WHY CHILDCARE IN SWEDEN ISN’T ALL IT’S CRACKED UP TO BE

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Presentation March 3, 2012 in Sligo, Ireland
for La Leche League of Ireland, Annual Conference 2012

Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter...

Martin Luther King Jr.

Personal details

- Married to Tamara and father of three children.
- Author of "Following your heart – in the social utopia of Sweden"
- Founder of the Mireja Institute, www.mireja.org
- President of Rohus, www.rohus.nu
- Family research expert of the Haro National Board, www.haro.se
- Regional director in Sweden for the Neufeld Institute
- Self-employed management consultant since 1981.
- Today a Swede in exile, resident with my family on the Aland Islands, Finland.
Criticism on Swedish childcare is spreading…

- Dec 2008 – Speech at Swedish Parliament seminar
- Jan 2009 – Speech translated to English for the web
- Oct 2009 – Familyplatform EU project
- May 2010 – Speech at Familyplatform conference in Portugal
- Nov 2010 – Speech in Brussels, Belgium
- Feb 2011 – Speech in Parma, Italy
- Mar 2011 – Speech in Budapest, Hungarian Presidency Conference
- May 2011 – Speech in Ottawa, Canada
- May 2011 – Speech in Lisbon, Portugal
- May 2011 – Speech in Cascais, Portugal
- May 2011 – Speech in Dublin, Ireland
- Jun 2011 – Speech at the United Nations in New York, USA
- Nov 2011 – Speech at Mothers at Home Matter in London

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
The Swedish childcare model

Child and family outcomes

Possible causal explanations

Social and political outcomes

Childcare 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 viewed as a better carer than parents, and having the ultimate responsibility for the children.

Full-time employment for all women is a goal.

A very strong focus on gender equality.

The envisioned outcomes

Greater gender equality.

Better child social development.

Better child academic development.

To even out social-class differences.

To liberate 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 child care model today

- 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 > 15000 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 education in effect illegal – prosecution.

Actual outcomes today

- 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.
- 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.
**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 development.

**Outcomes in quality of child 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 into learning and pedagogics.

**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.
Why no change?

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

Reasonable conclusions

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

A new childcare paradigm

- Childcare is at least 18 years – not just 18 months.
- Mother & father, equally committed, entire childhood.
- Early home care by mother, supported by father.
- Conscious father care growing from 2-4 years of age.
- Strong emphasis on parental emotional attachment.
- At school age, many mothers start their own business.
- Family receives children directly from school.
- Some families even home educate their children.
- These are large families, typically with 3-6 children.
Thank you for your attention!

Questions?

These slides will be available within a week at: www.mireja.org/120303.html
jonas@mireja.org

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.


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

2 "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/67412

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.)

Swedish Link: http://cat.inist.fr/?aModele=afficheN&cpsidt=17054366

4 "TIMSS 2007: Försämrad skolverksamhet 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

5 "Att våga sätta gränser", by Britta Johansson, Svd 07/01.26. (Swedish researcher on Swedish middle-class parents difficulties in their parenting role.)

Swedish researcher on Swedish middle-class parents difficulties in their parenting role.)

Swedish Link: http://www.svd.se/opinion/brannpunkt/artikel_195247.svd


English link: http://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/1583918175

Read more: http://www.stratletter.com/brev.lasso?id=324557917356


Sources continued


Read more: http://www.stratletter.com/mna.lasso?id=371631390/2144


Read more: http://www.stratletter.com/mna.lasso?id=27242249552148


"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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