

This is a post-peer-review, pre-copy edited version of an article published in European Social Work Research.

The definitive publisher-authenticated version: O’Leary D, Alfandari R, Cowley LE, Bertotti T, Gautschi J, Gregory M, Helm D, Killick C, Lwin K, Rölver M, Sicora A, Munkholt Sørensen K, Suarez H, Taylor B & Nirmalarajan LY (2025) Advancing social work research and practice: celebrating ten years of the Decisions, Assessment and Risk Special Interest Group (DARSIG). <i>European Social Work Research</i>. <https://doi.org/10.1332/27551768y2025d000000051>

is available online at: <https://doi.org/10.1332/27551768y2025d000000051>.

European Social Work Research

Advancing social work research and practice: Celebrating ten years of the Decisions, Assessment, and Risk Special Interest Group (DARSIG) --Manuscript Draft--

Manuscript Number:	ESWR-D-24-00016R2
Article Type:	Reflection, Exchange and Dialogue
Full Title:	Advancing social work research and practice: Celebrating ten years of the Decisions, Assessment, and Risk Special Interest Group (DARSIG)
First Author:	Donna O'Leary, Ph.D
Corresponding Author:	Donna O'Leary, Ph.D Tusla Child and Family Agency Cork, IRELAND
Corresponding Author Secondary Information:	
Corresponding Author E-Mail:	donna.oleary@tusla.ie
Other Authors:	Ravit Alfandari Laura Elizabeth Cowley Teresa Bertotti Joel Gautschi Mark Gregory Duncan Helm Campbell Killick Kristen Lwin Michael Rölver Alessandro Sicora Kresta Munkholt Sørensen Holger Suarez Brian Taylor Liesanth Yde Nirmalarajan
Abstract:	This article commemorates the tenth anniversary of the Decisions, Assessment and Risk Special Interest Group (DARSIG) established under the umbrella of the European Social Work Research Association (ESWRA) in 2014. We reflect on developments in DARSIG in the context of advancements in practice, service management, theory, collaborative research, and teaching on Decision-making, Assessment and Risk (DAR). We conclude that DARSIG provides a mechanism for further advancing social work research and teaching across Europe.
Keywords:	Social work; Decision-making; Risk; Special Interest Group; collaboration.
Additional Information:	
Question	Response
Conflicts of Interest Please declare any possible conflicts of interest, or state 'The Author(s) declare(s) that there is no conflict of interest' if there	The Author(s) declare(s) that there is no conflict of interest

are none. Further information about conflicts of interest can be found in the Bristol University Press Ethical Guidelines .	
Word Count The following word limits apply, including any references, tables, figures etc.: - Research Article (5000 – 7000 words) - Book Review (no abstract, 500 - 1000 words) - Research, Policy and Practice Exchange: between 500 and 2000 words, with an abstract	6880
Special issue Is this a submission for a special issue? If so please give details of the special issue, including the Editor if known.	Yes DARSIG special issue
Provide a tweet Please provide a tweet for us to send out about your article, so that we can help promote your work as widely as possible. The tweet should summarise the key findings of your article in laymen's terms, and be no longer than 240 characters.	
Artificial Intelligence (AI) The use of AI tools must be explicitly declared and detailed when submitting a manuscript. We do not recognise AI as meeting the conditions of authorship, and authors are expected to bear full responsibility for ensuring the originality and accuracy of their work. For more information, see our Ethical Guidelines . Please use the tick boxes to indicate if you have used AI tools in writing your manuscript, creating figures or tables, or in the collection and analysis of data.	I have not used AI tools to prepare my submission
Research Ethics Statement Please advise if any clearance was granted by your institution or an external ethics committee and provide a statement detailing the approval granted. If your research involved human participants but you did not obtain formal ethics approval, please include a statement to that effect	Ethical approval was obtained for original Irish studies included in this paper, from the ethics committees at Tusla Child and Family Agency and University College Cork. For the Danish studies included, all ethical guidelines are followed in regard to Danish standards and all participants in the study have given a verbal or written consent.

giving the reason. If your paper is accepted, the ethics statement will be included in your published paper. For more information on ethical research practices please see the BUP Guidelines on Ethical Research Examples of ethics statements which could be used are: 'This study has [ETHICS COMMITTEE or INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD] approval (XX Ref No: xxxx/xxx)' or 'Ethical approval was obtained from the ethics committee at [UNIVERSITY OF XXX]' or 'Permission to conduct the interviews for the purposes of this research was obtained from all participants, who were fully informed about the purposes of this research and how their responses would be used and stored.' or 'Written informed consent was obtained for anonymized participant information to be published in this article ' or 'Ethical approval was not sought for the present study because [REASON]' or 'Ethical approval was not required for the present study because the research does not involve human or non-human participants.	
Funding Information:	
Manuscript Classifications:	Comparative, European and international perspectives; Innovative and creative research; Partnership/co-productive research; Risk and decision-making
Author Comments:	Thank you for accepting our article for consideration in the DARSIG Special Issue.
Response to Reviewers:	Thank you for your positive comments about this article about the work of DARSIG. We agree the article has indeed benefited from the revision process, and believe it recognizes in particular, the wonderful collaborations that have emerged to produce a significant body of work over the past ten years.

**Advancing social work research and practice: Celebrating ten years of the Decisions,
Assessment, and Risk Special Interest Group (DARSIG)**

Donna O’Leary^{a,b}, Ravit Alfandari^c, Laura Elizabeth Cowley^d, Teresa Bertotti^e, Joel Gautschi^f, Mark Gregory^g, Duncan Helm^h, Campbell Killickⁱ, Kristen Lwin^j, Michael Rölver^k, Alessandro Sicora^l, Kresta Munkholt Sørensen^m, Holger Suarezⁿ, Brian Taylor^h, Liesanth Yde Nirmalarajan^o.

^a Tusla Child and Family Agency, Cork, Ireland; ^b University College Cork, Ireland; ^c University of Haifa, Israel; ^d Population Data Science, Swansea University Medical School, Wales, United Kingdom; ^e University of Trento, Italy; ^f Zurich University of Applied Science, Switzerland; ^g University of East Anglia, England; ^h Department of Applied Social Science, University of Stirling, Scotland; ⁱ Ulster University, Northern Ireland; ^j University of Windsor, Canada; ^k University of Münster, Münster, Germany; ^l University of Trento, Italy; ^m University College Copenhagen, Denmark; ⁿ University of Malta, Msida, Malta; ^o Aalborg University, Denmark

author list orcid id

Donna O’Leary^{a,b}, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1471-2466>
Ravit Alfandari^c, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4054-6262>
Laura Elizabeth Cowley^d, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7757-4219>
Teresa Bertotti^e, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3670-0709>
Joel Gautschi^f, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4694-5072>
Mark Gregory^g, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7428-9447>
Duncan Helm^h, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0728-7158>
Campbell Killickⁱ, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8421-2005>
Kristen Lwin^j, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4644-0629>
Michael Rölver^k, <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2549-3676>
Alessandro Sicora^l, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7944-8144>
Kresta Munkholt Sørensen^m, <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8430-8982>
Holger Suarezⁿ, <https://orcid.org/0009-0004-9947-427X>
Brian Taylorⁱ, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3833-1986>
Liesanth Yde Nirmalarajan^o, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4236-9872>

Following the first three authors, who are listed in order of contribution, authors are listed alphabetically.

Donna O’Leary PhD a researcher in Child Protection and Welfare works at the Tusla Child and Family Agency and University College Cork, in Ireland. Her research focuses on the epidemiology of multisectoral agency responses to reported child abuse and welfare concerns and case outcomes, and decision-making in child protection. She holds a BSc from University College Cork, a Diploma in Public Affairs from the College of Europe in Brugge, Belgium, and an MBS in Health Services Management from University College Cork. Prior to her current role, Donna worked on state, university, and agency-led initiatives in Ireland and the USA aimed at promoting youth and migrant participation and integration in education and voluntary sectors.

Ravit Alfandari is a lecturer at the Faculty of Social Welfare and Health Sciences of the School of Social Work at the University of Haifa in Israel and head of Data Analytics for Safeguarding Children Lab. She is a qualified social worker with solid experience in direct service delivery, program development, and research on vulnerable children and families. She conducted her PhD studies at the Department of Social Policy at the London School of Economics and Political Science in the United Kingdom and her postdoctoral training at the School of Social Work and School of Business Administration at the University of Haifa in Israel. Her empirical investigation focuses on decision-making and risk assessment in the field of child protection.

Dr Laura Cowley is a Research Officer and Data Scientist with a background and interest in children’s health, social care, and family justice research. Laura holds a BSc (Hons) in Psychology from the University of Liverpool, and an MSc with distinction in Neuropsychology from Bristol University. She completed her PhD at the Division of Population Medicine, Cardiff University, in 2019. Laura went on to work on several child health-related research projects at Cardiff University and also worked at Public Health Wales, where she gained experience in using linked data to deliver insightful research to improve population health and wellbeing among children in Wales. Laura’s current research focuses on the use of administrative data and statistical modelling to answer a wide range of research questions relating to child and family health and social care outcomes.

Teresa Bertotti, PhD, is an Associate Professor of Social Work at the University of Trento, Italy, where she is currently the Coordinator of the BA in Social Work programme. From 2015-2021 she was a member of the Executive Committee and President of the European Association of Schools of Social Work (EASSW). Prior to her academic career, she served in different positions in one of the most prominent centres working to prevent child maltreatment in Italy. Her main research interests range from child and family social work, child protection systems and decision-making in child protection, to ethics in social work and social work research and social work education. Teresa’s current research focuses on practice and participatory research, with children and young people, and power relations in social work. Teresa has authored over 80 books, articles, and chapters, nationally and internationally.

Joel Gautschi, PhD, is a lecturer and researcher at ZHAW Zurich University of Applied Sciences, School of Social Work, Switzerland. His research focuses on child protection, particularly judgement and decision-making, virtual reality in social work, and trust in client–professional working relationships. He received his PhD in social work from the University of Education Freiburg im Breisgau and his bachelor’s and master’s degrees in social work from the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland FHNW.

Mark Gregory is a Lecturer in Social Work at the University of East Anglia, where he completed his PhD in 2022. His background is in children and families social work, where he worked as a social worker and team manager before undertaking his doctoral studies. Mark’s career in social work sparked his interest in supervisory and team support and how this supports social workers to make

sense of their work. Mark's doctoral research was an ethnographic study of sensemaking and supervision. Mark has undertaken further research and scholarly work on group supervision and practice education and has published on sensemaking, the construction and use of supervisory spaces, decision-making in organisational contexts, and exploring the relationship between the team as a secure base and social workers' sensemaking. Mark is Director of Continuing Professional Development in the School of Social Work and is course director for the MA in Advanced Social Work; he runs modules on professional judgement and decision-making, and supervision and staff development for qualified social workers and team managers.

Duncan Helm is a registered social worker with experience of child welfare and protection work in local authorities and in integrated services. Duncan's subject expertise is in child welfare and in assessment and working with risk and uncertainty. Duncan directed undergraduate child protection CPD provision at the University of Dundee before moving to the University of Stirling in 2008 where he was director of the MSc Applied Professional Studies programme until 2019 and latterly the Head of Social Work at the University. Duncan's research interests include child wellbeing and protection, and judgement and decision making with a focus on sense-making and peer-aided judgement. Duncan supervises PhD students and would welcome further applications.

Campbell Killick is a lecturer in Social Work at the University of Ulster. He teaches on undergraduate (qualifying) and post-graduate (post-qualifying) courses, including being Course Director for the postgraduate Research Methods Programme and the MSc in Development and Co-Production of Social Care Research designed for service users and carers. Before joining the University, Campbell held the Research Officer: Social Work role at one of the Health and Social Care Trusts in Northern Ireland. His social work experience includes working with people who have disabilities and mental health problems, as well as older people. Campbell's PhD was on professional decision making in relation to the abuse of older people, and his research focuses particularly on adult safeguarding. He is an author on Understanding and Using Research in Social Work and Working with Aggression and Risk in Social Work, and an editor of Handbook of Decision Making, Assessment and Risk in Social Work, all published by Sage.

Kristen Lwin is an Assistant Professor at the School of Social Work at the University of Windsor and has over 25 years of social work experience, including direct and indirect practice, research and program evaluation, and knowledge translation and mobilization. Prior to her current academic position, Kristen served as the Executive Director of a non-profit knowledge translation and mobilization organization for child welfare organizations across Canada. Kristen's research focuses on exploring whether and how child welfare worker and organisational characteristics predict service delivery and the role of Evidence-based Practice in social work education and practice.

Michael Rölver is a social worker based in Münster/Germany. His major field of interest is discretion and decision-making in social work. Currently he is working at the University of Applied Sciences Münster on a research project for children of parents with mental illness or addictions. Michael has working experience in services for disadvantaged youth and policy advising on national level. He holds a Master of Science in International Social Work and Human Rights of the University of Gothenburg/Sweden. In December 2023, Michael finished his PhD thesis, a qualitative study on the use of discretion in case conferences of German services for disadvantaged youth. The publication is scheduled for December 2024.

Alessandro Sicora, PhD, is a professor at the University of Trento (Italy) where he teaches on Social Work Undergraduate and Master's Programs and researches on social work. He was a member of the Executive Committee of the European Association of Schools of Social Work (EASSW) from 2011 to 2015, chair of the European Social Work Research Association (ESWRA) from 2021 to 2023 and president of the Italian Society of Social Work (SocISS) from 2015 to 2021. Currently a Marie Curie Fellow, and a Research Associate of the Department of Social Work, Stellenbosch University, South

Africa, Alessandro has lectured at universities and non-academic organisations in Europe (Croatia, Finland, Italy, Germany, Portugal, Romania, Slovak Republic and Slovenia) and internationally in China, Hong Kong, India, Israel, Japan, Russia, South Africa and USA. Alessandro has extensive involvement in social work research and has published on topics including reflective practice, professional errors, social work and emotions, decision-making processes, violence in social work, social planning and comparative social policy. His works have been published in Italian, English, Spanish, Chinese, Greek and Estonian.

Kresta Munkholt Sørensen is an Associate Professor in the Department of Social Work Education at University College Copenhagen. Her recent research centers on children placed in foster care, particularly focusing on interventions feasible for practice and child participation. Her PhD was a mixed methods study where she focused on the risk assessments for vulnerable children and families made by social workers.

Holger Suarez is a senior social worker in the public service and a visiting senior lecturer at the Department of Social Policy and Social Work at the Faculty of Social Wellbeing, University of Malta. He has been teaching at the University since 2010. The Higher Education Academy UK awarded him the status of a Fellow (FHEA). Holger is also a member of the Institute of Health and Social Care Management (UK), a professional organisation for health and social care leaders. He is a warranted social worker with the Malta Social Work Profession Board (MSWPB) and is registered with Social Work England (SWE). Holger has practised his profession at Mt. Carmel Hospital in Malta and with Children's Services, Surrey County Council in the UK. He also served as an operations manager with Richmond Foundation, a leading Maltese Non-Governmental Organization specialising in mental health. Holger is reading for a PhD in evidence-based social work practice at the University of Hertfordshire, UK.

Brian Taylor is Emeritus Professor of Social Work at Ulster University in Northern Ireland. His 40-year professional social work journey included practice, management, training, teaching and research. This led him increasingly to focus on decision making, assessment and risk, and knowledge to develop practice and manage services. Brian was a founder member of the Board of the *European Social Work Research Association* (ESWRA), and founder-convenor of the ESWRA *Decisions, Assessment and Risk Special Interest Group*. He was the founder-organiser for the Decisions, Assessment, Risk and Evidence biennial conference from 2010, and has supervised about 20 PhD students on related topics, including some jointly with colleagues in communication studies, health care, psychology, law and computer science. Brian is a Fellow of the UK *Academy of Social Sciences*; an honorary Senior Fellow of the *School for Social Care Research* at the *National Institute for Health Research*, London; and an honorary Associate Scientist of the *Harding Centre for Risk Literacy* at the University of Potsdam, Germany. He is an author of textbooks for qualifying and post-qualifying studies on these topics and was recently the lead editor of the *Sage Handbook of Decision Making, Assessment and Risk in Social Work*.

Liesanth Yde Nirmalarajan is a trained social worker and holds a master's degree in social science and social work. He is an Assistant Professor in Social Work at VIA University College and currently a PhD fellow at Aalborg University where he is exploring the advantages and disadvantages of using digital technology to involve service users. His research interests include decision-making, predictive risk modelling, service user involvement and practice research.

Abstract

This article commemorates the tenth anniversary of the Decisions, Assessment and Risk Special Interest Group (DARSIG) established under the umbrella of the European Social Work Research Association (ESWRA) in 2014. We reflect on developments in DARSIG in the context of advancements in practice, service management, theory, collaborative research, and teaching on Decision-making, Assessment and Risk (DAR). We conclude that DARSIG provides a mechanism for further advancing social work research and teaching across Europe.

Keywords

social work; decision-making; assessment; risk; DARSIG; research; teaching; collaboration.

Introduction

Established in 2014 as one of several Special Interest Groups under ESWRA, the Decisions, Assessment and Risk Special Interest Group (DARSIG) set out to foster understandings related to these topics across client groups, practice domains, educational settings and countries. Today, DARSIG has 108 members in 29 countries: Australia, Belgium, Canada, Croatia, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the four countries in the UK, and the USA. This article outlines key insights emerging from DARSIG's work and activities to date.

The absence of shared terminology poses a challenge in cross-national and cross-sectoral collaborations (Bertotti and Fargion, 2023). DARSIG's work to build mutual understanding has simultaneously deepened awareness of similarities and differences among national and local decision-making contexts. Key contributions include theoretical work on models of rationality for social work (e.g. Helm, 2022; Helm et al, Forthcoming; Taylor, 2020), intuition in practice (Cook, 2017), decision-making thresholds (Platt and Turney, 2014; Turney et al, 2024) and teaching methods (Bertotti, 2016; Whittaker 2018), contributing to the literature of critical thinking and error prevention in social work (Taylor et al, 2023). Collaboration has resulted in co-authored articles and commentaries (Alfandari et al, 2023a; Alfandari et al, 2023b; Alfandari et al, 2024; Sicora et al, 2021; Søbjerger et al, 2020; Turney et al, 2024), books and book chapters (Taylor et al, 2023), and editing of journal special issues (Alfandari and Killick, 2025; Helm et al, Forthcoming; McCafferty and Taylor, 2020; Taylor and Whittaker, 2018; Whittaker and Taylor, 2017), shaping evolving processes of practice, policymaking, training and research in DAR.

Decision making and Professional Judgment

In social work practice and research, decision-making refers to the formal process of choosing between options following an assessment. Professional judgment is the evaluation of evidence by an individual to reach an opinion on a situation, risk, event or proposed course of action. Both are complex processes involving the integration of knowledge, values, beliefs, emotions, and cognitive processes that shape a social worker's perception of service users' well-being and service needs (Taylor et al, 2023).

While social work is pivotal in assessing risks and guiding life-altering decisions for service users, most decisions feature considerable uncertainty. Furthermore, in some situations, it may be necessary for social workers to make decisions against service users' wishes, raising questions about how and when service users should be involved in the decision-making process. 'Shared decision making' has emerged as a strategy to promote and prioritize service users' perspectives and rights, whereby service users and practitioners share their knowledge and views to make decisions on care (Levin et al, 2017; Nykänen et al, 2023; Nurmatov et al, 2020).

DARSIG members have employed holistic approaches to explore the integration of rational judgment and decision making with cognitive faculties including intuition (Sicora et al, 2021), blame and emotion (Sicora et al, 2023), and heuristics (Alfandari et al, 2022; O’Leary, 2022; Taylor, 2021) offering new perspectives to enhance our understanding of what social workers do in the ‘real world’ in contrast to positivist approaches.

Assessment processes and tools

Social work in many jurisdictions is characterised by the development, testing and use of structured and standardised tools and frameworks designed to be applied in conjunction with professional discretion and judgment, to assist practitioners in making decisions. These tools influence the information that social workers collect, and how information is prioritised (weighted) when performing assessments (Sørensen, 2018). Although standardised tools play a crucial role in social work practice, by guiding assessments and decision-making (Sørensen, 2023), their accuracy varies (van der Put et al, 2017), and many tools are not theoretically driven (Taylor et al, 2023). Publications by DARSIG members about social work assessment have also highlighted the necessity of understanding how emotions, power, societal structures and cultural factors are embedded in both decisions and organisational contexts (Killick, 2023; Rölver, 2023).

Understanding ‘Risk’ in Practice

Our work demonstrates that the focus on risk challenges social workers in European welfare systems to balance the necessity of assessing and managing risk with practice that upholds professional values rooted in social justice and respect for the needs of individual clients. Understanding risk as an evaluation of the probability and magnitude of a potential outcome differs from social and cultural perspectives on risk, which also influence social workers' judgments and decisions (O’Leary, 2022). Alfandari et al, (2023a) explain that the latter concept of ‘risk’ (sociological and cultural perspectives) is particularly evident in binary, ‘boundary decisions’ about whether to provide supportive services with voluntary engagement (care) or whether some level of compulsion or coercion (control) is needed for the best interests of the health and well-being of a client, family, or others in society. O’Leary et al, (2024) found that social workers’ decisions about child protection in cases of domestic violence were influenced by a pervasive cultural norms about dangerousness and safety, viewing mothers as the primary protectors of their children, even when they are victims. Gregory (2023) showed how negative media attention and critiques of social work practice led to defensive practices among practitioners.

Given that stakeholders may view ‘risk’ and their roles in risk management differently, a stronger evidence base is needed for effective risk communication in social work (Bagnisky et al, 2019; Przeperski and Taylor, 2022; Taylor and Campbell 2011). These perspectives, including the concept of ‘taking risk’, that may be inherent in a particular course of action (Taylor, 2021), are incorporated

in some social work teaching (Killick and Taylor, 2024). However, tools to accurately communicate risks are comparatively new in social work. Approaches that offer potential include defining frequency words more clearly (Taylor, 2017), using numeric measures (Stevenson and Taylor, 2017), using visual communications such as bar charts and icon arrays (Taylor et al, 2018) and structured drawing tools for working with children (Turnell and Murphy, 2017).

Methodologies for DAR research

Researchers need to employ a variety of data sources and methodological approaches to effectively understand and improve DAR (Hilder and Whittaker, 2023; Gautschi and Ghanem, 2023; Gautschi and Benbenishty, 2021; Killick and Taylor, 2023). Administrative data and case data offer the potential to study factors associated with professional judgment and decision-making processes (Gautschi and Ghanem, 2023; O’Leary and Lyons, 2023; O’Leary et al, 2024). Such data can be linked to surveys of professionals or agencies (Dettlaff et al, 2021; O’Leary and Lyons, 2021) to develop predictive models of decision making (Alfandari et al, 2024). The increasing availability of large, population-wide, linked administrative datasets in Europe has led to a surge in the creation and evaluation of predictive models and algorithms, developed using machine learning and other statistical techniques, to identify children at risk of maltreatment or entry into out-of-home care (Søbjerg, 2022). Several DARSIG members are currently undertaking research in this area, capitalizing on the rich linked administrative data accessible in Denmark¹, Israel² and Wales³

DARSIG members have used a range of qualitative, and mixed methods to gain proximity to decision-making in day-to-day practice, including ethnographic studies (Saltiel, 2016; Bastian, 2017; Helm, 2017; Whittaker, 2018; Dixon, 2023; Ebsen et al, 2023; Gregory, 2023), cross-sectional studies and case studies (O’Leary, 2022). Simulated cases can be used to compare social workers’ judgments and the impact of case factors through experimental manipulation (Gautschi and Benbenishty, 2021). Alfandari et al, (2022) investigated how child gender, ethnicity, and socio-economic status affect child maltreatment assessments using an experimental vignette. Although text vignettes remain most commonly used, other types of stimuli, including photos (Middel et al, 2022) and virtual reality simulations (Du et al, 2023), have been used by DARSIG members to explore differences in decision-making.

DAR research has involved a range of theoretical frameworks. Helm (2022) used Hammond’s (1996) cognitive continuum theory to explain how child and family social workers move between intuitive and analytic reasoning in different contexts. Whittaker (2018), Cook (2017), and Gregory (2023) drew

¹ <https://www.ucviden.dk/da/projects/underretninger-i-fokus>

² <https://ravitalfandari.haifa.ac.il>

³ <https://healthandcareresearchwales.org/researchers/our-funded-projects/predicting-risk-entry-and-re-entry-care-and-risk-placement>

on the work of Klein (2015) to examine the role of intuition in day-to-day decision-making, whilst Ebsen et al, 's (2023) observations of group interviews with social workers were analysed using heuristics (Kahneman, 2011) and 'satisficing' judgments (Simon, 1979) as theoretical lenses. O'Leary (2022) combined these lenses with the Decision Making Ecology (Baumann et al, 2014) to describe and visually map at different levels in the system, social workers' rationales for their judgments and thresholds for decision making. Weick's (1995) work on sense-making and story-building has been used to develop a model of social work sense-making (Gregory, 2023). Bastian (2017) drew on Latour's (1994) notion of hybridization to examine how social workers and assessment tools interact to shape outcomes. And Dixon (2023) used sociological theories of risk to examine how social workers make adult safeguarding decisions.

Teaching and training for DAR

DARSIG has also played a role in developing teaching and training in social work. Many DARSIG members have focused on developing teaching and training DAR in social work, employing a range of methodologies including new technologies. This includes developing our use of mathematical models within risk assessment (Taylor, 2021), using vignettes and providing immediate video feedback on judgments (Whittaker, 2018), and Virtual Reality to provide more realistic and interactive practice simulations (Du, 2023). Additionally, DARSIG members are guest editors for an upcoming special issue of *Social Work Education* on teaching and learning about judgments and decision-making (Helm et al, Forthcoming).

Conclusions

After a decade of innovation and collaboration in research and teaching across Europe, we can build on the progress that has already been made as we continue to strive for further improvements and advancements in our collaborative work. Some future aspirations include expanding the range of practice disciplines represented; aspiring to more participatory approaches including service users and practitioners; applying for funding for cross-country research and exploiting to maximum capacity the integration of new technologies and traditional research methods to achieve our research goals.

For those of us involved, DARSIG has fostered longstanding respectful relationships, provides a mentoring role for professional development and enables early career researchers to hone skills, form partnerships and develop international research projects.

References

Alfandari, R., Enosh, G., Nouman, H., Dolev, L., & Dascal-Weichhendler, H. (2022). Judgements of physicians, nurses, and social workers regarding suspected Child maltreatment in community health care services. *Health & Social Care in the Community*, 30(6), e4782-e4792.

<https://doi.org/10.1111/hsc.13885>

Alfandari, R., Taylor, B.J., Baginsky, M., Campbell, J., Helm, D., Killick, C., McCafferty, P., Mullineux, J., Shears, J., Sicora, A., & Whittaker, A. (2023a). Making sense of risk: Social work at the boundary between care and control. *Health, Risk & Society*, 25(1-2), 75-92.

<https://doi.10.1080/13698575.2022.2147904>

Alfandari, R., Taylor, B.J., Enosh, G., Killick, C., McCafferty, P., Mullineux, J., Przeperski, J., Rölver, M., & Whittaker, A. (2023b) Group decision-making theories for child and family social work. *European Journal of Social Work*, 26(2), 204-217. <https://doi.10.1080/13691457.2021.2016651>

Alfandari, R., Whittaker, A., Helm, D., Killick, C., Gautschi, J., Rölver, M., Taylor, B., Yde Nirmalarajan, L., Suarez, H., Middel, F. and Agu, L. (2024). The future is here: Digital technologies in social work practice. *European Social Work Research*, 1-5.

Alfandari, R., & Killick, C. (Forthcoming). Special Issue on Research methodologies for exploring social work assessment, decision making and risk. *European Social Work Research*.

Baginsky, M., Moriarty, J., & Manthorpe, J. (2019). Signs of Safety: Lessons learnt from evaluations. *Journal of Children's Services*, 14(2), 107-123.

Bastian, P. (2017). Negotiations with a risk assessment tool: Standardized decision-making in the United States and the deprofessionalization thesis. *Transnational Social Review*, 30, 1–13.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/21931674.2017.1313509>

Baumann, D. J., Fluke, J. D., Dalglish, L., & Kern, H. (2014). The decision-making ecology. *From evidence to outcomes in child welfare: An international reader*.

Bertotti, T. (2016). *Decidere nel servizio sociale: Metodo e riflessioni etiche* (Vol. 148). Carocci Faber.

Bertotti, T., & Fargion, S. (2023). International social work research: Transfer of knowledge or promotion of dialogue beyond borders? *European Social Work Research*, 1(1), 21-35.

Cook, L. (2017). Making sense of the initial home visit: The role of intuition in child and family social workers' assessments of risk. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 31(4), 431-444.

Detlaff, A. J., Hollinshead, D.M., Graham, J.C., Baumann, D.J., & Fluke, J.D. (2021). Instrumentation to understand the child protective services decision-making processes. In J. D. Fluke,

1 M. López López, R. Benbenishty, E. J. Knorth, & D. J. Baumann (Eds.), *Decision-making and*
2 *judgment in child welfare and protection: Theory, research, and practice* (pp. 81–108). Oxford
3 University Press.
4

5 Dixon, J. (2023). *Adult safeguarding observed: How social workers assess and manage risk and*
6 *uncertainty*. Policy Press.
7

8
9 Du, H., Jia, S., Gautschi, J., Quehenberger, J., Lätsch, D., & Pan, X. (2023, March 25 - March 29).
10 Towards more child safety-oriented decisions through VR. In *2023 IEEE Conference on Virtual*
11 *Reality and 3D User Interfaces Abstracts and Workshops (VRW)* (pp. 687–688). IEEE.
12
13 <https://doi.org/10.1109/VRW58643.2023.00186>
14
15

16
17 Ebsen, F., Leth Svendsen, I. L., Thomsen, L. P. & Jørgensen, S. (2023). Decisions in child protection
18 – heuristics, law and organisation. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 53(5), 2940–2957.
19

20
21 Gautschi, J. & Ghanem, C. (2023). Methods for studying professional judgement in social work. In
22 B.J. Taylor, J. Fluke, E. Keddell, C. Killick, A. Shlonsky, & A. Whittaker (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook*
23 *of Decision Making, Assessment & Risk in Social Work* (pp. 133–142). Sage.
24

25
26 Gautschi, J. & Benbenishty, R. (2021). Empirical methods for studying decision-making in child
27 welfare and protection. In J.D. Fluke, M. L. López, R. Benbenishty, E. J. Knorth, & D. Baumann,
28 (Eds.), *Decision-Making and Judgment in Child Welfare and Protection* (pp. 57-80). Oxford
29 University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780190059538.003.0003>
30
31
32

33
34 Gregory, M. (2023). Story-building and narrative in social workers' case-talk: A model of social work
35 sensemaking. *Child and Family Social Work*, 28(4), 949-959.
36

37
38 Hammond, K. (1996). *Human judgement and social policy*. Oxford University Press.
39

40
41 Helm, D. (2017). Can I have a word? Social worker interaction and sensemaking. *Child Abuse*
42 *Review*, 26, 388-398.
43

44
45 Helm, D. (2022). Theorising social work sense-making: Developing a model of peer-aided judgement
46 and decision making. *British Journal of Social Work*, 52(4), 2329-2347.
47

48
49 Helm D., Cook, L, Wilkins, D., & Kettle, M. (forthcoming) Editorial: Special issue on teaching and
50 learning about judgement and decision making. *Social Work Education: The International Journal*.
51

52
53 Hilder, J., & Whittaker, A. (2023). Studying the effectiveness of interventions to improve decision
54 making and work with risk. In B. J. Taylor, J. D. Fluke, J. C. Graham, E. Keddell, A. Shlonsky, & A.
55 Whittaker (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of decision making, assessment and risk in social work* (pp.
56 569–577). Sage.
57

58
59
60 Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking fast and slow*. Penguin Books.
61

- Killick, C. (2023). Introduction to section two: Assessment, risk and decision processes. In B. J. Taylor, J. D. Fluke, J. C. Graham, E. Keddell, C. Killick, A. Shlonsky, & A. Whittaker (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Decision Making, Assessment and Risk in Social Work* (pp. 145-150). Sage.
- Killick, C. & Taylor, B.J. (2024) *Assessment, risk & decision making in social work: An introduction*. Learning Matters.
- Killick, C., & Taylor, B.J. (2023). Studying risk-managing, decision-making and assessment processes. In B. J. Taylor, J. D. Fluke, J. C. Graham, E. Keddell, A. Shlonsky, & A. Whittaker (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of decision making, assessment and risk in social work* (pp. 281–290). Sage.
- Klein, G. (2015). A naturalistic decision making perspective on studying intuitive decision-making. *Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition*, 4, 164–168.
- Latour, B. (1994). On technical mediation. *Common Knowledge*, 3(2), 29-64.
<http://doi.org/10.1086/231301>
- Levin, L., Gewirtz, S., & Cribb, A. (2017). Shared decision making in Israeli social services: Social workers' perspectives on policy making and implementation. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 47(2), 507–523.
- McCafferty, P., & Taylor, B.J. (2020). Editorial: Risk, decision making and assessment in child welfare. *Child-Care in Practice*, 26(2), 107-110. <https://doi.10.1080/13575279.2019.1703369>
- Middel, F., López López, M., Fluke, J., & Grietens, H. (2022). Racial/ethnic and gender disparities in child protection decision-making: What role do stereotypes play? *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 127, 105579. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2022.105579>
- Nykänen, P., Schön U., & Björk A. (2023) Shared decision making in social services – some remaining questions, *Nordic Social Work Research*, 13:1, 107-118.
<https://doi.10.1080/2156857X.2021.1958908>
- Nurmatov, B.U., Foster, C., Bezeczky, Z., Owen, J., El-Banna, A., Mann, M., Petrou, S., Kemp, A., Scourfield, J., Forrester, D., & Turley, R. (2020). *Impact of shared decision-making family meetings on children's out-of-home care, family empowerment and satisfaction: A systematic review*. What Works for Children's Social Care.
- O'Leary, D. (2022). *Who gets ongoing service and why? An exploration of assessment, judgments and decision making during initial assessments in child protection and welfare social work in Ireland*. (PhD), National University of Ireland, University College Cork. Available at <https://hdl.handle.net/10468/14549>

- O'Leary, D., Christie, A., Perry, I. J., & Khashan, A. S. (2024). Determinants of receiving child protection and welfare services following initial assessment: A cross-sectional study from the Republic of Ireland. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 161, 107626.
- O'Leary, D., & Lyons, O. (2021). Examining the prospects for developing a national child maltreatment surveillance system in Ireland. *International Journal on Child Maltreatment: Research, Policy and Practice*, 5(1), 81-102.
- O'Leary, D., & Lyons, O. (2023). Exploring the potential of administrative data for understanding and advancing child protection and family support policy, practice and research in Ireland. *Irish Journal of Applied Social Studies*, 22(1), Article 5. <https://doi.org/10.21427/HNQJ-BA69>
- Platt, D., & Turney, D. (2014). Making threshold decisions in child protection: A conceptual analysis. *The British Journal of Social Work*, 44(6), 1472–1490. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bct007>
- Przeperski, J., & Taylor, B. (2022). Cooperation in child welfare decision making: Qualitative vignette study. *Child Care in practice*, 28(2), 137-152.
- Rölver, M. (2023). Ermessensspielräume als Gegenstand professioneller Praxis - Beispiele aus Fallbesprechungen in der Jugendsozialarbeit. In A. Wernberger (Ed.), *Schriften der Katholischen Hochschule Nordrhein-Westfalen: Vol. 38. Professionalitätsforschung in der Sozialen Arbeit: Praxeologisch-rekonstruktive Perspektiven* (pp. 85–107). Verlag Barbara Budrich.
- Saltiel, D. (2016). Observing front line decision making in child protection. *British Journal of Social Work*, 46, 2104-2119.
- Sicora, A. (2023). Blame and emotion in professional judgement In B. J. Taylor, J. D. Fluke, J. C. Graham, E. Keddell, A. Shlonsky, & A. Whittaker (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of decision making, assessment and risk in social work* (pp. 23–32). Sage.
- Sicora, A., Taylor, B.J., Alfandari, R., Enosh, G., Helm, D., Killick, C., Lyons, O., Mullineux, J., Przeperski, J., Rölver, M., & Whittaker, K. (2021). Using intuition in social work decision making. *European Journal of Social Work*, 24(5), 772-787. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2021.1918066>
- Simon, H. A. (1979). Rational decision making in business organizations. *The American economic review*, 69(4), 493-513.
- Søbjerg, L.M. (2022). Developing a statistical model for assessment of referrals of children at risk. *Child Abuse Review*, 31(4), p.e2749.
- Søbjerg, L.M., Taylor, B.J., Przeperski, J., Horvat, S., Nouman, H., & Harvey, D. (2020). Using risk-factor statistics in decision making: Prospects and challenges. *European Journal of Social Work*, 24(5), 788-801. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691457.2020.1772728>

- Sørensen, K.M. (2018). A comparative study of the use of different risk-assessment models in Danish municipalities. *British Journal of Social Work*, 48(1), 195-214.
- Sørensen, K. M. (2023). Implementing assessments using structured tools. In B. J. Taylor, J. D. Fluke, J. C. Graham, E. Keddell, C. Killick, A. Shlonsky, & A. Whittaker (Eds.), *The Sage Handbook of Decision Making, Assessment and Risk in Social Work* (pp. 347–357). Sage.
- Stevenson, M., & Taylor, B. J. (2017). Risk communication in dementia care: Professional perspectives on consequences, likelihood, words and numbers. *British Journal of Social Work*, 47(7), 1940-1958.
- Taylor, B.J. (2017). *Decision making, assessment and risk in social work (3rd edition)*. Sage Learning Matters.
- Taylor, B. (2021). Teaching and learning decision-making in child welfare and protection social work. In J. D. Fluke, M. López López, R. Benbenishty, E. J. Knorth, & D. J. Baumann (Eds.), *Decision-making and judgment in child welfare and protection: Theory, research, and practice* 81–. Oxford University Press.
- Taylor, B.J. (2021). Risk-managing decision making: A psycho-social rationality model. *British Journal of Social Work*, 51(7), 2819-2838. <https://doi.10.1093/bjsw/bcaa094>
- Taylor, B.J., & Campbell, B. (2011). Quality, risk and governance: Social workers' perspectives. *International Journal of Public Leadership*, 7(4), 256-272.
- Taylor, B. J., Fluke, J.D., Graham, J.C., Keddell, E., Killick, C., Shlonsky, A., & Whittaker, A. (Eds.). (2023). *The Sage handbook of decision making, assessment and risk in social work*. Sage.
- Taylor, B.J., Killick, C., Bertotti, T., Enosh, G., Gautschi, J., Hietamäki, J., Sicora, A., & Whittaker, A. (2018). European social work research association SIG to study decisions, assessment and risk. *Journal of Evidence-Informed Social Work*, 15(1), 82-94. <http://doi.10.1080/23761407.2017.1394244>
- Turnell, A., & Murphy, T. (2017). *Signs of Safety: Comprehensive briefing paper*, 4th edition. Elia International Ltd.
- Taylor, B.J., & Whittaker, A. (2018). Editorial: Professional judgement and decision making in social work. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 32(2), 105-109. <https://doi.10.1080/02650533.2018.1462780>
- Turney, D., Alfandari, R., Taylor, B.J., Ghanem, C., Helm, D., Killick, C., Lyons, O., O'Leary, D., Ebsen, F., & Bertotti, T. (2024). Threshold decisions in social work: using theory to support practice. *The British Journal of Social Work*, bcae073.
- Whittaker, A., & Taylor, B.J. (2017). Understanding risk in social work. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 31(4), 375-378. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650533.2017.1397612>

1 Van der Put, C.E., Assink, M., & van Solinge, N.F.B. (2017). Predicting child maltreatment: A meta-
2 analysis of the predictive validity of risk assessment instruments. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 73, pp.71-
3 88.
4

5 Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in organisations*. Sage.
6

7
8 Whittaker, A. (2018) How do child protection practitioners make decisions in real life situations?
9