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# **Problem-setting of social workers in complex and super-diverse contexts. An ethnographic exploration.**

**Bea Van Robaeys**

**University College Karel De Grote**

**Background and purpose:** In their daily practice, social workers are often confronted with the complexity of evolutions in the environment and the increasing diversity of their clients. Processes of individualization, emancipation, mobility, migration and secularisation in an urbanized society contribute to this. To cope with the challenges of the super-diverse society, the development of reflective competencies is more important than ever. In this presentation, we report on a qualitative research into the 'problem-setting-capacities' of practitioners and their 'tacit knowledge off working in complex and super-diverse contexts'.

**Methods:** Focusing on the question how social workers formulate 'the problem' in working with a clientele of poor people of diverse ethnic-cultural backgrounds, we report on an ethnographic study in a social work organisation working around family and parenting in the city of Ghent, Belgium. Over a period of one year, we followed a team of seven social workers. We observed team-meetings and interviewed each of the social workers at the beginning and the end of the fieldwork period. We followed the helping process and social work interventions for five individual cases/families. With each engaged social worker, we had several reflective interviews on the evolutions in the individual cases.

**Results:** In this presentation we identify different ways of categorising the problems of poor clients in a super-diverse setting, with a tension between anti-oppressive and ethnic-cultural frameworks. We also indicate the pivotal role of emotions in the problem-setting of social workers when confronted with extremely marginalized families in poor living conditions.

**Conclusions and implications:** We argue that an ethnographic strategy on the one hand, makes it possible to inquire the tacit knowledge off social professionals and, on the other hand, facilitates a learning process for a social work organisation by means of the 'reflexive and reflexivity-stimulating' presence of the researcher.