-determination and empowerment.**

Practitioners at the institution shared similar understanding of what self-determination is and how it is practiced at the institution. The word SD was frequently interchangeably used with autonomy and therefore they shall refer to the same thing in this thesis. According to Nicolaj, user autonomy referred to their *“ability to decide what they want to bring into the daily life, yes. When they want to do where they want to go. They're almost free to do whatever they want. That is one of the main points of this place”*. Jonas coins autonomy as a state *“when you buy a set of knowledge, then you can use it independently. So, the problem here is often that they do not have enough knowledge to navigate the world. So, it is our responsibility to help them buy this knowledge and use it independently”*. Service users are motivated to take up tasks or to clean up their rooms and practitioners can sometimes confront service users to have them clean up or perform some duty. Jonas terms autonomy as the ability for service users to acquire a set of knowledge and use it independently. Sussi, who is the director of the center sees autonomy as providing service users with opportunities, information about resources and their abilities to enable them to make their own decisions (You must get them opportunities, if you do that, then this, this, this will happen. If you do that, maybe this, this will happen. So, you must use your education, your knowledge, to make them make the choice they want.... And sometimes they don't listen to you.... hopefully, they maybe learn to use like to make another choice another day).

### **4. Practitioners' perspective on the impact of service users Self Determination.**

The impact of self-determination and user autonomy practiced at this institution can be categorized into two, impact on service users from practitioners' perspective and the impact on practitioners. After an understanding of the harm reduction policy practiced at the institution with its associated practices, it is also important to find out its impact on service users and practitioners. On the part of service users, it is very demanding because they must constantly keep watch on service users to make sure they are not behaving irrationally. Nicolaj also remarks that sometimes when service users become so violent and abusive, social workers may get irritated by the abusive nature of service users which makes it difficult to manage their emotions (*Sometimes he was so irritating..... and we must make substitutions. We must go to a colleague and say I can't do it anymore.*). Emotion to them is key in managing arousal and sometimes they may be dealing with some personal issues, and they become unable to attend to service users properly (*And sometimes, you know, the whole place was affected right when your morning started. And you have eight hours to go. And you have a bad day from the beginning. That's why we do a lot of talking here in this room every day. We talk people checking, which means Have you been sleeping? Or the family? How's it going? How's your day? Where are you so that your colleagues know? Okay? His wife is ill, he's taking care of the kids. And he's also building a garage. So, he might be a little tired. So that's the window you have here every morning to tell your colleagues where you are.*)

For service users, practitioners also share interesting perspectives on how self-determination has impacted service users in the institution. Nicolaj begins with the importance acknowledging the realities of the challenges service users go through by creating a safe space for them to confine in practitioners (*the positive flip side of doing so is that they can be open to us they can speak to us if someone has an overdose they are not anxious to tell us what did he or she take so that we know what we can do what we're going to tell the doctor and they can get the equipment they need..... So, if they don't trust us, we can't get in to talk to them about the issues*). Same view is shared by Jonas "*That's part of my job, to not seek to deny them substance and help them in whatever way I can. So not to shame it, but to speak openly about it*". Further, he mentioned that self-determination was impactful in that it allowed service users with some skills to express it and be offered opportunities (*we had one citizen here he was playing at a festival yeah last year so him playing eight songs a contribution I think it is we also opened the doors last year and we had a citizen here telling the neighbors around this place about painting there were twenty people listening to what she had to say because you could go very deep she's very intelligent woman so I think that's a contribution*).



With harm reduction practice at the institution, service users also have the autonomy to consume substances as well as get help to reduce or stop if they chose to. Jonas says the consumption of these substances is *“very destructive, it ruins their lives, and they know it's destructive, and we know it's destructive. No secret at all. The only way to stop it would be to imprison them, and even there, they can't stop it. So, this is the best possible solution, but not ideal”*. He also suggests that the best alternative will be to have them as substance users and not abusers although he mentions *“it's downhill for them, most of them die here within a few years”*.

### **5. Institutional expectations from service users.**

By institutional expectations from service users, it is referred to what the institution as well as practitioners would expect from service users after receiving social services. With service users being offered live-long accommodation and other care services, it was intricately necessary to study the impact created in service users being offered these services. Nicolaj highlights a set of things they set out to achieve which is to offer accommodation, motivation, and empowerment. *This is their home. So, we do other things... .. And the headline here is positive emotional energy..... The main goal is to empower the service users so that they get the resources. resources to master their own life in more self-mastery*. He also notes that when service users have an alternative to drugs, alcohol by either engaging in some activity or reducing the consumption, it's a huge success *“And if someone gets out of his room or her room 10 times in a month, that's a success”*. Another perspective from Jonas is the impact they create in society regarding general safety and wellbeing (*Whether you accept it or not, and you rather not have them in society, you would rather have them here. Trying to manage the personal economy, can we so they have money for their substance abuse. Because if they do not, they will steal and commit whatever crime.*). Still according to Jonas, though not an ideal expectation, one more interesting impact from this institution is the attempt to transition service users from being substance abusers to substance users *“They don't have the knowledge to navigate that line, and so we would like them to just be users, but they abuse it”*. Jonas shares this view of achieving what is not ideal but preferable because for an average service user in the institution, *it's difficult because mostly it's downhill for them, most of them die here within a few years. So, but maybe if you have a few deaths and they, whatever makes it a little bit more joyful*. According to Sussi, a big achievement is helping service users live with dignity despite their troubles *“our focus is how can we help them to live a life with the problems they have”*.

### **5.3. Empirical and Theoretical Analysis of Themes**

From the empirical findings, three major themes arise which are gotten from patterns within the responses presented by all three social workers. These themes form the basis of the way social work is practiced in this institution and they include.

- Practitioners Understanding of Self-Determination
- Practitioners Understanding of Empowerment
- The impact of social work practice at Svenstrupgård

A crucial point of departure into the responses of practitioners will be to analyze the highlighted themes from the light of the theoretical positions used in this research. These positions include the theories of self-determination, strength perspective and empowerment.

#### **I. Practitioners Understanding of Self-Determination.**

As mentioned earlier, self-determination is frequently interchanged with autonomy to mean the same thing in the context of this research. From a lay understanding, Self-determination refers to the ability of service users to make choices and decisions about their own lives, free from external interference or control. It emphasizes the right to pursue one's own goals, values, and aspirations. Self-determination is often associated with concepts such as freedom, independence, and sovereignty. Autonomy, on the other hand, refers to an individual's capacity to govern itself, exercise self-rule, and act independently within a defined framework. It implies the ability to make decisions and take actions based on one's own values, beliefs, and interests. While autonomy is related to self-determination, it may not necessarily involve complete freedom from external influence or control. Autonomy can be limited by external factors or constraints, such as laws, rules, or social norms.

According to Nicolaj's understanding, user autonomy was the ability for service users "*to decide what they want to bring into their life, when they want and where they want to go*". This perspective, he affirms, is complemented by a sense of freedom, ownership of accommodation, and the lack of external interference in the decision-making process of service users "*This is their home, we don't push on to get them in education and jobs and stuff like that*". He added that they are *almost* free to do whatever they wanted to. To understand just exactly how the institution guarantees that service users make decisions and live freely based on their desire, beliefs, and interests, Nicolaj talked about their daily routines.

*"There are certain goals from outside, you know, they have social workers from outside the house, social advisors, or counsellors and together with the staff here, kind of, have some goals, individual goals for the person. Of course, depending on the situation,*

*what's possible? You know, and I've got like, someone who's drunk 24 hours a day and my, they have some issues, they have cognitive issues, you know, you can't ask her or him to go for a run every day or walk. So, we have little goals..... If somebody doesn't want to go take a shower, or just sit sits in in the same chair, drinking for three whole weeks, we might say at a certain point, now you must go to the shower. Your room looks like I don't know what, we must do something”.*

This practice of setting goals for service users appears contradictory from an autonomous perspective where the goals are not set by the service users nor are an express representation of their desires. According to Ryan and Deci, these goals should focus on the evolution of inward personality development rather than external motivation. These goals are rather externally set by social workers and other staff at the institution with an objective of helping service users to gain self-mastery over their lives. Ryan & Deci (2000) stresses that in the setting of these goals for service users, they are not only required to be at the center of decision-making processes, but also to feel effective and competent in the process while also feeling connected and integrated to the society. In the setting of these goals, Saleebey (1996, pp. 269–305), highlights the importance of recognizing and building on the strengths and resources that service users possess to promote empowerment and positive change.

Jonas, one of the social workers at this institution argues that autonomy also included,

*...when you have a set of knowledge, then you can use it independently. So, the problem here is often that they do not have enough knowledge to navigate the world. So, it is our responsibility to help them buy this knowledge and use it independently.*

This argument from Jonas suggests that these service users require a set of knowledge which should permit them to independently use that knowledge to control their lives and to express their desires. Being void of that knowledge due to the different problems they are experiencing, it is therefore imperative to receive social assistance that helps them get some structure to live more independent lives. Besides decision making abilities, Jonas expresses an economic and social aspect of their intervention in that “*trying to manage the personal economy, so they have money for their substance abuse. Because if they do not, they will steal and commit whatever crime*”. This emphasizes the importance of service users having sufficient knowledge to navigate the world including their personal economies while living with addictions. Since they must consume substances, it is imperative for them to have steady source of income without which Jonas says they pose a security risk.

To Sussi who is the director of the center, self-determination was about choices. The ability for service users to decide on what they felt was good for them when provided with the necessary resources (*So, if you want to get out of the life and you wanted a different life then we have the yes. But if you don't want to, you have a roof over your head, and food to eat. Because sometimes they have all the money on drugs here, they get a food and shelter. And so, it's a different way of helping the most*). At the institution, they do practice self-determination by first granting service users' privacy and autonomy over their accommodation though in an institution, secondly, they acknowledge and tolerate their addictions and try to keep them as users of substances and not abusers. Service users at the institution also have the discretion to or not to engage in any activity and to do it at their convenience. Sussi mentions that self-confidence was also a relevant factor for service users to express themselves freely as of this conversation with a service user.

*I was talking to him if he wants to get an operation to look straight. And he said, "I don't know. And then I said, if you What do you want in life? And you said I would like a girlfriend, and maybe a dog. And then I said to him, what do you think it has to take for you to have a girlfriend? And he said, do you think they are looking at your eyes? You know when you don't look straight?"*

Nevertheless, the extent to which service users could self-determine depended on the resources that were affordable by the institution and available as Jonas recalls there was a service user who wanted horse-riding and was so passionate about it but could not be offered because it was expensive.

Ryan & Deci (2000) opines that SD is an approach that motivates the human and their personality through traditional empirical methods with emphasis on the evolution of inward personality development. Their definition places emphasis on the psychological needs of service users as essential for promoting intrinsic motivation, social development, and wellbeing. These psychological needs which service users have are autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Practitioners understanding of self-determination in this context is very narrow to service users' privacy and their ability to make uninfluenced decisions about their lives. Their understanding of SD has a sense of user autonomy in that service users are at the center of control over their own lives and decisions. This autonomy is however limited in that service users do not have enough knowledge and resources to make autonomous decisions based on a rational judgment due to their social circumstances. Therefore, practitioners and other support staff take the responsibility of setting certain goals for service users which we cannot consider to be the absolute representation of the desires of service users. From practitioners' narrative,

there is some form of coercion which comes in when social workers unsuccessfully motivate service users to perform certain tasks such as taking a bath or cleaning their rooms. One cannot therefore with absolute certainty say service users are autonomous in their living and decision-making.

Regarding how the institution manages service users' competence as suggested by Ryan and Deci, which is the process of acquiring the needed knowledge to master their lives, some resources are available. Though limited as stated by Nicolaj, some of these resources and services include access to financial support, medical aid, music, painting, wood workshops and some games. Service users being in the state of psychological trauma, mental health problem or drug abuse, are not usually able to have the mental or daily structure to go to these activities or as mentioned, are not interested because what they would have loved is not available (like horse riding desired by a service user). One possible reflection is that service users may not find the need for new skills and competences for accomplishment since they are provided with all necessary amenities and therefore feel less motivated to develop new skills.

Relatedness in this context can mean a lot in terms of socialization because most service users in this context have lost connection with their families and a larger society. They then resort to socializing among themselves where they share common traits or at least in the institution where they are accepted and cared for without a sense of judgment. Regarding having a sense of belonging and close relationships, service users here are often limited as they often lack the skills to socialize although receive necessary social support. When these needs psychological needs of autonomy, relatedness and competence are met, service users are likely to experience intrinsic motivation, engagement, and wellbeing. In as much as user autonomy and some form of relatedness and competence could be achieved, practitioners here do expect little in terms of rehab and reintegration. Jonas indicates it is a downhill for most service users as they end up dying after a few years of staying in the institution due to the damaging effect of drug abuse.

## **ii. Practitioners Understanding of Empowerment.**

At Svenstrupgård, empowerment of service users is also a key objective of the institution according to Nicolaj "*The main goal is to empower the service users so that they get the resources, resources to master their own life in more self-mastery.*" The ability to for service users to master their own lives and live more independently according to Jonas, requires that service users acquire a set of knowledge about themselves, resources and society and then be able to use that knowledge independently... "*It is when you have a set of knowledge, then you can use it independently. So, the problem here is often that they do not have enough knowledge*

to navigate the world. So, it is our responsibility to help them buy this knowledge and use it independently”. Nicolaj explains that they have service users who are dealing with very severe levels of addiction which has a great impact on their wellbeing *such as*

*I've got like, someone who's drunk 24 hours a day and my, they have some issues, they have cognitive issues.... we have had a drug user who was in the 60s and he's not here anymore... He was 24 hours a day thinking about drugs. And he was making a lot of noise...He was so damaged in his body and his brain. So sometimes he was very, very confused. Couldn't take care of himself. Other times you could be angry, like a little child. Call you all sorts of things, and you had this parenting vibe towards him. Yes. Sometimes he was so irritating.*

Setting high goals for service users who are dealing with so many challenges in their health and social life according to Jonas is an unrealistic goal “*They have too many issues and having them integrated in is not a realistic goal for them. Reducing their abuse is good, sometimes we succeed for some time and sometimes we don't. But that's the reality*”. According to Nicolaj, it will be ideal to hope that these service users could be empowered with resources and knowledge that will lead them to be reintegrated into the larger social system but he is objective in that; “*This is the end of the line when there is no reason you should keep on lying to yourself telling yourself that this person is going to be a citizen in this society and pay the taxes and get a work, get a family*”. Empowerment, therefore, is done by provisioning some resources and activities which can have service users participate in them, and while doing so, creating a window opportunity that causes them to think of something else other than drugs of their social problems. Nicolaj therefore thinks, *having people here focusing on one thing for more than five minutes is a victory.... We try to motivate them to do less(drugs) and more of what they feel they could do instead of that. Maybe that's what we do and try to find something to put in a little bit.* This approach of motivating service users to do more of thing they love to do beside thinking of their problems or consuming drugs, aligns with Saleebey's (1996, pp. 269–305) strength perspective approach. A concept which emphasizes the importance of recognizing and building on the strengths and resources that service users possess to promote empowerment and positive change. Therefore, this approach acknowledges what service users are best at and will enjoy doing, thereby incorporating the aspect of self-determination and autonomy and at the same time being empowered to gain a structure.

Depending on a specific service user, these empowerments could be by creating certain daily routing such as a walk, dinner, cleaning, music, sport, or by assisting service users to manage

their economy to enable them get money, or by providing external medical on-demand services as in the case of Sussi with the service user who wanted an eye surgery.

Some other resources directed towards empowering service users include the wood workshop at the institution, painting exercises, music band, yard cleaning which causes service users to interact with others as well as earn money from these activities. It is nevertheless not a guarantee as Jonas faces reality that; *But also, the reality is often they do not want it.... It's difficult because mostly it's downhill for them, most of them die here within a few years. So, but maybe if you have a few deaths and they, whatever makes it a little bit more joyful.*

These resources to them included social, financial resources such as social benefit or a stipend gotten from working at the facility, medical as well as other services which could be demanded by a service user. To both Jonas and Sussi, empowerment has to do with the resources they make available to service users and their availability to offer them services which they are interested in. For example, Sussi mentions that the doctor visits once a month and service users who are interested in rehab or some other medical care, the services will be made available, as well as the workshop which provides service users with an opportunity to do some light job and earn money within the institution.

According to Gutiérrez et al., (1995), empowerment was both an individual and collective process which involves the development of critical consciousness on the socio-economic and political factors that contribute to oppression and inequality. It also involves developing skills and resources to act and make informed decisions on a collective level by creating social and political networks that promote decision-making. In empowerment we analyze the idea that power is not just a limited resource that some individuals and groups have more of than others, but rather a dynamic concept that can be distributed and shared. Empowerment involves increasing individuals' ability to exercise control over their lives and make choices that are meaningful to them. This may involve providing them with the necessary knowledge, skills, and resources to make informed decisions and act. Empowerment theory recognizes that service users and communities are embedded in social structures that can either enable or constrain their ability to exercise power (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). Practitioners in this context do this by building service users self-efficacy and self-esteem, promoting critical awareness of power structures, facilitating access to resources such as social benefits and support networks, and fostering participatory decision-making processes.

### **iii. The Impact of Social Work Practice at Svenstrupgård**

It's crucial to emphasize aspects of the social work practice at this institution in this section. Although there is no precise way to measure these effects, social work may experience them in the form of support or transformation. Change in social work refers to the restructuring of social systems, societal structures, and individual lives to address social issues, advance social justice, and improve the wellbeing of people and communities. Social workers fight for policy changes, oppose repressive structures, and advance equality and inclusion in their efforts to bring about systemic change. They work to combat discrimination, deal with the underlying causes of social problems, and bring about long-lasting change (Williams & Graham, 2016). On the other hand, support in social work, otherwise known as care, is the provision of direct assistance, guidance, and resources to service users to help them overcome challenges, improve their well-being, and achieve their goals. Support in social work can involve counseling, therapy, case management, connecting individuals to community resources, facilitating access to essential services, and providing emotional support. The primary focus of support is to empower individuals, strengthen their capacities, and enhance their resilience to navigate difficult circumstances (Kirst-Ashman, 2017).

Regarding change as an impact of social work in this institution, the institution provides accommodation for people who are homeless and diagnosed with a problem or have an abuse. These people are unable to afford regular accommodation, live independently, and therefore become homeless. According to Nicolaj, this institution is the last resort in the Danish social system... *“To stay here, you must be 1.) homeless 2.) have an abuse or a diagnosis or both. That's the people we have here. It is the last resort in the Danish social system”*. This accommodation helps to bridge the gap between the social wellbeing of the persons with these social challenges and the rest of the society. Jonas also discusses the social work concern of the economy of service users who are not able to take up regular employment but have their needs, *“trying to manage the personal economy, so they have money for their substance abuse. Because if they do not, they will steal and commit whatever crime. So, you know, the reality”*. This is relevant in that the welfare system allocates social benefits which is a complex process for these service users to apply for, therefore the institution assists them to get these benefits and can also manage it for them.

On a supportive dimension of social work, social workers in this institution focus less on changing or stopping the addiction of service users, but rather on improving their quality of life, and dignity. In the narrative of Jonas and Nicolaj, they state, *we don't push on to get them in education and jobs and stuff like that.... Having people here focusing on one thing for more than five minutes is a victory. And that's kind of what we do here.... The main goal is to*



*empower the service users so that they get the resources. resources to master their own life in more self-mastery.... That could be a walk, or bath, or cleaning the room too, it could be to go to the kitchen and get your own dinner and bring it back to your room. It could be taking your plate, bringing it out of the room, and out to the kitchen”*. This approach that motivates and causes service users to engage in activities they are interested in, validates the SDT which posits that individuals are more likely to experience intrinsic motivation, engagement, and well-being when their basic psychological needs are satisfied. In contrast, when these needs are not satisfied, service users may experience feelings of frustration, disengagement, and dissatisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

To be more objective, Nicolaj says the reason why it is a great impact when service users achieve one of these small goals is because; *this is the end of the line when there is no reason you should keep on lying to yourself telling yourself that this person is going to be a citizen in this society and pay the taxes and get a work, get a family..... So, what is our job then? And then here our job is to bring some kind of dignity now, meaning to life*. Although it would be an ideal expectation that these service users regain an independent life, Jonas recognizes that these substances have a negative impact on service users, but they cannot stop it because they do not have the knowledge to navigate that line; *“It's very destructive, it ruins their lives, and they know it's destructive, and we know it's destructive. No secret at all. The only way to stop it would be to imprison them, and even there, they can't stop it. So, this is the best possible solution, but not ideal. Yes. Is that an ideal one? No. And most substance users here would rather not be substance abusers, but they can't control themselves. They don't have the knowledge to navigate that line, and so we would like them to just be users, but they abuse it.”*

#### **5.4. Reflections**

One glaring question in the data collection process which is pillar to the research objective is inquiring why and how service users who are dealing with addiction problems and mental illness are offered lifelong accommodations with very little expectations of rehabilitation and social integration. This wondering arises in this research because the research initially assumes that social work is about empowering service users with relevant resources to enable them to live more independent lives with equal access to opportunities. This reflection raises a concern in social work practice which essentially questions if the system at some point is giving up on service users who go through these experiences of drug addiction, homelessness, and mental health challenges. On the other hand, one may wonder if this is an innovation in social work practice and if it is the case, what is the justification for this?

Nicolaj shares an interesting reflection to this angle that *“the headline here is positive emotional energy.... having people here focusing on one thing for more than five minutes is a victory.....people here must think of something else other than the drug abuse or alcohol abuse, all the problems in their life.”* A reflection on these statements leaves the impression that activities in this institution are aimed at giving service users moments where their minds are taken off their addictions, mental health to something a little constructive. This viewpoint therefore justifies why very little steps such a walk, dinner, cleaning is celebrated at the institution. Nevertheless, Nicolaj states that it is at the discretion of service user whether to consume drugs and termed this tolerant policy as a “gray zone in the Danish society.” He justifies this by stating that drug abusers will resort to unconventional means to get money and acquire drugs with most likely unsafe needles if they are not recognized and moderated. Secondly, recognizing that they use drugs and not reporting to the police create confidentiality between social workers and service users in a positive way in that they can be able to know if they took and overdose and what to tell the doctor. Nicolaj agrees that it will be ideal if they could get off drugs, but they are far from achieving that and therefore, the right question such as *“what is the next best thing that is to keep them safe”*. It is more interesting when Nicolaj strengthens this by saying *“this is not the first place you come to as a homeless person on the edge of society. This is the end of the line where there is no reason to keep on lying to yourself that this person is going to be a citizen in this society, paying taxes, get work and family.”*

My reflections when such an institution is referred to as the “edge of the Danish Society” is that it can be inferred to a place where there is no longer hope for service users to be reintegrated into the formal civic life. This view is somewhat acknowledged by Nicolaj when he states that *“if it is getting someone back into society, that is not the case, then we have given up.”* But then he proceeds with *“an overall ethical question in a Danish welfare society which is What is our job then? Our job is to bring some kind of dignity to and meaning to life.”* This nevertheless does not cancel the fact that they couldn’t contribute to society as he cites a citizen who used to sing at a local music festival. Jonas takes the view of a realist and says *“denying the users is not helping...the only way will be to imprison them and even there, you can’t stop it.... therefore, it’s an acceptance of reality... we try to manage their economy and so that they have money to buy their substance”*. Sussi is more positive about having hope that the service users can live more decent lived out of their addictions. Although this hope might be small, it is still important to be hopeful as getting assistance and reintegration is at the discretion of the service user.

After the empirical analysis, an emerging reflection is to an aspect deeply connected to the social work practice at Svenstrupgård which is that of 'care in social work'. Often captioned as care ethics or ethics of care in many writings, Collins (2015, pp. 4-5) offers a relevant overview of the overall claims made by care ethicists as

- Responsibilities are rooted in specific relationships between individuals, rather than being determined by abstract rules and principles.
- Decision-making and ethical deliberation should be guided by empathy rather than strict adherence to duty or principles.
- Personal relationships hold moral significance that is often overlooked by other ethical theories.
- Some responsibilities are directed towards meeting the specific needs of vulnerable individuals, including the goal of empowering them, rather than focusing solely on universal rights of rational agents.
- Morality encompasses not only isolated acts but also ongoing patterns of interactions with others, along with certain general attitudes and dispositions. These aspects are equally, if not more, important than the values of respect, non-interference, and reciprocity.

The "ethic of care" and the "ethic of justice" are terms used by Gilligan (1982), who found two "moral voices." The term "ethic of justice" refers to principle-based systems of morality, such as Kantian and utilitarian moralities, which are founded on a set of unique rights and obligations and place an emphasis on impartiality, objectivity, and reason. Gilligan contends that this is a male-oriented philosophy of morality that ignores the ethical stances that women typically take. An "ethic of care" would be emphasized in the latter, emphasizing responsibility over duty and relationships above principles. Svenstrupgård practices a harm reduction policy which is centered on providing care for service users who have experienced so many difficulties in their lives and therefore are provided care, which is not aimed at change, but also at support. The care given to service users in this institution is not based on rules and principles, but on relationships established between the social worker and the service user. This therefore justifies the use of positive emotional energy as a strategy to motivate service users to engage in activities that relieve depression and substance abuse. This care is also spurred from empathy and moral responsibility towards vulnerable persons rather than a sense of duty. This sense of care goes way beyond giving service users an opportunity to be autonomous in their lives or to be able to control their lives, but it is a place designed to relief service users from the hardship, pain, rejection, and trauma they have experienced in life. Departing from struggling to meet up

with the overwhelming expectations of general society, to a meaningful and dignified life despite their vulnerabilities.

One other notable impact to this understanding and practice of self-determination and empowerment is the burnout that practitioners experience. Nicolaj is so specific about the fact that sometime the place is so affected by noise or violence from very early hours of the day making it a terrible experience for social workers especially if they are also dealing with some personal issues back at home or in their lives. When they are not in the best mode, it affects their relationship with service users, the ability to listen, be patient etc. When social workers cannot emit positive energy, service users can sense it and therefore Nicolaj says they always have meetings to check on each other and if they were in the best state for the day.

In my own perspective it is more relevant to high expectation and hope from these service users on substances with the hope that they can be reintegrated in some way into public life. This is because service users will logically not have the motivation to engage in an active rehabilitation process because they are comfortably catered for by the institution. Moreso, practitioners will reluctantly motivate service users to get reintegrated because they understand their stay is lifelong.

## Chapter 6

### 6.1. CONCLUSION

This thesis focuses on understanding the concept of self-determination within the context of the Danish welfare state, specifically looking at how this understanding has impacted social work practice in Svenstrupgård. This study had as objectives to investigating how practitioners like Svenstrupgård understand and implement the concept of self-determination and empowerment. The study further studied practitioners' perspective on the impact of this understanding of self-determination and empowerment on social work. The main question set out for investigation in this research was studying social workers' understanding of self-determination and empowerment and how it has impacted social work practice at Svenstrupgård. The theoretical framework of the thesis draws upon empowerment theory, self-determination theory, and the strengths perspective, which are commonly used in social work practice to promote the agency and autonomy of individuals and communities. The research question of the thesis is how the Danish welfare state's emphasis on self-determination has influenced social work practice in Svenstrupgård. The study used a mixed-methods approach, including qualitative data collection methods such as interviews, focus groups, and observations, as well as quantitative data analysis, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

The key findings of the thesis show that the alternative care department of Svenstrupgård is a shelter institution that provides accommodation to citizens who are either homeless, have an abuse or a diagnosed of a mental health condition or both. Results further suggest that Svenstrupgård represents the 'bottom of the Danish society', meaning it is not the first shelter facility homeless people or persons living with an addiction goes to, but they are referred to this institution after having been to several institutions without progress. Harm reduction is a practice at this institution that recognizes that service users are unable to live independently and are substance addicts. Social workers assist service users by providing positive emotional energy through music, sports, painting, and different activities both at a wood workshop. Service users engage in activities they are interested and passionate about, and the impact is that they get moments where they are thinking of something else other than drugs and trauma they are facing in life. Practitioners at this institution understand self-determination to be related to the ability of service users to acquire a set of knowledge which they can use independently. They further acknowledge that service users in this institution do not have the knowledge to be able to navigate the societal structures and systems and therefore require social care to be able to live more dignified lives. Practitioners understand empowerment to be linked to the provision of resources and services that helps service users realize their intrinsic abilities

and skills, thereby living more fulfilled lives despite their social challenges. The research findings point to the fact that care in social work could be a more effective approach to service users who are unable to live independently. The study also suggests that some service users may not be able to fully reintegrate into society but can still live with some degree of dignity and achieve a sense of purpose and meaning in their lives. Care therefore assures that these service users, despite not being able to actively contribute to the labor market, still get deserving services and resources to enable them to afford their most basic needs.

A last but not the least thematic result from the research shows that practitioners acknowledge the impact of social work practice to be harmful to service users as most service users ended up dying after a few years in the institution. Findings therefore show that social work here is geared at providing service users with positive emotional energy, care and all other resources that make their lives more peaceful, happy, safe, and fulfilling.

This research successfully provides relevant information to the research question of the practitioners' understanding of self-determination and empowerment, the impact on social work practice at Svenstrupgård. Findings show that their understanding has an impact on social work practice at the institution and on service users. Their understanding forms the basis for the harm reduction policy and tolerance, acknowledgment, care in social work and permanent accommodation. Key discoveries in this research are the dynamics between change and care in social work. Care in social work is a major headline of practice at this institution, where social work is generally geared towards giving service users relief from their previous experiences, pain, trauma, abuse etc. Care in this context does not have as an objective to push service users towards integrating into the larger social and economic network such as the job, families etc. but rather, providing service users with the necessary resources such as a home, health care, safety, feeding and financial resources that helps them live fulfilling and dignified lives despite their social challenges.

This study contributes to the knowledge in social work by improving data on how social workers' understanding of self-determination and empowerment at Svenstrupgård under the Danish welfare state impacts social work practice. The degree to which social workers understand key concepts such as self-determination, empowerment, care and change in social work will be reflected in the services they render to service users. It also provides practical knowledge on the importance for social workers to be aware of the realities of service users and therefore provide social services based on that reality while seeking to establish user autonomy and self-determination. The study demonstrates the relevance and applicability of empowerment theory, self-determination theory, and the strengths perspective in social work

practice in Svenstrupgård and suggests that a focus on promoting agency and autonomy can have positive outcomes for service users in challenging circumstances. The practicality of this finding is that it provides a case study of service users who are completely dependent on the social system for their daily survival. Regardless of the efforts put in by the social system, these service users may never be able to stop abuse or live independently, and therefore need care from the system.

Although few limitations have emerged during this study such as the scope, methodology and sample size, it is however an interesting opportunity that opens for further research on how new variables could impact our current findings. For example, if more research participants were included, service users' perspective on their experiences with autonomy and self-determination, using other research data collection methods or comparing data from one institution to another. Some of these variables could produce more interesting findings which might further strengthen or challenge the current findings from this research.

This research provides new perspectives on social work practice in complex and dynamic circumstances. Circumstances where the objective of social work is not directly towards achieving eminent change from service users but rendering basic care. A perspective requires social work practitioners to render social service not as a rule, but through establishing relationships, empathy, and relatedness with service users especially those requiring critical care. It is only through the establishment of this interpersonal relationship that social workers can adequately provide social services which are not only what the system can offer, but also services desired by service users. This study also contributes a strong perspective on the need for a wholistic approach of empowering service users in critical care by incorporating their intrinsic psychological needs of relatedness, autonomy, and competence. This study is therefore a significant piece in addressing practitioners' awareness in dispensing intensive care in social work.

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