

Article

Guidelines for Preventing Child Sexual Abuse and Wrongful Allegations against Staff at Danish Childcare Facilities

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Abstract: Since the 1980s, the fear of child sexual abuse (CSA) has become a major cultural feature of a large part of the Western world. Internationally, the unintended consequences of the fear surrounding CSA are rarely investigated and doing so is often controversial. The purpose of this study was to investigate how this widespread fear of CSA has influenced practices and teacher–child relationships at childcare institutions. This is the first study of Danish childcare facilities’ guidelines for protecting children against CSA, and staff against wrongful allegations of CSA. Examples of such guidelines include staff being forbidden to have children sit on their lap, or male staff being forbidden to change diapers. This mixed methods survey, which involved the participation of 2051 directors and teachers from approximately one-quarter of Danish childcare facilities, showed that the majority of institutions had guidelines that were aimed mostly at protecting staff from wrongful allegations. The study revealed that the guidelines were a sign that male workers were being stigmatized, and that some institutions had discriminatory guidelines that applied exclusively to men. Furthermore, the guidelines conflicted with staff’s trusting relationships with children, and the task of caring for them.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education and Care; child sexual abuse; prevention policies; no touch; teacher–child relationships; male childcare workers; stigma; discrimination; fear; panopticon; moral panic

1. Introduction

Since the early 1980s, the Western world has paid increasing attention to the sexual abuse of children (CSA), and over the past 35 years, in a large part of the Western world, including Denmark, the fear of CSA has become a major cultural feature [1–10], and, at times, the focus of a moral panic [11–16]. This widespread fear of CSA has created another fear, namely the fear of being wrongly accused, which is particularly significant in professions that involve working with children [4,6,9,17–26]. Being wrongly accused of CSA represents a significant threat to individuals, as it is an allegation that has vast personal costs, largely because it is virtually impossible to be cleared of this charge [17,19,24,27]. Despite the habitually volatile nature of a moral panic, some moral panics, such as one about CSA, become “routinized” or “institutionalized,” which means that they influence society’s institutions and interpersonal norms [14] (p. 41). The purpose of this study was to investigate how the fear surrounding CSA internationally has influenced practices and teacher–child relationships at Danish childcare institutions. The long-term impact of moral panics is often ignored, in part because strong feelings and a strong consensus are key characteristics [14]. This makes them controversial to investigate, and, in particular, to introduce perspectives other than that of the moral panic itself. Hence, our

study is one of few empirical studies, worldwide, of the unintended consequences of contemporary society's significant focus on CSA. It is important to emphasize that our study does not imply that the fear of CSA is wrong, or that strong CSA prevention is not essential in any society. This should go without saying. Instead, our study directs attention to the proportions of this fear, and its unintended consequences with regard to a specific setting, namely the childcare institution.

This study is the first study of Danish childcare facilities' guidelines for protecting children from sexual abuse and staff from wrongful allegations of CSA. Examples of such guidelines are that doors must be kept open when staff help children with toileting, or that staff are forbidden to have children sit on their lap. This study was conducted in 2012 at approximately one-quarter of Danish preschool institutions and before-and-after-school clubs (BASCs). The majority of institutions had such guidelines, and our study reveals that their principal goal was protecting staff from wrongful allegations, and that they significantly influence daily practices and teacher–child relationships, and have unintended, adverse consequences for children and staff, particularly male staff¹.

This study was informed by an earlier controlled study that we conducted in 2010 at Danish preschool institutions and BASCs, which strongly indicated that both institutional and social changes had occurred that were not justified by the actual risk of CSA at such facilities [21]. In 2003, the Danish National Institute of Social Research concluded, based on a cohort study of 5000 Danish children born in 1995, “that extremely few children had been exposed to sexual abuse or sexual acts by adults in Early Childhood Education and Care institutions” [28] (p. 8). Furthermore, the Danish Union of Early Childhood and Youth Educators (BUPL) informed us that between 2008 and 2015, three childcare teachers were convicted of CSA,² and The Danish Union of Public Employees (FOA), informed us that between 2012 and 2015, two childcare assistants were convicted of CSA.³ These numbers do not give a complete picture, but they indicate a low risk of children being sexually abused at Danish childcare facilities, where the vetting of staff has been mandatory since 2005. Yet, our 2010 study indicated that a climate of fear had resulted from an increased focus on CSA in society: 68.7% of teachers felt that the risk of wrongful allegations of CSA had increased in recent years; 8.5% of male teachers had considered leaving the profession because of the risk of wrongful allegations; 12.7% of teachers had become more suspicious of their colleagues; 47% of the control group participants had become more suspicious of other people's behavior towards children in recent years. As a result of the increased focus on CSA, 56.3% of male teachers and 21.1% of female teachers had changed their conduct towards children, keeping a greater distance from them. In their responses to open-ended questions, many childcare professionals mentioned formal and informal guidelines at their institutions to protect against wrongful allegations of CSA [21]. These responses provided us with the basis for the hypothesis that such guidelines, although previously more or less unknown to the Danish public, had a strong influence on pedagogical practices and teacher–child relationships at childcare facilities, especially with regard to male staff's working conditions and relationships to children. Hence, the purpose of the study presented in this article was to investigate these guidelines and this hypothesis in greater detail. Our aim was to investigate the pervasiveness of formal and informal staff guidelines for preventing CSA and wrongful allegations of CSA, what the guidelines addressed, why they were established, and whether the institutions had guidelines that applied exclusively to male staff. A further aim was to investigate how directors and teachers experienced the guidelines, and how they affected the children, the staff—in particular, male staff—and the daily practices and social relations at the institutions.

This study joins a small group of studies from the United Kingdom [4,16,29–31] and the United States [6,9,32,33] that indicated that guidelines for protecting children from CSA and staff from wrongful allegations are pervasive at British and American preschool institutions. These studies

¹ The study is called *The Guideline Study 2012*, in Danish, *Retningslinjeundersøgelsen 2012*. For a report on the study in Danish, see [20].

² BUPL informed us that until 2008, they did not regularly keep track of this type of conviction.

³ FOA informed us that until 2012, they did not keep track of this type of conviction.

showed that guidelines in the United Kingdom and the United States mainly addressed touch between staff and children, visibility at the institutions, and the presence of two staff members during certain tasks. Both in the United Kingdom and in the United States, guidelines were more about protecting staff than protecting children, and a gender inequality that stigmatized male teachers, who at times followed special guidelines, existed in both countries [4,6,9,16,29–33]. A study by Piper and Stronach investigated touch practices at British preschools and schools, and is the most comprehensive study of childcare facilities' guidelines for protecting children from CSA and staff from wrongful allegations in the English-language literature [16]. The study showed that in general, touch was either prohibited by so called no touch policies or limited by detailed “technical” and “depersonalised” guidelines [16] (p. 38), which complicated daily practices. The most pervasive guideline was to never be alone with a child. The survey indicated a “nightmare of surveillance” (p. 38) and a “microregulation of professional behaviours” at British preschools and schools (p. 45). The unanimous conclusion of the UK and the USA studies was that the concrete guidelines and the fear of wrongful allegations have impoverished practice and relationships for children and staff. As this article will show, our findings share striking similarities to the British and American findings. Both the nature of the guidelines for protecting children from CSA and staff from wrongful allegations at childcare institutions, and their unintended consequences—and thus, the important questions that they raise, which we discuss in this paper—are international.

We have structured our article as follows. In “Historical background,” we begin by offering new insights into the historical origins of Danish childcare facilities' guidelines for protecting children from CSA and staff from wrongful allegations of CSA. In the “Materials and Methods” section, we present our data, and the theoretical framework that we use to analyze our data in this article. This framework builds on a variety of interdisciplinary theories and concepts, and has Michel Foucault's theory of the panopticon as its main construct [34]. This is followed by the presentation of our results. After that, we analyze and discuss our findings, focusing first on the unintended consequences of the guidelines for staff, principally the discrimination against male staff, and then on the unintended consequences of the guidelines for the children, principally guidelines' adverse influence on staff's relationships with children. We also examine a new ruling by the Danish Board of Equal Treatment concerning special guidelines for male staff at childcare facilities.

Historical Background

In Denmark, the moral panic over CSA at childcare facilities began in 1997/1998, during the important “Vadstrupgaard case,” in which a male teaching assistant was sentenced to three and a half years in prison for the sexual abuse of 20 children at a kindergarten. This first major public case of this sort elicited a public outcry in Danish society, and undermined trust in Danish childcare facilities [35,36]. However, some claimed that the case was a miscarriage of justice, arguing that there was no concrete evidence, that the police made major mistakes in their investigation when interviewing the children, and finally, that the children's testimony was uncritically believed during the case [36–39]. In the aftermath of the Vadstrupgaard case, CSA received significant attention from the media, the public, politicians, and children's organizations, and considerable juridical, political, and institutional efforts have been made since to prevent CSA in Danish society. For instance, the vetting of childcare staff became possible in 2001 and was mandated by law in 2005.

In the years following the Vadstrupgaard case, the number of allegations of CSA against childcare staff increased dramatically. Before this case, allegations of CSA were rare at Danish childcare institutions; BUPL rarely received more than one such report per year. In the two years immediately following the Vadstrupgaard case, from 1998 to 2000, BUPL received twenty-five reports, only one of which ended with a conviction. BUPL considered it probable that more members were accused of CSA during that period, since at that time the union did not centrally register all allegations against members. During that period, the Danish Union of Early Childhood and Youth Educator assistants (PMF) received 35 reports of such cases, two of which ended in convictions. In the majority of the

reports registered with both unions, the allegations against members did not lead to charges being pressed [40]. In those years, several cases were publicized by the media, and newspaper articles from that period spoke of the “many cases” of CSA in Danish childcare institutions [39,41–45], and experts and stakeholders discussed whether a huge problem and taboo had been exposed, or whether this reflected a general hysteria [36,42,46].

The existence of a “before and after Vadstrupgaard” is illustrated by the contrasting ways in which male workers in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) were discussed before and after the case. A 1996 discussion paper for the European Commission Network on Childcare, “Men as workers in Childcare Services,” stated, “A particular argument against employing men is that men may sexually abuse children. This argument is particularly prominent in the United Kingdom. It does not appear at all in the Danish debates” [47] (p. 23). However, after the Vadstrupgaard case, the association between men and the risk of CSA at childcare facilities became central to the public debate in Denmark. In a newspaper article, a leading Danish psychologist claimed that “pedophiles are everywhere” and “quickly find their way to preschool institutions,” and warned against naïvely hiring men at childcare facilities [41] (p. 24). Other articles reported that worried parents were uneasy about male childcare workers, or raised the question of whether men should care for children professionally at all (e.g., [42,44,48]). Meanwhile, experts and leading figures from unions, teachers’ colleges, the police, politics, and child welfare organizations warned against the “stigmatization” and “hysteria” evolving around male childcare workers [43,44,49–53]. The male childcare workers spoke of their fears or were presented in the media as perplexed about their new stigmatization and the risk of wrongful allegations. Male students in ECEC programs reported feeling vulnerable before practicums, and teachers’ colleges around the country held seminars on how to ensure workplace security [42–45,50–54].

In the newspaper articles cited above, and in the literature of that time, we found indications that it was in the aftermath of the Vadstrupgaard case that guidelines to protect against CSA and wrongful allegations were introduced to Danish childcare facilities.⁴ They grew out of an interaction between a bottom-up movement by perplexed institutions that wished to protect themselves and the children in their care, and the influences of agents eager to help the institutions and their male workers. A 2000 anthology that addressed the Vadstrupgaard case, read, “In crèches, kindergartens and BASCs all over the country, staff discuss new workflows with the aim of ensuring that male teachers, in particular, are not alone with the children at any time” [36] (p. 11). Newspaper articles reported on institutions that established guidelines for staff, or special guidelines for men [42,46,50,51]. According to BUPL and PMF, many male childcare professionals asked the unions for guidelines that described which behaviors were appropriate around children and, in particular, those that would protect against wrongful allegations; for instance, the men asked whether it was appropriate to have a child sit on the lap [43,54]. PMF advised the men to keep in mind the risk of misconstruction, particularly in physical matters, and recommended that two colleagues be present [43]. The director of BUPL stated that male staff began to question their behavior, wondering whether to close the bathroom door while toileting [52]. In 1998, the municipality of Gladsaxe hosted a meeting for male childcare workers, during which a BUPL representative advised male staff on how to avoid misconstruction. For instance, the men were advised that hugging children was acceptable, but kissing was not [43]. However, in a 1999 pamphlet, BUPL and PMF jointly warned against control mechanisms, gendered practices, and the reduction of physical contact at childcare facilities, instead recommending strong leadership and an open culture [56]. These historical sources reveal how the guidelines that were well established at the majority of institutions in our survey in 2012 began cropping up in the years after Vadstrupgaard.

⁴ In point of fact, a touch policy existed in Danish public primary and lower secondary education for a number of years. In 1929, The Danish Ministry of Education sent out a so-called “Touch Circular,” prohibiting all kinds of touch—friendly or unfriendly—between teachers and pupils, unless it was absolutely necessary. The policy was withdrawn in 1987 [55].

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Participants

The participants in the study presented here were 2051 directors and teachers from 1457 Danish childcare facilities. The institutions were public and private preschool institutions for children aged 0 to 6 years,⁵ and public BASCs for children aged approximately 6 to 10 years; 1131 preschool institutions and 326 BASCs participated. The preschool institutions included crèches, kindergartens,⁶ and so-called integrated institutions with both crèches and kindergartens. Participants included 1374 directors (67%) and 677 teachers (33%); 456 participants were men (22%) and 1595 were women (78%). The directors' ages were between 31 and 70, and the teachers' ages were between 20 and 68; 50.2% of directors and teachers were over 50.

2.2. Procedure

We e-mailed our online survey to 4716 (74%) of Denmark's approximately 6400 preschool institutions and BASCs. We selected the institutions randomly, adjusting only to represent both urban and rural areas in all parts of Denmark. BUPL provided the list of institutions. We supplemented this with institutions from municipalities in Denmark underrepresented on BUPL's list. We obtained the e-mail addresses of these institutions from the municipalities in which they operated. As we were unable to obtain teachers' e-mail addresses, we sent the invitations to participate to the directors, and invited them to respond to the questionnaire and to pass on the survey link to as many of their teachers as possible. Initially, substantially more directors than teachers answered our survey, and through the directors, we targeted the teachers with three reminders. This reduced the difference between the numbers of directors and teachers participating in our survey, although a considerable difference remained in the final result (1374 directors versus 677 teachers). The percentage of male survey participants was high (22%), relative to the percentage of male pedagogues at a national level (12%), which is important, as the concern under discussion is particularly sensitive for male childcare workers [21].

Our questionnaire had a 30.9% response rate, which represents 23% of all preschool institutions and BASCs in Denmark. The pilot study had a 20% response rate, and when we contacted the unresponsive institutions, they all explained that they were pressed for time and received many surveys. Guided by the pilot study, we made the questionnaire easier to answer, which, with the reminders, may account for the improved response rate of the final survey.

2.3. Measures

Our survey included questions about formal and informal guidelines for staff and rules for children for preventing CSA and wrongful allegations of CSA at the institutions. As the data collected was extensive, we address only the guidelines for staff in this article, and have presented our findings concerning the rules for children in a separate article [57].

We used a mixed-method survey [58,59] that included both mandatory, closed-ended questions, and optional, open-ended questions. The purpose of the quantitative questions was to establish the prevalence of guidelines for preventing CSA and wrongful allegations of CSA (henceforth, "the guidelines") at Danish childcare facilities, and to be able to generalize findings from a large sample concerning purposes, practices, consequences, and experiences related to the guidelines. For the analysis of the quantitative results, we used Statistical Package Social Sciences (SPSS), version 23.

⁵ In Denmark, children begin elementary school at the age of 6.

⁶ In Denmark, crèches are for children aged approximately 0–3 years old, and kindergartens are for children aged approximately 3–6 years old.

The purpose of the qualitative questions was to give participants the opportunity to elaborate on their views and experiences, and to tell their stories of the everyday practices surrounding the guidelines. Since no previous research described staff guidelines for preventing CSA and wrongful allegations of CSA in a Danish context, it was important that both directors and teachers provided information that we may not have thought to ask for, and it was important to address both formal and informal guidelines [59,60]. To analyze our survey's qualitative responses, we first used coding and thematic analysis [61] and next, the theoretical framework presented in Section 2.4.

To integrate our findings, we sometimes used data transformation [58]: some numeric findings were described verbally, and some qualitative findings were quantified, either verbally or numerically.

The quantitative and qualitative dimensions of this study were integrated through design, data collection, analysis, and interpretation of the findings, and this article's conclusions were based on the integrated analysis of quantitative and qualitative findings [58–60]. The low response rate is a weakness of our study; therefore, our analysis and conclusions attach considerable weight to the study's qualitative data, which, in contrast, is abundant. In all, 1682 of the 2051 participants made qualitative comments, ranging from one sentence to entire "pages." These many responses to the open-ended questions provided a detailed picture of the everyday practices surrounding the staff guidelines at the institutions, which counterbalanced the weaker response rate.

2.4. Theoretical Framework

The main theory underlying the theoretical framework that we use to analyze this article's findings is Foucault's governmental theory of *discipline* and its central figure, *the panopticon*, which Foucault developed from Jeremy Bentham's 1791 concept of the Panopticon prison building [34]. The panopticon has been mentioned previously in the literature as an image of the surveillance in childcare facilities as a result of the panic about CSA [6,9,16]. We employ Foucault's figure to develop an in-depth analysis of the guidelines in the broader context of his theory of discipline. Our analysis demonstrates how Foucault's 1977 theory of discipline, which he traced back to the 18th century, is vividly exemplified by the childcare institution of late modernity. We argue that the panopticon function is reinforced in today's childcare institution, and, developing Foucault's concept, we invent a new concept, *the multidimensional panopticon*. Our conceptual framework also draws on Axel Honneth's theory of *recognition* [62] to demonstrate the lack of recognition of male childcare workers. We also apply a theory of fear, primarily from Lars Svendsen's *Fear* [63] and Frank Furedi's *Culture of Fear* [3], to analyze the fear at childcare facilities, and its impact on teacher–child relationships. We also examine the unintended consequences of the guidelines on the children, through the lens of developmental psychology and Arlie R. Hochschild's concept of *feeling rules* [64]. We conclude this article by noting the importance of trust as *social capital* at childcare institutions [65].

3. Results

3.1. The Guidelines

Of the 1457 participating institutions, 58% (845) responded "yes" to whether they had guidelines for preventing CSA or wrongful allegations of CSA at the institution, 38.2% (557) responded "no," and 3.8% (55) responded "don't know." A number of respondents who stated in the closed-ended questions that there were no guidelines at their institutions nevertheless described guidelines in the open-ended responses, for instance, that doors were kept open. This indicated that the percentage of institutions with guidelines was higher than 58%.

At 74% of institutions that responded "yes" to whether they had guidelines, these were written (37%), or both written and oral (37%), whereas they were exclusively oral at 26% of institutions.

Optional, qualitative descriptions of the guidelines were provided by 898 respondents: 710 directors and 188 teachers. These responses indicated that three closely related sets of guidelines were particularly pervasive.

(1) Visibility. Guidelines that aimed for visibility were mentioned by 400 respondents. The main guideline, to keep doors open, was mentioned by 342 of the 400 respondents. Some institutions kept all doors open, others mainly kept doors to the bathroom and the diaper changing area open. Some institutions would permit the door to the toilet or the diaper changing area to be closed in some cases, but then, two staff members had to help the child. Several institutions had a guideline for always opening a closed door if a colleague was on the other side of it with children, and always checking on colleagues' secluded activities with children. Another frequently mentioned way to achieve visibility was to install windows in doors or walls; at some institutions, in all doors or walls, at other institutions, the doors or walls to the toilet or diaper changing area, in particular. The respondents generally described their institutions as being very monitoring-friendly. Several respondents remarked that it was impossible to hide or to be alone in their institution. Many responses indicated that the quest for visibility influenced the use of the rooms in the institutions, as teachers were not allowed to be alone with children in secluded rooms; the basement, in particular, was mentioned numerous times. Three institutions used video surveillance or intercoms.

(2) Not alone with children. Guidelines "forbidding staff to be alone with children" or "demanding that two staff members be present" were mentioned by 371 respondents. At some institutions, this guideline applied to all activities, at other institutions it applied mainly to diapering and toileting. It could also apply to the following situations: being in the playground or behind closed doors, opening or closing the institution, going to the basement or on trips, or helping a child physically.

(3) Touch. Guidelines that addressed touching children were mentioned by 217 respondents. This number does not include the many respondents who mentioned that staff were forbidden to be alone while diapering and toileting or examining a child physically; although these guidelines are indeed touch-related, we included them under "Not alone with children." At some institutions, the guideline was to limit touching children; at most institutions, guidelines addressed specific types of touch. The two most frequently mentioned types were kissing and sitting on laps. Guidelines for lap-sitting were mentioned in 76 responses and existed in several versions. Some institutions entirely forbade holding a child on the lap; this was the case mostly in BASCs and applied mostly to male workers. The other institutions had guidelines, often very detailed, for sitting on laps, or simply noted that teachers, especially male, were to be aware of the way children sat on the lap. Several institutions required children to sit with their legs together to one side, and not astride, whereas other institutions stated that children could sit on a lap only briefly, or only if they were upset. At several institutions, children had to sit facing away from the teacher, and at one institution, the guideline's wording specified that male workers were to remove children who sat on their penises. Guidelines for kissing were mentioned in 68 responses, only one of which was from a BASC. Some institutions entirely forbade kissing children; others forbade kissing children on the mouth. Some respondents specified that you could give a hug, but not a kiss. At several institutions, children were not allowed to touch specific parts of the teachers' body, and several institutions had guidelines for how and where to roughhouse. At some institutions, guidelines for touching children directly addressed their care. At a few BASCs, teachers did not do toileting or help if a child had wet itself; instead, they assisted the child verbally from outside the door. A few institutions refused to apply medications for infections or irritations in the anogenital area, a few institutions forbade onesies, to avoid touching the crotch area, and a few institutions had teachers wear plastic gloves when toileting. Two institutions had children stand while being diapered. At one kindergarten, teachers did not wipe girls after urination, and in another institution, teachers did not diaper when they were alone in the institution. At several institutions, guidelines for visibility, not being alone with a child, or touch, applied particularly or exclusively to substitutes, new employees, or students.

Besides the three most pervasive sets of guidelines, the following guidelines were mentioned to a greater or lesser extent in the responses. Guidelines that aimed to achieve an open culture and dialogue were mentioned by 114 respondents. At their institutions, staff members were urged to question colleagues' behaviors if these appeared unusual. At most institutions, such guidelines were combined

with more concrete guidelines of the sort already outlined; at some institutions, they stood alone. At many institutions, staff were forbidden to take photographs with their own cameras, and guidelines addressed which situations staff could photograph, and how much clothing photographed children had to wear. Several institutions had dress codes for staff. Some institutions forbade affectionate language between staff members and children; teachers were not allowed to say, "I love you," or to give children nicknames. Similarly, several institutions forbade staff to keep secrets with the children, or to let any child cling to any one teacher. Some institutions had a guideline requiring parents to always be informed of any situation involving a child that risked being misconstrued, or that such situations be documented. Finally, many respondents mentioned their institutions' general work for preventing and detecting CSA, confirming the overall picture conveyed by the survey, that the institutions were observant of signs of abuse of children, from any abuser, and took this issue very seriously.

3.2. Special Guidelines for Male Staff

In the vast majority of institutions, guidelines applied to both sexes. Some respondents remarked that guidelines had been established because of male workers but in order to not discriminate, both sexes followed them. Nevertheless, the directors of 6.5% of all institutions in the study, and 11.6% of institutions with guidelines (=95 institutions), responded "yes" to whether they had special guidelines for men. Furthermore, the directors of 15 institutions responded "no" to this question, although one or more teachers from these institutions responded "yes." The directors of four institutions did not participate in the survey, but one or more teachers from these institutions responded "yes" to whether they had special guidelines for men. The directors of 25 institutions responded "no" to whether they had special guidelines for men, although the qualitative responses from the institutions indicated that one or more such guidelines did in fact exist. For instance, the director of one institution stated that there were no special guidelines for men but noted elsewhere that male teachers never did toileting. These findings indicated that the percentage of institutions in the study with special guidelines for men was higher than the 6.5% of all institutions indicated by directors' responses. Possible explanations for the divergences could be different interpretations of what a guideline is, the sometimes informal character of the guidelines, and the fact that some teachers established personal guidelines.

At an integrated institution, special guidelines for men sounded like this: "Men don't do diapering or toileting. Our men are not allowed to be alone with our children in the basement. Our men are not allowed to have children sit on their laps." These guidelines are typical of the special guidelines for men found by the survey. The four most pervasive guidelines that applied to male workers were:

(1) Men may not do diapering or toileting. At some institutions, this guideline was absolute. At other institutions, male workers either had to be accompanied by a female colleague or had to keep the bathroom door open while diapering and toileting. One institution had men wear plastic gloves while diapering or toileting.

(2) Men may not be alone with children. Again, at some institutions, this guideline was absolute, whereas at others, it applied to specific situations, mainly diapering and toileting, opening and closing the institution, going to the basement or on a trip, especially to the beach or the swimming hall.

(3) Men must keep physically distant from children. At some institutions, men were required to be physically distant from children, at others, men had to avoid specific situations, such as having a child on the lap or applying sunscreen.

(4) Men may not put children down for their nap. At some institutions, the special guidelines for male staff applied only with regard to the girls at the institutions. At several BASCs, male workers were told to be alert to the risk of older girls getting crushes on them.

3.3. Rationales for Establishing Guidelines

When we asked directors and teachers whether the guidelines at their institutions were intended to protect both children from CSA and staff from wrongful allegations of CSA, or primarily protect children, or primarily protect staff, 85% responded "both children and staff," 9% responded "primarily

staff”, and 6% responded “primarily children.” Male directors and teachers responded “primarily staff” significantly more often than did female directors and teachers.

When, with an open-ended question, we asked directors only about the reasons for establishing guidelines in their institutions, we got very different results from the foregoing. Of the 822 directors who responded “yes” to whether they had guidelines in their institution, 802 provided qualitative responses. The two most mentioned rationales were protecting children from CSA, and protecting staff from wrongful allegations, although some responses just said “protection,” without specifying of whom. In 273 responses, directors explicitly declared the protection of children to be the rationale, whereas in 441 responses, directors explicitly declared the protection of staff to be the rationale for establishing guidelines. Furthermore, in a number of the responses that claimed that both the protection of children and the protection of staff were rationales for establishing guidelines, the predominant reason was the protection of staff. For instance, one director wrote, “To protect both children and staff. But especially to avoid suspicion of staff.” In 70 responses, directors emphasized that male staff or male students had been the rationale for establishing guidelines, in some cases without specifying why, but the vast majority of the 70 responses specified that it was about protecting the men. Even though many directors wished to protect the children from CSA, especially in the aftermath of upsetting cases of CSA, the directors’ qualitative responses concerning the rationales for establishing guidelines aligned with the qualitative responses of the survey in general, and supported our overall finding that the predominant rationale for establishing guidelines was to protect staff, especially male staff. Furthermore, 127 of the 802 directors reported that cases of CSA or wrongful allegations of CSA—at their own institution or in the municipality, or cases in general, for instance those exposed by the media—had motivated them to establish guidelines. In their responses, 99 directors mentioned media coverage of CSA, or the general focus on CSA, as a rationale.

In 132 of the 802 qualitative responses from directors, they reported that the municipality had demanded or inspired the establishment of guidelines at their institutions. When asked directly, in a closed-end question, who had determined their guidelines, the directors’ responses showed that at 77.3% of the institutions, directors had participated in determining guidelines, in 73.1% teachers had participated, and in the majority of institutions (61%), directors and teachers had determined the guidelines together. At 32% of the institutions, the municipality had contributed to determining the guidelines, and at 14% of institutions, parents had contributed. Again, these numbers underscored the general findings of the survey, that most often, guidelines were not forced on staff because of the management’s mistrust, but predominantly represented staff’s defensive behavior against parents’ hypothetical suspicions, a finding also supported by the fact that, at times, staff established guidelines individually.

The foregoing findings were supported by the fact that the vast majority of respondents felt safer with guidelines. The question of whether their institution’s guidelines made them feel safer with regard to wrongful accusations of CSA received a response from 818 directors and 223 teachers: 83% answered “yes”; fewer than 10% did not feel safer. There was no significant difference between directors and teachers, or between men and women. When we asked the 17 male directors and six male teachers who answered “yes” to whether they worked at an institution with guidelines that applied to men only, whether the special guidelines for men made them feel safer, 91% answered “yes,” and 9% did not know.

3.4. The Childcare Workers’ Opinions of the Guidelines

The invitation to give their opinion of the guidelines, and their everyday experiences of these was accepted by 505 female and 100 male directors, and 123 female and 53 male teachers. Their responses may be divided into three groups: (1) the majority of respondents who had a positive view of the guidelines; (2) a significant group of respondents who were generally positive, but were critical of specific points, sometimes just one or two, sometimes several; (3) a small group of respondents who had a very negative view of the guidelines. There was no significant difference between responses

from women and men, or between teachers' and directors' responses. Men tended to be more critical, but the large majority of men embraced the guidelines. It is noteworthy that amongst the critical or divided voices were many directors, indicating some directors who experienced pressure to establish guidelines, despite their professional convictions.

The *positive* views of the guidelines held by the first and second groups were that guidelines provided security for staff, children, and parents, functioned well, did not restrict the work, and had become a natural part of daily practice. Many respondents were clearly aware that a wrongful allegation would be devastating, and considered guidelines necessary for protecting staff, especially the men. Furthermore, some respondents found that guidelines gave them a professional tool for navigating a difficult field, and constituted a shared framework for the institution, which provided support in interactions with parents.

The *negative* views of the guidelines held by the second and third groups were that guidelines caused distrust to replace trust, especially with regard to male staff, for whom guidelines were seen as a constraint, and they were described as negatively affecting how pedagogy and care were practiced in the institutions. Concrete examples were that guidelines made it difficult to comfort a child, that activities with children in small groups or in closed rooms were hindered when teachers could not be alone with children, that guidelines made the daily routine less flexible, and finally, that it was invasive for children to be forced to sit on the toilet with the door open. Some respondents also felt that the guidelines were resource-demanding, and could not prevent abuse, anyway. Quite a few respondents found that guidelines were necessary, but that they represented a sad development—"a necessary evil," as some put it.

With regard to special guidelines for men, we asked both directors and the male childcare workers themselves about the men's attitudes to these guidelines. When we asked the directors who answered "yes" to whether they had special guidelines for male workers, the majority responded that male workers found such guidelines necessary, and knew that they were established for their own safety. At times, male workers themselves had demanded or participated in establishing the special guidelines. However, some directors had found that even though male workers considered special guidelines a necessary safety measure, they still found them discriminatory, accusatory, or limiting to their work. The directors' responses were confirmed when we asked the 17 male directors and six male teachers who answered "yes" to whether they worked at an institution with special guidelines for men: Most of the men found special guidelines for men a necessary safety measure, but several regretted the development, and a couple of men found special guidelines discriminatory and accusatory.

3.5. *The Guidelines' Impact on Professional Identity*

When asked whether the guidelines affected their professional identity, two-thirds of both directors and teachers answered "no." Amongst the third of respondents who found their professional identity affected, 134 female and 49 male directors, and 31 female and 14 male teachers, provided qualitative elaborations, and fell mainly into two disagreeing groups. The first saw guidelines as an asset to their professional identity, finding the protection of children a crucial part of their professional task. Directors in particular, including several male directors, found that their professional identity was strengthened when they could provide safety, in the shape of guidelines, for both children and staff. According to this group, guidelines created a sound awareness, and provided staff with a shared framework at the institutions, just as they indicated responsible professional behavior, which increased parental trust. In contrast, the second group saw guidelines as a detriment to their professional identity. They found that they and their profession had been placed under suspicion, and that following the guidelines was tantamount to admitting guilt. Many in this group found that the fear of misconstruction had become a constant awareness that inhibited a spontaneous workflow and their relationships to the children. To some respondents, it constituted a professional dilemma when guidelines overruled pedagogical or ethical considerations, for instance when staff safety was prioritized over children's right to privacy on the toilet. Several male respondents found guidelines stigmatizing and limiting to their ability

to exercise their profession, for instance, with respect to building relationships with children. Some directors found it a challenge to their professional identity to have to handle the stigmatization of men, including one director who felt forced to be “professionally suspicious of the staff.”

Finally, a smaller group did not evaluate the guidelines’ impact on their professional identity positively or negatively, but simply stated that a new awareness was part of the profession.

3.6. The Childcare Workers’ Opinions of the Guidelines’ Consequences for the Children

We asked our respondents whether guidelines influenced the care taken of the children and their development. The vast majority did not think so, although a minority of respondents described such influences, mostly finding that guidelines compromised childcare. In their experience, guidelines and the fear of misconstruction distanced them from the children. They described how childcare staff were more reluctant to comfort distressed children, to put children on their laps, or to hug them, and how relationships between staff and children had become less warm and authentic. Some regretted this development, arguing that children need a warm environment during a long day in childcare, and that having a child on one’s lap ought not to be considered suspect. A few respondents reported that children might sometimes perceive adults as dismissive. Some feared particularly for vulnerable children. Again, some respondents criticized the fact that doors were kept open when children sat on the toilet or got help after soiling their pants. Several respondents emphasized that guidelines and the fear of misconstruction particularly restrained male staff in their work, which could result in more distant relationships between children and male teachers, especially at institutions with special guidelines for men. Some respondents also claimed that the guideline concerning not being alone with children deprived the children of activities such as trips, going to the basement to collect things with an adult, and spontaneous activities. Several respondents considered it a significant pedagogical loss that one-on-one contact with children was lost. However, some respondents found that, on the contrary, guidelines positively influenced childcare, because they safeguarded children.

3.7. Institutions without Guidelines

At the institutions that stated that they had no guidelines, almost half the teachers and directors indicated that they were “neither pleased nor displeased” about having no guidelines, but more were “pleased” than “displeased.” Three percent of directors and nine percent of teachers felt unsafe without guidelines, whereas seventy percent of directors and fifty-three percent of teachers felt safe. Of the directors who answered “no” to whether they had guidelines, 80% stated that there was no specific reason for this; 15% stated that there was a specific reason. In the qualitative responses to why the institutions had no guidelines and their attitudes to this, many respondents wrote that they had not considered having guidelines, or had not had the time to establish these, or that their institution was new, or that our study made them consider establishing guidelines. Many other respondents wrote that at their institutions, staff members trusted one another, and used open dialogue, professionalism, and common sense to prevent CSA or wrongful allegations. This was often the case at smaller institutions, where staff members knew each other well. Some directors explained that guidelines would weaken trust, and that they did not want to cast suspicion on their staff and discriminate against male workers. In contrast, other respondents mentioned having no male workers as the reason for having no guidelines. Some respondents feared that guidelines would negatively affect professionalism, leading to a more artificial relationship with the children. Finally, some respondents answered that guidelines such as two teachers being required for all tasks would not be possible at their institution.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1. A Climate of Fear

Some institutions had many guidelines, others had only one or two; a guideline rigorously applied at one institution might be more relaxed at another. Still, we argue that the general pattern at the childcare facilities with guidelines was a *climate of fear* that influenced practices and social relations, with considerable unintended consequences for staff and children. In this section, we analyze and discuss these consequences.

The fear at the institutions with guidelines was not intense, but the “low-intensity fear” that Lars Svendsen called characteristic of our time, a fearful perspective on the world, which has been normalized, like a habit [63] (pp. 51–53). Svendsen associated this “low-intensity fear” with what Bauman refers to as a “derivative fear,” a fear that is not caused by an immediate threat, but instead presents itself as a “sentiment of being *susceptible* to danger; a feeling of insecurity (. . .) and vulnerability” at the thought of a *possible* threat [66] (p. 3); [63] (p. 53). The following statement from a male kindergarten director conveyed just such a feeling of insecurity, and articulated “the possible threat” generally feared at the childcare facilities in our survey: “I find that it’s easy to put forward an accusation, which, even though it is groundless, may destroy my professional life, and possibly my private life too. I feel at risk.”

The general feeling of insecurity at childcare facilities was reflected in the *two overarching functions* of the guidelines: (1) The first function was to avoid *misconstruction*, especially by parents who might enter the institution and be unaware of the reason for a teacher’s close contact with a child; (2) The second function was to enable staff members to act as *witnesses* to one another’s practices, in order to always be able to refute any wrongful allegations. That is why two staff members were present for many tasks, and why institutions had increased visibility. As a kindergarten director stated, “The guidelines are all about ensuring being seen in one’s interactions with the children.”

4.2. The Childcare Panopticon

All techniques at the childcare facilities with guidelines converged on the aims of *visibility* and *transparency*, which leads us to argue that the fear of CSA and wrongful allegations has made the childcare institution into a *panopticon*. In *Discipline and Punish. The Birth of the Prison* [34], Foucault developed Bentham’s 1791 concept of the Panopticon, a circular prison building with a central surveillance post overlooking clearly individualized cells in the circle. Each cell, with a window facing the control tower and one in the outer wall, is flooded with light, making all occupants visible at all times. The main idea of the panopticon is that the supervisor is invisible to the visible occupants, who, ignorant of when they, personally, are being watched, consequently must behave themselves at all times. Foucault stated that no physical force is necessary with this sort of power:

A real subjection is born mechanically from a fictitious relation. (. . .) He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; (. . .) By this very fact, the external power may throw off its physical weight [34] (pp. 202–203).

Our study showed that in *the childcare panopticon*, the extensive visibility and the hypothetical ever-present gaze of colleague witnesses and parents also engendered extensive self-regulation among the childcare workers. Many respondents mentioned maintaining a constant awareness to avoid *misconstruction*, for example, a BASC director noted, “Several years ago, a parent misunderstood a play situation, which scared us all, so now we are careful that no misunderstandings can/are allowed to occur.” They also revealed that this awareness made them change their conduct, distanced them from the children, and inhibited the natural workflow. A female BASC director explained, “I’m more aware of my presence with the children; they hardly ever sit on my lap anymore, and there is less kissing and hugging, it affects my view of the work and my professional approach to being with children.” Such statements showed that, paradoxically, the continuous attempt to *not* be mistaken for a pedophile kept

pedophilia present in the childcare workers' minds. One male BASC director stated, "It is regrettable to have to focus on something that I have no intention of doing." It is clear that the pedophile had become a *ghost subjectivity* that haunted the childcare panopticon, and in their constant attempt to alienate themselves from this pedophile ghost subjectivity, the childcare workers "behaved themselves."

In Bentham's panopticon, the prisoners, unable to see one another, relate to the supervisor only. In the childcare panopticon, the supervisory effect is multiplied, as everybody watches everybody else. The childcare workers watch one another, and themselves, through the internalized gaze of colleagues and parents. As one kindergarten director explained, "There will always be eyes on one another's practices." Foucault mentioned Bentham's dream of releasing the panopticon mechanism from the prison building, putting it to work in a "diffused, multiple and polyvalent way throughout the whole social body" [34] (pp. 208–209). Foucault himself spoke of "panoptisme" in a broader sense, as the daily surveillance in a modern society of "intersecting gazes" [34] (p. 217). Developing Foucault's idea, we argue that the fear of CSA and of misconceptions has transformed the childcare facilities with guidelines into a *multidimensional panopticon of intersecting gazes* that *disciplines* childcare staff behavior.

4.3. A Disciplinary Power

The panopticon is the emblematic architectural figure of *the disciplinary power* that, according to Foucault, gained traction in the eighteenth century, and became one of the central governmentalities of modernity. Foucault defined *discipline* as "methods, which made possible the meticulous control of the operations of the body, which assured the constant subjection of its forces and imposed upon them a relation of docility–utility," a control exercised along three dimensions: time, space, and movement [34] (p. 137). For instance, such disciplinary methods were used to optimize education at schools, at times designed as panopticons in order to control sexual behavior, among other things. Foucault's definition is highly characteristic of the guidelines at the childcare facilities of today, that are the focus of our study, as they exercise detailed control over the childcare teacher's movements in time and space, and proscribe any behavior even remotely associable with sexuality, as in this kindergarten:

Teachers never change diapers with the door closed. We are not allowed to kiss children. We are decently dressed—children too. (. . .) Adults are never alone with a little group of children. Doors to bathrooms are always open. We do not apply zinc ointment when children have diaper rash. (. . .) We are allowed to hug the children, but not to touch any exposed skin—children like us to "draw" on their backs, but it has to be outside the clothes. When we put on sunblock, it takes place in the playground, where everybody can see it.

The many variations on guidelines for sitting on laps, mentioned earlier, are prime examples of how detailed guidelines control who may hold a child on the lap, where, how, and for how long. Discipline entails documentation as a way of extending surveillance in writing [34] (p. 189), which we also found at some institutions, such as the BASC that stated, "for instance, we write down on an everyday basis which adults are in the playground, the art center, etc., so that we are subsequently able to go back weeks and months, in case we need to know who was where, when." Such documentation brings to mind the detailed surveillance of each cell in Bentham's panopticon, and underscores the lengths to which childcare staff went, to prevent wrongful allegations.

Foucault argued that disciplinary power is always an attempt to control important threats to society, for instance, epidemics. Throughout much of history, sexuality, and even more so, deviant sexuality, have been considered a threat to institutions and society, and seen in this light, it is not surprising to find a disciplinary power at work at today's childcare facilities, in the shape of guidelines that guard against CSA and wrongful allegations. CSA is possibly considered the greatest evil in Western culture today, often specifically described as an "epidemic" or an "epidemic threat" to society [3].

4.4. The Disciplinary Counter-Law: Discrimination against Male Childcare Workers

Foucault argued that discipline confronts threats by striving to make subjects meet particular *norms* of use for a given situation, or for society as such. Punishing abnormal behavior and ranking people according to their level of success in following norms is central to discipline's functioning. Discipline is capable of depriving deviants of their rank altogether, creating outcasts, although disciplinary sanctions always have the homogenizing aim of making deviants follow norms. Historically, Foucault claimed, the liberties given to the people during the Enlightenment were counterbalanced by the development of discipline. Although, in theory, official laws and politics promise us equality and freedom as juridical subjects, in practice, discipline creates inequality and hierarchy, in order to force us to follow norms that are of value to society. Discipline reaches further than laws and politics can, regulating the minor behaviors of individuals in society. Foucault went so far as to define discipline as a *micro-power* and a *counter-law* operating on the obscure underside of the official laws, politics, and rights of a society [34] (pp. 222–223). He emphasized the example of the workplace as a place where the “real procedures” of discipline undermine “the legal fiction of the work contract,” adding, “Workshop discipline is not the least important” [34] (p. 223).

Foucault's theory of the disciplinary micro-power and counter-law operating beneath official rights and agendas is useful for fully grasping *the gender bias* of the guidelines at the institutions we studied. Male childcare teachers have the same education, and the same legal rights as female teachers. Clause 4 in Part 2 of the Danish *Consolidation Act on Equal Treatment of Men and Women as regards Access to Employment*, etc. [67] states, “Any employer who employs men and women shall treat them equally as regards working conditions.” Furthermore, in Danish society today, men are officially considered as fit to care for children as are women, and the increase in male involvement in the family has been on the political agenda for a number of years, primarily with regard to the number of men who take parental leave. Yet, a central finding of our study was that male and female staff were not equal when facing the subject of CSA at Danish childcare facilities. This was obvious in the group of institutions with special guidelines for men, but also in the fact that some institutions had established guidelines for both sexes because of the men, and that, in practice, guidelines for both sexes often applied only, or more rigorously, to men, as at one BASC that stipulated, “No children on the lap (especially male teachers).” Some institutions with no guidelines clearly stated that they had no guidelines because they had no male staff. Furthermore, the discourse of almost all respondents—including the large majority who did not themselves suspect their male colleagues of any wrongdoing—presupposed that men are those commonly associated with CSA. For instance, a female BASC director stated, “Always having children on the lap or clinging to you immediately sends the wrong signal when you are a male teacher. For a female teacher, others conceive of this as a sign of care and comfort.”

All things considered, we argue that our study reveals that male childcare professionals are stigmatized with respect to the subject of CSA and that, beneath official laws and politics proclaiming the equality of men and woman with regard to childcare, the childcare panopticon is mainly to be regarded as protection both *against men* and *of men*, who, in practice, receive less recognition and have reduced rights and poorer working conditions than female colleagues. Drawing on Foucault's theory of the disciplinary *micro-power* and *counter-law*, we claim that male childcare professionals are deprived of their rank as a collective punishment for the crimes of a small number of male childcare teachers and are kept at distance from children to prevent new crimes, disciplined into a *non-sensuous behavior* among children. All these are ends that official laws and politics would be unable to achieve and that conflict with these, but these ends serve Western society's subjacent, widespread fear of CSA, and the conviction that CSA is an epidemic that must be prevented, regardless of cost, which is probably the reason these guidelines—so discriminatory against men—have been allowed to exist for many years in a country such as Denmark, with high ambitions for gender equality. Regarding the guidelines as an expression of a disciplinary *micro-power* and *counter-law*, providing protection against both the feared epidemic threat of CSA in Western societies today, and the threat of false allegations, exposes not only the double standard of the Danish ambition for gender equality, it also illustrates why these

guidelines, conceived of as a safe defense by most childcare workers, in fact oppress male childcare workers, treating them as criminals under surveillance.

Discrimination against male teachers conflicts with the official ambition to increase the number of men in the ECEC sector workforce. In Denmark, 27% of the students training to become childcare teachers are men, but only 2.7% of teachers in crèches, and 6.7% of teachers in kindergartens, are men [68]. Still, Denmark is one of the countries with most men in the ECEC sector, as, in most countries, fewer than 3% of workers in this sector are men [18]. In Denmark, the question of attracting more men to the ECEC sector has repeatedly appeared on the political agenda over the last two decades [26,47]. As recently as 2016, the Danish government launched a campaign to attract more men to ECEC [68]. Moreover, attracting more men to the ECEC sector has been an international challenge for years and in several countries, governments and organizations have founded initiatives to increase the number of men in this field [18,25,26]. In 2011, the European Commission concluded, “There is a pressing need to make a career in the ECEC sector more attractive to men in all EU countries” [18] (p. ix). However, studies from several countries indicate that the stigmatization of male teachers with regard to CSA, with the subsequent risk of false allegations, is one of the main reasons men avoid ECEC [18,22,23,25,26]. Our findings confirm that there is an obvious contradiction between the gender equality officially desired by both the Danish ECEC sector and at an international scale, and the lack of equality and recognition that characterizes the actual work conditions for the men in this sector—what Foucault called the “real procedures” of the workplace [34] (p. 223).

4.5. The Lack of Recognition of Male Childcare Workers

Axel Honneth’s philosophy of recognition [62] offers a deeper understanding of why the stigmatization of, and discrimination against male childcare workers is harmful to them as individuals and as a professional group. Honneth argued that recognition is indispensable for humans to develop themselves as individuals, and that the struggle for recognition is an essential aspect of social conflicts and historical development. To become an autonomous individual, capable of relating to oneself positively, and of realizing one’s potential for a good life, one is dependent on the recognition of one’s fellow humans in three spheres of society: (1) in the form of *love* in one’s primary relations, (2) in the form of *rights* in the legal sphere, and (3) in the form of *solidarity* in social life. Solidarity is achieved when human beings reciprocally appreciate each other’s capacities and contributions to society, for instance, in workplaces. Honneth emphasized that if we are recognized in all three spheres, we gain *self-confidence* in our primary relationships, *self-respect* in the legal sphere, and *self-esteem* in the social sphere, whereas if we are not, we are treated with a disrespect that is devastating to these ways of positively relating to ourselves, which can hurt our very identity, and cause social isolation.

Our analysis demonstrated that male childcare workers were treated with disrespect with regard to both rights and solidarity. Despite their official rights, stigmatization in general, and special guidelines for men in particular, in praxis deprived the men of their right to gender equality in the workplace. Honneth points out that having legal rights signifies that we are accepted into the circle of citizens regarded as fit to pass moral judgment. In the case of male childcare professionals, depriving them of their rights questions their capacity for moral judgment around children, and threatens their self-respect as human beings and professionals. Furthermore, special guidelines and general stigmatization devalue male childcare workers’ professional capacities, and their contribution to the workplace and to society, which risks harming their self-esteem.

Although the majority of men who responded to our survey considered guidelines a necessary safety net, the qualitative responses revealed that some men suffered from the stigmatization that they experienced, and some men found both special guidelines for men and guidelines for both sexes offensive. A male kindergarten director remarked, “It is a bit offensive to always have to behave as though you were under suspicion. You feel that you are in a profession where your judgment is distrusted.” Other statements illustrated how some male childcare workers felt “hunted” by society, almost without human rights, and left to protect themselves. A male BASC director stated, “We are

several men, and every time there is something about male preschool teachers who have laid hands on a child, we are like hunted beasts. So, we have to protect ourselves." A male kindergarten teacher agreed, "I especially experience the media coverage as a 'witch hunt' and as suspicion of men." The strong metaphors in these statements, where the men compared themselves to beasts and witches, illustrate Honneth's point that a fundamental lack of recognition risks hurting the very identity of male childcare workers, and causing social isolation. These metaphors also make it clear why this position must appear undesirable to men choosing a profession that usually includes the hope of being recognized for contributing to society.

4.6. *Special Guidelines for Male Childcare Workers Are Illegal*

In 2017, it was officially established in Denmark that special guidelines for male childcare workers are illegal. The Danish Institute for Human Rights won a case before the Danish Board of Equal Treatment after filing a complaint concerning special guidelines for men at Danish childcare facilities. The ruling stated that such guidelines are illegal and unacceptable, as they treat men differently and more poorly because of their sex [69]. The case targeted a Danish kindergarten that wrote on their homepage that their male workers did not diaper, but the judgment concerned the principle generally, following a debate in Danish society over the previous four years, largely prompted by the study presented in this article, which revealed the existence of special guidelines for male childcare teachers to the broader Danish public in 2013.

The abovementioned ruling represents a milestone in addressing the discrimination against male childcare workers that results from the fear of CSA; however, it is important to realize that it cannot stand alone. Along with *rights*, male childcare workers also need *solidarity*, in Honneth's sense of the word. As our findings show, the now illegal special guidelines are the most apparent discrimination against male childcare workers, but this discrimination goes deeper, and underlies the entirety of the stigmatization of men with respect to CSA, and often implicitly the guidelines for both sexes. It is important to remember that, more than anything else, the guidelines are self-defensive. To ensure that male childcare teachers can perform their work without a sense of being at risk, as a society we need to address not only special guidelines for men, but also the underlying stigmatization, and move towards a genuine recognition of male childcare teachers as *professionals*, of value to childcare and society.

Our results also indicate that guidelines in general are problematic for the entire childcare profession. Guidelines for both men and women are the sign of a lack of trust in the profession. Even if the profession itself regards these guidelines as self-defensive, they imply to the world outside the institutions that childcare workers are not morally fit to take care of children, and risk becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy.

4.7. *The Guidelines from the Perspective of the Children*

Our survey revealed that the guidelines, which have the principal purpose of protecting staff, have a number of unintended, adverse consequences for the children. In the next sections, we address these consequences.

Our findings showed that the guidelines' gender bias could create gender-biased work performance and gender-biased relationships between staff and children. There was a clear tendency for the women to perform the historically traditional women's tasks of physically caring for children to a greater extent than the men, and close relationships between male staff and children were generally encouraged less than between female staff and children. A female kindergarten director from an institution where male staff were forbidden to be alone with children in the bathroom explained, "Children's experience will be that the close relationships that the staff may create, for instance, while diapering, may be established only with women." A male kindergarten director agreed, "Relationships with men, in particular, may become poorer, tense, and perhaps non-existent." In our opinion, not only is there the risk that the stigmatization of men will be absorbed by the children, but also that they will not be offered equal role models and equal opportunities to relate to the two sexes.

For the children, another important, unintended consequence of the guidelines concerns resources. The guidelines are highly resource-demanding when they require the presence of two staff members for a task, or extended documentation, but also in terms of constant awareness, rendering both mental and organizational operations less flexible. This is significant, as the caretaker–child ratio in Denmark has diminished since 2009 [70], fueling an ongoing debate in Denmark about the quality of ECEC institutions today. Furthermore, both direct and indirect learning are threatened because of the decrease in contact between one teacher and one child or a small group of children. This creates poorer conditions for concentrated activities such as reading and stimulating language development, and also hinders learning that derives from children’s participation in daily chores.

4.8. New Feeling Rules

Our findings showed that owing to the widespread fear of misunderstandings, the whole spectrum of caring for children was problematized in the childcare panopticon. This was the case for touch as basic caretaking and comfort giving, as well as a sign of affection. For instance, a female kindergarten director stated, “You are not so natural when caring for and touching the children—you think more about how to touch them, comfort them, etc., which means that the children are touched less, and that things become cold and artificial at times.” And this was the case for *relationship-building*, because a friendship between a staff member and a child was potentially suspect. A male BASC director described how, “Under some circumstances staff will withdraw from relationships where the interaction may be misunderstood, which creates the risk of children distancing themselves from normal behavior.” All things considered, it was evident that seeing to the basic needs of, and being fond of a child had lost its innocence. A new sort of *professionalism*, no longer synonymous with working according to knowledge about what is best for children and their development, but synonymous with defensive behavior, was gaining traction. A female integrated institution director noted: “The staff’s care becomes deliberately professionally distant from the children.”

Arlie Russell Hochschild’s concept of *feeling rules* describes social rules that dictate what is socially expected and acceptable to feel in given circumstances; these rules about how we “ought to feel” change over time with different ideologies [64]. Our study indicates conflicting and changing feeling rules at Danish childcare facilities. Generally, Danish childcare workers are expected to love children, and many would feel ashamed if they did not [71,72]. At the same time, our results indicate that affection for children in a professional childcare setting has become associated with pedophilia, and therefore suspect. The childcare panopticon watches for those who “care too much,” and childcare staff question themselves, if they do. A BASC director explained that in 25 years, the care had gone from “considerate and loving” to “considerate and correct,” and a BASC teacher mourned the loss of a time when teachers would take children home and serve them buns and hot chocolate. There is a tendency for the new feeling rules to dictate *professionalism*, in contrast to *affection*. In our opinion, we, as a society, have to ask ourselves whether this change promotes *the social good* [64].

4.9. A Threat to Trusting Relationships

All things considered, the guidelines influenced the *relationships* between staff and children negatively in several ways and could have the overall consequence that children will be met with less human warmth, at worst, with distance. This situation conflicts with developmental psychology research, which has stressed for many years that close, trusting, and meaningful relationships are essential to children’s wellbeing, development, and learning [73–76]. Moreover, the importance of children’s relationships with their caretakers in ECEC is increased in modern, Western societies, as young children spend a great number of waking hours in daycare, resulting in the *dual socialization* of children between the home and daycare [76,77]. In fact, Denmark has some of the highest numbers of children in daycare amongst OECD countries [78], with 17.7% of children under one year old, 89.7% of 1- to 2-year-olds, and 97.5% of 3- to 5-year-olds attending ECEC [79], and 38% of 0- to 5-year-olds spending 8 hours or more a day at ECEC institutions [80]. Bronfenbrenner defined the optimal

conditions for a child's development and learning in relationships: "Learning and development are facilitated by the participation of the developing person in the progressively more complex patterns of reciprocal activity with someone with whom that person has developed a strong and enduring emotional attachment (. . .)," and he characterized this attachment as "a mutuality of positive feelings" [73] (p. 60). Similarly, Sommer et al. [76] argued that to achieve high-quality ECEC with *a child's perspective*, trusting relationships are necessary: "Being emotionally available" and "establishing contact and trust" in "secure relationships of reciprocal attachment (. . .) are essential for the child's future mental health and ability to cope with and explore the world" [76] (pp. 463–464).

Sommer et al. defined *a child's perspective-oriented practice* as a practice that sees "the child as a person," interpreting and respecting its "utterances and world of meaning" [76] (pp. 463–464). This definition resembles article 12 of the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* [81], which states that: "States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child." Our results said little about children's experiences of the guidelines, but concerning one matter, several respondents reported the dilemma created by following one guideline, despite the fact that it made children feel uncomfortable. That is when children at kindergartens and BASCs had to sit on the toilet with the door open, or after having soiled their pants, had to be helped with the door open, especially in the case of older children. In such situations, it was obvious that the children's right to privacy was ignored. The dysfunctionality stood out when the normal became the exception, as in this institution: "In wintertime, when the frost is hard, we may have to close the door to the outdoor toilet because otherwise it gets too cold for the children to use it."

Our findings suggested that the guidelines could have a particularly adverse effect on vulnerable children, because they made it more difficult to confide in a teacher, and because vulnerable children have a greater need for a close relationship to their caretakers. A BASC director stated, "When you have a child who has a hard time and doesn't open up unless the child is alone with an adult to confide in. This is not a frequent issue, but it is in these situations that we may lose some children in our care." And an integrated institution director stated:

At times, some vulnerable children may demonstrate very physically invasive behavior (they put their hands under the clothes of the adults, and occasionally try to crawl in there). This can have a huge and very unpleasant effect on the one who is involved, if you are at the same time afraid that it may be misconstrued as an attempt at abuse by the adult.

What is striking here is that, in the eyes of the director, the one who is affected is the professional adult, not the child in distress. The account emphasizes how, in the panopticon, children may be regarded as potentially *dangerous* to adults, which is the subject of the next section.

4.10. Children as Risks

We argue that the two rationales behind the guidelines, the protection of children and the protection of staff, conflict. The alleged protection of staff comes at the cost of the children, at times leading to ethical dilemmas for the staff, who must choose between themselves and the children, when following a defensive guideline means ignoring what is pedagogically or ethically right for the children. A significant group of participants acknowledged this dilemma, including a male kindergarten teacher who remarked, "Personally, I never close doors, etc., when I toilet or diaper. It's an emotional assault on those children who are modest," and a female integrated institution director who stated, "The judgment of pedagogical activities happens to vanish in the attempt to not be misunderstood."

Furedi and Bristow [4] discerned the foregoing dilemma in a British context, arguing that the widespread fear of CSA and the politics of prevention have left childcare professionals and volunteers, and everyone else, in "a state of moral confusion" (p. 49), feeling "forced to weigh up whether, and how, to interact with a child" (p. 39). They spoke of "a generation of adults who have acquired the

habit of distancing themselves from children” (p. 51) and expressed concern over the weakening of intergenerational bonds that leave children more vulnerable. In a 2007 survey by Scotland’s Commissioner for Children and Young People, 48% of adults responded that the fear of being wrongly accused of CSA made them less likely to help a young person in danger or distress [4]. In our survey, a male respondent reported that after a colleague was accused of abuse, he felt disinclined to comfort children who were hurt.

A surprising finding of our survey was that the majority of respondents did not acknowledge the dilemma that we found in institutions with guidelines. Nevertheless, we argue that the childcare staff’s dilemma of having to choose between themselves or the children is a sign of a fear that has grown out of proportion. Svendsen [63] explained how fear, when it becomes disproportionate, also becomes *dysfunctional*. It leads to a politics of prevention, wherever more security is demanded in order to avoid all potential risks, without any reflection on costs. However, such politics of prevention are resource-demanding and undermine people’s freedom, quality of life, and the ability to go about their daily tasks without constant worry. Furthermore, dysfunctional fear transforms others into potential *risks*, distancing people from one another, and at worst leading to social disintegration [63]. Svendsen’s description is characteristic of the childcare panopticon that has resulted from society’s widespread fear of CSA, and consequently, from childcare staff’s fear of wrongful allegations and directors’ fear of accusations of inadequate CSA prevention. The paradox is that this snowball effect of fear that started with a concern for children has ended in dysfunctional childcare. At an international scale, the same development may be observed in other educational settings than ECEC facilities. Researchers from several countries have shown that various levels of no touch guidelines and other self-defensive practices have also gained ground in sports coaching and physical education (PE) of children in recent decades [82–85]. In a British context, Piper, Taylor and Garratt showed how the fear of misunderstandings and false accusations related to CSA have driven sports teachers and coaches to welcome surveillance, as they seek witnesses to their practices [86]. Öhman [82] reported a tendency among Swedish PE teachers to avoid touching or looking at students, or entering their changing room, out of anxiety surrounding intergenerational contact. Öhman and Quennerstedt [83] argued that touch is a precondition for optimal learning in PE, and therefore may be justified by children’s right to develop to their full potential, whereas Piper [84] stressed that these practices, which aim more for adult protection than child protection, damage trust and the moral and social values on which intergenerational encounters should be based.

In 1997, in his book, “Culture of Fear” (the 2006 edition, “Culture of Fear Revisited” is used here), Furedi already expressed the idea of others in society being perceived as potential risks. According to Furedi, one of the most devastating consequences of the culture of fear that defines current Western culture is that it estranges people from one another. It is profoundly *misanthropic*: “A society that pathologizes the act of touching a child transmits the very clear message that it has little faith in people” [3] (p. xix). Furedi argued that the pervasive focus on all sorts of abuse is a focus on the darkest sides of human beings, and distrust is the dominant feeling with which we encounter others, especially around children. There is a widespread fear that abusers prey on children everywhere, and children are the first to suffer, as childhood has become largely reconstructed around the principle of safety, especially in the United Kingdom and the United States [3]. Developing Furedi’s line of thought, we wish to emphasize that in the culture of fear, children not only pay a price, but also *themselves* represent a risk to adults. In our survey, the childcare staff were faced with the dilemma of whether to care for the children or to protect themselves, because the children represented a potential risk of wrongful allegations. There was a tendency for children too to be met with distrust. Children have become dangerous, and we argue that this development is dangerous to children. Piper discerned the same “mutually toxic relationship” between children and adults in sports coaching and PE: “Acting as if all adults acting in loco parentis are potentially toxic to those in their care has rendered children and young people potentially dangerous to coaches’ professional and personal well-being” [84] (p. 176). In our 2010 study, not only male professionals, but also 16% of the male control group participants had

changed their behavior towards children, keeping a greater physical distance from them. There were examples of grandfathers keeping their distance from their grandchildren, and parents keeping their distance from their children [21]. For children, the damaging effects of a development that positions them as a risk to adults, who therefore neglect their essential roles as children's carers, educators, and social guides, is reinforced when this self-defensive behavior occurs in several spheres of today's Western society.

4.11. Distrust and Trust

The low response rate to our study necessitates caution when generalizing the findings. However, studies have shown that there is not necessarily a linear relationship between response rates and nonresponse bias across surveys [87]. Also, a general decline in survey response may be observed in many wealthy countries. There is a general acceptance that nonresponse is partly related to the burden of answering a survey, and some researchers suggest that this general decrease in survey response reflects a corresponding increase in the total level of survey burden placed on sample populations today [87]. As all the nonresponsive institutions in our pilot study later informed us that they had not responded because they were pressed for time and received many surveys, we find it believable that the general trend of a larger survey burden in wealthy countries is also likely to be the main reason for the low response rate of our survey, especially in light of the diminished caretaker–child ratio in Denmark [70]. Furthermore, the quantitative part of our study, which indicates that these guidelines are pervasive at Danish childcare institutions, is supported by the rich qualitative part of the study, which gives a profound picture of how well established these guidelines are at Danish childcare institutions, and how they affect daily practices, and, partly as a consequence of the weak response rate, to a very large extent, we have based our analysis on the qualitative results. These are supported by our prior study [21], and similar studies from other countries [4,6,9,16,29–33]. Thus, this study remains a significant first study of Danish childcare institutions' guidelines for preventing CSA and false allegations of CSA. It shows that the panopticon does not define the whole truth about Danish preschool institutions and BASCs: 38.2% of the institutions we surveyed said that they had no guidelines, and at the institutions with guidelines, many teachers tried to balance things, and some protested against the fear, insisting on "giving children a hug." However, the study reveals that the panopticon captures an important aspect of Danish childcare facilities today, which has been little acknowledged, even though it affects children's wellbeing and development, and male staff's working conditions and recognition, and clearly is an international challenge.

Given that the Nordic countries are amongst the most trusting in the world, it was surprising to find the distrustful panopticon at work in Danish childcare facilities. Researchers have called the exceptionally high levels of trust in the Nordic countries the "Nordic trust exceptionalism" [88]. From 1981 to 2009, a period where trust was stable at a medium level in most Western countries, and declining in others, Denmark experienced a 50% increase in social trust [88,89]. Surprisingly, this was the same period in which the moral panic about CSA at childcare facilities developed, first in the United States, then in Europe. Our findings show that there is an exception to Denmark's trust exceptionalism, namely the distrustful childcare panopticon, which Denmark shares with, for example, the United States and the United Kingdom. This indicates the strength of the fear of CSA today, and the subsequent fear of wrongful allegations, which cross borders and function beneath official agendas and prevailing circumstances in society. Beneath the renowned Danish social trust, we found a hidden distrust of the childcare panopticon, exactly as, beneath the official Danish agenda of gender equality and the stated goal of attracting more men to the ECEC sector, we found male teachers stigmatized, and working in discriminating circumstances in Danish childcare facilities.

The considerable costs of the panopticon, for both staff and children, illustrate Francis Fukuyama's point that trust is not "nothing." Without trust, things fall apart, flexibility is lost, and relationships and operations are burdened by control mechanisms [63,65,90]. As part of *social capital*, trust is the very cement that makes workplaces and social life work and prosper [65]. It is no coincidence that

at a significant group of the institutions *without* guidelines, staff trusted one another, and relied on dialogue, professionalism, and common sense to keep children and staff safe. As we have seen, trust is essential to children's healthy development and learning. The international literature on guidelines for preventing CSA and wrongful allegations against staff unanimously calls for the rebuilding of trust around children at childcare facilities [4,6,9,16,32]. It is important to recognize that childcare facilities cannot solve this problem alone, as they react defensively to society's current, widespread fear of CSA. Therefore, our findings invite further reflection—in society and in research, in Denmark and internationally—on how society can assist childcare facilities to reestablish trust as fundamental social capital.

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Informed Consent: We state that no children took part in the survey. We state that no participants were asked to give information about their names. Therefore, all individual participants were anonymous to the researchers, as the survey was sent to the childcare institutions, and the participants answered the survey electronically at their institutions or at their homes. We have information about the participating institutions only, and this information remains strictly confidential and will never be disclosed to others than the researchers. In Denmark, a survey such as that described here does not require informed consent from the participants, nor does it require approval from an ethical committee. Therefore, we state that our study is compliant with all national and international guidelines for research without personally identifiable information.

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