

# The contested content of customized care

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Customized care has become a buzzword in many welfare services. No longer is the aim to provide standardized welfare services based on formalized care indications, but frontline workers are expected to become professionals and customize care to the beneficiaries' needs. Although this might sound self-evident and desirable, its implementation is not.

This paper asks how customized care is implemented in the Dutch child welfare. To answer the research question, ethnographic fieldwork has been conducted, including over 300 hours of observation of the daily work of frontline child welfare officials and their superiors between December 2016 and June 2017 and 42 interviews with frontline workers, their managers, and the involved policy makers.

This paper shows that customized care is contested in everyday work in three manners. First, the meaning of customized care is contentious and changing, leading to an under-appreciation of the actual work of frontline child welfare workers and challenging the actual accomplishment of it. Second, with the emphasis on customized care and the necessary discretionary space for professionals, structuring and routinizing elements of work have become contested and under-acknowledged. And finally, customized care causes complex communication with children and their families.

With this analysis, this paper problematizes the often taken-for-granted concept of customized care. It argues not to underestimate the complexity of its implementation and proposes to develop minimal structures for its actual accomplishment.

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