



To Work with Households that Are Facing Eviction – an Advice Bureau of Housing Rent and Its Outcome

Johan Holmdahl, Stockholm University

Introduction

From the filing of an application to evict to the final execution of an eviction is a long and complicated process that can go on for over a year in Sweden. In Sweden it exist few studies and limited knowledge of evictions. The studies are (Stenberg 1984, 1990, Flyghed and Stenberg 1993, Edlund, Olofsson and Östlund 1994, Sahlin 1996, Flyghed 1994, 1995, 2000, 2005, Löfstrand 2001, Nilsson and Flyghed 2004, SOU 2005:88, Holmdahl 2005, Holmdahl, Bergmark and Lundström 2006) and mainly focus on the development of evictions during the last 20 years and which individuals who get evicted and why. In Sweden around 12,000 eviction applications are brought to the social welfare offices while 4-5,000 evictions are executed by the enforcement administration each year (Skatteverket 2005) mostly in the big cities. Eviction is the last result of a breach of contract, representing an excluding sanction. For those individuals who get evicted wait, apart from losing their residence, marginalization as a sentence of eviction goes on the tenant's record. Approximately 85 percent of evictions are executed for failure to pay rent (Flyghed 2000) and for those individuals the eviction also results in a record of financial default.

All landlords applying for the Enforcement Administration to evict tenants are obligated by both the Housing Act and the Building Society Law to inform the social welfare offices. Thereby the social welfare offices, during the whole process of eviction, have the responsibility that the individuals get the help and support they need according to Social Services law. When it comes to the social welfares offices work with people facing eviction in Sweden it's generally organized in two ways. Common for many municipalities are that it's organized so that the social workers, work advising and without authorities or that the work with evictions are in the ordinary activity with financial support (SOU 2005:88).

The aim of this research note is to describe an evaluation and its most important results of an advice bureau for rental housing which is allocated in the municipality of Solna's social welfares office. The bureau is organized as the former and which main aim is to avoid evictions for those households that, in different ways, run the risk of loosing their residence and eventually becoming homeless. The social work at the advice bureau comprises both acute efforts for matters in which, for different reasons, an eviction might be the outcome and more long-term ambitions aimed at reducing the total amount of evictions in the municipality through preventive actions at the individual level and close co-operation with landlords.

The evaluation was done within the frame of the Centre of practical knowledge in Stockholm (CKP: Stockholm). The centre was funded by the National board of health and welfare and established 2002 through co-operation between the Department of Social work at the University of Stockholm and eight municipalities in the northwest region of Stockholm.

Concluded in 2006, the aim of CKP: Stockholm was to integrate the practise and education with science in terms of evidence based practice through a long-term development of knowledge founded on the co-operation between professionals in the social welfare offices in the eight municipalities and researchers within the field of social work.

Purpose, methods and data of the evaluation

The purpose of the evaluation was to study the outcome for the clients but also the characteristics and contents of the advice bureau of rental housing. The purpose could be summarized in three questions: what do they do at the advice bureau of rental housing, what is the outcome/effect, and does the outcome/effect depend on the work at the advice bureau of rental housing?

The evaluation has mainly been performed with quantitative measurements but attention has also been given to qualitative measurements. The latter consisted of qualitative interviews with staff which had been and was employed at the advice bureau of rental housing, clients and landlords. The purpose with the interviews was to get their perspectives of the advice bureau of rental housing and the process of eviction. Besides the interviews we observed conversations between the staff and the clients and reading documents and descriptions of the advice bureau. The focus for the observations was among all the structure of the conversation and the treatment of the clients.

The former and most important data was performed, as said above, with quantitative measurements. We used both a quasi-experimental disposition which aim was to describe the population of the clients and the outcome/effect of the work of the staff at the advice bureau of rental housing and a statistical comparison of the urban district of Solna and two other municipalities in Sweden concerning the number of eviction applications and the number of executed evictions. Concerning the former we more specific wanted to study the development by those 76 clients who got help and support (experimental group) versus those 27 individuals who didn't get any help and support (control group) by the advice bureau of rental housing. The data of the groups was collected by formulas of the individuals, consisted of four parts of questions with different variables concerning: how the matter came to the advice bureau of rental housing of rental housing, background information about the client, contacts with the individual and outcome/effect. All the variables in the formulas were first tested with Chi-2, thereafter we used a multivariate analysis where we held different variables in control.

Results and conclusions

There was no clear-cut support in our data for differences between those clients who got support from the advice bureau and those who didn't. What this implies is that we couldn't observe the social work at the bureau actually reducing the acute risks for individuals facing eviction. However, the quantitative data shows that among those households that were in contact with the bureau not a single one was evicted. In most cases, a household that is motivated and makes contact with the bureau faces good opportunities of avoiding the acute threat of eviction. It appears that landlords without any co-operation with the bureau evict their tenants more commonly than others. Conversely, landlords co-operating with the bureau appear to be better prepared and to believe more strongly in solutions other than evictions.

The conclusion from the study of the advice bureau of rental housing also points towards that both statistics and research referring evictions should be developed and how the action at the bureau can be improved. When it comes to the statistics on the level of municipalities, it's a question about standardize the registration of statistics concerning debts of rent and on a

national level make the information about evictions at the Enforcement Administration accessible as statistics on a level of municipality. Further there should be a development of unitary statistics concerning evictions on European level, with a unitary definition and unitary methods to collect the data to avoid terminological and methodological problems.

Concerning how the advice bureau of rental housing can be improved, a first reflection was that risk to be evicted were considerable higher if the individual were a tenant at landlord who didn't have any collaboration with the advice bureau. There could be reason for the staff to act more offensive to those landlords, that will say, not only contact them in acute situation but instead, with example from other collaboration show how debts of rent and other problem can be handle in a more efficient way. Another importance is that in the future research concerning evictions it could be valuable in more detailed way study how the negotiation between the social welfare offices, landlords and tenants turn out and which strategies they use and develop to reach their interest and goals.

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Author's Address:

Johan Holmdahl
Stockholm University
The Department of Social Work
Sveavägen 160
S-106 91 Stockholm
Sweden
Email: johan.holmdahl@socarb.su.se

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