BUSTING THE MYTHS OF SWEDISH FAMILY POLICY

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Personal details

- Author of “Following your heart – in the social utopia of Sweden”
- Founder of the Mireja Institute, www.mireja.org
- Member of the Haro National Board, www.haro.se
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- Self-employed management consultant since 1981
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Busting the myth of Swedish family policy

- The Swedish family model
- The family outcomes
- Possible causal explanations
- Social and political outcomes
- What do Swedes want?
- Conclusions
The great Swedish statistics

- Lowest infant mortality
- Very high life expectancy
- Relatively high birth rate
- Low child poverty
- Comprehensive day care
- High education spending
- Equality – gender equality
- 16 month parental leave

Swedish family model

- No babies in day care – only parental leave.
- 92% of all 18 month-5 year olds are in day care.
- Day care low cost to parents, 90% tax subsidized.
- Day care subsidy > CAD 20000 per child/year.
- No national home care allowance – no tax benefits.
- Day care and dual-earner household strongly encouraged both culturally and financially.
- Home care discouraged, and socially marginalized.
- Home schooling in effect illegal – prosecution.

Envisioned family outcomes

- Greater gender equality.
- Better child social development.
- Better child academic development.
- Getting children better prepared for school.
- Greater adult life satisfaction through more employed work and less family work.
- The vision of the "work policy" – every adult in employed (tax-creating) work.
Actual family outcomes
- Strong decrease in psychological health in youth.
- Discipline problems and poor results in schools.
- High rates of sick leave among women.
- Day care staff top the sick leave statistics.
- Deteriorating parental abilities, even middle-class.
- Quality in Swedish day care is deteriorating.
- Total fertility rate – high in Europe, low in Nordic
- Highly gender segregated labour market.

Outcomes in quality of care
- 1/5 of all day care groups more than 21 children.
- Day care group sizes for under 3s are never below 10 children, often 14 and sometimes 17 children.
- Day care group sizes for the 3-5 year olds can be upwards 30 children.
- Average day care child-staff ratio all ages is slightly above 5:1, but 7:1 and even 10:1 exist.
- No regulation of group sizes or child-staff ratios. Both are continuously increasing.
- A traditional focus on play is now more and more being diverged to learning and pedagogics.

Possible causal explanations
- Lack of adult attachment in infants can create chronically low thresholds for stress throughout life.
- High early exposure to large groups of peers, leads to peer-orientation which impedes child maturation.
- Peer-orientation leads to disinterest in learning, bullying, gangs, flat-lining of culture, promiscuity.
- The culturally endorsed early separation of infants causes stress in parents, and in worst case sick-leave.
- Large state intervention in family life, reduces parents sense of responsibility for their children.
Political and social outcomes

- Little public debate – the subject is too sensitive.
- Day care claimed to be “... a part of normal Swedish life, just like school” whenever questioned.
- The possibility of a future compulsory day care: “Every child has a right to day care.”
- Home care and ”house-wifes” bullied in the media.
- The word ”family” is becoming politically incorrect.
- Civil society is dying – government takes over.
- A strongly politised discussion on child-rearing.

What do Swedes want?

- A large number of studies during the last decades show that a great majority of Swedish women and families want more time with their small children.
- A recent study showed that 7 out of 10 mothers want to be home longer with their children. Young mothers want it more than older.
- More than half of the mothers believed that more mothers would want to be stay-at-home moms, if they could.

Reasonable conclusions

- Swedish family policies have lead to negative developmental outcomes for children, parents, and families.
- Swedish family policies are not emotionally sustainable – a possibly not even democratically sustainable.
- The basic reason for the negative developments is that individual child care has become a state political decision based on political ideology, rather than a parental decision, based on the needs of the individual child.
- Swedish family policies have to be tested by careful multidisciplinary research before any nation attempts to copy them.
- Every society has to protect parents rights and reasonable possibilities to make their own choice about care for their children, without involvement from government in the decision.
- The institution of family needs support and respect from society and government as the key institution for close relationships in the world today.
Thank you for your attention!

Questions?

These slides will be available within a week at: www.mireja.org/110505.html

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The MIREJA Institute
...welfare and development through family

Links

• Jonas Himmelstands speech on the future role of family; at a seminar in the Swedish Parliament December 8, 2008. www.stratletter.com/dec10speech.html

• Mireja – The Mireja Institute, welfare and development through family www.mireja.org

• Haro – Swedish organisation for freedom of choice, equality and parenthood, www.haro.se

• Rohus – The Swedish Association for Home Education www.rohus.nu

• Articles in English by Jonas Himmelstrand www.mireja.org/articles.html

Most sources, but not all, are only available in Swedish.


2 Unegdomar, stress och psykisk ohalsa (Youth, stress and psychological ill health.)


4 TIMSS 2007: Försämrade skolresultat i matematik för svenska elever (Swedish Government Education Agency on plummeting results in maths and science in Swedish schools.)

5 Förskola för de allra minsta – på gott och ont (Three leading Swedish day care experts write about the severely decreasing quality in Swedish day care.)


Read more: http://www.stratletter.com/brev.lasso?id=324557917262356
Sources continued


