

Means of measuring and monitoring: a participatory approach

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Background The paradigm of Empowerment is getting more popular as a framework for social work against social exclusion and poverty: a framework for both thinking and acting. According to Rappaport (1984): 'Empowerment is viewed as a process: the mechanism by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their lives'. Inherent to this paradigm is the focus on people or groups who are socially vulnerable: their strengths as well as their vulnerabilities and experiences. The objective of this study was to include the empowerment perspective into social policy and social interventions and to construct an instrument for measuring empowering effects on the individual level. Methods Combining quantitative and qualitative techniques in a Delphi-design we explored attitudes towards measuring and -in collaboration with social workers and people in poverty- we constructed a tool to measure empowerment of clients (and social workers) in Public Centers of Social Welfare. Results Accountability is, also in social work, of an increasing importance. It seems part of the job. Systems of measuring or monitoring are not adapted to social work. But social workers don't take an exclusive negative stance toward measuring. They see as benefits that it provides transparency and accountability, and the fact that one can learn from the results. There seems to be a need for an alternative way of measuring. Therefore we have constructed a meter together with social workers and service users. This tool was tested. This testing resulted in a reliable and valid scale to measure psychological empowerment. Conclusion The feedback afterwards lead to the conclusion that the scale looks promising, by answering some of the needs and flaws of the existing registration and monitoring systems, but there is still some work in fine tuning. Participation of social workers and service users is essential for a successful implementation.