

## Child welfare in Sweden

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## A brief description of Sweden

- Population of nine million people
- Half of these are concentrated to just 3% of the country's area.
- Roughly 13 % are immigrants in Sweden
- Since second world war a very homogenous nation to a multi-ethnic nation since 1960s-1990s
- During 1990s the welfare system was severely eroded.
- Dramatic changes in unemployment figures from 3 % to 8-10% during 2009. And was 7,4 Dec 2010. (25% for those under 25 years 2011)

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## The Welfare Model

- All Scandinavian countries dominated by the welfare model
- Universal approach - directed to all as not to stigmatise the few, as opposed to a residual approach

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## Limitations of the Welfare Model

- To benefit from the general welfare systems, individuals need to be part of the labour market
- Young people have often not yet entered the labour market ( 25% unemployment for those under 25 years)
- If they don't have access to support from their network, they will be dependent on means-tested support from social services

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## Family policy today

- Around 75 % of the children in Sweden live in nuclear families with both parents
- 50% are born out of wedlock
- Amongst 17 year old, one in every three has experienced divorce and is more likely to be living with the mother than the father

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## Current issues and trends in the child welfare system

- The emergence of the welfare state after second world war reduced the number of children in residential care from 20 per 1000 to 10 per 1000.
- The family continuity principle dismantled the institutions for children
- The extended family is looked upon as an asset to children at risk - not a source of family pathologies
- Increased number of placements in care – in spite of the family oriented perspective
- Towards a more child-oriented perspective?

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## Laws concerning Child Welfare

- No special Children's Act in Sweden. The equivalent of a child welfare law is found in:  
The Social Services Act - serves as a regulatory frame for different areas of social support - voluntary measures

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## Laws concerning Child Welfare

- The Care of Young People Act - regulates taking children and young people into care - mandatory measures. Criminality among children and young people ( under 20) are treated within the child welfare system.
- Law of Secure Institutional Treatment – part of the Criminal Code. Provides an opportunity to incarcerate young offender in homes for “special supervision”.
- 2008 only 541 young people in jail, none were under 18! All committed severe crimes (murder, assault etc)

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## Child Welfare in Sweden

- The Swedish social service authorities duties related to child welfare are as stated below:
- In partnership with families to support children's personal, physical and social development
- To monitor children who show signs of unfavourable development
- To make sure that children at risk get protection and support according to their needs, and if it is deemed to be in the best interest of the child to place children in care outside their families.

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## Preventive measures

- 28 100 children and young people were sometimes during 2008 the subject of some kinds of preventive measures
- Most common among 13 - 17 years old

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## Contact families/Contact person

- About 21 200 children had contact person or a contact family at some time in 2008. Mostly used as a measure towards parents (especially single mothers) and children with a weak social network
- Most frequent for children under 13 years of age
- Gender difference - boys are given a contact person to a higher extent than girls (to give boys with single mothers a male role model?)

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## Statistics of children in care 2009

- About 23 000 children were in care within placement outside their own home.
- About 28 500 received care according to the (voluntary) Social Services Act
- About 5 000 received care according to the (compulsory) Care of Young Persons Act
- Approximately 4-5% of the grown up population have been in care during their childhood.
- 73 percent were placed in foster care
- 27 percent were placed in residential care

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### The Family; a risk and resource

- Younger children with problems and their families mostly get voluntary support within the welfare system. 0-12 y 0.38 % are placed out of home
- Teen-ageers are the majority-group of the Child Welfare. 1,24 % placed out of home in the age group 13-17 y.

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### Teenage placements

- Asocial behaviour 40%
- Conflict in the family 40%
- Inadequate care 30%
- Physical or sexual abuse 10%
- "Run aways" or "thrown-aways" 10 %
- Special needs care(refers to physically or mental impaired children with no help from parents)

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### Problems when coming into care

- 68% had behavioural problems
- 57% had schoolrelated problems
- 34% had a recent history of crime
- 25 % had a recent history of substance abuse
- 18% had obvious psychiatric problems
- 16% had a recent history of violence

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### Out-of-home care

- Out-of-home care shall be the last option
- For young people foster care is regarded as a superior solution compared to residential care
- If possible young children shall be placed in care together with parents
- If children have to be placed in care strong efforts shall be made to keep up contact with their parents

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## Foster care

- Birth parents keep custody of their children and the importance of helping children and parents to keep in contact is stressed
- According to the legislators, foster carers should provide supplementary parental care to foster children, not substitute parental care
- Adoption of children in care without the parent's consent does not exist

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## Residential care

- The Social Services Act of 1980 brought about a change - foster homes with more than four children was to be defined as a residential unit. Resulted in an expansion of small private residential units. A lot of these were former foster home
- 73 percent of residential units are dimensioned for nine children or less
- It is possible to place children in care together with their parents. 90 percent of children's homes for 0-12 years old admit children and parents placed together (in most cases - for assessment)

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## Recruitment of fosterparents

- Unregulated private foster care is illegal, all foster parents are assessed by social workers.
- After 1998 placement in kinship care have to be the first priority
- Approximately 8000 active foster homes in Sweden
- Several different types of foster homes.

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## Ethnicity and child welfare

- More than double risk for children to be in care if both parents are non-Swedish but it is more a question of poverty
- Hard to deem what is connected to cultural differences - and what is dysfunctional parenthood
- Parents with own traumas – a risk factor
- Un-accompanied refugee children (Iraq, Afghanistan & Somalia). 2000-3000/y.

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## Gender and Child Welfare

- Child welfare can be gendered biased - different measures towards girls and boys
  - Quiet introvert girls - less problematical
  - “Difficult”, noisy boys - more problematical
- For teenagers - the conduct of young people are judged according to their sex.
  - Girls - sexual activities problematical
  - Boys - acting out, criminality problematical
- The relationship between *mother* and child is emphasised. Fathers become peripheral.

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## Problematic issues concerning contact between parents and children in care

- A majority of parents with children in care have a difficult life situation
- Children who stay in care until they are teenagers are seldom reunited with parent
- Less contact with parents the longer the placement lasts
- At the age of 18 every seventh youth with five or more years in care had lost his/her mother or both parents. At the age of 25 every fourth had lost one or both parents

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## Some possible changes in the future

- A ”Childrens´ s Act” which will regulate welfare work up to the age of 21 (2011)
- Stengthen the child perspective in assesment
- Make it possible for young people (over 15) to independently apply for economic support

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## Some possible changes in the future

- Stengthen the monotoring needs and conditions for children in care, health and education
- More manual based assesment- and intervention
- Conclusion: more focus on the child/ young person as a subject, with individual right and individual agency

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