

Swedish Family Policies

- are they delievering what they promised?

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About Jonas Himmelstrand

- * Human resource consultant and educator running his own business in Sweden since 1981.
- * Author of the Swedish book, "Following your heart in the social utopia of Sweden".
- * Twenty speeches since 2008 on Swedish Family Policies presented in fourteen cities in ten countries, including the Swedish, British and Irish Parliaments, and the United Nations.
- * Founder of the Mireja Institute, www.mireja.org.
- * 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.



av Jonas Himmels



The famous Swedish statistics

- * Lowest infant mortality
- * Relatively high birth rate
- * Low child poverty
- * Very high life expectancy
- * 16 month parental leave
- $\ \ \ast\$ Comprehensive day care
- $\ *\$ High education spending
- * High female employment
- * Equality gender equality



Swedish family policies – 2016 * 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 centers - a 45 year development Day care is at very low cost to parents. More than 90% tax subsidized, equivalent to about 16 000 euros per child/year. No home care allowance - no home care tax benefits. Day care and full-time dual-earner households are encouraged both financially and culturally. Part time work is discouraged. Child-minding, home care, granny care and neighbor care is culturally discouraged. Learning is encouraged over care. Sweden has a school obligation rather than the more common learning obligation. Home education is forbidden in Sweden. The quality of Swedish day care - 2016 * Day care group sizes for under 3s are seldom 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 into learning. * Several established Swedish psychiatric and educational experts say the quality of Swedish day care has fallen to a level where some children are at developmental risk. Swedish family policies envisioned outcomes 1972 * To achieve personal independence from family and kin. To manifest greater gender equality. To improve child social development. To improve child academic development. To even out social class differences. To liberate mothers from their motherhood instincts. The "work policy" - every adult, man and woman, in fulltime employed work, and every child in full-time day care. To achieve greater adult life satisfaction, through more employed work, and less family work.

* Highest number of single households i the world. * Strong increase in self-reported psychological ill health in youth. * Strong increase in diagnosed psychiatric disease among youth. * Plummeting educational results in schools in every measurement. * Increased discipline problems in schools. * High rates of sick leave among women. * Day care staff one of three top groups in sick leave statistics. * Deteriorating quality of parenthood, even healthy middle-class. * Quality in Swedish day care is decreasing. * Highly gender segregated labour market, and high gender pay gap. * Very high youth unemployment.	
Is there a causal link?	
Possible causal explanations	
* Lack of emotional nourishment to infants can create chronically low thresholds for stress throughout life. * Large state intervention in family life, reduces parents	
sense of responsibility for the care of their children. * Early exposure to large groups of peers, creates peer-	
orientation and emotionally defended children. * Emotional defendedness lowers the children's "teachability" and sets the stage for learning and behavioural problems of various kinds.	
* Peer-orientation leads to disinterest in learning, bullying, gangs, flat-lining of culture and promiscuity.	
* The culturally endorsed early separation of infants from parents causes stress in parents, and possible sick-leave.	

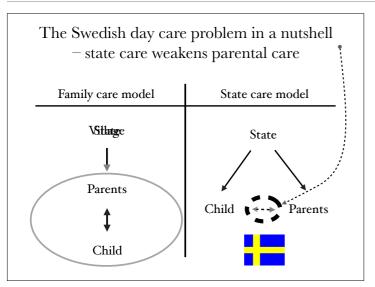
Why have Swedish parents given up parenthood?

- * The strong message from the state and media that children need to go to day care from one year of age in order to develop normally.
- * Day care claimed to be "... a part of normal Swedish life, just like school..." it is here to stay, not to be discussed.
- * The debate of a future compulsory day care: "Every child has a right to day care, not for parents to hamper with"
- * Day care staff don't tell parents what has happened their children during the day – "it would stress them too much to know". Parents have lost their bearings.
- * The interior of a day care center looks so impressive, that many parents feel they can never offer anything remotely similar – they wrongly loose trust in themselves.

Sometimes we don't have a choice, both parents need to work in order to support the family. We know daycare is not ideal but will settle for the best possible arrangement of out-of-home child care.

But this is not the message from the Swedish Government. They say children need daycare, they say parents can never provide what daycare can, they say daycare is a child's right, something parents should not be allowed to hamper with.

The Swedish Government financially encourages parents who are at home on parental leave to leave their older children in daycare.

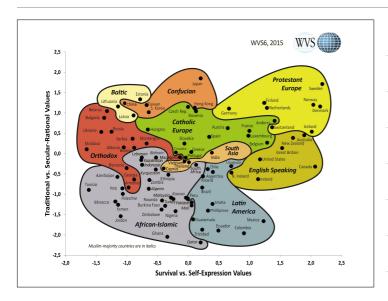




The Nordic Home Care Allowance 1-3 years of age In Sweden was used for 2,5% of the children In Norway is used for 27% of the children In Finland is used for 56% of the children Which country would you expect to have the best school results based on the information presented here today? You are right, it is Finland. Current Swedish family debate st The alarming state of Swedish schools – next biggest issue to immigration. * The alarming state of youth psychological ill-health – a national health problem. * Day-care expanded to Night-care, Weekend-care and Summer-care. st Full time day-care encouraged – even when parents are on parental leave. st Unemployed have to use day care in order to keep unemployment benefits. * Gender neutral daycare and preschools – key theme in day care development. Men don't want jobs in pre-school - they feel judged as suspect pedophiles. * "Parental anxiety month" - August - children back to day care and school. Reasonable learnings from the Swedish family model It seems to be a well-supported hypothesis that Swedish family policies have lead to negative developmental outcomes for children, parents, and families. The basic reason for the negative developments seems 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 of their children. The state should stay neutral to all forms of care, including home care, and not be 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 sustainable. They need to be researched and understood in depth before any attempt to emulate them in any way is done.

What could be the reasons for Sweden doing this?

- * Historically weak families
- * Historically strong domineering king/government
- * Historically weak aristocracy
- * Sweden has had no liberal revolution
- * Fear in close intimate relationships family
- * Consensus culture
- * The state-individualist citizen
- * Media generally supporting the state family policies.



A new Swedish 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 a strong 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 3-6 children or more.
- $*$ These families stick together and rarely divorce.

Thank you for your attention! jonas@mireja.org



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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

Sources

Most sources, but not all, are only available in Swedish.

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