

SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FAMILY & SOCIETY – THE QUESTION OF CHOICE

Jonas Himmelstrand

www.haro.se

Presentation February 4, 2011,
4th meeting, European Network of Cities for the Family

Uppsala, Sweden February 8, 2011

Dear Reader,

This is a transcribed text of the presentation given for the *4th Meeting of the European Network of Cities for the Family* in Parma, Italy on February 4, 2011. The text is fairly accurate to the actual presentation, some mild editing has been done. One slide with text which was presented due to time constraints has been added to this document

As this presentation was given with a special target group in mind, it may leave some questions which this text cannot answer. Some of my other writings may answer these questions.

I am working on an condensed English translation of the Swedish book on which much of the research material in this presentation is based. When this book is published in late 2011, this should hopefully answer even more questions.

On the links below you will find more written work in English by me. There will also be the possibility to pre-order the English book.

Jonas Himmelstrand

Links:

The Haro organisation, www.haro.se

Jonas Himmelstrand, articles in English: www.mireja.org/articles.lasso

Information on the English book: www.mireja.org/english_book.html

Contact information:

Jonas Himmelstrand

The Mireja Institute

Box 1837, 751 48 Uppsala, Sweden

E-mail: jonas@mireja.org

Phone: +46-18-10 14 50

Due to time constraints this written presentation has been rushed to finish. Possible updated and corrected versions will be found at www.mireja.org/articles.lasso

SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FAMILY & SOCIETY – THE QUESTION OF CHOICE

Jonas Himmelstrand

www.haro.se

**Presentation February 4, 2011,
4th meeting, European Network of Cities for the Family**

Thank you for the introduction. I am very pleased to be invited to come from Sweden in the north with lots of snow down to Italy where it is a bit warmer and to meet all of you here at this conference.

Sweden is often mentioned when discussing family policies and sometimes held as a benchmark model. Sweden has more than 30 years of experience on the topic of shared responsibility between society and family concerning children of 0-6 years of age. The conclusion of the outcome, which I will summarise here, is that such a policy needs to give the family the power of choice on how this responsibility is to be shared. The state and society needs to be neutral as to the form of child care arrangements that the family chooses. Otherwise there is a definite risk that the shared responsibility will lead to dominant state control of the child care arrangements, and leaving parents powerless as to choices for their children.

Such a development, to put it somewhat bluntly, leads to child care being managed by political rules, rather than by parental love. Under political rule child care becomes one cost among many others in the municipality budget. Child care will be compared and compromised with road maintenance, local transportation, building music halls and other projects just to mention a few. With all respect to those of you who are politically active, politics seems to have the scope of 3-5

years – the time until the next election. Parents, on the other hand, more often have a scope of 80 years plus in caring for their children and their future happy and fulfilling lives.

Jonas Himmelstrand



- * **Member of the Haro National Board, www.haro.se**
- * **Founder of the Mireja Institute, www.mireja.org**
- * **Self-employed management consultant since 1981**
- * **Author of "Following your heart – in the social utopia of Sweden"**
- * **Soon to publish a book in English om Swedish family policies**
- * **Married to Tamara and the father of three children**

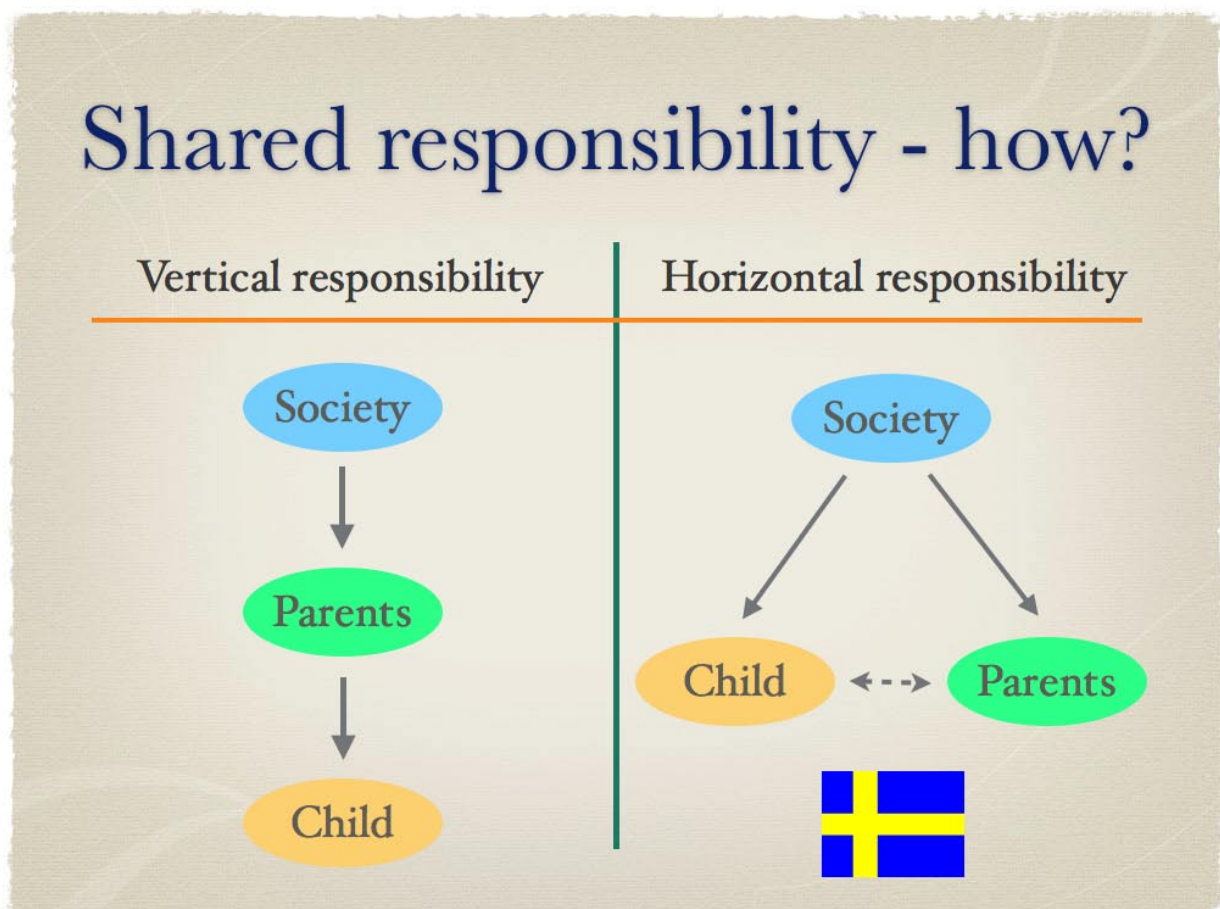


My role in this presentation is as the representative of the Swedish organisation Haro. In Europe we call ourselves a family organisation, but we don't call ourselves a family organisation in Sweden as it is a bit controversial. We rather say that we are a parental organisation. I am a member of the Haro national board. I am also the founder of the Mireja Institute on welfare and development through family. Both of these organisations are politically and religiously unaffiliated. Members of Haro typically do not come from a political or conservative tradition. Most of us are parents who for one reason or another spent more time with our children than typical in Sweden. We found that it was very rewarding and that we learnt things that other parents seldom learned. Therefore we feel strongly that parental care must remain a possible choice of child care in Sweden – it seems to be a great choice for those who choose it.

I have also written a Swedish book on this topic, which is now being translated into a short version in English. My basic profession is as a management consult-

ant. As such I have a passion for making sense out of various social phenomena. After spending 25 years in business life making sense out of different organisations and work places, and given the social challenges in Sweden with high rates of sick leave and a plummeting psychological health of our youth, I decided to take a look at it and this resulted in my book.

I am married to Tamara and we have three children. The experience of my children in the Swedish setting has had a lot of impact on my understanding of this topic.



We are here discussing a shared responsibility between family and society concerning the care of small children. This can be viewed in two different ways. Traditionally, this has been a vertical responsibility. Society then existed in the form of relatives, neighbours, friends and others who supported the parents with the resources the parents needed to support their children. The parents were the focal point about all the decisions concerning their children, simply because they were the one's who had the relationship with the children. Any other adult interacting with the smaller children had to come through the parents, rather than independently of them.

I was always amazed when my children were small and we went to see my parents, their grandparents, and my children were willingly hugged by their grandparents. How did they know that they were their grandparents before the verbal age? How did they know they were family? I realised they saw my relationship with my parents, and that I hugged them. Then they knew that this was family – instinctively.

The Swedish family model is a bit different. We could call it a horizontal responsibility where society is more and more taking a direct relationship with the child through day care institutions. Parents are typically not informed of what is happening to their children in day care, because the state considers this their responsibility during day care hours. There are clear signs that this weakens the relationship between parent and child. Up to six years of age this may not surface to many external problems. But when the child turns into a teenager problems of early childhood often surface. When Swedish media reports on problems with adolescents they often end up with the question: "Where are the parents?" "Where did the parents go?" "The teenagers need their parents now." The answer, which the media never reports, is, of course, that the parents were encouraged to give their children into state day care from an early age through the horizontal responsibility model. Many parents feel that the state should be able to care for them during teen age years as well.

A Swedish psychologist recently made the following somewhat provocative statement in a debate a few months ago: In Sweden the parents and the state have a joint custody of the child.

Early child care – choices

- * **Day care centers**
- * **Pre-schools**
- * **Family day care**
- * **Open pre-schools**
- * **Home care**
- * **Neighbors**
- * **Grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts and uncles**



There are many possible choices in early child care and in the Haro organisation we are very much pro-choice. We do not see any one choice is inherently better than another. However, we do believe that every individual family based on their traditions, their culture, their upbringing, their values and what they do in life, will make different choices because every family is unique and has a unique life situation. It is important for both the parents and the children that they can make the choice which feels right to them in their hearts.

There are many possibilities: Day care centers, pre-schools, family day care, open pre-schools, home care, neighbours and grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts and uncles and many more. In Sweden “day care” or “pre-school” are the terms used for all forms of state subsidised early child care 1-5 years of age. Day care centers refers specifically to center care.

Family day care is the Swedish term for child minding. Open pre-schools is when the parents are together with their children in a pre-school for a few hours 2-3 times a week. We believe that all of these different choices need to be supported by society and that the state has to be neutral concerning the different choices, and not use their influence to recommend one over another for various political reasons.

Early child care – Sweden

* **Day care centers**

* **Pre-schools**

* Family day care

* Open pre-schools

* Home care

* Neighbors

* Grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts and uncles



The Swedish state today is not neutral about child care choices. It takes a clear ideological stance. Only some choices are financially supported, and there is a strong political advocacy encouraging some choices and discouraging others. One choice is promoted more strongly by the state than all others combined: day care centers. Day care centers is the choice of the Swedish state and families are basically expected to follow suit. Other choices available are pre-school hours, which is simply a place in day care for the very small group of children starting day care at three years of age. In family day care a day care mother – child minder – takes care of children in her own home. A new variety of family day care is that a parent with a child of day care age can get financial support for caring for her child at home if she also takes care of at least one other child from outside of her family. Traditional family day care is now being discouraged by both the state and the local municipalities. The Swedish Minister of Pre-schools recently said that all day care mothers will be required to go through the same required pedagogical training as the pre-school teachers. The argument used was that every child has the right to a pedagogically trained day care person. This means that the families who have chosen family day care specifically because they did not want pedagogics for their children – they simply wanted a caring loving person – they will have one choice less in the future.

This new policy illustrates how applying the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child in the Swedish setting leads to the state – rather than the parents – deciding about the specifics of child care for a child. This is all motivated by the child’s “right”, the meaning of which is interpreted solely by the state. This leaves parents of other convictions with fewer or no choices.

Open pre-schools are becoming fewer as more and more children go to regular day care. The remaining choices on the list: home care, neighbours and grandmothers are all very small in Sweden. They are strongly discouraged and there is no nation wide plan for economic support of any form for these choices. In high tax Sweden this means that they are out of financial reach for many parents. Also, these choices are culturally considered odd today, and they are getting close to being non-existent.

The Swedish Minister of Pre-schools, currently Ms. Nyamko Sabuni, is also the Minister of Gender Equality, and Sweden has no minister of families. This is another tell tale sign of the view of child care by the Swedish Government. This view is represented by most political parties on both sides of the political spectrum.

Philosophies in Child Care

- * **Developmental psychology**
- * **Behavioural psychology**
- * **Developmental science**
- * **Attachment theory**
- * **Neurobiology**
- * **Learning theory**
- * **Anthropology**



Taking a look at the philosophies of child care it is clear that families have different philosophies and convictions, expressed or not, on how to best care for their children. This is a list of scientific terms, not at all complete, but whether you are familiar with them or not, every parent follows one or the other in some way. The developmental psychological approach will argue that play is of key importance for the child nurturing their maturation and making them able to learn. Behaviourists believe that controlling behaviour is the key, and that behaviour can be taught and learnt. Developmental science is a combination of attachment theory, anthropology and developmental psychology. This view relating to parenting and child development is well expressed today by Canadian psychologist Dr. Gordon Neufeld in his book “Hold on to your kids...” Here the conviction is that the child’s emotional attachment to caring adult, typically a parent, is the key to development, and that this attached relationship is actually the key to both behaviour, learning and maturation.

Philosophies in Child Care

* **Developmental psychology**



* **Behavioural psychology**

* Developmental science

* Attachment theory

* Neurobiology

* **Learning theory**

* Anthropology



As we have seen there are many different philosophies on child care, and again when you look at the Swedish example you will see that the Swedish state child care is based on behavioural psychology and learning theory. The members of the Haro organisation, who are convinced that home care is best for their children, they are at a loss, they find real difficulties and pay a high price in realising their choices.

It is interesting that although attachment theory is widely accepted internationally as a key to small children's development, there is not a mention of the term in the Swedish national curriculum for day care. The curriculum is all about learning. This is especially questionable as even Swedish psychologists will agree that the needs of a one year old is dramatically different from the needs of a four year old. Actually a four year old is more similar in maturity to an adult than to a one year old.

Sweden is more and more moving towards one form of child care, politically advocated and strongly subsidised by taxes. Other forms of child care are discouraged in various ways, this includes the media who see the Swedish model as "good" and who seem to feel a form of social responsibility to support it. Many parents who have their children at home until three, or until school age, are feel-

ing more and more odd and marginalized in the Swedish society. These parents want a true freedom of choice and state institutions which are neutral to different forms of child care.

An argument used by the Swedish state to support these policies is that day care centers are good for children and better than parental care. Maybe not expressed that bluntly but definitely implied. They say that children need day care centers and that they are actually more important for the children's development than parents.

POSSIBLE EFFECTS OF THE LACK OF CHOICE

We then ask ourselves what are the possible effects of these policies with its lack of choice? Being clear on cause and effect is difficult in this respect. As any social scientist in the audience will realise the number of variables in the equation are overwhelming and many difficult to control. One question could be: Should any nation have policies with such a possible wide range of effects and which are so difficult to study?

I do not contend what I present here to be science, but I do contend that it is a well supported hypothesis, needing further multi disciplinary research before any attempt is made to copy the Swedish child care model.

Swedish child care model

- * **0% of all 0-1 year olds are in day care**
- * **92% of all 18 month-5 year olds are in day care**
- * **Parents at home are encouraged to use day care**
- * **Actual day care cost > € 15000 per child/year**
- * **Low cost to parents, as it is 90% tax subsidised**
- * **No national home care allowance, or tax benefits**
- * **Home care politically strongly discouraged**

The Swedish child care model is basically this:

- In Sweden there are no babies under one year of age in day care. This is due to our long parental leave of 13-16 months. But in the second year of a child's life this radically changes.
- Of all Swedish children 18 month – 5 years of age, 92% are in day care for various amounts of time. From two years of age more than 95% are in day care. Day care from 18 months of age is the norm in Sweden today.
- Parents who are at home – taking care of a baby or being unemployed – are encouraged to send their children, three years of age or older, to day care for 15 hours a week. This is completely free of charge. Some municipalities have raised this offer to 20 hours a week. In our last election the Social democratic party wanted to raise the offer to 30 hours a week – free of charge. Again, the reason cited that a child has a “right” to day care. Few people in Sweden dare to argue that a child has a right to his or her parents. Sweden is actually actively encouraging parents who are at home to send their children to day care.

Even though we in my organisation feel the possibility should be there, we cannot see why it should actively be encouraged to the point of being free of charge.

Rather the benefits of a child being at home with their parents and their smaller siblings should be pointed out.

- The actual cost of day care in Sweden is over 16 000 euros per year and child, according to the Swedish government research institute.
- Swedish day care is subsidised by taxes to more than 90%. Hence the cost for parents to use day care is very low, typically 120 euros a month for the first child. No family ever pays more than 285 euros per month, regardless of income and number of children in day care. This is called the maximum fee (maxtaxa), a fee construction to encourage parents to use day care. As most of the cost is paid through the tax bill some economist argue that this creates an overuse of the benefit, because most people are not aware of the true cost.
- There is no national home care allowance for those who choose home care. However, in some municipalities there is the possibility of a small allowance of about 300 euros per month maximum. This can only be used when the parental leave has been used and only until the child is three years old – there are several rules making it difficult to use. This expressed political reason for these difficulties is that most political parties don't want the allowance to become popular.

About one third of all Swedish municipalities offer this allowance. The decision often depends on the political majority where most parties have the opinion that home care is bad for both children and parents, especially for mothers and for gender equality. However, there is no evidence to prove this. Rather the experience among the members of the Haro organisation is that home cared children are often complemented as being more happy, calm and mature.

Those in favour of this allowance feel that it should be national and that the amount should be at least doubled to make it possible also for families with lower salaries to have the option of home care.

In Sweden all taxation is fully individualised and there are no possible tax reductions whatsoever for families or for home care.

- Home care is strongly discouraged in Sweden by the Government, the State institutions, the health care system, the pre-school teachers trade unions and the media. The strongest reasons for this is gender equality, every child's "right" to go to day care and that parents are said to do better in the labour force than in caring for their children.

Quality of Swedish day care

- * Day care group sizes for under 3s are rarely below 10 children, often 14 and sometimes 17 children.
- * Day care group sizes for the 3-5 year olds can be upwards 25-30 children.
- * Average day care child-staff ratio all ages is 5:1, but 7:1 and even 10:1 exist.
- * No regulation of group sizes or child-staff ratios.
- * A traditional focus on *play* in day care is now being diverged to focus on *learning*.

In my introduction I mentioned the problems with child care being managed through politics, not because politicians are uncaring but because they have to make decisions on a 3-5 year basis – much too short a time to see the effects of child care. I want to show you here what the quality of Swedish day care actually looks like today, after 30 years of political control.

I would first like to say a few words about Swedish day care staff. They often are very hard working and committed to doing their best for the children, although this is difficult in today's large groups in Swedish day care. In the 1980's day care was sorted under the Ministry of Social Affairs and there were rules for group sizes: maximum 10 children of the under 3s and maximum 15 children of age three and above. Then day care was moved to the Ministry of Education and rules about group sizes were abandoned, basically because following these rules proved to be too expensive. From then onwards day care group sizes have risen dramatically together with the child-to-staff ratios.

- Group sizes for the under 3s are rarely below 10 children. They are often 14 children and sometimes even 17 children. Three Swedish researchers have looked into this carefully in a recent book. Staff who are on sick leave seldom get replacements. This means that there are extreme cases where one staff has to care for 17

children under three all on their own for several hours.

- The day care group sizes for the 3-5 year olds are typically 17-20 and can be upwards 25-30 children. It is hard to accuse the municipality for this. They have to keep their budget and then day care becomes a cost to be reduced among many other costs.
- The average child-to-staff ratio in Swedish day care, all ages, is 5:1, five children per staff, and there are ratios upwards 7:1 and even 10:1 in some municipalities.
- There are no regulations, or even national recommendations, in Sweden today of group sizes or child-to-staff ratios. This can be compared with England where there are definite rules on child-to-staff ratios, rules which most Swedish day care for under 3s would not pass. In the United States there are no national rules, but there are national recommendations which some states follow. Again Sweden would not measure up to those recommendations for the under 3s. In fact, if Sweden was a US state, Sweden would not have the best day care in the US.
- In the 1980's Sweden was famous for its focus on play in day care, following a developmental psychological approach that children grow, develop and mature best through play where they can use their emotions and feelings to discover life in safe small groups. During especially the last fifteen years this has diverged away from play and into learning. The government contends that this will improve later school results, but there is no clear scientific evidence to support this, in fact the Swedish statistics point to the opposite, which I will soon show you.

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 time.**
- * **The Swedish "work policy" – every adult of working age should be a full-time wage earner.**

When the Swedish child care model was put to practise in the 1970's there were grand visions as to the results this would produce. It was said that this would produce greater gender equality, better child social development, better child academic development and getting children better prepared for school.

It was also said to lead to greater adult satisfaction through more employed work and less family time. The later may sound a bit harsh, but it is true that our present government is working very hard for what they call "the work policy". This means that every adult of working age should be a full-time wage earner, and the government does not recognise home care of children as a job. The ideal situation which the government wants is that the parents split the parental leave 50/50 having seven months of parental leave each, for each child. Apart from that the parents should ideally work full-time until pension at 65 years of age. The Government openly states that they believe this will give the greatest life satisfaction for everyone.

The actual outcomes

- * **Decrease in psychological health among youth.**
- * **High rates of sick leave among women.**
- * **Day care staff at the top of sick leave statistics.**
- * **Quality in Swedish day care is plummeting.**
- * **Plummeting results in Swedish schools.**
- * **Severe discipline problems in Swedish classrooms.**
- * **Deteriorating parental abilities, even middle-class.**
- * **Highly segregated labour market.**

The actual outcomes are embarrassingly different. This is what I have researched in my book and on the slides there will be references, although most of them are in Swedish.

If you look at the last 25 years you will see the following not so positive outcomes:

- We see a decrease in psychological health among our youth. This development is stronger in Sweden than in any of eleven other comparable countries according to a Swedish Government meta-study where 15 year olds have been compared. The latest figures show that 6 out of 100 Swedes will be given early retirement before the age of 30. They do not manage to make a living. Psychological ill health is a common cause.
- We have very high levels of sick leave among women, one of the highest, if not the highest in Europe. It is an interesting parallel that in the 1970's there were 700 000 Swedish women who were at home and who did not want to enter the labour market. Changes in taxation forced them into the labour market. Today we have approximately the same number of women in the labour market – and on sick leave.

- Day care staff are at the top of the sick leave statistics. The reason for this becomes clear in several interviews with day care staff: “We do not have the resources to do the job we were trained to do”. Day care staff are being asked to do a mediocre job, which was not the reason why they trained to become a pre-school teacher.
- The quality of Swedish day care is plummeting. This I showed you earlier in this presentation.
- Some 30 years ago the results in Swedish schools were among the very best in the world. According to reports during the last decade, such as PISA, Swedish school children today barely make it to average among the OECD-nations, and they are actually below average in mathematics and the natural sciences.
- We have severe discipline problems in Swedish classrooms with high levels of truancy, bad mouth language and lack of order. This is acknowledged even by our present Minister of Education. The Swedish situation is in this respect worse today than in most other comparable countries.
- The Swedish parental abilities are deteriorating. An EU-sponsored study in Sweden a few years ago showed that even well-to-do, healthy middle-class families have serious difficulties in understanding their children’s needs and knowing how and when to set limits. The author of the study said that Swedish parents seem to have interpreted the offer of day care, school and before-and-after school care, as that this process of raising children is basically the responsibility of society, and not of the parents. Living in Sweden and meeting many families gives you ample evidence that these attitudes are indeed very common.
- We did not get gender equality as an outcome from day care. Instead we got one of the world’s most gender segregated labour markets with most women working in low-paid positions in the public sector with day care, school or health care. Some wages are so low that a husband working in the private sector is pretty much a necessity to have a reasonable income. There are very few women on higher leadership positions in Sweden, compared to for instance the United States.

Possible explanations

- * **Insecure attachment in infants creates chronically low thresholds for stress. Especially for "orchid" children.**
- * **Early exposure to large groups of peers, creates peer-orientation which hinders 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.**

[These I did not actually have time to present at the live presentation]

We know today from attachment psychology and neurobiology that early separation of infants from parents can, in some children, create chronically low thresholds for stress. This can lower the threshold for anxiety for the rest of the child's life. Early separation would be expected to lead to a less resilient future generation. Medical technology today can actually measure stress levels in the saliva easily and clearly, making stress research easy to perform, also in small children.

We also know today that early exposure to large groups of peers leads to peer-orientation, which has detrimental results on psychological maturation, learning, and the transference of culture between generations. Canadian psychologist Dr. Gordon Neufeld has in detail explored the causal connections in these phenomena. His work is reported in his book "Hold on to your kids – why parents need to matter more than peers". He shows that peer-orientation is the root of bullying, teen age gangs, promiscuity and the flat-lining of culture which are all visible to various extent in most western countries.

How does peer-orientation happen? Consider a typical day in the life of a ten year old in a Stockholm suburb. The child is left by his parents just before 7.00 in the

morning at the school for before-school-child-care. When school actually begins the child is already tired and hungry. After a long day in school there is after-school-child-care while the child waits for the tired parents to return at perhaps 5.00 or 6.00 in the late afternoon. In the evening the child may be having another activity outside home, which most ambitious Swedish parents believe is good for their children. Where does the child find emotional security? One needs someone for comfort and closeness, especially in distressing situations, which are common in school. The parents are inaccessible for too long. In the best case scenario there will be a caring adult in school. But for most children it will be a peer or a gang which offers emotional support during school hours. This is the genesis of peer orientation. It fills the lack of meaningful relationships with mature trusted adults who have an interest in the development of the child. The problem with peer orientation is that peers, especially during the teens, do not have the maturity themselves to handle the difficult feelings about differences, conflicts, failure, rejection and deceit. The limited maturity of peer-orientation results in conformism, gangs, bullying, aggression, and sometimes violence. Also as youngsters attach themselves to peers, they emotionally detach themselves from the adult world, including their parents.

The culturally endorsed separation of infants in Sweden causes stress in parents, manifested in many parents as disease and sick-leave. According to a meta-study by Dean Ornish high-quality, close relationships are the strongest health factor, superior to and more important than all other health factors combined. In Sweden we don't have much time for close relationships in families. The high frequency of stress related disease can be seen as a consequence.

According to research by Sir Michael Marmot too little control over one's personal life situation is another risk factor to health. Through its family policies Sweden has given the State a controlling position in the bedroom of every Swedish family – a clear risk factor to health.

High levels of state intervention in family life reduce parents' sense of responsibility for their children. Swedish governmental agencies have been very successful in promoting the idea of day care as more than a convenience and as the best child care solution for everyone. Unfortunately, unintended drawbacks and consequences have not been anticipated. When parents loose their sense of responsibility, they do not develop in younger years the strong relationships with their children which are essential for them to provide guidance to them, especially through adolescence.

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 housewives, if they could.**

What do the Swedish parents want? There has been numerous studies in the last decade and they universally show that parents want the option of taking care of their children at home at least until four years of age. Between 60-80% have responded in various polls during last decades that this is their opinion.

A recent study done among Swedish parents with modern IT means with thousands of respondents showed that 7 out of 10 mothers wanted the possibility to stay home longer with their children, and that young mothers wanted this even more than older mothers. This is interesting as the younger mothers are highly likely to have been in day care themselves from an early age with both parents working full-time.

It is important to note that the motivation for home care in Sweden is not about traditional parental roles. Sweden threw out these traditions 30 years ago and has been more successful in doing so than perhaps any other democratic country in the world. The motivation for home care from young parents today come from having witnessed their parents struggling with their full-time work and their children. This does not look attractive to many young parents and they want to make other choices. They say: "I don't want that kind of life. I want a different life with more family time especially when the children are young." Some modern Swedish

women will say: “I am much more fascinated about taking care of my children, and all the learning experiences this offers, than I would find in most jobs on today’s labour market.” Many of these mothers start small scale home businesses as the children grow older. Fathers seem more likely to be involved with their children if the mother is. Many home families end up running a family business. Most every home mother I know in Sweden, having children older than babies or toddlers, are active with a home business, in NGO’s or in politics. They are most always very happy with their choices, in spite of the difficulties in Sweden with their politically incorrect choices. This is important to understand: Sweden has already had two generations who have tried the full-time dual-earner model with early day care. The concept of the home parent has obviously survived this and has come out stronger, more politically conscious and more motivated than ever. The Haro organisation bears true witness on this fact.

Why no political change?

***Once in place,
Swedish family policies
have proven difficult to discuss
through normal
democratic processes
– discussion awakens guilt.***

Why is there no political change, given that most Swedish people would want other policies. It seems that once in place these policies are very difficult to discuss in an open public debate. We see very little discussion of this topic in the Swedish media. My own interpretation is that once you have been told by the state what to do – day care – and accepted it, and then to hear that home care might have

been a better choice, awakens feelings of frustration and guilt. No media working for profit wants to have this Pandora's box opened. Even presentations in Sweden on this topic are uncommon: Few people want to get reminded of the pain of not making their own choice about their children's early care.

Shared responsibility family & society

*The learning from the
Swedish experience is...*

**The family needs to make the
choice on how the responsibility
of the children is to be shared**

The conclusion which I and my organisation would like to express on the topic of shared responsibility between family and state is this: The key learning from the Swedish situation is the necessity of choice – under the power of the family. The family has to make the choice on how this responsibility is to be shared. They have to make up their own minds and decide what is right for them. What do we want? What do we believe in? What do we feel our child needs? Research today show that some children are simply too sensitive to be away from their parents at one or two years of age.

Thank you for your attention!

More information about Haro can be found at: www.haro.se

More English articles by Jonas Himmelstrand can be found at: www.mireja.org

References

”Att följa sitt hjärta – i jantelagens Sverige”, by Jonas Himmelstrand. ISBN 978-91-975836-1-9.
(Swedish book: ”Following your heart – in the social utopia of Sweden”.)

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

Newsletter “Strategier to Learn & Grow”, biweekly published by Jonas Himmelstrand.

Swedish: www.strategier.se

English: www.stratletter.com

Official statistics of Sweden – National level, by The Swedish National Agency for Education
(Swedish Government Education Agency statistics on day care in English for year 2008.)

www.skolverket.se/sb/d/3551

”Är svensken människa?”, by Henrik Berggren och Lars Trägårdh

Norstedts 2006. ISBN 91-1-302191-5

Read more in Swedish: www.strategier.se/hda.lasso?id=313875983891166

”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: www.adlibris.com/se/product.aspx?isbn=9173312673

”Familjen i framtiden – en socialistisk familjepolitik”,

av Sveriges Socialdemokratiska Kvinnoförbund. 1978

(Swedish socialdemocratic programme on the future of family from 1978.)

www.barnensratt.se/heavy-docs/familjframtid.pdf

”Ungdomar, stress och psykisk ohälsa”, SOU 2006:77.

(Swedish Government publication: ”Youth, stress and psykological ill health”.)

Swedish link: www.regeringen.se/sb/d/6293/a/67472

”Vem orkar ända till 65? Inte kvinnorna – mer än hälften avslutar arbetslivet i förtid”, by Kris-
tina 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>

”TIMSS 2007: Försämrade skolresultat i matematik för svenska elever”, Skolverket, pressmed-
delande december 2008.

(Swedish Government Education Agency on plummeting results in maths and science in
Swedish schools.)

Swedish link: www.skolverket.se/sb/d/2006/a/14303

”Att våga sätta gränser”, by Britta Johansson, Svenska Dagbladet 070126.
(Swedish researcher on Swedish middle-class parents difficulties in their parenting role.)
Swedish link: 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: www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/1583918175
Read more: www.stratletter.com/brev.lasso?id=324557917262356

”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: 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: www.gordonneufeld.com/book.php
Read more: 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: 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: www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/0747574081
Read more: www.stratletter.com/mna.lasso?id=272422439552148

”Full day care – national standards för under 8s day care and childminding.” (England)
English link: www3.imperial.ac.uk/pls/portallive/docs/1/46973696.PDF

”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>

”Föräldrar vill sköta hemma”, article in Svenska Dagbladet April 28, 2006, presenting a Sifo poll on parents wish to be at home longer with their own children.
www.svd.se/opinion/brannpunkt/foraldrar-vill-skota-hemma_314172.svd
”Sverigemamman”, by Familjeliv.se
(Swedish study on 9000 mothers and their attitudes from 2010)
www.familjeliv.se/files/sverigemamman.pdf

About the presenter and author

“Following your heart – in the social utopia of Sweden” is a book about learning and growing in my native country of Sweden.

Writing the book has forced me to dig deep into my own roots. I grew up in a newly built middle-class area of flats in the outskirts of Uppsala, Sweden. I spent my first school years in an idyllic country side school and a few years later in a big town school. But I also got to travel early in life. I started school in Berkeley, California, USA at the age of six. Later I lived three years in Ibadan, Nigeria where I went to an International School. Finally at fifteen I spent another year in High School in Palo Alto, California, USA.



Through my entire student years I lived with the ambivalence between the scientifically rational and the humanistically intuitive. In my studies I reached the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm before realising that my interest in chemistry between people was greater than my interest in chemistry between molecules. I did not begin to resolve this ambivalence before starting my own consulting business in the area of personal growth and leadership at 28 years of age.

Today I have been a trainer and coach in leadership, pedagogy and personal growth for more than 25 years in Swedish businesses and public offices. Since 1992 I have been co-publishing the newsletter “Strategies to Learn & Grow”. My wife Tamara and my three children have enriched my life experiences enormously and being self-employed has enabled a family oriented life style which is otherwise difficult to manifest in Sweden today.

“Following your heart...” has become an odyssey in the area of growing as a person individually, at work and in society. An odyssey with a definite goal in the idea of becoming more human, more of who you truly are.

A condensed English version of the book is in the works for publication during late 2011.