The child’s personal space at home – a sign of proper residential conditions and parenthood

Aino Ritala-Koskinen1, Aino Kääriäinen2

1University of Tampere, Finland
2University of Helsinki, Finland

Children’s residency is one of the core questions to be solved in divorce disputes. In Finnish context social work reports to the court represent the central tool to assess whether the residential conditions and parenthood are proper for the child at father’s and mother’s home. The social work reports are compiled on the base of social workers’ home visits to the residences of both parents. In the reports child’s residential conditions are described in multiple ways. This presentation concentrates to analyse how the descriptions of child’s personal space at home serve as signs of proper residential conditions and proper parenthood in social work reports to the court – in other words how the physical and material space express child’s psycho-social well-being. The data consists of 45 social work reports for five district courts from the year 2011 and it is analysed qualitatively.

Own or a shared children’s room with appropriate furniture are most visible physical signs of child’s own space in mother’s or father’s home. In after-divorce situations the housing situation is not always the desirable. If there is no possibility to an own room at least own place to sleep and have own things seems to be a norm. Special attention in the reports is assigned to the sleeping arrangements. If the child doesn’t have his or her own bed or is not willing to sleep in it the sleeping arrangements and parent’s explanations for that are described especially detailed. Descriptions of home rules and order both tell about the physical and psycho-social space of the child at parent’s homes.

Detailed description of child’s physical space at mother’s and father’s home in social work reports to the court is not just assessment of physical housing conditions. Instead they are descriptions of psycho-social space which aims to find whether the mother’s and father’s homes are appropriate places for child’s well-being in in after-divorce situations.

Keywords: space, home, well-being, divorce disputes