

# BUSTING THE MYTHS OF SWEDISH FAMILY POLICY

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Presentation May 5, 2011 in Ottawa, Canada  
for Institute of Marriage and Family Canada



...welfare and development through family

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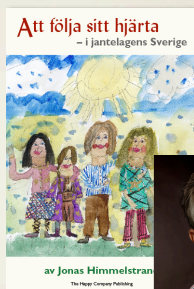
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## Personal details

- \* Author of "Following your heart – in the social utopia of Sweden"
- \* Founder of the Mireja Institute, [www.mireja.org](http://www.mireja.org)
- \* Member of the Haro National Board, [www.haro.se](http://www.haro.se)
- \* President of Rohus, [www.rohus.nu](http://www.rohus.nu)
- \* Self-employed management consultant since 1981
- \* Married to Tamara and father of three children



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## Busting the myth of Swedish family policy

- \* **The Swedish family model**
- \* **The family outcomes**
- \* **Possible causal explanations**
- \* **Social and political outcomes**
- \* **What do Swedes want?**
- \* **Conclusions**

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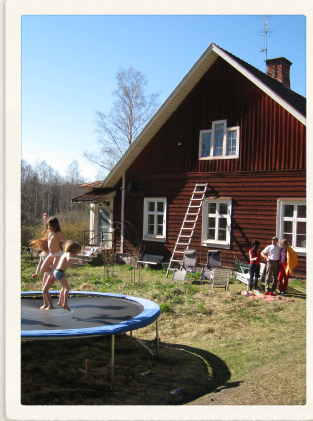
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## The great Swedish statistics

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



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## Swedish family model

- \* No babies in day care – only parental leave.
- \* 92% of all 18 month-5 year olds are in day care.
- \* Day care low cost to parents, 90% tax subsidized.
- \* Day care subsidie > CAD 20000 per child/year.
- \* No national home care allowance – no tax benefits.
- \* Day care and dual-earner household strongly encouraged both culturally and financially.
- \* Home care discouraged, and socially marginalized.
- \* Home schooling in effect illegal – prosecution.

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## Envisioned family 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 work.
- \* The vision of the "work policy" – every adult in employed (tax-creating) work.

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## Actual family outcomes

- \* Strong decrease in psychological health in youth.
- \* Discipline problems and poor results in schools.
- \* High rates of sick leave among women.
- \* Day care staff top the sick leave statistics.
- \* Deteriorating parental abilities, even middle-class.
- \* Quality in Swedish day care is deteriorating.
- \* Total fertility rate – high in Europe, low in Nordic
- \* Highly gender segregated labour market.

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## Outcomes in quality of care

- \* 1/5 of all day care groups more than 21 children.
- \* Day care group sizes for under 3s are never below 10 children, often 14 and sometimes 17 children.
- \* Day care group sizes for the 3-5 year olds can be upwards 30 children.
- \* Average day care child-staff ratio all ages is slightly above 5:1, but 7:1 and even 10:1 exist.
- \* No regulation of group sizes or child-staff ratios. Both are continuously increasing.
- \* A traditional focus on play is now more and more being diverged to learning and pedagogics.

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## Possible causal explanations

- \* Lack of adult attachment in infants can create chronically low thresholds for stress throughout life.
- \* High early exposure to large groups of peers, leads to peer-orientation which impedes child maturation.
- \* Peer-orientation leads to disinterest in learning, bullying, gangs, flat-lining of culture, promiscuity.
- \* The culturally endorsed early separation of infants causes stress in parents, and in worst case sick-leave.
- \* Large state intervention in family life, reduces parents sense of responsibility for their children.

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## Political and social outcomes

- \* Little public debate – the subject is too sensitive.
- \* Day care claimed to be "... a part of normal Swedish life, just like school" whenever questioned.
- \* The possibility of a future compulsory day care: "Every child has a right to day care."
- \* Home care and "house-wives" bullied in the media.
- \* The word "family" is becoming politically incorrect.
- \* Civil society is dying – government takes over.
- \* A strongly politised discussion on child-rearing.

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## What do Swedes want?

- \* A large number of studies during the last decades show that a great majority of Swedish women and families want more time with their small children.
- \* A recent study showed that 7 out of 10 mothers want to be home longer with their children. Young mothers want it more than older.
- \* More than half of the mothers believed that more mothers would want to be stay-at-home moms, if they could.

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## Reasonable conclusions

- \* Swedish family policies have lead to negative developmental outcomes for children, parents, and families.
- \* Swedish family policies are not emotionally sustainable – a possibly not even democratically sustainable.
- \* The basic reason for the negative developments is that individual child care has become a state political decision based on political ideology, rather than a parental decision, based on the needs of the individual child.
- \* Swedish family policies have to be tested by careful multidisciplinary research before any nation attempts to copy them.
- \* Every society has to protect parents rights and reasonable possibilities to make their own choice about care for their children, without involvement from government in the decision.
- \* The institution of family needs support and respect from society and government as the key institution for close relationships in the world today.

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Thank you for your attention!

Questions?

These slides will be available within a week at:  
[www.mireja.org/110505.html](http://www.mireja.org/110505.html)

[jonas@mireja.org](mailto:jonas@mireja.org)



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## Links

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

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

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