

Swedish family policy and care for small children



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The Mireja Institute
www.mireja.org

Presentation on June 13, 2013 at the
INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
NEW FORMS OF CARE FOR SMALL CHILDREN
Prague, Czech Republic

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...welfare and development through family

[SHIFT at start]

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It is a pleasure for me to be invited to Prague and the Czech Republic.

I am Swedish and I have lived in Sweden for most of my life, except for two years in the United States and three in Nigeria in my youth travelling with my parents. However, since a year back I live in Finland on the Åland Islands, although on the same latitude and with the same climate.

I am here to talk about the Swedish family policies and care for small children. Swedish family policies had a strong positive international reputation in this area. However, in Sweden they are being more and more questioned as they are not delivering the expected outcomes. I will basically use my time here to explain why this is so, and what one learns from the Swedish 30 year old family policy experiment. For those of you not familiar with recent developments in Sweden, this may be somewhat shocking.

My key professional interest for nearly 40 years has been human potential, how can families, worklife, societies and nations help individuals to develop their best resources, mature and aim for their full potential. I had an early experience in working with troubled children in the late 1970s at a treatment home. Then I worked as a human resource business consultant and educator for nearly 30 years, and had my own children. That was the starting point for my interest in child care and family policies – did our Swedish family policies create a good setting for our children to mature and grow to their full potential?

My oldest child was born 1994 and a few years later I witnessed the drastic shift which had happened since I was a child with respect to child care.

When I was a child in the 1950s we lived in an apartment area and all of us children played in the playground. We had moms, nannies, or Grandparents looking after us. I had my Grandmother looking after me when my mother worked.

When my own oldest son was 2-3 years I started looking at the playground outside our home. There were no children there. Where were they, I asked myself in my naivety? I soon realised they were all inside a fenced area going to day care. An enormous shift had taken place in Sweden during this period in how children were cared for. I did not think too much of this, but other developments in my professional life brought my attention to these family policies and their effects on human development.

• In the late 1990s I had more and more young adult participants coming to workshops who had great difficulty in exercises with presentation technique where they were videotaped. These are not the most enjoyable exercises, but people did them and handled the stress. But now I was getting people who could not handle the stress. Why was this, I wondered? Why does the coming generation seem to have lost self-esteem and inner strength?

• In the early 2000s I had my first study day for school teachers in more than a decade. The principal approached me when I was getting set up in morning and talked spontaneously about how difficult teaching had become and how the psychological health of the students had dropped in the last ten years. Why was this? I asked myself, in one of the best well-fare states in the world?

• At around the same time the number of Swedes on sick-leave skyrocketed, especially among women. Why did people in one of the most prosperous countries in the world have among the highest rates of sick-leave in all of Europe? I read a book with a meta-study showing the good close relationships was the most potent health-factor of all. Were we having problems with relationships in Sweden?

With my consultant mind I wanted to make sense of what was happening, and in 2003 I started working on a book which was published in 2007, and which has been the basis of this lecture which I today present for the 17th time in the tenth country which is the Czech Republic.

Here is a short presentation of who I am:

[SHIFT]

About Jonas Himmelstrand

- * **Swedish citizen, born in Sweden, and worked in Sweden for most of my life.**
- * **Human resource consultant and educator running my own business in Sweden since 1981.**
- * **Author of the Swedish book, "Following your heart – in the social utopia of Sweden".**
- * **Spoken on Swedish Family Policies in a thirteen cities in nine countries including the Swedish, British and Irish Parliaments, and the UN.**
- * **Founder of the Mireja Institute, www.mireja.org**
- * **Been a member of the Advisory Board on the EU Familyplatform project, www.familyplatform.eu**
- * **Faculty member of The Neufeld-Institute in Vancouver, Canada, www.neufeldinstitute.com**
- * **Married to Tamara, has three children and presently lives in Finland on the Aland Islands**



[All the points]

Here is my family:

[SHIFT]



This is from December last year, and as you can see the climate in Finland can be pretty brisk, minus 15 degrees centigrade here. As you can see I have a very tall son, it is me on the left.

As this is a controversial subject you need to know that I am no political conservative, neither am I active religiously. I am rather a intellectual leftist raised in an atheist family who matured through starting his own business and becoming a father and having a family. I just brought the idea of human potential to children, family and society, asking myself how to support more people grow and mature to their full human potential to become responsible adults.

Let us start to look at the statistics which have made Sweden so famous as the social utopia realised.

[SHIFT]

The famous 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**



As we all know Sweden is famous for its many great social statistics. Here are few of the most impressive ones.

- The Swedish infant mortality is the lowest in the world. Three deaths among 1000 births up to five years of age.
- The life expectancy is among the highest in the world, especially for men at nearly 79 years of age. For Swedish women it is 83 years of age, but Japanese women live until 86 years of age.

But we should remember that the life expectancy we see today is the product of the family policies of the 1920-ties and 1930-ties, the school policies of the 1940-ties and 1950-ties, the work-life policies of the 1950-ties through 1990-ties and the medical knowledge of the last decades. There is no assurance that the generation born today will live that long.

- The Swedish birth rate 1.7 child per women of childrearing age. The is relatively high by European standards, but low compared to 2.5 in the 1960-ties and to the 2.1 needed for reproducing the population.
- The child poverty in Sweden is very low by European comparison.
- Sweden spends more money per child on education than nearly any other nation in the world. But we do not have the best educational results.
- Sweden is greatly admired for its work on equality and gender equality.
- The Swedish parental leave is among the best in the world with 13 months at 80% of your salary and 3 months at a lower level.

How did the child care situation look like in Sweden when the first day care centers opened in 1968, 45 years ago:

[SHIFT]

Early child care in Sweden 45 years ago

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



There was a big variety of different options, with a strong support for home care of different kinds.

Today 45 years later there is a marked difference.

[SHIFT]

Early child care in Sweden today

- * **Day care centers**

- * **Pre-schools**

- * Family day care

- * Open pre-schools

- * Home care

- * Neighbors

- * Grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts and uncles



Today child care in Sweden is almost exclusively day care centres, also called pre-schools.

Here are some more details of the Swedish family policy model today

[SHIFT]

The Swedish family policy model today 2013

- * **No babies in day care – only parental leave first year.**
- * **A full 93% of all 18 month-5 year olds are in day care, predominantly day care centres.**
- * **Day care is at very low cost to parents. It is more than 90% tax subsidized, equivalent to about 16 000 euros per child/year.**
- * **No national home care allowance – no home care tax benefits.**
- * **Day care and dual-earner household strongly encouraged culturally and financially.**
- * **Home care, granny care and neighbor care is culturally discouraged. Even child-minding is discouraged.**

[the points]

This model makes some Swedes happy and others unhappy depending on political viewpoint. However, the outcomes show a more unified picture.

A clear trend is that the quality of Swedish day care has declined strongly since the 1980s.

[SHIFT]

The quality of Swedish day care

- * **Day care group sizes for under 3s are never below 10 children, often 14 and sometimes 17 children, or more.**
- * **Day care group sizes for the 3-5 year olds can be upwards 25-30 children, or more.**
- * **Average day care child-staff ratio all ages is a bit above 5:1, but 7:1 and even 10:1 do exist.**
- * **There is no regulation of group sizes or child-staff ratios.**
- * **The traditional focus on play, which once made Swedish day care famous, is now being diverged to learning.**
- * **Three established Swedish psychiatric and educational experts say the quality has fallen to a level where some children will have their development impaired or arrested.**

Sweden has a reputation of having day care of high quality. This was true during the 1980-ties. Small children were then in groups of 8 or 9 children with 3 adults.

But during the financial crises of the 1990s regulations of for group size and child-to-staff ratios were taken away and quality declined quickly and continues to do so. Swedish day care is no longer of generally high quality according to some Swedish experts, in spite of its hefty price tag.

[the points]

Bringing quality up to the demanding official US recommendations (which a few states in the US actually follow) for the under 3s would increase cost from 16 000 euros per year/child upwards 25000 euros which would be politically difficult. Thus our politicians are now saying: "We must find other ways to measure quality than group size and child-to-staff ratios". But the experts agree group size and child-to-staff ratios IS quality in day care, especially for the under 3s. As you know the under 3s have distinctly different needs than the over 3s. A three year old has more in common with an adult than with a one year old.

This suggests that the dynamics of political life has a hard time to uphold quality in day care. Day care becomes only one cost among many. The effects of poor quality may not surface for 10-20 years. Political mandate is only 4-5 years. Well-informed parents will make much better decisions. They see their children's well-being for at least the next 80 years.

Swedish day care will never again become of high quality. It is politically impossible. Rather the quality will continue to slowly but steadily decline.

What was the vision that created the Swedish family model? We need to back to the early 1970s to find this out.

[SHIFT]

Envisioned Swedish family policy model outcomes

- * **Greater gender equality.**
- * **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, man and woman, in full-time employed work, and every child in full-time day care from one year of age.**
- * **Greater adult life satisfaction, through more employed work, and less family work.**

The foundations for the current Swedish family policy were laid in the 1960s.

The Swedish Social–democratic Women’s organization outlined the policies in a pamphlet from 1972. They were seen as extreme at the time, but today a majority on both sides of the political spectrum in Sweden accept them. Only two parties out of eight somewhat oppose them, or about 15% of the electorate.

In 1975 general subsidized day care was decided in the Swedish Parliament. At around the same time home care was consciously made financially difficult for most families.

Here are the envisioned outcomes expected from the these family policies:

[the points]

None of these outcomes have been achieved. Rather the contrary. It is a pretty sad story.

Here is what has happened in the 30 years of applying the Swedish day care model.

[SHIFT]

Actual outcomes

- ✱ Strong increase in self-reported psychological ill health in youth.
- ✱ Strong increase in diagnosed psychiatric disease among youth.
- ✱ Plummeting educational results in schools.
- ✱ Increase in discipline problems in schools.
- ✱ Very high rates of sick leave among women.
- ✱ Day care staff one of three top groups in sick leave statistics.
- ✱ Deteriorating quality of parenthood, even middle-class.
- ✱ Quality in Swedish day care is plummeting.
- ✱ Lowered total fertility rate – although relatively high in Europe.
- ✱ Highly gender segregated labour market, and high gender pay gap.
- ✱ Ideologically motivated interventions by the social authorities.
- ✱ Very high youth unemployment.

What are the actual outcomes after 30 years of the present Swedish Family Policy model with highly subsidized day care encouraging one year olds to full time day care?

- Strong increase in self-reported psychological ill health among youth. Since 1989 Sweden has the worst development in this area of eleven comparable countries: Finland, Denmark, Norway, Hungary, Switzerland, Austria, Belgium, Spain, Wales and Scotland according to a Swedish Government investigation (SOU 2006:77). This has been confirmed by numerous official studies, the last one presented only a few weeks ago. Another recent study shows that 30% of Swedish high school students are seriously stressed and 8% to the point of being called burn-out if they were adults.
- Diagnosed psychiatric disease has also increased among youth, which according to official Swedish sources confirms the self-reported ill health. Suicide has increased among youth as compared with adults.
- The educational results in our schools have plummeted in the last 20 years. Sweden has lost its previous top position and is today hardly average among the OECD nations in the PISA study. The negative development has continued in the last six years to this day, in spite of attempts to shift the development with more authority and discipline.
- Discipline problems in Swedish schools have increased strongly. The Minister of Education in Sweden, Jan Björklund, asserts that "... Swedish schools has the highest level of truancy, destruction and most bad language in all the OECD countries." Björklund has been criticized for making too strong a statement. But his statement has been basically confirmed in the TIMSS study. Also, anyone visiting our schools and following the media can witness that the situation is bad enough. School is today one of the hottest political topics in Sweden.
- We see an increased stress related ill health among adults. Stress and anxiety is the new Swedish national disease. Sick leave is especially high among Swedish women according to a study, also highly educated women – the total among the highest in Europe. The study was titled "Who can work until 65? Not the women, more than half quit work life early". Stress related disease is the most common form of sick leave in Sweden today.
- Day care staff is one of the three groups with the highest rate of sick leave. Three Swedish day care experts say: "It is probably caused by the professional lack-of-meaning syndrome. This means having been trained to a work and believing it is important and then not be given the resources to do it."
- Lower quality parenthood. A study by school researcher Britta Johansson a few years ago show that even healthy, intelligent and reasonable Swedish parents have difficulties being parents today. They lack knowledge about children's needs and cannot set limits. She writes (my translation):
The public offer of full day child care seems to make many parents loose the grip of their own responsibility. They believe that their children are fostered by the pre-school/school and believe that the experts on their children are to be found there.

She also says that pre-school/school cannot fill the gaps caused by lack of time and trust in parenthood from the parents.

- In the 1980-ties day care was the responsibility of the Ministry of Social Affairs. Group sizes was limited to 10 children under three years of age and 15 for older children. In the 90-ties day care was transferred to the Ministry of Education and limitations of group sizes was taken away. Group sizes grew quickly and three Swedish expert now contend that Swedish day care is no longer of the high quality needed for children's proper development. I repeat, Swedish day care is no longer of high quality.
- Fertility rate was 2.5 children per woman in the 1960s. Today it is 1.7 which is relatively high by European standards, but as you can see it comes at a price.
- Swedish gender equality is admired, but has a dark side – the Swedish labour market is among the most gender segregated in the whole world, not just the western world. Women are mostly working in low-paid jobs in care and education in the public sector. Many countries have a considerably higher percentage of women in top managerial positions than Sweden.
- We see more and more ideologically motivated interventions by the social authorities. When the Swedish social authorities intervene today – this may be a most healthy home educating family – having not had your children in day care will work against you and sometimes seen as a sign of poor parenthood. By European standards Sweden takes a very high number of children in custody, sometimes for more or less ideological reasons.
- Sweden has a very high youth unemployment. To put it drastically: Sweden takes away the parents when the children need them the most in the early years. Then when they have grown to young adults Sweden has no jobs to offer as the jobs are taken by parents who have children in day care – it is called the work policy and is a basic Swedish Governmental ideology. We give our children a double blow, first as toddlers – no parents, then as young adults – no jobs. No wonder they are not doing well. The reason is basically an ill thought through educational and gender equality ideology.

How can this development be explained?

[part]

How can this development be explained?

Now, as you understand the Swedish Government and its institutions cannot agree with these conclusions. In fact they have never put all of them on one slide as I have. If they did, I would not need to be here. Papers all over the world would be topped by headlines like: "Swedish Government admits day care scheme a failure." That is not going to happen in a long time. So, which are the official explanations to these problems:

Swedish state authorities have come up with three different explanations for psychological illhealth:

- 1) It is due to the great number of choices teen-agers have today.
- 2) It is because of high youth unemployment.
- 3) It is because of the general "societal development".

As for schools it is blamed on teachers not being trained enough, not having high enough salaries, and on the municipalities not giving schools enough money.

Women sick-leave is blamed on men for not helping enough with household chores – although the statistics show that men work an hour or so more per week, putting together work and household chores.

But if you leave the politically correct guessing and look at what the scientific literature says one comes up with a number of more likely explanations to these outcomes.

[SHIFT]

Possible causal explanations

- * **Lack of emotional nourishment to infants can create chronically low thresholds for stress throughout life.**
- * **Early exposure to large groups of peers, creates peer-orientation and emotionally defended children.**
- * **Peer-orientation leads to disinterest in learning, bullying, gangs, flat-lining of culture and promiscuity.**
- * **Emotional defendedness lowers the children's "teachability" leading to schools and teachers not being to do their job.**
- * **The Swedish example questions the claimed cognitive benefits of day care, and confirms the behavioral problems.**
- * **The culturally endorsed early separation of infants from parents causes stress in parents, and possible sick-leave.**
- * **Large state intervention in family life, reduces parents sense of responsibility for the care of their children.**

* Scientists today agree that the groundwork for psychological health is laid in the first three years of life. The brain of the small child is physiologically formed by the psychological care of the closest caretaker. Lack of love and emotional warmth during the first years in life can lead to a chronically lowered anxiety threshold - as adults they become more easily stressed, afraid and anxious, and thus more susceptible to psychological problems. Small children do not need education or pedagogues. Love is their entire education. They need an emotional attachment to a caring adult - typically a parent - more than anything else.

* Also older children need time with their parents, or an other adult close to them who loves them and where they feel safe enough to share their feelings. When we are young we need someone to love us also when we do not seem to deserve it. Someone who stands steady in a storm. Someone who continuously gives the message I am here for you, I love you. We can work this out together. We will manage this situation. Young people need their parents. But from whom do many children today find their emotional support?

A day can be long in the life of a ten year old. Before school-care at 7.00 in the morning. Already tired and hungry when school starts. A long day in school. Then after-school-care waiting for tired parents to pick them up at perhaps 17.00 or 18.00. In the evening maybe another activity outside home. Where does the child find their emotional comfort and security? The parents are gone for too long. In best case there will be an adult in school. But for most children support will be an immature peer or a gang - it is called peer orientation. The problem with peer orientation is that peers, especially during the teens, do not have the maturity to handle more difficult feelings around school work, differences, conflicts, failure, rejection and death. Therefore peer-orientation results in poor learning results, trouble in the classroom, conflicts, gangs, bullying and sometimes violence. This phenomena exists in many western countries today, and it is unfortunately strong in Sweden.

* As nature wants to protect the relationship with those who the children attach to - nature had in mind that this should be the parents and other adults trusted by the parents - peer orientation shows the attachment instincts which leads to mature adults being emotionally rejected in favor of immature peers.

This results in parents feeling they have lost their teenagers, and teachers who find that their pupils have less interest in learning. The teenager has attached to their peers because being adults were not available for too long periods of time. A blind is leading a blind into the world of tomorrow. It is pretty much an analogy to William Golding's novel, The Lord of the Flies. And it is caused by an unawareness of what children need to grow to their full potential. Both parents and teachers witness to this phenomena. The adult world has lost the emotional connection to a young generation who is not yet mature enough to take responsibility for their life. Parents, and through them teachers and other mature adults, must regain their position as the emotionally most important people in their children's lives.

This development makes sense all the time in Sweden. Especially when there trouble around teenagers. The media asks "Where are the parents?" Well, the parents were told after parental leave that they were not so important any more. The state could do the fostering from now on. Unfortunately, Swedish parents betrayed the state.

* Children subjected to too much peer-orientation will encounter that their innate human vulnerability is too much to bear. They defend themselves against those emotions which hails their development. This makes them much more difficult for schools to teach. These children have lost their teachability factor.

* A miniature Sweden was created when Quebec in Canada introduced collective day care emulating the Swedish model. The effects were researched and the three researchers wrote the following:

Finally we uncover striking evidence that children are worse off in a variety of behavioral and health dimensions, ranging from aggression to motor-social skills to illness. Our analysis also suggests that the new childcare program led to more hostile, less consistent parenting, worse parental health, and lower-quality parental relationships. This is frighteningly similar to the situation in Sweden.

The research on day care in their years confirms the possible connection. A large exposure to care requested from parents or close relatives is associated with a small but significant increase in behavioral problems up until 12 years of age, even in those who went to the very best day care, and more risk-taking at the age of 15. This is not the fault of day care. The cause is more likely the separation from the child's closest attachment figures, the parents. Day care cannot replace parents even if some children are more resistant to day care than others.

* Good close relationships is the most important health factor. According to a meta-study by Dr. David Smith, high-quality close relationships is the superior health factor. In Sweden we don't have much time for close relationships. This leads to stress related ill health.

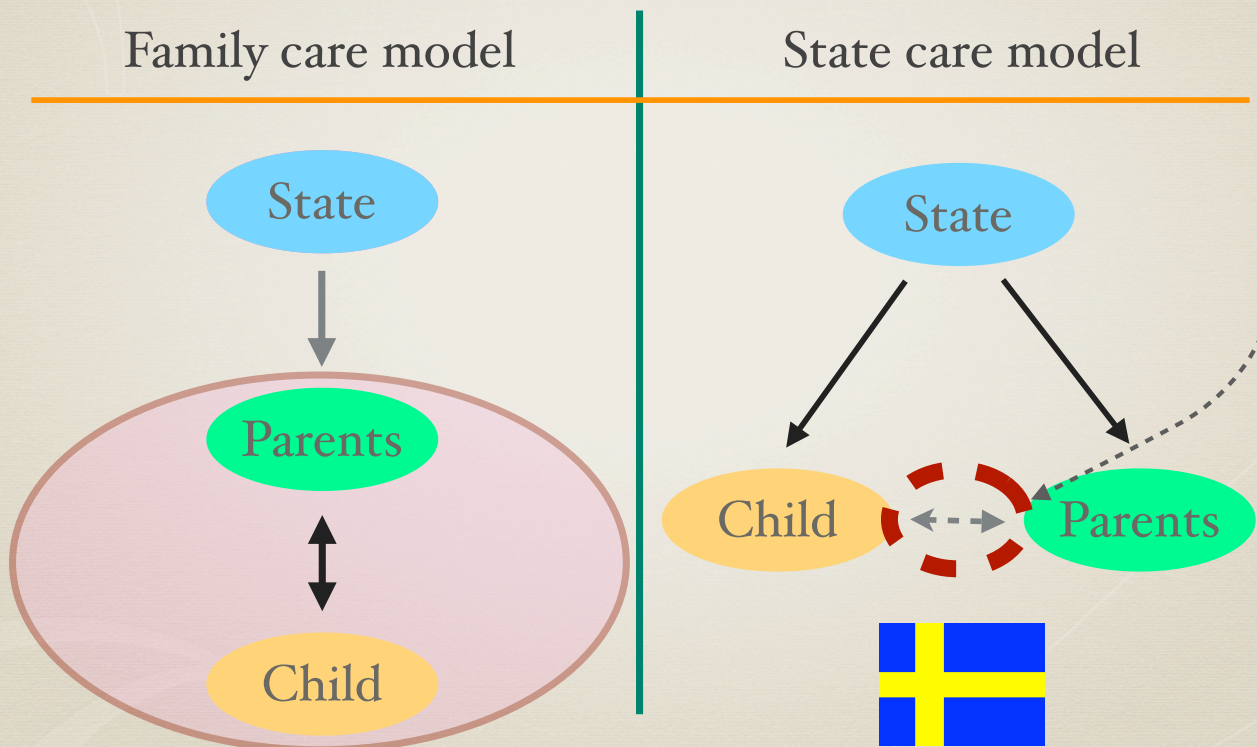
Too little control over one's personal life situation is another risk factor to health according to research by Sir Michael Marmot. Through his family policy Sweden has given the State a place in the bedroom of every Swedish family - a clear risk factor to health.

* In Sweden we have had the belief that the State, through day care, pre-schools, schools and after-school care, can raise our children. But in spite of the enormous resources Sweden spends on these institutions, they have proven to not be able to replace the parents. Rather child-parental attachment is the basis which these institutions need to at all be able to function in constructive ways.

Unfortunately the Swedish Government has been too successful in its hidden message "The State fosters children better than parents." This is probably the most destructive political message ever given in Sweden - at least in modern times.

The Swedish day care problem in a nutshell

– state care weakens parental care



Family care with extended families was the original form of care. The village supported the families.

In the modern society the state replaced the village. This seemed to work if they respected the family. Decent examples of this are many European countries including Finland.

Sweden has a diviant model which is not alinged with nature. It can be called state care. It wants direct access to the children without the parents involvment. There are many, many such examples in Sweden. But a state cannot care for children. In fact it weakens the very relationship which is the key to human development – the relationship child to parent.

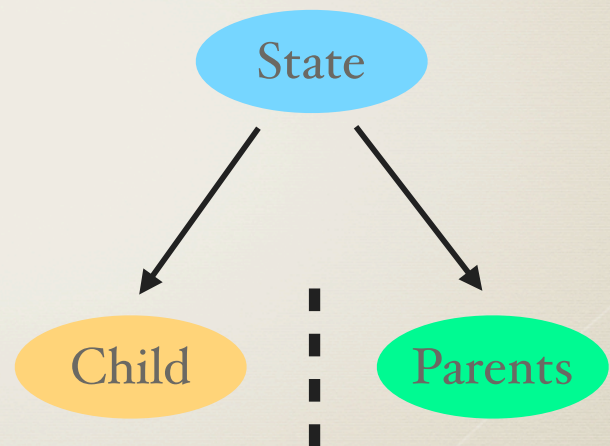
If the child–parent attachment is broken completely by state intervention, we are risking social breakdown.

[SHIFT]

The Swedish day care problem in a nutshell

– ultimate risk of social breakdown

State care model



We are not there yet. But with every generation it is getting worse.

What are some of the long-term consequences of the Swedish model. Is there a point of no return?

[SHIFT]

The tipping point

Who is responsible for the child? The parents or the State?



The danger with the Swedish model is that there seems to be a tipping point or a point of no return. Any nation contemplating the Swedish model need to be aware of this.

Once parents have entrusted their children to state care, they lose influence and the confidence that they can raise the children. As the State sees the challenges children face, they must address it by political necessity. A vicious circle has started where state gets entangled more and more deeply into the raising of children through normal political dynamics.

Sweden has clearly reached the tipping point or point of no return. Swedish parents more often than not look at the state as responsible for providing the day care, school and before and after school activities, rather than themselves. At parent meetings they look more like coordinators of different forms of child care than actual parents.

In Sweden today it is very provocative to be a stay-at-home parent, not to mention a stay-at-home mom. You are socially marginalised, and many times looked at in contempt.

I asked parents in Quebec, Canada, who also has a similar system, although for a much shorter time. Their parents view stay-at-home parents as lucky who can afford it – a very different attitude from Sweden. The same is true for Finland. Neither have reached the tipping point, yet. When I speak to teachers in Finland about the teachability of pupils and the importance of parental contact the teachers say: "The parents should listen to this." In Sweden the same group will say "Our politicians should listen to this."

How does the family policy discussion go in a country which has gone over the tipping point? Here are some of the policy discussions in Sweden today.

[SHIFT]

Current Swedish family debate

- * Swedish schools are in an alarmingly poor state.
- * Day-care, but also Night-care, Weekend-care and Summer-care.
- * Suggested compulsory day-care being suggested as a good thing.
- * Suggested compulsory school for 12 years until age 18.
- * Every child has the right to day care – parents must not hamper.
- * Day care encouraged – even when parents are on parental leave.
- * Unemployed have to use day care to keep unemployment benefits.
- * Gender equality – a very strong ideology in Sweden.

Just to give you a taste of the current Swedish political debate on family, here is what has been discussed in Sweden during the last year. There is a clear movement to even more state intervention in family life.

- Schools are the top political agenda since a couple of months back. Swedish schools are doing poorly academically, there are a host of discipline problems and there is psychological ill health. University professors are complaining about students how can hardly read and write. The suggested solutions are more discipline, more grades, shorter school vacation, better teacher training. Officially there is no recognition of the connection between the family policies and the school results, although some parliamentarians are aware of the connection, plus a great number of Swedish teachers and school officials.

- Several political parties want to expand day care to also offer night care, weekend care and summer care, as some parents work at odd hours.

- There are suggestions of compulsory day care from three years of age.

- There are suggestions of compulsory high school until 18 years of age.

We may end up with 15 years of compulsory day care and school in a few years time.

- Day care is argued to be a child's right, and nothing parents should be allowed to interfere with. Here it becomes clear how the Swedish Government believe children belong to the state, not really to the parents.

- Hence unemployed parents and parents who are at home on parental leave are encouraged to send their older children to day care although the parents are at home. This shows the ideological, rather than financial, motivation for day care from the Swedish Government.

- Extreme gender equality is almost a religion in Sweden:
 - gender neutral toys in preschools
 - gender neutral personal pronouns

The current news about children in Sweden from the last few months is this:

[SHIFT]

The last few months family news

- * 9 out of 10 pre-school teachers cannot follow national curriculum – too little time.
- * One out of three 16-year-olds croniclly stressed.
- * Increasing number of oneyearolds in pre-school, up 17% since 2005.
- * 43% of girls stressed about body, weight and looks.
- * 13% of the age group 15-24 see life as meaningless.
- * High school riot in Gothenburg – "Our generation will go crazy".
- * Strong increase in psychiatric drugs for youth – not tested on youth.
- * A week long riot in Stockholm. Even 12 yearolds burning cares

[the points]

Let us leave this depressing news and see what we can learn from this. First of all what do we know about good child care?

[SHIFT]

Which child care is best for the small child?

Mother

Father

Grandparents

Aunts and uncles

Trusted close friends and neighbors

Weak mother with support

Child-minder

Day care centre

Which child care is best for the small child?

We are here looking at what will support the child to fulfill his or her full human potential.

When we look at developmental science – developmental psychology, attachment theory and neuroscience the importance of relationship, emotion and play stand out.

Interpreting the findings of well-done evidence based research typically supports these findings.

Putting all of this together there is no mistake in what typically comes number one on this list. We may not like it, it might not fit some political ideologies, it may not always be possible to fulfill, but we need to acknowledge it. Science shows it loud and clear. It is mother.

Typically no one is closer to the child than the mother, for two very obvious reasons: The child lives in the mother for nine months and the baby is breastfeed by the mother.

Still if correctly set up the following can be just as good.

What about the weak or less sensitive mother? How is that situation best handled?

Child-minders will typically be the best choice outside of the close relationships, especially if the relationship between the parents and the child-minder is good.

Day care centres is not ideal for small children under the age of three, especially as group sizes tend to get big and personnell is often changed. Even many Swedish day care staff agrees with this, even if they do their best to handle it.

How can one support the informal and relationship oriented care. Actually there is a Nordic model called home care allowance. This is being payed to families with children of pre-school age not using day care. It exists nationally in Norway and Finland, and locally in about a third of the Swedish municipalities.

[SHIFT]

The Nordic Home Care Allowance 1-3 years of age

In Finland used for 56% of the children

In Norway used for 28% of the children

In Sweden used for 2,5% of the children

Which country would you expect to have the best school results based on the intuitive and developmental reasoning we have just talked about?

You are right, it is Finland.

Finland has had this allowance since 1984. Apart from child care policies the Finnish social system is very similar to Sweden. But the child outcomes as some of you know are quite different. And living in Finland the difference is obvious in meeting every child, and most parents.

Norway has had their allowance since 1998 when it was introduced by a centre-right government. The present centre-left government wanted to abolish it a few years ago, but decided against as it would have been too expensive to build day care centres as compensation.

Sweden has had a local home care allowance since 2008 introduced by the present centre-right government. A municipality has to decide to choose it. It is available in one third of all Swedens 290 municipalities. Its small usage can be attributed that it was initiated after Sweden reached the tipping point. The Social-democrats and the Leftist party has promised to abolish it immediately if they win the next election.

The allowance is about 300 euros per month in three countries.

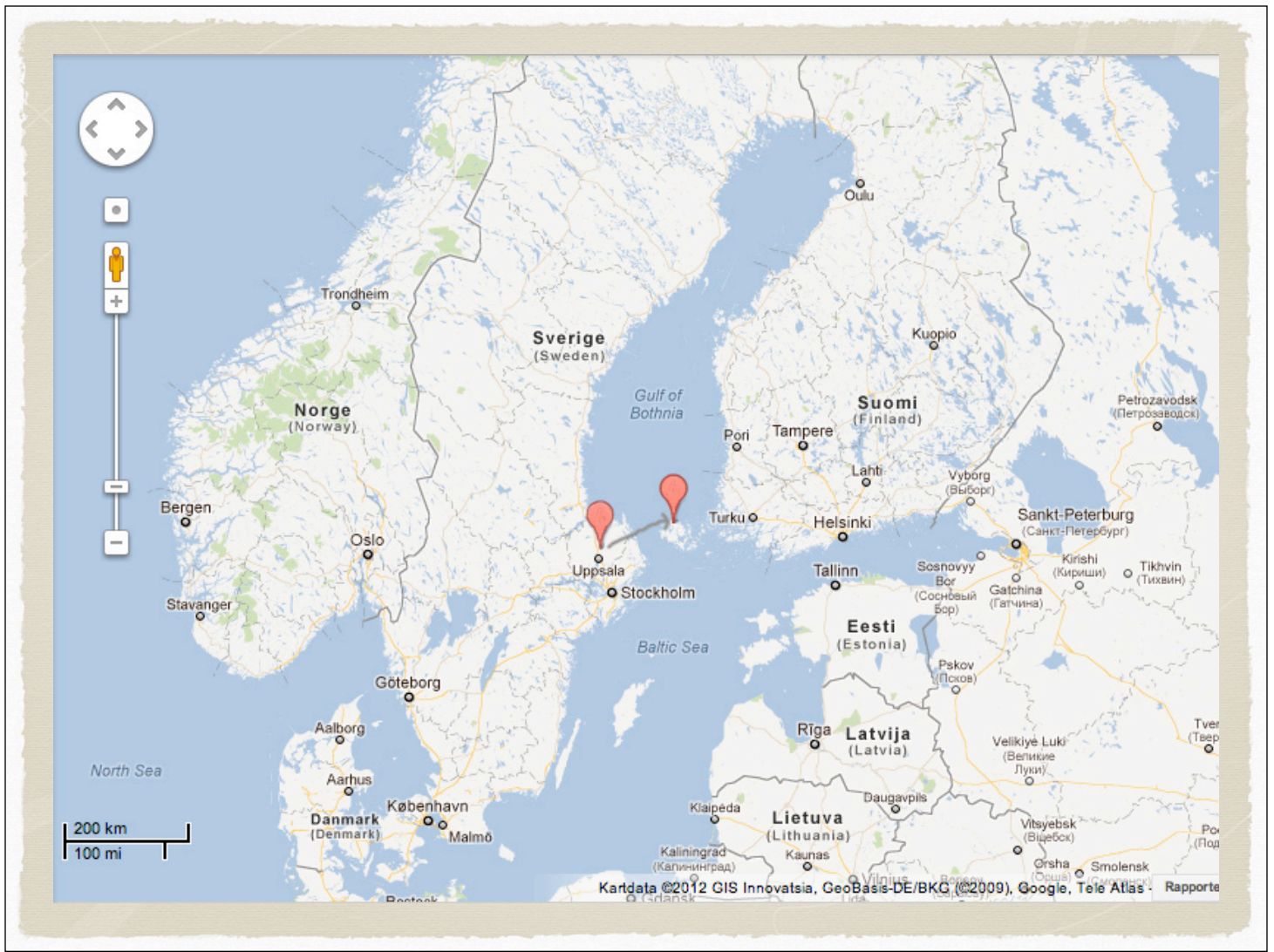
"Which country..."

With Norway coming 2nd

Modern developmental psychology says there could clearly be a causal effect.

Here is a map of the three countries.

[SHIFT]



You can see that Norway, Sweden and Finland are very close. You can also see how we moved from Sweden to Finland a year ago. From a birds perspective it is only about 150 kilometers.

When asked in a poll what Swedes think about having the possibility to be home the opinion has been pretty steady for decades.

[SHIFT]

What do the 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 Swedish 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.**
- * **A study of six years olds showed that their greatest wish was to have more time with their parents. For obvious reasons it was not possible to ask the one year olds what they wished for.**

[the points]

Okay time for conclusions

[SHIFT]

Reasonable conclusions and learnings

- * **That Swedish family policies have led to negative developmental outcomes for children, parents, and families seems to be a well-supported argument.**
- * **The basic reason for the 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.**
- * **Every society has to protect parental choices about the care and education of their children. The state should stay neutral to all forms of care, including home care, and not supporting one over another, culturally or financially.**
- * **The institution of family needs support and respect from government as family is the key institution for close relationships in the western world today.**
- * **Work for the good of society needs to be acknowledged. Raising children is certainly one of them. Women sometimes make different choices than men. Their choices as highly valid and worthy of respect – true gender equality.**
- * **Swedish family policies are not emotionally sustainable – and possibly not even democratically sustainable. They need to be researched and understood in depth before any attempt to emulate them in any way.**

What can we conclude from all this? Well, putting together all evidence-based studies, qualitative research, experience and anecdotal information I believe the following reasonable conclusions can be made:

Are there any signs of a post universal day care Sweden? Yes there is.

[SHIFT]

A new child care 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 healthy child-parent 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, often with 3-6 children or more.**
- * **These families stick together and rarely divorce.**

These Swedish families come from very different beliefs and political views. What they share is the experience of their children emotionally attaching to them, waking their parental instincts.

[SHIFT]

Thank you for your attention!

**A handout of the slides will be available
within a week at:**

www.mireja.org/130613.html

Contact: jonas@mireja.org

The
MIREJA
Institute

...welfare and development through family

Thank you for your attention. You can find the slides here, maybe even with some text.

Thank you!

Links

- Mireja – The Mireja Institute, welfare and development through family
www.mireja.org
- Articles in English by Jonas Himmelstrand
www.mireja.org/articles.html
- Jonas Himmelstands speech on the future role of family;
at a seminar in the Swedish Parliament December 8, 2008.
www.stratletter.com/dec10speech.html
- Haro – Swedish organisation for freedom of choice, equality and
parenthood, www.haro.se
- Rohus – The Swedish Association for Home Education
www.rohus.nu

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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".)

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"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.)

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"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>

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"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.)

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"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>
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"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>