



Universal day care harmful to Swedish youth, author finds

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OTTAWA - Experts from Sweden and New Zealand warned a pro-family conference of the negative social consequences of universal day care, anti-spanking laws and legalized prostitution.

Sweden's 30-year experience with a universal day care system has decreased the psychological health of youth relative to other Nordic countries, Jonas Himmelstrand, author of *Busting the Myths of Swedish Family Policy*, told the Institute of Marriage and Family Canada annual conference here May 5. Girls aged 15-19 have experienced a 30-per-cent increase in mental health problems, he said.

The policy has resulted in increased discipline problems in the schools and academic performance has plummeted, he said. Swedish schools, once ranked at the top, are now ranked among the worst in Europe. There is even a reality TV program that shows teachers trying to address problem classrooms, he said. He described a *Lord of the Flies* scenario with bands of teenagers characterized by bullying, gangs, the "flat-lining of culture" and promiscuity.

He blamed the problems on "too little parents and too much day care," noting that 92 per cent of children over the age of 18 months to age five are in the state's heavily subsidized day care system. Instead of developing the necessary psychological attachment to adults, children are raised in large groups of their peers. This impedes child maturation, he said.

The day care policy has deteriorated the confidence parents have in raising their children as decisions are deferred to the state, he said. Parents have become "co-ordinators of activities" rather than mothers and fathers with relationships with their children, and children are suffering because of a lack of attachment to their parents.

Sweden outlaws homeschooling, imposing fines of \$40,000 (Cdn.) on families that want to teach their children at home, he said. Yet government day care is also deteriorating, with higher and higher ratios of workers to children.

Even though seven out of 10 mothers would prefer to be home longer with their children, there is little public debate not dominated by feminist ideology, he said. The political ideology has made the upbringing of children a state decision rather than a parental decision based on the needs of the individual child, he said. A prominent Swedish politician recently spoke of the child's "right" to day care and families that wish to take care of their children at home are viewed as violating that child's right.

New Zealand's social experimentation with legalizing prostitution and criminalizing spanking or "smacking" has also produced adverse unforeseen consequences, according to Greg Fleming, CEO of the Maxim Institute, a public policy think tank in that nation.

Brothels have been popping up in residential suburbs, Fleming said, and municipalities can only use their regulatory power to keep them away from schools. Fleming challenged the fundamental assumptions that led to the legalization, beliefs that the sex trade has no harmful consequences in itself, and that the dangers of prostitution stemmed from its illegality that forced women to work outside the protection of authorities.

"The next generation is more realistic about the inherently damaging nature of prostitution."

New Zealand's anti-smacking law has seen 300 families prosecuted for "smacking," he said, and even if the charges are eventually dropped or proven false in court, the trauma a family faces begins when the police arrive at the door. The law gives police a wide discretion in whether to prosecute these cases, but this has eroded family confidence in discipline. Even enforcing a "time out" could potentially run a parent afoul of the law, Fleming said, and a recent study showed that a significant proportion of children had threatened their parents with reporting them to authorities.

Fleming noted that similar ideology underlies the anti-smacking law as that behind the Swedish day care model. Children are seen as "little adults" who must be protected against assault. The rights of children are seen not in the context of families must protect and care for them, but as individuals who must be "empowered" like women and groups that experience racism, he said.

This ideology has a deleterious effect on the rights of families and the care of children, and sees freedom only in the context of the choices of the atomized individual, he said.