Följebrev till paper NaPsa

Författare: Elisabet Sernbo, Katarina Hjortgren & Marianne Larsson Lindahl

Titel: ”Målgång eller startskott? Legitimation och specialistutbildning, hopp eller hot.”

Papret utgörs av ett artikelutkast som fokuserar den nya hälso- och sjukvårdskuratorslegitimationen och den tillhörande vidareutbildningen för socionomer. Artikeln utgör del av ett forskningsprojekt som genomförs i samarbete mellan de tre första institutioner som började ge utbildningen: Lund, Göteborg och Örebro. Projektet innehåller bland annat intervjuer med studenter från alla orter samt analyser av dokument från institutionerna, men också nationella aktörer.

Det större projektet har som övergripande syfte att undersöka och analysera vad införandet av legitimationen och den tillhörande legitimationsgrundande utbildningen har inneburit för kunskapsområdet samt yrkesrollens villkor och förutsättningar.

En del av projektet utgår från fokusgrupper som genomförts med handledare för programmens fältförlagda moment, vid alla tre orter, samt intervjuer med nyckelpersoner från de tre lärosätena. Detta material kommer att analyseras utifrån tre teman:

1. relationen mellan kuratorns generella kompetens som socionom, och specificiteten den nya i hälso-och sjukvårdskuratorsutbildningen.
2. om, och i så fall hur, legitimationens funktion som skydd av yrkestitel relateras till för hälso-och sjukvårdskuratorn specifika arbetsuppgifter, ansvarsområden eller kompetenser.
3. legitimationens förväntade funktion för såväl patientsäkerheten som det professionella egenintresset.

I detta paper fokuseras det tredje temat, och bland det som analyseras finns vilka förhoppningar och farhågor som knyts till utvecklingen av professionen, relaterat till både utbildningen och legitimationen.

Vi har hittills framför allt fokuserat på insamlingen av empiriskt material, men vi börjar nu göra analyser. Projektet är då såklart större än det enskilda tema som fokuseras i papret, men vi önskar under konferensen hålla fokus på denna avgränsade del. Vi välkomnar synpunkter på texten som föreligger. Tänk tidskrift är: Social Work Education.

Varmt välkommen!

Elisabet, Katarina och Marianne

**Finish line or starting shot? – The introduction of a professional license and Master of Science in Healthcare Counselling: a hope or a threat?**

**Abstract**

**Keywords**

Health social work, license, education, specialization

**Introduction**

In 2019, a licence and new title: “Healthcare Counsellor”, was introduced for health social workers (HSWs) in Sweden. After a transitional period - during which a social worker with five years of working experience in the field, or two years of working experience and further education - a new higher education program is required to get the authority to apply for the licence: a Master of Science in Healthcare Counselling (60 higher education credits).

The overarching argument for introducing the license, raised by the national authority The National Board of Health and Welfare, was to enhance patient safety and improve the quality of health social work (HSW). The licence is the first for social workers in Sweden and professional bodies had for many years strived for a licence. Among them, the largest union for social workers in Sweden: SSR, and the largest non-profit association for health social workers: Svensk Kuratorsförening. The arguments raised were varied. The union chairman of SSR at the time called the decision to grant the license “a positive development for the profession”, and added that she was “really happy, for the sake of the members, but also from a perspective of patient safety”. [[1]](#footnote-1) The development manager of the same union stated that the license, “in itself is a guarantee that the work is performed based on research and best practices”.[[2]](#footnote-2) The chairman of Svensk Kuratorsförening stated that the organizations´ ”hope is that requiring a license can have the effect of raising the average salary of health social workers and that that health social workers will get the recognition of being the experts on psychosocial aspects of/in health care”. [[3]](#footnote-3) The motives for stiving for a license can hence be understood as related to a professional self-interest, as well as to enhanced patient safety and the securement of professional knowledge.

Though HSWs were found to already meet the requirements for a license, related to educational level and treatment responsibility, the social work bachelor programs in Sweden were found not to prepare students for HSW, why the decision to introduce the license was accompanied by a decision to require a one-year Master of Science (Socialstyrelsen 2014, Universitetskanslersämbetet 2017). These Master programs, that are now emerging at several Universities, are the first higher education programs in Sweden specializing social workers in relation to a specific work title.

The licence and the Master can be regarded as professional stepping stones for HSW(s). However, these changes and their effects need to be further examined. This article is part of a larger research project aiming at investigating and analysing how the license and required Master of Science have affected the knowledge field, as well as the terms and conditions for the profession. The aim of this article is more specifically to analyse the perceived functions of the license and the Master, focusing on their expected effects. Among the questions asked are: what hopes and fears are linked to the license and Master, among HSWs and keypersons within the Universities?

**Previous research**

There are different kinds of social work registrations, authorizations, and licensures in different countries, and there are vast differences, not the least regarding the existence of different licenses, what is required for them, how they are obtained, and who has controlling functions regarding them being granted and withdrawn. Overarching questions of licensure are, however, vivid in international research regarding social work in general - and health social work in particular (e.g. Gray & Amadasun 2024; Hsieh et al 2023; Hunt et al 2019) .

In broad terms, research regarding processes of regulation can be understood as divided in two and sometimes opposing assumptions of how to understand these processes: as politically neutral processes of professionalization explicitly or implicitly regarded as a positive development for the social work profession; or as highly political processes concerning questions of governance, of how power is practiced and about who’s/what knowledge counts, that need to be critically examined (e.g. Baines et al 2022).

Pro-registration advocates refer to the potential to strengthen boundaries of social work and to how regulation means a power to protect the public. However, this view has been criticized for being based on common-sense assumptions rather than providing evidence for these claims. Further, concerns have been raised regarding how focusing on registration and licensure might lead the way for a mono-culture social work that enhances, rather than reduces, discrimination within the profession (Casterex 2019). Other researchers raise concerns regarding how these processes do not support social justice, and leave questions of theoretical growth and development of professional practices to actors outside of the profession, resulting in tensions between the prescriptive aspects of regulation and ideals of professional autonomy(Hunt et al 2019) . A specific concern regarding HSW is further how relatively few perspectives can be regarded as specific to HSW, as many tasks in the medical context can be performed by many professions, why licensure cannot be assumed to have strengthening effects on the profession (Baines et al 2022).

Regardless of whether the processes of licensure and registration are regarded as in themselves positive - for a likewise normatively infused view on the professionalization of social work and HSW - some researchers highlight how these processes are normative or have normative functions, why critically conscious research is needed, not the least regarding educational aspects (Grise-Owens et al 2016). The situation in Sweden – where HSWs on the one hand were found to meet the requirements for a license regarding further education and treatment responsibility, while they on the other hand were found not to be educationally prepared for HSW, offers a paradoxical nexus for further investigating these educational aspects of these processes.

**Materials and methods**

The research project is conducted in cooperation with the three Universities that were the first to offer a Master of Science in Healthcare Counselling in Sweden. The empirical material for this article consists of three focus groups with HSWs, who act as professional supervisors for students during field studies at the three Universities, as well as individual interviews with one keyperson from each University. The three authors are responsible for the project, but also act as coordinators for the Master´s programs at these three Universities.

The focus groups consisted of a total of 25 HSWs (nine, nine and seven). The groups were held during 2023 at each University, and the group discussions lasted for a medium of 117 minutes (120, 112, and 120 minutes). Methodically, we were inspired by an ethnographic approach to focus groups, and although we had written a general introduction describing our aim, we had an overarching ambition of asking few specific questions, allowing for the participants to discuss what might be important to them, as well as allowing for their interaction to become a part of the material (Haldar et al 2015; Halkier 2010; Hollander 2004). The focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

To separate the research project from the participants´ other engagements with the Universities - aiming at making it easier for them to articulate critique as well as to secure their confidentiality - the requitement process and focus groups were held by an author from another of the three Universities involved. The participants were recruited by inviting all professional supervisors from each University. They were sent information via e-mail and were encouraged to get in touch if they wanted to participate and/or had any questions about the project. A total of 87 (24, 26 and 39) HSWs were sent this information, 27 consented and had the opportunity to participate. Two withdrew at the last minute due to illness or time (on one occasion the weather resulted in delays in public transport). We cannot know if all of the people who were sent the information received it.

To recruit keypersons from the Universities, the authors discussed who at our respective Universities had leading functions in deciding to apply for examination rights and participated in planning and launching the Master programs. We agreed on three people to ask, they were sent information via e-mail, and encouraged to get in touch if they wanted to participate and/or had any questions about the project. All three agreed to participate. The question was asked, and the interviews were held, by an author from another of the three Universities involved. The interviews lasted for a medium of 64 minutes (73, 60 and 60); they were audio recorded, and transcribed verbatim. As all three of us knew the keyperson at our own University, and, due to our engagement in social work education and research, anonymity could not be achieved between us. The potential participants are few, not the least related to how there might be only a handful of potential keypersons at each University. However, the participants were informed about this when asked to participate, and they participated in their professional capacities regarding questions that, although they are important for social work and therefore might be considered controversial, are not of a private or sensitive character. In the interviews we further underlined anonymity in writing.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The analyses was inspired by Braun and Clarke (2006; 2018), although not strictly following the six steps of thematic analysis they describe. We began with each author reading the material several times, focusing on semantic and latent meanings in searching for patterns relating to the research projects´ overarching aim. These patterns were then discussed in two meetings held via zoom. In these meetings we identified themes. These themes were divided into three aims, which will be the focus of three articles. Related to the aim of this article, the first author made a first draft of themes, which was discussed at a meeting at one of our universities. At this one-day meeting, we collectively reviewed and refined the themes, and adjusted them until a conceptual depth in the themes was agreed upon and consensus was reached (Nelson 2016).

**Results**

In analysingthe material, the patterns we identified were divided in two over-arching themes: hopes and fears. This stems from how the license and the Master were, both explicitly stated and more tacitly related to, as possibly or actually having effects that we analyse as understood as potentially positive, or potentially negative. These normatively incused effects are primarily related to HSW and the profession, but the keypersons also relate the expected effects to patient safety, social work in general, and a wider societal context. In this section, hopes will be discussed first, followed by fears. The results will then be analysed jointly in the Discussion.

Hopes:

The hopes connected to the license and the Master are analysed as encompassing jurisdictional clarity and contextual normalization; professional self-esteem, a welcomed challenge and a merit; a strengthened, but differentiated, knowledge base and finally: an avant-garde social work.

* Jurisdictional clarity and contextual normalization:

When the participants in the focus groups discuss the expected effects of the license and the Master, many of them refer to a feeling of having been (too) dependent on relationships with other professionals, as the HSWs´ role and jurisdiction has not been made clear, sometimes not even to themselves. One of them describes how she, when she started working, felt: “what does a health social worker do? I didn´t really know…”.

The question of jurisdiction is also linked to how HSW can be performed differently, in relation to different medical fields, as well as to how HSWs have a wide discretion and can choose work methods related to factors such as personal interest. In the interviews with keypersons, this is discussed related to what the expert-role is and will come to be in the future: “it will be, by and through these programs that, slow and steady, some form of expertise will be formulated”.

In the focus groups, as well as in the interviews with keypersons, a general positive attitude towards the license and the Master is expressed. One keyperson says: “in a way it is a victory. It is something that I am happy that we have accomplished”. At the same time, the participants in the focus groups discuss that, while some of them have been congratulated by hospital management, particularly the license is not so much a victory to be celebrated, as it is a normalization. This is expressed in relation to the context and how it is: “very weird that I would be the only one working with treatment not to have a license”. This normalization aspect is also a recurring theme in the interviews with keypersons, and one of them says:

it is not that I think that HSW is that much more troublesome or hard or challenging than other social work, I mean, you also think that there is some form of status in the license, but … I am pragmatic, it is a professional group in the medical field, and in that field a license is required.

The context is at the centre of the argument – the keyperson describes how the license should not be understood as a differentiation within social work, at least not related to a potential understanding of the license as HSW being especially challenging or difficult, but as a normalization related to the medical field. As discussed below, this aspect of normalization should however not be interpreted as a feeling of a standstill. Rather, some things have changed.

* Professional self-esteem, a welcomed challenge and a merit:

The license seems to have had some effects on the work, and in one of the focus groups they discuss how having the license has made them write more certificates. This is related to a stronger feeling of being able to decide how to perform the work. Another effect of the title, discussed in the focus groups, is its strengthening effect on the professional self-esteem of the participants, or as one of them put it: “I am a little bit proud of my sign that says that I have a license”. Another HSW says that the license, and title, has made her feel “a bit cockier”. The title, and the visibility of the license, on signs and certificates, can thus be analysed as having performative effects, strengthening their professional self-esteem.

The license, the Master, and specifically their deciding to act as supervisors for students, is also presented as an interesting professional challenge and opportunity for growth, or as one of the focus group´s-participant say:

to push myself, in the direction of the academy, I thought about that when taking a student on, to put myself in that position, what can I learn from this.

Another factor discussed is that the license might be regarded as a merit: “that you have the license, then it is easier to get another job”. The license is however not only related to them as professional individuals, but also to the profession:

I think that the license becomes a part of the strengthening of our profession, in that we have this competence, and we stand for it. These are our boundaries, and this is what we know.

The potentially strengthening effect on the profession can be analysed in relation to the license: the competence it is understood to represent; the sign that the license is, as well as represents. And, not the least, hopes of an increased salary for the professional group, discussed in the focus groups related to how the Master hopefully will result in HSWs “becoming a part of a different salary group”. However, the strengthening effects are also related to boundaries and thus jurisdiction, and to questions of knowledge, and while the positive aspects are still highlighted, a potential “but” will become touched upon when these effects are elaborated below.

* A strengthened, but differentiated, knowledge base:

In relation to questions of knowledge, the new Master´s Program is in at the focus in the focus groups-discussions. One of the participants says: “it is a form of quality guarantee, a reinforcement to health social work, this education, where we are now supervising students.” These knowledge-aspects, and the Master´s, is however not always easy for them to relate to as supervisors, since they themselves have not taken part of the new Master´s Program. They are all licensed, but have been granted the license based on work experience and/or other further educations (e.g. in psychotherapy or a general Master’s program in social work). This is not always easy for them in relation the students and their supervising capacity, as one of them put it: “I think it is a bit strange, I can get the license based on me working the five years, but I don´t have that knowledge.”

This question, about who has what knowledge, is further related to an uncertainty about how employers will come to value different merits. As discussed above, having the license might be regarded as a merit, but if that license is a result of the Master:

will the employer then think: “Well, if we hire one with a license then that person will have more advanced (knowledge) compared to the ones´ previously employed?” Is that what they will think? I would have, if I was an employer. And, there might be some truth to that?

What is touched upon here, is that the Master can affect whether HSWs will be understood as a professional group, or as a group of professionals with different conditions and qualifications, and how these differences may come to be valued differently. As noted above, a “but” is linked to the potentially positive effects of the license and the Master. This “but” is related to the future, and of what “will” happen. These uncertainties about the future also relate to future social work in general.

* An avant-garde social work:

All themes described above are discussed, in varying amounts, in all three focus groups, as well as by all three keypersons, but there are differences between the two groups of participants. The most recurring theme when the keypersons discuss potential positive functions of the license and a Master is a theme that, apart from being touched upon in one quote above, is absent in the focus groups. This theme focuses on how the license and Master´s are related to future effects: changing HSW, and social work, as well as having societal effects. As one of the keypersons put it: “all the time, I think about the Master related to HSW in the future, the education is not to be about establishing how HSWs have worked to date”.

This orientation towards the future is related to how the keypersons describe how the Master will influence future HSW: ”by connecting the profession to research so that you will have the ability to work according to best practice, and use the best scientific knowledge in relation to work-methods and in your approach to the work”.

The potential effects on work-methods is also related to societal factors and to how:

We as a society face challenges: we have health care that is expensive, in many cases it does not work well, in some cases it works well, we know that social factors impact ill-health, so I think that it is a societal duty to contribute with knowledge that we can educe/pick out/select from our programs and contribute to an improved use of resources and better care for patients.

In this quote, the potential benefits of the license and the Master are related to a wider societal context. Social work and its future development, in more general terms, is also a context that is highlighted by the keypersons:

If we handle this smartly, if it turns out well, in evaluations from employers and so on, then we have a good ground to work on, for the next group within our field to get a license, maybe school social workers.

The keypersons underline how the license, and the Master, are expected not only to pave the way for a different HSW, but also lead the way for future social work in general. However, this hope is, as we can see in the quote above, not a taken for granted effect of changes already made, but a potential, related to a future “If”.

The conditional aspects of the potentially positive outcomes: articulated above as the “but”, the ”will”, and the “If”, are related to the future, and an uncertainty about what that future will entail. This can be related to how the potentially positive outcomes depend on factors that might as well conduce to negative outcome, fears.

**Fears:**

The conditionality of the effects of the license and the Master present potentially negative outcomes, that mirror the hopes discussed above. These potentially negative effects are interpreted as the over-arching theme of fears, that encompass the risk of losing the license; attracting the wrong students; and finally: a failed attempt at specialization in social work.

* The risk of losing the license

In one of the focus groups, one participant articulated a potential risk in relation to the hope of the license having a strengthening effect on HSWs´ professional self-esteem, and how the work being performed differently. One of the participants say, after these effects on their work has been discussed: “Now that I have a license, I can do what I want”. The tone of voice is understood as ironic, and the statement is followed by a joint laughter in the group. Another HSW however say: “Until the National Board of Health and Welfare says otherwise.” This is also followed by a joint laughter in the group.

This dialogue is the only time during the focus groups that the risk of the license being withdrawn is related to. This is interesting, as the strongest motive for the license was it enhancing patient safety, not the least related to how the license can be withdrawn. This governing aspect of the license is also prominent in previous research (e.g. Hunt et al 2019). These dimensions of the license are however not at the core of the focus group discussions. However, neither is the overarching question of patient safety, and if, or how, it might be affected by the license or the Master.

* Attracting the wrong students

A fear that is discussed, primarily in the focus groups, is however whether the Master will attract the “wrong” students. The participants express hopes that the Master will result in that their new colleagues “will be better equipped”, but also that they well be more engaged in HSW, having decided to study the one-year Master. However, this is not presented as a taken for granted. Rather, the participants in the focus groups discuss a perceived risk of attracting students for other, and less desired, reasons. In one of the groups this is expressed in relation to experiencing insecurities as to why some of the students they have supervised had even applied to the Master: “they hardly even know themselves, if felt like, for some of them it might be something you just hop on, not having got the jobs you´ve applied for.”

Apart from being related to individual push factors in the students´ lives, such as the perceived alternative being unemployment, this fear is also related to how HSW(s) wages are lower than many other social workers´, and uncertainties about whether the license and Master will change this. Especially since the Master in itself, although higher education in Sweden is free of charge for Swedish citizens, means that students most likely pay in other ways, by not being able to work in full capacity that year. In one of the focus groups this is related to whether potential future colleagues will think it is “worth it”. They also express a fear that, if the license does not result in a substantial raise of salaries, rather than attracting a specifically interested group of students focused on HSW:

“there will probably be many that apply that have a hard time getting a job. That it will become that category that apply for the Master, thinking “if I add this education it might become easier”, but in another way than….. Then you get further from, it will be a segregated/marginalized group that end up taking the Master instead.

This quote can be analysed as an expression of the potentially discriminatory effects of the regulation and licensure that are discussed in previous research, where it is highlighted that that marginalized groups, and their knowledge, can be further excluded in regulatory processes(). It can also be analysed related to hopes of the license strengthening the status of the professional group, as you might link this status of the profession to the professionals, and their perceived status in a wider societal context.

Another potential factor regarding this fear directs attention to the relations between the HSWs and the Universities, specifically regarding the value of education and the Master´s. In the focus groups, the fear of attracting the “wrong students” is related to potential risks of license being regarded as a more valuable merit than what the participants perceive to be more relevant in requitement. In the focus groups they underline the importance of work experience (primarily expressed as experiences in counselling), an interest in the field, and a personal aptitude. Specifically related to a potential risk of future colleagues, that equipped with these experiences, will be side-stepped by a licensed HSW with a Master, but perhaps neither with a strong interest in the field, or work experience that is understood as valuable.

In other words, the license might, as discussed earlier, become “a part of the strengthening of our profession, in that we have this competence, and we stand for it.” However, as the competence that the focus group participants discuss, and put value in, can be understood as personal traits and experiences rather than a result of a Master - the strengthening effects on the profession cannot be taken for granted. An education might change your interests, but the focus group participants can be understood as challenging an assumption of whether the Universities will teach the students the rights things, as well as whether they will examine the most relevant competencies when the give students an approved grade.

* A failed attempt at specialization in social work

A fear that is expressed in the focus groups, although only on one occasion, is the potential risk of specialization of social work, and specifically it leading to negative outcomes for patients with complex needs: “We need more HSWs, society becomes more and more difficult (to navigate) and people feel worse and it´s only demands”. The HSW is interrupted by another participant, who adds: “And soon everybody is a specialist, we need non-specialists”. This discussion is an exception, as the focus group discussions in general tend to focus on the profession, their every-day professional lives and the professional self-interest-aspects of the license and Master.

Another fear, that is more generally expressed, is that the license and Master will not have the desired positive effects or have no effects at all: that nothing will change. This is expressed in the focus groups related to the already mentioned question of salaries, but also to a general sense of the license being received with a cheer, but how everything after that seemed to be exactly like it did before:

* The hospital general manager came and congratulated us.
* And then we, for a couple of years I have continued asking how it will be, will we not get higher wages, but apparently those two are not connected.

…

* Applications are published, and they all mention the license, but it is not like we are at home with this, no

…

* We still like hire (those) without
* Cause there are none. If they see that all that it means is that they will put in one year, a lot of work, and then “I will get like one thousand crowns or whatever”

These non-changing effects are, among the HSWs in the focus groups, primarily related to what can be analysed as a professional self-interest, and particularly wages. And again, the question of who will take on the extra challenge and costs of a one-year Master, when the work that might (or might not even) require you to have the license pay less than other forms of social work, leading to a general sense of: “whatever”.

Among the keypersons, a fear of non-change, that is not directly related to a professional self-interest, is a question of knowledge. One of them say:

what I can express a fear about is if the license will come to be more important than the knowledge content, that it will simply become a symbol of status, that is empty regarding you not seeking enhanced knowledge, that it will comprise of nothing

This can be analysed in relation to the fear discussed in the focus groups – of the Master attracting the wrong students - related to how they might not be the most suitable in the eyes of the focus group members. The keypersons underline the importance of knowledge, and what the keypersons mean by knowledge is analysed as something slightly different than what the HSWs in the focus group discuss as “competence”. In the quote above, “the knowledge content” is explicitly related to “seeking enhanced knowledge”. This can also be related to the previously mentioned quote:

by connecting the profession to research so that you will have the ability to work according to best practice, and use the best scientific knowledge in relation to work-methods and in your approach to the work.

Knowledge is here explicitly defined as “scientific knowledge”, and in the quote, the relations between the profession, the work-methods and research is underlined. This focus differs from how the focus group discussions, rather than “research” or “best practice”, focus on personal aptitude.

**Summary of results**

To sum up, both hopes and fears are linked to the license and Master. Related to some dimensions, these hopes and fears are the same in the two groups of participants. Both HSWs and keypersons from the Universities express a general positive attitude towards the license and the Master, as well as hopes of jurisdictional clarity and contextual normalization, a strengthened knowledge base and an overall hope of change; of HSW being an avant-garde social work. They also express fears, that in many ways mirror the hopes, and articulate insecurities about what the future will entail. These fears can be summed up in an overarching potentiality of the development resulting in no change at all, or in a failed attempt at specialization in social work.

There are however differences between the two groups of participants. The HSWs tend to focus on professional self-interest and HSWs competence related to personal aptitude and experience. The keypersons tend to focus on societal dimensions, on social work in general, and on knowledge related to science. Theis can be related to an overarching difference between the two groups regarding whether the license is linked to hopes of strengthening what HSW is, or to hopes of changing it. These two standpoints are articulated in the different use of tenses in many of the already presented quotes. One HSW says:

“I think that the license becomes a part of the strengthening of our profession, in that we have this competence, and we stand for it. These are our boundaries, and this is what we know.

The tense used is present: the competence “we have”, what “we know” and the boundaries that “are”. In the keyperson-interviews, a future tense is generally used, and often underlined: “all the time, I think about the Master related to HSW in the future, the education is not to be about establishing how HSWs have worked to date”.

At the core of these differences is the Master, and how one keyperson says: it will be, by and through these programs that, slow and steady, some form of expertise will be formulated.

To conclude, although there are similarities between the two groups of participants, regarding hopes and fears connected to the license, there is one overarching difference between them: whether the Master should teach the students what HSWs do, or if the Master should teach the students to do HSW differently in the future. The license can in other words be analysed as being understood as a finish line for HSWs´ striving for professionalization, in line with the hopes articulated by the chairman of Svensk Kuratorsförening: “requiring a license can have the effect of raising the average salary of health social workers and that that health social workers will get the recognition of being the experts on psychosocial aspects of/in health care”.[[5]](#footnote-5) At the same time however, the license can be understood as a starting shoot, paving the way for a different future, where the yards to run manifest in the Master.

**Discussion**

What is illustrated in the analysis above is a tension between the hopes of the license strengthening the profession, as it is and as it is performed; and the hopes of the license, and especially of the Master, having changing effects on the profession, and how it is performed. These different standpoints can be seen in the focus group group-interviews and the interviews with keypersons. However, the two groups of participants can be analysed as overarchingly positioning themselves differently: HSWs´ underline the potential to strengthen what the profession is, whereas the keypersons underline a different future HSW that will have effects on social work and on society.

These differences can be analysed in relation to what the two different groups of participants represent and are in control of. They are both focused on their day-to-day work and work-conditions. The potential effects of the license are also, whether expressed as hopes or fears, linked to this work. The HSWs focus on potential effects on their wages. The keypersons wages are not at stake. The keypersons underline the importance of best practice; they represent the Universities, whose raison d’être is to present further education and linking research to practice. Underlining the practice´s relevance in theory can also be understood as at the core of social work as an academic subject. Not striving for the Master to have changing effects on HSW could be regarded as generally undermining further education, and thus the Universities. At the same time, there is no apparent need for changing HSW from the HSWs´ perspective – they were found to already fill the requirements for having a license. Not having had it already is, as one of the participants say: “weird”.

However, a potentially difficult divide between the two groups of participants can be understood as inherent in these different positionings. The HSWs´ might feel that not having the license would be “weird”, but the social work bachelor programs were found not no prepare the students for HSW. This can be understood in two ways: as HSWs not having known enough to perform their tasks, and/or as the Universities and social work departments not having been sufficiently focused on, interested in, or knowledgeable in HSW. Either way, the process of licensure and Master, can be understood as accommodating a potentially conflictual relationship regarding who really knows what, who just heard a starting shoot, and who just finished the race.

**Acknowledgments**

**Declaration of interest statement**

**References**

Baines, D., Clark, N., & Riley, J. (2022). RETHINKING REGULATION: INCLUSIONS, EXCLUSIONS AND STRUGGLES. Canadian Social Work Review, 39(1), 101-123. doi:https://doi.org/10.7202/1091516ar

Braun, V.; Clarke, V. Using thematic analysis in psychology. Qual. Res. Psychol. 2006, 3, 77–101. [Google Scholar] [CrossRef] [Green Version]

Clarke, V.; Braun, V. Using thematic analysis in counselling and psychotherapy research: A critical reflection. Couns. Psychother. Res. 2018, 18, 107–110. [Google Scholar] [CrossRef]

Castex, G. Senreich, E. Kolko Phillips, N. Miller CM. & Mazza, C. (2019) ”Microaggressions and racial privilege within the social work profession: The social work licensing examinations” i Journal of Ethnic & Cultural Diversity in Social Work, 28:2, 211-228, DOI: [10.1080/15313204.2018.1555498](https://doi-org.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/10.1080/15313204.2018.1555498)

Erlene Grise-Owens, Larry W. Owens & Justin Jay Miller (2016) Recasting Licensing in Social Work: Something More for Professionalism, Journal of Social Work Education, 52:sup1, S126-S133, DOI: 10.1080/10437797.2016.1174641

Gray, M., & Amadasun, S. (2024). Strategic processes to further the professional status of social work in Nigeria. International Social Work, 67(1), 180-193. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.ub.gu.se/10.1177/00208728221123193>

Haldar, M. Engelbretsen, E. & Album, D. (2015) ”Legitimating the illegitima-

te: How doctors manage their knowledge of the prestige of diseases” i Health

(2015): 1-19

Halkier, B. (2010) ”Focus groups as social enactments: integrating interaction and

content in the analysis of focus group data” i Qualitative Research Vol.10 (1):

71-89

Hollander, J.A. (2004) ”The social contexts of focus groups” i Journal of Contempo-

rary Ethnography Vol. 33(5): 602-637

Nelson, J. Using conceptual depth criteria: Addressing the challenge of reaching saturation in qualitative research. Qual. Res. 2016, 17, 554–570. [Google Scholar] [CrossRef] [Green Version]

Socialstyrelsen (2014) Legitimation för kuratorer inom hälso- och sjukvård. Stockholm: Socialstyrelsen

Sonya Hunt, Barbara Staniforth & Liz Beddoe (2019) Establishing the qualification criteria for social worker registration in Aotearoa New Zealand: conflict and compromise, Social Work Education, 38:7, 894-907, DOI: 10.1080/02615479.2019.1593957

Universitetskanslersämbetet (2017) Förslag till examensbeskrivning för yrkesexamen för kuratorer inom hälso- och sjukvården – redovisning av ett regeringsuppdrag, Rapport 2017:5. Stockholm: Universitetskanslersämbetet

De förväntar sig att fortsätta jobba på och bli stärkta i det. Få mer status, högre lön. De har kunnat styra sitt arbete efter den kompetens de har.

Om det blir för många lärosäten och ”för lätt att klara utbildningen” – för låg kvalitet.

1. <https://akademikern.se/reportage/nu-ar-det-klart-legitimation-kuratorer-infors-nasta-ar> (read 200824) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://akademikern.se/reportage/nu-ar-det-klart-legitimation-kuratorer-infors-nasta-ar> (read 200824) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://socionomkarriar.se/artikel/legitimationskrav-hojer-statusen-for-kuratorer/> (read 200824) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Forskningsprojektet har godkänts av Etikprövningsmyndigheten (Dnr 2022-03255-01). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <https://socionomkarriar.se/artikel/legitimationskrav-hojer-statusen-for-kuratorer/> (läst 200824) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)