

Investigation Into the Scandinavian Child Welfare Models

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Location



Norway:

Norway is a country in northern Europe that shares the Scandinavian Peninsula with Sweden and Finland and has a population of 5.2 million people. The people of Norway have one of the highest standards of living in the world. There is a high life expectancy rate, and a low infant mortality rate. The unemployment rate is low at about 4% as of Sep 2017. Norway is a constitutional monarchy divided into 19 counties and each has a governor that is appointed by the king as well as a community council made up of elected officials. It is an egalitarian society, so income differences are small and health care and education is available to all.

There are approximately 1,113,000 children living in Norway which makes up about 21% of the population. In 2017, there were almost 49,000 investigations started by Norway's child welfare services and 55,000 children were prescribed assistance or care measures by the agency.

Sweden:

Sweden is one of the least populated countries in Europe, with a population of less than 10 million people. All people have access to publicly financed healthcare, child care, education, and other public services. Sweden is also a constitutional monarchy and the government is run by elected officials. Their unemployment rate is 5.9% as of Feb 2018. It is also an egalitarian society that places importance on gender equality.

There are approximately 2 million children living in Sweden. In 1979, Sweden became the first country to ban the corporal punishment of children. Spanking a child is a criminal offense according to Swedish Criminal Code.

Acknowledgements

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Poster created for Fall 2018 Global Social Work Poster Fair

Project Information

My proposed project was to conduct a comparative analysis of the Scandinavian child welfare model, focusing in on Norway and Sweden. I believe it was important to carry out my project in Scandinavia because Sweden, like other Scandinavian countries, is characterized as having a "family service" oriented child welfare model as opposed to a "child protection" oriented system that is common in English speaking countries, like here in the United States. I did research to learn about this preventative, family based approach before arriving and learned from practitioners in the field while I was there about how they implement this model and what the mechanisms are that they need to be able to do so. I also wanted to assess if this more holistic model of response impacts the likelihood of children being removed from the home or the services they receive.

I partnered with faculty at Oslo and Akershus University of Applied Sciences, the University of Michigan's partner University, in Oslo, Norway. I visited relevant agencies, shadowed professionals in the field, and conducted interviews with practitioners to learn about their services and best practices. One of these faculty had connections to a professional in Stockholm, Sweden who was currently working in child welfare there and had previously worked in Norway's system.

Outcomes

This was a three week global independent study in which I was able to engage with stakeholders and community members as well as those doing research on my topic of interest. I was able to see local agencies and learn more about how they operate.

Key outcomes include:

- A literature review on Scandinavian and U.S. child welfare models
- Two main interviews with practitioners of Norway and Sweden
- This work for the Fall 2018 Global Social Work Poster Fair
- A reflection paper on my time abroad with ideas for implementation



Lessons Learned

It is important to be open to new processes and engage with other professionals as a learner in a global learning experience despite what professional experience you may have. Also, things do not always go as planned and flexibility is an important quality to have. A personal, but important lesson learned is that you need to be sure to make the most of your time abroad academically and personally, but while practicing self-care.

Skills Utilized & Developed

Three main skills developed during developing this project and my time abroad include the following:

- Rapport & relationship building
- Appreciation for cultural differences
- Adaptability
- Initiative
- Social work competencies
 - Diversity & difference
 - Context

Implementation of the diversity and difference social work competency's practice behavior to work with diverse groups and engage with others with different life experiences relies upon building rapport, appreciation, adaptability, and initiative. I believe the knowledge I gained of the Scandinavian child welfare model and their steps to implementation helped me to develop the context competency's practice behavior of providing relevant services and improving upon those services. Knowledge acquired pushes me to work towards bettering these policies in the U.S.

Connections

Classroom:

SW 633: Children & Youth Services and Social Policies - In this course we developed critical frameworks for assessing the strengths and weaknesses of the policies, organization, and delivery of child-oriented social services based on research which helped me analyze the Scandinavian systems for my literature review as well during my time abroad. We also examined cross-national comparisons of services and policies.

SW 530: Introduction to Social Welfare Policy and Services - This course explored current social welfare issues in the context of their history and the underlying rationale and values that support different approaches. Emphasis was placed on major fields of social work service including child welfare. Analytic frameworks with regard to social welfare policies and services were presented.

Career:

Not only do I want to obtain a global lens on the important social justice issue of the United States, but I want to be able to use this information that I learned to better inform my future practices as a social worker in the child welfare field. I want to be able to leverage the knowledge I gained to organize stakeholders, policy makers, and other key players to push towards their preventative Scandinavian model.

Advice

- Make a more detailed budget aside from the one required by the Office of Global Activities and continue to edit/add anticipated expenses as necessary.
- Really build up rapport and relationships with your connections before going abroad to ensure that your planned academic activities not only happen, but are also worthwhile.
- Really know yourself and what kind of guidance, project, and/or supervision you may need while abroad to ensure



Swedish Municipalities and County Councils



Norwegian Directorate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs