

University of Groningen

Taking the child's perspective

Bouma, Helen

DOI:
[10.33612/diss.97960770](https://doi.org/10.33612/diss.97960770)

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2019

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Bouma, H. (2019). *Taking the child's perspective: exploring children's needs and participation in the Dutch child protection system*. Rijksuniversiteit Groningen. <https://doi.org/10.33612/diss.97960770>

Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Take-down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal>. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.

Chapter 1

General introduction

1.1 Child maltreatment

In 2017, around 90.000 to 127.000 children were victim of maltreatment in the Netherlands. These results of a prevalence study under 785 professionals imply that, according to them, 26 to 37 per 1.000 children experience one or more forms of child maltreatment as defined by the Youth Act 2015 (Alink, Prevo, Van Berkel, Linting, Klein Velderman, & Pannebakker, 2018). This Dutch legislation defines child maltreatment as “every form of threatening or violent interaction towards minors of physical, psychological, or sexual nature, by the parent or other persons towards whom the child has a relationship of dependency or unfreedom, active or passive, which causes or could cause serious harm to the minor in the form of physical or psychological damage” (Youth Act 2015, article 1.1; Memorie van Toelichting Jeugdwet, 2013). This definition includes the following types of child maltreatment: physical abuse, emotional abuse, physical neglect, emotional neglect (including witnessing domestic violence), educational neglect, and sexual abuse. The prevalence study of 2017 shows that, similar to the prevalence studies of 2005 and 2010, emotional neglect has the highest prevalence. Furthermore, of all children that experienced child maltreatment, 29% experienced more than one type of maltreatment (Alink et al., 2018). Violence highly impacts children, their families and society; it has negative effects on children’s development by its health consequences as well as its behavioural consequences (CRC, 2011; Gilbert, Widom, Browne, Fergusson, Webb, & Janson, 2009; Odhayani, Watson & Watson, 2013).

1.2 Child protection

In the 20th century, often called ‘the century of the child’, changing views regarding children, child development and child rearing led to increasing awareness that children could need help and protection, and that parents might need state support with parenting (De Winter, 2018). This stimulated the development of child protection services. In the Netherlands, the Children’s acts in 1905 could be seen as the starting point of the Dutch child protection system (CPS) (Bonnet, 2016; Cardol, 2012; Clarijs, 2014). These acts were established to protect the threatened development or well-being of the child, but also to protect society against children’s behavioural problems (such as criminal behaviour).

They made it possible for the government to intervene in parental authority and the private family life (Cardol, 2012; Clarijs, 2014).

1.3 Children's rights

Furthermore, this increasing awareness for children's needs (by Maslow (1943) defined as motivating forces that direct behaviour, thoughts, and emotions, contributing to a healthy development) led to the recognition of children's rights; several declarations addressing children's rights were developed during the 20th century. In 1989, the United Nations ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). The Netherlands ratified this Convention in 1995, which implies that all 54 articles on children's rights should be incorporated in Dutch legislation and policy and put into practice. The UNCRC aims to encourage the view of children as rights holders and aims to secure "children's rights to survival, dignity, well-being, health, development, participation, and non-discrimination" (CRC, 2011, p. 6). According to the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC), this requires "a paradigm shift away from child protection approaches in which children are perceived and treated as 'objects' in need of assistance rather than as rights holders entitled to non-negotiable rights to protection" (CRC, 2011; p. 23).

1.3.1 The best interests of the child principle

The 'best interests of the child' (article 3) is seen as the core principle of the UNCRC. It needs to be a first consideration in all decisions concerning children. Already before the adoption of the UNCRC, the principle of the best interests of the child was used in behavioural sciences. For instance, Goldstein, Freud and Solnit (1973) stated that decision-making on children's placements focused only on the *physical* well-being of the child and wanted to address the necessity to protect children's *psychological* well-being as well. Therefore, they developed guidelines on how to serve the best interests of the child in out-of-home placements.

The UNCRC as well as Goldstein and colleagues (1973) relate children's best interests to their growth and development. According to the UNCRC, the best interests of the child should be viewed in relation to the child's development (article 6) and decisions

should be optimal for the child's well-being and development. Furthermore, the best interests of the child principle should be seen in connection to two other umbrella articles. Article 12 includes children's right to participate and states that children's views should be heard and taken into account in all matters affecting them, on the individual as well as the group level. Only by considering children's views, a decision on the best interests of the child can be made (CRC, 2013). Article 2 states that these children's rights are applicable for *all* children, irrespectively of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status (UNCRC, article 2.1). To ensure full implementation of the principle of the best interests of the child, awareness of the universality and interdependence of all children's rights is needed (CRC, 2013).

1.3.2 Right to protection

In the context of child protection, article 19 of the UNCRC is essential. This article affirms that "States shall take all appropriate legislative, administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse, while in the care of parent(s), legal guardian(s) or any other person who has the care of the child" (UNCRC, article 19.1). The CRC (2011) states that no violence against children is justifiable and expresses that "securing and promoting children's fundamental rights to respect for their human dignity and physical and psychological integrity through the prevention of all forms of violence is essential for promoting the full set of child rights in the Convention" (p. 7). The CRC emphasizes that the best interests of the child are served through prevention of all forms of violence, the promotion of positive child-rearing and the implementation of "a child rights-based and integrated child protection and support system" (p. 23).

1.4 The role of the State and the role of parents in the protection of children

The development of child protection and the increasing awareness of children's rights led to the possibility and responsibility for the State to intervene in private family life when this is needed in the best interests of the child. According to the UNCRC and Dutch child protection policy, parents are primary responsible for the fulfilling of children's rights and thereby for the well-being and upbringing of their children. Children and parents have the right for family life and children have the right to be raised by their own parents (article 8, European Convention on Human Rights, ECHR; article 7 UNCRC). Accordingly, the CRC (2011) underlines the primary position of families and thereby the important role of parents in the protection of children.

However, this centrality of the family does not dismiss the responsibility of the State; according to article 4 of the UNCRC, States have to undertake all appropriate measures for the implementation of children's rights. First, the State has to support parents in enabling them to fulfil children's rights. Second, the State has to intervene in family life when this is needed in the best interests of the child. As "the family is the fundamental unit of society and the natural environment for the growth and well-being of its members, particularly children" (CRC, 2013, p. 14), avoiding separation of children and parents by supporting parents in fulfilling their parental responsibilities should be an important component of child protection, and separation may only be used as a last resort (CRC, 2013).

This crucial role of parents and family life in the fulfilling of children's rights makes *collaboration with parents* essential in the implementation of children's rights to protection (Cardol, 2012). Moreover, research shows that parents' experiences with child protection practice and their attitude towards the CPS are linked to the outcomes of child protection trajectories (Ghaffar, Manby, & Race, 2012). However, in the context of child protection, professionals often face dilemmas in the fulfilling of children's rights and working in partnership with parents. For instance, States' obligation to protect children against violence (article 19) can be conflicting with the right for children to be raised by their parents (article 7) (Cardol, 2012). To determine a solution that is in the best interests of the child, balancing those rights is required (CRC, 2009). Furthermore, research shows

how professionals can experience a tension between children's and parents' interests and resistance of parents in child protection, which can complicate professionals' relationship with parents (Fargion, 2014; Forrester, Westlake, & Glynn, 2012; Munro & Ward, 2008). Therefore, to improve the support for parents in the fulfilling of children's rights, it is important to understand parents' experiences with their involvement in child protection and to get insight into their views on what families need.

1.5 Children's agency in child protection

1.5.1 Conceptualisation of 'children'

To ensure full implementation of the best interests of the child principle, it is crucial to recognise children as rights holders and individual 'beings'. The General Comment explaining children's right to protection emphasizes that "... a child rights-based approach to protection requires a paradigm shift towards respecting and promoting the human dignity and the physical and psychological integrity of children as right-bearing individuals rather than perceiving them primarily as 'victims'. The concept of dignity requires that every child is recognised, respected and protected as rights holder and as a unique and valuable human being with an individual personality, distinct needs, interests and privacy" (CRC, 2011, p. 3).

The attitudes and views of adults regarding children and childhood have a great influence on their interaction with children (Bell, 2011; Cardol, 2012). Several studies describe how the view of children as 'incomplete adults' or 'becoming adults' is changing towards viewing children as 'beings', including increasing awareness of children as agents and having the strength and capacities to shape their childhoods (De Winter, 2018; Horgan, 2017; Thomas, 2007).

De Winter (2018) describes that this 'self-government' of children already got attention a long time ago in participatory pedagogy. For instance, Korzack, working with Jewish orphans, developed a children's court, a children's newspaper and a children's parliament in the 1920s. However, De Winter (2018) also explains how children in Western countries "have long been raised by keeping them little" (p. 51). Although the

recognition of the distinct nature of children and the “shielding of childhood” has had important implications for the protection of children (for instance, against child labour and violence) and supported the knowledge on the upbringing, education and development of children, “infantilizing” children can widen the gap with adults and thereby undermine children’s development (De Winter, 2018, p. 52). According to De Winter (2018), children had been ‘rediscovered’ as active participants in their own upbringing and education since the 1990s. This seems to be fed by changing perspectives, including the ‘consumer movement’ demanding user involvement, the children’s rights agenda, and sociological views challenging the perception of children as incomplete adults (Bell, 2011; Thomas, 2007). Furthermore, besides that sociological theories regarding the understanding of childhood promoted viewing children as active agents, psychological theories on children’s development improved the understanding on how to work with children in age-appropriate ways, and ecological theories emphasized the influence of children’s environment and culture on partnership with children (Bell, 2011).

1.5.2 Children’s right to participation

Crucial to the fulfilling of children’s rights and to respecting children’s agency and children as beings is children’s *participation*. Article 12 of the UNCRC states that children have the right to form and express their views and that these views are considered in all matters affecting them (CRC, 2009). In the context of child protection, this implies that children should be seen as primary service users and experts of their own experiences, who have the fundamental right to contribute to the care and service they receive and whose views are essential in decision-making and service evaluations (Archard & Skivenes, 2009; CRC, 2011; 2013; Davies & Wright, 2008; Gaskell, 2010; Grover, 2004; Heimer & Palme, 2016; Heimer, Näsman & Palme, 2018; Lundy, 2007; Van Bijleveld, Dedding, & Bunders-Aelen, 2015).

Bell (2011) describes that participation literally means ‘to share’ or ‘to take part’. In this dissertation, we use the concept *meaningful participation*, which is defined as ‘that children experience being listened to and taken seriously’ (Defence for Children, n.d.; Pöllki, Vornanen, Pusiainen, & Riikonen, 2012). We focus in our definition of meaningful participation on *children’s experiences* of being listened to and taken seriously, as this can be interpreted differently. For instance, professionals can experience that they were

listening to and respecting children's views although children feel that they were not listened to or that no action followed upon what they said (Bell, 2011). The General Comment, which concretises children's right to participation, presents the following three dimensions of meaningful participation: *informing* children adequately as a prerequisite for forming their views; *hearing* the views of the child; and *involving* these views in decision-making (CRC, 2009). Furthermore, children's participation needs to be seen as an *ongoing process*, instead of a single event (CRC, 2009), which according to Vis and Thomas (2009) distinguishes participation from consultation.

In line with the non-discrimination principle as formulated in article 2 of the UNCRC, participation is a right for *all* children (0-18 years old). The starting point should be that all children are capable to form and express their views, and States have the obligation to ensure this right also for children who often experience difficulties in making their views heard (such as younger children, children with disabilities, and children who do not speak the majority language). The CRC discourages the use of age limits and underlines the importance to respect non-verbal forms of communication and to support children in forming and expressing their views (CRC, 2009; Lundy, McEvoy, & Byrne, 2011). Bell (2011) emphasizes that when ways of communication are appropriate to the child's needs, all children are able to contribute to the different phases of child protection.

Furthermore, children's right to participation is an obligation for the State but not an obligation for children: they should have the opportunity and thereby the *choice* to participate. Giving children choice on whether and how they want to participate is crucial to build safety and thereby to enable them to form and express their views. Providing children a safe space, characterised by information-sharing and a dialogue based on mutual respect, is essential for children to feel safe and comfortable to express their views (Bell, 2011; CRC, 2009; De Winter, 2018; Lundy, 2007).

1.5.3 Participation of children in child protection practice

Participation is not a goal in itself, but important to improve children's lives in line with the best interests of the child principle (Bell, 2011; CRC, 2009; De Winter, 2018). First, besides that participation is a right for children, it also promotes the protection of children

and is essential for getting insight into the child's best interests (CRC, 2011; 2013; Cardol, 2012; Heimer & Palme, 2016).

As child protection intervening highly affects children's lives, children should get the opportunity to form and express their views and children's views should be respected systematically in all decision-making processes in child protection (CRC, 2011). Moreover, children's participation is even more important in this context: as experiencing violence disempowers children, child protection intervening should not further disempower children but contribute to children's recovery by inviting them to share their views and giving these weight at every point in a child protection process (Bell, 2011; CRC, 2011). De Winter (2018, p. 55) emphasizes that professionals' willingness to start a *dialogue* with the child in child protection is an important condition for strengthening children's self-respect and social competence, and "a justified social claim and, moreover, an educational necessity".

Furthermore, children's participation is seen as an important factor for children's well-being and the success of interventions, and thereby for the quality of child and youth care, despite that it is difficult to relate certain outcomes directly to it (Balsells, Fuentes Peláez, & Pastor, 2017; Bell, 2011; Healy & Darlington, 2009; Heimer et al., 2018; Knorth, Van den Bergh, & Verheij, 2018; Križ & Roundtree-Swain, 2017; Sinclair, 2018; Vis, Strandbu, Holtan, & Thomas, 2011). Vis et al. (2011) reviewed health and social work research to examine the relationship between children's participation in child protection and children's health. They found that children's participation contributes to their mental well-being and sense of safety, which in turn is expected to contribute to the success of interventions. Other studies report that children's participation can provide essential information for decision-making about safety and can be an important learning experience for children (Bell, 2011; Cashmore, 2002; Križ & Roundtree-Swain, 2017).

Research describes how children's participation is influenced and determined by variables at various levels: the level of the individual child, the professional level, the macro level of the organization, and the levels of government and society. First, on the level of the *child*, factors like children's prior experiences with participation as well as self-esteem and self-confidence tend to influence their current participation (Horwath,

Kalyva, & Spyru, 2012). For instance, prior negative experiences with participation can lead to disillusionment and make children pessimistic about possibilities to participate and the influence of sharing their views (Van Bijleveld, Dedding, & Bunders-Aelen, 2014). Second, *professionals* play a key role in facilitating children's participation: children depend on professionals whether they get opportunities to make their voices heard and to have influence. On the level of the professional, first their conceptualisation of 'children', 'childhood' and 'children's capabilities' is important (Vis & Thomas, 2009). Furthermore, professionals' understanding of what participation includes, their views regarding the importance of and reasons for children's participation and their skills on communicating with children, are important (Archard & Skivenes, 2009; Berrick, Dickens, Pösö, & Skivenes, 2015; Healy & Darlington, 2009; Križ & Skivenes, 2017; Van Bijleveld, et al., 2014; 2015; Vis, Holtan, & Thomas, 2012). In the context of child protection, professionals can experience involving children as challenging or difficult. For instance, children in child protection are often viewed as 'vulnerable', which can lead to protecting them by not 'burdening' them with participating. In the difficult decision-making in child protection and in situations of risk and abuse, caution and safety can become a priority at the expense of children's participation (Bell, 2011; Leeson, 2007). Third, besides the role of the individual professional, research shows the influence of the context (*macro-level*) that professionals are working in. Legislation and policy regarding children's participation and rights, as well as dedication of managers and policy makers, are needed to ensure children's participation in child protection practice (Horwath et al., 2012; Van Bijleveld et al., 2014). The culture of the organization needs to enable, support and stimulate professionals to facilitate children's participation (Bell, 2011). Furthermore, children's participation needs to be facilitated practically. Clarity about professionals' roles, clear guidelines providing professionals concrete tools to involve children, and facilitation by sufficient time and resources as tools and training are needed to avoid that participation becomes dependent on personal choices of professionals (Bell, 2011; Križ & Roundtree-Swain, 2017; Morris, Brandon, & Tudor, 2013; Van Bijleveld et al., 2015). Fourth, on the *governmental and societal levels*, values and norms influence legislation and procedures applicable for organizations. For instance, the understandings of 'safety' could determine the focus and thresholds for the CPS to intervene and feelings of doubts regarding the need to protect the vulnerable child from 'stressful' participation in child protection could

influence guidelines on children's participation (Bell, 2011; Cardol, 2012). As these levels are intertwined, meaningful participation requires 'a culture of participation' at all levels (Bell, 2011).

1.5.4 Participation of children in child protection research

Besides participation in child protection practice, knowledge on children's views is essential in research on child protection. Research shows the valuable feedback children can provide, which is not only important for decision-making on the individual level, but also on service wider levels in child protection (Davies & Wright, 2008; Gaskell, 2010; Woolfson, Heffernan, Paul, & Brown, 2010). Gaskell (2010) states that children's experiences with care shape their well-being and that therefore the basis of improving children's outcomes should involve listening to children's views and needs. This requires that children's views should be central in child protection practice, but also in the development and evaluation of child protection strategies and programmes, and thereby in research on child protection (CRC, 2011; Grover, 2004; Lundy, 2007; Lundy et al., 2011).

1.6 Context: the Dutch CPS

Since 1995, when the Netherlands ratified the UNCRC, children's rights have been playing a key role in Dutch child protection policy (Clarijs, 2014). The principles of the UNCRC are represented in the Youth Act 2015, which forms the legal and policy framework of the Dutch youth care system, including child protection. In line with the important role of parents in child protection and the importance of children's participation underlined in the UNCRC, the Youth Act aims to strengthen the own strengths, problem-solving abilities and responsibilities of children, parents and their network. This makes client participation to a centrality: according to the Youth Act children and parents are considered as agents of their own lives. The Act aims to give parents and children more influence and responsibility in the processes of care by talking *with* instead of *about* them (Clarijs, 2014; Memorie van Toelichting Jeugdwet, 2013).

Several agencies are involved in the child protection chain (see Figure 1). Regarding the phase of *identifying* child maltreatment, the Reporting Code Domestic Violence and Child Maltreatment (in Dutch: *Meldcode Huiselijk Geweld en Kindermishandeling*) is applicable in the Dutch CPS. Although there is no mandatory reporting in the Netherlands, professionals in different fields (such as schools, healthcare, and child day care) are obliged to implement a reporting code within their organizations, based on a five-step model. This reporting code aims to identify cases of family violence in an early stage, by providing concrete steps on what to do in case of concerns of child maltreatment and domestic violence (Ministerie van VWS, 2016).

In the phase of *investigating*, the Advice and Reporting Centre for Domestic Violence and Child Maltreatment (in Dutch: *Advies- en Meldpunt Huiselijk Geweld en Kindermishandeling*—AMHK¹) and the Child Care and Protection Board (in Dutch: *Raad voor de Kinderbescherming* - RvdK) play a key role. Everyone can contact the AMHK to ask for advice or to report suspicions of child maltreatment. The AMHK can advise the caller, start an investigation based on the report, and refer families to organizations offering voluntary support. When compulsory child protection measures seem to be necessary, the RvdK becomes involved. Whereas everyone can report to the AMHK, only the AMHK, certified agencies and local authorities are authorised to request an investigation of the RvdK. Only in exceptional cases of acute and serious threatening situations, one can contact the RvdK (Memorie van Toelichting Jeugdwet, 2013; RvdK, 2016a). After investigation, the RvdK can advise the Juvenile Court to enforce a compulsory child protection measure. The Juvenile Court is the only agency that can actually enforce these measures and is not obliged to follow the advice of the RvdK (RvdK, 2016a). The Juvenile Court can enforce a supervision order, with or without an out-of-home placement, or a measure ending parental authority. A supervision order can be enforced when the development of a (unborn) child is threatened and when the support needed to take this threat away is not accepted sufficiently. In case of a supervision order, the expectation is that parents are able to accept the responsibility for the care of the child

¹ The term ‘AMHK’ is used in legislation and policy; in the practice field ‘Veilig Thuis’ (Safe Home) is the most common name for these services.

in an acceptable period of time. Parents' authority can be ended when they cannot be responsible for the care of the child in an acceptable period of time (article 266 Civil Law).

In the *intervening* phase, guardians of certified agencies have to execute these compulsory child protection measures. The requirement of certification has been applicable since 2015, aiming to improve the quality of the execution of child protection measures. In the case of a supervision order, the parental authority is partly taken over by a guardian; although parents remain responsible for the care for their child, they are obliged to follow the advice of the guardian. Whereas the child *can* remain at home during a supervision order, the child is always placed out-of-home when it is decided to end the parental authority and a guardian is fully taking over. Guardians of certified agencies mainly have the role of case directors; they can involve other organizations (e.g. offering psychological support for children or child rearing support for parents) when additional support for the family is needed (Memorie van Toelichting Jeugdwet, 2013). Regarding voluntary support, a wide range of different organizations offering youth and family support can be involved.

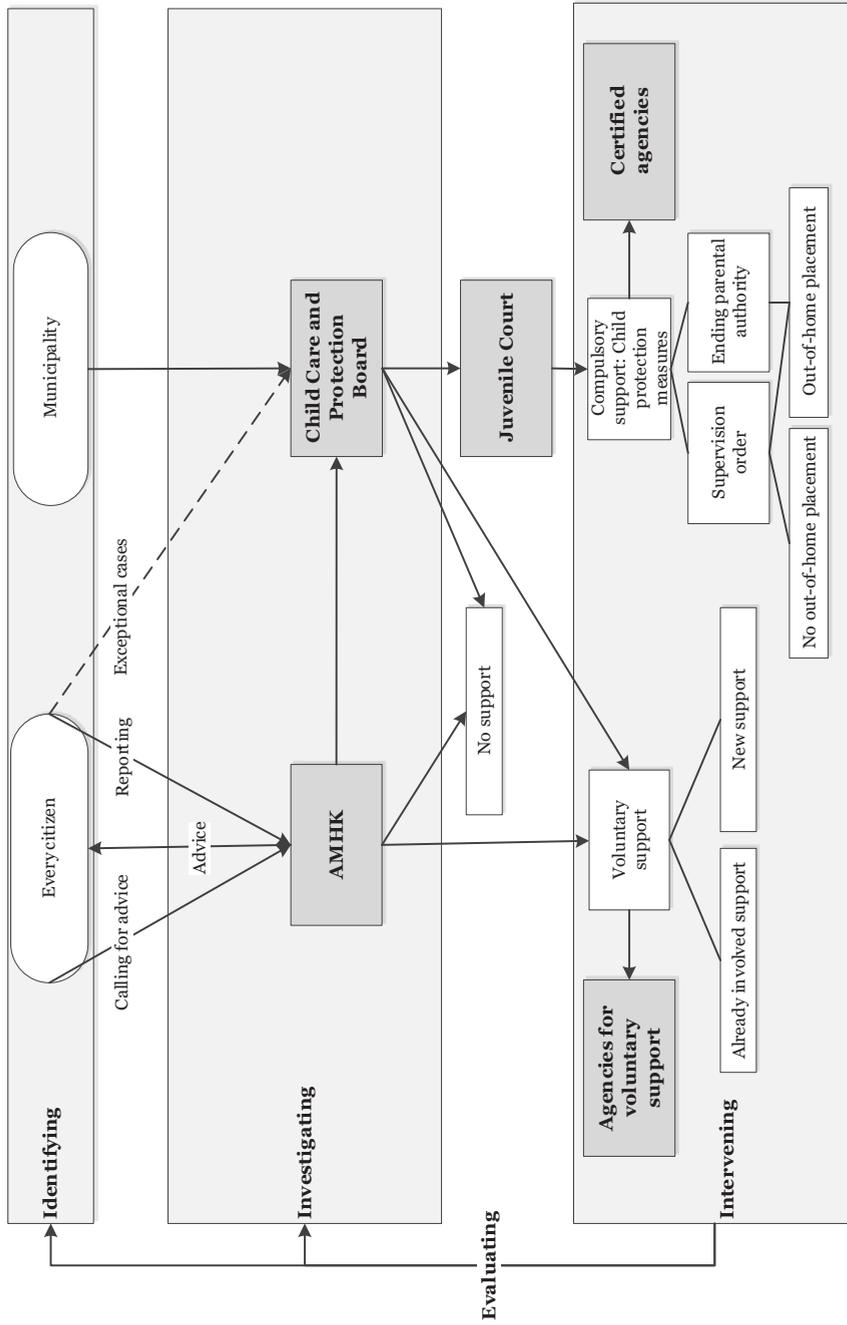


Figure 1. Overview of the Dutch CPS

1.7 Objectives

This dissertation aims to gain insight into children's needs and participation in the Dutch CPS. Knowledge about this can provide important evidence on how the CPS can best serve children's needs and participation, and thereby children's best interests. Furthermore, by addressing children's needs and participation from different perspectives and on different levels, this study adds new insights into child protection research.

First, as children's participation is an important prerequisite for the best interests of the child principle, we aim to examine the embedding of children's meaningful participation in Dutch child protection policy and practice. As described in paragraph 1.6, the chain of child protection exists of different phases (identifying, investigating and intervening), in which several decision-making processes and moments occur. To ensure meaningful participation of children, informing, hearing and involving them in these different phases and in these several (processes towards) decision-making moments is essential. As embedding children's participation in *legislation and policy* is the first building block for meaningful participation of children in child protection practice, we start by investigating key policy documents relevant for the current Dutch CPS. Next, as professionals play an essential role in making participation 'really happen' in child protection *practice*, we examine professionals' experiences and views on children's participation in child protection investigations. We address the following research questions:

1. (How) are the dimensions of meaningful participation of children represented in key policy documents relevant for the current Dutch CPS?
2. How do professionals view and experience children's participation in child protection investigations?

Second, children have the right to form and express their views on child protection as being involved in a child protection trajectory (the 'journey' through the different phases of the chain of child protection) highly affects their lives. Therefore, we investigate children's experiences with a trajectory in the Dutch CPS. By examining the following research question, we aim to gain insight into children's needs and to learn how the CPS can best support them in order to serve their best interests:

3. How do children experience a trajectory in the Dutch CPS and what are their needs during this trajectory?

Third, parents play an important role in the fulfilling of children's rights and their experiences and attitudes are important for the outcomes of child protection trajectories. This underlines the importance of collaboration with parents in child protection practice and the necessity of insight into their experiences. We investigate experiences of parents with a trajectory in the Dutch CPS to get insight into what they think families need and how the CPS can best support them to serve the best interests of their child. Therefore, we address the following research question:

4. How do parents experience a trajectory in the Dutch CPS and what are their suggestions?

1.8 Outline of the dissertation

Based on these research questions, the dissertation is organised in the following chapters. **Chapter 2** describes the results of the analysis of key policy documents of the Dutch CPS. It shows whether and how the dimensions of meaningful participation are embedded in Dutch child protection policy.

Chapter 3 presents the experiences and views of professionals on children's participation in child protection investigations. First, this chapter describes the helping and challenging factors professionals experience on the micro-level (interaction with children and parents), the meso-level (the organization where the professional is working) and the macro-level (the overall CPS). Furthermore, this chapter provides insight into professionals' views on what participation of children in investigations involves, as well as their views on the importance of children's participation in these investigations. The chapter shows how these views are linked to professionals' experiences with the contextual factors on the different levels.

Chapter 4 reports on children's experiences with a trajectory in the Dutch CPS. It gives insight into the impact this trajectory has on children's lives and their needs. The study

presented in this chapter has important implications for the improvement of child protection in line with children's needs, and thereby with their best interests.

Chapter 5 reports on the experiences of parents with a trajectory in the Dutch CPS and discusses what families need according to them. It also describes parents' advice on how to improve the CPS in line with the best interests of their children.

Chapter 6 provides a general discussion of the results presented in the four chapters. Before summarizing the strengths and limitations of this dissertation, we discuss our main findings on the needs of children and the embedding of children's participation in Dutch child protection policy and practice. We finish this chapter with a reflection on the implications for future research, policy and practice.

