"Alertas da Família: Lições da Suécia" -
Alerts for Families: Lessons from Sweden

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Personal details

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- Founder of the Mireja Institute, www.mireja.org
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- Self-employed management consultant since 1981
- Married to Tamara and father of three children

What can a family give?

- The best setting for children to grow into mature, caring, responsible and independent adults.
- The most commonly available setting for adults to grow – through the challenge of parenthood.
- The setting where parents are willing to sacrifice most, in order to help their children to grow.
- The best setting for caring for emotional needs in the changing societal era of knowledge.
- The only remaining institution in the western world for close attached relationships.
The great Swedish statistics

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

Basic 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 > 15 000 euros 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 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

- Plummeting psychological health in youth.
- Poor results and discipline problems and in schools.
- High rates of sick leave among women.
- Day care staff top the sick leave statistics.
- Deteriorating parental abilities, even middle-class.
- Continuously decreased quality in day care.
- Total fertility rate – high in Europe, low in Nordic
- Highly gender segregated labour market.

Swedish daycare of today

- 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.
- Peer-orientation leads to disinterest in learning, bullying, gangs, flat-lining of culture, promiscuity.
- The structured pedagogical situation in daycare lacks in free play, which impedes child maturation.
- 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 “housewives” bullied in the media.
- The word ”family” is becoming politically incorrect.
- Civil society is disappearing – government takes over.
- Child-rearing and schooling strongly politised.

The basic reason for these negative developments seems to be 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.

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 seven out of ten 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 housewives, if they could.
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 – 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.

Parents and parents-to-be need to be aware.

Comprehensive daycare is no success story. Rather the outcomes in the biggest real-life experiment – Sweden – suggests much caution.

Also, comprehensive daycare will make child-rearing a matter of politics. Decisions will be based on political ideology and national budgets, rather than on parental love and care.

Once parental power over child-rearing is lost, it is difficult to regain. This is the ultimate lesson of the Swedish family policy experience.
Thank you for your attention!

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www.mireja.org/110516.html

Links

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

• 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

• 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.


2) "Ungdomar, stress och psykisk ohälsa", SOU 2006:77. (Swedish Government publication on "Youth, stress and psychological ill health").

3) "Vem orkar ända till 65 Inte kvinnorna – mer än hälften avslutar arbetet i för tid", 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.)

4) "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.)

5) "Att våga sätta gränser", by Britta Johansson, SvD 070126. (Swedish researcher on Swedish middle-class parents difficulties in their parenting role.)

Sources continued


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"Full day care – national standards for under 8s day care and childminding." (England) English link: http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/default.aspx?
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