

BUSTING THE MYTHS OF SWEDISH FAMILY POLICY

Jonas Himmelstrand

www.mireja.org

Presentation May 5, 2011 in Ottawa, Canada
for Institute of Marriage and Family Canada

The
MIREJA
Institute

...welfare and development through family

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
- * President of Rohus, www.rohus.nu
- * Self-employed management consultant since 1981
- * Married to Tamara and father of three children



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 subsidie > 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-wives" 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

jonas@mireja.org



...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

Sources

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

"Att följa sitt hjärta – i jantelagens Sverige", by Jonas Himmelstrand. ISBN 978-91-975836-1-9. Swedish.
Swedish book: "Following your heart – in the social utopia of Sweden."
English link: http://www.thehappycompany.eu/follow_heart.html

"Ungdomar, stress och psykisk ohälsa", SOU 2006:77.
(Swedish Government publication on "Youth, stress and psychological ill health".)
Swedish link: <http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/6293/a/67472>

"Vem orkar ända till 65? Inte kvinnorna – mer än hälften avslutar arbetslivet i förtid", by Kristina Orth-Gomér et al
Läkartidningen nr 34, 2005, volym 102.
(Swedish medical journal, presentation of research on middle-aged womens sick leave and early retirement.)
Swedish Link: <http://cat.inist.fr/?aModele=afficheN&cpsid=17054366>

"TIMSS 2007: Försämrade skolresultat i matematik för svenska elever", Skolverket, pressmeddelande december 2008.
(Swedish Government Education Agency on plummeting results in maths and science in Swedish schools.)
Swedish link: <http://www.skolverket.se/sb/d/2006/a/14303>

"Att våga sätta gränser", by Britta Johansson, SVD 070126.
(Swedish researcher on Swedish middle-class parents difficulties in their parenting role.)
Swedish link: http://www.svd.se/opinion/brannpunkt/artikel_195247.svd

"Why Love Matters – How affection shapes a baby's brain", by Sue Gerhardt.
Brunner-Routledge 2004. ISBN 1-58391-817-5.
English link: <http://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/1583918175>
Read more: <http://www.stratletter.com/brev.lasso?id=324557917262356>

"Förskola för de allra minsta – på gott och ont", by Magnus Kihlbom, Birgitta Lidholt and Gunilla Niss
Carlssons förlag 2009. ISBN 978-91-7331-267-7.
(Three leading Swedish day care experts write about the severely decreasing quality in Swedish day care.)
Swedish link: <http://www.mynewsdesk.com/se/pressroom/carlssonbokforlag/pressrelease/view/dagens-foerskola-paa-gott-och-ont-349038>

Sources continued

"Are There Long-Term Effects of Early Child Care?" by NICHD Early Child Care Research Network. Child Development vol. 78 Issue 2 Page 681-701, Mars/April-07.
English link: <http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/117957245/abstract?CRETRY=1&SRETRY=0>

"Stress in Daycare", by Sir Richard Bowlby. Social Baby.com.
English link: <http://socialbaby.blogspot.com/2007/04/richard-bowlby-stress-in-daycare.html>

"Hold on to your kids – why parents need to matter more than peers",
by Dr. Gordon Neufeld. ISBN 0-375-50821-X.
English link: <http://www.gordonneufeld.com/book.php>
Read more: <http://www.stratletter.com/mna.lasso?id=371631139072144>

"Love and Survival – How good relationships can bring you health and well-being", by Dr. Dean Ornish. Vermilion 2001. ISBN 0-09-185704-X.
English link: <http://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/009185704X>

"Status Syndrome – How your social standing directly affects your health",
by Michael Marmot. Bloomsbury Publishing 2005. ISBN 0747574081.
English link: <http://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/0747574081>
Read more: <http://www.stratletter.com/mna.lasso?id=272422439552148>

"Home Schooling and the Question of Socialization", by professor Richard G. Medlin. Peabody Journal of Education, 75 (1 & 2), 107-123. 2000.
English link: <http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content-content=a785831043-db=all>

"Full day care – national standards for under 8s day care and childminding." (England)
English link: <http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DfES+0651+2003&>

"National Health and Safety Performance Standards: Guidelines for Out-of-Home Child Care Programs." (USA)
English link: <http://aspe.hhs.gov/hsp/ccquality-ind02/#Staff1>