The Rise and Fall of the Swedish Family Model

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About

- 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
The Swedish material wealth

- 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

Family model in its 1975 initiation

- A highly subsidized day-care at low cost to parents.
- Day care financed by high taxes.
- Home care, granny care and neighbor care strongly discouraged both financially and culturally.
- The state being seem as a better carer than parents, and having the ultimate responsibility for the children.
- Full-time employment for all women is a goal.
- A strong focus on gender equality.
Envisioned Swedish family model outcomes

- Greater gender equality – a religion in Sweden.
- Improved child social development.
- Improved child academic development.
- To even out social-class differences.
- Liberating mothers from their motherhood instincts.
- The ”work policy” – every adult in employed work and every child in day care.
- Greater adult life satisfaction, through more employed work, and less family work.

The Swedish family model today

- No babies in day care – only parental leave first year.
- A full 92% of all 18 month-5 year olds are in day care.
- Day care is low cost to parents, 90% tax subsidized.
- Day care subsidie about GBP 14 000 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 somewhat socially marginalized.
- Home education in effect illegal – strong prosecution.
Actual family policy outcomes

- Strong increase in self-reported psychological ill health in youth.
- Strong increase in diagnosed psychiatric disease among youth.
- Relative increase in suicide among youth, compared with adults.
- Increase in discipline problems and poor learning results in schools.
- High rates of sick leave among women.
- Day care staff one of three top groups in 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 countries
- Highly gender segregated labour market, and high gender pay gap.
- Ideologically motivated interventions by the social authorities.

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.
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 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.
- Studies on children show that what they most want is more time with their parents.

Why no change?

Once in place, Swedish family policies have proven difficult to discuss through normal democratic processes.
Reasonable conclusions

- Swedish family policies have lead to negative developmental outcomes for children, parents, and families.

- Swedish family policies are not emotionally sustainable – and 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 need to be tested by careful multidisciplinary research before any other nation attempts to copy them.

- Every society has to protect parents rights and reasonable possibilities to make their own choices about the care and education of their children, without involvement from government in their decisions.

- 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/111124.html

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• Jonas Himmelstands first 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.

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English link: http://www.thehappycompany.eu/follow_heart.html

(Swedish Government publication on “Youth, stress and psychological ill health").
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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&cpsidt=17054366

(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.
English link: http://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/1583918175
Read more: http://www.stratletter.com/brev.lasso?id=324557917262356

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(Three leading Swedish day care experts write about the severely decreasing quality in Swedish day care.)
Sources continued

"Are There Long-Term Effects of Early Child Care?" by NICHD Early Child Care Research Network.
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English link: http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/journal/117957245/abstract?CRETRY=1&SRETRY=0


"Hold on to your kids – why parents need to matter more than peers”,
by Dr. Gordon Neufeld. ISBN 0-375-50821-X.
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.
English link: http://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/009185704X

"Status Syndrome – How your social standing directly affects your health”,
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.
English link: http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~content=a785831043~db=all

"Full day care – national standards för 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