



# Keyless Coordinators

## *The Family and Sexual Violence Coordination Scheme and its Challenges in Protecting Human Rights in Cases Involving Persons with Intellectual Disability*

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### Abstract

From organisational perspectives, this study examines coordinators' experience in the field of domestic violence and sexual abuse, regarding the coordinator scheme and role. The paper has two related research questions: 1) In general, how do police organizational structures affect the coordinators' role and work? And 2) How does this reflect the coordinators' work to defend legal rights in cases involving persons with intellectual disability? The study is based on interviews with 11 coordinators. The analysis reveals that due to coordinators' organisational placement, they were not included in decision-making meetings, and that lack of mechanisms for accountability made the coordinators' work invisible. The concept of 'keyless coordinators' was developed to emphasise the need for mechanisms to ensure intra-organisational coordination of resources, competence, and shared understanding regarding the police's work in this area, and in particular, to safeguard the legal rights of, and adapt the work to the needs of, persons with an intellectual disability.

### Keywords

Police, domestic violence, sexual abuse, intellectual disability, organisational theories, coordinator, coordination

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Sexual abuse and domestic violence are social problems in which the police play a central role in prevention and investigation (Aas, 2020). Characteristic of work in this field is that it is very complex, calling for teamwork and specialist and intimate knowledge (Aas, 2014).

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1. Linda Hoel, one of the authors of this article, is now the Editor-in-chief of Nordic Journal of Studies in Policing. This article was accepted for publication by previous Editor-in-chief, Nadja Kirchhoff Hestehave, and Hoel has not been involved in this decision or the editorial work regarding the article.

Due to the latest police reform (NOU 2013:9) creating fewer, but larger police districts made up of several geographical units and sections, coordination is of even greater importance in ensuring and strengthening the field of domestic violence and sexual abuse. In 2002 the National Police Directorate (henceforth NPD) established a scheme involving family violence coordinators in the police. In 2008, this was extended to include a sexual abuse coordinator (both hereafter referred to as ‘coordinators.’) Similarly, Danish police established a system of ‘key persons’ (Justisministeriet, 2022, p. 10), whilst the Swedish police have a different organisation of their work with domestic violence and sexual abuse (henceforth ‘violence and abuse’). The role of coordinator represents a specialisation within police indicating that work with violence and abuse requires additional expertise (Aas, 2014a). In Norway, each police district must have one or two coordinators working districtwide (Aas, 2014a), aiming to have ‘coordinating responsibility for the police district’s overall efforts to prevent violence and abuse’ (NPD, 2002, p. 2).

Violence and abuse not only affect functionally healthy persons but also those with an intellectual disability (henceforth abbreviated to ID). This group is covered specifically by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (CRPD, 2006). A fundamental part of this is ensuring personal integrity and safety. That the police protect these individuals’ personal integrity and safeguard their legal rights is particularly important in respect of those who are vulnerable and therefore more readily subject to violation of their rights, such as people with ID (Olsen et al., 2018). People with an ID form a vulnerable group that does not fully understand that they have rights that society must safeguard when they are exposed to violence and abuse (Kuosmanen & Starke, 2015).

To our knowledge, it is not well documented in scientific research how the police organisation safeguards legal rights in such cases. The present study helps to fill this scientific gap by examining the coordinators’ experience of the coordinator scheme and their role in the organisation. The paper has two closely linked research questions 1) In general, how do police organisational structures affect the coordinator role and work?; and 2) How is this reflected in the coordinators’ work to ensure legal rights in cases involving persons with ID? The study has an intra-organisational perspective and is limited to the police’s investigative work, both strategic and tactical. The analysis is based on in-depth interviews of coordinators, and the perspective stems from their experiences alone. The study’s aim is to shed light on the coordinator scheme’s and whether it is appropriate for the police’s work with violence and abuse, and, particularly with respect to persons with ID.

This research question is explored using two relevant organisational perspectives; a structural-instrumental perspective and a cultural-institutional perspective. Organisational theories are relevant to an understanding of how organisations operate within society (Christensen, 2020). The structural-instrumental perspective sees public organisations as tools for their leaders, whereas an institutional perspective argues that organisations have their own cultures, values and norms influencing practice (Christensen et al., 2020, p. 3). According to Okhuysen and Beckhy (2009), coordination plays a key role in efficient processes within complex organisations.

There has been little research into the police’s experience of the way the legal system handles cases where people with ID are victims of crime (Hughes et al., 2011; Kuosmanen & Starke, 2015; Viljonen et al., 2017). This study contributes to reducing this scientific gap and helps to enable better, knowledge-based policy with respect to the human rights of people with an ID, as well as in their contact with the police. In terms of social diversity, knowledge-based police practice is important in ensuring democratic human rights, ensuring inclusion, and avoiding exclusion of vulnerable people.

In the following, we explain the background to the study, then the study's theoretical approach to organisations, followed by a description of the police organisation and coordinator role. Our method is presented before we discuss, from an organisational point of view, coordinators' experiences with respect to structural and cultural aspects of the police and how these challenge the coordinator role and work. We then present the practical implications of the study.

### 1.1 Background to the study

Nadheim's (2018) review of the victim's place in police reforms between 1990 and 2017 indicates that attention has been focused on women and children as victims of domestic violence. To varying extents, reforms have sought to take care of the needs of women and children through, among other things, information. Some victims may have cognitive impairments, not having the same understanding of what they are exposed to, or that they are victims of crime. For instance, people with ID need information to be presented differently in order for it to be understood (Hughes et al. 2011; Kousmanen & Starke 2015; Vadysinghe et al., 2016) – among other things, to understand their legal rights as victims.

Research (Olsen et al., 2016) has shown that knowledge about ID is lacking in the social and health care sectors, and particularly that individuals with ID are subject to sexual abuse and violence more than those without such a diagnosis (Vadysinghe et al., 2016). But research (Malmberg & Färm, 2008; Olsen et al., 2016) shows that it is difficult for Swedish and Norwegian police to become fully aware of this as they lack routines for logging vulnerability in their systems, there being neither coding nor statistics covering the extent of these cases. Being able to establish that someone has ID requires knowledge and skill. But education and training concerning ID is extremely limited in the police (Moen, 2023; Viljonen et al., 2017). A consequence of a lack of both training and experience is that the police's skill in communicating with people with an ID, as well as interaction between the different bodies in the legal system in connection with cases including people with an ID, is limited (Hughes et al., 2011; Kousmanen & Starke, 2015).

Evaluation of investigations in Denmark (Rachlew, 2020) and Norway (NOU 2007:7) has shown that vulnerable people particularly are let down by the legal system because the police lack examination of the accused, leading to miscarriages of justice. One Norwegian police district was brought before the Discrimination Board having a case involving a person with ID (Case 20/99 & 20/98).<sup>2</sup> The handling of these cases was e CRPD, which states that people with ID must have equality before the law and the same access to the legal system as other citizens (2006).

### 1.2 Earlier research into the coordinator role in the police

Knowledge about the coordinator role is based on Grøvdal's (2004) evaluation of, and Aas's (2014; 2014a) studies into, the coordinator scheme. Both Grøvdal (2004) and Aas (2014) argue that the coordinator's tasks are ambiguous, and that both the arrangement and exercise of the coordinator function differ between the districts. Aas (2014; 2014a) found that both the coordinator and the rest of the organisation found the coordinator function to be unclear. This corresponds to findings about the coordinator role in other organisational studies (Hansen & Høgås, 2016; Pagh, 2012). There was a lack of clarity about how the job was to be done and what the role involves. Aas (2014) claims that the coordinator was less

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2. [Discrimination Board](#)

influential in the police than in other organisations, due mostly to the strongly hierarchical nature of the police. In Aas's study, coordinators spoke of the difficulties of collaborating within their own organisation. Several found that they were listened to as professionals to varying degrees but experienced their lack of decision-making authority as being the most difficult part of their role. Further, the coordinator had to design their role and make their own place in the organisation (Aas, 2014a).

## 2. Theoretical framework

### 2.1 Structural-instrumental and cultural-institutional perspectives

Organisations' formal and informal structures influence the framework, the assumptions about and expectations of what the employees do in their roles (Christensen et al., 2020). The two organisational perspectives pertinent to the present study are the structural-instrumental approach and the cultural-institutional approach (Christensen et al., 2020).

*The structural-instrumental* perspective involves organising organisational processes in set ways to achieve desired goals (Christensen et al., 2018). This includes structures describing 'positions and rules for who must or can do what and which define how various tasks should be executed' (Christensen et al., 2020, p. 42). Organisational structures are distinguished by various degrees and forms of hierarchy, divisions of labour and sub-divisions. Specialisation and coordination are key aspects of formal organisational structure and organisations operate with various mechanisms for coordination (Okhuysen & Beckhy, 2009). Formal organisational structure does not make any claim about the behaviour of the members in an organisation. Still, it is not unusual that these structures either constrain or enable the way the job is done (Christensen et al., 2020, pp. 55–56).

*The institutional* approach to understanding how organisations work emphasises how actors within the organisation establish its informal norms, values and routines (Dacin et al., 2002). In this approach, there is dynamic interaction between the individual and the context presented by the organisation, in which informal norms, identities and appropriate behaviour and thinking influencing practice, are shaped, and are being shaped (Christensen et al., 2018). Implicitly, this gives direction and meaning to tasks and responsibilities. Christensen et al. (2020) claim that in order to succeed, the organisation's implementation of decisions and measures must be in accord with what seems to be culturally appropriate, indicating that culture strongly influences organisational activity. Johannessen (2015a) adds that framed by the formal organisational structures, development of practice is driven by social interaction, negotiation and constructive conflicts. Social negotiation can, however, also have the opposite result.

### 2.2 Formal and informal structures in the police

An organisation's formal structures are required to provide basic working conditions, such as responsibility and predictability, and to ensure that employees have a common understanding of the tasks belonging to, and boundaries between, different areas of work (Christensen et al., 2020; Johannessen, 2015a). Following the latest police reform (Justis- og beredskapsdepartementet, 2015), this becomes even more important. The aim was to reform the structure and culture of the organisation to enhance the quality of the police service (Larsson & Lundgren Sørli, 2018). Police districts were merged into larger police districts, which had to establish new geographical operating units and new functional sections. New routines had to be incorporated and new contact points established (Politihøgskolens evalueringsutvalg, 2022, p. 83)

The reformed police organisation has a bureaucratic and complex structure, divided into strategic, operational, and tactical levels with several sections, sub-sections and divisions of labour and routines. Further, the reform established a steep hierarchy and many connections both vertically and horizontally (Johannessen, 2018). A steep hierarchy, steering document and formal work descriptions is to secure working conditions (mentioned above).

Johannessen (2015a) describes culture as being identical to practice, and claims that the Norwegian police organisation involves four police practices/cultures: operational, bureaucratic, union and academic. These involve social negotiation, which forms identity and defines power and ethics within and between organisational practices; these processes create patterns of exclusion and inclusion (Johannessen, 2015; 2015a). Other characteristics of police cultures are great autonomy with respect to discretion (Gundhus, 2012) and officers' behaviour being motivated and controlled by their peers rather than the wider organisation (Reuss-Ianni & Ianni, 2005, p. 297). This is relevant to our study. As mentioned, the coordinators are not included in work processes, not being part of line management.

Due to the spread of knowledge in the field, violence and abuse require cooperation across hierarchical levels, departments and agencies (Aas, 2014a). In our case, the coordinators must conduct coordination with respect to the field of investigation. Investigation belongs to juridical-bureaucratic practice (Johannessen, 2015a): individual tasks and case management falling within clearly hierarchical thinking (Johannessen, 2015, p. 25) and the allocation of resources being based on measurable facts (Johannessen, 2015), such as goals (Wathne, 2018). Juridical-bureaucratic practice is a means of safeguarding political objectives, being independent of politics and the instrumentalization of laws and regulations. An instrument for the attainment of investigative goals aims to ensure that the police work effectively (Wathne, 2018). Efficiency, often assessed in economic terms, is also a criterion in the rule of law (St.meld. no. 22, p. 20):

The legal rights of both the victim and the perpetrator are best safeguarded by the proceedings not dragging on unnecessarily, because protracted proceedings may weaken the possibility to get the best possible elucidation of a case.

### 2.3 The concept of coordination

As the work of the police coordinator is what interests us here, coordination needs to be explained. Coordination can be both vertical, between hierarchical levels, and horizontal, between cooperative agencies and more 'network oriented' (Renå, 2018, p. 23). There are several theoretical definitions of coordination, sharing three 'commonalities: people work collectively; their work is interdependent; and a goal, task, or piece of work is achieved' (Oxhuysen & Beckhy, 2009, p. 469). Further, coordination is 'the process that integrates a collective set of interdependent tasks' (Oxhuysen & Beckhy, 2009, p. 463). To ensure coordination, formal and informal mechanisms such as 'tools, technology and interactions that bring together interdependent elements' are useful (Oxhuysen & Beckhy, 2009, p. 472). Oxhuysen and Beckhy (2009, pp. 473-483) put forward several mechanisms for coordination: plans and rules, roles, routines, common understanding and accountability. Plans and rules describe the actions the different groups must take to complete a task. For instance, which goals are important and relevant, and which actions should be taken. Plans and rules can also present schedules showing pre-set points as timing references. The creation of plans and rules at team level may serve to enhance agreement between the parties. Roles represent a particular expectation and facilitate continuity of behaviour over time. Routines provide a template for task completion by bringing people together, engendering a common perspective across groups.



Accountability stipulates which of the interdependent parts is responsible for specific elements of the task. Accountability is often associated with formal authority; however, accountability is also about making parties accountable for their actions by making them visible to each other – for instance, through interaction in meetings and through status reports.

### 2.3.1 The coordinator scheme

The Guidelines (NPD, 2002) and the Rammer og retningslinjer for etablering av nye politidistrikt (RR) (NPD, 2016) place the coordinator in a sub-section at the strategic level. In some districts the coordinator is placed in the prevention section, in others in the investigation section (RR, 2016). Though situated in a sub-section, they are not included in the hierarchy and line management. The police reform (2016) kept the placement of coordinator at the strategic level; now, however, there are several sub-levels between the coordinator and the chief of police. In 2002 NPD implemented general guidelines and the mandate of the coordinator role. The coordinator is to have ‘coordinating responsibility for the police districts’ overall effort to reduce family violence and sexual abuse.’ (NPD, 2002, p. 2). ‘Overall effort’ is understood to refer to both investigative and preventive work.

- Be a resource person for the operating units and relevant departments by contributing to uniform, consistent and high-quality delivery.
- Remain updated about the district’s efforts in the area and make proposals for the development of routines and methods.
- Have good knowledge of the possibility for other agencies, institutions and organisations to contribute with adequate follow-up and be a resource person in the contact between the police and victims of violence.
- Take the initiative in establishing good collaborative routines with other agencies, institutions and organisations working with the problem of violence.

It is the chief of police’s responsibility to write local job descriptions for the coordinator role, adapted to the individual police district.

In RR (2016, p. 90) a few points are added to the scheme, such as:

- Offer guidance in work with domestic violence
- Coordinate the police’s overall efforts to reduce domestic violence
- Monitor the flow of cases, giving advice about competence and the need for additional competence
- Maintain an overview of collaborating partner’s competence and possibility for offering satisfactory follow-up of victims, and contribute to establishing good collaborative routines with cooperating partners

The coordinator scheme implies that coordination is both intra-organisational and inter-organisational, as well as both vertical and horizontal. In this respect, the coordinators are to coordinate resources and competence to ensure a common understanding and provide a common meaning and direction regarding the total combined effort in the field of violence and abuse between the actors involved. The aim of the police reform – a uniform and efficient organisation (NOU 2013:31) – calls for a focus on coordination supporting this aim. In this, our preference is Oxhuysen and Beckhy’s (2019) integrated approach, both instrumental and process-oriented.

We use organisational perspectives to understand analysis of the coordinators' experiences, aiming to gain insight into the police organisation's structure and culture and how these potentially affect the coordinators' work with violence and abuse and, particularly, in cases involving people with ID.

### 3. Method

The study is based on in-depth interviews with 11 coordinators in eight of the 12 police districts.

#### 3.1 Selection of informants

Recruitment was by a direct approach to potential participants via the police email system of all 12 police districts. They received information about the study and were invited to participate voluntarily. The 11 coordinators who responded, joined the study.

#### 3.2 Interviews

A two-part, semi-structured interview guide was developed. The first part concerned a narrative from a case where a person with ID was subjected to abuse. The second part took in questions about experience of the coordinator role in general. The interviews were conducted between August 2020 and March 2021 and lasted approximately 90 minutes. Five interviews were held at the interviewees' place of work and six over the telephone due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Prior to the interviews, the informants signed an informed consent form.

#### 3.3 Data analysis

The data were analysed using Tjora's (2018) Stepwise-Deductive Induction method (SDI). This method is particularly well suited to generalising data by means of feedback loops between theory and data to ensure analytic, generalised and valid knowledge (2018).

All interviews were read to form an overall impression of the data. The data were then coded with 'text derived codes', not straying far from the empirical data and tested for validity (see Tjora, 2018, p. 45). This inductive process led to the development of 57 such codes. The next step was to analyse these into thematic categories. The categories contained codes related to each other, the 57 codes becoming eight categories. In dialogue with organisational theory and research, these categories were generated to the concept of 'keyless coordinators'. This concept explains that coordinators lack mechanisms that could ensure coordination.

#### 3.4 Strengths and weaknesses

Qualitative studies need to be assessed with regard to information power (Malterud et al., 2015, p. 1–5). The present study has a clear aim and direction in seeking to examine the experiences of the coordinators regarding their role, and in that coordinators who have this function daily, were interviewed. Additionally, they all have long experience from the field of violence and abuse and as coordinators. The study, therefore, has a high sample specificity. Another strength is the use of the Stepwise-Deductive Induction method (Tjora, 2018), during which data analysis was repeatedly held up against established theoretical organizational theories to ensure a satisfactory analytical level. A weakness could be that due to Covid-19 restrictions, six interviews were conducted by phone. Not physically seeing the other person could affect the quality of dialogue, as interaction between researcher and interviewee is needed to interpret meaning (Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2005).

## 4. Results

The results of the analysis is elaborated and discussed below. The analysis generated two findings which show that (1) organisational placement does not include coordinators in decision-making meetings, and (2) a lack of accountability mechanisms makes the coordinators' work invisible.

### 4.1 Organisational placement does not include coordinators in decision-making meetings

The guidelines (NPD, 2002) ascribe the coordinator coordination responsibility regarding strategic prioritising of cases and with respect to tactical investigation. The analysis shows that the organisational placement makes it challenging in respect of inclusion in central decision-making meetings at both strategic and tactical level. The coordinators experienced having insufficient opportunities to influence either priorities or the police districts' investigation because they are not included in forums where these are discussed and decisions are made.

The coordinators found that the police district's priorities are set and resources allocated at the strategic level without input from the coordinator. Vertical coordination has become a challenge due to the distance between coordinators and the chief of police being significantly increased after the latest police reform. Previously, when the districts were smaller, the coordinators were closer to the chief of police's strategic group, and some had more influence over the prioritisation of matters in the district. More tiers of management now lie between the coordinators and the chief of police's management team. Informant D, for instance, said that she is no longer invited to strategy meetings but now must contribute input through her immediate manager, who takes that further up the hierarchy. Informant D explained how this works out in practice:

I have conversations with my section leader when she is going to meetings, but I won't be there myself. I'm not the one to be at the meetings. It is about preparing [the leader] as best as possible before the meetings to get something through.

The analysis suggests that not being able to interact directly with leaders at strategic level can impact the coordinator's ability to horizontally coordinate the district's 'total combined effort' (see NPD, 2002, p. 2). A case may have both preventive and investigative aspects, and being placed in either the investigation section or the prevention section makes it difficult to be responsible for both. For example, informant A, working in the Joint Investigation section, said that the preventive aspect receives less attention:

When the system wants me as far as possible from the management group, I no longer have the possibility of telling them where we stand in the investigation of cases. I'm not asked about how [such cases] can be prevented, because I belong to the investigation section and not the prevention section.

The quote above is an example of where coordinators are placed constructing expectations to what tasks and focus the coordinator has. In this example the coordinator is expected to work with investigation and not prevention, although the coordinator guidelines (NPD, 2002) describe horizontal coordination, implying responsibility for both.

As the police force comprises several sections with their associated subsections, the coordinator function becomes even more important to seeing all aspects of a case. The analysis



suggests that this has become more difficult due to the increased distance between coordinator and strategic management.

The coordinators are placed outside the hierarchy – and therefore not included in the chain of command and control. From the analysis, it appears that whether the coordinators were drawn into matters at tactical level was arbitrary. The coordinators experienced the investigation management rarely demanding their expertise. Coordinator J told us that she had to ‘run after people with [my] expertise and must argue for coming into the meeting.’ Now, the coordinators in her district are routinely invited to meetings with the head of investigation and the manager at the strategic level. But she described the process as a struggle: ‘They had forgotten that they had a family violence coordinator. I had to man the barricades the whole time and front up.’ Informant B experienced that there are no routines for including coordinators in the investigations conducted in the police districts:

When we’re faced with a serious case, we very often feel that [investigative management] sit down at the police stations, work on the case and hand out tasks. But we would like it to be considered a natural point on the list, that the family violence coordinator be contacted, to provide input.

These quotes indicate that there is no mechanism ensuring that cases are properly coordinated with respect to resources/competence in order to ensure a common understanding and direction in the investigation.

#### **4.1.1 Coordinators’ work involving persons with ID**

Even in cases where persons were identified with ID, and hence the investigation demanded additional specialist competence, coordinators were not necessarily included in the investigation process. For instance, informant F told us that she was contacted by the leader of the investigation team towards the conclusion of an investigation and asked to go through all the investigation papers in the case to see whether she could contribute anything, saying: ‘Could you go through these and see what we can maybe do?’. Although the leader asked for input, informant F was nonetheless not invited to the meeting where the case involving a person with ID was to be discussed and decided. She said: ‘When I was asked to go through a case and give feedback on it, it’s maybe natural that I, who have some expertise, ought to be invited to the meeting.’

Being placed outside the line management, the coordinators experienced being arbitrarily and randomly included both up and down the hierarchy. The coordinators were not invited to decision-making meetings at strategic level and were arbitrarily included in investigation teams in the district. This suggests that the organisation has not developed a structure ensuring coordination of resources and competence, ensuring a common understanding and direction in investigations. This can result in haphazard coordination regarding prioritisation and investigation of cases affecting vulnerable people.

#### **4.2 A lack of accountability mechanisms makes the coordinators’ work invisible**

The guidelines (NPD, 2002, p. 2) prescribe that a coordinator is to be regarded as ‘a resource person for the operating units and relevant departments by contributing to uniform, consistent and high-quality delivery.’ Additionally, they are expected to be ‘updated about the district’s efforts in the area and put forward proposals for the development of routines and methods.’ This implies that coordinators possess significant expertise in respect of ensuring the quality of investigative processes and to developing routines and methods that ensure the improvement of the police investigation work in cases of violence and abuse.

Despite these formal expectations, the coordinators found their expertise rarely being called for during investigations, and that they were not in a position to represent the expertise the guidelines refer to.

The coordinators experienced the coordinator role as lacking authority with respect to the investigation process. They do not feel they have a legitimate role and do not want to intrude. Because of this, they describe their approach to the investigation team as being sensitive, referring to their input as ‘advice and guidance’. For example, a coordinator said that she ‘as a family violence coordinator has no authority in that capacity to give instructions in relation to the investigation, other than giving advice and guidance’. Another informant commented that: ‘I try not to be an active part of the investigation, but more an advisor.’ This approach seems appropriate with respect to the strategic role of the coordinator; however, it indicates that the coordinator is seeing inputs as ‘supplementary’ to the case. The coordinator’s input was neither necessarily listened to, nor taken further in the system, nor documented in any way.

Several coordinators stressed that cases are complex, often requiring a great deal of work from them. The data shows that there is no accountability mechanism showing who has done what in cases where the coordinator has been involved. Hence, the effort itself becomes invisible in the police district regarding both resources and substance.

The lack of accountability mechanisms (e.g. status reports) leaves coordinators seeing their own efforts as being irrelevant to the investigation management. What’s more, according to the guidelines (NPD, 2002, p. 2) the coordinators are to ‘be a resource person in the contact between the police and victims of violence’. These caretaking tasks are significant with respect to ensuring that the legal system manages victims appropriately (Nadheim, 2018), yet leave the coordinator invisible in the organisation. One told us: ‘My job is to make sure that people feel well taken care of. And nobody sees this.’ Being invisible seemed to create the experience of not playing a significant role. Coordinator D said:

I’m not seen at those levels where I ought to be seen if I’m going to show what I can do. In the municipalities, I’m more visible there. I have a higher profile there than in my own organisation. That’s quite frustrating.

#### **4.2.1 Coordinators’ work involving persons with ID**

The expertise of the coordinator is important with respect to ensuring the quality of the investigation (NPD, 2002). For instance, in cases where people with ID are to be questioned, due to the ID, the interview must be conducted by a police officer with special expertise, and it should be a person with special expertise in questioning people with ID. However, this is not always the case. For instance, informant G spoke about a case requiring adapted questioning due to the person’s vulnerability. The coordinator tried to coordinate to ensure suitable competence and due consideration of the work tasks involved, i.e. who should take the questioning and who should investigate the case. The investigation management had given the task of investigating the case to an officer skilled in questioning. The coordinator rather wanted this officer to conduct the investigative interview to ensure its quality. This was not respected, and was overruled by the investigation manager holding decision-making authority:

In the end, I stepped in and tried to manage it, saying that this officer must conduct the interview and not investigate the case. Then it went straight to the chief of police – that the coordinator wasn’t to get involved in the manager’s use of resources. I did it once, but I haven’t done it again.

It is interesting that the informant referred to the coordination as an attempt to ‘manage’ rather than to coordinate, but given that the investigation management perceived this as uncalled-for influence, taking the matter up to the chief of police, we can well understand that the coordinator subsequently referred to it as ‘management’.

Informant F talked about a similar experience of feeling insignificant by referring to a case involving a person with ID:

It was a big case. I go through it, write lists: who should be questioned again and what they should be asked, and all of that. I do a big job with it. And what happens? ‘... No, all the same, we won’t find out about it, we’ll drop the case’, says [the investigation manager].

Despite the effort, the informant experienced the investigation team as being uninterested in her attempt to coordinate the case, aiming to gather proper information for the investigation team. The dismissal of the case did not document the coordinator’s efforts.

The analysis shows that the coordinators’ efforts and involvement were not directly visible in the work of the police due to lack of accountability mechanisms (e.g. minutes and status reports). The organisation’s lack of a mechanism to hold the parties accountable regarding the coordination of cases has consequences for the coordinators’ ability to fulfil their roles, which in turn leads to them experiencing their work as invisible and relatively unimportant to the districts.

## 5. Discussion

This study examines how the coordinators experience the coordinator role regarding cases of violence and abuse and, particularly, in cases involving ID. Their experience provides an insight into the dynamics of the organisation’s structural and cultural aspects and how they affect the coordinators’ possibility of taking responsibility for coordination. The analysis reveals that established formal and informal aspects of the police organisation work against the coordinator structures. The police organisation is organised as a steep hierarchy for command and control aiming for accountability, predictability and shared understanding of roles and tasks (see Christensen et al., 2020; Okhuysen & Beckhy, 2009). However, in cases of violence and abuse, our study indicates that the formal hierarchy weakens the working conditions it is supposed to strengthen. Being placed outside the hierarchy reduces the coordinators’ status and authority. Aas (2014, p. 170) writes that the police’s hierarchical structure allows little ‘room for professionals to be heard’ in cases of violence and abuse. Gundhus et al. (2008, p. 97) write that a coordinators’ organisational placement is important with regard to authority and oversight in the field. For example, the most appropriate placement of coordinators was a staff function as this provided closeness to the operative field and strategic oversight (Gundhus et al., 2008).

The coordinators found their contribution often not being listened to, not being taken further into the system, nor documented. As the coordinators are placed outside the hierarchy, lack coordination mechanisms and are excluded from meeting rooms, they have a limited possibility to participate in the culture/practices where cases are handled. From an institutional perspective, the coordinators are, in practice, excluded from the social negotiations where the institutionalisation processes which construct relations and give direction to how practice should be carried out (Christensen, 2018). This exclusion can be explained culturally by Aas’s (2014a, p. 73; 2020) claim that investigation composes a culture which sees domestic violence as concerning generally difficult cases that you ‘don’t get far with.’

It just costs more time to call on the coordinators. As the coordinators' experiences tell us, family violence and sexual abuse cases are demanding and time-consuming to investigate. However, the lack of attention paid to these cases may not only be a question of structure. Due to the police being subject to political steering and tight budgets (Wathne, 2018, p. 46), it may well be that these cases are readily dismissed on financial grounds.

The coordinators primarily represent the NPD's aims regarding the police's focus on violence and abuse, and they will therefore not belong to the 'in group' (Johannessen, 2018), represented in our study by the investigative team. Reuss-Ianni and Ianni (2005) show that the operative police are motivated more by their peers than the wider organisation. Our study reveals the coordinator's difficulty in having influence in the organisation. It is crucial for the coordinators' work to be granted legitimacy by colleagues, and this legitimacy must be negotiated by the coordinators themselves (Pagh, 2012; Aas, 2020). Pagh's point supports the need for coordination mechanisms that ensure that coordinators have access to the practices they are tasked to coordinate with respect to common understanding, resources/competence and direction. However, for formal policies delivered from the 'top' (NPD) to succeed, they must be recognised by the members of the culture(s) (Christensen et al., 2020). It is important, therefore, that coordination mechanisms are developed at team level by the persons who are to work collectively (Okhuysen & Beckhy, 2009). Coordination mechanisms that ensure that the coordinator is included in practices and has influence in social negotiation will help to integrate the coordinators at both the strategic and the tactical levels. It is through social negotiations about practice that the coordinators' work and potential can be clarified and agreed upon. This can lead to increased legitimacy, as well as having a positive effect by merging the two structures and developing appropriate coordination practices regarding investigations of violence and abuse.

### 5.1 The coordinators' work in cases involving persons with ID

The findings demonstrate general structural difficulties with coordination in the police. In this, a major concern is how the police can safeguard the legal rights of particularly vulnerable victims of violence and abuse, such as those with ID who are less able to defend their own interests (Kuosmanen & Starke, 2015).

The study's findings indicate that police seem not to be well suited to handling cases involving ID, as these are even more demanding to investigate (Hughes et al., 2011) than other violence and abuse cases, requiring more time and facilitation of resources, support from guardians, employees, support staff and legal aid (Kuosmanen & Starke, 2015). Coordinating the collective work between agencies is also time-consuming (Aas, 2014), and is more drawn out when it comes to people with ID. This gives grounds to believe that these cases challenge the main criterion for efficiency in investigative work (see St.meld. 2002, p. 20). An informant claimed that due to these difficulties, cases with ID are often dismissed without thorough investigation. This may explain Åker and Johanson's (2019) finding that the police mostly investigate cases where people with ID were exposed to sexual abuse, which most likely provides more concrete evidence of abuse than do cases of domestic violence. Due to the lack of appropriate structure regarding the coordinator's work, there is a higher risk that cases involving ID will not be managed in the same way as other cases of violence and sexual abuse in the legal system, or they may even be incorrectly managed. To support this claim, we refer to the cases from the Discrimination Board where one police district was censured because of overly long case processing times and for its lack of specialist expertise (case 20/99 and 20/98) (see footnote 1). This shows the informational and other needs of the victim with ID are not properly taken care of and adapted to their level of function. It also

demonstrates that the general problems with the coordinator scheme become, particularly, a human rights issue with regard to Sections 12 and 13, which stipulate that vulnerable people are to be treated equally under the law, with the same access to the legal system as other citizens (CRPD, 2006).

## 5.2 The concept of keyless coordinator

In organisation theory (Christensen et al., 2020), coordination is described as a ‘key aspect’ of complex organisations. Coordinators therefore play a key role. The present study shows that the coordinator role, which itself is an important coordination mechanism (Okhuysen and Bechky, 2009, p. 463), is not in a position to coordinate when other mechanisms are lacking. Mechanisms such as ‘routines, meetings, plans, schedules and status reports’ (Okhuysen & Bechky, 2009, p. 463) could provide suitable conditions for coordination activity. Pursuing the concept of the ‘key function’, our study shows that the coordinators lacked ‘keys’ giving them access to the meetings where cases are discussed, and decisions made. Of course, they do have physical keys (or key-cards) to open physical doors. ‘Keyless coordinators’ is a generated concept derived from the two main findings which relates to established organisational theories, claiming coordination to be the key. Hence, ‘keyless coordinators’ describes the general experience of coordinators working in organisations which have just added a coordinator scheme to the established formal structure. The concept may be applied to other internal police functions with coordination tasks, such as the Chief of Staff (see Hoel et al., 2019) and the radicalisation contact (see Politihøgskolens evalueringsutvalg, 2022). Like the family violence and sexual abuse coordinators, they struggle to be the ‘key function’ to handle cases demanding that professionals and expertise work collectively. It is timely to ask whether the coordinator scheme structure adds value to the work of the police, in particular when persons with ID are involved in cases.

## 6. Practical implications

Our study indicates that the work of the police with domestic violence and sexual abuse should be undertaken within a different structure than today’s coordination arrangement. Police need a structure providing legitimacy, which does not run counter to the established hierarchical order, which as far as possible promotes processes of interaction working in the same direction, and which is capable of securing and maintaining control of the police’s efforts in this area.

The coordinator scheme warrants the establishment of a structure ensuring that professionals work collectively, sharing experience and information and developing a mutual understanding. An appropriate coordination structure would provide better judicial certainty in cases involving persons with ID.

NPD should consider establishing a staff arrangement at strategic level as an independent sub-section of the chief of police’s staff. This staff working with domestic violence and sexual abuse should be permanently staffed and have a staff manager, preferably the coordinator. The staff should include all the central roles in both prevention and investigation from all geographical operating units in the district, and internal and external actors with specialist expertise in violence and abuse. The staff manager should report directly to the chief of police.

Although the development of collaborative teams is characterised by mutual understanding, and trust and room for feedback also benefits from informal, social activities (Yakhlef, 2018), we believe that a new structure regarding the police’s work with family violence and



sexual abuse would contribute to appropriate and targeted institutional processes that help the work on family violence and sexual abuse at the various organisational levels to develop and grow in the same direction. The staff arrangement can provide a robust professional environment, in line with the intention of the reform, finally giving the coordinators the key to having scope to act.

## 7. Concluding remarks

Despite the best intentions behind the introduction of the coordinator scheme, the present study shows that it is still not appropriately integrated into the established structure. When the organisational structure contributes to coordinators being excluded from practices where they could have made a difference, one can hardly blame the coordinator for not doing their job. It is the responsibility of the chief of police to ensure that the police district develops an appropriate structure adapted to the characteristics of work in this field, and to demand teamwork and specialist competence. Considering the concept of keyless coordinators, we believe that a new structure that ensures constructive interaction can lead to enhanced agreement with respect to resources, competence, and common understanding and direction in the field. Lastly, the concept of keyless coordinators has validity to other studies as it can provide a fruitful theoretical contribution of coordination – in any organisation.

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