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Original article

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HANDLING COMPLAINTS IN RUSSIAN CHILD PROTECTION SERVICE: BETWEEN SAVING EFFORT AND THE “REAL” WORK

The article is devoted to everyday practice of handling complaints in Russian child protection service. This practice helps social workers to define the main goal of work in their own professional understanding. Employees of child protection service belong to the category of street-level bureaucrats and face contradictory expectations about their work both from the administration and from citizens. The article is based on complaints from neighbours, close relatives or parents, which were collected at the period from 2020 to 2022. Field examples are used to describe the reactions of social workers due to such complaints. Work with complaints forming the practice of “alignment” — a process of setting up professional optics and understanding the common goal for the team when individual interpretation of each employee may be assumed. This process is embodied in collective discussions of complaints from citizens. As a result of this practice, the child protection workers develop their own understanding of the “real” goal of the work and determines the choice of beneficiaries. In the anthropological analysis of the everyday life of the child protection team, it turns out to be problematic to separate two coexisting attitudes: the desire to preserve their time and emotional resources through ignoring and formal responses to complaints, and, at the same time, the desire to perform only that work which correlates with the idea of the “real” goal.

Keywords: *anthropology of bureaucracy, child protection service, street-level bureaucracy, complaints*

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