



Scandinavian Unexceptionalism

How Sweden's wealth, work and motivation have suffered due to the welfare state

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Given how often Sweden is held up as a shining example of equality, social welfare and economic success, the IMFC is examining these claims in the coming weeks. Today Andrea Mrozek reviews a new book that reveals the economic realities across Scandinavia. Economic prosperity affects families, so we start our Swedish series here.



Sweden. Home to IKEA, the Swedish Chef, Swedish meatballs...and the most comprehensive cradle to grave welfare system in the western world. Touted as a "third way" in economic systems, it was to have been compatible with the growth and prosperity of free markets whilst simultaneously offering an unparalleled social safety net. The idea of Sweden as a kind of utopia remains.

This is in spite of the evidence, sadly. In a recent book, Swedish author Nima

Sanandaji provides further fodder to reconsider the welfare systems of all Nordic countries. *Scandinavian Unexceptionalism*, published in 2015 by the UK-based Institute of Economic Affairs, argues that Scandinavia thrives thanks to a historic legacy of economic, social and cultural strength and community cohesion, not because of their welfare states.¹

A drop in wealth

Some Canadian activists and policymakers hold up Scandinavian countries as models to emulate.² Sanandaji instead writes the opposite, that Sweden could learn a lot from us: "Canada is a role model for Sweden, since it has successfully moved towards a model that rewards work and entrepreneurship."

Sweden fell from fourth richest nation in the world in 1975 to 13th by the mid-90s. Following free-market reforms at that time, they climbed back up to 10th by 2010.³



In 2004, only 38 of 100 businesses with the highest revenues in Sweden were privately owned. And only two of those 38 opened their doors after 1970.⁴ (IKEA, for example, began in 1943.)

Sweden fell from fourth richest nation in the world in 1975 to 13th by the mid-90s.

Also in Sweden, net job creation between 1950 and 2000 was close to zero in spite of the increase in population.⁵

Then there are the high rates of hidden unemployment. This happens when the government classifies individuals on various government programs as "employed."⁶ The Swedish government reported unemployment rates of about five per cent in 2004, but a McKinsey report in 2006 showed in reality unemployment was somewhere closer to 17 percent.⁷

Some of the most interesting sections of the book explore why Scandinavians accept such high taxation. The obvious answer is ideological support for social welfare. Less obvious, however, is that much of the government revenues collected are hidden from taxpayers.

Indirect or hidden taxes include things like social security contributions. Across Scandinavia, indirect taxation has risen drastically. In Finland, between 1965 and 2013, hidden taxes like the Value Added Tax ("VAT") and mandatory social security contributions rose from eight percent of GDP to 22 percent.⁸ In Denmark, indirect taxation rose from four to 10 percent; in Norway from four to 18 percent and in Sweden, indirect taxes rose from four to 19 percent.⁹

A drain on motivation

Consider the true story of a Swedish dentist who practiced only three days a week in the late 1980s. The remaining two days weren't worth it; the returns would have been taken entirely by taxes. The book gives statistics showing the decline in motivation, an increase in sick time and early retirement in spite of good physical health. According to the World Values Survey, in Sweden, there has been a substantial increase in the percentage of people who believe abusing government benefits isn't always wrong.¹⁰



Shockingly, "Sweden exhibits the highest level of wealth inequality... The reason for this uniquely uneven wealth distribution is that many Swedish households depend on government safety nets and thus have limited savings."¹¹

There are additional issues in Sweden in particular that go unaddressed. Sweden has experienced steep decline in education outcomes, inviting the OECD to investigate why. Not only were education outcomes falling, but Swedish students show a lack of motivation to work hard, with increasing rates of students showing up to school late.¹²

Ultimately, this book about Scandinavia must be taken in global context. Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Norway remain remarkable nations, and poverty there is not what it

is in other places around the globe.

Yet for all the ballyhooing about the success of Scandinavia, it is wise to read this myth busting empirical assessment. Where many would like to believe Scandinavia proves socialism works, in actual fact, the limitless spending, big government programs and high taxation functions exactly as most economists would predict: big governments run out of money, while running their people into dependency, necessitating economic reforms toward a more frugal course.

While some Canadians look to emulate Sweden, it's good to consider those Swedes, like Sanandaji, looking to become more like Canada.

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¹ Sanandaji, N. (2015). *Scandinavian unexceptionalism: Culture, markets and the failure of third-way socialism*. London: Institute of Economic Affairs.

² Anderssen, E. (2013, October 23). What the world can teach Canada about building better daycare. *Globe and Mail*. Retrieved online from <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/parenting/what-the-world-can-teach-canada-about-building-better-daycare/article15036667/?page=all>

³ Sanandaji, p. 27.

⁴ Sanandaji, p. 23.

⁵ Sanandaji, p. 33.

⁶ Sanandaji, p. 40.

⁷ Sanandaji, p. 41.

⁸ Sanandaji, p. 45.

⁹ Sanandaji, pp. 44-45.

¹⁰ Sanandaji, p. 75.

¹¹ Sanandaji, p. 60.

¹² Maclean's. (2015, May 8). What the failure of Sweden's schools can teach Canadians. Retrieved from <http://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/what-the-failure-of-swedens-schools-can-teach-canadians/>



Swedish daycare: International example or cautionary tale?

Part I: A look at Sweden after 40 years of public daycare

JONAS HIMMELSTRAND



Sweden is a pioneer in public, tax-subsidised, out-of-home daycare. In 1975, the Swedish government made public daycare available and affordable to all. Daycare expanded greatly during the 1980s and was made even cheaper in 2002 when a maximum fee (*maxtaxa*) was introduced. No matter how many children, no matter how many hours they spend in care, no matter how high your income – you never pay more

than a fixed maximum amount, which is SEK 2574 monthly, or just below CAD \$400. A low income family with one child would pay around CAD \$150 per month.¹

Daycare in Sweden is tax-subsidised at a rate of between CAD \$18,000 to CAD \$23,000 per child annually. Parents who stay home, in most municipalities, receive no benefits of any kind. In high-tax Sweden this forces many home care families into poverty.

The result, not surprisingly, is that daycare is the new norm in Sweden. Over 90 percent of all 18 month to 5-years-olds are in daycare.²

Since Canadians look to Sweden as an international example, it is wise to ask: Is the Swedish model a best practise to copy or a cautionary tale?

HOW SWEDISH DAYCARE GOT ITS START

In 1978, the women's caucus of the ruling Social Democratic party, a party that was in power for the better part of 40 years, published *The Family of the Future: A Socialistic Family Policy*.³

The pamphlet strongly called for state-funded, affordable daycare. The goals were 1) better outcomes in child social development and academic achievement, 2) class equity, and 3) gender equity (or, as they put it, the liberation of women from their maternal instincts).

THE RESULTS

Forty years later, official statistics show that the anticipated outcomes have not been realized. Poor outcomes are acknowledged across the political spectrum, but these are not connected to the daycare system in any way. Furthermore, there is surprisingly little interest in finding out why they exist at all. The following list shows what the outcomes are.

1. Rapidly declining psychological health in youth

Physical health among Swedish youth is among the best in the world, but the same cannot be said for psychological wellbeing. An official Swedish government investigation in 2006 showed that **mental health among Swedish 15-year-olds declined faster from 1986 to 2002 than in eleven comparable European countries.**⁴



For girls, rates of poor mental health tripled during this period, from nine to 30 percent. According to the latest report in 2014 from the Public Health Agency of Sweden (*Folkhälsomyndigheten*) the numbers have remained at these high levels.⁵

The study is based on self-reported symptoms such as anxiety, fright and alarm – a point to which we will return later. The

increase happened in all groups of youth regardless of family situation, labour market situation or parental socioeconomic status. These self-reported studies are confirmed by a comparable increase in diagnosed psychiatric illness among youth during the same period.

Suicide attempts among Swedish youth are also increasing.

The Public Health Agency of Sweden is careful about how to interpret these findings. They say they do not know the reasons, but possible causes could be a tougher labour market or cultural changes, like increased individualisation.

2. Increased sick leave among women

Sick leave for Swedish women is among the highest in Europe with half of all the women leaving work before age 65, due to psycho-social stress.⁶

A 2005 study showed that the first generation of Swedish mothers who used the new daycare system had an “extremely high” rate of sick leave in contrast with other European countries.⁷

Anecdotal evidence tells the story of stressed out mothers, who feel coerced, both culturally and financially, to leave their one-year-olds in daycare. That many parents prefer to care for youngest children at home is well-known.

3. The deteriorating quality of parenthood

A study by school consultant Britta Johansson published in 2007 in the Swedish daily *Svenska Dagbladet* under the title To Dare to Set Limits showed that even healthy, intelligent and reasonable middle class Swedish parents are losing their parental abilities.⁸ They are unaware of their children's needs and are not able to set limits. She concludes:

The public offer of full day child care seems to make many parents lose grip on their own responsibility. They believe/want that their children are raised by the daycare/school and believe that the experts on their children are found there.

She also states the obvious: Daycare/school can never fill the gaps caused by parents' lack of time or their lack of trust in themselves.

This is confirmed by Swedish school teachers, counsellors and psychologists.

4. Highly gender segregated labour market

Sweden is often hailed as a model for gender equality. It shouldn't be.

The Swedish labour market is among the most gender segregated in the world, not just in the west.⁹ Men typically work at well-paid jobs in the private sector, and women in comparatively lower paid jobs in the public sector.

Although the rate of employment of Swedish women may be among the highest in the western world, comparatively few women reach top career positions, public or private. Neither has Sweden ever had a woman prime minister or president, differing from all other Nordic countries.

Rather Swedish women have become "public mothers" as they work largely in daycares, schools and the healthcare sector.

5. Plummeting school results

PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) is the tool used by the Operation for Economic Cooperation and Development to rank country academic outcomes.

PISA studies show that Swedish school results for 15-year-olds in mathematics, science and reading have gone from above OECD average in years 2000 and 2003 to well below the OECD average in 2012. **No other country participating in PISA has seen a stronger decline in student performance in the past decade.**

The results are so shocking that the Swedish Government asked the OECD to evaluate the Swedish school system.

The OECD report identifies several problems in the Swedish school system, one of which

is the lack of high academic expectations on the pupils.¹⁰ Report author Andreas Schleicher writes: "At the top of the list is the need to raise standards and aspirations for students." The OECD report emphasises the need for better teacher performance too, among other things.

The OECD report does not mention daycare as a possible negative influence on Swedish school results. It seems clear from the report that they have not even conceived of daycare as a possible correlation to later academic performance.



6. Disorder in Swedish classrooms

Both PISA and TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) research shows that Sweden has a high degree of disorder in its classrooms.¹¹ This includes tardiness, truancy, bad language and disorderly behaviour. Again this is confirmed by Swedish teachers and headmasters.

LOW QUALITY CARE, NO QUESTIONS ASKED

Swedish daycare has the reputation of being high quality. This was true during the 1980s when Sweden had stricter regulations over group sizes and child-to-adult ratios.

By 1990, the average group size was almost 14 children with a child-to-adult ratio of 4.2 children per adult. Children under three were typically in groups of eight to nine children with three adults. Today, many children under age three are in groups of 17 children or more.

The number of adults may vary with sick-leave – daycare staff are one of the top three categories in taking sick-leave – and often substitutes are not used to save money. This means that **some days a group of 17 children under three can have only two or even one adult for several hours.**

Some Swedish experts are concerned that Swedish daycare quality is in some cases so low that healthy child development may be at risk. Two books on the subject have been published recently: *Daycare for the Smallest Children – for Good and for Bad* (2009)¹² and *Are the Children Doing Alright in Daycare?* (2014).¹³

In *Are the Children Doing Alright in Daycare?* Professor Ulla Waldenström, asks for more research on the effects of daycare on children's development. She notes that no substantial research on daycare has been done in Sweden since two small studies in the 1980s.

This is puzzling given the enormous possible effects of a phenomena involving over 90 percent of all preschool children at the most sensitive ages, and with allocations of two to three percent of national spending.

Before other countries copy Sweden's public daycare system, they should be careful to consider what the results have been.



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ENDNOTES

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² Swedish parental leave is 16 months. As a result, there are no babies under age one in daycare.

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Swedish daycare: International example or cautionary tale?

Part II: Weak parenting, big problems

JONAS HIMMELSTRAND



Sweden has youth with poor psychological health and poor school results, and stressed parents with weak parenting skills. Why?

Is there a causal relationship between the negative outcomes and the introduction of public affordable daycare initiated 40 years ago?

If so, there would be every reason to warn other nations contemplating the model until a more comprehensive understanding of the Swedish developments has been reached.

The Swedish government will go far to refute any causal claims. This is understandable. If causality was true it would be a near political disaster.

Typically, loyal government experts say that the poor psychological wellbeing is due to too many choices for young people today,¹ that school results and behaviour are due to lack of demands on the students, and that Swedish parents have never been more interested in their children (which may actually be an indicator that they have lost their parenting instincts).

They go on: Women on sick-leave is caused by men not helping enough at home. The gender-segregated labour market simply shows that child care and parental leave need to be even more regulated. A top political issue in Sweden today is different ways to force the sharing of parental leave between parents, forcing them to take a third to a half each or lose their leave.

While there may be some truth in these official explanations, they do not tell the whole story. It is also not right to consider every angle, to plumb every possible cause of the poor outcomes, *except* the daycare system.

Most developmental psychologists agree these children and youth need a stronger adult presence in their lives. The problem is that Swedish parents have lost trust in themselves. They have been informed by the medical profession, government agencies, media debate and modern Swedish culture in the erroneous belief that every child needs daycare from age one to develop and flourish.

A NOTE ABOUT CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Parents see well-planned daycare centres with abundant pedagogical materials and it is easy for them to feel they can never offer anything similar to their child. **But what daycare offers is not what children need, especially not for small children under three or four years of age.**

Developmental psychology is clear in this respect: Small children's first needs include a close emotional attachment to a caring adult, something which is difficult to offer consistently in a daycare centre setting, but is easy for the parent who chooses home care – or care with a caring relative, neighbour or close friend.



Swedish children and youth clearly need more involvement from those responsible for them – the key persons being parents. But presenting this message is no longer easy for a generation of parents who have been led to believe daycare, school, and before- and after-school activities will do a good share of the parenting and furthermore, do it better than they can.

This is the most destructive message in the whole Swedish daycare scheme. **When parents lose their parenting responsibilities and their key role with their children, there are problems, big problems.**

In the area of child development, Canada has one of the world's foremost active experts today, Dr. Gordon Neufeld in Vancouver.² Viewing the situation from the developmental science and attachment theory tells a different story about the children.

Modern neuroscience shows that too much separation from loving adults – usually parents – in the early years can result in a chronically lowered threshold of anxiety through life.³ This means that young people would be more easily affected by stress even as adults. Recall that studies show Swedish youth are reporting heightened rates of anxiety and fear.

Several other longitudinal studies on daycare show that this could be the case. A major, U.S.-based, peer-reviewed and longitudinal NICHD study shows a correlation between more hours in out-of-home care before four and a half years of age (54 months) and behavioural problems in childhood and risk-taking as teens.⁴ Several other studies show similar results.

According to modern developmental psychology, behavioural problems are typically the result of emotional defences that are heightened due to emotional overload. This can include too much separation from parents or care-takers particularly in the early years but also later, during childhood and youth. Emotional defences in turn may impede normal child development.

THE PROBLEM OF PEER ORIENTATION

When children and youth lack emotional contact with parents and teachers they turn to their peers for emotional

support. This is called peer-orientation. The result is a strengthened influence from peers and the weakened influence of parents, teachers and other caring adults. Peers typically do not have the maturity to deal with deep emotions and existential decisions. After all, youth still need emotional support and guidance from mature adults.



Peer-orientation often leads to emotional wounds resulting in emotional defences, poor mental well-being, as shown by increased stress levels and anxiety and less motivation to learn. This may well be a dynamic involved in the pupils attitudes to education in Swedish schools.

We also know that with modern information technology, parenting has generally become more challenging. Children and youth often access each other more easily through e-mail, texting and social media than they do the adults in their lives – parents, relatives and teachers. This puts greater demands on parenting.

In Sweden, parenthood has weakened during a time when it needed to be strengthened. **Many Swedish youth are raising themselves in immature peer cultures with little or no adult involvement** – a development seen more or less in the entire western world.

The conclusion can only be that a causal relationship between the Swedish family policies and these negative outcomes cannot be ruled out. **If Sweden offered a true choice of child care including home care, home-based daycares, daycare, nannies or any other form of care parents might choose, the situation might be somewhat different, as it is in Finland.** But when the state uses financial power to only support daycare, many parents lose their sense of importance to their children.

THE ISSUE THAT MUST NOT BE NAMED

Why doesn't the Swedish government report or react to these facts?

Given the public emotion that would likely be stirred up if the ubiquitous daycare scheme was truly questioned, the majority in Parliament has every interest in concealing the issues. For presumably similar reasons, Swedish media seldom give space to any critique of the scheme.

This raises the question of whether any government should involve itself in promoting any specific form of child care through financial, cultural means or otherwise – it easily gets too emotional for a serious democratic discussion.

At the bottom of the issue is, of course, that once Swedish parents have accepted that putting their one-year-olds in daycare is the only real option, they do not want to hear that other choices could be better.

It is hard to explain the phenomenal cultural pressure in favour of daycare to a non-Swede, and even to a Swede who is not a parent. Many Swedish parents panic when their child turns one. They feel there is no way they can possibly cater for the needs of their child. They simply must go to daycare. Although this is a completely erroneous idea, neither government institutions nor most experts or media do anything to refute it. Rather there is a sort of silent agreement among Swedish politicians, institutions, experts, opinion-makers, media and even many parents that daycare is good, and must be good, whatever problems it may have.

This means that **once a Swedish-style daycare scheme is accepted it may be difficult to change. Sweden is already in this difficult-to-reverse situation.**

There is another risk: A Swedish-style daycare scheme may produce great economic results and increase female work life participation in the short term, where the negative developmental outcomes for children and youth may take decades to surface.

CONCLUSION

No one can prove the Swedish daycare scheme has been good for children, youth, parents or gender equality. Neither can it be denied that evidence suggests, even if it does not prove, that there may be long-term detrimental effects of the early separation between children and parents on a mass scale without real parental choice.

No modern western nation has yet fully solved the issue of child care, women employment and gender equality. As was stated in a 2014 Canadian CBC documentary called The Motherlode, feminism forgot the children. A strong political force speaking for the needs of children is yet to come.

Ultimately, child care must be a parental decision based on the needs of the individual child – unlike in Sweden, where it has become a political decision based on other factors like gender equality and other ideologies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- We should look to the sprouts of a post-daycare society; families who for various reasons have chosen a different path than daycare. They have chosen home care, granny care, aunt care, neighbour care, taking children to work, or working from home or otherwise. Sweden has hundreds of these dissident families fighting their way against the tide.
- **If affordable public child care is to be introduced then Finland is a better model than Sweden and it has the better outcomes to show for it.** Finland has affordable public daycare just like Sweden but it also gives parents a reasonable choice through the home care allowance, which is the equivalent to

between 500 to 750 Canadian dollars monthly. Some municipalities top this off with additional financial support.⁵

- **Home care allowances give parents a clear message that the choice of child care is theirs** – daycare or home care or otherwise – and the state is supporting child care but being more neutral to its form and not supporting one form of child care against another.

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Scandinavian Unexceptionalism

Swedish daycare: International exception or cautionary tale?

Swedish daycare 2: Weak parenting, big problems

JONAS HIMMELSTRAND



Sweden, Finland, Norway, Denmark and Iceland constitute the Nordic countries. Despite some similarities, there is no coherent Nordic model for family policy.

One key difference is on financial support given directly to parents through a *home care allowance* (a literal translation from the term used in Finland).

Here, Finland and Sweden take opposite approaches. In Finland, a home care allowance is a feature of family policy, available to all who choose it and firmly supported by successive governments since 1985 until this day.

Finland's approach

Finland has had financial support for parents since 1985. It is used by 56 percent of eligible children under three years of age (2011).¹

The Finnish home care allowance is

- 340 euros (approximately CAD \$500) per month, per child age three and under after parental leave is over
- Additional children under three get an additional 100 euros (about CAD \$150) per month. Children above three but under school age are given 65 euros (just under CAD \$100) per month, per child, as long as at least one child under three is at home.²

All Nordic countries, with the exception of Sweden, offer some form of home care allowance to those who do not use tax-subsidized daycare after parental leave, up until the child's second (as in Norway) or third birthday.

Finland offers a choice of subsidized child care through either daycare or the home care allowance which can be used for home care, granny care, neighbour care or other private forms of care. Sweden for the last 40 years has offered only daycare on the national level with the exception of a few months in 1994.

There is little political controversy in Finland about the home care allowance. This is in stark contrast to the Swedish view that public daycare is always best for child outcomes and gender equality.

The Swedish case

Sweden has essentially eschewed a home care allowance.

After a brief attempt to institute one in 1994, a second attempt was made in 2008 when the government reintroduced a more limited form of a home care allowance at 3000 SEK, or about CAD \$470 monthly, per child. Offering this was a choice and only about one third of municipalities did. This will be cancelled at the end of 2015 by the current social-democratic government.

Many polls show that 60 to 80 percent of the Swedish population want some form of financial support for home care.³

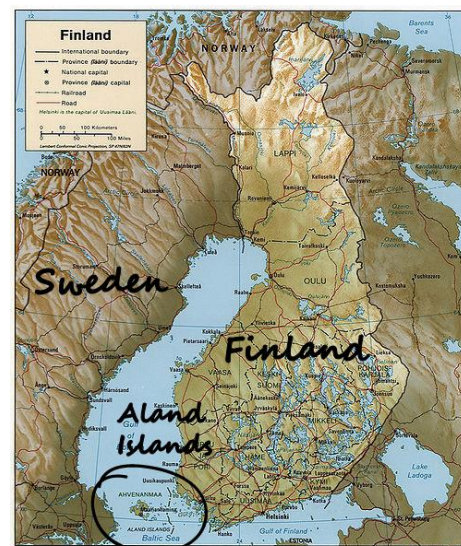
While proponents argue for funding fairness and choice, opponents argue that the home care allowance is detrimental to gender equality and, without any conclusive evidence, even to child development.

Opponents are also concerned that a disproportionate number of immigrant families use the home care allowance. Yet even for this, the numbers remain low. In the municipalities where the allowance was available seven percent of women born outside of Sweden used it as compared to four percent of women born in Sweden.⁴

A Finnish example – The Aland Islands

A completely different set of values meets you only 30 miles east of Sweden in the Finnish province of the Aland Islands. The Aland Islands are a Swedish speaking province, under Finnish sovereignty. There is no province outside of Sweden more Swedish than the Aland Islands. (Finland is bilingual: Finnish and Swedish, much like English and French in Canada.)

Being part of Finland, not Sweden, the Swedish-speaking inhabitants of the Aland Islands have the Finnish home care allowance and lack the Swedish dedication to daycare as the only option for child care.



The Finnish social-democratic Minister of Social Affairs of the Aland Islands, Carina Aaltonen, was recently interviewed by a Swedish newspaper about raising the amounts of the home care allowance to 500 euros (about CAD \$745) per child and month, and an extra 200 euros (about CAD \$300) as a gender equality bonus if the mother and father shared the time being home with the children.

Aaltonen said, "with the home care allowance we want to support parents to believe in their own ability to know what is best for the own child."⁵

Aaltonen diplomatically said that the social-democrats on the Aland Islands put a greater emphasis on parental rights and responsibilities than their political counterparts in Sweden.

Echoing the realities of developmental psychologists, Ms Aaltonen also says: [the first years] "...are an important time for children and parents to attach and it can also be a time in life to cool down, take it easy and not work full-time but to receive state support to be at home and take care of oneself and one's child."

She concludes by saying that raising the amounts of the home care allowance is costly, but a worthwhile investment: "Healthy families with children will create a healthy society."

Among Swedish parliamentarians, even the most passionate proponents of the home care allowance could hardly conceive of such an open expression on the key role of parents in raising children.

As a side note, the top political position on the Aland Islands is held by a woman, Camilla Gunell. Finland also had a woman president, Tarja Halonen from 2000 to 2006, and two female prime ministers, both in the 2000s. Swedish women have yet to rival these accomplishments.

Results

Percentage of children in daycare, 2013

Two year olds		Three year olds		Four year olds	
Finland	Sweden	Finland	Sweden	Finland	Sweden
52%	92%	68%	96%	74%	98%

Source: Nordic Council of Ministers, Nordic Statistics, Social integration and income, Day care, CHIL03: Children in day-care by reporting country, age, type and time⁶

With the home care allowance, Finnish parents were given a subsidized alternative to daycare – home care – and about half of them chose it. Nine out of ten Swedish parents chose daycare as no other subsidized options were offered.

There is no conclusive evidence that daycare is better for children's development than parents choosing home care.

In ambitious welfare states, public spending on child care makes sense. What doesn't is supporting only one form of child care. A child care monoculture with state-funded daycare as the only option can be harmful long-term.

Paying daycare staff to raise children and not the parents who want to do so at home makes no sense and will negatively affect culture and society.

Neither is this approach in alignment with the human rights conventions explicitly stating in various ways that the choice of raising and educating children is the responsibility of the parents, not the state.⁷

What do children need? A note on developmental psychology

Developmental psychology tells us there is a great difference between starting daycare at age one or at age three. A three-year-old has more in common with an adult than with a one-year-old. Developmental psychologists have known for decades that children under three or four typically are not developmentally ready for bigger groups and social contact with peers.

Without inferring further causality--as there are so many factors influencing social outcomes--the developmental outcomes for Swedish children and youth are significantly worse in both psychological health and school outcomes than in Finland, as shown in an [earlier article](#).

Finland, on the other hand, is consistently one of the top nations in education outcomes as measured by PISA. Mental health development in youth is better than in Sweden, too. There is also a stronger cultural support of parenthood in Finland.

Having lived in both countries, I would say that Finnish parents are generally more confident than Swedish parents.

Even if many factors are involved in these developments, the high exposure to early daycare in Sweden certainly cannot be ruled out as a substantial factor to the negative effects on child development and parenthood seen in Sweden.

Certainly, it is inarguable that the **Finnish school results have flourished in spite of less daycare attendance.**

CONCLUSION

Child care support will differ in different nations depending on the history and political culture. However, the basic needs of children are always the same. Children do best in a family environment of warmth, love and happiness. Only parents can judge how these needs are to be understood for the individual child. **Therefore, the decision of child care must stay with the parents without the influence of political agendas, economic, ideological or otherwise.**

The Nordic countries all have a political culture of high taxes and high subsidies. In this context, Finland is offering variety – daycare and the home care allowance. Sweden on the other hand has chosen a child care monoculture, providing only institutional daycare. Finland has all the signs of more successful child outcomes.

Of course, countries with other political cultures will choose different solutions. Keeping in mind that children's needs are the same, governments need to keep their child care policies neutral and not try and influence care decisions, which only parents can make.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- States need their policies to be neutral to forms of child care and not support one form of care above another through subsidies or propaganda. Choosing forms of child care, including home care, must be a parental decision only
- If tax-subsidised daycare is to be introduced there needs to be a corresponding financial support for home care, granny care and other private forms of care as for example the Finnish home care allowance
- Canadians wishing to learn from the Nordic countries should examine Finland

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Endnotes

¹ Duvander, A.Z. and Cedstrand, S. (2012). *Vårdnadsbidrag, En översikt av systemen i de nordiska länderna*. (Home care allowance, cash for childcare, a review of the systems in the Nordic countries.) 2012 Nordens Välfärdscenter. Retrieved from <http://www.nordicwelfare.org/Publications/Cash-for-childcare/>

² Some municipalities have chosen to increase the amount, in some cases doubling it.

³ "64 percent of voters want the state to make it financially possible for parents to be home until [their children are] four years of age. Among blue-collar workers the support is 76 percent. Among social-democratic voters, 65 percent." From Kågeson, P. (2006). *Tid för barn* (Time for children) SNS Förlag; "81 percent of the voters want to keep or improve the present home care allowance. Only 8 percent want to abolish the allowance and 77 percent want to keep or increase the present amount." From Sifo Research International in *Svenska Dagbladet*. (2006, April 28). *Föräldrar vill sköta hemma* (Parents want homecare.) Retrieved from <http://www.svd.se/foraldrar-vill-skota-hemma>; Sifo Research International in *Svenska Dagbladet*. (2010, April 28). *Väljarna vill ha vårdnadsbidraget* (Voters want a home care allowance.) Retrieved from <http://www.svd.se/valjarna-vill-ha-vardnadsbidraget>

⁴ Government Offices of Sweden, Ministry of Health and Social Affairs. (2015). *Det kommunala vårdnadsbidraget avskaffas* (The home care allowance repealed.) Governmental proposition Ds 2015:19. Retrieved from <http://www.regeringen.se/contentassets/3ee6421d967e49cc94de80e22d0ab520/det-kommunala-vardnadsbidrag-et-avskaffas-ds-201519>

⁵ Teglund, S. (2015, May 11). *S-minister gillar vårdnadsbidrag* (Social-democratic minister likes the home care allowance.) *Världen Idag*. Retrieved from <http://www.varldenidag.se/nyhet/2015/05/11/S-minister-gillar-vardnadsbidrag/>

⁶ Nordic Council of Ministers, Nordic Statistics, Social integration and income, Day care, CHIL03. Children in daycare by reporting country, age, type and time.

Retrieved from <http://91.208.143.100/pxweb/norden/pxweb/en/Nordic%20Statistics/>

⁷ UN Convention of the Rights of the Child. Preamble: "Recognizing that the child, for the full and harmonious development of his or her personality, should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding..." Retrieved from <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>; European Convention on Human Rights, Protocol 1, Article 2: "No person shall be denied the right to education. In the exercise of any functions which it assumes in relation to education and to teaching, the State shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions." Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/digital-agenda/sites/digital-agenda/files/Convention_ENG.pdf; United Nations Universal declaration on Human Rights, Article 26–3: "Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children." Retrieved from <http://www.un.org/en/documents/udhr/>



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